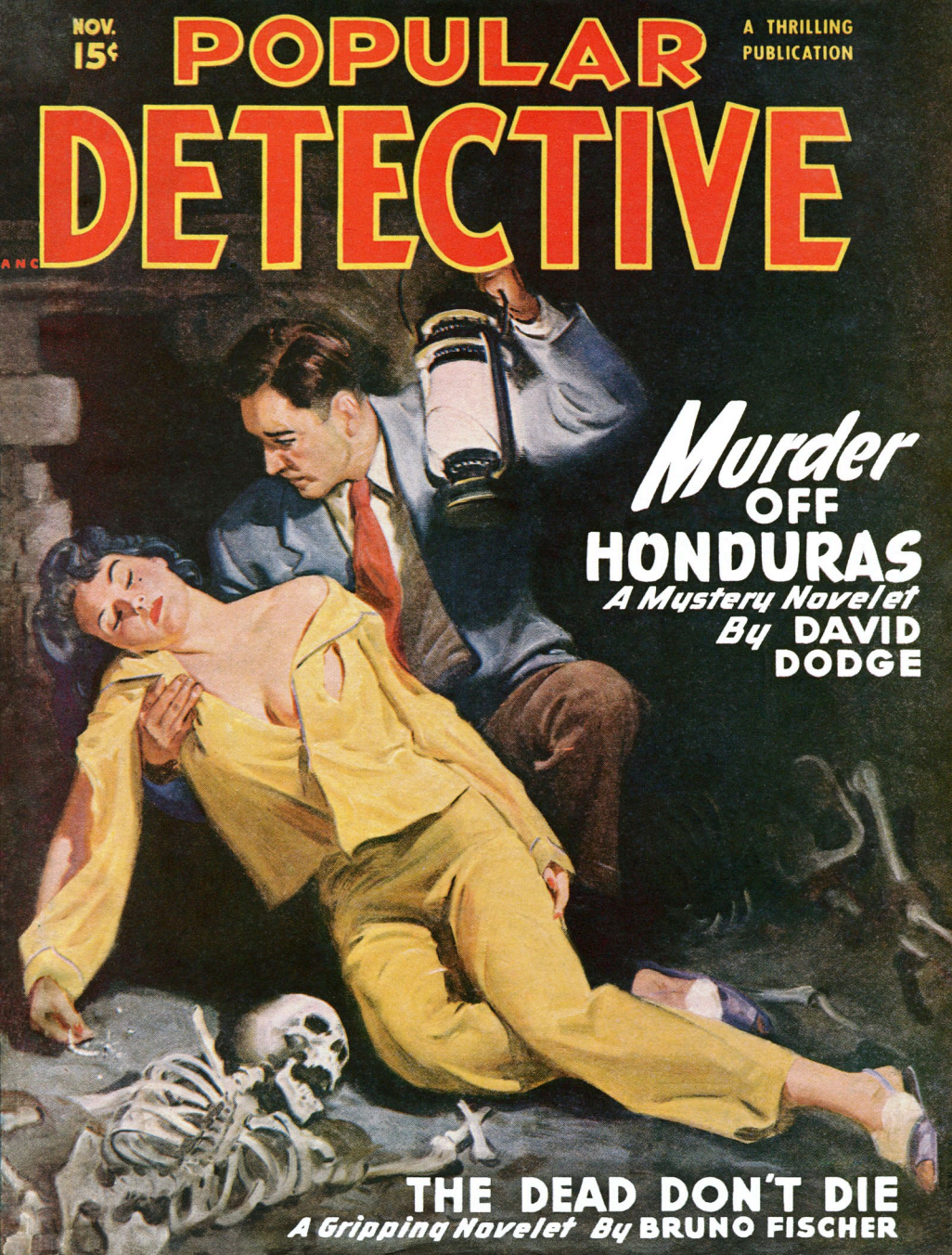


NOV.  
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A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

# POPULAR DETECTIVE

A man in a blue suit and red tie is kneeling on the ground, holding a large lantern that illuminates a woman in a yellow outfit lying on her back. She appears to be dead. In the foreground, a human skeleton is visible on the ground. The scene is set in a dark, possibly outdoor or semi-outdoor environment with stone walls in the background.

*Murder*  
OFF  
HONDURAS  
*A Mystery Novelet*  
By DAVID  
DODGE

**THE DEAD DON'T DIE**  
*A Gripping Novelet* By BRUNO FISCHER



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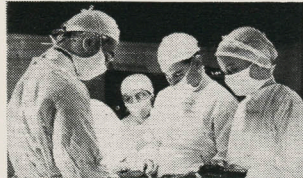
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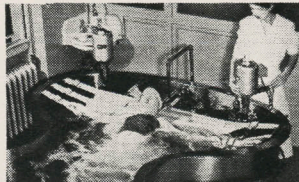
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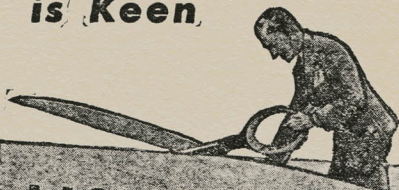
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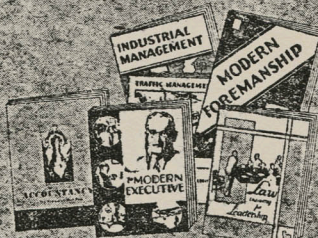
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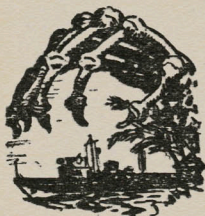
# POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXVII, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

NOVEMBER, 1949

## FEATURED NOVELET



## *Murder Off Honduras*

by *David Dodge*

A group of poker-playing fishermen aboard Bill Butler's boat face a swift showdown with doom when a "dead man's hand" mysteriously turns up! 11

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When Alvin Robson discovers the bones of murdered lovers in an eerie setting, he marks himself and his girl for a similar doom!

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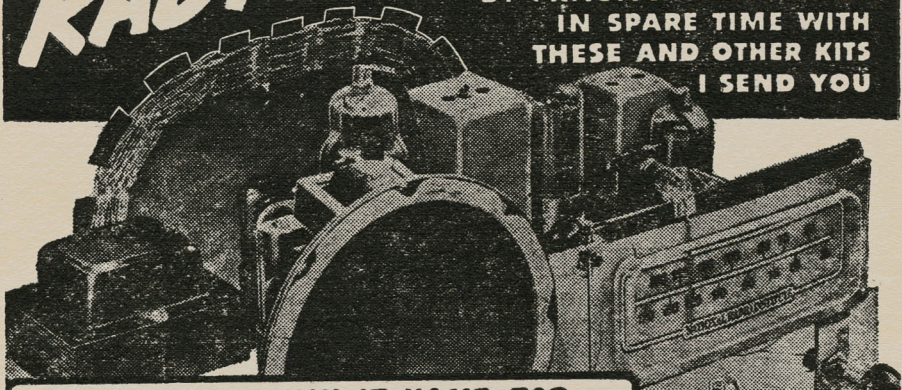
*Also See "The Inside of Detective Work," on Page 71*

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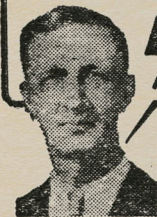


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# Official BUSINESS



A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

**M**URDER can happen anywhere. In a big town, in a village, on a river or in an airplane—no place is immune. As for motive, vengeance, jealousy, or any of the other familiar human passions may be the driving force behind the killing. But more than likely the motive will be—money!

And that brings us to a place where money flows like water—the racetrack. Racing horses is a big business with millions of dollars involved and huge fortunes being made or lost daily. So it is not surprising that murder's bloody hand reaches out for profit in this great sport too.

To achieve the magic of bringing home a winner in a big race, various tricks may be employed. There may be, of course, the shrewd maneuvers used by clever but completely honest owners, trainers and jockeys. But then, too, there are the thoroughly dishonest devices employed by crooks and criminals to gain dishonest dollars.

## Murder and Intrigue

To guard against these illegal operators and to foil their plans, the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau was organized, and one of its most famous representatives is hard-hitting, wise-cracking Detective Keene Madden, whom you'll meet in our next issue in an exciting novelty of murder and intrigue appropriately titled: **THE GALLOPING CORPSES**. Stewart Sterling is the author.

Keene Madden had been in Saratoga Springs less than an hour when the trouble started. It was his first visit to the sleepy old racing town.

He had no way of knowing that it was destined to be the most dangerous assignment of his career.

The waitress who set the thick wedge of

apple pie in front of Keene spoke his name. She knew him, knew his business there in town—which was surprising, considering that Keene was an undercover man.

This waitress was not like the others there in the Stirrup and Saddle Restaurant. She had something extra. She was small-boned, suggestively plump, with a pert elfin face under the long-billed jockey cap she wore. Very cute indeed in her scarlet satin blouse and shiny black riding boots. Keene especially liked the snug fit of her white, skin-tight breeches.

"How'd you know my name?" he asked her. "Do you know anything?" She must have had a reason for letting him know she was aware of his identity.

## A Secret Meeting

She bent her head, adding the figures on his check. "I might. If it was worth something to me."

Keene laid a bill on the table. When he took his hand away there was a small key on the greenback.

"Gray Buick," he said. "California plates. Far side of parking oval. See you there, around one."

There were still plenty of cars in the parking oval when Keene got there at the appointed time. The girl was already in the back seat, he could see, keeping out of the glare from the neons spelling out *Stirrup & Saddle*.

He opened the door, saw the reflection of the neons on the rear fender dim momentarily as something cut off the light behind him. He pivoted, throwing up an arm. He had a split-second glimpse of a bulky-shouldered figure, a rum-reddened nose beneath a low-pulled hatbrim, before the length of

(Continued on page 3)



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## OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 6)

pipe paralyzed his arm, exploded against his head.

He fell half into the car. His left foot caught the attacker six inches below the belt buckle. There was weight behind the boot, too. The man grunted, hit Keene again, viciously, with the pipe across the knee-cap.

Keene tried to roll on his side to get at his hip pocket. The heavy-shouldered man smashed him across the mouth with the iron. Twisting further into the car, doubling his knees to get them free of the door, Keene reached up, grabbed the handle, jerked the door, hard. There was an agonized yelp as the slamming metal caught the big man's fingers. Keene snatched at the door handle again.

From the darkness behind him then, a bomb burst back of his ear. It was the last thing he remembered.

### Stopped by the Police

When Keene came to, the taste of blood was in his mouth. His teeth ached hideously. The top of his skull seemed to be alternately expanding and contracting. He looked at the clock on his car's dash. It said ten past two.

He cursed himself for a stupe, letting himself be suckered into a trap like that. Yet if they'd only meant to wreck him within an inch of his life—to frighten him from Saratoga—how would they have dared to use the waitress as a come-on girl? Probably she would claim Keene had offered to drive her home after she'd finished working, then made a pass at her in his car, whereupon some club attendant had come to the rescue, beaten him up. If that kind of a story got into the papers, it wouldn't do Keene—or his chances of doing his job—any good whatever.

Keene didn't find out the real reason until shortly after he'd driven away, and was stopped by a motorcycle cop because his tail light wasn't working. It wasn't till then that he saw the blood dripping from the rim of his trunk compartment. Keene carefully shielded it from the cop's eyes until he had made his excuses and got rid of the officer.

Then he opened the trunk. It was a neat frameup. Those who had beaten him up had



undoubtedly ripped out the tail-light wiring at the same time with the expectation of having a cop stop him. Keene was pretty sure of what he'd find in the trunk even before he put his flashlight on it.

### Body in the Trunk

The waitress was lying face down, with her head on a spare tube, her knees curled up at her side, as if she'd just crawled in there to take a nap. She was wearing a white skirt and a dark red sweater instead of the jockey costume.

The back of her head looked like something that had just oozed out of a meat chopper!

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(Continued on page 97)

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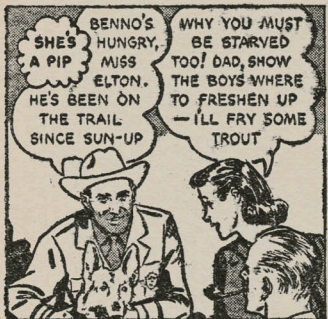
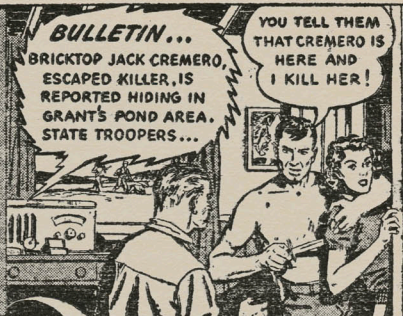
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*...and then  
things happened  
fast!!*





a novelet by  
**DAVID DODGE**

He snatched a knife from  
the rack on the bulkhead



# MURDER

## OFF HONDURAS

### CHAPTER I

#### KILLER ON BOARD

ON THE entire east coast of Honduras there was only one sight that could have made the men aboard the cutter *Albareda* forget they had a corpse for company. That sight was the girl on the beach.

She had stepped out of a skimpy bathing suit and was drying herself on a skimpier towel when the cutter, its big diesel throttled down to a murmur, came nosing cautiously in through the mouth of the lagoon. The island boy, swinging the lead in the bow, was the first to see her. He forgot to call the mark on the lead-line. When the captain of the cutter, a sun-blackened young man in dungarees and a singlet, shouted at him from the wheel on the roof of the deck, the island boy pointed.

The girl looked up at the shout. For

*The icebox on Butler's boat was intended for holding fish—and not for the slain man's corpse!*



## Poker-Playing Fishermen Face a Showdown

a moment, seeing the boat there, she was too startled to move. She made a pretty picture for the three passengers sitting under the deck canopy. She wore a white rubber bathing cap and white rubber slippers, with nothing in between but golden-brown tanned flesh and the skimpy towel.

Behind her, blazing in the sun, white beach stretched away in a wide curve to the cluster of palm-thatched huts that was the lagoon village half a mile beyond. Coco palms grew along the beach. It was their broad fans rustling in the breeze that had kept the girl from

hearing the mutter of the diesel.

Pelicans on motionless wings soared low across the surface of the lagoon, hunting fish. Over all, the hot tropical sky burned like a blue flame. One of the pelicans folded its wings and dived, beak first. The splash broke the girl's spell. She snatched up a robe that lay

The body was lowered into the cayuco



## When a Dead Man's Hand Suddenly Turns Up!

on the sand and fled—a flash of golden skin and white slippers among the coco palms.

The captain of the cutter shouted again at the open-mouthed island boy. "Rafael! Swing that lead! Are you trying to put us aground?"

One of the passengers said to the man

ing but the depth over the bar and a spot marked "Village." He hoped the village was big enough to have an *alcalde*. It should be big enough to have some sort of judge or mayor if there



next to him, "I wouldn't mind going aground here for good, if they're all like that."

The other man grunted. The third passenger said, "What are we coming in here for?"

The man who had spoken first nodded at the big box lashed to the deck in the shade of the canopy.

"The ice is nearly gone. It melts fast in this weather."

The other man shuddered.

UP ON the deckhouse, Bill Butler, the captain, got his sounding, found deep water under his boat's keel, and pushed the throttle of the diesel forward a careful inch. He didn't know the lagoon, and his chart showed noth-

was a girl around who wore bathing slippers. The Caribs and *zambo* shark-fishermen whose occasional villages dotted the lonely coast south of Cape Gracias á Dios didn't bother with shoes, or much of anything else. He wondered what the girl was doing in this God-forsaken spot, three days by boat from the nearest port.

Bill smiled, remembering her frozen surprise at the sight of the cutter. But the smile faded quickly. He had other things to think of. One was an ice-box that had been built to hold fish, not the body of a fat man with a broken neck. Another was an unidentified murderer aboard his boat.

By the time the cutter lay offshore from the village, everyone within ear-



shot of the motor had turned out to watch it come in. Or nearly everyone. Bill saw nobody with the golden-brown skin of the girl who had fled through the coco palms.

The skins of the villagers ranged in color from saddle-brown to sooty black. From their excitement at the appearance of the cutter, Bill guessed that boats of that size did not put into the lagoon often. But they seemed civilized enough. Everyone except the smallest children wore at least a pair of pants. One man even had shoes and a sun-helmet, sure signs of authority.

A small jetty, no more than a foot-walk on stilts, stretched out into the lagoon from the shore. Bill brought his boat in carefully, saw the lines made fast, and cut the motor. As he came down the ladder from the deck-house, the man in the sun-helmet was making his way along the jetty. Bill met him at the cutter's rail and gave him a hand up.

"Is there an *alcalde*?" Bill asked, in Spanish.

"Carlos Hernández Marín, at your orders." The man in the sun-helmet bowed. He had a sharp, intelligent brown face, and spoke the *castellano* of an educated man.

"Guillermo Bootlair," said Bill Butler, giving the Spanish equivalent of his name. They shook hands.

"How can I be of service?" asked the *alcalde*.

"I have a dead man in my ice-box, but no ice. It is three days to Puerto Cortés. I must either load more ice or bury the body here."

"The graveyard is at your disposal. There is no ice within a hundred leagues. How did the man die?"

"He was murdered?"

"So?"

The *alcalde* looked around. He saw the three passengers sitting under the canopy. He saw the bullet-headed Carib cook standing in the doorway of the deckhouse, and the two deckhands still at the mooring lines. They were all watching him and the captain.

"Which one?" the *alcalde* asked.

"I don't know."

"How did it happen?"

"We had better go ashore to talk

about it."

"As you wish."

Bill Butler walked over to his passengers.

"I'm going ashore," he said. "No one else is to leave the boat until I get back. There's no ice here, so I'm going to make arrangements to bury him."

One of the passengers, a tall dark man, said, "Where do you get the idea that you can tell us not to go ashore?"

Bill tapped his chest. It was a big chest, wide and deep, and the singlet that he wore didn't hide the heavy muscles of his arms and shoulders.

"Right here. I'm telling my boys the same thing, and they can handle you if you get any independent ideas. I'll apologize after this business is cleared up."

He called the crew together to give them orders.

One, Lazo, was a Panamanian, squat and black. Forbes, the cook, and Rafael, the second deckhand, were Bay Island boys from the same village on Roatan. Both spoke the liquid, strangely-accented English of the islands, and both were of a size, tall for islanders. The resemblance ended there. Forbes was as black as Lazo, with a Negro's features and hair. Rafael, because of some strain of blood from his pirate forbears—British freebooters who had landed on the islands between raids on the galleons of the Spanish main—was straight-nosed and blond, as tawny as a lion.

THEY listened silently as Bill told them that no one was to leave the cutter. He spoke in Spanish, because they all understood that language and his passengers did not. He did not want the passengers to hear him warn the crew that they were guarding a murderer.

It was a safety measure, more than anything else. Any one aboard might have killed the fat man. But the passengers were helpless, tied to the boat that was their only escape from the lagoon, while Lazo or the island boys, if they thought they were suspected and in danger, could slip over the side like eels and disappear into the surrounding jungle. The law would hold the captain



responsible if that happened.

He followed the *alcalde* along the rickety jetty to shore. The crowd of natives, staring, parted to let them pass. The village was clean, with little odor and none of the usual crop of pigs rooting for garbage among the huts. The *alcalde* led him to one of two buildings that were roofed with corrugated iron instead of palm thatch, and stood aside to let him enter first.

It was hotter inside, under the iron roof, than in the sun. Bill mopped his wet face and wished he had a drink of something cold. He didn't have to suggest it. The *alcalde* left the hut and came back with two green coconuts, their smaller ends slashed open. Bill accepted one gratefully, taking a long drink of the cool, faintly sweet coco-water.

"Now," said the *alcalde*.

"*Gracias*. That was good." Bill wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "The cutter is mine. I charter her for fishing trips. These four Norte Americanos came to Cortés on a banana-ship from the States. They had a ten-day stopover while the ship loaded for the return trip, and they wanted to go after tarpon. I took them. Every night they played cards—poker—in the galley. I played with them, as they asked, to make the game bigger, but when the stakes became too high I dropped out. Two days ago the dead man won nearly a thousand dollars. There was some kind of an argument—not a fight, but hard words.

"The game ended with the winner sitting alone in the galley counting his money. The other three went to their cabins, which open aft of the galley. One boy came up to relieve me at the wheel. He says the noise of the argument was still going on when he left. I gave him the wheel and spent ten minutes looking over the deck to see that everything was secure. When I went down the ladder to the galley, I found the dead man sitting there with a broken neck. I searched him. All of the money was gone, and the wallet from his pocket."

Bill took another drink from the coconut.

"And then?" said the *alcalde*.

"Everybody aboard stripped and was searched. I spent the night going over the boat without finding anything. I'd need more time to make a better search before I'd swear the money isn't there."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"No one in particular. Anybody but the boy at the wheel could have stepped into the galley, killed him, picked up the money, and got away without taking more than five or six steps in all. You'll see when I show you the boat. I'm almost certain that the only man who was alone and unwatched—one of the passengers—hasn't the strength to have done it. He's too small. He was in the cabin that he shared with the dead man. The other two passengers were together in the other cabin, and three men were in the foc's'le—until one left to relieve me at the wheel. The other two in the foc's'le remained there. They all say they did not go into the galley until I called them. And nobody was asleep."

"So, then. If I understand correctly, either you are wrong about the little man's strength, or at least two men are involved in the killing—or you did it yourself."

"I've been thinking of that, too," Bill said soberly. "I'll have trouble finding any more charter-parties until the death is explained."

"We must explain it, then. I should like to see the boat and question the passengers and crew."

"I'll have to translate for you. The passengers—"

"That would not be proper—one suspect translating for others." The *alcalde* made an apologetic gesture. "Please do not take offense. But I must bring my own interpreter. Our schoolteacher speaks English."

He stepped to the door of the hut and called to one of the group of boys who goggled expectantly outside, waiting to see the strange Norte Americano again.

"Ask the Senorita Esperanza to come, *hijo*."

The boy was off like a shot. The *alcalde* turned back to Bill, lifted his coconut, and said, "*Salud*."

They drank.

While they waited, Bill looked out through the open doorway of the hut toward the cutter lying at her moorings.



There was a sharp bang on the iron roof as a coconut fell from a palm overhead. He could hear the roar of the surf on the other side of the spit that cut the lagoon off from the ocean.

He wished he was out there, listening to the hammer of the diesel taking him back to Cortés. He would feel better when he had unloaded his passengers. He hadn't liked them very much, even before the fat man's death. The fat man had been the best one of the lot, although he wasn't a fisherman and didn't know a tarpon from a jack. Bill suspected that he had come along on the cruise only for the opportunity to play poker. All four of the men had had plenty of money. Three of them had less money now, and the fourth had a broken neck. It would make a nice advertisement for his business.

He stood up quickly.

A girl looked at him from the doorway. She was young, not more than twenty, with dark hair, blue eyes and a clear skin tanned the color of honey. She wore a crisp blue dress that matched her eyes, and white rubber beach slippers. She was so immaculate, so pretty, and so out of place in that remote beach village that Bill blinked—and blinked again.

Because she said, "Hello, Bill."

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEATH SCENE



ER VOICE was level enough, but the color was flooding her face and neck under the tan. Bill didn't need the white slippers to tell him that she had been the girl on the beach. Her slight accent stirred an older memory.

It had been four years since her father, a mousy, unobtrusive Englishman named Mitchell, had walked away into the banana groves behind Puerto Cortés and blown his brains out. Bill had been working for the fruit company then, hauling bananas and copra from the outlying cays off the north coast, and had heard the story when he returned from a trip.

In a company town the size of Cortés,

everybody knew all there was to tell. Mitchell's accounts—he was one of the company cashiers—had been short several thousand dollars. No one ever knew what he had done with the money, because before the auditors got around to asking their questions, he had taken his walk into the banana grove. His daughter—all the family he had in the world—had discovered the body. Bill remembered her as a gawky, long-legged kid whom he had taken sailing now and then because she seemed so lonely and out of place. She had been fifteen or sixteen, too old for the children, too young for the adults, too reserved to be easily friendly. He had never known what happened to her after her father's suicide. Nobody knew, although there had been some talk by people with nothing better to talk about than the stolen money had left Cortés with her.

In a few months she and her father and the small ripple they had made were forgotten.

Bill looked at her now and found it hard to recognize her in the slim, pretty, brown girl before him.

"Hello, Hope," he said awkwardly.

"They call me Esperanza here. I like the sound of it better in Spanish."

"You know each other?" the *alcalde* asked. He had been watching their expressions, unable to follow their English.

The girl who called herself Esperanza answered him. "Yes, We've met. What is it you want with me, Don Carlos?"

The *alcalde* was too polite to ask further questions. "The captain has a dead man aboard his boat," he said, "and a murderer. He does not know who the murderer is, and it is necessary for me to question his passengers, who do not speak *castellano*. If you will be so kind—"

"Of course." She turned to Bill again. "How did it happen?"

He told her what he had told the *alcalde*, and found his awkwardness disappearing while he talked.

"It's a nasty business," he said as they walked along the jetty to the cutter. "I'm sorry to drag you into it, but your friend wants an impartial interpreter. I'm a suspect, too."

"Nonsense."



"Why nonsense?"

"You're too kind. You couldn't kill anybody."

"I may have changed since you knew me last."

"Not that much. I'm a good judge of character."

"You've changed. Quite a bit."

"People do, don't they?"

He saw that she didn't want to talk about herself, and let it drop.

There was a three-foot rise from the jetty to the deck of the cutter. Bill, with a word of apology, took the girl by the waist, lifted her easily, and set her on the deck. When he followed her, pulling the *alcalde* up behind him, the *alcalde* spoke.

"You are a strong man, Captain."

"Strong enough to break a neck, if that's what you mean."

"I meant nothing except what I said. These are your passengers?"

"Yes."

The three men stood up as the girl approached them. Bill said, "Mr. Lehman, Mr. Warren, Mr. Page. Miss—"

He didn't know how to go on. While he hesitated, not knowing if she still used her father's name, she said, "Mitchell. I'm happy to meet you. We don't have visitors here very often."

They had all noticed the white slippers. It was Page who grinned and spoke.

"Sorry we sneaked up on you like that down the beach," he said. "I guess the captain didn't know we were sailing into a lady's bathroom."

She blushed.

"This is Senor Hernández Marín, the village *alcalde*," Bill said, before anyone had a chance to embarrass her further. "He wants to question you, but he doesn't understand English. Miss Mitchell will interpret."

"That will make the questioning a pleasure," Lehman said. "Take my chair, Miss Mitchell."

WHILE additional deckchairs were being brought aft, the *alcalde* studied the three passengers. He did not know how to begin a murder investigation. The killings that came to his notice were usually simple things—a stolen woman or a stolen boat, a slash



"I'm going ashore,"  
said Bill



with the *machete*, a body to bury, and a man gone into the jungle. Sometimes they got away, sometimes they did not, but there was never any mystery about it. This was different. He did not understand Norte Americano motives or Norte Americano ways. To kill with bare hands seemed uncivilized to him.

Lehman could have done it, he thought. Lehman was tall and lean, with big hands and thick wrists covered with black hair. He had a hard face—the face of a man who could make decisions and take steps to carry them through. Warren might be strong enough, but it was difficult to picture him twisting a man's neck until it snapped. He was middle-aged, nearly bald, and pink with sunburn. He wore tinted spectacles that slightly magnified his eyes. The *alcalde* thought he looked about as dangerous as a rabbit.

It was harder to decide about Page, the small man. He did not seem like a person who would attack another man with his hands. A gun or a knife in a fit of anger, perhaps. Page's unpleasant mouth spoke of a temper, as his too-careful clothes—in contrast with the rumpled ducks of the other men—spoke of vanity. Vanity and temper could lead to murder, as the *alcalde* knew. But it took courage and strength as well, to break a spine. The captain was a strong man. And probably courageous, the *alcalde* thought.

"Where do you want to begin?" Bill asked him.

"I think it would be best to see the scene of the murder before I ask any questions. I do not know much about these things. But if I understand more of the way in which it happened—"

"I'll show you."

Bill started for the deckhouse. The *alcalde* said, "You had better come with us, Esperanza."

She hesitated. Bill, turning in time to see her expression, said, "The body has been removed. There's no blood."

He could have kicked himself as soon as he said it, remembering how she had found her father. But if she felt anything, she hid it well. She went first down the short ladder from the deckhouse.

There was a strong odor of gasoline

in the galley. Forbes, the cook, was on his hands and knees mopping the deck. He stood up and got back in a corner to be out of the way. The galley—stove, table, food-lockers and all—was barely eight feet square. Four people on their feet filled it.

"The boat was built for the United States Coast Guard during the war," Bill explained. "It wasn't designed for comfort, and I haven't had the money to change it around." He opened a door leading forward. "This is the crew's quarters. Four of us sleep here."

The *alcalde* peered through the doorway at the small foc's'le, looked at the open hatch overhead which provided light and air, and nodded. Bill closed the door and turned toward the opposite side of the galley. From a passageway no larger than a telephone booth, doors opened on either side.

"These are the passenger quarters, two bunks in each. Lehman and Warren share the starboard cabin. Page and the dead man had the other. Behind the cabins is the motor-room. The only way in or out of here is by way of the ladder we came down, or through the foc's'le and out the hatch."

The *alcalde* opened the door of each tiny cabin and looked in without comment.

"They played poker at the table there," Bill went on. "When I found the dead man, his body was wedged between the table and the bulkhead behind it. He was too fat, and the space was too small to let him fall. I knew he was dead from the way his head hung, but I felt for a heartbeat anyway. His muscles were still relaxing. I went first to the foc's'le, where I found Rafael and Forbes in their bunks. They said they had heard nothing since the argument stopped a few minutes after Lazo went up to relieve me. Then I went to the cabins and found the other three passengers getting ready for bed. Warren and Lehman were together in their cabin and said they hadn't moved out of it since the game ended. Page was alone in his cabin and said the same thing. When I asked them about the argument, they said—"

"It will be best for me to question them myself," the *alcalde* interrupted.



"There was no money on the body?"

"Only a pocketful of small change. He had won nearly a thousand dollars in the game, and had more in his wallet. Everything was gone. I searched everyone immediately, including the man at the wheel, and was searched myself. Nobody had anything near a thousand dollars in cash. The same night I went over the entire boat and found nothing."

"I see."

The *alcalde* looked around the tiny galley. The cook stood uncomfortably in his corner by the stove, waiting for them to leave so he could get back to his work. At his elbow, a rack on the bulkhead held several butcher-knives.

"It could not have been an accident?" the *alcalde* said. "There was a theft, of course. But the death seems strange to me. What kind of a man would kill with his hands when so many weapons are available?"

He pointed at the knife rack.

"I don't know," Bill said. "But it couldn't have been an accident. You can see for yourself. Forbes, get around behind the table and sit down."

**F**ORBES, the cook, was slow in obeying. He squeezed in behind the table and sat down uneasily.

"More to your right," Bill said. "That's it. Now, what sort of an accident could it have been? We had good weather and the boat was riding smoothly."

The *alcalde* nodded. The cook sat with his back to a solid steel bulkhead. The deck above, equally solid, was four feet over his head. Lockers at either end of the table were barely within reach.

"But that makes it even more strange." The *alcalde* frowned. "It must have been done from in front. Would a normal man sitting there permit another man to reach across the table and twist his head until the spine snapped, without a struggle or a shout?"

"He didn't have room to struggle," Bill pointed out. "He was wedged in between the table and the bulkhead. It probably happened so fast that he didn't have time to get his hands up. As for shouting, I don't know. Nobody heard anything. But the motor is directly aft of the passenger cabins, and it makes

quite a racket."

The *alcalde* reached across the table and took hold of Forbes' head with both hands. The cook flinched, his eyes rolling.

"Just an experiment," the *alcalde* told him. "I will do you no harm." Over his shoulder, he said to Bill, "I could not break his neck, in this position, even if he did not struggle. It would take a strong man—a tremendously strong man."

Bill's mouth tightened. He said nothing. The *alcalde* released Forbes' head and straightened up.

"That's all," he said. "*Gracias.*"

The cook slid from behind the table as if he were squirming out of a trap. "Do you want to question him now or later?" Bill asked.

"The passengers first, I think."

They went back up the ladder. In the deckhouse above, Esperanza said curiously, "What was the murdered man's name, Bill? You always speak of him as the dead man."

"He called himself Jones. I don't think it was his right name."

"Why do you say that?" asked the *alcalde*.

"He had no identification papers of any kind on him—no passport, no letters, nothing, except for what may have been in his wallet. That's strange, for a *turista*. His cuff-links were monogrammed with a 'K'. It may have been a first initial, of course, but there were other things about him that didn't go with what he claimed to be. Fishing didn't interest him at all. I think he came along only for the poker game."

"A professional card-player?"

"Something like that. Do you want to see the body now?"

"If you please."

Esperanza did not go with them to look beneath the tarpaulin that covered the big ice-box. She was talking to the passengers when Bill and the *alcalde* joined the group under the canopy. Bill saw that she was blushing again at something Page had said about the lagoon as a place to swim. He felt a strong urge to pick Page up by the scruff of the neck and drop him over the side.

All he said was, "The *alcalde* wants to



question you now."

The three passengers told their stories to Esperanza, who repeated them in Spanish. The stories were simple and identical. They had never seen each other, or the man who called himself Jones, until they met on the banana-ship which had brought them down from Baltimore. They had made the trip for the tarpon-fishing which the ship's operators held out as an attraction to its passengers. They were all traveling alone, and had played poker together for small stakes on the ship.

Jones had suggested poker on the cutter, but for gradually increasing stakes. On the night of the murder, Jones had won nearly a thousand dollars. The game had broken up in a row. The three losers had left him sitting at the table in the galley and gone to their cabins. They had not left their cabins nor heard anything unusual until the captain called them into the galley and they saw Jones dead.

"What was the nature of the argument that ended the game?" the *alcalde* asked.

### CHAPTER III

#### PARTNERS—IN CRIME



HERE was a long silence before the question was answered. Page looked sullen. "Page called him a crook," Lehman finally said. "Jones took it all right at first, offered to cut cards double or nothing for what we had lost, but Page kept at him—we all let Jones see that we realized he had been building us up for a killing—and pretty soon we were all yelling at each other. Jones finally told us we could either play cards or go cry ourselves to sleep, it was all the same to him. So we left him there and went to bed."

"He was a crook," Page said angrily. "He was building us up all the time. We all know it—now."

Esperanza translated. Bill wondered where she had learned her Spanish. She had not spoken it so well in Cortés. He found himself wondering at many things—how she had come to that lonely

village, and why she stayed there, and what her life had been during the four years since her father's suicide. He forgot the murder in looking at her, trying to see in the brown-skinned, beautiful girl she had become the shy, unhappy child he had known. It was difficult.

She was translating the *alcalde's* questions now.

"How much did you lose to him, Mr. Page?"

"About two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Mr. Lehman?"

"Nearly four hundred."

"Mr. Warren?"

"About three hundred."

"Do you think he was dishonest, Mr. Warren?"

Warren took off his tinted glasses and polished them while he considered his answer. It was plain to see that he did not wear the glasses always. The skin around his eyes was as sunburned as the rest of his face.

"I think he was a more successful card player than any of us," he said carefully. "I don't know how much of it was luck and how much something else. But I agree with Mr. Page that Jones had probably planned the whole thing from the beginning."

"Could you all afford to lose as much as you lost?"

Everyone understood the reason for the question. Page answered it.

"I could. I've lost more before without complaining about it. I just don't like crooked card players."

"I think we could all afford it," Warren said, and Lehman nodded. Then Warren continued, "I suppose you're wondering if one of us needed the money so badly that he would commit murder to get it back. In my case, the answer is no. Besides, neither Lehman nor I had an opportunity. We were together in our cabin."

The *alcalde* looked at Page. Page reached into his pocket and held out a thick book of travelers' checks.

"There's two thousand dollars here, and more where it came from. I wouldn't walk ten feet for everything he had on him, opportunity or no opportunity."

"Tell them please not to misunder-



stand the questions, Esperanza," the *alcalde* said. "It is necessary for me to ask—"

Bill didn't hear the rest of it. He had been sitting on the rail, watching Warren polish the sun glasses. He stood up suddenly and went forward to the deck house. When he came back, he had a deck of cards in his hand.

"Let me see those glasses," he said.

Warren smiled in a puzzled way as he removed the tinted spectacles. His hand moved suddenly. Bill caught his wrist before he could throw the spectacles over the rail. They dropped to the deck.

Warren stabbed for them with his heel, but Bill had kicked them to safety before the heel came down. He picked them up and held them before his eyes to examine the backs of the cards in his hand.

"I thought so." He gave the cards and the glasses to the *alcalde*. "He said he wore them against the sun-glare, but I just remembered that he had them on more often in the galley than on deck. There isn't any glare in the galley—only a strong, bright light."

Warren said nothing. Page and Lehman were both staring at him. The *alcalde* had put the glasses on his nose and was examining the poker deck as Bill had done. When he had looked at four or five cards, he removed the glasses.

"I think we are making progress now," he said mildly. "Esperanza, will you ask Senor Warren why, with such cleverly marked cards and the glasses that enabled him to read them, he lost so much money to the dead man?"

For the first time, Esperanza stumbled in translating the bald question. Warren kept his eyes on the deck and did not answer her.

"Remind him that we are dealing with murder," the *alcalde* said. "It will be better for him if he tells the truth."

WARREN looked up with a shrug after Esperanza had put it into English.

"Jones and I worked the banana-boats together," he said. "One of us would deal the other good hands when the game got big enough. It was my turn

to deal on this trip, that's all. I suppose if it had been the other way around, I'd be on the ice instead of him."

"Did you kill him?"

"Ask him." Warren nodded at Lehman. "We were in the same cabin all the time. I don't know any more about it than you do."

Page's mouth was still open. He closed it when Lehman said incredulously, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"You still alibi him?" Bill asked Lehman.

"I have to. We alibi each other. We were never out of each other's sight for a second."

"I'll bet you were all in it together!" Page said furiously. "Pass that along to what's-his-name, Miss Mitchell. Either one of them could have done it. Or what about Tarzan here?" He glared at Bill. "Nobody has asked him any questions. He discovered the body—he says! Ask him if it was still breathing!"

Esperanza looked from one man to another, not knowing what to say. Bill translated the speech for the *alcalde*'s benefit.

"Senor Page accuses me of the murder. He also accuses Senores Warren and Lehman of doing it together. He has not thought of accusing my crew yet. Do you want to question them now?"

The *alcalde* sighed.

"I think it would be a welcome change," he said. "All this is too—too—" He shook his head. "But first ask Senor Warren the dead man's true name."

Warren either could not or would not tell them. He had known the dead man only as Jones. They had operated together for about six months, after discovering that they were wasting time trying to cheat each other during a card game on one of the banana-ships. The fishing trip had been a good chance to make a clean-up without risking the trouble that might arise from a complaint by a ship's passenger to its captain. Suckers, he explained, sometimes complained to ships' officers when they had lost heavily, which made further operations impossible on the same ship.

Page scowled at "suckers." The *alcalde* said, "Very well. That will do for now. Call the crew, Captain."



Bill called the crew aft to the canopy. Lazo and Rafael had been scrubbing paint in the sun, stripped to the waist, and were dripping with sweat. Lazo was black, shiny and long-armed, Rafael a brown Viking. Forbes, although he had been working in the comparative coolness of the galley, was also sweating—more so than the others, it seemed to the *alcalde*. The cook shifted his feet uneasily as he took his place in front of the big ice-bin.

"What are you afraid of?" the *alcalde* asked him. He felt more sure of himself, speaking his own language. But Lehman interrupted before Forbes could answer.

"Wait a minute," Lehman said. "These boys speak English. I think we're entitled to hear what they have to say."

"I agree with that," Page said. "If you can translate for us, you can translate for them, Miss Mitchell. Tell your friend we want to hear the questions in English."

Esperanza explained to the *alcalde*. He said, "Very well. Ask the cook why he is afraid."

She repeated the question. Forbes swallowed.

"He fears de dead mahn," Rafael said contemptuously. "He fears de body will jump off de ice and leap at him."

"He is bahd luck to de boat," Forbes said huskily. "He is bahd luck, until we bury 'him."

"Ignorant blahk pig," Rafael said.

"You do not fear dead men, then?" Esperanza asked him.

"I am educated," Rafael answered. "I have been to school and can read and write. A dead mahn is only a dead mahn."

"Where did you go to school?"

"On Roatan Island."

"You read and write both Spanish and English?"

"Yes, *senorita*. Also I can ahdd and subtrahct." He spoke with calm pride.

Esperanza turned to Forbes. "Did you never go to school?"

"No, *Senorita*." The cook's whole attitude apologized for his lack of education.

"What do they say?" the *alcalde* asked.

Esperanza told him. The *alcalde* said, "Some things are not learned in school-rooms. Ask the cook if he broke the fat man's neck."

FORBES shifted his feet again at the question. His sweaty face gleamed blackly. "I could not have done it. I was with Rafael and Lazo in de foc's'le until Lazo left, and den with Rafael until de cap'n called us. Ahsk dem."

"Rafael?"

"Yes, *Senorita*. We were together until de cap'n called us."

The *alcalde* looked at Lazo's wide black shoulders and long arms while Esperanza was translating. Lazo spoke only Spanish, so the *alcalde* questioned him directly. Esperanza interpreted for the passengers.

"What is your story?" the *alcalde* asked Lazo.

The Panamanian grinned, showing strong white teeth. "I have never been to school and can neither read nor write, but I could have broken the fat man's neck as easily as you twist the tail from a shrimp. Is that what you wish to know, *Senor*?"

"I wish to know if you did it."

"No, *Senor*. They were still arguing in the galley when my time came to take the wheel. I did not want to pass through the galley, so I went up through the foc's'le hatch. The captain saw me. I took the wheel from him and was still there when he came to tell me that the fat man was dead."

Bill nodded when the *alcalde* looked at him for confirmation. The *alcalde* said, "You said you spent ten minutes looking over the deck before you went below. Could Lazo have left the wheel during that time?"

"No," Bill answered. "The wheel can't be locked, and we were under way. I would have know it immediately."

The *alcalde's* eyes wandered from Lazo to Rafael to Forbes. The cook was standing as far as he could get from the ice-bin, his shoulders hunched. The other two gave no sign that they were aware of the body in the box behind them.

"And none of you know anything of the money which disappeared?" the *alcalde* said, "or how the fat man came



to his death?"

"No, Senor."

"That is all, then. You may go."

Afterward, there was a long silence under the canopy. The boat rocked gently on the changing tide. The afternoon breeze had died, and the air was swelteringly hot. The lagoon looked cool and inviting. Bill wished he could go for a swim. He wondered when he would have a chance to talk to Esperanza alone. There were a lot of things he wanted to ask her.

He tried to catch her eye, but she did not look in his direction. It seemed to him that she was being careful not to look at him. He felt vaguely irritated.

"I do not want the passengers to understand what I say now, Esperanza," the *alcalde* said thoughtfully. "Explain to them that this is a conversation between the captain and myself."

She explained. All of them objected—even Warren, who had not said a word since the exposure of his relationship with the dead man. The *alcalde* paid them no attention.

"I think the next thing for us to do is to search the ship more thoroughly than it has been searched," the *alcalde* told Bill.

"What good will it do to find the money? Anybody could have hidden it."

"That is true. But consider, Captain. Whoever killed Jones would have taken the money, either for gain or to confuse the reason for his death. If the money was the real reason, whoever risked killing him would take almost any other risk to keep what he had stolen. If money was not the reason—and there was an argument, remember, with angry words exchanged—the murderer would get rid of the money rather than take the chance that its discovery might point to him. If we can establish beyond question that the money is not aboard the ship, then I think that one of your passengers, to whom a thousand dollars is not as important as his safety, must be guilty. We can go on from there." The *alcalde* spoke slowly, presenting his points in logical order.

"And if the money is found?" Bill asked.

"Then I think we must look for the murderer among the ship's crew," the

*alcalde* said. "A thousand dollars would be a fortune to these men—enough to kill for."

Bill laughed, without humor. "A thousand dollars is just what I need to make this boat over into what it should be. Where does that leave me if the money is found?"

"In a suspicious position. You had a good opportunity to commit the murder. But the ship must be searched in any event. When can we begin?"

"Whenever you like. Right now."

The *alcalde* looked at the sun, low over the jungle behind the lagoon. "I think tomorrow would be better. We will have more daylight. Of course it means that nobody can leave the boat until then. I am sorry not to be able to offer you better hospitality."

"That's all right. I was hoping that if you could take the body off the boat tonight, you and Esperanza would have dinner here. I have a good barracuda and some canned things—nothing special, but it would be a change. We could eat on deck, where it's cool." He spoke to the *alcalde*, but he was looking at Esperanza.

"It wouldn't be too much of a bother?" she asked.

"Of course not."

"Then I think it would be lovely. Don't you, Don Carlos?"

"I would be honored."

## CHAPTER IV

### SWIMMER IN THE DARK



ILL was already making plans as he went down to the galley to tell Forbes that they were having guests. Everybody would have to shave and put on a shirt.

After dinner he would find a chance to talk to Esperanza somehow. They could at least walk down the jetty—the *alcalde* wouldn't object to that. But Bill's high hopes for the evening didn't last.

"I cahnt cook de barracuda, Cap'n," Forbes said. "I cahnt cook anything. De gahsoline is all gone."

"We had a full can in the motor room two days ago. What happened to it?"



Forbes looked sullen. "I spilled it, bringing it down de lahdder. Daht's what I was mopping up when you come down before, Cap'n. De tahnk is dry."

Bill looked at the indicator on the tank and saw that it pointed to Empty. The stove was a primus, burning gasoline and compressed air. Without gasoline, there was no way even to boil water aboard the cutter. Bill cursed the cook for his clumsiness and went back up on deck to withdraw his invitation.

"But I think we can get gasoline," Esperanza said, when he had explained. "Isn't there gasoline in the village, Don Carlos?"

"I am sorry, no. But I will send a *cayuco* down the coast to a village where it can be bought. However, the man will not get back before tomorrow."

"Then why not ask everyone ashore as our guests?" Esperanza suggested. "We could have a barbecue on the beach—roast a pig—"

The *alcalde* shook his head regretfully. "Tomorrow, certainly. But tonight they must all remain on the boat. You will understand, Captain. I should like to be your host, not your watchman. After the search has been made—"

"I know," Bill said. "Tomorrow, then."

Esperanza turned to the passengers and spoke in English. "Tomorrow night we're going to roast a pig on the beach. Everyone is invited."

Warren looked up. He was sitting alone. Page and Lehman, consciously or unconsciously, had shifted their chairs until they were facing away from him.

"Everyone?" Warren asked.

"Of course."

"I'm not going if that crook goes," Page said.

"I hope it's a promise," Lehman said bitingly. "I accept with pleasure, Miss Mitchell. Don't let Mr. Page's bad manners prejudice you against the rest of us."

"We expect you all. Please come." She smiled at them impartially and turned away.

The tide had dropped, so there was no real need for Bill to help her from the rail to the jetty. But he gave her his hand anyway. She smiled her

thanks, just as she had smiled at the passengers, and walked away.

He watched the slim figure in the blue dress go along the jetty, disappointed that she had not had a special word for him. They had been good friends once. She couldn't think that he had listened to the gossip—

"... if that is convenient for you," the *alcalde* was saying.

"What?" Bill asked.

"I said, I will send men down before nightfall to take the body to the cemetery. A man will be posted on the jetty to see that nobody goes ashore. Please warn your crew and passengers."

"All right."

"Can I send you any food?"

"No, thanks. We'll do all right."

"Until tomorrow, then."

Esperanza had reached the shore when the *alcalde* left the cutter. Bill watched her until she disappeared among the huts. She did not look back.

Damn Forbes, he thought.

AN HOUR later, the *alcalde's* men came to get the body. It had stiffened on the ice and was clumsy to handle. Rafael and Lazo had to help the *alcalde's* men get it out of the box and over the rail into the *cayuco* moored at the cutter's stern. Forbes looked on from a safe distance.

Bill watched the expressions on his passengers' faces as the body was lowered into the *cayuco*. He couldn't make anything out of them. If Warren felt any emotion at the last sight of his dead partner in crime, he was too accustomed to hiding his thoughts to give anything away. Page turned pale, but it was a natural reaction at the sight of the stiff, ugly body. Lehman's poker-face was as good as Warren's.

The only real reaction came from Forbes, and it was a strange one. After the *cayuco* had paddled off, he came up to Bill. "Got to clean de ice-box now, cap'n," he said humbly. "Got to wash de bahd luck away."

"Get at it, then." Bill was still angry about the spilled gasoline. "It's your job."

He expected Forbes to hold back. But the cook seemed almost eager to do the work. With the salt-water



hose line and a brush he scrubbed the ice box inside and out, even swabbed the deck plates for several feet around. Afterward, he stripped and soaped himself from head to foot, as Bill had never seen him wash before.

Bill wondered how much of it was superstitious Carib dread of any dead body and how much something else. Forbes' alibi was no better than four others. Only Lazo had a perfect alibi, and only he himself and Page had hopeless ones.

Bill was certain that the *alcalde* did not believe Page could have done it, any more than he believed it himself. If they found the money on the boat tomorrow, it would look bad for him—not enough for a murder charge, probably, but they could impound the cutter and tie up his living. His fishing business was probably ruined, whatever happened. He would have to go back to hauling copra and bananas from the cays. And after the gossip had gone around for a while, as it had about the embezzler's daughter—

Bill heaved himself to his feet and went down to the motor-room to mop oil off the diesel. Worrying about his troubles was a waste of time.

Night came, warm and quiet except for the boom of surf from beyond the spit. A half moon hung high over the coco palms. The breeze sprang up again, bringing with it an odor of water-hyacinth from beyond the lagoon, but it was still too hot below decks to eat comfortably in the galley. Bill and the three passengers drank lukewarm beer and ate canned peaches under the canopy, sitting apart from each other and

not talking. Afterward, Bill went up on the roof of the deckhouse to watch the dim lights of the village.

Lehman followed him a few minutes later.

"What were you and the *alcalde* talking about just before he left?" Lehman asked.

"Barbecued pig. You heard the invitation."

"Before that."

"He doesn't want you to know what we were talking about."

"Why not?"

"He didn't tell me."

"Did he tell you what he's going to do next?"

Bill didn't answer. Lehman said, "This killing could fit you as well as anybody. Better than some. I don't see that you have any right to know more about what's going on than the rest of us."

"I haven't. I just happen to speak Spanish, and you don't. If the *alcalde* wanted you to know what his plans are, he'd have let you hear them."

Lehman said nothing for a while. Bill continued to watch the village lights, waiting for the man to go away.

"How long are we going to be here, then?" Lehman asked.

"Until he lets us go. Two or three days—a week, a month. Your guess is as good as mine."

"I've got a return ticket to Baltimore on the ship that brought me here. It leaves in four days."

"I'm sorry. I'd have got you there in time if it hadn't been for the murder. That changed things."

[Turn page]

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"There isn't any chance that we can get away by tomorrow night?"

"Not without the *alcalde's* say-so."

"What if you just cast off and sailed out through the mouth of the lagoon? Who'd try to stop you?"

"Nobody. But this boat has a Honduran registry, and I make my living with it. Any time the authorities decide they don't want it to operate, it doesn't operate. That's one reason it won't sail until the *alcalde* clears us."

"Not for a hundred dollars?"

Bill reached over from the rail on which he sat and touched a switch near the wheel. The little binnacle lamp came on, throwing a fan of light upward which illuminated Lehman's face. Bill studied the hard mouth and strong jaw for a moment before he snapped off the light.

"You're pretty anxious to get away. Why?"

"I told you. I've got to catch that ship, get back to my business. It's worth a hundred dollars to me not to be stuck here until the next ship leaves. Jones wasn't anything to me. I don't see why I have to suffer because he was a crook and got his neck broken."

"You wouldn't be able to catch the ship even if I got you to Cortés in time. They wouldn't let you out of the country until his death is cleared up."

"Leave that to me. A hundred dollars if you get me there before the ship sails."

"No."

"Two hundred."

"You're wasting your time."

"All right. But when the word gets around that you don't keep your arrival dates, your business is going to suffer. Think it over."

"My business was ruined when I first took you and your friends aboard. But thanks for the tip, just the same. Good night."

Lehman went back down the ladder to the deck, leaving Bill scowling thoughtfully in the darkness.

**L**EHMAN did not strike Bill as a fool. Yet only a fool would try to bribe his way out of a murder investigation if he were innocent, and only a bigger fool, having gone as high as two hun-

dred dollars, would stop there if his neck were involved. Lehman was hard to understand.

There was no card game in the galley that night. None of the passengers was speaking to the others. They all went to bed early. Bill didn't feel sleepy. He smoked a couple of cigarettes, sitting in the dory lashed to the fantail of the cutter. The moon was bright enough to show him the figure of the guard who had been posted at the end of the jetty.

The village was quiet. Now and then a dark shape passed through the dim glow coming from the doorway of one of the thatched huts. Once it was a pale shape, oddly. Bill watched it without interest as it made its way through the village and came out on the beach. It wore a white robe, a white bathing cap—

Bill kicked off his canvas slippers, stepped out of his pants, and yanked the singlet over his head. His swimming trunks were under the thwart of the dory. He pulled them on and went off the stern like a seal, with hardly a splash.

The water was as warm as milk. He swam quietly until he was beyond the hearing of the guard, then struck out in a thrashing crawl. He thought he knew where the girl was going, and he did not want to go ashore too near the village. He swam hard until he was winded, floated for a while on his back, then swam again, saving his strength, until he felt the current pushing him seaward and knew he was opposite the mouth of the lagoon.

A mass of floating water-hyacinth, fragrantly deadly with its thousands of tentacle-like trailing roots, almost engulfed him there. He kicked away from the flood that was carrying the water-hyacinth out to sea and swam for the shore.

She had already been in the water and was sitting on the sand. He saw the white cap first, then the slight figure in trunks and a halter. As he waded in through the shallows, she called sharply.

"*Quien es?*"

"Bill."

He sat down beside her and squeezed the water from his hair with his hands. After a moment, she said, "You weren't



supposed to leave the boat."

"I know. I saw you walking along the beach, and I wanted to talk to you. You can watch me to see that I don't bury anything."

The sand was still warm from the heat of the day. He poured handfuls of it over his legs to dry them.

"Do you want to use my towel?" she asked.

"No, thanks."

"Did you swim all the way from the boat?"

"Yes."

"You're a good swimmer."

They were both silent for a long time, and finally he said:

"So it's Esperanza now?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been hiding here?"

"I'm not hiding. Don Carlos knows who I am."

"How did you come here?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Why not? We were good friends, once. I want to know what happened."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a nosy, talkative, busy-body who is going back to Cortés and tell everybody that I met the embezzler's daughter living in a palace she had bought with the money her father stole. Because—"

She put out her hand to stop him. "I'm sorry, Bill. It's just been so long—you're the first person I've seen in all this time who knows about it. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"Tell me how you came here, then."

"They needed schoolteachers. I needed a job."

"You didn't have to take a job like this."

He moved his arm in a gesture that took in the lonely moonlit lagoon, the jungle beyond, the empty beach.

"There was nothing else for me to do," she said. "You know Honduras. Here you either work for the fruit company or the government. I couldn't work for the fruit company, after what happened, and I didn't have enough money to go back to England—in spite of what people said." Her voice was controlled—too much so.

"I heard the talk," Bill said. "Every-

body but a few waggle-chins knew it was nonsense."

"Did they?"

"I did."

"Yes?"

## CHAPTER V

### THE SEARCH



SPERANZA'S voice changed, softened. "I knew you wouldn't believe it," she said. "But you were away when it happened. I had no one to turn to. It was awful, hearing them whisper behind my back, seeing them point their fingers at me—there she goes, Mitchell's daughter, with the money he embezzled. I was only fifteen, Bill. Do you wonder that I ran away?"

"I can understand how you felt. But I think you could have run to a better place than this."

"It's not so bad. I'm never more than a year in one place, so it doesn't get tiresome. I've been here eleven months. Before that I was in Caratasca, up the coast, and in Brewer's Lagoon."

"What happens after you leave here?"

"Another village."

"And after that?"

"I don't know. At first I meant only to earn enough money to go home, but now I like the work. The people are friendly, and everyone is grateful for the little I do. There are worse ways to earn a living."

"But it's crazy to bury yourself like this. If you want to teach school, why not come back to Cortés? They've forgotten your father by now."

"I'll never go back to Cortés." It was flat, cold.

"La Lima, then. Or—"

"Nor to La Lima or La Ceiba or Tela, or any company town. They're all the same. They'd all know who I was. You say they've forgotten, Bill. I haven't." She spoke in the same flat, dead tone. "Maybe they didn't mean to be as cruel as they were. Maybe I was just too young to understand. But I could never go back there, never have a friend among them. I'd want to spit on them. I'd want to tell them what I thought of



them and their d-dirty vicious c-cruel—”

She put her head in her hands and wept.

Bill sifted handfuls of sand through his fingers while she had it out. There was nothing he could say. She had lived too long with it bottled up inside her for him to reason with her now.

It only lasted for a minute. Afterward, she wiped her face on the towel and sat up.

“That’s better,” she said, almost cheerfully. “I’ve wanted to do that for four years. Yours is the first shoulder that’s come along for me to cry on.”

“I’m sorry it wasn’t there four years ago.”

“You were always sorry for me, weren’t you? You don’t have to be any more. I’m all right.”

“You’re not all right. You can’t spend your life hammering ABC’s into the thick heads of a bunch of shark-hunters’ kids. If you won’t go back to Cortés—”

“Let’s not talk about it any more. Tell me about yourself. You’re not working for the company?”

“No. I quit two years ago.”

“Is it your boat?”

So he told her about buying the cutter, while the coco palms rustled behind them and the small waves of the lagoon lapped at their feet. How the chance had come to get the boat for a down payment he could afford—his long grind to pay off the rest of the price by hauling copra and bananas, another grind to license the boat for fishing against the opposition of competing boat-owners, the charter-trips that began to put money in the bank at last, and finally the murder. Everything came back to the murder.

“I don’t know what will happen now,” he said. “My charter business is probably finished for a while. If they don’t impound the boat, I can go back to hauling bananas. If they tie the boat up, I guess I’ll have to get a job with the company again—or go back to the States.”

“Why would they tie the boat up?”

“That’s the way they do things. Until they find the murderer—if they ever do—they’ll want the scene of the crime

where they can wander down to the dock and look at it every couple of months. It wasn’t only melting ice that made me put in here instead of running for Cortés. Once I get back—”

He didn’t finish it. He didn’t want her to realize how bad his own position was.

“I wouldn’t worry too much,” she said. “Don Carlos is a clever man—more clever than you would expect to find in a place like this. And I have an idea myself. If he finds the money tomorrow, I may have a suggestion.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m not going to tell you until the money is found—if it’s found.”

“Why not?”

“Because I might do somebody the same kind of an injustice that was done to me. I came out here tonight to be alone so I could think about it.”

“I’d better leave you alone so you can think, then.”

**H**E STOOD up, hoping she would tell him to stay. When she did not, he said, “You could at least give me a hint.”

She hesitated. “All right. You remember I told you I thought I was a good judge of character?”

“Yes.”

“I have to be certain I’m as good as I think.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s all. Except that I’m glad you swam ashore tonight, and I won’t tell Don Carlos. Good night.” She put out her hand.

He took it and held it. “Why don’t you come back to Cortés when we leave?” he said. “I’ll make room on the boat. They need schoolteachers there as much as they do here.”

“You still feel sorry for me, don’t you? I wish you wouldn’t. I’m quite happy.” She lifted her face to the moonlight and smiled, to show him how happy she was.

“You’re not happy,” he said roughly. “And you’re wrong to hide yourself away like this, cut yourself off from everything and everybody because of something that wasn’t your fault. This is no kind of life for you.”

“Please, Bill. Good night.”

There was a genuine appeal in her



voice. He let go of her hand, turned, waded into the shallows, and jumped off in a flat dive.

A line was hanging from the cutter's rail when he got there, swimming easily in the lukewarm water. The line should not have been where it was, but it made it possible for him to go aboard without giving the guard on the jetty a chance to see him climbing over the stern. He dried himself quickly, put on his clothes, and went forward.

Rafael and Forbes were sleeping on the foredeck. Only Lazo was in the foc's'le. When Bill turned on the light, the Panamanian grinned from his bunk.

"Have a nice swim, Cap'n?"

"Yes."

"You were gone a long time. I thought you would be tired, after paddling around that long, so I put a line over the side for you."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome, Cap'n."

Lazo was still grinning when Bill took the mattress from his bunk and carried it back to the dory on the fantail. It was too hot to sleep below. He made a bed in the dory and lay for a long time looking up at the moon before he went to sleep. Part of the time he wondered if Lazo knew that he had gone ashore, and what would come of it. Part of the time he thought of the way the embezzler's daughter had smiled when she told him how happy she was. She needed practice before she would be able to smile convincingly.

Esperanza did not come aboard with the *alcalde* in the morning. The *alcalde* asked Bill to call crew and passengers aft under the canopy and explain that they were to stay there while he and the captain searched the boat.

Warren made no comment to this, but both Lehman and Page objected. They argued that Bill, as a suspect and the man most familiar with the cutter's layout, should not be allowed to hunt for something he himself might have hidden. The *alcalde* promised them that he would give Bill no chance to mislead him, and that it was because of Bill's knowledge of the boat that his help was needed.

Together they searched the cutter, starting at the bow and working aft.

It was a thorough job, and it took most of the day. They emptied lockers, tore bunks apart, uncovered scuttles, dismantled light fixtures, examined stores, even sounded pump-drains with a piece of wire.

The three passengers sweltered under the canopy. There was no breeze, and the glassy lagoon reflected heat and glare like a mirror. Lazo lay in the shade of the icebox and slept while Rafael and Forbes angled for shiners with hand lines, enjoying their holiday. Page got up several times to pace around the small deck, until Lehman snarled at him to sit down and relax. Page snarled back, and there was almost a fight.

The heat, and a strange, muggy heaviness in the air, made tempers short.

IT WAS late afternoon before Bill and the *alcalde* crawled up out of the lazaret hatch astern to make a final search of the boat's deck and superstructure. It was as thorough as the search that had gone before. They found nothing.

"What now?" Bill asked wearily.

The *alcalde* took off his helmet and mopped his head and neck. The heat was terrific. Not the faintest ruffle stirred the surface of the lagoon. A thin, high haze hung over the ocean beyond the village. Smoke from a fire burning on the beach rose straight up and dissipated into nothing.

"We have done enough for today," the *alcalde* said. "I think we had better search everyone again, and then they can go ashore for a swim and the barbecue." He pointed at the haze forming over the ocean. "We should not delay. The weather is going to change."

Even Page forgot to grumble at submitting to a second search of his pockets, and he did not repeat his refusal to go ashore if Warren also went. Everyone was anxious to get away from the heat that rose in waves from the cutter's deck.

The *alcalde* suggested that they change to bathing trunks before leaving the boat, which gave him an excuse to examine their clothes inside and out. When he had finished, he was all courteous hospitality. Nothing more was



said of the dead man or the missing money.

The crew stayed behind, with Bill's permission to swim as long as they remained near the boat. He would have liked to let them go ashore, but the weather looked treacherous to him. The humidity was climbing every minute, and the haze over the ocean had thickened.

If a blow came up suddenly, as blows often did on that coast, it would take the full crew to manage the cutter, get anchors down before she took the rickety jetty along with her and piled up on the beach. A wreck, Bill thought sourly, was all he needed to finish off a perfect cruise.

The *alcalde* went on to the village to change his clothes. Esperanza met the others on the beach near the fire. She wore a wide-brimmed straw hat with her swimming suit and carried a long charred paddle. She looked questioningly at Bill. He shook his head. He wanted to get her aside and try to find out more about her suspicions, but the chance did not come.

"The pig won't be done for another hour," she told them. "You have plenty of time for a swim, if you want to cool off. Isn't this heat terrible?"

"It's going to storm," Bill said.

"Oh, I hope not. It will ruin the barbecue."

"We can at least have the swim," Lehman said. "How about it, Miss Mitchell?"

"I can't. I have to watch the pig."

"Let Tarzan watch the pig," Page said. "We're paying his bill. He might as well do something to earn it."

Bill took the barbecue paddle from Esperanza over her protests. He would have volunteered anyway, because pig-turning was a hot job even in normal weather. But he wished, for a moment, that Page was substantially bigger and not a passenger. He could understand how a man might be tempted to break another man's neck.

The barbecue pit was a rock-lined hole in the sand under the palms. Cocusk charcoal made a bed of coals on which the pig, wrapped in a thick coat of plantain leaves, roasted fatly. A Carib boy was there to wet down the

plantain leaves with salt water as Bill turned the pig with the paddle. Warren came to stand at his elbow and watch the turning.

"Why don't you go for a swim?" Bill said.

"I'd poison the water for the rest of them," Warren answered. "When are we going to get out of here?"

"As soon as the *alcalde* lets us go."

"What's to stop you from leaving whenever you feel like it?" It was almost the same question that Lehman had asked the night before.

"You're anxious to get away," Bill said.

"Who wouldn't be? I'm not winning any popularity contests around here."

"Don't you want to find out who killed your partner?"

Warren smiled. "Let's not kid each other, Captain. He was nothing to me except the man who happened to be holding some of my money when he died. The money's gone. I'm ready to go, too."

"Talk to the *alcalde*," Bill said. "I can't do anything for you."

Warren wandered away and sat down under a palm.

Bill was turning the pig for the third or fourth time when a short, strong gust of wind rattled the palms and blew charcoal fumes in his face. The wind died immediately, then blew as strongly in another direction. Bill looked at the sky, which had turned greenish gray in the space of a few minutes. Another gust of wind lifted sand from the beach. This time it did not die so quickly.

Bill gave the paddle to the Carib boy and told him to get the pig out of the pit. There was no hope of finishing the cooking. He knew the signs. The storm would hit them in a few minutes.

HE WALKED down toward the water and called the swimmers ashore.

"I hate to break up the party," he said, "but a blow is coming fast. We'll have to change our plans."

"I don't know what we can do," Esperanza said unhappily. "There's no other place in the village to cook a whole pig. I'm afraid we'll just have to put it off."

"Do you know if the gasoline ar-



rived?" Bill asked.

"Yes. It's here."

"We can finish cooking on the boat, then," he told her. "The galley oven is big enough. But we'll have to get away from the jetty before the wind hits us." To Lehman and Page, Bill said, "If you want anything to eat, you and Warren had better forget your feud and rig up something to carry the pig. Don't waste any time, because it will be blowing coconuts in five minutes." To Esperanza he said, "Where's the gas?"

"I'll show you."

They hurried down the beach and met the *alcalde* coming from the village. Bill explained the change in plans. The *alcalde* waved them on and went to help the men who were bringing the pig. The sky was darkening rapidly. The wind had settled down to a steady, strong gale from seaward, and large drops of rain had begun to spatter the lagoon. Bill and Esperanza were running to beat the rain.

"Are you sure you couldn't have missed it?" she asked breathlessly.

He did not have to ask what she was talking about. "We made a good search," he said. "There are only so many places on a boat of that size where you can hide something in a hurry. I don't think it's there to find." He caught her arm and pulled her along with him as she fell behind. "Why do you ask? What difference does it make? Do you suspect one of the crew?"

She shook her head stubbornly. He was determined to make her talk, but it could wait until later. The rain, driven before the rising wind, was stinging their faces, so that they had to keep their heads down and save their breath for running.

The gasoline can was in a *cayuco* pulled up on the sand below the village. Bill grabbed the can and ran for the jetty. Esperanza at his heels. The surface of the lagoon was already choppy with whitecaps that made the cutter rock at its moorings. Lazo and Rafael were putting rope bumpers over the side to save the paint on the hull.

Bill threw the gasoline can aboard, then swung Esperanza after it and jumped for the deck as the cutter

slammed into the bumpers and rocked away.

"Get ready to cast off as soon as everyone is aboard," he called to Rafael, who was nearest. He had to shout to make himself heard over the noise of the flapping canopy. "Pull the canopy down before it tears loose. We'll anchor in clear water. Tell Lazo to stand by the wheel."

Rafael waved his understanding. Bill, picking up the gasoline can, turned to look toward the beach. His three passengers and the *alcalde* were running for the jetty with a litter made of palm fronds on which the pig bounced insecurely. They would be well-soaked before they reached the boat. Rain was slashing across the lagoon in torrents.

Bill followed Esperanza into the shelter of the deck house and down the ladder. The galley was empty. Forbes was in one of the cabins, closing the ports. Bill found a funnel and poured gasoline into the tank of the primus, then pumped up the pressure.

"Close the hatch of the foc'sle when you get through there," he called to Forbes. "We're going to cook a pig as soon as it comes aboard."

"I'll cook it, if you'll show me how to work one of those things—and if I can stand up." Esperanza was holding on to the table for support against the pitch of the boat, at the same time trying to push her wet hair out of her eyes. "This is terrible!"

"It won't be so bad after we get the anchors down." Bill had opened the valves of the stove burners and touched a match to the gasoline that was dripping into the priming cups. "But I don't want you to cook. I want you to tell me what your idea is about the murder. If you have anything at all that might be a clue, you can't keep it to yourself."

"I haven't a clue, Bill. Of course I'd tell you if it was anything like that. It isn't. It's just that—that—oh, it's so little to go on! And if I made a mistake I'd be doing somebody a terrible wrong. I can't forget how they talked about me, what they did to me with nothing but their suspicions. I can't do it to anyone else. I won't!"

"If we'd found the money, would you



have said anything?"

"That's just it. I was expecting you to find it—"

Something about the way she cut it off made Bill turn around.

## CHAPTER VI

### MURDER MONEY



**S**UDDENLY, Esperanza wasn't looking at Bill. She was staring at Forbes, in the cabin doorway. The cook stood motionless, frozen there, his eyes on the stove, watching the little crowns of hissing white flame form on the burners as the gasoline and air began to vaporize. He had the look of a man watching the end of the world.

With half of his mind, Bill knew that he had found the money. The other half caught the roar of the diesel starting up in the motor-room. Almost immediately the roar changed to a labored sputter, and the boat's motion steadied. Bill knew that they had left the jetty. His vague thought that Lazo should know better than to move the boat before the motor was warm remained unformed.

He reached for the burner valves, twisted them shut, and slapped the still-burning priming flames out with his hands.

"So it was you," he said to Forbes.

The cook's eyes moved. They looked at Bill, then at the girl, then back at Bill. He began to tremble.

"No, Cap'n. I—I didn't do it. I wouldn't—"

"Where is the money?"

"Cap'n, don't ahsk me! Let me go ashore, Cap'n! Let me off de boat—" Forbes had taken a step forward, raising his hands pleadingly.

"Stay right there," Bill said. "I'll find it myself." He bent over the stove, still keeping an eye on Forbes. "Esperanza, go call the *alcalde*. Tell him—"

He never finished the sentence.

Esperanza screamed. An arm came over Bill's shoulder and across his face, caught the point of his jawbone below the ear, tightened around his head, and yanked him back against the doorway

of the foc's'le with a twist that made his neck crack.

Esperanza screamed again. Bill, off balance and with one arm pinned by the weight of his own body against the door-frame, was helpless. A hand was pulling his free wrist behind him, trying to force it up into a hammer-lock. He struggled to call out to Esperanza, tell her to get away, but the fingers were like hooks under his jaw and the wrist covered his mouth.

He set his neck muscles in time to prevent a second strong tug from breaking his spine, and then the roll of the cutter pushed him away from the door-frame and his arm was free. He caught the wrist that was across his mouth and tore it loose, knowing he was too late to save himself. Forbes had snatched a knife from the rack on the bulkhead and was coming at him, his eyes glaring, his lips drawn back over his teeth.

Bill kicked at him and missed. Forbes struck powerfully with the knife, his arm sweeping around and up from the side, as Bill ripped his other wrist from the grip of the man at his back.

Bill heard the cook's grunt of effort as he threw the knife and its solid *thunk!* at the same time. He felt nothing at all. He hit Forbes with his left hand, knocking him stumbling back across the galley, and spun around to face his other attacker.

Rafael, the knife hilt standing from his ribs, sagged in the doorway. His knees buckled as Bill watched. He went down slowly, clinging to the door frame, until he was kneeling there, facing Forbes across the galley.

"Stupid blahk mahn," Rafael said, clearly and contemptuously. His eyes closed, and he fell forward on his face.

"He said he would kill me, Cap'n," Forbes babbled. "He said he would kill me did I not help him. He killed de faht mahn—"

**B**ILL said, "Tell it from the beginning."

It was early morning, and the storm had passed. The cutter lay at the jetty again. Surf still boomed heavily from the ocean side of the spit, but the sky was clear and the lagoon calm once



more. Bill and Forbes, with Esperanza and the *alcalde*, were in the *alcalde's* hut. Rafael's body had already left the cutter in the same *cayuco* that had carried the fat man ashore. The passengers slept on. Bill had several reasons for wanting to get away from the lagoon before they awoke—if he could.

Forbes wiped his hands nervously, and kept his eyes on the floor while he told the *alcalde* what he had told Bill the night before.

"Rafael wanted the money. We watched them play cards for all that money—more money than we had ever seen—as if it were nothing. It made him mad that they had so much. He said he was going to steal it and buy a boat, be captain himself. I told him that the captain would put him in jail if he stole from the passengers. He said I was a black fool and that he was too clever for the captain. That night, after Lazo had gone up to the wheel and the fat man was alone, he went into the galley. He hit me when I tried to stop him, but I watched from the doorway. He told the fat man that he had to get something from the locker at the end of the table. When the fat man leaned forward to let Rafael reach behind him, Rafael took him by the head, as he did to you, Captain, and broke his neck. The fat man's neck was not as strong as yours."

Esperanza shivered.

"And the money?" the *alcalde* prompted. "Where was it when the captain searched you?"

"In the fat man's pocket. Rafael put it there after the captain had searched the body and went to call the passengers into the galley. He got it back the next morning, after the boat had been searched and he and Lazo and the captain were putting the body in the ice box. He threw the wallet overboard, but he was afraid to keep the money with him when the captain said we were coming into the lagoon. He took the top off the stove and put the money under the fry-plate. Then he told me to spill the gasoline so the stove could not be used."

"Why did you do it?"

Forbes licked his parched lips.

"He said he would kill me if I did not help him. He watched me all the time.

I wanted to tell the captain, but I could not get away from the boat, away from him, and I was afraid. I thought he would run away into the jungle, and I could tell then. I stabbed him when he tried to kill the captain."

"That's true," Bill said. "Forbes could have stabbed me just as easily. After I was out of the way, there would have been nobody to stop him and Rafael but Lazo, who would have been easy to kill at the wheel, and Esperanza. I don't think Forbes has anything more to pay for."

"That is for the authorities in Cortés to decide," the *alcalde* said. "Lazo had no part in it?"

"No," Bill answered. "Rafael had to do something when he saw me bring the gasoline aboard. He told Lazo that I had said to push off immediately, before you and the passengers reached the boat. Lazo did as he was told, without asking questions. Rafael dropped down through the foc's'le hatch and caught me bending over the stove. He had killed once for the money. He was ready to kill again, as many times as he had to, to keep it."

"I thought it was Rafael from the first," Esperanza said.

"Why did you say nothing?" the *alcalde* asked.

She made a helpless gesture. "It is not easy to accuse someone of murder without proof, Don Carlos. And I had to be sure the money was still on the boat."

"What made you suspect him?"

"There were others like him in the school at Caratasca, where the blood is the same. His education and his color went to his head. He looked down on Forbes, who might have been his brother, as an ignorant black man. In his own eyes, he was too good for the life he had to lead because he was only a poor island boy. The money meant a new life, enough to murder for. Neither Forbes nor Lazo had the same urge, because they could never imagine themselves as anything different from what they were. I was sure that if the murder had been done because of the money, Rafael was guilty."

"How much money was it?" the *alcalde* asked.



BILL took the sheaf of notes from his pocket. They were greasy from the fat that had collected under the fry-plate, but the fire had not burned long enough in the stove to harm them. He put the money on the table in front of the *alcalde*.

"Twelve hundred and sixty dollars. Twenty-five hundred and twenty *lempiras*."

The *alcalde* looked at the money without touching it. "I can understand something of Rafael's thoughts," he said, after a moment. "My whole village does not earn that much in a year."

Bill took six hundred and fifty dollars from the pile and pushed the rest across the table.

"Lehman and Page were cheated. They get theirs back. The rest belongs to the village."

The *alcalde* opened his mouth. Bill didn't give him a chance to speak.

"No one else is going to complain," he said. "You can hire a substitute schoolteacher, if you haven't any better use for it. I've asked Esperanza to come back to Cortés with us."

She shook her head when he looked at her. "No, Bill. We've already discussed it."

"I'm not asking you to stay there. You said you had only another month here before you would be relieved. They can spare you that long. If you still don't want to stay at the end of a month—"

He was talking to an empty doorway. Esperanza had left the hut. Forbes broke the silence that followed.

"Cap'n," he said timidly.

"What?"

"I could cook breakfast, Cap'n."

"Never mind breakfast. Get back to the boat and stand by to cast off. Tell Lazo to warm up the motor."

"Yes, Cap'n."

Forbes ducked through the door and was gone. Bill held out his hand to the *alcalde*.

"*Gracias* and *adios*, Don Carlos. If I can do anything for you in Cortés—"

"You have already done enough for us." The *alcalde* gripped his hand. "We have many uses for the money. I would like to ask only one other favor of you."

"What is it?"

"Speak to her again. Try to persuade

her to go."

"You want her to go?"

"Yes." The *alcalde* sighed. "I do not say that we will not miss her. But we will lose her in a month, in any event, and this is no life for her. If you know her story—"

"I know it."

"Then I need not tell you why she is as she is. Something must be done to change her, make her see what she is missing. Talk to her again." He urged Bill toward the door.

"But what more can I say to her? She won't listen."

"It will come to you. Hurry." The *alcalde* pushed him through the doorway.

Bill saw her walking down the beach, away from the village. He caught up with her near the pit where the pig had been cooked. She stopped when he spoke, but she did not turn around. He put his hands on her shoulders and made her face him. She looked at him without expression of any kind.

"Listen," he said patiently. "Four years of this is long enough. "You're doing yourself wrong, and you're doing other people wrong. They aren't all what you think they are. Because a few gossipy people talked behind your back, you're ready to condemn the whole world. You leaned over backward to keep from accusing Rafael because you weren't sure about him, yet you damn everybody in Honduras for what a few did to you. Give them a chance. Come back for a month—a week—"

"What has Cortés to offer that I don't have here?"

"Life, for one thing. People. Something to think about." He was beginning to get angry. "My God, you're not even legally grown up yet! You ought to be still going to school, not teaching it. Another few years on this coast and you'll lose your ambition, your looks, your health, everything. You don't want me to be sorry for you, but how can I help it?"

"You needn't be." Her face was white. She stood very straight, her hands at her sides, the fingers clenched. "I don't need your pity and I don't need your advice. I thanked you for your offer and declined it. Is there anything else



keeping you here?"

"Only the hope that I can make you listen to reason. Even the *alcalde* wants you to go. He knows what will happen to you as well as I do. Unless you get out of this, get back to your own kind of people—"

He stopped, seeing that it was useless. She was deaf to everything he had to say. He couldn't reach her. And he was afraid that if he kept talking, his anger would make him say something to hurt her. He turned on his heel and walked away.

He did not look back until he reached the cutter. Esperanza was no longer in sight then. The villagers, hearing the boat's motor, had crowded down to the beach to watch it leave. Bill saw the *alcalde* standing in the door of his hut, and waved good-by from the roof of the deckhouse. Lazo and Forbes hauled in the mooring lines.

The cutter pulled away from the jetty, made a wide turn, and headed for the mouth of the lagoon.

THE racket of the diesel had wakened the passengers. They came up on deck, yawning, surprised to find the boat under way. Bill clipped a chain across the head of the deckhouse ladder to show them that he did not want company at the wheel.

He was still angry—partly at Esperanza, partly at himself for having failed to move her.

It wasn't as if he had asked her to give up something for nothing. Cortés needn't hold her. The whole world was open to her. She was young, pretty, in-

telligent—no, not intelligent. Nobody with intelligence could develop such a blind spot.

He put the wheel over to miss a clump of water-hyacinth drifting toward the mouth of the lagoon. It reminded him of the night he had swum ashore, and he remembered her tears. His smoldering anger left him. He thought, I gave up too soon. I should have kept trying. Some way, somehow—"

Lazo called from the foredeck. "I'd better take a sounding in the channel, Cap'n. The storm may have shifted the bar."

Bill brought his mind back to his job. The tide was low, and the mouth of the lagoon had narrowed. It would be better to wait for high water, but he needed every hour he could save if he was going to catch the banana-ship for his passengers. He cut the motor until it was barely ticking over and brought the cutter about to approach the channel bow-on.

"Sound!" he called.

The lead-line went out with a splash. Lazo read the mark. "Two fathoms and a half."

Good enough so far, Bill thought, watching the water for shadows. If he could charter the boat again within a month, he'd come back to the lagoon. There must be some way to make her see that she was wasting her life. She had been lucky, so far. She hadn't had malaria yet, or dengue, or seen a whole village die of smallpox. When that happened—

The lead went out again. "Two

[Turn page]

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fathoms," Lazo called.

It was shoaling too fast. They would probably go aground, this time, and have to wait for high tide to float them off. If they did, he could walk back to the village and have another talk with the *alcalde*. Between them they ought to be able to manage something. She was still a minor, legally under age. If he could get himself declared her guardian, with the *alcalde's* help, she'd have nothing to say about it. Once he got her out of there, got her back to civilization—"

"One fathom and a half, still shoaling," Lazo called from the bow. They were fairly in the channel now. Lazo pulled in the sounding line, swung it, and let fly.

They struck before the lead hit the water. The boat jarred, scraped over sand, and stopped on a level keel, hard aground. It was Bill's fault. If he had been paying attention to the channel, he would have seen the sandbar in time to sheer off. A flutter of blue on the spit had distracted his eye.

Esperanza stood there, her back to the slanting trunk of a palm, watching the cutter. The strong breeze from the ocean plastered her dress against her body and whipped her hair about her head. She was so close that Bill could see the redness of her lips, the beauty of her figure under the wind-blown dress. She did not look at him. When the cutter grounded, she turned away and began to walk slowly back toward the village.

Bill's hand, reaching for the throttle, stopped in mid-air. It was ten seconds before his arrested movement completed itself—ten seconds in which he saw what he had not seen before. He pushed the throttle shut and cut the switch.

"Guardian!" he said aloud, in disgust. "Guardian! You nitwit!"

He kicked off his canvas slippers and dived from the deckhouse into deep water on the side away from the sandbar.

SHE stopped when he waded dripping out of the lagoon and caught up with her. "There was one argument I didn't use," he said flatly. "It just occurred to me."

"Which one?" Her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"This one."

He reached for her. She neither struggled against him nor returned his kiss. The front of the blue dress was wet with sea-water when he let her go.

"I just woke up," he said. "I want you to marry me."

She began to walk again, without answering. He fell into step beside her. "I wasted a lot of time thinking up the wrong reasons," he said. "I don't want you to teach school, here or anywhere. If you don't like Cortés, we'll go somewhere else. Where do you want to live?"

"Anywhere you are, Bill." She had to be honest with him. "I always have—ever since I was fifteen."

"I wish I had known."

"I couldn't tell you. You were always so sorry for me. I thought it might be different when you came here. I had grown up. I thought you might have forgotten the sad little girl who had no friends. But you were still sorry for me, and I couldn't bear it."

"I'm not sorry for you now."

"You have to be sure. We both have to be sure. Let me finish out the month, Bill. I'll be here when you come back. If you still want me—"

He still had only one good argument. He used it again, convincingly. Afterward they walked down the beach to tell the *alcalde* he was losing his school-teacher.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

## THE GALLOPING CORPSES

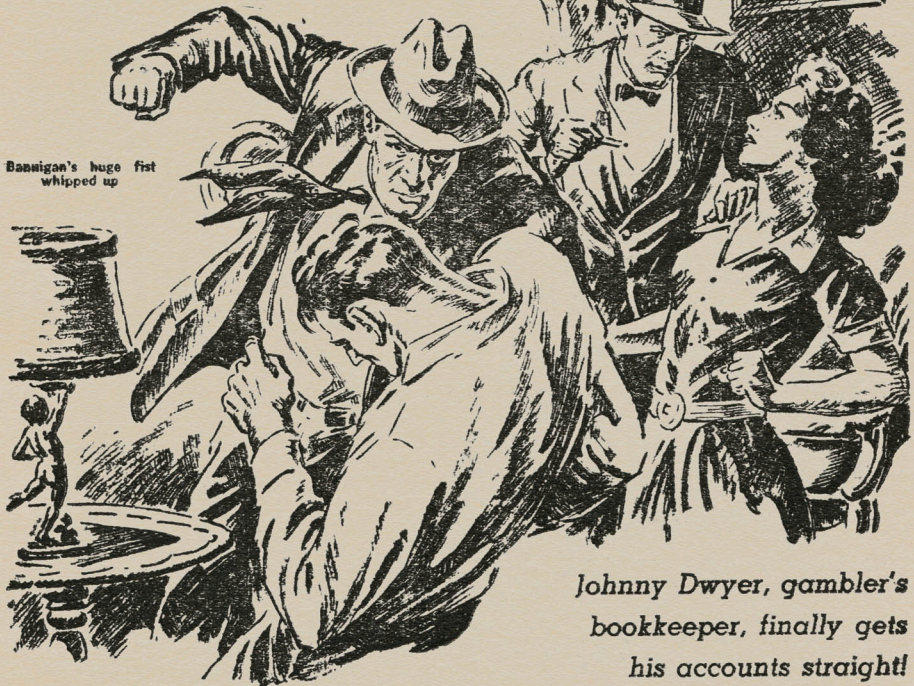
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# the ONLY WAY out



Bannigan's huge fist  
whipped up

*Johnny Dwyer, gambler's  
bookkeeper, finally gets  
his accounts straight!*

A TINY portable radio on the bar was pouring out nothing but bad news. The supper rush was over, so most of the Eldorado Club's staff of waiters, cigarette and hat-check girls, as well as the stickmen and dice girls from the gambling room, had gathered around and were listening in uneasy silence.

The impossible was happening. Every precinct was reporting the same story—Mayor Sullivan was being snowed under by the reform candidate, Ralph Thompson. It was certain, even from the early returns, that the reform crowd would be taking over city hall.

Johnny Dwyer glanced around quickly when he heard a stir behind him. He

By WILLIAM DEGENHARD



could see the others of the staff edging away a bit nervously. "Ham" Hamilton was coming in.

Ham was a large, well-padded, red-faced man who looked like an easy-going hardware salesman. Everybody liked him. But tonight, as never before, everybody was conscious that Ham was a cop. An honest cop.

"Been catching the returns?" Johnny waved to the bartender to set them up. "It looks like there'll be some changes around headquarters pretty soon."

"Yeah." Ham settled his bulk on the stool. "Some of the boys are going to find out 'honesty is the best policy,' after all."

Johnny frowned at his drink. "Nocky seems to think it won't make any difference who's elected. He says it's going to be business as usual around here."

"I got news for him," Ham chuckled. "Ralph Thompson can't be bought. He's a funny guy, in some ways. He doesn't want to do things the hard way, unless he has to. So, if Nocky folds his tent and gets out, Thompson's willing to let bygones be bygones. We're giving Nocky until Saturday to make up his mind. If this place is still open by then, we're paying the place a little visit—and we're bringing our hatchets. Pass it on to Nocky, will you?"

Johnny nodded soberly. "Sure."

"And Johnny, you're going to have to make up your mind, too," Ham added. "Which side do you want to be on—Nocky's or the law's?" Ham drained his glass and set it down carefully on the bar. "Sue's an awfully nice girl. She doesn't deserve a jailbird for a husband."

JOHNNY felt a flush creeping up his cheeks as he watched the bulky detective waddle out. He resented that Ham should think of him as one of the mob, a criminal like some of the others. He never was.

He was just another of the hired help, on the pay roll as bookkeeper for the All-City Amusement Corporation, operators of the Eldorado Club. He never mingled with the mob. He had never done, or had been asked to do, anything illegitimate. He kept books, that's all. To Johnny, this had always been just

another job. No more, no less.

He rubbed a sweaty palm along the seam of his trousers. Ever since he'd come to work here, Ham, who dropped in often, had acted like a Dutch uncle toward him. Over and over, Ham had been insisting that the mere fact that Johnny was working for "Nocky" Morrell put him in the same class. Johnny never could see that. He had done nothing wrong.

He stood up abruptly, glanced around. He'd better pass Ham's message on to Nocky before the late crowd started coming in and the place got busy. He noticed the gambling room had a few customers already. This would be the last night the place would be run so openly.

It was hard to believe the old order was crumbling. Johnny tried to hold back the thought nagging in his mind. He had never done anything wrong. But he had seen a lot. He realized, for the first time, how much he knew about Nocky's business. For the first time, too, he wondered if it were possible to quit his job—and stay alive!

He rapped nervously on the door marked "Manager" and heard a harsh "Come in."

Mike Raymond, a well-built, handsome man with a cleft chin—Nocky's junior partner—was slumped in a leather chair over on the left. Nocky was perched on the end of his big mahogany desk, scowling at a radio that was pouring out the election returns.

"Ham was just in," Johnny stated.

"I know," Nocky turned slightly. "What did he have to say?"

"He says unless the place is closed up by Saturday night, there're going to pull a raid."

Morrell sighed, got up from the desk and went around to his seat. "Well, it's nice to have a warning, anyway."

"Are you closing?" Johnny asked, a bit timidly.

Mike Raymond chuckled softly. "Sometimes I think you're not dry behind the ears yet. We've been through these reform movements before, Johnny. If the heat gets too bad, we'll pull in our horns a little. After the excitement dies down—as it surely will—things will get back to normal again."



"Ham says Ralph Thompson can't be bought," Johnny said uneasily. "That he'll get tough if he has to."

"We don't scare easily," Mike said flatly.

There was a long silence. Johnny shifted awkwardly from foot to foot, sweat unaccountably breaking out in the small of his back.

"Nocky," he said finally, "I want to quit my job."

Mike Raymond straightened, pulled an automatic from his shoulder holster. He leveled it at Johnny.

"Sure, any time, Johnny," he said evenly.

Nocky looked annoyed. "Put that away, Mike." His voice raised slightly as his partner hesitated. "I said, put that away!" He relaxed as Mike obeyed. "That's better! . . . Johnny, you know me pretty well now, don't you?"

"I think so," Johnny replied weakly. "Some of the boys think I'm peculiar. I never go in for murder—except as a last resort. Murder's a messy business, and very risky. If you're caught at it—Well, like I always say, there's no parole from the electric chair."

Johnny nodded without saying anything.

"If you want to quit," Nocky went on, "that's your business." He pulled out his wallet and counted out six crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. "This pays you for this week and give you two weeks' severance pay. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," Johnny agreed.

"Just one word of advice goes with this, Johnny," Nocky added. "I've been pretty careful to make sure you don't know anything outside of your own department. Maybe you know a little more than you should. But if you keep your mouth shut, you'll be all right."

"You've always played fair with me, Nocky," Johnny said, a bit huskily. "You won't have to worry about me. No matter what happens, I'll never talk."

Nocky smiled thinly. "Fine. Good luck, Johnny!"

Johnny half turned to say good-by to Mike. But the other partner didn't look around. His scowl showed he was in entire disagreement with the senior partner.

WITH no further conversation, Johnny got out fast. His heart was beating rapidly. He felt a bit confused, as if he had fallen into a whirlpool and been thrown clear again. He should be happy. He wasn't. This had been easier than he had any right to expect. It had been much too easy.

There was a chill, scared feeling inside of him as he hurried out the side door. He regretted in a way that he was leaving without saying goodby to some of the people he'd worked with—Alec the bartender, Carole the hat-check girl, Emil the head waiter. All decent, hard-working people, not like some of the trash that worked in the gambling room. He still felt the same way. He had never been one of them.

Tim, the parking-lot attendant, wasn't around when Johnny got into his car and drove away. He kept watching the rear-view mirror, conscious that his hands were damp on the wheel. The cool night air made him feel a lot better. He wasn't being followed.

The farther he got from the club, the more he was willing to believe in Nocky's sincerity. No, Nocky Morrell was too smart to go in for murder. Johnny was safe as long as he kept his mouth shut.

He braked suddenly when he noticed that a coupe was parked in front of his house. The momentary scare passed quickly, for he recognized it as Ham Hamilton's battered coupe. He parked in front of the car, and as he came up the front walk he saw the light flash on in the vestibule.

His wife, Sue, opened the door, stepped outside.

"Ham's here," she said in a low voice. "I know. I recognized his car."

Sue looked a bit nervous. "Is everything all right? I've been listening to the returns. Thompson made a victory speech, promising to run Nocky Morrell and his kind out of town."

Johnny smiled and kissed her on the forehead. "It's no skin off our noses, Sue. I've quit my job."

"I'm glad, Johnny." She gave his arm a quick squeeze. "I never liked you working for Nocky, even if it did mean so much more money."

She pushed the door back and led the



way into the living room. Ham was sitting by the radio listening to the election returns. He jumped up, turned sharply as Johnny entered.

"Did you tell Nocky what I told you?" he demanded.

Johnny told him yes.

"What did he say?"

Johnny shrugged. "He didn't say anything himself. But Mike Raymond says the excitement will die down after a while and everything will get back to normal."

"So, they're not closing up by Saturday," Ham mused.

"I don't think so."

"I never did myself," Ham growled.

He strode to the hallway, picked up the phone, dialed rapidly.

"George, this is Ham," he said when he got his number. "It looks like the boys are going to be stubborn. Tell Al to roll 'em. I'll meet you over there in ten minutes."

Johnny's eyes widened slowly. "Ham, you're not pulling a raid on the Eldorado tonight."

Ham dropped the phone into its cradle.

"I sure am!" he said with finality.

"But you said they had until Saturday night."

"To make up their minds," Ham added. "They've made up their minds already, haven't they?"

Johnny shifted uneasily. "It's going to look like a doublecross."

Ham stared sourly at Johnny for a moment. Then:

"I told you before, Johnny. The time's come when you got to make up your mind which side you're on."

"I never did anything wrong," Johnny protested. "I was only the book-keeper."

"Look, Johnny, stop being so naive!" Ham looked exasperated. "It's like saying a dope peddler is only a salesman. You've been part and parcel of his set-up. What he gets, you'll get, too—unless you decide to play ball with the law!"

Johnny's eyes shifted. "But I don't know anything."

"You know plenty!" Ham said in a hard voice. After a moment, his eyes softened a bit. "Johnny, I've always

thought of you as a nice, decent kid. Maybe just a little on the dumb side. But sooner or later, you're going to have to make peace with the law. Help us put Nocky Morrell where he belongs and I can promise you you'll get out of this with a whole skin. Stay on Nocky's side and I'll see to it that you go to prison for a long, long time!"

**S**UDDENLY, a wave of weakness went through Johnny. He groped his way to a chair, sat down. Ham was right: he had been dumb. He could see now where he had put himself—square in the middle, trapped between the police and the guns of Nocky Morrell.

Sue came over and put her arm around his shoulders.

"Ham's right, Johnny," she said softly. "You've got to work with the police."

He rubbed his hand across his eyes.

"I can't, Sue," he said finally. "I can't talk. If I do, they'll kill me—and you, too!"

"We'll protect you," Ham said gruffly.

Johnny's head jerked. "For how long—until after the trial? But what about later? Nocky has friends. They'll get me! I can't talk, Ham. I *won't* talk! You can't make me!"

Sue's hand tightened across Johnny's shoulders.

"I think Johnny's right, Ham," she said. "If he keeps his mouth closed, they won't bother us. And if he refuses to testify, your case may not be strong enough to get convictions, so Johnny may not even go to jail."

Ham's heavy features took on a fixed grim look. He was silent for a long time. Then he sighed.

"You two kids are all mixed up," he said. "You don't know how to tell right from wrong. By rights, I ought to lock you up. But I got faith in you, Johnny. I'm going to give you twenty-four hours to think it over."

"Thanks, Ham," Johnny said huskily.

"But you're going to do as I say," Ham went on. "You're not leaving town. And you can't stay here."

Sue gave him a puzzled look. "Why not?"

"Nocky didn't let Johnny go without strings," Ham said grimly. "You got a reprieve, not a release, Johnny. The



stakes are high in this game, higher than you seem to realize. If you talk, Nocky faces a life sentence. And there's only one way Nocky can be sure you won't talk. So, I'm not going to let you stay here and get murdered."

"We'll move to a hotel," Johnny suggested.

"You're going to stay at my sister's," Ham stated. He took out a set of keys and tossed them on the end table by Johnny's elbow. "My sister went to Chicago yesterday. Her house is empty. It's out in the Windsor Heights section—126 Walton Street. You can't miss it. It's a brick bungalow with green shutters."

He took out a notebook, wrote out the address, tore off the page and put it down on the table.

"I'm taking a big chance on you," he added. "But I want to give both of you time to think and talk it over. If you run out on me, I'm in trouble."

"I won't, Ham," Johnny said. "That's a promise."

Ham nodded curtly. The Dwyers got up, stood side by side, hands entwined, as the big detective went out.

Not ten minutes later they were packed and on their way. Johnny tried hard not to let Sue know how scared he was.

He realized now that Ham was right. He had been a fool, living in a dream world. There was no doubt that Nocky was squeamish about murder. But Mike Raymond wasn't. And Johnny was quite sure now that Mike would argue it out and convince his boss that their safety would depend on eliminating Johnny. And Sue, too!

They had a little trouble finding the house, for Johnny couldn't remember if Ham said Walton or Allerton Street and they had forgotten to bring the written address with them. Sue insisted it was Walton. And she was right.

They recognized the house at once, a brick bungalow with green shutters standing alone in the block, a cleared space in a tangle of weeds and small saplings. The windows were all dark.

Johnny looked back nervously as he turned into the driveway, but he could be sure they hadn't been followed. There wasn't another car anywhere in sight.

There wasn't a soul walking along the quiet street.

Sue remarked she felt a bit queer going into a stranger's house like this. Johnny himself felt something like a housebreaker as he opened the front door with Ham's keys.

IT WAS a nice place, comfortably but not lavishly furnished. Hand in hand, a bit timidly, Johnny and Sue explored. There was a small sun porch, a good-sized living room, a dining room, a big kitchen, a bath and two bedrooms in the rear. The shades were drawn on all the windows.

On the way back through the kitchen, Sue impulsively stopped and looked into the refrigerator. There were bottles of beer and a quart of milk in the upper compartment. She found packages of frozen vegetables, eggs, bacon, butter, and other such staples. From the bottom shelf, she pulled out a platter on which were several tempting-looking steaks.

"Well, we won't starve," Johnny remarked.

She gave him a quick look. "How long have you known Ham, Johnny?"

"A year or so—ever since I started working for Nocky."

"He's been out to our place lots of times. Has he ever mentioned to you that he had a sister?"

Johnny frowned slightly. "Not that I can remember."

"There's something funny going on around here," Sue commented in a low voice.

Johnny felt the same way. A woman going off on a trip wouldn't leave steaks in the icebox, not uncovered like that. He tried to figure out what it meant, but couldn't.

"Let's catch the ten-o'clock news," he suggested.

They went back into the living room. While the radio was warming up, Sue wandered around the room looking over the furnishings with a critical eye. Gradually, through the hum came the voice of the news announcer:

"Ralph Thompson is still running far ahead of the incumbent, Mayor Sullivan, by 13,476 to 5,197, clearly a landslide for the reform ticket. . . . Here's another



special bulletin on the Eldorado Club raid. Inspector Monroe, chief of the Rackets Squad, admitted to reporters that Charles "Nocky" Morrell and Michael Raymond, alleged heads of the city's gambling syndicate and operators of the club, had escaped the police net. Inspector Monroe believes, however, that the two men will be in police custody within a few hours. It was also revealed that Federal Agents accompanied the city police on the raid and have impounded the books of the All-City Amusement Corporation which were found intact on the premises. . . "

The announcer went on to other local news.

Johnny switched off the radio, sat down in the chair, stared into space for a long time.

"Federal Agents," Sue said in a whisper.

Johnny glanced at her, saw that she was very pale. "That's nothing to be afraid of," he said to allay her fears. "They're probably men from the Income Tax Bureau. But they won't get a thing on Nocky there. He wanted me to falsify some of the entries, but I talked him out of it. I told him he'd be sticking his neck out too far if he played around with the government. It cost him eighteen thousand more than he wanted to pay. He didn't like it at the time, but he'll thank me for it now."

Sue chewed her lower lip. "Nocky must have done a lot of business in cash. When they trace that money—"

"I'm still in the clear, Sue," Johnny said patiently. "Those books are correct to the last dime. Whatever happened outside of the books is none of my business. I was Nocky's bookkeeper, that's all."

Sue sat down on the edge of the sofa, smoothed a wrinkle out of her skirt. She didn't look at her husband.

"I wish I could feel the same as you do, Johnny. But I keep thinking Ham was right, after all. Nocky's a criminal—you helped him. That makes you a part of what he was doing. And now, if you help him escape from the law—Johnny, it isn't right!"

Johnny blew up. "What do you want me to do?" His voice was much too loud. "Do you want me to turn rat and

have Nocky and his gunmen come around looking for me?"

"As Ham said, they may do that anyway," Sue pointed out in a small voice. "And if they do leave you alone, the police won't. Johnny, sooner or later, you're going to have to choose sides."

Johnny suddenly felt very still inside. Sue had voiced exactly what he himself had been refusing to face. He had that oppressive, trapped feeling again. It was like being in a large room watching the walls come together, little by little. If he stood his ground he knew that, sooner or later, he would be crushed.

**T**HE DOORBELL rang. Sue jumped up, whirled as if momentarily confused. Johnny, too, felt a pang of fear, but it passed quickly.

"That must be Ham," he said. "Nobody else knows we're here."

"Suppose it's some of the neighbors who know Ham's sister is away," Sue suggested.

"I'll think of something to tell them," Johnny said, and hurried to the front door. "Who is it?" he called out.

"Bannigan—police department!"

A wave of relief went through Johnny and he opened the door. Two men were standing on the small porch. One was tall and paunchy, with a big nose and heavy-soled shoes. The other was thin, dapper, a pearl-gray hat shading his close-set eyes.

"Gonna let us in?" the big man asked.

Johnny stepped away from the door. The men followed him into the living room.

"This is my wife Susan," he introduced.

"I'm Bannigan," the big man said. "This is my partner, Fred Walsh." He glanced over at the radio. "You heard the news about the Eldorado Club?"

"Yes, we heard," Johnny answered.

"We grabbed the books," Bannigan added.

"I heard that, too," Johnny acknowledged, a bit defiantly. "The Federal Agents have them."

"Yeah, we'll be working together." Bannigan tipped back his hat, stared hard at Johnny. "We took a quick look, Dwyer. We knew what to look for—and we found it. You were carrying an



account for the Eagle Service Company—which we happen to know is nonexistent. It was the cover for the money Nocky was paying out for protection. Around twelve to eighteen hundred a week. Right?"

Johnny hesitated. Bannigan had put his finger unerringly on the one weak spot in the books. He remembered the violent quarrel Nocky had had with Mike about setting up that account.

Mike wanted the money paid out over a rigged gambling table so there'd never be any record of it. But Nocky had insisted he had to know exactly how much was going out every week, because the sum varied as police were shifted or new demands were made. Nocky had won.

Johnny glanced nervously from Bannigan to Walsh. There was no use denying he knew about the account.

"As far as I know," he explained, "the Eagle Service Company was a detective agency hired to protect the club against holdups and collect bad debts."

"Sounds good," Bannigan said coldly. "Now tell us the rest. Tell us who got that twelve to eighteen hundred a week."

Johnny shook his head. "I don't know. Nocky paid it out in cash. He gave me chits for the amounts and I entered them in the books."

"You're a liar," Bannigan said quietly. "You know who got that money every week!"

Johnny palms felt damp. "I told you I don't know."

"You're a liar," Bannigan repeated. "On at least three occasions, you were present when Nocky paid off the Big Boy himself!"

"No!" Johnny blurted hoarsely.

He knew immediately the very vehemence in his voice had betrayed him. He was frightened. It was uncanny! On each of those three occasions, no one else had been present but Nocky, himself and Mayor Sullivan. How did these men know?

Two possibilities immediately leaped into mind: Either Mayor Sullivan had already been broken down and confessed—which wasn't very likely—or else Mayor Sullivan had been seen coming

out of Nocky's office and the police had put two and two together. If it was the latter, then it wouldn't be evidence, just guesswork that wouldn't hold in court.

"I tell you, I don't know a thing about that account!" Johnny said in a strained voice. "Nocky gave me chits for cash. You'll find them in the file. I never saw any of the money paid out. I don't know a thing—"

**B**ANNIGAN took one step forward and his huge fist whipped up. Johnny didn't feel the blow right away. A black explosion inside his head blinded him for a moment and he felt himself staggering backward.

He heard Sue scream. He sat down hard on the sofa. Then he could feel the pain spreading over his jaw line and a wave of dizziness went through him. He thought for a moment he was going to get sick. But his stomach settled down and his eyes cleared a little.

Bannigan reached down and hauled him up on his feet.

"Get smart, Dwyer," he grated. "Give us the name of the man you saw Nocky pay off and you'll save yourself a lot of grief. Just give us the name and we'll let you go. It was Mayor Sullivan, wasn't it?"

"Go to the devil!" Johnny mumbled huskily.

The fist cracked again on Johnny's chin. This time, bright white lights exploded before his eyes. He felt as if he was clutching desperately for his senses. The lights went out, one by one, and he sank into blissful oblivion.

His face was like a stiff, cold mask when he regained consciousness. He could taste the blood in his mouth. Then he became aware that his face was wet. They must have thrown cold water over him. He was flat on his back on the floor.

He lay very still, eyes closed, a deep, burning anger welling up in him. Ham, that dirty rotten cop, Ham! This is what he had brought Johnny here for, so the cops could work without interference. Well, it wouldn't work. He had made up his mind on whose side he was now. The devil with the law!

The moment his eyelids flickered, he



felt rough hands grab him by the coat front and haul him up. He sat down hard in a straight-backed chair. He could see vaguely the figure of Bannigan wavering before him. "Ready to talk yet?" Bannigan asked harshly.

"No!" Johnny managed to spit out.

He watched numbly as Bannigan's arm drew back. A white hand fell on the big man's biceps.

"That's enough of that," came Walsh's cool voice. "We'll go on to treatment Number Two."

Johnny's vision cleared enough to watch Walsh go over to Sue, who was stiff-faced and white. Walsh grabbed her arm, swung her around and flung her onto the sofa.

"Before we start," Walsh said in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone, "maybe I ought to describe this next treatment. Of course, we're not going to kill either of you. The law takes a dim view of that sort of thing. So what we're going to do is work over the little lady for a while. Her face won't look so pretty when we get done with her."

Sue surged out of the sofa. "Don't tell them anything, Johnny!" she cried. "Let them do their dirty—"

Walsh gave her a hard shove that set her back down on the sofa.

"You've got to hear the rest, Dwyer," he growled. "After we're done, we're turning her over to Nocky and telling him she spilled everything. You know what Nocky and Mike will do, don't you? She'll be found in the ditch tomorrow morning. One more homicide for the boys to work on. Too bad!"

There was a moment of silence. Sue was white and trembling, but her lips were firm. Walsh glanced from one to the other, took out a cigarette, lighted up, smiled.

"We start the treatment like this."

His hand shot out. The glowing tip of the cigarette jabbed into Sue's cheek. She shrieked.

Johnny leaped out of his chair, babbling with hysterical fury. Hands clamped on his arms, pulled them back behind him. He tried to kick backward. The toe of Bannigan's heavy shoe met Johnny's heel and hot pain shot up his leg. Sue was sobbing hysterically.

Walsh glanced at Johnny. "Should

we go on with the treatment, Dwyer?"

Johnny stared numbly at his wife. He could see the searing red mark on her cheek. His will crumbled. His knees sagged and Bannigan let him drop into the straight-backed chair.

"What do you want to know?" Johnny asked hoarsely.

Walsh winked at his partner.

"Now, you're getting sensible, Dwyer," he said to Johnny. "Who did Nocky pay off—and give us the dates."

JOHNNY'S head drooped and his voice was a bare whisper, as he said: "Nocky paid off Mayor Sullivan. I saw it—three times. On March 12th and the 26th, and also on April 18th."

"How about other times?"

"A couple of times Ed Reegan, Sullivan's secretary, came around for the payoff. Nocky made out the Eagle Service chits while Reegan was still in the office and gave them to me."

"That does it," Walsh nodded to his partner. "Okay, Bannigan."

Bannigan hurried to the door, opened it, whistled. Johnny half turned in his chair, a bit puzzled. A moment later, two men walked in—Mike Raymond and Nocky Morrell!

A roaring set up in Johnny's head and bitter tears stung his eyeballs. He should have known. He should have known the police would never have pulled a stunt like this, no matter how desperate they were for evidence. Yet, only Ham knew where—

The thought broke off sharply and he looked at Walsh.

"How did you find us?"

"Mike always said you were a dumb kid," Walsh replied with an amused smile. "We found the address on an end table in your living room. You forgot to take it along."

"Did he break?" Mike asked.

"Wide open!" Walsh said contemptuously. "The 12th and 26th of March and the 18th of April. Check?"

"Check," Nocky repeated. He shook his head sadly. "You just cost me a hundred bucks, Johnny. I bet Mike you'd never open up and spill to the cops. . . . Bannigan, make it quick and clean. I don't like to see people suffer when they die. And remember you're a



gentleman, Bannigan. Ladies first."

Bannigan dug an automatic from his shoulder holster.

"Don't try it!" came a harsh voice from the dining-room archway. "The place is covered! None of you can get out alive! Drop it, Bannigan!"

Johnny's eyes snapped wide open and a yell of delight rushed up into his throat. It was Ham!

Two guns blasted at once. Johnny saw Bannigan stagger back and drop. Walsh was digging for his gun. Johnny leaped from his chair and threw himself at the thin man.

The next few moments was pandemonium. Johnny heard none of it. He twisted Walsh's arm savagely, laughed as he heard the smaller man scream in pain. The two went over, with Johnny on top. He went to work on Walsh's face, lashing out with vicious rights and lefts, only vaguely hearing the man's cries for mercy. The smooth, white face slowly dissolved into a bloody, shapeless blob.

Rough hands grabbed his shoulders and yanked him away, snarling and protesting. Then, suddenly, he calmed and the fire went out of him. Ham was shaking him.

"That's enough!" Ham was shouting.

Wearily, painfully, yet exultantly, Johnny held up his hand. Ham turned him loose. He saw that Nocky and Mike were handcuffed together and were in the custody of a detective. Another detective was trying to soothe Sue, who was crying and laughing uncontrollably. Johnny started toward her, but Ham held him.

"Let her alone," Ham said sympa-

thetically. "He'll calm her down. He's good at that sort of thing. Take it easy, Johnny."

Johnny relaxed a little, glanced at his friend. "You were here all the time," he said.

It was more statement than question. Ham nodded glumly. "I wanted to bust in a long time ago. But—well, we got everything on wax now."

"On wax?" Johnny repeated numbly.

"Sure!" Ham's brow furrowed. "Don't you see it? We planned it. We had you and Sue come here, figuring you two would argue it out and tell us what we wanted to know. We got mikes planted in every room. We took a recording of everything you said. But we didn't expect it to work out this way."

"When Bannigan and Walsh walked in, it was tough to stand by and let you take that beating, Johnny. But it worked out for the best. Now, we got leads, at least, on the evidence we'll need to convict. I'm sorry, Johnny."

Johnny frowned slightly, watched his wife. Sue was much calmer now.

"I guess I deserved it, Ham," he said slowly. "I guess I've been pretty dumb. You don't have to ask me that question again—the one about which side am I on. Just lead me to the witness stand and I'll show you."

"I knew you'd come around in time, Johnny," Ham smiled. "I'm a pretty good judge of men."

"I've been pretty dumb," Johnny said grimly. "I thought I could just quit my job and walk out and forget the whole thing. But I see now there's only one way out of a job like that. The right way!"

NO LUCK? - make a date with

**WILDROOT  
CREAM  
OIL**

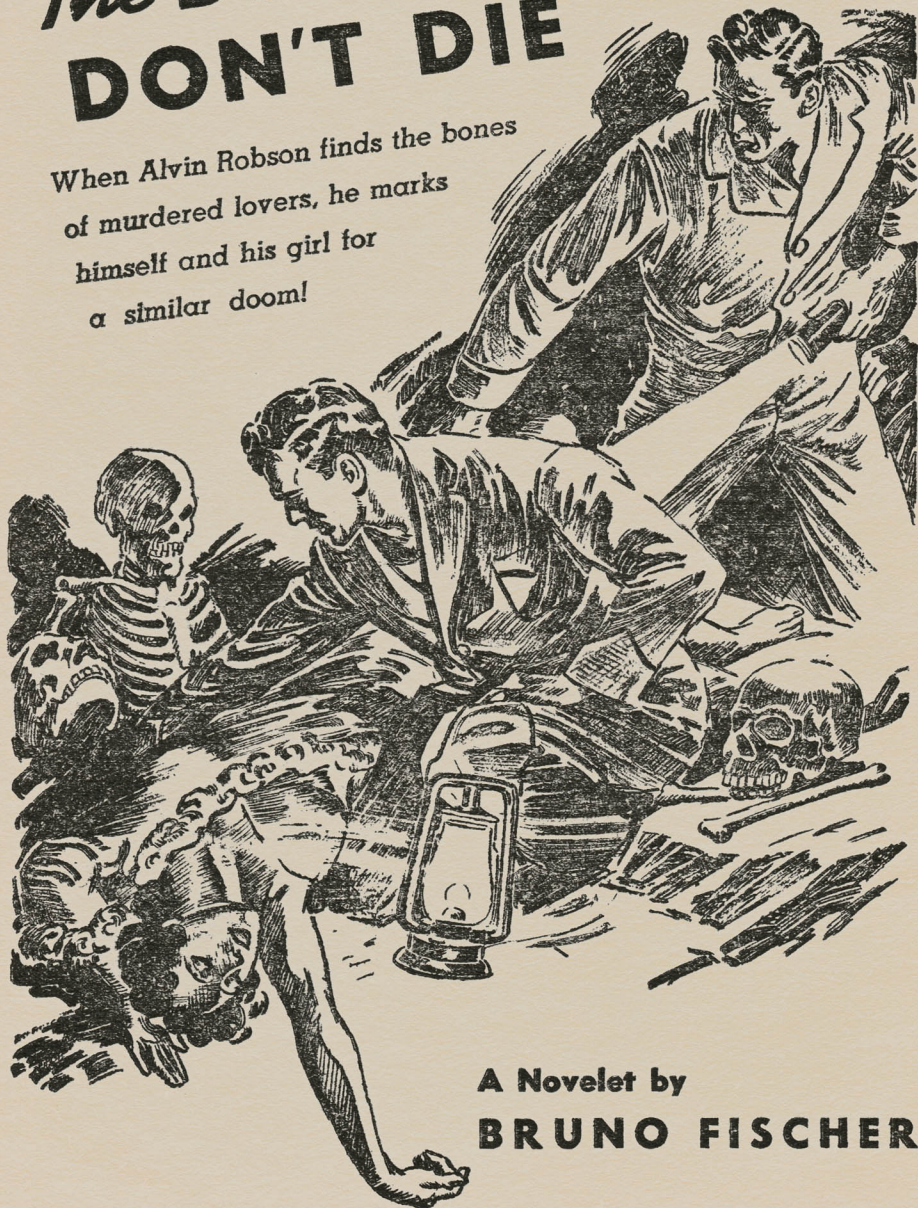


EASY TO USE  
NO WASTE  
OR SPILLING  
HANDY FOR  
TRAVELING



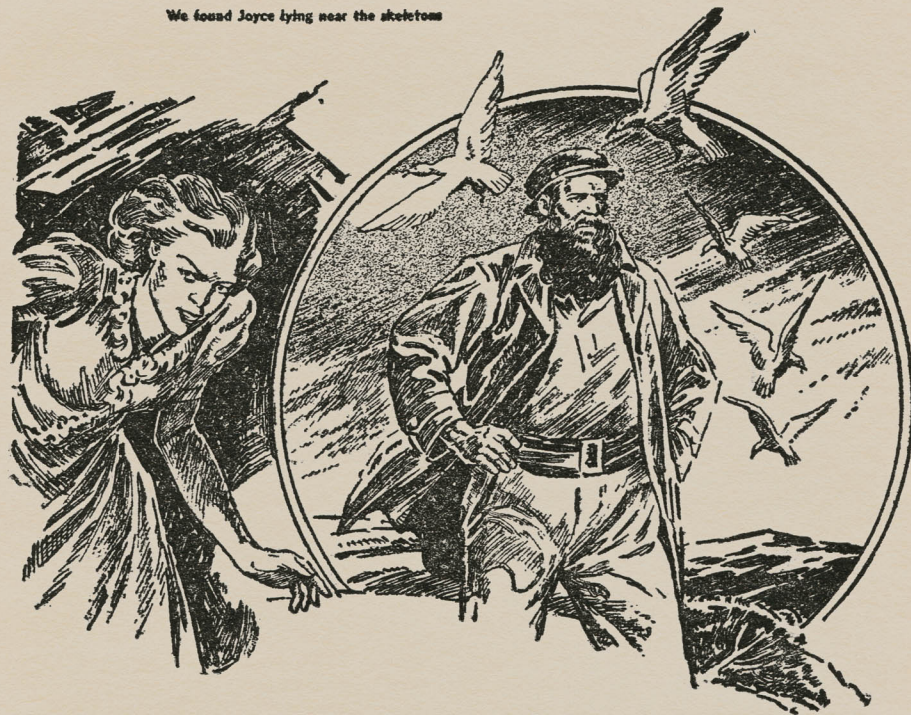
# The DEAD DON'T DIE

When Alvin Robson finds the bones  
of murdered lovers, he marks  
himself and his girl for  
a similar doom!



A Novelet by  
**BRUNO FISCHER**

We found Joyce lying near the skeleton



## CHAPTER I

### THE BURNED NOTE

A MILE from that stone house the road ran into the ocean. I swung the valise out of my car and started along the footpath. Moonlight cut a swath across the sea so bright that I needed no flashlight.

The hike was picturesque, if you were in the mood. I wasn't. It was no fun walking in city shoes and carrying a heavy bag on a rocky path between a wild shore and a wilder chaos of boulders. Greg Locke's great-great-grandfather, Captain Eli Locke, must have been more than a little cracked to erect a stone house on the most inaccessible spot on the coast.

Approaching the house by boat was impossible. Rocks and currents would tear the heart out of anything that floated. This diabolical path was the only way.

Presently a turn in the path showed me Devil's Head. Captain Eli Locke was supposed to have named it almost a hundred years ago. It didn't look anything like a head. It was simply a flat hump a couple of hundred feet above the raging water. But the devil part was apt enough.

From a distance, the squat gray house on the hump looked as if it were part of the rock. The lights in the windows, though, gave a cozy effect. I hurried.

The sight of the girl checked me. She stood some distance from the house, almost at the edge of the hump, and moonlight showed the skirt of her white dress whipping about her slender figure.

She would be Greg Locke's wife, whom I had never met. Five weeks ago I had received a wedding announcement, nothing more—no personal word from



Greg. Then yesterday a letter had come from her, brief and puzzling. The letter said:

Dear Alvin Robson:

Greg has told me that you are his best, perhaps only, friend. He needs you. Please come at once.

JOYCE LOCKE

I DROPPED my valise and walked over to the girl. She made a lovely picture against the sea and with the moon almost directly overhead. At college and after, Greg had never had much to do with girls. If the back view of this one was any indication, he had picked a honey. I cleared my throat and she turned.

She smiled. The front view of her was even better.

"Hello," I said. "I'm Alvin Robson."

"I know. My sister told me you were coming."

"Sister?"

"My sister, Joyce. My name is Lynn Evans. I'm spending a week with Joyce and Greg."

She held out a hand to me, and I didn't release it at once. I liked especially the way loose strands of hair blew across her face. My visit might turn out to be pleasant after all.

"What's wrong with Greg?" I asked.

"Nothing except moodiness and an occasional flare-up of temper."

"He was always a little queer," I told her. Then I added quickly, "I mean temperamental."

Lynn turned toward the ocean. "This place would make anybody moody. Maybe I'm silly, but I get a feeling of dead things around me."

"You're not silly."

She pointed toward the moldering spar of an ancient brig. "I hear that ship's been on the reef for a hundred years. You'd think the waves would have battered it down long ago."

"That's Captain Locke's last ship," I said. "He tried to take it through the reefs and failed. His pretty young French wife was supposed to be with him on board, but her body was never found. There are people around here who claim they've seen him and his wife walking hand in hand along the shore. The usual ghost stuff."

Lynn stepped closer to my side. The hem of her skirt whipped my leg.

"Why does Greg live here?" she said. "Why would anybody bring a bride here?"

"Well, it's his home. He can't sell it and he can't afford to buy another house unless he does. Besides, I think this house has a fascination for the Lockes. They can't break away from it. His father stayed away for years, but eventually returned, and now here is Greg back, bride and all."

"It's getting Joyce down," she said. "This afternoon she had a quarrel with Greg in their room. Really violent. They were screaming at each other. Greg came out as pale as death and Joyce was shaking with fury. I don't know what it was about any more than I know why I'm frightened. But I am. That's why I'm so glad you came."

A blast of wind swirled over Devil's Head, knocking Lynn Evans against me. I wound an arm about her waist to steady her. So was I glad I had come, but for a different reason.

"Lynn!"

A storm lantern swung toward us from the house. I recognized Greg's voice.

"Lynn, better not go too near the edge at night," he warned when still at a distance. He saw me then. "Who's that with you?"

"Good evening, Greg," I said.

He came forward and held the lantern in front of my face. "Al, this is a surprise!"

MARRIAGE should have put some fire into Greg's brooding eyes and luster in his pallid cheeks, but he seemed to have aged since I had seen him five or six months ago. His face was still rather cherubic, except that now it was like a cherub's that was growing old with weariness. His shoulders dropped as if carrying a burden too heavy for them. His palm felt too flabby for a man's as we shook hands.

"Didn't Joyce tell you I was coming?" I asked.

"Joyce?" He gripped my shoulder. "Wait a minute. Did Joyce invite you?"

"Why shouldn't she?"

"Don't misunderstand, Al," he said.



"I'm always glad to have you here. But Joyce had no business following her own selfish ends and then not mentioning it to me. First, she asked Lynn here to get her into this devilish mess, and now you. Curse her!"

"Does that mean I'm not welcome?" Lynn said stiffly.

"You know you are. Only—" He dropped his hand from my shoulder to my arm. "The thing is that Joyce is on a campaign to wear me down, and it's got me on edge. Come in, Al, and meet her."

In the years I'd known Greg, I'd spent about a dozen nights in that house, and I never slept comfortably through one of them. During the day, the house had a quaint charm, but as soon as the sun set it depressed me. The voice of the sea turned into the whispering of long dead things, and dry rot and decay seemed to seep out of the bare stone walls.

There was no electricity or central heating or running water. The furniture could have stocked an antique shop. But the cackling fire in the enormous living room fireplace and the soft radiance spread by kerosene lamps should have made the place cheery enough. They didn't.

A young woman sat in front of the fire. She rose and came toward me with outstretched hand. The first thing I noticed about her was that she wasn't as pretty as her sister, which still made her mighty attractive. She was taller than Lynn and more full-bodied. She possessed none of Lynn's vivid coloring.

"Joyce, what the devil was the idea?" Greg burst out. "You brought Al here so that he could help you work on me."

"Hello, Alvin," she said, taking my hand. Then she looked at Greg over her shoulder. "Don't get excited, darling. You told me that Alvin is your best friend and exceptionally level-headed." Her eyes came back to me, and I saw that they were green and hard and steady. Lynn's were brown and soft. "Alvin, would a moth-eaten superstition keep you from becoming rich?"

"That depends," I said, "if it hurt anybody."

"It will hurt nobody but Joyce and me!" Greg said bitterly.

Joyce's red mouth twisted. "You see what I'm up against? You'll have to help me, Alvin. Won't you sit down?"

We seated ourselves about the fire. I made sure that I was close to Lynn. As I lit my pipe, I studied Joyce. She looked very capable, very self-centered, the kind of woman who went after what she wanted. When she had written me that Greg needed me, she had really meant that *she* needed me.

"Let's have it," I said.

Greg slumped down in his chair, and his eyes shifted moodily from Joyce's face to mine and back.

Joyce said, "I'm sure you heard most of the stories about Captain Eli Locke. Most of them are ridiculous, of course, but a line of truth runs through them. But the important thing has been kept a family secret. There's a fortune in gems somewhere in this house. All the Lockes, including Greg, have always known where they are, but none of them had the spunk to go get them."

"You mean we had too much sense," Greg growled.

"Eli Locke left a note behind which was passed on from generation to generation," Joyce went on calmly. "It gave explicit directions, yet there wasn't enough of a man among all the Lockes to carry them out. Except Greg's father, and he lost his nerve and didn't go through with it."

"May I see the note?" I asked.

"I burned it!" Greg cried. "It should have been burned long ago!"

## CHAPTER II

### SCREAMS—AND LAUGHTER



JOYCE smiled placidly. "Greg acted like an ill-tempered child when I came across it among the family papers. He snatched it out of my hand and threw it into the fire. Luckily I had read it and remember what it said.

Most of it was superfluous verbiage anyway—a combination of blasphemy and superstition and piety. Anyway, it went something like this."

"Don't, Joyce!" Greg was pleading with her now.



She ignored him. "Captain Locke said that if his son—that was Greg's great-grandfather—favored his mother, he would have the face and body of an angel and the mind and heart of a devil. To anybody like that he preferred not to leave his fortune in precious gems which he had accumulated by the might of his fist, the iron of his will, and the aid of Satan."

"In short," I said, "he stole them."

"Probably, but as that happened so long ago, I'm sure they're legally Greg's now." Joyce smiled hungrily. "Captain Locke mentioned a curse put on the gems, no doubt by whoever he stole them from. To make sure the curse was sufficiently potent, he added one of his own. He's rather vague about what he did to protect the gems. But there's a line about the dead standing guard over them, whatever that means. The way to the gems is through a valley of horror, he wrote—a symbol, I suppose—and that they could finally be attained only by selling oneself to the devil. You can see that Captain Eli Locke was a pretty corny old duffer."

There was a silence. I heard Lynn shift in her chair.

"I can't make Joyce understand," Greg said to me after a minute. "To her, everything but the gems is a joke. My great-grandfather hated his wife. That's why he drowned her and himself in his brig. He was determined to hate her offspring and his son's children and children's children, from the grave if he could. He placed the gems in this house where they would be a constant temptation to his heirs, yet with the knowledge that they discarded their immortal souls if they went after them. My father tried to get them and practically had them. I don't know why he failed or what happened. I do know that he turned into an old man overnight."

"Isn't he a superstitious darling?" Joyce said, flashing her teeth at me. "In the cellar there's a walled up chamber, and the gems are in there. That's all there is to it."

"All except death and damnation!" Greg shouted.

"Tell Greg he's acting like a scared child," Joyce appealed to me.

I stood up and knocked out my pipe into the fire. I didn't know what to say. Of course, Joyce was right, but it was up to Greg to do what he thought best.

I turned to them. "At any rate, there's no rush. Why not wait till tomorrow to talk it over?"

Joyce shrugged. "Very well. I'll fix your bed, Alvin."

Greg followed her out, and Lynn and I were alone. She hadn't said a word since we had entered the house.

She stepped quickly over to me. "Joyce is logical," she whispered, "but I can't help feeling that Greg is right in his own way."

"Joyce will have her way though," I said, "because she's so much stronger."

Lynn stared into the fire. My hand dropped on her hip—a casual, almost automatic gesture. She slid away from me.

"I'm going to bed," she said.

I bit my lip. I should have taken it more slowly. Now I had driven her away.

"Let's stay here and talk a while," I suggested.

"I'm tired. Good night."

I watched her slender form pass out of the room. I was alone, and I didn't like it. I don't frighten easily, and I'm not sure I was frightened then, but I found myself anxious to get to bed and pull the covers over my head like a child hiding from goblins.

**T**HE banging of a loose shutter awoke me. I lay flat on my back, feeling my sweat-dampened pajamas pasted to my body. I shouldn't have been sweating. It was chilly in that stone-walled bedroom.

Then I realized that my ears were straining to catch a sound that was softer than the slapping shutter or the pounding of the sea. Something was padding on the floor.

I tore my eyes open. Moonlight was in the room, bathing the floor and walls and furniture and showing a blurred form approaching the bed. I felt myself cringe under the cover.

"Are you awake, Alvin?"

I suppose that I wasn't fully awake until she spoke. Nervous laughter trembled in my throat. I sat up and fum-



bled with the lamp at my bedside before I remembered that it was kerosene and too much trouble to light. The moonlight was bright enough.

Joyce Locke was wearing pajamas the color of sunbeams, and so thin that they might have been part of her full-fleshed figure. As she sat down on the edge of my bed, I had two reactions to her, and one of them was anger. After all, she was my friend's wife.

But I was unjust to her. The purpose of her visit was perfectly proper.

"Alvin, Greg will do whatever you say. He needs just a little push to make him give up his foolish superstitions. Will you talk to him tomorrow?"

"I'm going to keep out of this," I told her.

She leaned toward me with hands clasped. "Greg has so little money, and he isn't the kind who can go out and make a decent living. It's so unfair—with that fortune right here in the house. I'll see that you get a share."

"Don't try to bribe me," I snapped. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. Do it out of friendship."

"This is Greg's business," I said. "It's my business too," she answered. "I'm his wife."

"All right, yours and Greg's."

"So you won't help me?"

"No," I said.

With a tired little sigh she rose, and I could see how her shoulders drooped as her bedroom slippers whispered over the hard floor.

When the door closed behind her, I lay back. But for a long time I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking of fierce old Captain Eli Locke and what he must have dared for possession of those gems which had never done him any good. That is, if there really were gems walled up in the cellar.

It was likely, I realized, that that message to his descendants had been only a crackpot gag. And in my mind there was a vision of the wife he'd brought back with him from France, and she looked very much like Joyce Locke. What had she done to make him hate her and their son?

I couldn't tell where conscious thought merged with sleep, but I know that the image of Eli Locke's wife stayed

with me, or perhaps it was the image of Joyce Locke, for the two had somehow become one. Then, abruptly, I was awake again, hearing the insistent slapping of the shutter and the panting of my own breath—and one other sound, distant and muffled.

Something was thudding in the cellar.

For a taut moment I was gripped by a weird notion that Captain Eli Locke had returned from his grave in the sea and was stumping about below to protect his accursed gems.

I tried to laugh to myself, but I couldn't laugh. I would not sleep that night unless I went down there to see for myself.

I put on shoes and pants and scooped up the flashlight I had brought from the living room. Bare walls slid toward me, as the beam picked them out of the darkness, and then closed darkly over me from behind. The cellar entrance was at the end of the downstairs hall. It wasn't easy to breathe as I noiselessly pulled the door toward me.

The thudding was louder now, louder than the thumping of my heart.

**A** LIGHT was on down there. When I was halfway down the stairs, I saw a kerosene lantern on the floor, spreading its mellow rays in a circle and touching a pair of pajama-clad legs.

I breathed again. From the foot of the stairs I saw all of her in those sheer yellow pajamas. She was swinging a pickax with the steady, overhand strokes of a man.

Joyce Locke spun toward me, the ax raised menacingly over her head. Then she gave me an embarrassed grimace and let it sink to the floor.

"You're not going to try to stop me?" she said.

"I told you this was none of my business," I replied. I turned to go.

"Wait, Alvin. See, part of the wall is through. When I bring the gems out, Greg won't object. In a few minutes I'll be able to get in."

I sprayed the flashlight beam against the wall. Waist-high there was a ragged opening more than a foot square. I moved closer. The wall was a good eighteen inches thick. Lust for the gems had given Joyce the strength to do



a man's work.

I put my flash against the jagged hole. On the other side there seemed to be a tunnel rather than a chamber, about six feet high and not much wider. Some ten feet ahead it turned sharply to the right.

I felt Joyce's body against my side. "Haven't you any blood in your veins, Alvin?" she asked. "Doesn't treasure hunting excite you?"

I wasn't sure about treasure hunting, but Joyce was exciting me. I moved away from her, and just in time too, because the next moment footsteps sounded on the stairs.

Above a lantern, Greg's face was pale with anger as he descended. Behind him came Lynn Evans in a white negligee—more adequately dressed than her sister, and looking very much lovelier.

"Curse you, Joyce!" Greg said shrilly. "I told you not to!"

Joyce faced her husband defiantly. "I'm going in there."

"You're not! Joyce, for God's sake!"

She moved so quickly that none of us realized what she was about until she was halfway through the hole she had made. For a moment, a jagged piece of the broken wall held her, and she cried out as it tore her flesh. Then she was through. Her legs dropped out of sight.

Lynn wailed as if she would never see her sister again. I sent my light through the opening, and I saw Joyce pick herself up and run around the bend.

"Come back!" I yelled. "You haven't any light."

She didn't answer. For long moments there was no sound but Lynn's voice. Glancing around, I saw Greg standing stiff as death.

"I'm going after her," I said. But my shoulders were much broader than Joyce's. I couldn't get through. "Joyce!" I called. "At least come back and take my flashlight."

Then Joyce screamed.

Something flew at me, knocking me aside. It was Greg. Like myself, he tried to get his shoulders through the opening, and like myself he failed. He was yelling something which made no sense, and Lynn was clawing at my arm and begging me to save Joyce.

I snatched up the pickax. "Get out

of the way, Greg!"

He kept trying to force himself through the hole until I dragged him far enough away so that I could swing the pickax. It required a dozen swings before I could enlarge the opening enough to get through it, and by that time Joyce's screams had turned to laughter.

The laughter was worse than the screams.

### CHAPTER III

#### A GHASTLY FIGURE



REG was the first one through. I was delayed by ordering Lynn to get out of the cellar and stay upstairs, but as soon as I was in the tunnel I heard her follow. Greg hadn't stopped to take a light. I waited for Lynn to come up to me, then went around the turn.

The tunnel ended in a chamber twice as wide as the passage but no higher. Joyce was sitting on the ground, still laughing horribly, and Greg was trying to pull her up to her feet. He froze as my flashlight revealed what was on the ground.

There were bones to which clothing, fragile as cobweb, adhered here and there. The stuff crumpled to dust wherever Joyce touched it. She was fumbling among those bones, searching for something. An opal gleamed in her hand. Her laughter stopped as she twisted her head to look up at us.

"I found them! The gems are among these bones!"

At any rate, she wasn't completely out of her mind. After the first shock of stumbling among the skeletons had left her, her madness was only that of greed triumphant.

"Joyce, are you all right?" Lynn asked.

"We're rich." Joyce stood up and opened her other hand. On her palm lay two diamonds and a pearl. "Greg, they were here all the time, and you never had the sense to go get them."

Greg did not utter a sound or move.

I stooped down among the bones.



When I rose, I said, "There seem to be two skeletons. I'd say that the smaller one was a woman. See how close the skulls are to each other? And the skeletons are practically entwined. They died in each other's arms."

"Captain Locke and his wife!" Lynn exclaimed. "He walled her and himself up in here."

"I doubt it," I said. "The captain went down with his brig, and his body was washed up on the beach in recognizable condition. There's a marker in back of the house where he's buried. Besides, Eli Locke was said to be an enormous man, and the skeleton of this man isn't. What do you think, Greg? You know a lot more about him than I do."

Greg said nothing.

I was becoming fascinated by the whole thing. "Maybe something like this happened," I said. "Captain Locke discovered that his wife was unfaithful to him. I'm certain that she was—nothing else would make a man hate his wife the way he hated her. He walled her and her lover up in here. Then, because he loved her as much as he hated her, he ran his ship on the reefs."

"The gems," Joyce said. "Why would they be in here with them?"

Frowning, I put my hand among the bones. That was highly unpleasant, but I'm not particularly squeamish.

"Queer," I muttered. "The gems are under the bones of the woman and nowhere else."

JOYCE was down on her knees beside me, probing into the bones with her fingers. She hadn't much sensitivity for a woman—not when it interfered with getting what she wanted.

"I think I know what happened," she said. "The captain's wife and her lover had stolen the gems and were about to run away with them. He caught them. He was going to kill himself anyway, so he had no more use for the gems. He had a gruesome sense of humor. Let them have the gems as well as each other—here in the walled up chamber where a scrap of food or a drop of water was worth a million times as much as any diamond. Perhaps he made her swallow all the gems first. What

a nasty old man he was!"

I rose to my feet, but Joyce remained down there, plucking up the gems one by one.

Greg spoke at last, and his voice was hollow and uncal. "Leave them there, Joyce."

"Don't be silly, darling."

"You're robbing the dead, Joyce."

"So what? A lot of good these gems can do them."

He said, "You don't know what you're doing," and strode out of the tunnel.

I couldn't leave Joyce alone there. Lynn clung to my arm, as together we watched her sister gather up the fortune.

Presently Joyce rose, with both gem-filled hands pressed against her bosom.

"If there are any more, I'll get them tomorrow," she said.

The three of us left the tunnel.

WE WENT with Joyce as far as her room. Greg was sitting in the moonlight. He didn't look up when she entered.

She walked across the room and piled the gems on the dresser.

"We're rich, darling. Aren't you glad?"

Greg said nothing. Lynn and I moved away from the room.

"I'm afraid, Alvin," Lynn said, "that Joyce isn't normal tonight and neither is Greg. I've a queer feeling that there's something evil about those gems. While I was in that tunnel, I felt so—well, as if the dead resented being robbed."

I grinned. "Skeletons make people nervous, and give them some very wacky ideas."

She clung to me. I put my arms about her and kissed her. She didn't object, though her lips were unresponsive. What could I expect? This was hardly a time for love making.

Then she was out of my arms and moving hurriedly to her room. I went into my own room, feeling pretty good because of the kiss. The Lockes were rich, Lynn was here, and tomorrow was another day.

And as I passed a window on the way to my bed, I saw, in the moonlight, Captain Eli Locke stumping along the crest of Devil's Head.



THE whole business of the night had worked on me more than I had suspected. There I was staring out of the window in a stupor of horror and telling myself that Captain Eli Locke had been roused from his grave by the act of his great-great-granddaughter-in-law.

Baloney, I said to myself after the shock of the first moment. There's no reason that man I see can't be alive.

Against the moonlit sea, that figure looked almost too big for a man. It was the effect of shadows, of course, though he was certainly big enough. His great back was covered by oilskin and he had a seaman's roll. He was almost at the edge of the cliff when he turned to glance at the house.

What rational thought was left in me fled at the sight of that face. On the living room wall hung a painting of Captain Eli Locke—a mountain of a man with a square head and piercing eyes and a black beard reaching to his barrel chest. I can't say that in that uncertain light I could be sure of anything but the beard, but that was enough.

In the blinking of an eye, the figure vanished. There was nothing behind which it could have stepped. I leaned forward through the window which I'd pulled open, my palms pressing against the rough stone ledge. The figure had been at the very edge of Devil's Head. For all I had seen, he had calmly stepped into space.

I sank into a chair and told myself not to be a fool. There were several rational explanations, including the one that I had seen nothing but what an enflamed imagination built up.

From the chair I could look through that window. Tense, I waited for him to reappear. But nothing happened. The house was silent. The others seemed to have gone to sleep.

After a while I dozed off in the chair.

For the third time that night I awoke in a sweat. The first thing I noticed was the dial of my wristwatch, visible in moonlight. I'd slept about two hours.

Then again I saw the huge figure. He was coming toward my window, his head and his oilskin-covered shoulders bowed.

Was he coming into the house? I sat there frozen, waiting.

Without glancing up, he changed his direction and headed toward the far side of the house, away from either the front or the side doors. I found myself able to breathe again, but I couldn't regain the power of motion. My eyes remained fixed on him until he rounded the corner of the house.

The muffled pounding of the surf below Devil's Head accentuated the silence of the house. I fought down the urge to wake the others and urge them to get out of the damnable place. I fought it down because I was a rational, civilized human being and insisted on not believing what I had seen. But I didn't quite convince myself.

A figure came into view around the house. This time I jumped up. This time I was going to go through the window and make sure. Then I saw that the man carried a lantern and that he was smaller than the first. When he came closer, I recognized Greg Locke.

Could it have been Greg I had seen all along? Not unless something had happened to my eyesight. Greg didn't wear oilskin. He had no rolling walk. He certainly didn't have a beard.

When he passed my window, I called to him. He stopped, peering up at me. "Alvin? Aren't you asleep?"

"Not with all that's going on around here," I said. "Listen—did you see someone out there a few minutes ago?"

"You mean Joyce?"

"No. A man."

He didn't answer at once. He swung the lantern gently against his leg. "How could I have seen a man unless it was you?" he said then. "We're the only two men here."

He was showing more sense than I was. Or maybe he was a good liar.

"What are you doing out there?" I asked.

"I'm looking for Joyce. I woke up a few minutes ago and found that she wasn't in bed." He paused, then said in a lower tone, "The gems are gone."

"Good Heavens!" I said. "She—"

"Nothing of the sort," Greg broke in. "She didn't run away with them. She wants to share them with me."

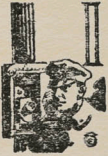
"Maybe she's gone off to sleep in



Lynn's room. You might have scared her by the way you acted."

## CHAPTER IV

## WALL OF THE DEAD



I GOT my flashlight and went out to the hall. I heard Greg come up the stairs. He moved past me to Lynn's door and rapped on it.

Lynn spoke almost at once. She sounded frightened as she asked who it was.

"It's Greg and Alvin," he said. "We want to talk to you."

"Just a moment."

Lynn came out in her negligee. My flashlight picked out her bed. It was empty.

"Have you seen Joyce?" Greg asked.

"What do you mean? Alvin and I saw her go into your room, Greg. You were there."

"She's not there now. Neither are the gems. She—" Abruptly Greg's voice changed. It became shrill with hysteria. "The fool! I begged her not to break the wall between the dead and the living."

Lynn swayed toward me. I caught her.

"Maybe she's down there again," I said. "She couldn't wait till morning to make sure she'd got them all."

"But why would she have taken those on the dresser?" Greg protested.

"I don't know," I said. "But I'm going down to the cellar. You better come along, Lynn. We ought to stay together."

I didn't explain why. I wasn't sure myself except that I didn't want her to be alone while an animated dead man, in whom I didn't believe, roamed around outside. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to go down to the cellar either. I wanted to get the devil out of there, and take Lynn and Greg and Joyce with me.

But first we had to find Joyce.

I led the way down, with Lynn close at my heels and Greg bringing up the rear. No light was on down there.

"Guess she's not down here after all," I said, but I continued to descend. And suddenly the panicking thought struck

me that maybe Captain Eli Locke was waiting down in the cellar for us.

But what I did see when I reached the last step was more horrible than the sight of a walking dead man. It was a jagged square of fresh cement in the wall, covering the opening that had been made to the tunnel. Crazy moans trickled from Lynn's constricted throat.

"He walled her up there," Greg whispered hoarsely, "just as he walled up those two a century ago!"

I didn't believe it and I didn't doubt it. I merely didn't have the power to think. I moved forward, with Lynn still clinging to me. On the floor was what was left of a freshly mixed batch of cement. I touched the wall. The cement was still wet.

"Joyce!" I called.

My voice clashed against the four walls of the cellar and came back to me, mocking me.

With a stricken cry, Greg picked up the pickax and savagely attacked the wall. The fresh cement was like butter under the impact of the pick. He cleared out the space that had been filled up, and dove through it.

"We'll wait here," I told Lynn. I didn't want her to go in there, and I couldn't leave her alone.

She slipped away from me. Her slim body was through the opening before I could stop her. I had to follow. In the darkness ahead Greg was saying his wife's name over and over in a queer croon.

We found Joyce Locke lying near the skeletons. This time Greg had remembered to take his lantern, and he was down at Joyce's side, taking her limp body in his arms.

She was dead.

FOR a moment or two I was busy with Lynn. She didn't quite faint, but she wouldn't have been able to stay on her feet without my help. I eased her down to the floor and turned to Greg. He was rocking his wife's body in his arms as if she were a child. His eyes were pretty awful.

Gently I unlocked his arms, and I lowered the dead woman's head and shoulders to the floor. She had been choked to death. The imprint of fingers



was still on the slender column of her white throat. Her bulging eyes and protruding tongue robbed the face of any scrap of beauty. But the rest of her body, clad in those torn yellow pajamas, was lax and peaceful as if in slumber.

"He did it," Greg was saying wildly. "He was afraid we'd break in if he just left her here to die like the others, so he choked her before he walled up the opening."

He! Meaning Captain Eli Locke. Meaning the huge figure I had seen on the hump.

Get yourself and them out of here! I told myself frantically.

I was about to turn away from Joyce when a bulge in her cheek caught my eye. It couldn't have been her tongue. I put down the flashlight and forced myself to pry her jaws apart. I suppose I had a certain amount of nerve, kneeling there in the eerie rays of the lantern, while Lynn and Greg sat on the floor in silent horror watching me poke a finger into a dead woman's mouth, and only a few feet away those century-old skeletons.

The tip of my finger found something hard behind the back of her teeth. I hooked it out and brought my hand close to the lantern. I had taken an opal out of her mouth.

They didn't realize at once what it meant. They gawked at that blue-black opal, and slowly I saw horror gather in Greg's face.

"He made her swallow the gems!" he muttered in a voice that was not all his. "The way he'd made his wife swallow them. That one stuck in her mouth. Then he killed her."

"No!" Lynn moaned. "No, no!"

I moved quickly to Lynn's side and put an arm about her.

"Where are the gems then?" Greg laughed. His laugh would have been an awful enough sound anywhere, but in that stone chamber and among those dead it was sheer horror. "Cut her stomach open and you'll find them!"

Lynn fainted. Probably it was just as well.

"Who do you mean by *he*?" I demanded.

"Captain Locke, of course. You know that."

"You lied to me then," I said swiftly. "You saw him."

Suddenly he was quiet. He dropped his head in his hands. "Yes, I saw him," he whispered. "Joyce broke down the wall between the dead and the living. He had to come back to carry out his curse."

"You met him around the side of the house. You spoke to him."

"Yes," Greg said simply.

"What did he say?"

"I can't tell you." His body rocked from side to side. He no longer seemed to know that I was there. "Joyce, Joyce," he moaned. "Why didn't you listen to me?"

WITHOUT delay I swung Lynn's unconscious form up in my arms. "Come on, Greg," I said.

Dully, he shambled after me. In the living room, I placed Lynn on the couch and lit a couple of lamps. I bathed her face with water. Her eyes fluttered open.

A fire was in order. I started one, but when it was blazing it did little to overcome the chill of the house. Maybe the coldness was inside ourselves.

I sat at Lynn's feet on the couch and listened to her weep and Greg mumble incoherently to himself. I knew that I ought to get them away from there, but taking them in their condition over that mile of dark and dangerous path at night would be worse than waiting here for daylight. And a man, a shape, a ghost, a figment of the imagination was out there. Whatever it was, it had killed Joyce, and it could kill again.

I stuck my hand in my pants pocket for a cigarette, and suddenly my fingers were like icicles. I pulled out the blue-black opal I had taken from Joyce's mouth.

Lynn sat up. Her mouth opened wide without words coming through.

Greg found his voice. "Greed got you too, I see," he said savagely. "You also robbed the dead."

"That's not true," I answered. "I must have automatically dropped it into my pocket."

The grandfather clock in the hall changed the hour. Four o'clock. Two hours until dawn.



The beauty or value of the opal didn't mean anything to me at the moment. It belonged to Greg—it and the rest of the gems, if he wanted them. In the morning I would bring the police, and maybe they would be suspicious when they learned I had one of the gems on me. They might think that I had taken others and hidden them, and that would lead them to wondering if I had anything to do with Joyce's murder.

I stood up.

"I'm going down to put back this opal among the bones."

Greg smiled a little. "You're afraid, Al. Afraid that you, too, will suffer the consequences of robbing the dead."

Was that the real reason? Probably, I told myself wearily, no longer quite capable of arguing rationally with myself.

And I left.

For the third time that night I squirmed through the narrow opening into the tunnel. By the light of my flash, I stood looking down at Joyce's body, weighing the opal in my hand. Should I put it back into her mouth? That was ridiculous. I'd simply drop it among the bones of the smaller skeleton.

Light shot from the turn in the tunnel. I cried out, half-expecting the huge figure of Captain Eli Locke to appear. But the twisted face above the lantern was Greg's.

"I didn't understand at first," Greg said. "You've come down here to steal the rest of the gems."

"Don't be silly."

"They could tempt a saint," Greg said. "Look what they did to Joyce."

I let the opal fall from my hand. It struck Joyce's throat and rolled over her shoulder to disappear somewhere in the shadows.

"I'd need a knife to get them," I said. "You can see I didn't bring a knife down. And do you imagine—" I stopped talking and found myself listening to the silence. "Greg, you shouldn't have left Lynn alone!"

"No, of course not. You wanted me to stay up there so you could get the gems." He laughed in a way that scared me. "Maybe Captain Locke is after her too."

## CHAPTER V

## THE BEARDED THING



WITHOUT waiting to hear more, I plunged past him in that narrow tunnel. I heard him laugh again, and then I heard his feet running after me. He caught up to me when I reached the living room doorway. Lynn wasn't

there.

"Lynn!" I shouted.

There was no answer.

Greg's voice was solemn now, controlled. "She probably went up to bed."

But she wasn't in her bedroom, or anywhere else in the house. Five minutes later Greg and I were back in the living room.

"She couldn't have gone down to the cellar," he said, "because we came from there. She has to be outside."

"Why would she go outside? Unless—"

"Unless Captain Locke came for her," he muttered, not looking at me.

"Unless *somebody* came for her," I flung at him. It didn't much matter whether it was the living or dead. She was out there and needed me.

I went outside. Wind hit me. I ran about the hump, swirling my flashlight, calling her name. As I paused for breath at the edge of the cliff, I struggled to get a grip on myself, to straighten out my wild thoughts.

Look at it from her point of view, I told myself. Her sister had been murdered. Wouldn't she believe that it was a living man and not a dead man who had done it? Greg might be the killer, or more likely I—for the gems. So she had fled from a murderer. She was probably running down the path to the village which was four miles away.

I started after her. After a quarter of a mile of stumbling along the footpath, I stopped and leaned, panting against a boulder. This was all wrong. If she had come this way, she would be safe. But if she was still at Devil's Head—

I ran all the way back. My lungs were on fire as the unlighted mass of the house came into view. Inside, my



voice calling her reverberated through the stone rooms. There was no other sound. Greg was gone too.

All at once I knew where Lynn was. I rushed down the cellar stairs. Again I found the opening in the wall covered with fresh cement. . . .

The soft cement melted away before the slashing of the pickax.

Lynn lay at the feet of her dead sister. Under my flashlight, she was as pale and motionless as Joyce. But when I touched her, I felt warm flesh. I could see she was breathing.

"Lynn!"

After a moment her eyes opened. She moaned and reached for me, and I held her close.

"Who did this to you?" I said.

"I don't know. I was sitting by the fire. Greg had gone after you. Suddenly a black cloth swooped over my head. It choked me. That's all I knew until now." Her fingers dug into my arm. "Alvin, you and Greg had gone down there. Who was it?"

I didn't answer that. "We're getting away from this place right now," I said.

"Yes!"

As I lifted her in my arms, I heard feet shuffling from the tunnel opening.

"Greg?" I called.

There was no answering sound, but the footsteps were coming closer. With Lynn in my arms, I couldn't bring up my flashlight. The footsteps stopped. Something was terribly close to us.

"Greg!" I yelled, and started to put Lynn down so that I could use my light and have my hands free.

It was as if the ceiling dropped on my head. I heard Lynn scream, felt her slip out of my arms. I sank into a darkness deeper than the black of the chamber. . . .

**T**HIS was death. Death smelled like this and was as cold. But there shouldn't have been pain in death—the sensation of burning irons laid against the back of my head. And there was a far-off voice mingling with the buzzing in my ears. The voice came closer and closer until I could distinguish my name.

I opened my eyes, but the darkness

remained. My hands moved and I felt soft arms through silk.

"Alvin," Lynn moaned. "I thought you would never recover."

"Where are we?"

"Where we were, among the skeletons and the gems and Joyce dead." Her voice was scarcely recognizable. "We're walled in. We'll die here together—like those two a hundred years ago."

I groped my way up to my feet. She rose with me, clinging to me, frantically not wanting me to go beyond reach of her hands. Sledge-hammers pounded my temples. I leaned heavily against Lynn. All at once I realized that the pounding was not part of the pain, that it was not in my head. It was the rhythmic beat of a hammer, close by.

I started toward the opening.

"We can't get out," Lynn said shrilly.

"I tried. He walled it up again."

"The cement will still be wet. We can dig it out with our hands."

She was trembling against me. "He built a barrier. Listen to him. He's strengthening it."

"But how can Captain Locke—" I abruptly stopped.

It was the fact that I was still groggy from the blow on the head, on top of all the terrible events of the night, that made me say that. I knew better. I had known better all along, but hadn't been able to bring myself to face it.

"Stop it!" Lynn was saying. "The dead stay dead."

"Of course."

By that time we were at the end of the tunnel. My hands felt wet cement. I gouged it out with my hands for a thickness of two or three inches, then came up against heavy wooden planks. They were firmly embedded in the old hardened concrete and fresh cement had been poured between them. On the other of the wall the thudding continued.

"Greg!" I shouted. "In Heaven's name, let us out! We never harmed you."

Lynn wailed, "I tried to reason with him, but he's stark mad."

The hammering ceased. I shouted again, reminding him of our friendship.

His answer was demoniac laughter.



"Why complain? You're in there with Joyce. You wanted her. Well, she's yours now!"

I heard Lynn gasp. She drew away from me, but not far.

"Greg, you fool!" I shouted. "I never met Joyce before tonight."

His voice was remote through the wall. "I saw her go into your room, wearing only her pajamas. She stayed there for some time. And later when I came down to the cellar, you were in each other's arms, and you broke apart. You can't fool me."

"Greg, listen. She came to me room to ask me to help her get the gems. I refused. That's all it was. It's Lynn I care for."

Her shoulder stirred against mine, but she said nothing.

"You wanted both of them and the gems," Greg went on in that crazy voice. "I was too smart for you, Al. Now you have Joyce and Lynn and the gems. Enjoy them all!"

I shouted that he was making a terrible mistake. He didn't answer. There was no more hammering. He must have left the cellar.

He had never been quite normal. There had always been that morbid streak in him. In college the fellows knew he was strange and asked me how I could stand to room with him. I replied that he was a pretty good guy when you got to know him. But there had always been that moodiness in him which sometimes made him difficult to get along with.

And tonight he had cracked completely. Cracked because of Joyce nagging him to go after the gems, because of the fear of the curse, because of what we had found in this chamber—but mostly because he believed that his wife was betraying him with me. And so he had done to Joyce and was doing to us what his cruel old great-great-grandfather had done to his wife and her lover. After a hundred years the horror was being repeated.

Lynn's body was against mine. I thought of the flashlight I had dropped. Light would be little enough to fight against the terror we faced. We returned to the chamber, and both of us got down on our hands and knees and

searched. Lynn moaned when she touched one of the skeletons.

We didn't find the flashlight. Greg must have taken it out with him. Holding each other in our arms, we sat with our backs against the wall. How long had we? The air was still fresh. Thirst would probably finish us, and it was said that was the worst way to die.

Lynn's body suddenly went rigid. "Somebody is in here with us," she whispered.

I felt it too, a soundless presence.

I thought: Suppose that walking thing I had seen outside was now in here with us.

**L**YNN'S lips were near my ear. "Greg must have come in. This is our chance."

She had not seen Captain Locke in the moonlight. But of course it was Greg. It had to be.

I unwound my arms from about her. I drew my legs under me and put my palms flat on the ground. Then I leaped. My hands shot out.

I screamed then and threw myself back against the wall. My fingers had hooked into a huge coarse beard.

Lynn flung her arms around me. "Alvin, what happened?"

Her voice gave me at least the courage to try to defend us from the living-dead thing. I thrust her behind me and forced myself to reach forward. My hands went through air. He was no longer there, but now I definitely heard a slithering movement away from us to our left.

"What was it?" Lynn whispered.

"Captain Eli Locke."

"Oh, no!"

I could have bitten my tongue off for telling her. He was leaving us.

"That can be an animal," she said. "Listen to it."

The slithering was fading away to our left.

"Whatever it is," I said "it had to get in somewhere and it's leaving the same way. We'll follow."

Hand in hand, we stumbled through the darkness. For a moment we lost the sound, but when we reached the end of the chamber we heard it again. Footsteps, maybe, or an animal's paws.



Presently I stopped and felt along the rock wall. Three feet above the floor my hand continued to move forward into space.

"Here it is!" I cried. "I'll go first."

There was barely enough space for me to crawl through. It was a passage, and after Lynn and I had almost worn our knees bloody on the ragged floor, it enlarged enough so that we could walk doubled over in single file. The sound had ceased. Ahead I heard the sea.

A blue-gray patch appeared. Dawn was breaking.

The exit was hidden in a pile of boulders halfway up the cliff. I helped Lynn out. We stood on the biggest of the boulders and watched the sun rise in an orange and purple mist.

"These boulders must have fallen away from the passage," I said. "They blocked it when Captain Locke's wife and her lover were shut in there."

LYNN gripped my arm. "Alvin, why did you say it was Captain Locke in there with us?"

"I felt his beard. He showed us the way out because he knew that Greg was wrong about me, and you were certainly innocent. The dead have a sense of justice."

"Alvin, no!" she argued in a kind of frenzy. "You can't be sure it was a beard. An animal showed us the way out, and it might have been his fur you

felt. Or moss hanging from the wall. Or even—when Joyce's hair."

I stared at the rising sun. An animal was too low and Joyce lay on the ground.

"And when you said you saw Captain Locke outside the house," she went on, "Greg must have dressed up to look like him. Greg, having gone mad, was putting on a show."

Sure. The distorting moonlight could have made Greg look so much bigger. And maybe I had been down on the floor and grabbed Joyce's hair in the chamber when I thought I'd been erect. Still groggy from the blow and my brain in a jumble anyway from horror, my perspective must have been completely haywire.

Now here, free and in the clean fresh air, I could look back at all that like a sane human being. But would I ever in my life be sure?

"Alvin, look!"

Above us a man appeared at the edge of Devil's Head. Greg Locke paused there for a moment, then stepped forward into space. His body struck a boulder not fifty feet to our right, bounced off to hit another boulder farther down, then lay inert and broken among the breakers.

Lynn buried her face against my chest. Like his ancestor, Greg Locke had killed the wife he loved and then taken his own life.

The cycle was completed.



Madeline Carter's father is killed in a laboratory explosion, and his strange death is followed by new menace as a mysterious criminal pursues Madeline with the shocking threat—YOU ARE NEXT TO DIE—in the gripping novelet of that name by Philip Ketchum, next issue!



# A Heel and His Loot



hit him, and he made like a throw rug

By **DONN MULLALLY**

**T**HE Swede was as plastered as only an amateur can get. His rusty hair was trailing over the edge of a beer glass and an empty shot glass was cuddled in his limp, knobby hand. He was the saddest looking specimen in the Shamrock Pub.

I eased on the stool next to him. "Hi, Olaf. How're you goin'?"

The sound of his name picked his head up. He squinted at me. "'Lo, Dooley," he said.

The Swede was the baker who shared the galley in which I was cook, and I'd always known him as the quietest guy on our ship. His gray eyes were as wet now as a San Francisco fog, and his face looked as if he'd missed his mouth with his last beer, poured it over the bridge of his nose. Call me a liar, but tears had run down the line that creased his cheeks, and were dripping off his chin.

I'd cut myself in on a crying jag, I

*When racketbuster Dooley tackles a lonely hearts fraud, it seems all he'll bust is—his pocketbook and noggin!*



saw, and it was too late to run. "What's the matter, fella?" I asked. "Somebody give you the dirty end?"

His head wobbled as his long neck lost its starch again, and he drooped.

"A dame?" I guessed. This wasn't too wild. I couldn't imagine any man making Olaf feel bad enough to bawl. Not and keep his health. Those arms of Ole's hung like hawyers from his shoulders, but he could pull the legs off the average guy.

He confirmed my hunch with another vague bob of his head. I ordered us a drink. "If you want to tell me about it, I'm available," I told him.

I had to wait for the drink to prime him before he'd even meet my eyes in the bar mirror. "Dooley," he said, "I'm a damn fool!"

"Aren't we all?"

"Not like me," he insisted. "I'm a big blamed fool!"

"You're big," I grinned. "But go on—let's have it. You'll feel better."

Well, to cut out the thumping he gave the bar and my own dopey comments as he went along, Ole's story stacked up like this:

**A**BOUT three years ago he was on the beach here in San Francisco, touring the parks and sidewalk flower stands, sniffing the posies. All of a sudden he discovered people ran in couples—male and female. Blame it on the weather. It was spring. Anyway, Olaf decided there must be something to it.

As I've said, Ole was a quiet, shy guy. He didn't have the brass to boo at any nice girl, and he knew he didn't want the kind who would boo at him. So he did what came naturally. He took his wants to a lonely-hearts club.

They accepted his money, introduced him to several ladies in their stable. Then, on about the fourth try, he met Louella Schwartz. From Ole's description, I gathered she was one of the leaders you see advertised by these outfits as follows:

Attr yng widow, priv means, wishes to meet sbr rel gent; obj mat.

Right away it was a take. Louella was several years younger than Ole—

blonde, buxom, a good cook, and she claimed to own the little house where she lived out in the Mission District. Her place became his snug harbor when he was in town, which was several times a year. Everything would've been strictly acey-deucey, except that Louella had set her heart on starting her next matrimonial bout with money in the bank. Fifteen thousand bucks was her price.

She had five grand of that herself—in the house. But it was Ole's job to pony up the balance. And here was her gimmick—she'd help him save the money. All he had to do was send her every dime he made, she'd see it was banked. How accommodating can a gal be?

It's easy to call my friend Olaf a dope. But that's what love does to a man.

When he came in port this time, he figured it was to get married. But the bungalow in the Mission was empty, sold. And Louella was A.W.O.L.—absent with Ole's picture.

He'd paid a full ten grand for his lesson.

Too bad. I guess he had a cry coming. But it made me sore. Not just because he was a shipmate, but I'd seen the poor devil sweat out two of those years. He hadn't held out enough money on Louella to keep himself in smokes.

"Look, Ole," I told him when he was through telling me his woeful tale, "you and me are going over to the Hall of Justice. They've got a bunko squad in this town that'll be delighted to hear about Louella."

"Cops?" he mumbled dimly.

"Yeah—big Irish ones who'll make that babe wish she'd never thought of her sweet little racket. Come on!"

I tried to haul him off the bar stool, but his pants were stuck fast. "No, Dooley," he protested. "I don't want to cause her no trouble."

"Cause her trouble? Are you kidding?"

He wasn't. I did everything except slap him in the puss with the bar-rag. I needed him, called him names, even tried an appeal to his sense of civic duty.

"Ole," I said, "it's bad enough that Louella took you for ten thousand clams,



but unless you go to the cops and see she's put out of circulation she'll work the same gag on other guys. In fact, she probably is already!"

I'd finally made an impression. Slowly Ole got off his perch—and just like that he clipped me in the teeth.

I'd earned it!

WHEN I came to, the bartender was holding my head, making me sniff spirits. He ran a high-class dive, didn't want his customers lying around on the deck. I staggered back to the bar. My pal Ole had skipped.

I had a double bourbon, swore as it stung a cut inside my mouth. If my good friend had to make Louella a present of his ten grand—if it gave him pleasure—I should end up nursing a fat lip! Well, I was.

And I didn't enjoy it any more than you would.

I guess that's why I decided to double-cross him. He didn't care to sick the cops on his Louella, which was plenty of excuse for me to want a can tied on that lady. Of course, I had to find her first. I didn't think it'd be too tough.

I remembered Ole had told me he met her through an outfit called, Happiness, Incorporated. And if he said it once, he wore it out—Louella was a ringer for Lana Turner. Even Happiness, Inc., couldn't have too many dames who looked like that on their list.

So I paid for my drinks and went to the nearest barber shop for an overhaul.

About an hour later, a very civilized-type Dooley was opening the door of Happiness, Inc., Annabella Blandy, President. An ice-pack on my lip, a shave, and a shine hadn't given me that Bond Street look, but short of miracles which I didn't expect, I thought I'd get by.

Annabella Blandy was behind her desk. At least a well padded old momma in a black net dress peered at me through gold and shell harlequin glasses when I said, "Mrs. Blandy?"

"I'm Miss Blandy. Yes?"

Quick, the office fit Miss Blandy like slacks, and just room in the hip pocket for me. I took in the filing cabinet, small desk, straight wooden chair for

the suckers, while she was asking what she could do for me.

I laid it on with a spade. I was, I explained, a lonesome sailor man, tired of the single way of life. I wanted a help-mate, someone at the cottage door when I came home from sea.

Annabella ate it up. "You poor, poor man," she cried with feeling as genuine as the paste lavalier that was discolored her breastbone. "I'm so pleased you came to us."

"You think you can help me find the right little woman?"

She squirmed in her corset, hedged. "Of course, you understand, I can't promise. However, we do have a number of very charming young ladies."

"I have a choice?"

"Naturally," she cooed. "We try to arrange for our people to make several contacts. In that way, there is more chance of their finding someone compatible."

"That's for me, Miss Blandy!" I fumbled my wallet out. "How much does it cost to register?"

I managed to drop the grouch bag so hundred dollar bills scattered over the top of her desk. Her eyes lighted up like a juke box.

She licked her lips. "Five dollars," said she.

I reshuffled my bundle, found her five and gave it to her. She slipped a card in an old Underwood typewriter, asked my name. For her I was Jerome Duggan—a Chief Mate I used to ship with. I expected her to check with the Masters, Mates and Pilots, so it couldn't be a phony name, just phony for me.

After we'd taken care of the vital statistics, I said, "Can I tell you what I sort of had in mind. I mean the type of girl?"

Annabella folded her fat hand on the desk. "But definitely, Mr. Duggan."

"Well, she shouldn't be too young," I explained. "About thirty would be right. A widow maybe. If she has some money of her own, okay, but I won't insist."

Annabella nodded. "That can be arranged, Mr. Duggan."

I made like Mortimer Snerd. "The rest of this may sound kind of silly, Miss Blandy. I wouldn't even mention it, but you've been so nice. I sure would ap-



preciate it if the lady you pick for me looks like Lana Turner. I mean, I guess she's—you'd say—my dream girl."

Miss Annabella Blandy's withered crop vibrated with ecstasy. She must've had Cupid tickling her with the feathers on one of his arrows.

"You're a most fortunate man, Mr. Duggan!" she exclaimed.

"You know a girl like that?"

"Yes, I do," she beamed. "She's been registered with us for a short time. A widow, some insurance money from her dead husband, no children, about thirty, blonde, and she does resemble your dream girl a great deal."

"No foolin'," I said. "When can I meet her?"

"We'll see what she's doing tonight," replied Annabella reaching for her phone.

Big surprise—my poor man's Turner was available. Miss Blandy introduced us over the phone and I had a date.

She was going by the name of Betty Gaynor now. Louella Schwartz, Betty Gaynor—who cares?

AT FIVE-THIRTY the head waiter of the Drake Hotel's Starlight Room made himself an easy buck by showing Miss Gaynor to my table. I'd arrived fifteen minutes earlier and set this up with him. She made a show of being acquainted, for the benefit of the other customers and the help.

In the graveyard-blue light of that penthouse saloon she was a fair copy of Lana. Maybe a little more heft, but only where it was appropriate. I could see why Ole had gone.

She permitted me to order a Scarlett O'Hara for her and we bandied around the weather, the view of the Bay, and the world situation. I don't believe we contributed anything startling, but it loosened us up.

In her line, Betty was an artist. She played on Jerome Duggan's ego like it was a Steinway grand. I didn't know how interesting Duggan could be until she started cuing me through the story of his life. She giggled, sighed, laughed, rolled her eyes whenever the script called for it.

With that kind of encouragement, the pitch I had planned came easy. Duggan

was not only lonely and ready for double-harness, he was also a chump about money. No matter how much he made, he was forever broke. He needed a banker almost as much as he needed a wife.

It cost me a couple hundred skins to illustrate this lecture, but by the time we'd made the rounds of the better night spots, I figured she ought to be convinced. I never worked so hard in my life—to sell the idea that I'm a push-over for a smart girl. But it was nice work.

I knew I'd scored when she said, "Jerry—" that's what she called me now—"Jerry, would you mind taking me home?"

"Aw honey—the night's still in three-cornered pants," I pouted.

We'd just left the Bal Tabarin where I'd let her do everything except count the money I was carrying. Her cool fingers shut me off, pressing against my mouth. She gave our hack driver an address on Russian Hill.

To me she whispered, "If you promise to be a good boy, you can come up—for coffee."

The way she said it, she didn't mean *good* any more than she meant *coffee*. I squeezed her hand.

"On my scout oath," I said.

Betty lived in one of those second story, walk-up flats—a made-over mansion with banjo-eyed windows and cupolas. Her sitting room was chintz and maple, real homey, with old sailing ship prints on the walls. A beautiful front for a gal in her business. I covered the whole thing while she was in the kitchen brewing coffee.

She brought the tray in, put it on the low table before the davenport, sat down beside me. We sipped, watching each other over the rims of our cups. The radio was moaning about love.

When a lovely gal looks at me like that, only one thing is going to happen. Our cups came down, together, and Duggan and Gaynor made a package. It was fun, but I kept track of her hands. This was the play I'd been building up to all night. If she went for my wallet—

Which shows how much I'd misjudged baby. She was no pickpocket.



She didn't operate that way.

I was jerked out of my Chanel No. 5 dream by, "What the hell's going on here?"

Betty and I did a fast break. She eeked, "Tom!"

**T**OM was a very large gentleman. He had on a bathrobe and pajamas and a scowl that dragged his black hair down practically to the bridge of his nose.

"Honey," I said to Betty. "I don't think I've had the pleasure. Who is this guy?"

"I'm her husband, see!" Tom shouted.

"Husband?" I looked at Betty cowering in the corner of the divan. She nodded, scared. "You forgot to mention him, didn't you?" I grinned.

I stood up, swiped my hat off the top of the bookcase. "Well, I'll be running, if no one objects."

Tom blocked the door. "I object. I want to know what this's all about!"

"Ask your wife," I told him.

"I'm askin' you!" He had ahold of my lapels by then, shaking me.

"Okay—" I broke his grip with the heels of my hands—"I'll tell you. I had some bad dope on your wife. I understood she was a widow. I don't know who's to blame, but she was registered with a lonely-hearts club as in the market for a husband. Unless you're a ghost, it looks like that'd put her one over quota."

"I oughta punch your brains in!"

"There's nothing for you to get worked up about, Tom," I said easily, drawing back as he reached for my lapels again. "We haven't done anything worse than a little innocent necking."

"Why you—"

He led a big roundhouse swing with the point of his chin. There was no choice. I had to beat him to the punch. And I did. Just a quickie that traveled about a foot.

He spun around, staggered, crashed into the wall with his face. One of us—me or the wall—knocked him out. He made like a throw rug.

It was too easy. I'm not that potent with my fists. But I had something else to worry about. My dame, or Tom's

dame, or Ole's—whosever she was—had come to life with a scream that should've shook the seismograph over in Berkeley.

She plunged across the room to her fallen mate, tugged at his shoulder until she'd rolled him over. His face was covered with blood, or what looked like blood. Betty moaned his name a couple times, then shrieked at me.

"You killed him! You killed him!"

"Stow it," I said. "Tell the big bum to wipe the catsup off his face and get up."

"He's dead! You killed him!" she raved.

"All right, if you say so, we'll call the cops."

"That won't be necessary!" It was another strange voice that said that.

I whirled just as a stocky little gent with a receding hairline, but arms like an ape, came through the hall doorway. He flashed an inspector's buzzer at me, looked around until he found Betty and her relaxed old man.

"What seems to be the trouble, Mrs. Gaynor?" the cop asked.

She pointed at me. "He killed Tom!"

"Baloney, officer," I said. "I barely hit him. The worst that's happened, he bloodied his nose when he fell."

"What was the fight about?" asked the inspector, squatting beside Tom, feeling his neck.

**S**INCE the question seemed to be directed to me, I took it.

"The fight was about the oldest skin game in the world," I told him. "A gal gets a guy up to her apartment claiming she's not married, smooches him a little, then hubby makes his entrance. He fakes a big take, they fight, and hubby proves to be very fragile indeed. The sucker thinks he really hurt the old man bad, or even killed him, so he pays off. You came in too soon and spoiled that part of the promotion."

The inspector went ahead prodding Tom's hulk. "Yeah?" he said.

"Incidentally," I asked, "how did you happen to get here so quick? They got radar for you boys?"

"I live downstairs," he said, rising. "And I have bad news for you, Mac. This man is dead."



"Dead? You're crazy. He couldn't be. I just tapped—"

"I say he's dead," said the inspector, moving toward me.

"You're a doctor, too?"

"I don't have to be, Mac. I know a stiff when I see one. No heartbeat, no breathing. It adds up, chum."

Betty threw her hysterics into high gear on that. Believe me, I blame near did the same. It didn't make sense, but there wasn't much ground for me to argue the point.

"What's your name, Mac?" the inspector said.

He'd patted me all over to see if I was loaded, and he had my wallet containing my Cooks and Stewards Union card.

"James Dooley," I answered.

"It's not," screamed Betty. "He's lying. His name is Jerome Duggan."

"What about that?" he asked.

"It's on my card," I told him. "I just borrowed Duggan's name to meet Mrs. Gaynor. I had a reason, but it doesn't matter now."

"Maybe it doesn't. Yeah, you're James Dooley, if this card's on the level. How'd you like to tell me why you called yourself Duggan?"

"It had nothing to do with this."

"I'll decide that, buddy."

"Hate to disappoint you, Inspector," I said. "And by the way, you can return my wallet now."

"You won't be needing it."

"There's over two grand there. I'd just as soon be responsible for it myself."

"What's the matter, Dooley?" he sneered. "Don't you trust me?"

"I'll give you a short answer. No! Not with that kind of money. Let's have it. Then we'll go down to the Hall of Justice and get this over with."

"You must talk yourself into all kinds of trouble with that big mouth, Dooley."

"Don't let it bother you, Inspector," I said. "Just hand over my cabbage."

I held my mitt out and got it—a loaded sap across my open palm. I might've known nature boy didn't have his hand in his coat pocket to keep it warm.

I thought my fist was broken, grabbed it, swearing at him. The next thing I

knew, I knew nothing. This joker in bull's plainclothing raised his sights and rapped me beside the ear.

Slow, soft music on the organ, mother—your little man is so tired.

I CAME back like a termite chipping his way through a hardwood floor—only there was some boiler-plate between me and consciousness. I felt like a termite, too—having a look around at the world and wondering if it was worth the labor of coming out. I'd have gone in again, except the inspector spoke to me. Right then he was a pair of large feet across the rug from my eyes.

"How d'you feel, Dooley?"

I groaned.

"As bad as that, huh?"

I raised my aching head. The inspector was sitting on the davenport, watching me. He looked pleased with himself. I passed up his question to get in one of my own. "Where is everybody?"

The cop and I were alone. No Betty, and no Tom—in corpse form or otherwise.

"Don't worry about them, Dooley," said the cop. "You're among friends."

I sat up, rubbed the tender lump in back of my ear. "Yeah. The love tap you gave me proves that."

"Sorry, kid," shrugged the inspector. "I had to. You were gettin' hard to handle."

"I'm always like that about money—particularly my own." I got my good flipper under me and boosted myself up, leaned against the wall.

"Will you listen to reason?" the cop asked quietly.

"Not two grand worth."

"Sit down, Dooley," he said, "and let me explain something to you."

I perched on the arm of a chair as he went on, "I don't have to tell you that you were in a jam. Whether you believe it or not, I'm on your side. I don't like to see a man go to Quentin for ten years just because he's unlucky enough to hit a guy who breaks his fool neck when he falls down. I know you didn't mean to kill him. But, hell, the law doesn't allow for those kinds of accidents. It's manslaughter."

"Look," I told him. "Skip the build-up. What're you driving at?"



"I made a deal for you, Dooley," he explained. "I've known the Gaynors a long time. They've had one of those on-again-off-again marriages with the old man off most of the time. After I quieted you down, I worked on Betty, made her see you'd actually done her a favor. Tom carried plenty of insurance. She—"

"What about Tom?" I cut in. "I always understood a stale corpus delicti could be an embarrassing thing to have around the house."

He tipped me a wise wink. "We're in the clear. Tom's body will be found in an alley and we'll say it was a hold-up that got out of hand."

"And my two grand?"

"Do you know where you can get it done any cheaper?"

"You bet, sweetheart! The Hall of Justice is running a special on manslaughter this week."

I had about two strides on him getting to the telephone. The sap was out again, swooping in my direction. But I expected it, was set to duck. The inspector missed, and I let him have it with the base of the phone as he came in. I'd chilled my second playmate for the evening, only I meant it this time. And he wasn't acting.

I watched a very white spot on his bald head slowly color and swell. I kicked the sap away from his hand and pocketed it. Then I made my call.

It didn't come as any big surprise that my buddy the inspector was a phony. Not that I haven't known a few crooked cops, but they're never so accommodating. I'm not that lucky. The deal he offered me was too good.

**T**HE legitimate characters weren't long coaxing a confession out of him. Betty, Tom, and the old witch who masterminded this con, Miss Annabella Blandy, were picked up before morning. My dough came home—and everything would've been eggs-in-the-beer except I couldn't find Olaf, the sad Swede.

I told the cossacks about Betty's promotion with him, but all we got out of her was a denial that she'd ever heard of Ole or Louella Schwartz, or Ole's ten thousand bucks. Without Ole, we were dead.

For two days the San Francisco police and I tore up the town looking for him. I about half-decided he must've cried himself into jumping off the Gate Bridge.

The day before our old bucket was to sail, I stopped playing cops and robbers. Betty and friends were out of business on the charges I'd made, Olaf was too much of a spook for me, and besides I had work to do. My toughest job was selling the Skipper on the idea he should keep Ole's billet open until the last minute before we shoved off.

For once in my life I had my neck out—and didn't get it axed. I remember I was on deck watching the crane gang top number three hold. I happened to walk over to the rail for the millionth time, hoping I'd see Ole lopping down the dock. And I did!

The big fella was side-stepping lories and fingerlifts, almost running in spite of a chubby little blonde dame who was sort of a sea-anchor on him.

I met him at the gangway. "Where the devil have you been?"

He threw one of those loose-jointed arms around my neck. "Dooley!" he gurgled. "I'm glad to see ya. I still got a job?"

I nodded, repeated, "Yeah—but where have you been?"

"On my honeymoon, Dooley!"

"Honeymoon!"

"Sure—remember I told you about Louella? I was all wrong about her. After I left you the other day, I came back to the ship. She was waiting."

"But—"

"She hadn't run out on me," he went on happily. "She'd sold her house and gone up to Petaluma to invest our money in a chicken ranch!"

He dragged me over to the rail and waved down to his missus. I looked at her again, close. "Just a minute, pal," I said. "You told me Louella was a repeat on Lana Turner."

"Well, ain't she?" demanded Ole.

Maybe my eyes aren't so good any more. That's what I'll say if I ever run into Leo the M.G.M. lion. Because I wobbled my head, lied. "Yeah—the image."

So he thinks she is. I guess that's all that matters.



The man stepped back  
and a gun seemed to  
grow in his hand



# EYE *for an* EYE

By MORRIS COOPER

**P**ATROLMAN William Guerney sighed deeply and silently lip-formed a single word: "Rats!" He wondered for the hundredth time how soon he would be able to enjoy the ex-

quisite pleasure of lying on his side or on his stomach.

He stuck his tongue out at the grotesque plaster-covered monstrosity that was suspended in the air by a steel

*Flat on his back in the hospital, Officer Guerney has to catch a killer—without lifting a finger!*



frame and a system of pulleys and weights. Save for the fact that he was irrevocably attached to that hovering appendage, he would cheerfully have deserted it and hopped out of the hospital on his one good leg.

Patrolman Guerney cautiously opened an eye. Pat Larkin was still sitting by the window of the hospital room, his uniform coat open, the tip of his tongue reflectively caressing his upper lip. Patrolman Guerney felt like snorting at the idea that a full grown man like himself should need the protection of a police guard. Then he thought back to what had happened three nights ago, and he wasn't so certain that he was big enough to take care of himself.

He had made his usual ten-forty stop at the Peerless Theater. George McGough, assistant manager, had given him a cheery wave when he walked into the theater office.

"Be ready in a couple of minutes, Bill."

Guerney leaned against a filing cabinet and massaged his left palm with the tip of his nightstick. "How're the pictures this week, Mac?"

The assistant manager blotted the bank deposit slip and said, "Both stinkers. But we're playing to standing room. You can never figure what the public will go for."

"Ain't it the truth," Patrolman Guerney remarked philosophically. "Sometimes I wonder what those Hollywood boys do to earn all the money they get."

McGough buttoned his jacket and picked up the canvas sack with the night's receipts. "I guess they get stomach ulcers," he said.

**L**EAVING the theater, Patrolman Guerney and McGough turned the corner and headed up the dimly lit street that led to the bank. "How're the kids?" Guerney asked the police officer.

"Growing like weeds. My youngest has the notion he wants to go away to prep school, and I've been thinking about it."

"Wouldn't do him any harm," Guerney said. "Only thing is, you'll miss all the fun of seeing him grow up."

"That's what's been holding me back." McGough handed Guerney the

canvas sack. "Hold this a second, will you, while I fish around in my pocket for that key to the night depository?"

Guerney tucked the bag under his arm the same instant a drunk weaved out of a doorway. The drunk lurched against Guerney and gave the patrolman a cheerful greeting.

"How ya, officer?"

Guerney pants-slapped him with his nightstick and growled, "Beat it, bum, before I give you a ride in the paddy wagon."

What happened next was like one of those bad pictures Guerney sometimes saw at the Peerless.

The drunk stepped back a space and a gun seemed to grow in his hand. "Just drop that sack," he said, "and turn around. That way no one will get hurt."

A snap-brimmed hat cast a shadow over the gunman's face, and in the dimly lighted street, Guerney had the illusion that there was nothing but a pillar of darkness between the man's neck and hat.

Patrolman Guerney lifted his elbow slowly, to let the money sack drop to the pavement. Then, suddenly, without warning, McGough hurled himself forward. The gun cracked viciously and the theaterman began to crumple.

Guerney was still going for his gun when he felt dynamite strike his left leg. The sounds of two more shots reached his ears as he was falling, but he was unconscious before he hit the pavement.

Guerney came to as they were lifting him on the operating table. "McGough," he whispered. "How is he?"

The surgeon shook his head sympathetically. "He never knew what hit him."

Guerney passed out again and began dreaming about a little kid who would never be able to go away to prep school.

Lieutenant Dale of Homicide was sitting next to his bed when he opened his eyes the next morning. The first thing Guerney saw was the surrealistic apparition suspended from the metal frame. He closed his eyes quickly.

Lieutenant Dale laughed. "It's only your leg, Guerney. The doc says it'll be as good as new when you leave the hospital."



"How bad is it?" Guerney questioned. "Three bullet holes and a couple of fractures. But except for a twinge on rainy days, you'll never think about it." "McGough—the doctor said he was dead."

Dale's face clouded. "A bullet got him right through the heart. Think you're strong enough to tell me what happened?"

Guerney told him. "I was sure the prize sucker."

"Don't blame yourself," Dale said. "It was just one of those things. Did you get a good look at the killer?"

"Just his build. It was too dark to see his face."

"Do you think you might recognize him?"

Guerney rolled his head on the pillow. "Not a chance in a million."

Dale sighed. "That's too bad. We've got the idea it's the same guy that's been knocking over night bank depositors all over the state, but so far no one's been able to come up with a decent description."

"He was about five-ten," Guerney said. "Maybe a hundred fifty-five, medium build, light gray suit, about twenty-eight."

"Just like ten thousand other guys." Dale opened his jacket and took a .32 automatic from his shoulder holster. He slipped the weapon under Guerney's pillow.

Guerney's eyes filled with curiosity but he waited until Dale spoke.

"I'm going to play a hunch," Dale said. "Beginning right now, I'm putting a police guard in this room."

"What good will that do?" Guerney asked.

"I'm giving the newspaper boys the story that you got a good look at the killer, and can identify him."

"Supposing he doesn't fall for it?"

Dale shrugged his shoulders. "What have we got to lose? I'll give the newspaper boys his description, and maybe his conscience will do the rest."

AND now, for the third day, Pat Larkin was playing nursemaid to Patrolman Guerney.

Guerney opened his eyes and said, "I don't think this is going to work."

Pat Larkin turned his head. "So what? At least my feet are getting a rest out of the deal." He stood up and lumbered toward the door. "Do you think you can guard yourself while I go mooch a cup of coffee?" His grin took the sting out of his words.

"Have a gallon," said Guerney. He picked a newspaper off the bedside table. Five minutes later the door opened again and Guerney said, "That was a quick cup—" He stopped.

The woman wore a white hospital smock, new-look glasses, and hair pinned into a tight bun.

"You're not a nurse!" Guerney felt silly as soon as he blurted out the words, and he rattled the newspaper to cover his confusion.

"Don't tell me you've never heard of women doctors."

Her voice was patient, almost as though she were speaking to a child. She picked up his chart, and looked at it with professional interest, then walked over to the dresser and took a hypodermic case from her pocket.

"What's up, Doc?" Guerney asked her.

"Just one of those nasty needles doctors are always giving patients," she said.

Guerney looked back to the newspaper item he had been reading, then said, "Here's something that ought to interest you." He read from the newspaper: "University authorities reported that John L. Martin, medical student, diagnosed his condition today, after a street brawl, as contusion of the periorbital integument, subcutaneous hemorrhage, oedema of the conjunctiva and the periorbital cuticular tissues, discoloration, tumefaction and abrasion of the supramalar epidermis."

Guerney stopped reading and said, "Some words!"

The doctor held the hypodermic needle point up and turned toward the bed. "He's really in a bad shape. A case like that requires surgery, and it's almost always fatal."

Guerney stared at her, and then his right hand reached under the pillow. Lieutenant Dale's .32 was in his hand and he pointed it at the woman.

"Just stand where you are, sister. If



I'm wrong, you'll be able to bawl me out later."

**L**IEUTENANT DALE came back to the hospital in the evening, a box of cigars under his arm.

"She broke down after a couple of hours," he exulted, "and told us where her boy friend was hiding. Seems he got his wind up when he read you could identify him, and thought up the bright idea of her playing doctor and sneaking in here the first chance she got. It isn't

the toughest thing in the world to do in a hospital this size. Incidentally, there was enough poison in that hypo to kill a dozen horses."

He put the box of cigars on the table. "That was a good piece of work, Guerny. How did you tumble?"

"I read her a newspaper story in which a medical student used a fancy way of describing a black eye, and I never heard of anybody dying from a shiner." Guerny puffed at his cigar. "Good thing, too, or we'd all be dead."



## The "Inside" of Detective Work

### 7. Disguises

**T**O ESCAPE recognition, criminals may attempt the use of disguise to alter their appearance. The most common tricks employed are the simple ones of dyeing hair, growing or cutting off of mustaches, wearing wigs or affecting glasses. Masks are an elementary form of disguise.

Only in rare instances, for the sake of disguise, have men masqueraded as women, or vice versa.

The attempt by the notorious John Dillinger to change his appearance by means of plastic surgery brought that type of disguise into prominence.

This type of concealment has many shortcomings. First, it is difficult to make changes that will really fool a sharp-eyed police officer. This is because a person is most often recognized, not by his individual features, but by such things as his build, his posture, his manner of walking, and his speech.

Surgical traces of any such surgery, too, are readily detectable for a long time afterwards.

A more successful type of plastic surgery disguise is that used in covering up some deformity or mark by which a criminal is known, and to which attention is usually attracted. If, for example, a criminal is known for a prominent knife-scar on his face, elimination of that scar by plastic surgery might help divert attention from him. Similarly, a broken nose or prominent ears might be corrected by surgery.

But, again, surgical traces of the changes can be detected!

Criminals have often tried to gain anonymity by obliterating or eliminating the surface ridges on the fingertips so they can't be fingerprinted or their fingerprints traced. One such method is to rub the tips of the fingers on stone or some other mildly abrasive surface until the skin is worn smooth. But these ridges quickly grow back and any suspect can be fingerprinted merely by holding him in custody for an adequate period.

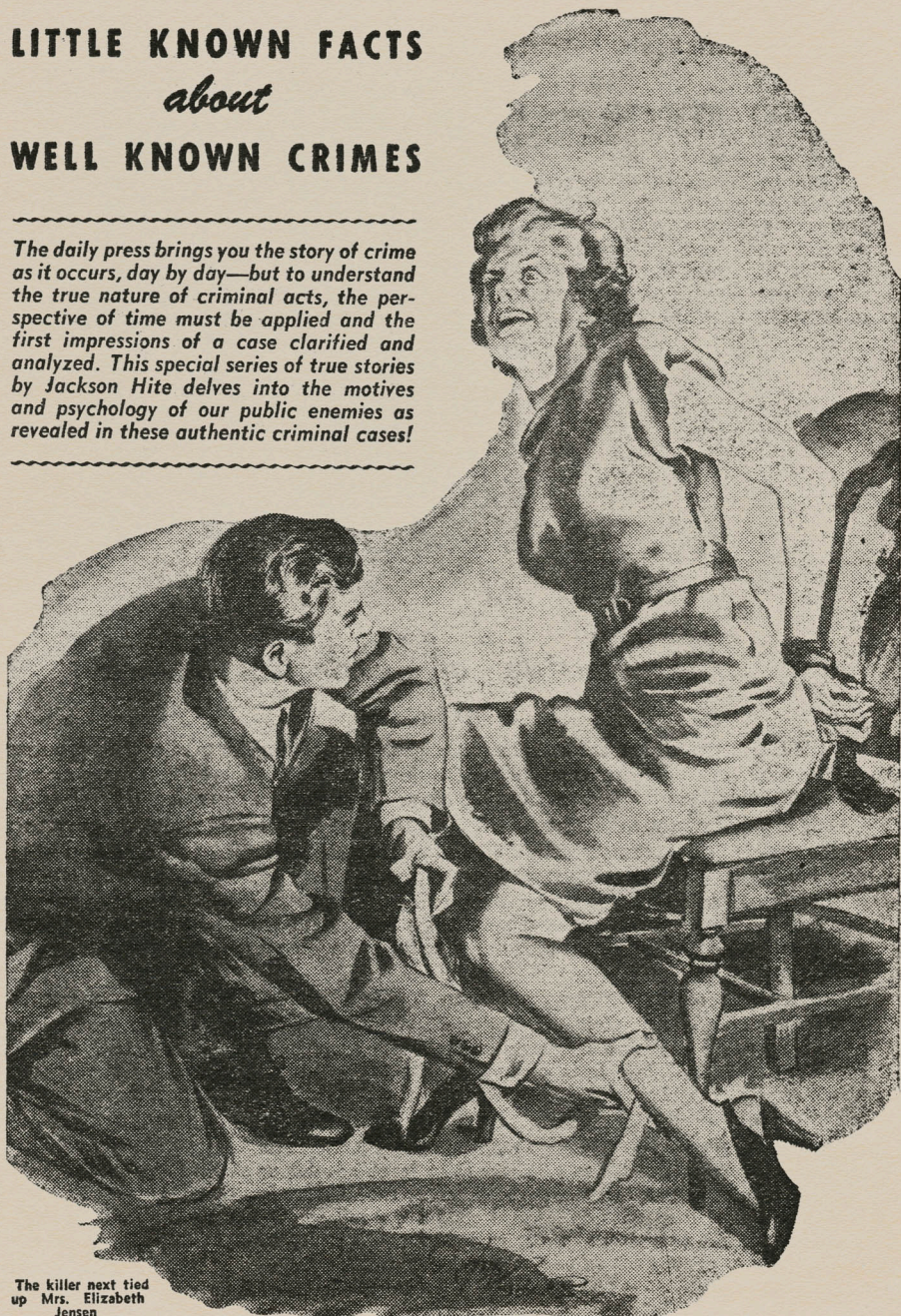
What is more, the mere fact that a man has tried to eliminate his fingerprints—marks him almost certainly as a criminal!

—Carter Critz



# LITTLE KNOWN FACTS *about* WELL KNOWN CRIMES

*The daily press brings you the story of crime as it occurs, day by day—but to understand the true nature of criminal acts, the perspective of time must be applied and the first impressions of a case clarified and analyzed. This special series of true stories by Jackson Hite delves into the motives and psychology of our public enemies as revealed in these authentic criminal cases!*



The killer next tied up Mrs. Elizabeth Jensen



# THE *False Mayor*

*Father Flanagan turned detective when a vicious killer used Boys' Town as a ruse in gaining access to victims!*

by **JACKSON HITE**

**T**HE unexpected death in the summer of 1948 of Father Edward J. Flanagan, the famous founder of Boys' Town, Nebraska, brought to an untimely close the brilliant career of a man who insisted that there were no bad boys, and proved it by rehabilitating youngsters that welfare agencies had classified as incorrigible. Boys' Town, under Father Flanagan was not a penal institution, but a haven for lads without homes. At Boys' Town they were taught to master a trade and learn how to be useful citizens.

But there actually is an instance where Father Flanagan turned detective and his work assisted authorities in trapping a youthful killer who was jeopardizing the reputation of the haven. Father Flanagan's role in this case was kept secret during his lifetime.

On the night of February 4, 1941, John Pappas, a wealthy importer, arrived at his home at No. 1032 Grand Concourse, in New York City. It was after 10:30 and Pappas was tired after a long day's work. But his stride became brisk as he strode to the elevator to be whisked up to his apartment.

Pappas was looking forward to being greeted by his beautiful bride, Catherine, whom he had married the previous year in Alexandria, Egypt, where her father was a well-to-do publisher. The importer, many years older than his bride, was deeply in love with the girl whose beauty had so stirred her neighbors that they called her the "Egyptian Princess."

He entered the foyer of his apartment and paused as he stared ahead with disbelief into the sunken living room. The usually immaculate apartment was a shambles. A heavy lamp had been knocked off an end table and lay shattered on the floor. Nearby was a pair of his wife's shoes, turned on their side as if discarded. The coffee table held two empty cups, a tray of cookies, two wine glasses and a cut-glass stem goblet. On another table was a bottle of aspirin tablets.

## *Pappas Finds Bride Murdered*

Pappas called out his wife's name and when he received no answer went to the bedroom. His wife was dead on the bed. She had been strangled with a kitchen towel knotted about her throat. Her shapely legs were bound with strips of a linen towel while her hands were tied behind her back with a man's tie. The bedroom had been ransacked.

Within a few minutes police and other officials were at the scene. Dr. Charles Hochman, Assistant Medical Examiner, tested the rigid limbs for rigor mortis and said she had been dead from 8 to 12 hours.

The investigation was headed by Captain Charles Armstrong, a veteran member of the detective division. At his request the grief-stricken husband went through the apartment checking his wife's possessions. Pappas reported that a diamond wedding ring and an expensive wrist watch his wife had been



wearing that morning were missing. An inventory of the dresser drawers added a dinner ring and a silver cigarette case to the loot. Her purse, now empty, had contained a diamond studded gold crucifix and about \$50 in cash.

Technical experts from the police laboratory and fingerprint men went over the entire apartment. The fingerprint men raised impressions of three fingers on the glass goblet. These did not match the prints of Pappas or of his murdered wife. A detective was dispatched to headquarters to check through the files but no matching prints were on record. Copies later were forwarded to the FBI in Washington and their files also drew a blank.

Pappas revealed that the dishes on the coffee table belonged to the more expensive company set rather than those for every day use. This indicated to the investigators that the visitor had been somebody whom the wife wanted to impress rather than a casual caller.

When Pappas was shown the tie used by the killer to bind his victim's hands he said it did not belong to him. Captain Armstrong noticed a framed group photograph resting on a chair and was informed by the husband that it was a picture of the wedding party and was kept on the dresser in the bedroom. Mrs. Pappas must have brought it to the living room to show to the mysterious caller who killed her.

Pappas was puzzled about his wife having a caller. He pointed out that she had no relatives in this country and was shy, not being used to the customs and language. He had impressed on her never to admit any strangers to their apartment and their front door contained a peephole through which she could examine any caller without unlocking the door.

An ash tray contained four cigarette butts of a popular brand. The murdered woman did not smoke. "The killer seemed to have stayed here for some time," Captain Armstrong commented.

Before the body was removed to the morgue Dr. Hochman reported that he had found a smear of blood on the woman's stockings. Since there were no lacerations on her body the blood must have come from the killer. "Prob-

ably scratched him," the physician suggested.

An alarm notifying police to be on the lookout for a man with scratches on his face or hands was broadcast by police.

### Neighbors Heard No Sounds

Questioning of other tenants in the building produced no results. Few of them had more than a nodding acquaintance with the girl they called Egyptian Princess. None of the residents in the adjoining apartments had heard any sounds of a struggle. The doorman of the building did not come on duty until early afternoon. He was certain that no strangers had entered the apartment house after he came on duty, so the killer could have entered and departed before he arrived.

With each passing hour bringing to light no clues, Captain Armstrong began to realize that aside from the robbery angle he had a murder without a motive on his hands. Robbery didn't seem logical because of the almost cloistered existence led by the bride, particularly since she had been trained not to open doors to strangers. Even delivery men were instructed to leave parcels with the building superintendent. If a thug had managed to force his way in it hardly was likely that Mrs. Pappas would have entertained him, using her best dishes at that. The Medical Examiner reported after an autopsy that the murdered woman had not been criminally assaulted.

Back in his office Captain Armstrong thumbed through records on other unsolved crimes hoping to find some *modus operandi* that would give him a lead. Suddenly he sat upright in his chair. The previous November a Bronx couple who resided in a different detective district had been returning in their car from a trip out of town.

On a ramp leading to the Pulaski Skyway outside of Newark, N.J., they had stopped to pick up a young hitchhiker thumbing a ride. The young man proved to be an entertaining talker. He introduced himself as Joseph Mitchell and said that he was a former mayor of Father Flanagan's Boys' Town. He was



on his way to visit an ill sister in New England from whom he had been separated for many years when their parents had been killed in an accident. Touched by the story and the fact that the hitchhiker had not asked for money, the man insisted upon giving him some. Mitchell took it with a show of reluctance and demanded his benefactor's name and address so he could return the loan.

Several days later he came to their apartment at noon. The husband was away at work and the woman was all alone. Mitchell had told her he had found his sister getting well and so he was on his way back to Boys' Town but he wanted to stop in and thank her again. She invited him in for lunch and he remained for about an hour talking. Stating that he had a severe headache he asked her if she had any aspirin and when she returned with it, he grabbed her, using his necktie to bind her hands behind her back. He tore her apron into strips to bind her feet and stuffed a soiled handkerchief into her mouth. After slipping a diamond ring from her finger, he criminally attacked her and escaped.

Captain Armstrong noted the points of similarity—the aspirin on the table and the tie used to truss up the victim.

Just one week before the Pappas murder the same youth had made another appearance in the Bronx. He called at an apartment and told the woman there that he was a friend of her husband. She admitted him and he asked for an aspirin. When her attention was diverted, he bound and gagged her, ransacking the place. She was not molested.

The description tallied in each case. The women described the attacker as a tall, husky youth who wore a green striped suit and a blue-green hat.

### *Got in by Ruse*

Armstrong now knew how the killer had obtained entrance to the Pappas apartment. By posing as a friend of the importer, the bride had ushered him in and then brought out her best dishes in honor of the occasion. After smoking several cigarettes he had asked for an

aspirin and then went into his routine. She evidently put up a spirited fight and he had throttled her during the struggle.

New York newspapers splashed the story on page one and the following morning a woman hurried to headquarters and reported that the day before the Pappas murder a young man had tried to enter her apartment in Washington Heights saying he was from Boys' Town. He told her that her husband had picked him up on the highway the previous week and invited him to visit them. The woman slammed the door in his face. She knew he was lying, because her husband had been dead for years.

She thought his overcoat was greenish but was certain that he was wearing a dark blue suit.

A wire was sent to Father Flanagan describing the attacker and his claim to be a former mayor of Boys' Town. The kindly priest lost no time in replying that the youth was an impostor. He revealed that the faker seemed to have been operating for over six months.

His first intimation had been in July, 1940, when he received a postcard addressed to him and signed, "Gerry." In it the writer told how he was getting on and urged him not to worry. A postscript added to the card in another handwriting informed the famous priest that the writer would see to it that Gerry arrived safely at his destination.

The card made no sense since no one named Gerry had left Boys' Town.

This was followed by a long string of other postcards addressed either to him or to nonexistent youths at Boys' Town. The cards bore postmarks of cities and towns through the Eastern half of the country and while they were signed with different names, all appeared to have been written by the same person. The impostor had so managed to win the sympathies of his victims that several of them even sent telegrams to Father Flanagan telling him not to worry about the former "mayor" of Boys' Town.

While the information was helpful it meant to police they would have to extend their search from Maine to Washington, D.C. for the mysterious killer



who seemed to have as many names as a telephone directory.

Two days later a bulky letter arrived in New York. It was from Father Flanagan. When officials opened it, they found it contained a number of the strange postcards the founder of Boys' Town had been receiving from the mythical ex-mayor. The Boys' Town angle had attracted national newspaper attention to the Pappas case and the public was getting the impression that the killer actually was a former resident there.

Father Flanagan proved himself an excellent detective when his letter pointed out that all the cards received were from towns on two main U.S. Highways, particularly Highway No. 1. He added that while the impostor might try to disguise himself physically, he always could be detected because he invariably wrote the letter "r" in the form of inverted v's.

Captain Armstrong studied the handwriting on the various signed cards and nodded. "Father Flanagan is correct."

### Priest's Clues Aid Police

With Father Flanagan's shrewd observation about the highway used by the hitch-hiking killer, teletype alarms were sent to all Eastern police asking them to patrol the roads on the lookout for the strangler. Meanwhile New York police began an intensive hunt for other victims of the fast talking fraud. They found more than 20 different women victims in the different states, with at least six of the women criminally assaulted by the youth they had befriended. His usual story was that he was on his way to see a sick sister who lived either in New England or the South, depending on the direction he was traveling. Many of his listeners had given him money and he obtained their addresses by pretending he wanted to repay the loan. Instead, he returned several days later while the men were at work, robbing the women.

Several habits of the killer were noted. He was a chain cigarette smoker, often lighting a new one with the butt of one he was finishing. Several motorists, who had brought him into

New York, had dropped him off near the Pennsylvania Station.

Reports began to come in to Captain Armstrong from other cities. A week after the murder of Mrs. Pappas the strangler had been picked up by a Philadelphia motorist. He repaid this courtesy by visiting the man's home, attacking his 19-year-old wife, an expectant mother, and stealing her furs and jewelry. She was rushed to a hospital in a hysterical condition and her child was stillborn some time later.

When police questioned the husband, he revealed that the youth had told him he was a leader of the band at Boys' Town, a new twist to his story.

The killer next appeared in Washington where, on February 16, he attacked and robbed a woman there, tying up her hands behind her back with a necktie. Although police from Washington to New York were alerted, the killer seemed to have eluded all traps and one week later attacked a woman in Newark.

Police in New York began to patrol all the routes leading into the city but the wily killer seemed to sense a trap and appeared two days later in Passaic, off the main highway, where he attempted to rob a 50-year-old woman. The plucky housewife managed to break loose from his grasp and shouted for help. The husky youth fled out of the back door and disappeared. That night he approached a parked car near the New Jersey approach to the George Washington Bridge and tried to open the door. A nurse who was checking a map was alone in the car. When he found the door locked, he rattled the handle and banged on the window trying to get in. The nurse promptly started up her car and headed toward a wall to hem him in. He jumped off the running board and ran away.

For days New York authorities waited wondering where the killer would show up next. On March 3 they had their answer. Mrs. Elizabeth Jensen was found dead in her Bronx apartment, strangled with a tie. Her hands and feet were bound with strips torn from a towel. It was the same *modus operandi* used by the fugitive slayer.

Captain Armstrong quickly sum-



moned his men. He pointed out that the killer had indicated a preference for the Pennsylvania Station area which meant that he stayed at some hotel or rooming house near there. He instructed his men to canvass every place in that region and inspect the signatures of newly registered guests.

"Don't forget what Father Flanagan told us about the way he makes those small r's," he told them.

### *Killer's Hotel Located*

Previous checking had disclosed that the suspect registered on a previous occasion at the Mills Hotel at 36th Street and Seventh Avenue not far from the Station. Detectives Durant, Mahon and Dillon were sent to the hotel. They inspected the register but found no signature containing the inverted r's. The officers decided to stay in the lobby and wait for a while.

Some time later a husky youth entered and asked the desk clerk for Room No. 1226 stating that he had that room over the weekend and liked it. The clerk checked his records and found that room was rented. The prospective hotel guest agreed to take another room on the eighth floor. As he went upstairs to his room, the detectives looked at

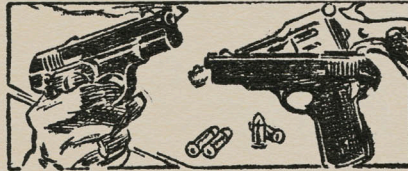
the registration card he had filled out. The man had signed his name as "G. Koslosky," a name which contained no r's.

"He answers the description in a general way, let's investigate some more," Detective Durant suggested. The three sleuths went to his room and asked him for his draft registration card. He produced it and on it he had signed his name as George Joseph Cvek, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Durant nudged the others. The strange inverted v's were particularly noticeable in the double "rr" in Harrisburg.

The suspect was rushed to the Bronx where his fingerprints were taken. The middle three fingers on his right hand matched those found on the glass in the Pappas' apartment.

Cvek cracked after eight hours of questioning and admitted the murder of the beautiful bride. He would not admit the Jensen slaying. He was convicted of first degree murder and was electrocuted at Sing Sing, trapped because Father Flanagan had played detective to protect the reputation of his Boys' Town. Cvek, of course, had never been at Boys' Town.

Perhaps if he had he would have led a different life and not died in the electric chair.



## *Headliners in the Next Issue*

### **THE GALLOPING CORPSES**

**Stewart Sterling**

It's a case of "Win, Place—or Die!" in this novelet of race track mystery!

### **YOU ARE NEXT TO DIE**

**Philip Ketchum**

Madeline Carter faces the threat of "death by accident" in a tense novelet!

### **THE LINCOLN MURDER PLOT**

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The amazing true story of the conspiracy surrounding the martyr president!



# FISTS for MUCURA



By ARTHUR J. BURKS

*The Brazilian jungle wasn't New York City, but the way Jim Lever got his man made the case seem quite routine!*

**J**IM LEVER faced the mayor of Itaituba, on the Tapajos. The man's nickname was "Bebito."

"We want Mucura," said Bebito. "We want him alive. He's cut the insides out of just one too many Brazilians! I can't send any of my officers to Barra for him, because they know him and won't go. Besides, he laughs at them. So I asked your boss, who hap-

pens to be my cousin"—Bebito grinned broadly—"to loan you to me. Mucura is tough, even for an American to handle."

Jim Lever winced at the major's last statement.

"I'm not a detective," he said. "I'm an engineer. I work for the Boa Vista Plantations, remember?"

"You are an engineer, yes," said Be-



bito. "But before you became a not-very-good engineer, you were a New York detective—and a tough man with your fists. I looked you up before I asked your boss—my cousin—to send you to me. Before you go upriver to get Mucura for me, I'll remind you of something: You dare not hit a Brazilian with your fists. If you do, all Brazilians are against you, make Brazil too unfriendly for you to live in."

"I must bring this man back alive," said Jim Lever. "I must not use my fists. Just how, friends, do I do it?"

"You were a detective," Bebito said, grinning. "I sent for you knowing you would find all the answers."

Jim Lever shrugged. Then an idea flashed in his mind.

"You have a knife somewhere, Bebito?" he asked. "Let me have it."

"I have a knife, yes," said Bebito. "But remember—"

"You want him alive, and he can cut rings around me with a knife," finished Lever. "But I'll borrow a knife, all the same, if you've got one. Would it not be dramatic for me to return with Mucura and prove I had taken him alive with the lucky knife of Bebito?"

Bebito grinned again. He took a knife from his desk. The haft was of Trombetas jade inset with Pimental crystal, the ten-inch blade razor keen, slim pointed, half an inch wide at the most. It was heavy, a formidable weapon. Lever looked up at Bebito.

"It's an honest knife," said Bebito. "I am not ashamed of its record."

"I'll keep it honest," said Jim Lever. "By the way, Mucura is an odd name for a man. Means 'skunk', doesn't it?"

"Yes, and Mucura is bad," said Bebito. "He has killed a dozen people altogether!"

**N**EXT morning, when Jim Lever set out on the upriver launch, he looked over the crew and passengers. Deadpan faces submitted to his scrutiny or looked away. He knew they were all against him silently pulling for Mucura. At breakfast nobody looked at him. Nobody passed him coffee, sugar or hardtack.

For six days and nights he was treated to silence, disapproval. He kept on

the alert. The friends of Mucura were doing everything possible to whip the American even before Jim Lever came to grips with him.

As Vila Nova, only halfway to Barra—where he expected to find Mucura—came in sight, members of the crew and petty officials of the launch began to smile at him. He was wise, then. Mucura was at Vila Nova waiting for Lever and everybody knew it.

As the certainty struck him, Lever wondered why friends of Mucura had not stolen the knife of Bebito. Had they done so, he would have *had* to use his fists. The truth occurred to him at once.

They had left him the knife because Mucura had got the word to them, he decided. Or perhaps they thought he didn't have a chance against Mucura with it. They were afraid that without it he wouldn't even *try!*

Lack of sleep, poor food, the obvious dislike of the crew and petty officials of the launch for the American, had tensed Lever's nerves. He sincerely hoped that what he suspected was true: that Mucura was at Vila Nova.

The pilot shouted from behind the wheel.

"There is a big crowd at Vila Nova! There must be a *festa* there today."

"Yes, did you not hear?" called the *commandants* of the launch. "There is to be a bullfight, if the two-legged bull will fight!"

Jim Lever deliberately placed himself in the bow of the launch. The roaring of the rapids before Vila Nova was a kind of music in his ears. The cutwater, slicing through the river water, made a sound he liked. There was something alive, thrilling about it.

The trail that led up from the river to the nearest Vila Nova cabin was lined with people, as if they were awaiting a parade.

The prow of the launch grated into the sand of the beach.

Lever jumped ashore and walked slowly up the trail between the lines of staring eyes. Even children clung to their mothers' skirts and stared solemnly at him.

Halfway to the first cabin, Jim Lever halted. Before anyone could accuse him



of being afraid, he carried the fight to Mucura.

"Mucura!" he called. "Smelly one! Stinker! Odorous nothing! Must I come all the way and dig you out like a skunk out of a drain? Where is your courage? If your courage is not lacking, then where are your manners, your hospitality?"

Mucura came out of the first cabin, bellowing like a prize bull. He was bare-foot, bareheaded, almost bare-chested. He had a hermit's head of thick black hair which had not been cut in months. His face and chest were ape-hairy, his shoulders as broad as those of Lever, his arms longer.

He was a formidable antagonist. His legs were bowed; they were like the trunks of sturdy trees. He carried a knife in his right hand. Lever, as the murderer charged, studied him for other weapons. He appeared to have none. Lever wondered if the tricks he had planned would work after all.

Mucura ran as if he would smash Lever into the ground with his first charge. Lever stood, legs together, negligent, nonchalant, watching the killer's charge.

When Mucura was almost within reach, Lever called out:

"That's far enough, Mucura! You *are* indeed Mucura?"

Mucura, amazed, had slid to a halt. His face split in a grin.

"He asks me if I am Mucura," he shouted, not at Lever but at his audience. "As if even peculiar Americans did not know Mucura! Of course I am Mucura, you! Here from Barra to save you a longer trip! Who else would I be?"

Jim Lever didn't raise his voice. The words came out calmly:

"I arrest you in the name of the *perfeito* of Itaituba for various murders. Hold out your hands for the manacles!"

A ripple of laughter burst from the lips of the onlookers. The sound drove the murderer almost mad, as if he were certain they were laughing at his expense.

He flung himself in, knife set for a disembowling stroke.

Lever stepped back, drawing the knife of Bebito as he did so. His heel caught in a root and he fell flat on his back!

WITH a yell of triumph, Mucura flung himself down on Lever, left hand reaching for Lever's throat, right hand thrusting.

Lever held Bebito's knife in a manner such that the heavy butt protruded past his little finger. With the butt, he struck at Mucura's bearded jaw. It was like striking with a mailed fist—but no part of Lever's hand touched the skin of the murderer. If Lever had missed, he would have been a dead man. But he did not miss. The butt struck true.

Mucura's left hand clawed at Lever's throat, nails ripping into his skin, while his knife struck through Lever's shirt and burned a streak along his left side.

Mucura was flung aside by the savage force of Lever's blow, however, and Lever got quickly to his feet.

The murderer was still bellowing hoarsely. The knife in Lever's hand was visible to all onlookers, most of whom had now closed slowly in to see what manner of man this was who escaped the first charge of Mucura and had rolled free of him after going down.

Lever moved in on Mucura. Mucura staggered a little as he sought to close again. His lips were wide, showing snagged teeth. The man was as dangerous as a bushmaster snake and almost as fast. Lever's salvation lay in the fact that Mucura was awkward.

Lever struck again, twice, blows that should have knocked Mucura off his feet. Each blow was dealt with the butt of the knife handle. Mucura staggered, rubbed his hand over his numbing face, seemed amazed to see no blood on his hand.

Any moment now, Lever thought, Mucura would go berserk and throw the knife. Lever struck again as Mucura's knife ripped the rest of his torn shirt from his body. The American's torso was smeared with blood from two flesh wounds. But he was a cold, merciless attacker. Twice again he struck Mucura on the chin.

Mucura's knees buckled. There was excited chattering among the onlookers. Probably not one of them had ever seen a fist fight, and none had ever read of such a thing because none could read. Lever struck once more, and Mucura went to his knees.



In the old days back in the States, Lever would never have given a murderer such a break. He would have smashed him with his foot or with his knee. But he gave Mucura a chance now to stagger back to his feet—then struck again, three times, with all his power. His hand felt numb, though his fist had not once touched Mucura. He hadn't even touched him with his left hand, used as defense against thrusts.

Mucura started down and Lever smashed him a half dozen times as he sagged. Mucura fell hard, rolled to his back, lay still. Lever took the murderer's knife, thrust it along with his own into his belt. He manacled his prisoner. Then he raised his voice and snapped at the *commandante* of the launch the first request he had voiced in almost a week:

"Send a man with a bucket of water!"

"I take no orders from . . ." began the *commandante*. But as Lever rose quickly to his feet and started toward the launch, the timbre of the captain's voice changed. "Boy, take a bucket of water to the officer!"

**L**EVER had a hard time to keep from grinning. He flung the water in Mucura's face. The bearded man spluttered, rose to his feet.

"I am not dead, then?" he asked. "There is no blood? Sacred Name, how

can you use a knife and draw no blood?" The onlookers heard Mucura's questions.

"Do you go quietly, Mucura?" asked Lever. "Or do I make you bleed this time?"

Mucura began to chuckle.

"Why should I not go?" he asked. "After all, I shall escape, as usual, in a couple of weeks and be a fugitive again, a hero to everybody!"

Mucura went ahead of Lever to board the launch.

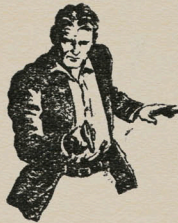
"Turn back downriver, *commandante*," said Lever. "I'm not going to sit on Mucura all the way upriver to Barra and back. I'll take the responsibility."

"But—but have no authority," spluttered the *commandante*. "My orders are to go to Barra and return."

"I have issued new orders," said Lever coolly. "Cast off!"

"*Commandante!*" bellowed Mucura. "Do you not hear the man? Get us away from here! Between here and Itaituba this American will teach me the trick of using a knife without drawing blood! Two weeks from now, when I escape again, Bebito will send him after me once more. Then what chance will he have with Mucura?"

As the launch backed, turned, headed downstream, Lever's smile was a quizical one as he looked at Mucura.



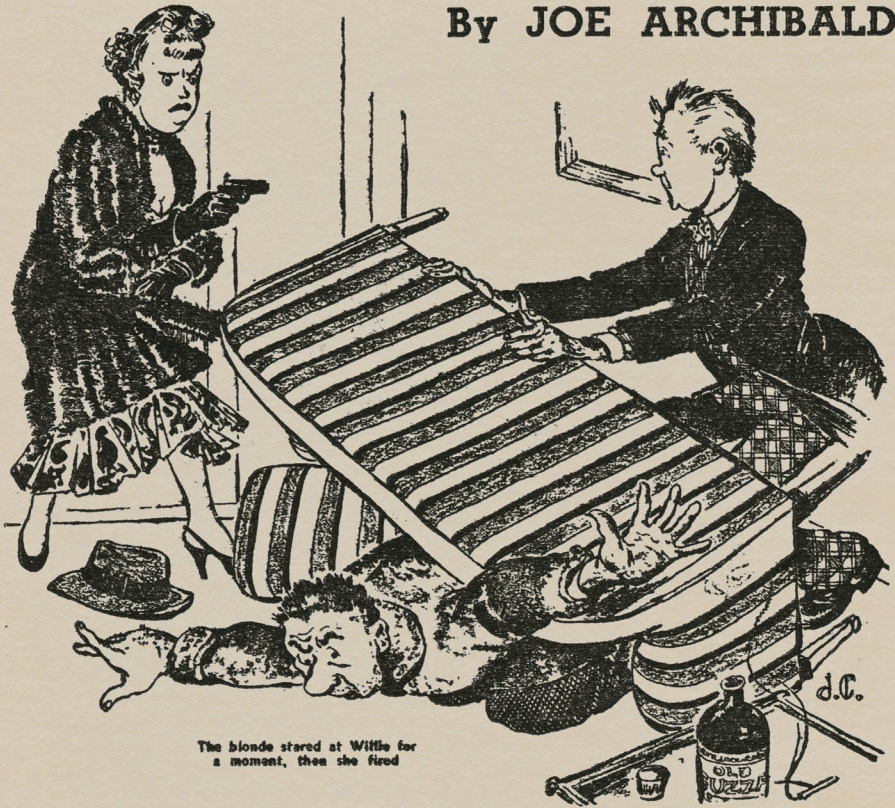
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By JOE ARCHIBALD



The blonde stared at Willie for a moment, then she fired

## Cheesecake and Willie

WILLIAM J. KLUMP walked into his office late one afternoon burning slower than a city dump and swearing that one fine day he would murder one flatfoot by the name of Aloysius "Satchelfoot" Kelly. Willie had been all the way up to the Bronx as the result of a telephone call that had informed him that a body was reposing in an empty lot near Gunhill Road. He had found the remains of an

ancient Model T jalopy with a sign hanging on same which said: For Sale. See William J. Klump, Hawkeye Detective Agency.

"A comic," Willie sniffed. "Like Dracula," and opened the tabloid he had purchased on the trip back. A box on the front page warned citizens that this was April First and not to pick up stray pokes or accept any kind of a cigar.

"Now they tell me," Willie sighed.

*Private Eye Klump is no Napoleon, but when he gives the wrong answer on April First he soon meets his Waterloo!*



The phone rang and he snatched it up. "This is Station WHOZ calling. Are you William J. Klump?"

"Yeah." Willie set his jaws and waited.

"Well, you lucky man, you! If you can answer this question, Mr. Klump, you will get five hundred dollars cash! Are you ready?"

"You ain't kiddin'," Willie snapped.

"Who lost at the battle of Waterloo?"

"Maxie Rosenbloom!" Willie yelled.

"Ha ha!" He hung up and hoped they liked those for apples. "You'd think I was born yesterday an' would bite twice at the same hook. If I'd said it was Napoleon they would have ast me to wait as Josephine wisht to talk with me. How dumb do they think anybody can git?"

Just on hour later the phone in the Hawkeye Detective Agency clamored for Willie's attention again. At first he decided to ignore it and then it occurred to him that it might be Gertrude Mudgett and nobody could fool with that babe even on the first of April. He answered it.

"Hawkeye Detective Agency?" an excited voice inquired. "Look, I haven't time to talk. I need protection! This is Barnaby Bowers, Lovering Arms Apartment on East Thirty-Sixth. I think they're outside—my life's in great danger, Klump! She an'—"

"Drop dead!" Willie yelled and banged the phone back on its cradle. "Now I'm goin' home an' sleep until April Secunt. Of all the silly—!"

Willie went home and stayed there until ten ayem, the next morning. When he walked into the Hawkeye Detective Agency the phone was ringing once more. This time it was Gertie Mudgett:

"Oh, Willie, wait until you hear!" she said. "Then you'll know why I can't keep no date with you t'night. You know my girl frien', Tilly Hoffenspiel? She won five hun'ed dollars on a radio pogrom by jest answerin' who lost at Waterloo yesterday. So us girls are goin' t' help her celebrate. Ain't that wonderful, Willie, say somethin'!"

**T**HE HEAD of the Hawkeye Detective Agency became articulate on the third try. "Arsenic," he gulped. "Do

you need an inscription to git it, Gert?"

"Look, lemonhead I just said Tilly H—"

"Shah-h-hdup!" Willie said, and severed connections, and felt like doing the same to his jugular vein. He stared woefully at the open window which was very inviting and wondered if worse could have happened to him if he'd been born a cocker spaniel. "Five hun'ed clams," Willie sighed. "For that much I would commit mur—oh-h-h-h-h!"

William Klump's jaw dropped and the worry brine oozed out of his brow. He thought of the frantic appeal for help he had callously ignored and wondered if it had been the McCoy. "I'll jus' forget about it," he said. "I got to git holt of myself an'—"

The phone rang. Willie answered it and Satchelfoot Kelly's voice scraped along his nerves. "Look, Willie," it said, "You get over here to Lovering Arms on East Thirty-Sixth right away. We are in the penthouse with a corpse an' you have got to tell us why we found your name an' address on a card it had in its pocket! Hurry up, knucklehead!"

Willie went quite limp and the phone he held became as heavy as a keg of nails. Yeah, why did that citizen call you and not the cops, Willie? He got his hat, put it on backwards, and hurried out of the Hawkeye.

Twenty minutes later William Klump stepped out of an elevator right into the sunken living room of a very swank penthouse where Satchelfoot Kelly and four cops were in a huddle near a defunct character wrapped up in a silk dressing gown.

"Okay, Klump!" Kelly said sternly. "What you know about this rub-out?"

"I know he could have been alive right now but for you, Kelly!" Willie yelled. "He called me on the phone yesterday just after Napoleon—I mean a'ter you pulled that April Fool gag on me, so I figured it was you ag'in an' I hung up on him."

"A likely story," Satchelfoot sniffed. "How would you like t' git a nice goin' over with a rubber hose downtown, huh? A guy like Barnaby Bowers gits his life threatened an' he calls a shnook like you, Willie?"

"Yeah," Willie said. "It is silly, ain't



it? I wisht I knew why myself. Who is Barnaby Bowers?"

"Oh, brother," Kelly groaned. "Didn't you ever hear of Bowers' models?"

"Airplanes or ships?" Willie asked.

"Dames, stupid!" Kelly yelled. "He had a big agency where he photographed the cuties for ads an' such an' hired them out t' wear minks an' lingers an' stuff."

"May I ask how long he has been dead?" Willie said. "In a way he is my client you know."

"Sincet last night around eleven accordin' to the medico," Satchelfoot said. "Somebody shot him with a thirty-two caliber Roscoe. We been investigatin' an' the murderer come over from the other roof as—"

"There was more than one," Willie cut in.

Kelly took off his hat and banged it down on a table. "So you do know all about this rub-out, hah? Awright, come on an'—"

"When Bowers called me," Willie said, "he said they was after him. She an' somebody elst."

"I told you I bet one of them beautiful dolls did it," a cop said to Satchelfoot. "In that den over there the walls is covered with cheesecake. Wo-wo-o-o!"

"They I must see," Willie said, and crossed the room, his feet sinking deep into the oriental. In the late Barnaby Bowers' snugger he felt his ears blush, and he wondered why the victim had bothered to install a radiator in the room. Never had Willie seen such a broad-minded display of feminine pulchritude. The autograph of each cutie, he noticed, had been scribbled on the works of art.

"Come out of there, Willie," Satchelfoot said. "You ain't an adult above the ears."

Willie came out into the living room just as a cop came up from behind a long divan holding a flimsy hanky between thumb and forefinger. "Look, Kelly! I thought I smelt perfume somewheres an' look what I got! A dame's nose doily."

"Gimmie it," Satchelfoot yelled. "Any initials on it?"

"Yeah, J. D.," the cop said.

"Now we're gittin' somewheres,"

Kelly yelled elatedly. "Most likely a babe was gittin' a spare tire around the middle an' had bags under her eyes an' Bowers fired her. Well, don't jus' stand there. Le's find out where his list of babes is kept."

"They wrote their names on their pitchers," Willie said, "Didn't you notice in there?"

SATCHELFOOT snarled at Willie and hurried into the picture gallery, the cops behind him. Finally he said, "That's the babe!" and pointed. "The one with the long black hair an' French bathin' suit."

"Why she really has one on," Willie said. "I could of sworn—"

"Shuddup!" Kelly said. "Her name is Jellica Devine. She better have an alibi but good as it looks like we've got plenty on her, boys!"

"She needs it," Willie sniffed.

After the remains of the cutie maestro had been removed, Satchelfoot Kelly combed the contents of the late Barnaby Bowers' Louis the Sixteenth desk and found a very ornate address book containing the names of at least a hundred delectable dolls.

Jellica Devine, the book revealed, shackled up on West Ninth Street and so Satchelfoot Kelly did not spare the horses. "We're on our way," he said. "You, too, Willie. You ain't in the clear yet."

Jellica Devine came out of the little apartment house on West Ninth just as Satchelfoot got out of the blitz wagon. "We are from headquarters," Kelly said, and flashed his badge. "We have some questions to ast you, sister."

Willie thought the doll looked scared for a second. Then she became indignant and said she had an important appointment with Mr. Bowers. "I am a model, you know," she said.

"If you want to meet Barnaby Bowers," Satchelfoot sniffed. "You'll have t' turn on the gas, babe. He was murdered last night whicht is what we want to see you about. Leave us go inside, huh?"

"Mr. Bowers? Murdered?"

"Yeah," Kelly grinned coldly. "Surprised? Don't kid us."

The cops followed Jellica Devine into



a cozy little two-room apartment and Satchelfoot snapped: "Okay, why did you rub him out?"

"I didn't!"

"Where was you between nine and twelve las' night? Think fast, Devine?"

"I was here all the time."

"Who can prove it? When did you visit Bowers' penthouse last?"

"A week ago," Jellica said.

"Yeah?" Kelly grinned like a hyena. "Now Bowers would get his place tidied up each day, wouldn't he? With his rocks he could afford maid service?"

"Of course," the model said.

Satchelfoot Kelly whipped out the flimsy hanky and dangled it in front of Jellica's nose. "It's yours, babe. Why did it take a week t' find it? And then by cops! You was there las' night. That does it, huh? You want t' confess?"

Willie felt very sorry for the cutie. Her face reminded him of a smear of red paint against a whitewashed fence.

"Who was in it with you?" Satchelfoot kept firing. "Come on, sister, as the jig is up."

"Nobody," Jellica said in an anemic voice. "I mean I didn't do it even if I went to see him last night."

"Ha, ha," Kelly sneered. "You went t' play drop the hancherkief with the guy, huh? You ever see this lug before?" He pointed at Willie.

Jellica shook her head. "All right, I'll tell you the truth. I was going to marry Bowers, a week from today and I would rather have died. He forced me into it. I'm glad he's dead!" She snatched the handkerchief out of Kelly's hand and sniffed into it.

"Hey, that's Exhibit A!" Satchelfoot yelped.

"The D. A. will have t' wait until it comes back from the laundry," Willie grinned. "Go on, Miss Devine."

"Keep out of this, Willie!"

"You ast me in, remember?"

**J**ELLICA DEVINE reached out and clutched at Satchelfoot's sleeve. "You promise to keep my sister's name out of the papers if I give you the whole thing straight?"

"I'll try," Kelly said.

"Well, this Bowers kept askin' me to marry him and I refused. Then one

day my sister came to call for me at the studio," Jellica explained. "She's ten years older than I am and has a part in two or three radio programs. That night Bowers sent for me and Flo and we went to his penthouse.

"All of a sudden he asked Flo how she'd liked it in the woman's klink over in Pennsylvania and Flo nearly passed out. It seems that Bowers, before he became famous, took pictures of well, criminals, for the police department in Shamokin. He remembered taking Flo's picture. She got caught shoplifting. Oh, this is horrible."

"There's the motive," Satchelfoot said. "Looks like we don't have t' go no further, boys."

"I tell you I didn't kill him, you fat-head!" Jellica screamed at Kelly.

"Flattery won't work on him, Ma'am," Willie sniffed.

"So he was forcin' you t' middle-aise it with him or he'd tell the radio people that a soap opera star was onct a shoplifter," Satchelfoot said. "No jury will singe you for that. Le's go to the D. A."

"I will not! I am innocent!"

"Tsk, tsk," Kelly went on. "Well, we will have t' do it the hard way. I must tell you to git a mouthpiece an' not to say no more as we'll use it against you, babe. You are under arrest for knockin' off Barnaby Bowers."

"To think a beautiful babe like you would just up an' stab a guy!" Willie observed dryly.

"Stabbed?" Satchelfoot yelled. "You know he was shot, blubberhead! What is the idea?"

Willie ignored Kelly. He watched Jellica Devine's face and saw no reaction to his ruse whatsoever. It occurred to Willie that if Jellica had really liquidated Bowers with a Roscoe she would have looked quite surprised to hear that he had been shived.

"Let's go, sister," Satchelfoot said coldly.

Willie sat down and began biting his nails. Ten minutes later he realized that he was left alone in Jellica Devine's apartment, and that it was actually in his mind that the doll was innocent.

"I wish I knew why I was so sceptic about it," he said, and began moseying



around. He made himself a ham and cheese sandwich in the kitchenette and washed same down with a glass of milk. After which he wandered into Jellica's boudoir and noticed the letter on her dressing table.

"With a life at stake," Willie decided, "Who is Emmy Post?" He took the letter out of the mauve envelope and was aware of a very exotic scent. "It is some stationery. 'The Willows, Westhampton, L.I. Mrs. Theodore Brottinger.'"

Willie sat down on a very sleek counterpane and scratched his noggin as if trying to recall where he had seen the name before. He gave up and read the letter:

Dear Jellica.

How are you, darling? It seems just ages and ages since we had lunch together at Pierre's. How is that old wolf, Barnaby? Sometimes I envy you and think I'd gladly swap places with you as being a member of the smart set isn't all it is cracked up to be. Really, darling, you just can't let your hair down for a minute. Remember when we modeled slips at the convention in Cleveland?

Has Barnaby proposed to you again? Why don't you grab the snook and it'll serve him right. My Theodore is such a darling but sometimes I wish you could swap a sixty-year-old one for two thirties, ha ha. Well, I have about given up on the police finding those jewels, but after all they were insured and—

Now Willie remembered. Six months ago the Brottinger place had been broken into and relieved of nearly a hundred grand worth of assorted gems, and he'd gone to the insurance detectives and offered his help for a very moderate fee. Willie never forgave the flatfeet for what they said to him.

**K**LUMP left Jellica's and went uptown and saw that the first editions of the evenings rags were draping the stands. Scareheads announced the violent removal from the scheme of things of Barnaby Bowers, and the taking into custody of one of his luscious models, Jellica Devine.

"Well," Willie told himself as he hied to a beanery, "When that society babe reads it she'll spring her ol' pal with a lump of lettuce an' hire her a lawyer that could've beat the rap for the Nazis. I bet she'll bust all speed records gettin' over the bridge. I better stick aroun' downtown after I git a ham-burger."

Willie called Gertie after he'd flirted with ptomaine. How's everythin', Gert?" he inquired.

"Ain't it awful about that murder, Willie?" Gertie Mudgett yelled back. "It looks like she done it awright an' it looks like Kelly will git to be a real cop yet. I don't know why I bother with the likes of you."

"After seein' them models I wonder why—skip it," Willie said, making a fast switch. "They ain't got a conviction yet."

"Oh, I had the swel-es' time with Tilly Hoffenspiel, Willie," Gertie gushed. "We had cocktails an' lunch at Schraff's. Then she an' me got tickets fer a show an' after that—"

"I have t' be goin', Gert," Willie sighed, "I—what was that you said?"

"We went t' a swell show I told you, stupid."

"No, it was somethin' elst you said," Willie insisted. "I'll see you around, Gert."

All the way downtown Willie tried to think of what Gertie had said that put humming birds in his stomach and started the wheels far in the back of his head turning. The trouble with Willie Klump, however, was that he was usually more aware of what might happen tomorrow than he was of what had really taken place yesterday. "I won't try t' force it," he said. "Maybe it'll sneak up on me."

At precisely three the next afternoon, Mrs. Theodore Brottinger, ex-Bowers model, wrapped up in half the mink in Canada, stepped from a limousine half a block long and was immediately followed by a very legal citizen packing a briefcase. A big sports roadster drew up just behind the limousine and stopped and Willie Klump came out of a doorway across the street just as photographers swarmed the steps of the pokie.

"Maybe she is wearin' fifty grand worth of more jewels," Willie told himself. "An' the gee in the roadster is a bodyguard. It is a swell polo coat he is wearin' but I'll lay six t' one he never saw a horse. I'll go and draw him out."

"Good afternoon," Willie greeted as flashlight bulbs popped. "The babe come with heavy bail, huh?"



"Git lost," the character behind the wheel said. "What's it to you, frog-face?"

"I was just bein' polite," Willie sniffed. "I am a detective."

"I'm King of Siam. Here's a dime. Go git a cup of coffee, Buster."

"Thanks," Willie said, and he was halfway across the street with the dime in his hand when he suddenly stopped. "What am I doin'? Huh, ver-r-r funny! Well, I know my rights an' I'll hang aroun' as long as I please."

Willie retraced his steps and took his stand against a hydrant not more than ten feet behind the spiffy roadster. The gent in the polo coat twisted around and gave him a funny look, he thought.

Half an hour later, the peroxide Mrs. Brottinger came out with Jellica Devine and Willie watched the big citizen in the polo coat jump out of the roadster and form interference for the glamor dames. He wrecked two cameras and had one photog down and was feeding him a bulb when the cops broke it up. Willie was just three feet away when Mrs. Brottinger hustled Jellica into the sports roadster.

"I have a tea with some Park Avenue biddies, darlin'," she told the accused. "An' some shoppin' to do. You go along with Sheehan and I'll be home about six."

"I'll never forget you for this, Trixie," Jellica said weepily.

"You're as good as in the clear, darlin'," Mrs. Brottinger said. "That mouthpiece eats juries. Sheehan, if any reporters foller her you use your judgment."

"Leave it t' me, Trix—er—Mrs. Brottinger, Ma'am."

"H-m-m," Willie grunted. "Don't he know his place?" The humming birds in his stomach were joined by butterflies now and Willie wondered if he was coming down with something. He was standing there gazing after the departing roadster when Satchelfoot-Kelly came up griping down his rain-barrel.

"Okay, so that broad got bailed out," Kelly snapped. "Leave her try an' get outa that rap, though! So it is you, Willie! What are you moochin' around here for?"

"I want you to understand that I have

[Turn page]



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a client even though he is post humorous," Willie said with dignity. "He detained me just before the foul deed was done."

Satchelfoot Kelly pawed at his face and then sat down on the curb. "That is what I can't figure out, Willie," he said. "When he could have just ast for cops, but instead looked up the likes of you in a phone Classified while his murderers were breakin' into the penthouse. An' the aitch of it is we'll never know."

"You give up too easy," Willie said. "Well, I must go to my office an' see if clients are waitin'. Yeah, Jellica will get the rap awright, but don't be surprised if it is a mink one."

**CAUTIOUSLY**, the president of the Hawkeye counted his petty cash when he reached his office and it came to sixty-seven cents. He immediately called Gertie. "Look, my passion flower," Willie promoted, "I just got to see you. Tonight you can meet me in front of Luigi's for spaghetti an' meatballs, huh? Bring about five as I had emergency expenses t' day."

"I'm sorry, Willie," Gertie said. "Tilly Hoffenspiel just called a minute ago. She wants she an' me to go for smogensboard t'night an' she has a friend. Maybe tomorrer night, Willie."

"Ah-er-maybe later t'night," Willie pleaded. "A midnight snack somewhere an'—"

"No dice, Willie. After a show, she an' me—"

"I'm sick of listenin' t' that she an' me stuff. Always it is she an'—awk! Something cut loose inside Willie's noggin when he hung up. It made a sound like a busted harp string. Tw-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-g! A desperate voice was in his ears again. "I think they're outside, Klump. She an'!"

"Sheehan!" Willie gulped out when he'd pulled his tongue down from the roof of his mouth. Jellica Devine was a Bowers model and so had been Mrs. Theodore Brottinger! Sheehan worked for Trixie Brottinger; Willie worked mentally with a ball of twine to tie the characters all together. He looked up the Brottinger telephone number, found it and grabbed the phone. Finally a doll



with an accent answered. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Brottinger's residence!"

"I want to talk t' Mr. Sheehan," Willie said, "This is an old frien' just got in town."

"Oh, Mr. Sheehan," the menial said. "You weel have to call the supereen-tendent's offese, oui."

"Okay, I weel," Willie said. "Mercy bookoo." He clamped his teeth together. He was indignant, for his intelligence, such as it was, had been insulted. A superintendent of an estate calling the lady boss, Trixie. And wearing a coat that had not cost less than two hundred clams.

"A round peg in a square hole if I ever saw one," Willie sniffed. "I am a long ways from the Fulton fish market an' why do I smell haddock?" He sighed deeply and then snapped his fingers. "Yeah, I have to face the grim tragedy. Tonight I will ride the Long Island railroad."

An hour later William Klump sold a beat-up typewriter to a second-hand outfit for fifteen bucks and so had his expenses covered. "Dead or alive, I pect my clients," he asserted stoutly and went out to stoke up for the ordeal. An hour later, heavier by three pork chops, french fries and apple pie ala mode, William Klump arrived at the Pennsylvania Station where he purchased a ticket for Westhampton. "No use t' git a round trip," he mused philosophically. "In this business you never know."

It was getting quite dark when William J. Klump alighted from a bus out on Long Island and began hiking the half mile to the Brottinger estate. It was a lonely road and not far away frogs were croaking and they seemed to chant, "Klumpa-klump! Klump-klump! Klump's a chump!"

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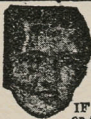
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"Could be." Willie sighed as he came to the entrance to the Brottinger estate. The iron gate was closed and Willie scaled a high stone wall and fell into some shrubbery not twenty yards away from the gatehouse. He listened for awhile, then reconnoitered and discovered that a casement window was open.

He hauled himself up and inside a very dark room and just as his eyes were getting accustomed to the objects in the room, he heard somebody come in the front way. Willie quickly scootched down behind a couch that was close to the wall. A citizen with a heavy tread came in and snapped on the light and a few moments later the private eye heard liquid escaping a bottleneck:

"Ah, brother, I needed that hooker," a familiar voice said, and the springs of a chair creaked. Willie's ticker sounded to him like a voodoo drum.

Nearly an hour passed and Willie felt rigor mortis coming over him. A mouse trotted up and stared Willie in the eye, then scampered away. He felt a sneeze coming on and knew he couldn't stop it. It cut loose just as the phone rang.

"Ah, nuts!" Sheehan growled and went out into the hall. "Gatehouse, yeah. Who? Now look, Trixie, don't come down here. Oh, you will. Okay, come ahead."

The character paced the floor and talked to himself. Willie heard him hit the bottle again and again. Then the door out there opened and closed and in a few seconds Willie smelled perfume.

"What's the idea comin' here?" Sheehan growled.

"For twenty grand I'd go anywhere, Georgie," the dame said. "How about it? Where's the dough for the rest of the jewelry?"

"Look, you got nothin' more t' worry about, babe," Sheehan snapped. "Why so greedy? Don't you think the rest of that scratch belongs t' me? After all I just didn't go out an' bake a cake the other night."

"I'll let you keep five grand," Mrs. Brottinger said. "I owe a bookie nearly ten G's and Theodore despises gambling of any sort. And I didn't bail Felicia out with peanuts. And there is a certain mouthpiece wants five grand as down



payment to get Jellica out of the hot seat so I shall not quibble with you, Georgie. After all I've practically supported you since I married Theodore."

"Leave us understand each other, Trixie. You was in business with me long enough to know I don't change my mind once I make it up," Sheehan said. "The bite is off you permanent and my profit is twenty grand. I'm quittin' this cockeyed job now everythin' is put straight."

**I**T WAS difficult for Willie Klump to keep from shivering, the woman's word was so cold.

"So you want to be difficult, Georgie," she said. "Look—I come into the gatehouse to talk to the superintendent. He attacks me and I have to kill him. The cops will identify you by some old fingerprints as Mervin Merrivale alias Hubert Whipple, old badger game himself. And they won't wonder why you got a job on a millionaire's estate. Look at me,

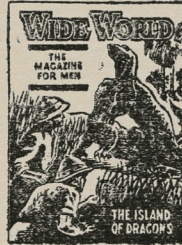
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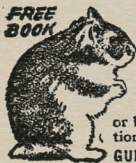
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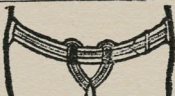
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Georgie. Do I look like the blonde that used to play the two-timin' wife? Who would ever suspect me when the cops arrived? All right, let's have the twenty G's."

"Nice lookin' Betsy you got there," Sheehan said, and the sweat was oozing out of William Klump. "This bulge at my coat pocket ain't from a banana, you doublecrossin' moll! I took all the chances with the fences peddlin' the rocks you had me steal. You can thank me that your meal ticket won't ever learn you was a crook and my fee is the twenty grand I've got right in my kick, baby. Okay, drop that g—"

There was plenty of lint on the floor behind the sofa and it got into Willie's nose once more and this time the sneeze cut loose and knocked Willie's hat off. The doll yelled, "Sheehan, who was that? There's somebody behind the—!"

William Klump was on his feet in a jiffy and he lifted up the divan and pushed it with all his might and he heard Sheehan say some very uncouth things as he went down under it. Mrs. Theodore Brottinger stared at Willie for a moment, her lipstick stretching all out of shape. Then she fired her Roscoe and the slug went through a pocket of Willie's coat but the private shamus hit upon a clever ruse and fell flat on his face. "Ug-h-h-h, you've gone an' kilt me," he choked out and made like a death rattle.

"Hah!" Sheehan yelled triumphantly as he got out from under the sofa. "Now we're in the same boat, baby. You lam outa here an' I will right after and in the roadster which will also be part of my take."

"All right, Georgie," Trixie said, and her voice was like air escaping from a slow leak in a tire. "M-M-Mum's the word. I don't know what made me act like—"

"Lo-o-okout, Trixie!" Sheehan howled as Willie came up from the floor like a wild cat on springs. The private eye tore the Roscoe loose from the ex-model's hand and swung toward Sheehan and the big character turned as white as a mackerel's dickey.

"No, don't shoot, pal," the big man howled. "It was a banana in my pock-



et!" Mrs. Theodore Brottinger, deadlier than the male, made one more try at Willie with a vase big enough to hold Margaret O'Brien, and Willie pivoted, put his head down, and hit the glamor doll in the solar plexus. The vase continued on and hit Sheehan who had charged in to get himself a piece of Willie's throat.

"She must git her girdles made at Bethlehem Steel," Willie gulped, as he felt of his pate. "I better git the Long Island cops right away."

William J. Klump was sitting on Georgie Sheehan and eating the last of the banana when the gendarmes arrived.

"Why, that woman you got tied up is Mrs. Brottinger, you lemonhead" a flat-foot said.

"Yeah, an' you will be surprised who elst," Willie said. "She is mixed up along with this gee in the rub-out of Barnaby Bowers over across the river. You search this shack an' look for twenty grand and also a thirty-two caliber Betsy before we load these characters into the blitz jalopy. The big boy under me is Mervin Merrivale, alias Hubert Whipple. The doll used to be the character who was always with another guy when her outraged husband come back from a hard day at the office."

"Don't open your trap, Trixie," Sheehan yelled. "Save it fer a big mouth-piece."

William Klump waited until the house was ransacked. The cops found that Sheehan had packed his bags and in the false bottom of one, there reposed twenty grand in coin of the realm. And stashed with the clams was a thirty-two caliber Betsy.

"She wa'n't really robbed of them jewels that time," Willie explained as he followed the culprits out to the new look paddy-wagon. "She had Sheehan come in through a winder one night an' lift them so's she could hock'em. I don't know why jus' yet. It looks like some dishonest gee was blackmailin' her an' not her partner in crime."

"Then that other cutie is innocent, huh?" a cop asked Willie.

"Satchelfoot Kelly made the arrest," Willie sniffed. "Any more questions?"

[Turn page]

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**G**EORGE J. Sheehan, accompanied by his aliases and a very scared and penitent Mrs. Brottinger, finally reached headquarters in the borough of Manhattan. The D. A. convinced the recalcitrant pair that no lawyer lived or had ever been born who could possibly beat their rap, and Sheehan started singing.

"It's a long story sir," the criminal character said. "Just after me an' Trixie—her name was Mamie then—got back from a couple of jobs in Philly where we shook two characters down for three G's, this Barnaby Bowers got a gander at her comin' out of a beauty parlor. He offered her a job as a model an' she took it. It was swell goin' straight, she tol' me. Well, I was overboard for the babe an' still am an' so whatever she wanted was okay by me, even though it meant the end of a sweet racket. Times got kinda tough fer me."

"It is sad, ain't it?" Willie sniffed. "Shut up, Klump," the D.A. snapped. "Well, who comes along one night but this guy Theodore Brottinger. He meets Trixie at a night club an' dates her up," Sheehan went on. "Inside of three months they git married. Somehow this Barnaby Bowers finds out who she used to be an' he begins to put the bite on her. He wants a hundred grand an' so Trixie calls me up to meet her an' shows me how things stand. We cook up the jewelry deal an' I peddle the stuff an' take the cash to Bowers."

"Huh," Willie exclaimed. "An' Bowers was goin' t' force another model, to wit Jellica Devine, to marry him or he'd expose her sister's past. If I was on a jury, I wouldn't let nobody fry for killin' the likes of him!"

"Thanks, Klump," Sheehan said. "Just tell me one thing, frogface. How in aitch did you git wise I was mixed up in that rub-out? You don't look smart enough to git by the third grade even now."

"Bowers tipped me off," Willie said. "He grabbed a phone when he heard his assassin outside the penthouse. He said they was goin' to kill him. She an' somebody else it sounded like at the time so it looked as if a dame was one of the guilty parties. Get it. She an'—Sheehan I guess I'd never tumbled if Tilly Hoffenspiel hadn't told a radio quiz-



master who lost at Waterloo and won five hundred fish. Gertrude Mudgett, that's who I go steady with, kept tellin' me that she an'—"

The D. A. groaned and dropped his head in his hands. Satchelfoot Kelly, who had been listening to all this, got out of his chair and placed a hand on the big guilty character's shoulder. "I almost feel sorry for you, pal. I know how you feel as once I sat over in Brooklyn an' got beaned by a line drive by a bum who never had a battin' average over two hun'ed. I wisht you could go out an' get plastered with me."

"It shouldn't happen to a Republican," the guilty gee griped.

"Drag the river tomorrer as I'll be there," Satchelfoot said, and closed the door behind him.

"Sour grapes," Willie sighed. "Always it is that way. You would think that it was the first time I ever apprehended a criminal person."

"That's what has us stumped, Willie," the prosecutor said. "Each time we think it just has to be the last. There is nothing in any book on criminology I've read that applies to you."

[Turn page.]

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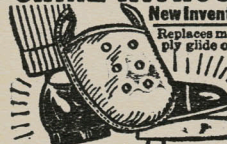
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"I guess they was written 'fore my time," Willie said.

It was two hours later just as the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency walked out of the lift of the building where he had office space that a doll rushed up to him and threw her arms around him. Soft fur that nearly purred brushed Willie's face. An exotic perfume atomized him and soft lips pressed against his cheek. "You darlin', Mr. Klump! You sweet precious thing, you. Darlin'" said a honeyed voice.

"I'll kill the guy that wakes me up," Willie sighed.

"That was a down payment, Mr. Klump," Jellica Devine said. "Now you send me a bill for five hundred dollars as soon as you get to your office." Willie's knees wobbled when she kissed him once more. And then the lift stopped at the floor again and coughed up Gertie Mudgett. Gertie stood aghast for a second, then came alooping.

"Run, Jellica, as it is my dame" Willie yelped and started running. "It is every man for himself an' I'm the only one!" He reached his office and locked the door behind him. The sounds of battle seeped in through the door as Willie grabbed up the phone.

"I'll tear you limbs from limbs, you man-stealer!" Gertie howled. "I'll—put down that fire—axe! No!"

"Lay off or I'll split you up like cord wood," Jellica Devine screeched. "Now you listen to me, sister!"

Willie got the cops. "Yeah, they're havin' a fight over me. She an'—oh no! Never mind as I don't want t' start that all over ag'in. Wrong number." He went to the door and listened, wondering at the sudden quiet.

"Yeah, I shouldn't be so impetuous, honey," Gertie said between gasps for breath. "I'll buy you a snort, huh? You think you could git me in as a model somewheres?"

"An auto body works," Willie said, and grinned. He listened as the two dolls walked toward the elevator. "Why, you can easy have your engagement ring now, darlin'," Jellica was saying. "I'm paying him a fee of five hundred dollars for—", and Willie reeled away from the door to get his aspirin tablets.



## OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 9)

filling the next gala issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE. Look forward to it!

### Letters from Readers

**W**ANT to see your name in print? Drop me a postcard or a letter telling what you think of the stories in this issue. That's all there is to it. What story, for example, do you rate first? Were there any you didn't care for at all? Write me about it, pals. I'll be glad to know, and happy, as well, to publish your comments in this column, for it's your valuable criticisms and suggestions that have made and will keep POPULAR DETECTIVE the leading magazine of its kind in the world today!

Dear Editor: It's easy to rate the stories in the latest POP DETECTIVE. I liked them in just the order you had them on the contents page. First, THE CAT FROM SIAM, by Fredric Brown. Second, GUNMETAL FINISH, by Stewart Sterling. And so on, down the line. Let's have more of these Steve Koski stories.—Gendron George Felbright, Kansas City, Mo.

I'm happy to report Sterling will be back with another Steve Koski yarn soon. Now  
[Turn page]



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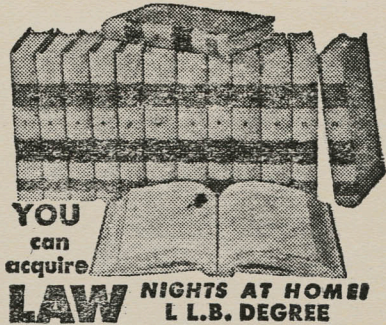
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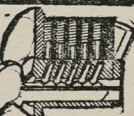




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here is another letter with something more to say about that kitty from Siam.

Dear Editor: The Fred Brown story, THE CAT FROM SIAM, still leaves me unconvinced. I don't believe you can hypnotize anybody and then make them go out and commit a murder for you. Come right down to it, I wonder if there is actually such a thing as hypnotism anyway.—Raymond Pierre, Jr., St. Marys, West Va.

I'll steer clear of this argument and let some of you readers take it up, for you can probably answer it better than I. Perhaps some of you have been hypnotized. I'd enjoy hearing your own experiences and what you think. And, having neatly sidestepped that complaint, what do I barge into but another!

Dear Editor: Don't get me wrong, I think GUNMETAL FINISH, by Stewart Sterling, was swell, but you better have Stew brush up on how armored cars operate. When they come to collect money from a customer, an armed guard goes inside and gets it. The customer doesn't go carrying dough out to the guards while they wait outside at the curb as in this yarn. Just a minor technical point maybe, but such are the things that go to make up realism—or lack of it.—Marjorie Bresline, New Bedford, Mass.

Chalk one up for Marjorie!

Dear Editor: I was very much interested in a letter in which a reader asked about how long fingerprints last. According to what you say, there would still be fingerprints in King Pharaoh's tomb. Oh, yeah?—Rodney Dasher, Fargo, N. D.

Yeah, Rodney. Certain types of fingerprints (plastic ones) are still around which are thousands of years old. In fact, I've just been reading in a book that back in the old days, when few persons could write or even so much as sign their own names, thumbprints were used as a sort of signature. They're still around. And while I'm on the subject, did you know that the first murder case in which fingerprints figured in the evidence was—back in the days of ancient Greece! Yeah!

With that I'll sign off for now. Thanks for listening, folks. We'll be back again next issue, with a batch more of mail and chit-chat. Hope I'll have a letter from you. So drop me a note or postcard meanwhile, won't you, pals? Please address it to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. See you all next issue. Until then—good luck, everybody!

—THE EDITOR.



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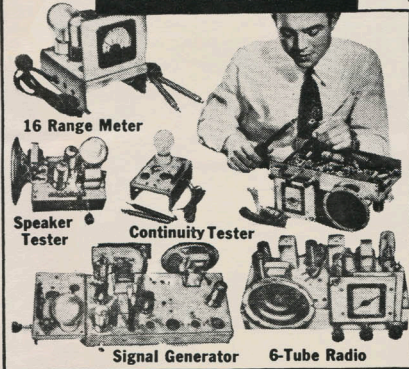


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