POPULAR DETECTIVE

MURDER BY TELEVISION
A Gil Vine Novelet
By STEWART STERLING

YOU CAN DIE, TOO
A Mystery Novelet
By PHILIP KETCHUM
How a lucky Accident Made Me HEAR AGAIN!

No Button Shows In Ear!

“My hearing loss used to make me terribly unhappy. Then one day, by a lucky accident, I discovered how to hear again from a little book. Now, thanks to a tiny electronic miracle, I hear with startling clarity! And it's so amazingly light, I hardly know I wear it.

And thanks to a transparent, almost invisible device, no button shows in my ear. I urge everyone with a hearing loss to get the book that told me how to HEAR AGAIN. It's FREE!”

Mail coupon for your FREE copy of this valuable book. Do it today!

Send For FREE BOOK

MONO-PAC
Symphonette
One-Unit Hearing Aid

Beltone

BELTONE HEARING AID COMPANY
Dept. TF-7, 1450 West 19th Street, Chicago 8, Ill.

Beltone Hearing Aid Company, Dept. TF-7
1450 West 19th Street, Chicago 8, Ill.

Please send me without obligation, your valuable FREE book that tells how deaf can HEAR AGAIN without a button showing in the ear.

Name...........................................
Address......................................
Town........................................State..........
There isn't much difference . . .

between a swing
and a swat!

Three inches higher and that powerful swing would have sent the ball out of the park.

And that's often about the same degree of difference between the fellow who gets ahead and the fellow who "gets along." It just takes a little extra—and that little extra is training.

I.C.S. takes average men and fits them for above average wages. It does so by careful, thorough, home instruction. You learn while you earn, develop confidence along with ability. I.C.S. receives more than 1500 letters a year from its students reporting salary increases and promotions.

This success-proved method of training can be yours. The first step is to mark and mail the coupon. It's a simple step, yet one that can change your entire future. Why not send for the facts today.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course(s) before which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- Air Conditioning
- Heating
- Refrigeration
- Steam Fitting

Chemical Courses
- Chemical Engineering
- Chemistry, Analytical
- Chemistry, Industrial
- Chemistry, Met. & Iron & Steel
- Petroleum Refining
- Plastics
- Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- Architecture
- Architectural Drafting
- Bridge and Building Foreman
- Building Estimating
- Civil Engineering
- Coal Mining
- Contracting and Building
- Highway Engineering
- Lumber Dealer
- Reading Structural Blueprints
- Sanitary Engineering
- Structural Drafting

Electrical Courses
- Electrical Engineering
- Electrical Drafting
- Electrical Light and Power
- Lighting Technician
- Practical Electrical

Internal Combustion Engine Courses
- Auto Technician
- Diesel-Electric
- Diesel Engines
- Gas Engines
- Mechanical Courses
- Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- Aircraft Drafting
- Flight Engineer
- Forging
- Heat Treatment of Metals
- Industrial Engineering
- Industrial Instrumentation

Metalworking Courses
- Industrial Metallurgy
- Machining
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mold-Loft Work
- Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- Reading Shop Blueprints
- Sheet-Metal Drafting
- Sheet-Metal Work
- Ship Drafting
- Tool Designing
- Welding Engineering
- Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- Air Brake
- Diesel Locomotive
- Locomotive Engineer
- Locomotive Fireman
- Locomotive Mechanic
- Railroad Section Foreman
- Steam-Diesel Loco. Eng.
- Stationary Eng'r's Courses
- Boilermaking
- Combustion Engineering
- Engine Running
- Marine Engineering
- Power Plant Eng'r's

Textile Courses
- Cotton Manufacturing
- Loom Finishing
- Rayon Weaving
- Weaving

Business and Academic Courses
- Accounting
- App. Psychology
- Bookkeeping
- Business Administration
- Bus. Correspondence
- Bus. Law
- Certified Public Accounting
- Commercial Art
- Commerce
- Cost Accounting
- Federal Tax
- First Year College
- French
- Good English
- High School
- Higher Mathematics
- Illustration
- Industrial Supervision
- Motor Traffic
- Postal Civil Service
- Retailing
- Retail Bus. Management
- Secretarial
- Sign Lettering
- Spanish
- Traffic Management
- Stenography

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course(s) before which I have marked X:

Name
City
State
Home Address
Working Hours
A.M. to
P.M.

Present Position
Employed by

Length of Service in World War II

Enrollment under G.I. Bill approved for World War II Veterans. Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces.

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.
A GIL VINE NOVELET

Murder by Television
by Stewart Sterling

When a fugitive Latin dictator arrives in town with a yen for homicide, a hotel dick makes an impromptu video debut while pursuing a slayer!

ANOTHER COMPLETE NOVELET

YOU CAN DIE, TOO
Philip Ketchum
Sam Rogers went to Frisco to help a buddy—but when he got there, he discovered that he had to avenge a brutal murder!

SIX SHORT STORIES

IMAGINARY KILLER
Lew Talian
Tony thought one holdup would give him everything he wanted

MR. BROWN'S BARE FEET
J. Lane Linklater
Three strange visitors create a mystery at Digger’s Hollow!

THE PHONY
Will Oursler
A tense drama of crime and courage is enacted at Joe’s Bar

CABIN IN THE STORM
Ray Cummings
Silence is indeed golden when speech may bring sudden death

CHASE YOUR VICTIM
B. J. Benson
This crime started in China and led to Texas and California

POISON IVY
O. B. Myers
A ripped pillow and a laundry mark spell doom for a murderer

FEATURES

OFFICIAL BUSINESS (A Department)
The Editor

THE "INSIDE" OF DETECTIVE WORK (Fake Burglaries)
Carter Critz
YOU CAN'T LOSE!

HAVE A PROFIT MAKING BUSINESS
OF YOUR OWN

A LIFETIME FUTURE

Man or woman—young or old, YOU can earn a steady income in full or spare time as an independent Kendex dealer. Amazing and almost "impossible" earnings can become a reality for you. Herbert Armstrong of Tenn. earned $202 in 9 days. C. O. Watkins of Oregon sent 92 orders in one day. You have the same opportunity to duplicate these exceptional earnings. Over one million dollars will be earned in 1950 by Kendex dealers—why not let us establish you in your own business and get a share of these wonderful earnings?

KENDEX NYLONS REPLACED FREE . . .

if they run or snag within guarantee period up to three months! Impossible? It's true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—whether it is fault of the hose or the wearer—Ken-dex-nylons are replaced FREE if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within the guarantee period. How could any woman resist a positive guarantee of satisfaction when she can obtain it without paying any more than other standard advertised brands? Kendex nylons are NOT sold in stores, so you have no competition. Complete line includes everything from heavy 70 denier service weight to gossamer luxurious ultra sheer 15 denier 60 gauge. Proportioned sizes and lengths. Latest colors plus white.

LINGERIE - ROBES - HOUSECOATS - MEN'S HOSE

In addition to the sensational Kendex nylons, you will have a complete line of glamorous lingerie, beautiful robes and housecoats plus a complete line of Kentercraft mens' hosiery guaranteed for one full year. Any pair or pairs of men's hose that does not give satisfactory wear within one year of purchase will be replaced FREE!

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Kendex will spend over $500,000.00 in 1950 to tell millions of readers of the advantages in buying from you. Almost every issue of Good Housekeeping, Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, Women's Home Companion and Ladies' Home Journal carry our advertising in addition to many others. Kendex has advertised in Life, Look, Collier's, etc. Awarded Good Housekeeping Seal. Thousands of orders are shipped daily from coast to coast.

EVERYTHING GIVEN FREE

Risk nothing! Mail coupon and we will send you, free and prepaid, complete money-making outfits including sample nylon stocking, samples of lingerie, robes, housecoats and men's hose fabrics and everything you need to immediately start making money. Complete outfits become your property even if you don't send any business. Simply write orders, we deliver and collect. Advance cash plus huge bonus. No money or experience needed. Mail the coupon is all you need to start on the road to a 52-weeks-of-the-year high paying business of your own. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

KENDEX COMPANY
BABYLON, 843, N. Y.

[Space for mailing address]

Date_________________1950

Send me, free and prepaid, everything I need to make money as a Kendex dealer, including sample stocking etc. There is nothing for me to pay now or later and I am under no obligation in accepting your money-making outfits.

Name_____________________

Address___________________

City_____________________State_____

KENDEX CO., BABYLON, 843, N. Y.
A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

TERRENCE LANNIGAN first noticed the blonde riding on his streetcar about seven-thirty in the evening. When eleven o’clock rolled around and she was still with him, he knew something must be wrong.

Lannigan had been a gripman on San Francisco’s Powell Street cable car line for over five years. He’d hauled plenty of people on his little green car who were just riding to see the scenery, and there was plenty of scenery that could be seen along his route.

But this blonde babe had been riding for over three hours. Nobody could be that crazy about the Bay City’s sights!

At one o’clock, when his little green relic swayed to a stop in front of the carbarn, the girl was still there.

“T’m sorry, Miss,” Lannigan told her then. “This is definitely as far as we go.”

Without a word she got off. Lannigan thought the matter ended there. But he was wrong.

A Suicide Attempt!

After he had put the car to bed and was heading for an all-night coffee shop down the block, he saw the blonde girl again. Something in the way she tensed, hugging her thin coat to her throat, telegraphed what was coming.

Lannigan was just in time to stop her from hurling herself in front of a speeding truck!

Lannigan got her to talk after that.

He took her to the coffee shop. There he learned that her name was Betty Blandy and that she was married. She told him that her husband was being released from San Quentin prison that day, and that she was afraid to go home and meet him because he had the insane idea that she had been doublecrossing him and running around with other men while he was serving time.

“What was he in for?” Lannigan asked.

“Embezzlement . . . but that’s unimportant,” Betty Blandy said. “When he was sentenced, I sold our home in Los Angeles, came here and took a job, to be near him. I love my husband, Mr. Lannigan. I don’t care what anyone thinks, what he’s done. . . .”

Lannigan gave her a mild scolding. He told her that she should try to talk her husband out of his foolish notions and convince him otherwise. He offered to go along for moral support—and wait outside, within calling distance, in case any trouble should develop.

And trouble did develop.

A window opened ten minutes after Betty had gone inside and he heard her cry: “Help! Terry, please hurry!”

She sounded dazed, hysterical.

Blood on Her Sleeve

Lannigan dashed inside. He met Betty at the door of her apartment. One sleeve of her green coat was smeared with blood. Her hair was mussed, and Lannigan followed as she stumbled backward into the room.

He saw a man’s body behind the coffee table. He knew immediately it was a corpse. It was too flat against the floor to be alive. There was a black-handled kitchen knife lying on the coffee table, its blade covered with blood, and the handle was also blood-smeared. There
was blood on the curtains and window where Betty had gone to call him. Blood on the door and on the light switch.

Lannigan crossed the room and eyed the corpse. It was a complete job of brutal murder. The knife blade had been driven into the man’s body five or six times, from the throat to his belt buckle...

That’s the smash opening of A STREETCAR NAMED DEATH, by Donn Mullally, featured novelet in the next issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE.

Had Betty coldly walked into the apartment and slit her husband’s throat? It looked that way. But Lannigan wasn’t so sure—even though Betty claimed her mind was a blank and that she couldn’t remember what had happened. Even though her bloody fingerprints were on the knife Lannigan still wouldn’t believe her guilty.

You’ll find A STREETCAR NAMED DEATH one of the most exciting crime yarns you’ve read in many a moon! It’s action is swift and thrilling from start to finish!

Another Thriller!

And speaking of blood, it’s a trail of scarlet, too, that starts harbor policeman Steve Koski off on an adventure loaded with suspense and menace in A NICE NIGHT FOR MURDER, by Stewart Sterling, another fine novelet in our next issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE. And while A STREETCAR NAMED DEATH takes you for a ride along the colorful and mysterious byways of San Francisco, A NICE NIGHT FOR MURDER sends you speeding along the equally glamorous backdrop of New York’s waterfront.

When the flash came over the radio of the police boat, Vigilant, ordering Koski to investigate a small craft that was reported adrift and awash off City Island, Koski did a slow burn.

It was probably only some late-season eel-fisherman overturned in the ugly channel chop. Or perhaps some reckless kid whose leaky scow got swamped in the tide rip. Nothing really important, the radio dispatcher’s tone had indicated. No hot headline police stuff—like [Turn page]
a Broadway theater stickup or a Third Avenue bar battle!

But Koski wasn't so sure it was unimportant when he located the reported craft ten minutes later. The boat was one of those small plastic beauties they advertise as non-sinkable—but someone had obviously made an attempt to send her to the bottom. Ragged holes had been chopped in her bottom. Why?

Koski thought he had the answer in the blob of crimson that smeared the white nylon rope which ran around the boat's gunwale.

As Koski put it: "What I've got is a dink somebody tried to sink. Plus a glob of blood somebody might have figured would wash off if the boat did sink. I don't know what it adds up to. But it doesn't look like the score of a tiddly-wink game!"

Koski wasn't long in discovering the real score was not one, but two murders, and if a third corpse turned up Koski realized it would be his own—for he had stepped into the middle of a desperate gamble with high stakes!

A NICE NIGHT FOR MURDER is packed with fast, rough-and-tumble action, racy dialogue and some beautiful, if slightly tarnished, babes. Both as a whodunnit and as a hard-knuckled action story, you'll call it tops.

There'll be plenty of other high quality yarns in the next issue—plus entertaining articles and features, every one of them a winner!

LETTERS FROM READERS

A ND now for a look into our mailbag and at some of the letters we have recently received.

Dear Editor: A few lines to let you know I was especially pleased and surprised at the good luck awaiting me in the latest issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE. Race Williams and Michael Shayne have been two of my favorite detectives since I first started reading your magazine some years ago. But to find a story of both in the same magazine was beyond my expectations. Carroll John Daly and Brett Halliday are both fine authors and have a special way of telling their stories that I sincerely like. Please thank them for me.

THE UGLY IN HEART, by William Degenhard, came next, then A LIFE FOR A LIFE, by O. B. Myers—a very touching story.
which is bound to make people realize not all detectives are hard hearted. Last but not least,
LIVE BAIT, by Morris Hershman and DANCE
WITH ME, by B. J. Benson. Also I enjoyed
THE "INSIDE" OF DETECTIVE WORK,
which is very interesting, plus a most pleasant
time reading OFFICIAL BUSINESS.
As it seems I've covered the complete book,
need I say more? I enjoyed the entire book
and am eagerly looking forward to the next
issue.—Mary Kolb, 16 South Street, Newark,
3, N. J.

Thank you very much for all those
nice words. But you know, readers,
brickbats are just as welcome as bou-
quets in this column and so if you have
some beefs to get off your chest—get
them off.
Now here is a reader who has both a
complaint—and a possible solution.

Dear Editor: Seems to me the quality of
stories in POPULAR DETECTIVE has been
slipping lately. I read some stories that made
me want to throw the whole mag in the ashcan.
I could write better ones myself. In fact that's
just what I'd like to do. Do you buy stories
from outsiders? What are the things I have
to know before submitting a story to you?—
Jackson K. Alcorn, Monroe, La.

POPULAR DETECTIVE is happy to
consider manuscripts from free-lance
contributors. All stories must be type-
written, double-spaced, and accompanied
by self-addressed stamped envelopes.
Good luck!

Dear Editor: I am a regular reader of
POPULAR DETECTIVE and have been so
for years, but I missed the Willie Klump story
this last time. Why was he not in?—John A.
Garman, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore 5,
Md.

We understand that Willie Klump's
creator, Joe Archibald, has climbed up
the ladder to a big and important job
that, at the moment, has a monopoly on
his time. But perhaps if enough of you
readers request it, we can prevail upon
him to send Willie Klump off on some
more of his hilarious adventures.
With that, we close OFFICIAL BUSI-
NESS. But we'll be back next issue with
more previews of stories to come and
more letters from you readers. Please
address all letters and postcards to The
Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10
East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.
Thanks to all of you!
—THE EDITOR.
JERRY RECAPTURED THE LION AND THEN...

HEY, LOOK! RAJAH'S LOOSE!

ON AN OVERNIGHT HOP TO THE NEXT TOWN, YOUNG JERRY HUNTER'S SMALL TRAVELING CIRCUS SUDDENLY LOSES ONE OF ITS MAJOR ATTRACTIONS...

RAJAH, YOU TOOTHLESS OLD SADIST! WHAT'S THE IDEA SCARING THE FOLKS?

HE'S HARMLESS, MISS. GOT AWAY FROM OUR CIRCUS!

I'M STILL ALLERGIC TO LIONS!

OUR GARAGE WILL HOLD HIM UNTIL YOU CAN GET HIS CAGE.

MARY PETERS HAD HEARD THAT ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN ON OPENING DAY OF BASS SEASON. BUT THIS IS TOO MUCH!

YOU MUST BE STARVED AFTER TRAMPING AROUND ALL NIGHT, MAY I GET YOU A SNACK?

SOUNDS GREAT! WOULD YOU MIND IF WE CLEAN UP TOO?

HERE IS MY BROTHER'S SHAVING BLADE. MY FACE NEVER FELT BETTER.

WHAT A SMOOTH SHAVING BLADE! A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE ALWAYS GIVES ME A LIFT!

THEN YOU'LL COME TO OUR SHOW TONIGHT?

I'D LOVE TO!

HE'S BETTER LOOKING THAN I THOUGHT!

 YOU GET EASY, REFRESHING SHAVES IN JIG TIME WITH THIN GILLETES. FAR KEENER THAN ORDINARY LOW-PRICED BLADES, THIN GILLETES LAST LONGER, SO YOU SAVE MONEY. WHAT'S MORE, THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A"T" PROTECT YOU FROM RICKS AND IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETES IN THE 10-BLADE PACK WITH USED BLADE COMPARTMENT.

THIN GILLETTE 10-BLADE PACK: 10-25¢

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES
CHAPTER I

NOT WANTED

HARRY WEISSMAN pushed the reader across my desk. "Make this guy, Gil?"

I gave the photo a quick up and down. It wasn’t one of those front-and-profile jobs they take at Stone College—not even a passport pix. Just an enlargement of a candid camera snap. Looked as if it had been shot down a manhole on a rainy day. The photography suited the face.

Sinister was the word for that pan.

MURDER

BY TELEVISION

A hotel dick finds himself in boiling water when a fugitive Latin dictator comes to town with a yen for homicide!
Man about fifty—spiky movie-menace moustache. Stuck on a less-malevolent set of features it would have been plain silly. On him it looked bad. He had dark eyes that didn’t seem to like anything they saw. Either there were hollows under them or he used a shadow pencil.

A bird-beak of a nose, sharp and pinched-in at the nostrils. Thin slit of a mouth—a mean tight mouth.

There was no description of any crime beneath this unpleasant portrait—not any name. I made a guess. “Who is he? A killer?”

Harry wig-wagged a toothpick from one side of his long horseface to the other. “Y’might say. In the wholesale end of the business. He’s Luis San Lasquez.”

“What do you know!” I’d never heard the name. I have enough to do, trying to keep tabs on five thousand Joes and Janes wandering in and out of the Plaza Royal every day. Any Chief Security Officer of a big New York hotel is likely to get behind in his current events if he tends to his job.

Harry spat out a shred of the toothpick. “We had a tip he’s here in the house.”

“Not under that name.” I make a practise of checking our registration cards every hour or so. I couldn’t have overlooked a tag like San Lasquez.

“He’d sign in under an alias. Any lug who’s hated by as many people as he is would want to hide his light under a bushel. But you couldn’t miss a puss like that.”

“No if I’d seen it, Harry.”

“Maybe he doesn’t look like this now. Photo may have been taken a couple of years ago. Nobody seems to be sure.”

“Let me have three, four of those readers,” I said. “I’ll sic the boys on our greeters, the bell captains, the room service waiters. If this customer’s wanted for homicide we crave to hustle him out of the house with no delay.”

Harry waggled his head—negatively. “San Lasquez isn’t wanted for anything officially. Better not put any of your regular lobby men on it, Gil. Hop on this yourself. The ole hush-hush treatment.”

“Look!” I took a burn. “I’ve a few other fish to fry, Harry. Think I’m going to buttonhole every bellman and elevator operator in the house myself? I have a Protection staff to do that sort of thing!”

“Sure, sure.” He made the toothpick do nipups. “But this is a high-voltage job. You better handle it with gloves. The Commissioner spoke to me about it personally ten minutes ago to impress it on me. If we knew for sure this San Lasquez was in the hotel there’d be enough Feds here by now to start a convention.”

“Feds, hah?” That sounded noky. If a flock of whiskers were on the hunt for this bird I wanted to make sure he wasn’t in the Plaza Royal when they closed in on him. Shooting in the lobby is bad for trade.

I FIGURED there must be a chance of real trouble because Harry was so keyed up. He didn’t usually get taut over trifles. But a matter like this—with the big brass down at Headquarters keen to beat those FBEyes to the quarry—it could make or break a plainclothes lieutenant.

Harry and I had worked together pretty well since I took over at the Fifth Avenue swankery. Not exactly one hand washing the other but a slight exchange of favors now and again.

We’d spot some paperhanger trying to shove a bum check to our cashier’s, turn him over to Harry to make the actual pinch, get the credit. In return he would keep the Plaza Royal out of the public prints if an arrest didn’t raise too strong a smell. So I went along with him.

“How’s your tip come from, Harry?”

“It was more of a tap really.”

“Thees senor, he mus’ be verree bad hombre, hah?” Nobody bothered to tap telephones to catch a run-of-the-mill killer.

“Not us.” Harry lifted a protesting
palm. "This was some crew of listen- ing lads from Washington. There’s a lot of pressure coming down from way up high somewhere. Seems this San Lasquez brings on what y’ might call an international incident. When they kicked him out as president of that South American republic—"

"Oh! That crut!" I finally got it. A few weeks before the front pages were bubbling with hot tales about this dic-

tator who'd called himself president—and spent an hour after dinner every evening watching his firing squad work on his political opponents.

I was hazy about details. Something about people being tortured for weeks, tossed in damp dungeons to rot. "Some of his enemies are gunning for him here?"

"Could be. But the tough angle—when this cluck slipped away from the revolutionaries he also skipped out with the master engravings for his country’s currency. If they don’t catch up with him before he starts to run amok with a printing press it’ll really tear the high-finance boys apart."

I thought it over. "Leaving these diplomatic didoes out of it he still sounds like a poor insurance risk. What about this phone call?"

"Pal of San Lasquez lives over on West End Avenue. Ex-general, name of Ramon Habado. The earphone boys been on his line for three or four days, thinking maybe San Lasquez would communicate with his ole buddy. About an hour ago he did call Habado. The general wasn’t in. San Lasquez left a message saying a meeting had been set for tonight right after the show—whatever that meant."

"The dictaphone kids traced the call here?" I asked.

"Yeah. But before they could find out what room it came from the party at this end hung up."

"It might not have come from a room at all," I pointed out. "We have forty-odd phone booths. Lobbies, grill, on the mezz—"

"It came through your switchboard—not a coin machine."

"Take some checking, Harry. He might have stepped into one of our as- sistant manager’s offices—or a credit office. Used phone. The girls wouldn’t have questioned him for a local call."

"Ask around, huh, Gil?"

I said I’d get on it. He had to be satis- fied with that. I don’t think he was very satisfied when he went away. But there wasn’t anything much he could do about it.

A big hotel is a complicated mecha- nism. Trying to find out what goes on in fourteen hundred rooms by quizzing a couple of thousand employees—that’s no cinch for anyone who doesn’t know the ropes. There are a heck of a lot of ropes.

I began to pull some of them. A call to our resident manager’s office brought me the clearance on the Not Registered cards.

MOST of the time we have a few prominent personages in the house who aren’t entered on the regular cards. They aren’t ‘in’ to anybody who phones, wires or calls. Their names can’t be
included in the mimeographed Celebrity List our Public Relations staff releases to the gossipers. The switchboard doesn’t know they exist. They don’t have to sign their names to room-service checks. Except to the front office they’re absolutely incognito.

Usually my office is tipped off to the presence of such Very Important Peep—but I couldn’t recall any San Lazquez on the list.

There wasn’t any. And of the six Registered To No One guests only one had a Spanish-sounding name. A Carlos Guitierrez from Sao Paulo in Suite C-14—the C meant it was one of the four-room Campanile super de-loox.

I decided the senor must be well up in the bucks if he could afford a hundred of them each and every day for the privilege of renting C-14. He’d been there a week.

Of course, if he was making his own money by the mile a yard a day wouldn’t matter.

I checked with Mona, our switchboard supervisor. She had no record of any toll charges against C-14. It seemed odd. Customers who can afford those lavish sleeping quarters usually do quite a mite of long-distancing to friends and family.

Mort Zingara is our night captain on the bell desk—and our seven-to-three shift has the smartest bellman in the East in my opinion. Zingy seldom misses a trick. I got him up to my office.

Zingy knew C-14. He’d wondered about C-14. The guest bought many setups, was a free-wheeler when it came to tips. Always left a greenie on the center table for the bellman—which was why Zingy usually answered those calls himself!

But C-14 was strangely shy. Usually he was in the john—or in one of the other rooms of the suite—when Zingy arrived with the ice buckets. He’d never set eyes on the guy!

I got hold of Emile, our banquet maitre who also captains night room-service for the Campanile because the banquet kitchen is in the tower. Emile had often talked to C-14. Foreign accent but of a certainty. The Lagniappe of the most generous. There had been a secretary, a charming one, absolutely.

Emile had seen her on several occasions.

But as to Senor Guitierrez? Now one came to consider it, it was peculiar, was it not, that Emile himself had never spoken to the man face to face. Instructions from the adjoining room or relayed by the charming secretary. Très mystérieux, no?

“Yes,” I agreed. And got rid of Emile.

Through the night housekeeper I located Effy Rice, the turn-down girl on that floor of the Campanile. Yes indeed, Effy’d turned down C-14’s beds. She’d carted in fresh linen to the suite every peeyem. And—she’d seen the senor!

But she found it difficult to describe him. He usually wore pajamas and a dressing gown. They sort of hide a man’s figure. Also he wore dark glasses—which makes it kind of hard to describe a man’s face. Still Effy could recall a thin slit of a mouth, a pointed moustache—

That was good enough. I went up. I couldn’t locate Tim Piazolle, my best floor patrol.

But I left word for him.

The night elevator boy on Car 6 knew from nothing. Never noticed the senor. He couldn’t have gone up or down much. As far as the operator could recollect nobody ever asked where the Guitierrez suite was. Lots of guys with mustaches used the elevators.

I gave up on him.

At the living-room door of C-14 I put an ear to the panel. Voices—but I couldn’t distinguish what they were saying. It didn’t sound like an argument though.

After a minute I knocked.

A purry feminine voice inquired, “Who is it?”

“The house officer. Smoke on the floor somewhere. Like to check your suite.”

The door opened—only a crack.

The voice that said “Venga aca” wasn’t purry—or feminine.

My Spanish is limited to stuff like Hasta luego and Manana. But I understood the senor. He could have said it in Arabic and it would still have been plain with that tommygun in my short ribs.

I went in.
Inez said, "No, no. Stan' quite still, please"
CHAPTER II

SOMETHING SPECIAL

SCARED? I was petrified.

Even if the gun in my tummy had only been a .22 I’d have had butterfly-belly with those wicked eyes glittering above its trigger. The senor wasn’t wearing pajamas. He was dressed up like a head waiter—hard-boiled shirt, white tie and tails.

He didn’t have on tinted glasses at the moment. Not that it would have made a bit of difference as far as any expression I could read in his stare. I tried to remember where I’d seen eyes like that before.

Then I did remember. At the zoo—the panther den. Watchful eyes, waiting, hating...

His Castilian countenance seemed plumper than in the photo; his nose fleshtier. Soft living might have put fat on him since that picture. The mouth and mustache were about as advertised.

His voice had that curious, hollow tone used by ventriloquists. “You think we have fire, Mistair—?”

“Vine.” I had to swallow before I could speak. “Gilbert Vine.” I sniffed. “Can’t smell anything in here though. Must come from another suite. Sorry to bother you.” I started to back out. The muzzle moved up from my navel to my nose.

“Now you are here”—he showed long, narrow teeth in what was intended for a smile—“perhaps you will so good as to help us. We are check out of the hotel right away. My secretary”—he bowed over the forward grip of the submachinegun at the corn-tassel cutie half hidden by the door—“Inez cannot assist me with much strength.”

The girl closed the door softly behind me. Under other circumstances I’d have enjoyed giving her the once over slowly. Secretary or whatever—she was something special.

Skin like flower petals—tropical flowers. Stark white, pale pink, vivid scarlet—lush-blooming out of the black lace of her high-throated evening gown. Lips that were an open invitation to seduction. Corn-silk hair against a frame of towering Spanish comb. A gilt gimmick with a curious design at the top—a winged lizard or something.

She was a chubby sweaterful above, a slim, trim waist below. She had a honey-dripping voice. “It is the beeg trunk, Mistair Vine. Too heavy for one man to move. Senor Gutierrez wish it put out here in the living room.”

“Oh.” As if it was all in the day’s work for a Chief Security Officer to be asked to shove baggage around! “Let me call the porter.” The phone table was across the room beside the big video set our C suites have as standard furnishing. “He’ll bring up his truck, take care of it.”

“Splendid.” The senor trailed me across the moss-spongy carpet. The T-gun kept its eye on me. “Tell him in about fifteen minutes, please.”

When the board answered I said, “This is Vine, in C-Fourteen. Connect me with the porter’s desk.”

The senor didn’t seem to care whether or not I’d tipped the girl off to where I was. But he cocked an ear when I told the head porter to bring a truck up because C-14 was checking out in a quarter of an hour.

When I hung up Inez was at my elbow. “You mus’ think we are very rude, Mistair Vine.” She waved nervously at the weapon. “There has been bad trouble. Senor Gutierrez has great fear.”

He put in his own apology. “It is not possible to explain. But there is much danger. So—I provide myself with protection.”

“That’s my job—to protect guests.” He could tell I didn’t buy it.

If he’d, really been frightened he wouldn’t have opened the door at all. Also, if it was merely that he had a trunk to move he knew all he had to do was ring downstairs, get help. There was something more behind his waving that T-gun around. He stopped waving it, nuzzled me in the ribs with it.

“Tengo mucha prisa”—he began.

INEZ translated quickly. “Senor Gutierrez says he is sorry but he is in a big hurry. He cannot wait for the porter.”

“Okay.” Cold sweat was busting out
all over me.

"In here." She led the way to one of the bedrooms.

I followed, the senor breathing down the back of my neck.

The Plaza Royal spends enough decorating any one of those upper-cruster suites to build and furnish an ordinary house. But I'd never have known it if I hadn't been in C-14 before. The floor was littered with newspapers. The four-poster looked as if a camel had slept in it.

There was luggage all over the place, enough stuff for a circus troupe. On the chairs, on the bureau, partly packed, stuffed with clothes, shoes, books, papers. Suitcases, gladstones, train bags, hat boxes, attaché cases—and one huge trunk.

He'd never brought that out of South America on any plane unless it'd been a cargo carrier. It was about the size of two ordinary steamer trunks. Covered with rawhide—with a crescent sticker from the Hotel Magnifique in Caracas pasted clumsily over the place where the initials would be.

It was closed. The two big brass locks, on each side of the lid, were snapped shut.

He wouldn't need a carryall that size just to transport a few engraving plates. But of course there was an even chance he'd gotten away with a chunk of other loot besides.

He gave the T-gun to Inez. She held it as if it were a cobra.

"The trunk, it is very heavy." He grabbed one handle.

I got a grip on the other end. He was right. It was like lifting a flatcar. But what jolted me wasn't the weight. It was the ugly splotch of red on the papers beneath the trunk, an irregular blotch about the size of a dishpan. A bottle of ketchup, smashed and spilled, would have made about the same gory mess. It had soaked through onto the chenille carpet.

So that was it!

He hadn't dared let a porter see that stain. He'd spread papers underneath the trunk to dry up the blood. Now he wanted me to help drag it out to the living room, where there wasn't any telltale mark on the carpet.

I set my end down. "This was the 'bad trouble,' Senor San Lasquez?"

Inez prodded me in the small of the spine. It didn't feel like a finger. I picked up the trunk again. The senor and I staggered to the living-room with jerky steps.

He panted, "No doubt—you wonder—what is in—this trunk?"

"I don't think you just cut yourself shaving." Being an involuntary pall-bearer didn't improve my disposition. I was sore at the idea that this high-binder would have the gall to pull such raw stuff in my precinct. Murder's bad anywhere but especially in a hotel. Guests check out in droves. Security Officers get bounced.

"A most unfortunate accident," he murmured in that odd echo-tone. "Inez will inform you I am something of a swordsman. The sabre. My cavalry days. Si."

I saw the draperies in the living-room sway slightly. There'd been no sound from the bedroom we'd just left. But the door from the corridor to the bedroom must have opened to cause that draft. Tim Piazolle, using his master key! My stomach muscles relaxed a mite.

The senor tilted the trunk on its side, rubbed the bottom with his handkerchief. It came away brownish pink but there wasn't enough blood to attract anybody's attention unless they were looking for it.

"Senor Guitierrez was practising," Inez explained.

He spoke to her in Spanish so rapidly I couldn't even separate the syllables. She nodded. "Since you have guessed his identity, I will call him Senor San Lasquez, too. While swinging his sabre a little while ago unhappily my pet poodle ran in the room. Senor San Lasquez did not see him. The sabre lashed poor Pepe so badly—ah, it was tragic. You can imagine how I feel!"

I said, "Your pooch must have been as big as a Brahma bull. This trunk weighs two hundred if it weighs an ounce."

"Books." The senor stuffed the handkerchief back in his breast pocket, daintily, arranging the points neatly so as to show.
“One cannot blame you for doubt, Mis-tair Vine. But I will show you how it happen.” He stepped behind me swift-ly.

I spun around to keep him in sight.

Inez said, “No, no. Stan’ quite still, please.” She said it with gestures—of the T-gun.

THEY couldn’t have put it plainer. On the pretext of demonstrating this phoney accident the senor was to come up behind me and bop me right out of circulation.

They’d have done it too except for Tim Piazolle.

The way I was standing I couldn’t even see him catfoot in from the bed-room. But his gruff bass was a sweeter sound than the clink of payoff coins after a jackpot.

“Up,” he said. “Up! Way up! High! Quick!”

Inez couldn’t lift the tommy-gun above her head. She dropped it. It bounced on the carpet.

I caught it on the bounce.

Tim’s shiny brick-red face registered anger and puzzlement in approximately even proportions.

“What gives, coach?”

“You see the blood in the bedroom, Tim?”

“Looked like somebody lost his weekend in a slaughterhouse.”

“Yeah. Let’s find out who did.” I looked at the senor. “Keys, please.”

He fished a bunch out of his coattails.

“Allow me.” He knelt in front of the trunk and put a key in one of the twin locks.

I gave him the toe. None too gently.

“You’re likely to get your dress shirt all mussed up, Senor.” He must have had a low opinion of Security Officers to suppose I’d let him open that lid and grab a gun out of the top tray.

He rolled over, sat up on the floor, close beside the trunk.

It wasn’t easy to get those big locks open, especially since I had to work with my left hand. I kept the T-gun in my right.

The trunk was packed tight. The lid came up hard.

The top tray was overflowing with shirts, socks, ties, underwear, photo-graphs in leather cases, traveling clocks, enough gadgets to fill a drugstore win-dow. When I lifted the tray out some-thing bulged up from beneath it so that for a second I had the idea they’d stuffed somebody in there, still alive.

I was wrong. He was extremely dead. They’d pushed his body down on top of so much clothing that it sprang up like a jack-in-the-box. Only it was much more hideous than any jack-in-the-box could be.

I saw the uniform first—an officer’s uniform. Gold braid on the collar, decora-tions on the chest. I didn’t pay much attention to the ribbons and medals because just then his face came up out of its nest of purple silk underwear. What there was left of it—the face, I mean.

The lower half had been blown off—as if he’d taken a bite out of a bomb. It wasn’t nice. The T-gun, at short range—they must have stuck the muzzle in his mouth or something.

I’m not used to gore. Not that way. I saw my share overseas. But this was something else again—it seemed more gruesome right here in the Plaza Royal.

It got Tim too. He swore fiercely. Inez couldn’t stand the sight either apparently. She screamed once, high and shrill. Then she keeled.

Tim made a grab for her—the natural thing for a man to do but fatal at a crisis like that.

She came to life the instant he lowered his gun hand. The fingers of her left hand clawed at his eyes. She bent her head, caught his gun wrist with her right hand—and sank her teeth in his thumb.

I could have drilled her with the tommygun. But there was the risk of hitting Tim, too.

Before I could move to help him, the senor had banged the heavy trunk lid down on my elbow. It knocked me off balance. I thought the arm had been broken but it was strictly of secondary importance.

Because in that split second of pain I saw the senor coming at me with his shoe. He’d slipped off one of his patent leather Oxfords, was swinging it like a club.

The heel caught me smack between the eyes.
CHAPTER III

NOTHING TO SPOIL

WAY I hear tell, when a man is put to sleep by a conk on the cranium he wakes up in a fog, his mind blurred by shock. All he can think about is bombs bursting inside his skull.

It wasn't that way with me when I woke up.

I came out of my coma with a fist in my face. My brain picked up right where it left off when the senor slugged me. I took it to be the senor's fist, tried to beat him to the punch. I figured the reason I couldn't see anything was because of that clout from the hard heel of his shoe.

My swing never got going. Natch—with my wrists tied behind my back!

The knuckles in my mouth weren't sacking me either. They were Tim's. He was lying on top of me. He was still out cold. I thought he was out for good.

He wasn't. He began to groan in a minute. We put the pieces together—decided we'd been heaved into one of the bedroom closets. It was a closet anyhow—dark as the inside of a safe. As tightly locked, too.

Every time we moved there was a great crackling. The senor and his fair Inez had evidently gathered up all those newspapers, tossed them in the closet after us. We couldn't hear anything except the newspapers though—even with an ear to the door. Apparently the Latins had left.

It took about three minutes for Tim and me to maneuver back-to-back, get the silk stockings untied from each other's wrists. I found my lighter, flicked it on close to my wrist ticker. It was 8:27. It had been around eight when I'd knocked on the C-14 door. We'd been shut in ten or fifteen minutes.

Automatically I dug down for my masters. They were gone. The senor'd frisked me!

I said a few words that aren't generally banded about in the lobby of the Plaza Royal. Stealing a security man's master keys is like robbing a cop of his nightstick—downright degrading. Besides being dangerous—leaving an unauthorized person in possession of keys that let him into any room in the house, any time.

The idea of my masters in the senor's pocket sent my blood pressure way up to there. It made me a lot madder than the bump above the bridge of my nose!

Timm cursed. "That tricky little she-cat!"

"Next time don't let your gentlemanly instincts influence you." I pounded on the door. "Not that I blame you. Letting that cruddy buzzard bang a trunk lid on my arm—that wins me the Boobblitzer Prize."

"Who was that gun-boy, Gil? An' the slick chick? Who's the lug they blasted?"

I told him. By the time I had, somebody was hollering on the other side of the door.

"Mister Vine! You in there?"

"Zingy!" I yelled. "Get the dupe keys from the desk."

He had them with him. He opened up. After one look, he ran for the phone. [Turn page]
“Gimme Doc Seurle, fast!”
“Hold it,” I told him. “Tim, you need medical attention?”
“No!” he roared. “Nothing wrong with me five minutes with that mustard wouldn’t fix.”

Zingy hung up. “You look like you want the full fifteen to a decision, boss.”
“You ought to see the other guy,” I said.

All the luggage was gone from the bedroom. A glance at the living room showed the trunk wasn’t there. I made a quick whizz-through to be sure they hadn’t stuck the corpse in any of the other closets.

Zingy brought hot towels from the bathroom. "Lieutenant Weissman’s been raising the roof to find you. Mona said you’d called down from this suite. The desk told me the guest had just checked out. Putting thisa with thata I thought it sounded kind of screwy. I came up to reinvigorate."

“You’ll be in line for an assistant manager’s carnation, first thing you know.” I looked in the mirror. The senor’s shoe hadn’t clipped me in the eye but I had a shiner like an eggplant just the same. Be humiliating to explain that purple puffball to Harry—that, and how Tim and I happened to get locked up in the closet.

Besides, if I gave it to the Lieutenant straight it’d ball things up worse than ever. The senor and his succulent secretary had checked out, bag and baggage. The trunk was out of the hotel. The corpse, presumably ditto. So-o-o—there might not be any front-page screaming about Murder in the Plaza Royal if I could play my hand right.

SOONER or later the dead man would be found—probably. When, as and if that came to pass there’d be a good chance the corpse would still be in the original container. The cat would be out of the bag as soon as the body was out of the trunk. That rawhide item would be traced to the hotel before you could say Luis San Lasquez. Then I’d have some explaining to do.

I’d have to come up with more than an explanation too—or I’d be in for a felony rap. Accessory after the fact—concealing evidence of homicide—so forth and on. Besides being out of a job.

If I came out flatfooted and gave Harry what I had at the moment the hotel would get mucked up in the public prints. And I’d be sitting in the front office, listening to the manager tell me how he hated to let me go.

“Tell Mona you couldn’t locate me, Zingy. Tim, call the porter’s desk, find out whether the C-fourteen party took a cab or carted away its luggage in a private bus.”

Zingy used the bedroom phone. Tim used the one in the living room. I went down to my office to put a fresh shirt on, get the spare set of grand masters out of my private safe. I had to fix the suite so maids and housekeepers wouldn’t be running in and out, squawking about bloodstains on the carpet.

There was a note from Harry on my desk:

Gil:
A tip from the top. LSanL has a sweetie somewhere in town. She might be with him. Get you a desc in as I can.

H.W.

I didn’t need any description of Inez! Chances were we had a slew of her fingerprints upstairs. Also Tim had a toothmark in his thumb if that would help.

He came in while I was sticking adhesive over the lump on my forehead.

“They cabbied out,” he said. “Gordie Welch was the hackie. He’s not on the line now. Expected any minute.” He scowled. “You know what the sucker complained about down at the cashier’s window when he was paying his bill? He said you’d told him you would personally be on hand to help with their luggage—and you weren’t around!”

“I hate a sense of humor in any fink who’s as loose with a gun as he is,” I gave Tim the spare grand masters, told him to lock C-14 to one and all, no matter who wanted in.

Then I went down in a service car to the basement, out via the commissary loading platform—in case Harry was hanging around the lobby. Welch was just pulling into the tail of the cab rank when I got to the street.

He was a short, squat cluck with a
face that looked as if he'd been a pug at one time.
He listened and leered.
"Remember that party? You kidding?! He had sixteen pieces—an' a trunk. Wowzie!"
"Where'd you take them?" I asked.
"Penn station, Baggage room. He tips me a twofer."
"Check the stuff through on a ticket?" I pursued.
"Dunno. I help him tote the light pieces. Some redcap handles the trunk."
"Shoot me down there on the double. For dough."
We shaved the lights, scraped paint off other cabs, frightened a few pedestrians, got there, jig-time.
I took Welch to the baggage room with me. He described the senor. I inquired about the trunk—merely a matter of form. I could see it only a few feet away on the other side of the baggage counter—with the suitcases and train boxes and stuff piled on it, around it.
"The gent's coming back, soon's he buys his tickets to Pasadena," the baggage-man reported.
"His plans might be changed." I told the baggage-boss who I was, suggested there was some question of the 'gent's having skipped without the formality of settling his bill. "Let me use your phone?"
"Yuh, yuh. A crook, huh?" He got a kick out of it.
I called Tim, told him to hop down in a rush.
"Bring your pacifier. Baby might be irritable."
Tim said that would suit him swell—the irritable the better.
The baggage-man was anxious to be helpful. "Pretty sure this fella'll be back in a few minutes. He said somep'nto th' young lady about getting tickets in a hurry so's they'd be able to make th' show in time."
"Mention what show?" I asked.
"Don't b'leeve he mentioned." The baggage-man reflected. "Young lady was askin' me if it was safe t' leave all those things here a while. I tol' her they c'd stay a month, long's there wasn't nothin' in 'em would spoil."
I gave him the laugh he expected.
time Tim steamed in Welch was back with a brown manila trip card that had Frank P. Helfer, Hack Badge 72-019 scribbled in the blanks at the top.

"Here y'are, coach." Welch pointed at figures halfway down the cardboard:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trip No.</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>8:24</td>
<td>Penn T</td>
<td>CTC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Helfer identify this party of two?" I asked.

"One full-rigged furriner in hard-boiled shirt and caffee sassietie tie. One nifty number wearin' a grandma's shawl—she had a comb th' size of a ping-pong paddle stuck in her mop. That was them, all right."

"Sounds like 'em," I said. "What's CTC?"

"Continental Telecasting Building."

"Ride me thither." I told Tim to play them close to his vest and take no chances with the senor.

"I will bat his bridgework in on very short notice if he gives me any guff," Tim said. He said it too loud. That baggage master had his big ears fanned out.

Welch zipped me up to the Continental Building. I tried to pay him off but he said he'd stick around just on the chance I'd need him again. He claimed he was having more fun!

I wasn't.

The idea of trailing a couple of murderers into a television studio had about as much appeal as sticking my hand into a dark rattlesnake den to see what I could feel.

The building was always jam-packed. Video fans swarming to clap at their favorite brand of corn. Actors, directors, make-up men—camera men, sound effects men, decorators—dancers, musicians, scene shifters. I'd been there once to act as technical adviser on a mystery show about a house dick. It was worse than our lobby on a Saturday night after a pigskin Donnybrook.

Of course the senor wouldn't be toting his Tommy-gun—but any gunwork whatever in crowded quarters like that would be strictly a massacre.

I had no needle-in-the-haystack difficulty—so far as Inez was concerned. The Westpointish head usher in front of the Reserved Tickets window remembered her right off the bat.

"Yes, sir. Lady in a mantilla."

"Blonde." I didn't care to commit myself.

"Veddy." He gave it the bon-ton business. "She wished to know where the Stack O'Jack program was being produced."

"One of those giveaway games?" I go in more for daily doubles myself. I never even won honorable mention in a raffle so those things don't appeal to me."

"Sir?" He eyed me sharply. "Stack O'Jack has the largest audience of any program on the networks. Sixty-eight thousand dollars' worth of prizes."

"What studio?" I cut his sales talk short.

"Visitors are not permitted in the producing studio," he answered stiffly. "You may obtain a pass to witness the telecast in Studio Seven M."

"Thanks." I got a pass, crowded into an Up car, followed the mob into a miniature theatre. The place was in semi-darkness but I could see it was crammed to the ceiling with non-paying customers.

I couldn't find a seat. I didn't want one anyway. I wanted to be able to move fast.

In front of the sloping semicircle of seats was a big screen, maybe ten feet by fourteen. The Stack O'Jack title was just fading in—piles of silver dollars arranged like those on the crap tables at Reno and Las Vegas. Coin—ready to be collected.

While I was casing the crowd for a tall gilt comb in a nest of honey tresses I wondered why this cartridge-careless couple would be interested in a show where, if they were lucky enough to get called to the phone while they were watching the program, they might win what would be a good twenty years' income for the average Joe. If they had those copper plates they could manipulate their own moola easier than by being a guess artist on a video show.

The title faded. The commercial came on. A beauteous babe pulling on a pair
of Kobler’s Smoothskin Gloves. Some butter-voiced announcer began his spiel:
“To all you who already know the incomparable luxury of Smoothskin Gloves—to all you who plan to treat yourself to the best in handwear when next you need fine gloves—the Kobler Glove Corporation offers the chance of a lifetime—the chance to win a STACK O’ JACK—by merely identifying the charming girl whose hands are shown here.”

A big question-mark popped up on the screen. Beneath it, WHOSE HANDS ARE THESE???

I KEPT moving through the crush, hunting for that tall comb. Out of one corner of my eye I could see the scene being televised on the screen—the keyboard of a grand piano with ten dainty digits frisking up and down, playing Melancholy Baby. All that showed of her was from the boozum down to about her lap. I couldn’t see her face.

But I did see the buckle or ornament or whatever it was she wore at her waist—a thing that looked like a lizard with wings!

For a second I wondered if maybe Inez herself was the cutie at the piano. But then, clear across the saucer of seats at the far side, I saw a figure that looked like an old lady in ashawl. I couldn’t see the comb but it might have been because of the gloom. I shoved toward it. It was slow going. I didn’t want to raise a rumpus.

The announcer was giving out with a cute little clue, sung to the next tune the Mystery Babe was playing—I Won’t Go Home Until Morning.

“These are the hands of a lovely Millions of People have seen
In magazines, newspapers, movies
And now, on our video screen.”

There was a great buzz-buzz in the audience. Everybody was guessing out loud. People were positive they knew she was Dinah Shore or Shirley Temple or Gypsy Rose Lee.

It was Inez in the shawl, all right. Fifteen feet away I could make out the comb with that creepy lizard pattern on it. But she spotted me too. She began to slither through the standees.

I gained on her. But there were too many people who didn’t understand what “Gangway” meant. Or who just didn’t give a darn about anything except the announcer’s statement that “we are now ringing a number in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I can hear the ring.”

I couldn’t see the senor if he was there. Maybe squinting around for him—because he was the more dangerous of the duo—maybe that let Inez gain on me. Anyway she beat me to a door that said, No Admittance.

She got through it while I was still muttering apologies to a couple of old geezers whose feet I’d stepped on.

By the time I yanked at the chrome handle, got it open, she was nowhere in sight. A husky young redheaded lad was.

He stood in the passageway just outside the heavy sound-proof door. At his back was the only exit from the corridor. Inez must have gone out that way.

He gave with the big glare. “Where do you think you’re going, bud?”

“One side,” I said. “A dame just crashed out here and—”

“Didn’t you see that sign?” he growled. “No Admittance? This goes to the Seven M Control Room.”

“Look.” I did my best to sidestep. “That dame is wanted!”

He grabbed me, muscled me back toward the studio.

I couldn’t take time out to discuss it at length. I gave him the bouncer’s one-two—knee to the crotch, knucks to the chin when he doubled over.

He did a fold-o.

CHAPTER V

PRELUDE TO A CHAT

Rdinarily, doors are no mystery to me. A security officer has to know which ones he can open without surprising a babe in the bathtub—when to unlock the right one to stop a suicider from taking that ten-story plunge. I’m not putting on the brag when I call myself something of a specialist on doors. In hotels, that is.

Backstage in that video rodeo it was
another color of a horse as Emile would say. Too many doors—nothing to tell me what was hidden behind them.

When I stepped over the recumbent redhead the door ahead said, DO NOT OPEN WHEN LIGHT IS RED. There was a light bulb above it. The light was red. I opened the door.

I was in a gloomy little room about the size of the theatre-screen in the studio I'd just left. One side was plate glass. Four Joes sat facing it at a long black waist-high shelf. On the shelf were more panels with knobs and dials and illuminated indicators than on the pilot's dashboard of a B-36.

In the panels in front of him each Joe had a couple of midget television bulbs with stuff going on in all the bulbs simultaneously—different stuff at the same time.

A baggy-pants comic, mugging at a pretty with a parasol—a row of dancers doing the can-can—it was like watching those mirror mazes where every movement is reflected six ways from the ace.

Somewhere in the shadows a loudspeaker blasted out, Ta-Ra-Ra-BOOM de ayce.

The level of the floor where the guys sat at their controls was a couple of feet higher than the corridor. I couldn't see much of what was going on beyond that big window. But I could see Inez wasn't in the control room.

Three of the telecast boys swiveled around to see who'd buttied in on their privacy. One growled, "Close that door!"

I did—and opened the only other one I could see. I hadn't put a paw on the door-handle before all four came up off their chairs.

The surge of sound that whammed at me from the orchestra on the set drowned out whatever they were yelling. I had a suspicion it wasn't polite per-siffage. I'd walked right through into the studio where they were shooting. It was the only way Inez could have slipped out.

I didn't have to be told it wasn't the way to Make Friends and Influence Anybody. I got set to have some usher escort me rudely to the nearest exit. That's what I wanted. It would have been the quickest route to catch up with Inez. But I didn't figure on what happened.

The lights dazzled me. Banks of overhead fluorescents—clusters of baby spotlights in front of reflectors on the floor. Soon as I closed that control room door behind me it seemed as if fifty navy searchlights pinned me right on the beam.

I tripped over a lad squatting on the floor, wigwagging to the cast with his fingers. I untangled myself from a rubber cable as thick as a garden hose, stumbled smack into the line of thighbinders. It must have been cute on a million sets. Me with my egg-plant shiner staggering through that hedge of black stocking legs and fluffy white petticoats and ruffled drawers!

It wasn't the Stack O'Jack program—there were no identities being hidden in here! Baggy-pants probably thought I was out to crab his act. He made a pass at me. The pretty whacked me with her Gay Nineties parasol.

Except for the fact I didn't have on any makeup and must have looked like a gravedigger on a moonlight night I could have been a comedy stooge who'd just blundered onstage.

But it was a bad spot. I was wrecking ten thousand bucks' worth of gaudy entertainment. These vaude people wouldn't care for such. They wouldn't be likely to toss me out on my ear and let it go at that.

If THEY grabbed me, held me for the studio guards, it would only be a matter of seconds before that husky redhead would snap out of it. He'd want to put the pinch on me. I couldn't afford that. If I was held up even a couple of minutes Inez would be long gone from those parts before I could catch up with her.

As for the senor, more than likely he'd be out of the building already, I figured. It was possible, of course, he'd never come in there. He could have dropped her at the telecast building, gone elsewhere. I had to get my hands on Inez. She was my best bet to keep out of the clink and hang onto my job.

All this flashed through my mind in the split second I was ducking from the failing parasol. A brace of shirtsleeved buckos dropped white cardboard pla-
cards, crept up stealthily on either side of me.

The orchestra leader, right ahead of me, made pushing-up gestures toward the ceiling. The brass section hit the high notes like a flock of fire sirens competing with a calliope. That was to cover any squawk I might make which would sully up the loudspeaker.

I took steps to get out of there. There was another door ahead of me—a prop one, set in a wall of painted scenery indicating an oldtime Tenderloin joint. Over it were gaslight bulbs with Haymarket lettered on them.

I went through like a beer bottle through a wet paper sack—and crashed into a makeup table. No bull ever did more damage in a china shop!

A quartette of gay barbershop boys—peg-top trousers, pearl-gray derbyes, wing-collars and handlebar mustaches—were having their cheeks rosied. They gawked at me as I floundered through the shambles—bottles, jars, wigs, mirrors, brushes, glass breaking, stuff bouncing around on the floor. It was a good thing the orchestra was going full tilt.

Before they could jump me, I barked: “Which way’d she go? Dame in the Spanish shawl?!”

One of them pointed. Another door!—marked DRESSING ROOMS.

I made it in a hop with half a dozen of them right at my caboose. I’d have been cornered then and there except for a bevy of buxom babes in skin tights and burlesque bras.

They were coming out of the dressing rooms as I went in. They collided with my pursuers, held them up.

To my right were WOMEN. I couldn’t head in there even if Inez had taken refuge inside. I ran down the hall, cut around a corner, saw a triangle of black lace sticking out of a door tabbed NO EXIT.

JACKIE ROBINSON sliding for home never made faster time than I did to that shawl stuck in the jamb. I yanked the handle. Nobody outside—nothing except the clatter of high heels on cement stairs!

Two flights down I caught her. I closed in with a rush, not wanting to give her time to pull a pacifier out of her bag—or her stocking.

She didn’t have any weapon. She didn’t make much fuss, either. “What are you going to do with me, Mistair Vine?” She was frightened, all right. But not so much she couldn’t put plenty of the old oomph into her voice and eyes.

I couldn’t very well tell her that depended in part on what the CTC people were going to do with me—if they caught up with the crazy man who’d panicked their studio. Instead, I asked, “Where’s the senor?”

She scowled. “That unspeakable! He ran out on me! He left me to hold on to the bag!”

“That old gag?” I said. “Each of you going to blame the other?” I couldn’t hear anyone clumping down the stairs behind us but I hurried her down three more flights just to play safe.

“You don’t think I killed that poor man?” She put on what was intended to be a horrified stare.

I laughed at her. “Go on. Tell me you were just playing footsie with him. The senor found him and shot him before you could do anything to stop the slaughter!”

“Non, non,” she cried. “It was not so. But the killing was in self defense. Beyond question it was. The senor had a right to protect his own life. We do not know how these things are considered in America del Norte but we thought it would be better to conceal everything—even though we are guilty of nothing.”

“If you want to make some bail money,” I said, “see if you can find anybody to give you a hundred to one the prosecutor has hysterics when he hears that line.”

We got down to the second floor landing. I led her out with my fingers firm on her arm. “You can chuck a fit if you think it’ll help.” I put it to her deadpan. “But I’m going to break your nice plump arm the minute you do.”

We walked out into a big lobby with a thick carpet, a lot of bleached overstuffed furniture, a crowd of visitors watching a cabinet video set. Inez kept her voice low. She didn’t try to bust loose. She even snuggled closer to me.
“Don’t you think we might talk this over somewhere, Mistair Vine? Just you an’ I. Perhaps if we got together somewhere—”

I was about to hand her a chuckle, for essaying that old reliable mahaha. But I got stopped cold by the stuff I saw on the video set. The announcer drew my attention to it:

“We interrupt our Chat With A Wooden Indian program to give you an important bulletin from the police department—”

I looked at the screen. The words jumped out at me:

FLASH!! DO YOU KNOW THIS MAN?

A photograph appeared. Sure—Luis San Lasquez!

The announcer again:

“This man is Luis San Lasquez, wanted for murder. The body of his unidentified victim was found this evening in a trunk checked at the Pennsylvania Terminal. If you see this man or have any knowledge of his whereabouts, please get in touch immediately with Inspector Sherlin at Police Headquarters by telephoning SPring 2-1000.

“Warning—use extreme care in apprehending this man! He is probably armed and extremely dangerous!”

I said, “We might go somewhere and have a little chat at that, senorita.”

CHAPTER VI

HIGH-BOARD CHAMP

HERE was no need to ask ‘Wha’ happen?’ I knew. As well as if I’d been there. That baggage master—he’d wondered why Tim had threatened to hammer the senor’s teeth down his gullet. It wasn’t the sort of thing a house detective would ordinarily say about a mere bill-skip.

The baggage master had been all hopped up about apprehending a crook, anyhow. He’d decided Tim and I were giving him a lot of yatada, yatada. It would only take a nickel in the slot and a twist of the wrist—and maybe he’d get his name in the papers—instead of our grabbing off all the glory. So he’d called in John Law.

The gendarmes would have been glad to oblige. To put one over on the Federal snooper would be whip-cream in their java. I wondered if Harry Weissman had seen the telecast?

Anything more was strictly a stab in the dark. Had Tim stuck around when the blues opened up that blood-soaked sarcophagus? Did the cops know the murder’d taken place in the Plaza Royal? Were they looking for Inez too?

I took her down in the elevator. She worked on me without being blatant about it. Kept a little too close in the car—pressed her chest against my manly frame when the crush in the elevator began to look like a subway train at rush hour.

I did a little handwork myself on her bag—to make sure she didn’t have anything that had powder in it except a compact.

A hotel man gets many a curious invite in the course of his nocturnal prowls. Invariably the femme who offers the key to their rooms want to take the security officer’s mind off more serious matters. I thought that might be Inez’s plan.

She clung to me like a bride on the second day of a honeymoon as we shoved through the throng to the street. I had the cold chills again, watching for the senor, expecting to feel him poke me in the pit of my digestion with a loaded argument before I could see him coming.

Nothing like that occurred. When we climbed into a cab I said, “You tell him where to drive, Inez.”

She slid against me. Her knee rubbed mine. “Some nice cafe?”

“If the senor’s there,” I said. “Just wherever the senor is.”

“But I told you, dahrrling! I don’t know where that unspeakable has gone.”

The driver was peeved. “I’ll get a ticket if I hang on the curb, here.” “Nearest police station,” I told him. He made the gears growl.

Inez stroked my cheek with her hand. “Why are you so disagreeable? You do not believe me, no?”

“No,” I agreed.

“Perhaps,” she purred, “that filthy one is with her.”
"With who?" I asked. "Whom?" Remembering my grammar at a time like that!

"The girl on the vee-deo program, dahrrling."

"One with the half-lizard half-bird trinket on her belt?"

"Of course. It is like the one on my peinta—the comb."

"So it is." I waited to see how near we'd get to the green lights in front of the precint house before she quit stalling.

"It is the mark of Hacienda San Lasquez." She leaned close enough so I could smell the perfume in her hair. "A sign of the senor's—attention."

"I've seen other signs of his attention," I said. We cut up Eighth Avenue. The station was a block away. "You know this Mystery Woman?"

"How well I know her," she wriggled, suggestively. "Her name, it is Stacia Jenn—the one who dives so magnificent."

I said, "Oh, yeah" as if it didn't mean a thing. Matter of fact all it did mean to me was that this Jenn girl had been Olympic diving champion, had starred in a couple of short films out on the Coast, had her sleek supple diving-board poses in the Sunday supplements nearly as often as Esther Williams.

"She was Senor San Lasquez'—ladyfren," Inez noticed the cab pulling in to the curb, saw a couple of blues marching out of the doorway between the green lights fifty feet ahead. "But I do not know where she is, I give you God's name!" She gave up the sex appeal, began to bawl.

"Driver," I called. "Stop here a sec."

HE LOOKED over his shoulder, puzzled. Then he slid over to the curb. The patrolmen came past us, twirling nightsticks, peering stonily at the weeping female by my side.

I dug a copy of the Round-Town Table out of my coat. It took a minute to find what I wanted. More cops came by. Inez sat rigid as a fish in deep freeze.

Under the Important Sportcasts listings was the entry I'd been hoping was there. Station WCTC, 7:30-8:00 P. M., M., T., W., Th., Fr.—Seascape (With Stacia Jenn, world high-board champ) from Gayland. * * * *

Four stars, no less. Quite a show. I asked the hackie how he'd like a fare to Gayland.

"Gee, doc. That's way th' hellangone," He was dubious. "I'd hafta keep it on the clock. Can't make no special rate."

"Win yourself a cash bonus," I said, "by hitting none but the high spots on the way."

He did that. We'd have done very little better with a motorcycle escort. And neither of the passengers in that cab would have felt so good about having a motorcycle escort.

Inez kept up the weeps—deciding that was the smart play since I hadn't shown any signs of seething lust. I kept trying to figure out something that had me on a hook.

Why hadn't the senor and Inez beat it high, wide and then-some away from New York as soon as they'd gotten that trunk out of the hotel?

I could only think of one possible answer. It wouldn't do any good to ask her. But I thought it might jolt her into saying something she didn't intend to if I made it a flat statement.

"You didn't get those banknote plates after all."

She forgot all about the tearful-innocent pose. She let loose a string of Spanish that didn't sound quite decent to me—even though I couldn't savvy same. Then she added in a snarl, "I didn't!"

"Ho!" I needled her with a chuckle. "You let the senor get away with all the loot!"

"Si!" Inez dug her fingernails into my arm. "He promised to keep me with him. But now he have the engravings safe he run away from me so he get all the money himself. The filthy one!"

I nodded as if that cleared it all up. "The other one, the one in the trunk—he came to the hotel to get the plates—and got a sword in the gizzard, instead?"

"That was how it was, dahrrling."

She didn't go into details. I didn't press her for any.

We went up Merritt Parkway like a bat ablazing, swung off at the Gayland Amusement Park sign, zoomed in.
I thought about taking the Gayland park guards into my confidence. But if I'd done it right that wouldn't work—because my idea was the Stack O' Jack Mystery Girl scenes had been shot at Gayland an hour after the sport telecast, and piped into the studio as part of the program originating there.

The CTC people could do that easy. They'd have to have a mobile unit at Gayland anyway to handle the Seascapades thing—a kind of diving-girl carnival over the giant Gayland pool. Be no trouble to use the same equipment to shoot a few minutes of Stacia Jenn's hands, playing piano or knitting socks or whatever.

In that case it wouldn't be any cinch to get close to those mobile telecasting trucks. They'd be guarded. Same with Stacia Jenn's quarters or wherever they sat her down at the piano.

The glowing neon come-ons of the big park lit up the shore for miles. There were fireworks too—neon tubing flashing up into the sky, breaking into a billion sparks.

The fireworks were the edge I needed. Most of the guards were around the pool, keeping an eye on the crowd while the roman candles and rockets and pinwheels looped and arched and burst above.

I put a down payment on the taxi, told the driver to buy a few chances on the Wheel of Fortune, went to try a spin of my own luck.

The show at the Seascapades was still on though the telecast was over.

A brass band big enough for the whole army—girls doing swan dives, back-jackknives, one-and-a-halfies, full gaynors—like a troupe of acrobats working without a net—and falling every time. Spectacular stuff.

I was disappointed because Stacia Jenn wasn't out there, floating down from that high board in the amber spotlight with the others. A ticket seller told me she'd finished for the night, it was too bad I'd missed her—by far the best diver of the bunch.

I said, "yeah-sure." I knew they'd been televising her. It must be hard work.

He grunted something about it not being so tough—short hours. Look at those trucks now, right over there—boys quit an hour ago.

The trucks were only a few yards away, two of them marked CTC MOBILE TELECAST UNIT.

I took Inez over to look at them. Nobody stopped us. Nobody was around. It was simply a matter of following a big thick cable. It went about ten feet to a stucco building built right up against the Seascapades amphitheatre.

It went through into an arched portico. There were two rooms off it. Both rooms were dark.

I hated to run the risk of snapping any switches—for fear I'd blow something in the video apparatus. But I couldn't afford to have Inez that close without being able to watch her. Besides I thought the senor might still be lurking around.

He wasn't. There wasn't anybody in the first room. It was fixed up as a wardrobe room. Bathing suits hung on racks—hundreds of 'em. But no one in any of them.

The second room was a dressing room. Stacia Jenn was in there. And if anyone was going to give a correct answer to that "Whose Hands Are These" query—from then on it would have to be 'the hands of a dead person!"

CHAPTER VII

.45 FOR EMPHASIS

**HERE** was blood on the shoulder-strap of the diving beauty's gown, on the glossy chestnut of the bobbed hair at the nape of her neck. Enough blood, from enough stab-wounds— at her throat and breast—to make any question of self-destruction silly.

"Your senor might not go to the hot rocker after all," I told Inez. "Any jury got a look at this, they'd commit him to an asylum."

She didn't seem to be paying much attention to me. Her glance roved around the dressing room. A cardboard box, the kind those snooty shops on Fifty-seventh use to ship out their high-bracket duds in, was the only thing that had been opened—or left open at least.
"He got the plates," she murmured. "He made her tell."
"Maybe." I looked for the winged lizard at her belt. It was gone. "Maybe she didn't know where they were."
I found her handbag under the dressing table, looked in it. There was an address book but no keys. The senor had a fondness for other people's key-rings.
As I straightened I saw a glitter in the dressing-table mirror. It wasn't bright enough to be the reflection of a rocket through the window. I ducked, rolled, snatched.
I caught an ankle, put beef behind my yank. She lit on her shoulder-blades with an unnnn that sounded as if the wind had been knocked out of her.
It hadn't. She kicked me in the chops with her free foot, scrambled around on one knee and elbow so she could slash at me with the comb. That cockeyed gilt gimmick had a stiletto in each long prong. One good rake with those teeth and I'd have been ready for the incinerator.
I grabbed for her wrist, missed. I wrenched her ankle with all the power I could put into the twist.
She screeched, flopped over on her stomach, doubled up her knees. I came up on my feet, stamped on that stiletto grip of hers. I wasn't particular about what I broke. Something cracked—maybe the comb!
I got her by the hair, hauled her upright, cufféd her around a little. I know—not the way a gent should treat a lady. My sense of gallantry had been dulled a trifle.
She leaned against the door, white-faced, tear-streaked. But if I was any judge the viciousness hadn't been whipped out of her.
Having her on my hands made it tough. The smart thing to do was holler cop quick and loud. But then I'd be right back where I started—in trouble up to my ears. And I wouldn't have a thing to bargain with except one dead diving beauty.
I could turn Inez over to the Homicide crew. But she couldn't have been

[Turn page]

**NOW! this FULL-WEIGHT Blade**

**in Handy Dispenser**

...at this amazing low price!

| 10 BLADES IN DISPENSER | 25¢ |

REGULAR PACK 3 FOR 10¢

*Try this sturdy, full-weight Blue Star on those tough, hard-to-shave spots. If *any* blue steel blade, at any price, gives you better shaves than Blue Star, we'll give you double your money back.

[Make this TOUGH SPOT TEST]

Blue STAR: SINGLE EDGE DOUBLE EDGE

PRECISION ASR PRODUCTS

AMERICAN SAFETY RAZOR CORP. • BROOKLYN 1, N.Y.
the one who’d slashed Stacia Jenn. The Mystery Hands weren’t even cold yet. She’d been murdered within the hour.

Like any gambler who’s in so deep he can’t be worse off if he loses everything I decided on double or nothing. I’d go for the senor and Inez as my only guarantee of an out.

It seemed queer nobody had noticed the light in the dressing room or heard our kilkenny set-to. The fireworks were responsible. Their noise and lighting effects had covered our little sideshow completely.

I got her out of the dressing room with no more combat. In the deep shadows behind the mobile transmitter trucks somebody moved. If I put Inez between me and that vague blur of movement would anybody blame me.

"Hi," I called.

A voice answered “Hello”—not a voice with an accent. We pushed along toward the taxi.

"Get it right, senorita. One more play like that and you’ll go to trial in a hospital cot."

She moaned. "My ankle—it pains."

"You’ll hurt more before you stop hurting." It was a long way to the parking lot. She limped and whimpered and I didn’t bother about it one bit.

WHEN we were rolling toward the Merritt again, I bore down. “You tried to hand me a lot of mahooly about the senor’s having those banknote plates. He didn’t even know where they were. You told me Stacia Jenn was San Lasquez’s sweetie.”

“She was, once,” Inez mumbled. “Not now though.”

“She’s nobody’s sweetheart now.” The old song seemed to fit. “But she never stopped being Luis San Lasquez’s sugar-cookie. That’s why your cutthroat chum sliced her to ribbons.”

“My chum—Senor San Lasquez?”

“Luis San Lasquez is down on a slab in the autopsy room on Twenty-sixth Street right about now.” I checked with Stacia Jenn’s address book, told the driver where to go. “Your slick side-kick—the one who looks enough like San Lasquez to be his twin—General Habado, huh?”

She kept quiet. I went on. “General Ramon Habado, sure. You were his gal-pal. How you managed to get in as San Lasquez’s secretary—I can make a guess.”

Inez made a hissing noise, through her teeth.

“Sex marks the spot, yeah," I said. "So Habado came over to the Plaza Royal tonight after you phoned him that San Lasquez was getting set to check out and possibly hide out somewhere—maybe with Stacia Jenn.”

“You are wonderful, dahrrrling!” She made the dahrrrling sound sarcastic.

“I’m a slow starter. I get better as I go along. So Habado came to C-Fourteen. You let him in. He tried to make San Lasquez give up the plates. Instead your ex-dictator boss put up a battle. Habado blew him apart with that Thompson.”

“You see too many exciting movies, dahrrrling!”

“Okay. You’d just stuffed the body in the trunk when we got wind of something sour up in the suite.”

She cried angrily, “You know everything! You have it all exactly right. Except—I did not help Ramon. I try to keep him from killing Luis. I am afraid when you detectives come, sir. I wish to get away from the hotel without being arrest, sir.”

“But now he have done this other horrible crime. I hate him with my heart. He is a monster. I will help you to catch him. You will let me go when you have Ramon? The police, they do not know about me. My picture was not on the vee-deo.”

The cab cut off the parkway, swung toward Grand Concource. “I might play ball with you—if you had something to offer, senorita. But you haven’t. I don’t even think you’re very bright to be living in the hotel with San Lasquez and not know where he had those plates hidden.”

It got under her skin. “He lied to me,” she complained. “One day he tol’ me they are right there in the apartment under lock and key. The nex’ day, he tell me they have never been out of his sight one single minute. We search the place top to bottom. The plates are not there. How can you trust a liar like that!”
MURDER BY TELEVISION

I said it was difficult to make a deal with somebody you couldn't believe.

THE cab pulled up in front of Castle-
reigh Court—one of those snazzy
apartment houses with an admiral out
in front to open the taxi door. I let him
help Inez out—but I kept tight hold on
her arm.

There was a drugstore on the corner
of the ground floor. I took her in, kept
a grip on her while I stepped into a
phone booth.

When I got through to Tim, he began
to bellow like a stuck porker, "Gil! You
know what? They got a warrant out
for you!"

"How cozy!" I calmed him as well
as I could.

"Harry Weissman says he'll fix your
wagon so it won't squeak for a long
time, boss. No fooling, he's going to
have you indicted on more counts
than—"

"Keep your shorts on, Tim." I hope
I sounded more confident than I felt. I
told him where I was, what I was after,
I added, "If I don't ring back inside
twenty minutes call out the reserves."
I hung up. "That does it, senorita."
"What?"
"Tim Piazolle—the one whose thumb
you chewed—he found those plates."

She didn't know whether to believe
it or not.

"They're in my office right now." I
steered her into the lobby of Castlereigh
Court. "And I'll give you any reasonable
odds you care to name your chum
Ramon is upstairs right now, hunting
for them."

We inquired at the switchboard. The
boy didn't think Miss Jenn was in. I
told him not to bother ringing—we were
expected. He said it was Apartment
Six A.

We went up.
I buzzed the buzzer. Drew blank.
"Do your stuff," I prodded Inez.
"Speak up to the man. He'll be right
inside, listening."

He was, too.

After she'd spied off some Spanish
at steen miles per minute—the door
opened an inch. The panther eyes peeked
out.

"Venga aca," he said for the second
time that evening—this time, empha-
sized with a simple .45.

CHAPTER VIII

PISTOL SCRATCHES

TACIA JENN'S apartment
must be quite a thing. I must
go back sometime and look at it.

All I got then was a hazy
impression of the advertising
lights on the Concourse as
they filtered through Vene-
tian blinds—and a lot of low-slung
divans, glasstop tables, mirrors, paint-
ings. Habado had thoughtfully switched
off the lamps before he let us in.

While he made up his mind what to
do he kept us in the dark—or me, at
least. I needed a cigarette. But it
didn't seem the right time to go for the
case in my coat pocket.

The General nudged me tactfully into
a chair that left my knees higher than
my head. A poor position from which
to start any of that jujutsu or judo stuff
they taught me in training camp. The
muzzle of the .45 was cold, against my
ear—not the best stimulus for clear
decisive thinking!

Habado jabbered away at Inez
in their Latin lingo. She quarreled with
him, ferociously. About what I couldn't
make out. All I got was his outthrust
chin, his sneering repetition of three
words, "Tiene usted miedo. Tiene usted
miedo."

"No!" She stood close to him, glaring
at those evil eyes. "No, I am not afraid,
Ramon. I tell you better way, that is
all."

I got it then via the General's gestures
with the gun! Their dispute was about
me! Whether my brains should be spat-
tered all over Stacia Jenn's shiny furni-
ture right then and there.

At that instant I'd have sold out very
cheap. Plainly the General wanted to
snap the switch on me pronto. There
was sufficient evidence he had no reluct-
ance to demising people.

I held my breath like a guy going
under water for the third time. The
only thin glimmer of hope was the way
Inez was facing into him. In English!
Only reason for her talking so I could understand it would be to give me some cue to action—at the indicated moment.

I didn’t miss a syllable of her tongue-lashing:

“It is so simple, Ramon. You are wanted for murder. I saw your picture on the vee-deo. Everybody will be hunt for you. They will catch you, too. You have no chance unless it is this one.”

She pointed to me. He laughed. I didn’t care for the tone of his humor.

She spat at him. “Hear what I say. This man, he is house detective in the hotel where Luis and I stay. He learn about the plates. He come to the suite, kill Luis. I am away. When I return it frighten me to find Luis dead. So I telephone you. You come to help me get rid of Luis’ body. When this one find you are with me, he bring his assistant to arrest us.”

Ramon’s mustaches quivered with amusement. I could see the white gleam of those thin animal fangs beneath the mustache.

“He allow us to overpower him. Take the trunk an’ bags to the station—but only so he can claim we are escape, eh?”

He shook his head. He didn’t think it would hold water. I didn’t believe she thought so either. But she had her reasons for keeping me alive.

“With Stacia,” she ratted on, “he is in worse situation. A cab driver will tell how he took this one up to Gayland. His fingerprints, they will be in the dressing room where you kill her. A boy saw us come out of that place.”

“An’”—she patted Ramon’s side coat pocket with a swift, searching gesture—“you have the buckle which everyone know belong to Stacia. You thought possible she concealed the engravings there. But no. Now, if this one is found with the buckle on him—”

He nodded. He thought it might be a neat idea—providing I was found stone cold dead in the morning.

“No, no.” She pointed vehemently. “The cab man, the boy downstairs, they know I come here with Mistair Vine. If he is foun’ dead, they will say I did it.” She kicked me in the shin. Not hard—just a sort of signal kick.

I said my two-bits worth. My mouth was dry as a Death Valley acre. But I managed to keep my voice steady.

“Don’t be dumb, General. You blew San Lasquez apart to get the plates for printing your government’s currency. You didn’t find ’em. You thought his girl might be hiding them for him.

“You went uptown, caught her in her dressing room just after she’d finished with that Stack O’Jack telecast, tried to make her tell you where they were. She didn’t know. You cut her to ribbons. Now you’re figuring on shooting me—when I’m the only one who can really give you the plates.”

He belted me with the gun barrel. It made my ears sing, blurred my eyes. But I had sense enough not to make the reflex comeback that would have brought a bullet in reply.

He clattered madly to Inez in their native jargon. She st-st-d—nodded vehemently. He stuck his ugly mug so close to mine I could smell his foul breath.

“Where did you find these engraving, eh?”

“I didn’t.” I made it as nonchalant as I could, under the circumstances. “My assistant, Timothy Piazolle, did. They were right there in the suite all the time you were hunting for them.”

“Where?” Another tap that loosened my teeth.

“Those big locks on the trunk.” I made it up as I went along. “I could tell they were new. The brass at the bottom was just a thin sheet to cover the copper.” It seemed to fit the only requirements I’d been informed about.

Inez exclaimed: “Then Luis did not lie to me! He said they were under lock and key yet always within his sight.”

The General scratched my jaw with the front sight of the pistol. “Where are thes plates now, amigo?”

“Tim put ’em in the upper right-hand drawer of my desk at the Plaza Royal.” I moved my shoulders up toward my ears. “But you have a fine fat chance of getting them if that Colt kills me.”

The General sniggered. “If I do not—how you say it?—kick you, how then would one obtain thes engraving, eh?”

“I’d deal,” I said. “You get the plates. I get to live a little longer. I can call Tim. Have him bring the copper goodies
from my office.”

“Not here,” Inez objected. “He would bring police, here.”

General Habado made his mustachios wiggle up and down. “He would trick us.”

“No tricks.” I wiped a trickle of blood off my chin. “I couldn’t afford to trick you. You decide where you want him to bring the plates. I’ll let you talk to him yourself—or the senorita can do it.”

She nodded. “You will stay here until we have them.”

“Oh, no,” I knew she’d try something like that. “Tim wouldn’t ever give them up unless I was around to okay. I go with you. Tim hands over the engravings. I walk out with him. That’s the only way I’ll do business.”

The General argued against it. He didn’t like it. Any scheme like that would end in his being caught. No, no, a million times no.

Inez put in the deciding vote. “You throw away a million dollars, no? That’s what it is if you do not make this arrangement.”

Ramon hesitated. Greed against fear. As always greed won hands down. “The Copaverra?” he inquired. “Possible. There I have certain fren’s. At the Copaverra one might be safe, eh?”

I said, “Anywhere you like. I’ll call Tim.”

“Wait. Not so eagerly.” Ramon pulled out an envelope, produced a pen. “Write what it is to say.”

I scribbled:

Timothy, this is Gil. I need your help. Meet me in twenty minutes at the Cafe Copaverra. Don’t tell anyone where you’re going. Bring the metal plates from the upper right hand drawer of my desk.

He read it carefully. So did Inez. They couldn’t see anything wrong with it.

“You will call the number.” Ramon hooked the .45 in the back of my collar. “You will read just what is on these paper. Nothing more—understand?”

I understood. I hoped to God Tim wouldn’t misunderstand. If he did bring

the blues I wouldn’t be around to know what went on.

We paraded to Stacia’s ivory handset. I dialed. But Ramon still had a slight surprise for me.

“I will hold the receiver,” he said. “To my ear. Then there will be no mistakes made, eh?”

My stomach felt as if I’d been socked by a kangaroo. It was too late to do anything about that.

CHAPTER IX

BETRAYED BY A STOOL

THE Copaverra is one of those tony taverns where scotch is two bucks a sniff. Preference is given to the stiff-shirt trade. Nobody would be welcome in the Copaverra at any time wearing a mussed-up business suit and a shiner. I didn’t care whether I was welcome or not.

The bar wasn’t full enough for them to throw us out though the halibut-eyed captain viewed the three of us with no enthusiasm. I had none myself.

They kept me in the middle—Inez on my left, the General on my right. Inez had the gun under a coat she’d borrowed from the late Stacia Jenn. I had the sweating jitters. All the way down in the taxi the General had snagged that gun had been in my side.

Tim wasn’t there when we went in—nor anyone else I recognized. I thought they’d take a table. But the General evidently wanted more freedom for action.

We took three stools at the bar. The barman must have thought I was a stranger to the polite niceties, letting the lovely creech sit on one side of me while the General crowded me on the other.

They ordered fundador. I never did care for Spanish brandy. Then it tasted like sulphuric acid. It was maybe two minutes before Tim strolled in. It could have been two hours so far as my nerves knew.

I saw him in the mirror, turned, waved. He came over.

“Ho,” he grunted. “You two?” He squinted at Inez, stared at the General.
“Careful,” I cautioned Tim. “They’re loaded.”

Habado preened his moustache.

She purred, “You bring them with you?”

Tim said way down in his throat, “I do what the boss tells me to. Sure I brought ’em.” His hand went to his hip.

Habado put a dainty hand on Tim’s sleeve. It would have been enough to distract Tim’s aim if he’d been meaning to pull a pacifier. “It weel not be necessary to explain that one will find no use for a gun, eh?”

I put in my oar hastily before Tim got sore and swatted the General’s fingers away. “Tim knows the score.”

Tim scowled at the South American. “There’s a juicy reward out for you, you know that?”

Habado leered. “You would not like to try to collect, no?”

“No,” Tim agreed gruffly. “But they got a television set here. Must be a dozen people recognized you already.” He inclined his head up toward the head of the bar.

I looked where he indicated. So did the other two. It hadn’t occurred to me a swankery like the Copaverra would go in for that Broadway bar-and-grill business. Most high-class places don’t care for video sets as part of their decor.

There wasn’t any set there but Habado took two full seconds looking for it—long enough for Tim to get the cuffs out of his pocket. Inez hissed a warning.

Habado’s hand flashed to his left armpit with the speed of a striking ferret. Inez slapped at his chest to keep him from getting the gun free. He got it free, fired it, at the same time.

Whether he thought she’d been involved in trapping him or whether it was merely that she’d shoved in between him and Tim Piazolle I wasn’t sure. The blast burned her eyebrows. The slug went in above her left eye.

Before she’d toppled off the stool—before the waiters had frozen and the barman ducked—Tim swung at him with the cuffs in his fist. He missed.

Habado slid off his stool like a snake, backed away, moving the gun in a short arc covering Tim, then me. I grabbed his stool by the top, lifted it. Habado aimed at my eyes.

I used the stool waiter-fashion, jabbed at him with the legs, got my weight behind it. The gun roared. My eyes stung from the flare. But that was all.

The upper leg of the stool hit him in the solar plexus. The opposite leg caught him hard—well, just where the other leg of a bar stool would.

He screeched, threw his head back, collapsed in Tim’s grasp. Tim hammered him twice on the whiskers for good measure before he rammed Habado up against the bar.

While the captain was howling for police and the waiters were piling in and the shooting had stopped Tim snapped on the handcuffs.

“Geeze, what a chance you took, Gil.”

“Which one?” I asked shakily.

“He had that gun pointed straight at your puss.”

“It was aimed too high.” I finished my fundador. It tasted okay, all of a sudden. “At my eyes. I was pretty sure the kick of that .45 would buck the gun up so it would only part my hair.”

“Oh, yeah?” Tim broke Habado’s pistol. “You’ll never have a closer call.”

“Speaking of calls,” I said, “thanks for interpreting mine right.”

“Interpreting my eye!” He waved at Harry Weissman coming in from the street. “Those bracelets were the only metal things in your desk besides paper clips.”

Harry Weissman rode me as far as Headquarters. “I got to execute that warrant, Gil.”

I said, “I came close enough to a real execution not to give a good damn about what happens from here in. What’s the charge?”

“Aiding and abetting a felon’s escape.”

“No one ever aided less. I chased the General all over town.” I felt too let down to dispute the point.

“From where I sat,” he said, “you didn’t give the authorities much help. You didn’t notify them when you found San Lasquez’s body in the hotel—or when the killers made a getaway.”

“Other things on my mind,” I answered.

“The Commissioner will want a lot
of explanations. F'rexamp if you weren't cooking up a dish with those two highbinders how'd you manage to wise up Piazolle to your predicament on the phone?"

"Timothy," I said wearily. "We have an understanding. Kind of thing you have to have around a hotel where you're dealing with guests who may be sensitive about house officers. Any time I call him Timothy he knows I'm tipping him off to play it cagey, to be careful what he says."

"Yuh?" He swallowed his toothpick, spat it out again. "If you think the big boys are going to go for a dilly like that—"

"I'll tell you what they might go for, Harry." We stopped at the big white stone building. "They might excuse a lot if they got those plates."

He banged the door of his coupe. "You know where they are?"

"Maybe," I said. "They might be right where I told the General they were. Behind the brass locks on that corpse-carrying trunk."

"What makes you think so?"

"The locks," I said crossly. "They were new. They had Yale keys. If you'd seen as much South American luggage as our porters bounce around in the Plaza Royal you'd know very few trunks down there have Yale locks. Something to do with customs regulations. So he most likely had those locks put on just to make a hiding place for his engravings."

"Anybody else know this?"

"Nobody. I don't even know it myself. I told the General just as a gag—to save my life."

"He hasn't talked since they took him to the hospital," Harry said. "If you got right on this—it might save you from a rap, Gil."

We went up and down a hall and into the Commissioner's office. The trunk was there—exhibit A as to the alertness of our police force, a trophy in the tug-of-crime between Washington and New York.

The plates were there too. Harry pried off the brass strips with his pocket knife. That was all there was to it.

The banknote engravings weren't even riveted on!

Harry said, "Gil helped me dope this out, Commissioner. I think maybe we ought to drop any charges, huh?"

The Commissioner and the two Inspectors and the Homicide Captain agreed that charges would be superfluous—as long as I wished no part of the credit for the recovery of the loot.

Perhaps, however, I might care to be cut in for a part of the reward for Habado's capture?

"Not any, thanks." I jingled the ring of master keys I'd taken from Habado before they carted him to the ambulance. "I've got my reward. All I want is something to tone down this shiner."

---

COMING NEXT ISSUE—ANOTHER EXCITING NOVELET BY

STEWART STERLING

Featuring Harbor Policeman Steve Koski on the Trail of a Waterfront Mystery in—

NICE NIGHT FOR MURDER

PLUS OTHER GRIPPING NOVELETS AND STORIES!
By LEW TALIAN

Imaginary Killer

MISERABLE. He felt sticky, the rain rolling over his body, his nose leaking no matter how many times he cleaned it. Little. His hard, narrow shoulders hunching as he trudged down Harrison street, the summer rain sometimes splashing ankle-high. Heart-sore. He didn't want to go home to his dingy two-room flat.

He hugged the soggy collar of the splotched sport coat closer about his throat and nearly broke into a run, but the thought of his room was unbearable and he continued his slow, steady march through the warm, beating downpour. A rib ached sharply as he suddenly

Tony was as brassy as a movie toughie—and he was certain his gun and one holdup would give him everything he wanted!
slapped the dripping collar away from his chin. He wiped at his face, his hand moving across the wet brim of his dark hat and flicking water across his eyes. Lowering his head, he stepped into a shadowy, smelly hallway.

Opening his jacket he took a handkerchief from his hip-pocket, careful not to dampen it on the drenched flaps of his coat. After clearing his burning nostrils, he inhaled deeply, his side still painning slightly.

He wondered if other people ever hurt themselves as he often did. Sometimes he’d angrily reach over to shut off the radio, and he’d wrench his arm—or strain a rib when pushing away a damp collar as he’d done just now.

His head felt light and heavy by turns. Curse this summer cold he had. All of the depressing annoyances of mankind he’d felt at one time or another. His nostrils burned slightly and he snorted, trying to blow away the tiny fiery stabs which were reaching down his throat.

Eyes watering, he looked out upon the street. There was just a faint movement to the gutter pools. The rain was stopping.

Hurry down the street he temporarily forget about his cold and soaked clothing. But the flame of the fire-throwing germ made him wretched with pain and sorry for himself. If, only, he had something to do, some place to go, he could put the cold out of his mind and the burning would dissolve or abate. But when he was moneyless he just had to suffer.

Lincoln Street was one of those short narrow streets which are so frightening to pretty social workers. Long, slender three-story brick houses stuck together like rotting waffles, flakey and painted harshly by the yellow of the sun and the more subtle colors of the atmosphere.

The second house from the corner was a neat wreck. Not a pipe or scrap of glass remained—only long, dripping, useless plaster-boards. Other houses were in semi-ruinous states. At the end of the street a beer sign marked a tavern and across the street a Pepsi-Cola sign shared the name of Ferdiando Lupente, a storekeeper.

Further down was visible the hazy beauty of a tree-lined intersecting boulevard, which had fine stone buildings of another era. There, most of the unions housed their local offices. Across this wide, nicely graded thoroughfare another street of houses sneaked along. Another lost street, disgracing some famous personage who’d have his name stricken from bent pole-markers if he were alive.

Into the house next to the demolished one went sniffing Tony Battio. The heat of July was still present in the foul, dirty hallway. He leaned against the round, damp newel post at the bottom of the slightly curved stairway. A large Greek family lived in the first floor flat. It seemed that the smell of burning sheep’s heads always fumed from their rooms.

Up a flight. The purer, spicier odors of greens and burning tomato pastes made Tony forget the tasteless rawness that creased the inside of his mouth. A large Italian family. Always arguing, cursing, beating each other. Made him a little ashamed. The Greek people never cursed and shouted obscene threats.

He smiled ruefully as he went up the darkening staircase. He didn’t understand Greek, so maybe in their own quieter, deadlier fashion they were being obscene and cursing too. He didn’t know. But he did know the Greek girl was sure pretty.

Third floor. The wail of the Japanese baby made him forget to inhale. This was his floor. He lived in the two-room front flat. The Japanese family which had just moved into the rear three-room flat were quiet and polite. He liked them in an awed, slightly reverent manner.

That dirty fat slob on La Salle street would do anything to collect another rent. What did it mean to him that connecting doors gave access to the only water closet on the third floor?

Tony walked down the narrow passageway and keyed open his door. He stepped in quickly and pulled the light cord, not looking at the ancient, unevenly mounted sink because roach-life was always to be observed when one switched on the light.

Over the garbage burner, two curved pieces of stove-piping met and smelled
into the leaking chimney slot. Black water streamed down the walls. In winter it wasn't so bad, thought Tony. Then you were cold and didn't care what you lived in, just as long as it was warm. But in summer—after a cooling rain, when you wanted to eat something cool and light and just rest—then these places were unbearable.

"Damn it."

He tore off the jacket, hurled it on the kitchen table, the legs squeaking as the jacket rolled across the table-top and smacked the wall. He pulled off his shirt, jerked suspenders away from his shoulders and allowed his pants to drop to the floor. He pulled down the shades and went to the sink.

After throwing glassfuls of water against the animals of the sink he began washing. In shorts, his legs not carefully spread because his shoes were soaked anyway, he began washing. Then he peeled the wet, moulidy shorts from his flanks, soaped, quickly rinsed and dried himself.

He donned clean underwear, a good pair of socks, his other pair of shoes, and with gentle ease he stepped onto a kitchen chair, his pants carefully held in his right hand. From this elevated position he stepped into the trousers, so as not to soil the cuffs on the floor.

Gingerly he stepped to the floor, the boarding creaking under his slight weight.

He pulled the light cord, opened the window, after slamming the shade up, and immediately an insect barrage grr-ed wildly inside. He grimaced savagely, slamming the window down when the fat winged animals showed no inclination to escape. They'd settled about the sugar bowl on the table and he looked around for something to destroy them.

A pulp magazine was the tool of destruction. He scraped the bodies away from the table, wincing at the bloodsmears. Even the most nauseous of living matter managed to stay fat, and could choose any place at all for their homes. Only the humans were damned.

He set the charred coffeepot on the little gas range, made a sandwich of lunch-meat and drank re-heated coffee. He had twelve dollars to his name. He was wearing his best clothing. Luckily he'd got a haircut before going to the bookie's this afternoon, so he looked presentable.

"Gotta get a better job," he said to the walls.

But he knew he was just talking. He'd slugged his way up to the sixth grade, then his old man had rapped him across the head for being a dummy and a loafer and sent him to work. The old man died soon after, and ma took him to Cleveland to live with her folks. The only thing he'd liked about Cleveland was the Indian ball club, which was as hopelessly mired in the second division as his own beloved White Sox.

At seventeen, he'd told his mother what he thought of her allowing her people to kick him around at will, and left.

DURING the war years he'd lived a fairly good life. Too thin, too nervous for the army, he'd worked in a war plant, making as much as a hundred dollars a week.

But after sixty hours in a snarling room of machinery and money-hungry people, he had to find some pleasure on his day off. The race track, the bookies, the card-sharks took his weekly earnings. He even went hungry in those money flushed days.

"Coulda had a Buick if I'd taken War Bonds," he said, watching an insect rise from the floor and circle the ceiling with steady, speedy precision.

Tomorrow was Sunday. Maybe he'd go to a show, fool around the Loop. Maybe some pretty girl'd make him kid around with her. But he was a little frightened by women. He'd always considered them dangerous.

"Go with 'em a couple times and you'll want to marry 'em," he always said to the scoffers at work. Yet, what could he give a wife?

"More important still," as he frequently snapped back to fortify his position, "ain't it worther'n a sin to put a kid in this world if you ain't got the right kinda money?"

Yes, Tony was a wonderful human. But in his heart he knew the real reason he didn't take a wife and have periodic flights into the realm of romantic forgetfulness. He just couldn't bear loving
somebody—especially a warm, soft woman. He just couldn’t. Something’d happen. She’d die, or he’d get sick. Something like that would happen.

Sometimes, late at night, when he couldn’t sleep and was listening to night club music on the radio, he’d imagine he was in one of those swell places. A beautiful girl was at his side, and the eating and drinking and smoking were over.

He’d pretend little love scenes. Like in the movies, there always was a cool, fragrant “outside place” connected with these night spots, and he’d take the girl outside.

One kiss would lead to another and pretty soon he was telling the girl that he loved her, that he couldn’t live without her. And then, either a radio talker or a station break shattered his mood and he felt weak and punctured, and not unhappy that it’d been only a dream. He’d go to bed, dulled to an unbelievable state, and rather grateful that tomorrow was all his.

But this was Saturday. Late afternoon Saturday. The big day for most fellows. He stared at the beautiful after-rain sunlight which filled and dazed his eyes.

The people downstairs started arguing and he hastily left the flat. His mind was made up. Actually he’d been unconsciously pondering the question for years. Now he knew he just had to do it. Prison was no worse than this. Dammit, maybe in prison he’d even find a friend.

The .32 revolver in his pocket seemed to pull the coat’s cloth away from his shoulder. Surely everybody must see it. But he was smart enough to know that people only see what they’re forced to view, and are not over-interested in small, cheaply clothed men.

He’d slipped the empty .32 into his pocket many a time in the past. Like a real gangster he’d felt. The radio’d be playing music and he’d light a cigarette, open the bottom drawer of the dresser and take the gun from among his clothes. If the gun were loaded, he would have been frightened to death of it. If the gun were loaded, he felt sure the thing would go off accidentally.

He just didn’t want to suffer any more. Death was a pleasant thought to him. And he always imagined it coming to him swiftly, unexpectedly, as if God would swat him down like an insect. This idea Tony had fully developed through the various summers he’d endured. He never told it to anybody for fear he’d sound arty.

He really worshipped Humphrey Bogart. The Dick Powells and George Rafts never gave him much of a jolt. He’d never considered the possibility that Bogart was a splendid, highly trained actor, that also he spoke memorized words like Powell and Raft. Words that had been written for pennies or dimes, but really for no other purpose.

Now he was going on a job. Okay, so what was there to be scared of?

He boarded a bus on the boulevard and breathed a sigh of relief when he noticed a set of vacant seats. The gun was in his right-hand pocket. Now there wasn’t the danger of anyone bumping against it.

In the Loop he entered a gaudy little tavern and listened to a pianist musically suulk. He’d never acquired a taste for liquor due to his lack of money. He sipped a beer, feeling sure that everyone in the partially filled room thought him a piker.

He went to the dice-girl who was ridiculous—in the sense that she looked and acted like a dice-girl.

She said, “Nice day out for duck huntin’.”

“Yeah.” Bogart would have said that. He lost two dollars and retired to the wash room. He inspected the gun in the privacy of a stall as if the weapon contained cartridges. The disinfectant wasn’t conducive to mental or physical breathing so he re-entered the barroom, lost two more dollars and went out into the false evening brightness.

It takes too long for it to get dark in summer, he thought. Certainly this time he was going to pull a job. He’d never taken the gun for a stroll before. He really couldn’t have sworn one way or the other—whether he was going to rob a passerby, stick up a store, or go home.

If he went “home,” he knew he’d never be able to dream any more. Always he’d promised himself that he would pull a job if things became unbearable.
With one, two, maybe three thousand dollars he could get a room in a nice hotel. Then he’d get a little business. Anything. A shoe shine stand, a newspaper spot on a corner. Anything. Just one heist. That he’d definitely promised himself.

There was a good stage show at the Chicago so he bought a ticket. He was nervous and slightly upset. He had six dollars and fifty cents left. God, let me get lucky. Just once.

It was smooth and black outside when he emerged from the theatre. The picture had been some stuff about a screwy dame who’d do anything to get a silly ba-ba of a moron. Nothing.

But the girl who’d assisted the comedian on the stage had been some girl! Wha-woo! What would a fellow give to meet something like that? Why, just talking or listening to her must be something! What a body! Was she mean? Was she nice? Was she no good?

He hoped she was good.

Don’t mean nothin’, he figured, that she said kinda dirty jokes and shook around like a burley dame. Maybe that was all she knew to make a livin’.

Another tavern. Two beers. Threer-fifty to the dice-girl. This dice-babe was different than the first one. She said “whom?” and glared at you when she caught you staring.

He didn’t like her very much. Least the other one was honest. Even God must really hate this kind.

He immediately forgot about God. God was the rainbow that appeared after a storm, or around the head lights of cars on dark, filthy nights. God was the one you prayed hopefully to when you were hopelessly in distress. That’s all.

God wasn’t very real to him. His parents hadn’t had much to do with Him—except to throw in His name whenever a heatful enough situation arose. That’s where Tony first heard God’s name—when his mother had copped her damning of the old man by adding God’s name to the obscenity.

But Tony wasn’t thinking of all this. His mind was filled with the images of the wondrous objects of earth. A cool, clean hotel (maybe with television!). A big dinner in the hotel dining room (while the ork did something soft). Of meeting a girl who knew how to say “whom.”

But that last vision made him slightly lower his head. Who’d take up with him? He didn’t know no good language, he thought, he sure as hell didn’t. But guys—say a real tough guy (Bogart flickered savagely throughout his mind)—always managed to make some wonderful babe love them.

Casablanca. There was a picture. Big gambling joint. What was his name in that one? Rickey. Sure, he knew. He remembered every one of bogus Bog’s actions. Every last one.

THE TIME was now. The dreams, the hopes, the desires, the hungers of Tony were forgotten.

Down there—off Clark Street. One of those combination sandwich-and-fruit stores. Nobody in it but a young-looking slick-haired fat man. Automatically Tony reached for his cigarette pack, and was fairly shocked to discover that he didn’t feel like smoking. The thought of inhaling smoke made him dizzy. He just didn’t know if he had the nerve to step in, show the gun, take and run. He just didn’t know.

He slowly walked down the dark street, the rumpha-aoogho of els soaring over his head. He heard them. He sniffed and smelled. He thought and prayed. His mind wasn’t a blank. He wasn’t hopped-up. He was coldly sane.

Then he thought of Lincoln Street, of his flat. Of the roaches that got into everything, his shorts, his socks, his pants pockets. Of the mice and rats that played under his bed. Of the cat-and-rat fight he’d seen. The rat had won! Gee, who’d ever believe that?

He was halfway to the store. No neon sign on the joint. The street light showed the name Pepsi-Cola, also the name DiBono. Italian.

He was noting everything tonight. What was the difference? He lived in the same joint with Greeks and Japanese. Maybe he was a better man than Drive people.

His head ached. It always did when he thought, when he thought too much. That last idea was sorta all wrong. All the different kinds of people lived together because they were all damned.
"Lord." He was almost there now. Two more steps and he would’ve passed the store. He wheeled, entered the store.
"Yes sir?"
"Uh—gimme a pack of Spearmint."
"Yes sir."
He tumbled the little package into his gun pocket and went away. Other places had more money. Why hit a poor cop-patriot? Guy might even get heart-failure if he saw a gun.
The long, black ride back home. Watching the laughing couples go into this fancy-fronted pizza joint and that one. Pizz, dough and tomato. He slowly crossed the boulevard, started the walk along Lincoln Street, nodding to no one and still getting cheery greetings.
"Go to Sox Park, Ton?" yelled a little boy.
Tony grinned. "No. What’d they do?"
"Lost—but Seery hit two homers!"
"That Irishman’s good." He gave the kid a quarter and watched him run to Ferdo’s store. Dixie-cup, maybe a Pepsi or Coke. Maybe some cake. Kids and dogs liked him.
The Greeks’ hard bodied little white dog raced around him in a frenzy. "Easy, Mr. Brown, easy. Here Browny, down. That’s it, boy." He patted the dog’s head and tickled its ears. "Easy, boy, whatsa matta?"
"Play," said the Greek old lady. "He think everybody wanna play."
"He’ll dirty your clothes," said the Greek girl.
Tony grinned up at her and saw the blush, the pretty young blush which started around the gentleness of the throat and crept into her wavering eyes and blinded him.
"It’s okay." He sat on the second stone stair of his house, hearing the old lady and the daughter rustle over to the wooden bench placed on the stoop’s platform. Greeks are strict. Wouldn’t want the girl to get in any trouble.
"Did you see a show, Tony?"
He brought out his cigarette pack, not looking up. "Yeah."
"Downtown show?"
"The Chicago."
"Good floor show, huh?"
He threw the match away, veering from the smoke and rising. "Fair."
The old lady intently watched the kids running along the curb. A Ford cop-car rolled slowly around the corner and continued toward the boulevard. The old lady spoke harshly in Greek.
Tony nodded for no good reason at all.
"Cops have been around all night," said the girl.
"They always are."

She wore a loose summer frock of a dark green shade. Her feet were in heelless shoes and only the cleanliness of her face and the careful hair mold gave her any sparkle. He wanted to kiss her, to walk with her, their hands clasped and swinging a little bit. He would have proposed. He knew it.
The old lady rattled in Greek. The girl rose, touching her dress and quickly putting it into place around her legs.
"It’s getting late. Night, Tony."
"Good night."
The old lady waited for the girl to enter the stink of the hallway and then followed. "Let Browny in when you come," called the girl.
"Okay," he shouted, looking around for Browny.
The kids across the street were playing tag with the dog and from time to time the happy pup would flop on his belly and happily lick coolness from the pavement. He called to the dog and the pup came leaping across the street. Tony played with the panting creature and gently shooed him into the corridor. He opened the basement door, but the dog balked.
"Gowan, you wanna stay out all night?"
Whining, the dog smugled between his legs. He had to pet it a little longer.
"Okay, down, go ahead."
Meekly the dog went down the stairs and he shut the door. He went up to his room and, cursing, snapped the light cord. He glared at the roaches.
He slapped them away, drank two glasses of water. He opened all of the windows. He screwed on the radio. Crazy jive. Nothing else tonight. Just jive.
He took off his coat, threw it on the bed. The gun slid into view. The music was hot and as alive as the African bush, slithering and croaking and screaming and moaning.
He shouted curses, grabbing up the gun and pointing it at his temple. Again and again he pulled the trigger, wishing it were loaded.

Then he listened. Jumped up, jamming the gun under the pillow. Someone was knocking on the door. He opened it.

"Ton—" The Greek girl held a pitcher of lemonade, the cool icy shade of pale yellow moving as the ice swayed inside of it. "Mama thought it'd be nice if you'd take some. Most of the family's away visiting. Care for some? I made too much—forgot."

"Thanks." He looked at the sink. Only one roach. He took the water glass from the sink. He rinsed it slowly, ignored the roach. He held out the glass. The tinkle of glass. The grateful sigh.

"Tony."

He smiled, touching her soft shoulders. The pitcher shook between her hands. "Devil of a way to spend a night." He kissed her gently.

She turned and swiftly went down the stairs, the ice clanking inside the glass pitcher as wildly as her heart.

"Crazy dame," he said, and took off his clothes, went to bed, forgetting he'd placed the gun under the pillow.

The Japanese baby started to cry, and somebody slammed a door downstairs. Somebody yelled. But Tony didn't mind. He didn't need music in order to dream tonight. He had a warm, sweet taste around and inside his mouth—and he'd forgotten about his cold.

Tomorrow he'd sell the gun, and he'd have enough to get by for the week—and maybe enough to bring a cake downstairs and ask if it was all right if he took the girl out. He wasn't a hoodlum. The old lady couldn't object. Everybody on the block knew he was a right guy. Every day he went to work.

And he smiled, pushing his face deeper into the pillow. She could be beside him, always.

And he closed his eyes till the idea struck him and had to open them again. Maybe she wasn't asleep yet.

He rolled from bed, hastily jumping into shoes, forgetful of socks. Up came his pants, suspenders over shirtless shoulders. Down the stairs.

Slowly he looked at the little glass over their door. No light. But it was summer—too hot with the lights on. Maybe they were on the back porch.

He stared at the door. He couldn't knock. What could he say when they answered?

The whine of the dog startled him. He went to the basement door, opened it quietly. The dog plunged into his legs, scouted madly, leaped upon him.

"Shh." He quickly went out the front door, closing the door behind him.

The dog pawed at the door, then went to its master's door. The door opened.

"Brownie! You still out!" It was the girl. Her!

The dog whipped about her skirts.

"Ma," called the girl, "I'm putting Brownie downstairs."

A burst of Greek.

"Come on, Brown." She closed her apartment door before the dog could dart in. Tony opened the front door and stepped inside the hall. The dog ran out the front door and he carefully closed the portal again.

"Ton—"

"Hot tonight," he whispered.

"So darn hot, Tony."

He pressed his face against hers and soon found her lips.

"Get Brownie."

He went out, whistled, and the dog came running. He opened the front door and quickly the girl dispatched Mr. Brown into the basement.

"Your old lady didn't come out," said Tony. "She gettin' to trust you?"

"She asked me to bring the lemonade to you."

"Honest?"

"She likes you—I think, because I like you." And she hugged him.

"Your brothers and old man sure love me."

"Oh, them!" She touched his nose with her lips and kissed his eyelids. "I don't care. I'm glad they don't like you. I don't want you to be like them. I only want to love you."

They just held hands, breathing and listening to their heart-beats, which were as heavy and in perfect accord as a Cathedral's bells.

"I love you."

"I love you."
Mr. Brown's Bare Feet

By J. LANE LINKLATER

Three strange visitors create mystery at Digger's Hollow, mystery that young Peter Rhoades must solve—in a hurry!

There are few places in the world more lonely, and none hotter, than Digger's Hollow in mid-July. A road manages to struggle over that way from Silver Hill. Another, even narrower, road runs up from that point to the mountains some miles away, where a few stubborn prospectors still make holes in the ground.

Digger's Hollow consists of a small road-side cafe, with five cabins to the rear of it. It is run by Pop and Mom Parrish. A small group of cottonwoods, the only trees for miles around, give
meager shade.

That is all there is to Digger's Hollow except for a flimsy building occupied by young Pete Rhoades, who, at first glance, looked sensible enough, in spite of the fact that he sweltered at Digger's Grove when he could just as well have been cooling himself pleasantly in the sea breezes a couple of hundred miles away.

Pete, a tall, rather rugged young man, tanned and toughened in the desert wind, actually liked the life. As an excuse for being there he dug around for rock and gem specimens, which he sold occasionally to collectors.

It was about eight o'clock that evening, and already dark, when Pete walked into the cafe and sat down.

"What'll you have, Pete?" said Wanda Parrish, who was Mom's and Pop's only daughter.

"A steak and french fries," Pete said.

"And tell me what's worrying you."

Wanda did, as a matter of fact, look worried. She was a pretty girl, rather small, with dark brown eyes and softly-waving hair. Probably when she reached forty, Pete thought, she'd get a little plump, which was all right with him.

He thought it was pretty nice of Wanda to come out to Digger's Hollow to be with Mom and Pop in the summer, the worst time in the year. The rest of the time she was attending college in Los Angeles.

NO ONE else was in the cafe. At this time of year the cafe did very little business. Pop refused to close in the summer only out of loyalty to the tough old prospectors who depended on him for supplies.

"Worried?" said Wanda. "Oh, I don't know."

Pete scowled. "Must be something." He looked up at her. "You have guests, don't you? I noticed three cars in the lot out back."

"Yes. Three men drove in this afternoon. They all took cabins."

"Three? Were they together?"

"No. They drove in about an hour apart."

"Do they know each other?"

"I don't know. They act kind of funny, somehow. Each one has a separate cabin."

"'M. Do they look like rock-hounds, or prospectors?"

"No. They don't look like desert men at all. They look—oh, sort of slickish. I don't like them."

Pete was silent. This was certainly unusual. This was rather a favored part of the desert for rock-hounds on the hunt for specimens, but people of that kind didn't show up until fall, and through the winter; never in the heat of mid-summer.

Wanda, still looking worried, vanished into the kitchen. In a moment Pete got up and walked back there, too. He often did that to keep Wanda company while she was cooking. This time, however, he walked on back until he came to the living room door.

He quietly opened the door a few inches and squinted in.

Pop and Mom Parrish were sitting in there. They were not reading, nor listening to the radio, nor talking to each other. They merely sat silently, gazing glumly into space.

They made, Pete thought, a perfect picture of two people in trouble.

Pete was sorry about that. He liked Pop and Mom. Pop was tall, rangy, with a narrow, serious face. He was usually quiet, and rarely laughed, except when Mom kidded him into it. Mom was plump and cheerful—usually—and hearty in her ways.

Wanda finished fixing Pete's dinner. They both went back to the cafe. Pete ate, not saying much. Wanda sat and watched him, saying even less.

It was all very quiet. Yet there was a feeling of tension in the air, strumming through Pete's head like a telephone wire in the wind.

He looked up suddenly. "Say, these three visitors must have registered. What are their names?"

Wanda smiled curiously. "Mr. Smith, Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones."

Pete stared. "Say that again."

"Mr. Smith, Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones."

"'M. Phonies, huh? What cabins are they in?"

"Smith in One, Brown in Three, Jones in Five."

Pete started to get up, then sat down again. "Say, where are they supposed
to come from?"

"Mr. Smith is from Chicago. Mr. Brown is from St. Louis. Mr. Jones is from New York."

Pete grinned. "Well, well." He got up again and moved away to the door. "See you later, honey. Maybe we can take a little walk before bedtime, huh?"

"Maybe."

Outside, Pete stood on the road, in the darkness.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones! Well, well. What in the world were they doing here?

Well, it certainly looked as if they were using Digger's Hollow for a hideout. The obvious thought was that they were crooks, had done something desperate and had had to disappear. This would be a perfect place for them.

But why had they come here? How had they known about Digger's Hollow?

Perhaps because one or more of them knew Pop and Mom Parrish!

It was not a happy thought.

Well, the thing to do was to take a look at Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones.

The cabins back of the cafe were ranged in a rough semi-circle. Number One faced Number Five. Number Two faced Number Four. Number Three was by itself down at the other end.

Numbers Two and Four, of course, were dark. There were lights in the other three.

Pete looked at Number One.

The window was open. The heat of the night made that imperative; had it been closed, anyone inside would have been stifled. The neat cretonne curtains, however, were drawn across it. And those curtains would keep the cabin uncomfortably hot. That could mean only that Mr. Smith did not want anyone looking in on him.

But the same was true, Pete noticed, of Numbers Three and Five. So both Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones also craved concealment.

Pete knocked on the door of Number One.

Inside, footsteps slurred along the linoleum. A moment of silence. The door opened a little, warily.

The eyes looking out at Pete were bloodshot. There was fear in them, fear, approaching panic.

Pete said genially: "Hello, Mr. Smith. Like to talk to you."

He pushed in. Apparently Mr. Smith's uncertainty was all that permitted the entry. Pete was inside. Mr. Smith hesitated, looked sharply at Pete, then hurriedly bolted the door.

"What you want to talk about?" Mr. Smith said huskily.

Pete took his time. He looked at Mr. Smith, noted that he was a medium-sized man whose sallow skin was drawn tightly across the jutting bones of his face. The face was wet with neglected sweat.

Mr. Smith was fully dressed except for his jacket which was draped carefully over the end of the bed.

Mr. Smith's suitcase was standing against the wall. It was strapped and fastened.

Pete heard a drip—drip—drip!

That would be the water faucet in the tiny bathroom just beyond the drapes in the corner. Each of the cabins was equipped with such a bathroom. The water was piped all the way from the foothills in the distance.

"I understand you're from Chicago," Pete said. "I used to live there. Like to talk about the old home town."

Mr. Smith eyed him with suspicion. "Who," he said, "are you?"

"Name is Pete Rhoades. I live here. My shack is about a hundred yards back. I'm in the rock business."

"Rocks?"

"Yes, sir. Gem specimens. I dig 'em out of the desert. You can get good stuff around here. Especially topaz. I find—"

"Look," cut in Mr. Smith. "I'm tired. I want to rest. Don't feel like talking. How about you getting out of here?"

"Well, okay," said Pete, looking disappointed. "If you say so."

Mr. Smith was crowding him toward the door. As Mr. Smith turned momentarily, however, Pete did catch a glimpse of the gun stuck in the hip pocket.

Pete stepped out. As soon as the door was closed, he heard the bolt being shot back into place.

Pete stood in the middle of the yard. Well, that for Mr. Smith. The guy was unsociable and unfriendly, and didn't
want to talk.
So how about Mr. Brown?

Pete walked down to Number Three. He knew that, should anyone be watching him, he would be perfectly visible. The light of the moon bathed the yard in a whitish light.

He knocked on the door.
Pete noticed the window curtains move a little.

He heard the bolt being released. The door opened. Mr. Brown, too, was inclined to be coy, opening the door just a few inches. With a quick glance, Pete noticed that Mr. Brown was a large man, of bulky build, with a meaty face. He was wiping sweat from his face with a handkerchief which was already sodden with moisture. He was wearing nothing but brown slacks; not even an undershirt.

Even his feet were bare. No shoes or socks.

Pete explained who he was, and said he understood Mr. Brown was from St. Louis, and he was an old St. Louis boy himself and would like to talk to someone from the old home town.

Scowling, Mr. Brown considered this. Then he admitted Pete. When they were both inside, he carefully bolted the door and sat where he could watch the window.

Mr. Brown swabbed his face. "This is the dirtiest, hottest, thirstiest spot I've ever seen," he grumbled.

"I like it," Pete said.

"You can have it." He peered at Pete shrewdly. "You know these people who run this dump?"

"Mom and Pop? Sure."

"Uh-huh. How long they been here?"

"About seven years. That's five years more than I."

Mr. Brown was silent, thoughtful.

Pete looked around and was impressed with Mr. Brown's untidiness. His suitcase was open and the contents—odds and ends of clothing—were scattered all over the bed.

Suddenly Mr. Brown seemed to make up his mind that he had nothing to learn from Pete.

"Look, boy," he said. "I don't feel too good. And I'm too thirsty to talk. How about taking a powder?"

"Okay," said Pete. "If you say so. I sure would like to talk about good old St. Louis, though."

Mr. Brown didn't care about St. Louis. He was showing Pete out. Pete heard the door being bolted. Well, Mr. Brown didn't have a gun stuck in his hip pocket, Mr. Brown's fat hip leaving no place for a gun there.

He did have a gun, though. Pete had seen the business end of one peeping out from under the pillow on the bed.

Things were not going very well, it seemed to Pete. He had learned practically nothing from either the lean and nervous Mr. Smith nor the burly and surly Mr. Brown.

So how about Mr. Jones?
Pete moved back to Number Five. He rapped on the door.

The door opened very promptly, and fairly wide. Not only that, but he was greeted with a smile. Mr. Jones was in his shirt sleeves, and he was sweating, but it didn't seem to bother him.

"You wish to see me, sir? Come right in."

He admitted Pete, closed the door quickly, and bolted it.

Surprised, Pete studied Mr. Jones. He was fairly tall, and bony. The horse-like structure of his face was emphasized when he smiled, which he did constantly, disclosing large teeth.

Pete was puzzled by the reception, until it occurred to him that probably Mr. Jones had been peeking out through the windows and watching him.

Pete explained who he was. "I understand you're from New York," he said. "I'm an old New Yorker myself, Mr. Jones. I'd like to talk about the old home town."

"A natural feeling, sir."

Mr. Jones rubbed his hands until the sweat in his palms squished.

Pete glanced about the room. Everything tidy. Mr. Jones' coat was folded neatly over the bedstead. There seemed to be nothing else to see. There wasn't even a suitcase in sight.

"You've just come from New York?" Pete inquired.

Mr. Jones leaned his head over thoughtfully. He appeared to be sizing Pete up in a fatherly way.
Then he smiled broadly. “You don’t really care about that, my friend. I think you’re just curious. You’re wondering why I’m here. Isn’t that so?”

Pete was embarrassed. “Well, yes, I guess so.”

“That’s natural, sir. And I’m going to tell you!” He lowered his voice. “Because, sir, you appear to be a law-abiding citizen. I am here because of your other two visitors.”

“You mean Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown?”

“Exactly. Mr. Smith is in Number One and Mr. Brown in Number Three. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Jones nodded slowly. He had become serious.

He said: “You’ve talked to both of them?”

“Yes.”

“They didn’t tell you anything, did they?”

“Not a thing.”

“As I expected. That is because they dare not talk. They are both bad.”

“Bad?”

“Indeed, yes. Mr. Smith, sir, is a thief. Mr. Brown is not only a thief, but a killer.” Mr. Jones smiled gravely. “You wonder how I know? It is because I am a detective. I represent the Jewelers’ Protective League. Both of these men are involved in a jewel robbery. We have no proof, however. My employers are more interested in recovering the jewelry than in arresting the culprits. That is why I am following them.”

Pete lighted a cigarette to cover his nervousness.

Mr. Brown went on: “I am telling you this because I may have to go for help. The nearest telephone is at Silver Hill, is it not?”

“That’s right. It’s a couple of hours’ drive back.”

“So I thought. And there is no way out of this part of the desert except by Silver Hill?”

“That’s right. The road doesn’t go any farther than here. Anyone strange to the country would soon get lost if he tried to get out any other way except back by Silver Hill.”

Mr. Jones nodded again. “That is good. Well, some time tonight I may leave quietly for Silver Hill. I am telling you this so you and the good people who operate this place may be on their guard.”

“Thank you,” said Pete.

Mr. Jones seemed to have nothing more to say. Pete backed out. He heard Mr. Jones bolt the door.

He had observed that Mr. Jones, too, had a gun. It had been resting on the window sill, partly concealed by the curtain.

Pete first walked out to the road. The cafe was dark now, the front door locked. Looking along the rough road to Silver Hill, he realized more than ever before what a lonely, remote spot Pop and Mom Parrish had chosen to live at.

He walked back around to the rear, knocked on the back screen porch door. Pop came out to the door and let him in. Pop seemed suddenly to have become an old man.

He said quietly: “We’ve been waiting for you, Pete.”

He took Pete into the living room, and they sat down. Mom was still there, in the same chair. Both Pop and Mom were gray-faced, eyes shadowed with strain.

Pop said: “Let’s talk low. I don’t want Wanda to hear this. She’s in her room now, reading.” He peered at Pete gravely. “I’ve been watching through the back screen door. I saw you visiting the cabins.”

“That’s right, Pop,” Pete said apologetically. “I got curious.”

HE TOLD them just what he had found out, which was mostly from Mr. Jones.

Pop frowned. “That part about the jewel robbery is right, I guess.” He looked at Mom, who was watching him with a troubled gaze. He said: “I’m going to tell you something, Pete, that I hoped I’d never have to tell anyone. It’s about Wanda.”

“Wanda!” Pete almost jumped. “What in the world do you mean?”

“Wait a minute. She’s done nothing wrong. She—well, she’s tops so far as we’re concerned. We love her just like she was our own.”
"Whoa! You're telling me Wanda is not your own child?"

"That's right, Pete. Wanda was born in a little town in Indiana, where we were living at the time. Her mother was a friend of Mom's, a very fine young woman. Her father was a young fellow who was no good at all. He got caught in a bank hold-up and was sent up. Wanda was about six months old.

"Well, Wanda's mother was in very poor health, an invalid. She wanted to break with her husband, for Wanda's sake as well as her own. She gave Wanda to us. We adopted Wanda."

"Wanda doesn't know this?"

"She doesn't even suspect it. Before her father was due to come out of the penitentiary, her mother moved to a little town in Ohio. We moved west to San Francisco. We had a small cafe there for several years, and then for a few years more in Los Angeles. Then we came out here. We made the moves to make it difficult for Wanda's father to locate us. But some months ago he found out where we were. He drove out here one day. Wanda didn't know it because she was attending college."

"How did he find out?"

"He traced Wanda's mother to her home in Ohio. You see, we write to her once a year to let her know how Wanda is. He searched her house one day while she was out and found the last letter we had written."

PETE shook his head and said, "You mean one of these visitors is Wanda's father?"

"The one," said Pop, "who calls himself Mr. Smith."

Mom muttered bitterly: "I wish he was dead!"

It was the first thing she had said. And it came from the bottom of her heart.

Pop went on: "I'll tell you what happened this afternoon. About three o'clock a man drove in and said he was tired and wanted to rent a cabin. He registered as Mr. Brown. We put him in Number Three.

"About four o'clock another man drove in. It was the so called Mr. Smith—Wanda's father. Wanda didn't see him because she was back in her room. He talked to Mom and me. He seemed badly scared. He said he had been mixed up in a jewel robbery in Los Angeles and that other members of the gang figured he was squealing on them. He said he found out they had hired a killer to come out from the East to kill him.

"So that's why he came out here—to hide out from this killer. He claimed he didn't know who the killer was. Of course we were pretty sure about him coming here, but what could we do? He said if we didn't help him he'd tell Wanda who he was.

"Well, I agreed to let him use one of the cabins. He took Number One. At that time I didn't even think of the other fellow, Mr. Brown, who was already in Number Three—didn't dream he had any connection with it.

"Then, about five o'clock, this third man, Mr. Jones, drove in and wanted a cabin. Well, Mom and me were back here, talking things over, and Wanda was out front. She didn't know what was going on, of course, so she had the fellow register and put him in Number Five."

"When he registered," Pete cut in, "he'd see the other two registrations on the registry, wouldn't he?"

"Of course. Well, when I heard about it I knew something was rotten—we haven't had three strangers drive in and take cabins for years. It never happens this time of year. So I went back to Number One and told Mr. Smith—we might as well call him that. When he heard about the other two, he got the jitters bad."

Pete said: "He figures one of them is the killer?"

"Right."

"But he doesn't know which one?"

"He says not. He could be lying. But he's sure there was a leak somewhere and the gang found out where he was heading for."

"Looks like it," Pete said. "But can't he get out of here—make a run for it?"

Pop said: "He wants to. But you know how hard it would be to get away from this place without getting caught. Right now he won't leave his cabin. The trouble is there's no way to get out of the cabin except by the door or window.
and they both open on the yard in plain
sight of the other cabins. And he'd
have to get to his car, which is out
back."

"I hope," Mom said violently, "the
killer gets him!"

"Now, Mom," said Pop, "we can't
take that attitude. It would be plain
murder."

"Oh, I know, I know," mourned Mom.
Pete was silent. He knew they had
told him this only because they were
desperate, and hoped that somehow he
might be able to help them.

While they watched him anxiously, he
got up and strolled out to the back porch.
Looking through the screen, he could
see the entire yard.

It was deathly quiet out there. The
whitish light of the moon still shimm-
ered. The dust in the yard looked
almost like fine snow.

Lights still glowed behind the cur-
tains of Number One, and Number
Three, and Number Five.

BEHIND those curtains stood three
men, each watching for some move-
ment of one of the others; and waiting
for—what?

Suddenly Pete went back to the living
room.

He said: "Listen, folks. I'm going
out. I'm going to try something. I won't
tell you what. You just bolt your doors.
And, no matter what happens, don't un-
bolt them, until I say so. Just stay right
where you are."

Pop and Mom looked at each other,
dubiously. But as they turned to look at
Pete again, he could see in their eyes a
faltering glimmer of hope.

Pete walked out through the back
porch. Outside, in the shadow of the
wall, he waited until he heard Pop bolt
the door from the inside.

Noiselessly, Pete slipped around to
the back of the cabins. From there he
raced across the dusty space to his own
shack. He dug out a gun, a small auto-
matic, which he slipped into his pocket.
He picked up also a stout wrench, which
he carried in his hand.

From his place he could look back and
see the little group of cabins, flanked
by the ragged line of trees.

He hurried back.

He stopped behind cabin Number
One. Mr. Smith, no doubt, was still in-
side, cowering, the sweat forced out of
him by both the heat of the night and
fear of the killer.

Pete stood still for a moment, think-
ing.

This was vital. It all depended on how
accurately he had sized up the situation.
What was the relationship of these
three men? Mr. Jones had said that he
himself was a detective, that Mr. Smith
was a thief, that Mr. Brown was both
thief and killer.

Had Mr. Jones told the truth?
Pete came to a decision. He felt along
the back wall of the cabin, low, near the
ground, until he came to the water
pipe. Carefully, he used his wrench.

Then he moved until he was in the
space between Number One and Num-
ber Two.

CABIN Two was dark. By standing
close to it, Pete was well concealed,
but could still watch the others. He
wondered how long he would have to
wait. He wondered how long Mr. Smith
could stand the strain.

He hated Mr. Smith. He felt just as
Mom did, that Mr. Smith would be much
better off dead. Yet Pete felt that he
himself could not kill the man. The fel-
low was, after all, Wanda's father. And
even if Wanda never found out the
truth, he could not go through life with
the knowledge that he had personally
killed this Mr. Smith.

Yet he hated him, and hoped he would
not live the night through.

Pete was motionless, scarcely breath-
ing. For a long time.

The night was still sweltering. This
was desert heat at its worst. Digger's
Hollow was not high desert. It was a
sunken spot in the vast Mojave Desert.
The heat of the day did not begin to
leave it until morning, and by that time
a new hot sun was coming up again
with smothering intensity.

Already Pete's lips were dry and his
tongue woolly with thirst. He should,
realized, have brought water with
him. But this was something to which
he had become accustomed; he could
control it—for awhile.

Mr. Brown would be hot, but he had
water in his cabin with which to quench his thirst.

And Mr. Jones would be hot, but he, too, had water.

Mr. Smith would be hot. And now he had no water.

How long could he stand it, with all moisture sapped from his quivering body by both the heat and his own hysteria?

Mr. Smith stood it for about two hours.

It was just about midnight when the light in Mr. Smith's cabin snapped out. Pete tensed warily. Mr. Smith could be going to bed, but it was most unlikely. No, Mr. Smith wanted something wet and cold for his swollen tongue, and he could get it only by going out of his cabin.

He would have to turn his light out, or his leaving would be too plainly visible to Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones.

Almost at once, Mr. Brown's light snapped out.

And, an instant later, Mr. Jones' light snapped out.

No lights anywhere now. Even the light in Pop's living room was not visible from the yard.

Pete waited.

The first sound came from nearby. It was Mr. Smith's door. The door was being opened with great care. Pete moved forward very slightly. He caught a glimpse of Mr. Smith, who was furtively edging out of his door.

Mr. Smith was outside now. He gently closed his door.

He waited for a moment, his body pressed against the cabin door. Then he shot away from there, as if propelled, and raced for Pop's back screen porch.

Pete retreated again, just a foot or two, and kept close to the side of the cabin.

He heard something rattle. That would be Mr. Smith, now at Pop's screen door. He had found it fastened.

He wanted to get in there, desperately. He didn't dare shout. All he could do was shake the screen door, discreetly.

Silence came again.

Mr. Smith would have to come back soon.

Pete, his gaze darting about, from Mr. Brown's cabin to Mr. Jones', was fastened suddenly on Jones' cabin. Mr. Jones' door was opening.

Mr. Jones came out.

He stood just outside his door for a little while, motionless. Pete sensed rather than saw that Mr. Jones' eyes were searching the yard.

Then Mr. Jones moved. His long legs took him rapidly across the yard. He reached Mr. Smith's door. He was quiet for a moment. Then Pete heard the door being opened.

Mr. Jones was now in Mr. Smith's cabin.

Pete remained still. Mr. Jones was very busy in Mr. Smith's cabin. He was, Pete thought, in a hurry. Pete could hear scratchings and rustlings inside.

There was still no sign of Mr. Brown. Pete wiped sweat out of his eyes. He took his gun out of his pocket and let it hang at his side.

Sounds of running came to him. He pushed his face forward a little to look. Then he pulled back again.

It was Mr. Smith. Pete couldn't see Mr. Smith now, but he could hear him. Mr. Smith was breathing painfully, gasping, sobbing.

Heat and fear had driven Mr. Smith frantic.

The sounds in the cabin had ceased. Pete listened intently. He heard the latch click as Mr. Smith opened the door and stepped in.

Mr. Smith was still breathing heavily. Then he seemed to stop breathing completely, as if he was just standing there, inside the door, the breath caught in his throat as he stared into the darkness.

Pete, pressed against the outside of the wall, found that he was holding his own breath. Again there was that complete silence.

It came then, a sharp report inside the cabin that tore the silence to shreds. Then came a thump.

Pete edged forward a few inches. He still waited. There was no sound from Cabin Number Three, no sign of the big burly Mr. Brown.

There were noises again. Someone was coming out of Mr. Smith's cabin. Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones?
Pete didn’t dare crane his neck far enough to see. But whoever it was moved silently along the front of the cabin, away from Pete, toward the far corner.

So far as Pete could judge, the man stopped there.

Pete thought quickly. He knew that he could have made a mistake, that he had been guessing. He started to move forward, then stopped.

He had caught a movement from Cabin Number Three. Mr. Brown was now on the move, but he was being very quiet about it.

Rapidly, Pete moved back, turned along the rear of the cabin to the corner beyond. Cautiously, he peered around the back corner.

He was looking at the man’s back, the man who had come out of the cabin. The man was standing quite still. He would be out of sight of Mr. Brown. Obviously, he was waiting for Mr. Brown.

He had a small package in his left hand. And a gun in his right.

Pete could not see Mr. Brown, nor even hear him, but somehow he knew the big man was coming this way. Mr. Brown would be carrying a gun, too. But he wouldn’t get much of a chance to use it, not with this man all ready for him.

Suddenly, Pete knew that Mr. Brown was quite close. He knew it because the man in front of him had moved his gun up, was straightening his gun arm.

Then Pete spoke.
 He said softly: “Oh, Mr. Jones?” Mr. Jones whirled. Yes, he was smil-
ing. Pete could see the teeth gleam in the moonlight. There was a cold savagery in the smile.

Mr. Jones swung his gun toward Pete.

PETE fired first. The shot took Mr. Jones in the chest. The impact pushed him backwards. But he regained his footing, and stood there, swaying a little.

Then he dropped the package. He dropped the gun. He, too, dropped. The desert dust swirled as he hit the ground.

Pete stepped forward.

Suddenly, Mr. Brown came lumbering up. He was still bare-footed.

He looked sharply at Pete. Then he stared down at Mr. Jones. He had a gun in his meaty hand. He shoved it in his pocket. He got down on his knees and examined the package Mr. Jones had dropped. He got up again and glared at Pete.

Mr. Brown said: “Well, I’ll be blistered!”

It was half an hour later. With two dead men and a hundred thousand dollars in jewelry to arrange for, Mr. Brown had got his shoes back on and was on his way back out to his car. He had to drive to Silver Hill to telephone to the sheriff’s office.

He let Pete know, in his gruff way, that Pete would be in line for a cut in the reward.

When he drove off, Pete returned and joined Mom and Pop and Wanda in the living room. With Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones both dead, Mom and Pop looked

(Continued on page 96)
Sam Rogers went to Frisco to help a buddy, but when he got there his mission changed—and he found he had to avenge a murder!

CHAPTER I
THE BODY IN ROOM 311

The airliner from Chicago came in high over the Sierras and began its gradual drop toward the San Francisco airport. It had been a fast, smooth trip and the airliner was ahead of schedule—but to Sam Rogers, one of its passengers, the trip hadn't been nearly fast enough.

"The way I feel," Sam muttered under his breath, "you'd think I was on my way to meet a girl."

"Aren't you?" asked his seat companion.

Sam hadn't realized he had spoken loud enough to be overheard. He glanced at the man sitting next to him, grinned, then shook his head.

"Nope, it's a man. Toby Clark. I grew up with him, went to school with him. We were in the same outfit during
the war. Afterwards Toby went back to China, just shipped out on his own. He said he wanted to see more of the Orient and I imagine he has. He has sent me letters from Singapore, Saigon, Basra, Calcutta and half a dozen other towns I don't remember."

"He sounds like an interesting chap."
Sam nodded. "He's more than that. There never was another man like Toby Clark. He has a love for people which I've never seen equaled. I mean all kinds of people—rich or poor—black or white—good or bad. It make no difference to Toby."

"He hates authority, the kind of authority as represented by army brass. He has an appreciation of justice which sometimes has little to do with law. He is religious but there is no orthodoxy
which will confine his religion. He can see beauty in everything and with it ugliness. He's—well—he's just Toby Clark. I can't explain him to you but he's quite a guy."

The stewardess, moving down the aisle, asked them to fasten their seat belts and a few moments later the plane was down. Toby wasn't waiting at the airport but Sam hadn't been expecting him. He had had no address to which to wire his expected time of arrival.

Toby, over the telephone to him in Chicago, had said he had made a reservation for him at the Palace hotel. He had promised either to be there or to leave a note. Toby had a room in a waterfront hotel. He hadn't said which one.

There was the usual delay at the airport, then the long ride into San Francisco. It was late afternoon, almost six. A fog was sweeping in from the ocean and the air was chilly. Sam piled from the limousine when it reached the Palace and hurried inside. Toby wasn't there but had left a note which was handed to him at the desk. The note was characteristically brief:

Sam—if you get in before 7 pm. grab a taxi to the Bay Shore hotel. I am in room 311. It's at the end of the hall. Rush it.—Toby.

Sam Rogers didn't even go up to his room. He left his bag to be taken up by a bellhop and hurried outside. A taxi carried him down to the Embarcadero and around the corner of a side street to a dingy, five story, red brick building, over the door of which was a sign, reading THE BAY SHORE HOTEL. Its narrow lobby was almost empty and the old-bald-headed man at the desk hardly glanced at Bill as he angled toward the elevator. There another old man took him to the third floor.

Why Toby Clark should have picked a hotel like this Sam didn't know but appearance or personal comfort had never been important to Toby. He could, he imagined, write it off to that—or to the mysterious job which had been facing him here and in which he had wanted help.

Sam was frowning as he recalled his telephone conversation with Toby. He was frowning and was suddenly uneasy. He stepped out of the elevator on the third floor.

"Room three eleven is to your left," said the old man running the elevator.

Sam stopped. He looked back at the man. "How did you know I wanted room three eleven?"

"Just figured it," was the answer. "There have been others up here who wanted three eleven."

The elevator man was stoop-shouldered. Thin white hair covered his head. His watery eyes were deep-set in a wrinkled face. The uneasy feeling which was crowding in on Sam Rogers was suddenly more insistent. He turned and looked down the hall.

At the far end a door opened and closed and a girl stepped into view. She came toward him. She was tall, slender. She was wearing a dark tailored suit and a ridiculously small hat, one which had probably been ridiculously expensive. Clothing such as hers didn't go with a room in the Bay Shore hotel.

"See what I told you," murmured the elevator man.

The girl glanced at Sam as she passed him and stepped into the elevator. Her face was pale and her eyes, it seemed to Sam, had a frightened look.

She said, "Down, please," in a voice almost too low to be heard.

The elevator door closed and the cage started down. Sam was scowling. He remembered something Toby had said over the telephone to him in Chicago. "There's a girl mixed up in this, Sam. She's just your type. Well educated, beautiful and with hair the color of an autumn storm." What color was an autumn storm? To Toby that might have meant anything. And this might have been the girl—or it might not.

Sam hurried down the hall. He came to the door of three eleven and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again and called, "Toby! Toby! It's me—Sam Rogers."

There was still no answer. Sam reached for the door knob. He turned it and pushed. The door opened easily and
Sam stepped into the room. He stepped into the room and came to a rigid stop.

An icy cold chill raced up and down his back and something was choking his throat, making it almost impossible to breathe.

He stared at the figure on the floor and shook his head, not wanting to believe what he saw.

"Toby," he whispered. "Toby!" And then he moved forward and dropped to his knees at Toby’s side and reached for his wrist. There was no pulse but of course there couldn’t have been. Toby Clark’s life had bubbled out through the two bullet wounds in his chest.

* * * * *

The police were courteous but insistent. They kept probing. After they had taken his statement at the Bay Shore hotel they asked him politely if he would mind coming to headquarters. There other policemen talked to him and at long last the man who seemed to be in charge of the case, Detective Donovan.

Donovan was middle aged and had fuzzy grey hair and a square beefy face on which he wore a scowl.

He was a big man, wide shouldered, tall, heavy.

"Let’s see," he rumbled. "Your name is Samuel J. Rogers. You’re twenty-nine, unmarried. You live in Chicago, where you are an attorney. Yesterday you had a telephone call from Toby Clark, an old friend, a fellow you were in the service with. He asked you to come to San Francisco. He said he was in some kind of trouble."

"He didn’t say that," Sam answered. "He said he was mixed up in something. He didn’t say it was trouble."

"You dropped everything and grabbed a plane. Did you think there was money in it for you?"

"Toby Clark was a friend," Sam said stiffly. "The best friend I ever had. I would have come here just to spend an evening with him."

"An expensive way to spend an evening."

"Maybe you’ve never had a friend," said Sam Rogers.

DONOVAN chuckled. He said, "All right, Rogers. Forget it. Over the telephone Toby Clark mentioned a girl—perhaps the one you saw leaving his room. Tall, slender, young, attractive—a good description. It fits only about a hundred thousand women in San Francisco."

"I’d know her if I saw her again."

"All right, let’s get back to Toby Clark. After his discharge from the army he shipped out to China, jumped ship when he got there and apparently wandered about quite a bit. You’ve had letters from him but you say they were just casual letters and throw no light on his death.

"The only recent facts we have are these—Toby Clark signed on the Francis P. Jones, an American merchant ship when she touched Calcutta about eight weeks ago. The ship docked here three days ago. Toby Clark was paid off. He got a room at the Bay Shore hotel.

"He’s had a good many visitors according to the elevator man but we don’t know who they were. Today, just before your visit, three men went to his room. They left. The girl came and left. Then you came and found him dead—or so you say."

Sam nodded. He still felt stunned at Toby’s death. He was tired, so tired it was hard to think. He was hungry and he wished this eternal questioning would end.

It did, suddenly.

"You’re staying at the Palace hotel?" asked Donovan.

"Yes."

"How long will you be here?"

Sam shrugged his shoulders. "I don’t know."

"Check with me before you leave town," said Donovan. "And if you run across anything which you think might help us give me a ring."

So that was that, at least for the present. Sam left headquarters. He stopped at a restaurant for something to eat, then caught a cab back to the Palace hotel. At the desk he asked for the key to his room and with it was handed a package, a small package, not much larger than a bar of soap. It was addressed to him in Toby’s familiar
cramped handwriting.

Sam Rogers stood there at the desk, turning the package over and over in his hands, aware of a sudden, sharp excitement which made him forget his weariness. Here was a gift from the dead, perhaps a key to the understanding of Toby's murder.

"The package was here when you checked in," said the clerk, "but hadn't been put in your box."

Sam nodded. He turned away, then stopped. A little behind him and to one side stood a tall thin-faced young man whose eyes were glued to the package Sam was holding. Sam slid the package into his pocket and as he did so the man looked at him. He had rock-hard black eyes and in them was a threat of violence so strong Sam could feel it.

For an instant Sam didn't move and during that instant he realized that the package he had received might not only hold an answer to his questions but danger as well. Danger to him of the same type as had overtaken Toby Clark. His lips tightened. He met the man's eyes, then moved past him and circled around toward the elevators.

All the way up to the fifth floor and down the corridor to his room Sam Rogers kept his hand on the package in his pocket. He was anxious to examine it. His mind was starting to work again. Toby Clark was dead. The best friend he had ever had was gone. He had told Donovan he didn't know how long he would stay here but he knew, now. He would stay until he had wiped out the score for Toby's death.

He found his room without any trouble, unlocked the door and stepped inside, clicking on the lights. And then again he came to an abrupt stop. There were three men in the room. One was seated on the bed, one was leaning back in a comfortable chair, the third stood in what must have been the bathroom door. All three were staring at him silently.

It was Sam's first thought that he must have entered the wrong room but he discarded that at once. These men had been waiting in the dark. They wouldn't have been sitting in their own room in the dark. There had been three men, according to Donovan, who had visited Toby Clark's room in the Bay Shore hotel shortly before the girl's visit and shortly before his. These were the three men.

"Come in, Rogers," said the man in the chair. "Close the door. We'll have a little talk."

Sam Rogers pulled in a long slow breath. He took a backward step, then saw the gun in the man's hand and nodded.

There was nothing else to do.

CHAPTER II

MESSAGE FROM TOBY

SAM Rogers closed the door. He looked from one to another of the three men in the room. The man on the edge of the bed was about his own age, was thin, hollow-chested, pale. The man in the bathroom door wasn't much older but was heavier, dark skinned and had bushy black hair.

The man in the chair was evidently the important one. If he had stood up he wouldn't have been tall. He was, at a guess, fifty. His hair was light and was plastered close to his scalp. He wore thick glasses and had a pink chubby face. He was smiling.

"What's this all about?" Sam asked slowly. "I don't think I understand."

"We think you do," said the man in the chair. "You are the fellow Toby Clark sent for. He told us he wouldn't close the deal until you got here."

"What deal?" asked Sam Rogers.

"I'll do the questioning," said the man in the chair. "Where is the package?"

Sam shook his head. "Let's go back to the beginning. I'll admit I'm the man Toby Clark sent for but I didn't get here in time to talk to him. Whatever his interests were, however, mine are the same. And that being the case I think you can understand that I won't deal with anyone blindly. I want to know who you are and what right you have to the package."

The man in the chair considered this for a moment, then nodded his head.
“Fair enough, Rogers. My name is Arthur Bolivar. I’m a—shall we say—merchant. The man in the bathroom doorway is Dink Oliver. The man on the bed is Lou Patton. They are my—er—associates.

“The package I mentioned belongs to me. It was being brought to me by Webber Hall, who entrusted the job to Toby Clark after his unfortunate accident. To be quite honest I should not have to pay a cent for the package. I am, however, a generous man. I shall be glad to pay a certain reward in return for the delivery of the package.”

“How much of a reward?” Sam demanded.

“Shall we say—er—a thousand dollars?”

Sam reached into his pockets for his cigarettes, aware when he did so of the way the man on the bed stiffened, as though expecting him to draw a gun. He propped a cigarette between his lips and lit it, then looked at the fellow on the bed and grinned. After this he glanced at Arthur Bolivar.

“Give me time,” he suggested. “Give me time to think.”

“You have exactly one minute,” said Arthur Bolivar and he wasn’t smiling now.

Sam shoved his hands into his coat pockets, one of them closing around the package the desk clerk had handed him. If Bolivar was ready to pay a thousand dollars for the package it was probably worth many times that much. At least that was a good guess.

But the value of the package wasn’t the important thing. Sam didn’t want a thousand dollars. He wanted the man who had killed Toby Clark. He wanted to clear up the mystery of Toby’s death.

“Your time’s up,” said Bolivar.

Sam nodded. He said, “Bolivar, I want one thing more—one thing beyond the thousand dollars.”

“What?”

“I want the name of the man who killed Toby Clark.”

Arthur Bolivar shook his head. “I don’t know who killed Toby Clark.”

“You three fellows were in his room this afternoon.”

“Toby Clark was lying on the floor of his room, dead, when we got there.”

That might or might not be true. Sam stared thoughtfully at Arthur Bolivar, trying to read the answer in the man’s face. That Bolivar was capable of murder he didn’t doubt. The chill of it lay in his cold blue eyes and in the tight line of his lips.

“Look here,” said Bolivar. “We wanted the package. Toby Clark had it. Do you think we would have killed him before he turned it over to us? Never.”

“Someone killed him.”

“Maybe you did.”

“Maybe the woman did. Who is she?”

“The woman who went to see him? Donna Hall?”

“Yes. Who’s Donna Hall?”

Bolivar’s eyes had narrowed. “There’s a lot you don’t know, isn’t there,” he said slowly. “Maybe you haven’t got the package.”

Sam shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe.”

A MOMENT of silence followed. The man in the bathroom door, coughed. He stepped forward. “You want us to work him over, Bolly?”

“Not yet,” said Bolivar. “Not until—”

He was interrupted by the telephone on the stand near the bed. It rang once, rang again, rang a third time.

Bolivar motioned toward it with his gun. He said, “Answer it, Rogers. Be careful what you say.”

Sam crossed to the bed stand and answered the telephone. He listened for a moment, then glanced at Bolivar.

“It’s for you,” he said briefly.

Bolivar got to his feet. He came over and took the telephone. He listened for a moment, then dropped it back into its cradle. He turned toward the door.

“Come on,” he said to Dink Oliver and Lou Patton.

Oliver and Patton moved to the door. They opened it and stepped outside. Bolivar hesitated, staring soberly at Sam Rogers.

“We may be back,” he said finally. “Don’t go away, Rogers.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” said Sam Rogers.

He closed and locked the door after
the three men left and while he wondered at their abrupt departure he wasted no time worrying about it. From his pocket he drew the package the desk clerk had handed him, the package addressed in Toby Clark’s handwriting.

He opened it. Inside a paper wrapping was a small cardboard box. Except for a note, the box was empty. He unfolded the note and read it.

Dear Sam, If all goes well I’ll get this back from you and destroy it. If I slip up anywhere and this falls into your hands I will expect you to finish the job for me.

Donna Hall knows where the money is to go. See that it gets there. I had meant to enclose the sparklers in this box but since the box might go astray I didn’t.

One thing more. I ran across Butch Ellis in Calcutta last month. He is living in a hovel in the northeast corner of the city with a native wife and two knee-high kids. He’s a swell guy and could use a little financial help. A fistful of money for him, please.

And that’s all, Sam. Adios, Amigos

Toby

Room 311, Bay Shore hotel.

Someone knocked on the door and at the sound of the knock Sam Rogers stiffened. He folded Toby’s note and slipped it into his pocket. He hurried to the bed, picked up the wrapping paper and the box which had held the note and shoved them between the mattress and the bedsprings. The knock on the door sounded again, this time more insistently.

“Who is it?” Sam called.

“Detective Donovan,” came the answer. “Open up. I want to talk to you.”

“Just a minute,” Sam begged.

He took off his coat and hung it over a chair and then moved up to the door. He unlocked it, opened it and stepped back. And again his body went rigid. The man outside wasn’t Donovan.

The man was the one who had stood at the desk downstairs when he had received Toby’s package from the desk clerk, who had seemed so interested in it. The same harsh look was on his face as had been there then and in his hand, was a gun.

“Steady, Rogers,” said the man as he moved into the room. “I’ll not keep you long. I just stopped by to pick up that package. Where is it?”

CHAPTER III

ENTER MR. BOLIVAR

OGERS moved over to the bed. He sat down. He shook his head. “You’re too late. When I got to my room tonight three men were here, waiting for me. Maybe you know them. One said his name was Arthur Bolivar.”

“Sure I know them,” said the young man who stood against the door. “But they didn’t get the package. They knew you hadn’t had time, since hitting town, to pick it up. They didn’t figure Toby had mailed it to you. They didn’t get it or they wouldn’t have chased out of here on the tip I phoned them.”

“It was you who called Bolivar?”

“Sure. Now where’s the package?”

“I opened it,” said Sam Rogers.

“Then where are the rubies?”

“There weren’t any. Inside the pack-
age was just a note from Toby. It explains why he didn't mail them. He sent the note by package, probably to delay its delivery so that if nothing happened to him he could pick it up and destroy it himself. Here's the note."

Sam reached into his pocket. He drew out Toby's note, laid it on the bed. He got up and crossed to the window and stood there, waiting. The young man moved up to the bed and picked up Toby's note and read it. He was frowning as he finished.

"It sounds to me as though you knew where the rubies were," he muttered.

"Maybe I do," Sam agreed.

"Then where are they?"

Sam shook his head. "The secret of where they are is my insurance. I don't want to die like Toby. Living is too much fun."

"We'll split them, Rogers," said the man with the gun. "I'll be your insurance."

"Did you make that offer to Toby?"

"No, but maybe if I had he'd still be living. He was quite a guy."

"You sound as though you knew him."

"I did, Rogers. We were shipmates. Look here, I'm going to put this gun away but I can get at it in an awful hurry if I have to."

"You won't have to," said Sam Rogers, "unless Bolivar comes back or someone else moves in."

"There's no one else but Donna Hall and I'm on her side."

"What's your name?"

"Ulrich—Joe Ulrich. I was on the Francis P. Jones when Toby Clark signed on in Calcutta. We were short-handed and Toby had his papers. We bunked together, got to know each other pretty well.

"Of course within a week Toby knew everyone and everyone liked him and trusted him. I suppose that's why Webber Hall picked on Toby to deliver the package."

"Who was Webber Hall?"

"An A.B.—able-bodied seaman. He was bringing in the rubies for Bolivar. To be honest, smuggling them in, and they were stolen to boot."

"What happened to Webber Hall?"

"He was knifed in some waterfront dive in Manila. There was quite a brawl. One of the natives got him but he lived for a couple of days, long enough to ask Toby to deliver the rubies to Bolivar. I didn't know a thing about the rubies until after we were paid off here in San Francisco.

"I met Toby the next day on the street. He said that Webber Hall's sister was here and was anxious to talk to the men who had known her brother. He asked me to see her and tell her what a swell guy Webber had been and stuff like that."

"I did and then this afternoon Donna telephoned me and said she had just been to Toby's room and that Toby had been murdered. I had dinner with her and got the story."

"What story?"

"About the rubies. Since Webber Hall was dead Toby felt that part of the money the rubies would bring should be used to care for his dependents, if any. The rest Toby meant to use for some pet scheme of his own, some China war-orphan-relief fund.

"Since the rubies were stolen and had been smuggled in Toby couldn't see that they belonged to Bolivar, who apparently is the head of some smuggling ring. He felt the money could be used to better advantage in caring for orphaned kids."

SAM Rogers nodded and again he could feel a mist gathering in his eyes. Here was something that was typical of Toby Clark. A fortune in rubies had fallen into his hands. Why should they be turned over to some smugglers. Why not dispose of them and use the money where it could do some good?

"Who killed Toby Clark?" he asked bluntly.

"As a guess, Bolivar."

"But why would Bolivar kill him before getting his hands on the rubies?"

"Maybe Toby fooled him, made him think he had found the rubies. If Bolivar thought he had his hands on the rubies he would have no more use for Toby Clark. In fact Toby Clark alive would be a danger to his future smuggling operations."
That seemed like a fair assumption, reasonable, logical—but it wasn't proof. It was maybe a good guess but that was all.

Joe Ulrich was not sitting on the edge of the bed. He was smoking a cigarette and his features didn't seem nearly as harsh as they had a few moments before.

"Had Donna Hall agreed to Toby's plan for the use of the money?" he asked slowly.

"She tells me she had and I think I believe her. She's quite a sensible girl. She says Toby insisted that some of the money should go to her mother, who is quite old. How much I don't know."

"Where was Toby going to sell the rubies?"

"I don't know. Haven't any idea. They were Burma rubies and of good size. Rubies like that are worth more than diamonds."

"From whom were they stolen?"

"That's something else I don't know."

"Where is Donna Hall?"

"She moved early this morning from the Fairmount hotel to the St. Francis. I sent Bolivar chasing up to Fairmont on a tip she was checking out and heading for the airport."

"Tell me more about Toby?"

For almost an hour, Joe Ulrich and Sam Rogers talked about Toby Clark and to Sam this was the only pleasant part of the day. Joe Ulrich didn't insist again on knowing where the rubies were hidden but he promised before leaving to get in touch with Sam the next day.

"You're going to have your hands full in dealing with Bolivar's crowd," he predicted. "Maybe I can help out."

There were no more interruptions that night. Sam again studied Toby's note and tried to puzzle out its hidden message, without success. He went to bed and slept much better than he thought he would and didn't wake until eight thirty.

Shortly after nine he went downstairs for breakfast in the palm-lined court of the Palace hotel. The morning newspaper, the San Francisco Examiner, devoted only a scant column to the murder of Toby Clark and offered him no information which he didn't already have. At a later date the Examiner was to carry quite a story about Toby Clark but there was no indication of it now.

Sam gave his order and was still scanning the newspaper when a voice said, "May I join you?" and he looked up into the steady brown eyes of Donna Hall, eyes which this morning didn't hold the terrified look he had seen there the afternoon before.

Sam came quickly to his feet. He nodded. "Of course. Sit down, Donna Hall."

"You know my name?"

"Joe Ulrich told me."

He held a chair for Donna, then sat down again, smiling. "Toby," he mentioned, "said that your hair was the color of an autumn storm. I would have said rusty brown but maybe an autumn storm is a rusty brown."

The girl frowned. She was as attractive, Sam decided, as Toby had promised. Even the frown didn't spoil her features.

"I hardly knew Toby Clark," she said slowly. "He was a rather remarkable man, wasn't he."

"That's only part of it."

"I didn't know there was any danger in what he was doing. That is—until the very end. He telephoned me yesterday afternoon and wanted to see me. He sounded—strange. He asked me to come to the Bay Shore hotel. I—"

Donna's voice broke off. She was staring past Sam Rogers toward the entrance. Her face had suddenly paled.

"What is it?" Sam asked.

"Don't look now," said Donna, "but Mr. Bolivar has just come in. Maybe he won't see us."

"What if he does."

Donna bit her lips. "He's seen us," she said under her breath. "He's coming this way now."
CHAPTER IV

DEATH WEAPON

RTHUR Bolivar was smiling as he reached their table but his smile, as Sam had noticed before, had neither warmth nor friendliness. It didn’t reach his eyes and wasn’t reflected in his voice when he spoke.

“Rubies would look good around that neck, wouldn’t they, Rogers. Rubies or maybe a rope.”

“A rope would probably fit your neck better,” Sam answered.

Bolivar chuckled. He pulled out a chair and sat down. He shook his head. “Don’t be deceived by a pretty face, Rogers. You made a proposition to me. I think I’ll accept it.”

“What proposition?”

“A package in return for a name. The rubies for the murder of Toby Clark. I’ll give you the murderer—Donna Hall.”

“And the proof?”

“I’ll get it.”

Sam looked at the girl. Donna Hall seemed to have recovered her composure. She leaned forward. “Why not tell the truth, Mr. Bolivar? Why not take the credit yourself?”

“I’m a professional, Miss Hall, not an amateur,” said Arthur Bolivar. “I don’t make mistakes. The death of Toby Clark was a mistake. You killed him after you thought you had discovered the secret of where the rubies were hidden. If I had been going to kill him I wouldn’t have done it until after the rubies were in my possession and had been appraised.”

This was said lightly but Bolivar’s manner or voice could not lift the chill from his words. Sam Rogers scowled. He said, “Bolivar, why don’t you run along and get this proof you’re talking about?”

“I’ll get it,” Bolivar shrugged. “But I’m more interested in the package of rubies. Don’t try to get away with them, Rogers. Don’t try to leave town.”

“I won’t,” Sam answered, “until I’m ready to.”

Bolivar got to his feet. He glanced at Donna, then looked at Sam Rogers. “Yes, she’s mighty sweet,” he murmured. “That’s a cute little hand that’s lying on the table. Yesterday afternoon it held a gun and blasted away a man’s life.”

“Get out!” Sam grated.

Bolivar nodded. He turned and started toward the lobby. He seemed to be laughing to himself.

Donna shuddered after Bolivar had turned away. She lifted her right hand from the table, looked at it, then moved it out of sight under the table’s edge. “I didn’t kill him,” she said in a low voice. “He was dead when I got there. I knocked on the door. It wasn’t latched. It opened a bit as I knocked and I could see him, lying on the floor. I stepped inside. I thought at first he might have fallen and injured himself. Then I saw the blood on the front of his shirt.”

“How long were you there?” Sam asked.

“Only a moment. I didn’t stay. I didn’t search the room. I didn’t want the rubies. I didn’t even want the money Toby Clark wanted me to take for my mother. Honest, I didn’t.”

She was looking straight at him as she spoke. Her eyes were wide, her voice earnest.

“What had Toby said to you over the telephone?” Sam asked.

“Nothing with any meaning I could understand. He asked me to come to see him. He said if I didn’t hurry it would be too late but he didn’t say why. He didn’t explain.”

Sam nodded. He finished his breakfast and Donna finished the coffee which had been brought for her.

“What now?” Sam asked.

“I don’t know,” said Donna.

“I have in my pocket a note I received from Toby,” Sam mentioned. “I have a feeling there’s a hidden message in it. Would you like to help me puzzle it out?”

“I’d love to.”

“Come on,” said Sam Rogers.

He signed the check and he and Donna crossed the lobby and took the elevator upstairs. Sam’s room had been made up while he was at breakfast and on the
desk was a package. Sam noticed it the minute he stepped into the room. He walked to the desk and stared curiously at the package. It was several times as large as the one he had received from Toby.

It was tied with white twine and addressed to Mr. Rudolph Bonetti, General Delivery, Washington, D. C. It was stamped. There was a return address in the upper left hand corner—1615 Fulton Street, San Francisco. The handwriting was a little like Sam's.

"What is it?" asked Donna at Sam's shoulder.

"I don't know," said Sam Rogers. "This is my room but this package wasn't here when I went to breakfast. Someone brought it here, perhaps while the maid was making up the room. I don't like it."

HE PICKED up the package and opened it. Inside was a .38 caliber Smith-and-Wesson revolver. According to the morning newspaper, Toby Clark had been killed by bullets fired from a .38-caliber gun. This was the gun which had killed Toby. Sam was suddenly sure of it.

The sound of the telephone bell startled him. He crossed to the bed stand and answered it. "Hello, Rogers," said a vaguely familiar voice. "Detective Donovan is on his way upstairs to see you. I thought you might like to know."

"Who is this?" Sam asked.

"Joe Ulrich. I've been hanging around the lobby. I saw you with Donna. Let's not get her mixed up in this."

Sam nodded at the phone. He said, "Thanks, Joe," and hung up.

"Something's wrong," said Donna Hall.

A good many things were wrong and some of them Sam was beginning to understand. This gun in his room, for instance, had been brought here by the murderer of Toby Clark, not to be mailed to some fictitious person in Washington, D. C., but to be found by the police. It had probably been tossed into his room while the maid was making it up.

If Joe Ulrich hadn't called—

"A detective's on his way up here, Donna," Sam said hurriedly. "I don't think he'll search the place but if you're here he may guess you're the woman I saw leaving Toby's room yesterday afternoon."

"I could wait downstairs."

"Would you?"

The girl nodded. "I could also take that gun if there's any danger you might be searched."

Sam handed her the gun and Donna slipped it into her purse. She stepped to the door and looked back at him and smiled but she wasn't as calm as she pretended. Her smile was shaky.

There were two other officers with Donovan and all three were rather abrupt. They had a search warrant. They searched him and searched the room and after they had finished Donovan stood at the door, scowling.

He said, "All right, Rogers. We were working on an anonymous telephone tip that we'd find a .thirty-eight in your room. Sometimes those tips pay off. Sometimes they don't. This one didn't. Do you know a man named Bolivar?"

"I've heard the name," Sam admitted.

"He's an importer—a jeweler. The Treasury department suspects him of being involved in smuggling operations. Six months ago a fortune in rubies was stolen from an Indian prince whose name I can't pronounce. We had another tip that a man named Webber Hall, a seaman, was bringing them in.

"He was knifed in Manila, maybe by a man who wanted the rubies, maybe by Toby Clark. Maybe Toby Clark was killed because he had the rubies. This case is assuming real proportions. This Indian Prince has offered a fabulous reward for the recovery of the stuff. Does all this mean anything to you?"

"Not much," said Sam Rogers.

"It should. It should warn you to move pretty carefully. We want those jewels, Rogers, and we're not kidding about it. If you mess around in this affair you're liable to get hurt."

The telephone rang again and Sam Rogers turned to answer it. The man on the other end of the line wanted to talk to Detective Donovan. Sam called him
to the phone.

Donovan talked for just a moment, then hung up and nodded grimly. “That was one of the boys,” he said to Sam Rogers. “We’ve had a couple here at the hotel. You were joined at breakfast by a woman.

“She came up here to your room but left before I got here. The boys picked her up when she got downstairs. She says her name is Donna Hall. She’s been searched. In her purse was a thirty-eight Smith and Wesson revolver.”

Sam pulled in a sharp breath. He tried to look unconcerned but he was afraid he didn’t.

“Rogers,” said the detective, “is she the woman you saw in the hall outside Toby Clark’s room? Did you know she had that gun in her purse? Or did you give her the gun and ask her to dispose of it for you?”

Sam Rogers reached for a cigarette. He lit it, trying desperately to think of a way out, a way that would leave him free and that would be fair to Donna.

“I’m waiting for your answer,” said Donovan, “and believe me it’s pretty important. What do you know about Donna Hall? Was she working with you, Rogers, or is she in this alone?”

CHAPTER V

SITTING DUCKS

This time, when they took Sam Rogers to police headquarters, they weren’t quite so courteous as they had been the night before. They weren’t quite so polite. The questions they threw at him were more pointed, more abrupt, sharper. Sam admitted having found the gun in his room and having given it to Donna. He insisted that he had never seen it before this morning.

The police questioned Sam alone. They questioned Donna alone. They questioned Sam and Donna together. They telephoned the police in St. Louis for a report on Donna Hall. Donna lived in St. Louis.

The .38 Smith and Wesson revolver which Sam had found in his room had been identified in the police lab as the gun which had killed Toby Clark. The police were now trying to trace its ownership.

Shortly after noon, abruptly and with no explanation, Sam and Donna were told that they could go. Sam was rather surprised at this. He had anticipated having to call an attorney.

“Maybe Donovan wants to give us more rope,” he said to the girl. “That’s the only guess I can make.”

They went to the St. Francis hotel and had lunch and afterwards, in Donna’s room, Sam showed her the letter he had received in the package from Toby Clark.

“Here it is,” he said to her. “The key to where the rubies are hidden.”

Donna read the letter, then looked up at him. She said, “Sam, what are you going to do?”

“Find the rubies,” Sam answered. “What was Toby going to do with them?”

“He was going to sell them. He insisted that I take some of the money for my mother. The rest he was going to send to a man named Yat Su Chang in Formosa. I have his address. The money was to be used for Chinese war orphans. Then of course, part of it, I suppose, was to be for the man mentioned in his note to you.”

“We’ll do all but the last,” said Sam Rogers.

Donna shook her head. “I don’t want any of the money. Mother and I can get along.”

“Then it all goes to this Yat Su Chang.”

“But if the rubies were stolen—”

“Listen. Who needs it most? Bolivar or some Indian prince or the kids in China?”

Donna was frowning. She bit her lips. After a moment she picked up Toby Clark’s letter and read it again.

“The message is hidden in the final paragraph,” said Sam. “Butch Ellis is dead, so that last paragraph is the one thing in the letter which stands out as wrong. Read it aloud.”

Donna read it aloud.

“... One thing more. I ran across Butch Ellis in Calcutta last month. He is living in a hovel in the northeast cor-
ner of the city with a native wife and two knee high kids. He's a swell guy and could use a little financial help. A fistful of money for him, please.

"And that's all, Sam. Adios amigo—Toby."

"There it is," Sam nodded. "In what you have just read Toby names the place where we can find the rubies. I'm sure he does."

Donna shook her head. "He names only one place—Calcutta."

"Then maybe Calcutta has a meaning. There might be a Calcutta restaurant in San Francisco—or a hotel. Wait a minute. Let me see that letter."

Donna handed it to him and Sam studied it.

He was suddenly aware of a growing excitement.

"What is it?" Donna asked. Same straightened.

He got to his feet. He said, "Donna, will you go with me?"

"Where?"

"To pick up the rubies."

The girl was staring at him, wide-eyed, startled.

"Listen," said Sam. "I want someone with me when I get them. I want—well, you're in this just as I am and if we move fast I don't think there's any danger. Bolivar probably doesn't know that we're even out of jail. But about it, Donna? Let's finish what Toby started."

Donna Hall seemed to catch some of Sam Rogers' excitement. A sparkle came into her eyes.

She nodded her head and turned to put on her hat and coat.

ULRICH was waiting in the lobby of the hotel. "You two folks," he told them with a wry grin, "are really getting to be important. There are a couple of plainclothesmen from headquarters eyeing you from the door and over there against the wall are two of Bolivar's men. Besides all that I'm here."

"Is there any way to duck the others?" asked Sam slowly.

"I have a car outside," said Joe Ulrich. "It can run away from anything on four wheels."

Sam scowled. What did he know about Joe Ulrich beyond the fact that the man had been a shipmate and a friend of Toby's and was apparently interested in Donna? Where else, if anyplace, did Ulrich fit into this picture?

"Maybe we ought to let it go?" Donna whispered.

Sam shook his head. Bolivar wouldn't fool around much longer. Neither would the police. He took Donna's arm. "Let's just go for a drive," he suggested. "Let's look at it this way. The air will do us good."

* * * * *

At five o'clock that afternoon Joe Ulrich parked his car a block from the Bay City hotel and left Sam and Donna to scout the hotel. They hadn't been followed here—Sam was sure of that. In fact, if any attempt had been made to follow them he hadn't been able to identify it.

Joe Ulrich was gone for only a short time. He was grinning when he returned. "No cops at the hotel," he reported. "No sign of Bolivar. I've got a key that will let us into Room three-hundred eleven. I swiped it from the desk when the guy wasn't looking. What do we do with the sparklers when we get them?"

"They go back to China in the form of money for war orphans," said Sam Rogers.

"Yeah," said Ulrich. "Toby would have liked that."

They left the car and walked to the hotel. None of the dozen or more men in the lobby paid any attention to them as they crossed to the elevator. The man running it wasn't the same man who had been running it the afternoon before but he looked just as old. Without comment he took them to the third floor and they walked down the corridor to room three eleven.

"Sam," Donna whispered as they stopped, "I'm frightened. I don't know why but I'm frightened." Her fingers were digging into Sam's arm.

Sam chuckled. "You're excited, Donna," he answered. "That's all. There's nothing to be frightened about. We'll be out of here in a minute."

Joe Ulrich unlocked the door and they stepped into the room. It had been straightened up. A throw rug covered the place on the floor where Toby's body had been lying, also covering the blood
stain in the carpet.

"This room has probably been searched from one end to another," Ulrich muttered. "What makes you think the sparklers are still here?"

"I showed you that letter from Toby," said Sam Rogers, "and explained why the last paragraph was wrong. I said that in it Toby had named the hiding place for the rubies. Donna said he had named only one place in the letter—Calcutta.

"But she was wrong. Toby had put at the end of the letter, 'Room three-hundred eleven, Bay Shore Hotel.' And in that final paragraph were two other directions. 'Northeast corner and knee high.'"

"You mean we look in the northeast corner of this room at a place about knee high?"

Sam nodded. He was staring toward the northeast corner of the room. There was nothing there—nothing but the corner made by the two walls. He moved that way. He knelt down and examined the wall paper.

It was dirty and old and if any additional message was written on it he couldn't find it.

Donna and Joe Ulrich stood just behind him. He could hear them breathing.

"I don't see anything there in the corner," Ulrich growled.

Sam reached out and ran the palm of his hand up and down over the wall paper. At one of the seams he felt a slight bulge. He tore the paper away then reached down and picked up the square of cardboard which fell to the floor, a baggage check from the Ferry Building check room.

The date stamped on the back was less than a week old.

"So that's it," said Joe Ulrich. "They're checked with his baggage at the terminal."

Sam nodded. He got to his feet, still feeling the tight drive of excitement. He said, "Donna—" and then he stopped. Voices reached into the room from the hall and above them the heavy tones of Arthur Bolivar.

"Come on," Bolivar was ordering. "They're in three-hundred eleven. Let's find out why."

CHAPTER VI

FINAL INTERRUPTION

OE ULRICH moved swiftly to the door. He closed it and locked it. He reached for a chair and jammed it under the knob. His face was pale, tense. It was moist with a sudden perspiration.

"That'll hold them for awhile," he said grimly. "They must have been watching this place from outside. I should have figured that."

Sam had put an arm around Donna. The girl's body was rigid. Her breath was coming fast. Sam glanced out the window. It opened on a court. The court flooring was a dozen feet below.

Someone tried the door, then knocked, then knocked again.

"Open up, Rogers," called Bolivar. "We're coming in."

Sam shook his head but made no other answer. Joe Ulrich turned toward him.

"Give me the baggage check, Rogers," he said swiftly. "I'll go out the window, cross the court and get down into the alley by the fire escape. I'll telephone the cops. Maybe they'll get here before Bolivar breaks in but at least we'll keep Bolivar from getting the sparklers."

"He won't get them," Sam grated. "I'll eat the baggage check first."

"No, give it to me. I can get away. The drop is too far for Donna but I can make it."

There was a sharp insistence in Ulrich's voice. His eyes had hardened. His lips made a thin tight line across his mouth. His body had dropped into a half crouch.

"Give it to me," he said again and this time all hint of friendliness was gone from his voice. His hand dipped into his pocket and came out with a gun. He leveled it at Sam Rogers. "This is it," he was saying. "It's got to be it. Twice before I missed. The third time I'm lucky."

Complete understanding flashed across Sam's mind. It was Joe Ulrich who had knifed Webber Hall in Manila in a first attempt to get the rubies. He had killed Toby Clark in a second attempt. After killing Toby he had prob-
ably expected to find the rubies here in this room. Or perhaps Toby had deceived him about the hiding place and Ulrich had killed Toby and then discovered his mistake.

Other things fell into line. Joe Ulrich, a seaman, could have entered and left this seaman's hotel without attracting the attention of the elevator man. He had attached himself to Donna, who might have known where the rubies had been hidden. He had been at the Palace hotel this morning when the gun which had killed Toby Clark had appeared. His friendship with Toby had never been verified.

Ulrich stepped closer. "Give me that baggage check," he ordered. "Hand it over, now!"

Blows were thudding against the door as Bolivar and his men tried to break in. Here in this room Joe Ulrich covered him with a gun. Sam wondered if anyone had ever been more thoroughly trapped. He dropped his arm from around Donna's shoulders and stepped away from her.

He said, "Sure, Joe. I'll give it to you. Here!"

He reached into his pocket and drew out the baggage check. He held it out toward Ulrich.

Ulrich took it. He glanced at it quickly to make sure of what it was. This took only the fraction of a second but it was what Sam had been waiting for. As Ulrich glanced down Sam drove straight at him, hammering one arm at the man's gun and driving its barrel down.

He heard the roar of the gun's explosion as his shoulder caught Ulrich just below the chest. And then they were on the floor, fighting for the gun, clawing, kicking, grunting, rolling from side to side.

There were no rules in a fight like this. Nothing was barred. Sharp fingernails raked Sam's face, feeling for his eyes. He slammed his free fist at Ulrich's head. He hit the man again and then again.

In a rather confused way he was aware of sounds of excitement in the hall but they meant nothing to him. Someone was once more beating on the door, insisting on coming in, and he saw Donna at the door, pulling the chair away, turning the key in the lock.

He shouted, "No, Donna! Don't!"

And then he forgot about Donna and about Bolivar for Joe Ulrich was twisting the gun in toward his stomach and it took all the power he could summon to turn it back.

He jammed his fist again at Ulrich's head and then again and then someone was standing over him, pulling him to his feet and someone else had reached down and taken the gun from Ulrich's unresisting grip.

"You don't have to kill him, you know," said the voice of Detective Donovan.

Sam Rogers pulled in a long ragged breath. He stared around the room. Bolivar, Dink Oliver and Lou Patton were here but they were handcuffed and under the guard of policemen. Donna stood leaning against the wall. Her face had no color at all.

"I guess this is where you take over, isn't it," muttered Sam Rogers.

"You bet it is," said Donovan.

"Didn't you tell me there was a reward offered for the return of the rubies?"

"Quite a big one."

"It goes to a man in Formosa to be used in relief work for Chinese war orphans. That's where Toby wanted all the money to go but we will settle for less—and the man who killed him. There he is—Joe Ulrich."

Ulrich was sitting up now. He looked at Rogers and swore bitterly.

* * * * *

Sam Rogers and Donna Hall had breakfast together the next morning, and this time there was no one to interrupt them or at least that's what they thought. The morning Examiner, on the table beside them, carried a feature story about Toby Clark and his dream of using a Rajah's rubies for the relief of Chinese war orphans.

It was quite a colorful story. The night before Sam Rogers had spent an hour with the reporter who wrote it, an hour talking about Toby. The story included Toby's letter to Sam with its
hidden message explained. "What will you do now?" Sam asked the girl.

"Go back to St. Louis, I suppose, and back to work."

"But not for awhile," said Sam, frowning. "This is California. People who come out here never hurry away."

"But I'm afraid I must."

A figure loomed up at the table beside them and Detective Donovan sat down. "I'll just join you for coffee," he suggested. "You don't mind that, do you?"

"Would it make any difference if we did?" Sam grinned.

"Who was watching the Bay Shore hotel late yesterday afternoon and managed to get to room three-hundred eleven just in time?" asked the detective. "I think I've earned a cup of coffee. Incidentally we have a full confession from Joe Ulrich.

"He killed Webber Hall in Manila after he thought he had spotted the rubies. He hadn't. Here in San Francisco he followed Toby Clark around and finally offered to pal up with him against Bolivar. When he was sure he knew where the rubies were he killed Toby, then discovered he was wrong.

"He left the murder gun in your room, Rogers, to frighten you. He was building up to a point where you would take him into your confidence. From something Toby Clark said to him he was sure the rubies had been sent to you or would fall into your hands."

"What about Bolivar?" Sam asked.

"He's in the hands of the T-Men—Treasury Department officials. Whether or not they can hold him I don't know. The Police Commissioner has agreed that the reward will go where you want it to go—that is, to this chap in Formosa, Yat Su Chang. You know this Yat Su Chang is quite well known in the Orient. MacArthur says he's okay."

"Toby wouldn't have picked a man who wasn't."

The detective's coffee had been brought. Donovan sipped it slowly. He glanced from Rogers to the girl. "What are you two planning now?"

"I'm going to stay out here for awhile," said Sam Rogers. "I've had a vacation coming for a long time."

"Good," said the detective. "I might need to see you again. And Donna?"

"I'm going home," said Donna.

"She ought to stay for awhile, too," Sam suggested. "Can't you make that an order?" He winked at the detective.

Donovan chuckled. He glanced at the girl. He said, "Sure I can make it an order. But is one needed?"

Donna's cheeks were unusually pink. She stared down at her plate. "I might—stay for a day or so," she said slowly.

The detective was grinning as he got to his feet. "Have fun, kids," he suggested. "I'll get in touch with you if I need you. And if you want a best man one of these days I'm always available."

Donna still didn't look up after the detective left. Her face was still flushed. Sam watched her, smiling and wondering how this would work out and willing to see. "Like an autumn storm," he said under his breath.

"What's that?" asked Donna.

"Your hair," Sam answered.

"If you talk like that," said Donna, "I will go home."

"No you won't," said Sam. "Not until I do."

---

Service Manager

Does Himself Service

James M. Davis* switched to Calvert—found today's best blend is also today's very best buy!

*of Boise, Idaho

CALVERT RESERVE BLENDED WHISKEY—86.8 PROOF—65% GRAIN NEUTRAL SPIRITS. CALVERT DISTILLERS CORP., NEW YORK CITY
"I wouldn't make any false moves," Sully was saying.

The PHONY

By
WILL OURSLER

WHAT gives a guy courage—and what makes him tremble like an old woman in the wind—it's sometimes hard to tell. Like the other night over at Joe's Bar, when the gun-ssel walked in.

The crowd was all there. The regulars. Sopping up beer and talking and waiting for the fights on television. One of the crowd was a fellow who had started dropping in about a month before, a little bald-headed runt they called Sully.

Up until that night, we'd had Sully figured for a blowhard. A hot-air-phony with a glib tongue for tall stories, always with him as the hero in some rumpus nobody in his right mind would swallow.

We rode him pretty rough. Any story he told we'd rip apart, almost before he was finished. "That fight you was in," somebody would interrupt, just about the time Sully was capturing some gun-happy enemy. "What were you using, Sully—real cap pistols?"

The rest of us would roar. But Sully would just grin. "I was on the New York force at the time," he'd state.

A Drama of Crime and Courage, Enacted at Joe's Bar!
quietly. "Detective undercover, of course." And he'd go on with another story.

The next night he'd be yapping about the time he was a private operative, running down jewels thieves for some big insurance firm. Or else he'd spin out some incredible stuff that supposedly happened to him in Africa—on secret assignment for Army G-2.

He was getting along in years, maybe fifty-five or sixty. We figured he must have read all this stuff somewhere, or heard it on the radio, and just taken it over for his own uses.

Only thing puzzled us was the bulge in his left-hand coat pocket. He'd never let us see what it was. But he'd tell us, in that casual tone he liked to use, that it was a .38 automatic. "Wouldn't feel safe," he'd say, "without a rod."

The night the gunsel came in Sully was holding forth about some fantastic business in Tangiers. The rest of us were quiet, sipping our beers. The fights would be on in another half-hour.

Then the gunsel swaggered in. The first thing I knew I heard his voice rasping out, "Okay, you guys. Everybody line up and don't make no noise. This is a stickup."

I TURNED and looked at the guy. He was tall and thin, with a cigarette sticking to his lips. He couldn't have been over twenty years of age. He looked like a B-grade movie version of a holdup man.

Of course, the thing that popped into my mind right away was Sully and his .38 automatic. Sully and his big stories about capturing crooks. Sully the "private op."

It was a funny twist. Even with the tough guy ordering Joe to hand over the cash in the register, even with those ice-water eyes fastened on me, I couldn't help grinning. Almost before I knew it, I heard myself blurting out, "You better be careful, kid. We got a private op right here. He's captured hundreds of crooks. He's—"

The gunsel was coming my way. I never saw rage like that before in a man's face. "Shut up!" he said. "You hear me—shut up!"

He had a gun in one hand. He lifted it and slapped me hard across the face with the muzzle. The blow spun me half around. I could feel blood start to trickle down my cheek.

And then I realized. In that split second, somebody had moved up behind the gunsel. And the somebody was—of course—Sully.

I saw Sully put his hand into his pocket and dig it into the gunsel's side. "That's a .38 automatic," Sully was saying. "I wouldn't make any false move, kid. Unless you want to wind it up quick."

The gunsel didn't move. He stood there gawking, his mouth open, like a man in a nightmare. The gun he was holding hit the floor with a clatter.

Sully was saying, "Joe—get on that phone and call the cops."

The rest of us were shaken and scared, standing there waiting. Everybody but Sully. He was his usual self, talking a blue streak.

"Better get that cut fixed up on your cheek," he was advising me. "But it was lucky, his coming at you like that. Gave me the chance I needed to get in close—"

He gave the gunsel an extra dig. "Pretty stupid—losing your temper, lad. That was what cost you. You didn't have a chance. Reminds me, once when I was working on a case downtown—"

SULLY was off again, telling another one of his yarns. Fortunately, the cops came in just then to break up the monologue or he'd have kept on all night. There was a whole carload of cops and they sure seemed glad to land the holdup artist.

"Been a rash of barroom stickups like this," the sergeant told me. "This may be the lunkhead behind 'em. He gets rough sometimes—"

Then the sergeant spotted Sully. "Hi, Sully," he said. "So you're the guy who landed this fish. Big stuff. What are you doing in this neck of the woods, anyway?"

Sully grinned. "Having myself a short beer," he said.

The rest of us looked at each other. We were all thinking pretty much the same thing. We'd figured the guy wrong. I said to the sergeant, "Funny thing.
We never believed him. Never thought he was any detective at all, or any private op—"

"Detective! Private op!" The sergeant looked bewildered. "He ain't no detective. Sully—he's a counter man in a cafeteria over on the West Side. Always been a counter man. What's he been telling you guys? What kind of—"

Sully was standing there, looking sheepish. Outside, the gunsel was being driven off in the Johnny-wagon. I said, "Sully—that bulge in your pocket. The bulge you said was a gun. I want to see it, Sully. I want to see that gun."

The sergeant pushed forward. He said, "Yeah—that's right. Gun in your pocket, huh? You know you got to have a permit to carry a gun, don't you?"

The little guy just stood there with a silly smile. The sergeant finally made a dive for him and the next second he was pulling the thing out of Sully's coat pocket.

Only it wasn't a gun, of course. It was a book. A crumpled up, dog-eared paper-bound book. But if you held it tight with a strong hand and dug it into somebody's ribs, it would fool him all right. Just the way it fooled the gunsel.

Sully reached out and grabbed the book from the sergeant. He held it like it was something precious, smoothing it out. When he had it flat, we could read the title: "Tales of Adventure—Old and New."

The rest of them started to laugh. It kept growing louder, until the laughter filled the room. Sully looked around and began laughing with the others.

But I still say it's funny about courage. Because we were the guys who were trembling when that gunsel was in the place. Trembling for our own skins.

And it was Sully—Sully the phony, the two-bit hashslinger with all his made up glory—who stood there, calm as a daisy in a summer breeze, holding a real criminal at bay with a fake gun that was nothing but a paper book in his pocket.

Matter of fact, remembering the grin on his lips as he stood there behind the hold-up guy, waiting for the cops, I'd say that was Sully's shining hour.

The "Inside" of Detective Work

11. Fake Burglaries

IN INVESTIGATING burglaries, police officers must always bear in mind the possibility that no real crime has actually been committed and that the alleged burglary has been faked in order to collect on insurance policies covering such losses. Occasionally, too, a burglary may be simulated in order to explain shortages in accounts or as a cover for embezzlement.

Of help to an investigating officer in such cases is the fact that the perpetrators of these frauds are often ignorant of the methods of real burglars. Windows may be smashed from the inside instead of the outside. (Glass falls in the direction opposite to the blow.) Screws on hinges of doors allegedly forced may have been unscrewed (show screwdriver marks), instead of torn free (show particles of wood clinging to threads). Holes allegedly cut through walls or ceilings to gain entry may not be large enough to permit anyone to get through.

Search should be made for the merchandise supposedly stolen. It may have never been removed from the premises. Windows, doors, sills, etc., should be carefully checked for fingerprints.

Finally, as in the case of all burglaries, genuine or faked, investigating officers must accurately list all items presumed to have been stolen and all marks that may help in later identification.

—Carter Critz
CABIN in the STORM

By RAY CUMMINGS

THE rising wind in the gully moaned like a banshee. The cabin room was dim now. Outside the late afternoon twilight was deepening by the moment as clouds scudding across the sky. A summer storm was on the way.

Lige Peters sat before the big dark hearth. He was a tall, rangy youth, gangling, awkward of movement, taciturn with the silence of the mountains upon him. He was the hired hand here. A little light from the partly open kitchen door slanted into the cabin sitting room and fell upon him, putting a sheen on his tousled black hair, highlighting his dark gray shirt, dark trousers and heavy mountain boots.

John Hawkins was doing the kitchen work because Nancy was away. A pot

Silence Is Golden When Speech Means—Death!
rattled as he washed. It under the sink pump.

The sound made Lige turn a brief scowling, brooding gaze on the kitchen door. The flask in his hip pocket was empty; the whisky was warm, comforting within him.

A big storm was coming. You could tell by the rising howling wind, the lashing tree branches. It was always a crazy wind, out there in the gully, a wind split by the rocks, narrowed like water in a pipe and forced to greater speed. Now it was raining. At first it was only a splattering like tiny musketry fire on the cabin roof and against the north wall. Then it came harder, driven by the crazy wind.

The kitchen door opened wider, letting in more light, and the big square figure of John Hawkins loomed in the opening. Lige's hand moved beside him as he lounged in the rickety old rocking chair. He was bent forward, nearly double. One sits like that on winter nights, warming and gazng into the crackling fire; and habit is strong in the mountains. Lige's moving hand rested on the handle on the big iron poker which stood here always in the rack and pan at the end of the hearth. He sat moving the poker aimlessly between his feet.

"Wouldn't hurt you to come out an' give me a lift," Hawkins said.

"I'm goin' to town," Lige said. "Never mind me. Why should I help you? You tol' me I'm through workin' here, didn't you?"

"Goin' to town in this storm? You're crazy," Hawkins muttered.

LIGE paid no attention. He was through here. Fired out. Sure, he'd be paid by Hawkins tomorrow and go. Sure, he was a good worker. Hawkins hadn't said anything like that. He hadn't given the real reason, but Lige knew it right enough, because he had sent Nancy away for a month. Hawkins didn't want Lige to get any fancy ideas about marrying his daughter. But Lige would marry her, all right. There was plenty between Nancy Hawkins and Lige Peters that nobody knew but them, and only their business anyway.

Now Lige said suddenly, "I'm onto you, Hawkins. Nance is out of here, so you think you can get rid of me and—"

Hawkins came further into the room. "I'm not a fool, Lige," he said. "You're through, and your gettin' out of here. Figurin' you'll hang around the mountain maybe until Nancy gets back? Well, she won't be back! From Bellport she's goin' to her Aunt in Frisco. She'll be there a year—"

A year. It seeped into Lige's slow mind. A year. She might get over it in a year, out there in Frisco so remote, beyond reach, with only his painfully scrawled letters to make her remember him.

It came to Lige Peters like a puff of the crazy wind bouncing off the gully rocks and hitting him. There was a way he could get Nancy back from Bellport in a hurry. A way he could have her all to himself, to marry her. He wouldn't be a hired hand then, fired out and looking for a job with everybody on the mountain against him. The cabin, Hawkins' money in the bank, the woods here out beyond the gully, the little mill—all of it would be for him and Nancy.

Lige slowly got to his feet, the big poker dangling from his hand. "A year?" he said. His low, growling voice mingled with the crackling of the cabin in the storm. "A year she'll be gone? That's what you think? But she won't —"

Hawkins raised an arm as the heavy poker suddenly came up in an arc and swooped down, but it went past his arm and crashed against the side of his head. His cry was lost in the roar of the wind outside. For a second he wavered on his buckling legs and then he went down, with his head split, his iron gray hair matted with blood and the life gone from him. The kitchen lamplight slanted in on him as Lige tossed the poker away looked down at him, and his heavy-lipped mouth curved into a grim smile.

The wind rushed in like a whirling demon when Lige opened the cabin door. He banged it after him and started up the gully path, bending into the wind and rain.

"Lige!" He looked up and saw a blurred figure coming along the upper
path on the gully top. Through the gloom and the rain, the man must have seen him come out of the cabin and had called out. When Lige looked up, the man raised his hand in greeting. He was heading toward town and he waited to let Lige join him.

“You, Lige—”

“Hello, Sheriff Marks. Goin’ to town?” They went on together. The sheriff lived near the edge of town. The rain pelted them, the wind tore at them, and blew their brief words away so that they had to shout.

“Pretty bad storm, Lige.”

“Yeah.” He was conscious that he was bareheaded and coatless. “Didn’t think it was so bad, Sheriff, ’til I got out the gully. Never wear a hat anyway.”

He was beginning to be frightened. The sheriff had seen him come from the cabin, and when Hawkins’ body was found, he would remember it. Lige forced his heavy mind to work out a plan.

“What with Nancy away, have to eat in a restaurant, Sheriff. You seen Mister Hawkins? Ain’t been home for couple of hours—”

The sheriff hadn’t. They were beyond the path now, on the back road down through the woods. It was Sunday, and the mill was closed. They could see it through the wood-patch. The force of the wind was less, in the woods, but the tree-tops were swaying. Behind them a tree came down. A big tree. The splintering, grinding crash of it mingled with all the other noises of the wind and rain and the lashing branches.

Lige said, “Goshamighty!”

“You better not try gettin’ to town, Lige,” the sheriff yelled. “Here’s where I turn. My place isn’t far. If you—”

“I’ll duck into the mill,” Lige said. “When it eases I can go back.”

HE HAD it figured now. The frightened tightness in him eased up. Sure, everything would be right, because he had it figured. The sheriff turned into the crossroad, waved, and in a moment the shape of him was lost in the roaring gloom.

Lige turned at the mill road and ran to the shelter of the mill. Inside, while the storm beat more furiously, his thoughts crouched with him, little gibbering companions in the resin-smelling darkness.

In Lige’s mind there was only one vision, as clear as though he had stared at it for an hour and memorized it. That widened shaft of light from the kitchen doorway; Hawkins lying there in the cabin sitting room, with his broken head crimsoned and the crimsoned poker on the floor beside him where the killer had flung it.

Now it seemed that at last the storm was lessening. The torrent of rain had stopped. The wind still puffed, but it was dying. Lige could hear the drip of water, running off everything.

He waited another ten minutes and then left the mill. Up through the dripping trees he could see that the scudding clouds were breaking away, that the late twilight was brighter now. Out to the west, where the setting sun was almost breaking through, it was still brighter. There was no one to see Lige now. He made sure of it. He went a little way toward the gully through the dripping woods, then he turned and ran back toward Sheriff Marks’ place.

The sheriff was in his sitting room, reading his paper when the panting Lige burst in.

“I waited in the mill, Sheriff, like you said it was a good idea—then I went home. Sheriff he’s lyin’ there—Somebody must’ve come home with him, and killed him and—”

“Killed him? Who? Hawkins?”

“He’s lyin’ there in the sittin’ room, Sheriff. I jus’ took a look and ran back here to you—the kitchen lamplight on him an’ his head all busted in by the big poker that hit him—”

He gasped it out and he gasped it again while the sheriff phoned for two of his deputies, Baker and Robinson, who lived near by. Then the Sheriff was ready to go with Lige, and down a piece in the dripping woods, the excited Baker and Robinson joined them.

“John Hawkins killed?”

“Lyin’ there with his head busted in by the big poker that hit him,” Lige told them.

Now they were all hurrying through the dripping woods, out onto the gully top and to the little path that led down
to the Hawkins cabin. It was just a little frame building, backed against the overhanging cliff with the path going steeply down beside it and the little garden in front of it.

Sheriff Marks was leading and now as he saw the cabin he stopped, stared, turned back to Lige who still was beyond its view.

"You were here jus' now after the storm, Lige?"

"Yeah, jus' now. I come runnin' to you. Come on, you'll see him lyin' in there."

But Lige's parrot-words stopped and he stared, because the sheriff looked so queer. Then Marks was pulling him forward.

"Look at it—what the storm did here to it—"

At the base of the gully, where water was dripping on the rocks, a big tree had crashed in the crazy wind, crashed onto the flimsy cabin roof, mashing it. The cabin was slued around, half toppled.

Lige saw it, and the blood drained out of his face. With dropped jaw he stood staring until the startled sheriff shoved him, urging him down the path.

"So you jus' found him in there now after the storm, eh, Lige? Lyin' in the kitchen lamplight, with his head bashed in where a poker hit him! That sure was before the storm, when I caught you comin' out of here in a rush and you said Hawkins wasn't home—remember?"

"Why—why—" Lige couldn't find any words for anything.

Now they were all shoving into the cabin doorway. The kitchen light had been extinguished without setting fire to the building. The sheriff's flash disclosed the wrecked and littered sitting room, and the body of Hawkins lying here with the rubble strewn on him and his head a broken bloody horror.

"Nice of you to tell us he was murdered," Marks said grimly. "Else we'd have figured it an accident, wouldn't we? His head bashed in like that! You hit him with a poker, Lige? It ought to be here somewhere."

Of course they'd never have found the poker, or even thought to look for it, if Lige hadn't told them.

"Swell of you to give us all the dope," Baker commented.

Now Marks had unearthed the poker from the rubble. He held it under his flash. "Yes, there's blood on it just like you say, Lige, an' likely your fingerprints too! Thanks a lot for tellin' us!"

---

Meet the Blonde Who Rode to the End of the Line on—

**A STREETCAR NAMED DEATH**

*in the suspenseful mystery novelet of that name*

**By DONN MULLALLY**

---

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE!
The crime started in China, led to Texas—and in California Roger Chase saw it closing him in its deadly trap!

"May I come in?" he asked in a voice that had a trace of accent.

CHASE YOUR VICTIM

By B. J. BENSON

WHEN I got to El Paso, Texas, it was a little past one o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was warm and pleasant and I thought it would be as good a time as any to get my first peek of Mexico. I checked into a motel on Alameda Avenue, had lunch in their coffee shop, and drove down Texas Street to Santa Fe. At the end of Santa Fe Street there were some flags and uniforms and a rickety little wooden bridge with a decrepit streetcar moving slowly over it. Somebody waved me into one of the parking lots.

I pulled in and poked my head out of the window.

"Where do I park my car?" I asked.

The man was short and fat and he grinned at me.

"Boston," he said.

"That's not fair. You saw my Mass. plates."

"Boston," he said. "I get a kick out of the way you say 'pahk my cah.'"

"Where do I park it?"

"You kill me," he said. "Pull in there. It's a quarter and you can stay as long as you like."
I put my Ford between a Packard from Minnesota and a Buick from Tennessee. I locked the door and came out. Rolypoly was still grinning at me.

"Going to have fun?" he winked.

"I'm going to buy some perfume for my sister," I said stiffly. "Where's that big Rio Grande I've been hearing so much about?"

He took the quarter I offered him.

"This is it," he said shamefacedly.

"This? It looks like a leaky hose. I thought you did things up big in Texas."

"Conversation," he said mournfully.

"Besides, you're looking at it the wrong time of year."

"Excuses," I said. "I've been getting them the whole trip. You ought to see our Charles River."

I left him there, shaking his head sadly, and walked over to the bridge. I paid my two cents' toll and went through the turnstile. Crossing over the old wooden planks I looked down and sneered at the tiny trickle that seeped through the sandbanks. A sign said CIUDAD JUAREZ, and if I remembered my geography, it was in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

I spent ten minutes pushing off street vendors and hawkers with offers of pleasure, entertainment and sterling merchandise. Then I saw a store sign that read City of Versailles. There was a display of perfume in the window and I went in.

THE STORE was crowded, and the proprietor, a nervous little man, looked at me briefly as he bobbed from one group to another. I went over to the perfume counter where a dark, languid salesgirl slowly looked me over.

"Chanel Number Five," I said.

"What size?" she asked in perfect English.

I pointed to a bottle. "That one."

She lifted a plucked eyebrow. "Thirty-five dollars," she said.

"I'll take it."

She smiled as she wrapped the simple white carton. "Staying long?" she asked lazily.

"I'm going back now," I said as I paid her. I turned to go and bumped squarely into a big, bulky, red-faced man of about sixty.

"Pardon me," I said.


"From Boston," I said briefly and pushed my way by him and out. I went back up the untidy street to the bridge and paid my toll again. The man pushed one of the pennies back.

"One cent," he said.

"Fine. I paid two to get over."

"Come back again."

I went across the bridge to the customs officers in their field green uniforms. "Declare yourself," one of them said to me.

"On what?"

"Your citizenship," he sighed. "Are you American or Canadian?"

"American," I said.

"What do you know!" he said. "You're from Boston. I'm from Nashua, New Hampshire, myself. What did you buy?"

"This perfume here."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"You get good buys on sterling silver right in El Paso," he said. "A lot of people buy silver things."

"Everybody in Texas works for the Chamber of Commerce," I said. "What's wrong with New Hampshire?"

"It's all right," he said expansively. "Too much snow in the winter, that's all."

I went by him and back to my car. I waved good-by to Rolypoly, went back up Santa-Fe to Texas, and over to Alameda Avenue to my motel. When I got inside my cottage, I took a hot bath, put my robe on, and sat down to write some letters back home.

I must have fallen asleep at the desk because when I awoke it was dark. I switched the light on and looked at my watch. It was eight o'clock and I was hungry. I yawned and stretched. There was a knock at my door. I went over and opened it.

The man standing there was middle-sized and thin, but he had wide shoulders and he stood very erect. He was wearing a blue, pin-striped suit that was well tailored. He looked at me and bowed slightly.

"May I come in?" he asked. His voice was clipped and precise and there was
a trace of an accent in it. I nodded him in, and when he came under the light I saw that he had iron gray hair and a thin graying moustache.

I saw something else, too. There was a snub-barreled .38 Colt Banker’s Special in his hand.

“Porter gave it to you,” he said.

“I haven’t seen the porter,” I said. “And don’t point that thing at me. I’m afraid of guns.”

“Mr. Porter gave you the envelope,” he said coldly. “Don’t jest with me.”

“I don’t know any Mr. Porter.”

“I saw him meet you in the shop in Juarez. It was very clever of you.”

“Do you really think so? I thought I overpaid for that Chanel. I am a tourist and those people knew it. It sticks out all over me.”

“Please step aside,” he said. “I’ll have a look at that perfume.”

I stepped aside and then forward. My arm came around and landed a haymaker on his jaw. He crashed sideways against the wall, and I lifted him by the collar and swung again. He tried to bring the gun up. I chopped it out of his hand and it dropped to the carpet. I lifted him once more and swung. His head rocked back, and as I released him, he slid down the wall and sat down. He blinked his eyes and I rubbed my bruised knuckles. Then I picked up the revolver and emptied the six cartridges from the cylinder onto the desk.

“You have the wrong time, place and person,” I said. “Now you’d better go, before I call some police.”

He got up and stood there unsteadily. I handed the gun over to him.

“I’ve got no use for it,” I said. “I’m a peaceful citizen. Now, if you’ll turn around, you’ll see the door is directly behind you. Good-by.”

He took the gun and put it in his pocket. Then he turned and went to the door.

When he opened it he looked back at me again.

“I let you get too close to me,” he said. “I’ll remember that the next time.” He opened the door and went out. I sat down again to my letters. The perfume was on the desk. I picked it up and shook the carton. It gave back a comforting gurgle.

I HAD three letters done and I had completely forgotten about the time when I heard another rap on my door. I got up and stood beside it. Then I reached out and yanked the knob.

The girl standing there was tall and blonde. She was wearing a gray flannel suit and a ruffled white blouse. Her mouth was round and full and her nose was short and straight. She had long, slim legs and she was wearing black platform sandals with high, thin heels.

“Wrong address again,” I said. “This is number Twenty-seven. My name is Roger Chase.”

“I saw your light,” she said. “I thought you might be lonesome.”

“I’m from Boston,” I said. “I thought you might ask me.”

“I saw your license plates. I’m from New York.”

“Welcome to El Paso. As long as there’s no mistake, you might as well come in.”

She stepped in and closed the door.

“Is this part of the motel service?” I asked.

“It’s my own idea,” she laughed. “I have the cottage next door.”

“I’d offer you a drink,” I said, “but I don’t have my bar with me. I don’t know what to call you, either.”


She looked over at the desk and I looked at my bare legs beneath my robe. “I ought to get dressed,” I said. “I wasn’t expecting company.”

She pointed to the perfume. “Been to Mexico today?”

“Yes. I’m on my way to visit my sister in North Hollywood, California. I thought I’d bring her a little gift.”

“I’ve a confession to make. I saw you in Juarez this afternoon. I was wondering who the tall, dark, handsome American was.”

“I didn’t see any,” I said. “Where was he standing?”

“I’m talking about you, silly,” she laughed.

“I talk better after I’m fed. How about some dinner with me?”

“There’s lots of time,” she said. She sat down in the club chair and crossed her legs carelessly. “Tell me about yourself.”

“There’s nothing to tell. I’m twenty-
nine years old and I'm a government man."

She dropped her handbag. I picked it up for her.

"F.B.I.?” she asked. She was half out of the chair.

"Department of Agriculture. I'm attached to the experimental station at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. My sister has been living in California for ten years. She had two boys I've never seen. I thought it was time to see her little family. So I accumulated six weeks, including sick leave, and here I am. Simple?"

"Too simple," she said. "Married?"

"No. You?"

"No."

"Wonderful," I said. "Let's go out and dine."

"There's time." She got out of the chair and came over to me. I looked at her. She put her arms around my neck and put her lips up. I bent and kissed her.

"I should have started traveling a long time ago," I said. "I think I'll change my mind about going out to dinner."

She slid out of my arms, leaving a heady scent with me.

"We have lots of time," she said. "It's almost nine and I've already eaten. I'll tell you what. You go along have something."

"Alone?"

"I'll wait here for you," she said softly. "It's a long evening."

"You won't go away?"

"No, Roger."

"I'm not even hungry any more."

"Get along with you," she said, laughing.

I went into the bathroom and got dressed. When I came out she had taken off her jacket and was smoking a cigarette.

"I won't be long," I said, "Should I bring anything back?"

"A drink would be nice," she said. Her eyes wandered over me. "Weren't you wearing that jacket this afternoon?"

"This corduroy? No, I have two of them and I get mixed up myself. They look the same. I kind of like corduroy."

"Me, too."

I waved good-by and went out. When I got to the sidewalk I put my hands in the pockets and found some pennies. Then I realized it was the same jacket I had worn in the afternoon.

I had a good dinner at the restaurant across the street and bought a fifth of Bourbon. Then I hurried back. I went quickly up the steps and knocked at the door.

There was no answer. I knocked again. Then I tried the door. It was locked. I put my key in and opened up.

The lights were on but there was no Terry Palmer. The bottle of perfume had been torn from the package and opened. My suitcase was on the bed and everything was out of it. I went to the closet. My clothes were on the floor with all the pockets turned inside out.

I ran out of there and to the cottage next door. The car in front was a Studebaker with Michigan plates.

I pounded on the door. A middle-aged, gray-haired woman opened the door and peered out at me.

"Where's Terry?" I asked.

"Terry? Our name is Sweeney."

"Terry is her first name," I said impatiently. "Terry Palmer. She said this was her cottage."

"Well, I like her nerve," Mrs. Sweeney sniffed. "This is our cottage. We paid it in advance and we've been here since seven o'clock. I'm going to talk to the manager. Why, of all things."

"Mistake," I mumbled. "I'll go back and pull the hay from my ears. Thanks, Mrs. Sweeney."

I went back to the cottage and straightened things out. As far as I could see there was nothing missing—nothing except the six cartridges that had been on the desk. I rewrapped the perfume as best I could and went to bed. It took me a long time to fall asleep.

The next morning I was up early.

It was still dark when I took Route 80 out to La Cruces, New Mexico. I drove fast, making good time. By eleven I had crossed the Continental Divide and was disappointed because it didn't look any different from the rest of the scenery. All I could see was bunch grass and bare rock mountains in the distance. After going through Lordsburg I passed
over the New Mexico state line into Arizona. I drove a few miles more and just before I hit San Simon there was an inspection station. I pulled in.

"Plant inspection," the officer said.

"I've got nothing," I said.

"Pick up any cactus or anything?"

"I picked up a girl," I said. "But that was in El Paso."

I went around back with him and opened the trunk. He poked his head inside.

"When did that tall, blond girl come through here?" I asked suddenly. "Her car had New York plates."

"A knock out came through an hour back," he said. "Beautiful long legs. Nice. Only she had a Pontiac with Louisiana markers."

"Gray suit?"

"Yeah. Seemed in an awful hurry."

"Alone?"

"There was a guy with her."

"What did he look like?"

"Ordinary. Maybe fifty. Kind of straight and skinny. Little gray mustache. She was driving."

"Thanks," I said as I got in behind the wheel. "Keep your eyes peeled for plant lice."

"What's that?" he asked.

I got into Tucson at twelve thirty, rode through slowly and turned left on Route 84. About a mile out, my eyes caught a beautiful motel named Regis Lodge. It had a blue tile swimming pool and it looked out across the desert to the Coronado Mountain Range. The sun was strong and the air warm and the palm and orange trees bordering the flower-banked patio looked cool and inviting. I checked in. Ten minutes later I was in for a swim. I lounged around in the sun until the air got cool, then I went in, got dressed, and drove down to Broadway to a movie.

It was nine o'clock when I got back and put the Ford into the carport. As I went up the front stairs to the door, I noticed the light in the window. I tried the knob. The door was unlocked. I opened it and went in.

The man sitting in the big leather chair facing me was big, bulky, red-faced and familiar. He was holding a .38 automatic pistol in his hand.

"Come in," he said softly, waving the gun at me. "Close the door, please."

I closed the door and stood there facing him. "This business is routine to me now," I said. "Do I know you?"

"Yes. My name is Porter. We bumped into each other in Juarez."

"I remember now. You said I was an American tourist."

"You were buying perfume like other tourists. Sit down, please."

"Thanks," I said. "It's very decent of you to be so hospitable, but I'm the one who paid the rent on this place."

"Ah," he said, "a sense of humor. I like that in a man. One must have a sense of humor in these trying times."

"You've got me splitting my sides. What's so funny about a gun pointing at your nose?"

"It's insurance. I'm a man who abhors violence. But, you see, I've come for something. I want it and I don't care to have any trouble."

"I carry travelers' checks," I said. "They wouldn't be any good to you."

"It's something else. I'm looking for stamps."

"Stamps? I've got a booklet of twenty-four ones. I paid a quarter for it and I've used two of them. You're welcome to the rest. I haven't sent as many postcards as I thought I would."

"Rare stamps," he said. "I'm a stamp dealer. I'm particularly interested in a set of Siberian stamps."

"That's swell. Were you looking for them in Juarez, Mexico?"

"No. I had them in Juarez. I had them while I was in the City of Versailles, at the perfume counter. I no longer have them."

"You have my sympathy, looking for Siberian stamps in Mexico. It all sounds crazy to me."

"I'm talking about a series of postage stamps issued by Admiral Kolchak in nineteen nineteen."

"I don't know the admiral."

"The stamps have an interesting history," he said. "At the time of the Russian Revolution, Imperial Army and Naval forces escaped to Omsk in Siberia where a monarchical, anti-Soviet government was set up under Admiral Kolchak. They issued their own stamps by surcharging existing stocks. A lovely
stamp, sir. Twenty kopecks on a three and a half ruble. The color was maroon and light green."

"Sounds interesting," I said politely.

HE INCLINED his head. "Yes. Especially when you consider that these stamps are worth in the neighborhood of three hundred dollars apiece today."

"In Omsk," I said.

"The stamps didn't remain in Omsk. Kolchak's forces were licked by the Red troops and some of his officers found their way to Shanghai, China. One of them had a block of one hundred of these stamps. I was able to get my hands on them."

"Don't tell me how," I said. "I think I know."

"You're quite wrong. I bought them. I have a receipt for the purchase. But that's beside the point. I brought those stamps to New Orleans. From there I went to El Paso. I was in Juarez only an hour. That's where I lost them."

"Sounds like fun," I said. "Did you mention New Orleans?"

"Yes."

"That's in Louisiana."

"Yes."

"A hundred stamps is thirty thousand dollars," I said. "People have been killed for lots less."

"That's right," he said amiably. "I haven't got them, if that's what you've been driving at."

"Ah, but you have." He motioned at me with the pistol barrel. "Pull up your coat collar."

"I'm not a bit cold," I said.

"Delightful wit," he said. "I'm rather too old to appreciate it. Go ahead, please."

I pulled up the collar of my corduroy jacket and a small cellophane envelope dropped to the floor.

"What you know," I said. "I had them all the time."

"Yes. I put them there when I bumped into you in that store. I was being followed at the time. It's been an effort to catch up with you." He leaned forward and retrieved the envelope.

"I could have jumped you just now," I said. "I could have made myself thirty thousand dollars."

"I know," he said as he slid the packet into his pocket. "But I saw that you're not a man who's given to violence, either."

"Thanks for the compliment. You haven't seen me when I'm cornered."

"You must be a veritable tiger," he said as he stood up. He put the pistol away and came out with a flat brown wallet. "I'd like to offer you something for your trouble."

"It was no trouble at all. I enjoyed it. Thanks just the same."

"Ethical," he said. "I like a man with ethics. I must go now. I have a customer waiting for me in Los Angeles. Good day to you, sir, and thanks again."

"Don't mention it. I'd be careful if I were you."

"I do my best," he said.

He put on a gray felt hat and went out. I heard him go down the steps. I waited. A motor started up and I looked out the window and across the patio. A gray convertible Chrysler with Louisiana plates was making the turn onto the highway. He looked back and waved, although I don't think he could have seen me. I waved back. Then I locked the door and went to bed.

AT TEN-THIRTY in the morning I was well beyond Phoenix on the road to Wickenburg. Up ahead I saw a sign on the road that said SANTA LOMA CITY LIMITS Speed Thirty. I slowed down. I drove along another mile when I saw the wrecked car across the road shoulder on my right. I went by it. Then I stopped and backed up, because I had noticed that it was a gray Chrysler convertible with Louisiana markers.

I pulled up alongside it and saw there was another car parked across the road from me. It was a black Ford with a white star on it, and when I looked back at the wreck I saw a ten-gallon hat bob up. It was a man in a Gene Autry outfit, except for the spurs. I got out of my car and went over to him. He had a tanned, deeply seamed face and he was wearing a five-pointed, silver-plated star that said City Marshal. He looked at me impassively. Then he squirted a stream of tobacco juice that raised a puff of dust.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Got a report on a wrecked car. I
moseyed out and had a look."
"Where's the driver?"
"That's why I started to look."
I went over and looked at the leather upholstery. There was a smear of blood on it. "Did you see this?" I asked.
"Yup."
I walked around the car some more. I bent down and looked at the tear in the rear left tire.
"It looks like a bullet hole," I said.
"Yup."
"That driver may be hurt and laying around here somewhere."
"That's why I'm looking."
"You'll need some help."
"I've got a call in to the Highway Patrol."
I left the road and crossed the sandy soil. The area was scattered with sagebrush and cacti. On my way back to the car I saw the dragmarks and followed them.

There was a little rise about thirty feet away and on top of it was a clump of sagebrush. I went over and had a look at Mr. Porter.
He was lying behind the bush with his arms stretched out beside him. His fat face was no longer red, but slate gray. The top of his head had been crushed in, and blood matted his silvery hair. He was lying flat on his back with his eyes staring unblinking at the sun. His shoes and socks were off and I could see the varicose veins under the skin. His hat was beside him with the sweatband torn from it, and his coat pockets were turned inside out. I patted his clothes. There was nothing in them.
I looked at him a moment, then I reached down and felt of his coat collar. Something crackled inside and I looked closer and saw the uneven stitching of the thread on the seam. I tugged away at it and the thread broke. I poked my fingers into the opening and came away with the cellophane packet. Putting it in my pocket, I went back to the road. The marshal was waving a smattering of cars along.

"Find anything?" he asked.
"He's back there in the sagebrush," I said. "He's as dead as a canceled postage stamp."
"Did you touch anything?"
"No," I lied. "He was all cleaned out."

"We'd better go and have a look," he said.
"Go ahead. I've had mine."

In the distance there was the wail of a siren.
"Maybe you'd better hang around," he said. "The Highway Patrol is here."

A half hour went by before they asked me to identify myself, took my name and address, and let me go. I headed on toward Wickenburg, passing a screaming ambulance on the way. I turned the radio on, then turned it off. I was in no mood for music.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when I crossed the Colorado River and passed through the inspection station at Blythe, California. I felt tired and low and, for the first time in my life, I needed a drink.

There was a row of tourist cabins ahead on the right, and I pulled in. After I had checked into the cabin I drove down the main street and over to a service station to have my car lubricated. I chatted with the attendant until my car was up on the lift, then went across the street.

A lot of Indians were in town for the harvest and I made my way through them and into a bar. After one stiff Bourbon I began to grin to myself. I had forgotten the unopened fifth in the glove compartment of my car.

I went outside and stood among the crowd. A car came barreling down East Hobson Way and disappeared along Highway 60 in the direction of Los Angeles. It was a black Pontiac but I didn't catch the license plate.

The next morning I was up with the sun to make the long trek through the desert into the mountain passes along Joshua Tree National Monument. I went through Desert Center and began to climb. Just before I reached Cactus City I saw a little gully along the side of the road. A car was parked in it. As I came closer I saw it was a black Pontiac and when I flashed by it I saw the Louisiana plate.

I began to slow down. Looking through the rear view mirror I saw the car pull out and come after me. I took my foot off the gas and my car lost speed rapidly.
Then I heard a shot whine by me. I looked back again and saw a man in a blue suit with his head out the window. As I pushed the pedal down I saw him lift a gun and aim. I put the gas down to the floorboard as the shot sang by the car. Reaching into the glove compartment, I pushed my hand by the liquor bottle to where my nickel-plated monkey wrench was. I held it by the head and poked it out the window beside me. The sun glinted on the handle, and the Pontiac began to fall back. I turned a bend on screaming tires and that was the last I saw of the Pontiac. I patted the wrench and put it on the seat beside me...

I drove down the steeply graded hills into Indio and from there took Route 101 into Palm Springs. After leaving Palm Springs I went through Banning and Riverside without incident. When I got to Los Angeles I went up Sunset Boulevard and onto the Cahuenga Freeway, turning right into North Hollywood. My sister lived on Riverside Drive, but before I got there I thought I'd stop and have some lunch.

There was a drive-in restaurant on Lankershim Boulevard, and I turned in. The place was circled with cars, and the carhops were busy juggling trays. I sat there and waited.

Hearing a car door open at my right, I turned my head. A girl flashed a long slim leg as she got in and sat down. She was wearing a tight black dress with a little cape. Her blond hair was brushed severely back and tied with a ribbon.

"Hello, Terry," I said. "I had an idea you'd show up again."

"Hello, Roger," she smiled.

"You look very pretty today. Maybe we can finally have that lunch together."

"Later, Roger," she said. "I have some explaining to do."

"You sure have.

"Not here," she said nervously. Her fingers played with the clasp of her big black handbag. "I have a little place over in Laurel Canyon. We can talk better there."

"Suits me fine," I said.

I turned the car out of the drive-in and, following her directions, headed over to Ventura Boulevard. From there we took a left turn and wound in through the brown, rolling hills.

"Pretty country," I said. "Familiar with it?"

"I've been here before. You take another left here."

It was a narrow, winding road that climbed steeply, and I put the car into second. When we got to the top I saw a modernistic house finished in glass and redwood. It was perched on the edge of a sheer drop, and there was an ornamental, wrought iron fence around it.

"Nice view," I said.

"It's private," Terry said.

There was the sound of a motor laboring up the grade, and I twisted around to look. The car was a black Pontiac and I knew the number on the bumper by heart. I started to open my door.

"Stay a while," Terry said. Something hard was poking into my side. I looked down. It was a short, flat little automatic.

"It's only a twenty-five," she said.

"A Colt Pocket Hammerless. It holds six rounds. I know how to use it."

"I think, I'll stay," I said.

The car I had heard pulled up behind us and stopped. The man who got out was wearing a piece of adhesive tape on his cheekbone and his upper lip was puffed. He had a thin graying moustache and he stood very erect in his blue, pin-striped suit.

"I seem to remember him," I said to Terry.

"Yes, and he has good reason to remember you. His name is Boris Mdvonoff and he's my husband. My third husband, I should say."

Mdvonoff came over to my side of the car and opened the door. "Get out," he said.

I stepped out. He backed away about twenty feet. Both his hands were in his pockets.

"You see, I remember," he said. "Not too close."

"Into the house?" I asked him.

"The house is empty. If you'll notice, there's a 'For Sale' sign in front."

"I noticed."

"You're very stupid," he said. "I'm disappointed in Mr. Porter's associates."

"Not so stupid. Let's say I was curious.
When your wife stepped into my car back at the drive-in, I knew she hadn't walked all the way."

"I see," he said. He looked past my shoulder to my car. "Terry," he called, "search him, please."

She came out and moved up to me, gun in hand. Her free hand patted my clothes gingerly. Then she took my wallet out and went through it. The collar of my jacket itched."

"He has no gun?" Mdvanoff asked.

"No gun," she said. "I don't see the stamps, either."

"We know you have them," he said to me. "We are sure now that Porter passed them to you. I'm prepared to offer you a thousand dollars cash."

"They're worth thirty thousand," I said."

"That's catalogue value. We couldn't get that on the open market. Fifteen hundred, Mr. Chase."

"What did you offer Porter?"

"Mr. Porter didn't care to talk business," he said.

"So you left him beside the road in Arizona with his head crushed in. They'll be wanting you back there."

"They may be wanting me here, too, in a moment, Mr. Chase. I don't wish to dawdle. Two thousand and that's final."

"You'd better take it," Terry said. "Boris has a quick temper."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Whose stamps are they?"

"Mine," Mdvanoff said. "They were stolen from me by Mr. Porter."

"How?" I asked. "Porter was a stamp dealer?"

"He gave me five hundred dollars for them."

"And you gave him a receipt."

"I didn't know their value at that time."

"Seems to me it was a legal sale," I said.

"This won't get us anywhere," Terry said to me. "Here, let me explain it. Boris was a Czarist officer. At the time of the revolution he fled to Siberia with the White forces. When the end came, he made his way to Shanghai with some others. He had these stamps with him. He didn't know what they were worth."

He had kept them, more or less, as curios. Well, you know what happened in China. The Japs, the civil war, inflation. He got strapped for cash. So he went down to the Bund and saw Mr. Porter. Mr. Porter gave him five hundred dollars. Then I came along."

"From Omsk?"

"From the States. I was in China with my second husband. He was a marine officer. He divorced me."

"Oh. He divorced you."

She smiled provocatively. "He wasn't at all broadminded. I daresay I kicked up my heels once in a while. I wanted a change anyway. He was very dull and stuffy."

"So you married this one. You seem to run to officers and ex-officers."

"Boris fascinated me and I haven't been bored since. He has such a nice continental air about him. After we were married, Boris told me about the stamps. We checked on them and found out what they were really worth. Then we went after Mr. Porter."

"To Louisiana?"

"Yes. To New Orleans. Mr. Porter had gotten out of China and he was here on a temporary visa. He was trying to sell the stamps. We followed him. He headed west, and we went after him. We caught up with him in Juarez, but lost him after he had contacted you. Then we finally found him in Arizona."

"When you say finally," I said, "you mean—finally—for him. Why didn't he go to the police for protection?"

"Because his visa had expired. He would have had to go back to China, or perhaps, some other country. Nobody wants to go back to China now. And anywhere else he went, he couldn't get a good price for the stamps. Not real money. He had to stay in the States."

"That's enough of this talk," Boris Mdvanoff said. "It is getting late."

"I'd like to do business," I said. "But how do I know I won't wind up like Porter after I hand them over?"

"You have my word," he said. "As an Imperial officer and a gentleman."

"It sounds like boloney," I said.

As I said it, I whirled and grabbed Terry's wrist, twisting the automatic from her hand. Mdvanoff screamed something. His hand jumped inside the
pocket, and he fired at me. The shot screeched by me and echoed off in the hills. I brought the automatic up quickly and squeezed the trigger. There was a sound like the pop of an air rifle. Mdvanoff staggered. I squeezed another shot at him. He snarled something and worked his hand feverishly in his pocket. He couldn’t make it. A dark stain was spreading in his midsection. He went down on one knee and pitched forward on his face.

Terry ran over to him and tried to get her hand into his pocket as she lay there.

“Trick shooting,” I said, as I went over and pulled her to her feet. “It looks great but it never works. You get all tangled up in your pockets.”

Her hands reached up and clawed for my face, I slapped them down.

“You ought to quit,” I said to her. “Seems to me it’s all over now.”

She stopped short and her hand went slowly to her hair. “You’re right,” she said. “I must be an awful sight.”

“You’re as beautiful as ever.”

“You said you were single, Roger. No ties?”

“None—and staying that way. Don’t waste your charm on me.” I bent over Mdvanoff and opened his coat.

“How is he?” she asked.

“I’m afraid he’ll live and make the trip to Arizona. Come on, we’d better go.”

“Where are we going, darling?”

“We’re going to look for some police,” I said.

“You’re not serious, darling?”

“I sure am. Your husband will want your company on that trip.”

She opened up then. She swore beautifully.

“I guess you did have a husband in the marines,” I said. “But the first one must have been in the cavalry.”

IT WAS many hours later when I drove up to a little bungalow on Riverside Drive in North Hollywood. I left the car and went up the cement walk. When my sister opened the door I felt like I was home.

She squealed a little and got red and flustered, and so did I as I kissed her cheek.

“Have a nice trip, Roger?” she asked.

“Fair enough,” I said as we went in.

Her two tow-headed youngsters peeped out shyly at me.

“You’ve only seen pictures of them,” she said to me. “That’s Tommy. He’s eight. And Rickie, there, is five.”

“They’re big for their age,” I said.

“Come and meet your uncle,” she called to them. Then turning back to me, she said, “They’ve been so busy with their albums.”

“Records?”

“Stamps. They’re avid collectors.”

“They tell me it’s a fascinating game,” I said. “You know, I may have something to add to their collection later. The authorities are checking on them now.”

“How nice,” she said. “It’s a wonder you yourself don’t take it up. You lead such a dull, prosaic life. Now sit down and tell me all about the family.”

196 Pages of the Best in Mystery Fiction!

Featuring a Complete Novel by JEAN FRANCIS WEBB
Plus Novelets and Stories by RICHARD SALE,
PAUL ERNST, STEVE FISHER, LAWRENCE TREAT,
GEORGE BRUCE, WARD HAWKINS and others!

GIANT DETECTIVE ANNUAL

NOW ON SALE — ONLY 25¢ AT ALL STANDS!
POISON IVY
By O. B. MYERS

Because he was at home when the call reached him, McCorlie did not go in his official police car. He went downtown on the subway and walked from 50th Street to the Hotel Fannimore, on the fringe of the theatrical district.

He passed the door that opened into the bar, and turned in the main entrance between soot-streaked Doric columns of imitation marble. In the lobby the only bright light was over the desk. The other side, toward the writing rooms and the grill, was illuminated by dim amber floor lamps and shaded wall fixtures. This gave the vaulted foyer a furtive, clandestine air, which in truth was well suited to the general run of patrons it attracted.

McCorlie was not surprised when no one stopped him or spoke to him as he strode toward the two elevators in the rear. In this type of off-Broadway hotel, half resident and half transient, occu-

A ripped pillow, a wrong pair of shoes and a laundry mark spell doom for a killer—and a headache for the Inspector!
pants and their visitors came and went without attracting overt attention. The only certain reaction from the dapper desk clerk would be toward one going streetward with baggage.

In response to McCorlie’s “Three!” the elevator boy yawned and clanged his doors.

As soon as he emerged on the third floor, McCorlie saw signs of something unusual. Rumor travels fast in a hotel. Doors stood partly open, the people in them either gawking down the long corridor or withdrawing nervously as he strode past. A faint odor of flashbulb smoke drifted in the gloomy air.

At the door of 326 stood a uniformed cop. He started to raise his hand, then, recognizing McCorlie, changed the gesture to a salute.

“Good evening, Inspector!” he said respectfully.

McCorlie nodded and pushed open the door.

The room was small, and crowded with bulky furniture. Over by the windows an area of the floor was littered with what appeared to be small feathers. Everywhere else the place was so full of cops that McCorlie could hardly push in. Most of them were in plain clothes, and they were all very busy with their tasks, for it was scarcely two hours since a voice had cried over the phone: “Murder! Somebody’s been murdered here!”

RECOGNIZING the inspector’s sharp features and prematurely white hair, they made passage for him.

“Dan?” he grunted, looking around.

“Sergeant Allison is not here, sir.” A short, stocky man with a tape measure in his hands explained that it was Dan’s day off. He was out of town, but would be back in the morning.

Meanwhile, McCorlie’s eyes were busy. On the rug, in a morass of blood and feathers, lay a thin, angular man in the slack repose of death. The left side of his head, just behind the angle of the jaw, was a gaping wound where two bullets had entered. At least one had severed the jugular vein, so that bleeding had been profuse.

“Between five and six o’clock,” said the physician in reply to the inspector’s questioning look. “Death practically instantaneous.”

Obviously a pillow had been used to muffle the shots. It lay near the foot of the bed, the ticking ripped and scorched. The pillow case was not in sight.

“Who is he?” asked McCorlie.

“Name is George Corning,” the stocky detective told him. “According to his driver’s license, he’s forty-two years old, and his home address is up in Mount Vernon. Other papers in his pockets say he’s an importer of dolls, with an office down on Varick Street.”

“If he lives in Mount Vernon, why the room at the Fannimore?”

“The clerk says his wife took the room, this morning. Said that she and her husband were going to the theatre and night-clubbing, and wanted to sleep in town instead of going home afterward.”

“His wife? Where is she?”

“She apparently hasn’t been seen in the hotel since this morning. The Mount Vernon police are looking for her.”

“Anybody see this Corning come in?”

The reply was a nod. “That’s how he got discovered so quick. At five-thirty he stopped at the room-service desk and ordered some drinks sent up to 326 at six. Said that would give him time to take a shower. A boy took up two Manhattans at six, but got no answer. He tried again five minutes later, but still no one opened the door. He thought that was funny, and called the bell captain. After some more knocking, they used a pass-key, and found the body.”

“He never got time for that shower, did he? Either the killer was waiting for him, or followed him in. How about that?”

But none of the help remembered a visitor asking for Corning, or entering 326. They had all been questioned.

“They wouldn’t remember, in this dump,” growled McCorlie.

During most of this conversation he had been peering sharply at the body on the floor. Under the head and shoulders the tan rug was deeply stained with a great, irregular blotch of blood, now half dried. The coat-tails and trousers of Corning’s light gray suit were clean, but his shoes were badly splotted, and the
solences were so gummy with blood that several feathers were embedded in the instep.

"McCorlie pointed them out to the detective. "What do you make of that, Hoffman?"

"Why, he trod in his own blood. He must have put up quite a struggle, before he went down."

"Yeah?" McCorlie glanced at the physician, remembering his statement. "Death practically instantaneous." He shook his head. "And there were feathers in the puddle before he stepped in it, eh? When you bust open a pillow at shoulder height, the feathers don't clatter down like pebbles, you know. Look!"

He picked up a clean, dry feather from the floor. Holding it out at arm's length, he released it. In fascinated silence they watched it drift and flutter. It seemed like half a minute before it finally reached the floor.

"And with two bullets in his brain, he was struggling all that time, eh?" asked the inspector caustically.

The detective wore a puzzled frown. "But then how—"

"Figure it out!" snapped McCorlie. "I've got a hunch those are the killer's shoes the corpse is wearing. The murderer had to walk out through the lobby into the street, and he was afraid someone might notice blood on his shoes. So he made a quick change with the victim. Take 'em off, and let's see what they tell us."

BUT they told practically nothing. Bought from a large chain, the shoes carried the name of the chain on the insole, but no indication of which store had sold them. Furthermore, they were Size 8½-C. With an outsize like 5-A, or 14-EE, there might have been a chance of tracing them. But every clerk in every store sold half a dozen 8½-Cs every day, and would never remember an individual customer.

It was while McCorlie was holding them that Hoffman spoke.

"Your hands, Inspector. You've got something on your hands."

"Huh? Oh, that!" McCorlie sniffed at his chalk-smeared wrists. "Poison ivy," he muttered. "Got a dose up in the country, last Sunday."

Like any grown man, he acted faintly ashamed of such a childish ailment. He barked unnecessarily loud at the detective:

"And when you get him downtown, check all the rest of his clothes! Who knows? He might be wearing some other clue."

After some more questions, none of which brought illuminating or helpful replies, the inspector left.

Before nine the next morning he was at his desk, down on Centre Street. The desk held two phones, one on his right and one on his left. A teletype clattered from a room down the corridor. An intercom 'squeak-box' faced him across a fresh pad of paper. All through the building assistants awaited his summons.

Here in this office he was somewhat like a spider at the center of a far-flung and enormously sensitive web. The slightest tremor at any point would reach him immediately. The only defect in this system was that the one fly he wished to catch was keeping very, very still. That fly was the murderer.

One of the lab men came in to report.

"That Corning case, Inspector. We've checked the clothes."

"Yes? What did you find?"

"The tailor's tag in the coat carries his name. There are some dry cleaning numbers. But the shirt and the underwear don't show any laundry marks at all."

McCorlie's eyebrows indicated his surprise.

"He must have had his stuff laundered at home," explained the lab men. "All except the undershirt. That showed a faint trace of an old laundry mark. We brought it up with lampblack."

He laid a scrap of paper on the desk.

The inspector glanced at it briefly. "The number means nothing to me, by itself. Has it been traced?"

"They're working on it now."

The inspector nodded. His caller departed.

He was followed by a fingerprint expert. They had picked up, of course, a great many prints in Room 326. Doubtless most of them belonged to the hotel staff or previous occupants. There was
no way to connect any of them to the killer until they had a suspect.

Next came a man from the ballistics department. Two bullets had been dug out of Corning’s skull. They were .32 caliber, and carried plenty of markings from the lands of the barrel from which they had been fired. It would be possible definitely to identify them with the right gun—when and if a gun was found.

On his heels arrived Dan Allison, the detective-sergeant from the precinct in which the Hotel Fannimore was located. Dan was young, with strong, well-chiseled features and tightly curling blond hair. In plain clothes he looked more like a lifeguard off duty than a top-grade detective, and he was at pains to support this illusion by a flippant, irresponsible manner.

“Good morning, Inspector! Who’s this Corning, who had to get himself shot on my day off?”

In two minutes McCorlie brought him up to date on the status of the case, being careful to confine himself to hard facts, injecting no theories or guesswork. Dan could evolve his own theories.

He had barely finished when the phone rang. McCorlie listened.

“Vaile Corning? Oh, yes! Send her right in.”

He hung up and turned to Dan. “It’s Corning’s wife. They brought her down from Mount Vernon.”

DAN rose to his feet. He carefully moved a chair a foot or so until it was back against the wall. The inspector started to lift his hand in protest, when the door from the corridor opened.

Timid and uncertain, Vaile Corning walked into the room.

The Mount Vernon cop who was acting as escort stayed outside, closing the door softly behind her. Dan sprang forward. With a gesture of simple courtesy, he moved the same chair back to its original position, a position which faced the inspector’s desk at an angle which allowed the light from the high window to fall full on the face of its occupant. With a murmured word of thanks she sat down.

She had evidently not yet taken time or thought for mourning dress. Her light green tweed suit was severely tailored, yet managed to show to advantage the somewhat sensuous curves of her figure. Its color matched and accentuated the lively green of her eyes, which were wide and frightened under brows etched in a high arc. Her hair, coifed in a trim upsweep, was brown with overtones of red. The overtones might have been natural.

“I appreciate that this is a very difficult time for you, Mrs. Corning,” said the inspector gently. “You must not feel that we are prying into your personal affairs. But we have, of course, our duty to perform, and naturally you will wish to help us.”

“Yes, of course.” Her voice was low, with an intense, emotional quality. She spoke to McCorlie, but looked at Dan. “Now, apparently, your husband had some enemies—or at least one enemy,” continued the inspector.

“Enemies!” she cried. “Why, I—I never thought of George having enemies. But now, I suppose he must have. Yes.” “Can you give us any idea?”

But she could give no suggestion whatsoever. She spoke of their circle of friends, their rather restricted social life.

“He was fifteen years older than I, and he didn’t care much about going out. But he was always a good husband to me. I don’t think I could have asked for any better.”

Her full lips, rouged to a rose-petal pout, trembled faintly.

McCorlie asked a question about financial circumstances. They had been difficult, she explained, right after the war, especially when they first bought the house in Mount Vernon. But in the last year or so they had improved a great deal. Their income had tripled.

“About George’s business, I know practically nothing,” she declared, with the helpless air of a woman lost in a man’s world. “If he had business enemies, rivals—well, I just wouldn’t know.”

“We will look into that,” McCorlie promised. “Now perhaps you would tell us exactly what you did yesterday.”

She spoke with no sign of reluctance.

“We had agreed to go to the theatre in the evening, and do a few night clubs afterward. The last train to Mount Ver-
non isn’t very late, so I thought we’d stay in town overnight. That’s why in the middle of the morning I went in and took a room at the Hotel Fannimore. It’s convenient to the theater district, you know. Then I did a little shopping, and went back home to Mount Vernon. I intended to pack a bag and return in time to meet George.”

“And what time did you return to New York?” asked McCorlie.

“I didn’t,” was her reply. “After I got home, I had a headache. The cook got me some aspirin, but it didn’t do any good. A friend of mine dropped in—Emmy Dorbat, it was. She lives in Tuckahoe. We sat and talked, and the headache got worse. So I gave up the idea of going to the theater at all, finally.”

“I see. And you let your husband know?”

“No, I didn’t call him again. By that time it was after five o’clock, and I was sure he would have left his office.”

“Call him again?” repeated Dan. “Had you called him earlier?”

“Oh, yes. When I was in town, in the morning. I told him about the hotel, and gave him the room number. I said I’d meet him there at five-thirty. He must have expected to find me in the room. I suppose that’s why he ordered those two cocktails.”

“Only he found, instead, someone else,” murmured McCorlie. “Now how do you suppose that someone else got in the room to meet him?”

Her eyes were wide and appealing, and there was genuine fright in her husky voice.

“I—I don’t know!”

FURTHER questions and answers added nothing new to her story. She had risen to leave, at McCorlie’s gesture, when he suddenly came out with another query.

“Do you have a washing machine in your home, Mrs. Corning?”

She was plainly puzzled. “A washing machine?” She looked from Dan to McCorlie. “You’re joking, aren’t you?”

The inspector assured her that he was not.

“Yes, we do. We got it several years ago. I have a woman who comes in twice a week and does all our laundry for us. But why?”

“That’s fine, Mrs. Corning,” the inspector told her. “If we need any more information, we’ll contact you in Mount Vernon.”

After she had left, Dan muttered, “A cook and a friend, fifteen miles away. A perfect alibi, isn’t it?”

“So perfect it’s almost suspicious,” grunted McCorlie. He looked up at Dan out of the corners of his eyes. “She looks like a warm number, doesn’t she? Think you could make her?”

Dan did not smile. “I know what you mean, and the answer is yes. Fifteen from forty-two is twenty-seven. That’s the dangerous age in a woman’s love life. And she’s got something in her eye—”

“Yeah, I noticed it.”

The inspector was grimly thoughtful. But before he gave voice to his speculations, his phone rang. He scooped it to his ear.

“Yes? . . . Oh, you have, eh? Let’s have it.”

His right hand reached for a pencil, and began to trace block letters on the blank pad of paper. When he snapped, “Good!” and hung up, he tore off the top sheet and studied it curiously.

“That laundry mark on the undershirt—they’ve traced it,” he told Dan. “The name is Howlick—Harry Howlick. Here’s his last address, up in the Bronx. Follow it up.”

“Good gravy, Chief!” exclaimed Dan. “You don’t think that the killer changed undershirts with the corpse, too, do you?”

“No, not quite,” admitted McCorlie. “But there must be some connection there. Let’s find out what it is.”

Dan took the paper, shrugged skeptically, and departed.

During the morning, reports continued to flow to the inspector’s desk. They came from the medical examiner making the post mortem, from detectives in Mount Vernon checking back on Corning’s home life, from others at the hotel studying the contents of Room 326.

It was almost noon before Dan returned.

“I could have saved myself the trip to the Bronx and back,” he declared
ruefully. "In the first place, Howlick has an office right up here on Broadway at Nineteenth Street. He's an insurance man in a small way. In the second place, the minute I walked in, I knew that we were working on a wrong steer."

"Why?" demanded McCorlie.

"Because he weighs two hundred and fifty pounds. Corning was a skinny runt. The undershirt that fitted him could never possibly fit Howlick. There's something cock-eyed about that laundry mark. But I questioned him anyway."

"What did he have to say?"

"He admitted knowing the Cornings. Says he lived with them for a few months, a couple of years ago. They advertised a room for rent in their Mount Vernon house, and he took it. Then after a while Corning got more prosperous, decided he didn't need a lodger, and Howlick left. He moved to the Bronx. That was a year and a half ago, and he says he hasn't seen anything of the Cornings since."

McCorlie's eyes narrowed. "Where was he yesterday afternoon?"

"In his office until just before five. He left and took a subway uptown as usual. But he says he made a mistake and got on a West Side train—didn't discover it until he was at 181st Street. He got off, and just for the exercise walked across the bridge and up University Avenue. Ate dinner in his customary restaurant on Tremont Avenue, and then went home. He can't place the time exactly. He thinks it was about seven when he got to the restaurant."

"So at the time of the murder, he is supposed to have been taking a long walk across the Bronx, alone?"

"That's right," nodded Dan. "No alibi at all."

The inspector frowned at his desk.

"Incidentally," added Dan, "he's got the same trouble you have."

"What do you mean?"

Dan indicated the white blotches on McCorlie's hands. "Poison ivy. Says he got it out on Long Island, last weekend. Calamine lotion all over his right hand, just like yours. His left hand must be even worse. It's all bandaged up."

McCorlie reddened. "So he's a damned fool, too!" He picked up a pencil and began to doodle on his pad. "You know, Dan, there's one thing I keep hearing—that Corning began to get more prosperous a year or so ago. When a man makes money, he's apt to make enemies at the same time. Maybe you'd better go over to Corning's office this afternoon and look into his business."

**THIS time it was late afternoon before Dan returned.**

"It's a small set-up, but it might be a gold mine," he reported. "Corning had a secretary, a couple of typists, and an assistant, a young fellow named Perry Cope. They all agree that business has been good recently. But Cope has a theory that Corning was engaged in some deal outside of dolls."

* McCorlie was interested. "Such as what?"

"Well, he doesn't know. But he says Corning frequently left the office for several hours with no explanation. There were phone calls from people who wouldn't give their names, and Corning shut his door before he talked to them. There were some deposits made in cash. Only Corning knew where that cash came from, and he didn't explain. Cope can't explain it either, but he's suspicious."

"What does he suspect?"

"Smuggling. Dolls make a neat hiding-place for anything small. Diamonds, for example, or drugs. It's a business a man could make quick money in—and make some pretty rough enemies, too."

The inspector considered this, frowning. "Sounds like an attempt to throw suspicion elsewhere, to me. Is there any reason why this fellow Cope should be anxious to throw suspicion the other way?"

"Plenty," said Dan. He leaned across the desk. "He admits having an affair with Vaile Corning."

The inspector merely said, "A-a-ah!" and listened.

"She used to come in the office occasionally. She gave Cope the eye, and one day she slipped him a telephone number. He called up. They made a date. He says she was a push-over. After that they saw each other half a dozen times. He'd get the afternoon off and meet her for lunch at one of the mid-
town hotels. She always left in time to get back to Mount Vernon before her husband got home.”

“How recently was this?”

“It ended a couple of months ago. Cope says he called it off, refused to see her any more. He was afraid her husband would find out, and to Cope it meant his job. He insists that he hasn’t seen anything of little round-heels in the last two months.”

“And how about yesterday afternoon?”

“He left the office about five, as soon as the boss had gone. He lives with a married sister in Jackson Heights, but he didn’t go there. He took a subway and then a bus out to La Guardia Field, and spent a couple of hours loafing on the observation deck, watching the planes land and take off. He says he does that occasionally. He used to be in the Air Force, and gets a kick out of it. He was alone, and didn’t meet anybody who knows him.”

McCorlie snorted softly. “In other words, no alibi for the hour between five and six?”

“Not a shadow of an alibi, no.”

McCorlie creased his lips in thought. He started to scratch the back of his hand, then stopped himself. He picked up a pencil and began to doodle furiously. At least it served to divert his attention from that maddening itch.

At noon the next day McCorlie’s pad was covered with an assortment of petrified eels and geometric gargoyles. More reports had come in—from downtown, from the Bronx, from Mount Vernon, and from Long Island. But they had added little if anything to his stock of information. He was at the point where he could do nothing but sit and think. Movement in the web had ceased. The fly was wary.

He tore off the top sheet. Then he began to write, slowly at first, then more rapidly. When he had filled two of the small pages, he pressed a button and spoke into his squawk-box.

“Send Daley in here.”

Daley was a tall, studious fellow with a faint drawl.

“I want you to make a couple of telephone calls for me,” the inspector told him. “The names and the numbers are right there. Read those messages and see if you understand ’em.”

Daley scrutinized both pages carefully. “I guess I get the idea, Chief.”

“Use a public pay phone, outside,” McCorlie advised him.

A few minutes later the inspector went out to lunch.

It was an hour after his return when his phone rang. A voice inquired, “Is Sergeant Allison there?”

McCorlie looked across his desk at Dan, seated facing him. “Sergeant Allison stepped out for a minute,” he said coolly. “This is Inspector McCorlie. Is it something about the Corning case?”

“Yes, it is.” The caller hesitated. “This is Perry Cope. I work in Mr. Corning’s office.”

“Oh, yes! The sergeant told me all about you.” The inspector’s tone was pleasant, cheerful. “What’s on your mind, Mr. Cope?”

“Someone called me up a while ago, Inspector. A man. I don’t know who he was. He wouldn’t give his name. Only it must be someone who knows me by sight. Because he said he had seen me Tuesday afternoon, about five-thirty, out at La Guardia Field.”

“Well?” encouraged McCorlie. “He might have, eh?”

“Yes, but he said he understood, from what he’d read in the papers, that I was going to need an alibi and need it bad. He said he could furnish it—but not for nothing. He told me to come to the Forty-ninth Street entrance of Madison Square Garden at eight o’clock tonight, and bring along all the cash I could get together. If it was enough, he would see what he could do.”

“I see. And what did you tell him?”

“He hung up before I could tell him anything.”

“And what are you going to do? Are you going to meet him?”

“I don’t know what to do. I thought I ought to tell you. I haven’t got any money, Inspector. Only a couple hundred dollars in the savings bank. And besides, there’s something phony about him.”

“How do you mean?”

“He said he saw me at the east end of the promenade deck, about five-thirty. I got out there to La Guardia around
five-thirty, all right, but I was at the other end at first. I didn't go up to the east end until after an hour or more. Maybe I'll need an alibi, even though I'm innocent. But if this man testifies, and then it comes out that he's lying, it'll look worse for me than ever, won't it?"

"That's right, Cope," McCorlie assured him. "Better stick to the truth, even if it hurts. I'll tell you what. You go home tonight, and get a good night's sleep. I'll see what we can do from here about identifying the man who phoned you. And thanks for calling, Cope!"

He hung up and described the conversation to Dan.

Dan grinned crookedly, shrugged, and murmured, "Kind of a tough spot to put a guy in, isn't it?"

At SEVEN-THIRTY that evening, after eating dinner together, Dan and the inspector drove uptown in a black sedan that carried the letters 'P.D.' on each side of the body. They parked on 51st Street, headed west, walked two blocks down Eighth Avenue, and turned the corner into 49th Street.

At a time when anything was going on in Madison Square Garden, this whole block would have been jammed from curb to curb with traffic, the sidewalk crowded with scalpers, and the entrance foyer a seething crush of humanity trying to get near the ticket windows. This week, however, the Garden was idle, and activity here touched the opposite extreme.

Except for a double line of silent parked cars, the side street was empty, the only movement an occasional taxi-cab whizzing past toward Ninth Avenue. Plenty of pedestrians flowed north and south on Eighth, but almost none of them turned into 49th. The advance sale for next Tuesday's fights was going on at the main entrance, around the corner on Eighth Avenue. There was nothing to bring a visitor to this side entrance.

The foyer, cut some ten or fifteen feet into the building from the sidewalk, was deserted and dark. Steel gates shielded the inner doors and the ticket windows. Papers blew about on the floor in listless gusts. The nearest street lamp threw a sharp, diagonal line across the terrazzo, leaving one corner buried in a triangular pool of shadow.

"You stay back there, Dan," the inspector ordered. "And you'd better lay off the cigarettes while we're waiting."

They did not speak to each other again. Dan, leaning against a blank poster frame, was well-nigh invisible except to a purposeful scrutiny. The inspector stood squarely in the mouth of the foyer, facing at a slight angle toward Eighth Avenue. His hands were folded in front of his torso, the picture of unhurried patience.

Occasional pedestrians passed, singly or in pairs. They gave him one glance, but no more. He was simply an elderly man in a somber dark suit and a conservative fedora, waiting. There was nothing about him to indicate his profession, or his errand.

Eight o'clock came, and passed. McCorlie gave no sign. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and cursed his itching wrists, but his patience did not desert him.

It was nearly eight-fifteen when he saw his man coming from the direction of Eighth Avenue. The inspector spotted him instantly. He had spent a lifetime training himself to recognize a man from a verbal description. Heavy frame, dark complexion, prominent eyebrows, wide, thick shoulders—it all registered in a glance. And besides, this man exhibited one feature that marked him incontrovertibly.

His left hand was completely swathed in bandages.

He approached slowly, following the curb so as to get a look at the foyer entrance as soon as possible. His eyes fastened on McCorlie as he came nearer. He kept on walking, as if to pass, but his head turned as he came opposite the inspector's position.

McCorlie spoke bluntly. "Howlucky? You're looking for me, aren't you?"

The big man stopped at once. He was recognized. That was what he had been waiting for. His eyes narrowed.

"Who are you?" he demanded gruffly.

"Never mind that," said McCorlie. "Did you bring the money?"

"Yes. But first, what do I get for it?"

The inspector spoke rapidly, in a low tone. "If you were seen and recognized,
on the 181st Street bridge, at 5:40 on Tuesday afternoon, that would fix you up pretty good, wouldn't it?"

Howlick considered. "Yeah. But how could you have seen me when I wasn't there? And how do I know you'll appear to testify?"

McCorlie disregarded the first question. "Because after you've paid, I'm going to tell you who I am. How much did you bring?"

"Two thousand," hissed Howlick. "It's all I—"

"Not enough," grunted the inspector coldly. "You know plenty well I'm sticking my neck out for you. It's worth more."

"Yeah, I know that," pleaded the big man, "but dammit! I'm not rich. I could get maybe another thousand, tomorrow morning after the banks open, but that's tops, absolutely. Here, it's a deal, eh?"

HE WAS reaching under his coat. Because the money was apparently in the inside pocket, and he had to use his right hand alone, he fumbled awkwardly. At that moment Dan made a slight movement.

Howlick, startled, went rigid. "Hey! Who's that there?"

Perceiving that he had been seen, Dan stepped forward. The light fell on his face.

"The cop!" croaked Howlick. "He's a cop! And you—" He glared angrily at the inspector.

"Take it easy, Howlick," cautioned the latter. "You're under arrest for the murder of George Corning."

"What! You're crazy! What do you mean?"

"An innocent man doesn't try to buy himself a false alibi from a stranger," McCorlie told him in a grim voice. "You weren't at 181st Street, and you knew it. Better come quietly, now."

For a moment the big man seemed stunned by the sudden turn of circumstances. His shoulders sagged, his right hand dropped empty to his side. But then a curse hissed through his clenched teeth. His left arm, ending in a thick wad of white bandage, jerked up.

McCorlie heard a strange, flat sound, like a walnut being cracked inside a fold-
ed handkerchief. Something stung his shoulder. He realized abruptly what was going on.

"Down, Dan!" he blurted. "He's got a gun!"

The inspector's two hands pushed violently against Dan's chest. The shove sent Dan sprawling. There was another muffled crack, and a fragment of flaming cotton dropped to the pavement. A smack and a tinkle of broken glass came from the rear of the foyer.

McCorlie had dropped to one knee, and was tugging under his coat at his service pistol. He got it out, but never fired it.

Dan, without getting to his feet, rolled horizontally across the sidewalk, but not in his original direction. His tumbling form took Howlick's feet out from under him like a halfback executing a low block on the ten-yard line. The big man crashed to the ground.

Dan pounced on his arm, and the inspector, leaping in, laid the flat of his pistol where it would do the most good. Howlick relaxed, and rolled over limp as a pudding.

"Blasted fool that I am!" growled McCorlie, ripping at the bandages on the big man's left hand. "I should have guessed it! Poison ivy, my eye! It itches bad enough when it's open. It would be unbearable, covered up with bandages. Fathead!"

The last turn of bandage fell free. Howlick's left hand was disclosed, curled neatly around the butt of a black .32 automatic. The inspector picked it up gingerly, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and dropped it in his side pocket.

"We'll see tomorrow morning if some slugs from this don't match up under the microscope with the ones they fished out of George Corning's skull," he growled. "And it's no thanks to me that they won't be fishing some of them out of us, either. Numbskull!"

"Chief!" cried Dan. "Your shoulder—there's blood on it!"

"It's nothing!" snarled the inspector, signaling to the traffic cop who ran from the corner. "Later—after I get this big slob's story. He'll be in a confessing mood when he first comes to, and I'm the one that'll be right there with the questions."

It was in fact more than two hours later before Dan, almost by force, managed to drag the inspector down the corridor of Police Headquarters to the first aid room. While the attendant stripped off his coat and shirt, McCorlie grinned in grim satisfaction.

"I've got it pretty straight now," he declared. "It started more than a year and a half ago, when Howlick roomed with the Cornings in Mount Vernon. They had a washing machine, and did all their own clothes at home. But Howlick, the lodger, sent his out to a laundry. Somehow one of Corning's under-shirts got into Harry's laundry bag, by mistake."

The inspector made an eloquent gesture, and winced.

"It's anybody's guess how that happened. Howlick can't explain it himself. But he was making merry with Mrs. Corning at the time, and you can use your own imagination. Anyway, the difference in size made the mistake obvious as soon as it came back, and Howlick returned it. But that's how Howlick's laundry mark got on Corning's shirt. Howlick, naturally, forgot the incident completely."

The attendant did things with iodine. McCorlie gasped.

"Well, the husband discovered what was going on, and threw the roomer out. His business was getting better then, anyway, and he didn't need the extra income. Howlick moved to the Bronx. He claims that he didn't see Vaile Corning for a long time. It may be true. But six weeks ago they met again by accident, started seeing each other, and fell in love all over again. Desperately, this time."

"Desperately enough to kill her husband, eh?" asked Dan.

The inspector nodded.

"They wanted to run off together, but Howlick hadn't much dough. So it was necessary for Corning to die, so that Vaile could lay her hands on his money. They planned it together. She went in town and took the room at the hotel, just like she told us. She phoned Corning at his office, told him the room number, and said she'd meet him there at five-thirty. Only then she got Howlick
for lunch, and gave him the key to 326. After that she went back to Mount Vernon, and fixed herself an alibi."

"How about an alibi for Harry?" asked Dan.

"They didn't figure he'd ever be connected with the case at all. And it would have been pretty difficult. He went up to the Fannimore right after five, let himself in with the key, and waited. When George Corning knocked, Howlick let him in, shut the door, and shot him behind the ear. As simple as that—but he had troubles."

"Too much blood?" queried Dan.

McCortie agreed. "He didn't know that a jugular vein could spurt so much. He was wading in it. But Corning had fallen like a log—his shoes were clean. So Howlick exchanged. It happened that they fit perfectly. A big man doesn't necessarily have big feet, you know. Their undershirts were a mile apart in size, but their shoes were identical. Funny thing—hey! Take it easy, fella!"

The attendant was binding a wet dressing in place.

"Howlick had muffled the shots by holding a pillow over the gun. But he was clumsy, and had shot himself through the fleshy heel of his hand. Not [Turn page]
NERVOUS STOMACH
ALLMIN relieves distressing symptoms of “nervous stomach”—heaviness after meals, belching, bloating and colic due to gas. ALLMIN has been scientifically tested by doctors and found highly effective. World famous—more than a ¼ billion sold to date. At all drug stores.

ALLMIN Garlic Tablets

BIG-MONEY PROFESSION FOR YOU
LEARN IN FULL OR SPARE TIME
LEARN AT HOME

Large incomes in Scientific Swedish Massage, working for doctors, hospitals, sanitoriums, clubs or in your own private practice. Hydrotherapy and Electrotherapy included in easy-to-learn course. Prepare for Diploma and Security in this interesting and profitable field. Write for facts and Success Book—FREE. THE COLLEGE OF SWEDISH MASSAGE, Dept. 6053H, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11

OLD LEG TROUBLE
Easy to use Viscose Home Method. Heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe your trouble and get a FREE BOOK. VISCOSE COMPANY, 140 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago 2, Illinois.

RAISE HAMSTERS
GULF HAMSTERY, 1557 BASIL ST., MOBILE, ALA.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?
Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with PEDOSAL. Used successfully for over 15 years by men and women both civilian, military and work. FREE BOOK. THE NEWELL COMPANY, 453 Clay St., St. Louis 6, Mo.

STOP ATHLETE’S FOOT $1
RELIEF from cracked, hot, sweaty feet due to athlete’s foot is yours with PEDOSAL. Used successfully by over 15 years by men and women both civilian, military and work. FREE BOOK. CAROL DRUG CO., Dept. B-P, L.A. 1557, Santa Barbara, Calif.

BE GUIDED BY THE STARS
YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE APPEARS IN EVERY ISSUE OF EVERYDAY ASTROLOGY
Now on Sale — 25¢ at All Stands!

a bad wound, but that was bleeding, too. When he was ready to leave, he stripped off the pillow case, wrapped it up, shoved his hand deep in his pocket, and walked out unnoticed.

“He went straight home in a taxi, and dressed the wound himself. He didn’t want any doctor to see it. After he had bandaged it, he thought up the explanation about poison ivy, and daubed his other hand with calamine to support the story.”

“But when did he put the gun in there?” asked Dan.

“Probably the following day, after you surprised him by calling on him. He realized then that the gun had to be hidden, and where better than under all those bandages? Besides, it gave him a means of defense if he found himself in a tight spot. He never would have got into that spot, though, if he hadn’t been over-eager. An innocent man may worry, but a guilty man worries twice as hard. So when he was offered a phony alibi, he tried to investigate.”

“It was a neat trick, Chief,” asserted Dan.

“Neat!” snorted McCorlie. “Me, with poison ivy, and never suspecting the story about those bandages? They ought to put me back on a beat in the Bronx!”

MR. BROWN’S BARE FEET
(Continued from page 51)

relieved, in a solemn way, as if a great burden had been lifted from their shoulders.

Wanda, who still did not know that Mr. Smith was anyone but Mr. Smith, was pale with excitement, and also filled with obvious admiration for Pete.

Pop said quietly: “Nice work, Pete.”

“Mostly guess-work and luck,” Pete said modestly. “After all, Mr. Jones told me the truth, except that he changed places with Mr. Brown. According to his story, he was the detective and Mr. Brown was the killer. He told me that because he figured some time during the night he’d get a chance to kill Mr. Smith and get away. In that case, if I had believed him we’d have been watching Mr. Brown and wouldn’t have done anything to have him trailed.”
"How did Mr. Jones know Mr. Smith was coming out here?" asked Pop.

"Mr. Smith bragged to someone in the gang several weeks ago about his special hide-out. It was passed on to Mr. Jones. Also it got around to Mr. Brown, who knows a lot of characters in the gem-stealing racket. Mr. Brown got here first because he didn’t know how soon Mr. Smith would reach here."

Pop smiled gravely. "I still don’t see," he said, "how you figured Mr. Brown was really the detective."

Pete said: "That was because of Mr. Brown’s bare feet."

"His bare feet?"

"Yes. I figured he wouldn’t have had his shoes and socks off, and practically everything else except his pants, if he was the killer. Because, if he was the killer, he’d want to be all set to leave the moment he had done the job. Like Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones. Mr. Smith only had to put on his coat and grab his suitcase. Mr. Jones didn’t even have a suitcase to grab."

"That’s right," said Pop.

Mom, who had been silent, said softly: "Well, thank God!"

Wanda said wonderingly: "Mr. Smith, Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones! Surely they were not their real names?"

"No," said Pete. "Mr. Brown’s name is really Oglesbore, believe it or not. And Mr. Jones’ name was Dayberry."

"How about Mr. Smith?" asked Wanda.

There was silence for a moment. Pop and Mom sat very still.

"Mr. Brown didn’t say, honey," said Pete. "I doubt if we ever find out. He took her hand. "How about a little walk before going to bed?"

---

Next Issue’s Featured Novelets

*A STREETCAR NAMED DEATH*  
By DONN MULLALLY

and

*NICE NIGHT FOR MURDER*  
By STEWART STERLING
WOMEN ARE HERE TO STAY!

...OR...

HOW TO STAY HOME WITH A GOOD BOOK---AND LIKE IT!

THE SEX MACHINE by Shepherd Mead
Mac depends on the Sex Machine when he starts his search for America's sexiest girl! Don't miss the zany pay-off when a buxom lass stands in the way of his fame!

PIKES PEEK OR BUST by Earl Wilson
Charley sells G-strings to damsels in "un-dress"...and from here you see Broadway backstage. Get the inside dope about Milton Berle, Fred Allen and others!

MACAMBA by Lilla Van Saher
She tore off her clothes, walked into his arms. But this was just an interlude for Paul, the half-caste in a land of lust and hate, where only Macambas (white men) counted!

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES by Anita Loos
Gus wanted to improve her "mind", but chorus-cutie Lorelei preferred to make her sex appeal pay off! Read this daffy dame's diary! It's now a Broadway hit! Find out why!

Newsstands are selling out fast! Insure yourself against missing this exciting reading! Order your handsomely-bound Popular Library Books by mail now! Use the coupon...but hurry...before it's too late!

POPULAR LIBRARY, INC., Dept. TFG-7
10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.
Send me postpaid the POPULAR LIBRARY BOOKS I have checked. I enclose $2.50 (in coin or in U. S. stamps of small denomination) per copy. (NOTE: We pay postage for orders of four books or more. If ordering less than four books, please enclose 3/4 per book extra for postage.)

☐ THE SEX MACHINE by Shepherd Mead
☐ GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES by Anita Loos
☐ MACAMBA by Lilla Van Saher
☐ PIKES PEEK OR BUST by Earl Wilson
☐ FOCUS by Arthur Miller (Not Shown) author of the prize play, "Death of a Salesman"
☐ DUKE by Hal Elson (Not Shown) a novel of teen-age gangsters that will both shock and awaken you.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY & ZONE...........................................STATE
THE STRANGEST ENTRY EVER MADE ON A POLICE BLOTTER!

An exciting story of a man who had 48 hours to avenge his own murder!

"I want to report a murder!"
"Who was murdered?"
"I was!"

HARRY M. POPKIN presents
"D.O.A."
starring
EDMOND O'BRIEN
and
PAMELA BRITTON

A PICTURE AS EXCITINGLY DIFFERENT AS ITS TITLE!

with
LUTHER ADLER - Beverly Campbell - Neville Brand
Lynn Baggett - William Ching - Henry Hart - Laurette Luez

Produced by Leo C. Popkin - Directed by Rudy Mate - Story and Screenplay by Russell Rouse and Clarence Greene
Music Written and Directed by Dimitri Tiomkin - A Harry M. Popkin Production - Released thru United Artists
NOT ONE! NOT TWO! NOT FOUR! NOT SIX! but

EIGHT FREE!

ON THIS AMAZING OFFER

YES—we want to give you, AT ONCE all of these best-read books FREE, to prove how much pleasure you'll get as a member of "America's Biggest Bargain Book Club"! ordinarily book league members get their Bonus Books at the rate of one FREE with every two club selections (or alternates) purchased. But, on this offer, you not only get ALL 6 Bonus Books—you also get 2 more best sellers free, as your membership gift!

THOUSANDS HAVE PAID $18 FOR THESE 8 BOOKS—

But YOU Get Them FREE

If you join the Book League now!

PRIDE'S CASTLE, by Frank Yerby—One woman sacrificed her honor to win his love; the other only pretended goodness to become his wife! Darling, just the author of "Fates of Harrow."

LORD JOHNNIE, by L. T. P. White—This dashing rogue risked death and torture to win the richly married woman he loved. One of the most exciting books in the world!—Pride's Castle.

REBECCA, by Daphne du Maurier—Drama of the strange woman who is never seen—told by an even stranger girl who is never named!

THE GOLDEN FURY, by Marion Castle—Caroline Lawler tried desperately to forget the scarlet secret of her past—but continued to love the one man who might remember it. A deliciously thrilling book!

SHORT STORIES OF Maupassant—Over 264 of the most charming, thrilling stories of their kind ever written!

Calf for Venus, by Noreh Lotte—Young, innocent Lotte was handed for a fate worse than death—but the handsome young doctor risked his career to save her! A heart-wrenching story!

ARABIAN NIGHTS—The fabulous "1001" tales of adventure, magic and romance that have captivated millions of readers. The Decameron.

Rachel avenged France because of one kid's too similar "palms" and saintly "sinners."

MAIL WITHOUT MONEY TO
BOOK LEAGUE OF AMERICA
Dept. 1MG-7, Garden City, N. Y.

Please send me at once—FREE—all eight of the books described on this page (worth $18 in publishers' editions) and enroll me as a member. You may start my subscription with the current selection.

The best-selling book I choose each month may be either the regular selection or any other book, described in our monthly "Review." I am to pay only $1.49 (plus a few cents shipping charges) for each monthly book sent to me. I may cancel my subscription at any time, after buying twelve books. There are no dues for me to pay; no further cost or obligation.

Mr. / Mrs. ____________________________
Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City ____________________________
State ____________________________
Zone No. ____________________________
Address: 105 Bond St., Toronto 2

Why The Book League Gives You $18 Worth of Books FREE

YOU never pay any dues or club fees as a Book League member. And every month you receive the current Selection, or an alternate, at the Club's low price.

You get a popular best-seller by an author like Steinbeck, Maugham, or Hemingway—a book selling, in the publisher's edition for as much as $3.00 or more. But YOU get your copy at the special low members' price of only $1.49, plus a few cents shipping charges.

You Get 8 FREE Books RIGHT AWAY

On this special offer, you don't have to wait a year to assemble the Bonus Books which members receive with every 2 club selections (or alternates) purchased. You may receive SIX of them right away! In advance! AND—In addition—you get, in the same big package, TWO MORE FREE BOOKS as your membership gift from the Club! Eight free books in all, yet the only requirement is that members accept twelve of the Club's book bargains during membership.

No Need to Take Every REGULAR Selection

The books you receive need NOT be the Club's regular selections. Each month you get without extra charge, the Club's "Review," which describes other best-sellers; so that if you prefer any selection not to the regular selection, choose it instead. No dues; no further cost or obligation.

Send No Money Just Mail Coupon Now!

Mail coupon today—without money—and receive your Big membership gift package containing the EIGHT books described above. You also receive, as your first Selection, the current best-seller just now being distributed to members. Enjoy these nine books—eight FREE, and the ninth at the Club's bargain price.

Then you will understand why this is "America's Biggest Bargain Book Club"! Mail coupon—without money—now.

BOOK LEAGUE OF AMERICA
Dept. 1MG-7, Garden City, N. Y.