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ONE SKULL TOO MANY

by Jonathan Craig

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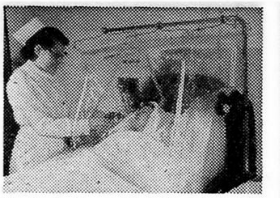

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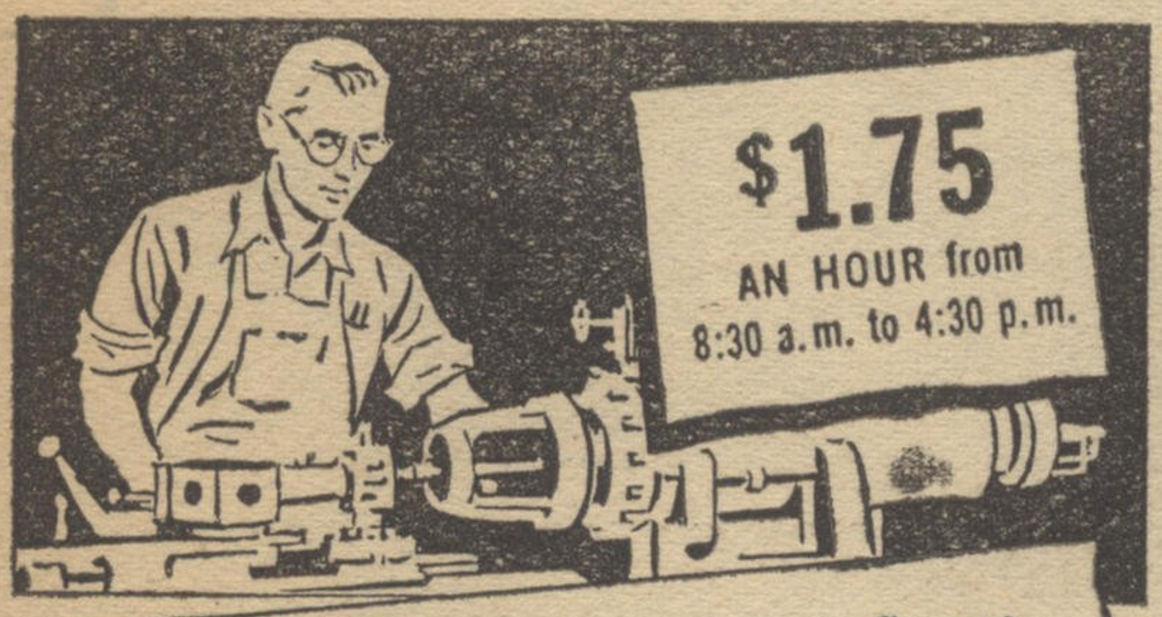

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Volume 2 **December, 1953** **Number 6**

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by Seven Anderton **40**

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- **THE BODY IN MY BED** ..... **William F. Schwartz 108**
  I'd taken her to my apartment, all right — but why had I killed her?
- **AN ASSIST FROM ARCHIBALD** ..... **David James 115**
  Police departments on both sides of the pond will be relieved that this is fiction.

Next Issue on Sale January 1st

Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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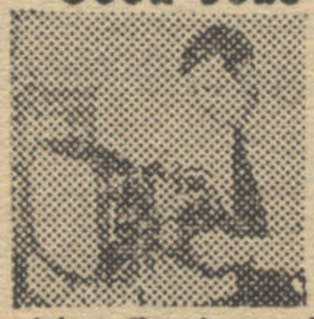

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Homicide Bureau
Miami Police Department

to Thomas Thursday

1. FINGERPRINTS HAVE A LONG MEMORY

YOU CAN get the full force of this case if you identify yourself as Louis Zommer. The year is 1916, the place New York City, and you have just reached the age of 19. You are broke, can't find a job, and walking down the street, dejected. Coming toward you is a woman, with a pocketbook swinging from her right arm. Impulsively, and without thinking, you rush up and snatch it.

You start to run but your luck is lousy. Within less than a block you run head-on into a police officer.

The purse contained exactly $1.50. You are brought to trial and the judge gives you a five-year term in Auburn prison. Your percentage, figured from the net profit angle, is less than .30 per annum; your crime not only fails to pay, but it takes a power-dive into bankruptcy. But you, Louis Zommer, have to pay five years of your life for your petty theft.

Then one day, after you have spent two and a half years in prison, you hear that your mother is seriously ill. You ask the prison authorities for permission to visit her, just for an hour, and of course under escort. But the authorities rule that you cannot go to see your mother. So, for the next few days you brood; then you suddenly get the chance to escape, and you do so. It is easy; no guard is even looking, and when you get outside the prison walls you walk five miles to the nearest railroad and hook a freight-train ride back to New York City. You find your mother is much better and you are glad, but your happiness is short-lived when you realize you are an escaped prisoner. Nevertheless, you feel that you have served two and one-half years, which you consider enough for stealing $1.50, and you decide to stay free and go straight. Your mother gives you a few dollars and you buy a cheap suit and then get a job as a bus boy in a cafeteria, at a salary of $6.00 per week.

After working for a month, you manage to save enough out of your meagre wages to buy a ticket to Bridgeport, Conn., where you work as a porter in a barbershop, and then learned the trade. But all the time you are looking over your shoulder for a detective's long arm to cut short your liberty. You are not detected as an escapee, and remain in that one shop for 18 years,

[*Turn To Page* 8]

Would You Fly to the Moon If You Had the Chance?

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keeping your character-nose clean, and saving enough to buy out the business.

Time, the great memory-killer, gives you a little brain-ease from your prison escape episode, but at that the haunting fear of arrest continues to bedevil you. You sell your shop in 1927 and migrate to Miami, Florida, and go to work in a hotel barbershop. Several times a day you are called to the suites of wealthy guests for barbering services. You note many valuable gems in full view but not once are you tempted to steal them. Besides the fact that you are not tempted, you also know that if you do steal again, and fingerprinted, a check of your prints with the FBI will reveal that you are an escapee from Auburn prison.

Meantime, you are married and have two fine children, a boy and a girl. You have never told your wife of your prison record and, naturally, your kids think you are a wonderful father. So the memory of your youthful indiscretion fades dimmer and dimmer into the closet of closed accounts and you have practically bolted the door against your long-ago mistake. More, you have reached the age of 56, and have gone straight for 36 years, have won the respect of your community and also your little family.

UNFORTUNATELY, you have a small weakness; you like an occasional glass of beer, but it does not like you. Now and then you will drink a bottle in the privacy of your home and then go to bed. You know that, if you go out, you might do something that you shouldn't. Even one glass of beer effects you in a strange manner.

Comes the day, however, when you break your own rule and have a few beers at a bar with an old friend. You bid the friend goodbye and tell him you are going home to bed. You mean it but, instead, you become dizzy and sit down on the street curb, with head in your hands. Two officers in a squad car come along and spot you. After a few sniffs of your breath the police assumed you are a bit intoxicated and bring you to Headquarters. You are charged with being drunk, but not disorderly; you are mugged and fingerprinted in their Bureau of Criminal Identification.

You appear in Municipal Court the next morning, where you are released after being tagged with a small fine. But you begin to worry. They now have your prints and you wonder if they still have your prints of 36 years ago. It seems incredible and fantastic that fingerprints have such a long memory, but you find that they do. So you begin to brood; your wife and children notice it and then you think it best to tell them the whole story of what happened to you when you were just 19 years old. The story does not in any way change your wife's love for you and that makes you feel a little better.

Comes now the ghost of the long ago, just as you always felt that it would. Detectives Raulerson and Newton, of the Miami P.D., receive an order from our detective chief to arrest you, and they do so at your house. Strangely, you seem relieved of a great fear, like a terrible burden has been lifted from your heart.

You are placed in the Miami city jail and told you must await extradition to New York on the charge of escaping from Auburn prison 36 years ago. And then things begin to pop in your favor. Your story makes the front pages of every newspaper in the land and even in England; soon you learn that there are many fine folk in the world who want to help you. Some even wire Governor Dewey, of New York, and many wire and phone Governor Warren, of Florida, in your behalf.

Both governors began a prompt investigation of your case. The N. Y. Parole Board is instructed to get full information in reference to your deportment and general character during the last 36 years. Your freedom hangs on the accuracy of this information;

[*Turn To Page* 124]

Now! The Amazing Facts about

BALDNESS

...AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

The following facts are brought to the attention of the public because of a widespread belief that nothing can be done about hair loss. This belief has no basis in medical fact. Worse, it has condemned many men and women to needless baldness by their neglect to treat certain accepted causes of hair loss.

There are six principal types of hair loss, or *alopecia*, as it is known in medical terms:

1. Alopecia from diseases of the scalp
2. Alopecia from other diseases or from an improper functioning of the body
3. Alopecia of the aged (senile baldness)
4. Alopecia areata (loss of hair in patches)
5. Alopecia of the young (premature baldness)
6. Alopecia at birth (congenital baldness)

Senile, premature and congenital alopecia cannot be helped by anything now known to modern science. Alopecia from improper functioning of the body requires the advice and treatment of your family physician.

BUT MANY MEDICAL AUTHORITIES NOW BELIEVE A SPECIFIC SCALP DISEASE IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF HAIR LOSS.

This disease is called Seborrhea and can be broadly classified into two clinical forms with the following symptoms:

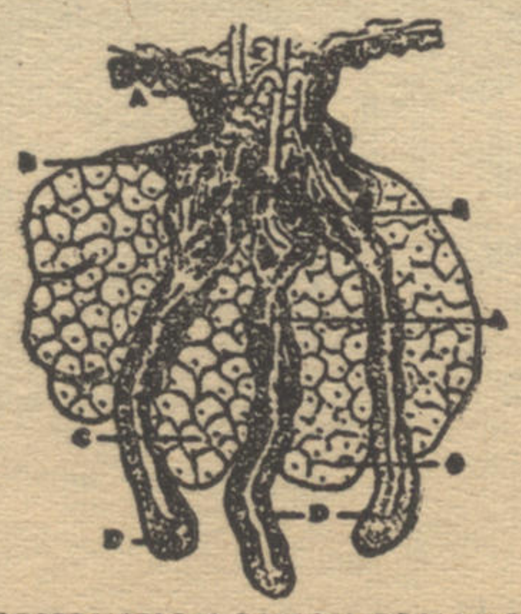
a. ***DRY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair is dry, lifeless, and without gloss. A dry flaky dandruff is usually present with accompanying itchiness. Hair loss is considerable and increases with the progress of this disease.

b. ***OILY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair and scalp are oily and greasy. The hair is slightly sticky to the touch and has a tendency to mat together. Dandruff takes the form of heavy scales. Scalp is usually itchy. Hair loss is severe with baldness as the end result.

Many doctors agree that to NEGLECT these symptoms of DRY and OILY SEBORRHEA is to INVITE BALDNESS.

Seborrhea is believed to be caused by three germ organisms — staphylococcus albus, pityrosporum ovale, and acnes bacillus.

These germs attack the sebaceous gland causing an abnormal working of this fat gland. The hair follicle, completely surrounded by the enlarged diseased sebaceous gland, then begins to atrophy. The hair produced becomes smaller and smaller until the hair follicle dies. Baldness is the inevitable result. (See illustration.)



DESTRUCTION OF HAIR FOLLICLES
Caused By Seborrhea

A — Dead hairs; B — Hair-destroying bacteria; C — Hypertrophied sebaceous glands; D — Atrophic follicles.

But seborrhea can be controlled, particularly in its early stages. The three germ organisms believed to cause seborrhea, can and should be eliminated before they destroy your normal hair growth.

A post-war development, Comate Medicinal Formula kills these three germ organisms on contact. Proof of Comate's germ-killing properties has been demonstrated in laboratory tests recently conducted by one of the leading testing laboratories in America. (Complete report on file and copies are available on request.)

When used as directed, Comate Medicinal Formula controls seborrhea—stimulates the flow of blood to the scalp—helps stop scalp itch and burn—improves the appearance of your hair and scalp—helps STOP HAIR LOSS due to seborrhea. Your hair looks more attractive and alive.

You may safely follow the example of thousands who first were skeptical, then curious, and finally decided to avail themselves of Comate Medicinal Formula.

A Few of the Many Grateful Expressions By Users of Comate Medicinal Formula

"My hair was coming out for years and I tried everything. Nothing stopped it until I tried Comate. Now my hair has stopped coming out. It looks so much thicker. My friends have noticed my hair and they all say it looks so much better." —Mrs. R.E.J., Stevenson, Ala.

"Your hair formula got rid of my dandruff; my head does not itch any more. I think it is the best of all of the formulas I have used."—E.E., Hamilton, Ohio.

"Your formula is everything you claim it to be and the first 10 days trial freed me of a very bad case of dry seborrhea." —J.E.M., Long Beach, Calif.

"I do want to say that just within five days I have obtained a great improvement in my hair. I do want to thank you and the Comate Laboratories for producing such a wonderful and amazing formula."—M.M., Johnstown, Pa.

"I have found almost instant relief. My itching has stopped with one application."—J.N., Stockton, Calif.

"My hair looks thicker, not falling out like it used to. Will not be without Comate in the house."—R.W., Lonsdale, R. I.

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Today these benefits are available to you just as they were to these sincere men and women when they first read about Comate. If your hair is thinning, over-dry or over-oily—if you are troubled with dandruff with increasing hair loss—you may well be guided by the laboratory tests and the experience of thousands of grateful men and women.

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I said, "Hello, Carol." She gasped and dropped the shovel.

Why had Jeff Harper suddenly taken a high-dive from the window of his hotel? What was the meaning of the headless corpse which had finally been traced to the same hotel? Jeff's brother was sure Jeff had been murdered; that's why he hired me to snoop around—but how could you get around the fact that someone had seen Jeff jump?

ONE SKULL TOO MANY

Novelet Of Midnight Murder

by Jonathan Craig

HE GLANCED about my office as if he couldn't believe what I'd just told him.

Not that I could blame him. When you're sitting in the back booth of a dive like the *Cameo,* and tell a prospective client it's your office, and that you take your business calls on the pay phone next to the bar, it has a tendency to throw him.

"And this is your, ah, base of operations?" he asked.

I nodded, and held up two fingers to the bartender. "I like it this way," I said; "no overhead."

He finished his inventory of the

Cameo and leaned back against the booth cushions to take one of me. He was a big guy. Not fat; just big all over. He was all of fifty, but there was no gray in his crew-cut black hair, and his pink jowls were as smooth as if they'd never known a razor. He had the kind of look you get when you're born with a lot of nickels and keep adding to them as you go along.

He'd called me on the bar phone half an hour ago, said his name was Walter Harper, and that he wanted to see me immediately. I'd told him where to find me.

He cleared his throat. "Judge Storm referred me to you," he said. "He thinks very highly of you, Mr. Logan. He told me you were the best private detective in the business." He waited, to see how well I took compliments, I guess. I took it dead-pan.

"I worked with him a few times when he was a criminal lawyer," I said.

"Yes; so he told me. Well, I suppose the first thing to do is come to terms."

I shook my head. "Not quite; first, you tell me what you want done."

The bartender brought two beers, placed one in front of each of us, and went back to the bar. Other than the bartender and two drunks at the street end of the bar, Harper and I had the place to ourselves.

He took a sip of his beer, put the glass down carefully, and frowned at it. "I'll put it bluntly," he said. "I'm not satisfied with the way the police are handling the investigation of my brother's death." He glanced up at me. "You're familiar with the case, of course?"

I thought a moment. "I remember reading something in the newspaper about a man named Harper committing suicide," I said. "Jeff Harper, I think it was. That your brother?"

"Yes. But it *wasn't* suicide, Logan. The police seem determined to write it off that way, but I know damn well it wasn't."

I took a sip of my own beer. "If I remember correctly, he was supposed to have jumped out of a window."

"Not Jeff; he wasn't the type." Harper studied me narrowly. "That's why I want to hire you, Logan; I think Jeff was murdered."

I got a cigarette going. "You tell the police that?"

"Of course. They laughed at me."

"You got anything concrete? The homicide boys in this town are better than most. If you gave them a good reason for thinking it wasn't suicide, they'd—"

He made an impatient gesture. "No, I haven't got any proof, if that's what you mean. But I *know;* I'm damned well positive of it."

I waited.

"Jeff was killed a week ago," he went on. "They found him on the pavement beneath his fifth floor hotel window. The police prowled around a little, but that's all. The coroner's jury was a mockery." He lifted his glass and drained it in two deep swallows.

"And you want me to make another investigation?" I said.

"Of course I do. I was very fond of my brother, Mr. Logan. I think there's been foul play, and I'm determined to see that justice is done." He moistened his lips. "Do you want the job or don't you?"

I FINISHED my beer and signaled the bartender again.

"Well?" he asked.

"Why not? It's legitimate. If the police ruled out the possibility of murder, then you're probably wasting your money. But that's up to you. And there's one thing I'd like you to get straight, Mr. Harper. . ."

He frowned. "What's that?"

"Once I start to work, I'll stay with it. I don't report to a client every time I change my shirt, or stop off to have a beer. If I take the case, I'll be able to use all the information you can give me—but I'll have to handle the investigation exactly the way I want to handle it. That means no interference

from you." I grinned a little to take the edge off it. "You can understand why that's necessary, I think."

He shrugged. "You can work with a Ouija board for all I care, Logan. I'm interested only in final results."

The bartender brought our second round of beer, and took away the empty glasses.

"I'll do the best I can," I said. "It'll cost you fifty a day, plus expenses. And expenses include mileage on my car." I sampled the new beer. "And of course there's the retainer; a couple hundred ought to do it."

He took out his wallet and counted off ten twenties and pushed them across the booth table toward me. He did it as negligently as if he were giving someone a nickel for a newspaper.

"That puts me on the payroll," I said. "Now fill me in on your brother Jeff. Everything. Bad habits, people who might have wanted him dead; things like that."

He took out a cigar, stripped the cellophane off it, and worried it around in his mouth without lighting it.

"As I told you," Harper said, "I was very fond of him. He was twenty years younger than I, but that only served to make us more like father and son than like brothers. We were the only children, and our parents died when Jeff was hardly more than a baby." He glanced at me questioningly. "But maybe none of this is important..."

"Everything's important," I said. "Go on."

"Well, Jeff was always something of a problem. I got him out of a lot of scrapes, most of them due to liquor and women."

"Most of them are," I said.

"Yes. Well, even though I strongly disapproved of many of the things he did, we never had words between us until he told me he was going to marry Gloria Hanson." He paused. "A little tramp if there ever was one."

"Before or after their marriage?"

"Both; but even more so afterward. Jeff must either have been blind, or the most tolerant man I ever heard of. Gloria seemed to have some hypnotic power over him. Why, you couldn't go out to their place any time of the day or night without finding at least one strange guy hanging around."

I took a final drag on my cigarette and rubbed it out in a tray. "You said you were sure Jeff was murdered," I reminded him. "Why?"

He hunched his big body closer to me and lowered his voice. "I think Gloria murdered him," he said. "Either personally, or she had it done."

"Divorce is safer," I said.

"But not as profitable," he said. "There was a twenty-thousand-dollar policy on his life, and it had been in force long enough so that death by suicide wouldn't have voided it." He leaned even closer to me. "But that isn't all. The night before he died, Jeff phoned me. He sounded excited, almost the way he used to when he was a kid and something very important had happened. He said he was in a position to repay some money I'd loaned him. He sounded really happy, for the first time in months."

I MADE WET rings with the bottom of my glass. "How much money?" I asked.

"Six thousand dollars. I loaned it to him about a year ago. He needed it badly at the time, he said. I was glad to help him out, of course, and I never thought much more about it. But the point, Logan, is that Jeff sounded as if he'd made a real killing of some kind. He said he didn't want to talk about it over the phone, but that everything was going to be all right from now on. He indicated that paying his debt to me was only one of the obligations he was going to meet the next day. We made an appointment for lunch that day—and then I received the news that he was dead."

"I see," I said. "And you haven't any idea of exactly how much money he'd come into, or where he got it?"

He shook his head. "None. Except,

of course, that it must have been a considerable amount."

"All right," I said. "We can assume motive on the part of his wife. Now, how about enemies?"

"There were a lot of them," he said; "frankly, my brother had a talent for trouble."

"Anyone in particular? Anyone you think might go so far as to murder him?"

He mulled it over a moment. "Well, there are a couple who *might* be capable of it." He shook his head and smiled at me grimly. "But Gloria is the one, Mr. Logan; I'm convinced of it."

"Tell me about the others," I said.

He drank a little of his beer. "One of them is Mel Lambert. He and Gloria were going around together before Gloria met Jeff." He shrugged. "You know how it is. Jeff had some money at that time, and Lambert didn't. Anyhow, Gloria threw Lambert over for Jeff. Lambert took it pretty hard, and he never seemed to get over it; he tried every way he knew to break up the marriage. About two weeks ago he and Jeff met on the street and had a pretty bad fight. Jeff beat him up."

"Who else, besides this Lambert?"

"A man named Wayne Edwards. Somehow Edwards got the idea Jeff was playing around with his wife."

"Was he?"

"You can't ever be certain about a thing like that, but I don't think he was. This Edwards is a bottle baby; when he's drinking he can get some weird ideas. He's an ex-fighter, and he's always looking for an excuse to throw his weight around. But, even so, I don't think he'd—" He broke off suddenly and lifted his beer.

I took out my notebook and got him to give me a few facts and figures, including the addresses of everyone he'd mentioned. Then I put the two hundred dollars in my billfold, finished my beer, and stood up.

Harper glanced at me, and then back at his glass. I hesitated a moment, wondering whether it would do any good to probe him further about his suspicion of Gloria Harper. Probably not. I had the impression he was holding something back. And there was one thing for sure. If he did have any good reason for suspecting Gloria, then he must have an even better one for keeping it to himself.

Maybe it was worth thinking about; maybe not.

"You know," Harper said, "I think I'll stay here a while. I could use a few drinks. Maybe more than a few."

"Good idea," I said. "Me, I'm going to work."

I CAME OUT of the *Cameo* and stood on the sidewalk a moment while my eyes became accustomed to the bright glare of the sunlight. It was a beautiful day, with enough breeze to give the girls a little trouble with their skirts. I watched a redhead walk past with so many bundles in her arms that she couldn't do much about the breeze. She glared at me, and I sighed and walked over to my battered Plymouth. I didn't feel much like working. But then I seldom did.

I eased the Plymouth into the mid-afternoon traffic and headed for the Third Precinct.

Detective-Sergeant George McJanet was the only plainclothes officer on duty in the detective bureau, but he was the one I got along with best, anyhow. There were plenty of wise boys on the other side of the law who figured McJanet was the nearest thing to a one-man police force they ever wanted to see. He was scientific when he had to be, tough when he wanted to be, and shrewd all the time.

He glanced up at me and groaned. "Not again," he said.

I sat down on the straight-backed chair next to his green metal desk and grinned at him. "I'm glad to see you, too," I told him.

"Damn it, Steve, you spend more time here now than when you were on the Force," he said. His head was abnormally long and narrow, and his dark eyes peered out gloomily from

beneath a single shaggy eyebrow that stretched the width of his face. He was even taller than I was, but I would have given eight to five that he didn't weigh over one-fifty sopping wet with a Police Positive in each hand.

"You handle the Jeff Harper case?" I asked.

"Case? What case? The guy took a jump, that's all."

"I've got a client who disagrees with you."

"That so? Who?"

"Walter Harper. Jeff's brother."

"Uh-huh. He was around, trying to give us a bad time; to hell with him."

"All right. To hell with him. What can you give me on it?"

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. His deep-set eyes looked pained and moist, as if he were on the verge of tears.

"This Jeff Harper was a real heller," he said in his dry, toneless voice. "A real heller. He was a fast man with a buck or a babe or a bottle. No record, but we'd called him down a few times for D and O. Seemed to be a pretty handy guy with his fists, too."

"But the jump. You're sure it was a Brodie?"

"Positive. He had a lot of troubles —that we know. Wife trouble, money trouble, the works. He had quite a bit of property—including the hotel where he suicided and a bunch of cabins of some kind—but he couldn't get up the mortgage money. The old story."

"Anybody see him jump?"

McJanet laughed. It sounded like someone raking up dead leaves.

"Yeah," he said. "It just so happens they did. A guy named Charlie Dillon. He's the desk clerk at the Lenida Hotel, where Harper took his dive; he was just coming to work when he looked up and saw Harper climb out and do his stuff."

"Anyone else?"

"No other witnesses. But the public stenographer at the Lenida saw Harper not long before he did it. He told her he was going to take care of all his troubles—or something like that. She didn't remember exactly what it was he said, but it was something to that effect. Anyhow, he was half drunk at the time, and she was busy. She didn't pay much attention; later, of course, it began to make some sense."

I got up. "You meet Harper's wife?"

For the first time his eyes seemed to come alive. "I met her," he said. "I've seen a lot worse in the movies." He made a soft sound in his throat. "It's all there, and two hundred proof."

I turned toward the door. "Thanks, George."

"Yeah. And don't hurry back."

2

THE HARPER residence was on Wister Street, just off Maple, in a neighborhood that averaged about three homes to the block. I parked the Plymouth and went up the long winding flagstone walk to the front porch. Long before I reached the porch I could hear dance music. A trumpet man with a shaky high register was hitting screamers against a hard-riding riff by the rest of the brass section, and the drummer was apparently determined to see how much wood a crash cymbal would take before it buckled.

I rapped on the frame of the screen door, and waited, and after a while I could hear a man's steps approaching.

He was about my height, but heavier, especially at the shoulders. He had on a blue-and-white gaucho shirt, pale blue slacks, and white buck loafers. The sun had darkened his face and lightened his hair to almost the same color, and if looks had been money he'd have been set for life.

He raised an eyebrow at me.

"Mrs. Gloria Harper home?" I asked.

"Maybe; who are you?"

I told him. He chewed on his lip a moment, then shrugged and opened the screen.

I followed him through a small foyer and into the living room.

The girl who sat cross-legged on the floor in front of the portable record player might have been nineteen or twenty, but she was not over that. She had blue eyes and blue-black hair and a face like an angel. She was wearing the briefest shorts and halter I had ever seen, taut wisps of some shimmering white material against a body even more tanned than her friend's.

She shifted her position slightly, and turned down the volume on the record player a little, but she made no move to get up.

The man sank down in an easy chair and gave me a quick once-over. "This guy says he's a private detective, Gloria," he said to the girl. "He wants to talk to you." He said it as if it were a hell of a good joke.

There was a coaster on the floor near her with a tall glass on it. She reached for the glass without looking at it, sipped at it thoughtfully, and put it back. She didn't say anything.

"My name's Steve Logan, Mrs. Harper," I said. I glanced at the big guy in the chair and then back at her. "I wonder if this could be private?"

"Listen, fella," the man said. "You can damn well—"

"Shut up, Mel," the girl said. She had a voice to go with the body, soft and warm and vibrant. Any woman who can tell a man to shut up, and still keep her voice musical, has got something.

She took another sip of her drink and studied me over the top of the glass. She had incredibly long eyelashes, which probably made her blue eyes seem darker than they really were.

"What did you want to see me about?" she asked.

I glanced at the man again.

She laughed and held her glass out toward him. "This needs freshening up, Mel. And make one for Mr. Logan while you're at it."

He muttered something under his breath, but he took the glass and strode off toward the rear of the house.

IN MY BUSINESS, telling the truth sometimes makes for a nice change of pace. I didn't think this was one of the times.

"I've been retained by the insurance company to make a supplemental check on your husband's death, Mrs. Harper," I told her. What with the bop trumpet and the abbreviated man-bait she was wearing, condolences would have been ridiculous; she was the most unmournful widow I ever expected to meet.

"Another investigation? But there's already been one. And then the police, they—"

I nodded. "I know, and I'm sorry I have to bother you again. The other man apparently didn't do quite the job he was paid for."

She'd stopped smiling, and now the blue eyes had become just a little annoyed.

I asked her a few routine questions, not that I thought they'd buy me anything, and then I threw the bombshell.

"We have reason to think your husband came into considerable money just before his death, Mrs. Harper," I said. "What can you tell me about that?"

Either she was genuinely surprised, or I could start counting acting ability among her other great gifts. She didn't say anything, but her lovely face changed expression at least four times, and every one of the expressions looked like the real thing.

She kept her eyes on me while she leaned forward slowly and snapped off the record player. From out in the kitchen I could hear the muffled sounds of drinks being made.

She moistened her lips with the tip of a pink tongue. "I—I don't understand," she said.

I moved a little closer to her. "Money," I said softly. "A lot of it."

And now, finally, she got to her feet and tilted her head back to look up at me. She didn't reach my shoulder. Up close like this, I noticed a sweet, clean scent. It was definitely not perfume.

"Someone lied," she said. "There was no money, Mr. Logan." She went through the lip-moistening business again. "Who told you that?"

I smiled at her. "If true, that would put quite a different face on things, wouldn't it?" I said.

"What are you getting at?"

"Maybe nothing," I said. The drink-mixing sounds out in the kitchen had stopped. "I take it, then, that your husband said nothing about any money..."

She shook her head.

"How does it happen that he was at the Lenida Hotel?"

"I've answered that before."

"Not for me."

The blue eyes were slightly narrowed now, and there were tiny hot fires behind them. "He stayed there often," she said. "He—we owned it, you know."

"Yes. He stayed there when you two were feuding—is that it?"

SHE CAME up to her full height, but she still didn't reach my shoulder. "I don't think I like you," she said. It was just a statement; there wasn't any emotion behind it.

"I'm just working at a job," I said. "Is that the reason he stayed at the Lenida?"

She put her hands on her hips and arched her back, and the suggestion of a halter grew dangerously taut. "That's the reason he *pretended* to go there," she said. "I think he had better reasons."

"Such as?"

"There are a lot of rooms there," she said. "And there are a lot of girls in this town. Jeff had the staff bullied so much that they'd cover for him."

"That's if they had anything to cover," I said.

She didn't say anything.

I was thinking about the ex-fighter that Walter Harper had told me about—the one who thought Jeff Harper might have been playing around with his wife. I fumbled around in my memory a few seconds before I could come up with the name. Wayne Edwards; that was it.

"Anybody in particular you had in mind?" I asked. "Somebody like, say, Wayne Edwards' wife?"

It had been only a wild try, but I knew I'd hit a nerve. For just an instant. Then the expression of controlled annoyance was back again.

"When was the last time you saw your husband alive?" I asked.

She hesitated a moment. Then, "He killed himself last Tuesday morning, a few minutes after ten. I hadn't seen him since Monday afternoon."

The big guy in the gaucho shirt and heavy sun tan came back into the room, carrying three drinks on a small tray. He passed the tray to Gloria and me, settled back down in the easy chair, and gave me a stare that was somewhere between amusement and contempt.

"Mrs. Harper called you Mel," I said. "Would you be Mel Lambert?"

"That's right. What about it?" He was grinning now; I was giving him a lot of kicks. And I was also remembering that he was the joker who had tried to break up Jeff and Gloria Harper's marriage—or at least he was according to Jeff's brother Walter.

I searched the handsome face for marks of a fight. There were none. But then two weeks was long enough for marks to heal. "How'd you get along with Mr. Harper, Lambert?" I asked.

He stopped grinning. "What's that to you?"

"Mr. Logan is from the insurance company, Mel," Gloria Harper said.

"I don't give a damn where he's from," Lambert said.

Gloria shrugged and tasted her drink. I did the same, and then put it down on a cocktail table. "I hear you and Harper had a little trouble," I said.

He moved to the edge of his chair, put his drink down on the floor. He grasped the arms of the chair, his body rigid, and for a moment it was a toss-up whether he'd jump me.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

He looked tough, and he probably was tough, and he was spoiling for trouble. I wondered why I'd gotten such a rise out of him. This was more reaction than my statement had called for. I could let it drop, and be nowhere. Or I could tap him again and see what happened.

"I hear he beat hell out of you," I said pleasantly.

That got to him. He was on his feet and in front of me in one fast, fluid movement.

"Mel!" Gloria said. "For Lord's sake!"

"Keep out of this," he said. He put his hand on my chest and pushed, gently but firmly. I took a step backward. He was grinning again, having a ball for himself.

I grinned back at him. "What was the fight about, Lambert?" I asked.

He stepped close and put his hand flat against my chest again. His grin was wider now. I had a mental picture of him as a little boy, baiting the other kids into fights with this same pushing routine. With a bully-boy like Lambert, nine-tenths of the fun was in making the other guy swing first. Then, whatever happened after that, Lambert could feel self-righteous and justified.

I REACHED up and clamped my fingers around his wrist and squeezed. I put the pressure on fast, watching the sadistic anticipation drain out of his face—then disbelief—then the slowly building pain in his eyes and the sweat that broke out on his brown face.

"Be good, Lambert," I told him. "Nobody has to get hurt."

He couldn't believe what was happening to him. He stared down at my fingers on his wrist and at the swelling, darkening hand he had pushed me with—and suddenly he got it.

He balled his free hand into a fist and threw it at my face. I jerked on his wrist just enough to throw him off balance, and his fist grazed by my left ear.

"Be good," I said again.

Gloria Harper yelped and tried to get between us.

Lambert's toe arced up toward my shin, and at the same time he tried to elbow me in the throat.

I got my shin and throat out of the way and chopped a short left to his jaw. I hadn't exactly pulled it, but I hadn't tried for a kayo, either. He staggered, but he didn't go down. He caught me with a left hook just behind my ear that hurt plenty but wasn't too damaging; and then I figured things had gone far enough. I put my shoulder behind a six-inch chop that dropped him flat on his face.

But he still wasn't out. He rolled over, got to his hands and knees, and slowly pushed himself back to his feet. He stood there glaring at me, but I could tell that glaring was all he was going to do, at least that was all he was going to do right now. Later, it might be a different story. I'd seen kill-fever in men's eyes often enough to know it when I saw it. And I was looking at it right now.

"Get out of here!" Gloria yelled. "Get out, before I call the police!"

Mel Lambert called me something, so softly I could scarcely hear it. I walked over to him. "How was that again?" I asked.

He tried to say it again, but he was so choked with anger that he couldn't get the words out.

I turned my back on him and walked past Gloria toward the door. She was breathing rapidly. In her get-up, rapid breathing was something to see. Her blue eyes seemed almost black now and her lips were drawn back from small white teeth. It would have made most women look ugly.

With Gloria Harper, it was just another expression.

"Get out of here!" she yelled again. She called me the same thing Lambert had called me, but she had no trouble at all in saying it distinctly.

I grinned at her. "Sorry to bust up the party," I said. "Maybe some other time. . ."

She called me the name again and took a short step toward me. She was as feminine as they come, and about half my weight, but I would have been willing to bet the Plymouth that she was thinking very seriously of tangling with me. It was an intriguing thought.

I left the room and went through the foyer to the front door.

No hits, no runs, and only the Lord knew how many errors.

3

THE LENIDA Hotel had once been a ritz suburban place that turned up its nose at the hotels downtown. But not any more; now it was just another hotel.

I parked in front of it and got a cigarette going while I looked it over.

It was a nine-story affair, faced with field stone and setting about a hundred yards back from the street. It was the only building of any size within half a mile, and scattered around it in an irregular oval were about two dozen small stone bungalows. Each of the bungalows had an adjoining two-car garage, and none of them was closer than fifty yards to the hotel proper or to one another. The grass around them didn't look as if it had been mowed recently, and in a few places it didn't look as if it had been mowed at all.

There was a horseshoe-shaped gravel drive from the street to the entrance, but I decided I needed to stretch my legs a bit. I got out of the Plymouth, threw my cigarette away, and crunched through the loose gravel to the entrance without meeting anyone or seeing anyone around any of the bungalows.

The man behind the desk was about forty, a little shorter than I, and built like a fire hydrant. His dark blue worsted jacket had creases sharp enough to cut bread with and his wavy salt-and-pepper hair had been combed with a wide-tooth comb and parted exactly in the middle. I doubted if he'd ever won any beauty prizes, but he had a grin that made up for it.

He said good afternoon in a way that made you know he'd been waiting all his life for just this moment.

"You Charlie Dillon?" I asked.

"Yes, sir?"

I took out my wallet and showed him the photostat of my license. "My name's Logan," I said; "you got time to answer a few questions for me?"

"Of course, Mr. Logan." The smile was still there, but his eyes were a little careful now. I glanced about the lobby. There were a couple of bellhops on a bench near the elevators, but that was all.

"It's about Jeff Harper," I said. "I understand you saw him jump."

He nodded.

"He stayed here the night before—is that right?"

"Yes."

"What time did he get here?"

"About four in the afternoon."

"Did you talk to him?"

"Just the usual pleasantries when I gave him his key, that's all."

"He mention anything about money?"

His eyebrows raised almost imperceptibly. "Money?"

"Money he'd come into suddenly," I said. "A lot of it."

Dillon shook his head. "Mr. Harper was hardly the type to confide in his employees about something like that."

"I understand he was about to lose

this place and the bungalows," I said.

He was studying the knot in my tie. "I wouldn't know about that, sir," he said.

I grinned at Charlie Dillon and he grinned back at me. A couple of very shrewd operators. "If he owned the hotel, and he came here often, then he probably kept one of the rooms on a permanent basis," I said. I glanced at him questioningly.

"That's right," he said. "509."

I ran my eyes over the pigeonholes in back of him until I located the one with 509 above it. The key was there. "I'll take a look at it," I said.

A little of his smile went away. "The regular police have already—"

"I'll take a look at it," I said again.

Several slow seconds passed while a little more of Charlie Dillon's smile went away. Then he shrugged, got the smile back on, and reached for the room key.

NUMBER 509 was a two-room suite with an outsize bath and a dressing room. I spent an hour in it, and it bought me absolutely nothing. I hadn't really expected it to, of course, but sometimes the regular police—when they're sure they have a clear case of suicide—aren't quite so thorough as they usually are.

I sat down on the side of the bed, stared at the Gideon Bible, and reviewed everyone I'd talked to and everything they'd told me. That didn't buy me anything, either. No matter what tangent my thoughts took, they always twisted back to Gloria Harper. If she'd been the original beneficiary of the policy Walter Harper had mentioned, and that policy had been in force long enough so that suicide wouldn't void its payment, then Harper must have married her when she was very young indeed.

The place behind my ear where Mel Lambert had tagged me in our little fracas was beginning to throb, and I felt kindly disposed toward a good jolt of something a little stronger than I'd had so far today.

I opened the door and stepped into the corridor, and as I did so the toe of my left shoe caught under the carpet-runner in the corridor. I closed the door behind me, and ran the sole of my shoe along the edge of the carpet, figuring I might save someone else from tripping the way I'd done and possibly taking a header into the opposite wall.

There was a tiny lump beneath the thin, worn carpeting.

I reached down and folded the carpet back. At first I thought the small glittering object that lay half buried in the grime was the setting from a ring. But when I lifted it, I found it was glass. Molded glass. Modeled in the form of a woman's head and shoulders and bust.

The whole thing was no more than a quarter of an inch long. The glass below the bust indicated that there had been more to the figure. I got down on my hands and knees and blew some of the dust away. There was a small quantity of broken glass ground into the grime, crushed beneath someone's foot. The rest of the object, though, had been protected because it had been lying in the space between two of the ancient boards beneath the carpeting.

I smoothed the carpeting back down and took the object to the window at the end of the corridor. It was small, but it was beautifully done. By squinting, and holding it close to one eye, I was able to make out that the girl's eyes were closed and her lips slightly parted.

And suddenly it came to me that I had seen an identical glass figure somewhere before. I recognized those closed eyes and parted lips just as surely as I would have recognized the Mona Lisa.

But where?

I took an envelope from my inside jacket pocket, tucked the figure into it and walked back to the door of Jeff Harper's room, trying my damndest to remember where I'd seen that first glass lady.

I stood looking down at the place where I'd found it. The police had searched Harper's room, but they would hardly have searched the corridor just outside it.

Of course I couldn't be positive that Harper himself had dropped it, but the odds seemed pretty good. The glass object, to roll under the carpeting at the spot where I'd found it, could not have been dropped elsewhere than in Harper's room. If someone walking along the corridor had dropped it, it might have rolled to the edge of the runner—but it would not have then rolled back *under* the runner.

And the glass had not been grimy. What dust had been on it when I picked it up had come off on my fingers. That would indicate that it hadn't been there long. If it *had* been there long, it would have acquired a thin film of scum.

AND NOW, abruptly, I remembered where I had seen the little lady's twin.

Sully Boardman's place. The place where you could buy anything from a drink to heroin to a blonde to a hired gun. You could go there alone, or with a girl, and watch incredible films; or you could, if you made arrangements beforehand, watch the same girls do their stuff in the flesh. You could sip pre-World War 1 absinthe and look at one of the world's greatest collections of pornographic photographs, or you could drink bourbon and gamble for any stakes you liked.

And if you happened to prefer a mixed drink, you were welcome to take home the stir rod as a souvenir. The stir rod would be in the form of an exquisite little mermaid with an elongated tail, made entirely of crystal glass.

That was why I hadn't recognized the stir rod from the first: the part of the girl that made her a mermaid had been broken off.

I walked to the elevator and pushed the Down button.

Back in the lobby again, I went over to the row of pay phones against the wall and shut myself into the one nearest Charlie Dillon's desk. I watched Charlie making entries in a ledger of some kind while I fished in my pockets for my address book, in which I had long ago written down Sully Boardman's unlisted phone number. Nobody but Sully was permitted to answer that phone. If he was in, I meant to go over there. But if he wasn't, then I had better things to do than hang around his place waiting for him.

I dialed the number. Sully answered on the fourth ring.

"Yeah?" he said. His voice was soft, almost a whisper.

"Steve Logan, Sully," I said. "Stick around there; I'm on my way over to see you."

He made a sound that, with Sully Boardman, passed for a laugh. "Business or pleasure?" he asked.

"Business," I said, and hung up.

I opened the door and started to step out. Then I discovered I'd dropped my address book and I stooped down to pick it up. When I raised up and started out of the booth again, I almost collided with a blonde girl who had apparently just stepped out of the booth next to mine.

I mumbled an apology; she smiled forgivingly, and then I did a double take. She was only a couple inches shorter than I—which made her a good six feet tall—but she was beautiful, and so perfectly-proportioned that it made a guy glad there was so much of her.

I watched her move away across the lobby, and then I let my breath out slowly and crossed to the desk.

Charlie Dillon's smile was waiting for me. He took the key, put it in its pigeonhole, and smoothed back his salt-and-pepper hair.

"Any luck, Mr. Logan?" he asked pleasantly.

I shook my head. "Afraid not." I took out my pack of cigarettes and offered him one.

"Not while I'm on duty, thanks," he said.

I lit one for myself and sucked the smoke down deep in my lungs, and did a little rapid thinking. "You have a public stenographer here, I think."

"Yes. Mrs. Edwards." He nodded toward the far side of the lobby. "Over there."

I said thanks and started back across the lobby in the direction he had indicated.

THERE WAS no name on the frosted glass door. Just *Public Stenographer*, and, below that in smaller letters, *Notary Public*. I opened the door and stepped inside.

There was only one person in the small office, but she filled it beautifully. She was the same lovely Amazon I'd almost bumped into when I came out of the phone booth.

She glanced up at me and smiled. She had turned around from her desk to take something from one of the filing cabinets behind her, and her skirt was up about six inches above her knees. She pushed her skirt down, without being fussy about it, and swung around to face me. "May I help you?" she asked.

"Maybe," I said. I sat down on the chair at the end of her desk and ground out my cigarette in a large copper tray. After I'd showed her my license, told her who I was and why I was here, I said, "This won't take long, Mrs. Edwards." I made it friendly. "Just a check on a few items."

"Of course," she said. "What would you like to know?"

"You talked to Mr. Harper shortly before his death, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Can you remember the conversation in detail?"

"I'm afraid not. I passed Mr. Harper in the lobby. He said something to me, but he was—well, drunk. I couldn't make out what it was. I started to move on, and then he said something about his having troubles, and that he was going to take care of them." She paused. "I'm afraid that's it."

I nodded. "How was his mood? I mean, was he despondent—or did you get the impression that he might have found a way to solve his financial worries?"

She pushed a stray strand of honey-blonde hair back from her forehead. "He didn't seem so much despondent as he did bitter, Mr. Logan."

"Bitter?"

"Yes." She looked away from me, her face grave. "I've felt just awful ever since it happened. I can't help thinking that if I'd only made sure someone stayed with him... I—"

"You couldn't have anticipated suicide, Mrs. Edwards," I said. "There's no point in feeling responsible; none at all."

Her desk held a phone and a photograph, and nothing else. The photograph was of a man about thirty, with a flattened nose and heavy, scar-laced eyebrows. The retoucher had done a good job, but he hadn't been able to remove the signs of ring warfare altogether.

It should have hit me sooner, of course.

I picked the photograph up and looked at the man's face closely.

"Your husband, Mrs. Edwards?" I asked.

"Yes."

"His first name Wayne?"

"Why, yes... Do you know him?"

"Not personally," I said.

I put the photograph back down. Wayne Edwards. The ex-fighter Walter Harper had told me about. The one who had suspected Jeff Harper of playing around with his wife. It wasn't hard to understand a man's being overly jealous of a beauty like Edwards' wife, and it wasn't hard to understand why Jeff Harper might have wanted to play around with her, either.

"He came very near to winning the middleweight title," she said, and if that wasn't real pride in her voice, then

Mrs. Wayne Edwards was in the same acting league with Gloria Harper.

"He was a mighty good boy," I said. "Mighty good." I got up and moved toward the door. "Is there anything else you can tell me, Mrs. Edwards? Something you've recalled after talking with the regular police, perhaps?"

She shook her head. Her eyes were still on her husband's picture. "No. We talked together only a few seconds."

I said good-by and closed the door behind me and crossed the big lobby to the entrance. I had a date with Sully Boardman.

THE SAPPHIRE INN was just over the city line, about fifteen yards beyond the reach of my friend Sergeant George McJanet and the other city cops. The cops on the other side of the line—the county boys—were a different breed. They knew as much about Sully as McJanet did—which is the reason some of them drove Cadillacs and sent their daughters to eastern finishing schools.

McJanet drove a Ford, and he would have jammed it down Sully Boardman's throat if he'd ever caught Sully on the wrong side of the line.

It was just beginning to get dark when I left my car in the parking area and walked around to the rear entrance of the big roadhouse. There were three stories. Downstairs was for the usual dining and drinking and dancing. The second floor was for gambling only. The top floor was for anything you cared to name, and could pay for.

There was a bruiser on the back door, as there always was. He glowered at me, but he knew me, and apparently he was expecting me. I went past him, through the kitchen, and across the oily sheen of the dance floor to the corridor that led to Sully's office.

A second bruiser opened the door for me, and I went inside.

Sully was short and fat and prematurely gray. He was wearing a flowered sport shirt and dark gray slacks and a white beret with a red monogram at the front.

He motioned me to a chair, sat down behind his desk, and said nothing. Once, when Sully had been operating in the city, several years ago, he'd been hit with a murder indictment. The city cops hadn't framed him; the evidence had simply been overpowering. But I'd done a little afterhours work, and come up with the real murderer. And ever since then I'd been able to write my own ticket with Sully Boardman. He didn't like cops—even private ones—any better than I liked guys who sold what he sold, but we got along.

I didn't spar around. "You know a guy named Jeff Harper, Sully?" I asked.

He bobbed his chin about an inch. "See him recently?"

He smiled wryly. "I saw him. I saw too damn much of him."

"When was this?"

"Day before he knocked himself off. He came in and bought a couple hundred dollars' worth of chips. At the craps table. He ran that up to about a grand, and then he sat in on a poker game with me and some of my friends from Chi and Kansas City. Before he cooled off, he'd taken us for about thirty grand."

I whistled softly.

"Yeah," Sully said. "Tragic, ain't it?" He pursed his lips and stared down at the top of his desk. "Tell me something, Steve. Why would a guy who'd just won thirty grand want to knock himself off?"

He didn't expect any answer to that one. There wasn't any. Thirty grand.... Thirty thousand tax-free dollars. Now, for the first time, I knew for sure that Jeff Harper hadn't *jumped* from any window. And I had a pretty good idea who'd been lying, and who hadn't.

SULLY TOOK a triangular bottle and two glasses from a cabinet behind his desk and filled the glasses to within an inch of the brim. "To lucky poker," he said, and drank. I took five long swallows, and my glass was empty. I put it down and said, "Anybody else been asking about Harper, Sully?"

"No. And naturally I didn't volunteer anything." He laughed. "You know how I feel about the cops in your town."

"Yes," I said. "There's that—and there's also the fact that some of your friends might have wanted their money back."

"Uh-uh. Not those boys. *Me*, it hurt a little, but not them. Their pride was hurt, but that's all."

I let it ride. "Did Harper come out here alone?"

"Yeah. It was just about the first time he did, though. And it was only the second or third time he'd done any gambling out here."

"Did he bring the same girl, usually?"

"Same one all the time." He took a swallow of his drink. "She was one of the biggest blondes I ever laid eyes on. And built? You wouldn't believe it. Gorgeous—but, man, she was big."

I didn't say anything.

"Only time she ever came here without Harper was about three years ago. Carol, her name was. She came out with this other guy just once. I remember it because the guy she was with clipped me hard, too. Not as bad as Harper, but I had to take the whole jolt myself that time. About twelve grand."

I listened to him with half an ear and thought about Mrs. Wayne Edwards. *Carol* Edwards.

"She was really something," Sully went on. "She and this guy took a cab out here and had the driver wait for them. I happened to be standing outside when they finally got through celebrating the guy's luck in the bar, and damned if she didn't tell the cab driver to take them to the Lenida Hotel. I remember *that* because it struck me as funny as hell that she and this guy should go to Harper's own hotel." He shook his head. "But who can ever figure out a dame?"

I got up suddenly.

"What's the rush?" Sully asked. "Stay and have another drink."

"You'll have to give me a rain check," I said, and headed for the door.

4

I STOPPED at the first drug store I came to and went back to the phone booth. I dialed Sergeant George McJanet's home phone number, and cut short his attempt to bawl me out for disturbing him in the middle of his favorite TV show.

"Listen, George," I said. "Was there ever any serious trouble at the Lenida Hotel, that you can think of? I mean—trouble in hotels is usually hushed up by the papers, and if there was, I don't know about it."

He swore a little, but he did it the way a man does when he's thinking at the same time.

"No," he said finally. "Nothing big enough to count."

"You're sure?"

"Hell, yes, I'm— Hey! Wait a minute, Steve. This wasn't *at* the Lenida, you understand, but about three or four years ago we found a body. No head. Just the body. We had a hell of a time getting identification. Finally made it through a tattoo. The guy was registered at the Lenida." His voice grew sharp. "What you got, Steve?"

"I'll let you know," I told him.

"Listen, boy, you get in the Department's hair again, and—"

"Thanks, George," I said, and hung up.

I glanced at my watch. It was a few minutes past eight. Charlie Dillon and Carol Edwards would be off work by now. I looked up Carol's home number on the list Walter Harper had given me.

A man's voice answered. It had a slight wheeze, the way a voice can get when the nose structure has been hammered to a pulp in the ring.

"Mrs. Wayne Edwards, please," I said.

"She isn't home yet," he said. His voice was suspicious, hostile. "Who's this?"

"I'm a guest at the hotel," I said. "Mrs. Edwards is doing some work for me. But it can wait till tomorrow. I—"

"Who's this?" he asked again. His voice had gone up a couple of notches. I felt sorry for the guy; jealousy had apparently pushed him off his rocker—and the hell of it was that he had good reason for that jealousy.

"Just say Ralph Webster called," I said politely, and hung up. There was nothing else I could do.

I walked outside and got into the Plymouth. If Carol Edwards wasn't at home, then she might still be at the hotel. And if not, someone there might know where she was. I turned off at the next intersection and headed for the Lenida.

CHARLIE DILLON wasn't behind the desk when I went through the lobby. I walked to the frosted glass door of the office where I had talked to Carol, but it was locked and there was no light behind it. I crossed to the desk.

Charlie's replacement was a thin, oily character who shut off his smile the moment he found out I didn't want a room.

I asked him if he knew where I could locate Mrs. Edwards.

"I think she's in the basement," he said. "I saw her get the key to the record room a little while ago." He reached for a phone. "I can call her there and ask her to come up, if you like."

"Never mind," I said. "It can wait."

He shrugged. "Whatever you say."

As long as Carol Edwards was in the basement, and I couldn't get down there without attracting suspicion from the desk clerk, the next best thing was to locate Charlie Dillon.

"Is Charlie around?" I asked.

The clerk was becoming a little annoyed. "I think you'll find him in his room."

"What's the number?" I made it casual. For no good reason, I was a little surprised to find that Charlie lived there.

The clerk gestured toward a corridor that angled off from the lobby. "Last door to your left," he said.

I walked down to the end of the corridor and knocked.

Charlie opened the door. He wasn't smiling.

"What the hell..." he began. He tried to close the door. I got my foot in it.

"Your folks taught you better manners than that," I said. "Why the freeze?"

"I'm off duty," he said. "I got better things to do with my own time than talk to shamuses."

I put my shoulder against the door and shoved it open another six inches. It was a mistake. He suddenly released his hold on the door, and I damn near fell on my face. Before I could recover my balance, he'd caught me flush on the mouth with an uppercut.

For a moment I thought I was going down. Charlie must have thought the same thing because he took his time winding up for another crack at me. It was long enough. I slipped to one side and caught him with a left hook. It splatted sickening against his nose. Almost instantly, both nostrils were fountaining blood.

He lunged at me and I gave him another hook in exactly the same place. It made him lose interest for a mo-

ment. I heeled the door shut behind me and stood there staring at him.

"All right, Charlie," I said. "You've proved you're glad to see me. Now tell me why."

He started toward me again, breathing hard through his mouth.

"And tell me something else, Charlie," I said. "Tell me why you lied about seeing Jeff Harper jump out that window."

He was bleeding badly. I was hoping there wasn't any more fight in him.

HE DIVED for me. I chopped the edge of my hand against the back of his neck. But my aim was bad. The sheer weight of his body slammed me against the wall and upended me.

He might not have been much in a straight stand-up fight, but he knew all the tricks when it came to the alley stuff. Once he had me down on the floor with him, he was a hard man to hold.

It lasted a full minute, and except for our ragged breathing, there was hardly any noise at all. When it was over, I knew I'd been in a fight. Charlie was out, but he'd got in his licks. I was almost as bloody as he was. Most of the blood was Charlie's, but not all of it; not by a damn sight.

I got to my feet and looked down at myself. My clothes were in bad shape. I was going to have a tough time operating with my clothes half torn off and soaked with blood. But in a way, coming here to Charlie's room had been a real break. It had opened my eyes a little wider, and a couple of the doubts I'd had were no longer doubts.

I went over Charlie's room fast. They were right there on the dresser, the bankbooks, with a magazine spread out over them, as if Charlie had been looking at them when I interrupted him. There were three of them, for three different banks. The first one showed that Charlie had deposited six thousand dollars three years ago, and nothing since.

The second book carried an entry for fifteen thousand dollars, deposited on the preceeding Friday. The third book showed many small deposits, plus one star entry of four thousand, made about a year before.

I knelt down by Charlie Dillon and slapped his face. Not hard. Just to see if I could rouse him. He was out for a while.

There were two open suitcases lying on the bed, but there was nothing in them. I went to the closet. It was locked, and the lock was one of the few kinds you can't pick in a few seconds. If Charlie had been planning a fast run-out, I'd caught him before he'd had time to pack. There was no clothing of any kind in the room, except for a wrinkled dressing robe over the back of a chair.

Which made it bad. I couldn't do much prowling around in torn, bloody clothes. I didn't have any choice. I stripped off my jacket and shirt and the shoulder rig for my .45, and got into the robe. I put the automatic in the pocket and tied the belt and went to the door. I was going to look eccentric as all hell, wandering around like this, but it was better than rags and blood.

I made sure Charlie was still unconscious, and then I left the room.

I glanced along the corridor outside the room. It was empty. The corridor joined another, smaller one, and at the far end of this second corridor I could see a red Fire Exit bulb.

I went down the fire stairs two at a time. I didn't know my way around, of course, but it stood to reason that if I could prowl around long enough without being caught, I was eventually going to find the record room and Carol Edwards.

It took me almost half an hour. The room had a small sign that read *No Admittance.* But it wasn't locked. There were stacks of registration cards, papers loosely tied with string,

and several shelves of ledger books.

But no Carol Edwards.

There was another door at the far side of the room. I opened it and stood staring down at a flight of steep iron steps. From somewhere down below a little illumination filtered upward. Very little.

I waited, listening. There was no sound. I started down the steps.

I came out in another small room, this one cluttered with rubbish that looked as if it had been there for years. There was an open passageway on the far side of the room.

AT THE END of the passageway, I found Carol Edwards.

She was kneeling beside a stone wall, a shovel in her hands. There was a mound of loose earth near her, and scattered around the edge of a hole in the earth floor were several bones.

Human bones, obviously.

As I watched her, she pushed the shovel into the hole and lifted out a skull.

I moved toward her slowly. Just before I reached her, I got the .45 out of the robe and pushed back the safety. Carol Edwards was a beautiful girl, but she was also a large one; and there was a chance she might have a gun of her own somewhere handy.

I said, "Hello, Carol."

She gasped and dropped the shovel. The skull rolled away across the foor. She turned slowly toward me, one hand flying up to her mouth as if to force back a scream.

I glanced at the skull. There was a hole over the right eye socket. It had the look of a bullethole.

I stepped closer. There were enough bones for only one skeleton, and yet when I looked into the hole I saw another skull.

And now I knew what had happened to the head of the body that George McJanet had told me about. The body of the guy who'd been registered at the Lenida about three years ago.

Carol Edwards got to her feet. She had herself under better control now; the sick fear in her eyes had changed to something else.

"You should have stayed in that phone booth a little longer, Carol," I said. "If you hadn't been in such a hurry to get out, after you overheard me making that call to Sully Boardman, I wouldn't have known you were there. But when you knew I was going to talk to Sully, you realized that it was only a matter of time. You covered nicely when I almost bumped into you, but you must have been operating on pure instinct."

She opened her mouth to say something. Her throat worked, but there were no words.

"You and Charlie Dillon had a pretty good thing here," I said. "You didn't work it often enough to raise suspicion, but when you did work it you really made it pay off. I don't know how many men you and Charlie knocked off, but there were at least three. I just looked at his bankbooks, and there were deposits—big ones—that jibed with the death of a guest here three years ago and with Jeff Harper's. They were for amounts which would have been an even half of what Harper and this other man won out at Sully Boardman's place. You must have split fifty-fifty. There was another deposit, too, and I've got a hunch it's within a few days of the time this pile of bones here became a skeleton."

She still didn't say anything.

I gestured with the gun toward the skull with the bullethole.

"When the police lab checks this guy's teeth, I think they're going to find out that the skull belongs to the body of the guy who got knocked off three years ago. You probably lured him down here somehow. You thought cutting off his head and burying it would prevent identification. It almost did, the cops tell me. Then you and Charlie dumped his body a few blocks from here."

SHE FOUND her voice. "You son of..."

"Sure," I said. "A hundred per cent." I pointed to the skull in the hole. "But when you killed this one here, you felt a little braver; you just buried the whole body. This place was by way of becoming a pretty fair-sized graveyard."

I paused, wondering if she'd bother to deny anything. She didn't.

"You were playing Jeff Harper for all you could get," I went on. "When he came back here after winning thirty thousand dollars out at Sully Boardman's, he called his brother and told him he was going to pay off all his debts. But you didn't know that. Your first big mistake was when you told me Harper was despondent; he was a long way from being despondent. And he must have talked to you." I took a breath. "Who really pushed Harper out that window, Carol? You or Charlie Dillon?"

She took a step toward me. I brought the gun up, and she stopped.

"Yeah," I said, "you and Charlie had a pretty good thing. You tipped him off when one of the guests had some heavy dough. They'd check it in the hotel safe, naturally. All Charlie had to do was make sure there was no duplicate of the receipt he gave them. Then, after you and he had killed them, Charlie got the receipt off them. Who could say they had ever given Charlie the money for the safe? Who could prove either Charlie or you even knew they *had* the money?"

She whirled and grabbed for the shovel. I stepped close and put my foot down on the handle. She sank to her knees and covered her face with her hands, sobbing.

"We'll get the whole story, later," I said. "But right now I've got more than a hunch that *you* pushed Jeff Harper out that window. You're big and strong, and Jeff was too drunk to take care of himself. You probably spent the night with him in his room, and some time during the night he felt like bragging about his winnings at Boardman's place. It would be easy enough for a girl your size to get him near a window and give him that one last shove."

"No, no!" she choked. "I—we—"

"Let's go upstairs, Carol," I said. "When I left your business partner a few minutes ago, he had a couple of big suitcases on the bed. I thought maybe he was planning a run-out. But now I know what the suitcases were for. He was going to bring them down here to carry the bones out in. You'd told him about my call to Sully Boardman, and you two must have figured that if you could get rid of the evidence, there might still be a chance to squirm out of this. You came down here to do the digging, because Charlie couldn't leave the desk until he got off."

I was getting a little nervous. Charlie Dillon wasn't going to sleep forever. Carol looked at me with defeat and admission.

"Come on, Carol," I said. "Let's go upstairs."

Her shoulders slumped. She got to her feet and walked ahead of me as if she were in a dream. She neither spoke nor answered me when I spoke to her. Just as we reached Charlie's room, she began to cry.

She was still crying as I lifted Charlie's phone and called the police.

★

A Hollywood Murder Mystery

THERE WAS BLOOD ON THE SCRIPT

by Hal K. Wells

appears in the November FAMOUS DETECTIVE

Little, inconsequential-seeming details were out of place. Dr. Mahlon Steele, a man of careful precision, noted these inconsistencies; he added them up, and the sum was murder!

FIRST AID FOR MURDER

by Bramley Fox

JOE, THE elevator man, worried what would happen when Dr. Mahlon Steele, the psychiatrist, left the office of his chief, Dr. Hugo Sunderland, and went to the lobby to meet the girl who waited for him.

She sat on the middle bench, her knees together, a black Corday pocketbook on her lap held by her small, white gloved hands. A smart, sleek blond muskrat fur coat was draped over her shoulders. She wore no hat, and that was a blessing, because even the tiniest bit of milliner's fancy would have distracted from the perfect glory of her hair. It was satin-black, and had a sheen like precious metal. Yet, the weight of it bunched loosely and

spreading like two raven's wings on each side of her neck conveyed the illusion of exotic softness. Her skin was clear, and her cosmetics applied lightly in deference to custom—not because her rich red lips needed delineation, or her wide, curiously direct brown eyes needed darkening or accentuation.

She was Lisbeth Steele, Dr. Steele's wife.

Joe answered the call-board when the light flickered, *seven*.

Lisbeth watched the indicator crawl upward, swore to herself in a most unladylike fashion, reset her watch, and rehearsed what she was going to say to her husband.

A moment later she forgot the tongue-lashing she had practiced. "Hello, darling. Been waiting long?"

Dr. Steele took two long, lithe steps toward his wife, put his hand on her arm and squeezed. She felt claimed.

A thin wire-like line of scar extended from his left jaw to the hairline. His left ear had been involved in the same injury that had split open the side of his face, and a bridge of cicatrix attached the earlobe peculiarly to his cheek.

The defect was noticeable, but by no means disfiguring. The dignity in the wide-set amber eyes, the experience and competence declared by the lines etched about the corners of his mouth took attention from the scar.

A plastic, molded left hand looked lifelike and natural until studied carefully. The curved fingers did not move although the wrist flexed and rotated. There was a shell covering three shiny steel prongs that jutted from Dr. Steele's left forearm. With these cleverly-designed metal fingers, Dr. Steele had trained himself to do almost everything a man could do with a normal hand.

Scar, ear-deformity, and artificial left hand had merited the psychiatrist the Purple Heart, a memento of an incident on Saipan when a Japanese mortar shell had exploded near a Battalion Aid Station.

LISBETH made indignant commentary on the plight of being a doctor's wife while Dr. Steele hailed a cab, and directed the driver to take them to a restaurant near Times Square.

She heaved a big sigh and happily turned to her husband, nestling against him. "I finally got you away from that smelly old hospital. Do you realize we haven't been out in weeks? First, I want a big, delicious Martini; and then some salad, jellied consomme, roast lamb with sweet potatoes—"

Mahlon smiled at her possessively. The cab crawled crosstown in heavy traffic and reached Sixth Avenue, south of Forty-second Street, when their driver suddenly exclaimed, "Say, I wonder what's going on over there?"

He pointed to where a crowd was collecting.

"Pull up to the curb; we'll get out here," said Mahlon. The cab stopped. Steele paid the fare and with a guiding hand on Lisbeth's elbow he turned toward the opposite side of the street.

Lisbeth looked annoyed. "But Mal, it's six-thirty. We're going to have to wait in line to get a table."

"Someone may be hurt."

She picked her footing across the cartracks and cobbled road-bed obediently, and they let themselves be sucked into the stream of jostling, morbidly-curious people who wanted a touch of drama to take into the subway with them.

Some of the homeward-hurrying throng, inured to any surprise New York could invent, cast no more than a glance and hopefully held their tokens in their hands, ready for the turnstiles.

"A guy—looks like he's fainted—"

"I saw him come out of the restaurant—"

"Did you see his face?"

"There's a doctor there. Lucky thing—"

Dr. Steele and his wife knew from the snatches of conversation they heard trickiing back through the shoving ranks that there had been some sort of accident.

A big policeman with a sweaty face kept shoving at the horde and was fast losing his patience while assuring all and sundry, "It's nothing folks. Nothing at all...now break this up before I start taking names."

It decidedly was something.

A well-dressed man lay supine on the sidewalk with his brown alpaca top-coat flung loosely about his sprawled limbs. His black felt hat had rolled away from his lax hand; his face was any age but very young or very old, its mouth was open and sagging like a wet paper cup; the skin was purplish and congested.

A thin, ascetic-looking, middle-aged man sat on his heels next to the body and looked very much as though he wished he'd never left his office.

The crowd watched and admired his coolness. The doctor knew exactly what to do. He felt the outstretched wrist for the artery that no longer pulsed. He loosened the collar and belt. He put his thumbs against the victim's lower eye-lids and pulled downward, looking attentively at what he saw.

Then he slipped his hand underneath the coat of the figure, and concentrated. He hardly moved for half a minute.

He changed his hands, impatiently, and a long sigh went up from the crowd, reading the diagnosis from his fixed expression, the professional declaration-of-bad-news-without-words.

He withdrew his hand, stood up a bit creakily, and remained staring at the man with the blue face.

"I'm afraid he's dead, officer," he apologized.

There was a commotion.

A tall, blond, mustached man with yellow pigskin gloves and a black homburg called out, "Say there, anything I can do? I am Dr. Barrett. I was just passing and thought I might be of assistance."

The examiner reached over the heads of some high school kids who ducked, and he shook hands with his colleague. "I'm afraid it's over. Dr. Barrett. I'm Dr. Gordon Roscoe from Cleveland. I happened to be in the telephone booth in the coffee shop, saw the—this fellow grab his chest and go down."

Dr. Barrett flicked a negligent hand. "Embolus, most probably—coronary—maybe a hypertensive stroke—" he surmised, as if he and Dr. Roscoe were talking over the case in a Medical Society meeting, and there was no fascinated crowd, silent now, drinking in every syllable.

The policeman asked respectfully, addressing Dr. Roscoe, "Would you mind, sir, remaining just a while until the ambulance gets here?"

THE LITTLE doctor looked a bit uncomfortable and embarrassed, but with an I'll-see-it-through expression, nodded his acquiescence.

Dr. Barrett tipped his homburg and philosophized, "That's what you get for being a Good Samaritan in New York. By the way, Dr. Roscoe, are you from Western Reserve? I knew some people there in '30..."

They were old friends now. Hardly anybody in the crowd was listening to them—only those who weren't deaf.

Dr. Roscoe smiled quickly. "No. I'm a graduate of Michigan."

His associate demanded politely again, "Sure there's nothing I can do?" It was rhetorical. "Then I'll be getting along." The black homburg disappeared.

An obese woman in a shocking purple dress and wadded cloth coat sneered audibly and spoke aloud. She leaned toward Lisbeth, confidingly. "If they'd have let me take care of him with some old-fashioned spirits of ammonia, he'd still be alive... I saw him when he came out of the door, his face like a pickled beet, tearin' at his collar, hardly seeming to breathe."

"What would you have done with the spirits of ammonia?" inquired Mahlon in a low voice addressed only to her.

She stared at him, the fleshy wattles on her chins shivering, then lifted a condemning eyebrow at Lisbeth. "Why, the old remedy—put a teaspoon in a half a glass of water and push it down his throat..." She sniffed.

Mahlon smiled grimly. "But wouldn't that go down his windpipe, if he were unconscious? Seems to me you might just as well put your hands on a man's throat and choke him as drown him in medicine..."

It hadn't been subtle enough, the pretended attitude of Socratian inquiry. Lisbeth correctly guessed her husband had come near losing his temper.

The fat lady glared at Dr. Steele. "Some people like to give themselves airs," she spat viperishly. "Decent folks don't come to watch a man die for the fun of it, or ridicule their elders, young man."

Lisbeth's bag fell, she was so astonished.

Mahlon's left hand came out of his pocket. There was a flash of metal as he retrieved the bag.

The chins were rippling again.

"The artificial hand doesn't impress me, my boy. I know about you jokers. My brother-in-law was in the war, too. He told me about you left-handers. Every one self-inflicted," she spat. "Shot themselves because they were scared to do their share. Sometimes they got into a little trouble, didn't they, wise guy? And the medics would take off a little more than they bargained for—didn't they?"

She laughed shrilly, her voice traversing the tonal range of white metal slipping on glass. Lisbeth dragged her husband from the harpy.

Making little grieving noises, she pressed Mahlon away from the thinning crowd. "Oh, Mal, how could she!"

With a drawn face, Mahlon thought of a little clearing on a Pacific Island on a dusty June day.

A tent with a big Red Cross on it... A surgical team working furiously inside... The explosion... The wreckage of hopes of a career in surgery that came with the return of consciousness at a base hospital.

Self-inflicted. He sighed, and said quietly, "How about some coffee, honey? Let's go in there." He nodded his head toward the hamburger house.

THE AMBULANCE had not yet arrived, which was not surprising in view of the rush-hour traffic.

Dr. Roscoe and the policeman stood smoking and chatting together. An unleafed newspaper covered the dead man, its pages spread like white shingles on a roof. Most of the crowd had disappeared. The fat lady still held her position, determined to see to it that the dead man was at least given into the hands of those competent to receive him. And now the high school kids forgot their morbid interest, remembered what theatre featured a stage show with Guy Lombardo and drifted off.

Without looking at the harridan, Mahlon and Lisbeth slipped into the steamy coffee house, and looked about for seats. One wall was occupied with the steam table, the opposite with booths. A few tables sat between the stools at the long counter and the booths. Along the back wall was a door with the polite legend, *Ladies Only*, and a four-foot window with a wide ledge on which hands put plates full of the *Special Dinner*. It would always be roast beef.

Near the door there was a telephone in an all-glass enclosure.

A couple evacuated a booth and paid the cashier, a middle-aged man with a tired expression, beetle-browed, pale-skinned. You could almost see the rusting links in the chains that went from his neck to the cash register. He was that tired.

Dr. Steele and Lisbeth started to walk to the empty table, but were

beaten to it by two middle-aged women. They had come in the door behind Mahlon, whispering about, "The horrible thing on the sidewalk".

"Lost by a nose," said Mahlon, smiling at Lisbeth's outraged dignity. "Get on your mark for the next vacant table."

The cashier was sympathetic, "Some people have no bringing up and fewer yet, have any consideration for a fellow creature these days."

Dr. Steele leaned against the counter and shrugged. "You sound as if you've got troubles, too."

Lisbeth sighed. That was the way it always was. Mahlon worked at his trade twenty-four hours a day.

The cashier lifted his shoulders. "Everybody's got troubles. Some got more, some got less." He glanced down the aisle. "Another minute and you'll get the table there, by the lamp," he said.

"How's the place? Doing all right? You look pretty busy," asked Mahlon picking his words out of the air for their casual value.

Sharply, Beetle-brows looked at them. "Who wants to know? You thinking of buying? It's a good spot; the gross take is near two thousand a week with enough net so you make a hundred fifty—two hundred after all expenses including three shifts."

Mahlon laughed, "No, just curious. How's the food?"

He shrugged. "How's the food any place? As good as you can get. Most people don't complain."

He laughed grimly. "Last guy who complained got himself a heart attack he was so excited. Didn't like my coffee, he said." He jerked his head toward the street.

Mahlon looked at him. "The man who fell down on the sidewalk? Did you see him?"

"Did I see him! He slapped his check down on the rubber with a half-a-buck—said the coffee was getting worse and worse every day. All the time he's breathing slow and deep and his eyes are getting tiny, he's so burned up. Must have had a bit more coffee, too, the way he walked on his heels. Say, mister, do those guys know you?"

He pointed down the crowded, humming room. The smell of roasting meat, frying potatoes, and burnt chocolate was heavy in the thick air.

About midway down the restaurant, two men sat opposite each other at a booth. One man in a bright-checked, out-of-season sports-jacket had his back to them. The other, a thin-faced, dark-complexioned man with an extraordinary mouth, thin as a slot, as if it had been cut in his face by a butcher knife, was beckoning to Dr. Steele, bobbing his head in happy recognition.

Lisbeth looked at Mahlon questioningly. She had never seen the man at the table before. Mahlon's face looked thoughtful, calculating, and intense. For a second, the thin scar turned livid as he flushed with some controlled emotion Lisbeth alone could sense. Swiftly, he glanced out of the window where an arch of letters in reverse spelled out *Manny's Restaurant*. The cross-bar of the "A" in "Manny" and half of the capital "R" of "Restaurant" was missing. The evening breeze picked up the corner of the mounded newspaper like a disrespectful and curious child. Both the policeman and the little doctor ran forward at the same moment and restored the paper bier to the corpse. The fat lady stolidly watched. The sneer would have to be chiseled off her face.

MAHLON took a long deep breath and looked deliberately down the restaurant and acknowledged the waving gesticulations of the man at the table as if he accepted a challenge.

If anything, his voice was more casual, more disinterested. He said, "Yes, I remember him. We are old—acquaintances. Does he come here often?"

Unaccountably, Lisbeth's heart began to pound. She was beginning to get a little afraid of... What? She didn't know.

The cashier took a toothpick from a dispenser, used it, and then said in the manner of a man who would like to share a bit of gossip, "I see him a lot. Him and the guy with the noisy jacket... They're friends of the one lying out in the street, and—" he shook his head, "it's funny that with him lying dead out there, that they don't seem interested. After all, they know who he was."

"Oh?" said Dr. Steele.

Lisbeth had the absurd feeling that if she put her hand on his sleeve he would throw it off.

"Something funny going on with those people," said the cashier. "Whenever they come in, it's an act. First the one out there takes a seat at a table, the same booth every time. Then in about ten minutes, the others—"

"What others, aside from those two?" asked Mahlon. He stopped as he saw the expression of suspicion in the eyes of the cashier. "You see, I haven't seen the fellow in five years. I'd like to get an idea whether any more of my—friends come in with him."

The hostile look vanished. "Well, aside from those two, there's the fat lady and a professional guy. Got a little mustache and always wears a homburg. I think he has offices around here somewhere. I see him in the neighborhood a lot."

Dr. Steele's mouth hardened. "That could be Dr. Barrett. Was he out there a few minutes ago, talking to the doctor taking care of the dead man?"

Beetle-brows nodded. He said, "Yeah" over the heads of two pretty girls who had time, as they paid their checks, to exchange stares with Lisbeth that almost twanged with envy.

MAHLON leaned across the counter, his face stern with the effort to remain polite. Lisbeth could see he was consumed with impatience, and breathed easier, thinking she finally knew why he was so overwrought. Naturally! He was just as anxious to get to the theatre as she was.

She nudged him. "Mal, we've only got about an hour—" she began.

"You mean we've got less than fifteen minutes," he said flatly. "Hold everything." The girl had the weird idea that they weren't taking the same language; that suddenly she couldn't understand him and he couldn't understand her. She bit her lip.

Later she remembered that that was the low point in the evening—when Mahlon turned his back on her to interrogate the cashier. Everything got better from then on, but that part was low water.

"What happened tonight? I mean, when the man in the brown coat came in?" he was inquiring.

The cashier shrugged. "The usual funny business. The doctor who is waiting with the cop out there was sitting at the table. The dead guy—he wasn't dead then, of course—went up to the booth and you could just see him politely asking the Doc to change his seat—that he expected guests. Well, the doctor got up, picked up his hat and coat, paid his check, and went into the phone booth."

Mahlon nodded impatiently, "That gave the others a chance to sit down at the table with this fellow...didn't it?"

The black brows lifted again confidingly. "Now that you mention it, that's right. Those two—the heavy guy and the tall skinny one—walked in, and sat down at the table with the fellow in brown. A few minutes later, the fat lady came in, too.

"As usual, he had his three cups of coffee. I've been keeping my eye on him for a couple of weeks now. Don't like the funny business going on in here. What do you think they were up to?" he asked, looking at Dr. Steele with a sidelong glance.

"Murder," said Mahlon, quietly.

The toothpick broke in half. "Murder? I don't get it," he declared a little pathetically, after he'd thought for a moment.

Mahlon smiled ironically. "Now what happened after they all sat down?"

"Are you a detective or something? I don't know. I don't remember, hardly. Nothing at all happened." The cashier was excited and nervous. He fluttered.

"The fellow got up after a while, sore as hell, complaining about the coffee, and sort of wobbled out, like I said— The fat lady was right on his heels. She was mad about something, too. Do you think she killed him?" he whispered conspiratorially, his eyes rolling toward the window.

MAHLON wasn't listening. He drew a slip of paper out of his pocket hastily, and penned a note.

"Lisbeth, if the ambulance gets here, give this to the driver. It'll be the Manhattan City ambulance. This is our territory. The men know my handwriting. Wait for me here."

Lisbeth took the note, a little uncertainly; while she opened the note, Dr. Steele was on his way, striding down the aisle to the table where the two men sat.

Lisbeth read:

Ambulance attendant: Please don't leave until I personally notify you. Am in Manny's Restaurant. Stall if necessary. Thanks.

Dr. M. Steele

Manny cocked his eye at the girl standing straight-shouldered, worriedly reading.

A smart little chicken. He wondered what she'd be like in a bathing suit. Then he remembered the expression on her escort's face when he had said, "Murder," and Manny stopped wondering about her.

Lisbeth gave a little gasp, and started uncertainly forward. The cashier followed her gaze.

"Hey," he said mildly, "I hope he don't start no fight in here."

Mahlon had suddenly grabbed the sleeve of the thin man with the slit mouth and was holding its material twisted painfully about his forearm. It was a static pose for a moment, but then it was over as Dr. Steele released his grip.

Mahlon stared at the pigmented papules following the bluish veins... He looked at the eyes of the two men, their pupils tiny as seeds. Their skin was moist, their faces registered fear. This man Ragon was very much afraid.

The face of the man in the loud checks, who had just been introduced to Mahlon, was no candidate for cosmetics advertising. At some time in its past it seemed as though a mesh screen had been squeezed against it, leaving the skin coarse and pocked. It was twisted into a sneer, which added little to its beauty. His thick fingers built steps and made designs with the sugar cubes out of the bowl on the table, as he said softly, with menace, "'Pull up *my* sleeve, Doc, and I'll break off your other arm and beat you with it eight to the bar." Then he smiled as if they were pals.

Ragon readjusted his sleeve in some confusion, glanced over at his confederate warningly and muttered, "I don't think the Doc scares, Masland."

Mahlon reached out his hand, stared into the eyes of the man in the checked suit and said mildly, "Let's not be heroic, Mr. Masland."

He pointed to the half-dozen soiled cups and saucers and the ashtray, a concentration camp full of dead and dying cigarets. "You've been here waiting for that policeman to leave. Does he know you're both drug addicts? Does he know that a murdered man sat with the two of you less than twenty minutes ago, alive and well?"

Their breaths were hisses.

"OK—OK, Doc, you win," said Masland. "That cop has picked us up before—"

"Your arm, Masland."

The checkered sleeve was withdrawn a few inches. Mahlon examined the brown spots following the veins, narrowed his lips over the numerous sores from the use of unsterile hypodermic needles.

He spoke softly and to the point. "It's been five years, Ragon, since you were my patient at Manhattan City, and you promised you'd go to Lexington, Kentucky, to take the cure at the Government Narcotic Farm. I warned you you'd get into trouble if you didn't. Looks as if you couldn't be in a worse jam."

HE LOOKED at them closely. "Both of you have had a dose of one of the opium derivatives in the past hour. You should be feeling pretty good, pretty confident. Now tell me. Who is the dead man? Who is the stout lady in the purple dress? Where do you get the drug, and why did you call me over, knowing I'd recognize you, Mr. Ragon?" demanded the psychiatrist searchingly.

He went on implacably. "Was it because you are guilty and want to brazen out your fear of being caught—at murder?"

Mr. Ragon held out his twig-like fingers and seemed pleased that they did not tremble. He sipped at his coffee before he answered.

"Dr. Steele, you were good to me when you were a lowly initiate into the mysteries of medicine. And even now, though you are a master of your profession," he was perfectly serious, "and have added mind reading and wrestling to your armamentarium for diagnosis," he was a shade less serious, "you are still good to me. A veritable *Aesculapius*. It's incredible," he sighed.

"In about six hours, hardly more, both Reggie and I will be most unhappy about the death of one Harry Bigard, dope-peddler, blackmailer, ex-convict. Right now we're quite contented that Mr. Bigard is dead, although I didn't kill him. Did you, Reggie?" he asked lazily, the egg-shell white of his eyes flickering at his companion.

Reggie's face grew black. "You damned fool—are you trying to start something? With me!" He seemed astonished that anyone would want to try something—with him.

The curtain-rod of a man opposite him snickered, and looked up again at Dr. Steele. "Reggie's nervous. But not as nervous as he's going to be when he can't have his little needle of consolation. By tomorrow morning we should both be clawing the ceiling, shouldn't we, Reggie? And wishing very much that Mr. Bigard were still alive. Still alive and well, and doing business at his old stand."

"Selling dope here at Manny's?" challenged Mahlon.

"Yes, Dr. Steele. Now, to answer your questions. Mr. Bigard would take sugar labelled with Manny's insignia—" he picked a handful of the paper-covered cubes out of the sugar bowl, "take off the wrappers, cut the cubes, and hollow out their centers. Then he'd put whatever dope he had to sell inside the sugar, wrap the paper on again, and mark one side of the wrapper with an ink mark; a little dot. We'd leave the money in the sugar bowl, and help ourselves to our share."

"And today?"

"Today," said the slitted mouth, closing grimly, "there were no cubes with the little ink marks. Mr. Bigard has raised his price. I'm afraid it made his regular customers very angry."

His fingers moved over the edge of the table like something dug up from a dark cellar and only barely alive.

"Lotte Anderson, that delicate, faun-like, sweet dove of a woman, made some interesting remarks. She didn't like the idea of the rising cost of living. She said it was a shame that Bigard was the kind of a business man that causes inflation in this country. Lotte is a masseuse. She runs a parlor on the West Side. I suspect her clients get

most of their massage at the end of a needle.

"Harry laughed at her. Lotte hates to be contradicted. After he finished his third cup of coffee, he walked out on us. Lotte may have killed him. We haven't looked. Does he have a knife stuck in his back?" he asked sardonically.

Dr. Steele glanced toward the doorway. Lisbeth was biting her thumbnail. He made a mental note to remind her what that act signified. Then he turned back to the two dope addicts.

"No, he was poisoned."

Mahlon reached with his shiny steel fingers. They clamped smoothly over the handle of one of the cups that stood in the middle of the table.

"Has the waiter cleared away his cups yet? Were these the ones he drank from?"

They nodded affirmatively.

MAHLON lined up the cups. There wasn't even the click of metal on china. He stared at the half-moon of muddy residue on the bottom of each cup, and swirled them about, one after the other. Little coffee-browned particles of recrystallized sugar clung to the china.

"Do you know any other of Bigard's regular customers?"

Their faces reflected censure.

"Come now, Dr. Steele. Do you really think we would volunteer names?" asked Ragon, smiling.

Mahlon smiled wryly. He put his forefinger into one of the cups and tasted the dark residue gingerly.

Ragon demanded, "Hey—what's the matter?"

Mahlon was perplexed. He sat bolt upright looking off into space. Finally he said, philosophically, "You never know." Then he asked. "Do either of you take sugar with coffee? Did Bigard, usually?"

"Black, without cream for both of us," said Ragon. "Bigard used three cubes with each cup. He had a sweet tooth. As a matter of fact, he complained about his coffee today. Said it was bitter, didn't he, Reggie?"

Reggie's heavy face indicated agreement.

Mahlon demanded, "Taste this, both of you, you'll be able to recognize it—better than I can, probably."

Wondering, Masland and Ragon dipped their fingertips into the cup, and imitating Mahlon, tasted. They looked at each other and nodded.

"It's morphine," said Ragon.

"Thank you. That cinches it! Don't touch those cups!" ordered Mahlon. Then, he half-ran to the front of the restaurant. A clangor from the street which he recognized immediately, told him the ambulance had finally arrived.

"Lisbeth! Give the driver the note," he shot at his wife and dashed into the phone booth. She ran outside as the ambulance slid to a stop. The woman in purple had disappeared.

Lisbeth intercepted the burly man in white by running out into the street.

He took the note, and looked at her narrowly. "What's this lady?"

He read the note, and projected his lower lip in surprise. As he got out of the cab of the ambulance he winked the whole left side of his face to indicate he'd do what he could.

"Where in hell have you been, driver?" demanded the policeman. "There's a man died of a heart attack and you'll have to get him to the morgue for identification."

"Okay, okay, officer. All the cars were out when the call came through. I got here as soon as I could. Considering traffic, sooner. Now let's see what ails this fellow. Is he dead or is that just your idea?"

The policeman snorted. "The Doc here saw the guy fall down dead... What more do you want?"

The ambulance driver perked his cap to Dr. Roscoe—who was very weary, very patient, and very resigned.

"No offense, Doctor, I gotta make a

report. Will you tell me what happened?"

The policeman raised his eyebrows. "Since when do *you* have to make a report?"

The burly driver stared him down. "New Department of Hospitals regulation. Didn't you know?"

Lisbeth saw Mahlon through the window, in the glassed-in telephone booth. His every gesture communicated violent haste to Lisbeth.

Dr. Roscoe had recited the story three times to the slow-thinking, slow-moving, slow-talking driver before Mahlon came out of Manny's and slipped his hand around Lisbeth's waist.

The driver caught his eye, caught a signal, and suddenly became much more efficient. With the help of the policeman, he unloaded the stretcher-bed, and enlisted some willing assistants from the ranks of the Sunday baseball athletes in the crowd, who enthusiastically lifed Harry Bigard into the back of the ambulance.

"You want to come along, Doc?" asked the driver, speaking to Dr. Roscoe.

The ambulance orderly glanced swiftly to Mahlon, saw no signal, shrugged and got into his seat.

A tiny nugget of sound expanded against the backdrop of swishing tires, shuffling feet, honking horns, and street-voices as a spotlight on a train first seen from a distance in dead of night swells into an avalanche of light.

The sound grew up, acquired dimension. It became strong and threatened every listener. It was the sharp shriek of a police car siren, shouldering traffic out of the way, stopping the breath in men's throats, heart breaking.

Out of the silky dusk the black Buick came. It slid to a halt in front of the radiator of the ambulance.

Lisbeth felt Mahlon pull away, into the depths of the crowd, across the street. The crowd extended tentacles, dragged into itself every passer-by.

FROM THE top step of the entrance to the park, Mahlon and Lisbeth watched.

A heavy man got out of the car. He was tall, and wore civilian clothes. With him were two policemen.

Lisbeth saw the crowd part for the men, saw them stop and talk to the officer who had so patiently waited for the ambulance, saw them question the ambulance driver. Then the man in civilian clothes shook hands with Dr. Roscoe.

A moment or two later, he tipped his hat to the little physician. The man in the black overcoat—and one of the policemen who had come with him walked through the crowd, and entered Manny's Restaurant.

Mahlon laughed like a little boy with a big surprise for his parents.

"Now, darling—watch!"

Lisbeth watched.

She was astonished.

The little doctor had edged through the crowd. He stopped. His coat-tails were held.

He turned and fought. The startled roar of the crowd obscured his hysterical curses, as the second uniformed policeman who had come with the detective flung him to the concrete. The door to the coffee shop burst open and the heavy-set man lunged through the crowd like a swimmer through the surf.

Lisbeth gasped, "Mal! The *Doctor?* Him?"

Mahlon hurried her through the park toward 42nd Street. "Let's get out of here, Lisbeth. Lieutenant Lindquist will be looking for me."

"But what have *you* done?" She stopped dead in her tracks. "Now, Dr. Steele, what have you been up to?"

He grinned at her. "Come on Lisbeth, we're awfully late."

"Not a step until you tell me." She sat down on a bench.

"All right, you nag."

He sat with her, and his arm went over her shoulders.

"If Lotte Anderson," he began, "that fat lady with the overwhelming oral aggression, hadn't thrown me off-balance, I would have realized Dr. Roscoe was a fraud much sooner. He was too good, Lisbeth—just too competent, too assured for that kind of an emergency. Why, I've spent a year in emergency surgery, and you know what my Army experience was; yet I felt shaky when I saw that man lying dead on the street. It was unfamiliar. Out of proper environment. It takes a while to adjust.

"Those gestures *Doctor* Roscoe made—lifting the victim's eyelids, feeling for the pulse and especially his feeling for the heartbeat through the man's shirt was a dead giveaway—no pun intended."

Lisbeth murmured. "My, he must be a cool customer. Imagine how he felt when the doctor—I mean the other one—Dr. Barrett, or whatever his name was, came out and wanted to help!"

Mahlon's eyes narrowed. "Dr. Barrett will stand a little investigating, as will our friend Lotte Anderson, the lady in purple. The policemen have their names. Apparently none of the others knew Roscoe, who must have made his contact with Bigard elsewhere, and resolved to kill him for motives other than that Bigard raised his price of narcotics."

"How do you know Roscoe isn't a drug addict, too?"

Mahlon's hand tightened on her waist as they sat together. "It's not certain as a Pythagorean formula, but it is as sure as anything in psychiatry can be—that an addict would never have used morphine as a weapon to kill!"

Lisbeth nodded dubiously.

MAHLON went on. "I suspected Ragon or Masland, until I discovered that morphine had been used as the poison. There are other bits of evidence which exclude them, too. For example, they had made no effort to get rid of the coffee cups out of which Bigard had been drinking. They had plenty of time to have had the table cleared before I reached it. Furthermore, they were suspicious of each other later, when I accused them of having killed Bigard. No, honey if they shared the crime of using narcotics, of buying them illegally, they would have plotted Bigard's murder together, and they wouldn't have used morphine."

"How about that woman? Didn't the proprietor say she sat in with them?" asked Lisbeth. "Why did you rule her out?"

Mahlon chewed the inside of his cheek. "To tell the truth, I'd like very much to saddle Lotte with a murder charge. But both Manny and the two men recall that she came into the restaurant a while after Bigard had already taken the fatal dose."

Mahlon squinted across Bryant Park. They were in the shadow of the New York Public Library.

"Let's start looking for a cab, honey," he suggested. They began to walk toward the nearest exit.

"What was all that fuss about you telephoning?"

"When I realized that Bigard had been poisoned by morphine, and put together my previously-unconsidered criticism of Roscoe's action, it seemed certain that Roscoe had planted the poisoned sugar cubes. Bigard made a mark in ink on one side of the wrappers to identify those he had previously loaded with drugs. Roscoe put clean, new wrappers on the poisoned cubes, and knowing Bigard's sweet tooth, and also where Bigard usually sat, it was easy for him..."

Mahlon stopped walking, and looked back over his shoulder.

Lisbeth asked, "After he planted the poisoned cubes, Bigard asked him to leave the table, just as he expected. They pretended not to recognize each other naturally. Roscoe dodged into the phone booth to wait for the drug to take effect, and then got out in the street to play 'doctor' in order to fore-

[*Turn To Page* 69]

It just didn't seem right; Bette Calhoun had left neither kith nor kin—in fact, she seemed to appear from out of nowhere. And, to make the confusion even more muddled, there was no trace of almost a quarter of a million dollars she reportedly had had—or the set of diaries she kept.

THE DEADLY DIARY

A "Ware & Pender" Novelet

by Seven Anderton

BEAUTIFUL blonde Bette Calhoun, riddled by bullets fired from a car which promptly sped away, died on the sidewalk at the entrance of a swank apartment house at two-thirty a. m. on a June morning. It was noted in the newspaper accounts that the queen of St. Louis night spots had been rubbed out in true gangland fashion. It was inferred that Bette's death was probably the result of playing fast and loose with too many men of the wrong sort.

Upon reading of Bette's demise, Miss Edna Pender observed that the event was long overdue.

"You shouldn't speak ill of the dead," Grace Mitchell said.

"Nuts," Edna retorted. "She was a bitch; now she's a dead bitch. But she must have salted away a million dollars. I wonder—"

"Forget it, keed," Steve Ware cut in, grinning at her. "That's one batch of boodle you'll never get your little paws into."

"Don't be too sure," she snapped. "And it's time we brought in some dough from somewhere."

"Yeah," Steve chuckled. "Almost a week since we banked that last twenty grand. I'm beginning to worry about pocket money."

Miss Pender ignored that. "*Somebody,*" she said, "must want Bette's killer caught and—"

"In the circles where Bette circulated," Steve interrupted, "they take care of such matters in their own way. You keep my favorite nose out of this."

"Steve is right," Grace Mitchell said. "Bang, bang. No more Bette; let's forget her."

But Edna Pender didn't forget. Moreover, her interest in the Calhoun rub-out increased as the case developed peculiar aspects rapidly and in increasing number.

Bette Calhoun had appeared on the St. Louis scene some five years before her sudden and unlovely death. She stepped into the spotlight as a torch-singer and entertainer in a night spot out in St. Louis County. A vivid, voluptuous and sexy blonde, Bette had sensual beauty of both face and form and an adequate, throaty voice. She flourished like the green bay tree; a

greedy wench and totally minus morals, she craved luxury, pleasure and money. From the start she used her plentiful equipment to get what she wanted—from men. With shrewd calculation she used the best available, transfering her favors promptly when a new prospect offered increased ability and willingness to underwrite her luxuries and pleasures and bestow cash—very, very little of which ever escaped from Bette's clutches. She was adroit at playing one source of revenue against another. But she had finally slipped somehow—and bled out her life on a sidewalk.

When that happened, Big Ed Bladen had already been paying the rent on Bette's luxurious apartment for nearly six months. Her consorts had run the gamut from society playboys and business men with roue inclinations, through mobsters of lesser stature, to culminate with Big Ed. Bette Calhoun had done well by herself—by her standards.

Big Ed had been a mob punk during the final years of the prohibition era, gaining experience in the ways of iniquity. Tough but smooth and with native ability for organization, Bladen was shrewd—and ruthless when need be. He had prospered and gained considerable power in various fields of vice and crime as the years passed. Then a new administration came into power, and such opportunities as Big Ed had never hoped for came his way. Having been an important wheel in the machine in its heyday, Big Ed in short order became a power in politics. From then on, with corruption firmly in the saddle, Big Ed really prospered. As he raked in the graft, he began to cloak himself with respectability by entering fields of legitimate business. He also owned the *Blue Lantern,* a night club with a back room which was never approached by police. His vice and numbers operations were carried on by underlings. He was said to be boss of the reorganizing St. Louis setup of the Syndicate; Big Ed had reached the top of the world for his ilk.

SO BETTE CALHOUN had moved into his love nest—to die nastily at its portal. When Bette was cut down, Big Ed was in Chicago attending a banquet. The first peculiar aspect of the affair to come to the attention of Edna Pender was the fact that Big Ed, although he paid for a lavish and expensive funeral for Bette, did not return to attend; the next was that no relative of the slain beauty appeared to claim the wealth she was said to have amassed—this despite the fact that her having died intestate was widely published. Pondering these facts, Miss Pender got in touch by telephone with Paul Grimes, a reporter who had covered the police beat for more than a decade.

A standing feud between Edna Pender and Lieutenant Dan Polcher of the St. Louis Police Department made it difficult for her to obtain information directly from headquarters. But Paul Grimes was one of the motley host of fast and true friends that Miss Pender had made while battling her way up from shanty-town waif to partnership with Steve Ware, in a highly successful firm of private investigators.

Edna was waiting in a rear booth in Chris. Stathias' dining room when the reporter joined her.

"How did you get into this mess?" Grimes asked as he slid onto the bench to face her across the table. "I'd begun to think nobody gives a damn about what happened to the Calhoun wren."

"That's not the only odd angle," she replied. "And I'm not on the case—just trying to get a client." She gave him a steady look. "Do you know a prospect?"

He shook his head.

"I'd take most any retainer," she said.

He grinned. "I get you," he said. "Dan Polcher would certainly blast if he caught you out on a limb—poking into murder on your own. What have you smelled that's got you itching on this one?"

She told him, then added, "I've had

what Steve calls my underground working, but not much luck yet. What do you know that I don't?"

"This shenanigan is screwier than a dimestore watch," Grimes declared; "I've found out a lot more than I can publish. Strictly off the record, so treat what I tell you accordingly. This is how it stacks up. So far as the law has been able to learn, Bette Calhoun never existed until she popped up here five years ago. No record of her anywhere, no relatives; not a thing can be found to show where she came from or why. All the men she ever met—all the people she worked with or was close to have been grilled well done. No results. Also—and this has the G-boys pawing the air—no boodle. No bank account; no safe-deposit box that they've been able to locate. And try to tie this one. The thrush pulled down not less than a thousand a week from bistros where she strutted her stuff, not to mention the lettuce she gathered elsewhere—and has never filed an income tax return."

"The hell!" Edna exclaimed.

"Nor paid any taxes of any kind—or had a social security card," Grimes went on. "Doesn't sound possible, but it's fact. Some tails are going to be set afire because of that, but it won't worry Bette any more—if it ever did."

"But she must have piled up heavy swag," Miss Pender said.

"And how; evidence of that keeps piling up. For instance, there is already proof that her suckers gave her more than two hundred thousand in jewelry. But rings and ear-rings on her body, and other jewelry found in her apartment, assayed less than fifteen grand. So far, they have traced six mink coats that were delivered to her at the expense of boy friends; they have all vanished. How or where the wench turned all that loot into cash, nobody knows—but she must have done it."

"And all of it—could be nearly a million—is somewhere," Edna said. "Must be a deposit box."

"If so," Grimes declared, "it's damn well hidden. Don't think the boys are not working—even on the post office. And our Bette never spent anything; she kept men around to do that. And the wads of cash she induced them to put in her hot little hand—me-o-my!"

"What else is mysterious?" Miss Pender asked.

"That's all that's turned up."

"Any leads to the killer?"

"Not a one."

"What about Big Ed Bladen?"

"Still in Chicago. Word is that he'll be back tomorrow.

"Hm-m," Edna said. "Well, I invited you to dinner."

Grimes chuckled. "I've been wondering about that."

"I told Chris not to bother us until I rang the bell," she said and reached for the wall button.

GRACE MITCHELL was seated at her desk and Steve Ware was sitting on the corner of it when Miss Pender entered the suite just before ten the following morning. Both of them glanced meaningly at the reception-room clock.

"I've been busy," Edna told them. "Have you? And I'll tell you a few things you may need to know—because we're going to get into this Calhoun frolic. Remember that nobody else is to know that we know these things unless and until they become public."

She then told them what she had learned from Paul Grimes the previous evening. "And we are going to have a client soon," she concluded.

Steve Ware shook his head slowly. "Who and why?" he asked. "You certainly pick the damndest things to monkey with."

"Try supposing," Edna snapped, "that Bette Calhoun put away even half a million—without ever paying a penny of income tax. Then suppose we can locate that loot and turn it over to the treasury people. Our cut would be—"

"You try supposing that Dan Pol-

cher catches you meddling in—" Steve began.

"We'll have a client when Big Ed Bladen gets back to town," she chopped him off.

"Want to bet?" Steve asked.

"I'll dig up another, if I can't land Bladen," Edna retorted, "and today. Time is wasting. I'm not sure we haven't a right to hunt that money without a client. I'll ask Murray Holden about that if Big Ed won't retain us. There is—"

She was interrupted by the opening of the corridor door. Paul Grimes entered. "Morning, people," the reporter said. "Some more monkey business you might like to know about in the Calhoun caper, Edna."

"Spill it," Miss Pender said. "You know Steve and Grace."

"You know Eula Easter?" Grimes asked.

Edna sniffed. "And how. Damn it, why didn't I think of her before. Right name is Lizzie Borkowski; she's been Bette Calhoun's maid for three or four years. What about her?"

"Several whats. One; she bought a new Caddy convertible this morning. Two; she hired a chauffeur. Three; she's on a shopping spree this morning—buying purple and fine linen in gobs. Four; the G-boys may have her by now—asking where she got all the dough."

"Hell," Miss Pender said flatly.

Grimes nodded. "Could be Eula got to the Calhoun cache."

"I'll talk to the wench," Edna said, "as soon as I can get to her. Can you find out for me what she tells the cops?"

"Maybe."

"Anything else?"

"Big Ed is back. Polcher has had him at Clark Street; that's all that's new. I'll keep in touch."

The reporter left and Miss Pender picked up the telephone on Grace Mitchell's desk. After talking to a secretary, she got Clyde Worth on the wire. Worth was an attorney who had

thus far evaded disbarment as chief mouthpiece for the district mobs.

"Worth," she said, "this is Edna Pender. I want to talk to Big Ed Bladen. I'm calling you because I've no time to waste on runarounds. I'm at my office, and if you and Big Ed are smart, he'll call me here—right away... Oh, I might have known; tell him to get on the phone."

She winked at Steve Ware, then waited half a minute before a voice barked over the wire, "This is Bladen. What the hell do you want?"

"We can turn up Bette Calhoun's killer," Miss Pender said, "if you will—"

"You keep your ugly nose out of this," Bladen snarled; "the police are working on it and—"

"That satisfies you?" Edna interrupted.

"Yes, and—"

"Could it be," Edna cut back in, "that Bette got too expensive, or you got tired of her and arranged—" She winced from the clatter in her ear as the phone at the other end was slammed down.

STEVE CHUCKLED and Miss Pender frowned. "No client," he said.

"I'm going over to Murray Holden's office," Edna snapped. "Then I'll hunt up Lizzie Borkowski. Grace, if Paul Grimes calls or shows up, get whatever he has. Steve, how about trying to see

what you can get out of your friend Polcher on this dizzy mess?"

"Nothing doing," Steve declined. "Look, my little trouble-hunter, no client—and Eula-Lizzie or whatever probably has the Calhourn boodle, which means the Federals will take it over. Where's the chance for profit? You've already twisted Big Ed's tail. A little of that can stir up a lot of grief; why don't you give up?"

"You go to the devil," she invited and slammed out of the office.

Steve looked at Grace and shook his head. She smiled and asked, "Has romance between you two gone pfft?"

"Sometimes," he growled, "I could wring her damn neck—and this is one of the times. Who and what is this Eula whoosis and what does Edna expect to get out of her?"

"She might think she could get a client by going around Robin Hood's barn," Grace replied; "Eula is Stella Borkowski's sister."

"And who the hell is Stella?" Steve asked. "Don't tell me she's another of our Edna's underground."

Grace nodded. "Stella is the oldest of the sisters. They grew up with Edna in shanty town. Six-seven year ago, Edna set them up in a little eating-house down on South Broadway. Stella is all right. She's made a go of the place, but Lizzie got ideas and walked out. She's Polack, but sort of pretty in a dumpy way. She played footsie with some mob punks and Stella and Edna got her out of a scrape or two before she finally landed as Bette Calhoun's maid. So if Eula's in trouble in this thing, maybe Edna will use Stella as a client—dummy, of course, but all Edna wants is an excuse—"

"I know that," Steve interrupted, "but we've got to stop her on this."

Grace smiled. "I've known Edna more than twenty years—and I've never yet known her to be stopped."

"But this," Steve protested. "Just what she said to Big Ed over the telephone could get her what Bette Calhoun got—and there's positively nothing to be gained."

"Bet you," Grace offered, "a quart of Bushmill's against a pair of nylons she annexes some dough out of this."

"You're on," he retorted.

"Sucker," she said.

Chapter Two

IT WAS four o'clock in the afternoon when Miss Pender returned to the office. The door of Steve's private office stood open and he sat at his desk reading a magazine. Grace Mitchell at the reception desk was occupied in the same manner.

"Got a client?" Grace inquired.

"I'll produce one if I need to," Edna replied. "Heard from Paul Grimes?"

"He called ten minutes ago. Said he'd come here pretty soon; didn't want to talk from there. Did you see Eula?"

"No. But I've talked to Mike Rosso and a few others that have been digging for me. There is something very whacky going on; I'll get hold of a break somewhere." She glared at Steve, who had come to the door of his office. "Why the hell don't you see if you can find out anything from Polcher?"

"Don't want to know anything," Steve said; "I've been studying. Suppose you should stay alive and make fifty grand out of this. We've already banked so much this year that all but maybe a couple of grand would go to the government."

"Like hell," she retorted. "It would go into more building, and pay more help at the kid's camp."

Steve shrugged. He was perhaps as keenly interested in the Ozark camp for poor children maintained by Miss Pender as she was. "Okay, Lady Bountiful," he said. "Show me a slim chance for more dough than trouble in this romp, and I'll get interested."

They had been arguing for some twenty more minutes when Paul Grimes arrived.

"Got a drink around this joint?" the reporter inquired. "I've been moving too fast to even stop in a gin mill."

"Everybody come into my padded cell," Steve said, "and I'll buy."

In Steve's office he produced a bottle of Bushmill's and poured for all but Edna, who didn't drink—except for wine with a good dinner.

"What happened with Eula?" she asked as Grimes put down his glass.

"Back in circulation," Grimes said. "And the situation gets more curious and curious. She is moving into a new apartment—in the Cadmus Arms, believe it or not."

STEVE WHISTLED softly and Grace Mitchell offered to be damned.

"Did they find out where she suddenly got so much money?" Miss Pender asked.

"And that's odorous, too," Grimes said. "She won five grand last night at the *Blue Lantern*—on the wheel. Ed Faust checked, and her story stood up. It could have happened, but I'll bet on jiggery pokery. Could be that Eula made arrangements to have some of her own dough passed to her that way—in which case she is in possession of the Calhoun poke. Could be a slick way for somebody to make a payoff—not because Eula found the buried treasure, but because she knows where something else is buried—namely; a body. Or maybe because she knows who made a body of Bette. Give me another slug of that potato juice, and I'll vision some more could-bes."

As Steve poured Bushmill's into a glass, Edna said, "Vision me how that wench climbed over a waiting list and got into the Cadmus Arms."

Grimes downed the drink, licked his lips and said, "Check the list of La Calhoun's meal-tickets and charge-accounts, and you'll notice that Gerald Montgomery, the fourth, was number three. And you'll notice that Gerald could add up to something."

"Is that what the cops think?" Edna asked.

"I know not whether, or if, the minions of the law think," Grimes replied. "I turned that up with my own able effort."

"Has Eula already moved into Cadmus Arms?" Edna asked.

"She told the gendarmes that she would be in residence there henceforth. Our Eula has certainly fed upon strange meat." Grimes grinned. "You should see what she uses for the grand manner."

"I'll see," Miss Pender declared, "shortly. Any other queer quirks?"

"Only that there seems to be a sudden strange unrest in the haunts of the unrighteous about our fair city. I sense a sort of shaking in the boots on the part of some of our most elite hoodlums."

"Big Ed Bladen, maybe?" Edna asked.

"That stalwart politician," Grimes said, "I beheld only briefly in Polcher's office this morning, but I understand he has gone into seclusion—making no comment in several languages. However I'm speaking of just a general feeling that there is an unexploded explosion lurking. The gorillas have an air of unhappy expectancy."

"Ump," Miss Pender said. "I had hints of something like that before I came back to the office. Are you through at the paper for today, Paul? Nothing else to do?"

Grimes had been looking at Grace Mitchell. The shapely redhead was perched on a corner of Steve's desk, exposing an enticing nylon-sheathed gam. The reporter grinned at Edna Pender.

"I have indeed something to do," he said. "I think I have just fallen violently in love. In order to make certain, I am going to take Miss Mitchell to dinner at Chris Stathias' beanery."

"Strange," Grace said, "what two drinks of Bushmill's will do to a wolf. But nobody threatens me with a Chris

Stathias dinner and get's away with it. I hope you've got lots of money."

"Chris trusts me," Grimes said. "I shall ply you with his chianti and—"

"Heaven will help the working girl," Grace assured him.

"That will be all right," he told her, "as long as *you* don't resist."

"Let's all go to Chris'," Steve suggested, looking at Miss Pender.

"I'm not going to eat or sleep," she declared, "until I have taken Lizzie Borkowski apart."

"I wish you'd call her Eula," Grimes complained. "You confuse me."

HALF AN hour later Miss Pender approached the desk in the elegant but decorous lobby of the Cadmus Arms. A nattily-dressed young flower of a male looked down his nose at her.

"Eula Easter," Edna said.

"Miss Easter is not receiving this evening," the petunia informed her haughtily.

"She's receiving me," Miss Pender snapped; "just tell her I'm here."

"Who shall I announce?" the lisp inquired.

Edna Pender's eyes flashed. "Leslie Evans, you louse," she snarled, "you tell Lizzie Borkowski I'm coming up to see her—and do it quick."

Evans shrank back from the desk and Miss Pender leaned across it to continue, "And you try to get me bounced and see if the morning papers don't call attention to how particular this snob nest is concerning its tenants —and name the gutter that you crawled out of, you perfumed peasant. Who shall you announce! Why didn't you say 'whom', you—"

"Please, Edna," he held up a manicured hand with tinted nails.

"And don't call me Edna," she snapped.

The hand found a telephone and the lisp informed Miss Eula Easter that Miss Pender was calling. An elevator operated by a grinning Negro in burgundy livery received Miss Pender. As it shot upward, she said, "This must be a hell of a place for a man to work, Dave."

The Negro chuckled. "Yassum, but it pays good—and times like just was it's interestin'. Boy don't offen get spoke to like this by ladies—"

"Dave," she said, "are you calling me a lady?"

The elevator stopped and Dave opened the doors. "Not if it's gonna stir you up, Miss Edna," he said, grinning. "Second door on the left is where you want."

Lizzie Borkowski, alias Eula Easter, greeted Edna Pender without pleasure. Eula was arrayed in what was her idea of elegance; it was at least expensive finery. A print housedress would have become her better; she was thick-bodied and thick-ankled. Blonde and with slightly protruding blue eyes, the ministrations of a beauty parlor had wrought horribly with what, Miss Pender knew had once been a lovely pink-and-white complexion.

Edna promptly punctured Eula's attempt to be haughty. "Sure," she snapped. "I'll call you Eula Easter, except when we are alone—for Stella's sake. You've caused her enough trouble without mixing her up in whatever you're doing now. And for the same reason I'll not make any trouble for you that I can help—if you give me some straight answers. Where did you get the money you've suddenly been spending?"

"I won it at roulette," Eula declared hotly. "I told the cops—"

"I know what you told the cops," Miss Pender stopped her. "But I'm not the cops. I know you're lying—and I'll prove it if you force me to. Did

you ever gamble before? Were you ever in the casino of the *Blue Lantern* before last night?"

Eula stared at her with hate and licked painted lips, but did not answer.

"I can find out, you know," Edna went on. "And that's just one of a lot of ways I can trip you up. Are you going to tell me where you got the money?"

"I told you," Eula turned defiant. "And I'm not going to tell you anything else. What I do is none of your business. My—a good lawyer told me I don't have to answer any questions about my personal affairs and—"

"Clyde Worth?" Miss Pender cut in.

Eula shut her mouth tightly, kept it thus while Miss Pender asked several more questions, then began screaming profanely that unless Edna got out and left her alone she would call the manager and have her thrown out.

Leaving, Miss Pender turned and said, "I gave you a chance, Eula. Now I'm going to upset your applecart—and probably a lot of others."

Eula gave her a look of unadulterated hate. "You won't live long enough," she spat.

Miss Pender left. When the elevator came for her she said, "Hold it here, Dave, unless your buzzer rings. I want you to keep your eye on a few things for me." She handed him a ten-dollar bill which she had taken from her purse.

The Negro shook his head. "No, Miss Edna. I does anything you wants, but not for money; what you done for my mother—"

"Fooey, Dave," she said. "That didn't cost *me* anything. I stood good for Mammy Dot's operation, but you and Daisy paid for it—every penny."

"Yassam, but the hospital wouldn't have—"

"Dave, you either take this money or I'll pay somebody else to—"

He took the money. They talked for a few minutes and then Edna Pender stepped into the elevator. As it descended, Dave said, "She got her car ordered to be at the door, come eight o'clock, Miss Edna."

"Know where she's going?"

"No, Miss Edna."

AT A NEARBY drugstore Miss Pender found a booth and called Chris Stathias' grill and tavern. "This is Edna Pender," she said when the proprietor was on the wire. "Is Paul Grimes there?"

"Yes, Miss Pender, they have just ordered. Why Chris and Mamma Stathias have not seen you for so long?"

"I'll be around, Chris. Let me talk to Paul."

The reporter came on the wire moments later. After a little badinage, Miss Pender said, "Paul, Eula Easter is leaving the Cadmus Arms in her car at eight o'clock. I wish—"

"Say no more," Grimes broke in. "Whether she goeth, there will I also go—accompanied by my gorgeous titian-haired sweetheart. We will observe her wanderings until she desists and returns to her bed of roses—or is it sin? And you shall know all. Now may I return to my bird, bottle and light-o-love?"

Edna laughed. "If you'll stay sober," she said.

At fifteen minutes before eight, Paul Grimes parked his Ford coupe across the street from the Cadmus Arms. Grace Mitchell occupied the seat beside him. Grimes produced cigarets and lighted both. "Too bad," he mourned, "that the night we were to have devoted entirely to abandoned amour should have been gummed up like this, my beautiful, but we are young. Life stretches before us and—"

"You are primed with Bushmill's, topped by Chris Stathias' chianti," she finished for him, "and I have defended my chastity—if any—from more formidable assailants. Damn you, you've got me doing it. Now talk sense; I wonder what Edna wants Eula trailed for."

"That is what we shall mayhap discover," he replied. "Before we

start discovering, let us briefly discuss our future together with the purpose of—"

"You are either drunk or nuts," she declared. "Probably both."

"That, sweetheart," he told her, "is an insult to both my intelligence and my capacity for stimulants. Let us not begin our joint existence thus."

"Suppose we begin attending to business," she suggested. "A canary-yellow Caddy convertible just pulled up over there. Would that be Eula's?"

Grimes looked. "Alas," he sighed. "Why must the only woman who ever tugged my heart strings be devoted to duty? We shall resume later."

"Would you look at that chauffeur!" Grace exclaimed.

"Under protest," Grimes replied. "He does look expensive."

They had been watching for five minutes when Eula Easter sailed out of the impressive portals and was put into the car by the splendid chauffeur. Grimes started his motor. Fifteen minutes later, Grimes, having followed expertly, parked again. Eula's Caddy had pulled up before her sister's modest little restaurant on South Broadway and Eula in all glory had entered. She remained about twenty minutes and emerged looking and acting like a very much put-out young woman.

Again Paul Grimes' car took up the trail. It was ten o' clock when the Caddy led the way into the parking space behind the *Blue Lantern*, far out on Delmar. The chauffeur escorted Eula to the entrance of the bistro and returned to the Caddy. When Grimes and Grace Mitchell entered, Eula was just pushing through the brass-studded door that led to the big gambling room in the rear of the sprawling building.

"Can we get in?" Grace asked.

Grimes grinned at her. "The power of the press, darling," he said, "opens all doors."

They were in time to see Eula receive two stacks of chips—one of blues and one of golds—for a roll of bills she had pushed through the cashier's window.

"Whew," Grimes said softly to Grace. "Big business. Those gold chips are five hundred dollars. The blues are hundreds. Five grand, I'd say from here. Eula is going to *gamble!*"

"Say!" Grace replied. "It doesn't work out. If she won five thousand last night and bought that Caddy and hired a chauffeur and splurged for rags and—where did she get money to buy those chips?"

"The sixty-four thousand dollar question, darling," Grimes said. "But let us observe all. Eula approaches the wheel."

Chapter Three

IT WAS Wednesday night and the hour being early, the casino was not crowded. Grimes and Grace had no trouble obtaining a good vantage point near the ornate roulette layout. Eula bet one blue chip on either black or red each time the wheel rolled, for more than a dozen rolls. She won some bets and lost some. Her stack of gold chips remained idle before her. Between plays she kept looking about the room, as if searching for something or somebody.

"Darling," Paul Grimes whispered in Grace Mitchell's ear, "I have a hunch. We might as well profit from this interference with our night of passion. Have you got any money?"

She gave him a sharp glance. "Some. Why?"

Grimes had taken out his wallet. "How much is some?"

"About two hundred dollars," she told him.

"Give it to papa, quick," he said. "Don't argue; opportunity is knocking."

Grace opened her purse and gave him a small roll of bills.

"Wait here," he said and headed

for the cashier's window. He returned with a handful of red chips.

"Now stand right here," he whispered, lips close to her ear, "and watch us prosper. Eula had ten gold ones. These reds are fifties and I have ten. I'm going to move up close. Every time Eula bets a gold one I'll bet a red the same way. This is murder." Before she could reply he moved away and around to edge into the table in a position to watch Eula's play.

Ten minutes passed while Eula fooled around with her blue chip bets and Grimes made none at all. Then a reaction by Eula told Grimes that she had seen what she had been watching for. A minute later a thin, sallow-faced man in a brown suit took a place at the table almost directly opposite Eula. Grimes knew the newcomer, a lieutenant and reputed trigger-man for Big Ed Bladen. He was called Spig Trotter. Grimes became more alert. Trotter placed a stack of gold chips on the rim before him. With the next spin, he pushed one chip onto the red. Eula, her attention fastened on Trotter from the moment he moved in, had four or five of her blue chips left. She placed one of them on the red. The wheel crawled to a stop—and red won.

Grimes was thinking fast. Trotter was, of course, playing house-money, the reporter was certain. The skulduggery had begun—but what form was it to take? Given time, Grimes thought, he might get onto that. Trotter pushed his bet to the black, so did Eula—still betting blues. Black won. Half a dozen spins later Trotter had not yet lost. A smile tugged at Paul Grimes' lips as he fingered his ten red chips. He thought he had it. The dozen or so other players had all begun to ride with the hot winner; it was proving profitable and they began to pyramid winnings.

A few more spins and what Grimes had foreseen happened. Black had turned up four times in a row and the bank had paid off heavily each time. Spig Trotter switched his bet to red

and pushed out all of his gold chips—nearly ten grand, Grimes estimated. The other players moved with Trotter's golden bait and apparent luck. Their winnings went with him onto red. Eula's hand for the first time went to her stack of gold chips. Grimes' eyes gleamed as he suppressed a smile. Slick. Eula had carefully placed all her gold chips on the black. She was going to win. All the other bettors would lose, but Trotter's chips meant nothing to the house. Grimes reached out and dropped all his chips on the black. The operator, reaching to spin the wheel, gave Grimes a sharp glance as he set the wheel in motion. Then the usual tense silence fell. Forty seconds later the wheel stopped—with the ball resting in a black slot!

Eula picked up her winnings and turned from the table. So did Paul Grimes. Followed by Grace Mitchell, he made the cashier's window ahead of Eula. Five minutes later, Grimes and Grace sat in his car on the parking lot watching Eula's Caddy. "Gravy, darling," Grimes chuckled softly. "Five hundred simoleons we gathered in. Four or five months' rent on our new apartment."

"You," Grace told him, "sober up very slowly."

He began a reply, but checked it as Eula Easter came swiftly to her car. With Grimes' car trailing, the Caddy

bore Eula back to the Cadmus Arms where she dismissed it. Grimes had parked close enough behind to hear Eula tell the chauffeur that she would not need him again before nine o'clock in the morning.

When Eula had gone inside, Grimes chuckled, "Going beddy bye with her loot. Now we can give our attention to more important matters." He started the car.

"Such as getting this working girl home to bed," Grace said.

Grimes grinned at her. "You'll be surprised at when you're going to sleep tonight, sweetheart."

MISS PENDER had put in a busy night, contacting her widely-assorted sources of information in various parts of the city. It was past two o'clock in the morning when she drove out Eighteenth Street to the two family house which she owned and the upper floor of which she occupied. She turned her big Buick into the drive and drove it into the open garage at the rear. Her mind still busy trying to find a beginning to untangle the jumbled situation that had developed from the murder of Bette Calhoun, she got out of the car and walked back to lower the garage door.

Two men leaped around one corner of the building and one man around the other. Two of them seized Edna Pender, one clapping a hand firmly over her mouth. The third, shot-filled leather sap in hand, moved close to strike if necessary. Edna fought furiously, biting at the hand which silenced her.

"Sap her," the bitten man snarled.

The blackjack swished and landed expertly; Miss Pender went limp. Her captors carried her into the garage. Minutes later when the Buick backed down the drive and rolled away down the street, Edna lay on the floor between the seats.

Half an hour later, Edna Pender sat in a big chair in a basement room. Her hands were bound behind her with tape. One of her captors with blackjack in hand stood beside the chair. Another man, wearing a domino mask, sat on a straight chair before her.

"Now," the masked man said. "You can make this easy and profitable for yourself—or mighty tough and get nothing out of it. Get this straight before you say anything; you can raise plenty of hell by balking, but if you do you'll be dead when you are carried out of this room. You might wreck our present setup, but you won't be around to gum us up when we rebuild. On the other hand, to save us a hell of a lot of trouble and money, you can have ten grand now and a grand a month afterwards—as long as you don't cause us any grief."

He drew a sheaf of bills from an inner coat pocket. "I have the ten grand right here. You can take it and walk out as soon as we have the package Eula Easter left with you. Do you get it?"

Miss Pender's thoughts raced as she sat silent. Eula Easter had left no package with her—unless it had been left with Steve Ware or Grace Mitchell since she had left the office. That was highly unlikely. But Edna had no doubt that she was in a very tough spot. How to play for time—and what to do with the time if she won it?

The masked man gave her an inkling. "You know best how to get that bundle out of your safe and into our hands—with the seals unbroken," he said. "And getting it to us is the only way you are going to stay alive, so you'd better see that everything works smoothly." He fell silent, waiting expectantly while slapping the back of one hand with the packet of bills held in the other.

"If I make a deal," Miss Pender said, "I'll make it directly with Big Ed Bladen."

"Bladen is not concerned in this," the other snapped; "he knows nothing about it. And *I'm* making the deal, not you. All you can do for yourself is get that bundle to us the easiest way. And I'll tell you this; we'll get it anyhow, from Steve Ware. He'll give it up to save you. But if we have to get it

that way he'll never see you again. You haven't got a prayer. Now how do we get it—and how soon?"

Miss Pender kept sweating her brain while she threw in arguments to gain time. She knew it would be useless to say she knew nothing about any such package. Half an hour later she said with feigned resignation, "All right, I'll deal, but I'll have to talk to Steve Ware on the telephone."

"That's all right," the man said. "You don't know where you are anyhow—and if you start one crack over the phone that we don't like, we'll bat your brains out. And now let's go over every move of getting that stuff delivered. Then we'll ring Ware."

"He won't be at the office until after nine in the morning," Edna said.

"There's a phone in his apartment," the masked man retorted. "We want action on this. Let's get down to business."

IT WAS FOUR a. m. and day was breaking when the telephone on the stand beside his bed jangled Steve Ware awake. He muttered profanity as he rolled over and dragged the telephone into bed.

In her prison-room, Miss Pender's wrists had been unbound and she had been led to a phone on a small table against one wall. The masked man had dialed Steve's number, then given Edna the phone. Miss Pender's eyes had flicked to the base of the instrument and a ferverent prayer had been answered. The number was there!

"Hello," Steve's voice, sleep-thick and annoyed, came over the wire. The masked man stooped beside Edna, his ear close to the receiver. The other man stood at her other side—blackjack ready.

"Get yourself awake, Steve," Miss Pender said. "This is important. I'm in a forked stick and you'll have to get into the safe in my private office and get that package Eula Easter left with me. Get a pencil and I'll give you the combination."

In his room, Steve got out of bed as he said, "Hold on a minute," and laid down the phone. He dashed into the bathroom, splashed his face with cold water, swiped at it with a towel and went back to the phone—now keenly alert. He and Miss Pender—as well as Grace Mitchell and Bob Goodrich, the disabled veteran who was night office man—had an understanding that when they got a call from one of the others that didn't make sense, they were to search it for a hidden message. This one certainly made no sense. The only safe in the Ware and Pender office suite was in a wall of the reception room—and Steve had the combination.

Back at the phone, Steve picked up a pencil and drew the phone pad into position. "Okay," he said.

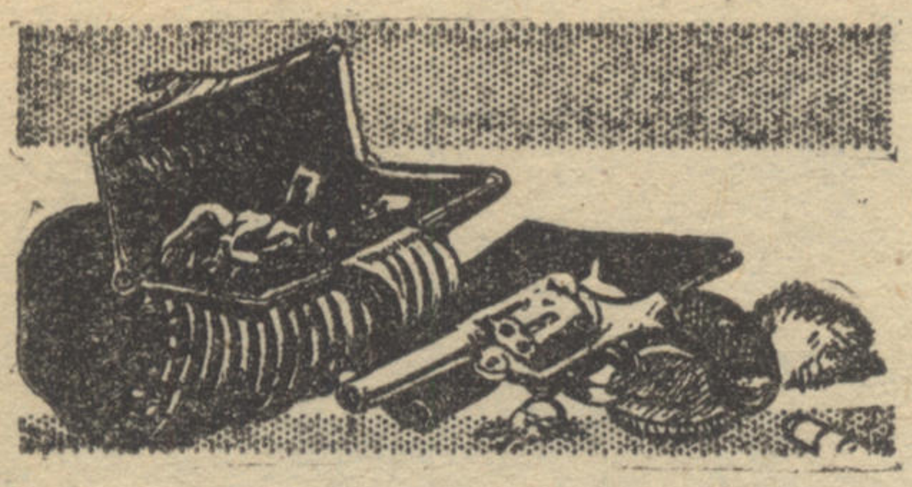
"Now don't argue about this," Edna said. "I'm in a real spot—and I've made a deal anyhow that will pay us better than Eula would have. Here is the combination. Full right to 2, left to 7, right to 9, then full left to 3. Got that?"

Steve said yes and waited. He had jotted down in shorthand every word she said. She had spoken slowly and clearly.

"Now listen for the rest," Miss Pender said. "Grace Mitchell is out in Kenwood, spending the night with that old office chum of hers, Florence Hill. I don't know the address, do you?"

"No," Steve said jotting. He was unaware that Grace had any such friend. "Maybe the Hill gal is in the phone book."

"She isn't," Miss Pender said. "But you'll need Grace to deliver the package. She'll be at the office by eight o'clock. You have the package ready when she gets there. She is to take it to the main post-office and wait there at the writing desk, straight in front of the general-delivery window, until somebody comes up and asks her if that is the package for Ralph Anderson. She will give the package to the asking party, then stay right there for ten minutes before she leaves the post



office. And be sure the seals on the package are not broken. Got that?"

"Yes," Steve said. "Have you been snatched?"

"Yes, but I'm all right and I've made a good deal. Just be sure to get Grace started the minute she gets in from Kenwood. Be sure she goes alone—and don't make a bobble. No cops—or it will be just too bad. 'Bye."

The connection broke and Steve swore as he put down his own phone. Without delay, he transposed his shorthand. That done he glanced at the clock on the stand. Ten minutes past four. He took up the phone and dialed the number of Grace Mitchell's apartment. No answer. He let the ringing go on for two full minutes before giving up. Grace wasn't home. That worried Steve. He dialed the office, and Bob Goodrich answered promptly.

"Bob," Steve asked, "do you know where Grace Mitchell is?"

Bob chuckled. "No more Miss Mitchell," he said.

"What do you mean?" Steve snapped.

"Grace is now Mrs. Paul Grimes," Bob replied; "she called me about ten minutes ago. Seems Grimes is a fast talker and strikes while the iron is hot. Anyhow they're married, and Grace asked me to stay here until either you or Miss Pender came in and tell you she's taking the day off to—"

"Like hell she is!" Steve barked. "Where are they now?"

"Probably in the bridal cot at Paul's apartment," Bob said. "That's where she called me from."

"Look, Bob," Steve said. "Edna has been snatched; I think she's in a real mess this time. We're going to need every friend she's got and more. Grace knows more of them than anybody else. You call her and Paul Grimes and tell them to get to the office on the double. I'm on my way now. I think I've got a lead, if there's enough brains among us to figure it out. Get busy."

STEVE DRESSED and reached the office unshaven in ten minutes. Bob Goodrich was still alone. "Where—" Steve began.

Bob anticipated him. "They're coming. What hap—"

Steve told him rapidly of Miss Pender's phone call, then laid the transcript of her words on Bob's desk. "Type three or four copies of that, Bob. There's a message in it. I'm having a look in the safe."

Steve was just closing the safe when Paul and Grace arrived. Steve quickly outlined the situation and gave each of them a copy of what Edna had said over the telephone.

"She tried the best she could to give us a message in that," he said, "and I think the figures in that screwy combination are part of it, because you know our safe dial is lettered instead of numbered—so the key is a word easy to remember. That gives us 2793. Street number, phone number or license plate? In either case we need a prefix."

"Got it," Grace cried. "There's nothing in here for license plate or house number, but she used Kenwood twice. And I've got no friend in Kenwood or—"

"So it's a phone number," Paul Grimes cut in. "Kenwood 2793. Maybe she wants us to call it."

"No," Grace said. "I don't think so. I'd say it was the number of the telephone they made her call from—to let us know where she is being held."

"I think you're right," Steve agreed.

"I'll call the paper," Paul said, "and

get the address for that phone. We've got an inverted book."

Paul waited with the phone at his ear for several minutes after requesting the dog-watch desk-man to get the information. Then he jotted down the number given him over the wire.

"We've got something," he said as he cradled the phone. "That's the phone at Digger Grossman's place, out west off the Olive Street road."

"It figures," Steve said. Fritz (Digger) Grossman was the lieutenant who fronted for Big Ed Bladen in the numbers racket.

"What about the package?" Paul Grimes asked.

Steve frowned. "No package. I searched the safe. This is the dizziest damned razzle dazzle she ever hatched. Nobody on our side—if we've got a side—knows nothing. But we've got to find out if Edna is being held at Grossman's place—and get her out if she is. Then we may find out something about what we're up against." He glanced at his wrist watch, "And time is getting short. If we call on the cops—"

Grace shook her head as she interrupted. "I don't think so. Edna told you no cops—and if we got them into this on a bum hunch, Dan Polcher—"

"Then what?" Steve snapped. "There's no package to deliver—and it might not be smart to—damn it, Grossman's place is our best bet and we've got to shake that place down, law or no law. Means we need help."

"How about Will Gaffney and his legion gang?" Grace asked. "They did a bang up job for Edna in raiding Little Andy's joint. And since Edna built that clubroom for them, Sid Garvin and a lot of others would turn this town bottomside up if you tell them about this."

"By gawd, that's it," Steve said. "And we need 'em fast. Can you get—"

"Leave that to me," Grace picked up the phone. "I'll have a dozen carloads of them any place you say in less than half an hour. Where?"

"Have them park along this block," Steve replied. "And tell them to keep their arsenal out of sight, and—"

"Don't worry," Grace said. "I'll just pass the word that this is the same sort of job as they did at Little Andy's, except that we think Miss Pender is being held in the dump and we've got to get her out safely. Those boys will do the rest."

Grace dialed a number. Steve said to Paul Grimes, "Do you know how to get to Grossman's place—and anything about the lay of the land out there?"

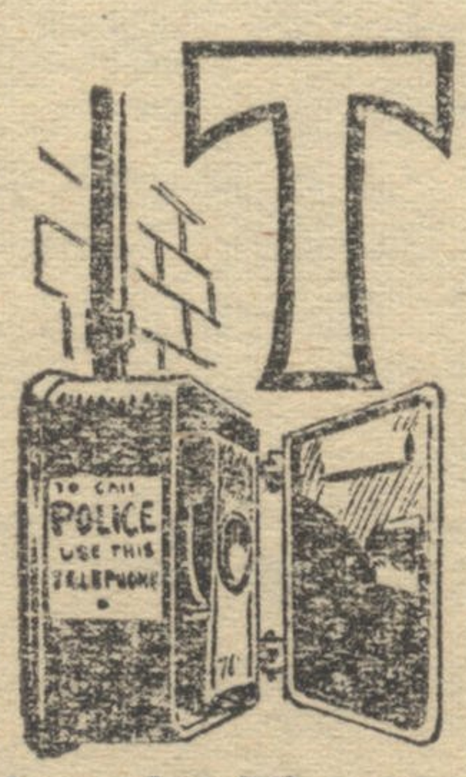
"Been there a couple of times," Grimes replied. "Quite a joint. Stands in twenty-thirty acres of grounds. Grossman is experimenting with being a country gentleman."

"Any close neighbors to call the cops?" Steve asked.

"Not very close."

Steve looked at his watch again. "Damn," he said, "nearly five o'clock."

Chapter Four



THE CAVALCADE of cars rolled out on Olive Street, in full daylight. Paul Grimes' car, occupied by Paul, his new bride and Steve Ware, was in the lead. Nine other cars, two of which were taxicabs, followed. These carried forty veterans of the most recent world war. Most of them were reservists, and several were again active members of the national guard. Out of view in the cars were weapons, ranging from pistols and shotguns to tommy-guns and grenade, appropriated from the local guard arsenal.

It was nearing six o'clock when the procession turned off Olive Street onto narrower black top leading north. There a previously-agreed-upon stop was made for a council of war. The rescuers piled out and gathered midway of the line of cars.

"Grimes here says the Grossman

place is about two miles ahead," Steve Ware said. "This is the picture. We believe Miss Pender is being held there." He went on to tell them why. "And we don't want to get her hurt," he went on. "We will lead the way in and—"

"That's all you have to do." The man who cut in was Sid Garvin, a veteran who was driving his own cab because Miss Pender had advanced him the money to buy it. "We'll take care of it from there. The rest of the boys will surround the dump and I'll go in and get Edna—or else. And don't worry about us getting hurt. I'll see to that."

After a few minutes of conference, the procession again got under way. The semi-rural countryside was still quiet in the fresh early morning when it turned right and rolled up a crushed stone drive. Every man armed with at least one weapon, the veterans piled from the cars and had the large country house surrounded in less than two minutes. Paul Grimes had driven his car into the areaway of a large double granary where it was hidden from view of the house.

"You stay right here in the bus, darling," he ordered Grace. "I haven't had you long enough yet to take any chances with you."

"You two," Steve said as Paul dodged a slap, "picked out a hell of time to get married."

Paul and Steve got out and walked to the end of the areaway. The crew in command of Will Gaffney and Sid Garvin had scattered to encircle the house, taking positions that gave them shelter but concealed none completely from view of any who looked out house windows.

"Those bozos mean business," Grimes said. "I hope to hell Edna let's me break this story."

"I hope," Steve said, "that Sid isn't wrong about being able to get her out of there alive and undamaged. I'm—"

"There goes Sid," Grimes cut in. Sid Garvin, his cabby's cap cocked belligerently, strode up to the front door and rang the bell. He kept on ringing it for nearly two minutes before it was opened by a man with a gun in his hand. Another, likewise armed, moved up beside him.

"Put away the rod, Jake," Sid said. "You can't shoot your way out of this. Take a look around. This is the same gang that smoked Little Andy out of his upholstered hole. You guys ought to learn pretty soon. Just go back and send Miss Pender out here—and make it snappy."

"She ain't here—" the man Sid had called Jake began.

"You're a goddamned liar," Sid stopped him. "We'll come in and get her if we have to—and if she's hurt we'll kill every son in the dump. All the choice you've got is whether you send her out quick. Unless you do that, the cops can mop up here after we get through. Send her out, and we'll go on away; and there'll be no cops unless you call them. Make up your mind."

Jake had been looking over Sid's shoulder. From his position in the doorway he could see seventeen of the armed rescuers. "I'll be back," he said as he closed the door.

SID STOOD waiting and the situation remained static for more than five minutes before the door opened again. Miss Pender stood in the hallway several feet inside the door.

Sid grinned at her. "Hello, Miss Pender."

The black leather shoulder bag that Edna Pender habitually wore had been returned to her, and her long barreled twenty five caliber automatic was in her hand. Jake and the other hood had no guns in evidence.

"Glad to see you, Sid," she said. "Did you promise that you and the boys would leave if I came out of this rat-hole?"

Sid nodded.

"Then I'm not coming out just yet," Miss Pender said. "That lets

you out of your promise. I'd like to have you and couple of the other boys come in."

Sid turned his head. "Milt, Sammy, come here," he called. "We are going to look this dump over."

Two men headed for the porch. Both carried guns. As they joined Sid, Edna said, "There's a guy in here whose face I want to see. And I want a look at every rat in the nest—if there's any I haven't seen. Then we'll decide what to do."

Sid and the other two stepped inside.

"Wait a minute," Miss Pender said. "I don't need these two goons; let the boys outside take care of them. We'll turn them loose when we are through—if everybody behaves."

At Sid's grim order, the two hoods walked out of the house with their hands in the air and were promptly taken in charge. Steve Ware, gun in hand, entered the house as the pair left.

"I told you," he began, scowling at Edna.

"You," she snapped at him, "stay outside if this party doesn't suit you. I've got things to do—and they're going to get done."

She led the way, and moments later the five entered the basement room in which Edna had been held. The masked man and two others ceased talking as the group entered. While the others stood with weapons ready, Miss Pender walked over to the big horse-faced gorilla who had used the blackjack and held out her hand.

"Give me that sap," she ordered.

The hoodlum produced it from a coat pocket and Edna shifted her gun to her left hand and took the sap with her right. One quick movement placed her behind the man and she rose onto her toes as she swung the blackjack with all her might. Her victim had started to turn and dodge, but the savage blow caught him on the side of the head and tore an ear as it glanced downward. He crumpled and

fell hard. Miss Pender looked down at him, then hurled the sap at his face. It hit his nose and started blood flowing.

"Maybe he'll not be so careless about bouncing those things off other people's heads after this," Miss Pender said.

The masked man had half risen from a chair in which he had been sitting beside a small table. Edna glared at him and snarled, "Pull that damned thing off your head—unless you want a dose of the same. Move, it! I'm not fooling."

The man's hands went up and pulled off the domino.

"Gerald W. Hilliard!" Miss Pender exclaimed. "Well, well. *Very* interesting. Especially to the boys on the narcotics squad—if they don't know it already."

Gerald W. Hilliard, general manager of the St. Louis branch of a large wholesale drug corporation, sat with a white circle about his tightly-closed lips, and hatred burned in his pale blue eyes.

"Enjoy yourself," he snarled at Miss Pender. "You haven't got long."

Before Edna could reply, Sid Garvin spoke up. "Let me speak a little piece, Miss Pender."

Then, facing Hilliard, "You can tell this to Big Ed Bladen and have it scattered; there are only forty of us here this morning—because we came in a hurry, but we can have more than a hundred more by just calling them. And lately we have made up a list of names. Big Ed Bladen is at the top. You will be on it now, and we're going to have Miss Pender look it over and put on any more that she wants to. This is what the list is for; if any harm comes to Edna Pender,

every man of our gang is going to start out with a gun; before we get through we will kill every mobster on that list—down to the two-bit punks that peddle the numbers tickets and pass out the marijuana. We'll blast where we find you. We're not cops; you can't bribe us, or have us handled from higher up. We don't need complaining witnesses, and we don't have to have warrants. All we need is targets—and we have them picked out. One more pass of any kind at Miss Pender and meat wagons will be picking up rats all over this town and county. That's all—and you'd better believe it."

SID'S MOUTH snapped shut. Miss Pender looked at him and smiled. The effect was startling; every man in the room, including those who had seen the phenomenon before, stared in wide-eyed amazement. Edna Pender's smile brought a strange spiritual beauty to what was at all other times what Lieutenant Dan Polcher of the St. Louis Police insisted was the ugliest face ever fastened to a human being.

The smile lasted for a long moment and every man in the room sighed when it vanished. That happened when the hoodlum Edna had sapped stirred and groaned. Miss Pender turned, looked down, lifted a brogan-shod foot and kicked the hood on the jaw. Again he went limp.

"I don't like that louse," she said. "Sid, Steve will stay here with me. You take the other boys and frisk this dump; bring whatever you find down here."

"Jake and Slick were the only others here," Hilliard spoke up.

"We'll find out for ourselves," Edna snapped.

Sid departed with his buddies. Miss Pender pulled her gun and pulled the trigger. Hilliard gave a sharp cry and grabbed his left ear which the bullet had nicked.

"Answer me," Edna spat, "or I'll put the next slug where you'll really feel it."

"Bette Calhoun's diary," Hilliard said shakily. "Five books."

"Well I'll be damned!" she exclaimed. "Where is Eula Easter?" Her gun-muzzle continued to threaten Hilliard.

"I don't know," Hilliard almost screamed. "That's the truth."

Miss Pender glanced at Steve. "Do you know? Did you try to get in touch with Eula?"

Steve shook his head. "I—we just got busy trying to get you out of here."

Edna frowned thoughtfully, then went to the stand upon which the telephone rested. A minute later she asked, "Eula?... Are you alone?... *You're* in trouble? What do you think you've got me into? Can you get over to my office?... I see. All right. Stay right there. I'll be there soon." She put down the phone as Sid Garvin and his buddies returned.

"Not another soul in the joint," Sid reported.

"All right," Miss Pender said. "We're leaving. Most of the boys have jobs to get to. I want you and two or three others to come along with me to Eula Easter's place at the Cadmus Arms." She glanced at Hilliard. "Where is my car?"

"Out in one of the garages," he replied.

"We'll leave you and your goons here," she told him, "but if you ever mess with me again, there'll be a different windup."

"And she ain't woofin'," Sid Garvin spoke up. "You better not waste any time passing on what I told you. If—"

"Let's get going, Sid," Miss Pender stopped him.

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Her rescuers cheered when Miss Pender and the others emerged from the house. Edna glared at Paul Grimes and Grace as they came hurrying, hand-in-hand, to greet her.

"What are you two doing here?" she demanded.

"We two," Paul grinned at her, "are one. A justice of the peace who is beholden to me did the welding several hours ago. We were torn from the verge of our bridal bed to help snatch you from the jaws of death. Now that you are snatched, will you please wind up this shenanigan so that we may depart to consumate our—"

"What the hell," Miss Pender snapped, "are you talking about—if the sounds you're making are talk?"

"Paul and I were married last night—or this m o r n i n g—Edna," Grace told her.

"What else," Miss Pender demanded, "can happen to screw up this dizzy mess? Who is at the office?"

"Bob," Grace answered.

"Then everybody isn't crazy," Edna said. "Well, go on and consumate and—"

"Not with the odor of a major story in my nostrils," Paul interrupted. "I'm going to need my job. I have seen my darling eat, and—"

"Oh dry up," Miss Pender snapped. "Steve, find my car. Sid, pick your help and let the other boys go. Turn loose those two rats and let them go hear what the others have to tell them."

Chapter Five

EDNA PENDER parked her Buick near the entrance of the Cadmus Arms, near nine o'clock. Paul Grimes' car pulled in behind. Sid Garvin, according to previous instructions, had turned his taxicab into the alley behind the apartment house. Miss Pender and Steve Ware got out of the Buick, and Edna called loudly to Paul and Grace, "You two wait here; we won't be long."

Steve and Miss Pender crossed the decorous lobby and went directly to the elevator. The petunia behind the desk watched them unhappily but made no protest. The operator started the car upward.

"I'm glad you're on duty, Dave," Miss Pender said. "This is my partner, Steve Ware. Dave Walters, Steve."

The elevator hissed to a stop and Steve shook hands with Walters.

"We're going to need some help, Dave," Miss Pender said. "We want to get Eula Easter out of this place—and she says some goons have told her not to leave her apartment, or else."

"Flatfoot been hangin' aroun' the lobby, Miss Edna," Dave said. "I ain't seen no goons."

"I saw the cop as we came in," she replied. "Ben Kane. Here's what we want to do, Dave—and fast. Sid Garvin and some help are in the alley now, with Sid's taxi. They'll have the alley cleared of any trouble. Can you help us get Eula out to Sid's cab without taking her through the lobby?"

"Does she go, or is she took?" Dave asked.

"She'll go," Miss Pender assured him, "but with that cop down there, it's got to be fast."

"You brings her to me here, Miss Edna," Dave said, "and I gets her out to Sid—and no foolin'. How soon you be here?"

"Less than five minutes."

"I be here."

It was only three minutes later when Miss Pender and Steve Ware returned to the waiting car, accompanied by a flustered Eula. The buzzer was calling the elevator back to the lobby.

"That's mebby the flatfoot," Dave said. "Miss Easter, you walks down to the next floor and waits at the elevator. Don't ring the bell and stand out of sight."

Miss Pender nodded approval and she and Steve stepped into the elevator. The doors closed and the car started down.

"I'm depending on you now, Dave," Edna said.

"I get her to Sid," Dave answered.

The elevator doors slid open at the ground floor and Steve and Miss Pender faced a stocky and scowling city detective.

"Where are you going?" the detective growled.

Edna nudged Steve and he followed as she stepped into the lobby, ignoring the question. The officer's hand shot out and grasped Miss Pender's arm. "I asked you a question," he snapped.

Edna slapped his face hard and jerked loose from his grasp. "The answer is none of your business," she spat, "and you keep your hands off me." She moved towards the entrance.

The detective lunged after her. "You want to be pinched?" he snarled.

Miss Pender kept moving, "For what?" she asked. "Pinch me and see what happens. You'll be on a beat down in Carondelet."

The detective leaped and planted himself between her and the street door. "I've got orders to hold you here until Lieutenant Polcher comes," he snarled.

Edna Pender halted; she had heard the elevator doors click shut. "Why didn't you say so before you got tough?" she asked.

Five minutes passed before an official car squealed to a halt at the curb and Lieutenant Dan Polcher, followed by two assistants, strode in.

Edna bristled as Polcher halted before her. Steve Ware stood at her elbow.

"What you foolin' around this Easter dame for?" Polcher demanded.

"That's your business?" Miss Pender snapped.

"Anything you do, you ugly pest," Polcher retorted, "is some of my business if I can find out why. What you been talkin' to that jane about?"

"Sorry to disappoint you," she said. "I went up to Eula's apartment, but she isn't there."

"Ain't there!" Polcher exclaimed and spun on the officer who had been posted in the lobby.

"She must be," the officer protested.

Anger flushed Polcher's beefy face. He jerked a thumb at Steve and Edna Pender. "How long was they upstairs?"

"Just two or three minutes," the other replied.

The clerk, who had overheard it all, spoke up. "Miss Easter must be in her apartment; she received a phone-call only a half hour ago."

THAT SENT Polcher into action. He ordered Steve and Miss Pender to remain in the lobby, and assigned an officer to make sure they did so. Then, armed with a pass-key, and followed by his other aides, he rushed up to Eula's apartment—the rush being held up by a long minute while Polcher fumed and waited for the elevator. Finding Eula's apartment unoccupied, Polcher telephoned for more officers to bottle up the Cadmus Arms until he could get authority to shake down the building. During the hubbub, Edna got a sly wink from Dave Walters, signifying success in his venture.

His arrangements made, Polcher stomped back to face Miss Pender. "What did you come to see the Easter dame about?" he demanded.

"I've known Eula a long time," Miss Pender told him. "Why should my paying her a visit be a matter for cops? I've got business to attend and

unless you want to make it a pinch, I'm going to get about it—right now. Come on, Steve." She headed for the street door and Steve followed.

A glance showed Edna that Paul Grimes' car was gone. Paul and Grace had gotten away from there with Polcher's arrival, she surmised, and felt a little less worried.

"What now, Meddlesome Mattie?" Steve asked as Miss Pender tooled the Buick away from the curb.

"To the office—unless we're followed," she replied. "You watch out for that. I want a talk with that wench before the cops get their hands on her. I hope Sid—and Grace and Paul—have used their heads."

They were not followed—and they learned why when they entered the office suite. Paul, Grace and Bob Goodrich were in the reception room—also three city detectives in charge of Sergeant Dyer.

"What the hell is this," Miss Pender demanded angrily, glaring at Dyer.

Dyer looked smug. "Lieutenant Polcher will be here," he said, "and he wants all of you, and any company that comes, to be right here waiting for him."

Edna's lips tightened. If Sid brought Eula Easter to the office now—but perhaps Sid would have drawn conclusions from the way Eula was delivered; Sid was a sharp cookie.

"I'm going to cal' Murray Holden," she snapped. "It's about time Dan Polcher had some new blisters on his fingers."

Before any of the officers could move to prevent, Miss Pender stepped into her private office and closed the door after her. Sergeant Dyer swore.

Edna picked up the direct wire phone on her desk, but she didn't call Attorney Murray Holden. To the exasperation of Lieutenant Polcher, that phone was safe from tapping, because of injunctions and restraining orders obtained by Holden and served on all law-enforcement bodies. During the next twenty minutes, Edna Pender called eight other numbers to hold brief conversations in each case. She was checking her underground. Her door was still closed, and the electric bolt shot, when Lieutenant Polcher arrived.

"Where's that scarecrow?" Polcher demanded, after a glance around.

"Went in there," Dyer told him, pointing, "to call Murray Holden, she said."

Polcher who knew the setup of what he called 'that damned trick office' snarled at Bob Goodrich, seated at the reception desk. "You tell her I want to see her—right now."

Bob threw the intercom switch and said, "Miss Pender, Lieutenant Polcher is out here; he says he wants to see you."

"That's too damn bad," Edna's voice came from the box. "Tell that leatherhead he can either break in here or chase his face and take his stooges with him. Call me when they're gone. I won't answer anything else. And tell Polcher I dare him to pinch any of you—and don't answer a damned question." The box went silent.

"Do we go in?" Sergeant Dyer asked hopefully.

Polcher's face was flaming. "No," he snarled. "It would take a torch or a bulldozer to get through that door—and Murray Holden told her to say what she just said. I'll cool that shyster one of these days. Dyer, you keep Hiler and watch this place from the hall. Grab the Easter dame if she shows up. She got out of that dump somehow, but there's an APB out on her. Ed Faust wants her, too. Bring her in if you get your eye on her. I'll know what the rest of these jokers do if they leave this office. Come along." Polcher stalked out, followed by his cohorts.

IT WAS NEARLY noon when Sid Garvin entered the suite. Miss Pender, Grace and Steve had been discussing the baffling situation. Bob Goodrich had been sent home and Paul Grimes had gone to the paper to get onto his beat.

"Hell of a honeymoon, sweetheart," he had said to Grace as he was leaving.

"It certainly is," she had agreed.

"Where is Eula?" Miss Pender shot at Sid the moment the sound-proof door closed hehind him.

"Chris Stathias' basement," Sid replied. "We had a devil of a time getting her planted. That's the best I could do. She'll stay there; that gal is scared—plenty."

"She ought to be," Miss Pender said. "I'll get right out there and talk to her—soon as I can dodge Polcher's tails. You get out with your hack and make the rounds. See everybody. I want a line on Bette Calhoun's killer —and her boodle."

"Jake," Sid said. "I just heard something that might add. Lily Williams has disappeared; nobody has seen her since right after Bette was bumped."

Miss Pender frowned and snapped her fingers. "Why didn't I think of Lily? Maybe she's it. Scatter the word, Sid; I want to talk to Lily as soon as I'm through with Eula. I'll go down in the elevator with you. Steve, you and Grace stay here until I get back or call in."

"I'm going to get some sleep on your couch," Grace said. "Hell of a place for a bride to—"

"You've no damn business being a bride," Edna retorted. "Putting the Indian sign on my best contact at headquarters. Come on, Sid."

"Who the devil is Lily Williams?" Steve asked Grace when they were left alone.

"She's been Bette Calhoun's cook for a long time. Worked for Bette quite a while before Eula Easter," Grace told him, then yawned. "Me for the hay. You better do likewise; I have a hunch we are going to get busy."

It took Miss Pender the better part of an hour to get herself smuggled out past Polcher's watchdogs; it was nearly three o'clock when she returned and awakened Steve and Grace.

"This," she told them, "is the most cockeyed mess I ever tried to straighten out. I could break Eula's fat neck. I pumped her for two hours and she didn't hold out on me; scared too silly. And of all the tales. Right out of her own little bonehead, Eula cooked herself up a scheme to get rich—and screwy as it was, it worked. The next day after Bette Calhoun was bumped, she called up every one of the men that Bette lived with since she came to St. Louis and put the bite on them."

"Oh, ho," Steve said. "With what for teeth?"

"She told each one that she had the diaries Bette kept for the last five years and—"

"Comes the light," Steve cut in. "Bette either did or could have jotted down enough to blow off the lid and—"

"Something like that," Miss Pender said, "but listen. Only three fell for the bite. The others told the little darling what she could do with the diaries—and be damned. Only Big Ed Bladen and Gerald Montgomery, the Fourth, came through with what she asked. Montgomery fixed her up at the Cadmus Arms and Big Ed paid her off by fixing for her to win at the *Blue Lantern* and on the numbers. She protected herself—or thought she did —by telling them that she had sealed the diaries in a package and left them with me—not to be opened unless something happened to her."

"Um," Steve said. "Explains some. But where are the diaries?"

"That's the capper," Miss Pender replied. "Eula never had any diaries—don't even know if there are any; she ran a big bluff. Got the idea from something she read in a confession magazine. Was too dumb to know that the cops would swarm down on her, and that the mobs would only play for time until they could get rid of her." Miss Pender suddenly looked savage. "And they almost got rid of me."

Steve gave her a long, hard look. "What have you done about Eula?"

"She's on her way," Edna replied. "It will be a long time before she shows up again around St. Louis. She had a little more than seven thousand dollars. I took two thousand and a bill of sale on her Cadillac for getting her safely away. Now I want to find Lily Williams. Has anybody called or been in?"

Both Steve and Grace shook their heads.

Miss Pender's lips twitched as she met Grace's eyes. "Not even your husband?"

"No," Grace replied, "and that's not funny."

The corridor opened and a youngster of sixteen or so entered. His eyes found Miss Pender and he blurted, "Miss Edna, the cops took Sid Garvin in. He had me followin' him all afternoon, to come and tell you if anything happened."

"How long ago?" Miss Pender asked.

"Ten minutes ago—over at Ninth and Market!"

Miss Pender snatched up a telephone and dialed Murray Holden's office number.

IN A ROOM just off the police shooting-gallery, Sid Garvin sat in a chair into which he had been pushed by two of a half dozen officers. Sid's jaw was out and he seemed neither awed nor frightened.

"You threatened to kill a lot of people this morning," one of the officers barked at him. "That will do for a starter. Why?"

Sid glared. "I don't answer a damned thing," he said flatly, "unless my lawyer is with me. And that means *not a damned thing*. Go ahead and bust yourselves. You ain't got long."

Sid proceeded to prove that he meant it. He shut his mouth tightly and kept it that way. A powerful lamp was turned on and moved to glare into his face. Sid shut his eyes tightly. One of the officers grabbed a handful of Sid's hair and yanked his face up to the light.

Sid kept his eyes shut and said through his teeth, "Have fun, you sons; my turn's coming. Mark me. Make it show good."

The 'interrogation' went on.

Sid had been under fire nearly half an hour when Murray Holden, accompanied by Miss Pender, arrived at headquarters. It took them a few minutes to get to Lieutenant Polcher. He glared at them across his littered desk.

"Lieutenant," the attorney said, "I am here on behalf of my client, Sidney Garvin. What is the charge against him?"

"He's just being questioned," Polcher growled.

"Let us hope," Holden said, smiling faintly, "that the quiz is not violent. It so happens that the arrest was witnessed and that I can produce a number of reliable witnesses to the fact that my client was not even slightly injured in any way at the time of his arrest. I am also quite certain that my client will not answer a single question unless I am present. Would you like to have me assist your questioners?"

Polcher snorted and banged his desk with a fist. "All right, shyster," he snarled. "You can have your damned client." He reached for his telephone.

Holden lifted a hand. "Just a moment. I'm going to know something about this. You can release my client without explanation, and I will take the necessary steps to air the entire proceeding in court—in order to gain

the information I want. Or we will keep it just between friends—by going with you now to wherever my client is being interrogated. Well?"

"I can tell you all about it," Polcher said after a moment.

Holden smiled and shook his head. "I wish to see who is questioning my client—and where it is being done. The next best thing will be to bring out the facts in open—"

Polcher heaved himself to his feet. "Hell," he grumbled, "come on."

A few minutes later Polcher led the way into the interrogation room. An officer standing beside the big lamp snapped it off. All the officers shot puzzled looks at the newcomers. Sid opened his eyes, saw Miss Pender and Holden, and grinned.

"Hello Sidney," Holden said. "Have you been mistreated?"

Sid got out of the chair and shook himself. "Not much," he said. "Only this louse here pulled my hair," with a quick move Sid was behind the officer, "like this." As he said the final words, Sid knocked off the officer's hat, grabbed a double handful of hair and yanked.

The officer let out a howl as he went backwards to sprawl on the floor. "Only," Sid said, still grinning, "I was in the chair and—"

"Never mind any more demonstrations, Sidney," Holden said.

"Behave, Sid," Miss Pender added. "Let Mr. Holden keep this all legal."

The fallen officer scrambled to his feet, fists clenched and lips peeled back from his teeth.

"Hold it, Connor," Polcher snapped.

"What were you being questioned about, Sidney?" Holden asked.

"They said I threatened to kill a lot of guys," Sid replied.

"And did you?" Holden asked. "Tell the truth, Sidney."

Miss Pender snorted. "If the kind of monkey business that's been going on here is police business I—"

"Edna," Holden interrupted, "let's have a private conference before anything else happens. I want to have a talk with Sidney, too. Suppose we all leave—quietly."

6

THE CONFERENCE was over; Miss Pender and Steve Ware were alone in the office suite at five o'clock when Ed Faust of the St. Louis FBI office entered. Paul Grimes had come and taken his bride away with him. Edna had called Bob Goodrich and told him to take the night off: Faust came into Steve's private office, pulled out a chair and smiled at the partners as he sat down.

"I've just had a session with Dan Polcher," he said. "Edna, why do you have to row continually with Dan?"

"No comment." Miss Pender snapped. "You know the answer to that. Anything else on your mind?"

Faust nodded. "Yes. I came to see if we can't work together on this Eula Easter-Bette Calhoun mess. I'm not Polcher; I don't know how or why you got into it—and I'm not going to worry about that. I've got a lot of respect for what you can do with this conglomeration of amazing friends you have scattered in all corners of this town. I think we both have some answers that the other doesn't have. If we put them together—"

"One thing, before we go into that," Edna cut in. "What's the cut for this firm if we turn up Bette's loot?"

"Ten percent," Faust replied promptly, "and you don't have to turn it up—just supply us with information that will turn it up."

"Fair enough," she said. "And with that understanding, what's your idea about working together?"

"I'll tell you everything we—and the police—have turned up thus far, if you'll tell me everything you've got. Then we'll add it up and see if it puts any ahead. What do you know about

Bette Calhoun's background—prior to five years ago?"

"Not a damned thing," Edna replied; "the gal is a mystery from there back."

"Not to us," Faust said. "She was raised in a Kentucky orphanage. We found it. Ran away from the place when she was seventeen. We haven't placed her after that—until her St. Louis debut. But I don't think that's important; we know she has no heirs. Now, have you any line on her killer?"

"No. But plenty of my friends are keeping ears and eyes open."

"Eula Easter," Faust said. "Right name Lizzie Borkowski. Do you know where and how she suddenly struck gold?"

Miss Pender studied a moment and then told him.

"I will be damned," Faust declared. "And on a dizzy bluff! Do you suppose there *are* any such diaries? Maybe—"

He was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. Edna went into the reception-room to answer it. She talked for several minutes, then returned, poker-faced.

"Where is Eula Easter?" Faust asked. "I don't suppose you'll tell how you got her out of Cadmus Arms."

"Professional secret," she said. "The last time I saw her, she was leaving town. I don't think you'll find her—and I know it wouldn't do you any good if you did."

"You're sure she knows nothing about the vanished Calhoun bankroll or who rubbed Bette out?"

"Absolutely," Miss Pender declared. "But I think I have a line on a much-overlooked bet."

Faust smiled. "If you mean Lily Williams, she hasn't been overlooked; we just haven't been able to find her yet."

"I know where she is," Edna said.

"Where?" Faust demanded. "I think that she is perhaps the key to this thing. She had some reason for diving into a hole so quick. We want her bad—" he stopped and looked sharply at Miss Pender. "Is Lily one of your pets?"

"She's not one of my *friends*," Miss Pender. "Say we have a mutual friend. Anyhow, I know where to find her and I know that she is frightened almost out of her wits. I don't think you could get a thing out of her, but I'll make a deal with you; let me have a try at her first. If I can't straighten her out, and bring her to you of her own accord, I'll make sure that you can pick her up."

"How soon?" Faust asked.

"By morning, or before—depending on how quick you can get Dan Polcher's tails off me."

Faust scowled. "Now look here, why use me to slap at Polcher? After all—"

"Hell," she snapped, "I can lose his damn snoopers; I've done it twice today—but it takes time and could cause me to miss Lily. Anyhow, I could give you a list, beginning with Big Ed Bladen, of slimy crooks that the cops had better be watching."

Faust sighed. "Edna, when this thing is cleaned up, I want to have a talk with you and see if I can't arrange a truce, or peace, between you and the police. But right now, I'll string with you. I'll call Polcher and see that you leave here without any escort. You want to go right away?"

She nodded and Faust got up and went to the telephone on Steve's desk.

Ten minutes later Miss Pender was ready to depart. "You stay here," she told Steve, "until I get back or call. If I need you, lock up the office. I'll be calling in anyhow—in case there should be anything important coming in. And if Faust is going to stay here, don't tell him anything that I haven't told him already." She looked at Faust. "And you'd better stay where I can find you by calling your office."

"Try here first," Faust said. "Unless you are too long, I'll be here gabbing with Steve."

IT WAS just past ten o'clock when Miss Pender returned, bringing with her a solidly built and very black

woman of about forty, whom she introduced to Faust as Lily Williams.

"Lily can unsnarl your case for you," Miss Pender told Faust, "but first I want to tell you that I have promised her that she will be well-treated and protected from any harm. I want you to promise the same thing—not that I won't see to it myself."

"Is Lily liable to any criminal charge?" Faust countered.

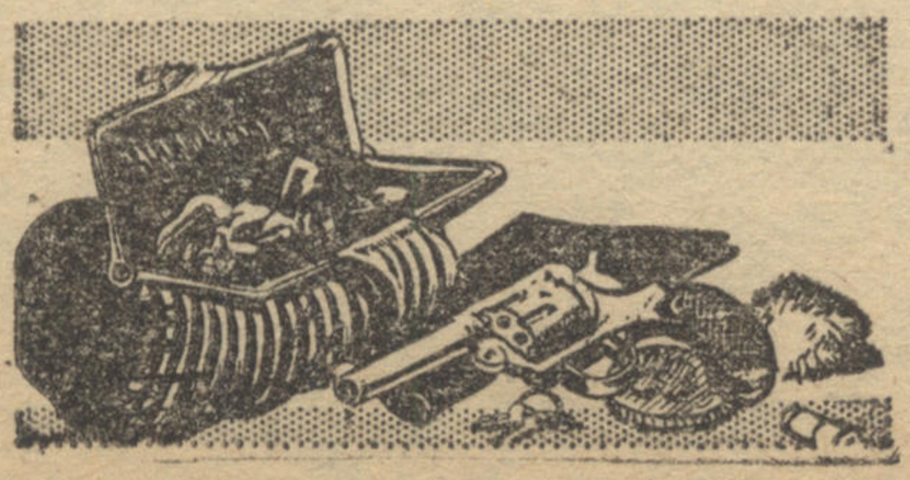
"No; she's your star witness."

"In that case, I promise," Faust said. "Witness to what?"

"The murder of Bette Calhoun," Miss Pender replied. "Lily was sitting in the front window of Bette's apartment, watching for Bette to come home. She saw a car park there near the apartment-entrance, about fifteen minutes before Bette arrived. There was only the driver in the parked car, and Lily got a good look at his face when he used a cigaret-lighter. It was Curly Maserik. Bette came soon afterward, parked her car and started across the sidewalk. Maserik fired from his car—then drove away. Lily saw it all. Before she could make up her mind what to do, the cops were there; when they got through bulling around and left, Lily packed up a few things and ran."

"Why?" Faust demanded.

"Don't be a damned cop," Edna snapped. "Try to remember that people are human beings and let me tell it to you in order. Lily is no angel. Are you? She got out of there because the cops had already given her a pushing around—and she got some fool notions about doing some good for herself. In her place, who wouldn't have? She even considered a little shakedown, but luckily she was too afraid of the people concerned to try it.



"And besides that she had a problem. Every few days for years, Lily has been carrying an envelope to the Boatman's bank for Bette, and bringing back deposit-slips which Bette put away in a small metal box. When Lily beat it, she took that box with her. She broke it open, but she couldn't think of any way to profit from what was in it—and she was afraid to ask anybody's advice. The deposit slips show that a Janet Harvey has more than $450,000 in a savings account. Naturally, Lily did some thinking about that dough. But she *did* nothing—and she can't be arrested for thinking."

"She can be held as a material witness," Faust said.

"You try that," Edna retorted, "and see how much cooperation you get out of me in the future. I've promised Lily I'll look after her. She'll be ready to testify whenever you want her."

Faust looked at Lily. "Have you got Bette Calhoun's diaries, too?"

"I don't think Miss Bette ever had any, Mr. Faust," Lily replied. "She never hardly wrote letters. She never did have any books like that around. I know, 'cause I took care of her room and she didn't keep anything locked up 'cept the little box."

"And where is the box?"

Lily looked at Miss Pender.

"Lily ruined the box, breaking it open," Edna said, "and threw it away." She delved into her shoulder-purse and handed Faust a packet wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. "The deposit-slips are in there. That's all there was in the box. The account is arranged to be withdrawn by signature *and* thumb-print. If you have Bette's prints—"

"We have," Faust told her. "Taken at the morgue."

"A handwriting-expert should settle the signature," Edna said. "Who is going to bring in Curly Maserik—after they apologize to Big Ed Bladen—or is he going to get tipped in time to take a powder?"

Curly Maserik was Big Ed's chauf-

feur-bodyguard; Bladen had brought him along in the rise from the lesser rackets.

"If Maserik isn't gone already," Faust snapped, "he isn't going. But I want a sworn statement from Lily—right now."

Twenty minutes later, with the statement in his pocket, Faust prepared to leave. "Remember," Edna Pender told him, "that the information on this came from Lily and Ware and Pender. We are splitting the reward. I'll look after Lily. And tomorrow morning I want to see you and Dan Polcher for a private conference. We'll tie up a few loose ends—provided Curly Maserik is in the jug, without bail. If that gets messed up, friendship ceases—and I'll still make this mess stink 'til you can't stay in town with it."

Faust gave her a grim look and went out without a reply.

LIEUTENANT Dan Polcher and Ed Faust found Steve and Miss Pender waiting for them when they entered the Ware and Pender suite the next morning shortly after nine o'clock. The morning papers had blazened the news of Curly Maserik's arrest.

"You fellows are improving," Miss Pender said when they were all seated in her office. "Were you surprised when Maserik failed to come up with an alibi?"

"I thought you must have had something to do with that," Faust said. "Is that one of the loose ends you mentioned last night?"

Edna nodded. "It ties in. So does the—understanding you talked about. To begin with, I'm going to point out a few facts—"

Faust interrupted. "First, would you mind telling us how you spiked Maserik on the alibi. If he doesn't pop one into the mill we are going to mop this thing up quick—and clean."

"Okay," Miss Pender said. "I'll tell you, because it's an example of what I'm going into later. I had a watch on last night. Maserik was picked up at twenty minutes after eleven. That was reported to me two minutes later, by telephone. I got Big Ed Bladen on the phone quick. I told the puffed-up rat that if any witnesses gave Maserik an alibi I'd start with them and dump the works right back in his lap—perjury, conspiracy and the works. It was twenty-seven minutes past eleven when I hung up the phone. At nineteen minutes to twelve, Clyde Worth left his homeland went straight to headquarters—and was allowed to talk to Maserik. Result; no alibi—except his own declaration that he was in bed in his quarters over Bladen's garage when Bette was killed."

Lieutenant Polcher snorted. "Crow, damn your ugly picture! But I'm going to get you; threatening to kill people and—"

"Now you listen," Edna snapped him off. "I haven't threatened to kill anybody. That was somebody else's idea but—"

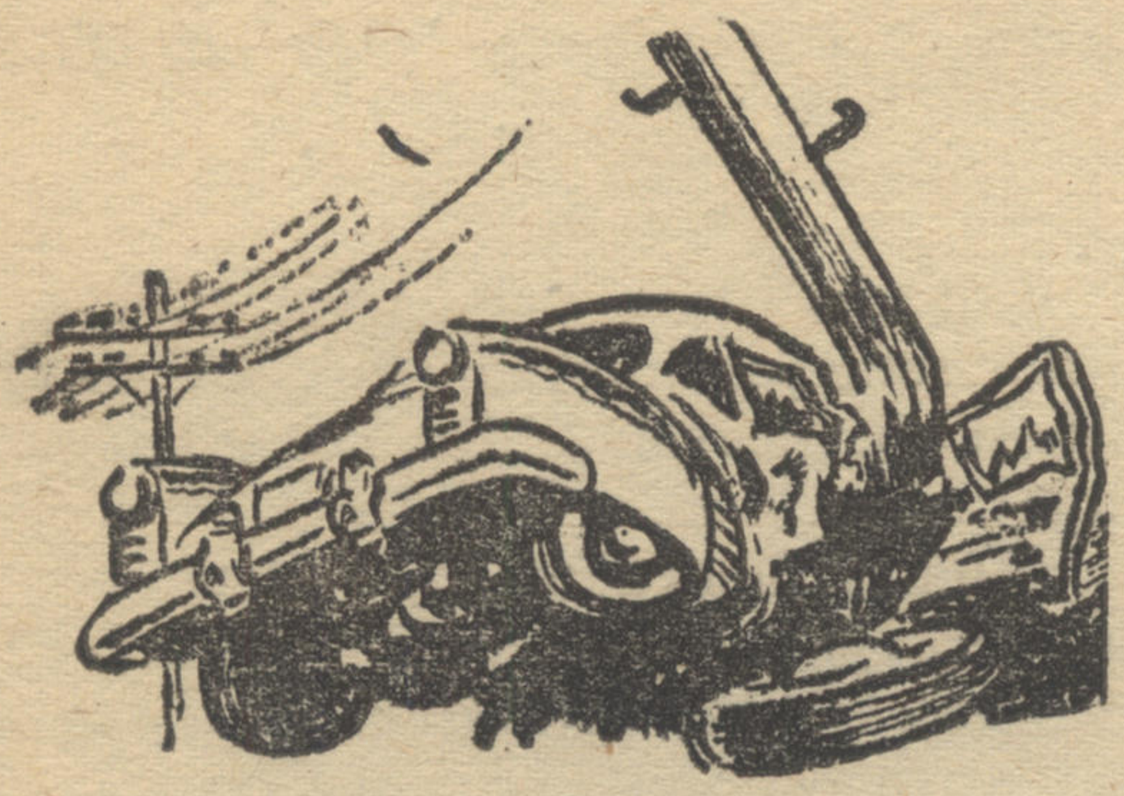
"Sid Garvin's," Polcher snarled, "but you put him up to it."

"I didn't," she retorted, "but I like it. Now you tell me something; who complained that Sid had threatened—"

"I told you—" Polcher began.

"A lot of hogwash," she sneered. "Sid was yanked in because Big Ed Bladen ordered it—and you know it. Hell of a note when your police department dances to Bladen's music. But from now on I'm going to do what you can't do. Because Big Ed and his mob and the rest of the racket rats are afraid—and here is why."

Edna picked up a folded sheet of paper from her desk and thrust it at Polcher. "There are a hundred and thirty-six names on that list—with Big Ed Bladen at the top. By now, every rat on the list has a copy of it—and a warning that all of them are going to break out with bullet holes if any harm comes to me. You see, the idea originated with a group of my friends—for the sole purpose of protecting me. I've enlarged on that. The point is this; the rats, from Big Ed on down,



know that several hundred men and women—my friends and friends of my friends—have solemnly agreed to start exterminating the entire list on sight, and without warning, if I should be rubbed out, or any attempt to do so be made. I have added some more names to those under that protection. By now, Lily Williams is included—so I don't think you need to worry about Lily being alive to testify."

"By gawd," Polcher growled, "you can't—"

"You let me finish," she stopped him, "then have your say. I'm making a final try to get along with you. I don't think you are crooked; I think your hands—but we'll take that up later, after we finish this. There are more than three thousand men in the police department, and the mobs of this town laugh at them. But they're not laughing at me—and my friends. Why? Because they can't buy any of my friends, nor scare them. They don't even know more than a couple of dozen of them. You have three thousand; I have a couple of hundred. But mine are incorruptible, and I can trust any and every one of them with my life. Would you be willing to do that with even a dozen of yours if Big Ed Bladen—for instance—wanted you rubbed out?"

"What the hell are you getting at?" Polcher countered.

"I'm getting at this," she said. "I'm going to make the crooks in this town sing low from here on—either in co-operation with you or on my own. Damn it, Polcher, if we'd get together we could raise blue hell with the rats. I've done it a couple of times alone, remember?"

POLCHER emitted something between a grunt and a growl.

"Steve and I," Edna went on, "talked this over last night. I'm going to make you a proposition. I know what is tying your hands; orders from upstairs, plus the whole lousy setup that you swallow, because it's only two years until you can retire. Suppose you didn't have that to fret about. I know that your pension won't amount to more than two hundred a month. Steve and Ed have both argued with me, time and again, that only worry about the future of your family—in case you were squeezed out without a pension—keeps you in line when the whip cracks from higher up. That's why I asked Ed Faust to sit in on this.

"I'm calling their hand. I'll set up a trust fund tomorrow to pay you two hundred a month for life, beginning on the day you are bounced off the force without pension, if you will agree to bow your neck and refuse to shut your eyes to the corruption that you can't help knowing is all around you. Steve has agreed on the fund and he will help set up the terms to suit you. Now if—"

Polcher closed his mouth which had fallen open and stabbed a finger at Miss Pender. "That's attempted bribery of a public official and—"

"Nuts," Miss Pender cut in. "I went over this with Murray Holden; you can't bribe a man to do his sworn duty. Do you think I'm dumb enough to offer you a bribe with Ed Faust for a witness?"

"There's a catch in any damn thing you do," Polcher declared hotly. "You're trying—"

"Listen, Dan Polcher," Edna flared. "You've ridden me since I was a brat making faces at you while you walked a beat in shanty town. I'm damned if—"

"Both of you listen," Steve Ware interrupted. "Dan, you and I have been friends for a long time. Edna has a

lot of whacky ideas, but she makes them work. I think this one is sound. You've told me more than once how you'd like to bust this town's rotten political setup wide open. This is your chance. I lost a lot of sleep persuading Edna to quit feuding with you. Now you're both at it again. Why don't you both stop it and begin pulling together? Dan, ask Ed what he thinks about this proposition."

"I can't meddle officially in local affairs," Faust spoke up, "but just as a friend, Dan, I advise you to take this offer up. It's insurance, that's all. And I'd lay a little bet that you can get yourself promoted instead of bounced. Personally, I'd like to have the chance this would give you to cut a lot of big shots down to size."

Polcher sat glowering for moments, then said, "I ain't going to have this ugly mug running—"

The argument went on for another quarter hour before Polcher finally agreed to Miss Pender's proposition, after stipulating that he would not be influenced by it if he caught her off-base.

"And," he declared in conclusion, "I'll get you—and a lot of your gang—on this business of threatening murder wholesale."

"Tell you what," Miss Pender snapped. "You bring on witnesses who heard Sid Garvin make such threats—and we'll see who gets whom. Also, I'm not going to stand by and do nothing when you mistreat any of my friends. Remember that a man is presumed innocent until he is proven guilty. Were you treating Sid like an innocent man when we came after him?"

"Now everybody," Ed Faust spoke up. "Let's wind this up nice and friendly. I feel that after Miss Pender has thought it over she will tone down the attitude of her private army." He smiled at Edna. "Remember that, even though it looks like a good way to clean up this gangland jungle—the jungle might shoot first."

"Business meeting is adjourned," Steve said, placing a bottle of Old Bushmills on the desk.

●

Paul and Grace Grimes entered the office suite just after four o'clock that afternoon. Steve and Miss Pender were in a huddle in Steve's office.

"The Grimes family," Paul announced, grinning at them, "invites you two to a slightly-belated wedding supper at the establishment of Chris Stathias. There will be vintage wine and—"

"Listen, you nuts," Edna cut him off, "if you are really married—"

"Woman," Paul grinned down at Grace in the circle of his arm, "show her the papers before she tears up the child."

"I'll show her nothing," Grace said. "But as soon as we get her drunk I'm going to tell Steve all about your technique in the business of overwhelming—"

"Is nothing sacred, darling?" Paul reproached her.

"Very little," Grace replied. "And don't you forget what I told you. We have an objective for tonight. Let's get on to supper and commence to begin."

Steve looked at Edna, then grinned at Grace.

"I'm not going out with a bunch of maniacs," Miss Pender declared.

"That," Grace retorted, "is what you think." She picked up the bottle of Bushmills which still stood on Steve's desk. She winked at Steve. "Do you think you can hold her, handsome, while I give her a transfusion?"

"Undoubtedly," Steve said, coming out of the chair.

Miss Pender leaped to her feet and started for the sanctuary of her own office, but Paul Grimes was blocking the doorway.

Moments later as Grace Grimes moved in on her captive friend and employer she declared, "This is going to give me almost as much pleasure as it does you—so quit squirming."

★

First Aid For Murder

(*continued from page 39*)

stall anyone else from examining him too closely. Is that right? It seems he took quite a chance."

"Lisbeth, keep out of the direct beams of the light." Mahlon suddenly pulled Lisbeth into the shadowy, tree-lined walk. "He had everything to gain. He knew that once he got Bigard into the ambulance on his way to the morgue with a judgment of heart disease made by a physician, the chances were that the Medical Examiner would not have performed the full autopsy, but merely would have signed Bigard out to his family. Yes, his kind always have families. Usually nice people, too. But that wasn't the main reason; he wanted to steal Bigard's stock of morphine out of his pockets. I have no doubt that it was a rich haul."

"Don't rush me so, Mal," she panted. "But what about *your* phone calls?"

"The second call, Lisbeth, was to the Hospital Library. I asked her to check the American Medical Directory for a physician by the name of Gordon Roscoe. There was; he died during the war.

"The second call, Lisbeth, was to Detective Brickley Lindquist. I told him to set a trap to catch a murderer; he's a quick-thinker and came through."

"The big fellow? What did he do across the street?"

"I think he followed my suggestion. When he was introduced by the traffic cop to Roscoe, he probably said he'd just been tipped off by some one inside the restaurant to the effect that a murder had been committed. Roscoe fell for it, and started to sneak away. I've no doubt that when they search him at Headquarters they'll find his pockets full of narcotics."

He suddenly grabbed Lisbeth and pushed her toward the street. "Now, Lisbeth, run for that cab. I mean—run!"

Lisbeth ran.

Mahlon shouted to the driver, "Get going, man!"

The driver had the cab in midstream traffic in seconds, but not too soon to hear the shouts of, "Hey, You! Hey, Doc Steele! Come back here!"

The cabby glanced back at them. "Do I stop?"

"No, indeed," said Lisbeth determinedly. "Ambassador Theatre, please."

She turned to her husband, "Any arguments?"

Mahlon had none.

★

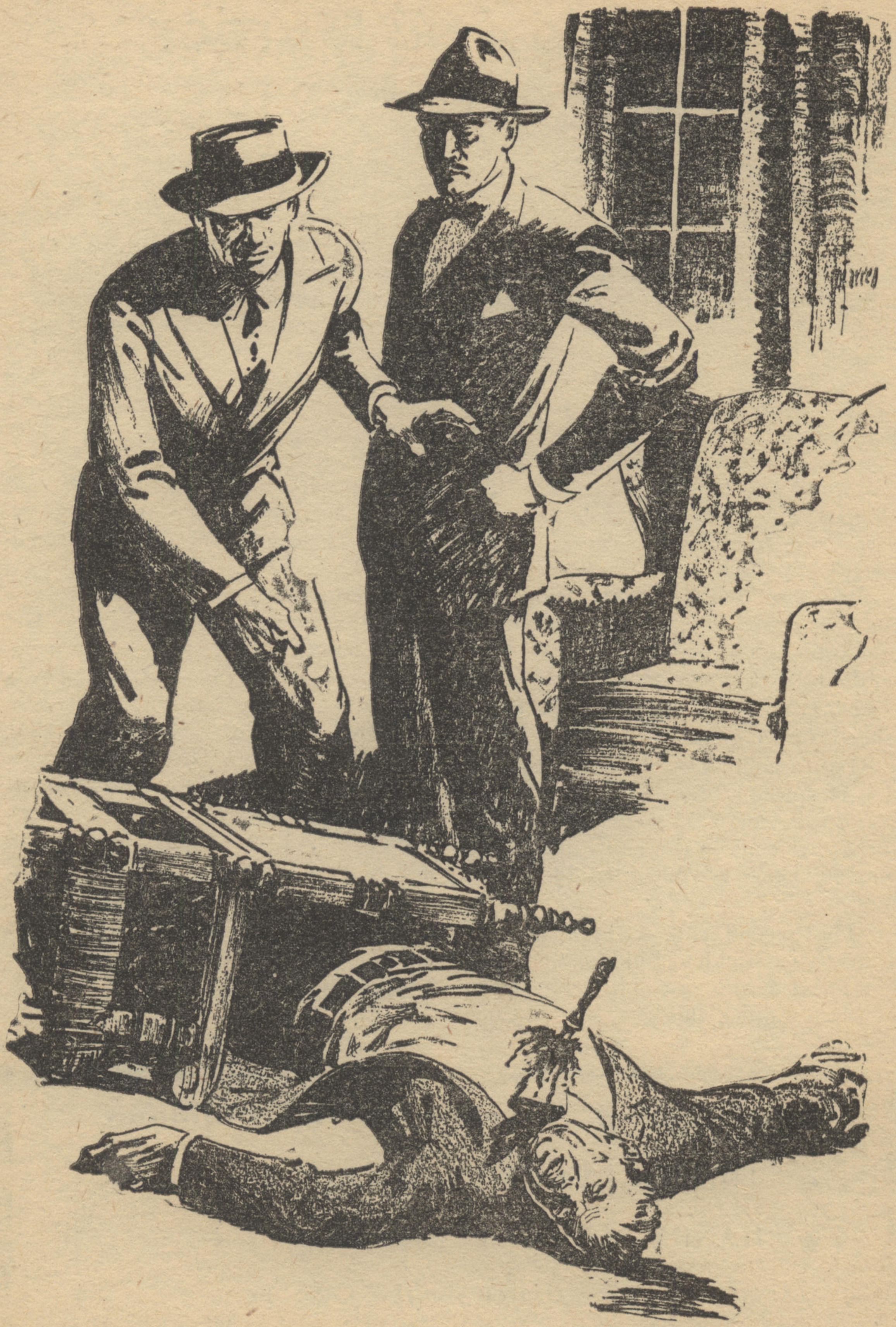
2 Thrilling Novelets of the Diamond

★ THE BIG STICK **by William F. Schwartz** ★

★ HANDY ANDY **by Roe Richmond** ★

are featured in the October

TEN-STORY SPORTS



The handle of a paper-knife—my paper-knife—projected from the dead man's chest.

That did it! Two hundred dollars as a retainer—just as it should be. But there were just two things out of place. The first—why was my fee paid in such an odd way? And two—the big question—why was I paid to find old man Walker's murderer if he wasn't even dead yet?

DIE TOMORROW, PLEASE

Novelet Of Strange Mystery

by Buck Gilmore

I HAD MADE the grade. My office was in the Graham building on the fifth floor, way back. The glass panel in the door said I did private work. Investigations. I did, when I got the chance, do investigations — but wasn't getting much to investigate lately. I had a cubbyhole of an office. It wasn't the type of office that would ordinarily fetch a lieutenant from Homicide up there for advice or help. Not Lieutenant Scott, at any rate. But it happened.

I had just walked into my office and was thinking of maybe someday dusting off the cane chairs I use for my customers, when the door opened and in walked Scott. He looked around, sniffed a couple of times and looked at me kind of hard.

"What do you use for air in here, Kelly?" he asked.

It steamed me for a second. I almost forgot who he was; then I suddenly realized. "You're very funny, Inspector; a regular killer-diller at 9 a. m.!"

He curled his lip and if I'm not entirely wrong, he sniffed. "Kelly, you know I'm a lieutenant. Keep that in mind! And now, let's step into your *private* office. I want to talk to you."

"Yeah? Sure. What laws did I break now?"

"You tell me, Kelly. What laws did you break?"

Well, that didn't leave much of an opening, so I pushed open the door of my private office, which was divided from my customers room by a single, thin wall. For Scott's benefit I yanked open the one and only window and let some of the alloyed air from outside filter through the dust into the office.

I took the chair behind my desk and motioned Lieutenant Scott to the sucker's stool.

"Kelly, have you got your morning's mail yet?" he asked.

I looked at him in surprise. "Why, yeah, I guess so. It must be on the table in the outer office. You came in before I could pick it up; I'll get it."

"Never mind; I'll get it," he said, and went through the door. He was back in a second, riffling through my own assortment of advertisements, bills and the like.

"Hey," I squeaked, "That's *my* mail!"

"Beef to the Captain about me," he said, without even looking up. Then he seemed to find what he was looking for. The bills, ads, etc., he dropped on the chair. One envelope remained in

his hand. He tossed it on the desk in front of me. "Open it," he said.

"You quite sure it's all right to open my own mail?"

"I'm laughing, can't you notice?"

I was a little burned, but I couldn't forget what he had once done for me a while back when I was looking for a stolen gem. He had notified the insurance company that I had dug it up—thereby assuring the reward money for me. Of course, I really *had* found it, but some cops overlook the niceties. Scott wasn't one of them.

So I picked up the envelope and slit it open. I extracted a once-folded sheet of paper and handed it to him. At this he smiled, then laughed, and sat down on top of the bills and ads.

"Oh, you can read it first. I know what it says, anyhow."

"Clairvoyant," I muttered, and read. But first I jumped a little before I read, for when I unfolded the sheet, two bills—bank notes, that is—dropped out and fluttered to the desk. Each was a century. One hundred dollars times two.

Scott never batted an eye. He hardly noticed the money. So I read. It was typed in caps: *RETAINER FEE ENCLOSED. SOLVE THE DEATH OF WILLIAM R. WALKER. DIED FEB. 25TH. THIS CITY. SEE POLICE FOR DETAILS. P. F.*

I HANDED it over and Scott read it quickly. "Seems you're more important than all Homicide put together," he observed. "P. F., whoever he is, wants you to solve a murder. What do you know about it?"

"Absolutely nothing," I said, surprised.

"Well, pick up the money. You're taking the case."

I carefully laid the two beauties in my wallet next to a cheap five and a couple of filthy ones. Then I put my wallet back in my hip pocket. All of a sudden it felt nice and warm and cozy, snuggling back there.

Scott grinned again at me. "You look like you never saw a century note before," he remarked.

"Well, Scottie," I admitted, "it's so long between centuries, you know..."

"Oh, murder!" he groaned.

I sat back expectantly. "What's the advice you wanted?" I finally asked.

"Who said I wanted advice?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody was right. I want to do this thing the decent way, Kelly. I'm going to ask you—ask you—mind, to go to your filing case and see what you find under 'F'. Especially, 'P. F.'"

"Okay," I said. "I'm always willing to help my brothers when they're decent about it."

"Brothers!" he flipped out, looking through my dirty window.

"But I'll tell you right now, that I haven't anything under 'F' to my knowledge. I've never had a client whose name began with..." as I said this last I had pulled out the drawer marked 'E to H' and flipped through the folders. Almost as though a magician had stuck it there, a folder catalogued 'Farnam, Phyllis' showed before my startled eyes. "Judas Priest!" I muttered.

"Find something?" Scott asked casually.

"Yeah. Phyllis Farnam. I never saw it before, either."

"Maybe your stenographer put it there."

"Oh, sure! My steno isn't working this week. In fact, I haven't a steno. I tell you I never saw this before and what's more I *did not* put it there!"

"All right," he said mildly. "What's in it?"

I opened the folder. Inside was a plain piece of paper with a few typewritten notations on it: *Received of Phyllis Farnam today, Feb. 25th, $200 retainer in William R. Walker case.* That was all. I read it to Scott, then I thought of something. I took the piece of paper over to my typewriter and inserted it in the machine, pecked out a few keys. The size type was the same.

"I don't know for sure," I said slowly, "but I think this was typewritten on my own machine. At least it looks like mine."

Scott nodded. "Probably was," he agreed.

"Now look!" I argued. "I'm levelling with you. I didn't type it; I have no steno who could have typed it. Furthermore, I swear this was not in the files last night. If you had the great big booming business I have, you'd know exactly what clients you've had—just like I do."

"All right, Kelly, all right. Let's not get our steam up. I believe you."

"Okay," I said. Then I thought of something. "Hey! How did you know I was going to get this letter and the money? And how did you know about the file?"

"I didn't know about the file," he admitted. "But I knew about the letter. I got a letter at Homicide early this morning telling me about yours."

I WAS RIGHT there with the answers. "You did?" I said, surprised.

"I said I did. In fact, the letter stated that you had been retained to solve the murder of William R. Walker, and would I please cooperate with you. How do you like that?"

"Good. Fine. That's the way it ought to be all the time."

"Uh huh. I figured you'd feel that way. Now tell me something before I 'cooperate' with you. Do you know William R. Walker?"

"Nope. You mean 'did' I know William R. Walker."

"I mean *do*."

"Whaddya mean, *do?*"

He dropped the egg right in my lap, and it wasn't cooked. "Today is February 24th," Scott said.

"Holy cow! You mean Walker isn't dead?"

"He isn't dead."

"There goes my case," I said.

"We hope. I've got men protecting him. He's quite a boy. Rich old lawyer; used to be in politics."

"How's he taking the news?"

"He's afraid he's going to die."

"Why?"

Scott lifted an eyebrow. "He doesn't know, he says."

"H'mm. And who is Phyllis Farnam?"

"Used to be his secretary until this year. Devoted to him. Faithful employee, etc."

"Did you see her?"

"Yes. She lives over on Yacuta Road. 3657. Right outside of San Berdoo."

"What's she got to say?"

"As much," Scott commented dryly, "as anybody will listen to. Unfortunately the woman is a psycopathic case."

"Confined?"

"No, no. But she has a fixation that her former employer is going to be killed tomorrow. So much so that she wrote to me; hired you; and in addition, broke into your office and put that folder in your file. I was sure of it when I spoke with her. Now that you've gotten the letter I'm positive. There's only one queer thing about it."

I beat him to the draw. "The queer thing is why Walker is afraid he's going to die."

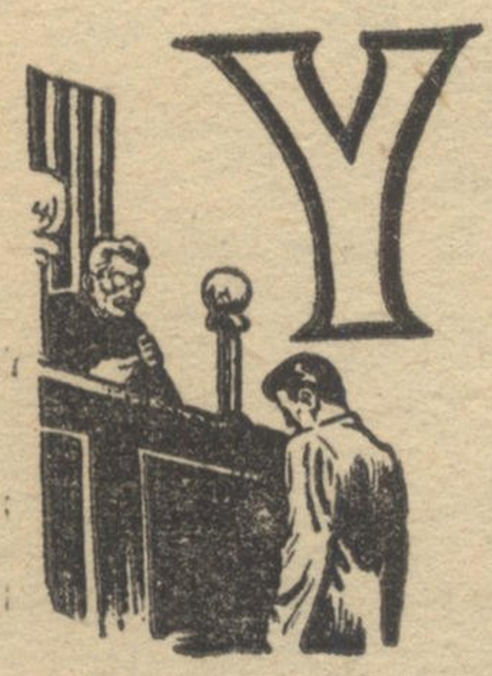
Scott looked mildly surprised. "Yes," he said wonderingly. "Exactly. Why *is* Walker afraid he's going to die?"

"Well," I said cheerfully, "I'll let you get back to your little office now,

Inspector. And when you get some more dope on it, I'll expect you to cooperate with me."

Scott didn't even bother to argue about the "inspector" as he made for the door. He just stopped a moment and his eyes were calm and thoughtful as he said: "The department will expect you to report any developments you discover, Kelly. I think we have a right to that—considering the unusual aspects. So long."

2



YACUTA ROAD was a quiet little street lined with palms and eucalyptus. There were orange trees in the neighborhood and the scent from the blossoms gave a clean smell to the air. Number 3657 was a little house set back a few feet from the street and had a well-cared-for lawn before it.

The door opened almost before I got my hand off the knocker, and a little woman dressed in a dark blue skirt topped by a frilly white blouse stood before me. She was about fifty-five or sixty and had lines etched in her face and brow which went well with her plain dressed gray hair. She looked up a little at me, for she was small.

"How do you do?" she asked in a plaintive voice.

"How do you do," I said. "I'm looking for Miss Phyllis Farnam. My name is James Kelly."

"Oh! I'm Phyllis Farnam. Please come in, won't you? I really didn't expect you until tomorrow, you know; the mail was faster than I would have thought."

I followed her inside into a tiny living room loaded with all kinds of little chairs, both covered and not—and one small divan placed kitty-corner against two walls. Half reclining on the divan was an old character which I perceived in the dim light to be a man aged enough to have remembered the "crime of '73" as though it were yesterday.

The little lady quickly seated herself on one of the more fragile chairs and I looked around for a strong one.

"This is father," Miss Farnam said. "He's a little deaf, so we can speak before him. It's all right, you know."

I didn't pay any attention to 'father'. "Look, Miss Farnam," I dug in. "First, I've come to give you back your two hundred dollars. Second, I want to know by what right you entered my office last night and used my personal property." I handed over the two centuries.

The little lady seemed more concerned with number two than with the money. She ignored it. "Mr. Kelly, I didn't 'enter' your office, as you call it. True, I went in, but the door was unlocked. Since there was no one in the office at the time, rather than entrust a note to the whims of chance, I made out that folder you found in your file. I have been a secretary all my life, and I love neatness. And as to the money, you are to keep it; you'll be earning it, won't you?"

"Look," I began again, "I'm not sore about the folder in the file. And Lord knows I'm not even a little annoyed at the money. But for heaven sake, Miss Farnam, your former employer, William R. Walker, is just as much alive as. . ."

She interrupted me. Her voice rose a pitch or two, "Mr. Kelly, I object to your use of the term 'Lord' in this sense. There's no necessity for us to allow ourselves to become disrespectful."

"Sorry," I said.

"Furthermore, I am aware that Mr. Walker," and her tone at the use of Walker's name got a pious quality about it as though she were referring to the Lord, herself, "is alive—at the moment. However, I am convinced that the dear man is going to be killed. Since

I am powerless to stop it, I am content to apprehend his murderer."

"After the murder happens, of course," I mentioned.

"Naturally," she agreed.

"What makes you think he'll be murdered?"

"This," she said and gave me a yellowed slip of paper. There was penciling upon it in a crude hand that said: *You will die Feb. 25th.* No more. Just that.

I tucked it away in my coat pocket. "Okay. So we got a blackhand. So what?"

She got a little peeved over that. "Mr. Kelly, you will please treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves! Do you think I throw money away in jokes?"

"I think you do," I said, studying her. "Lots of it, too. Two hundred dollars of it."

Somehow I got the impression that the money meant a great deal to this old lady. Her mouth began to twitch a little.

"What's more," I went on, "I think you're sacrificing this money at great suffering to yourself. But it isn't a joke. I came here to find out what it *really* is. What's the truth, now?"

Her mouth twitched faster. "Mister Kelly!" she said, but it was more as if she had asked a question.

I got up and went over to her. I put my hand under her chin and lifted her head so that her eyes met mine. She started to tremble at that.

"Please," she said quietly and then, "Please, please!" and the tears rolled down from her eyes as though I had turned on a tap. I dropped the chin, and went back to my chair.

Almost instantly she regained her composure. She spoke again: "That slip of paper, Mr. Kelly, came in the mail while I was still working in his office. It was addressed to him."

"Does he know about it?"

She tilted her head to one side and appeared to be thinking. "No," she said finally, "I don't believe I ever showed it to him."

"And you believe, because of this note, that he will be murdered tomorrow?"

"Of course. You will please devote all your time to this, won't you?"

"Oh, sure," I agreed. "It's so interesting."

"Do you really think so?" she said, a little pleased smile on her face.

"Miss Farnam, I don't know what to think. I believe that you're mistaken about all this, though. This paper you gave me is obviously a note from a crank of some sort. Tomorrow I will return your money to you, for there will be no need of an investigation. Mr. Walker will not be killed."

"Oh, I hope not," she said wistfully.

I arose and walked to the door. "Goodbye, Miss Farnam," I said.

As I went through the door, the old character on the divan sat up with a jerk. "Phyllis," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Phyllis! Who was that?"

"Would you like your warm milk now father?" she replied as I closed the door behind me.

I PAUSED outside the door marked *Homicide* and knocked. There wasn't any answer so I walked in. Scott was seated behind his desk. He looked up at me.

"I'm looking for Mr. Homicide," I said, real cute.

"Something like that has been pulled before, I imagine," Scott commented.

"Yeah," I said, throwing Miss Farnam's yellowed slip of paper on his desk.

He carefully picked it up by its corner in the manner of all homicide people who see fingerprints when there aren't any. "What's this?"

"Phyllis Farnam gave it to me."

He read it. "Funny. She didn't mention it when I talked to her."

"You probably didn't give her a chance, like me," I said. Then I told him where she got it.

"H'mm. No chance of fingerprints, I suppose. Still it's worth trying."

"Yeah. It's worth trying. And don't

forget to give me a receipt for it, will you?"

Scott's face colored at that. "The trust you place in this department," he murmured, "moves me deeply." He scribbled a receipt and passed it over.

He said something else, too, that was meant to put me in my place. "Ingratitude goes with a short memory; that's a bit of philosophy, Kelly."

"I'll stick it in my next letter to Ma," I said. "And now, Lieutenant, since I have been legitimately hired to solve a murder that was never committed, I'll be toddling off to interview the 'corpse'. I suppose your hard boys will let me in?"

He nodded slowly and turned his head to look out the window at his side. This, I imagined, was my dismissal. So I crept out tippy-toe and closed his door quietly.

●

William R. Walker was the kind you meet when you're trying to sell vacuum cleaners door to door.

"What *you* want?" he said when I gave him my card.

"Miss Farnam has hired me to discover who is going to murder you," I told him simply.

This set him off like a lit fuse. "Oh, for the love of heaven!" he exploded. "What the hell's wrong with everybody? Can you tell me? Well, young man, don't just stand there! Open your mouth—but think first, think first!"

"I'm getting two hundred dollars for listening to you. I don't mind it so far," I told him.

"You mean Farnam's giving you two hundred?"

"Yeah."

This set him stroking his chin. He was the kind of a guy who sets his moods by what he hears. Right now it was the reflective mood. "You'll give it back," he said at last.

"No."

"Listen, Mr. Kelly! Farnam's a poor woman; she's been supporting her father for years on a very small salary."

"Yeah? Wonder who she worked

for?"

His face got ripply-purple like a sixty year-old alcoholic who shaves too much. "You're too damned fresh, young man!" he spluttered.

"Okay. I came here for information anyway. Of a different kind, I mean. What you afraid of?"

This last stopped him and he assumed a new mood.

His breast rose two inches and I could see him breathe in deep. "I," he announced as though I were a reporter interviewing him, "am afraid of nothing or no one."

"Fine. You won't be scared when you die, then."

"Of course not. That is simply rubbish and this whole affair is the result of somebody's imagination."

"I don't know about that, Mr. Walker. Did you know that sometime earlier this year Miss Farnam got a letter stating you would die on Feb. 25th?"

"I did," he said solemnly. "Not only that one but several more have since reached my office. It's not unnatural for a man of my standing to have made enemies. I pay no attention to the notes."

"You know," I said wonderingly, "Miss Farnam said you were unaware she received that threatening note. Isn't that funny?"

FOR SOME unaccountable reason his face got purple once more. I expected another outburst, this time an

invitation for me to share the great outdoors with God. Instead he suddenly sat down in the nearest chair and wiped his brow with his old hand. His hand shook as he did so, and I was amazed.

"Something—?" I began.

"The police will protect me..." he muttered.

"Sure. As well as they can. You're afraid, huh?"

"I'm not afraid of dying; I'm afraid of being killed. There's a difference."

I thought that over. "Yeah, I guess there is. Well, have you got one of those threatening notes? I'd like to see one."

He reached into his breast pocket and passed over a slip of paper. Yellowed like the rest. Same crude hand. Same message: *You will die Feb. 25th.* However, underneath this was another message. A post script, as it were: *I have spent much on postage for these warning notes. It must stop. Don't fail me tomorrow.*

"This came today?" I asked.

He nodded, and I thought it over for a moment. "You have any idea who's sending them?"

He nodded to this one, too. "Yes. It's old Mr. Farnam; he has put a curse on me."

"Why?"

"For ungentlemanly treatment of his daughter, he says."

"He right about that?"

Walker lifted his hand off his forehead and looked at me. "Farnam was with me for many years. Would she have stayed had I been ungentlemanly?" he asked.

"Well that's that," I said. "You afraid of that old man?"

"I don't know. He's weak and old and..."

"And deaf," I added. "He won't hear your cries as you die. No fun in it for him."

"Look here, Kelly! This all seems funny to you, does it? Something to joke about? You can get the hell out, then. Now!"

"Getting killed isn't funny, Mr. Walker," I admitted. "But being scared of an old man who can't do much more than say his prayers anymore *is* funny."

Walker's face got still and the purple drained out like water dripping from a bag. "That's just it, Kelly. He prays—all the time that I'll die!"

"His batting average so far is zero," I answered.

"Prayer is strong," he countered. "Even Gerald tells me that."

"Who's Gerald?"

"My nephew. He lives with me; he's very religious."

This was getting out of hand. My Doctor of Divinity's degree hadn't come through yet so I had to stop there.

"My two hundred dollars goes back to Miss Farnam tomorrow," I said. "This is the second time I've said that, now. Goodbye."

"The Police will protect me!" Walker said again, hopefully.

"Better yet," I told him as I left the room, "why don't you pray hard that old Farnam's prayer don't come true. That'll confuse the Angels." He didn't seem to grin much at that, I saw, as I closed the door behind me.

3

I HADN'T been back to my office for my daily nap, so I headed there. On the way I dropped off my latest threat note at Homicide. Lieutenant Scott was still in. He looked as a matter of fact as if he were all in.

"Tired?" I said.

For the first time I got out of him a friendly tone of voice. "No, Kelly, but somehow I don't feel up to par today. I must have eaten something."

"People often do," I encouraged. But he didn't follow it up.

"Did you want something?"

"Not especially. You instructed me

to report progress, etc. I'm reporting." I laid the yellowed threat note in front of him and he read it at a glance.

"This come from Walker?" he asked.

"Yeah. And you were right. He *is* afraid of something. I don't believe it's a fear of death. He himself said he was afraid only of being killed; he pointed out there was a difference. But I think he's afraid of something else. We parted not on the mutual note of cheery comradeship you might expect of a couple of love birds like us."

Scott laughed. It was a pleasant laugh and not sarcastic. I was finding out that this guy was a nice Joe once you got to know him—if you were on the right side of the law.

"Why don't you join the force, Kelly?" he asked curiously. "I could have you attached to Homicide."

That made me laugh with him. "It'd be a break for your department." I conceded. "But I don't like homicide. Matter of fact I'm returning Miss Farnam's two hundred dollars tomorrow because I think this case is going to get serious."

Scott's laughing wasn't laughing anymore. It was noises in his throat. "It doesn't matter, Kelly," he was saying. "I've been to see Walker. My boys are guiding his path for the next few days, just in case. But since I saw you earlier, I've gotten the impression that we'd better go softly, Kelly."

"What you mean?" I asked. And of course, then I got it. "Somebody closer to heaven than you whisper to tread easy?"

Scott's face tinged pinkly. I couldn't help thinking he'd have made a nice blushing bride—around 1925 or so. "Captain Hendricks was in this morning and he—"

"He what, Scott? He speak rough?"

"I take back what I said about you joining the force, Kelly."

"I thought you'd feel different when you considered."

"The truth," he said quickly, "as I see it, or think I do, is that William R. Walker was annoyed at my visit. He complained. I heard about it. Therefore, I'm just as pleased that you're dropping the case."

"You 'heard' about it? I'll bet. And you told me you felt ill over something you ate! Oh, fine. That sort of loyalty we often read about, don't we?"

I GOT BACK to my office and put my feet on the desk. Ah! This is the way I liked to run a case! This was the way to live. Desks were designed especially for the feet. Yessir, feet on a desk, hat over the eyes, hands on the chest. What more could a detective want? What more...

A stinkin' little voice that I wouldn't have given two cents for floated into my private office from the "reception" room outside.

"Mr. Kelly. Mr. Kelly? Oh, there you are, Mr. Kelly!"

"Here I am, Lord," I conceded.

A shocked, chubby pink face stuck itself into view. "Did you say that?" it asked.

"I said that. I being Kelly, aforementioned."

The voice built into that pink face whipped up and out at me. "Never, never speak in that irreverant manner when quoting from the 'book'!" it told me.

"Who are you, little man?" I wanted to know.

Pink face came closer and lost its stern look. It almost seemed to want to smile a bit. "I am Gerald Walker, you know?" he said and asked at the same time.

"The nephew of old William R."

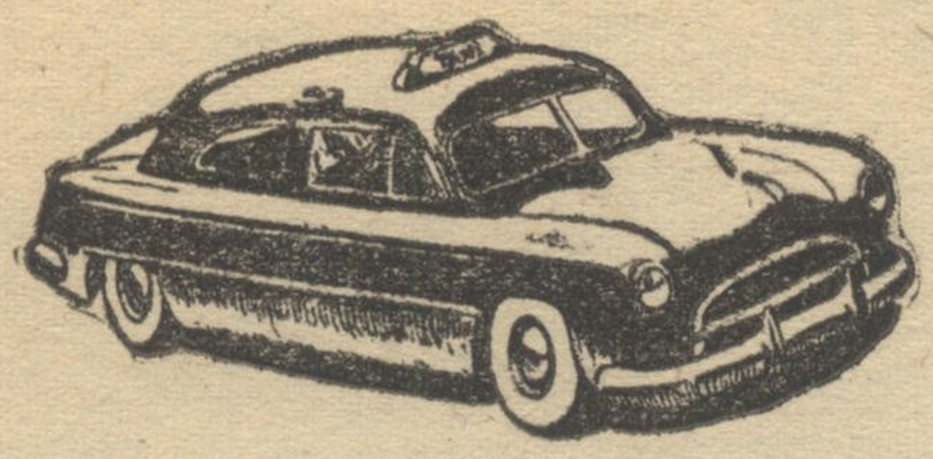
"Yes," he dipped his head in agreement.

"Okay. Now we're buddies. What can I do for you?"

The pink face got a little pinker. "This is rather embarrassing, you know, Mr. Kelly? I believe you were out to see uncle this morning?"

"About noon," I admitted.

"Oh, yes? I would have thought earlier. I'm afraid that uncle gave you a bad impression, now?"



"No badder than I've ever gotten before."

"Excuse me. No what?"

"Badder. Comparative of bad."

"Oh, I'm not sure?" he seemed to surmount his doubts, manfully. "I'd like to apologize for uncle's discourtesy, Mr. Kelly. You see, he's not quite himself."

"Yeah, I know. Prayer's killing him."

"Oh, you noticed?"

"He told me. Have a drink?" I offered him a guest bottle usually hid in my desk for occasions like this.

Pink face stared as though it were a rare sort of beetle. "Is—is that liquor?"

"Used to be ink. Now I got a ball pen. Drink it, instead."

"I rather think we had better talk about uncle," he said hastily.

"Okay. What about?"

"Well, please try to understand, Mr. Kelly. Uncle is going to die tomorrow, I'm afraid. And I must say he rather deserves it?"

"Who's killing him tomorrow?"

"Not 'who', but 'what'. Prayer. *Prayer*, Mr. Kelly!"

I opened the bottle and sampled the ink. A nice big generous sample. "Oh, brother!" I gargled.

This offended him. "Mr. Kelly! A gentleman shouldn't act like that."

I just stared at him. "Tell me, Gerald, what do you do for a living?" This at the moment seemed important.

He drew up his little frame in what seemed to be a pose. "I", he announced as though he were discovering the Canadian Cataract at the Falls, "I am an attorney-at-law."

That did it. I could hear it tear. "Cripes!" I whispered.

And that little statement of his seemed to be a flick of the switch that would begin to end this silly business. He gave me one good, chin-up look then turned on his heel and left. And I sat there, letting him go, wondering just what had brought the little man to see me. Maybe to apologize for uncle's rudeness. It seemed likely.

LIEUTENANT Scott called me at my office the next morning. The phone was ringing as I walked in the door. I grabbed the thing before it had a chance to change its mind.

"Kelly?"

"Yup."

"Scott, Homicide."

"Yup."

"Can you come out to William Walker's home at once?"

"Yup."

"I want you to identify something."

"Yup."

"Make it snappy—and don't say 'yup'."

I didn't get the chance. He slammed the receiver down and I spent the next couple of minutes picking it out of my ear.

Scott was the butler who met me at the door. He was a little grim. "C'mon in," he said.

I followed him into the hall and through a doorway into the same room where I had met William Walker yesterday. The thing lay flat on its back, arms stretched out on the floor like a crucifix, the face looking at the ceiling but not seeing it. And from the little chest of the thing, stuck at right angles to it, was a slick-looking paper knife. The handle of a paper knife, rather. My paper knife, from my desk, in my office. And the thing on the floor was chubby pink-face who, I guessed, had got his prayers short-circuited.

"He doesn't look natural," I told Scott.

He'd been watching me. "How'd you know that?" he asked.

I grinned at him. "Pretty boy paid me a visit yesterday afternoon. I see he had fetching ways."

"Yeah?" Scott said, watching me.

"My paper knife, that, sticking amidst the ribs."

"You're sure?"

"Yup."

"I thought so; your name stamped on the handle, anyway. Just wanted to be sure. We'll have prints taken off it, if any."

Looking at Gerald's cadaver on the floor, I related to Scott the visit of the former on the previous day.

He eyed me carefully. Finally he said: "Do you have any idea why he came to the office?"

"I'm not sure, of course. But since last night I've had a feeling that the little fellow just wanted to see what sort of a fraud a detective really was. Why, I don't know."

"What makes you say that?"

"I really wouldn't know. Just a feeling."

Then I had another idea. "Where's old man Walker?"

"Upstairs. Lying down. He discovered his nephew's body. Quite a shock, I imagine."

"Could I talk to him?"

From this I got the deep-freeze. "You're off the case, remember, Kelly? Today you're sending the two hundred dollars back to Miss Farnam."

"I've changed my mind again," I decided.

"Change it once more, then. I called you over to identify that paper knife. Later, you'll sign a statement to that effect. And that," here Scott laid his brown eyes on me like a kindly father, "is that."

I got out the needle and gave it to him. "Okay, *Inspector,*" I said. But the needle was dull. He never even felt it.

I BUZZED across town and pulled my little Plymouth coupe up in front of the Farnam house. Miss Phyllis Farnam was on her hands and knees on the lawn with a little instrument in her hand. As I walked close to her I saw she was pulling weeds. Today she was dressed in a plain black dress covered by a Hoover apron that was a little soiled. Her small figure resembled a child's as she yanked patiently at the dandelions.

"Good morning, Miss Farnam," I said.

She looked up and wiped a little film of perspiration from her forehead. "Good morning, Mr. Kelly."

"Today is the 25th, Miss Farnam."

"Yes," she sighed. "The 25th."

"Here's your money, Miss Farnam."

The little lady looked up at me questioningly. "Money, Mr. Kelly?"

"Yes. I'm returning it. Deal's off."

"But, Mr Kelly! The 25th, you know!"

I gave her a stony glance, but it didn't do any good. It wasn't working this morning. "Miss Farnam, will you take the two hundred or won't you?"

She didn't like that one bit. "Mr. Kelly! An agreement is an agreement. It's too late for me to get another detective now so you'll just have to go through with it! I must say you're a fine man. A body can't depend on you for one minute—"

She might have got real wound up if I hadn't stopped it. "Miss Farnam," I said. Then I got fresh. "Phyllis!" That did it. She stopped like gas when you don't pay the bill. "I'll keep my end of the bargain on one condition."

She just looked but didn't say anything, so I continued. "I'll go through with it if you'll tell me why you swiped my paper knife—and what's more, where it is now."

Gentle rain falling with a caress on her tender cheek would have disturbed her more than I did. She never even blinked. "All right, Mr. Kelly. You see, Gerald Walker would never have believed that I actually went to your office without some proof to present to him. Therefore, since you weren't there to write a note of proof, I simply stole the least valuable object I could find. I gave the paper knife to him and I suppose he has it now."

"You can be sure he has," I said grimly. "It's sticking in his chest. Is that the way you gave it to him?"

"Of course not!" Then she got the implication. "You mean Gerald's hurt?"

"Gerald's dead. He was killed last night."

"Oh, no!" the breath left her with the words.

I reached down and took the weeding implement from her. She was automatically digging a hole with it. She seemed to be surprised at the hole for a while. "Dead?" she said to herself.

"You see, Miss Farnam, this matter isn't just a game any longer. Lieutenant Scott of Homicide has warned me to keep out of it. However, if you are still determined to carry on with your original intention, I'll keep the money—and either give it back to you later when you want it, or apply it toward any services I can perform aside from this death."

She raised herself quickly like a small girl. "I must see how father is. It's time for his warm milk, I think. You'll excuse me, please, Mr. Kelly." And with that she quickly walked into the house, leaving me with a weeder and some droopy dandelions. I placed the weeder on the steps of the house and walked back to the car.

This thing had me thinking for a change. First, I hadn't quit, like Scott told me to. Second, I had more or less promised Miss Farnam to carry on. How? The solution to that lay in a session at the office.

I HAD BEEN dreaming it over for about ten minutes when the phone rang. It was Scott again. He seemed curiously interested in speaking to me for some reason.

"Kelly?"

"Yup."

"Oh, no. Not that routine again, Kelly."

"Okay," I said. I felt agreeable.

"A question I'd like to ask you, Kelly."

"Fine. Shoot."

"When Gerald Walker was in your office yesterday would you say he'd had a chance to take your paper knife, without your knowledge?"

Scott was pumping a dry well but didn't know it yet.

"I might say so, Lieutenant," I said softly; "but I won't."

The line was quiet for a moment. I could almost hear Scott thinking that over. Finally: "Like that, eh?"

"Well," I told him, "consider; you told me to get out and stay out. You also told me to return that two hundred to Miss Farnam. I've just come back from there. And you want information."

"I see. Well, Kelly, maybe you have a point and maybe you haven't. That's up to you. My question was merely in the line of a favor, really."

"Don't get me wrong, Lieutenant. But look; you got a steady job—not me. Each little case I get means milk and pie for a few more days. When I see the milk and pie go whispering away, just because somebody else says to scat—well, you can see what I mean."

I'll say one thing more for Scott. He was decent inside of him. He proved it with the next words: "I can understand that, Kelly. Perhaps I didn't see it that way at first. I'm sorry you lost the money."

"Save the sorrow," I said; "maybe we can make a deal."

There was a sudden chill on the line. "Deal?"

"Sort of. How about me carrying on with this investigation but with

your approval of everything I do—before I do it?"

"Hmm. Any mental reservations behind the—deal?"

"Nope."

"All right. I'll take your word for it. You report to me what you want to do; if it's okay, you can do it."

"You're a gentleman, Scott. And now for your question. No, *sir*, Gerald Walker didn't have a ghost of a chance to remove my paper knife without my knowledge yesterday. I've thought that over. He stayed only a moment, and never got close enough to the desk."

"Hmm. There were prints on the knife, but blurred. No soap. That means only one other thing, doesn't it?"

"Exactly what, Lieutenant?"

"One other person could have removed that knife, Kelly."

"Who?"

"Miss Farnam."

"Yes. She could have."

"Did she?"

"I should know?"

"I think so."

"Okay, then. Yes, I think she stole the knife."

"Why would she kill Gerald?"

"Bud, you're on the wrong road. That old lady cries her heart out when she has to decapitate a dandelion. She didn't kill Gerald. One thing I'll tell you for sure. Walker—I mean the old man—felt he'd be knocked off by 'potent prayer'."

"By what?"

"Potent prayer."

Scott was having a hard time with that one. "Yeah?" he said at last.

"Yeah. Miss Farnam's father was doing the prayers for this season, it seems. He didn't quite like Walker. Wanted him to die. Practically asked him to."

"Are you serious?" Scott asked.

"I don't know," I replied; "I'm repeating what Walker told me."

"At any rate, prayer was left out in Gerald's case."

"Looks like it. Prayer was too slow, I guess."

"You think Mr. Farnam killed Gerald?"

"Did I say that? I must be getting careless."

"Well, no. I assumed you meant that."

"Hey, Scott."

"Yes?"

"I want to talk with old man Walker. Can do it?"

He thought that over. "Yes, I guess so."

"Alone?"

"All right. I'd like a report from you later, though."

I SNUCK over to Walker's house. Some of the Homicide men were there. They didn't object to me so I guessed Scott had called about me. It was easier than I had thought. Walker was up and about. In fact, he was very much about. He was screaming at the department men for messing up his living room.

I tried to bust into it but for a while it looked like I was going to get pasted by both sides. Finally however, Walker seemed to quiet down. He looked at me anew as though I had just walked into the room.

"What do you want here?"

"Ah, that's more like the old Walker tone," I said cheerily. "Nothing important; just wanted to ask you a curious question or two."

"Well, ask then."

I raised my left eyebrow. "What? In front of all these snoopy department boys?"

He seemed to agree instantly with that one. "Yes, you're right; come into my den."

I followed him in and he shut the door. We both walked over to his snuggy fireplace in the far corner and sat down.

I got at him before he could start on his own. "You're not too cut up over Gerald's death?" I asked mildly.

It jolted him and I could see the

blood pressure mounting again. Just as suddenly, though, he calmed down again.

"Why should I be?" he asked suspiciously.

That one jolted me. "Wasn't he your nephew?"

"He was not."

I managed to say, "Oh," and then waited, like waiting for an explosion you know will occur. Only, in this case it didn't ever.

"He lost the right to call himself my nephew when he married that woman last month."

I scratched my chin. "He did, eh? Last month. What was her name, again?"

"Linda Raleigh, she called herself. Now she's Linda Walker, but as far as I'm concerned, she's nobody. She'll never get a penny out of me. Gerald didn't know it, but I had my will changed last week."

I decided to try my luck some more. "What you got against Linda, Mr. Walker?" I said casually.

He bit. "My Lord, what *wouldn't* I have against her? She's nothing but a nightclub female cockroach. One of those girls who crawl out of the woodwork, and the next thing you're trying to brush her off your coat. Only Gerald was too much of a blind fool to see it. He thought she was 'pretty'. Hmmph. Pretty!"

"Like that, huh? How's she feel since Gerald got—er, ah, since something happened to him?"

The old man snorted. "How should I know? She might not even know it, for all I care."

I thought of something. "She doesn't live here?"

"She does not. And neither did Gerald since he tied himself to that—that..."

I thought of something else. It bothered me. "What was Gerald doing here when he got killed?"

Seemed like I was annoying the old boy. He ran his hand through his sparse hair and growled: "I don't know that, either. I've told the police that a hundred times already, and now you. How do I know what Gerald was doing here? He still had his key to the house, I suppose. Anyway, I was asleep and I didn't even hear him come in."

"I see," I said. "And he didn't have any enemies at all, eh?"

"I didn't say that. I wouldn't know, but I'd guess he'd have plenty; he was always so damned pious he must have rubbed somebody the wrong way."

"Uh huh. I can understand that. Well, I won't be bothering you any more today—today that is. Only one thing, though. You still afraid of being killed?"

He stopped the hair polishing for an instant. "Hmm. I hadn't thought of that."

He was in a totally different mood now. The thoughtful mood. It didn't brook any disturbance, so I left him.

4

SCOTT WASN'T in when I called on the phone, so I decided to go over to headquarters and wait for him. Ten minutes cooling myself in his office finally brought him in. "Hot out, huh?" I asked.

He was sweating. "Hot, my dear Kelly, is not the right word. And not only the weather. I have just had the painful pleasure of talking to Gerald's wife."

"So? She's all the old boy intimated, I suppose?"

He grinned sourly. "I don't know what the old boy intimated, but she's a rough one; gave me a very bad time."

"She pretty, Scott?"

He wrung a laugh out of the grin. "Yes, in a way. You'd think so if you were about half lit and didn't care what happened to you. In my sober moments, I'd say she was hard."

"She all broke up over Gerald's death?"

"At first," he shrugged. "Two minutes of that, though, and she tired of the part. She's interested only in what she gets as his widow."

"You think she did it?"

He thought that over. "I'm not saying, Kelly; I'm not going to book her now, however."

"Good. You'd be making a mistake if you did."

"You think so?"

"Look, Scott," I said, "doesn't it seem funny, in the first place, that Gerald should be dead at all? Especially since it was old man Walker who was supposed to die today?"

Scott nodded. "Yes," he admitted slowly. "I've been thinking that, too. But not funny. Ironic, rather."

"Okay, ironic. Now, sneak up on that thought, son."

"There isn't any sneaking to be done. Gerald's dead and that's that. All I want to know is—what was the motive?"

I shook my head sadly at the old boy. It grieves me when a good brain like Scott's goes to sleep right in the middle of the feature picture. He just stood there sort of looking away into space, little beads of sweat sparkling like jewels in his forehead.

"Ah, yes," I murmured. "Well, Scottie, so long now."

He suddenly snapped to attention. "So long? Didn't you have something to tell me? A report?"

"Oh, that," I brushed.

"Yes, that. What's on your mind?"

"You really listening, son?"

His nose narrowed a bit at the nostrils when I called him that, but he only nodded.

"Okay. I spoke to old man Walker. He dislikes his nephew's wife. In fact, he changed his will so that Gerald wouldn't inherit a cent; wouldn't even let the poor boy live with him any more."

Scott was looking straight into my eyes. I couldn't tell whether he was

studying me, or whether he had dropped off to dreamland again. So I kept on talking. "The dear old gent doesn't know whether he's still afraid of getting killed. I asked him and it set him thinking. Moody thinking. There's my report, chief."

A kindly smile played about Scott's wet face. He continued to smile; it looked as if it was pasted there.

"Something funny has been said?" I asked.

"H'mm. I was just thinking of my remark about you working for Homicide, Kelly. When you called me Chief."

"Merely a name," I shrugged. "Homicide's not my dish; it sickeneth me."

"Yes. Aren't we all? Well, I guess you've told the truth—partially, at least. Something else, Kelly. Are you entirely through with Miss Farnam? I mean about the money end of it?"

"Conscience bother you?" I spoke to someone. Nobody in particular.

"Conscience!" he sniffed. "I've always had a weakness for Irishmen, that's all. I thought that since you have bothered to speak with Walker again, you might have made more arrangements with Miss Farnam. Well, just in case, you have my blessings with your investigations—should Walker be killed. But be careful!"

"My gosh!" I said. For a minute I looked carefully at him. He *did* look sick, now that I thought of it. "Pretty generous, Scott."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"Okay. One good turn from you. Ditto from me. Listen carefully. Don't waste time looking for motives for Gerald's death. There aren't any."

"Why?" Scott whispered, his eyes

almost closed but still looking at mine.

But that was enough from James J. for one day. I crept softly toward the door. " 'Bye, son," I said.

LINDA WALKER, nee Raleigh, must have had a small roll somewhere because she lived in a nice apartment on Main near Second in Riverside. Not snooty, just pretty refined. I blushed with shame when I punched eight bell buttons in the old time-worn manner and grabbed the door when the little click bid me enter. The apartment I wanted was on the third floor, front. Quiet, sedate, well-groomed—where nice people live.

Tall, blonde, lovely skin answered the door for me when I knocked softly. Eyes that looked at me were brown, which gave me the thought that the hair was bleached. Maybe I was wrong, maybe not.

"Hello Mrs. Walker," I said, slipping her one of my cards that said I was a bright young man like you'd expect.

She read the little card and questioned me with the brown eyes.

I dragged up all the charm combined with understanding that I figured must be in me. "Would you please talk a little with me, Mrs. Walker? It won't hurt too much; I'm a nice feller, honest."

Brown eyes closed and opened fast, then laughed. Some eyes can do that without half trying. She just pulled the door open farther and walked into the apartment again. I followed and picked out a nice-looking chair that had bamboo for a framework. I half noticed that the covering on the chair matched with exactitude the stuff on the walls which I vulgarly thought of as paint.

"I met your husband only once, Mrs. Walker; I don't think he liked me much. But we were scheduled to have become better acquainted. Only now, of course, we can't. So I've come to you for help."

One rare, precious word escaped her lips before she could catch it. "How?" she asked.

"I've been retained by a Phyllis Farnam to solve the murder of Gerald's uncle William."

That did it. The eyes popped and the mouth dropped open. *"What?"*

"Yeah. Of course uncle William hasn't been killed—yet, but he's due today."

The brown eyes widened again with what I thought was disgust. She got up from the divan and walked to the door.

"Where you going?" I asked.

"Nowhere, but you are. Did it ever occur to you that my husband is dead—and that I might be feeling sad?"

"I'm sorry," I said hastily. "I might have been more delicate about this. And I would have, except that I don't think your grief is exactly bowing you down."

Her left hand was on the satiny door knob. I was watching it. You'd expect her muscles would have tensed when I told her that, but nothing like that was happening. She looked like she was *leaning* on the knob for comfort.

"You know," I continued. "You'd be a good looking gal if you'd only quit acting. It's out of season here anyway. Hollywood's fifty miles away and folks around here never even heard of it."

"You don't say," she said in her most natural manner.

"So, come on back here and talk like a human. Maybe I'll forget the acting of a minute ago when I find out just how sweet and loveable you really are."

She put both hands on her hips and pinned me down with her eyes. "I oughta bust you one in the teeth for that crack," she said coldly.

"Yeah, only you wouldn't."

"Oh, wouldn't I?"

"Well," I temporized, "if you'd like to try, go ahead. And as soon as you do, I'll smash your cute little nose flat against your makeup. And I ain't kid-

ding, sweetheart. When it comes to you, I'd just as soon paste you one as spit. And I feel like spitting right now."

SHE CAME back to the divan and sat down. Just as though everything was natural and she was back home in Missouri or Texas or Kansas somewhere and her father was talking to her again just like he did when she was fifteen.

"You unspeakable name!" she said flatly. Then her mouth relaxed. She was feeling better. She was on home grounds again.

"That's me," I agreed. "And now for a bit of advice. You might as well collect Gerald's insurance and get out. You'll never get anything else; the old boy changed his will last week."

Her eyes left me and studied the rug.

"You won't do so badly," I reasoned. "Of course, you won't get all the insurance and estate that Gerald left. Uncle will come in for some of it—unless he left a will, of course."

And for the first time Linda smiled. "He did," she said agreeably. "And all for me!"

"Good. I hope you enjoy every penny of it."

"Oh it isn't so much!" she flared. Suddenly she got another thought. "What *are* you here for, anyway?"

"Information," I said. "I'll make it quick and interesting. First, did you kill your husband?"

"Hell, no," she said with a lilt on the 'no' such as you hear in Nevada even nowdays.

"Why not?" I asked with a nice load of surprise in my voice.

"Why should I? I could stand that dope of a Gerald, let him go to his church meeting if he wanted to. I can entertain myself I guess. Besides, Uncle Will was due to kick in soon. I figured that we'd be rolling in it before long. Then I could kick Gerald out and live."

I couldn't keep it back. I had to say it: "Brother!" I breathed. "Okay, Mrs. Walker. Now another. Two, in fact. Do you know who might have killed him? And what was he doing at his uncle's house last night when he should have been here with you?"

"No, dammit," she said, provoked. "I don't know what the jerk was doing over there. He was supposed to be seeing a client."

"Who?"

"I wouldn't know. He just said he had to meet a client. And I don't know who would kill him. Tell me, who would bother?"

"I don't know. I wish I did," I said.

"You want to know what I think? I think *nobody* would bother. That jerk!"

"Yeah," I said. Then I got up and moseyed over to the door. The rug was nice and thick. Gave me a good feeling going through it. When I was at the door I thought of something else and turned again. "Mrs. Walker?"

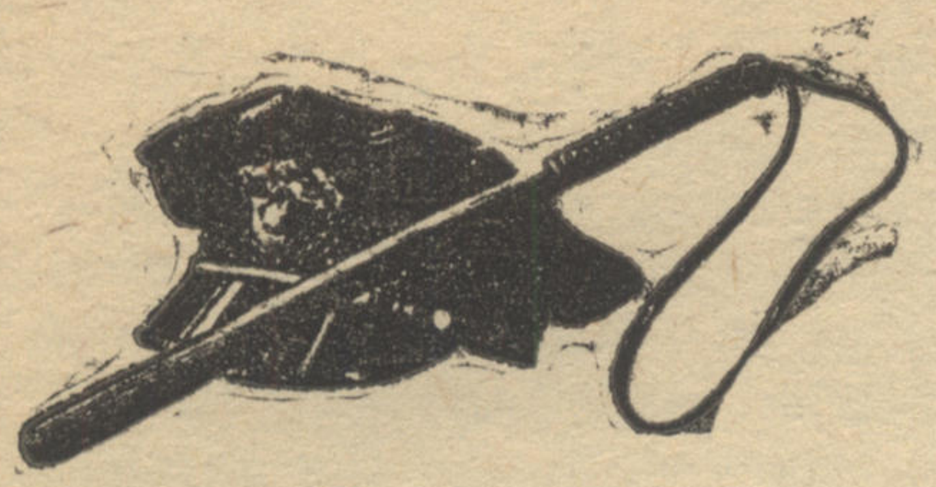
"What?"

"The world is full of different people and they all have their points of view. But sometimes others can't appreciate that point of view. That's what starts wars. So, when you go over to see old man Walker, why not sort of wear the black and weep a bit, huh? It'll look better."

As I closed the door I heard a couple of words from her: "Another jerk!" she was saying to herself.

I TOOLED the Plymouth over to Yacuta Drive again. The afternoon was getting late and I wasn't sure if I was breaking in on their dinner hour or not, but I picked up the knocker on the Farnam's little bungalow.

The door opened slowly and I came face to face with Miss Farnam's father. Although I had seen him in a rather vague manner when I was there before, this was the first time I got a good look at the old bird. Austerity, the noun, means severity of manner of life; harsh discipline; rigorous simplicity. But its cousin, the



adjective, austere, when applied to Mr. Farnam, was weak indeed. Mr. Farnam was not austere; he was the grand-daddy of all ascetics. When he breathed, he did so sparingly and with great dignity. His was the simple, cup-of-cold-water type of existence. It stuck out all over him like a basketball in a bowl of soup.

"You," he pronounced solemnly.

I felt like saying, "What did you expect, Mrs. Zelinsky?" but somehow there was too much surprise in it for me. I let it ride.

"So you know me."

"My daughter may know you," he corrected. "I know of you."

"Okay, I'm James J. Kelly. Until now a happy sort of guy. Keep me that way, huh?" All this short time I'm casually looking for his hearing aid. He *must* have one. Miss Farnam said he was deaf, and yet he hears me perfectly although I'm speaking in a normal voice. And then, when I thought I had made a fine dandy discovery, I saw it. A thin almost invisible wire peeped out from behind his ear and snuck ashamed-like down his neck and into his collar somewhere. He was wearing one of those bone conductor outfits. It didn't show much from the front. Somehow, I felt sorry for the old bird. "Excuse the flippancy," I said apologetically. "I'd like to see Miss Farnam, if I could."

His old gray head shook slowly from side to side somewhat like a tired old horse does when he looks at you over a fence. "Not today, not today," he whispered. "My daughter is sick."

"Sick?" I repeated stupidly.

The handsome old man forgot my existence. He raised his gray mane and searched the late afternoon sky with his watery old eyes. "May the gracious Maker," he prayed, "deliver her from the evils which beset her this hour." Then the old head bowed and he muttered "Amen," and closed the door in my face. Funny, but I didn't mind. I've seen crackpots here and there of various kinds, but for some reason or other I felt like I had just been in church.

I WALKED slowly back to the car, thinking. What to do now? And was there anything to do at all. I was trying to earn my two hundred bucks but really I didn't know how. There was one big thing wrong, of course. The right guy hadn't died—as yet, that is—so I was without a corpse to work with. I felt kind of naked.

The old office in the Graham building was still there when I got back to it. Don't now why I didn't go home. Guess I just wanted to think out why Gerald had gone over to see Miss Farnam last night. That is, if it were she he went to visit. Linda had said a client. I guessed it had been Phyllis Farnam, but I didn't know why. But thinking didn't help any. I've never been very good at that at any time in my life. Don't know why I expected anything now.

For luck, I called Homicide on the phone. No luck. They told me Scott was out. So I tried the Walker residence, and got one of the strong boys. "Yeah?" I got.

"Lieutenant Scott there?" I asked.

There was whispering and then, "Who's calling?"

"Kelly. He's heard of me."

More whispering and then Scott's voice. "Well, Kelly?"

"Nothing much, Inspector," I drawled sleepily. "Just reporting; nothing to report. I saw the widow of young Gerald. Quite a lady. Went to Farnam's. Miss Farnam is sick—the father says. Now back in my little office."

"Thank you, Kelly," Scott said politely. It staggered me. The more I hung around him, the better he treated

me. That couldn't be normal unless I had something on the ball, and knowing me like I do, I doubted that. He offered me no news, just murmured some more politeness that fell on my happy ears and hung up. I was beginning to worry. Scott must be sick, I thought.

5

WHAT DID I have to work with? Nothing, I decided. Not forgetting brains, either. Nothing too disturbing, however. As far as my conscience was concerned, I hadn't let Miss Farnam down. On the other hand I hadn't done anything to earn the two hundred, but that wasn't my fault. The victim simply hadn't been killed. But I did want to keep abreast of things so I summed it all up on a little scrap of paper that I found in my waste basket. It looked like this when I got through:

1. *Walker was due to get killed.*
2. *Gerald, his nephew, is removed instead.*
3. *Presumably, old man Farnam still wants Walker to die—for wronging his daughter.*
4. *Walker isn't grieved over Gerald's death.*
5. *Gerald has a widow who isn't grieved either.*
6. *Is there a connection between widow and Farnam?*

There wasn't too much to think about in this, but the whole business, as I found out later, hinged on why Walker was due to die. I didn't know that then, though.

I didn't have too much trouble finding out what club the Walker, nee Raleigh, woman had worked at. It was a "picturesque" spot and right inside the city on Orange Street, nestled behind a row of Lombardi trees. As I saw it from inside my little Plymouth coupe, I wondered some about what would be going on inside. For, walking with measured steps up and down in front of the club were two sandwich men who were picketing the joint. Their signs protested the unfair management inside who wouldn't hire Union Labor, and urged prospective patrons to avoid the place.

What made me wonder was the fact that the *Siam*—for that was its name—was lit up like a Christmas tree, glowing neon tubes embracing the edges of the building like a white-hot wire basket.

The pickets tossed a few ready-made cracks at me as I went in through the *Siam's* doors but they were weak-kneed and I figured the boys were sort of tired of the job.

A hat check girl eyed me speculatively as I walked toward her. I wasn't wearing a hat but I laid a half dollar on the counter before her anyway.

"That's for what?" she asked me, her little nose turning up in what somebody must have told her was a cute look.

"An apology," I said quietly; "I'm not wearing a hat. Also, I'm a crackpot who throws money around right and left."

"Oh. A big spender."

I smiled at her. "Yeah. You must have seen my picture somewhere. Two questions."

"I'll see you."

"The joint's picketed and yet it's going full blast. How come?"

The little nose turned up cute-like again. "Oh, gosh!" she cried. "Thought everybody knew that gag. Minego—big cheese here—hired the pickets for a stunt. Makes the customers feel real brave 'crashing' the picket line. Business picked up ten percent since they've been outside."

"Hmm," I said.

"What's the other, big boy? Your time's running out."

"Okay. What did Linda Raleigh do when she worked here?"

That chilled it. The girl looked

down at the half buck as though it were a great big soil spot on the pure white counter. I pulled my hand up and laid it over the half buck. Then I removed the hand. There was another fifty-cent piece lying on top of the first.

"Gee," the girl said. "You certainly burn holes all over the place with your money, don't you?"

"There's plenty more where that came from," I explained. "Only trouble is I can't get hold of it."

"Poor kid," she said. "Well, sonny, Linda used to sing here, the ads said. Personally, I never saw the resemblance."

"Friend of Minego?"

For that I got an innocent look. My three minutes were up. "You didn't get your money's worth, mister," she said. "On the other hand, you can't always tell. Minego's office is behind that little door over there." She held out my money to me.

"Thanks," I said. "Keep the money, it'll help."

"Pennies make dollars," she said as I walked away.

THE DOOR marked *private* wasn't locked, so I walked right in. The brave act was wasted because nobody was there at the moment, so I sat down. Then I got nosy. A filing cabinet in the corner looked unlocked so I stepped over to it, pulled out the E-to-H drawer. No soap. No Farnam. With a sinking feeling in my tummy I yanked open the next drawer. There was a folder marked personal. Something told me to hurry while I still had my breath inside of me.

I clutched maybe six sheets inside the folder, doubled them, and stuffed the works into my inside breast pocket. The folder was too big. That I jammed back into the drawer and eased it closed again. I never worked so close to eternity in all my life. I had just—and I mean just—left the cabinet and slipped across the room to a chair opposite the black walnut desk when that door opened again and in he walked. There was sweat on my face but innocence in my eyes as he stared fascinated.

"Who let you in here, sonny?" he was a solid job of a man. Looked like he'd been raised on stacks of wheatcakes, and they all lumped up till they made a heavy-looking creature that breathed. He was the type of character you instinctively grab at in a high wind when you want to keep your feet under you; massive, solid and tough.

"You Minego?" I asked without any more trembling in my voice than a canary with the palsy.

He laughed like Edward Arnold. Even his eyes twinkled. If I'd been calmer, I'd have probably thought he looked like Arnold, too. "Boy, are we tough!" he boomed.

"Thanks," I said faintly. His laugh had turned into a nice pleasant smile such as you use for the minister when he sees you out of church on Sundays. It just sat on his face, waiting, as though it were sure what you had to say would please the ears that belonged to the face.

"You don't look like a guy who'd knife me," I said.

"Not if the knife was dull. But I don't have to, you see." He spread his hands expansively. "I have money, plenty of it. I enjoy making money. And now I've a new hobby. I enjoy helping other people."

"It was you who said that, not me," I warned. "Try making me happy."

"Sure," he agreed. "Whoever you are is beside the point. What you want counts with me."

"Okay. How come Gerald Walker got mixed up with Linda Raleigh?"

I expected the temperature of the room to drop suddenly. But in this I was wrong. Minego's face turned into a picture Van Gogh might have painted in one of his heavy moments, titled: 'man in brown study'.

Finally he spoke, rubbing the desk top with a fat palm. "I wouldn't know about that. He was hardly the type

to marry Linda. Not that she was a bad kid—no, no. Just that, well, you know."

"Maybe I do," I admitted. "And now she's a widow."

A flush spread around his fat cheeks. "What business is it of yours?"

"Only professional," I said quickly. "More or less. Lieutenant Scott of Homicide knows I'm questioning you."

He seemed puzzled over that but let it ride. "I think," he said quietly, "Gerald is lucky to be out of it."

"Why would anybody want to kill him?"

"I don't know. A kid like that hasn't any enemies, you know. He couldn't have; he was too good."

"You talk like you knew him well," I said.

His hand still stroked the desk top and although he was looking at me, his eyes weren't trying to bore holes through my coat. "Gerald's Uncle William has been my attorney for years," he said. "I know the family very well."

"Somebody," I mused, "had something against him, but I don't know who. That's what I'm trying to find out. Well, I guess I've wasted enough of your time. I'll be going now."

"Okay, friend," he said. "Drop in anytime. What did you say your name was?"

"Kelly," I told him. "James J. Kelly."

"Okay, Kelly, glad to know you." He walked toward me and I thought he was going to be polite with the door but instead he stopped about a foot from my face. "Would you mind," he asked quietly, a smile fading slowly from his lips, "giving me back the papers you took from my file?"

With a watery feeling in my stomach I reached the papers over to him. He took them, backed away from me. "Thank you," he said simply. It was then I noticed he had done me the compliment of my younger physique. A .38 that cared not the slightest for

me lay in his fat palm, pointed in my direction.

I HAD ONE of those horrible premonitions that I wouldn't make it to the door. Then when I went through it the premonition transferred to a feeling that I'd never get out to my car again. I had to pass by the hat check girl on my way to the outside again. She was looking at me, wondering, I suppose, how come I still walked under my own power. I gave her a grin but I could feel my cheek muscles wobbling with it. You ever have this happen to you? It's a hell of a feeling.

I went back to my apartment and decided to call it a day. I took off my coat, threw it on the bed, and a little square of white fluttered in the breeze from it and landed on my pillow. Idly I picked it up and then froze in my tracks when I read what was on it.

Just a typewritten sheet, half-folded, bearing a few simple words. Rather like a note preceding entry in a ledger of some sort. It read thus: *Walker-Farnam—$300.00 Final.*"

It didn't require much mental effort to guess where this came from. When I handed Minego his papers, this one must have stayed behind in my pocket. Oboy, if he missed it. Yeah, I told myself, oboy for you, Kelly! How dead can you be?

Late as it was, I bounced out to the Plymouth again and headed for the Walker house. When I got there I cased it from the opposite side of the street. Two of the boys from Scott's office were holding up the verandah so I figured Walker was still under guard. There were a couple of lights on inside the house. One in the den. It

wasn't too late, I guessed, so I left the car. The boys didn't know me at first.

"Who are you, pally?" asked the taller of the two.

"James J. Kelly. Lieutenant Scott tell you it was okay for me to go in?"

"Oh, yeah. Walker want to see you?"

"I don't know, fellas. I hope so. Let's try him, huh?"

INSIDE the house, another of Scott's men studied the wallpaper in the living room. He looked comfortable enough to be bedded down for the night.

"Where's Walker?" I asked him.

He looked at the two with me. They nodded. "In his den. Went in there about ten minutes ago."

"Let's try," I suggested.

A couple of raps on the den door brought Walker to answer it. He looked awfully tired, almost haggard, I noticed. Nor did he seem to click mentally. "What is it now?" he asked wearily.

"Mr. Walker..." I began and then he recognized me and stiffened.

"What do you want, Kelly?"

"Just like to speak with you again for a minute. Okay?"

"What's there to speak about? This has been a trying day for an old man."

"Yeah, I know," I sympathized. "But I've got to ask you a couple of questions for the record. Only take up a minute more of your time."

He stepped aside. "Oh, all right, come in."

The boys from Scott's department looked questioningly at him but he shook his head. "It's all okay," he told them.

I closed the door quietly behind me, and walked over to the fireplace in the far corner of the room. Walker followed me.

"Where did they take Gerald?" I asked.

"Morgue," he said lifelessly. "Tomorrow they'll move him to Graham's Funeral Home."

"Uh huh. No more threats made against your life today?"

"No, of course not."

"Why, of course not?"

"Well," he explained, "the police have been here all day. Rather silly to expect threats with all that protection isn't it?"

"I guess. Now, Mr. Walker, I'm going to be very damned nosy. As you know, Miss Farnam hired me to solve your murder. So far you're still alive. But I feel, regardless, that I owe it to her to keep my eyes open as long as I've got her money—and I still have. In fooling around, wasting time, you might say, I've picked up several ideas about things that two days ago weren't any of my business. They still aren't, but since I've gotten them, I believe that you can help me protect your life if you'll play along with me."

"Well?"

"The first idea I've gotten is that Gerald Walker wasn't your nephew; he was your son—and Miss Farnam was his mother."

I was tired myself. I felt like I was standing in Parles' Art Store downtown studying a surrealist painting that contracted and expanded, that lived and breathed. And Walker emerged from the painting and hung on to the frame like he was hanging on to his suspenders. And strangely, he swayed to and fro from the sides of the frame and I saw he was standing in a swing suspended from the limb of a tree. It was slowly cutting an arc like a pendulum on a grandfather clock. I blinked my eyes and the whole thing disappeared. Walker was there, all right but he was only swaying on his heels and the blank look on his face was me looking at the painting—or could have been. His lips were parted and I could hear his breath whistling in and out.

I DON'T KNOW why, but I waited, knowing he'd answer in a while. And presently he did. "Gerald was not my son," he finally said.

I heaved a sigh. "Oh, well, it was too good to be true. But for a minute I thought I had the tiger by the tail. Well, I'll try another. Why did you kill Gerald?"

This time I could hear the jackpot cracking open. He still swayed on his heels, didn't even break the rythm. "I had to," he said simply.

"Okay," I said, shocked in spite of myself. "Care to tell me why?"

"I had to. Last night Gerald came here just as I was retiring. He wanted money, practically a fortune."

"What for? He had a practice of his own, didn't he?"

"Yes, but he also had an expensive wife. I think she put him up to it. He asked me for twenty-five thousand. Then when I wouldn't give it to him, he—he threatened me. He had that paper knife and told me he'd kill me if I didn't give him the money."

"So," I finished for him, "you took the knife away from him and in the scuffle it got stuck in his chest. That it?"

Walker nodded. I felt kind of sorry for him. "Yes," he admitted. "That's the way it happened."

"Well, I suppose Lieutenant Scott ought to be told about this, don't you?"

He looked down at the floor and nodded. "Yes, I suppose he had. Yes, it would be best that way."

He was in another mood. The reflective mood, I labeled it. Too bad it couldn't last. On him it fitted pretty well. "Yeah," I agreed. "It would be the best way if it were true. Unfortunately—or fortunately, whichever way you put it—you didn't kill Gerald."

He glared up at me. Reflective mood gone. Now the indignant mood. "I said I did, didn't I?"

"You said it, Mr. Walker, but it wouldn't even convince me. In the first place, isn't it silly to think of Gerald threatening your life over money? He was too pious for that. And if he had, isn't it just as silly to believe that an old man past his physical prime could so easily kill a much younger man—especially with a knife—with no signs in the room of a struggle?"

"That's the way it happened, nevertheless," he persisted.

"Okay, have it your way. I'm going now, but before I do, would you care to tell me why Gerald didn't have more to do with Miss Farnam? He was *her* son, wasn't he?"

Walker didn't answer. Slowly his hand went to his coat pocket. Funny I didn't catch on to it at first. Maybe because I wasn't mentally prepared for it from him. I even kept on talking—I was that dumb. "I think Gerald was an illegitimate child, Walker. That's what I think. Further, I think you were the father of that child. That's why you raised him as your nephew—"

I didn't get any farther. From out of his pocket emerged with sickening reality a deadly little gun. A .25 caliber, it looked like. Those things give me the shivers. They're as common as cigaret lighters and as final as a last act.

Walker was talking as he pointed the gun at me. "Not from you, Kelly; not from you. I don't have to take it from you."

I could feel the reaper putting on his grim act for my benefit. Walker was standing with his back to the den door, facing me. There wasn't a chance that I could get to that gun before it got to me. And Walker didn't look like I could talk him out of it. This was his determined look. His new mood. "Look, Mr. Walker..." I began, and I could see his head move a little from side to side like a man arguing with himself. He took one step toward me. This was it, I figured. And then, like lightning, the act was ended. Walker clutched at his side with his left hand, sort of half-doubling up. His old head with that self same determined look on his face, bent slowly and looked at the floor. I think he was dead then, but his old muscles refused to collapse any faster in death

than they would have in life. He just crumpled, like a tire with a leak, going down. But even in death his latest mood played itself out. Before he hit the floor, that little .25 in his hand spit five times and all five slugs chased one another into the wall behind me at about knee level.

IN THAT instant I recalled the last threat note he had received that morning. It finished with: *Don't fail me tomorrow.* Well, he hadn't. Walker had died February 25th—as requested.

I didn't get a chance to examine him. Scott's men were in that room like flies in half a second. And I was in handcuffs. And almost before I got used to the feel of them, Scott himself was there and had taken me into another room to question me.

"I didn't do it, of course," I told him.

"No," he replied calmly. "I don't think you did, Kelly; but it looks as though you may know who did."

"Not even that," I said.

"Okay, Kelly. We'll start from there. How did it come about, shall we say?"

"Well, Walker and I were gassing. I was just going to scram. I had told him that I believed he was Gerald's father—for the second time, as I recall. Suddenly he seemed to resent it. Pulled that little gun on me. And before he could use it, he just folded up."

"He shot five times," Scott reminded me.

"Yeah, but while he was going down. He knew he was doing it."

Scott thought for a moment. Then: "Kelly, I know pretty positively you didn't do it. You're not heeled. Moreover, until the M. E. gets here, we won't know what really killed Walker. I'm asking you like a friend to tell me if there was anything more to it than you've already said?"

"Thanks, Scott," I replied. "That's how it was—the way I told you. I don't know what hit him and I doubt if he knew himself. He just collapsed, and that was that."

"All right. I'll have to hold you, though, until the M. E. gets here at least. There's something awfully funny about the death."

"You know what I'd do if I were you, Scott? I'd find out where old man Farnam spent the last hour and a half. Also his daughter, Miss Farnam. Remember, Walker stated he thought Farnam sent those threat notes. I think he did, too."

"You think he meant to kill Walker, really?"

"I don't know about that, but look; I think Farnam believed that Gerald was Walker's illegitimate son, and that his daughter was the mother. He probably wanted Walker to marry Phyllis."

"You would have thought he'd try something like that years ago. After all, Gerald was twenty-four years old. Pretty late to be rectifying matters, wasn't it?"

"Yes," I agreed, "but not if he had just recently found out about it. Something or somebody must have stuck an idea into his head—within the last year—and he acted on it with the notes. He was a religious old bird, remember; that could have become an obsession."

"It could have," Scott admitted.

"Okay. How about you acting on it? And as for me, how about letting me loose for tonight? You know damned well *I* didn't do it and if you want me for questioning, I can be had at any time."

"What's your hurry?" Scott asked suspiciously.

"Well," I said, "it just occured to me that from this moment on, I'm now working for Miss Farnam. Walker's dead, and I'm supposed to find out who murdered him. Also, I haven't had lunch or supper yet today. I can eat, now, you know. I'm getting paid."

Scott laughed in my face and looked his apologies at once. "Damned if you're not right," he said. "Okay, I'll chance it. Scram. But I want to see you in the morning about a formal

statement on this mess. And remember, I mean in the morning!"

"Yeah," I said, remembering.

I DID A double time over to the Farnam cottage on Yacuta Road. There was still a light on in the kitchen so I rapped on the back door. Miss Farnam answered.

"Why Mr. Kelly," she said, surprised.

"You bet," I told her.

I came into the kitchen. She was drinking coffee and having a sandwich. Late snack.

"Can I have some?" I asked. "I'll take it off the expense account."

"Certainly!" she said. "You poor boy, I'll bet you're hungry, aren't you?"

She gave me some coffee and pushed over a ham sandwich. "What... I mean, did you come to find something?"

"I don't know, really, Miss Farnam. I see you're feeling better."

"Oh, yes. Father told me you had been here. I was resting. I had a headache."

"Uh huh. Well, I'm afraid I'm going to give you another. Mr. Walker died tonight and I was powerless to stop it."

She gaped. "He—he—did?" she almost squeaked.

"In front of me; I don't know what killed him."

She sighed. "Well, I knew it would be, you know. I'm awfully glad that you were there when it happened. That was worth the two hundred dollars alone."

"Miss Farnam, I'm going to ask you a question that may hurt."

"You may," she said, strangely relieved, I thought. "Even if it does hurt."

I stopped eating and studied her. I was convinced that it wouldn't hurt, but darned if I knew why. So I dove. "Was Gerald your son?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Of course not, Mr. Kelly. He was a good boy and I liked him; but I was never married, you know."

I believed her. In addition, I felt it would be merely bad taste to ask if she thought marriage was a necessity in these cases. Somehow I figured she just wasn't suited for the part.

"Good," I said. "Your father, though, I imagine, has some ideas of his own."

"Yes, that's true," she admitted. "Father is—well, you know what I mean. He sometimes imagines things."

"Sort of loopy now and then?" I helped.

"Loopy?" she repeated. "I don't know. However, Father's a very old man and his memory wanders now and then. Years ago I lost a large sum of money through real estate transactions in which I should have known better. Mr. Walker was in on the transactions but he was not the one who caused me to lose the money. Afterwards, he gave me a job in his office. He was very kind. However, lately, Father has had the idea that Mr. Walker was the guilty man."

"And he sent him the threat notes?" I helped again.

"I think so," Miss Farnam said, "but I'm not sure. I have never caught him at it. However, just in case any harm ever came to Mr. Walker, I hired you to find the murderer so that my father would be cleared of any suspicion."

"What made you so sure your father *wouldn't* kill Walker?" I asked, watching her closely.

Miss Farnam put her hand to her mouth and snickered through it. "Why, Mr. Kelly! How perfectly fantastic. You know father wouldn't do anything like that. And, besides, I'm here to watch him, you know. That's why I quit my job in the office; so I could be with father and attend to him all the time."

"H'mm," I said. "Your father's in bed now, I suppose?"

"Of course," she replied. "Father always retires right after supper."

"Let's peek in on him, shall we?" I suggested.

"All right, Mr. Kelly. But I hope it won't awaken him. He needs his rest, you know."

WE TIP-TOED to a little bedroom off the kitchen toward the hall. Miss Farnam opened the door and from the light reflected from the hall I could see old man Farnam snuggled up in bed. What's more he was snoring. The peaceful sleep of the just and of little children.

I followed her back to the kitchen. "Miss Farnam, there's one more question I'd like to ask. Can you tell me who Gerald Walker really was? I mean —was he really Mr. Walker's nephew?"

She studied that one for a minute then came to a half decision. "Mr. Kelly, as my private detective, you are obligated to keep inviolate anything you may learn, aren't you? Just as though you were a doctor—or a priest?"

I nodded.

"Well," she decided, "in that case, I can tell you; Gerald was not Mr. Walker's nephew. He was the illegitimate child of a politician who was friendly with Mr. Walker. He had been raised in the belief that he was really a nephew, though. I believe the politician paid Mr. Walker quite well all through the years."

"It's a secret," I promised her. "And now to the important one. Who was the politician?"

I drew a blank. "I never knew," Miss Farnam said.

6

IT WAS twelve thirty when I picked up Scott at the Walker home. The Medical Examiner had come and gone long before.

"What killed Walker?" I asked.

"That's the funny part," Scott said. "He just died, as nearly as we can find out. The M. E. finds no wound, no traces of poison, no nothing, so far. We're going to perform an autopsy in the morning to make sure, but from the looks of it, I'd say he had a heart attack. And that's the picture."

"My gosh," I said. "It seems hard to believe that he'd have a heart attack on the very day he was scheduled to be knocked off."

"It does seem funny," Scott admitted. "However, there's the possibility that the threat notes upset him more than he would admit. If he'd had a weak heart, an attack might have been induced through fear. However, we'll know for sure in the morning." He stopped abruptly. "Have you eaten?"

"Yes. A sandwich and coffee."

"Like another?"

"Okay by me, but I've a suggestion. How's about going over to the *Club Siam* and getting your fill of Minego?"

"What the hell for?"

"Well, in the first place, I believe Minego was really Gerald Walker's father. Me, I'm too little a guy to get anywhere with him, but with you along he might be more helpful. I thought maybe he might shed a little light on Gerald's death—also, perhaps, on Walker's tonight."

"Okay," Scott agreed, "but in this you're running the show, remember. I'll tag along for the moral help—but that's all."

This was all fine by me so we scooted over to the *Siam*. The bar was closed and the bartender was cleaning up. He waved us away but at the same moment recognized Scott.

"Something wrong?" he asked hesitantly.

"Where's Minego?" Scott said.

The bar boy reached under the bar. Office button, I figured. I was right. In a second the private door opened and Minego stood there giving us the old study glance. "Well," he said, suddenly turning on that fine old Edward Arnold smile, "come in, come in."

Scott looked at the bartender and

I'm glad that look didn't hit me. It meant that his wash would have to be very clean from then on—or else.

"Hello, Kelly," said Minego to me.

"Yeah," I answered. "Hello: William Walker's dead, Minego. You did it up right, didn't you?"

"That won't get you anywhere, Kelly," said Minego, lighting a cigar. "Come into the office; we can talk better in there."

We followed him and he closed the door. As soon as that was done, Scott turned to Minego. "First, Minego," he said, "I'd like to tell you that I'm not here to threaten you or even to question. I *am* here as an interested party though. Whatever Kelly says to you is strictly unofficial. He's on his own. However, if it's all okay with you, I'd just like to listen in."

"Why certainly, certainly, Lieutenant!" boomed Minego. "Outside of the profit side of my ledger, anything about me is an open book, you know!"

"Oh sure," I agreed. "Well, 'open book', tell me why you killed William Walker."

"Are you joking, Kelly? What would I kill Walker for? Got nothing against him. In fact, he's my lawyer."

"*Was* your lawyer. Second question; why did you kill Gerald, his nephew?"

I could have stuck a pin in him instead, I imagine; it wouldn't have hurt as much. I rather felt Scott was sorry for Minego, considering what I had told him about Gerald's relationship to Minego. I almost felt sorry for him myself. His face lost the cheery smile it had. And his eyes blurred. Had he been a good church-goer, I imagine he'd have cried a little. That's how he looked.

"I didn't kill Gerald, Kelly," he said at last. "I wouldn't; I couldn't."

"Why?" I asked.

"That's none of your business!"

"Ah, the 'open book'," I said.

He disregarded it. "I'm not sure, Kelly. And this goes for you, too, Scott. But I think I *do* know who killed Gerald. Not that it's any of my business." He tried a little shrug.

I PULLED the little typewritten slip of paper from my breast pocket. The one that said: *Walker-Farnam $300.00 Final.*

I handed him the little slip. "None of your business, huh?"

He read it. "So," he murmured. "You did get away with something after all when you helped yourself to my cabinet."

"Yeah. Mess me up, why don't you —in front of Scott."

He gave me a dirty look and walked over to the private door again. Stuck his head through. "Bring her in," he said to somebody. And a second later two of Minego's strong boys entered with a doll between them. A doll who should have been in black; the widow, Linda Walker.

She shot Minego a dose of poison with a look that should have been reserved only for a mother-in-law. "What now—big shot?" she spit at him.

"You will tell Lieutenant Scott how Gerald died," he said evenly.

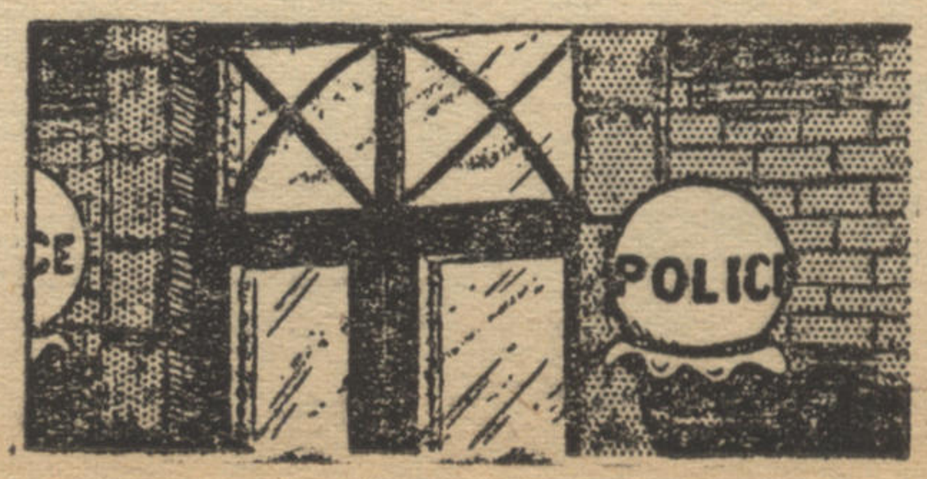
"How should I know?" Linda answered. "Why don't you throw a little light on it yourself, you fool!"

"Linda," I broke in, "if you know anything that might help..."

"Oh shut up, you!" she blazed. "You self-righteous punk! Who the hell you think you are? A one man investigation for that dirty louse of a Gerald?"

Minego took one step closer to her and slapped her across the mouth with his open palm. I could feel it sting even over here where I was standing. "You cheap—" he slurred.

"Yeah, and you!" she screamed. "Minego, the pious! Minego who never done nothing wrong ever! What I



could tell you about you that would make you curl!"

"Shut up!" Minego warned.

"I will, like hell! Why don't you let your strong boys rest a while? You afraid I'd get to you?"

Minego motioned to the two who held Linda and they dropped her arms. At once she jumped over to Minego and spit at his face. The saliva glistened from his cheek, reflecting the light bulb above like a diamond as he fought to control himself.

"Hmmph! Minego the mighty! Minego the wonderful! Minego, who's so damned powerful that he's afraid of a little scandal. Afraid to let people know he's the father of..."

"Shut up!" Minego hissed.

"...the father of an illegitimate son!" she finished.

Minego looked wildly around the room. He would have given anything to have been alone with Linda. I could see the hate glowing from his eyes. I felt sorry for Minego at that. He had a false sort of pride that had driven him to funny things in his lifetime, but that was the standard by which he lived. It was his core, his warp. He couldn't help it now, and he knew it.

I thought I'd stop it before it went too far.

"Hey!" I yelled. She stopped her ranting and turned to me.

I grinned. "That's better. Now, Miss Lovebird, perhaps you'd better stop accusing. I know Minego was Gerald's support. And we know another thing; we know who killed Gerald."

I could see her eyes widen with the suddenness of the switch. She stood tense, like a statue.

"You, Mrs. Walker, killed Gerald. Are you surprised? It was a mistake, wasn't it? You meant to kill old man Walker, so that Gerald would inherit the money from the estate, didn't you? But unfortunately, Gerald went over to his uncle's house that very night to warn the old man. He knew what was in your mind. You had hinted around it enough so that he guessed. You meant him to. You meant him to do the killing himself.

"But Gerald believed in the Ten Commandments. He wouldn't kill. What's more, he loved his uncle—or at least cared for him too much for a thing like that. He could wait for the estate, but you couldn't. You had to have it now. So you went over to Walker's house. You somehow got hold of that paper knife. And Gerald, himself, probably let you in when he saw you at the door. There was an argument, then a scuffle and you couldn't control yourself. You went crazy and stuck the knife in Gerald instead. Then you straightened up the room, didn't you—so that it would look neat and orderly when the police arrived!"

I STOPPED and waited for I was coming to my big scene and it had to be good. "But," I said, "you overlooked one thing; in the scuffle, a button flew off your sleeve and rolled under a chair. You never noticed it. We found it, Mrs. Walker; it was a button off the very dress you're wearing now!"

That did it. Her eyes flew to her sleeve and then up again. I doubt if she even noticed that the buttons were all there. She wasn't mentally focusing at that instant. Suddenly, she lunged toward one of the muscle boys and pawed at him. And in a flash a .38 gun was in her hand, fanning the room.

I began to feel wobbly in the knees. I was sure she'd try it out on me first. A wild light blazed in her eyes; her lips were open and her teeth shone out, gritted in primeval desperation. Her breath panted shortly and I noticed the big veins in her forehead throbbing passionately.

"You wise boy!" she snarled. "Oh, you wise boy! You know so much. But it's the last thing you'll ever know; take it, wise boy, take it!"

She pulled the nose of the gun around and aimed it at me. And I said my prayers for what I knew was to be the last time.

And then it broke. The private door opened and the bartender stuck his head inside, talking at the same time. "I'm through, boss," he said. "I'm going, now." He didn't get any farther. Linda swung half way around at the sound and in that instant, Scott lunged. The gun roared once and I heard Scott grunt in pain as he struck Linda Walker in the breadbasket with his fist. She folded easier than a road map. Her body crashed over a chair, lay half in and half out, and the gun clattered on the bare floor. She was through for the evening, I figured, mopping my brow.

●

Later, Scotty and I did have that cup of coffee and a sandwich at an all night beanery over on Market Street. He looked kind of picturesque with his left arm in a sling. The slug had grazed his arm and made him bleed quite a bit, but it wasn't anything he couldn't take in his stride.

I was just starting my second cup of coffee when he spoke. "You know," he said, "I still think you should be on the force working at Homicide, Kelly."

"Yeah," I agreed. "Cause I love murder so much. Cause I'm so darned smart."

"I don't know about your love for murder, but you really are smart for a private eye at that. I hadn't a chance to figure out yet who was guilty of Gerald's death—and besides, I had been warned to go easy on the investigation. I can guess Minego wangled that. He used to be in politics before he went for that night club business. And besides, somehow, those warning notes of Walker's threw me off the track. I still don't angle them in at all. Do you?"

"Why shore," I obliged. "Old man Farnam probably did send the notes, thinking Walker had cheated his daughter out of some dough many years ago. His mind's like a little child's. Infantile reactions, and all that. And Miss Farnam was afraid that since her father had begun to get screwy notions, he might do something besides send the notes."

"She knew about that?" asked Scott.

"She suspected," I corrected. "She never was sure of it. However, she hired me to find out who killed Walker—in case he did get killed—only to clear her father. For she quit her job this year just so she could attend to him and watch him. Therefore, she knew that if Walker got killed, it wouldn't be her father who did it. But she was afraid that the notes would be traced to her father and so therefore I was the boy who was to be on hand ready to crack down in his defense by finding the real murderer—if any."

"Hmm. Pretty complicated."

"Yeah. The little old lady works like that. To her, it's sound reasoning. I kind of like her. She makes good coffee, too."

"Tell me, how did you know that Linda killed Gerald?"

"Well, to be truthful," I admitted, "I didn't know for sure. That little act I put on in Minego's office was just that—an act. But I believed from talking to old man Farnam, and Miss Farnam, that neither of them could have done it. And there was no motive for Walker to have killed his nephew.

"Also, I guessed that Minego was Gerald's father—after I had that last talk with Walker before he died. Therefore, he certainly wouldn't kill his own son, I reasoned. And as to the note I swiped from his file, it helped all add up. He had been making payments to Walker for the support of Gerald. Apparently, Miss Farnam was the go-between for the note read: *Walker-Farnam, etc.* And that payment was the final, since Walker had put Gerald out. It probably peeved Minego."

"What the devil was Minego feeding the kitty for after all these years? After all, Gerald was grown up—had his own law practice, didn't he?"

"Yeah," I admitted. "That was fun-

[*Turn To Page* 130]

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Being a rookie cop is not the most pleasant duty—especially with weisenheimers like Danny Denning strutting around as if they owned the place. Yet, there are rewarding circumstances, too. For instance, the case of Dolly Graham . . .

ONE DUMB COP

by Richard Brister

MIKE DOOLAN paused under the awning of a dingy little second-hand clothing shop, took the heavy policeman's cap off with his large freckled hand and wiped perspiration from his forehead. A pinch-face, sallow man dressed in the loudest, ugliest and, probably, most expensive suits Mike Doolan ever laid eye on, stood picking his teeth in front of Joe's Pool Room.

" 'S matter, copper. Can't take it?"

"Sure," said Mike. "Sure I can take it." It was his first day on regular duty since graduating from rookie school. He was conscious of the glitter his badge made, down there on his huge chest. He was more conscious of the weight of the gun against his right leg. He wiped his forehead again, and said with dignity befitting an officer of the law: "I seen it hotter than this. Lots of times."

The sour little character who appeared to use the front of Joe's Pool Room as a sort of headquarters grinned at Mike and said, "Brand new recruit, ain't you? So you're takin' Quill's place on Sixteent' Street, hey? What's your name, copper?"

Mike Doolan looked the man over more carefully now. His large, deceptively soft brown eyes took in the loud clothes, the elevator shoes, the expensive diamond bedecking the man's soft hands. "Doolan," he said. "Me name's Doolan. What's yours, friend?"

"Danny Denning."

Mike looked at him carefully and said, "So you're Denning. I been hopin' I'd see you today, Denning."

"That's so?" grinned Denning. "Why?"

"You're the hoodlum that's responsible for most of the trouble down here on Sixteenth, the way I understand it. You an' me may's well start right off with a clear understanding."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah? I ain't putting up with no nonsense from you. So if you step out of line and wind up in back of the eight ball, don't say I never give you fair warning."

Danny Denning glanced back over one small shoulder and called through the open door of the pool room: "Hey, you guys, c'me on out if you wanta laugh! There's a big mick from headquarters out here making like tough. From the looks of him, he don't even shave yet."

Danny Denning's friends spilled dutifully out of the shadowy interior of the pool room, a motley, unappetizing lot, stood grinning at Doolan, whose large-featured face was rapidly turning a strawberry color. Nothing in his

policeman's handbook coverd this situation. He couldn't very well punch Danny Denning, as he fair itched to. It would be beneath his dignity as an upholder of Law and order.

"If you're smart," he said, "you'll change your tune, Denning."

Now a group of passersby was collecting, sensing the conflict between Sixteenth Street's new law officer and its least desirable denizen. Danny Denning's grin grew wider as he looked at Mike Doolan. Obviously playing up to his audience, the hoodlum and petty

racketeer said, "Am I supposed to scare when you talk tough, sonny?"

Mike Doolan's large ears burned. He stood there trying to control the heat of his temper, wondering what was his best move now. "I got a good mind to run you over to the station, Denning."

"Why don't you kid?" said the gambler. "That'd be just ducky. What would you charge me with? Hurtin' your feelin's?"

This drew a raucous laugh from Denning's friends, a nervous titter from the group of passersby who were standing behind Mike Doolan. Mike saw that he was losing face, gaining nothing by this interchange with the gangster. He turned with a cloudy expression, and stalked off down the sidewalk.

"That's all right, son," Danny Denning jeered. "We ain't goin' to hold this against you."

Mike Doolan kept on walking. A group of hard, dirty-faced street kids tagged after him, and he was aware of their wide-eyed expressions. "Jeez," he heard one kid say, "the force ain't what it used t' be, is it?"

"Quill would of told Danny where to head in," said another.

Mike Doolan hit rock bottom then. He realized he was off to the worst possible start in his career as a policeman. And it wasn't just for himself that he worried. He had a brand new bride at home to be thinking of, though he could always get another job if he flopped as a cop.

The worst part was these street kids. When they began drawing unfavorable comparisons between a duly sworn-in cop and a small-time racketeer, they were in very real danger.

"Kids are too impressionable," Mike muttered. "First thing you know, if I let Denning walk over me, they'll be makin' a hero out of him, wantin' to grow up and sass the law the way he does."

MIKE DOOLAN was gunning for Danny Denning, in the days that followed. He haunted the smart aleck gangster, trying to pin something on him, anything that would justify him in running Denning in to the clinker.

Danny Denning made a joke of it. "You really hate my guts, don't you, copper?"

Mike didn't say anything. He had learned that technique, belatedly. It disarmed Denning, a little.

"You ain't going to get nothing on me, copper. You ain't got the brains. I eat dumb flatfeet like you for my supper."

Mike Doolan knew he wasn't any Einstein for brains, otherwise, he wouldn't have gone in for a career on the force. On the other hand, he had a quality of stubbornness in him which kept him eternally plugging away at any project he set his mind on. And those large, disarmingly innocent brown eyes never went on vacation. Mike not only saw, he observed, and what he observed was swiftly categorized and tucked away in the recesses of his brain, for possible future reference.

He used to study the rogue's gallery up at the precinct after hours, and one day he recognized a face on Sixteenth Street and ran his man in to the station house. It turned out he was right; the guy was wanted up-State, and Mike Doolan's self-respect received a shot in the arm.

"Good work, Doolan. Keep it up," Captain Regan said. It wasn't much but Danny Denning had been riding him pretty hard, down on the beat, and a starving man is not choosy.

Danny Denning grew more sure of himself, more careless in his operations. One afternoon, Mike Doolan watched Denning greet a dozen passersby in front of Joe's Pool Room. With each, the racketeer exchanged a few words, then took out a pencil and pad and made a notation on it.

Mike Doolan was watching from the interior of an office supply shop across the street and about forty yards up from the pool hall. Finally he strode

down the street to where Danny Denning stood, looking worried, for once, and said, "All right, let's have it, Denning."

"Have what?"

"That pad you been writing down bets on."

"You mean this?" said the gambler, and handed the pad over to Mike Doolan. There was no writing on it.

Mike stared at it, frowning a little. He looked at Danny Denning, and saw that the gambler was smiling at him. "Lift your mitts, Denning. I'm gonna frisk you."

He did, but there was not another scrap of paper anywhere on the gambler.

"What's the matter, copper?"

Mike Doolan took the top leaf of paper off the writing tablet and held it up to the sun. "Disappearin' ink, maybe. You ain't bluffin' your way out of this, Denning. I seen you makin' them bets. Come on. You and me better go have a little talk with Regan."

"Sure," grinned the gambler. "Why not?"

When Mike Doolan brought his prisoner into Captain Regan's presence, he was a little shocked at the way the racketeer and the police captain greeted each other.

"Hello, Cap," Denning said casually.

"Hi, Danny," said Mike Doolan's captain. "Why can't you keep your nose clean? What's this about Doolan?"

Mike told him. Regan's face clouded as he listened. "Let's see that pad, Doolan." He studied it for a brief moment, then flung it on his desk. "Disappearin' ink, my eye! That's virgin paper. You ain't got a thing on this man, Doolan!"

"But—"

"Doolan, if I was an ambitious young copper like you, I'd spend some of me spare time in the courts, listenin' to trials. It don't do no good to arrest a man until you've got something real on him."

"But I saw him. I—"

"Doolan, you haven't got a legal leg to stand on, in pressin' these charges against Denning. Better get back to your beat."

Mike Doolan was aware of the triumphant smile on Danny Denning's face. "Look," he said, "I—"

"Back to your beat, Doolan," said the captain.

MIKE DOOLAN received a merciless ribbing along Sixteenth Street, the next few days. Danny Denning did the lion's share of the razzing, and he always chose a time when there were plenty of onlookers, before he teed off on Doolan.

"How about the disappearing ink, copper?"

Mike tried to ignore him.

"You wanta know somethin', Doolan? That whole thing was planned. I knew you was watching from that crummy store up the street. Me and the boys put on an act for you, pretendin' they was makin' bets and I was makin' a book. Only I never wrote nothing down, just went through the motions. And you went for it."

"Some day I'll get you, Denning," Mike said.

"You'll never pin nothing on me," Danny Denning said. "It takes more than a dumb flatfoot to reach me."

The little man with the big diamonds and the flashy clothes had a supreme self-confidence which infected people. Sixteenth Street was inclined to take Danny Denning on his own valuation, especially so since he had made a public monkey out of that new young cop, Doolan.

Mike's prestige reached a new low. The only way to regain his waning authority on the street, he knew, was to turn the tables on Danny Denning. He continued to watch the petty racketeer like a hawk. One day he saw Denning go into a cheap nightclub, the *Coco*, on Allison Alley. Mike had been watching the place for some time. It seemed to do a lot of business during afternoon hours, and Mike was pretty sure it was a gambling trap.

He staged a one-man raid on the place, a foolhardy gesture, but he had to nail Denning in something soon or turn in his gun, so it seemed a gamble worth taking.

Doolan encountered surprisingly little resistance. He found his way into the back room, and saw Danny Denning standing in front of a roulette layout. He wasn't playing the wheel; he was taking horse bets from the customer's choices down on his pad.

"I'll take that," Mike said.

Denning shrugged and handed it over.

"Where's the guy that runs this joint?" Mike said.

"He's out of town," somebody wisecracked.

Mike said, "When he gets back, he's goin' to be up to his ears in hot water. All right, Denning. Let's go."

"You dumb flatfeet all have to learn the hard way, don't you?" said Danny Denning, still smiling as he accompanied Mike Doolan out of the *Coco Club*. "You can't buck the system, kid. Why don't you get smart?"

●

Mike Doolan didn't know what the gambler meant till he testified against Denning in Magistrate Keenan's court, the following morning. This time the evidence was sufficient to convict, but the magistrate was content to fine Danny Denning sixty dollars and turn him loose to continue booking the horses.

"Your Honor," said Mike, "if you'll forgive me presumption, this ain't the first time this man's been in trouble. Ain't he getting off kind of soft?"

Keenan was a large man in his early forties. He still was handsome in a raffish, high-colored way, but his face was beginning to pouch from good living. He looked at Mike shortly and said, "When this court needs your help, Doolan, it'll ask for it. Next case."

"But you can't just turn this man loose," Mike said, sweating. "It—"

"Next case," said the jurist, ignoring Mike Doolan.

Danny Denning was peeling sixty dollars off a fat roll of greenbacks. He paid his fine and started out of the courtroom, then changed his mind and walked toward Mike Doolan.

"See what I mean, kid?" he grinned. "You can't buck the system."

●

MIKE DOOLAN put in a bad hour, during which time he aged a good deal, as he thought over what had happened in court. At the end of that hour he reached a decision. He went into Regan's office and laid down his policeman's badge.

"What's this, Doolan?" said the captain.

"Me badge," said Mike. "I'll be turning me uniforms in too, Captain."

"So you're quitting, eh, Doolan?"

"He should of gone up for at least two years. I nailed him red-handed. That Keenan ain't honest."

Regan couldn't help smiling. "Unfortunately, his job is a political appointment, Doolan. You'll find a lot of dishonest men in and around City Hall. And believe it or not, you'll find one or two, here and there, who are straight as a stick. They're the ones that keep the wolves at bay, Doolan. We need a few honest men in politics. And we need honest cops, to make up for the ones that can't resist the temptation of an easy dollar."

"Keenan's been fixed," grumbled Mike Doolan. "Danny knew the minute I put the arm on him that he wasn't going to run into no trouble. He's got the horse laugh on me now, more than ever. This finishes me on Sixteenth Street. Nobody'll take me seriously down there. And what's the use haulin' a guy in here, if the court's gonna spring him?"

"Every cop asks himself that kind of question sooner or later," said Mike's superior. "Every cop has to find his own answer, Doolan."

Mike Doolan fidgeted in front of the older man's desk. He clasped his big hands behind him. "There wasn't

but one answer for me. To nail Danny Denning. But it's like he says; one cop can't buck the whole system."

"So you're quitting?"

Mike frowned. He didn't like that word. "How you going to nail a guy like that? He's got all the cards in his favor."

"I'd like to see somebody nail him," said Regan, suddenly changing his manner. "Danny's gotten too big for his britches. He'll step on thin ice one of these days and go under, with or without Keenan to pull his fat out of the fire. That's the only hope, and you're the guy I'd like on the job down there when the time comes, Doolan."

"I ain't done much good down there so far."

"That's why I want you to stay with it," said Regan.

"Huh?"

"Danny's got you marked down for a stupe, a born fall guy. He figures you'll never give him any real trouble. He'll get more careless all the time, and someday he'll leave himself wide open, and you'll trip him."

"And meanwhile," said Mike, "I get me ears razzed off me down there."

"Well, if you can't take it," said the captain, "if you want to quit—"

"Who said anything about quitting?" Mike said, none too consistently.

And he picked up his badge off the desk.

MIKE DOOLAN sopped up the jibes, down on Sixteenth Street, in the weeks that followed. He was that pitiable figure, the honest young cop in a world peopled by crooks and double dealers. He had tried to pin a rap on Danny Denning, not once but twice, and his efforts had succeeded only in making him the laughing stock of the community where he spent his working hours.

Sometimes Mike asked himself if he wasn't piling folly on folly, in blindly hoping that Danny Denning would leave an opening whereby Mike could get something real on him.

"Sure an' it's wishful thinkin' an' nothin' much else," he told himself dismally. "If I ever do catch him redhanded in somethin' an' hail him into court, that Keenan'll just set him free. It's like tryin' to catch rain water in a sieve."

Common sense told him to quit, but some streak of stubbornness in him kept him from throwing the sponge in. He stayed on the job, he absorbed the jibes and sneers, the disgusted looks of the kids, and all this while he kept his large brown eyes open, seeking a solution to a problem which obviously had no solution.

Sometimes Keenan, the magistrate, would drive down Sixteenth Street in his black sedan, and Mike Doolan's bitter brown eyes would follow the man who had turned Danny Denning loose with a sixty dollar fine for bookmaking. Keenan lived in the suburbs, and sometimes Mike wondered what business brought the magistrate down to this section of the city.

"Sure an' it's graft brings him down here," Mike told himself. One day he saw the black sedan parked in front of a fire plug. He wrote out a ticket, smiling grimly, and was about to stick it under the windshield wiper when he heard the magistrate cursing at him from a window up above him.

"Tear that thing up and throw it away, Doolan, if you know what's good for you."

"You're in front of a plug," Mike reminded the jurist.

"All right," the magistrate grumbled. "I'll come down and move it— Go peddle your papers."

Mike Doolan walked up the street, reflecting that Justice was a fiction, and wondering why he bothered going on being a cop.

Still, he didn't quit. He suffered the ridicule that was his daily lot now, and he kept Danny Denning under sharp surveillance.

One day he followed the insufferable self-confident gangster down Allison Alley to Cumberland Street, saw Denning enter an office building and

mount a flight of stairs toward an apartment several stories up.

Mike Doolan's lips tightened and he could feel the tempo of his heart beats climb, for as he watched the window of that apartment, he could see a blonde head moving, and then Danny Denning's black, glistening hair, as he pulled the girl into his arms, up there.

Mike Doolan stood in the shadow of a building across the street, thinking what he must do now, and the excitement was rising up higher and higher within him. Finally he stepped across the street, entered the building and climbed toward the apartment where Danny Denning was having a rendezvous with his blonde girl friend.

When he reached the landing in front of the apartment door, his bulk caused noise on the straining wood. Suddenly the door of the apartment swung open and Danny Denning stood holding a gun in his hand.

HE PUT THE gun away with a grimace of disgust when he saw it was Mike Doolan. "You again, is it, Doolan? Y'know, I'm gettin' kinda sick of you taggin' me around town, sonny."

"Is that right?" said Mike Doolan.

Danny Denning's blonde friend was standing behind the small time racketeer now, looking over his shoulder. The gambler was playing up to her as he sneered at Mike Doolan.

"Matter of fact," he said, "I got a good mind to phone a couple pals of mine, down in headquarters, and have you shipped out to some beat in the sticks, Doolan."

"You're a fresh guy, Denning. Only you had your innings, see? Now it's my turn up to bat, and I'm ready to commence batting."

He moved close to the man, without warning, and swung his right hand, cuffing Danny Denning on the cheek. The blonde girl squeaked with fright and retreated into the room.

"Good grief, Dan, watch out. He's gone berserk!"

Danny Denning was bouncing off the wall of the apartment, as the girl spoke. He was shaken up, was Danny Denning, and he was muttering vilely through his teeth.

"Why, you screwy big ox, I'll learn you to manhandle Danny Denning. I'll—" He was trying to get that pistol back out of his pocket.

Mike Doolan's right leg came up and punted the pistol out of the gangster's hand. It hit the ceiling, then dropped onto the carpet. Mike grabbed the startled little gambler by the front of his shirt and slapped him on either cheek, then clipped him with a short right.

Denning was flung headlong to the other side of the room. He would have fallen if the blonde hadn't caught him.

Mike said agreeably, "What'sa matter, Danny? You don't look happy."

The little man's face was twisted with hatred. "Beat it into the other room," he snapped at the blonde. "Phone the bulls an' tell 'em Doolan's up here, off his trolley an' tryin' to kill me."

"Go ahead," Mike grinned at the girl. "I'll have all the time I need, before they get here."

The girl retreated from the room, her eyes wide with fright. Mike said to Danny Denning, "Come on and fight, Danny. This ain't even begun to be fun yet."

He hit Danny Denning and knocked him into a big sofa. The gambler put a frightened hand to his bruised chin and half-threatened, half-whined, "You ain't getting away with this, pal. You're way out of line. I got some friends at Headquarters. They'll strip that uniform off you so fast you'll think you been hit by a cyclone."

"Why," grinned Mike, not worried, "that bein' the case, I may as well make the most of my time. Stand up, Danny. There must be some scrap in a loud-mouth monkey like you."

There was. Danny tried to knee him. Mike caught the gambler's leg, shoved him across the room, and tucked him neatly into the fireplace. It was a

tight fit. His head seemed to get bumped against the bricks, on the way in, and Danny Denning became very unconscious.

HE WAS STILL half out when the riot squad. came. They took both combatants into custody, took Mike's gun away and rode him off to Headquarters like any criminal.

"Kid," said a fellow policeman, "you must be off your nut. Whatever made you think you could beat up on Danny Denning and get away with it? He's got the fix in on Magistrate Keenan. They're goin' to boil you in oil, kid."

"Maybe," grinned Mike.

In court, the magistrate mounted the bench and listened gravely to the charges and counter charges. He listened with special attention to the description of the scene of battle. "You say this disturbance occurred in the apartment of a Miss Dolly Graham, at 8713 South Cumberland Street?"

"That's right, Your Honor," said Danny Denning's high-priced lawyer.

"What was the nature of Denning's business with Miss Graham?" asked the man on the bench.

"Personal, Your Honor," cut in Danny, and leered, despite the misshapen condition of his face.

"I see," said the magistrate. "You've been a frequent visitor in this court, Denning. Too frequent. I find you guilty of carrying concealed weapons, striking an officer, resisting arrest, and disturbing the peace. Two years."

"Two years!" raged Denning. "You can't—"

"Get him out of here," said the magistrate, inspecting a hangnail. "You, Doolan, return to your duty."

Mike Doolan returned to his duty via Captain Regan's office. "Son," said that worthy, "I take me hat off to you. I'm givin' you another stripe for your sleeve, as of today. How in the name of sin did you do it?"

"Once," smiled Mike, "I started to give Magistrate Keenan a parking ticket. He bawled me out from Miss Dolly Graham's apartment."

He went out of there, his ears still ringing with the captain's guffaws. He walked down toward Sixteenth Street, and for the first time in weeks his head was high, his shoulders squared, and his step showed no reluctance.

★

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These, and others, are in the October issue of

DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION

It was all hazy to me; a woman lying there, her flimsy nightgown a revealing thing. The pixies were still playing the "Anvil Chorus" in my skull—and it suddenly struck me that the girl wasn't moving . . .

THE BODY IN MY BED

by William F. Schwartz

I FLIPPED on the light switch and saw her through a drunken haze. She was sprawled out on my bed—a tiny vision of doll-like loveliness with a tiny, well-formed body and an abundance of copper-hued hair that cascaded from her head and clouded her face with a misty, golden veil.

My breath caught in my throat—in surprise and admiration. *She's beautiful!* I thought, and the word seemed strangely inadequate. I'm an alleged artist and I think I know beauty—especially feminine beauty—at a glance.

And there she was, stretched out on my bed. For a second or two I thought I had staggered into the wrong room by mistake. But I recognized my furniture and decided, maybe, she was a lush who had wandered up from the noisy party below—the same drunken brawl where I had acquired my own rubber legs. Then I saw her feet were bare and she was clad only in a frothy, flesh-colored nightgown.

Then I heard Rita, who was beside me, heave a sigh. "Rod," Rita censured, "you shouldn't have done it."

"Done what?"

"Lured her up here."

"But I didn't!" I protested. "I never saw her before."

Rita smirked. Suspicion lurked in her heavy-lidded blue eyes. "Oh, yes, you did! You certainly did see her before. You spent at least an hour bending her ear. You had her backed off in a corner—and making passes, too."

I stared at the figure on the bed again. Vaguely, I remembered her—a charming creature—still in her teens—who had informed me she was an artist's model. It started to come back to me—in spots. I had been downing rum-cokes by the dozens. And when I am swilling rum-cokes, I go slightly haywire. I am liable to pursue anything attractive that wears skirts.

"Oh, well," I began and started toward the bed. "Finders keepers!"

But Rita grabbed my arm and I went stumbling backwards.

"Don't be silly, Rod!" Rita said. "We got to get her out of here."

"Killjoy!" I muttered and watched as Rita swept toward the bed with her long-legged stride.

Rita grasped naked shoulders and shook the girl. Then she wheeled on me, her eyes round with sudden shock. "Rod!" Rita gasped. "She's as cold as ice. Look at the marks on her throat! She's dead! *Strangled!*"

My jaw dropped. I stared, stupidly and drunkenly. I tried to think, but couldn't! Then, from outside in the street, came a distracting noise. The banshee wail of a police siren that cut through the stillness of the room like a jagged knife. The clamor jarred some of the intoxication from me.

"This," I blurted out, "is a job for the cops."

I lurched across the room toward the telephone on a floor that was oddly uneven. I tripped over something and the foot of the bed rose suddenly to crash into me. A flash of white brilliance blinded me as my head smashed into wood. Then I reeled off into deep, dark space.

I WOKE UP with the sound of men's voices in my ears.

"All I know, lady," a big guy in a blue serge suit was explaining to Rita, "is that we got a tip over the phone that there was a murdered girl in this apartment."

Rita nudged me with the point of her alligator-leather shoe. "That's the only corpse here, officer. And that's not death—that's alcohol."

I wanted to get to my feet to explain. But Rita was shoving them, almost bodily from the room.

"Go back to your checker game," she told them. "Solve your mysteries somewhere else; my boy friend and I want to be alone."

One of them, a particularly nasty character in a derby hat, scowled down at me in scorn as I tried to scramble to my feet. "Call that a boy friend?" he sneered. "Looks more like a crawlin' infant to me."

For a second or two, I thought Rita was going to crown him with a left hook. She was perfectly capable; that, I knew from experience. And Rita has always considered herself my guardian angel. "You better go, officer!" she bristled, belligerently.

He went. And she almost slammed the door to the apartment in his face.

Then she whirled on me. Her mood was far from jovial. "Now *you!*" she exclaimed and dragged me to her feet. Among her other jobs, Rita was once a nurse and she could throw grown men around with surprising ease.

"Where is *she?*" I wanted to know. The bed was empty now. No corpse.

"Never mind," Rita told me. "Get into the shower while I make coffee. You have to sober up."

"Why pick on me?" I protested. "I didn't do anything."

"How do you know?" she asked. "How do you know what you do when you're drunk—you silly chippy-chaser? If only I hadn't let you alone with that sexy kid!"

As I stumbled toward the bathroom and the shower, I began to worry. I had quaffed more than my usual quota of rum-cokes. There were blank spaces I couldn't account for—little gaps in my memory of just what had occurred at the party. Maybe I had brought this kid up here. I wasn't quite sure. Maybe I had even—

I shuddered, and drove the accusing thoughts from my brain.

The cold shower that Rita insisted upon knifed into my body like a million little needles. After I dressed again, Rita forced me to drink almost a pot of black coffee. Gradually, the effects of the alcohol began to wear off. "What did you do with her?" I asked Rita.

"I took her away."

"Away?"

"Yes, away. After you went into your nosedive and passed out, I went down the corridor until I found an unlocked door. Then I carried her down and dumped her on somebody else's bed."

"Why?"

"You didn't actually want her around when the police came, did you? I wanted to get rid of her."

I shook my head, tried to throw off some of the cobwebs that still lingered there. "I don't know whether that was smart," I told her. "If anybody knows she was in here, they'll think I killed her and got rid of the body myself."

Rita said nothing. But I didn't like the look in her eyes. I guess I shouted: "Rita, you don't think I killed her, do you?"

She shuddered. "I don't know, Rod.

You do some queer things since you got that bump on the head in the service—especially when you've been drinking."

Mechanically, I felt the scar on my left temple. There was a steel plate inside. A Japanese riflebutt on Guadalcanal was responsible for that. "I didn't do it!" I insisted. But I knew that there was no conviction in my tone.

"Well, it's a cinch *somebody* killed her," Rita went on. "It wasn't suicide, not with those marks on her throat; she didn't strangle herself. She—honestly, Rod, when I saw her body and figured the cops were coming, I guess I got panicky."

"That's not like you," I said. "Getting panicky, I mean."

She made a wry attempt at a smile. "I never figured you killed anybody before, either."

IT WAS MY turn to say nothing. Strange thoughts were festering in my brain. Rita was always insanely jealous of me. And she said I had been hanging around that kid. Maybe—Once again, I forced wild thoughts from my mind.

"Honestly, Rod," Rita was saying. "I didn't know what to think. Maybe it was crazy but I—I thought that perhaps—perhaps you *had* killed her. That's why I got rid of the body."

"I don't know what to think myself," I confessed.

"Well, somebody at the party must have done it," Rita told me. "We have to find out who—before whoever lives in that apartment comes back and sees the body. Pull yourself together! We're going back down."

We were walking toward the elevator when I asked her, "Who brought her to the party, anyway? Do you know?"

"A fellow named Hakins, I think. A writer."

"Think he'd do it?"

"He might. I never liked his looks. Too big and surly for me. And I know he doesn't like his women to mess around with other men. He might have done it. But—" She broke off and looked at me in that peculiar way again.

"But what?" I demanded.

She grabbed me and hugged me close, pressed her body against mine. I could feel her contours, hard against me.

"Rod," she said, earnestly. "you know the law. If you marry me, they can't force me to testify against you."

I pushed her away—none to gently. It wasn't easy, either. I'm no midget; I stand six feet in my socks and weigh one ninety stripped. But Rita was nearly as tall and almost as strong. She was entirely feminine; her curves were lush; but there was a hint of Amazon about her, too. And she knew almost as much about judo as any Japanese.

I stared into her eyes. They were almost on a level with mine.

"You're a funny dame," I told her. And I meant it. I could never figure her out.

"I'm nuts about you," she said. "You know that."

I nodded. I didn't argue. Why she wanted me. I didn't know. Rita probably could have had her pick of dozens of men A big, buxom blonde with a fine-featured face equal to anything you'll see in cigarette advertisements. If I ever got a notion to take the plunge and get all tangled up with a ball and chain, she would probably be the one. Sometimes I think I was loco for keeping our relationship strictly on a boss-secretary basis.

"I guess I'm just not the marrying type," I told her. But inwardly, I was putting the proverbial two and two together and getting sixteen. She was practically telling me she thought I was the guilty party. *Why? Why?* After all, I had no grudge against the babe we had found sprawled out on my bed. But Rita did. As I said, she was insanely jealous of me and I had been making a strong play for the

dame. After all, that stuff about not being forced to testify against one's mate works both ways. "I guess I'll never marry," I said as I shook my head again, trying to dislodge the suspicions that were boring from within.

"Maybe you'll be glad to marry me," she warned.

THE PARTY was still going full blast when we barged in again and a bunch of muscle detached himself from Aggie Clouser, the hostess, and came charging over. Drunken anger was written in every line of his handsome face. I knew him all right. He was Hal Logan, well-known illustrator who drew cuties for calendars and magazines.

"Where is she?" he demanded of me. "Where is she?"

"Where's who?" I asked, trying to sound guiltless.

"You know well enough!" Logan sneered. "May—May Musiel. Don't try to look innocent. I guess you don't remember. Not much you don't! You were bragging about how good an artist you are. You said you were going to paint her like she was never painted before."

"Yes," Aggie, the hostess cut in, "where is she? You're a naughty boy. May borrowed a nightgown from me, said she was going to pose for you. What have you done with her?"

I shook my head. There were still cobwebs there. Flashes of the party kept coming back to me. And I wasn't liking what I remembered. I have a habit of asking pretty girls to pose for me when I drink rum-cokes.

And I was remembering that I had told this kid the number of my apartment.

Besides that, I remembered telling her she could pose for me there—tonight.

Rita stepped between us. "What are you talking about?" she asked Logan. "Rod was with me. After all, he is my fiance." That last was a fib. "We were together for the last couple of hours. I didn't see any May around." Then she clasped me in her arms and planted a torrid kiss on my lips that might have paralyzed me at any other time. "Don't worry!" she whispered into my ear. "I'll be your alibi—to the limit."

Logan wasn't satisfied. "I saw you go through the door with May," he accused me.

"Aw, let's all have a drink," Rita interposed. "Little May'll be back, wagging—well—wagging herself like Mary's little lamb. How do you know she didn't go off with somebody else?"

Another bulky figure crowded himself into the scene. Harry Hakins, the writer. "I got May's coat," he said. He had a fur coat drapped across his arm. "She didn't leave without her coat; she's somewhere in the building. And she's not going home with anybody but yours truly. I brought her here; I take her home." Then he glared at me. "I'll find her and break the neck of the guy who's got her hidden away."

"What a way to end a party! Aggie, you better get some more drinks," Rita cut in again.

Aggie giggled. "Yes, I better." Then she mouthed a few select cuss words. "May—the little witch. Got every man here worked up. This is the last party of mine she'll ever come to."

I groaned inside. *How right she was!*

"RITA," I protested, taking a gulp at my drink, "we're getting nowhere."

"Easy on that grog!" she ordered. "I don't want you passing out again. Besides, we are getting somewhere. I see four suspects.

"Four! Who's the four?"

"You," she began.

I winced. "Me?"

"Yes, you; and Logan; and Hakins. They're both nuts about her."

I shrugged. Still suspecting me, she was. Hell, she was so hard to make understand. But I was thinking, numbly, that it was possible. Maybe I had

done the trick during one of those times I blanked out. It was hot in the room but I shivered again.

"Who's the fourth?" I asked.

She pointed to a hefty bruiser who had a young blonde crowded on a sofa and was making passes at her. "Him."

"Who's him?"

"Name's Garkus. The Silver Terror. A wrestler. He was making a big play for May when you horned in. Aggie told me he's had a crush on May for some time; she wouldn't bother with him, though, when she was sober."

I took another look at the guy and thought of that moth-eaten gag about a gorilla with a shave. I thought to myself that I must have been well-polluted to take a chance on crossing up an ape like that by making a play for the same babe as he did.

"Hate to meet him in a dark alley," I commented. "Say, what's the pitch, anyway? Every guy here's a big guy. Any one of them's big enough to wring any dame's neck. I never saw such a collection of over-sized monkeys."

"That's Aggie," Rita said. "She likes her men big. Maybe because Charlie—that's her divorced husband—was small. That's why she told me to bring you. You're big, too, you know."

"Fine thing," I muttered. "Three guys after one dame; any one of them could be guilty."

"Don't forget yourself, Buster," Rita said, mercilessly. "You were after her, too; you make the fourth. Maybe this'll teach you when to stop the guzzling."

Minutes later, Rita said: "I've got a plan. I'll go upstairs and call Aggie. I'll say I'm May and that I've been sleeping a load off upstairs. Aggie's too polluted to recognize voices. I'll give the number of the apartment where I dumped her. That'll draw the killer out; he'll want to go back and finish the job. You watch and see who comes up. That'll be the guilty party."

She hoisted her lush figure from the chair and started for the door. I tried to follow but she shoved me, hard, back into my seat. "You stay here!" she ordered. "It's your only hope."

I WAITED for the phone to ring. Then, when it did jangle, there was so much noise nobody else heard it.

"Aggie!" I called the hostess. "The phone."

"Another complaint, I guess," she giggled. "Such neighbors. They don't like parties."

I watched her listen, saw her cradle the receiver.

"Quiet everybody!" she commanded. "Quiet, everybody, please!" She stood up, wobbily, on a chair. "I have an announcement to make. May, our dear May—the little witch—is upstairs in apartment—apartment, oh, let me—think, apartment 1314. All you anxious men can report to same."

Logan and Hakins were both in my line of vision. Both of them headed for the door.

"What a plan!" I muttered. "Two of them."

It was a cinch both of them didn't do it; that was a one-man job. I started for the door after them but somebody else bowled me over. I didn't see who it was because my head hit the floor and I almost went into another blackout.

When I got to the elevator, Logan and Hakins were still fumbling with the switches. I leaped aboard before the door closed. Then the damn thing wouldn't start.

"It's only two flights up!" I told them and ran toward the stairs.

We dashed down the corridor to apartment 1314. The door was open. But there was no May—no corpse on the bed.

Hakins cursed. "There's nobody here!" he snarled. "Some smart guy pulled a gag." Then he balled up his hands into fists and swaggered toward me. "I guess it was you," he accused

me. "You're a smart cookie. I guess it was you."

"Yeh! The great painter!" Logan sneered. He began to move toward me, too.

I saw I was in for a rough time.

But a groan from the other side of the bed brought them to a halt. A woman's hand clutched the bed clothes from the other side. Rita came up, holding her throat. There were red marks on it.

"The louse!" she said. "He almost did me in, too."

"Who?" Logan, Hakins and I brought out the word like a chorus.

"Garkus. He just left the room with the—the—May, I mean."

I knew where Garkus was going. Back to plant the corpse in my apartment again.

"Let's go!" I shouted at the others and sprinted for the door.

"Don't! Rod, don't!" Rita begged. "He'll kill you, Rod. Wait! Wait! I called the police."

GARKUS WAS just coming out of my apartment when we reached it. He wheeled and faced us like an animal at bay.

We hesitated for seconds as Garkus glared at us out of red, pig-like eyes.

"Yeh!" he snarled. "I killed her! No babe can two-time me. Walked out on me for somebody else, eh? Well, I showed her. I followed her; I saw what she was gonna do. Well, she's done for. Just like you mugs—when I'm through with you."

"He's drunk," Logan said.

"A psycho, too!" Hakins cut in.

Hakins had guts. He went after Garkus first. But Garkus clouted him with a forearm like wrestlers do in the ring, and Hakins went sprawling.

Logan and I tore in. I was punching with everything I had and so was Logan. I don't know what hit me. I think it was the edge of Garkus' hand. But, if it was, he missed my neck and the hand crashed into my temple—the bad one.

A thousand fiery stars danced in front of my eyes and I tried to fight off darkness as I lifted myself, slowly, to my feet. Garkus was holding on to Logan and beating his handsome face to a pulp with his fist.

It was no time for polite combat. I aimed a kick at Garkus' middle with all the force I could muster. My foot thudded home and Garkus grunted in rage and pain. But he held on to Logan.

Hakins was on his feet again and we both crashed into Garkus, trying to break the terrible hold he had on Logan's neck. We smashed and smashed at Garkus' face, stumbling over each other sometimes in our anxiety. Garkus' face was smeared with blood but he didn't relax his hold on Logan's throat.

Then Rita came up. She was carrying a vase—a vase so huge I doubt any other woman could even lift it.

"Get back!" I yelled at her. "Are you crazy? He'll kill you!"

"Oh, yeh!" she said, calmly, with sarcasm in her tone. Garkus tried to duck, but he was too slow. Rita slammed the vase into his skull.

That did the trick. Garkus staggered around—and collapsed.

We were still staring at his prostrate form when the minions of the law arrived.

"Not you too again!" said the nasty one in the derby hat.

Rita did the explaining. She was the only one in condition to explain.

Logan, Hakin and Garkus were carted off to a hospital dispensery. Garkus was safely handcuffed.

"I'll take care of this one," Rita told the police, meaning me. "I'm a nurse."

"Well, don't leave town—either of you," said the big cop in the blue serge suit. "They'll be questions."

"Don't worry, officers," she told them. "This guy won't leave my sight any more." Then she turned to me. "Why don't we get married now, just like they do in the movies?"

Archibald wanted to write about crime and criminals. To be frank, we must warn you that Archibald wasn't very bright—but he muddled through nonetheless.

AN ASSIST FROM ARCHIBALD

by David James

DRESSED in baggy tweeds, his hair slicked down and a monocle clamped in one eye, he presented a startling picture to the desk sergeant on night duty at the police station. Looking down at him, the sergeant said, "Yes, may I help you?"

"Indeed, constable, you may be of service to me." He placed his bowler carefully on top of his raincoat and polished the monocle with a monogrammed handkerchief. "My name is Archibald Frawley." He paused then, waiting for instant recognition. After some seconds, when none was forthcoming, he went on, "I am a writer. I wish to write a book about your American police. You know, something full of blood and guts. Frightful night, wot?"

"Uh, oh, yes, very lousy night. How can I help you write a book?" the sergeant inquired.

"I have heard it whispered about that the constables here are on speaking terms with the chaps of the underworld in America. I wondered if you'd be good enough, old man, to introduce me to some of your gangsters so that I may gather background material for my book. You know; have them take me with them when they take a man for a ride to bump him off," came the answer.

The sergeant concealed a smile and

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then asked, "Why don't you take it up with the F.B.I.?"

"I hadn't thought of that," the other answered. "But I heard that their headquarters is in Washington—and besides, they're frightfully busy, wot?"

"Yes, they are; so are we," the sergeant was getting impatient.

"Sorry, old chap, didn't mean to get nasty. Perhaps I could make the rounds with one of your constables," Frawley suggested hopefully.

"Awright. The midnight shift is due in soon. Hang around until they come in and I'll send you out with one of our men," the sergeant said.

"Thank you. That's veddy British of you old man." Then he crossed to a bench, pulled a copy of the *London Times* from his overcoat pocket and began to read.

"Gould, pipe the jerk," the sergeant said to one of the men checking in. "Wants to write a book, you know—what a laugh. And you know what I'm going to do?"

"Nope," Gould answered.

"I'm going to send His Lordship out with McFinn. That ought to save Mac from having a dull night."

"McFinn! Look, sarge, Mac is going to kill you for that!"

"Yeah, but let's hope he kills Archibald over there first." The sergeant tried to hide his delight at the thought of Irish McFinn being told to take Archibald Frawley with him on his rounds, but couldn't conceal a wide smirk.

The precinct house quieted down. Frawley sat stoically on the hard wooden bench, puffing his pipe and reading his paper; the time dragged by until the clock showed five minutes before midnight.

THE RELIEF men were slowly coming in, checking with the board and idly waiting for their eight-to-midnight men to come in. Irish McFinn, a tall, strapping man with a beet-red nose and flaming red hair, was talking with Gould.

[*Turn To Page* 118]

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The sergeant lined the men up and then sent them out. "Mac!" he shouted to the broad back of McFinn. "A minute!" Then, he beckoned Archibald Frawley and introduced the men to each other.

"English?" McFinn asked.

"Rawther," Frawley said.

"Too bad," McFinn said, striding to the door, the short Frawley trotting after him.

Out on the street, the two walked to the bus stop in silence. When they alighted at 14th Street, they still had not said more than three words.

McFinn called in, then started on his beat; eerie and quiet, 14th Street was deserted save for an occasional drunk staggering by.

"I say, old man, we'll be together till eight o'clock," Archibald said. "We may as well talk to each other."

"I understand, my foine lad, that you were to come with me on this beat. I did not hear tell of me havin' to talk to you, too."

"I say, not veddy British of you, old chap."

"Thank me lucky stars," McFinn answered, smiling for the first time.

"Well!" Archibald seemed stunned. The two men continued on their tour—in silence. One hour dragged by without a word. Then another.

A few hundred feet down the street, two men huddled in a doorway. The taller of them reached into his pocket and pulled out a large handkerchief. "Better get yours on," he snapped to his companion.

"What for?" came the reply. "You know what I look like; so why should I put a handkerchief over my face?"

"Shaddup! Do as I say!" the tall man said angrily. "It's too bad that Al had to pick a plainclothesman to heist last night—or else he'd be here. You—I swear—you're the thickest guy between the ears I ever worked with—and I've had some pretty sappy guys with me in my day!"

"You don't have to go an' give me a

complexion!" the shorter, barrel-shaped man said.

"The word is complex, stupid!" the tall, bony man answered.

"Look who's so smart all of a sudden," came the mocking reply.

"Forget it. But remember; when the cop comes by, give him the sap. And if you have to say anything to me, when anyone else is around, you call me Joe." The skinny man adjusted the kerchief over his face.

"Awright. But make sure the alarm is off before you bust the glass," the short man answered. "I loined that off a guy in Leavenworth onct."

"Get the bag open!"

"Leave me mother out of this!"

"The satchel; the satchel!" the tall one said irritatedly.

"Oh, yeah. Why'nt you say so in the first place?"

WHISTLING to himself, McFinn walked down the street, his arm swinging freely and his nightstick suspended from his wrist. Archibald Frawley walked a few feet behind him, occasionally writing a thought or two in the notebook which he carried in his hand.

Without warning, an arm reached out and a dull thud brought Archibald's gaze from his notes to the crumpling form of McFinn.

"Hey, Joe! There's another guy here," the short man shouted.

"Sap him, Joe!" came the quick reply.

"Oh, don't mind me, gentlemen; I am merely along as an observer," Archibald said.

"So what's that got to do with it?" the dumpy one asked.

"I say, haven't you ever heard of Archibald Frawley?" the scribe asked, awaiting a look of recognition to spread over the face of the other man.

"Sure—who ain't?" the stocky man answered.

"Well then, you know who I am," Archibald said hopefully.

"You run thoid at Belmont last week—right?"

[*Turn Page*]

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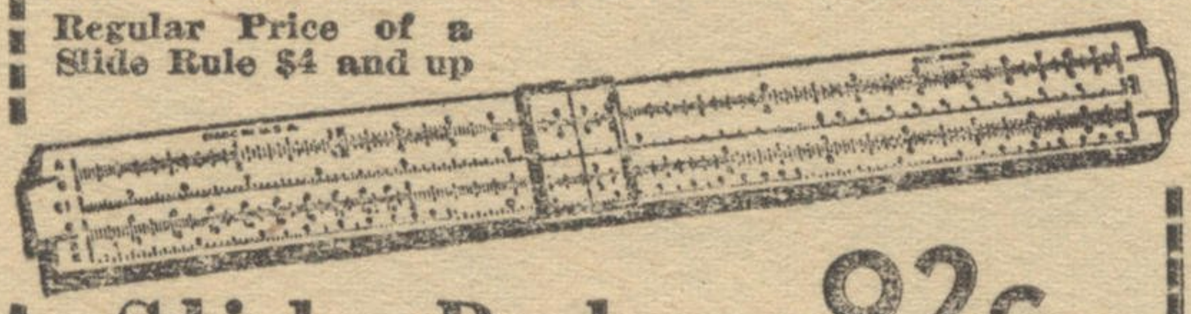

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"Hey, Joe!" the tall man called from the doorway. "Who is it?"

"This is the guy what lost my two bucks for me last week," came the answer.

"I say! You must be in error. I am a writer; I am doing a book—" Archibald began.

"Of all the places for a nut to be running around, *this* guy has to pick 14th Street at two thirty a. m. to go writing a book," a muffled voice ghosted from the doorway.

"Do I sap him?" the barrel-bodied man asked.

"Don't sap me, chaps. After all, I couldn't take notes if I were stretched out on the pavement unconscious, could I?"

"You're going to take notes?"

"If I may, chaps," declared Frawley.

"You mean," the roly-poly one said, "that you're going to write a book about *me?*"

"That's the general idea."

"Well, well," the short man announced. "Leave me introduce myself. I am Horace—"

"Idiot! Will you shut up?" the tall man asked as he stepped from the doorway.

"Don't talk about me friend Archie like that!" Horace snapped.

"I meant *you,* jackass!"

"I have a splendid suggestion," Archibald said. "If you'd hand me your club, I'll promise to knock Constable McFinn over the head as often as you'd like. Rawther enjoy it, too, I might add."

"That's thoughtful of you," the tall man said. "Go on, genius, give it to him." He winked broadly at Horace.

"Hurry, chaps. Constable McFinn is coming round," Archibald said.

"Go on, stupid, *give it to him!*" the tall one said, nodding at McFinn. Horace didn't see the nod, and handed the club to Frawley.

"Thanks, chaps, rawther decent of you. Say, can't you do a better job of breaking that window? I'm getting

[*Turn To Page* 122]

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tired of all this balderdash, and you chaps certainly seem disorganized." Archibald strode up to the window of the jewelry-store and swung mightily at the plate glass, breaking it to smithereens and setting off the alarm. "There you are, lads, a perfect job!"

"That does it!" the tall man said. "Let's beat it!"

"What for?" Horace asked. "Archie wants me life history—don'tcha? I was borned under the grandstand at Ebbets Field at the age of—"

Archibald sat down on a nearby hydrant and began to write copiously in his notebook. Suddenly, he was startled by the voice behind him.

"Stand where you are!" Patrolman McFinn shouted, holding his gun on the stricken, tall man who was about to run down the street.

"Don't shoot!" the tall man said nervously.

"Higher!" McFinn motioned the man to raise his arms. Then, grabbing Archibald around the wrist, McFinn hooked him to the subway-grating with his handcuffs. "Stay there," he said.

"You gotta get them cuffs off him!" Horace insisted. "He's gonna write a book about me!" He looked downtrodden.

The wail of sirens split the sleepy night and police cars converged on the spot from every direction. As the first one squealed to a stop, Horace looked up and asked, "What happened?"

"Holdup?" the first policeman asked.

"Yeah! Where?" Horace asked. "Imagine—there was a holdup around here!"

"I say, chaps, release me. I demand to see the British Consul!" Archibald yipped.

"Take off those kerchiefs!" McFinn ordered. Both men did, then were herded into the police cars and driven away.

THE DESK sergeant had just written the report in his ledger. He stared down quizzically at Archibald.

"I'm speechless!" the sergeant said. "How could you hold two armed men on the scene of the crime for nearly five minutes until help arrived?"

Archibald looked up. "I'm British—wasn't difficult."

"And you, McFinn. What have you got to say for yourself?" the sergeant smiled.

"God Save the Queen!" McFinn smiled back, throwing his arms around the stunned Frawley. "Care for a spot of tea, your Lordship?"

"I say, chaps, that's a bit of all right," Archibald answered. "But there is just one thing."

"What's that?" they all echoed.

"I lost my notes down the underground grating; I'll have to start all over again!"

"You're British; shouldn't take long," the sergeant said with a broad grin.

"Indeed. But I have a priceless interview with that nice chap named Horace in those notes. I recommend him highly for the constabulary. Fine, upstanding chap. Ought to finish that interview, though. I'll write the bloody head of Scotland Yard about Horace. Ought to be some place in the Yard for him—"

And the last any of them saw of Archibald Frawley, he had picked up his soiled bowler, stuck it purposefully on his head, clamped the monocle menacingly in his eye, and strode quickly through the doors.

"There'll always be an England," the sergeant said.

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SPOTLIGHT ON CRIME

(*continued from page 8*)

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[*Turn To Page* 126]

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The idea of quick dough—minus honest work—entered the head of Edgar Louis Thomas during his fifth drink with young Gibson. Their cash was fading fast over the bar and they decided that they should replenish it. Of course the thought of legitimate labor never occurred to them, especially the older punk.

"Listen," said Thomas to Gibson, "all taxi-drivers are pushovers for a quick haul." This observation, unfortunately, is quite true. The exact number of taxi-drivers held up, even murdered, in one year, is not known but it is very high. And it is the most cowardly type of criminal attack because the driver, with back turned, never has a chance to defend himself.

Gibson and his older pal-bum left the skidrow dive and hailed the cab of E. L. Thomas and told him to drive down Highway No. 1 until they told him to stop. When they were 14 miles south of the Daytona Beach city limits, young Gibson became ill from drinking and the cab was stopped and he got out. As he walked in the grass beside the road, he heard a shot from behind him. He turned and saw the driver slumped over the steering wheel.

"I shot him," said the older man.

Why?" asked Gibson.

"Oh, I don't know," said the bum in the rear seat, nonchalantly. "I guess I just felt like it."

In other words, some anti-social and useless male member of the human race feels like killing another person and he does so. No reason, no provocation, no anything. Needless to report, this Thomas creature had no medals for

bravery on any front line during war. However, a gun makes artificially brave men out of rank and rotten cowards.

They removed the dead driver from the front seat and placed him in the rear of the cab, then drove down a sandy side road and dumped the body into a clump of scrub palmettos. That chore completed, and feeling that they were big shots—instead of very little lice—they drove the cab all the way to Miami.

BY THIS time the fumes of alcohol were less potent and the older man had enough sense to realize that the cab was 'hot', and that all departments of Florida law enforcement would be looking for it, and also the driver. So they drove the taxi down a side street to the foot of Biscayne Bay and left it stranded in an empty lot with roof-high weeds. Next they rented a cheap furnished room in Miami's small skidrow district and the following morning the older man quit the younger and went to Miami Beach.

While on the Beach, Edgar Louis Thomas honored several bars with his cash— or rather the dead taxi-driver's cash— and then wound up early the next morning at Al's Bar, 600 Fifth street. Therein he became boastful and confided to one Walter Bevis, a seaman off the British ship, *Malabar*, that he had killed a man up near Daytona Beach. To prove what a hot-shot he was, he took out a German Luger and waved it in all directions. It was the same fun that had murdered the taxi-driver.

During the murderer's demonstration of just how tough he was, the owner of the bar, George Goodman, came over for a look and a good listen. After he got both, he walked away and secretly phoned the police. Within less than six minutes, five officers of the Miami Beach P.D.—three detectives and two uniformed officers —walked into the bar an informed the bragging Thomas that his story

[*Turn Page*]

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was most interesting and that he could retell it at Headquarters. Thomas clammed up, said he was just kidding, but the police weren't.

There was one bullet in the brain of the taxi-driver and one bullet missing from the Luger, which fact made Thomas a man of prime interest to the police. Comes now a quick phone call to Sheriff Littlefield, of Volusia county, wherein the crime had been committed, and when the information was relayed to Thomas, he began to sing like a canary with vitamin-seasoned seeds for lunch.

"But I didn't mean to shoot him," said the now-sober Thomas. "Honest I didn't. But I guess it was me who shot him, not the kid; he didn't have anything to do with it. It must have been the booze."

"Where's Gibson now?" he was asked.

"I left him in Miami. I don't know where he went after we checked out of the room."

Enter now some ever-welcome police luck. The scene changes from Miami Beach to Miami, a short trip over a few Causeways across Biscayne Bay. We had been alerted to be on the look-see for young Gibson, described as a slim, blond lad, with dirty trousers. It is now January 7, the day is Monday, and the time is 9:30 A.M. In brief, it is just about nine hours from the time that Thomas had been caught by the Miami Beach police.

On Southwest First Street, just a block from Headquarters, Detectives Charles Papy and Thomas Elder were driving along slowly with both eyes open for anything. Papy noticed a bedraggled-looking fellow walking, hick-like, with hands in pants pockets, slowly down the street. He seemed to be lost, strayed and also friendless. As the car neared the walker, Elder left it and walked casually up behind the stroller.

"Just a moment," said Elder. "Do you live in Miami?"

[*Turn To Page* 130]

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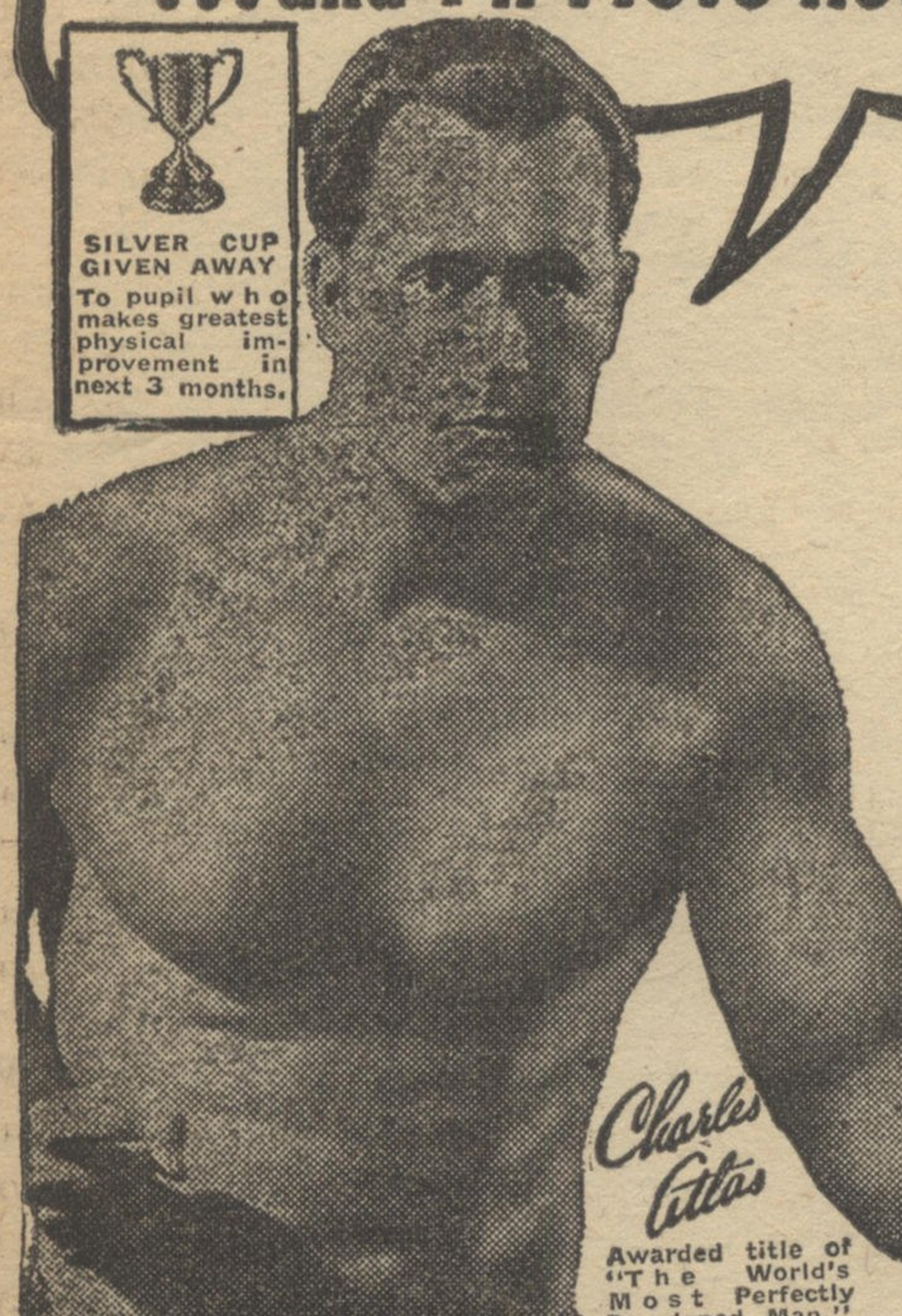

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"I'm from Virginia," said the young man. "Elliston, Virginia. I'm down here looking for a job."

Det. Papy came up just then and said, "Let's go to Headquarters and have a little talk."

Closeted in Det. Chief Howard's private office, they had a little informative chat. When it was over, Douglas Alvin Gibson had confessed that he was with Thomas when the cab-driver was shot.

"He shouldn't have killed him," admitted Gibson, which was a profound and precient statement, which in no way brought the dead taximan back to his wife and children.

A few months later, in the little city of Deland, Gibson and Thomas had a very fair trial in criminal court. Gibson received a life sentence in the Florida State Prison, while Thomas got the full dose—death in the electric chair.

Die Tomorrow, Please

(*continued from page 98*)

ny. But, consider. Minego was Gerald's father. He couldn't lavish his affection on the boy in any other way, for then Gerald might find out he was not an orphan as he was probably led to believe. Therefore, Minego gave Walker money all the time, just to see that Gerald wanted for nothing. And he didn't. I'll bet if you check up you'll find he had the best clothes, best cars, best everything. And he figured 'Uncle William' was doing it all."

"What led you to be sure Linda did it, then?"

"Well," I reasoned, "nothing for certain. But I was sure that Walker *hadn't* done it. Incidentally, he told me right before he died, that he *did* kill Gerald. Probably thought old man Farnam had done it by mistake, and was trying to cover up for the old gent, for Miss Farnam's sake."

"Why, for heaven's sake?"

"You got me," I said. "Who can tell what goes on in another's mind?"

"Well, you've been guessing pretty steadily right along now," Scott commented.

"Yeah. Haven't got to that, though. Well, I was also certain Miss Farnam was innocent. Also, Mr. Farnam. And it was evident that Minego wouldn't kill a son he loved as much as Gerald. Who, then, was left? The only one who had a disposition that should have been better refrigerated when she was a child; Linda. She was greedy, mercenary, lousy, and anything else you might think of."

Scott was trying not to appear too interested.

"Anyway," I continued, "she was the only one who could have done it, so I put on my show in Minego's office. She was ripe to give herself away, if guilty, because at that moment she was all het up accusing Minego, remember?"

Scott whistled. "Kelly, you were luckier than even an Irishman has a right to expect to be. If you ever work in Homicide for me, you'll have to be more down-to-earth."

"I probably won't ever work for you in Homicide."

"Hmm," he murmured, "I see how you're figuring. You've got two hundred dollars now. You won't be hungry for a couple weeks."

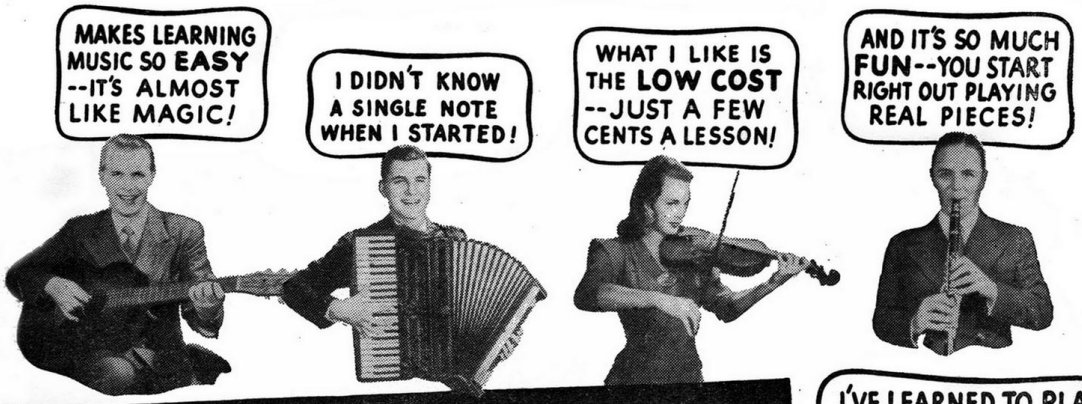
"There's one thing wrong, though," I complained.

"What's that?"

"I solved the wrong death, didn't I?" I asked.

"Oh, murder!" Scott sighed disgustedly.

★



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