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The MISSING MR. LINK

by Roger Torrey

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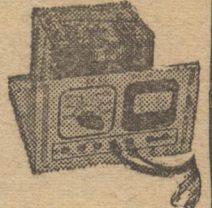
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July, 1944

Vol. 3, No. 2

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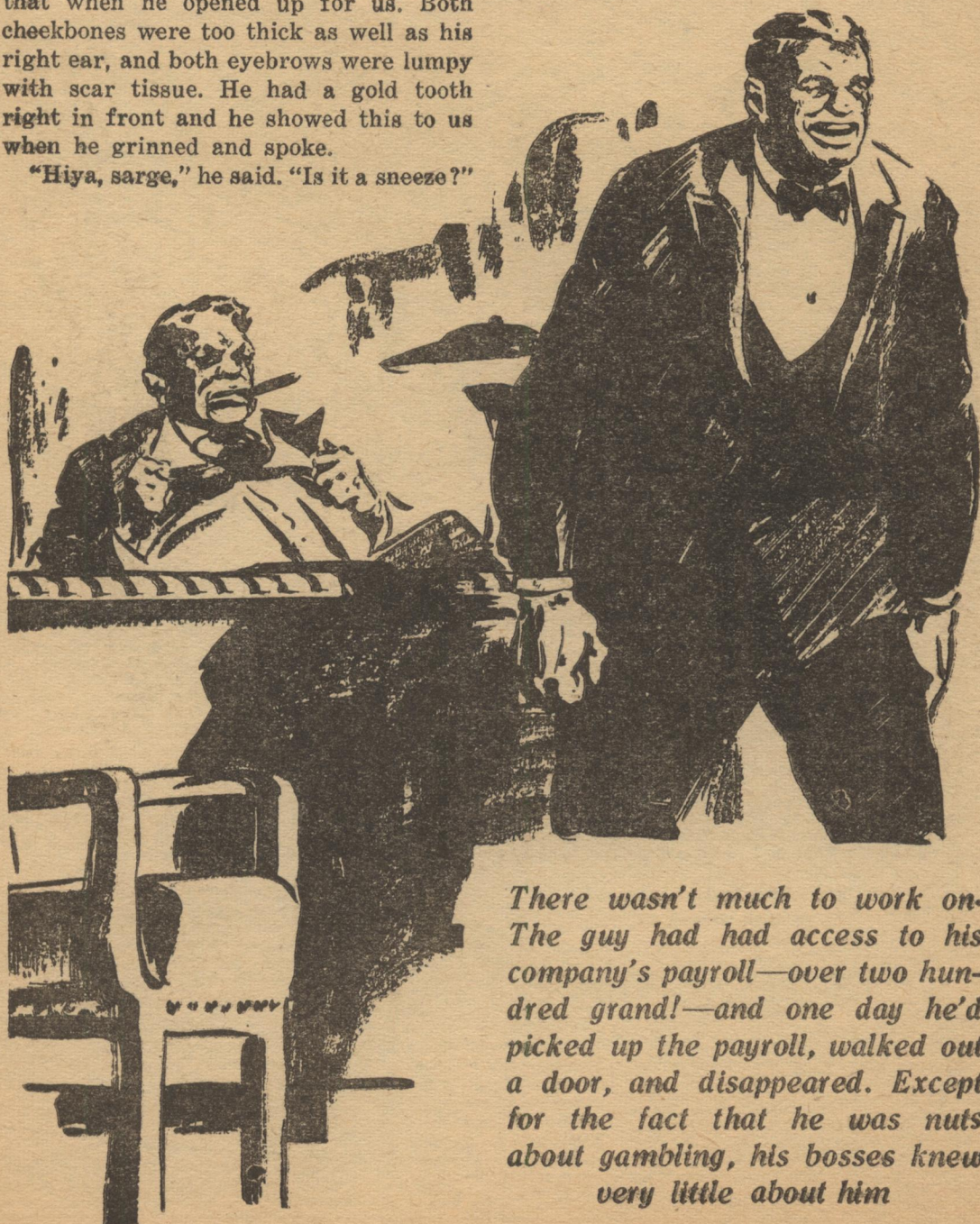
THE MISSING

THE spot was just run-of-the-mill, just an ordinary small town gambling joint. The sergeant knocked at a blank door that showed no sign of light, and somebody looked out at him through an eye slot. This somebody turned out to be a heavy-shouldered lad who looked a bit the worse for wear—I saw that when he opened up for us. Both cheekbones were too thick as well as his right ear, and both eyebrows were lumpy with scar tissue. He had a gold tooth right in front and he showed this to us when he grinned and spoke.

"Hiya, sarge," he said. "Is it a sneeze?"

"Just checking," said the sergeant.

The guy must have used a signal of some kind because the door from the main room opened and another man came out. This one was also short, but fat where the door-tender was solid. This one also had a gold tooth in front and looked enough like the other one to be a fatter,



There wasn't much to work on. The guy had had access to his company's payroll—over two hundred grand!—and one day he'd picked up the payroll, walked out a door, and disappeared. Except for the fact that he was nuts about gambling, his bosses knew very little about him

MR. LINK . . .

By ROGER TORREY

"This big ape tried to kiss me," she said, and she clung to me like a kitten.



smarter, older brother.

This one also said: "Hiya, sarge," but let it go at that.

The sergeant said: "Hiya, Boleo! Just making a check. We're looking for a guy."

"What guy, sarge?"

"A guy named Link."

"The missing link, eh, sarge?"

I'd taken the same crack from the sergeant, when I'd told him my troubles. It hadn't been funny then and it wasn't funny now. I'd been looking for Link about three

weeks by then, and if I'd heard the gag once, I'd heard it a hundred times and it was getting no better with age.

The sergeant said: "That's right, the missing link. Ever see the guy?"

HE handed over the photograph I'd given him and Boleo, if that was his name, took it to the side, where there was a little light coming from a dimmed-out bulb. He studied it carefully, but that didn't mean so much because the picture was just a snapshot and was five years old.

He said briefly: "Not here."

"Been here?"

"Not that I remember. You remember the guy, Sam?"

The doorman took his turn at the picture. "Not any. But I might forget."

Boleo said to us: "You want to look?"

"I do."

He shrugged then. He complained: "Every time you come in like this, sarge, it gives the boys a bad taste in their mouths. They drift out and they don't come back for a day or two. You can't blame 'em—they think I ain't been paying off and that you're trouble for 'em."

"Nothing like that, Boleo."

Boleo looked at me then and raised his eyebrows inquiringly. They were thick and bushy and he could do everything but talk with them.

"A friend of this Link's," the sergeant told him. "I'm just giving him a hand."

"Cop?"

"Oh no."

Boleo looked as if he didn't believe this, and I gave him the same stall I'd been using for the three weeks I'd been working on the thing.

"The guy slid out on his old lady," I said. "He took off with some babe, and the old lady's sore and wants to locate the two of them together. The guy's got a little dough, I guess, and she wants alimony."

Boleo shrugged again and said: "Go ahead and look. I'm damned if I see what the cops are doing on it, though. It ain't like the guy's hot or anything like that."

"His old lady will pay a little dough if I find him. That's all."

Boleo said to the sergeant, and in the

same complaining way: "Another angle you're working, eh, sarge. It ain't enough that I pay off through the nose—you got to louse up my place making another dollar off it. Oh, well, go ahead."

"Thanks, Boleo," the sergeant said, and, so help me, seriously. "I hate to do it, but business is business."

Certainly lots of cops have their hand out, when a gambling joint's running wide open in their territory, but there's damned few of them act apologetic with the guy that's running and doing the paying-off. Most of them wear even a bigger chip on their shoulder than usual in that case. Just to show that they're tough, even if they're crooked.

But not my sergeant. He went through the door and into the main room as though he was grateful to be allowed in the place.

THERE was a crap table against the far wall—a big one, maybe sixteen feet long and with high-boarded sides a foot and a half above the table level. There were about thirty men around it, jammed in and crowding and making the noise that goes along with a game that's running a temperature.

There were two poker tables, one straight draw and one stud, one five-handed and the other seven, and that's not counting the rake-off man. There was a blackjack stand right by them, but only one man was bucking it and he was playing just quarters. That's a pastime and not gambling, in a proper sense. There was a bird-cage, but nobody was by it except the house man. There was a roulette lay-out, too, but they hadn't even taken the sheet off it.

I said: "Quite a place you've got here, Mr. Boleo."

He said: "My name's Ortez."

"It's a nice set-up."

"Not with what I pay-off to keep open."

The sergeant winced and said: "Now, Boleo."

"I take in a dollar and pay out a dollar-ten."

"Now, Boleo."

"Go ahead and look, sarge."

The sergeant looked and I looked. He'd

look down at the snapshot and then peer around at faces, and I just peered. I knew that picture by heart. This guy Link was thin, blonde, was going a little bald, and was kicking his early forties around, and there was nobody in the place that looked that way. About three out of every four men in the place knew the sergeant and called him by his name, which was Eberhard, and he knew 'em as well.

There were four whom he asked for identification, and they brought out social security and draft cards, johnny on the spot.

That made us through with that place—which was the biggest and best of the joints we'd covered that night, and we started to leave, but found Boleo, or Ortez, in our way.

This time he was grinning, but that gold tooth of his didn't make it a warm one.

He said: "I'll buy a drink, men, if you're open for it."

"I—ugh—"

I said: "What Sergeant Eberhard is trying to say is thank you. You bet we're open."

The sergeant gave me a funny look and I had a notion about what he was thinking. I could be leveling and really looking for a man named Link. I also could be a spotter for some civic virtue outfit, in which case I had enough on the guy to hang him.

It was that that probably decided him, I thought. The harm was done in any case, and he thought he might as well have a snifter for himself.

He said: "Ah yes, sure, Boleo. I'd go for that."

BOLEO led us to his office then, and I got a surprise. It was a plain door leading through a plain board partition at the back of the place, right next to the crap table, but inside it looked like a movie set. Like something the rich executive gave his orders from. A big flat desk, absolutely clear of everything but a desk set that held two silver-mounted pens. A leather chair back of it and three more facing it. A leather couch, but one of the comfortable kind, along

the wall. They were covered with soft Morocco leather, too, instead of the usual cheap tan stuff. A cannon ball safe, big enough to do credit to a country bank against the side wall, this facing what had to be filing cabinets against the other. The cabinets were hand made though of mahogany, and looked like they belonged in the room.

The fourth wall, the one we'd come through from the gambling quarters, was lined with book cases, and the books looked as though they'd been read.

It was indirectly lit with no openings except through that one door, and Boleo, or Ortez, if that was his name, caught the look I'd taken.

"Sound-proofed," he said. "Air-conditioned. What'll it be, Scotch, rye, or bourbon. Or I can give you something fancy."

"Straight rye," I said.

"I figured you as a Scotch drinker. I can usually tell."

I gawked at this one, and he laughed. "It's a fact. I always guess, and I'm right three times out of four. Now the sergeant's a bourbon man—it's written all over him. I drink Scotch—I thought you would."

I said: "If you want to know the truth, I do. But I had an over-dose, night before last, and it still gags me when I think of it. Another day or so and I'll be back on it."

As a matter of fact I drink anything at any time, but I thought it would be good policy to show the little fat guy how smart he was. Carrying on the old one about catching more flies with sugar than with salt. He went to the filing cabinet—one corner of it was a handy little bar and built-in Frigidaire—and came back with the tippie, which he put on the desk with magnificent disregard for the finish.

"I'll get ice," he said, and did. "Here's soda, too. Plain water, mister, if you'd rather have it."

He furnished me a pitcher of water and the three of us glasses, with a shot glass for me and highball glasses for himself and the sergeant.

And then he sat down and showed us

the gold tooth and said: "And now let's hear about this missing link. I'm interested."

I took my drink down and waited for it to hit bottom. It did and very satisfyingly. I said: "It's like I said. The guy couldn't stand his little home, so he did something about it. Mama doesn't like what he did, or who he took with him to do it. So mama hired me to find him."

"That all?"

"That's the size of it."

"Where did this happen?"

I lied and said: "Chicago." As a matter of fact it was in Muncie, but I couldn't see what difference it made. I just happened to be working out of the Chicago office and Muncie was in that territory.

"What makes you think he was here?"

I told the truth then. I said: "He wrote a card from this town. Not to his wife, but to somebody that happened to tell her about it. He likes to gamble—that and women and whiskey are his only weaknesses—so I figured it would be smart to look around the spots."

"What's it worth to find him?"

I shrugged and said: "I'm on salary and expenses. That's all. I can pay out up to a thousand for information that leads me to him. I don't get a dime of it."

"Unless you work a cut-back with who gets the thousand."

I nodded and said: "I've thought of that, of course. It's been done."

The sergeant grunted and made himself another highball without waiting to be asked. He was nearing sixty; a fat puffy red-faced old man—and I could see he thought a lot of his little tot.

He poured his drink and said: "What d'ya say we move on and try another place, Ryan? Hey? After this drink."

I said: "Sure," and Boleo, or Ortez, didn't urge us to stay. But as we left he let the sergeant lead the way to the door, and he whispered to me from the side of his mouth so the sergeant couldn't hear a thing.

"Drop back," he said. "I'll tell my brother to be looking for you."

I nodded and didn't answer, but I decided I was finally getting a lead on Mr. Link.

CHAPTER II

Dead Men Don't Squeal!

I'D told the same story I'd used right from the start and there was some basis of truth in it. Not too much, though. Link was missing, all right—that was perfectly true. He was married, as well, and his wife wanted him back. Also true. The poor lady had a hazy notion that he could straighten things up if he came back.

The guy had been cashier and treasurer of a company that was working full out on war contracts and was still using their old system of paying the men with cash money instead of vouchers. They paid once every two weeks instead of weekly, as they always had worked that way. But where they'd once hired around a hundred and fifty men, they were now using five times that, and practically every man was getting rich on overtime. It put that payroll up over the two hundred thousand dollar mark, every two weeks.

Mr. Link was in charge of the payroll and he'd taken complete charge of it. He'd just taken it, period, to be exact.

He'd worked things out in a pretty fashion, too, showing it was no sudden notion. The money had been sent to the plant by an armored truck, at ten, on a Saturday morning. By noon it was divided—seven hundred and fifty little pay envelopes, all bulging with good solid money. There was some silver in the swag, of course, but it didn't amount to much. The entire lot of envelopes wasn't too big to go into a small handbag, and that's what Mr. Link used when he walked out at the noon hour for lunch.

He just stepped out, carrying his little handbag, and he just dropped from sight from then on.

The plant was insured up to a hundred and fifty thousand, so the insurance company investigators were on the job. But the company was stuck for between fifty and sixty thousand and they'd hired me to do something about it. I'd finally got a line on a girl that Link had seen occasionally, and I'd got her a little bit drunk and more than a little confidential and she'd told me that Link had written

her and asked her to join him in Callenville.

He'd given her no address to meet him, though; her idea was that he'd write her

again and give her details. She could have written him general delivery, sending the letter to Joseph B. Conlin, but she claimed she hadn't done a thing about it.

She probably was telling the truth about not writing him because the guy was hotter than a pistol and she knew it. She probably was sorry she'd ever known him—she seemed like a pretty nice kid.

I'd put a plant next to the general de-



Even as he said, "Why, it's little Tommy!" Little Tommy shot him three times.

livery window at the postoffice, but I didn't expect anything from that. The guy had worked his get-away too well to be caught on the postoffice stuff, I thought.

I HAD only the one lead—that he was or had been in Callenville and that he was nuts about gambling in every shape and form it came in. If it had been just horses, I'd have made the rounds of the tracks still open, but he played the horses just like he played everything else. He was no specialist, like most gamblers are. He went for cards, dice, horses, dog races, and I had it on good authority that he'd match pennies, pitch 'em at a crack, or spit at the crack with anybody for anything if there didn't happen to be any pennies in the crowd.

Just a gambling fool—and that's right because anybody that's bitten by that bug's the biggest chump there is.

It's worse than drink or women, when it comes to making a bum out of a man, though this Link drank and chased women as well as gambled. Sure he didn't do either of those if he could dig up something to wager on—and that's usually not hard to find in this day and age.

So I had this fever of his to work on and that was about all.

The sergeant and I got outside of the joint and I said: "This Boleo, or Ortez, or whatever it is. Who is he? And which one is right?"

"I don't get that?"

"What's his name? Boleo, like you called him, or Ortez, like he told me it."

"It's both."

I didn't understand and said so.

"His name was Boleo, at first. That was his brother, tending door, and his name's still that. Sam Boleo; he's an ex-fighter."

"I caught that."

"Boleo managed him. Arthur's his name, or Arturo, I guess it is. I mean the older one now."

I tried to sound patient. He was drawing me little pictures of which was who and I didn't need 'em.

"I get it. Sam's the doorman. He's an ex-pug. Arthur's the big shot—he's the one that owns the spot."

"That's right. Well, when Arthur, we

just call him Boleo—we never think of Sam as anything but as Sam—started in politics, he changed his name. Legally. Because of all the talk, you see."

"What talk?"

"Why, about how a guy like him could run the town the way he did. He was the boss bootlegger in this part of the country, see, and he had a wire into the sheriff's office and into the department. That caused talk. So when he came out openly into politics he decided he should change his name. So he did. To Ortez—that's his legal name."

"I get it now."

"But we still call him Boleo. That is, us old-timers. I guess we always will."

"He still run the town?"

"Pretty much. Just between us, that is."

"That his only joint?"

The sergeant ticked 'em off on his fingers.

"We been in six places. We'll make maybe that many more, tonight. That'll be about the size of 'em. In every one you'll meet the guy that's supposed to own 'em. Everyone of the guys just work for Boleo. There's not a chiseler in town can spit on the sidewalk unless Boleo says he can spit. Nobody but a stranger would try."

"What if one did?"

"He'd spit out the back of his neck. He don't act it, but Boleo's tough."

"How big's the town?"

"About sixty thousand, now the boom's on. It'll run about forty, on the average, I guess."

I had the picture and I said so. It was a nice spot for a hustler, I could see that. If he ran the sheriff's office and the police department, and had the gambling concession in his pocket like that, it meant he also had every other racket the same way. Right in his hand.

And the fast money in a town of sixty thousand, filled jam full up with war workers, is a lot of dough.

I started looking ahead to seeing the little fat guy again.

WE made the rounds and didn't find a thing. We went through the same performance, except that nobody else

complained about the protection money he was dishing out.

That checked with the sergeant's story—Boleo was the man who was doing the paying for the places and so was the one to squawk. The joints were about the same. Usually with a crap game going full blast and with little play on the fancy stuff—and that checked with the kind of town Callenville was turning into. When you put twenty thousand extra workers into a town and give 'em dough to spend—enough to gamble with, that is—they go for the fast games and craps are certainly that.

And the percentage on a crap game is a lovely thing. For the house, that is. Even with a straight game it's pure and simple murder, and I didn't think I'd seen a game that classed as straight. The house men were handling the dice too much, and the dice in the jars they alternated with were too much of the same sizes and colors.

There's a system on the crap games and it can be worked by a good operator to perfection.

The house man's got a rake, in the first place. He pulls to the dice to him with this, after the shooter makes his pass. He'll let the same dice roll for a couple of passes, maybe more, it all depending on how they're running. Then he'll change 'em for another pair, taking the new set from a jar by his elbow that's full of them. He'll tip the jar once in a while, so as to keep the fresh dice on top, but a good operator can palm three sets of dice and change 'em as he tosses 'em back to the shooter. A few of the places used a cup, with the house man putting the dice in the cup and so not giving the shooter a chance to handle the dice at all, but this was the exception.

The house, in most cases, was taking a cut out of each pass, the amount depending on how much money was riding on the cubes. There were a few house games, where the players would bet against the houses straight through, rather than against themselves, but these were the exceptions.

Mostly the games were just straight crap games with no trimmings, except

those the players took. But the big one, the game that ended the others, took place after the other joints closed, at Boleo's main spot. That was why he had his office there I thought. He could be handy to watch the heavy money roll—and roll into his pockets.

There'd be a few winners in each of the places, and they closed at two in the morning. Boleo's main place kept open as long as there was a play. So the winners would drift in there, riding their streak, and the play would be correspondingly high.

And the cut would be the same way. If a man had a hundred dollars down, the house would cut out five. If there was a hundred dollar side bet, the house would take another five. Right straight through like that. The result was the house would end with about all the money that had come into the game—it was just a matter of time.

I CAUGHT it all when I drifted back to the main place and while I waited for Boleo to get through with some business in his office, and decided it was the most brutal thing I'd yet seen. Gambling, the way it was run there, was good for at least three hundred thousand a month, counting the entire town, and here was one man taking the big share of it.

And from the people who worked in the war plants. That was the bad thing about it.

I was steaming when Boleo finally came out of his office with the man he'd been talking with. A big, bland, smooth-faced bird who looked familiar, in an unpleasant sort of way. Boleo went to the door with the guy and then came back to me, and I said what was bothering me.

"I've seen that guy before."

"That's hardly likely, Mr. Ryan."

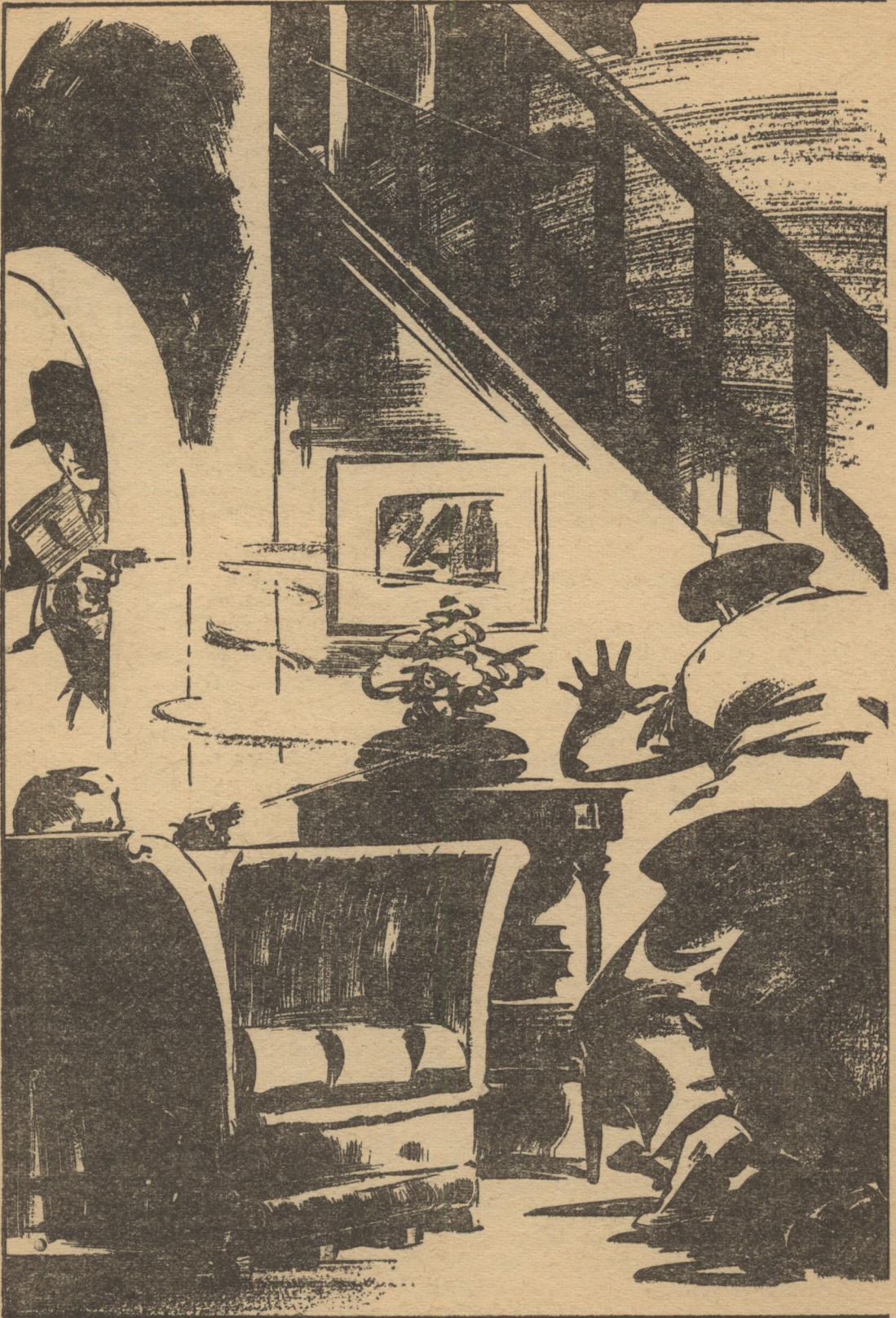
"He looks familiar."

"That's our district-attorney."

"It must have been his picture that I saw then."

"No doubt. He's getting quite a lot of advertising these days."

They were touting the guy up for nomination for governor, so that was no story. And here he was in a gambling



*All at once, and
right on schedule,
the battle started.*



joint, the main one in town, and talking to the town's main gambler.

Boleo led the way back into his office and got out the drinks without bothering to ask me if I wanted one or not. He sat down, nursing his own which again was a thin highball, and watched me pour my shot glass full.

"About this Link," he said. "This, ha, ha, this missing Link? I'm interested in that, Mr. Ryan."

I shrugged and said it was worth a thousand bucks worth of interest to anybody.

He watched me carefully. "It's worth two hundred thousand bucks, isn't it, Mr. Ryan? Outside of what he's spent."

"I suppose you read about it in the paper, eh?"

"Not so. The D.A. just told me about it."

That was bad luck but something to be expected. Of course the papers had made a hell of a fuss about the steal when it had happened, but it had been dying down and I'd hoped nobody five hundred miles away from Muncie would remember it. But the guy's name was against me—when a man named Link is missing, it's beyond news—it's a gag.

I said: "The guy took that much, but between his bond and the insurance, the company was covered a hundred and fifty grand worth. The rest is their loss."

"You're working for the company? Or for the insurance people?"

"The Company. The Amalgamated Tool & Die Works."

"That's better. Much better."

I asked why but it wasn't necessary and I didn't get an answer. All I got was a gold-toothed smile. He meant, of course, that if I was just a run of the mill private cop I'd be interested in cutting in on two hundred thousand dollars, whereas if I'd been a decent, honest guy, the kind that works for insurance companies, I wouldn't touch the thing.

I came right to the main point. I said: "You know about the guy. Why cut me in at all? If you find him, why not work it out by yourself?"

He widened his eyes. He said: "But, Ryan! Suppose he's not in Callenville. In Callenville I'd have things the way I

wanted them, but out of town, no. Suppose this man Link's out of town, out of the country? That's where you come in."

"How?"

"You locate him. You tell me. You bring him back here, how I don't care. I'll even help you bring him back, if you know what I mean. When he's here, I can handle the rest of it."

"There's others working on it."

"Do they know he was here?"

"Well, no."

That was also true. I'd located the girl who'd got the letter from Link, here in Callenville, and I'd kept it to myself.

Boleo said: "That's fine I'm going to have to put others in this—you know that. But there'll be enough left to really mean something to both of us."

I didn't think I could make him put himself on record, but I didn't know how confident he was. I said: "When I get him, or if I get him, and get him back here, what then? If we just take his money and turn him over to the cops, why, he's going to squeal like a pig."

"He won't squeal," said Boleo.

I knew then that he meant to kill Link, just as soon as he'd found and robbed him. And that I was to go along on it, or else. He wouldn't have come out in the open that way if he hadn't meant business—and telling me about it meant it was my business, too.

I was beginning to think I was up against somebody really tough, by that time.

CHAPTER III

A Loser Both Ways

I WAS staying at the Callen, the town's best hotel. And very good, too, for a town of that size. It had about four hundred rooms, a dining room besides a coffee shop, and a nice little bar. The bar was supposed to close solidly at two in the morning, but I'd already found that I could get service from it later than that if I wanted it.

And when I got back to the hotel, I decided I wanted it—for my company if nothing else.

My company was the D.A., the same

big smug guy I'd seen in Boleo's place. He looked like a bond salesman rather than a lawyer, but I suppose that was because most bond salesmen have that syrupy way of talking.

He met me, inside my own door, holding out his hand and smiling cheerfully at me.

"It's Mr. Ryan, isn't it?"

I said: "Well, it's my room, so that's a safe guess. And what in hell are you doing in it?"

"My name's Lauders. You may have heard of me."

"I have, Running for office don't give you any right to come in my room. That's breaking and entering, isn't it?"

He looked pained. "Oh no, Mr. Ryan. I simply explained to the desk clerk about wanting to see you and he suggested I come up and wait for you. The bell boy let me in, I can assure you. Now you can see that's not breaking and entering."

"It's your law, I guess. You run it."

"Ah, yes. That's why I'm here."

I said: "As long as you are, I'll provide a drink. I want one."

"That would be very nice."

He beamed on me while I phoned room service, and when the night bell captain brought up the bottle of rye and the ice I'd ordered, he beamed at him, too. They called each other by name and I took it the D.A. threw a party in the hotel, once in awhile.

THE bell boy left and I poured drinks and said: "And what is it, Mr. Lauders? If it's credentials, I've shown them to the police. My gun permit is in order. I haven't done a thing I'm not allowed to do under my license."

"I'm sure you haven't Mr. Ryan. I'm here to arrange it so that whatever you do will also be as safe."

"I don't get it."

"Link, Mr. Ryan. The missing Mr. Link. I know why you're here, you see."

"From Boleo?"

"And from the police, as well. Sergeant Eberhard is a good friend of mine. He has found it pays to, let us say, cooperate."

"Sure. Let's say it."

"It's two hundred thousand dollars,

Mr. Ryan. Between ourselves, if Mr. Ortez—Boleo, if you'd rather call him that—if he gets his hands on that money, nobody else will. I'm speaking plainly. Once Boleo has it, you and I are out."

"What did you do? Try to cut yourself in on it with Boleo?"

"Naturally. I heard why you are here. I assume, of course, you have a line on your man that leads you here. The man certainly has that money, or has it where he can get it promptly. What would be more natural than that I should cut myself in, as you say?"

They were coming too fast for me to catch. The town was bad enough. All the racket stuff run by one man and that a had one. But here was even worse—here was the sworn protector of the people—the man who was supposed to uphold the law and who'd been elected for that purpose—here was that man, selling out and on a wild chance. And to a stranger!

I said: "I still don't get it, I guess. You mean you want to cut Boleo out of it? Or won't he work with you on it? Or what?"

"Why should he enter into it? We have no need of him. I can give you protection anywhere in the county. That's all. You'll be safe, no matter what you do. I see no way of speaking plainer."

"I'm to get the guy, take him for his dough, and how or what I do to get it makes no difference. I'm protected. I won't be stuck, no matter what. That it?"

He hesitated delicately and said: "No matter what, that is, if everything is as it should be between us two."

"As long as you get your bite, you mean?"

"Exactly."

I stood up, intending to throw him out. I didn't have time. The bathroom door, at my right, opened and a short, husky young lad stepped out. He wasn't more than twenty-two or three, and I wondered how the Army had missed him. He held a .45 Automatic in his hand, which is maybe why I thought of the Army, but I don't know.

He said: "Hold it, Ryan. Well, Lauders."

Lauders said happily: "Why, it's Tommy. Little Tommy Chime."

And with that Little Tommy Chime shot him three times.

A .45's a big gun and it makes a hell of a lot of noise in a small room. When three slugs are ripped out like those were, just one-two-three, just as fast as the man could aim and shoot, it's deafening. I just stood and watched it. I had a gun under my arm and absolutely no chance to get to it because Little Tommy turned that big gun my way and just grinned at me above it.

"Come on," he said.

"Hunh?"

"I said come on."

Then he moved closer and I took a step back. I shoved up against a heavy chair though and had to stop, and he kept coming.

That is he kept coming until he was close enough to reach me and he did just that.

He clipped me alongside the jaw and I saw it coming and didn't have either time or space enough to duck the smack. I twisted and rolled with it—that was all I could do.

I CAME to on Boleo's couch and I couldn't have stalled on it if I'd wanted to. I was sick the second I snapped out of it and in a big way. I was so sick I couldn't even see—I could just hear Boleo laughing and hear him call somebody in from outside. It was a goofy looking bird with a mop, and he and Little Tommy Chime put me back on the couch and the mop man cleaned up the mess I'd made.

By that time my stomach had settled, though not back to normal. Boleo went to his little bar, in the corner of his filing department, and found some ammonia, and that and a little water did help.

In fact it helped enough so that a drink of rye stayed down a few minutes later.

Boleo was back of his desk again and Chime was by me, at the side. I had no gun but he still had his Army .45, and it looked as big as a cannon even if it wasn't pointed at me. Chime just dangled it on his knee, with it pointing every which way, but I could see the safety catch was

latched off and I knew it wouldn't take him long to get it in action, if I got ideas.

He said: "I didn't mean to hit you so hard, chum. My hand slipped."

It was a wonder I didn't have a broken jaw and I said so. I had a knot on the side of it as big as an egg and I could move a couple of teeth back there with my tongue. The inside of my mouth was cut, too, though there was just a break in the skin on the outside. It was black and blue, though—I could tell that without looking in a glass.

Boleo said: "I had to get you out of there, Ryan, in a hurry. There was no time for arguments. I think that Chime did very well. Very well indeed."

"You had to get me out of there?"

"Of course. The shots were heard. The police were there not five minutes after Chime took you down the fire escape. You should thank him."

"I should like hell. My gun wasn't fired. They'd have found that Lauders wasn't shot with my gun. My story would have held up with them."

"It won't now," said Chime, easily. "They can say now that you shot him with a .45 and took the gun with you when you left. And that you got rid of it. You can tell 'em different but they won't believe you."

"I could help you on that, Ryan," Boleo said, showing me his gold tooth. "I can indeed. If I told them what to believe, they'd believe it."

"That's what Lauders told me he could do."

"Chime heard it. Just about all of it."

I looked at Chime.

He said: "Yeah, I got the bell hop to let me in the room next to yours. You remember when he brought you ice? Remember when he went in the bathroom and filled the ice pitcher with water? That's when he opened the door between your room and mine."

"He know why you were there?"

"Hell, no. And with a shooting like that, he won't admit I was in the building. He's no fool."

"Of course I know him, too," Boleo said, grinning.

IT was a nice frame, with me as the picture. I'd killed the D.A., or so the cops would think unless this Boleo told them different. The cops knew me, knew

I found the two girls and the kid huddled behind the furnace when the shooting died out.



I was registered there, and some of them even knew me by sight. Like Eberhard, for instance. I was in a strange town, a town run by this grinning Boleo, and I was in a hell of a spot no matter which way I jumped.

Boleo said: "I've been wondering about Lauders for some time. He seemed even too reasonable about things I'd suggest. You've got to watch a man, Ryan, who gives in too fast. It isn't natural, and when something isn't natural, it pays to keep your eyes open. I'm glad that you didn't put in with him. For your sake, I mean."

"There'll be a lot of stink over this. The guy was all set to run for governor. That won't die down fast."

Boleo shrugged, and I decided finally

that he was probably a Syrian. Possibly Roumanian, but not Italian as I'd first thought. There's a difference, though how it can be told I don't know. It's something that's sensed, rather than thought out.

He said: "That won't matter. I'll let just enough out about him to take him off the hero's stand. When the people find out what a crook he was, they'll be glad he's out of the way."

I could have laughed at that one, if I'd been somewhere where it would have been safe to do it. Here was Boleo, about the worst I'd ever met, talking about another man being crooked.

"I'd like to know where I stand now," I said. "You didn't bring me here just to keep me safe. I know that."

"You're here to find Mr. Link. The missing Link, ha, ha, ha. That's why you came to town and that's why I want you to stay in town. That's all."

"Any idea of how I'm going to do it? If I go out on the street, the way you've got me framed, the cops will have me then and there."

Boleo said: "I've thought of the way for you to work it, Ryan. You will write to the young lady who got the letter from Link. I presume it was a young lady, though you didn't say. You will ask her to come here and help you."

"She's a nice kid. She don't want any part of Link."

"You can tell her you'll broadcast her connection with Link if she doesn't do as you ask. That will bring her. If she's a nice girl, like you say, she won't want that. If she isn't, she'd help you for a share in the money."

I began to see then why he wanted me to work with him. Other than a five year old picture of Link, he had no idea of what the guy looked like. He knew nothing of the man's habits, other than what I'd told him. He couldn't get in touch with anybody in Link's home town, Muncie, without cutting out-of-town crooks in on his gravy.

That left me as the logical person to find the guy, and after I'd found him, I had a notion of what would happen to me. I'd either be found in a ditch, someplace out of town, or I'd be turned over

to the cops for the murder of Lauders.

I was the one to lose, no matter which way it went, and my only chance of life was to work along with the gang and do the best I could to break things up my way.

I didn't have much hope but I went ahead on it. I said: "Okay, Boleo. I'll ride along. I'll write the gal a letter, here and now."

"And you can live with Chime, while you're waiting for an answer," Boleo told me.

That meant I'd be guarded day and night and by a guy that was a good guard, if what I'd seen of him in action meant a thing.

Chime was a good guard and a good gun man, and he wasn't as dumb as he appeared to be. If he had been, he couldn't have taken me out of that hotel as nicely as he had.

CHAPTER IV

"Safe as Gold"

THE girl's name was Marie Walters and I knew she had a job. It wasn't much of a job as they go these days—she was stock girl in the same plant that Link had worked for. The Amalgamated Tool & Die Works. That's where Link had met her—she'd told me that. She'd gone out with him a couple of times and found that he was married and dropped him, but he didn't want to stay dropped. He'd kept sweethearting her right along, up to the time he'd skipped out with the bank-roll.

She was a good-hearted kid and hadn't dropped him hard enough to hurt him, I thought. The guy, from what I'd heard, was a conceited sort, and so probably hadn't even realized he wasn't welcomed by the kid. He'd still had hopes and was working on them when he'd written her to join him in Callenville.

I wrote her and took two hours on a two page letter. I'd taken the girl out a few times, but we weren't what you'd call sweethearts, at all. Just friends, though that's as far as I'd tried to go along that path with her. I told her nothing of the jam I was in; just told her she could

help me if she'd quit her job and move to Callenville. I told her—this was Boleo's idea—that she'd be on salary and expenses while she was here, and I got a funny feeling about it when Boleo told me how much to tell her the salary and expenses would be.

They were far too high—they were so high it showed Boleo thought he'd never have to pay them.

I explained she could get her old job back, when I'd caught Link, and that no harm would be done on that score. I pointed out that stealing a war plant's payroll money, in time of war, was a form of sabotage against the workers themselves, even if most of the loss was covered by insurance.

I stressed that angle some, knowing the gal was working in the plant just out of patriotism. I finished, acting as though I didn't have a doubt about her joining me, and I gave her a phony name and Boleo's address, for her to tell me when she'd get there. The name was John Kaufman—another suggestion from Boleo.

I was all through and ready to put the letter in the envelope and seal it, when Boleo reached out a hand for it. I gave it to him—Chime was there, with the gun, and it wouldn't have done any good to object. Boleo read it through, carefully, and then gave me some news I didn't want to hear.

"You'd better tell her not to believe all she'll read about you in the papers," he said. "They'll be full of this business, in the morning. You'd better tell her that it's part of some scheme you're cooking up or something like that. You know the girl—you tell her something she'll believe."

I put a postscript on, using the scheme idea as the stall. Naturally the Muncie papers would have space on a prospective candidate for governor in a neighboring state being knocked off, and the main suspect would be mentioned by name as a matter of course.

That would be me, and it would be too much to hope that Marie wouldn't see the item.

I'd been hoping that Boleo would use his pull and keep the thing under cover—

at least hold the cops down so they didn't go all out for me. But he was showing no sign of doing that and he was the one that held the cards.

He held them as long as Chime held the gun—and the way he stuck with me he might as well have had it jammed in the small of my back.

He did everything but sleep with me—he even locked me in my room, when we went to his place after leaving Boleo's.

CHIME did himself well and I figured that the gunman business must be paying him well. He lived in an eight room house, at the edge of town, and he was married to one of the prettiest wenches I ever saw in my life. This Marie Walters I'd written was a good-looking girl, but Chime's wife should have been in pictures.

She looked like Hedy Lamarr, and they had one kid, a brat of about four.

Chime said, as we went up the steps: "Don't make a crack, Ryan. The kid don't know a thing. She thinks I'm still a dealer for Boleo—she don't know that I've changed work."

I found out afterward that he'd been a stick man on one of the crap tables.

We went in and I was introduced, and Chime said: "Mr. Ryan, honey, owes the boss a piece of money and I'm supposed to keep an eye on him until it's paid. Mr. Ryan ran short and had to send east, to his bank, and the boss don't want him to leave until the dough gets back here."

The girl took it as a matter of course. It explained why I was a prisoner, and she apparently thought nothing wrong in my being one. It was five in the morning then, but she was up and waiting for Chime. She cooked us scrambled eggs and coffee, and we had all the butter we wanted and real cream, thick and yellow, the way it should be.

I took it that if you worked for Boleo, ration points were something that didn't bother you. It put the guy in the black market, too—something else I could hold against him.

After breakfast Chime took me upstairs and to my room, which was very

(Continued on page 73)

REFUGEE

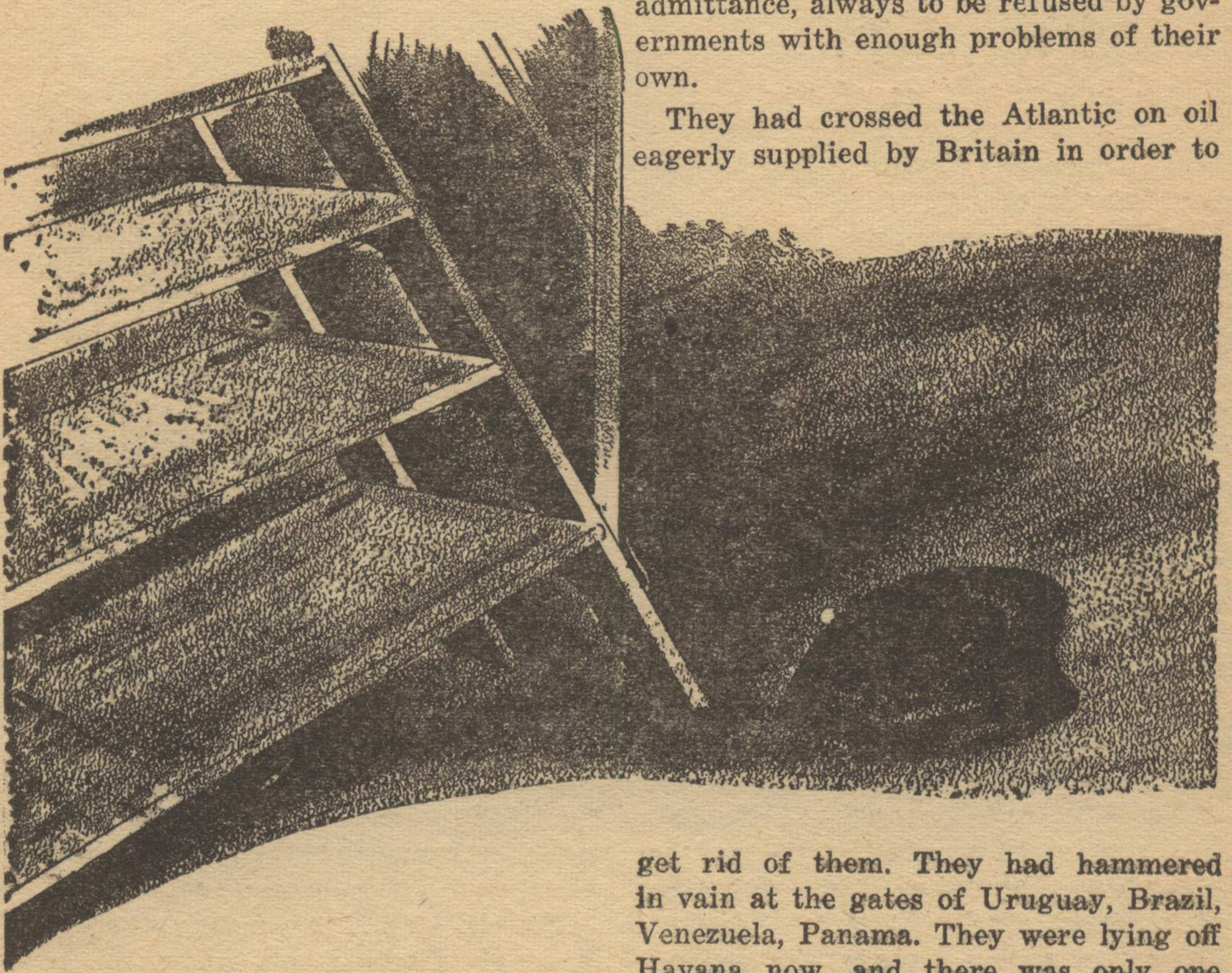
CARTER watched the passengers come stumbling up onto the deck, and then he remembered his role, and tagged along in the rear. He was inclined to forget sometimes that he represented the Immigration Department of the United States, so oppressed was he by the sight of this collective human misery.

It is very seldom that an American of

language had at first seemed strange to him.

Of course it was necessary for Uncle Sam to keep tabs of the vast migration of refugees from Europe. So, in the guise of a Czech exile, he was here, on the refugee ship. Almost all the refugees had started from Haifa, Palestine, and they had spent months attempting to gain admittance, always to be refused by governments with enough problems of their own.

They had crossed the Atlantic on oil eagerly supplied by Britain in order to



Pure Yankee stock can speak Czech well enough to pass for a native. Add enough German, Polish, Serbian for him to understand what was being said by nine-tenths of the passengers, and it becomes obvious that Carter was a very valuable man to his Department.

All which he owed to a native talent for languages and a boyhood spent in Prague, where his father had been employed as a technician in the city water supply. Carter had been seventeen when he returned to America, and even the English

get rid of them. They had hammered in vain at the gates of Uruguay, Brazil, Venezuela, Panama. They were lying off Havana now, and there was only one chance in fifty that the Cuban government would prove any more hospitable than the rest of the world.

Gray old M'Clintock, captain of the *Urania*, had sworn he'd find a haven for his boys and girls, as he called them, somewhere. M'Clintock was a skipper of the old type, a strong lover of liberty, and he was infuriated that human beings should be shipped and rejected, like infected cattle, from place to place, all over the globe.

So, with a skipper of that type, things

SHIP

By
LEW MERRILL

★ ★ ★

In the guise of a Czech exile, Carter watched the passengers. Among them, he knew, was a Nazi spy. Somewhere among them, too, was the man earmarked for Gestapo vengeance

★ ★ ★



Under the impetus of Carter's leap, the two of them rolled on the floor.

hadn't been as bad as they might have been. There were some two hundred and fifty passengers crowded into the steerage, and about three dozen more, who had some means, occupied the cabins along the deck. It wasn't paradise, for the food was scanty, and the old *Urania* rolled from bulwark to bulwark whenever the sea ran high. But the hope of emancipation, of finding homes, buoyed up all the refugees. There had been only four deaths since they left Haifa.

OF course Carter had kept a sharp watch on his fellow-passengers. Every shipload of refugees contained at least one Nazi spy, and Carter's business was to detect him. He had boarded the *Urania* at Recife, three weeks before, in the guise of a deportee, supposedly of Nazi sympathies. That was a good role, though it hadn't made him popular with his fellow-travelers. In fact, they had avoided him like the plague. All except one, who had penetrated his disguise from the beginning.

That was all right, because Carter had spotted him as a representative of the British government, also keeping tab. Anderson had revealed his name, and the purpose of his presence in the guise of a Polish refugee. Tall, distinguished, with a drooping mustache, and a slight limp—feigned, Anderson said—he looked the part of an officer of noble birth, who had escaped from a German concentration camp.

Of course, they had to pretend ignorance of each other, but they had exchanged information in hasty two-minute talks during those three weeks.

"There's a fellow on board whom the Nazi government is particularly anxious to get hold of," Anderson explained. "I've been aboard since the *Urania* left Haifa, but I haven't spotted him yet. Nor the Nazi agent, who must be on this ship. They're deuced clever, both of them. If they're among that steerage crowd, it's pretty hopeless for my attainments don't go so far as to include a knowledge of Yiddish, or the ability to pass for one of them. If either of them is among our favored saloon crowd—well, that different.

"I'll bet you one thing though, Carter. Something is going to break just as soon as permission to land is obtained, wherever that may be. My guess is that our Nazi friend has postponed operations until then, knowing it's difficult to get away with murder on an American ship on the high seas."

"Murder?" asked Carter.

Anderson shrugged his shoulders. "What else? Just to prove how long-reaching the arm of the Nazis is."

Carter might have reciprocated with what he knew, but he was under a pledge of silence to his department.

WHATEVER he knew, he didn't know who was the man he was anxious to contact. He watched the passengers, as he trailed them up the deck. There were Rabbi Solomon, from Breslau, and his daughter, clinging to his arm, always. Carter hadn't often seen such a devoted pair. But the tragedy that had overtaken them would naturally draw them together. On Saturdays—the Hebrew Sabbath—Rabbi Solomon held a service in the steerage, and the girl always accompanied him. Seen from the deck, the old, gray-bearded man looked like one of the ancient prophets as he held forth to his congregation.

Carter had noticed that the girl was totally unresponsive to her fellow-passengers. She never so much as gave any of them a glance when they sat at meals in the saloon. The pair would sometimes pace the deck, her arm drawn through her father's, but mostly she remained in her cabin, next to his, and a little way down the passage from Carter's, on the opposite side.

She was attractive in a way, slender and dark, perhaps five and twenty, not at all like the stout, paunchy old rabbi, whose bulk had survived all the hardships of those months at sea. Carter had wondered about the mother, whether she had been a victim of the Nazi atrocities.

Carter wasn't the only person who was watching the two. The second was a lean, bespectacled man of middle age, definitely not Hebraic, for his broad head, with the truncated occiput, bespoke the Alpine

race, and things like that were obvious to the anthropologist. He might have been a Czech or an Austrian. He might have been a Bavarian, or even a Prussian.

Carter had noticed that Slavinski had been watching the two since he had come on board, but he had never seen him in conversation with either of them. The name Slavinski of course meant nothing. It was very improbable that the man with the spectacles was a Pole.

Studying the old man and his daughter, as he went up in their wake, Carter noticed something more about the girl. The roots of her hair were fairer than the rest of it.

OLD M'CLINTOCK had a megaphone in his hand, and one of the passengers was standing beside him. "Attention—*Achtung!*" he shouted, using the only German word he knew. "It is possible that we shall be permitted to land at Havana, but the Cuban government has not yet made up its mind. We shall know in a day or two. Meanwhile the American Government is making strong representations to Cuba that you be permitted at least temporary residence in this country.

"We shall lie off the harbor until the decision is reached. Keep up your courage. If Cuba rejects you, we shall go on trying. I shall never take the *Urania* back into European waters."

The refugees, to the greater part of whom the words were unintelligible, were straining forward, eyes fixed intently upon the speaker. The feeling of suspense, coming to Carter from the packed mass of humanity upon the deck, was almost unbearable. When M'Clintock had concluded, the man beside him interpreted, first in Yiddish, then in Polish. As he finished, a deep groan broke from the throats of the crowd. In that groan was all the hopelessness of which humanity can be capable. Their shoulders sagged, their heads drooped. They must have heard words like those many times before.

The ship's stewards were already herding the steerage passengers below. They trooped down, leaving the decks clear for

the saloon passengers, who walked dejectedly to and fro. There was the girl, with her arm linked through her father's; there was Slavinski, trailing them, watching them as usual. Carter passed Anderson, who was walking alone, as was his custom. As they met, Anderson whispered, with hardly a movement of his jaws:

"I've seen that girl before."

Carter walked to the bow, turned, and went back. "Where?" he inquired as he passed Anderson again.

"I don't know, but I'm sure of it. I never forget a face."

Again that walk. Carter passed the two, and again noticed how much fairer the roots of the girl's hair were than the rest. Next time Anderson said:

"It must have been somewhere on the continent of Europe. This year, or late last year."

The ship's gong sounded for dinner. The saloon passengers trooped down. Carter's place was near the end of the table, nearly opposite Rabbi Solomon and his daughter. Slavinski was the second man on his right, and there was a stout, elderly woman between them. Anderson sat farther up the table, and was invisible to Carter. Captain M'Clintock, of course was at the head, with his chief officers on either hand.

CARTER ate in silence. He could affect broken English, but it was always an effort, and he preferred to pose as a Czech with little knowledge of it. There was little conversation at meals. The exiles were too dejected for light talk, and then too many languages were spoken to make a general conversation easy.

The meal consisted of thick bean soup, followed by corned beef hash and potatoes. It was the usual meal; sometimes it slightly varied, but there was always either the hash or the soup. There was bread without butter, and the drinking water was slightly saline. The meal was nearly over when M'Clintock rose.

"My friends," he said, "I've got a treat for you. It was donated by sympathizers ashore. I hope their good-will is going to

win for us what is in all our hearts." He nodded to the steward, and sat down.

John, the steward, had a perfect Nazi face, pale, bleached hair, and two ice-blue eyes. Nevertheless he had always been

considerate and deferential to the passengers. He went out, and came back with a great bowl loaded to the brim with oranges. There were cries of delight from all as he filled the three fruit dishes set

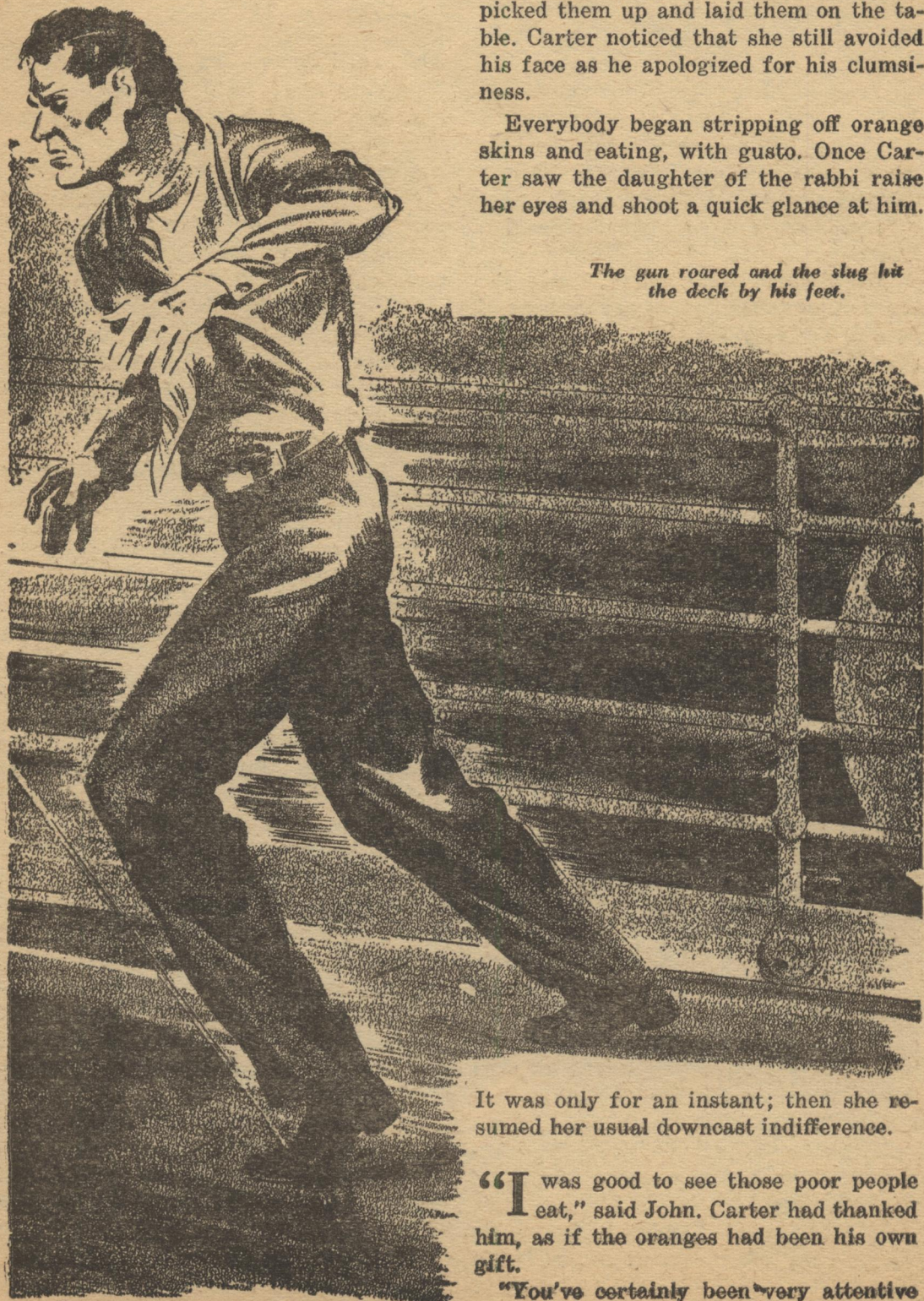


at equal intervals on the table. Nobody had seen oranges since they left Palestine. Supplies had been taken on at various South American ports, but oranges had not been among them.

The stout woman and Carter grabbed simultaneously. The bowl was upset, and the oranges cascaded to the floor on the opposite side from Carter. A half-dozen landed squarely in the lap of the rabbi's daughter. Startled for a moment, she picked them up and laid them on the table. Carter noticed that she still avoided his face as he apologized for his clumsiness.

Everybody began stripping off orange skins and eating, with gusto. Once Carter saw the daughter of the rabbi raise her eyes and shoot a quick glance at him.

The gun roared and the slug hit the deck by his feet.



It was only for an instant; then she resumed her usual downcast indifference.

“I was good to see those poor people eat,” said John. Carter had thanked him, as if the oranges had been his own gift.

“You’ve certainly been very attentive

to them," said Carter.

"And why not? You must understand, *Herr Cerny*, we Germans are not all beasts. I fought in the war against Poland. I thought it was righteous war, until I saw the atrocities that were committed upon the helpless people. I knew then that Hitler was a beast, and not the divine *Fuehrer* I had imagined. And so I left the army and worked my way south into Turkey. And now I look for the day when the beat shall be overthrown. Are not these people human beings, with feelings like ourselves?"

"I wish more of your countrymen felt that way."

"Believe me, *Herr Cerny*," said the steward earnestly, "there are millions of us who live only for the day of Hitler's overthrow."

Carter went up on deck. It was night, and the lights of Havana seemed so near, twinkling across the bay. All the sooloon passengers seemed to be on deck, staring at those lights. But there were few at the rail on the lower deck, from which arose a subdued, melodious chanting, and, going toward the stern, and looking down, Carter remembered that this was Friday evening, the opening of the Jewish Sabbath.

He paced the deck slowly. For once, Rabbi Solomon's daughter had not accompanied him; she was standing at the rail alone, looking shoreward. Also alone was Anderson, and Carter stood beside him for a moment.

"How's your end of the game progressing?" he inquired in a low tone.

"I think I'm on a trail. "How about you?"

"I've got one of my men," said Carter.

"One of them? You're looking for more?"

"I'm looking for a Nazi and a refugee, who is rather intimately mixed up with him. I'm not sure which of the two I've spotted."

"If you mean Slavinski," whispered Anderson, "I've had my eye on him from the beginning."

"I didn't mean Slavinski, though he may be the other one, of course," said Carter.

"Which of the two men do you mean?" inquired Anderson.

TWO of the passengers came up to the rail beside them. The movement was quite innocent, to all appearance, but one never could be sure, and Carter turned away without replying. He pursued his walk until he reached the place where Rabbi Solomon's daughter was standing, looking out toward the shore. He stopped beside her, and affected to be gazing shoreward likewise.

Speaking in German as execrable as he could make it, Carter said: "I guess you're hoping that we'll all be going ashore tomorrow."

"We're all hoping that," she answered. Her voice was low and melodious, and had that slightly husky tone that men find attractive in many women. Also it was completely indifferent. She hadn't looked at him as yet.

"That singing in the steerage is very melodious."

"Yes."

"You generally accompany your father, don't you?"

"Mostly." There was now a faint note of annoyance in the girl's voice, as if she wanted to be left alone.

"I'm sorry that I upset those oranges. It was very clumsy of me."

"It doesn't matter." For the first time there was a swift, fugitive glance at him, though Carter inferred it rather than perceived it in the darkness. The girl turned away again, and it was perfectly plain that she had no desire to continue the conversation. Carter left her, and began pacing up and down. When he got back to where the girl had been standing, she was gone. Almost the last of the passengers had gone below. The bow end of the vessel was deserted. Carter walked to the bow limit of the deck, and stood looking seaward.

He was pretty sure of his man now, but still he hadn't got the key he needed. He was trying to think, to piece the bits of puzzle together. Then he perceived a man a little ahead of him, right at the bow rail, over which he was leaning, motionless.

He was in the attitude that one adopts when one has a sudden attack of seasickness. But the sea was perfectly calm, and the vessel lay at anchor with hardly a perceptible movement. Besides, one doesn't often get an attack of seasickness after one has spent several months at sea. Carter watched the man for a while, saw that he made no movement, and went up to him.

It was John, the steward, and he was as dead as he would ever be, with a dark stain running down from the grisly wound in his back, which must have pierced through to the heart. There was no weapon in the wound. That would, of course, have been thrown overboard.

The pockets of the steward's uniform were hanging inside out. Evidently the murderer had searched his victim thoroughly. He must have searched quickly, because he had not taken the time to put the pockets back into position. The job had been a deft one.

CARTER got hold of a seaman and told him what had occurred. He volunteered to stay by the body while the man went in search of Captain M'Clintock. Before he had had time to try to figure out the problem, M'Clintock and the seaman arrived. The captain bent over the body, quickly examining it.

"When did this happen?" he asked Carter.

"I don't know. I found the body three or four minutes ago."

"You saw nobody near?"

"There was a crowd on deck. I was pacing the deck, but I didn't come up to the bow until just now. There was nobody near here then."

"Okay. The principal thing to do is to keep the knowledge of this from the passengers—tell them John's sick. Later, if they don't get permission to land, he'll tell them he's dead. No time for precipitating a wave of hysteria. I was afraid something like this might happen, but not to John, poor fellow."

"He was telling me he hated the Nazis and looked for Hitler's overthrow," said Carter.

"And that was truth," said M'Clintock

emphatically. "John was one of the best. I picked him up at Istanbul. He had deserted his regiment. Bill, you keep this absolutely mum," he said to the seaman, who was looking in horror at the body. Come along. We'll remove him to his quarters. Make him look as if he's walking," he added to the seaman. "I'd like you to come too," he said to Carter.

"I'll help," Carter suggested.

"We'll manage this job. If you'll just walk behind, casual like, that's all that will be necessary."

OF course the news had to be broken to the dead man's mates. There was something of a stir, quickly hushed by M'Clintock. Carter remained just out of hearing. Then the captain came back and asked him to accompany him to his cabin.

Inside, he turned to him. "Sit down, please," he said. "What more do you know about this than you've already told me?"

"Do you mean I'm under suspicion?"

"Everybody's under suspicion, and you happened to be on the spot just after the murder was committed. By the way, Herr Cerny, what does your actual nationality happen to be?"

"I'm registered as a Czech, expelled from Brazil for supposed Nazi sympathies."

"I know that. If it's true, you're practically the first Czech who's ever played the traitor. I don't know how well you've fooled the passengers, but you haven't fooled me. Nor Oblonski either."

Oblonski was the alias of Anderson. Carter smiled. "You're pretty sharp, captain," he said.

"I have to be. Oblonski is an Englishman, of course. Secret Service, I'd say. You two stand out like chalk from cheese. Of course you don't have to commit yourself."

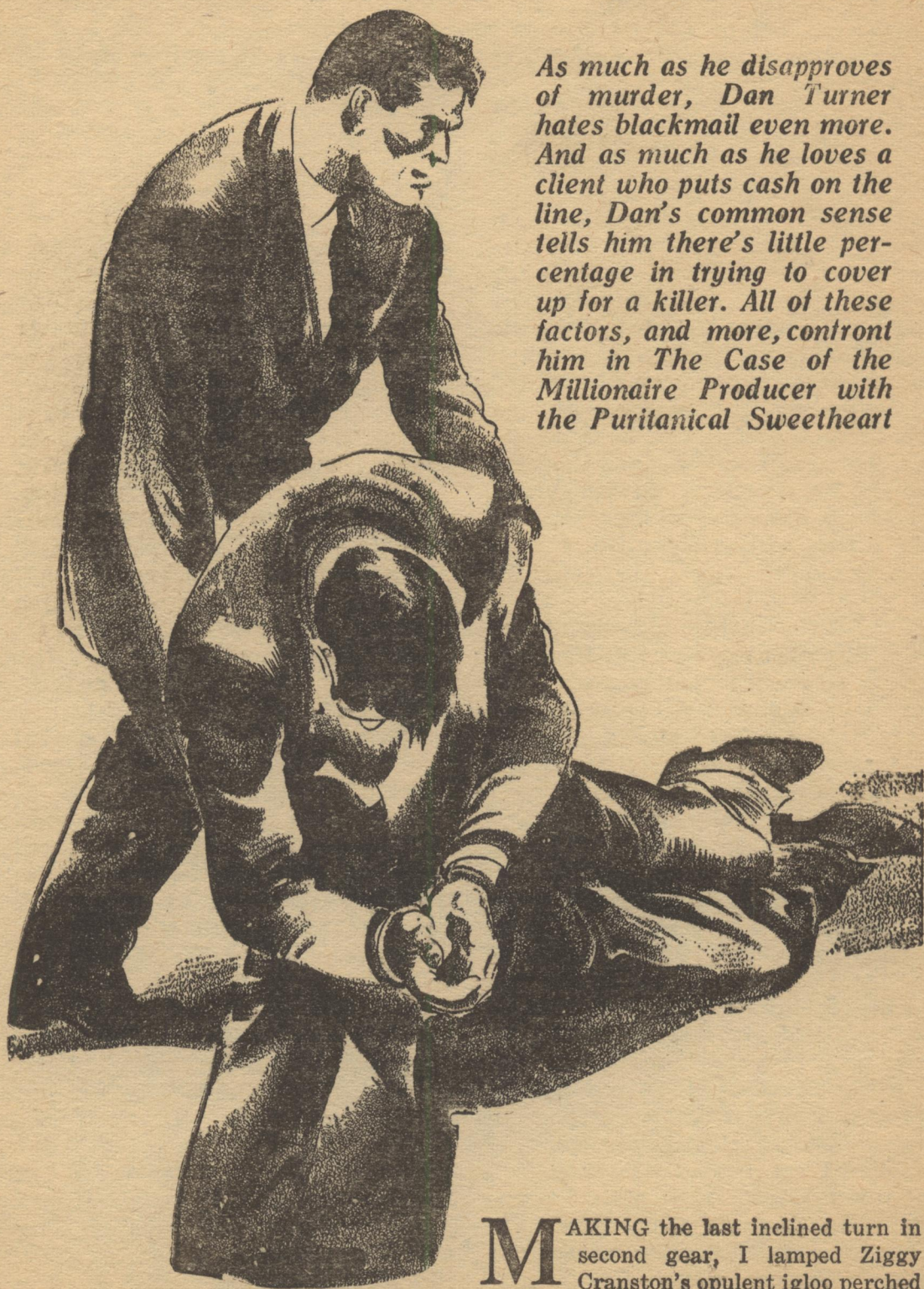
"I can't," said Carter, speaking perfect English now. "I'd like to come clean with you, captain, but I guess you can infer what the situation is."

"I understand what I think, but I've got to go by the records. You know our radio's broken down. I'm sending a launch ashore to wake up the port authorities.

(Continued on page 68)

STOCK SHOT

*As much as he disapproves of murder, Dan Turner hates blackmail even more. And as much as he loves a client who puts cash on the line, Dan's common sense tells him there's little percentage in trying to cover up for a killer. All of these factors, and more, confront him in *The Case of the Millionaire Producer with the Puritanical Sweetheart**



MAKING the last inclined turn in second gear, I lamped Ziggy Cranston's opulent igloo perched on the hilltop like a huge fondant decoration crowning a wedding cake. Late afternoon sunshine slanted against its west-

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

"What are you going to do with him? Where are you taking him?" she bleated.



ward windows, turning them to so many rectangles of glowing gold—which, after all, was pretty much in keeping with Cranston's grabby character. Every thing he owned became golden, sooner or later; it was a Hollywood tradition. Now that I was going to do a job for him, maybe some of his dough would rub off on me. I hoped so.

I bent my rudder to the right, rolled along a private driveway as wide as Wilshire Boulevard, and parked my jalopy

under a porte-cochere roomy enough to shelter a double-decker Greyhound bus, which gives you some idea as to the size of the residence itself. The joint's massive dimensions awed me as I disembarked and ankled toward its front portal.

Then, abruptly, my awe turned to ire.

From somewhere on the rear grounds a guy in shiny black patent leather puttees and sky-blue chauffeur's livery barged into view, opened the door of my bucket, and calmly installed himself behind the steering wheel as if it belonged to him. He was an undersized ginzo whose upper lip was embellished by a mustache waxed to sharp points, and his supercilious manner scorched me to a crisp. It was bad enough for him to crawl into my chariot without an invitation, but when he sneered at the paint job it made me indignant as hell.

I moved off the porch, favored the liv-

eried lug with a dark scowl and said: "Ix-nay, dizzy. Fade."

"*Pardonnez-moi, monsieur?*"

"You heard me," I said. "Scrammez-vous. Removez the seat of your britches from Pupholstery de la coupe. In other words, powder before warfare commences."

"But *Monsieur* Turner, I—"

I fastened the frosty focus on him. "Who are you?"

"Antoine, sir."

"Just plain Antoine? No family tree?"

"Antoine Leblanc, sir. *Monsieur* Cranston's chauffeur."

"And how do you know my name?"

He shrugged. "*Monstieur* Cranston informed me that he expected Dan Turner, the noted private detective. He instructed me to extend the usual courtesies."

"Hm-m-m," I said. "And does the Cranston hospitality include glomming a guest's go-cart?"

"I was merely going to drive it to the rear, *monsieur*, so I could wipe the dust from it."

I said: "Don't bother. That dust is all that holds the fenders on. Scram, chum."

"*Oui, monsieur.*" He got out. "*Merçi.*" Then his Paris accent faded like a lap dissolve shot. "Pretty tough dick, huh? Remind me to hate your guts some day when I've got a minute to spare." And he sauntered away, swaggering.

His sudden switch from phony French to colloquial American startled the be-joseph out of me; I couldn't even fish up a nice dirty insult to hurl after him. By the time my astonishment wore off, he was long gone and I decided it would be a waste of time to chase him. Instead, I thumbed the Cranston bell-push and was presently conducted by a pompous footman to the presence of Ziggy Cranston himself.

THIS was quite a presence. You crossed a reception hall two feet smaller than the Taj Mahal, descended three broad steps, and found yourself in a sunken chamber paneled in fumed oak, lined with deep shelves containing a fortune in symphonic record albums. A Cape-

hart automatic player the size of a giant's juke box filled one corner, knocking itself out with something sad by Tschaikowski, and the master of the mansion sat dolefully listening to the plaintive strains with tears in his soft brown optics as big as horse chestnuts.

"Hi, Ziggy," I said.

He bounced out of his chair, switched off the music, greeted me with an unhappy handshake. "Thanks for coming, Sherlock. Have a drink?" He poured me a brimming beaker of Vat 69. "I'm in one hell of a jam."

That was obvious; otherwise he wouldn't have sent for a private snoop. To gander him, though, you wouldn't have thought anything on earth could give him the fantods. His tallness topped my own six feet plus by at least an inch, his mush was rugged with excellent health and he had the heft of a professional wrestler beneath an outfit of tweeds as trimly tailored as the paint on a battleship.

Those imported threads had probably nicked him a good three centuries, maybe more; but he could afford it. He had the Midas touch that made a profit from everything he owned, including the controlling interest in *Masterpiece Pix*, an insignificant studio whose majority stock he had recently acquired at a thundering bargain. Since his buying that control, the shabby outfit had miraculously produced three click hits in a row; and now cash was rolling into the company's coffers faster than a flock of auditors could count it. In short, *Masterpiece* was headed for Hollywood's major brackets without a stroke of personal effort on Ziggy's part; another example of the fabulous Cranston luck.

I tossed down my tippie, set fire to a gasper, peered at him through the fumes. "What kind of jam are you in?"

"Romantic and financial," he answered dolorously.

I grinned. "Romance and finance. The inevitable combination."

"Don't be cynical at a time like now. I'm in hot water up to here." He hesitated. "You know Sylvia Duane?"

"I've piped her on the screen in quickie westerns."

"Then you know how beautiful she is," he said. "You can understand why I'm in love with her, why I want to marry her." He took a snapshot out of his wallet and regarded it fondly. "She's what I've been waiting for all my life."

I HAD to admit the jessie was mighty delicious. In the snapshot she was garbed in cowgirl regalia: a Stetson riding her brunette tresses, a silk shirt and buckskin jacket festooning her more obvious contours, an abbreviated riding skirt flippantly embellishing the rest of her. Even in tooled leather boots you could see she sported a pair of shapely shafts that belonged in sheer two-thread nylons. Her map, though, was just like scores you'll find around the movie lots—pretty but expressionless. She had a deadpan look, as if she might be afraid to smile for fear she'd crack her makeup.

"Very nice indeed," I said, copping a furtive hinge at Ziggy's billfold. It was stuffed with lettuce. "That's something to dream about," I added, referring to the dough.

He thought I meant the Duane doll. "Yes. But my dream may never come true—unless you help me."

"Hey, wait," I said. "My name's Dan Turner, not Dan Cupid."

"Will you stop clowning? This is serious. Sylvia's a very serious person. Sedate and prim and—"

I said: "Sort of a Puritan maid?"

"Well, yes, sort of. I mean she'd drop me quick if she ever so much as suspected me of—of, well, playing around with other women."

"Do you, Ziggy?"

"Do I what?"

"Play around with other women?"

He made an indignant mouth. "Hell, no. At least not since I got engaged to Sylvia a few months ago."

"Then she's got no reason to suspect you," I said. "So what are you worrying about?"

"Blackmail," he whispered. "A lousy stinking shakedown. I'm being—" Then his words choked off, lost in the sudden shattering crash of nearby window-glass. This tinkling uproar was emphasized

by an accompaniment of shouts, oaths, and blows; a thwack-thud-thwack of knuckles massaging flesh.

Ziggy Cranston turned green around the fringes; blinked foggily at me. His kisser sagged open but no sounds came out. Meantime I tabbed the general direction of the fracas, which was evidently just beyond a closed door leading out of this sunken music room. I started sprinting.

WHEN I hit the door and jounced it open, I saw that it gave access to a massive solarium, a kind of inside hot-house devoted to wicker furniture and various forms of plant life growing from potted earth. The roof and three walls were of clear glass arranged in huge squares, and one of these panes had been bashed to fragments by a human projectile wearing a truculent expression and a suit of shabby blue serge. The guy was a sawed-off, chunky party with a burden in his arms.

The burden was Ziggy Cranston's chauffeur, Antoine Leblanc—the one with the phony Paris accent. Antoine had apparently tried to keep the shabby citizen from entering the premises and had got knocked cockeyed for his pains; now he was being carried like a slumbering infant. Barring a nasty bruise on his jawbone he looked as peaceful as an iced her-ring.

"Hey," I said to the bozo who toted him.

"Are you addressing me, sir?"

I said: "Yeah. What takes place?"

"Nothing of any importance — yet," the chunky monkey said in refrigerated accents. "This misguided soul made the mistake of attempting to prevent my entrance into the house. I had to show him the error of his ways."

I stared. "What did you teach him with, a baseball bat?"

"Not at all. He was a sucker for a left hook. I then employed him as a battering ram to break one of the windows." He surveyed me sourly. "What business is it of yours?"

"Maybe I'll make it my business," I said. "I don't like your way of talking."

"Ah?"

"You sound like a college diploma that took a transfusion of gangster plasma by mistake. If you—"

He scowled. "Quiet, lackey. Take me to your master."

"My master?" I hung the flabbergasted focus on him.

"Yes. Ziggy Cranston."

Then I caught hep' the guy thought I was one of the servants attached to Ziggy's domestic staff. This galled me. I said: "Now wait a minute. Let's understand each other."

"There's nothing to understand, my man. Announce me to Cranston, instantly. Tell him Wilbert Winslow wishes to see him. Tell him I'm tired being evaded."

"Wilbert Winslow—?" I yeped. "Cripes, you used to own Masterpiece Pix, didn't you? You went so deep in the red you had to let the sheriff sell you out for peanuts. I remember now."

He favored me with a somber frown. "Flunkies are not supposed to remember. They should be seen and not heard."

"Yeah," I said. "Only I'm not a gun-ky, I'm a private dick." I advanced on him. "I carry a badge and so forth. I'm empowered to make arrests, just like a cop."

"You don't tell me."

I growled: "Consider yourself pinched, brother. Breaking and entering, assault and bashery, destruction of property, malicious mischief—"

"And resisting an officer," he said. "Don't forget that. Provided you really *are* an officer." Then he hefted Antoine Leblanc high in the air and hurled him at me.

I wasn't expecting it; didn't have time to get set. The senseless chauffeur sailed in a straight line, arms and legs flopping crazily. The top of his noggin bopped me on the profile before I could duck.

All my fuses blew out and I went bye-bye.

CHAPTER II

Ka-Chow!

THERE were voices in the adjoining music room when I snapped out of my trance. One belonged to Ziggy Cranston and the second conversationalist was

that chunky Winslow character; I'd have recognized his cultured syllables anywhere.

Winslow was saying: "You cheated me, Cranston. You waited until I was financially insolvent and then forced me to sell you my studio."

"That's c-crazy," Ziggy answered. "And besides—"

"Don't interrupt me. Had you allowed me to retain control of Masterpiece just a few more weeks, certain productions would have been completed and released; productions which subsequently proved immensely profitable. I should have had that profit, not you. It wasn't fair."

I couldn't see Ziggy from where I was sprawled in the solarium, but his voice had a resentful pout. "Fair! I paid every dime your lousy outfit was worth. Sure, things turned out in my favor. But can I help it if you couldn't hang on long enough to get over the hump? I took a gamble and won, is all."

"You knew I had three hits coming up."

Ziggy howled: "That's not so! Dammit, nobody knew those cheap-budget turkeys would click like they did. Even you didn't know it or you'd have made a bigger effort to retain control."

"I still think I'm entitled to—"

"And I think you're nuts!" Ziggy said bitterly. "Judas Priest, the way you've been hounding me lately it's a wonder I don't hire somebody to knock you off!"

Winslow's tone dropped a notch. "Threats, Mr. Cranston?"

"Who's got a better right to make threats, especially against a blackmailer?"

You could hear the Winslow guy drawing a sharp breath. "Blackmailer? What do you mean by that?"

"As if you didn't know. As if you weren't the one who swiped that stock shot from the Masterpiece film library. As if you aren't holding it over my head, trying to break up my wedding plans. You dirty heel," Ziggy tacked onto his tirade. "By rights I ought to break your scum-my neck."

"Try it," Winslow invited coldly.

I rolled over on the floor of the indoor greenhouse and said to Antoine Leblanc: "Wake up, Frenchy. Something tells me

we may be needed. That Winslow citizen is no setup for Ziggy to tackle. You and I both found that out the hard way."

The chauffeur didn't answer me. He wasn't there. He'd awakened from his swoon while I was still in dreamland, and now he was gone; probably to repair his bruises and contusions. This left me to handle the situation all alone, and I wasn't sure I was going to enjoy it.

I SCRAMBLED upright, made for the door of the music room. As I staggered over the threshold, I lamped Ziggy Cranston advancing on his chunky caller, who stood spraddle-legged with a bleak look of anticipation on his puss. Mayhem was in the making and it had a short fuse.

"Ix-nay," I snarled, and catapulted at Winslow; dived for his ankles. He toppled with a jarring thump and I pinned him with my poundage, held him helpless. "Be nice," I said. "Be nice, or it gives violence."

He regarded me without rancor. "You couldn't have done this if you hadn't sneaked up on me from behind."

"Yeah. Have it your way." I perched on his chest and darted a glance at Cranston. "Let's go into that alleged blackmail routine, Ziggy. Right now it's all pretty hazy. Whistle the patter while I restrain this ape."

Cranston made a harried grimace. "There's nothing hazy about it, Hawkshaw. First of all, do you know what we mean in the picture industry when we speak of a stock shot?"

"Sure. Old newsreel footage or random reels of travel background; foreign scenery and the like. Battleship launchings, big city fires, sports events, mob scenes, spectacular wrecks and accidents—anything that might come in handy when you're making a movie and want to splice in some authentic bits of business without it costing too much. For instance, say you're producing an opus that has a railroad smashup as part of the plot. You go to your library of stock shots and drag out a reel of genuine train wreck. You feed in this footage, match-

ing it up with a sound stage set which fakes the closeups of the train debris."

"Right," Ziggy said. "Every studio has such a stock shot library; and, in addition, can rent similar reels from various outfits making a specialty of supplying that sort of material. Masterpiece has a fairly complete assortment, collected over a long period of time."

I said: "So what?"

"Well, a couple of months ago there was a minor fire in a small hotel here in Hollywood; more smoke than flames. It was at night and a lot of fire department equipment showed up, although it wasn't really needed. The hotel staff got everything under control with hand extinguishers."

"It's still hazy," I said. "All dialogue and no action."

He shushed me. "Comes the action now. I was on a bender. You know what I mean? Saturated. Fried to the hat. When I go on these drunks, I always wind up sleeping it off in some grade B hotel. I wouldn't want Sylvia to know this, you understand. She disapproves of drinking to excess—"

"Yeah, you told me she was a Puritan. If she found out you're a periodic lush, she'd ditch you, hunh?"

"Exactly. So I'm in this hotel and there's a fire. I wake up in my underclothes, open the window, and climb out the fire escape. But just as I'm going over the sill I hear somebody pounding the door of my room. I go back inside and open up. There's a—a girl standing there; a woman. In her nightgown."

"Oh-oh," I said.

He went on: "She had an inside room. No fire ladder. My room was her shortest avenue of escape. Smoke was billowing all around. She was hysterical. Well, hell, what was I going to do, let her stay there and maybe perish or something? Mind you, I didn't know but what the whole place was burning."

"So you picked her up and carried her out your window, down the fire escape," I said.

"Yes. An entirely innocent act."

I COCKED a glimmer at him. "It makes a plausible scenario, anyhow. Some folks might not believe it, though."

"Sylvia wouldn't," he said. "She'd think the worst. She'd get the idea that girl and I had been in the hotel together . . . you see what I mean?"

"Definitely," I nodded. "But what's that got to do with your blackmail beef? And where do those stock shots come in?"

He made a discontented mouth. "Some damned fool independent movie photographer happened to be in the neighborhood and took a lot of footage with hand-



size Filmo. Mind you, the blaze wasn't big enough to draw any newsreel outfits. Just this one jerk with a sixteen millimeter camera. Later he sold the shot to Masterpiece for its stock library. It was fairly spectacular, what with all the smoke pouring from the upper windows."

"And he got some footage of you lugging a dame down the ladder in her nightie, is that it?"



*He hurled the chauffeur
in a perfect forward pass.*

"Yes," Ziggy moaned. "I didn't even know it. And I didn't know the reel was sold to Masterpiece until recently."

I said: "How did you find out?"

"A studio employee in charge of stock shots reported to me that the files had been burgled. One can was missing. Fire stuff. Next thing I knew, I began receiving anonymous letters enclosing clips from the hotel scene—individual frames, cut from the reel itself. Those pictures show me, as large as life, coming down the fire escape with that girl."

"What's the bite?" I asked.

"Bite—?"

"The demand. The payoff."

His peepers got wrathful. "A threat to show the entire scene to Sylvia unless I sign over my majority holdings in Masterpiece Pictures."

"Sign them over to what guy?"

"In blank," he said. "The scheme is too clever to name a specific recipient. But obviously it's that man you're sitting on—Wilbert Winslow. He's the one who wants his studio back. Anybody can see that."

Winslow stirred fretfully under me. "That's a lie. I want my just due, but I wouldn't stoop to blackmail."

"Quiet, cousin," I advised him. Then

I said to Ziggy: "Even so, I can't understand why you'd be so scared. All you have to do is explain the truth to your sweetie—"

"She wouldn't believe me."

"Why not put 'er to the test?"

He shook his head. "No. I'd have to confess to her that I was plastered at the time. In her eyes, that would be almost as bad as being with another woman. She—"

"Yeah, a Puritan. She'd give you the frigid air."

"In a hurry," he agreed morosely. "That's why I sent for you. I was going to tell you all this stuff and then have you try to break into Winslow's house, steal the reel away from him, destroy it."

I growled: "Instead of which he barges over here and steps into trouble. That's dandy."

WINSLOW attempted to buck me off his chest. "I don't see anything dandy about it," he complained. "The whole thing is a frame-up. I haven't got any stolen reel. I haven't been on the Masterpiece lot since I lost control."

"You've been hounding Ziggy, haven't you?" I said.

He nodded sullenly. "Yes. I wanted—"

"What you wanted makes no difference now," I announced grimly. "It's what you're going to get, which is a swift poke in the kisser unless you cough up that shakedown footage."

Ziggy said eagerly: "That's right, Sherlock. Give him lumps." He came toward us. "Lean aside and I'll take the first punch. Let me at him."

"No, not yet. First we go through a slight formality. You put some geetus in my duke. Say five hundred hermans as a retainer. A grand extra when we recover the reel."

Winslow did some more bucking and squirming. "A fine thing, I must say!" he sulked. "Accepting money to beat me up. And before my very eyes."

"Don't worry," I told him. "You won't be able to see me write out a receipt. You'll be unconscious, if that's any consolation." I looked at Cranston. "The dough, Ziggy."

"Eh? Oh, yes, sure. Here." He dug out his wallet, peeled five centuries off his stack, thrust them at me.

I reached for the lettuce, started to stuff it in my pocket.

Never in my misspent career have I made a worse mistake than grabbing for that greenery. For an instant my attention was diverted from the chunky Winslow, and he seized his golden opportunity so fast it made my kidneys pucker like raisins. With a mighty heave he dislodged me off his torso, sent me floundering. I careened across the carpet at a crazy angle, caterwauling at the top of my tonsils and calling him every name in the stud book.

He seemed to take exception to this, because he arose in the full panoply of his anger and said: "Tut, tut. Such language. No gentleman would use it."

Then he kicked me on the skull and ran like hell; aimed himself at the doorway to the solarium. Ziggy Cranston took out after him—an action which I only dimly witnessed because my peepers were thumped out of focus. Then I heard a terrific crash of glass and a petulant yelp from Ziggy. "Dammit!" he screeched in irate tones. "At least you could have been polite enough to go out through the pane you broke when you came in. You didn't have to smash another one!"

FOOTFALLS sounded on the outer grounds, receding hellity blip. That was Winslow taking a rapid powder with Cranston still trailing him by three laps. I couldn't see any of it but I could get the picture in my imagination: Winslow scissoring toward the tall timber and Ziggy trying to catch him. It reminded me of a slapstick comedy chase and my dazed condition made it seem as funny as a two-reeler in the old silent days. I started to giggle.

I quit giggling when the shot sounded.

It came from a distance, the spitefully sneezed: *Ka-chow!* of a triggered roscoe. This was followed by a fading scream, ending in a gurgle like sewage going down a clogged drain. Then came an ominous silence.

I struggled to my stems, launched my-

self on an erratic course through the sun room, pelted across the rear garden, and finally came to a frozen halt near the Cranston swimming pool. There was somebody in the pool, floating face down; a bozo with a bullet hole in his dandruff. Gravy was leaking from the wound, staining the water with streaks of pallid pink, and I didn't need a second gander to tell me I was gazing upon the mortal remnants of Wilbert Winslow.

He was deader than chopped bait.

Ziggy Cranston stood at the pool's tiled edge with a smoking rod in his mitt and a severe case of the quaking jabberwockies shivering through his tonnage. A brunette cupcake was just churning into view, racing around the corner of the nearby building which served as garage and servants' quarters. I tabbed her immediately; she was the cookie of Cranston's snapshot, the doll he craved to marry—Sylvia Duane.

"Ziggy!" she wailed. "You . . . you killed a man!"

CHAPTER III

The Answer to \$10,000

AT THE sound of her voice, Cranston pivoted; goggled at her and then at the fowling piece in his fist. He twitched as if he'd found himself caressing a rattlesnake; made a motion to toss the gat into the water.

I roared: "Oh, no you don't!" and lunged up close to him, relieved him of the deadly weapon before he could throw it. Then I prodded him with its muzzle. "No tricks, Ziggy."

"Huh? Wh-what?"

"I said no tricks."

He seemed stupefied. "No tricks? You mean . . . you mean you . . . I . . . you think I shot Winslow?"

"Your sweetie just accused you of it," I said. "And the guy's obviously deceased. Moreover, here you were with a cannon. Everything adds up, including your motive. Winslow was blackmailing you and this was the payoff."

"But . . . but that's not true!" he gibbered. Then he turned to the Duane frail,

who had reached us by that time. "Sylvia . . . darling . . . surely you didn't mean to . . .?"

She kept her big dark glims away from the thing that floated in the water. "What else can I think? I saw the same thing Mr. Turner saw. Winslow falling into the p-pool, and you with th-that gun." Brine began to spill down her peachbloom complexion. "T-to think I'm engaged to a . . . a murderer!"

"Now wait," Ziggy burst out desperately. "Let's not jump at conclusions, either of you. I can explain this. I can explain it so you'll both understand what happened."

"I said: 'You don't have to, pal. You were chasing the guy and he was getting away. So you creamed him.'"

"No." He got red and then pale, like a traffic signal with a short circuit. "No, it wasn't that way at all. I ran after him—yes. Then all of a sudden I heard a shot and he yelled and threw up his hands and—pitched into the pool."

I brandished the rod I'd glommed from him. "And this sprouted in your duke, I suppose. By magic, maybe."

"Listen. Listen to me, please. I was looking at Winslow as he fell in the water. Naturally I'd be looking at him. So then when the splash came I—I sort of stepped back a little. Reflex, perhaps; you know how you'll do when you see water coming at you. I felt something under my foot. It—it was that gun. I stooped and picked it up, and then—well then you and Sylvia came. That's as much as I can tell you, and it's the God's truth."

The brunette wren pasted the puzzled focus on him. "Oh, Ziggy, you sound as if you weren't lying. And yet—"

"Yeah," I rasped. "And yet his story's as full of holes as the inside of a sponge." I swung around. "Show me the exact spot where you claim you stepped on the rodney."

He took three strides; pointed to an indentation in the turf. "Right here."

SURE enough, the outlines of a pistol seemed to be impressed in the ground; but that didn't mean much. "You dropped the roscoe after you

bumped Winslow. You accidentally stepped on it, then picked it up again. That's the only way it makes sense as far as I can figure," I said.

He stretched out his palms imploringly. "I tell you it isn't so. Somebody else—"

"Now look, Ziggy," I tried to be patient with him. "Who else was in sight when the guy got drilled?"

"Nobody. That is, I didn't see anyone."

I said: "So whoever fired the murder slug was an invisible man, eh? He stood here and you couldn't see him. Horse apples." I spun on my heel, started back toward the house. "This is something for the homicide heroes to chew on."

"Wh-what are you guh-going to do?"

"Phone headquarters."

"You mean you—you're going to have me arrested?"

"That'll be up to the cops. Maybe they'll believe your screwy story."

"But you d-don't, eh?"

"Correct," I said. "Come on, march ahead of me. You may as well make the best of it. Don't force me to use my handcuffs on you. After all, you're a friend of mine." Then I added: "Not that I ever let friendship interfere with duty when I'm messed up in a bumpy case."

He balked, cast a sorrowing glance at Sylvia Duane. "Don't let him do this to me, Sylvia honey. Say something to him. Try to convince him I'm innocent!"

"How can I do that when I'm not convinced myself?" she demanded hesitantly. "Oh-h-h, Ziggy . . . everything's so jumbled up!" All of a sudden she faced me, her dark glims narrowed suspiciously. "What was that you said about . . . blackmail?"

"Ask Ziggy, hon. He'll tell you."

"No!" Cranston yipped in panic. "That's not to be mentioned—not to be talked about! I don't w-want Sylvia to—" He lowered his voice to a conspiratorial wheedle. "Look, Turner. Let's make a truce. How would you like five thousand dollars?"

"I'd love it."

"Then all you have to do is help me move Winslow's body somewhere off my estate. Let it be discovered some other

place where nobody will connect me with—"

I said: "Nope. No dice."

"But for five thousand dollars, Turner! You said you'd love to be paid—"

"I wouldn't love it that much," I said. "I'd be compounding a felony, obstructing justice, and putting my tippet in a wringer. You and Miss Duane would be in on the deal with me. You'd be able to make me dance to your tune from that time on. We'd all be conspirators together. Much obliged, I value my conscience more than that. Let's go phone for some law."

His shoulders drooped and he pretended to surrender. Then he pulled an unexpected fast one; whirled and started running. Maybe I could have brought him down with a pill from my heater, but I hated the idea. Instead, I plunged after him.

And again he fooled me. This time he reversed his direction, angled off at a tangent, aimed himself toward a cable of electric wires leading from a tall pole to the rear of his tepee. Gaining these, he leaped high in the air; grabbed them and swung hard on them.

They snapped. He tumbled, almost fell. At the same instant I overhauled him, collared him and snarled: "What the hell was the big idea?"

"Phone wires," he said simply. "Now you can't call headquarters. Not from here, anyhow."

"So you think that'll do you any good?"

He shrugged. "It's a delay. Now we can talk some more. What's your answer to ten thousand dollars?"

"This," I said, and made a tight fist; corked him on the prow. He dropped like a cut rope and I leaned over him, whisked out my nippers, fettered his wrists. I started dragging him around toward the front porte-cochere where my jalopy was parked.

THE Duane chick raced after me. "You—you can't—"

"Keep your beautiful beak out of this, babe," I warned her.

"But—but Ziggy—you knocked him unconscious—"

"That was the general purpose."

"What are you going to d-do with him? Where are you t-taking him?"

I fed her a supercilious leer. "To the nearest gendarmes. And if you get in my way, I'll knock you loose from your girdle. That's a promise." Then I boosted her boy-friend into my bucket, crawled in beside him, kicked the starter, and went away from there in a cloud of peanut brittle.

"I didn't go very far, though. There was another palatial wigwam farther down the winding drive, a stash belonging to some big shot movie director. By dint of persuasion plus a flash of my badge I got a butler to let me use his telephone, whereupon I dialed my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide bureau. "Dan Turner squalling," I announced. "I'm wading around in croakery and I've got the 'iller under wraps for you. Come a-running."

"What?" Dave's voice rattled the receiver.

I said: "You heard me. Ziggy Cranston, current owner of Masterpiece Pix, just cooled the studio's formal mogul, name of Wilbert Winslow. Flag your frame out here in a hell of a yank. I'll wait for you."

After that it was all over but the trial—or so I thought. I was wrong, though. I went back out to my coupe, kept a wary glim on Cranston; burned my way through half a deck of gaspers. Then I heard a siren wailing, coming closer. That was Donaldson's official sedan imitating a rocket. Presently I spotted it coming around a bend; flagged it down.

"Hi, hideous," I said.

Dave poked his beefy lineaments at me. "Never mind the airy chatter. Let's have more on this alleged kill. Hey, who's that sleeping in your car?"

"Cranston," I said. "The guilty gee. Follow me up the street and I'll show you the bozo he rendered defunct."

So we made a parade to the Cranston igloo on the hilltop; assembled ourselves and ankled toward the swimming pool in the rear. Cranston himself was just regaining a section of his senses, but his brogans weren't tracking very well and

he needed support from both sides. Dave and I furnished this; steered him where we wanted him to go.

We reached the pool. It contained an occupant, all right; but not the one I was expecting. Sylvia Duane was splashing around in a red silk bathing rig the size of an airmail stamp, looking gorgeous; but there was no trace of a cadaver.

The late lamented Wilbert Winslow had lammed.

CHAPTER IV

What Body?

DONALDSON COPPED a squint at the swimming cupcake. Then he glared at me and grated: "Corpse, hunh? That's the liveliest stiff I ever saw. What's the rib? Tell me so I can laugh too."

"Hold everything!" I bleeped. "Hey, you—Miss Duane!"

She pretended to spot us for the first time; rolled over and paddled to the edge of the pool. Dripping from every curve, she hauled herself out of the drink and stared at Ziggy handcuffed between Dave and myself. "Darling! What—what is it? What's happened? Why are these men holding you that way?"

You had to give Cranston credit; he was quick on the uptake. He blinked blurrily at the brunette doll, sucked in a deep sigh, got control of himself and said: "I'm under arrest for something that never happened."

"But—but I don't understand!"

"Neither do I," he lied like a taximeter. "I was strolling around the front part of the grounds when this maniac Turner got out of his coupe, jumped me, knocked me cold, and handcuffed me."

She stiffened. "But why? What for?"

"There you've got me. When I came to, he had this other cop with him and they brought me back here. Your guess is as good as mine, honey."

I said: "All right, you've had your fun, both of you. Now I get my turn. What became of Winslow's body?"

"Winslow?" the Duane quail said. "What Winslow?"

"The one that was in the pool when I left here with Ziggy," I rapped back at her. "What have you done with the corpus delicti?"

She was as calm as Sunday in Philadelphia. "Really, I don't know what you're talking about. I've been here swimming for the past hour or more, and I'm sure I haven't noticed any corpus delicti—whatever that may be."

"Wait," I tried to keep my voice down. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me in my teeth Ziggy Cranston didn't plug Wilbert Winslow through the brains?"

"You must be drunk," she said. "Stinking."

I gnashed my grinders; turned to Donaldson. "Do I look saturated?" I demanded in challenging accents. "Here, smell my breath."

Dave squinted at me thoughtfully. "Maybe you're slipping. As a man grows older his capacity diminishes. What are you trying to pull?"

"Pull!" I yodeled. "Thanks for reminding me. Take a slant at those phone wires leading from that pole into the igloo. You can see where Cranston pulled them apart so I couldn't call you from here. That's why I had to bop him and nipper him. Then I ferried him to the next stash down the hill; dialed you from there."

"Do tell."

"And while I was gone this doll must have fished Winslow out of the pool and—"

"How big was he?"

"Not tall, but chunky. And plenty muscular. He even lifted a chauffeur and hurled him at me some time before the shootery."

"I see," Dave said.

"You see what?"

"That you're out of your mind."

"Me?" I strangled. "Why, you—"

"I've got a bird's-eye view of this young lady hauling a cadaver out of the water and hiding it. Especially the cadaver of a guy who could fling grown men through the atmosphere."

"But I tell you—"

He scowled ferociously. "You're nuts.

I always knew you'd go off your chump some day from too much alcohol."

I SNARLED: "Now, look. Be reasonable; use your common sense. There was a corpse in that pool; Wilbert Winslow's body. Ziggy Cranston cooled him. Here's the rodney he did it with." I yanked the gat from my pocket; flourished it. "Okay. If the jane is too tiny to have disposed of Winslow's remainders all by herself, it just proves she had help."

"What help?"

"A servant, maybe." Then a hunch hit me. "The chauffeur I was telling you about would be a likely prospect."

"Why would he?"

"Because he's a phony to start with," I said. "He—"

Ziggy rattled his handcuffs with a plaintive gesture. "Am I supposed to stand here in chains while you morons discuss a murder that never happened?"

"Quiet," I growled.

The Duane frail said: "Yes, darling, give them enough rope. You can sue them later for assault, false arrest, illegal detention and slander."

"You forgot arson and kidnaping, kiten," I sneered.

"Much obliged. We'll add them to the list."

Dave said: "How was he phony?"

"How was who phony?" I tried to pick up the thread of my interrupted discourse. "Oh, yeah, the chauffeur. He talked with a fake French accent but dropped it when he got sore."

From behind me a voice horned into the dialogue. "So okay, I use a phony French accent. What does that make me?"

I whirled. "Ah, Antoine Leblanc."

"In person," he said evenly. He flicked a speck of dust from his sky-blue livery, tweaked the points of his waxed mustache. A supercilious smile played around his kisser as he added: "So I'm under discussion, eh, shamus?"

Ziggy Cranston goggled at him. "Hey, I thought you were from Paris!"

"Paris, Texas," the guy grinned. "Sorry if it shatters any of your illusions, sir. I had a grapevine that you pre-

ferred foreign servants, so when I applied for the chauffeuring job I made with the Frog routine. Am I fired?"

"Well, I—I—dammit all, don't annoy me with trifles at a time like this. Can't you see this stupid gumshoe is trying to put me in a jam?"

Dave Donaldson snapped: "Oh for cripes' sake, shut up, all of you. You're

making me dizzy." He glowered at Antoine. "French, eh?" Then he turned to me. "At least you were right about him being a fake."

"I was right about the rest of it, too," I said. "Five brings you twenty that Antoine knows where the body's buried, if I may coin a phrase."

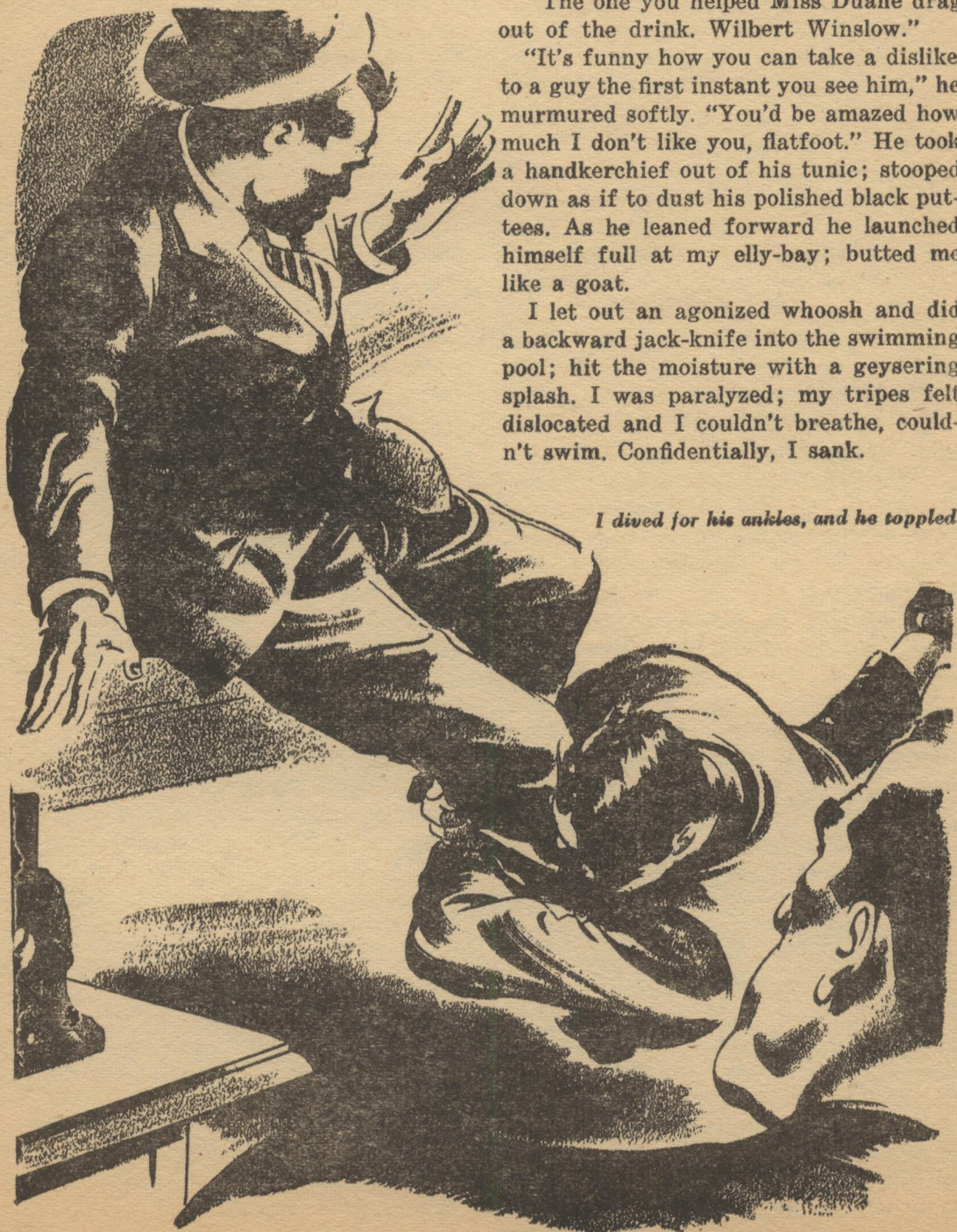
The chauffeur showed me his uppers and lowers. "What body?" he purred.

"The one you helped Miss Duane drag out of the drink. Wilbert Winslow."

"It's funny how you can take a dislike to a guy the first instant you see him," he murmured softly. "You'd be amazed how much I don't like you, flatfoot." He took a handkerchief out of his tunic; stooped down as if to dust his polished black puttees. As he leaned forward he launched himself full at my elly-bay; butted me like a goat.

I let out an agonized whoosh and did a backward jack-knife into the swimming pool; hit the moisture with a geysering splash. I was paralyzed; my tripes felt dislocated and I couldn't breathe, couldn't swim. Confidentially, I sank.

I dived for his ankles, and he toppled.



CHAPTER V

The Prowler

THEY SAY when you're drowning your whole past flashes before your eyes like a movie montage. Mine didn't. I simply surrendered to an enveloping blackness that gulped me like a raw oyster, and when I woke up, I was in a hospital bed with an empty sensation in my clockworks and a feeling that somebody had probed my lungs with the business end of a blow torch. I learned later that a rescue squad had used a stomach pump on me, which accounted for the emptiness; while the fire in my bellows was the result of artificial respiration with a pulmotor. I felt lousy.

Dave Donaldson leaned anxiously over my bed; breathed his halitosis in my kiss-er. "You alive, Sherlock?"

"No," I said bitterly. "Get away from me."

"Don't be like that. After all, I—"

"After all my nostrils!" I grated. "You stood there like a baboon and let that chauffeur character ram me into the soup. Powder, pal. I hate you to pieces."

He sulked. "A fine thing, after I ruined a perfectly good suit of clothes diving in and saving your life. Nineteen bucks that suit cost me. So the water shrinks it to fit a midget, and what thanks do I get?" He drew a deep breath. "Oh, well, that's gratitude."

"What time is it?" I said.

"Time? Why, eight o'clock. You've been here in the hospital since sundown."

I yeped: "The hell you preach! And what have you been doing in the meanwhile?"

"Oh, a little of this and that. Detecting, mainly."

"Detecting what?"

He looked hurt. "Your accusations, of course. We prowled every cubic inch of Cranston's house and grounds, including the garage and servants' quarters. No dice. I mean no corpse. We quizzed the household staff and they denied they'd heard a shot, seen a murder or witnessed a body being moved from the pool."

"Bribery might account for that," I

said. "Maybe they'd been paid to keep mum."

"Whale feathers! The plain and simple truth is there never was a dead guy. You must have dreamed it." Then he added: "You've got one satisfaction, though. I cast that Antoine Leblanc bozo in the jug for butting you into the water. You can make formal charges against him tomorrow and we'll salt him down for a spell on general principles."

I sat up, shoved my covers aside. "That's fine. Meanwhile I've got work to do."

"What kind of work? Hey, get back in that bed. You're a sick woman."

"And you'll be sicker than I am before I get finished," I retorted grimly. "I'm going to prowl Wilbert Winslow's wigwam, find a certain movie reel—"

"Movie reel?"

I nodded and stood up. "A stock shot whereby Winslow was blackmailing Ziggy Cranston. It will prove Cranston had a definite motive for bumping the Winslow citizen."

"Now why don't you relax?" Dave said earnestly. "There wasn't any bump. You can't have a bump without a corpse."

"I'll find that too, before I'm done," I dished him a sarcastic leer. "Where are my garments?"

"In that closet, all dried and pressed. I saw to it myself." He tried to block me. "But damn it, you're in no shape to go gallivanting—"

I said: "I'm in shape to clout you on the smeller if you get in my hair." Then I skirted him, located my threads, installed myself in them and made for the door.

Dave made one last attempt to wheedle me. "Look, Philo. How's for letting all this slide until tomorrow? Then you'll see it in a different light."

I told him I preferred the dark and scrambled.

MY jalopy was in the hospital garage, another of Donaldson's efforts to be helpful. I piled in, got a flask of Scotch tonic out of the glove compartment, swallowed a copious jolt to ward off possible snake-bite and lit a shuck for Westwood

where the late lamented Winslow party had lived. It took me fifteen minutes to drive there and another three to find a master key on my ring that would work the lock of the modest bungalow's front door. Presently the latch clicked and I stole over the threshold with as much noise as a mosquito landing on a bowl of jello. In the snooping racket it sometimes pays to be silent.

This was one of the times.

As I groped forward in solid blackness, I reached for my pencil flashlight; got ready to risk a ray as soon as I was certain the joint was uninhabited. Then, all of a sudden, I saw a brief and vagrant flicker of illumination from one of the rear rooms, like the beam from an oversized electric torch.

I got tense all the way to my toenails. Somebody was in the tepee with me; somebody who didn't belong there any more than I did. Wilbert Winslow had been a bachelor; had lived alone without any servants. Now that he was defunct, nobody ought to be prowling his premises; and I knew it couldn't be Winslow's ghost because ghosts don't use flashlights.

My .32 automatic was in its shoulder clip, undisturbed during my hospital sojourn. I hauled it forth, snapped off the safety, jacked a cartridge into the chamber. The metallic click was drowned out by other sounds emanating from that rear room where an intruder was moving around. Judging from the noises, a job of frisking was being committed.

You could tell that this unseen character considered himself to be alone, for he wasn't making much effort to disguise his movements. I figured he must be pretty engrossed in his work, so I chanced a quick splash of glow from my own torch. In that momentary wink of light I piped my surroundings, realized they'd been rifled. I was in a living room that looked like the aftermath of a Kansas cyclone. There was a desk in one corner with its drawers sagging open, their contents dumped on the floor. There were several hunks of overstuffed furniture, the cushions and padding slashed by a sharp knife. A bookcase yawned emptily,

its volumes piled on the threadbare carpet and a lot of their pages ripped out. The prowler was damned thorough.

But what was he looking for?

I thought I knew. I also had a pretty good idea who the bozo was. I stalked toward that rear room, gained its doorway, peered in and lamped a tall, suntanned guy in the act of taking a down pillow apart feather by feather.

"Hi, Ziggy Cranston," I said.

CHAPTER VI

A Threat

HE WHIRLED like a dervish with the hotfoot, hung the flabbergasted gander on me and choked: "Turner . . . you . . .!"

"Yeah. Were you expecting Santa Claus?"

"I—I didn't expect anybody. I mean—"

"Sure, you thought you could fan the joint without being nabbed. Keep your dukes still, chum. This thing I'm holding doesn't shoot marshmallows."

He sucked in a noisy breath. "I—I'm not armed. I won't try to—to do anything."

"You've done enough already. You croaked Winslow. Now you're trying to locate the blackmail reel."

"No. No, I didn't kill Winslow. I swear I didn't! I'll admit I've been hunting for that reel of film, but—but—"

I said: "It all meshes. If you could find the footage and destroy it, nobody could pin a murder motive on you. But you've given yourself away by coming here. Reel or no reel, it links you up with the Winslow bump."

"Won't you please listen to me? I—"

"Shut up." I advanced on him, waved my rod. "You're going to tell me what happened to the guy's remnants. You're going to tell me now and save yourself trouble or you can do it later after I beat you across the mush with this cannon. Take your choice, and take it fast."

He quailed. "I don't know what happened to the b-body."

"Quit stalling. Speak out before I make with the violence."

"I give you my oath I don't know!" he squealed. "Sylvia took it from the pool, yes; she admitted that much to me. She said she did it to get me out of trouble."

I sneered: "A noble gesture on her part. Evidence of her true love. But where did she hide the defunct gee?"

"She w-wouldn't tell me. She said it would be better if I didn't know."

"Damned thoughtful of her," I said. "Particularly since she seemed to be convinced that you were the murderer."

"You're wrong about that. She thought it over and decided I was innocent. That's why she went to bat for me, fronted for me. She figured I had no logical reason for shooting Winslow; therefore she concluded I wasn't guilty."

I regarded him bleakly. "You mean she still isn't hep to the blackmail angle?"

"Gosh, no! I've kept that from her. Otherwise she'd think the worst and leave me in the lurch!"

"That'll happen anyhow when the blowoff comes," I said. "And there's always a blowoff when you monkey with homicide. Thanks to you, I know now how to crack Sylvia Duane wide open and force her to spill."

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"I'm going to tell her you were being blackmailed."

"No—!"

"I'm going to tell her *why* you were being blackmailed."

"Please, Sherlock, you mustn't do—"

I said: "Then she'll get the idea you were playing around with some other dame. She'll be sore as hell. She'll quit shielding you and come clean. She'll believe you're guilty of croaking Winslow; and she'll confess where she hid his carcass."

"Don't do that, Turner!" he begged. "I love Sylvia. She's never marry me if you did that!"

"She couldn't marry you in any case, bub. You'll have a previous engagement with the gas chamber. The instant we locate a corpus delicti we'll have you by the short hair. Catch on?"

He winced. "You insist you're going to railroad me, do you?"

"Yeah, if I can."

"Would money make any difference?"

"Not a bit. This is one time I'm bribe-proof."

"But do you realize if you trick Sylvia into telling where she hid the body, she'll be confessing herself into a jam? I mean obstruction of justice or whatever you call it—"

"Accessory," I nodded. "She'll be jugged." I beckoned to him with my heater. "Come along, let's go talk to her. Where does she live?"

HE faltered: "The Gayboy on Wilshire. She isn't there now, though. At least I don't think she is."

"How come?"

"Because I—I left her at my house an hour or so ago. I told her I had an errand. She said she'd wait for me."

"I'll check that," I said, prodding him into the front room. There was a phone in one corner and I made him dial it while I kept him covered. He got a connection with the Gayboy Arms; handed me the instrument. I said: "Is Miss Sylvia Duane in her apartment?"

The clerk asked me to wait while he rang. There was a pause, then, "Sorry, sir, she doesn't answer. Any message?"

"Nope." I hung up, nudged Cranston out of the bungalow; told him to take my jalopy's wheel and drive while I sat beside him with my .32 nudging his short ribs. He obeyed with his bridgework clattering and we made knots toward his hilltop hovel, presently drifting to a halt under the mammoth porte-cochere. I said: "Do you ever accept free advice, Ziggy?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean you'd better play your cards my way if you crave to avoid a fractured skull. We're going indoors, savvy? And you're going to sing extremely small while I feed your sweetie the sixty-four dollar question."

He nodded, keyed his front portal open and we marched inside like a two-piece parade. The first character we encountered was a flunkey in the reception hall: the same pompous footman who had admitted me earlier that afternoon. This individual took one horrified hinge at the roscoe I held against his master's left

At the sound of her voice he made a motion as if to toss the gun in the pool.



kidney and emitted a strangling gurgle. "Wh-wha-what—?"

Ziggy said weakly: "It's quite all right, Jervis. Just a little joke between Mr. Turner and myself."

"It is like hell," I growled. "I never jest with firearms." Then I added: "Where's the quail?"

"Quail, sir?"

"Yeah. Miss Duane."

Ziggy made a plaintive mouth. "Tell her we want to see her, Jervis. Instantly."

"I'm sorry, sir, but she's not here. She departed fifteen or twenty minutes ago. She left a message for you, sir. She said to tell you she would telephone you later tonight."

If ever a guy registered sheer relief it was Ziggy Cranston. He acted like a condemned prisoner with a last-minute reprieve on the thirteenth step of the gallows. "I see," he whispered. His sun-tanned puss brightened. "Well, gumshoe, I guess you won't be asking her that sixty-four dollar question after all. Not right away, anyhow."

This, unfortunately, was all too true. I wasn't stymied, however. "Don't be so happy about it," I snapped. "I'll find something to while away the idle hours, commencing right now." I turned to the footman. "Jervis."

"Yes, sir?"

"How many servants are there besides yourself?"

He counted on his fingers. "Three, sir. Butler, cook and parlor maid." Then he corrected himself. "Beg pardon, sir, I forgot to include the chauffeur. Antoine."

"Skip him," I said. "He's out of circulation. Go fetch everybody else. Have them here in a hurry."

The guy bowed, turned, stalked off. After a brief time he reappeared with the rest of the household staff and they all glued the bewildered glimpse on me.

I lined them all up with a wave of my artillery. "Okay, pals. If anybody doubts my authority to ask questions, just remember a man with a gat is always top dog. Now, then. This afternoon just before sunset there was a murder committed near the swimming pool of this es-

tate. How many of you witnessed it?"

All I got was silence for an answer.

I said: "Well, then, who heard the shot?"

Four noggins shook a vigorous and concerted nix.

I WAS beginning to get impatient. "Did any of you happen to look toward the pool and pipe Sylvia Duane dragging a body from the water?"

"Miss Duane, sir?" the footman said. "Oh, no, sir. It's precisely as we told the police when they investigated: none of us knew there had been a murder."

"Oh. Then the cops have already quizzed you, eh?"

"Quite so, sir. It was Lieutenant Donaldson, sir. He gave us all a—a grilling, I believe the term is. We informed him as to our whereabouts at the approximate hour of the alleged homicide. Cook was in her kitchen preparing dinner, sir. She had no view of the rear grounds. The butler and I were in the front of the house. Maid wasn't here at all; it was her afternoon off. Moreover, sir—"

He stopped on that. He corked his gab because he was interrupted by a bell in the room, shrill, insistent; the phone bell. It startled me, too.

"What the hell!" I said. "I thought the telephone wire was busted."

Ziggy Cranston put in: "We sent for a repairman as soon as you'd been taken to the hospital to be pumped dry, Hawkshaw. We had it fixed."

"Oh, so?" I growled. "All right, Jervis. Answer it."

"Yes, sir." The flunkey moved across the room, lifted the instrument from its cradle. "Mr. Cranston's residence . . . Yes . . . You wish to speak to Mr. Cranston personally? And who is calling? . . . I see." He turned, covered the transmitter with his palm. "Someone who refuses to give his name, sir."

Ziggy made a vague half-step toward the phone but I cut over in front of him, gave him a shove. "I'll take it," I grunted.

A muffled voice came over the wire, thick, obviously disguised. "Cranston? Listen and listen fast. I'm just going to

say this one time, understand?"

"Yes," I said. If the party on the other end of the connection thought I was Ziggy I wasn't going to correct him. Maybe I'd learn something if my luck held. "Yes," I repeated.

The voice said: "I want that Master-piece stock, see? You're to sign it in blank; a full endorsement and no trickery with the signature. Put the certificates in an envelope and mail them to John Q. Smith, general delivery downtown. John Q. Smith, got it? Don't forget the Q. part. And you better not have any dicks watching at the general delivery window to see who picks up the envelope. Not if you wanna stay out of jail."

"Jail?" I tried to make my tone sound disturbed.

"Yeah. And don't get the idea you can trace me through the eventual transfer of the stock to my real name. It'll pass through two or three dummies before it finally gets registered to me, and by that time you won't be in no position to blow the whistle on me. Not when you got a murder rap staring you in the face."

I quavered realistically: "M-murder—?"

"You heard me. The last time I put the bee on you it wasn't no iron-clad setup like it is now. All I had to go on then was a lousy stock shot reel. Now it's different. I know you put a slug in Wilbert Winslow—and I know where your sweetie stashed the body after she fished it outa the pool, see? I was watchin' her. So unless you play ball my way I'll let the cops know what really happened. I'll tell 'em where to find that corpse. Then you'll sniff cyanide at San Quentin an' the jane will go up as an accomplice. Think it over, Cranston."

The line went dead.

CHAPTER VII

The Plan of Action

ZIGGY CRANSTON goggled at me, his peepers protruding like a pair of squeezed grapes. "Who—wh-what—?"

"A witness," I said. "A witness to the

kill." Then I started dialing so fast the gadget gave off sparks. "Hello. Police headquarters? Lieutenant Donaldson of homicide and I won't take no for an answer."

There was a wait, then Dave came on the connection. "Who is it and what does it want?"

"Turner talking. Is that phony Frenchman still down there in the bastille?"

"You mean Cranston's chauffeur? Funny you'd ask about him at this particular time. Quite a coincidence. I—"

"Omit the conversation and give me the answer!" I caterwauled. "Is Antoine Leblanc there or isn't he?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, no he isn't. Somebody put up the five hundred dollar bond he was under; did it through a bail broker. All we had on him was an assault rap, you know. I mean there was no way we could legally hold him after—"

I screeched: "I don't want the details! When did you turn him loose?"

"Just now. That is, he walked out of here not two minutes ago. I happened to be passing through the main office and saw him get his belongings from the property sergeant. How it came to my attention is, he noticed me and thumbed his nose at me. I was going to go up to him and slap a few of his teeth out on general principles, but just then somebody sidetracked me and asked me a question. By the time I—"

"Will you quit using so many words?" I yodeled. "I don't want a case history. Wait, hold the line a minute." I turned to Ziggy. "Did Antoine live here in the servants' quarters?"

"Why yes. That is, all except his day off. I understand he had an apartment somewhere, but I don't know where. I don't keep track of the help. Not their personal lives." All of a sudden he seemed to realize what I was driving at. "Antoine! Do you mean maybe he—"

I tried to hold my temper in check. "Talk, talk, talk! All I get is talk and no information. Will somebody please for heaven's sake make a little sense? I want Antoine's private address. Now. Before I blow my top!"

(Continued on page 60)

DRAFT DODGER

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

"The guy's nutty," the whole town said—as if that were explanation enough why the draft board should classify an able-bodied man as 4F. What did they know about the hunting accident years ago that had made the very sight of guns a thing to recoil from?



NORMA was curled up on the porch hammock, her feet tucked under her, and her slim hands clasping her knees. Moonlight brought out the reddish sparkle of her hair; she was so close that I could see the filigree of her ear pendants, and smell her perfume blending with the honeysuckles that screened the porch. As near as all that, but miles away from me, and getting further every minute.

All of a sudden, she was on her feet, so quickly that the move left me gaping. We stood there, face to face; her eyes weren't natural, and her voice was strained when she said, "Dennis—I think—we—I'd better say—good-bye."

She was in the full moonlight now. There was nothing lovely about her face



I got a whiff of perfume, but that was one girl I didn't care to meet.

except its outline. I'd had my last look at the glow that'd built up, evening after evening. But pretending not to get the point, I caught her hand and said, "Heck, darling, it's not late."

It was like grabbing something dead. She didn't even yank it away. "I didn't say good-night. It's good-bye—we'd better—well, we've been seeing too much—of each other—and—"

She didn't have to finish. She'd been trying to think a nice way out of it all evening, and being too honest to string

anyone along, she'd blurted it out at last.

In other words, she knew all about me. It was as final as the slam of the screen when she ran into the house.

Well, the rest of the town figured me for a louse that was taking advantage of the agricultural workers' exemption, so why shouldn't Norma Cheney join the crowd?

While I wasn't a war-dodger, explaining my 4-F rating would've made things even worse, so all I did was look for a

second at the door that wouldn't open for me any more, and then hoof it back to Carver's bunk-house.

My job was bossing the Mexicans who worked old man Carver's date grove, just outside of Bagdad, in the Mojave Desert. After miles of sand and rock, there was the town, an oasis of blue-green umbrella trees, gray-green tamarisks, and tall date palms.

No use trying to figure who had knifed me. Every time I went to town, the leathery and dried-out natives began thinking of their sons in the SWP and in Italy; you'd hardly expect them to cheer my bullet-proof essential job. And Norma, being a young widow who owned a big chunk of the oasis, shouldn't be getting too interested in a bullet-dodger from up north. Just that simple, and what'd you do about it?

Nothing at all. You're lucky to be alive. But a couple nights later, I went to hoist a few beers at the Oasis Bar, where I planted myself at a corner table and made a stab at reading the out of town papers. Ray Saddler got them from all over, and sent them to the bar as fast as he read them, which was plenty quick. Keeping informed was his business, and being postmaster was just a side line. He was an expert on foreign and military affairs; he'd won the World War, and he knew how to win this one; and he hated draft-dodgers. Probably not a bad guy; just an old buzzard, forty-five anyway, and sore because he couldn't get back in uniform.

HANGING around a bar all by yourself wears thin in a hurry so I barged out into the shadows of the arcade that ran half the length of the block. Nice timing; Norma and Saddler were coming from the movie, way ahead of time. Soon they'd be sitting behind the honeysuckle vines on her front porch.

The doors were still swinging behind me when the chatter in the bar eased off, with only one man speaking. Dallas Rapp, who ran the filling station, bawled in his bull voice, "Mason ain't a slacker. You fellows got him wrong."

"Hell, he acts able-bodied."

"Sure he is, but the poor guy's nutty. Ray Saddler told me so."

There they had it. Ever since that hunting accident, when I shot a friend of mine, it makes me sick to touch a gun, or look at one, or even think of one. The same goes for anything that sounds like a shot, or a noise like a riveting hammer, or even anything dropping with a slam. Everyone said it was accidental, but that didn't help me; the kink remained, and having to explain it made it worse. You try telling the first hundred people you're just shocked and shaken up, and not really nutty, and see what it does for you. You end up by not believing yourself. That's why I came to Bagdad for a change of scene and a quiet place. But try to get away from your hoodoo!

I barged on and braced Saddler. "So you told her I'm crazy, huh?"

Without waiting for an answer, I socked him. Considering his age, he did mighty well, but every time he got up, I knocked him flat. Where I was wrong was yanking him to his feet when he couldn't get up, and then setting him up against a pillar and plastering him some more.

That was when Sam Parley conked me with his night stick and flung me into the village hoosegow. The judge gave me thirty days in the county jug and told me to stay out of Bagdad.

MY time was nearly up before old man Carver got me out, and put up a peace bond, so I could come back and work.

Ray Saddler had got over his bruises, but that's all he got. Norma had in the meanwhile found a hero in San Bernardino, and he followed her to Bagdad to finish recuperating from his wounds. Major Heffner wasn't much over thirty. Maybe thirty-five, tall and sandy-haired and impressive-looking. On top of it all, he wore an acre of decorations; he'd been places in two years of war. Just one eye-ful, and you couldn't blame Norma for going for him.

Old man Carver grinned and shook his head and said, "Well, now that you and

Ray won't have nothing to wrangle about, I won't be forfeiting that bond."

Next evening, I went to the post-office to pick up the mail. While I was twiddling the combination on the lock box, Saddler poked his head from his office. I didn't know what to make of it when he said, in a fumbling and awkward way, "Mason, I want to talk to you."

"OK, sound off."

"Come to the house, around ten, after I finish reading my papers."

"What for?"

"Well—uh—I want to talk to you. Maybe I been wrong."

I didn't like the guy or any part of him, but you got to give a fellow credit when he's trying to do the right thing, so I said I'd be there.

Bagdad sprawled out on both sides of the highway. Just short of the lighted block, I cut over toward Saddler's place. The houses were well apart, and surrounded by tamarisk hedges to keep dust storms from driving through. There were voices, and radios, but the hedges blocked off the lights.

Saddler's house was dark. When I knocked, I noticed that the door was ajar.

"Saddler!" No answer. "Saddler!"

But there was a paper tacked on the panel. I struck a match, and read the typed words: BACK IN 30 MINUTES. I walked in, the way you would in a village like Bagdad. Another match, and I found the wall switch.

Saddler had come back, and for keeps. He was on the floor, near the typewriter and folding table, which had been upset. Blood splashed scattered newspapers, some opened, some still in their jackets. He'd been conked with a stone pestle, the kind the Indians used to use for pounding acorns and mesquite beans. It was part of his collection of curios. And he was as dead as if he'd been socked with the ox yoke over the fireplace.

Of the whole six-eight hundred people in Bagdad, I had to be the one to find Saddler. With no one having heard him ask me to come out, my story was as thin as cigarette paper.

Saddler's hand was still warm. The blood splattered around hadn't got thick

and dark yet. His hand reached for the long bladed shears he used for making clippings. I'd noticed that most of the papers he sent to the Oasis Bar had had items cut out of them, mainly from the People's Forum, or Public Opinion sections, but sometimes bits had come from the news columns, stuff that was hot enough to write editors about.

His sending all those out of town papers to the bar might've been good fellow stuff, and it might've been just to remind people how he kept posted on what was going on all over the nation.

There wasn't any sign of a brawl. He'd been conked as he bounced to his feet. Someone had sat on the leather upholstered Mission sofa. That was plain from the marks in the dust. The Indian girl didn't clean things very well.

Then I thought I heard something behind, or alongside the house. When a tin can rattled, there wasn't any doubt. I made a dive for the front door, and jabbed the switch.

It was dark between the porch and the tamarisk hedge, but the desert stars gave enough glow for me to make out a blur of something to my right; and I got a whiff of perfume, clear and spicy. But that was one girl I did not want to meet.

IT didn't take long to circle the outskirts of Bagdad. The breeze freshened, whipping up the sand. By morning, there'd be no tracks; but when I got to my room in the tank-house, I began to wonder if anyone had seen me on the way to Saddler's.

That worried me almost as much as the perfume of the woman in the shadows. It was Norma's brand, one they didn't sell in Bagdad.

Getting up before sunrise was easy. There hadn't been any sleep for me.

The news spread early and spread fast, once the Indian gal who cleaned and cooked for Saddler got there to fix breakfast and found him. Old man Carver hobbled out into the grove to tell me about it. My job was to look surprised and properly shocked and sorry.

"Some woman was there," he wound up.

"She left a heel print in some sticky blood."

"Probably the Indian gal," I said, remembering the perfume.

"Nuh-uh. Tula don't wear high heels, not to work."

Later, Sam Parley came over to ask me where I'd been when Saddler was killed. I came back at the red-faced marshal, "Depends on when it happened."

Carver chuckled and whittled off a fresh chew of Star. "Sam, that gag has whiskers longer'n yourn, you'd oughta know he'd not snap at that kind of bait."

Parley grinned all over his good natured face. "No harm trying, it worked back in 1909, on Digger Bill. After all, Mason here had words with Saddler."

Carver's face got dark and rocky-looking as the hills; he was thinking of that

peace bond he'd posted to guarantee I wouldn't do any more brawling. "That there was a month ago, and Saddler had it coming. Shucks, I once nearly shot my dad accidentally, and for weeks, I got sick at the sight of a gun, but that didn't mean I was crazy."

"All right, Lem, all right," Parley said, and hauled out.

Then Carver turned on me: "Son, I ain't saying you did it, and I ain't saying you didn't, I just ain't saying."

"Nice having a friend in town, Mr. Carver."

"Haw! It's my rheumatism, you're useful helping around here. And don't get in the dumps account Norma shying away from you, women folks can't take any chances with fellows with a loft full of bats. Not that you have, but that's what she was given to think."

Where I was wrong was in setting him against a pillar and plastering him some more.



"You know all about it."

"Ray Saddler told all he knew."

"How'd he find out?"

"Reading papers, I guess. And digging deep. Anyway, it's not hard to get cured of being gun-shy. Take my old double barrel Parker, or that .38 Smith & Wesson and handle it, no matter what it does to you."

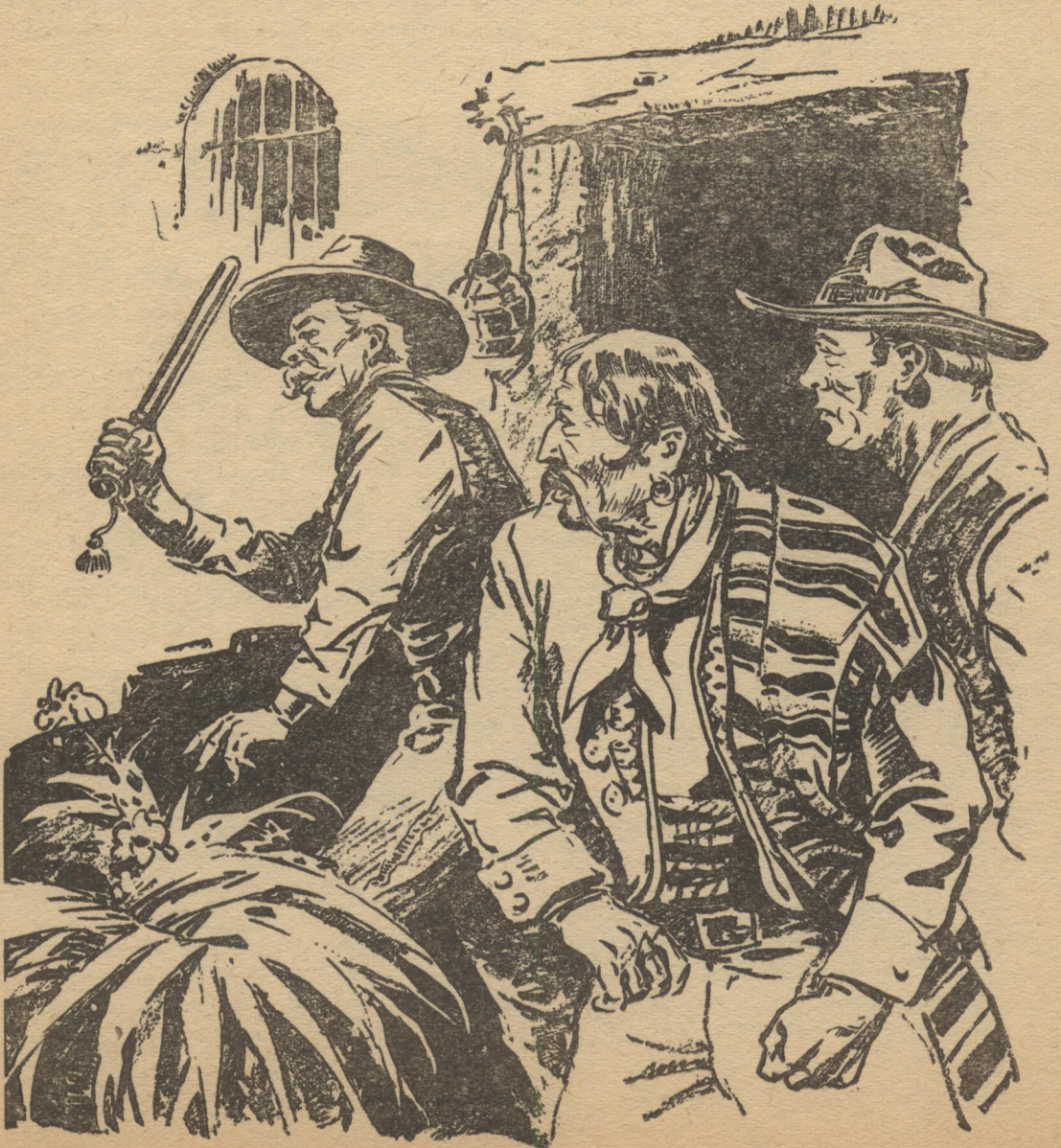
The idea made me sick and dizzy. I backed away. Carver hobbled forward and wagged a shaky finger under my nose. "You do like I tell you. And finally, fire a shot. That'll cure you."

Then he remembered the farm hands were listening, and he went back to the

house. Nice thing about those Mexicans; they didn't stare and gawk; they did a good day's work, not caring whether I was a draft-dodger, or just crazy.

THAT noon, something did make me sick. It was the smell of burning leather, coming from Norma's place. With rationing, it was funny, her destroying shoes. If she was tired of them, she could've given them away.

The more I thought of that heel print in the blood splash, the more I wanted to talk to Norma. What kept me from it for a whole week was Major Hefner keeping a track worn between the Mojave



Inn and her house. They'd go driving in his Pontiac convertible, or sit on the front porch. When the wind was right, I could catch their voices, and smell his cigars.

Sometimes, I'd see him at the Oasis Bar, where he'd kill an hour or two. He was getting in solid with the town, building himself up for when he'd be moving in permanent. It seemed he was out of the army for keeps, or soon would be.

After a week, Major Heffner headed for San Bernardino. That evening, I dropped in as soon as the help had checked out. Norma looked surprised and a bit at a loss when she saw me at the door. I said, "Thanks for the cigarettes and stuff you sent while I was in the jug, but that's not what I came to talk about."

She stepped to the porch. "Sit down, Dennis."

Here we were again, on the hammock, and miles apart. She was wearing a diamond the size of a Deglet Nur date. Heffner wasn't losing any time.

"A lot of people think I settled Ray Saddler."

"Aren't you imagining things?" She hitched over, and laid her hand on my arm. "Oh, I'm sorry about everything. I was afraid—well—that you were taking things too seriously, and—"

"That I'd get violent?"

"No, not that. But you'd had your troubles, and a disappointment wouldn't help. I just made too much of a garbled story."

"All right, skip that, but Sam Parley's waiting to get something on me. I can tell that from the way people look at me whenever I'm in town. What do you know? What are they saying? I'd like to know where I stand."

"I've not paid particular attention," Norma said. "And that's what you ought to do. Look and act too worried, people will begin thinking things."

"Well, I've been thinking. Plenty. For instance, the day Saddler was found dead, you burned some shoes. I smelled that pretty soon after there was word about the woman's heel print in the blood on Ray's floor."

Her face changed, and she caught her breath. But that was nothing compared

to the smack I got when she came right back at me, "Your ideas on shoe leather couldn't've carried very far, but if I'd said anything about you having been at Ray's place that night, you know where you'd be now."

While I answered right away, the voice sounded like someone else's. "What do you mean, I was at his house? Would you claim you saw me there?"

Pretty smart, putting it that way, and not missing a beat? That's what I thought, until she answered, "Ray told me he'd tried to make up for having you condemned as a draft-dodger, but telling about your 4-F status only made it worse. And he was really sorry. So I told him he ought to have a man to man talk with you, at his house in private, and try to square things up, so you'd feel more at home in town. Convince you he'd do everything he could to keep you from being treated like an outcast."

"Well, I told him I'd see him, but that doesn't prove I did."

She shook her head and smiled a little. "You went. You would go, just to meet him half way."

"All right, I did, and I found him, and I was panicked. Plenty. But you were there, I smelled your perfume, I saw something move in the dark at the end of the porch. You kicked a tin can in the walk alongside the house, or maybe in back. We're both in this, I guess."

Norma nodded. "I took a shortcut, when you left Carver's. I went to see how he'd treat you."

"You figured he wouldn't play ball?"

"No, not exactly. But for a man like him, it would go against the grain to knuckle down. I wasn't sure but what he was staging it all to please me, to convince me he was generous-minded, rather than because of his sense of justice."

"You mean, do the noble and big-hearted stuff to build himself up and help him meet Major Heffner's competition?"

"In a way yes. Ray was stubborn and persistent, and anyway, he did want my good opinion, regardless—"

"And he might've fudged a bit, trying to get it?"

"All's fair," she said, and smiled a little more.

THE crazy thing about it was that there hadn't been any motive for murder, except the run-in I'd had with him. Saddler hadn't left Bagdad for twenty-five years, barring trips to go to Legion conventions. He didn't keep money around the house, he wasn't mixed up with any women, and the limit of his gambling was penny ante in the back room of the Oasis. Norma must have read my thoughts, for she finally went on, "It must be either you or me, and since you didn't do it, you're afraid I did?"

What could I say?

Before I knew what'd happened, she swayed toward me, and kissed me, and drew back out of range. "Good-night, Dennis. Don't worry about me, I'm no more guilty than you are. And you'll get over being gun-shy, just take Mr. Carver's advice."

I started home on clouds, but pretty soon my heels hit hard ground; that glow in her eyes and that sweetness of her voice was just a hangover from the major's visit. Being thoroughly in love, she found the whole world a grand place full of swell folks.

Saddler had figured on patting me on the head to get himself square with Norma; I kept thinking of that angle, wondering how he got the idea he stood a chance with her, particularly when Major Heffner had Norma dizzy and dewy-eyed? Saddler would either have to have been a plain fool, or else, he'd had reasons, good ones, that no one else knew.

To try for an answer, I ended up by approaching Saddler's house from the desert side. Getting in the back door was easy enough with a bit of wire and a broken phonograph spring. To keep from making clear tracks, I'd pulled heavy socks on over my shoes. Trying to figure what a man had been thinking of during the couple weeks before he was killed would've been too much for a level headed fellow like Sam Parley, so maybe I had a chance.

The floor was clean; no blood, no scattered newspapers. Otherwise, it was like

it'd been the night I barged in. Well, my cotton gloves wouldn't leave prints, so I dug into the shelf of big scrapbooks Saddler had been filling, year after year.

There were newspaper sketch maps of Krajalein and other atolls, and maps of the European fronts. Another page had stuff about strikes and shutdowns. There were clippings of letters he'd written to editors, hot and sharp, on all sorts of people and current events. He'd tramped on toes all the way from Tia Juana to Tacoma, and Frisco to Miami.

There were even articles on my hunting accident. A clipping bureau must have fixed him up, as he didn't get my home town paper; just the key points, like Salt Lake City, New Orleans, Chicago, and so on. He'd changed his mind about a recent New York item, it'd been torn out of the book, nothing but a bit of the date line was left. There were a couple small blood spots on that page, they'd kept it stuck to the next one.

So far, so what? I pushed some books over, and then yanked my hand back. There was a long barreled Colt .45, clean and oiled, and loaded, with just a thin film of dust it'd gathered since Saddler had quit taking care of it. He could've reached it from his typing table, if he'd had a chance.

Same old jitters. I shook all over. That accident was right in front of me again. I smelled powder, and blood, and my ears rang from the blast. I gritted my teeth, and tried to grab the pistol, and see if what Carver said was true. But I couldn't do it. No more than some people can force themselves to a parachute jump, or a high dive. They go plumb to pieces, no guts, no control.

When the flashlight beam quit dancing, I carried on, looking for signs of girl friends, letters, pictures, in the writing desk and in the bedroom. There were some old time studio photos, dead-end romance, judging from what the gals had written, and then forgotten about.

In a closet was an old fashioned, high-collared army coat, all pressed. He'd been a sergeant, and he'd been decorated;

(Continued on page 64)

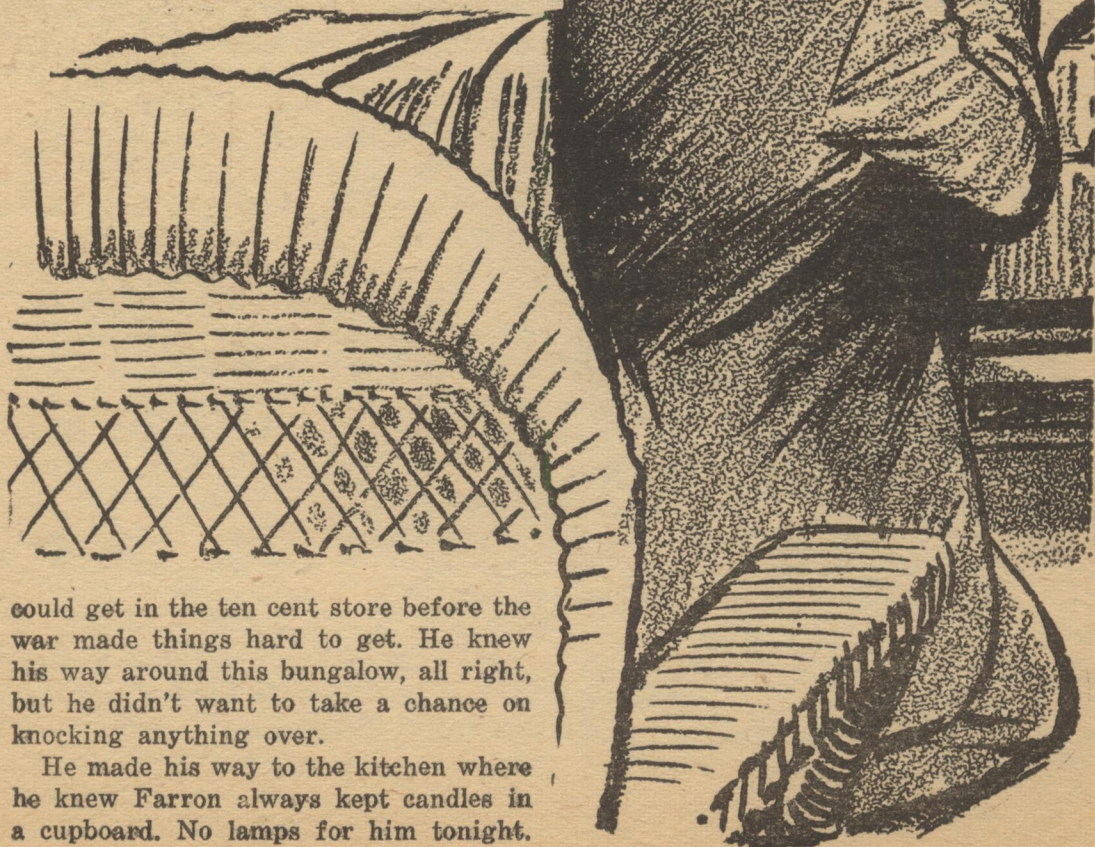
MOUTHPIECE

By HAROLD De POLO

BARRY O'LEARY couldn't help smiling to himself in the dark as he put the key in the lock and opened the door. This was about the most important house break he'd ever attempted in his life, and for once he was doing it legitimately. Hell, the owner had even given the key to him, a few months ago after that Haverstraw bank job. Farron had forgotten to ask for it back. O'Leary could have busted in or jimmied a window, but this made it look better. Would make the inquest look better, he hoped.

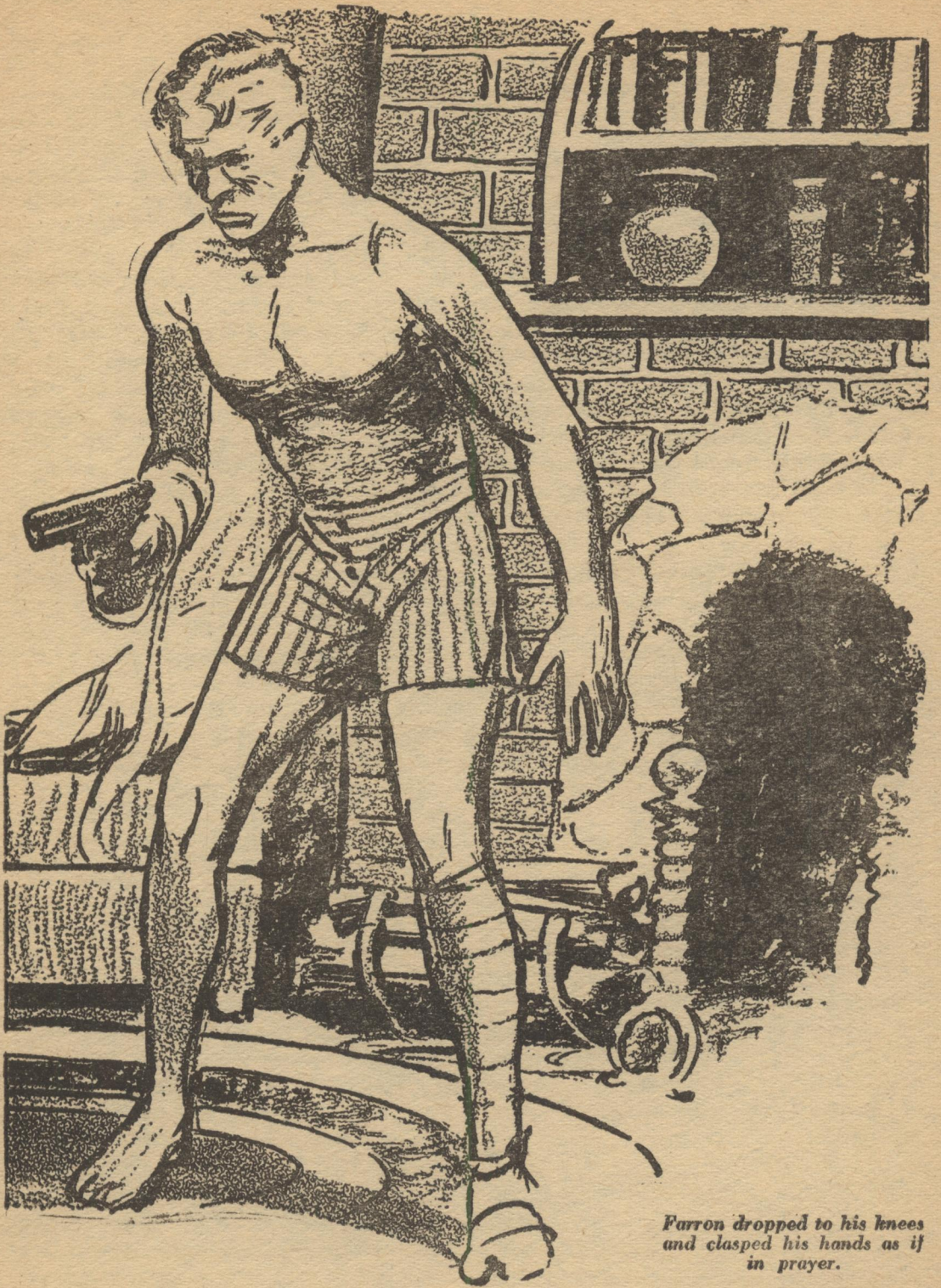
He went on playing it careful when he got inside, although he knew the nearest building was close to a mile away down on the tarvia road. He closed the door quietly after him and took out of a vest pocket one of those very small flashlights you

You never could tell who might come along, even up on this steep hill, and Farron sure couldn't make it until after daylight. Lighting a candle, and shielding it with a cupped hand, he went through all the four rooms and saw that all the dark green shades were down. Then he went



could get in the ten cent store before the war made things hard to get. He knew his way around this bungalow, all right, but he didn't want to take a chance on knocking anything over.

He made his way to the kitchen where he knew Farron always kept candles in a cupboard. No lamps for him tonight.



*Farron dropped to his knees
and clasped his hands as if
in prayer.*

★ ★ ★

*Farron was slick. Farron had political pull. Farron knew all
the right people. But just let Farron try to talk himself out
of this set-up!*

into the back bedroom and put an oblong box he was carrying, well wrapped and tied, on the bureau. After that he spilled a few drops of wax onto an ash tray and set the candle up.

It wasn't until then that he took off the gray silk gloves he was wearing. He'd never left any fingerprints around in his life and he didn't figure to now.

He untied the string on the box and unwrapped the paper, and then he gathered the stuff together and went into the living room, taking the candle. He lighted the paper from this and tossed the bundle into the fireplace. He watched it burn to fragile ashes. No evidence there. Then he went back to the bedroom. He looked down at the contents of the box that he'd dumped on the bureau—bandages, adhesive tape, a smelly disinfectant that stank to high heaven, a bottle with a red and white label and a skull and crossbones over the word POISON written in large letters. He grinned again as he set this on the small table by the bed.

BARRY O'LEARY put on his gloves again and then picked up the most vital thing of all, an ornate and elaborately scrolled silver jewel box. He held it in his hand for a couple of minutes, squinting down at it with a slightly quizzical and rueful expression. There was a cold hundred grand in diamonds in that box, easy. Sol had told him that there was more than that, and the bookmaker wasn't a liar about money. He'd given them to his wife, and Barry knew that Sol wasn't a piker. He didn't have to be, with the jack he was taking from the suckers, and besides he'd been nuts about his wife. Yeah, there must be a hundred grand in ice in that box, at that.

Barry pulled out the lower bureau drawer, lifted up what looked like some shirts and underwear, and stuck the box under them. He couldn't help giving a short sigh as he kicked the drawer back into place, and once more removed the gloves.

He undressed himself down to his birthday suit. Then, on an unmarred body, he wound some bandage gauze around

his left leg, close up to the thigh, and strapped it securely to his flesh with adhesive tape. He spilled a lot of the smelly disinfectant over it, wrinkling his nose at the odor. He'd never liked that medicinal stink. This would be worth it, though. He had a harder job, bandaging up his right hand. He had to do it so that it would look as if the whole hand was out of action, and he never had been much of a southpaw. It was hard, working with his left. He wanted to cover up all his fingers, too, and yet leave 'em free enough so he could handle a gat. Finally he was satisfied. The bandages looked as good as if they'd been put on by a doc. After spilling some more of the antiseptic over his hand, he stuck the bottle in a coat pocket. He could get rid of that later.

Barry pulled down the covers of the bed—Farron always kep' his flops ready to use, in this hideout—and then he got the automatic from his clothes before getting between the sheets. He stuck the gun down by his right side, where he could get at it easy, but he couldn't help making a grimace of disgust as it touched his flesh. He didn't like these small-calibre weapons. He liked a .38 or a .45. Still, it was Farron's gun, and that was the big thing. It was big enough to kill a guy with, anyway.

Then he blew out the candle to wait and think, just to lie there and wait and think.

BARRY had a lot to think about, at that. He was just twenty-nine now, and he'd been one of the best safe crackers in the business for the last six years. Farron had edged him into the racket, just the way he'd done with his older brother Tom. Tom was dead, now. He'd been put on the hot seat in Sing Sing nearly a year ago, when Barry hadn't been able to dig up the ten grand that Farron had said was necessary to save him. Scotty had been given twenty years, but Barry had known that Scotty had done the killing in the robbery and Tom hadn't. So was his mother dead—she'd died last week—and he knew that Tom's conviction and electrocution had made her pine away and die.

That was another reason he was going to do what he was going to do when Farron showed up.

He rubbed his left hand through his carrot hair and shook his head and closed his eyes tight, like trying to get rid of a bad dream. He didn't like to think of his mother, now. She'd been a good woman, a good mother, living on the Spanish War and World War I pensions from her husband. Barry had never known his father, but his mother had always told him that she wanted Tom and him to grow up to be real men like him. Now Tom was dead, burnt for being a murderer, the judge had said, and he—well, maybe he could at least go out like a man in this war if everything broke right for him. It wouldn't take more than a couple of months to fix up that bum knee, that surgeon said, after it was operated on. He wouldn't be in Class 4-F then. He'd be good enough to enlist.

Coldly, without emotion or excitement, he began to curse Artie Farron to himself. Farron was known to all New York, to every politician, big and petty, to every racketeer and punk, as The Big Mouthpiece. Barry guessed that he probably was, when you came right down to it, the greatest pleading lawyer in the game. What a lot of people didn't know—even some of the wise politicians—was that Farron was the case man for a lot of jobs that were pulled. He was also the fence. Most of the stuff went through his hands, and he was a tough baby to deal with. He liked to split about eighty-twenty, him getting the eighty. Barry didn't know how much of a cut he got before that. He did give a guy protection, though. Barry had been up close to twenty times, but he'd never had a conviction against him.

Farron was like that guy in that book by Dickens, Barry suddenly thought, that trained kids to steal and be crooks. Fa—yeah, Fagin was the name. Barry remembered he'd had to read the book, *Oliver Twist*, when he went to first year high. He hadn't gone any farther, even though his mom had wanted him to. He'd quit and gone to work—until he'd gotten in with one of Farron's cheap mobs. Then Farron

had singled him out a few years later and pushed him along into the big time stuff. He'd had what he'd thought was a swell life, after that, with Farron getting most of the cut. He didn't think it had been such a swell life, now, lying here and waiting and thinking.

HE had to go back—thinking of Farron. He couldn't help it. He was a slick guy, all right, Farron was. He'd come from an orphanage, he didn't know who his mother or father were, he'd educated himself up through grammar and high school and college and law, and now he was The Big Mouthpiece. He sure had a lot of drag. He knew all the right people in all the right places. Barry didn't think this would do him much good when he showed up here. He had to smile again, happily, as he saw a streak of dawn coming in around the side of a shade. No one knew he was here, except Farron. No one had seen him come. He'd been careful to take two different trains, two different busses, to walk in the last few miles to this hideout Farron kept up here in the Ramapo hills. It was a cinch bet that no one but Farron knew he was here, and Farron wouldn't talk or be able to talk later.

As the sun came up, as the streak of light alongside the window shade showed a golden yellow, Barry figured that Farron should be showing up almost any minute. Farron had been up in Albany—seeing some political louse, probably—and he'd been expected back last night. Barry had slipped a neighborhood kid a sawbuck to wait around, in front of Farron's apartment, and give Farron the message. All he'd told the kid to say was that Farron would know where to find him—the code on the hideout—and there was a hundred grand in it. The kid would deliver the message, all right, seeing that he'd promised him another ten in a couple of days if he did it. Farron would come out all right—and come as fast as he could—when he heard that hundred grand news. Oh, Farron would be here, Barry thought with a chuckle.

Farron was there not more than a quar-

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STOCK SHOT

(Continued from page 47)

The butler cleared his throat. "I can furnish that, sir." He mentioned a number on Franklin. "I believe that is the apartment house where Antoine resides."

"You're marvelous!" I applauded him. Then, talking fast, I relayed the address to Dave Donaldson, who was still waiting at the other end of the phone connection. "Meet me there as quick as you can travel," I told him. "I'm on my way right now and we can't afford any delays."

"But—but what's the idea? I mean—"

"It's a possible solution to this croakery clambake. Get on your horse and ramble," I yeepled, and rang off in his ear. Then I pivoted, grabbed Ziggy Cranston's arm. "Let's make tracks, bub. Here comes the payoff."

He tried to pull back. "Payoff? Now wait. I tell you I didn't kill Winslow. I don't know who did. I don't know what became of his b-body, and you aren't going to drag me any deeper into something I had nothing to do with."

"Ah," I snarled as I dragged him toward the front portal. "I see. Then you admit Winslow got killed. You admit there was a body that vanished."

"Well, y-yes, only I—"

I turned to the gawking servants. "You heard it. All of you. Make sure you remember it in case we need your testimony later. All right, Ziggy boy. Out."

MOANING piteously, he obeyed. Once again I forced him to take the wheel of my crate while I perched beside him and fondled his liver with my fowling piece. He got the cylinders firing and we aimed toward Franklin Street under forced draft with my gasoline ration coupons spurting out behind us in a red stream of exhaust sparks. The sight saddened me.

I felt better, though, when we finally barreled to a squealing stop in front of the apartment dump where I'd told Donaldson to meet me. Dave's official sedan was just arriving from the opposite direc-

tion, which was damned nice timing. He berthed his bucket at the curb; came lumbering across the sidewalk looking peevish. "Hey, what brews?" he demanded when he lamped me nudging Ziggy out of my conveyance at the muzzle of a gat.

Ziggy, meantime, was staring at a station wagon parked nearby. "Now how the devil did my—?"

"Quiet," I cut him off. Then I said to Dave: "We'll go in-side and do some trapping."

"Trapping? You mean when Antoine gets here?"

"If he isn't here already," I nodded. "Come on."

Dave shook his noggin foggily. "He couldn't be here already. That fake Frenchman, I mean. You phoned me at headquarters only a minute or two after he was turned loose. Then I dashed out to my sedan and drove here like crazy. Even if he was riding on a skyrocket I must have passed him on the way." He glowered at me. "I don't get the setup. I don't get any part of it."

"We're clearing up a kill," I said.

"But dammit to hell, there wasn't any kill!"

I said: "Oh, yes there was. Ziggy, here, has finally admitted it in the presence of witnesses. His four servants heard him. He spilled the works."

"You mean he confessed?"

Cranston called loudly on heaven to help him out of his jackpot. "I never confessed anything!" he denied vigorously. "Except that Winslow got shot and his body disappeared. But I didn't have anything to do with it. How many times must I say it? I'm innocent. I want a lawyer!"

"Well, well," Donaldson purred. He turned to me. "So you were leveling, after all."

"Yeah."

"Then where's the corpse?"

"That remains to be seen."

Dave rubbed his jowls. "I get it. You

said just now we would go inside and do some trapping. You meant the chauffeur. We'll be planted in Antoine's flat when he shows up, eh?"

"Yeah."

"And then we'll make him sing what he knows. You figure he's got the lowdown on the missing body. He saw Miss Duane haul the dead guy out of the pool and hide it."

I said: "Yeah. Do we start now or stand here on the pavement all night beating our gums?"

"Let's go. And you, Cranston—don't pull any funny stuff. I mean I'm officially placing you under arrest right now on suspicion of homicide. Got that?"

Ziggy gulped a couple of times; nodded. Then the three of us ankled into the apartment drop; consulted the row of brass mail boxes in the lobby and located Antoine Leblanc's number. It was up on the second floor, 205. We marched up the stairway and headed for the phony Frenchman's portal.

"Dave," I whispered. "Let me handle the routine from now on. If you don't mind," I added.

He made a sour mouth. "What difference will it make whether I mind or not? I'm just your stooge. I've been your stooge for ten stinking years. The scenario never changes. Lead on, genius. The show's all yours."

"Thanks, pal," I said. And I knuckled a light tattoo on door 205.

From within, somebody said: "Is that you, Tony? Just a moment, darling." There was a click of the latch, a creak from the hinges and we stood ferninst Wilbert Winslow's murderer.

"Hi, Toots," I said to the brunette Sylvia Duane. Then I produced my roscoe, jabbed her with it. "Consider yourself pinched for killery."

CHAPTER VIII

Fitting the Puzzle

FOR a split instant there was nothing but shocked silence, a series of stunned gasps from everybody concerned. Then Ziggy Cranston emitted an anguished yelp. "Sylvia—!"

I shouldered the shapely cupcake back into the flat; followed her and gestured for Dave and Ziggy to come in. Sylvia's peepers narrowed at me, hot with hate. "What's the idea?"

"Shakedown payoff, hon," I said. "End of the line for you."

"I don't think I understand."

I said: "Sure you do. Shall I sketch you a blueprint? It may be a trifle boring."

"I'm sure you haven't anything to say that would interest me in the slightest degree," she gave me the haughty focus. "But if you want to make a speech I guess I can't stop you."

"Damned right you can't," I agreed. I set fire to a wheezer, exhaled the poisoned fumes and murmured: "It commences when you set your cap for Ziggy Cranston; made him fall in love with you. As this romance blossomed, you convinced him that you were very sedate, very strait-laced. A Puritan. I think, though, that you never really cared a damn about him. You hooked him because he's a goose that lays golden eggs."

"How chivalrous of you to say such nice things," she sneered regally.

I went on: "Ziggy acquired the majority interest in Masterpiece Pix. You were only a cowgirl in cheap B westerns; a horse-opera prima donna. To you, Ziggy meant an opportunity to get on top of the Hollywood heap."

"What is this, a mind-reading act?"

"No," I said. "Some of it's guesswork and some is backed by actual facts. Let's see, where were we? Oh, yes. With Ziggy owning Masterpiece, you had access to the studio. I'll probably never know whether you knew of the existence of a certain stock shot or whether you stumbled on it by sheer chance. Anyhow, you glommed that hotel-fire footage from the Masterpiece files and began blackmailing Ziggy with it."

She stiffened. "How dare you say that!"

"You blackmailed him by threatening to show the reel to yourself. You were the anonymous shakedown artist, baby. And through your Puritan pose you made Ziggy think he might lose you if that

footage ever came to light."

"I suppose you have proof of all this. I hope you have. Otherwise I'll sue your pants off, shamus."

"Yeah," I said. "Now we come to this afternoon. Wilbert Winslow busted in on Ziggy with certain screwy demands. Ziggy concluded that Winslow was the black-mailer. This was all wrong; but it threatened to upset your own plans. Maybe Ziggy would give Winslow back his studio stock holdings—in which case you'd be left out in the cold. And you wanted control of Masterpiece yourself. As majority owner you could make yourself a star."

SHE peeled her lips away from perfect white grinders. "This is fantastic. Ziggy, are you going to stand there and allow him to accuse me of—?"

"Hush," I said. "Now, with Winslow horning in, he became a menace to your shakedown shenanigans. So you croaked him. It was a very neat trick indeed. You were concealed around a corner of the combined garage and servants' quarters. You plugged Winslow as he was running away from Ziggy. You drilled him through the conk and he toppled into the pool. Naturally, Ziggy was watching him fall in the water. *That was when you tossed the murder gun toward Ziggy's feet.* When he lurched backward to avoid the splash from Winslow's body, he stepped on the roscoe and then picked it up, wondering where it had come from. He thought some invisible character had dropped it."

She said: "You make it sound so plausible."

"I'm a plausible guy," I nodded. "Well, I accused Ziggy and bopped him cold; carted him away. That was when you fished your defunct victim from the pool. You now had a stronger hold on Ziggy than you'd had before. Instead of blackmailing him with that stock shot reel, you could club him into line by threatening to dump him in the grease for a bump-off."

"How wonderful!"

"Yeah. I tumbled to it when you phoned Ziggy's stash a while ago, demanding the

studio stock back in the name of John Q. Smith. It was your voice I heard on the wire. You muffled it and lowered it so you wouldn't be tabbed; but I had a hunch. You see, none of the servants were hep to the murder. Nobody knew it but Ziggy himself, and me, and you."

"No other possibilities?" she challenged me.

I said: "Well yes, one. Antoine Leblanc. But he couldn't be the party who made the blackmail call. I checked and found out he was just being released from the gow at the time the call was received in Ziggy's tepee. So that left you."

"Nonsense!"

"You weren't a your own apartment at the Gayboy Arms," I ignored her interruption. "You wouldn't risk calling from there because you might be checked through the Gayboy switchboard operator. So I asked myself where you were when you dialed Ziggy's igloo. The answer was interesting."

"Was it?"

I crushed out my butt. "Yeah. It goes back to when you hauled Winslow's remainders out of the pool and hid them. You must have had help. And Antoine was the only person available to give you some assistance on that particular caper. If Antoine was in with you on that job, maybe he was also connected with your blackmailing activities."

She tossed her head. "Do you think I'd attach myself to a—a common chauffeur?"

"Maybe," I said. Then I resorted to a pack of lies. "If you want to know something, we pinched Antoine before we came here. He confessed everything. How you shot Winslow, and all the rest of it."

"Tony—you mean he—he ratted on me?"

"Yeah. So we came here and knocked on the door and you figured he was outside. You even said: *Is that you, Tony? Just a moment, darling.* Which proves he's your sweetie, although the fact that we found you here in his nest is proof enough."

"You—you say he—confessed?"

"He implicated you all the way up to your adenoids, kitten. He did it to save himself," I lied some more.



"Keep your dukes still, chum. This thing don't shoot marshmallows."

ALL the color leaked out of her puss, leaving it as white as bleached linen under splotches of rouge. "The heel. The filthy weak-livered heel! Getting out from under at my expense! Why, I—I did what I did because of him. Because he wanted to get in pictures and nobody would consider him as an actor. I was going to control Masterpiece and make Tony a star. Tony, you understand, not myself. Now he rats on me!"

The front door pushed open. "Who rats

on you?" a voice said. It was Antoine.

The Duane chick took one vicious swivel at him, her glimmers brimming with loathing. Then she whipped up her skirt, displayed a length of extremely nifty gam. There was a .25 auto strapped to her thigh. She brought it up, aimed it, pulled the trigger. The gat sneezed: *Ka-Cheef!* and sent a hot pill into Antoine Leblanc's ticker.

He fell down. He was deceased before he hit the rug.

At the same instant Dave Donaldson unlimbered his service .38 and squirted flame at the brunette doll. His bullet took the automatic right out of her mitt, along with an assortment of fingers. She moaned briefly, then stared at the ketchup spurting. "My . . . my hand. . ." she whispered.

I said: "Think nothing of it, sister. You

won't need those fingers where you're going."

"Where . . . I'm . . . going . . . ?"

"Yeah. The gas house," I said. Then I turned to Ziggy Cranston. "Well, stupid, I've saved you from the clutches of romance. That will cost you five grand."

He paid me the day they executed Sylvia Duane.

DRAFT DODGER

(Continued from page 55)

D.S.C., and the French *Croix de Guerre*, with palms.

All static, so far; and then on the dresser I found just the thing a fellow like him would have—a card with a clock face, and two hands you could set to show the hour and minute. Over the dial was printed, BE BACK AT.

But with such a gadget, why'd he type that note I'd found pinned in front? He wouldn't! Someone had done that after knocking him off.

ONCE back in the living room, I heard a hinge squeal that gave me chills. The door was sneaking open. The latch tongue was out. After a minute or so, the door began shutting, slowly, with just the faintest scrape of tongue and jamb-socket. It was the suction of the wind, made by my having left the back door open. The settling of the house, or the drying out of the panel and frame had caused enough warping to keep the latch from working right.

I headed for the bunk house, to try to figure some way of getting Sam Parley to wonder about that typed return notice.

Norma was one person I could talk to, but I had no chance. Sam Parley was around the next day to pick her up for questioning. Desert-patient, Parley had prowled until he found a shred from her skirt, where she'd snagged it on a nail at the back gate of Saddler's place; that bit, and a few threads caught on a mesquite thorn.

The law man had checked up on the dry cleaner, snooped around clothes lines, gabbed with women shopping at the general store; he'd watched the women folks, evenings and afternoons, and he'd looked so dumb no one got wise, till he drove up to ask Norma if she'd mind taking such and such a dress, and going to the county seat to have it checked against samples.

The phones spread the news and the details as quickly as they had the news about Saddler's death.

I asked old man Carver for the day off. He gave it to me, along with a funny look, and not asking why. Chances are he had his ideas, but however that may have been, I caught the next bus for San Bernardino. The odds in favor of my getting hold of a library file of New York papers were pretty good. I remembered the date and page number on the scrap left in Saddler's book, though that wasn't all that took me to town. Seeing Major Heffner was important. There was a chance that Norma wouldn't phone him, preferring not to holler till she was hurt.

When I found Heffner, I learned that Norma had not got in touch with him; so I got to work, and he listened. His face got sharper, and so did his eyes; they began boring into me. He was getting on edge. He'd reach for a match to light the dead cigar, and then he'd forget to, and finally he'd dig for another match.

"All right, Mason!" Heffner got up and paced the carpet. "That Blockhead Parley thinks he can prove she was in Saddler's

back yard. However, the bits of cloth do not prove *when* she was there."

"We don't know how much else he has up his sleeve, major. The girl that does the housework must've smelled burning leather. She probably knows how many pairs of shoes Norma had, you know how the hired help snoop around."

His forehead was puckered in three ridges; the tip of his nose was edging down a bit, and his mouth was tightening. He made a snarling sound, and a helpless move of his hands. "Damn it, yes. Even if he's bluffing, he'll uncover the facts."

"It's sure as hell bad, major. The heel print is on record, and every person has a certain way of wearing heels down, so destroying that pair didn't do much good. The others'll spill the beans."

"Mason, how do you fit into this? Tell me."

"I'm trying to help her. She's a neighbor."

"There's more than that behind it."

"I'm in on this myself, and if Parley questions me, it sure won't help her any."

"Good Lord!" he groaned, and changed color.

After telling him pretty much what I had told Norma, I went on, "And since talking to her about both of us having been there, the answer hit me right between the eyes. Only, I don't know how to use it without putting myself on a limb. But maybe you could figure out a way. You're the last person on earth who'd want me put on the pan, not that I'd spill on purpose, but—"

"I understand," the major cut in. "Your nerves are—um—unstable, you've had a severe shock. Very much like a man in battle. The police would have an unfair advantage of you. All right! What is it?"

"Suppose we went to Saddler's, on the quiet, and I showed you?"

"Anyone know you came to see me?"

"Positively no one. Couldn't take a chance. Everyone thinks I've got bats in my loft, and quite a few think I finished Saddler. The only way to get Norma totally in the clear is to take a whack at whoever did it."

He whistled, then straightened up, and

smoothed out his decorations. "Nice, if you can do it."

"It's just a matter of figuring why someone typed that BACK IN 30 MINUTES note. Saddler didn't do that, there was a gadget with clock hands to show what time he'd return. Suppose you look at everything and then you can figure."

"Let's do that." He dug a five out of his wallet, handed it to me, and said, "You go down and find some Bourbon, we can both do with a drink. Meanwhile, I'll promote some gas, I'm a bit low. Wait at the bank at the corner, in case you find the bottle before I can wangle a tankful."

We both worked fast; I'd not been waiting more than five minutes when the Pontiac pulled up, and we were heading for Bagdad.

ABOUT two miles short of town, we swung into a wagon track, and then ran the car into greasewood. That done, we set out afoot, with the murky lights of Bagdad guiding us.

Once we were in Saddler's house, I began showing Heffner around. "A draft can suck the front door open, but the guy that conked Saddler didn't know that, so he puts up the phony note, not suspecting it'd miss fire. The only reason he'd put up such a note is in case there was an expected visitor."

"How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Simple. The visitor sits around on the steps half an hour, forty-five minutes, then goes to the Oasis or the Mojave Inn, or the like, asking whether Saddler was around. And in the morning, when the corpse is found, the whole town knows about the caller, and figures he conked Saddler and tried to put across the idea he didn't go in. Only, I did go in, account of the door being open, so I didn't advertise myself. See why it's important to show that the killer must've left the note, and that Saddler wouldn't have?"

"Mmm . . ."

Just that; and with the flashlight not pointing at him, I couldn't see his face, but it'd been worth seeing. He sounded impressed and surprised. "Another thing, major, Norma came in after me, to see

what'd gone haywire with the friendship convention, and stepped in some blood. Looks bad for her, though that phony note helps."

"Carry on!" he snapped, when I held my fire a second.

"Well, figure it. Suppose, like Parley probably does, that she went to see Saddler, and he got rough and familiar, and she conked him, which is not impossible. Only, can you picture her or any woman coming out of a jam like that, and then stopping to type a note? She'd make tracks, crazy-mad, tearing her clothes on nails and mesquite."

"You may have had enough of a nervous breakdown to rate 4-F," the major said, pretty slow and thoughtful, "but you're offering very good logic."

"Nothing wrong with me except I am gun-shy. It was this way—"

"Norma told me all about *that!* Now, how am I supposed to have become acquainted with these interesting things—what I mean is, how am I to present the facts to Parley without mentioning you?"

"Heck, you're an officer, you're supposed to have more brains than the mill run, that's why I let you in on this. But I can do some guessing while you're thinking. Let's sit down."

I flipped the light toward the settee, for him to sit down, then drew the chair from the typing table, and planted myself. "You take the flash a second and play it on that shelf, while I find the book with the riddle. You know, he was looking at his news clippings when he was conked. Fine drops of blood fell on an open scrap book, and when it dried, it stuck the page against the next one."

"Yes? What of it?"

"What he was studying when he was conked might tell what his thoughts were about." I leaned to grab the scrap book. "There was a clipping, pretty good size, torn out, only whoever tore it out didn't get all. There's enough left to show it came from page eight of the *New York Times*, dated January 4, 1944. Getting another copy is easy. And whatever the item was about, it has a bearing on why Saddler was killed."

"Far-fetched, isn't it?"

"No, sir. Only one clipping on that page, and nothing on the one facing it. If he'd changed his mind and yanked the clipping out, *before the run-in*, he'd sure not have been looking at blank pages while someone was getting sore enough to conk him."

BUT the major was ahead of me, when I'd been thinking I was still ahead of him. He made a move; the shift of the light warned me, like I expected it would. But what I didn't expect was having him pull a gun. I'd been ready for him to snatch that Indian war club right next to where Saddler had kept the mortar and pestle, which Parley had taken for evidence. I was due to be socked then, and if my guess was right, beaned to keep me from ever telling Norma he was a phony, a home-made major who wore a French *Croix de Guerre* in his collection, when he was way too young to have got one in the first World War. None had been dished out to Americans this time, naturally not. Ray Saddler would surely have noticed that boner, and what happened to him, the way I figured it, wasn't coincidental!

So here I was, ready to heave the typewriter when Hefner grabbed the war club. Only, he had other plans.

"Quit playing! Get in front of me, and do what I tell you or I'll drill you, here and now."

"Uh—what do you mean, major?"

"This damn' foolishness has gone too far. You're going to the police station right now, you know too much of this, entirely too much."

Only he would not take me to the station. His voice made that clear. The only reason he was hanging off was that it'd look very odd if they found me dead in Saddler's house. But half a mile out of town, you could bury ten men in the sand, and no one would ever suspect. I'd just have disappeared, and the law would figure that when Norma was taken up for questioning, I lit out while the lighting was good. And the phony major marries Norma, her date grove, and her bank roll.

And that last bit is what was the shot of hop; though I was good and scared, all the more so for knowing from Hef-

ner's voice that he was scared too, scared he'd not only lose his whole gamble, but flirt with a murder rap to boot! And when a man is panicked, he can do a lot he couldn't begin to do otherwise.

My move was unexpected, which helped. I made a dive for the shelf, and just as Heffner's gun smacked, I got hold of Saddler's .45 revolver. Gun-shy, but no time to get sick and shaky. The big double action gat began bellowing and bucking. The light blinded me, slugs were whacking all around me, one or two hit me, but I was yelling and blazing away.

The flash dropped, and there was a thump, and choking and groaning. Bagdad turned out howling.

WELL, I was leaking like a sieve. The major was worse off, a single .45 almost anywhere is like being hit with a broad-axe, and he'd stopped a pair.

Meanwhile, Parley had come back from San Bernardino. He was there in time to pour the heat on Heffner before the shock wore off. When I showed the item I'd snitched from the library files, the fake major threw up the sponge. It told all about his swindles, and cashing bum checks, using the uniform as a front. The name was different, but the face was his. He'd slipped, letting someone mug him, and realizing his boner, he'd headed for the desert to cool off, and then, meeting Norma, he figured he'd combine business with pleasure.

Saddler had called his hand, but privately. After Norma got sore at Saddler for ribbing me, he was afraid that exposing Heffner would kick back, the bearer of nasty news never being popular. It was clear now why Saddler had figured himself still having a chance with Norma. And Heffner flaring up, had conked him, and yanked the clipping out of the scrap book.

Parley said, when the smoke cleared away, "Look here, Mason, you didn't know a *Croix de Guerre* from a Legion of Honor!"

"Sure I didn't, but the bronze palm leaves on the red and green ribbon stand out, no matter how many other ribbons you got, and I noticed Heffner wore one the first couple times I saw him. Then came the killing. And then, tonight, I noticed he had no *Croix de Guerre*, and why'd he dump it? Even if I'd not found the *Times* in the library, his getting rid of that decoration would have been a tip-off. Particularly since Saddler's old uniform has one of the same kind."

Old man Carver cackled and cut off a chew. "I told you that the way to cure nerves was to grab a gun. And grit your teeth."

I straightened up and blinked. "You sure did tell me! But things happened so fast—heck, I guess I forgot to be gun-shy, I was just plain scared he'd riddle me."

Then I headed for the door.

"Hey, where you going?" Parley hol-lered.

"To wire my draft beard, to tell 'em I'll cold caulk any or all sons of ———s that claim I am gun-shy 4-F."

But Carver hobbled after me, and hooked a claw on my shoulder. "Son, that there is a first rate idea, but this war'll last another couple months anyway, you stick around till I find myself some weak-minded and decrepit cuss for a gang boss."

"Well, that's no more than right."

Carver scratched his head. "Sam, I think this fellow must have bats in his loft after all! It don't seem to have occurred to him if he sticks around another week or two, it'll give Norma a chance to get over the shock of finding her hero was an imitation."

That's the way I played it. And here's one advantage I got over the other G.I.'s—while there's no telling whether Norma will have a welcome sign out when I come back from winning the war, it is at least one hundred percent certain she is going to shy away from heroes, whether the real article, or home-made.



REFUGEE SHIP

(Continued from page 27)

They'll take you off for questioning, of course. This is just a tip to you, Mr. Cerny."

"And in the meantime?"

"Please go below, and stay below, and don't mix with any of the other passengers. That'll be all."

"If I'm arrested, please communicate with the American consul on my behalf," said Carter, rising.

He knew he'd scored there, knew that M'Clintock trusted him. He left the cabin and went slowly down the companion toward the passengers' quarters, thinking. If the steward, John, had really been in sympathy with the refugees, and his story of desertion from the German army was true, the long arm of Nazi power would probably have reached out to slay him, even though he had been only a private soldier.

Nothing was too large or too small for the Nazi web that was spun all over South America.

CARTER shrugged his shoulders. He wished it could be possible for him to complete his investigation before the Havana authorities intervened, but that seemed hopeless. He could make nothing of the killing. He reached the bottom step of the companion, and peered through the gloom. Owing to the breakdown of one of the dynamos, the electric light was turned off at ten o'clock, to save consumption. Carter couldn't focus his eyes immediately, but, as he groped forward, a sudden instinct made him whirl. A figure leaped at him out of the dark, and the stunning blow that might otherwise have split his skull glanced off his left temple.

Nevertheless, the force of the blow sent him reeling. He saw his aggressor making at him again, with the right arm raised, pulled himself together, and hurled himself at him, avoiding the second blow, which smashed into his shoulder, numbing his left arm.

The man went down under the impetus of Carter's leap, and the two sprawled on the saloon floor. Carter managed to get a grip on his assailant's wrist, so that the man couldn't use the implement again. It rolled across the floor. Sprawling there in the darkness, they interchanged savage blows. Carter got in a furious punch with his right, and caught the other on the chin. His grasp relaxed.

But Carter was too groggy from the blow he had received to take advantage of his temporary success. As he tried to rise to his knees, he felt the saloon swimming around him. He struck out feebly, and encountered nothing. Then a moment of unconsciousness must have followed.

Then someone was gripping him by the shoulders, trying to raise him, and, as Carter lashed out a voice said: "Hold on. It's Anderson. I came to look for you. I was afraid you were going to run into something."

IN Anderson's cabin, a stiff glass of whiskey quickly revived him. "I'm certainly obliged to you," said Carter. "Maybe I was off my guard. I didn't guess that I'd been spotted."

"You know who that fellow was?" asked Anderson.

"I'm not prepared to swear. But he looked to me like Slavinski."

"It was Slavinski all right," said Anderson. "I don't know yet how to proceed. It's a pity our paths don't run together."

"He's not my man," said Carter.

"He certainly went a long way toward proving that he was."

"He may be the other one."

"You mean the refugee? Refugees don't attempt to commit murder; they're trying to keep from being murdered themselves."

"They might, under the influence of panic. He may have thought I was a Nazi on the vengeance trail. I've got the reputation of being one."

Anderson remained silent. It wasn't his play, and he was waiting for Carter to lead. Instead, Carter asked: "You're sure you've seen that girl before?"

"The rabbi's daughter? Positive. In some show, I think, possibly in Vienna. You may have noticed she has the stamp of the actress."

"Yes, I've seen that," said Carter.

"It's odd that I can't place her. My memory is usually almost photographic. Why are you interested in her, Carter? You think she is mixed up with Slavinski?"

Instead of answering, Carter said: "I'm not supposed to tell you this, but John, the steward, has been murdered."

Anderson's mouth opened. "What's that? When? How?"

Carter described what had happened. "Somebody must have slipped up in the dark," he said. "He'd killed John because he wanted something that he suspected him of possessing. His pockets had been emptied."

"Where have they taken the body?"

"To John's quarters. I'm telling you this because there's going to be a general inquisition in the morning."

"Well—thanks," said Anderson. "As I was saying, I'm sorry that our paths don't run parallel. But what makes you think that girl is mixed up with Slavinski?"

"She doesn't resemble her father," answered Carter.

"What do you want to do about Slavinski? Stay quiet and give him another chance of killing you?"

Carter shrugged his shoulders. "What is there to do?"

"M'Clintock would put him under arrest. I've told you he's your man."

"I want both my men, the hunter and the hunted, at the same time," said Carter.

Anderson said: "My job is simply to trail Nazi agents on this ship. If you don't want Slavinski arrested, I'm willing to cooperate. You know your own business best."

"I'm obliged to you for my life, at any rate," said Carter. He left the cabin in rather a stiff silence.

DESPITE Slavinski's Alpine head, Carter knew he wasn't the Nazi. Whether or not he was the one refugee who was of much more importance to him, Carter hadn't yet decided. His own belief was that Slavinski had simply made a mistake in trying to murder him.

It was imperative that this phase of the situation should be cleared up. Carter went into his cabin, unlocked his suitcase, and drew a small gun from the hidden floor of a harmless-looking toilet-case, whose very obviousness would probably baffle any investigator of his belongings. He locked the suitcase again, slipped the loaded gun into his pocket, and went out into the passage.

As he passed the girl's cabin, in almost complete darkness, he heard the low muttering of voices inside it. He listened, but could make out nothing. This fact, however, caused him to try the door of her father's cabin adjoining. As Carter had surmised, it yielded. The cabin was quite dark.

Putting his ear against the partition, Carter was still unable to hear a word of the continuous conversation, but it sounded as if the old rabbi was protesting vehemently, and that the girl was the aggressor in a quarrel. And that might have seemed odd, considering the apparently affectionate relationship between them.

There are certain things axiomatic in any sort of detective work, one of which is always to try a door before knocking, on the off-chance that it may be open. When Carter stepped out of the rabbi's room he moved along the dark passage to Slavinski's cabin, and did that. He didn't know anything about master-keys or burglarizing. This was just a preliminary to knocking and rousing Slavinski. But, to Carter's surprise, the door opened, and Carter slipped inside, closing it noiselessly behind him.

The cabin was not quite so dark as the rabbi's for a little moonlight entered obliquely through the porthole, sufficient to reveal the form of Slavinski stretched out under the blankets. Carter stepped softly to his side. He touched him on the shoulder.

"Wake up, Slavinski," he said. "And don't pull that gun from under your pillow. I guess you're awake. I'd like to know why you tried to murder me tonight."

Something dripped heavily upon the floor beside the bunk. Carter touched Slavinski's face, and discovered that it was cold. He dragged the dead man from underneath the blankets, and the head lolled upon one shoulder. The stab had been a brutal one. It had been delivered from the side, evidently while Slavinski was turned away, and it had severed not only the main arteries, but the spine itself, at the medulla oblongata, the breathing center. Death must have been instantaneous.

THE dead man's belongings had been ransacked too. As Carter straightened himself, he stumbled against an open suitcase, then tripped over Slavinski's clothing, which was scattered over the floor. Then something cold was pressed against his cheek, and a husky voice said quietly:

"Don't move a hand, Mr. Cerny, or whoever you are. That's not the muzzle that you feel; it's the silencer. See if he's got a gun," she added to a second figure.

The rabbi took Carter's gun. The girl said: "That's better. Now we'll go into father's cabin, and talk. Get moving."

Prodded by the weapon, Carter had no alternative but to comply. It was densely dark in the rabbi's room, but the girl stood very close to Carter, the weapon against his ribs.

"You know what I want. Those papers!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't make me lose my patience. Do I have to explain to you that I'd spotted you from the first, and that your silly trick at dinner proved who you were? Do I have to go into your relations with the man calling himself Slavinski? He passed you those papers when he knew I was on his trail. Now—will you hand them over alive, or would you rather be dead?"

Carter said: "It's not much use trying to explain to you, Miss Solomon. You're

too unreasonable. I can only say I've never seen those papers in my life."

"I'll count seven. That will give you time to refresh your memory. One—two—three—four—"

"Wait—wait!" cried the old rabbi tremulously. "It may be true what he says. Slavinski may have hidden them, or passed them to someone else. We don't want murder—not another murder—"

"Shut up, you old fool!" said the dutiful daughter. "Five—six—" She hesitated. "Seven!"

The rabbi sobbed and moaned. Carter stood silent. He knew that the girl wasn't going to shoot. Yet the few moments that followed were tense with anticipation. Then she laughed.

"All right, you've called my bluff," she said. "But it wasn't just bluff. I'd kill you now if I was quite sure you have those papers. I'll make you an alternative proposition.

"You'll go up on deck with me, strip to the skin, leaving your clothes behind, and jump overboard. You'll swim for shore. Whether you make it or not is no concern of mine. If you're taken, of course there won't be any question as to who killed Slavinski. And this time I mean business. Yes or no?"

"Yes," said Carter.

HE was hoping, as he was prodded up the stairs, that there would be no intervention on the part of Anderson or anyone else. His chance was pretty desperate, but he had no intention of stripping and jumping overboard. He was relieved that they encountered no prowlers. The starboard side of the ship, on which they emerged, appeared to be deserted.

The girl said: "It's no use trying any tricks. Get your clothes off as quick as you can, and jump. I'll give you three-quarters of a minute."

"I don't like lightning calculators," said Carter, beginning to peel off his coat. The girl was only a blur before him, and he was calculating which side to spring before running in for the knockout. To the right, and he might get a slug through the heart; to the left, and it would probably pierce his liver. That was

a weird thought, he reflected, as he pulled the coat over his face and, leaping to the left, flung it over the girl's head.

The gun coughed, and the slug impacted itself in the deck between Carter's feet. Carter leaped, but the rabbi had acted still more quickly. He had the girl by the gun arm, and the other was about her shoulders, straining her back. "Quick! Quick! I can't hold on!" he panted.

As the girl flung him off and tore the coat from her face Carter let his right go in a mighty blow that caught her on the jaw, and stretched her out instantly, unconscious. The gun clattered to the deck. The rabbi clung to him, sobbing. His voice rose into a screaming wail that brought men running along the deck.

The first of these was Anderson, and McClintock followed, together with the sailor who had helped carry the steward's body from the rail. They stared at the girl, prone on the deck, at Carter, and the still screaming rabbi.

McClintock said: "Stop that damned noise! Do you want to start a panic among the passengers?"

"Oy, oy," moaned Rabbi Solomon, "he was my curse. It was in an evil day we met."

"Who are you talking about?" snapped the captain.

"He means that fellow masquerading as a girl," said Carter. "Lock him up, and put irons on him. He's a slippery customer. He killed Slavinski and the steward."

IN the captain's cabin, Anderson said: "I knew I'd seen that fellow before; it was the female role that baffled me. He's Schweitzer, the female impersonator who was all the rage in Berlin five or six years ago. He was decorated by Hitler—I don't know if you'll recall the circumstance. But I confess I didn't see through the disguise. How did you spot him, Carter?"

"Well, of course you'd noticed that the hair was dyed. That didn't necessarily mean anything, except that most women are very particular not to give themselves away like that. Then I saw that she had a man's knees. You don't have to be an anthropologist to know that a woman's knees are set quite differently.

"I wasn't sure, though, until I tried the famous old trick of tossing oranges into her lap. When her knees came together, instead of spreading, I was sure. Unfortunately, Schweitzer was smart enough to know I'd caught him.

"I knew I had my man, but I was more interested in the refugee, and was still not certain that was Slavinski, until Schweitzer murdered him."

"But Slavinski tried to kill you," said Anderson.

"That was pure terror on his part. The papers he was carrying were so important, he suspected everyone who came near him. He'd detected something unreal about me, and I suppose imagined that I was the Nazi who'd been set to get those papers. Or maybe it was my reputation as a Nazi that influenced him."

"Then why did Schweitzer murder John?"

"I can explain that," said Anderson. "John was working for me, and Schweitzer had spotted me as a British agent. He may have killed him in rage, or panic, but probably he thought you and I were in collaboration, and had passed those papers on to John.

"My job was simply to trail Nazi spies. I didn't know anything about any papers. That was your own show, Carter."

"Well, Mr. Solomon, it's up to you to do a good deal of explaining," said McClintock.

The rabbi stepped forward. He was still shaking with hysteria. "Yes" he said, "I shall tell you. Well, I had known *Herr Slavinski* in Breslau in the old days. He was my friend. Also he was experimenting on a new method of radar, which will prove of inestimable value to whatever government gets hold of it.

"But his mother was Jewish, and so Slavinski was sent to a concentration camp. Later, when the Nazis realized the value of his discovery, they released him to carry on his work. He escaped, carrying the papers that showed his formula.

"That devil, Schweitzer, who had been commissioned to get that formula, discovered that I was Slavinski's friend. He knew my old mother was being hidden by friends, and threatened to betray her to

the Nazis unless I fell in with his plans. She is over eighty, and blind, captain. I could not let her go to a concentration camp. I was compelled to let him pretend that he was my daughter. Ach, what a nightmare I have lived through! But now, praise God, my old mother will die in peace."

"The point is, what happened to the papers," said Carter. "Unless Schweitzer got them, and concealed them somewhere—"

"No, gentlemen," said Rabbi Solomon, "Slavinski knew he was being followed, and he passed them to me. And that is where I outwitted Schweitzer who never suspected for a moment. I have them in my underclothes."

PANIC had swept the refugee ship when it was known there was a Nazi murderer aboard, and that the harbor police boat had taken away the bodies of two murdered men, but not the killer.

As a matter of fact there had been considerable argument on that point, for the police claimed the right to adjudge the matter, since the murders had occurred in Cuban waters. M'Clintock had stuck to his guns. Schweitzer's crime had been committed aboard an American ship, and the criminal would be conveyed to the United States for trial.

There had been another government boat, and officials had been with M'Clintock for a considerable time, so that, when he summoned all the refugees on deck, there was terror, and wild surmise.

"Attention — *Achtung!*" M'Clintock shouted through his megaphone. "The Cuban government has given its permission for all passengers who are refugees to disembark, and will extend its protection to them until definite arrangements can be made for them. You tell them," he added to the interpreter beside him.

But already the substance of his remarks was known. The reaction was dramatic. The refugees were sobbing and clinging to one another, as the black shadow of fear that had so long oppressed them was lifted from their lives.

Carter turned to Anderson. "I'm sorry I wasn't allowed to tell you more," he said. "Maybe some time we'll get the chance to work together."

"I'd like nothing better, Carter. But, as a matter of fact, you've been doing my work for me. The papers weren't up my alley. I was looking for a Nazi, and you found him for me."

Carter stood at the rail, watching the nearing harbor of Havana, and the happy, tearful faces of the refugees.



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THE MISSING MR. LINK

(Continued from page 19)

nice and with its own bathroom. It was also at the back of the house, which was well by itself and at the back of a double lot with nobody living on either side. There were no bars on the windows but the wall went straight down, too far to jump.

Chime pointed this out. He said: "This has been used before, for something like this same thing. So don't get notions. If you make a fuss, I'll make one with you. You be nice and I'll be nice. You crack wise to my wife, and I'll beat your head in."

"Don't she know a thing?"

"Why should she? A man should leave his business downtown. He shouldn't bring it home. That's the way I work it, always."

"I'm here, mister."

"You're business, and the way I'm working it, she don't know a thing. Keep it that way, Ryan."

There was no point in doing anything else so I didn't argue it. He'd brought up most of a pint of whiskey for me, in case I felt the need, and when I told him I liked to read myself to sleep, he shouted down and his wife brought me up some magazines.

I didn't do so good on this because all she had were women's magazines and the only things interesting in them were the corset ads. But I checked through a couple of them while I took a bath—there was no shower and I made up my mind to complain about the lack of one—and then I took a drink and went to sleep.

And woke up staring at Eberhard.

HE was worried and plenty. His fat red face was sweating and he was breathing like he'd been running a fast mile. He was overweight, anyway, besides being past his chicken years, and excitement hits an old man like that sometimes.

He said: "Shshshhh," and put a finger to his lips.

I said: "How did you get in? Chime

locked the door—I heard him turn the key."

He nodded toward the window and I saw it was open a lot wider than the way I'd left it.

"Through there."

"You fly up there?"

"Ladder. Hurry up, get your clothes on."

"What for?"

"You want to get away, don't you?"

"And go to the pokey? Not any."

"You haven't got a chance here, Mr. Ryan. You've been framed."

"Sure. How'd you know?"

"I can tell Chime's work. Always three times. Always from the belly up to the neck, with the slugs placed even. Always a .45. I've seen too much of it."

"Why not pick him for it, then?"

Eberhard laughed, but didn't sound as if he was laughing at a joke. "How long would it stick? Until Boleo got news of it, that's all. He'd have him out on a writ in half an hour. I'd be off the force."

"Aren't you working with Boleo?"

"Some. We all are. We have to. Some of us don't like it much."

"Suppose I go with you. The frame'll stand against me. Boleo wouldn't have put Lauders out of the way unless he had somebody to step in and take his place. He just as much told me so."

Eberhard said: "I'm not going to take you to jail. I'm going to take you out in the country. I've got a place out there. I think the guy's gone too far this time. With you where we can get you, we can maybe break him up."

I wanted time to think. I said: "How did you know I was here?"

"I knew where you'd be. I took a plant outside of Boleo's and saw you come out with Chime. I knew he'd bring you home. I've been here in this house—I knew where this back bedroom was."

I'd been thinking of the letter I'd written to Marie Walters, and that was the sticker. She'd come—I was fairly sure of

that—and she'd go to Boleo's place, expecting to find me. That would put her in bad all the way around because Boleo would have her to use against me.

I said: "I'm sorry, but I don't see it. You guys can get a warrant, I suppose, and take me out of here, but that's the way you'll have to do it."

"I can take you now. I don't need a warrant."

"Not if I sing out for Chime. You'd have to shoot it out with him, and you don't want that. Boleo would be in the clear."

"That's right, too. You going to stay here?"

"If that's what Boleo wants, I am."

"You're depending on him, Ryan? Can't you see, man, that he's going to put you out of the way, after you've found Link for him? That's just common sense."

"I know it."

"You won't be killed in jail, even if I took you there. And I won't take you there. We want you out where we can use you, when we need you."

"We?"

"There's others," he admitted.

"Who?"

"I won't say."

"More cops?"

"Some of them."

I had a notion to tell him about the girl coming and then decided not to. I wasn't sure of him. He was Boleo's man, even if he was trying to break loose, and I had no guarantee he would do the breaking.

So I said: "Well, that's that. You show me something that will help me, and I'm with you. But that's the way it has to be."

HE went down the ladder and I watched him until he got to the bottom. It was a little after seven—broad daylight—but the room was at the back of the place and nobody could see a thing from the street. I saw him step off the ladder and saw somebody else come out from behind the garage and help him carry the ladder away, but I couldn't see who this other party was. He wouldn't look up and give me a peek at his face. Mrs. Chime was asleep, as was Chime,

and the only chance the two of them took was in having the kid wake up and hear them—and that wasn't much of a chance.

I didn't realize how little a chance it was until I saw the kid, later in the day, and then I knew they'd taken no chance at all.

The kid was crippled, poor little brat, and didn't get around much by itself. Spinal meningitis, Chime told me. One leg was warped and twisted, and a child that young don't do well on crutches, so the baby had to crawl.

It was a smart kid, too. It was too thin—which couldn't be blamed on the way it was taken care of—and the veins on its forehead stood out against its skin, which had no color. It had dark blue eyes like its mother, and would have been a swell-looking boy if it hadn't been for that bad leg.

There's nothing a man can say about a thing like that and I didn't try to say it, but Chime must have known how I felt.

He said: "The boy was just over a year old when it happened. That's the best the doctors could do. We tried 'em all."

"There's quite a lot about a system some nurse invented," I said. "I don't know anything about it—I just read an article or so."

He knew what I meant and told me a lot about it. He'd studied the subject and knew what he was talking about, at least as much as any amateur knows about the professional side of medicine. I actually sort of liked the guy by that time. In spite of what he was and what he'd done to me. And he gave me what could have been taken as an explanation of what he'd done and why.

He said: "That's why I've done a lot of things, Ryan. The kid cost dough, all the time I was trying to do something for him that would help. More dough than I was making as a dealer, if you know what I mean. It didn't leave me much choice in making up my mind, when I got a chance to do better."

Murder for hire was his idea of doing better, but he was honest about his reason, anyway. I don't suppose a man dies any easier, because he's killed to get money to look after a crippled kid, but

somehow you don't hold it so much against the killer. It isn't as though the guy had done the job to get money for a blond.

I said: "Those things are bad, all right. And nobody's fault. No chance at all, you say."

He shrugged and said the Mayos hadn't offered any hope.

I GAVE him something to think about right then and there. I said: "The boy certainly would be in a bad way if you weren't around to look after him, wouldn't he?"

"I'll be around."

I said: "I'll bet a hat that's what Lauders thought. Only Boleo thought different."

"Lauders was trying to cross him up. That's all."

"That's enough," I said, and laughed. "You may trust him—I don't. He isn't my boss, except for this little deal, and he wouldn't be. I don't like to have to watch for that knife all the time."

He wasn't bright. He asked: "What knife?"

I said: "The one aimed between the other guy's shoulder blades. The one he's got ready, any time he thinks it would pay him to use it. Figure it out."

"I'm all right with him. Boleo and I are like ham and eggs."

"Eggs go bad, mister. Ever think of that?"

He shut up and went back to his morning paper. It was three in the afternoon but we'd just got up, and we were waiting for breakfast. But I noticed, after we'd had the breakfast, that he acted pretty thoughtful, and a couple of times when I looked up, I'd find him staring at me.

I gave him something else to think of then, on top of the other. I said: "Two hundred grand, cut two ways, would go a long ways toward helping a man get his wife and kid away from this town. And from a beef that's sure to come in time and that'll take in everybody."

"Boleo's safe. Safe as gold."

I just laughed and let it go at that. I could see the guy was thinking—and he wasn't the type that does it much. He was

a bit screwy, anyway, and when a man like that starts using his brain anything can happen.

Anything but common sense stuff, that is.

CHAPTER V

The Tip-off

CHIME had a Cadillac convertible that was a pip and we went down to Boleo's in it. That was the third day from the time I'd gone to Chime's with him, and during those three days I hadn't been out of the house. Mrs. Chime had gone out and bought me some decent magazines to read, though, and she'd shown me she was a master cook, so I'd been comfortable enough.

Boleo had sent up a case of assorted hootch, too, and both Chime and I had been pleasantly loaded for at least half the time. I was liking him better all the time, and I was nuts about his wife and the kid. Two better people than those I never saw—and it got me to see the way Chime was putting it over with them. He was the honest decent family man at home and nobody ever played it smoother.

Boleo called that third day and we started, just at dusk. Chime explained: "It's before the joint opens to the trade. You'll probably have to stay there until after they close up."

"In that back room?"

He just grinned.

"You've got a nice car," I said.

"It was Ducky Fowler's."

"Who was Fowler?"

"Fowler," Chime said indifferently, "was a guy who ran a couple-three road-houses, out past city limits. He started a game in 'em, when the town opened up, and he shouldn't have done it. It was his own fault."

"For opening the games?"

"For not closing 'em when Boleo told him to. I got his car—Boleo gave it to me for free."

"That all you got?"

"Five grand, mister. I own my own place. No mortgage, no nothing. I even carry insurance, so help me."

That was the family man, talking and

bragging. He'd just admitted he'd killed a man named Fowler, for five thousand dollars, and that he'd been given the car we were in as a sort of bonus.

And I liked him in spite of it.

I said: "This Fowler, now. Didn't he have any friends?"

"Lots of 'em. It made quite a stink at the time it happened. But there was nothing against Boleo on it. Nobody could even say that Boleo had warned him out of business."

I said that Boleo was undoubtedly a smooth worker, and Chime agreed. Just as we pulled into the parking lot alongside of Boleo's place he gave me Boleo's system.

"He warns 'em, personally. Then he does what he's told 'em he'll do. But he don't warn 'em in front of witnesses and he don't do anything in front of witnesses. Not unless they're his own people, that is."

"That's what'll stick him," I said.

"How you mean?"

"His own men will turn on him. They'll beat him to the punch. They'll turn on him before he has a chance to turn on them."

We got out of the car then and went inside, with Chime not saying a word. I'd put another thought in that bird brain of his, and he was working on it.

MARIE WALTERS was waiting for me, and she looked scared. I could see why, too, as soon as I got in the room. Sam, Boleo's brother, was in the room with the girl and Boleo, and he couldn't keep his eyes away from her. I also noticed he had lipstick smeared across his cheek, and that the other one showed four red lines.

Boleo was grinning, and Sam looked as though his feelings were hurt. Marie started talking before either of them had a chance to. She ran to me and caught hold of my coat and hung to me like a kitten on a curtain.

"Oh, Mickey," she said. "I thought you'd never get here. This big ape tried to kiss me."

I didn't think being kissed by Sam would poison her but I didn't say any-

thing. I let Sam say it for me.

He grumbled: "What the hell! The dame walked out with me, didn't she?"

"He just told me, Mickey, that he'd show me how people gambled. About the games and all. Then he tried to kiss me."

"A little smooching never hurt anybody," Sam argued.

Boleo said: "Get out, Sam."

Sam got out, but I noticed he watched Marie even as he went to the door. And I learned something else—that Boleo had had trouble with him before and over women.

Because Chime said: "You ought to watch that guy, Boleo, even if he is your own blood brother. He goes wacky when he sees a dame, and it ain't right."

"Sam's all right," said Boleo, absently. "Look here, Ryan. The girl's here, so we might as well get down to brass tacks. Link isn't in town—that is, he isn't in any of the hotels or boarding houses. I'm sure of that. I had copies made of that picture of yours, and a bunch of my boys made the rounds. He could be wearing a phony beard, or something like that, but it isn't likely. He's out of town, just close enough so that he can drop in now and then. So let's narrow it down."

"Let's," I said. "It's all right, kid. I'll see that that big guy don't bother you any more."

Marie sat down then and I parked on the arm of her chair.

Boleo asked: "What kind of a guy is he? Fussy? I mean about cooking and where he sleeps?"

"He is. He's an old maid that way, or that's what I heard. How about it, Marie?"

"You mean Link?"

"Yeah."

"He's cranky about such things," Marie said. "I didn't like to go out to dinner with him because of it. He'd be mean with the waiter if things didn't suit him."

"He'll be worse," said Boleo. "Now that he's got money to spend and lots of it. He'll be more finicky than ever. What about clothes? Was he fussy about them, too?"

I said: "He was. Very much so. How about it, kid?"

Marie said: "His suit always had to be pressed just so. Everything had to match, or contrast in color."

Boleo thought that one over and proved he had a mind and could use it. He said, consideringly: "Now he may fool us on that. He probably will. He'll probably be wearing rough clothes. Good ones, maybe, expensive and all that, but rough. That would be a change from normal for him and he'd do something to be different. He wouldn't miss on meals though—your skin don't care what's put over it but your belly cares what's put inside it. What you think, Ryan?"

I said he sounded reasonable.

"He wear a mustache, miss?"

"Oh, no."

"What color would it be, if he wore one."

She hesitated and said: "His hair is grey, but I think it used to be dark. So his mustache would be dark."

"Or grey," Boleo said. "That would change his looks some—he'd probably go for that, too. His hair, now? He wear it long?"

"Oh no. Short and always with a hair cut. He was a fussy man, Mr. Boleo."

BOLEO thought this over and turned to me. He said: "It figures just one way. That is, if he's still handy to Callenville. He's got to be at Forest Lake. That's just over the county line, twenty-two miles from here. It's the only place he'd stay."

He was making positive statements with no basis for them that I could see.

I said: "I don't get it. I don't know this country very well, but there's a lot of places either right in town or just outside where he could stay. Your men couldn't cover everything."

"You're a cop, Ryan, but I'll tell you something. Figure this, now. The man wouldn't go to a private house, one of the rooms-for-rent places. Now figure out why?"

"Easy. Because there's too much talking in a place like that. People are curious about other people, when they're together in a little place like that. He couldn't stay by himself without comment."

"Right. So that puts him in either a rooming house, where they don't give a damn what you do, or a big hotel, where they figure the same. That right?"

"Sure."

"Now he's fussy. That cuts him out of the tourist camp places. He likes good food and you don't get it in the tourist traps. You don't get it in the little towns around here, either. There's nothing but grease joints in any of them. Except Forest Lake. And now I'll give you the clincher. There's gambling at the Lake and big stuff. Bigger than anything here in town. That's where a guy like that, with a brand new set of money, could get action for it. They really play in that place."

"Your games?"

"No, damn it," Boleo said. "They're in the next county, like I said. I wish they were mine. It's a resort and a high class one, and everyone that lives there has to have dough to afford it. The games there are run by Joe Fowler."

"Ducky's brother," Chime put in helpfully. "That's how Ducky got the notion of nosing in here."

"You talk too much, Tommy."

"He knows about Ducky, Boleo."

"How?"

"Well, I told him. But nothing that could hurt."

BOLEO gave him a look and I could see the thoughtful expression creep into Chime's eyes. He was remembering, then and there, what I'd said about Boleo getting rid of anybody he didn't want around.

I said: "If Link's there, then what? What can I do about it, the way I'm tied down?"

"Tommy can take you and the girl over there. No cop or deputy's going to stop Tommy's car. They all know it. Once you get there he can show you the places and you can look around. Will you know this guy Link, if he's got himself fancied up?"

I said I thought I would.

Marie said: "I'd know him, Mickey. So would you if you'd known him as well as I did. But Mr. Boleo!"

"Speaking," said Boleo.

"I won't help you at all, unless you make your brother leave me alone. You've got to promise."

Boleo said: "I promise."

I made the same promise but I made it to myself. I was getting pretty well fed up with the brothers Boleo—and they were harder to take each time I saw them.

Not that I was stuck for Marie or anything like that. She was just a nice girl that was lending a helping hand in time of trouble. I just didn't like the idea of her being pawed by fat Sam.

FOREST LAKE was bigger than I thought it would be. Probably five thousand people, either tourists or people making a living from tourists. There were four big hotels, all of them bigger than the one in Callenville. And more expensive, as well. There were two that looked to be tops, besides these—something that belonged in Sun Valley or a place like that.

I hadn't known it but Forest Lake was famous for some kind of mineral water that was supposed to be good for what ailed you, whether it was a bald head or athlete's foot, and all points between. It had been going for a hundred years and I'd never heard of it.

Some places like that don't advertise—they don't need it. They get the same clientele, year in, year out.

Chime drove us through the place, showing it off like he was running a sight-seeing bus. He said, and wistfully:

"This is the spot where they really spend dough. Imagine it. The wheels get more of a play in this town than the crap game does."

That was a tip-off right there. Moneyed people like to lose their dough with style instead of speed, and that's the difference between roulette and dice.

Chime finally dropped us on the main street and in front of a restaurant that I could see was below basement level. A nice looking place, too. Called just Fowler's.

He said: "This is the main place, in back of where they eat. Good eats, too—best in town. You might see your guy

as you're passing through to the back, so watch."

I said: "How'll we get in the back?"

Chime said he almost forgot and handed me a card with a signature scrawled on it. That was all. The signature could have been anything, but he assured me it was Joe Fowler's.

He said: "That's your entrance card. Nobody goes in without one. He don't hand 'em out like they were for free, either."

"What's Fowler look like?"

"Why?"

"He might be in here. He might ask me where I got the card."

"Tell him you met him in Chicago, and that you both were drinking. He don't drink here in Lake Forest, but when he goes out of town, he really puts one on. He doesn't remember a thing about what he does, either. So tell him any name you want and tell him you met him three months ago in Chicago and you'll be all right."

"What's he look like?"

Tommy Chime considered. "He's about forty, only he looks about thirty-five. He's about six feet tall and he's got a nice build. He's dark and he's got a mustache like Ronald Colman. He talks like Ronald Colman does in the pictures, too. Very soft and refined, sort of. Only he's a pretty tough guy."

"What did his brother, Ducky, look like?"

"Like Joe, only younger and not so nice. He looked like what they are, not refined like Joe puts on."

He told us he'd park and wait for us, right down the street, and I knew he would. I didn't have a chance at getting away from him and I knew it—I wasn't too sure I could even go through the restaurant and to the gambling room without being stopped.

CHAPTER VI

Safe Under Convoy

THE Callenville papers had played me up big, and in some way they'd gotten a picture of me and had splashed that over their pages, too. It was an old

one and didn't do me justice, but it showed the way my nose is bent and it showed the couple scars I've got over one cheekbone.

If somebody remembered the picture, he'd spot me in a second, so I went through the restaurant without doing much looking for Link. About all I saw was that it looked to be a darned nice place, and that it was doing the same kind of business.

Marie looked for Link, though, and told me she didn't see him. This was while we were waiting in front of a door at the very back of the place—a very innocent looking blank door that had no knob on our side.

Chime had told me about this and all I did was stand before it and wait. By and by it opened and a little dark man, in a dinner coat, came out and stared around him with no curiosity.

I said: "My name's Kline. Billy Kline. Mr.—ugh—Mr. Fowler suggested I call on him here, when I came to Lake Forest."

"Card?"

I handed him over the pasteboard holding Fowler's signature, and he looked it over carefully.

"Where'd you meet the boss?"

"Chicago. And man, was he high! We had a few drinks together in the hotel and then we went out and had a few more. At the College Inn."

The dark man nodded and opened the door for me in an odd way. He stepped back, somehow, and the door swung open a crack without help from anybody. I know that because we went inside and the stairs leading up were empty.

I said: "Mysterious stuff, like in picture shows, baby. Doors open by 'em-selves. Voices will come out of the air, next thing."

"Is this all right, Mickey?" Marie asked, and I realized I hadn't had a chance to talk to her since I'd met her in Boleo's. We weren't alone there, and we'd been with Chime, in the car, all the time after leaving there.

I said: "You're doing fine, kid. Just point out Link, if you see him. And I

think you'll see him—Boleo seemed pretty sure that he'd be here."

"His reasoning about it was good, Mickey. You said so yourself."

I laughed and said: "He's got more to go on than reasoning, kid. He's got a line on the man and the thing I can't figure out is why he hasn't grabbed him."

"I don't understand why he wants to find him, Mickey. After all, that's a job for the police. Or for you, because the company's hired you to do it. I don't see why this awful man Boleo's concerned at all."

I COULDN'T explain because, by that time, we were at the top of the stairs and facing another door. This one opened for us, too—but there was a man on the other side of it. He could have been a twin to the one who'd let us on the stair—short and dark and smooth.

He said: "Good evening, Mr. . . ."

"Kline. Billy Kline. Well, William Kline, Jr., to be right. Ha, ha, ha, ha."

"Your first visit, Mr. Kline?"

"That's right. I met Mr. Fowler in Chicago, about three months back. A fine man. Is he around tonight?"

"Not just now, Mr. Kline. Just go ahead—the bar's at your left and the games are right ahead. The checkroom isn't open yet, I'm sorry to say."

We passed the checkroom and turned into the bar the guy had mentioned. It looked like a very good hotel bar and was getting a fair play, but I noticed there was no register and that no cash, other than tip money, changed hands.

I nudged Marie and said: "Big stuff, kid. More like in movies. Drink on the house, like free lunch in cheap bars."

It didn't mean a thing to Marie—she didn't know whether that was good or bad. We got a booth, just inside the door, and then I looked around. And I didn't see any sign of Link but I did see something that I hadn't seen since I'd last been in Reno.

It was a window in the back of the bar, up high where it commanded the whole floor of the place. One man was looking out, and I could see the muzzle of a shotgun standing up beside him. There was

a slit below the window, which even at that distance showed it was made of funny looking glass.

"It's a look-out cage," I told Marie. "More movie stuff. Bullet-proof glass and a guy inside to cut down any hold-ups. He could pick 'em off like shooting at clay pigeons."

Marie looked up at the window and shuddered. She was a home girl, and things like that were a little out of her line.

THE waiter came over and I ordered straight rye for myself and an Alexander for the girl. Home girls like the fancy drinks that make the strong men shudder.

She said, while we waited: "I missed you a lot, Mickey. But I think the only reason you ever took me out was to find out something about Charles Link. Tell me the truth, Mickey. Wasn't that the only reason?"

If I'd told her the truth, it would only have hurt her feelings. The only reason I'd arranged to meet her, in the first place, was because she was a friend of the guy and would know about him.

But I lied and said: "Of course not, kid. Nothing like that at all. It's nice that you knew the guy because you can be a big help to me by pointing him out, but that's all. I don't mix business with pleasure and I like taking you out."

The waiter brought the drinks, good, very good rye for me, and that awful mixture for the kid, and I thanked him.

He said: "I wish you luck tonight, sir."

I thanked him for the drinks, which sure enough were on the house.

And then Marie said: "Oh, Mickey, there he is."

It was Link but I don't think I'd have known him. All I had to go on was a five year old snapshot of him that wasn't too clear when it was new. This man looked younger than he did in the snap, even in spite of that five years' difference. He'd dyed his hair brown, almost a reddish brown, and he'd made a perfect job of it. He had a scrubby mustache that showed more red than did his hair, and that was also right. He looked heavier than he had

in his pictures, and he wore an outfit that looked like it was out of one of the Hollywood fan magazines.

A checked tweed sport coat that was loud enough to speak up for itself and grey flannel slacks that were cut pleated at the waist and came up almost to his short ribs. A brown shirt, with a fancy collar. No neck tie but a scarf, though this last was swinging loose. Brown and white shoes that looked custom made. His eyes were blue, very blue, and they went with both his new brown hair and his fancy clothes. He was forty-five by his service record with Amalgamated Tool & Die, but the only way he showed he was over thirty was by tiny wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. And you had to look close to notice that.

I asked: "You sure?" even if I was myself.

"Positive. Oh, Mickey. If he sees me, he'll know me."

I said: "Just sit quiet, kid. If he talks to you, tell him you're visiting your aunt, in Callenville. Stall. I'll be back."

I got out of the booth and over to the bar and just in time. Link turned his head and saw Marie, and for a second he could have been looking at a ghost. Then he turned his head and ducked out toward the door that opened to the gambling room.

I went after him but I stopped at the booth and told Marie what to do while I was on my way.

I said: "Just sit here, kid. Take another drink or two—they won't hurt you. I've got to line this out."

She nodded and I went out into the gambling part of the set-up.

I HAD the answer to everything then. I knew why Boleo wanted me in on the deal and there was no chance of error on his reason. It all tied up.

Link hadn't gone in to the bar alone, that was the thing. Two men were with him and the same two men had followed him out, to the gambling room.

One was thin and tall and not a bad-looking guy, if you don't mind 'em having too much space between the eyes and with

a smirk on a face that comes too much to a point at the chin. He carried his hands swinging free but there was a bulge under his left arm.

The other was also thin, but short, not over five feet tall. He carried his head forward, as though he was looking for something he'd dropped on the floor. The first one about twenty-five and the second at least forty-five. Both were guarding Link, with the first man packing his gun in a shoulder rig and the second, as near as I could figure, carrying his in his coat pocket.

At least he kept a hand in it all the time.

They had to be Fowler's men. There was no other answer to that one, either. Link couldn't have hired guards from any agency, as hot as he was. Any agency man in the world would have spotted him for who he was. They couldn't have been private gun experts, working for Link, for the same reason. They'd have known he needed them to protect his two hundred thousand dollars worth of stolen money, and they'd have ganged on him and taken it for their very own.

That left it squarely up to Fowler. He was protecting Link for some reason, and he was keeping him safe under convoy. That meant Boleo couldn't get his hands on the man without waging a pitched battle for him, and away from Callenville and out of Callen County, Boleo couldn't get away with a small war like he'd have to fight.

Fowler couldn't keep Link away from the cops, if they located the guy, naturally. But he could keep him away from another hustler, even if the other hustler did control the adjoining part of the country—and he was doing just that.

And Boleo was going along with me, on my wagon, so I'd make the break that might get Link loose and in the open where he'd be Boleo's meat. I had some authority and could always claim I was honestly trying to arrest the guy. That is, I could if I could get clear of the charge hanging over me on Lauders' killing. That would give me an out, if any rough stuff came into the open. Boleo had me solid

or thought he did, on the charge, and he thought he could depend on me going to bat with him because of the fix I was in. It was a frame that he could either push or drop, and he'd think I'd play it his way on account of it.

I WAS in the middle all the way around. The cops were on one side, Boleo on another, and now Fowler on the third.

Link had shoved his way into the crowd around one of the three wheels that were running, and I was right behind him. I had expense money to spend and no grudge against dropping a little of it in the tiger's mouth. Link bought chips and so did I. He was on my left, with the older, shorter bodyguard between us, as well as just another customer. This one happened to be a fat, red-faced man who was putting twenty dollar chips all over the lay-out, and who depended on the croupier to tell him whether he won or lost.

He lost, of course. The wheel man was only human.

Link put a red—ten dollars—on black, another on the first twelve, and another on seven, on the nose. I put the same amount on red. Playing colors won't make a man rich, but he won't lose near as fast and he has the fun of watching the wheel spin.

It came black and I doubled on red. It came black again. I put fifty on that time, still riding the red, and red showed up for me.

Link had won on his color bets the first two times, but he'd lost on the others. The wheel was running high and he lost betting that it would hit the lower third of the thirty-six possible numbers the ivory ball could end up on.

I played along easy, losing forty dollars in half an hour, and by that time I'd decided that the short man did carry his gun in the side coat pocket next to me, and that the fat customer was going home in his underwear if he kept on playing.

Link ran out of chips twice and he was buying 'em five hundred dollars' worth at a time, but from the conversation he was having with the croupier, I gathered

he'd won a little the night before. Playing like he was, with an occasional hit like the night before, his two hundred thousand would last him quite a while, I thought.

THEN I decided to do something about the situation and, as I did, I saw Fowler come in. There was no mistaking him. Chime's description would have been good enough to tell him, and the way he came in and looked the place over would have tipped me anyway.

He had that owner's look. Checking on how much and how heavy play was going on. Looking to see that each table had enough bank money to run nicely with. Having a word with the cashier, who had an office at the side of the place. Looking up at the window at the end of the place to make sure his shotgun guard was on shift.

He came near the wheel I was working on and I waved at him and he nodded back at me. He looked a bit puzzled, as though he was trying to place me, and I decided I might as well start with him. I picked up my chips—I had a hundred and sixty dollars worth of them left—and moved over next to him.

"Nice to see you again, Mr. Fowler," I said.

"Ah yes," he said, shaking hands. "And how's everything with you?"

"I'm losing a little."

He looked down at the chips in my hand and said that luck went that way. That a man might lose for hours and then pull ahead in ten minutes of the evening's play. Just ordinary come-on talk.

I stopped that. I said: "You don't know me, Fowler, but you should. You really should. Where can we talk?"

"Why should we?"

"It might pay both of us."

He shrugged and nodded toward a door at the side of the room. "My office is there, mister—I don't believe I know your name."

"It's Ryan."

"Oh, oh."

"That's right. Same man."

CHAPTER VII

Both Ends Against the Middle

HE led the way to his office and motioned me to a chair across the desk from him. He was as hard as Boleo, but in a different way. This man was smooth, but I didn't think he was as smooth as he fancied himself. His office, though, was nothing like Boleo's. Boleo's was fancy and this was plain and business like. This was a place to work in and Boleo's was a place to impress people.

Fowler said: "Ryan, eh? Well, Mister Ryan, you're hotter than a fox. You're a damn' fool to be out in public. It was Chime that killed Lauders, wasn't it? Little Tommy Chime?"

"That's right."

"You see it done."

"I did. Hew'd you know it was Chime?"

"It bore his trade mark, from what I heard. The man was shot three times. All centered, and running from the pit of his stomach to his neck. It takes good shooting for that."

"That's what I want to talk to you about."

"The shooting? I can't help you, Ryan. That isn't my county. You should know that by this time."

"I know it. It isn't about that shooting—it's about another."

"Whose?"

"Your brother's. Ducky's."

I was watching his face but he didn't change expression. His eyes maybe looked a little different but that was all.

He said: "I'll do something about that, but I'll pick my own time. That was Chime's work, too."

"Just on order."

"Sure. I know that. I told him not to try and buck that combination over there, but he wouldn't listen to me. I can't do anything about it, not the way things stand right now. I've got to wait for the proper time."

"Suppose I arrange it? Will you turn Link loose if I do?"

"You know about that, eh?"

"I can guess. That's who I'm after."

That's something the papers didn't know."

He considered this and he took a minute to do it. "Look, Ryan," he said. "Suppose I am taking care of him? He's got two hundred grand and I don't know where it is. I want to know that, before I turn him over."

"You've had time to find out."

"I can't work on him. The guy's got a bad ticker. Anybody gets rough with him, and he'll pop off. That's why he took the dough, he tells me. He says he has only so long to live and he might as well live high while he's doing it."

That was something neither Boleo or I knew. I kept my mouth shut and let Fowler argue it out with himself. He said:

"You working for the company or for yourself?"

"Why? What difference does it make?"

"Plenty. There's enough to split. There'd be no split if you're working for the company."

"That's Boleo's thought."

"I'll turn him over for half of what he's got. For Boleo thrown in, I mean."

I said: "I'll be fair. I didn't know about Link having a bad heart, and that makes it different. Suppose I give you Boleo, and we'll argue it out about Link after that. We can get together — there's enough dough in it so we can."

"I want Chime, too. He was working for Boleo—I know that—but I want him, too."

"You can have him."

"You got a plan?"

I had and I began telling him about it.

MARIE had taken three more Alexanders and they'd acted on her, or acted up on her, whichever it was. Her eyes were about twice as big and she wasn't talking as usual. She didn't exactly stutter, but she was starting to. She wasn't drunk but she wasn't sober — she was at that in-between stage where everything's peaches and cream.

She said: "Oh Mickey, honey! I didn't think you were ever coming back."

"They been treating you all right?"

"Oh, yes. A couple of men sat down

here and tried to talk to me, but I told them I was waiting for my husband. Wasn't that right?"

"Sure."

The waiter came over and I ordered another rye and another Alexander. Another snifter wouldn't hurt the gal, that I could see.

I said: "We're going back to Callenville now, kid. There's going to be quite a lot happen and don't let any of it get you down."

"Why, what will happen, Mickey?"

"I'm not sure yet. Nothing tonight."

We had our drink and went downstairs and found Tommy Chime parked half way down the block. He was sitting well back in the seat with his face in shadow, and when we got in the car I saw he had that Army .45 in his lap, all ready.

He said: "I had a close one, mister, and I don't mean perhaps. Fowler walked by here and looked right at me. If it hadn't been for a car coming by and blinding him with its lights, he'd have seen me sure."

"He know you?"

"Sure."

"You know his boys, too?"

"Most of 'em. They leave us alone and we leave them alone. That is, if they stay where they belong, to hell out of Callen County."

"He figure the same about this one?"

"Sure. The county line's the dead line. We can come over here and give his games a whirl and his crew can come over to our joints and try us if they want. But no trouble, that's all."

"What about you?"

"Not me. The bars are up for me on account of Ducky. And for Boleo, too, of course."

Marie asked: "Who is Ducky?"

I said: "You mean who *was* Ducky? Ducky was a man who didn't know where he belonged. Isn't that right, Chime?"

Chime got the car out into the line of traffic and agreed that I was right. And for the rest of the ride into Callenville I spent my time fending Marie away. Those Alexanders were taking hold and she'd decided that if I thought anything of her I should be showing it more, and

she moving half way toward the showing.

It would have been embarrassing if Tommy Chime hadn't been a family man, but as it was it worked out all right.

We went straight to his house, and when he'd called Boleo to tell him we were back, and Boleo had told him to keep the girl there in the house, the same as I was kept, Marie never complained.

For one thing I could see she liked Mrs. Chime, and for another I was with her there. That made it perfectly fine.

IT was just after daylight when I saw Eberhard, and I was worried for fear he wouldn't show up. He'd said he'd keep in touch but I was afraid something might have interfered with the plan. I dropped the note I'd written him and watched it flutter to the ground with him chasing it like a cat chases a butterfly, and when after he'd read it and motioned toward the back of the garage where the ladder was stored, I waved him away.

I knew what he wanted. He wanted to argue what I'd lined out for him and his pals to do, and I didn't want any part of it. It was too tricky as it was. I had to depend on Chime, on Boleo, on Fowler, and on this bunch of cops that wanted to get out from under Boleo's thumb, and I had to work on each one of them from a different angle.

Each angle, of course, had something in common. Each depended on the well known double cross—each bunch was after something the other one had.

All I had to do was work 'em against each other and slide out with Marie and Link, during the pay-off. It wasn't going to be easy.

Marie was sleeping with Mrs. Chime, not more than half realizing she was a prisoner, and Tommy had made himself up a bed on the front room couch. I woke him up from that about nine.

I said: "Look, Tommy, it's about time we had a talk. I'm going to give you a chance to get out. To get out while you're alive and to get out with the wife and kid."

"You're nuts," he said, but he was pay-

ing close attention, I noted. "Why should I want to get out? I'm doing all right with Boleo. There's no reason why it won't go along like that."

I needed him and I had to have him on my side. He'd gone to sleep on the couch with his gun on the floor by the head of it, and he was lying back on the couch, then, with a hand propped under his head and staring at me.

I WAS five feet away but I had the advantage of the first move. I dived for the gun and landed on top of it, and he rolled off the couch on my back and started to pound my head up and down on the floor.

As a gun man he was good, very good. On the rough and tumble stuff he was only fair. I twisted so I got a purchase with my feet against the couch, and then I kicked out as hard as I could. It moved me away from there fast, with the rug sliding under me like a pair of skates, and it tipped him to the side and gave me a chance to roll clear. I had the gun in his belly then and had the safety catch off—he carried it on full cock, the way the gun should be carried if a man has any idea of having to use it in a hurry.

I said: "Behave now. Sit back there. I don't want to blast."

He coughed—I'd jabbed the muzzle of the gun into him pretty hard. He got back on the couch and stared at me, and when he spoke, he sounded as though his feelings were hurt.

"I sort of trusted you, Ryan," he said. "I wasn't watching you the way I should have been doing."

"What did you do with my gun, Chime?"

"It's in the car pocket."

I took the magazine out of the .45 and jacked the shell out of the chamber. I tossed it back to him and said:

"I don't want this, Tommy. I want my own."

He held the gun as though he'd never seen it before.

"Why'd you give it back to me?"

I knew then the beef was over and that I could talk him into what I wanted. I

gave him back the shells and watched him shove the magazine up in place and jack a shell into place. I noticed though that he put the safety on them.

I said: "I'm going to give you a chance, Tommy. The pay-off's coming tonight. I want Link, you know that. Now I want Boleo. If you work it, I can have 'em both. If not, you go out with Boleo."

"I don't get it," he said.

"Play it my way and you've got a chance to go clear. Maybe not—there's a chance, of course. But play it against me and you're through. I've got Fowler in it now."

"You double-crossed us, hey?"

I laughed and he got the idea. He said: "Not that I blame you. We put you in a spot, all right."

"I'm getting off it. You want to go along?"

"Go ahead."

I talked—and we ended by going out to the garage together and getting my own gun. I felt better with it, too. There was going to be shooting that night and I wanted my own gun to do it with.

CHAPTER VIII

Last Act Curtain

FOWLER was where he said he'd meet me, and with him were Link, Link's two bodyguards, and two other men I'd never seen before. Link's hands were tied behind him, which couldn't have been comfortable, but he wore no gag. When I walked up to the car, he was cursing Fowler steadily, but not as though he were mad. It was a discouraged sort of swearing, more than anything, and Fowler just sat next to him and listened.

The car was parked about two blocks from Chime's house, just as we'd arranged.

I walked up to the car and spoke to Fowler and then looked at Link. Link had quit swearing as I came up, but he picked it up where he'd left off.

Fowler pointed a thumb at him and said: "The guy's sore. What the hell! He don't seem to realize that money isn't everything."

"How much of it you got left, Link?" I asked.

He started cursing me then.

I said: "It's going as planned. There's just one thing. If there's any shooting, and there will be, I want you boys to be careful. My girl's in the house, too, and I'm going to try and get her down in the basement. But if I can't, I don't want her to stop any wild ones."

Fowler said: "Don't fret, Ryan."

"We might as well start."

Fowler and three of the men with him got out of the car, leaving the older one of Link's guards still with him. Fowler said: "If he gets noisy, just knock him on the head. Link, if you're smart, you'll keep that trap of yours shut."

Link told him to go to hell, in detail.

We started toward the house then. I said: "Now remember! I want Chime left alone until the last. I need him right straight through, until then. That plain?"

Fowler said: "I said so last night, didn't I? I want Boleo more than I want Chime, anyway."

We walked up to the house and on the porch and through the front door, and there was Tommy Chime to meet us. He held that Army gun of his at full cock and he had the safety off it and he was as tight as a wound up watch. He was so scared he was white around the lips. He lined the gun on Fowler's middle and said:

"Hi, Joe! If there's any cross on this, you go first."

"Don't be a chump," Fowler said. "I don't want you, Tommy. I want Boleo."

"Play it that way," Tommy said.

I cut in with: "Okay, Chime. Now's the time to do it."

AND I told him again what to do. I said: "Go ahead now. Tell Boleo I went out last night and got Link, and that I'm barricaded with him down in the basement. And that you've got to have help to get me out. That'll bring him."

Fowler made the same objection he had made the night before, when I'd given him the plan. He said: "He'll send somebody else out here. He won't come out himself."

I gave him the same answer as I had before. I said: "He will not. He won't take the chance. He knows he has to have Link alive, if he's going to get the money from him, and he won't trust the job to anybody else. Get going, Chime."

Tommy eased around to the door, watching Fowler all the time. They were like two strange dogs, circling each other with their hair up on their necks and growling. He backed out the front door and I heard his car start up from where it was parked in front, and I breathed a whole lot easier.

I'd been afraid of that first meeting. There was a chance of Fowler losing his head and shooting it out then and there with the man who'd killed his brother, and there'd been the chance of Chime going panicky when he faced him.

That was over. I told the boys to sit down and have a drink while they waited and they did. And then I went upstairs, to where Mrs. Chime and Marie were playing cards with the boy.

It was some sort of casino that the kid was nuts about. Both Chime and his wife played it with the kid all day long, and now they'd roped Marie in on it.

I said: "Mrs. Chime, you're to go down in the basement. You and the boy. Marie, you too."

Mrs. Chime said: "What's wrong, Mr. Ryan? Where's Tommy? I thought you went with him—I heard him drive away."

I didn't explain but told her the one thing I knew would get her moving.

"There's going to be some trouble here in a little while," I said. "I want the boy out of the way."

She got moving right then. She and Marie and the boy were in the basement, locked in, inside of five minutes' time. If it had just been herself, there'd probably have been an argument, but there was none when the boy was in danger.

It seems like people think more of a crippled child than they do a well one.

FOWLER and I sat by the window, where we could watch the street. I was looking for it and so saw something Fowler didn't. There was quite a lot of shrubbery in the vacant lot next to

Chime's house, and every now and then I'd see a movement there that didn't come from the wind.

Then Boleo came—just as it was getting good and dark. It had taken him about an hour to make up his mind and collect his gang, and he came in force. There were two cars of them, and I saw Fowler lick his lips and figure out the odds.

He wasn't backing up on them, I'll give him that. There were five of us, counting me on his side, and Boleo had seven men with him, not counting Chime. I didn't know just how to count Chime, either. He was supposed to be out of it, but I knew it wouldn't work that way. I hoped it would work so that he'd be out of the first of the mess, but that was the best I could do for him.

Boleo and his crew came up the walk, first Boleo and Chime, side by side, and then Boleo's brother and the rest of them. They were in a huddle and a good man could have murdered the bunch of them with any sort of shooting, but that wasn't the plan.

It worked out as it should. Chime and Boleo came to the door and Chime opened it and stepped to the side, so the others could go past him. It was the natural thing to do and he did it that way. Just opened the door and stepped back and said:

"Okay guys."

By that time Fowler was against the wall, right next the door. The end drape from the front window covered him entirely. One of his men was behind the couch. Another was in the doorway leading to the kitchen and the third was clear up on the stairs leading to the second story. I was still by the window, but sitting at the side of it, and every man of Boleo's was inside before he saw me. Chime even had time to close the door behind them before Boleo spoke.

He had a gun in his hand but he didn't raise it. He must have been surprised, expecting to find me in the cellar, but he didn't show it.

He said: "Hagh, Ryan. I thought Tommy said he had you locked in and that you had him locked out."

Then Fowler, who was behind them, said: "Let's go."

The shooting started and I went out the window. Boleo shot, but whether at me or at Fowler I didn't know. He could have hit the window glass but I was going through it shoulder first and there was no way of telling. I saw Chime running toward the street and his car, and I shouted:

"I'll see you, Tommy."

He raised a hand but didn't stop.

I COULD see Eberhard and his merry men breaking out of their cover in the next door lot, then. There were about ten of them, and one of them was carrying a gas gun—a short-barreled, nasty-looking thing that could do three times the work the old-fashioned kind could ever do. It sounded like every man for himself inside the house though, and I didn't think the boys were going to need gas to take charge.

There were eight men standing in the center of that small room, and Fowler and his boys were cross-firing into them. Fowler was taking a chance and knew it, but his men were under some protection. The eight in the middle of the room had none and it was just a matter of how much lead they could take and still shoot back.

I got to the sidewalk and started down it just as Eberhard got to the front door. Two of his men were at the side of the house—I could see that—and another couple were racing around toward the other side to blanket that as well. He'd have a pair at the back, too—I knew that without seeing them.

I didn't wait. I wanted to get down to Fowler's car before the man guarding Link had time to get worried and pull out of there.

And I just made it. I heard the starter grind when I was half a block from it and the guy was just putting the car into gear when I ran up beside it. He leaned his head out when I came up to the window, but if he was scared he didn't look it.

He said: "How they coming out? There's plenty of noise."

I hit him on the head, rather than argue with him. I wanted Link, not talk about him.

And then I drove the car back and parked it in front of Chime's leaving Link still tied in the back seat.

EBERHARD had things under control, but he hadn't had much of a job getting it that way. The boys had really shot it out.

Boleo and his brother were both dead. Boleo had been shot six times—the boys had sort of centered their fire on him it looked like. Boleo's brother Sam was hit twice but both were centered.

Of the other six men with Boleo, two were dead, one was dying, and the other three would live, barring accidents. They can do a lot with gun shot wounds this day and age.

Fowler was hit twice, both through the right lung, and that gave him about an even chance. One of his men had taken a slug through the arm—that was the one who'd been shooting out from the shelter of the doorway. The other two hadn't a mark on them and were handcuffed together.

Fowler was conscious when I went in, and if looks killed, I'd have been down on the floor with the Boleo boys.

"You kept Chime out of this," he said.

"Right."

"You double-crossing rat."

"You got enough for your money."

"I wanted Chime."

"You don't want anybody but the doctor, chum," Eberhard told him. "He's coming now. By the time you get out of the car, you'll have whiskers down to your knees. If you want Chime then, you can have him."

I did what I'd told Tommy I'd do for him. I was putting the blame on a dead man and so I didn't mind too much.

I said: "Listen. It was Boleo that killed Lauder's. I saw him do it. It was Boleo that killed your brother, Fowler. It wasn't Chime—Chime just took the blame. It wasn't as though he was up in court accused of it—it was just talk. Boleo paid

him to take the beef and he took it, that's all."

Both Eberhard and Fowler said: "You said it was Chime."

I said: "I just agreed with you when you said that. I should know—I saw Lauders killed. About your brother, Fowler, all you can figure is the same man killed him, too. That is if you go by the way the job was done."

I DIDN'T think it would stick with Fowler but it would keep the police away from Chime, and that's all I'd promised him. I knew Fowler would have men gunning for him as soon as he could get in touch with what was left of his crew. The protection would be off Chime and he'd have to depend on himself to stay clear, that was all.

I stayed there until I heard the ambulance siren sounding nearer, and then I went to the basement. I went down and found both girls huddling back of the furnace, with the boy still further behind them.

I said: "It's over. Mrs. Chime, Tommy got clear. He'll write me when he gets located and then I'll tell you where to go. He won't write you—you may be watched for awhile. I'll see you get out so that nobody follows you, and that's the best I can do."

Marie was shaking all over. She said: "Good heavens, Mickey, what's happened?"

I said: "Nothing of importance. The town is out from under, that's all. No more of the Boleo brothers, which means the police can start in and do a little policing. The same will be true of Forest Lake—the boys just sort of cleaned up their own situations. It's a good thing for everybody—this town needed cleaning up and now it's done. Marie, if you'll get ready, we'll go back where we started from."

She started climbing out from behind the furnace then, but I wouldn't let them go upstairs until Eberhard called down to me that the house was clear.

That front room was nothing for a woman to see.

CHIME got free from the men Fowler put on him, but I didn't know it until I got a letter from him. It was mailed from South Africa and it said he was now a sergeant and he liked the Army fine but missed his wife. The letter had to pass the censor, of course, and so it didn't say a great deal, but I could read between the lines and guess what it was he wanted.

That night I made arrangements about it. I told Marie: "You and I'll drop over to Callenville, toward the end of the week. I got a letter from Tommy Chime and I've got to tell his wife about it."

By that time Marie knew all about it. She didn't know whether she approved of what I'd done, though, and now and then had things to say about it. She said some of them right then.

She said: "You let that man go, knowing he was a murderer, Mickey. You shouldn't have done it."

What to do had puzzled me, too. I'd crossed everybody but Chime, but I'd played it square with him. And he was the actual killer of both Lauders and Ducky Fowler, that I knew—and maybe others as well.

I said: "Look, kid! The guy had a wife and baby, and the only people he killed were better off dead. There's that angle. Another thing is, he's doing all right now. He's in the Army and he's been made a sergeant. That's swell. He'll come out of it okay, see if he don't. And working it the way I did, cleaned up that town all right, so it must have been partly all right, anyway. A man can work in that town and play around a little now, and still go home with money in his pants. So that's something, isn't it."

Marie said she thought it was.

"And I found Link, and the D. A. turned up his loot. That's something else. When it was a question of getting ten years and keeping the dough, or getting five and giving it back, he gave it back, didn't he?"

"Well, yes, Mickey."

"Then everybody won, didn't they?"

"Mrs. Chime didn't win."

"Tommy wouldn't have lasted another year, kid. Boleo would have killed him

Do You Know That

1. Since the war started, 23,000 U.S. and Canadian lumbermen have left the forests and gone into the armed forces or war plants.

The work these lumbermen did—like topping trees—is out of most people's line. It requires a high degree of skill, nerve, and strength, and thus the 23,000 lumbermen just can't be replaced today.

More than two-thirds of our wood supply is used for vital building needs, including ships, barracks, military roads, etc. There's not much the average person can do to conserve that lumber. But the other third goes into wood pulp, from which paper is made—and there is a great deal we can all do to conserve paper.

2. Not only has the supply of paper gone down—the demand has enormously gone up. The armed forces use an amazing quantity of paper and paper products. For example, 700,000 items—including food, clothing, and weapons—must be wrapped or boxed in paper for delivery to the Army. And the armed forces use great amounts of paper in communications, ammunition, V-mail, camouflage, manuals, and blueprints. (Incredible as this may seem, it actually takes **175 tons** of paper to make blueprints for **one** of the big, new battle-ships!)

3. You might not guess it, but one of our largest users of paper is the American home. Uncle Sam says that if the enormous needs of our armed forces are to be filled, we should do our level best to limit home use of paper in all possible ways—to accept unwrapped packages when shopping, and to be careful never to waste a single piece of stationery, towels, tissues, napkins and such-like. This is a wartime emergency. Can the government count on getting your valuable aid in conserving that one log out of every three that makes your paper?

4. Though all U.S. magazines use but 4% of our paper, they present a double opportunity for you to help. First, pass along your copies to a friend. Second, turn all used magazines and newspapers in to local salvage agencies. **Old paper can be used to make new paper.**

because he knew too much. That was the way the guy worked. So Mrs. Chime won—Tommy's alive and making a hero out of himself."

The funny thing is that Mrs. Chime agreed with me. She gave me a letter to forward to Tommy, that just in case any of Fowler's crew were still checking on her mail. Fowler couldn't—he was doing twenty to forty in the State pen.

She said: "I was going to sell the house, so that I'd be ready to join Tommy, as soon as I heard from him. Now I'll just wait until after the war."

"I'll get the guy to send you a picture, Mrs. Chime."

"Sonny would like that, too."

The kid said: "I bet my dad's a good soldier, too. It isn't everybody can be a sergeant, I bet you. Why that's higher than a captain, I guess."

Neither Marie nor I told him different. The way it was working out he'd find that a sergeant maybe wasn't as high as a captain—but he'd never find out what his old man really had done for a living, anyway.

I counted that on Chime's credit side, too. The kid would grow up thinking his daddy was a hero, rather than a gun man, and that was all to the good.

I was sort of proud of Chime myself.

MOUTHPIECE

(Continued from page 59)

ter of an hour later. Barry heard a car churning up the hill in second, and then it stopped and he heard the door open. A voice called out:

"You here, Barry? You alone?"

"Yeah. In the back bedroom," said Barry, as he rubbed his leg comfortingly against the gat.

"**W**HY all the gloom, kid?" asked Farron, coming in a minute later and pulling up the shades.

"Well, you know how careful you always told me and Tom to be when we used this place. I didn't want no one but you to know I was here."

"What's this hundred grand mean?"

"Ya might ask me what's the matter with me," said Barry, with a wry smile.

Artie Farron looked troubled, sympathetic. He was a big man and a handsome one. He had a large face, with fine features and dark blue eyes that were better than any actor's in a courtroom. He used them now, and they all at once looked as worried as if he were terribly distressed about the grave illness of a brother or best friend. He rubbed a hand over his thinning black hair, meticulously parted and brushed, and took a step near-

er the bed. He asked in a sonorous voice:

"What is the matter, kid? I didn't think at first. That message about the hundred grand had me worried. I was worried thinking *you* might be in a jam."

"Looks like I might 'a' been shot up," said Barry, taking his right hand from under the covers and showing it.

"The hell you say! What—?"

"Look at my leg, too," said Barry, tossing back the covers from that side and exposing the bandages. "It could be bad, maybe."

"Doc Siegel fix you up?"

"Nope."

The Big Mouthpiece looked uncertain. He stuck his hands in the pants pockets of his expensive and beautifully tailored suit—he knew how to dress and wear clothes, Artie Farron did—and looked down at Barry O'Leary. He frowned for a moment. Then he pushed back his shoulders and got hold of himself:

"What's this all mean? I didn't think we'd planned to pull any cracks while I was in Albany. You try a fast one on your own and take a licking?" he finished, the barest hint of menace in his last sentence.

"So what?"

Artie Farron flushed. He seemed flustered for a fraction of a second. He seldom—rarely, very rarely—stumbled over a word, but he did now:

“Wh-what happened, Barry, old kid?”

Barry got a kick out of that. He got a better kick out of what he said: “Maybe—I said ‘maybe,’ get me?—I stuck up Sol Bluementhal and got all them di’monds he give his wife Estelle.”

“What!”

“Yeah. That ’ud be the hundred grand, Artie,” said Barry softly, his gray eyes serious as he looked at his mouthpiece.

“Estelle, Estelle,” Farron was saying, his own eyes thoughtful. “She get hurt?” Farron jerkily added.

“Nope,” said Barry, keeping a dead pan.

“You give Sol the works?” Farron rasped out eagerly, just a little hopefully.

“I—ain’t sayin’,” drawled Barry, not finding it easy to hide his smile when he thought that The Big Mouthpiece looked as much up in the air as any poor sucker he’d ever had in the witness chair.

“What the hell is this set-up?” snarled Farron, who was usually pretty cool.

Barry kept his mouth shut, for a minute, eyeing Artie Farron. He knew, like everyone in New York did—except Sol, who’d just found it out—that Farron was nuts about Estelle and that Estelle was nuts about him. That was the big reason Sol had played ball with him, Barry O’Leary damn’ well knew. He said vaguely, in a monotone:

“What set-up?”

It was great to see Farron get excited. Farron did it, too. He showed it by clenching his fists and tightening up his lips when he spoke sort of between them.

“Coming here! Getting shot! Slipping that over on Estelle! . . . That’s what I mean! . . . Why the hell did you do it?”

“I got the di’monds, anyways,” breathed Barry as if to himself, with a little smile and half-shut eyes.

“Where—?”

“I got ’em,” repeated Barry, leaning farther back on the pillow with a sigh and shutting his eyes completely.

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HE was quiet, after that, and Farron, for some reason, didn't think it was up to him to say anything. Barry, finally, opened his eyes and raised himself up on his left elbow. He looked at Farron with unblinking eyes, and there was an almost gruesome expression of bitterness on his face. It was in his voice, too, when he spoke in slow, dull, hopeless tones:

"I'll tell ya maybe why I came here. Maybe a guy like me gets tired of life, maybe he wants to rub it all out. Maybe my brother goin', and mother dyin', was the windup. Maybe I wanted to die here, in peace and quiet, and maybe I didn't want it to look like anyone had done it an' get blamed for it. Maybe that's why I sent for you, and why I brought that bottle of stuff along that says 'poison' on it. Maybe I—maybe I sort of wanted you to take down my last will, you might call it, seein' you been my mouthpiece. I—"

"What about the diamonds?"

Barry knew that Farron would ask that question. Barry could tell, as sure as he was lying there, that Farron's brain was already thinking of how he could get hold of them if Barry bumped himself off. Farron made a lot of jack—oodles of it—but women and roulette got most of it and he was nearly always broke.

"You'll learn about the di'monds," said Barry, with a wave of his hand and a tired voice. "Get a paper an' pen, anyways, an' write down what I tell ya. I can't write with this mitt. I could sign it later with my left."

Artie Farron got up and came back with paper and pen and ink. He didn't try any of his oratory, that had gone over so big in many courtrooms, to attempt to persuade his client not to commit suicide. There was an eager light in his eyes, that he couldn't quite hide, as he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Well, lots of men kill themselves, and sometimes I don't blame them."

"Glad you feel that way. Go ahead an' write."

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm tired of living and I am going to kill myself and I don't want no one else blamed.

I have been a rat and a louse all my life and I am finished being one. I pulled the Sol Bluementhal diamond robbery last night, and I am sorry. The diamonds will be found in my lower bureau drawer, under my shirts and underwear. I guess that is all.

"Go ahead an'—"

"Lower bureau drawer, eh?"

"Yeah. Go ahead an' put that in good English, if I ain't done it, an' hand it over."

Farron was making another copy on another piece of paper, and when he finished he got up and handed it to Barry:

"Well, if you *feel* that way, kid . . ."

BARRY had closed his eyes again, for a moment, after putting the paper carefully down on the table by the poison bottle after having read it. Suddenly, wholly unexpectedly, he got into action. He tossed back the covers with his left hand and came out standing on the floor with the gat—Farron's gat—in his right hand. He leveled it at Farron, unwaveringly, and neither did his voice waver. There was an odd, staccato, metallic quality to it:

"Thanks for writin' your death message, you louse. Reco'rize this gun? . . . It's *your* gun, Farron. It's the gun that's gonna kill ya an' be found in your hand. It'll be found without *my* fingerprints on it, too . . . Reco'rize it? I pinched it from your dump that night I was up there with you divvyin' on that Paulson job. I—"

"You're — you're *crazy*, Barry," cried Farron, backing away with a white face and sagging jaw. "Hell, kid, you want to commit *murder*? . . . You're crazy. You've lost your head. Get calm. Think it over . . . *Put that gun down!*"

"I'll put it down after I put a bullet through your head with it. I'll wipe it off careful an' I'll put it in your hand. You don't make no more bums of kids, Farron. You don't send no more of 'em to the hot seat, like you did Tom. You wanted ten grand, huh? When I couldn't dig up ten grand, an' Scotty's pals did, you made Tom take the rap for the killin'. No, you don't make no more bums out of kids nor send 'em to the chair. You don't make no

more good mothers get sick an' die, you dirty rat. You—"

"Don't, Barry—*don't*," cried Artie Farron, and he cringed back as abjectly as any culprit he had ever defended when the verdict had gone against him.

"Sure I will," said Barry O'Leary, and his eyes were gloating with righteous vengeance. "I planned this one better 'n you ever planned any crooked trial. No one seen me come here. I got your own gun. I breeze with my stuff later an' leave no ev'dence. No ev'dence but them Bluementhal di'monds. They're in the bureau drawer, all right—*your* bureau drawer. Sol give 'em to me when I told him the set-up. Yeah, that's the set-up. You took Sol's wife, an' don't think he don't know it, an' he was glad to help me. . . . Me? . . . Listen—"

Farron got to his knees, now, and clasped his hands as if in prayer. His voice was an hysterical shriek:

"Barry—"

But Barry O'Leary threatened to slap him across the cheek with the barrel of the automatic:

"Shut up, you louse, an' take your medicine. . . . Me? . . . I don't figure to go out like a rat the way you are. I'm goin' out like a *man*, I hope. I'm gonna have this bum knee operated on, an' I'm gonna get it done with *clean* money. My mom left a grand insurance, an' I got over four yards left after I give her a decent funeral. Them four yards will fix up my knee, an' after that I'm gonna enlist. I'm goin' in the marines or the army or the navy, whatever'll take me first, an' I'm gonna fight them Japs or them Germans like hell an' I'm gonna step in the way of a honest bullet when I get in a jam an' I see there ain't no chance. . . . That's what *I'm* gonna do, you louse. That's—"

But Arthur Francis Xavier Farron, The Big Mouthpiece, was on both elbows as well as knees, groveling at Barry's feet. His voice was an insane cry of a tortured soul, but he made one of the best pleas that he had ever made in his life. For ten minutes, fifteen, twenty, Barry O'Leary let him go on and on and on.

Then he calmly stepped over and put a bullet through his brain!

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Conscience and Crime

HE was a small man, with a small head and small hands, and small, closely spaced eyes. He shambled into the lobby of the second-rate hotel, carrying a travel-beaten cardboard valise, and he hurriedly asked the desk clerk for a room, any room. He signed the register in a scrawling hand, and the weary clerk gave him the large key to room 506. An elderly bell-hop approached the small stranger and won-

dered whether he could help with the valise. No, no help. The stranger clutched the valise tightly and made his way furtively to his room.

Once inside room 506, the small man seemed to relax. The tension was off. At least there would be one night of rest before he started again in the morning. He opened the valise to see if the money was really there. It was. Then he hurriedly undressed and got into bed. He was about to turn out the lights when his hard eyes fell upon a Bible, a Gideon Bible. Taking the Bible from its place on the night table, the man began to read, just at any old place, and somehow he began to see the error of his ways. From that moment on, he was a changing man, and it was not long thereafter that he gave himself up to the proper authorities, after making full restitution.

This story may sound impossible and silly, but it's happened time and time again, all because the Gideons saw to it that most hotels in this country should have a Bible in every room.

Actually, it is hard to walk into any hotel room in all of the United States without finding a Gideon Bible resting on the bed table, or on the bureau, or tucked away in the desk drawer. Even in such distant hostelries as Sheppard's in Cairo, St. David's in Jerusalem, or the Race View in Tasmania, a Gideon Bible

will be found in every room, giving every weary traveler an opportunity for a moment's contemplation.

It was in the autumn of the year 1898 that John H. Nicholson, a commercial traveler of Janesville, Wisconsin, happened upon a hotel in Boscobel, Wisconsin, where, with two other men, he suddenly decided that all hotels, all over the world, should have Bibles in every room to give those transients of this world an opportunity to study again the heritage of our civilization. From that time, the Gideons have been in existence, a society dedicated to the simple proposition that a hotel room is the loneliest place in the world, and that a Bible often is the one bit of cheer that is desperately needed.

The Gideons have been very successful. For they have brought renewed faith to thousands of lost people. Their work is even more important today, when they have undertaken the tremendous task of supplying spiritual surcease to many thousands of our men fighting overseas. They are keeping the arsenal of faith well-stocked, and they are sending out Bibles at the rate of 300,000 a month to our armed forces, khaki Testaments for soldiers, blue testaments for sailors, and Testaments bound in white for nurses and chaplains. For this is a war of the spirit, too.

Hanged for Murder, but Lived to See His "Victim!"

THE aspects of justice have altered considerably since 1723, when a certain young Londoner was convicted and hanged for a murder he had not committed. In those days, circumstantial evidence was sufficient to send anybody to the gibbet; but professional executioners were not always as efficient as they are today. And thereby hangs one of the most fascinatingly gruesome tales of English jurisprudence, for the falsely condemned killer survived the gallows and later met the man he had been accused of murdering!

It was in the year 1723 that a young apprentice sail-maker in London obtained leave to spend the Christmas holidays with his mother, who lived in Kent. The youthful sailmaker made the trip on foot, stopping overnight in the town of Deal, where he lodged at a public inn.

It so happened that the inn was crowded, and the landlady had no accommodations available except a room already occupied by her uncle, a bo'sun of a merchant ship recently arrived from India. "My uncle will share his bed

with you if you're willing," she informed the young apprentice.

He willingly accepted this offer, and slept that night with the seafaring man. Some time after midnight, however, the youthful traveler experienced some intestinal trouble and awakened his bed-fellow to inquire the way to the inn's garden.

The bo'sun directed him to go through the kitchen. "But you may have trouble opening the door to the yard, for the latch is out of order. Here, take my pocket knife so you can lift the latch and get out without noise."

Thanking the older man, the young apprentice accepted the knife and wended his way to the garden. He remained about thirty minutes, then returned to the bedroom. Here he was somewhat surprised to find that the landlady's uncle had arisen, dressed and departed. The apprentice thought little of this, though. He got back in bed, slept until dawn and then went on his own journey to visit his mother, arriving home about noon.

MEANTIME the landlady of the inn began preparing breakfast for her various guests, and was a trifle annoyed when her uncle failed to come to the table. She went into his room, discovered both tenants gone, and was shocked to see the bed stained with blood. Moreover, a search for her seafaring uncle proved fruitless. He had vanished!

Alarmed, she summoned the authorities, who found a trail of blood leading from the bedchamber, through the inn to the outer street, thence to the waterfront. Suspicion naturally fell upon the young apprentice sailmaker. A warrant was issued for his arrest, and he was taken in custody at his mother's house at Kent, charged with murdering the bo'sun and throwing the body into the sea.

When he was examined and searched, bloodstains were found on his clothing. In addition, his pocket was discovered to contain a knife and a curious silver coin—both of which the landlady swore belonged to her missing uncle.

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The youth protested his innocence. He must have stained his clothes with blood when he got back into bed after returning from the garden, he said. As for the knife, he had borrowed it from the seafaring man. The coin he could not explain at all—and because of that fact, he was tried and convicted of murder. The judge was so positive that the young man was a killer that the execution was ordered to take place within three days.

On the appointed day the unlucky apprentice was taken to a gallows tree and "strung up." The hangman, however, was anything but an expert at his trade—and in those early times, platforms and drops had not been invented. The condemned youth was so tall that his toes touched the ground as he was hanged.

SOME of his friends surrounded the gallows and managed to afford support to the dangling youngster. Later, after he had been cut down, they quickly took him away in a coffin and subsequently revived him—restoring the innocent youth to life, as you might say. In any event the youth recovered, little the worse for his harrowing ordeal.

Shortly thereafter he was urged to quit the country. Heeding this advice, he disguised himself slightly, changed his name and journeyed secretly to Portsmouth, where he enlisted as a seaman on a man-of-war which sailed for the other side of the world that night.

Years passed. The fugitive's good conduct and praiseworthy efforts soon earned him various promotions, until finally he had gained the rating of master's mate in the Royal Navy. Then his ship dropped anchor in the West Indies, and he was transferred to another naval vessel which had just arrived, short-handed, from distant waters.

Going aboard his new man-of-war, the erstwhile apprentice was astounded to meet that very same bo'sun for whose murder he had been tried, condemned and abortively hanged! After the passage of five long years, the one-time bed-fellows met again!

Explanations quickly followed. The

landlady's uncle related that he had been suffering from a pain during his visit to Deal five years ago; and, after the custom of those days, had gone to a barber for relief—barbers acting as surgeons at that time. The barber had "bled" the bo'sun, then bandaged the wound. The bo'sun, however, had not seen fit to tell his niece, the landlady of the inn, about this. He had not wanted to worry her concerning a minor illness.

Then, on the night of presumed murder, the bandage had come off the bo'sun's arm. He discovered that he was bleeding profusely, and decided to go across the street to the barber for a fresh bandage. This decision, incidentally, was reached while the young apprentice sailmaker was out in the garden.

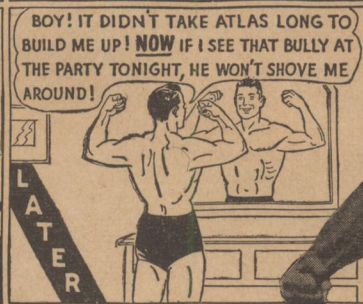
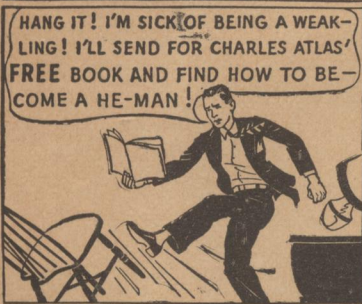
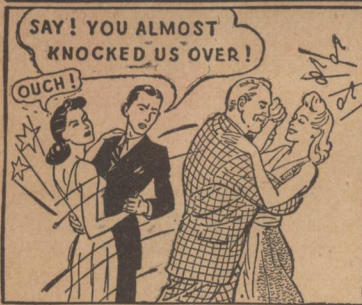
WHAT happened after that was very simply explained, considering the customs of the period. The bo'sun, dressing and going outdoors, was set upon by a "press gang." These press gangs were members of the Royal Navy who wandered through various city lanes to capture unwary citizens and "impress" them into naval service, a perfectly legal form of kidnaping at the time. To shanghai a man and force him to enlist for sea duty was an every-day occurrence.

This had befallen the landlady's uncle. He was dragged down to the waterfront, leaving a trail of blood behind him to mark his reluctant progress. He was bundled aboard a boat which was ready to embark at that moment. The ship, a war frigate, sailed away instantly; and the bo'sun never bothered to write home concerning the experience.

As for the knife which the youthful apprentice had borrowed, the bo'sun never gave it a second thought. And the curious silver coin that had condemned the young man to death—well, that, too, was easily explained. The coin had lodged between two blades of the pocket-knife, later coming loose and lodging in the youngster's pocket.

But if it had not been for fate—plus an inexperienced hangman—the law would have executed an innocent man!

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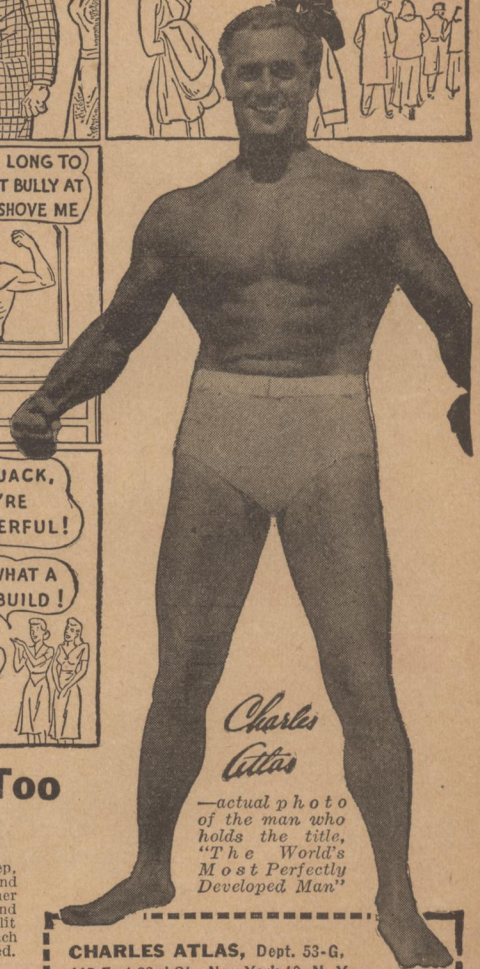
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