
MARCH 15¢
SUPER-DETECTIVE
IND
A SPEED MAGAZINE
STAKE-OUT KILL
by Roger Torrey

OUTGUESS THE WEATHERMAN

AMAZING FORECASTER

PREDICTS THE WEATHER 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE

READ ALL ABOUT THE "SWISS" WEATHER HOUSE AND FREE GIFT OFFER IF YOU ACT AT ONCE

Why pay $5 or $10 for a barometer when you can predict the weather yourself, at home, 8 to 24 hours in advance, with this accurate, inexpensive Weather House forecaster? It's made like a little Swiss cottage, with a thatched green roof and small green shutters. Inside the house is an old witch and a little boy and girl. When the weather's going to be fine, the little boy and girl come out in front. But when bad weather is on the way the old witch makes an appearance. There is an easy-to-read thermometer on the front of the cottage that shows you the exact temperature. . . . **Here is positively the most amazing introductory advertising offer ever made.** But you must act quickly—prices may rise.

NOW YOU CAN BE YOUR OWN WEATHERMAN!

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Almost every day of your life is affected in some way by the weather, and it's such a satisfaction to have a reliable indication of what the weather will be. With the "Swiss" Weather House made in the U. S. A. and easy-to-read thermometer you have an investment in comfort and convenience for years to come. The Weather House comes to you complete and ready to use. Ideal for gifts and bridge prizes. It will bring new pleasure to everyone in your family. The price is only $1.69 C. O. D. You must act now to secure this price.

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The greatest novelty plant ever discovered! Tradition is—a person owning one of these plants will have much good luck and success. When planted in earth, it grows two feet tall and blooms beautifully.

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"Please rush 6 more Weather Houses. I want to give them away as gifts. They are wonderful." Mrs. I. F., Booth Bay, Maine.

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"Ever since I got my Weather House I've been able to plan my affairs a day ahead. It's wonderful." Mrs. D. L. B., Shenandoah, Iowa.

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☐ Send C. O. D. ☐ I enclose $1.69. You Pay Postage.

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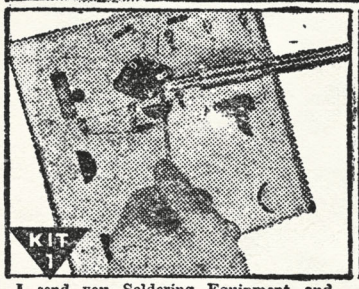
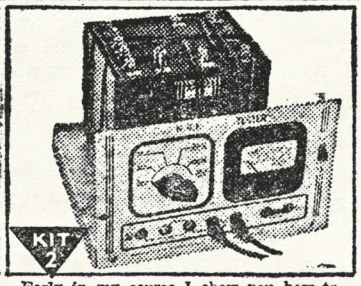
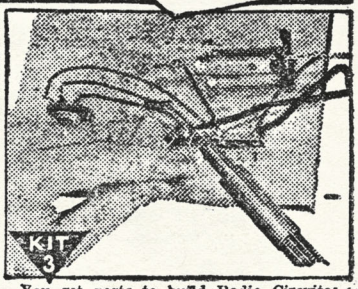


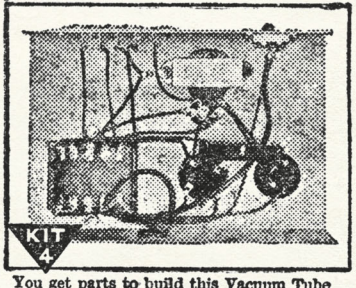
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



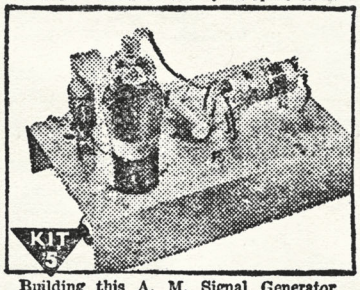
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



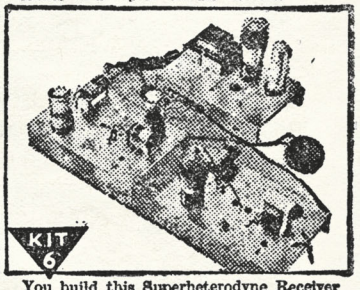
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

KNOW RADIO—*Win Success*

I Will Train You at Home—SAMPLE LESSON FREE

Send coupon for FREE Sample Lesson, "Getting Acquainted with Receiver Servicing," and FREE 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." See how N.R.I. trains you at home. Read how you practice building, testing, repairing Radios with SIX BIG KITS of Radio parts I send you.

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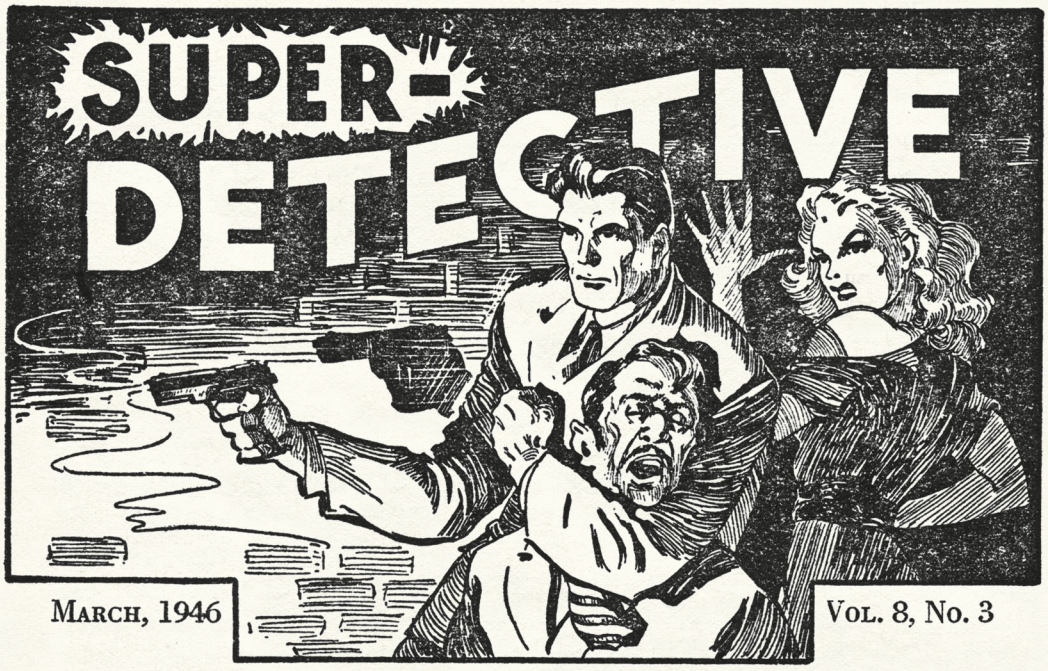

MARCH, 1946 VOL. 8, No. 3

Feature Novel, Complete In This Issue

Shorter Fiction and Features

SUPER DETECTIVE is published bi-monthly by Trojan Publishing Corporation, 125 East Forty-sixth Street, New York 17, N. Y. Frank Armer, Publisher; K. W. Hutchinson and W. E. Matthews, Editors. Re-entered as second class matter May 8, 1945, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879 Subscription: Yearly, $.75; single copy, 15c. Canadian and foreign postage extra. Manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk.

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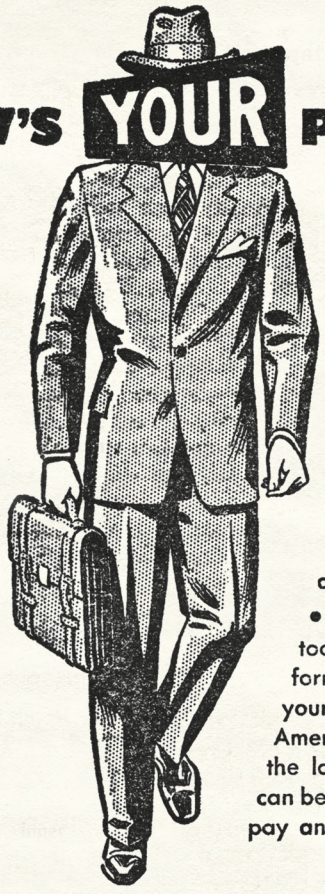
HOW'S YOUR POST-WAR PROGRESS?



• Remember when you were going to prepare for the period of post-war opportunities? *This is it!* New industries are coming into being, established industries are expanding . . . and there are rewarding openings for *trained* men in all lines.

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BRAZIL CURBED NAZI GANGSTERS

HITLER AND HIS unsavory henchmen have frequently been called gangsters, among other things. But there was at least one instance where the Nazis went into a neutral foreign country and actually employed the bootlegging and hijacking methods of Chicago's mobs in the prohibition era.

It happened shortly after the Axis conquered the so-called "low countires" of Holland and Belgium, which, at that time, were the diamond-cutting centers of the world. Hitler needed diamonds; needed them desperately—not for his personal adornment, but for industrial purposes in his war machine. The production of armament depends upon diamonds, for in some stage of manufacture, all guns and tanks and planes require the use of the world's hardest stone. Industrial diamonds are used in machine tools and for making precision gauges, without which no steel fabrication can continue.

Germany's diamond loot in pillaged Antwerp and Amsterdam was far below expectations, for the Dutch and Belgian diamond merchants had cleverly taken most of their wares to England before the Nazi conquest. In consequence, Hitler was forced to turn to other possible sources for his necessary supply of industrial gems.

One of those sources was Brazil, which ranks second only to South Africa in its number of diamond mines. German agents swarmed into Rio de Janeiro and began desperately bidding for every available gem, either industrial or ornamental. They didn't care whether they bought gem diamonds which could ordinarily go into rings and bracelets, or carbonadoes and borts—the rough stones usually cut for industrial purposes.

(*Concluded on page* 95)

"Murphy—are you watching *me?*"

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STAKE-OUT KILL

By

ROGER TORREY

A gun blasted out sound.

Trouble, I decided, is like gold—it's where you find it. You don't have to go looking for either. But I dote on excitement, so I went searching and wound up with more than I asked for

IT WAS as neat a stake-out as I'd ever seen and I was proud of it. We were three houses down from the Simpson girl's place, on the other side of the street, and we had a back entrance. She didn't. Her house butted right up against a high board fence, and outside of windows, all of which were on our side, the only entrance and exit to her place was through the front door. She was in a two-family house, which explains the blank wall she had on the far side.

It wasn't much of a place, either, but then neither was ours.

We were comfortable at that. I'd bought a second hand ice-box and we had it full of beer and something to go with the harder stuff. We had two army cots with bedding. We had cards and magazines.

And right then we had Lieutenant Down, of the Rockville police department.

I said: "This is Swede Olson, Lieutenant, and this is Harvey Kline. I've got two other men but they're at the hotel. They'll take over tonight."

Down and Olson and Kline said they were glad to know each other. All three lied. Olson and Kline had as much use for a Rockville cop as they had for smallpox and Down worked on the theory of a private cop being lower than a snake's belly.

All three maybe had something at that.

Down went over to the window—the shade was pulled down until there wasn't more than two inches of space between that and the sill—and looked our set-up over. And it was good. I had a pair of eight-power Zeiss glasses taking in the whole of the house and I had a thirty-seven Fecker spotting scope—the kind a rifleman uses on the range to check his target—set on a tripod and lined on the front door. We weren't more than seventy five yards from it, and at that distance you could count the hairs in a man's moustache with the thing.

I said: "Neat, eh?"

Down just grunted.

I said: "The girl and her mother are inside now. If the girl leaves, why it's Swede's turn to tag her. We're letting mama come and go as she pleases. If anybody from Freddie's gang shows up, instead of Freddy, Swede will follow him. Leaving Kline to take after the girl in case she goes out."

"And what do *you* do?" Down asked.

I said: "I foreman."

He looked me up andd own and said he'd thought that. That he understood a man with a giant brain always needed a lot of rest. I asked him what the hell was the use in having a giant brain if you couldn't arrange for rest, and then pointed out the ice-box.

I said: "Beer? Highball? I can even fix you up a raw beef sandwich, with onion and mustard on it."

"Eats raw meat, eh?"

"Sure. The gas isn't turned on."

He grunted again and sat down in front of the spotting 'scope, swinging it so that it bore on the Simpson girl's front window.

And then he said: "Oh Lordy. I can pick you up right now, Mullaney, on a Peeping Tom charge."

I told him I didn't know what he was talking about and he got up from the chair and motioned me into it. And I saw a sight to see. The window had nothing but a scrim curtain draped across it and that heavy glass just the same as put my nose up against the Simpson window.

MAMA was fitting a dress on daughter, and I could see she'd be a knockout in a bathing suit. She was too blonde, with the kind of blondeness that comes from bottles, and she used the wrong color make-up and too much of it for that coloring. Her mouth was too small, too pouty and petulant, and her fingernails looked more like claws than anything that belonged on a human being.

I said: "You see, Lieutenant, sometimes this job isn't as monotonous as a man would think it would be."

He said: "Lemme look!" and I gave him the chair and got a bottle of beer for us all. With Swede Olson winking and nodding at the lieutenant and with Kline making shaming motions at him with his two forefingers.

The beer got Down away from the show. He took half a glass of it down, wiped foam from his ragged grey mustache, and grunted thanks.

He said: "Okey, you got your plant. Now what? What am I supposed to do? How d'ya know Freddy Nolan will show up?"

I said: "I don't. But he always has and there's no reason to believe he won't this time. The Simpson girl is his and he's cooled off there, in her house, before. Twice before that I know of. He's not going to run around the country until he's sure he hasn't been fingered for this job. Why shouldn't he come home to the loving little woman instead of sitting it out in some rooming house?"

"How d'ya know all this?"

"He hocked a little piece of the stuff. I got next to the fence."

"How?"

I said: "After all, Lieutenant, I have my secrets, too."

I could have told him I had a line on the fence through a kid that worked in the hockshop the fence ran as a blind, but what was the use. It was none of Down's business, that I could see.

He said: "All right, all right. What am *I* supposed to do?"

"Make the pinch, Lieutenant. You get the credit, or at least part of it. I'll want mention, of course. We're from out of the state—we can't do anything here. It's either work with the cops or work with the sheriff's office, and you're handier."

"D'ya expect me to sit here, like a bump on a log, waiting for Nolan to call on this tart?"

"I'll call you when he shows up. Then all you've got to do is make the pinch. What's wrong with that for an idea?"

He was getting everything and giving nothing in return, so he grudgingly consented to make the arrest, if and when Freddy Nolan appeared on the scene. And then he drank another bottle of beer and left, using the alley entrance, as we did.

And Olson put it very nicely.

He said: "That stinker would bite the silver dollar he stole from his own mother, up and once for knocking off the payroll

just to make sure there was no lead in it. And if there was he'd beat her within an inch of her life."

Which was about the truth.

FREDDY NOLAN had worked a heist job at a wedding reception given by Mrs. Henry L. Williams, in Glendale, two states away. The Williams' kid had gone down the aisle with an Army flier, who was just back from England and who had enough ribbons on his chest to stock a counter. A pretty boy, too. And Mrs. Henry L. had done her girl child proud. Every high mucky-muck they knew was there, with their wives, and the wives were with their jewelry.

Nolan and his boys had walked in and taken over, and the loot ran up around two hundred thousand bucks worth of assorted ice.

Most of it was covered by insurance, of course. But the Williams' insurance had lapsed—Williams had been too busy getting rid of his kid to bother about renewing it—and they were out about forty grand worth of stuff. And he'd called in my super-duper little agency—at least I think it's that if I'm the only one that does—to do a recovery job. Nolan had been short of get-away money and had fenced Mrs. Henry L.s engagement ring, and I'd located through the boy I knew who worked for the Uncle Benny.

And after Swede Olson and I had taken Uncle Benny apart, in his own back room, we knew a lot about Freddy Nolan and his habits. Uncle Benny hadn't wanted to talk, but constantly tapping a man's nose with a sap will wear him away as surely as dripping water wears away a stone.

Uncle Benny hadn't proved to be the courageous type, anyway.

I'd hired a couple of extra men, taken Swede and Harvey Kline from my own office, and set up my plant. And now had nothing to do but wait until Freddy either sprung it or backed away from it.

Nolan was bad and his record showed it. It didn't show many convictions, though. He'd been up before Grand Juries for everything from armed robbery to murder, but he'd only gone to college twice. Once for a stinking little gas station holdof a Cleveland battery manufacturing company. He'd shot a guard on the last caper, though the guy didn't die, and he'd put in eight years of a ten years sentence for it.

The service station job only earned him a year and a day.

Uncle Benny hadn't wanted to talk, but——.

The word was that he'd use a gun and was good with it.

Five men had been with him on the Williams' heist but I had no line on any of them. Which was another example of how smart Nolan played. He'd line up a job and then hire talent for it. Never

the same boys two times in a row. And he'd tell 'em nothing, outside of what the job was and how they were to work it. In that way, if any of them were nailed, they couldn't turn him up in return for an easier rap. They couldn't tip off his hide-out because they didn't know it.

It was just luck through luck and a break and some strong-arm work that I'd learned about his girl friend in Rockville, and I figured to play the string out as far as it would stretch.

CHAPTER II

One Down And His Tab Paid

ROCKVILLE WAS AND IS a funny town. Saint Paul used to be one. Detroit used to be one. New Orleans used to be one. All were safe towns. A thief could come in, do a little paying off, and as long as he minded his business he'd be left alone. He couldn't pull any local jobs—he had to keep his nose clean. He could get out and around, as long as he used any discretion, though of course if he was hotter than a pistol he was supposed to stay out of the public eye.

A nice arrangement for everybody. The cops had a few extra bucks in their pockets—something that always gladdens a policeman's heart. The citizens had a good safe town—they were as safe from the thugs as they could be. No thug would work on a local character—he'd not only louse himself up with the cops but he'd have his brother hoodlums on his neck, for putting them behind the black ball.

And the crooks had a haven, as long as they did the proper thing first, with the cops, and then behaved themselves.

I, coming to town after Freddy Nolan, was likely to throw a wrench in the machinery, but that was no skin off my neck. At least it wasn't as long as I kept a watch on who was behind me.

I knew damned well that Down would try to get word to Freddy about staying clear, but that was a chance I had to take. And it wasn't so much of a one at that. In all probability Freddy would head for the Simpson girl like a homing pigeon going to roost, figuring on making his contact with the cops after getting settled.

And I wanted him right when he came in—before he had a chance to ditch his share of the wealth. It meant a night and day watch, but I had the men to do it.

OLSON was at the window when the girl went out that evening about six, and he grunted at Kline to take over and headed for the back door, just taking time enough to finish off the highball he'd been nursing. I heard our car start, in the alley, then pull down toward the cross street, and then Kline got a thought. He's not too bright, so it rather surprised me.

He said: "You don't suppose that that damned lieutenant will tell the girl about us being here, do you? I peg him for rat in any man's language."

I said: "He may. It's a chance we have to take."

"Why?"

I said: "When Freddy shows up we'll have to work fast. We wouldn't have time to call the cops and give them the history of the case. This way there'll be no delay."

"And there'll be no Nolan if Down tips off the girl."

"Maybe not. I've been worrying about it, but what can I do. We can't pinch the guy. I've got a deputy's license in our state and can, but I've got no authority here."

"You could have offered to split the fee with Down," Kline suggested, grinning.

I said: "And I could grow wings and fly to the moon. If I cut a cop in on my take, it'll be an honest cop. There is one thing I can do, but I'll have to wait until dark to do it. That's jam their phone. If I can get at the wire, right where it leads in the house, I can fix it so it will take a repair man sometime to find the break. And, with the war, telephone repair men are as scarce as last winter's ice. Most of the boys are in engineer battalions."

Kline said: "Here comes the girl back. And Swede's right behind her. He got too close to her, I guess. He's walking past her, as though he's got some business up the street."

I peeked out and saw Olson hurrying past the girl as though he had a date with his best girl. And I also saw a black sedan coming up behind the two of them. And then the car seemed to hesitate and a gun

blasted out sound, and Swede took a couple of running steps ahead, trying to keep his balance.

And then he spun half around, trying to claw his gun out of its shoulder sling, then went down to the sidewalk.

Kline, by that time, was pulling his own gun and running toward the door.

I said: "Hold it, Harvey! The Swede's gone. The sedan's on its way—it'll be gone before you can get to the door."

"He ain't dead, Mike," Harvey said. "He was going for his gun. I saw him."

He'd stopped, and that's what I wanted. He was a good man but he had to have somebody else think for him. If his brain had feet, both of them would have been left feet.

I said: "He hit the sidewalk all spraddled out. He'd started for his gun when he was hit—he must have seen something wrong with the car. Write this down."

Kline mechanically copied the license number I gave him. And then said: "Ain't we going to do anything at all about this? Are you going to leave him there, on the sidewalk?"

I went back to watching the window while I said: "That's all we can do, right now. We can't help the Swede. All we can do is give away our plant. Swede had nothing on him that would identify him as being a private cop. All he had was an out of state driver's license and an out of state gun permit. I can't do anything that will help him. That is, right now."

"What d'ya mean by that 'right now' business, Mike?"

I said: "Well, only one man in town could have spotted Swede as he was. Only one man in town knew why he was here. Only one man in town could have said, "Tag, you're it."

"Down?"

"Of course."

"I guess I'm plain dumb, Mike. I just don't get it."

I said: "Don't let it worry you."

IF the telephone book was right, and they usually are, Down lived in the seven-hundred block on Maple. Number seven twenty-two, to be exact. It was almost dark when I got there, having had to wait for Boroski and Flint, my other two men, to relieve Kline and myself, but that was fine with me.

The kind of hunting I was going to do is easier in the dark, anyway.

Down's wife, a thin, harassed looking woman, was in the kitchen, setting china and silver on a cloth spread on the breakfast room table. This I saw while I was circling the house, and I was damned glad to see that she was only setting two places. It was going to be tough enough on her and it would have been a lot worse if there'd been kids.

And then, thinking of Down, I thought maybe I was going to do her a favor. Being as crooked as he was he was a cinch to have money in the bank or in a deposit box, and he probably had insurance as well. I skidded past the kitchen window to the garage, which had both doors standing wide open, and I got around to the back of this and squatted there, praying that none of the neighbors owned a snooping type dog. I wasn't feeling happy at all, and I'd have been more miserable if I'd had some pup snapping at my heels.

So I sat there and waited, swatting a mosquito now and then and wondering what Down was going to say when he saw me. I had the guy picked for a rat but not for a coward and so I thought any remark he might make would at least be interesting, if not educational. I didn't think he'd be long or mama wouldn't have been setting the dinner table, but at that I had to wait half an hour or more.

And then he came in, running the car into the garage and swearing as he stepped out of it.

By that time I was at the side of the place and I let him close both garage doors before I stepped out into sight.

I said: "It's me, Lieutenant."

He grunted as though he'd been kicked in the belly and flashed a hand down toward his belt. He carried his gun on the left side, in front, with the butt pointing to the right. It makes for a nice fast draw, but there's no percentage in pulling a gun when another one's looking right at you.

I said: "Why don't you?"

He said: "Uh . . . Mullaney! You startled me for a second."

I said: "Didn't you expect me, Lieutenant?"

"Why should I?"

"You didn't think I'd let a man of mine get shot down without doing something about it, did you?"

"Say, that was a shame. I knew who he was, of course, the minute he was brought in. But I didn't give your pitch away. He's down on the books as unidentified, right now."

"Tip off the Simpson girl yet?"

"Now, Mullaney, I don't have to take that from any man. I'm on your side—I want Nolan as much as you do. You can't make cracks like that to me—I won't put up with it."

I said: "Swede Olson had been working for me for five years. The best man I had. We lived in the same hotel—had rooms

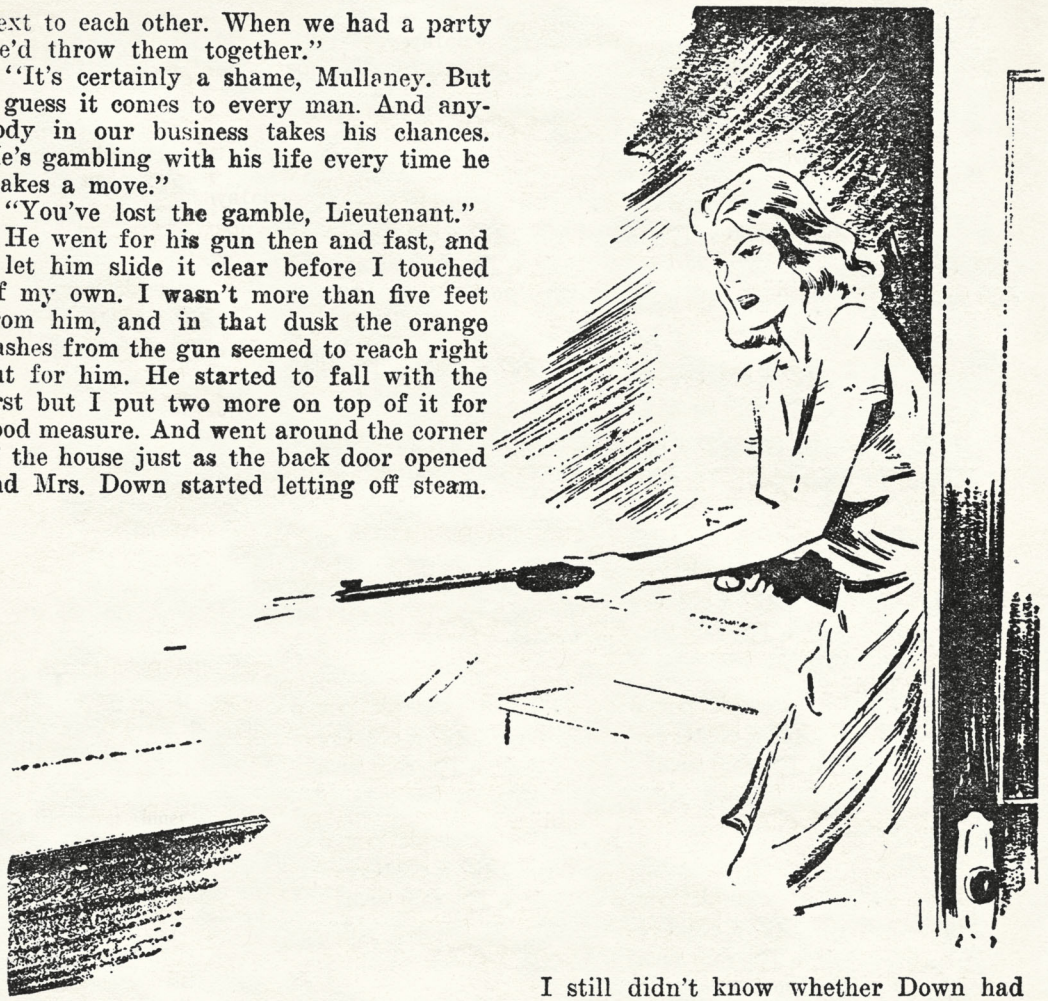
The girl shot at me with a rifle.

next to each other. When we had a party we'd throw them together."

"It's certainly a shame, Mullaney. But I guess it comes to every man. And anybody in our business takes his chances. He's gambling with his life every time he makes a move."

"You've lost the gamble, Lieutenant."

He went for his gun then and fast, and I let him slide it clear before I touched off my own. I wasn't more than five feet from him, and in that dusk the orange flashes from the gun seemed to reach right out for him. He started to fall with the first but I put two more on top of it for good measure. And went around the corner of the house just as the back door opened and Mrs. Down started letting off steam.



I WAS out of the alley that ran back of Don's garage and on a cross street before I met anybody, and by that time all anybody could see was a tired looking fat man, going along about his business.

I should have looked that way. My business for the evening was completed.

I thought that paid Swede Olson's check for him. That he could enter Heaven or the other place with nothing against him on his tab. I felt sorry for Mrs. Down, but there are plenty of happy widows and I thought she'd probably be one.

Certainly I wouldn't wish any woman in the world a fate worse than being married to a man like Down. A man who'd use knowledge, gained through his police connection, to have another man murdered. Or to have done the murder himself.

I still didn't know whether Down had been driving the murder car or whether he'd been in the back, doing the shooting that cut poor Olson down. It made no difference. He'd killed to protect his graft, and it made no difference whether he'd held the gun himself or had someone else hold it for him.

In every sense he was the man who'd pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER III

Here Comes Nolan

WE GOT THE papers sent up to the room with the morning pot of coffee, and Kline, as usual, looked at the column caps and ignored what was under them. He couldn't have missed what I was look-

ing for, though. It was centered on the front page and had a two inch heading. It read POLICE LIEUTENANT MURDERED!

And went on to say that Lieutenant Down had been shot to death in the yard of his home at approximately eight-thirty the evening before. It reviewed the lieutenant's record. He'd been on the force sixteen years, going there from a job with the local unit of the prohibition enforcement people, and while the article leaned forward, trying to say nice things about him, it wasn't very good reading.

I took it the reporter was working under a handicap—that Down's rating had been very low indeed.

I looked up from this to find Kline staring at me. And with his eyes popping out like the little man on the cover of *Esquire.*

He said: *"Eight-thirty!* Huh! You didn't get here until after nine."

I said: "As I remember it, I got here about a quarter of eight. In fact I'm sure of it. You and I had half a dozen drinks together, before we went out for dinner."

He said firmly: "It was after nine, Mike."

I said, equally firmly: "It was a quarter to eight. I'd swear to that on the stand."

I thought I'd have to kick him on the shin, but he finally tumbled. He said: "Oh—uh—that's right. It was a quarter to eight."

But he still kept staring. It seemed as though he couldn't keep his eyes away from me.

BOROSKI had gone out for a paper and both he and Flint had read it before Kline and I got to the stake-out to take over. Boroski was tall and dark, and just about as thick through the shoulders as they were wide. A nice guy. He'd gone across and joined the Polish contingent that was working with the British Army, but he'd been invalided out because of a shot up leg.

He was no fool at all.

Flint, on the other hand, was just a good wheelhorse. He and Kline could work that position side by side and pull even. Both dependable as long as they had orders about exactly what to do—neither dependable if they had to do their own thinking.

Boroski cocked his pale blue eyes at me and said: "Interesting, this paper. About the lieutenant who came calling getting his last evening. Didn't you think so, Mike?"

I said: "You might even call it a coincidence. First Swede getting shot and then the lieutenant. If a person didn't stop to think, they might even see a connection there."

"They might at that," Boroski agreed. "Enough of a coincidence that I'm damned glad I had an alibi for last night."

Kline said, too hurriedly: "Mike and I were lifting a few before dinner, just about the time that must have happened. As I remember, Mike came in at a quarter to eight."

I said that was right.

Boroski dropped an eyelid and said nothing more. Flint said nothing at all—just looked puzzled.

I said: "Anything doing?"

"The cops spent most of the evening talking to the girl, Mike. They took her to the station about ten and brought her back an hour later. We didn't tag her—it was a cinch they were taking her down to make a statement of what she'd seen when Olson was shot down."

"I suppose so."

"If she saw anything she wouldn't be fool enough to say so," Kline said. "If she's running with Freddy Nolan, she'd know better than to put the bite on a life taker. She'd be next in line."

Boroski looked at me when he answered that. He said: "Sure. If the life taker was in any shape to take action. Well, back to the hotel, boys. Anything you want me to do after I get some shut eye, Mike?"

Boroski was smart and I needed somebody that was exactly like that. Kline couldn't hold down the fort alone, which kept me stuck there on the plant, but I couldn't see any reason why Boroski couldn't do a job as well as I could.

I said: "Here's twenty bucks for expenses. When you get up, suppose you look around the bars until you find some bird with half a mouthful that looks as though he knows what it's all about. A character, I mean. You can get him started

by mentioning this Down killing. See if he mentions any honest cops—there must be one or two in the damned town. Find out about the sheriff's office. See if the sheriff and the local boys see eye to eye. If they're doing a Hatfield and Coy, we may be able to work 'em against each other. I need local help, or I'm going to, and when I need it I'll want it right then. Can do?"

Boroski said: "Can do. You know, Mike, the cops, outside of Down, who's dead, don't know you or why you're here. And the paper says that Olson is a stranger in town. They're going to check with the cops in Glendale. The cops there will tell these local boys that Olson was a private operator, working for you. They'll also probably tell them that you and Swede were buddies. I could go down to the station and tell them that I knew a man named Olson, then see him and identify him. Maybe I could louse up the detail so that it would slow their routine, maybe I could even ball it up for them. What d'ya think?"

"It could work," I admitted.

"It might give us extra time. The Glendale boys might know about you being on this Williams job and they might let it out and give these boys some ideas."

"Suppose you try it then."

Boroski said he'd do just that and left, with Flint trailing after him like Mary's little lamb. If you can imagine a little lamb weighing two hundred and looking like a refugee from some state prison. Flint had been a fighter when a kid, and he still wore the marks of it. Even he admitted he hadn't been good—that he'd caught instead of pitched.

But for what I needed him for he was all right. He kept his mouth shut, did as he was told, and what the hell more can you expect for ten dollars a day and expenses. I was charging Williams fifteen and expenses for him and making five bucks a day off the big ox, so he suited me very well.

I'd like to have a couple of hundred working for me the same way, and at the same terms.

NOBODY turned a wheel until after ten o'clock. Mama and daughter got up,

I shoved Betsy in Mr. Heims' lean middle.

cooked breakfast, ran around their living room in their nighties a while before dressing—the spotting scope told us that—and then the girl sallied forth.

I left Kline on watch and took after her.

She caught a bus at the corner two blocks down, and I helped an old lady on, after her, then followed. She got off at the corner of First Street and Grand Avenue, in front of the Guarantee Trust and Savings Bank, and went in and through the lobby and down into the basement, where the deposit vaults were. The guard at the first door let her through, and I ducked back and took up a station across the street.

And then I saw Freddy Nolan—I could pick him from a police flier I'd seen in Glendale.

He was probably thirty. Thin and sandy haired, with a sharp eager face and a nose that was too long and too sharp. With light colored eyes, somewhere between grey and blue, and with them set too close together. He probably had a hundred and forty pounds distributed over his six feet, and part of it was in a cute little paunch—he looked like he'd swallowed a whole canteloupe. His little pod was just the size and shape of one. He was wearing two-tone sport shoes, cream colored flannel slacks, and a sport jacket cut full enough to hide the gun I had a notion he was packing under an arm. He went in the bank, and after I'd strolled over and looked the lobby over and didn't spot him, I decided he'd met the Simpson girl down in the safe deposit vault.

And that was that. I couldn't ask any of the bank guards questions about it. They were honest, it wasn't that, but questioning would just make them curious and I didn't want them that way. I couldn't very well tell them their bank was used as a thieve's meeting place.

So I ducked back across the street and waited for developments, and decided to tie on Freddy instead of the girl.

I couldn't see what I had to lose.

FREDDY was first out and he turned right and walked away from the bank as though he was hurrying to an appointment. With me, acting as if I had one, too.

I guess he had one, at that. He went in the central police station as though he knew his way around there, and I followed him in and stopped at the desk sergeant's counter. And watched Freddy go through a door that had lettering on it reading DETECTIVE BUREAU.

The sergeant put down a copy of Superman and gave me a bored look and said: "What's it, mister? What's your trouble?"

I said: "My dog's been stolen. I thought I ought to report it."

"Sure. What kind of a mutt?"

"Well, I guess that's what he is. A mutt. A little grey and white dog."

The sergeant looked more bored than ever. "That all you can tell me, mister? I can't very well have the boys searching the town for little grey and white dogs. We'd get too many of them. Anything else about him?"

I said: "Well, he's got a curly tail."

I could see the sergeant had me figured for a fat, harmless fool, who didn't have brains enough to come in out of the rain. His voice showed it.

He said patiently: "Now where you live, Mister?"

I remembered a street sign and said: "Nine twenty-seven Ardis. I'm new here—just been in town a couple months."

"Look around the neighborhood, did you?"

"All morning, officer."

"Go down to the pound?"

"Well, no."

"I'd do that, if I was you. The dog licensed?"

"Well, no."

He'd been making a pretense of writing up the thing on a memo slip, but now he gave that up.

I said: "Well, like I say, I'm new here and I guess I just didn't get around to it."

Freddy Nolan came out from the Detective Bureau and started out the door.

The sergeant yawned and said: "We'll see what we can do, Mister, but there's not much chance picking up an unlicensed mutt, with no better description of him than you can give."

I gave him a thank you and went out, just in time to see Freddy climbing into a cab. And when I finally got one for myself, he was long gone.

He fell with the first shot.

So I went back to the stake-out, at least knowing where part of the loot from the Williams' job was stashed. Either both Freddy and the Simpson girl both had safe deposit boxes at the Guarantee, or, and more likely, they had a single one, under a Mr. and Mrs. And Freddy had met her there to make sure everything was okay at her place. He'd been too canny to just go steaming down, right after hitting

town, and the bank was as safe a place to meet her as any other. As well as a place where he could clean himself of the stuff from the Williams' heist.

I'd thought Freddy was a smart boy and now I knew it.

CHAPTER IV

Here Comes Nolan Shooting

HARVEY KLINE SAID: "The girl just got back. In a cab. It's still here —the hacker went in the house with her."

I said: "Move over."

I got the spotting 'scope lined on the front door—Kline had had it focused on the front window, and said he'd been watching mama cheat herself at solitaire —and just as I got it set right out came the cabby. A little short dark man, with a squint in his left eye. He wore a taxi driver's visored cap, but the rest of him was dressed in a rig that looked strictly from rag bag.

He turned, as I saw this much, and the girl followed him out a couple of feet from her door. I could see her lips move as clearly as the cabby could have, if he'd been watching them.

She said: "At seven then, Dominic."

Dominic jerked his head in a nod and went down to his cab and the girl waved at him and backed into the house, closing the door.

I said: "I take it Dominic's a pal."

Kline said: "Hunh? Dominic?"

"The hacker."

"How'd you know his name's Dominic?"

I said: "Hell, Harvey, don't you know I'm an investigator? I investigated and found that out."

He gave me a suspicious stare but let it go.

Boroski wasn't due on shift until seven, but he dropped in just a little after five. About half tight, but carrying it well. And I was glad to see him because he was the only one I could trust to do business at seven, when Dominic was due back.

He said: "Well, I clicked. I identified Olson—said he used to be a pal of mine. Said that I didn't know where he'd been staying, in Glendale, but that I'd get in touch with another friend there and find out. The cops aren't paying it much attention, anyway, Mike. It will probably go down as just another unsolved murder."

I said I hoped it did—that it wouldn't do anybody any good to have Down brought in on it. That if he was, it could cause a lot of harm.

BOROSKI had four or five too many under his belt, but they weren't enough that he didn't catch what I meant. He just nodded and grinned at me.

He said: "And I located a lush in the Palace Bar who knows the town every which way. Works for one of the papers and used to be on the police beat. He told me the sheriff and the chief fight every time they get together. That the chief's getting rich, riding the gravy train, and that the sheriff's starving to death on what little he can knock down on the county road houses and slot machines and such else. He says the sheriff's having a time making both ends meet on the hundred grand or so a year he's taking off."

I said I sympathized with the poor man.

"His chief deputy's honest, according to my lush. Honest but dumb. The sheriff keeps him because everybody knows the guy's honest, and that white-washes the sheriff a little bit."

"Does this chief deputy know his boss is taking off the rackets?"

"If he don't he's alone in the town. There are plenty of honest cops, too, Mike, but this lush of mine tells me they're out with the chickens and the goats. He says that some of them have to walk their beats with lanterns—that the electric lights don't run that far out of town."

"Name one," I said.

He tore a leaf from his notebook. It held five names—that of four patrolmen and one sergeant. He said: "Every time lush would think of another honest man I'd go write it down before I forgot it. That's the catch. And you owe me another six-sixty. The lush really put 'em away."

I handed over the six-sixty.

"The lush said there isn't an honest man on the headquarters squad. That if anybody even looks honest on it he's transferred. What a town."

"It's a dilly," I said. "You sober enough tc drive a car?"

"Why yes."

"I tagged the girl pretty close today and I don't want her to see me tonight. And I tagged Freddy Nolan right into the station and had to report a lost dog because of him."

Boroski said: "That'd be Fido. Imagine a detective not being able to find his own dog. So Freddy showed up. Here at the house?"

"She met him at a bank. She came home in a hack right after that, and the hacker is supposed to come back at seven. That is, unless the old lip-reader ran into a misprint."

"So-o?"

"So I want you to do the driving tonight. I'll ride along, in the back of the car but out of sight. I've got a hunch she might lead us to something."

"Met him at a bank, you say?"

"Right. The Guarantee Trust and Saving Bank."

I told him about them meeting in the vault and he got the same thought I did.

He said: "He'd leave the loot there, safe. It would be better than carrying it around in his pocket. Now he'll contact a fence, or fences, and try to do the best he can with it."

I said that was the way I'd figured it, and told him to put himself outside of a lot of black coffee before seven—that he might have to do some shifty work with the car.

And this he promised to do as he left.

Nothing else happened during the time between then and a quarter to seven, other than mama going out for the evening groceries. It was just down the street a couple of blocks and so we let her go and return alone.

I'VE got a half way decent car but the one I was using was a battered looking Ford of '36 vintage. One of the kind that everybody's going to turn in for a new model after the war. It had a new block though, just broken in nicely, fair tires and damned good brakes, and it was as good a trail car as a man could ask for.

Lots of pick-up and neither too good or too much shot to be picked out of traffic easily.

We were waiting in this just up the street from the Simpson girl's place before seven, with Boroski lolling in his seat and pretending to be waiting for somebody in the house he'd parked in front of, and with me ducked down on the floor in the back. Also on the floor with me was a twelve-gauge Winchester pump, with the barrel cut off to twenty inches. It was one of the Model '97's, a hammer gun, and the action on it clattered like a corn sheller, but it was my pride and joy. It had five shells in the magazine—I wasn't planning on using it on anything that conflicted with the Federal game laws and so didn't have to bother with a plug—and these and the one in the magazine were loaded with double-O buckshot seating twelve to the cartridge.

I hadn't forgotten about Freddy Nolan being supposedly handy with a gun. The way twelve buckshot spread, coming out of that sawed off barrel, will beat any handgun artist in the world at twenty-five or thirty yards, and I wasn't planning on taking any chances with either myself or Boroski. I was beginning to like the big lug—was planning on keeping him on steady in Swede Olson's place.

Just at seven Dominic drove up, but he'd changed his cab for a Chevvy coupe. One about as old as my Ford. He tapped his horn a couple of times and the Simpson girl came out, bareheaded and looking like the tramp she was.

She climbed in the coupe and Boroski let Dominic get the thing around the corner before starting, but we picked it up less than a block away and followed it straight through town and to 2147 Elder Road, where it pulled into a driveway.

Boroski drove past, not slackening speed, and stopped around the next corner.

That put me on a spot. There was too much light to go near the house and it would be that way for at least an hour. I didn't know whether the girl was meeting Freddy Nolan there or not—and there was no way I could find out. At least not until it got dark enough so that I could prowl.

Boroski grinned and said: "I guess we sweat it out, eh, Mike? Did you notice that the guy driving the heap stayed in

I said: "Stan, knock a couple of teeth out."

it? That she went in alone?"

I said I had, and we waited. In not more than half an hour the girl came out again, got in the coupe, and Dominic drove her home. With us tagging her within two blocks of her place and making sure that was where she was going. So we put our car in the alley, back of the stake-out, and went in.

And heard the news.

Kline, staying on shift because of me being short-handed, sprung it on us.

He said: "He's there. He came at seven-fifteen and the old sister let him in. The first thing he did though was pull down the front room shades, and we ain't been able to see a thing."

I looked at Boroski and he nodded. He'd figured it as I had. We had Nolan, or at least we had him holed up. We knew, or at least we were fairly sure, where the loot was at that time. Recovering it from the safe deposit box was just a matter of getting a court order and identifying the stuff after the box was opened. The only catch was that we had absolutely no legal right to do a thing about Nolan—and that we didn't know of any cop we could trust to go with us and make the pinch a legal thing that would hold.

I said: "We could hold him here, Stan."

Boroski had Stanislaus for a first name.

He said: "If we can take him without too much fuss. Then we could hunt up an honest cop and let him come here and take the guy over."

I said it would be tricky and he shrugged and said that as long as we had things going our way we might as well get it over with. That if we got the thing through

and finished we could get out of the stinking town.

And so we started.

We had no back exit to worry about—just the front and the windows at the side, and I put Flint and Harvey Kline at the side, telling them they weren't to shoot unless Nolan came out smoking. I wanted to take my scatter gun but I couldn't see how I could walk up to that door with that cannon under my arm. Any excuse like saying I was just back from a duck hunt wouldn't work—the season wasn't open.

So I tucked my gun in my waistband and Boroski and I walked up to the door.

And Freddy Nolan opened it before we got to it and started shooting.

CHAPTER V

The New Uncle Benny

HE WAS USING a little gun and it didn't make much noise. Probably a .32—I knew for sure it was an automatic. And the guy couldn't shoot it for sour sour beans. Boroski and I were about three feet apart and he either shot between us or around us. Boroski went to the side, breaking his fall with his forearm and dragging at the gun under his coat with his other hand, and I jerked Old Betsy out from my waistband.

And never got to use it because Nolan ducked back in the house, slamming the door in my face. I shoot a .44 Smith & Wesson Special and a slug from it would have gone through that flimsy wooden door as if it were so much paper, but I'm odd. I like to see what I'm shooting at. And there were two women in the house and blind-shooting like that, through a door, was nothing to do.

I may try to be a lady killer but I'm no woman killer. There's a difference, if you see what I mean.

Flint and Harvey Kline came pounding up from the side of the house then, both of them with guns out and ready. They saw Boroski, propped on an elbow on the ground, and they braked to a halt so fast their heels skidded on the lawn.

Both of them said: "You hit, Stan?"

Boroski said: "That guy couldn't hit a bull with a handful of rocks. I'm going in, Mike. If he'd clipped me it wouldn't make me as mad."

I said: "Hold your hat—here we go."

And we hit the door together.

I'm fat, but I'm solid underneath it and I hit around two hundred. Boroski weighed at least one-eighty. The door went down, breaking both at hinges and lock, and while I managed to keep my balance, Boroski went sprawling.

And the Simpson girl, standing in an open doorway, shot at me with a .22 rifle. But just once because I aimed at her shin and let the big gun go. Her leg went out from under her and she fell on her face, with the rifle clattering to the floor beside her.

I went through the door the girl had been standing in front of, leaving Boroski to pick up the rifle the girl had been so cute with. The door opened into a dining room, with the side window standing open, and I leaned out of this and then ducked back as a bullet took splinters from the casing, a foot over my head.

THEN I saw Nolan, chinning himself over the back fence, and so help me, I missed him twice, handrunning. I was in an awkward position for shooting, all right—leaning from a window and shooting to the right, with my body and gun arm cramped in a half-circle, but even then I should have connected at least once.

But I didn't. I laid the other three slugs in the gun into the fence at waist level, about where Nolan would have dropped, but I didn't have any hope of them hitting. It was more that I'd just started shooting and didn't want to stop.

Then Boroski was breathing on the back of my neck and asking me if Nolan had got away or had I clipped him.

I said: "He and I belong in the same league. I need a bat and somebody to throw a pillow at me. I bet I hit it two times out of five."

He didn't laugh but he acted as though he wanted to. I'm supposed to be a target shot, and missing a man that was spread-eagled against a fence like that, at not more than fifty feet, wasn't good.

In fact, it was pretty bad.

We went out through the house then, almost as fast as we'd gone in, picking up Harvey Kline and Flint as we went through the yard. And then ducked back and around through the alley and into the stake-out.

I was as sore as a boil about it but I didn't light into Kline and Flint for leaving the side, where they had been stationed and where Freddy Nolan had gone out the window.

It wouldn't have done any good and they were feeling badly enough about it as it was.

THE cops came—just flocks of them. Also an ambulance, which took the Simpson girl away. Which left mama holding the fort alone.

The five of us sat around and played

hearts for the rest of the afternoon, and I succeeded in winning four dollars and sixty cents and getting half a can on. This because we decided we might as well drink up the rest of our beer and liquor—that particular plant being worn out.

It was a cinch that Freddy Nolan wouldn't be back to the Simpson girl's place and it was as certain that she wouldn't be back for some time. Anytime anybody takes a .44 Special slug through a shin, they're due for a siege in bed and that meant the hospital for the girl.

With the money Nolan had clicked for, between the Williams' job and all those that had gone before, I thought she could afford it. If he'd been living at her house he'd been paying the bills, and the gal was the kind of wench who'd have knocked down plenty of his money.

In all, I thought she was getting off very well. Considering how she'd tried to do us dirty with the little rifle. She'd have a bad leg for the rest of her life, but in these days the doctors can do wonders and she'd still have one good left. She'd be a little gimpy, that was all—and a girl that's fool enough to front for a thief like Nolan, isn't bright enough to deserve two good pins.

About dark—that made it almost nine—Boroski said: "And now what, Mike? We back where we started from?"

I said: "Not so. In about fifteen minutes we go calling. We'll close up shop here and Kline and Flint can go back to the hotel. You and I will go places and meet people."

He caught it. He said: "Elder Road, eh?"

I said that was right, and we finished the rest of our drinking stock, took Kline and Flint to the hotel, and then started for Elder Road.

It was the one tie-up I had left. And I didn't know what I was going to run into and couldn't plan a thing. It was take what came along and pray for the best, and in Rockville that could mean almost anything.

NUMBER 2147 Elder Road was a brick house, set about twenty feet back from the sidewalk, and with a drive going past the side of the house and to the double garage in the rear. It was two-storied,

The janitor leaned on his mop.

looked staid, well-kept, and conservative, and just about the last place in the world a hot-shot like Nolan would put up in.

Which made it a likely spot.

I rang the bell, with Boroski standing back and to the side of me and ready to go at the drop of a hat. This, in case we were lucky and Nolan opened the door for us.

But it wasn't Nolan. It was a tall, thin,

and dignified looking gent, probably in his early fifties. Gray-headed and dressed very neatly in the same color.

I'd found out his name by asking four houses down the street. Using the old gag about hearing there was a house for rent in the neighborhood, I said: "Mr. Heims?"

He said: "That's right."

I was looking him over and deciding I'd been right in my guess. He looked every inch the honest, respectable business man, but his eyes were too close to his nose and he had a money-hungry look. There was just about as much warmth in him as there is in a cake of ice.

I persisted with: "The Mr. Heims who owns the Heims Jewelry Company? The one that advertises 'Heims For The Best'?"

He said: "The same man. What is it, sir?"

I said: "It could be that I've got some of the best to sell you?"

He had fishy gray eyes and I could see them glaze a little. He wanted to bite but he was afraid of the bait.

He said: "I only see salesmen by appointment. I'm sorry, Mr—uh—"

I said: "That's right. At least for now. It's Mr.—uh."

"Now if you'll tell me whom you're representing, I can give you an appointment, well, let's say tomorrow in the afternoon."

"I'm representing Mr. Uh. And I don't like those long-range appointments. Sometimes a man meets people he don't care for that way. People with buttons and badges. I haven't liked badges since my Sunday school teacher gave me one for good attendance."

He thought that over, looking from me to Boroski, and apparently not liking what he saw. And making up his mind what to do about it and picking the wrong thing to do when he made it up.

He said: "I don't quite gather what you're driving at, officer, but I'll gladly talk it over with you in my office. In the meantime you'll have to excuse me. I have an engagement for this evening."

I TOOK Betsy from where I had it tucked in the waistband of my pants and shoved it in Mr. Heims' lean middle. Maybe I shoved it a little too hard, too, because Mr. Heims folded a little, grunted loudly, and turned so green it even showed in the porch light.

I said: "I just love cute girls, mister, but I hate cute men. When they get cute with me, I mean. I want to talk with you now, not tomorrow. Back up. Watch behind him, Stan."

Heims backed into the hall of the house and Boroski got to my side, where he could see past him, this in case Heims had a hole-card in the back of the hall. I didn't know who or what was in the house and I didn't want some old family retainer stepping into sight and buying the game.

And I didn't want Nolan coming out and taking up where he'd left off earlier. He might have practiced up on his shooting some, or he might be luckier.

I said: "Where would you suggest we go, mister? For a quiet little chat."

He jerked his head toward a door at his right and I nodded at Boroski, who threw it open and looked the situation over for pitfalls.

Heims said: "It's all right—it's the library. I'm alone. There's no need of the gun. No need of rough stuff."

I said I'd have to be the judge of that and used the gun to poke him through the door, with Boroski stepping back out of the way and watching the hall again.

Then he followed us in, snapping the spring lock on the door behind us. And I steered Mr. Heims into a wing chair, with the gun, saw a portable bar set up and ready for action at the side of the room, and told Boroski that he might as well make us all a drink.

That it looked as though we'd have a nice long talk, the three of us.

CHAPTER VI

Dominic

THE LIBRARY LOOKED as though it was used as much as an office as a reading room. Or more. There was a fireplace, with a comfortable looking couch facing it and two big chairs grouped at one side, and there was a smoking stand indented for drinking glasses between them. Two of the walls were book-shelved almost to the ceiling, also, and there were scattered

chairs around the room, all looking very comfortable and cozy. The little bar carried out the same thought.

But the books didn't look as though they were being read—there were too many sets and they were in too good order. And the big desk and the filing cases behind it

He mashed the cigar against the greasy man's mouth.

looked business-like. There was no safe in the place that I could see, but I was willing to wager there was a nice new modern one tucked in the wall somewhere.

I took a sip of the drink Boroski had made and watched Heims try his. It was all just nice fellows getting along together, except I kept Betsy on my lap, with the muzzle slanting toward our host.

Boroski said anxiously: "That all right, Mr. Heims? I didn't put too much soda in it, did I?"

Heims said: "It's perfectly all right. I don't understand the meaning of this, gentlemen, but I'm not arguing with a gun."

I agreed with: "A man never wins on it. That same Sunday school teacher that gave me the badge told me that."

Heims let himself smile and said: "That's the one that gave you the badge for good attendance?"

"The very same."

"That wouldn't be Warden Billings, would it?"

Billings had charge of the pen in that state.

I said: "Mister, I'm strictly from out of town. And I haven't been herded into line in years."

His eyes glazed again.

I said: "I heard that Rockville was a nice town and I heard you were nice people to do business with. That is, if I watched the fillings in my teeth."

"Who told you all this?"

"Maybe that same Sunday school teacher."

BOROSKI came in then at just the right time. He studied his drink and said: "Give it to him. Why stall with him—he knows what it is."

Heims said: "Well, frankly I don't, but I certainly would like to know what it is."

Boroski said: "We got something to sell. You buy such stuff. What's the sense in yap, yap, yapping about it. Back and forth! I don't want to say anything. Just yap, yap, yap and nothing said. Get at it, chum."

I said: "Okey, Stan! That's it, mister. You in the market for what we got to sell?"

"What is it? I—uh—take it you gentlemen don't want to market this merchandise through regular channels."

Boroski made a chopping motion with his hand and said: "You can say that again. It's not too hot to touch but it's warm. It's from a thousand miles away so it's only warm here. What the hell! Call a spade a spade."

"Shall we?" Heims said. "Suppose you tell me why you came to me with such an offer? Suppose I tell you I'm not interested in anything like that?"

Boroski said: "I'd call you a liar."

"An officer can always act tough."

I said: "At that cop stuff again, eh. All right, mister, here it is. I know Big Joe Whalen. I went to school with him and it wasn't Sunday school. He's the one that put me on you. He said that you were right. He also said to watch you every second—that you'd rob me blind if I didn't. He said you squeezed a buck so hard you got free silver out of an iron dollar, but that you'd go for anything that showed a profit. Now if the shoe fits, put it on. We've got something and it ain't growing in our pockets. We can't spend it the way it is—we want to trade it for something that'll pass for money."

"I don't know anybody named Big Joe Whalen."

I said: "Maybe he was using some other name when you knew him. I've heard that some of the talent does that."

"Where'd you know him?"

"Walla Walla, Washington, you snoopy —. And I'll tell you more. I went there from Tacoma. I went there because the guy that was supposed to be backing me looked the wrong way when the buttons came up."

"Where is he?"

"Six feet under. He didn't have brains enough to drop the percentage."

"I can check that, you know."

I said: "Check. The name's Reggie Daniels and don't make any cracks about the 'Reggie'. I came out in December, '41. Check that, too."

He could check and I hoped he would. I happened to know that a heist artist named Reggie Daniels had made that Washington State pen and been discharged in December, '41. That he and his partner had tried a bank job, with the partner

doing lookout, and that the cops had killed the partner and nailed Reggie to the cross. And I also knew that Reggie had managed to get in the Army and had been killed on the Anzio beach.

But not under the name of Daniels.

I said: "It's like that. You check. You can do it by wire—you must know some-

He shot the automatic empty.

body out in Washington. And we'll come back and talk to you some more."

"When?"

I shook my finger at him and said: "Naughty, naughty. You don't suppose I'm going to tell you that, do you, and possibly walk into a stake-out? It'll be sometime after you've checked, but it won't be here. And there's another thing. If you happen to run into a thief named Nolan, I forget his first name, tell him I've got a message for him from Big Joe."

Heims kept on with his cover up. He said: "I'm sure I wouldn't know anybody named Nolan. And, if I did, it's doubtful if he'd remember this Big Joe under that name."

I said: "Well, this is his town, according to Joe. Joe told me this Nolan had the cops in his pants pockets. Pass it on, anyway."

He said that if he happened to meet anybody named Nolan he'd certainly do that.

AND then we had another drink and left, with me keeping Heims under the gun every second. And once outside Boroski started his beef.

He said: "I don't get that last play, Mike. Suppose Heims does contact Nolan? Nolan will say he never heard of this Big Joe character you've dreamed up. He'll ask Heims about you. Heims will tell him what you and I look like. Nolan will know it's the same two men he shot at, at his girl's house, and he'll go into the hole and pull it on top of him."

I said: "Not so. The guy was so jittery, and the light was so bad, that he won't know us from any two men he meets on the street. Let's go back to the hotel."

"We should have brought along either Kline or Flint and let them take a plant on the house. Heims may get in touch with Nolan and tell him about this, right away."

I laughed and said: "If he gets in touch with him, it'll be by phone. Or he'll be telling it to him right now. There's a good chance that Nolan's right in the house there. That Heims is too cagy an operator to go out looking for him. He'd think of that plant idea before we'd think of putting one on him."

Boroski thought it over and admitted I might have something there.

Dominic had been driving a Yellow cab when he'd delivered the girl to her house, and it was only reasonable to suppose he worked for that outfit. And that he worked a daytime shift—he'd taken the girl home during daytime shift hours. There was no way of knowing where his stand was, though, and so Boroski and I had our heap by the Yellow's main garage before the night shift drivers even started coming in with their reports. And before the dayshift drivers came to take over. Dominic was on time, too—coming in at a quarter of eight.

I said: "That's our boy! The ratty looking little customer with the corkeye. The one that needs a shave."

He was with two other drivers and Boroski said: "Now what the hell, Mike. They all do."

I said: "He's the one that needs it the worst. The one in the middle. The runt."

Boroski looked him over and said he thought he could remember him for future use.

The little guy came out, fifteen minutes later, and we tagged along after him until he stopped at a Yellow stand right by the Guarantee Bank and Trust at First and Laurel.

And then Boroski went into his act. He got out of our car and I went around the block in time to pick him up as he got into Dominic's cab. I could see him shaking his head but pointing ahead, and ahead meant a trip toward a swamp section that was just over as swampy a little creek, two miles past the city limits.

I knew that but Dominic didn't. And he didn't until he was almost out of town, with me trailing along a hundred yards in the rear. Then I could see the cab hesitate and almost stop, and then saw Boroski giving me the speed up wave from the cab window.

I got right behind them then.

I could see Boroski hunched ahead in his seat and I didn't have to see it to know that what he held on the back of Dominic's neck was a gun. We'd both thought the little guy was too hot to take a trip into the woods like that without persuasion, and it was turning out that way.

It began to look better and better.

We kept on across the creek for about half a mile and then swung into a side road for a couple of hundred yards. The cab pulled to the side and I jammed in alongside and got out, with Betsy set and ready.

This to give Boroski a chance to get out and to still keep Dominic from any chance of doing anything about his fix.

I said: "Come on, Sonny Boy. If I was Jolson I'd give you a song and dance, chorus, but I'm not Jolson. So you're going to do the singing."

The little guy got out of the car and he was so scared his black beard looked like a disguise. Like something that was painted on his white face. White, that is, except for the dirt grimed in it.

Boroski followed him and I didn't blame the little man for looking scared. I'd have been if I'd been facing Boroski and a gun, at one and the same time. He's tall and dark, and his light blue eyes stand out against that coloring in a startling way. He's hardboiled and looks it, while I don't look like anything except a good-natured slob of a fat man. Even with a gun in my hand.

Boroski said thoughtfully: "He'll sing pretty, too, I bet. He looks like a kid I grew up with, a kid I used to beat up about once a week. It'll be just like old times, working this little monkey over."

I said: "You beat him up too bad, Stan, and he won't be able to talk. I say take it easy and start downstairs on him."

Boroski said to the little man: "Okey, you! Take off those shoes."

That's when Dominic went down on his knees.

CHAPTER VII

Some Honest Cops

WE PUT DOMINIC in our car after frisking him and finding that he had six hundred and eighty-four dollars and some silver. And also that he had a .380 Savage Automatic in a rubber holster that fitted into his groin. It's a gun that hasn't been made for a good many years, but a pretty good old gun at that. A natural pointer and as reliable as any automatic that old ever is. The groin holster isn't new, but for carrying a gun where a quick search won't show it, it's good. Cops usually pat hips, armpits, and coat sleeves and let it go at that until they make a thorough search at headquarters. If they're just looking somebody over on suspicion a gun hidden like that will usually pass.

I found it and said: "My, my, Stan! We've found us a smartie."

Boroski said: "And he's such a little man, too, to be carrying so much money around. I bet he didn't come by it honestly."

Dominic whined: "You guys want the money, why take it. Me, I'll not even turn it in."

I said: "Where were you week before last? To be exact, Wednesday a week before last?"

"Working, mister. I ain't missed a day on the job in a month or more."

I said: "Stan, knock a couple of teeth out. Maybe he's got too many teeth to talk."

Boroski used his gun barrel for the job. He didn't knock any teeth out because the little guy ducked as Boroski swung, but he certainly didn't help the bridge of the little man's nose.

I waited until the little rat got up and until he could focus his eyes again and said: "Let's try it another way. Where'd you go after you helped Freddy Nolan knock over that party, over in Glendale? I mean the Winters job."

"The Winters job?"

"D'ya do so many of them you can't remember them all?"

"Honest, mister, I don't know what you're talking about. I won that dough in a crap game."

I said: "Stan?"

Boroski bopped him again.

Dominic lay there and looked up at us and Boroski reached down and cracked his gun barrel across the little man's right knee cap. And hard. If you've ever stumbled and fallen, catching your knee on something hard, it'll give you an idea of what the little man felt. He got so sick we let him alone for all of two minutes.

Then I said: "Okey, Sonny Boy. Where'd you go after you knocked over

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DON'T CHANGE HEARSES

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

A haunting melody grinding away endlessly on a phonograph and a cold corpse do not comprise a very happy welcome

They were stunned, as they saw the hotel man whip out a pistol.

IT WAS a frowsy neighborhood, a frowsy hotel, a hot stinking frowsy room. Danny Hogan cursed the malodorous night and the sticky heat that flowed in through his open window from the nearby river, an unbearable heat that turned his light khaki shirt dark with sweat. The deep hollow circles under his eyes were dark, too, and in his ears a song dinned mockingly.

You Belong To My Heart. . . .

Sylvia's song. Sylvia's and Danny's song. They'd hummed it together back in Lakeport under a Spring moon, dancing on a pavillion while the juke box played it. And now he was hearing it again; he couldn't shut it out of his mind. Somebody in the next room had a portable record player which kept grinding out that one tune, endlessly, over and over, until Danny

Hogan wanted to commit murder. *You Belong To My Heart.* Sylvia's song. Yeah. Sylvia, who had danced it with him, her sweet yellow hair fragrant in the moonlit evening, her eyes tender with promises.

Not promises; lies. Danny clenched his fists around the dreams she had killed for him, and in imagination his fingers were closed on Sylvia's lovely soft throat, strangler fashion, repaying her for what she had done to him; exacting final recompense, not for the money she had stolen but for the dreams she had killed. Damn her, he thought. Damn her and damn her song. Damn all songs—and all women.

The music kept playing, tinny, nasal, mocking, monotonous. A man could go crazy listening to it. There was a dull heavy throbbing inside Danny Hogan's head—or was it a pounding on the thin wall of the room? Presently it stopped, but the song didn't. *You Belong To My Heart. . . .*

HE opened it to a girl who glared at him spitefully; a small, sullen girl in a sleazy kimono carelessly wrapped around an even sleazier nightgown. She stood in the hallway just past his threshold, her pinched face vaguely sallow without makeup, her feet in cheap run-over mules, her brown hair braided in two pigtails over her shoulders. She looked gaunt and her voice was tired, angry, a harsh husky voice tinctured with bitterness.

"Cut it out, soldier," she said. "Some people want to sleep even if you don't."

He regarded her bleakly, then grinned. His grin held no mirth, though. "That's a new approach, but suppose you try it somewhere else. I'm not in the market." He started to close the door in her face.

Her cheeks reddened. "You got me wrong, soldier. Looks like I got you wrong, too. I thought—"

"Scram, will you? And quit calling me soldier. Don't let the khaki shirt and pants fool you. I'm not in the service; never was. I was 4-F and fought the war in a factory. These are work clothes. Go on, sister, beat it."

"Sure," she said. "Excuse me. My room's right next door and I kept hearing that music. I thought it came from here. I see it isn't. Sorry to bother you, sol—mister."

All of a sudden he felt a bond of sympathy between them. She, too, hated Sylvia's song. He was lonely, hungry to talk. Maybe talking would help him to ignore that tune somebody was endlessly playing; maybe it would help him to forget his loneliness and the hurt ache, the disillusionment inside him. You could keep things like that bottled up just so long, and then you might find yourself doing something crazy; something you'd regret the rest of your life. . . .

He smiled apologetically at the girl in the hall. "You weren't bothering me. Not really. It's just—well, I'm sort of mixed up. The heat, and being here in town four days hunting for somebody without finding her—" He wondered how that sounded, wondered if the girl understood he was trying to be friendly. He blurted: "Want to come in a minute? There's a pint of rye in my bag."

"Now I know you got me wrong," she said.

"It wouldn't be the first time I made a mistake about a woman," he muttered. "Anyhow, I didn't mean what you thought I meant. It may have sounded that way, but—"

"Skip it," she told him, unemotionally. She pointed to a door next to his, the other direction from her own room. "I guess that music's coming from in there." The record had finished and started again: *You Belong To My Heart.* "How's for you asking them to chop it off? Or don't it bother you like it does me?"

"It's driving me nuts. I gave a record like that to a girl one time. Our song, she used to call it." He stepped out into the hall. "Sometimes I think I'd like to kill the guy that wrote it." Unconsciously he had clenched his fists.

The girl in the kimono stared at him. "Hey, listen, don't go getting violent, mister. Maybe you better let me handle it." She made for the door of the room where the music was playing. "Go on back," she told him. "I'll do it."

She knocked.

The song was her only answer. *You Belong To My Heart. . . .*

Danny Hogan scowled. He reached past her and hit the door sharply with his knuckles. As he did it, the tune stopped inside the room. There was a brief scrap-

ing sound and then it began again, scratchy, tinny, the introductory violin passage squeaking into the melody and getting drowned out under a blare of horns. "That was deliberate," Hogan said. "The guy's either drunk or trying to make trouble." He grapsed the doorknob. "If it's trouble he wants he can have it." He opened the door roughly and stepped inside. "Now see here—" The words died in his throat and he froze as if he had been sandbagged.

to the record's labeled center, the celluloid contrivance was released for one full revolution, and centrifugal force sent the pick-up arm flying back to the outside rim; dropped it there for a repeat play. You could buy such celluloid gadgets for a dollar in almost any phonograph store, and with it you could keep a disc playing indefinitely, as long as the current held out.

Danny Hogan didn't notice this at first,

The patrolman cursed bitterly and continued to take single stubs from the unsearched heap.

He had found his Sylvia, but moments too late. She lay across the mussed bed, throttled, her neck broken. Danny Hogan's sweetly golden-haired Sylvia had been murdered.

TAUNTINGLY, mockingly, the record player on the bureau continued grinding out Sylvia's song—Sylvia's and Danny's song. There was a flat crescent-shaped celluloid contrivance on top of the record itself, held in place by the turntable pivot and a long thin groove for the needle in the pickup head. When the needle came

though. He didn't even notice the cheap little portable record player itself. He saw only Sylvia lying dead, still warm when he touched her, and in his fogged mind there was room for no other thought. He leaned over the bed and tried to speak her name, but the word was just an inarticulate sound.

It was followed by another sound, a muffled gasp from the girl in the sleazy kimono who had come into the room behind Hogan. She stared, wide-eyed, and then quickly closed the door behind her as she darted forward. "My God, mister, is she

—is she—?"

"She's dead," he said dully. "Sylvia's dead."

"You knew her?"

"I loved her."

The girl turned, went to the bureau. "But who was playing this thing?" Then she saw the record-repeater contrivance. "Oh. That's how it worked." She shut off the switch and the music stopped; it left a vacant silence in the room, like death itself. There was no more song, Danny Hogan thought, just as there was no more Sylvia; there was only the silent emptiness of death. "Look, mister," the girl said. "Maybe you better tell me about it."

"Tell you about what? What is there to tell? Sylvia's dead. I searched the city for her and she was in the room next to mine all the time and I didn't know it. And now she's dead."

"That's not enough, mister. Listen, we got to call the office and tell the manager, see? There'll be cops."

Heat washed into the room from its open window. "Cops?" Danny Hogan blinked. "Oh, sure. Yes, of course. Cops." He clenched both fists until the knuckles showed white and the nails bit into hard palms. "Sylvia's dead. She'll never dance again." His eyes looked remote, lusterless.

"Did you kill her, mister?"

That snapped him out of it. His face grew taut. "Me?" Then he remembered the anger and the hurt that had blended with loneliness inside him; remembered how he had thought of Sylvia's throat under his strangling fingers, how he had imagined himself killing her because she had destroyed his dreams. Remembrance brought an expression of guilt that he couldn't quite mask. "Me?" he repeated. "Did I kill her? Why should you ask me that?"

"I want to know. I've got to know before I call the desk downstairs."

"I mean what makes you think I might have—done it?"

"Lots of things. Things you said. Like it wouldn't be the first time you made a mistake about a woman. And you gave a record to a girl, this record, *You Belong To My Heart*, and how she used to say it was your song, yours and hers, and sometimes you'd like to kill the guy that wrote it. Things like that. They sort of add up funny when you put them with this," she gestured at the bed.

HE realized, then, that he had some explaining to do. "I see what you mean, Miss—"

"Kennedy. Mary Kennedy."

He nodded. It was odd how, a while ago, he had wanted to talk to her, to get things off his chest. Now it wasn't a question of wanting to. He had to. He told her how he and Sylvia had been engaged, back in Lakeport; how he'd worked in a war plant, made big wages, and turned those wages over to Sylvia for safe keeping. "I would've wasted the money otherwise. Gambling, buying things we didn't need . . . but Sylvia was the saving kind. She said we'd go into some kind of business after the war, buy a gas station or garage or something and get married. We used to plan on it. Maybe a little apartment over the shop . . . you know."

"Yeah," Mary Kennedy made a wry mouth. "I used to dream, too. A long while ago. And so?"

"So then Sylvia left town with a guy. Perry, his name was. Jerome Perry. She eloped with him and never even left a goodbye note for me. They just went. With my dough. Five thousand bucks. Every dime I had."

"And you followed her here to the city."

"Yes. I tried to find her."

"So you could kill her?"

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know what I wanted. It wasn't just the money. That didn't matter so much. But when you love somebody, and you find out they been figuring to double-cross you from the start, well—I don't know. I wanted to find her. Not to kill her, though. The idea might have been in my head, but I wouldn't really do it."

"Somebody did."

"It wasn't me." The corners of his mouth drooped. "Just think, she was in the next room to me and I never knew it. I heard her playing that record, our song, I heard it through the wall. Maybe she was being murdered even then and I could have come in and saved her—"

"You make it sound convincing, mister. I think I believe you," Mary Kennedy said. "But the cops won't. Not if they find you here and get wise that she was your

sweetie and stole your five grand. They'll say you had motive and opportunity and they'll pin it on you—but good. They'll make it stick."

"How can they? I didn't do it."

"I know cops." Her voice was sullen, bitter.

Danny Hogan blinked at her. "Let the cops pin it where it belongs. What about the guy Sylvia ran away with, this Jerome Perry? Maybe all he ever wanted was the money, my money. Maybe he talked her into taking it and coming here to the city with him, and then he killed her and stole it—"

"Could be," the girl said. "But they'd never bother with that if they got you first. Too much trouble. It'd be easier to make you the fall guy. On the other hand, though, if they don't nab you to start with—if they don't even know about you—then they'll maybe go for this Perry fella. That's your only hope. You got to lay low, fade out of the picture a while."

"How can I? There's no place I can go. I'm registered here in the hotel; my name's on the book."

She made her voice harsh. "Your name don't mean anything, not yet. It isn't connected with this dead girl. Just stay out of the way; let the cops choose Perry. They'll figure him. He killed her and started that record to playing and then beat it; the music made it seem like she was still alive after he was gone. Or else he thought somebody would make a complaint about the tune, sooner or later, and that way her body'd be discovered. It's in his lap if you duck fast enough."

"But—"

"Look," she said. "If you're scared, you can hide in my room. It's close and it's safe; nobody will think to look there for you. Nobody's going to look for you at all, for that matter, but go on in my room anyhow if it'll make you easier in your mind."

"The hotel people won't like you having a man in your room."

Her lips curled. "I been through that before, mister. I know how to take care of myself. Don't let it worry you. Go on, now's your only chance—"

She was wrong. Danny Hogan's chance had gone. There was suddenly a brisk, peremptory rapping on the door, and a voice deep with authority called: "Open up. This is the house dick. I been getting complaints about phonograph music in there. Open up."

He was subjected to ceaseless questioning.

Hogan winced and felt his mouth go cotton-dry. "For God's sake stall him!" he whispered to the Kennedy girl.

"It's too late to stall," she gave him an odd glance. "That'd only stick our necks out, now. And they're stuck out too far even as it is." And, louder: "Come on in, the door's unlocked. We were just going to phone you downstairs."

The hotel man strode in. "Gonna phone me about what?" Then he saw the body on the bed; he saw Sylvia's corpse and his reactions were a cop's reactions. He whipped a pistol from his pocket, covered Danny Hogan and Mary Kennedy. "A killing, hey? Okay, the two of you. Get 'em up and keep 'em up while I get me some law on the job."

NO NIGHTMARE ever took weirder form than the next hour of Danny Hogan's travail. He was subjected to

ceaseless questioning when the homicide detectives came. They badgered him, bullied him, backed him into a corner and hurled accusations at him in an effort to break him down and extort a confession from him. They did the same thing to Mary Kennedy too, of course; that was to be expected. But Danny took the brunt of it because, at the outset, he told the whole truth—admitted that he and Sylvia once had been engaged, and that she'd eloped with another man, stealing Danny's savings. *Who was the other man?* His name was Jerome Perry. *Where is Perry now?* I don't know. *But you followed them here from Lakeport, eh?* Yes, I was hunting for them. *And you found the girl here in this hotel.* No, I didn't know that. *Liar, you found her alone in this room and killed her.* No, I swear I didn't! *Nuts, you killed her for the dough she stole off you. Where's the money, Hogan? Drag it out and make it easier on yourself.* No, I haven't got it. I didn't kill her. It must have been Perry who murdered her—so he could keep the whole five thousand for himself. *How can you prove that, Hogan?* I can't. All I know is the record started playing around eight-thirty and that must have been when he strangled her. He left it playing and went away, and at nine-thirty I couldn't stand it any longer. Miss Kennedy and I came in to stop it. I walked in and saw her—dead—I tell you it was Jerome Perry who killed her. It must have been.

From the room's doorway a man rasped: "That's a stinking lie!" and Perry himself came over the threshold.

He was tall and dark and sleek, this man with whom Sylvia had eloped. He was poised and cynical and sure of himself, displaying no grief over her death; callously interested only in establishing his own innocence. Seeing him now for the first time, Danny Hogan experienced a curiously detached sensation of anger, so impersonal that it puzzled him a little. Here, he told himself was the man who had taken Sylvia away from him; he ought to hate him for that, ought to hate him with a hatred as hot and sharp as a steel sword glowing in the forge. Yet Hogan's anger was not like that at all; it was dull and remote, almost indifferent. He was not even particularly moved by the thought that Perry had killed Sylvia; what was done could not be undone, and she had got only what she'd deserved. What Danny Hogan really resented was Perry's poise, his glib readiness to answer police questions, his whip-smart alertness to danger—his cleverness at evading responsibility for the murder he had committed.

Hogan had no doubt about Perry's guilt. Perry was the killer, all right; you knew that. It wasn't like a fictional detective story with a whole raft of suspects, and try to guess the guilty one. Here was the man who had throttled Sylvia and broken her neck; but could it be proved? That was the only question. To Danny it was an important question, because unless they pinned it on Perry—where it belonged—then he, Hogan, would be the fall guy.

"Sure, Sylvia and I were married," Perry was answering a homicide cop. "Just the other day. Why the hell would a bridegroom murder his bride?"

"That's what we're asking you," the cop said.

Perry snapped: "Then *I'll* ask *you* something. When was she killed?"

"A little over an hour ago, as near as the medical examiner's preliminary inspection can show. Why?"

PERRY dug two small, irregular fragments of red cardboard out of his pocket. "It's about nine-thirty now. That would put the job around eight-thirty or a few minutes before, right?"

"So this guy Hogan claims," the cop indicated Danny. "He says the phonograph started playing about that time, which is when the kill probably happened."

Perry grinned. "Here are two ticket stubs to the Bijou Grand. That's a movie theater up the street. I left Sylvia in this room at seven and went to the show; she had a headache and didn't want to strain her eyes looking at a picture. I was in the theater from five after seven until just now when I came home. That's my alibi, copper, and it's plenty good."

"Yeah?"

"Plenty good," Perry repeated. "And I'll tell you why. First, you can check the serial numbers on these pieces of tickets. You know how they slide out of a slot in the counter of the cashier's booth; you pay your money and she presses a button and the machine spits out as many tickets

as you paid for. They come off a printed roll, perforated and numbered. All you have to do is check up how the numbers were running around seven o'clock and you'll see I'm telling the truth. You'll find I bought these around that time and went in. And if that's not enough for you, there's more."

"Such as?"

"There was a kid hanging around outside, a punk, a boy, twelve or thirteen I'd guess; you know how they'll suck around a theater lobby hoping some dope will bounce for a ticket and take 'em in to see the picture. So this kid put the bite on me and I bought two tickets instead of one and gave the extra to him. All we got to do is find the kid. It may not be easy; I don't know his name or who he was. But find him and he'll back me up that we went in the theatre a little past seven."

They're swallowing it, Danny Hogan thought. *They're eating it up, believing it; Perry's got himself in the clear and that means I'm the goat. They'll send me to the chair; I'll fry for something I didn't do.*

He didn't want to fry in the chair. "Can I see those stubs?" he asked.

Sure he could look at them as long as he didn't touch them. He studied the numbers, both in sequence, 29044 and 29045; engraved them on his mind while a plan formed around them, desperately. He realized Perry's story sounded valid; the cops were taking it for its face value, a comparatively airtight alibi. Pretty soon they'd be taking Danny down to headquarters, throwing him in a cell, working him over.

"Wait!" he burst out grimly. "You're looking for somebody to take the rap. Okay, I'll talk."

"Ready to confess, eh?"

"No. Just tired of trying to shield the real murderer."

"Oh, a stoolie act. Well, spit it out."

Hogan drew a deep breath and expelled it slowly, bracing himself for his Judas role. "It was this girl here," he pointed nervously at Mary Kennedy. "She killed her for the money. I tipped her off about Sylvia having my five thousand dollars and she said she could get it back for me. I didn't know she was going to kill Sylvia for it; I didn't know that until after it happened. And then it was too late."

"You heel!" the Kennedy girl said. "You contemptible—" Then the police seized her and there was a brief struggle, a commotion that gave Danny Hogan the slender chance he'd gambled for. Whirling, he lunged frantically at the door—and made it.

He gained the hall, the stairs, the main floor lobby, and finally the street, eluding pursuit, moving so fast the cops never did catch up with him. Instead, he caught up with a cop; a patrolman walking his beat two blocks away. Hogan came up behind the uniformed man, stealthily, measuring his chances, eyes riveted on the holstered revolver hanging over the officer's hip. The gun had a thin leather strap over its projecting handle, tying down the grip and fastened by a gripper-button clasp. A swift movement yanked this free and suddenly the pistol was in Hogan's hand, lifted from its holster before the cop knew what happened.

Hogan prodded him with it. "Be a hero," he challenged. "Go on, try it if you feel like dying fast."

"Hey—!" the patrolman froze, stared.

There was no traffic on the street at that moment, and no pedestrians passing to notice anything wrong. Hogan made his voice as low and menacing as he could. "I need help. Cop help. You're elected. Play it my way and maybe we'll both get a break. Play it wrong and you're finished. I'm already wanted for one murder. Two won't make it any tougher for me."

"Listen, are you nuts? I—"

Hogan gestured him quiet. "We're going to the theater and you're going to ask the manager for his ticket hopper."

"Ticket hopper?"

"The thing they drop the torn stubs in. You know. You buy your ticket and hand it to the doorman. He tears it in half and drops a piece in the hopper and gives you back the other piece. We'll open that hopper, understand? And then we're going through every ticket. We're looking for numbers."

"This will land you in a padded cell, brother," the cop rasped. "I promise you."

Hogan shrugged. "Padded cell or electric chair, what's the difference? We're hunting two stubs, understand? Numbered 29044 and 29045. Remember those numbers, copper, and remember where you find

them. *How* you find them."

"Of all the insane capers—"

"Because how you find them means everything," Hogan talked on, ignoring the officer's interruption. "If they're the way I think they are, I've got a chance. But if they're together, God help me, I'm sunk."

And then the tawdry, garish lobby of the movie theater loomed ahead: the Bijou Grand that held Danny Hogan's future in a ticket box.

SUSPENSE and fear and the night's sticky, all-pervading heat brought sweat pouring from Danny's body, soaking his khaki clothing, making his face a pale glistening mask. Time was running out, he knew. There would be a city-wide dragnet looking for him, now. He was wanted for murder, and he had kidnaped a cop, and his freedom hung by the slender thread of two ticket stubs in a hopper. A tightness fastened upon his throat as he told the patrolman what to ask for, what to do and how to do it. First the theater's manager had to be found. Then the chromium-and-glass hopper had to be brought to the manager's private office. The hopper's lower receptacle had to be taken out—carefully. Oh, very carefully, so the stubs wouldn't be disarranged. There was a thick deep pile of the stubs, little torn red fragments of cardboard, all numbered serially, all to be examined, all to be taken one by one from the stacked heap. Needles in haystacks . . . numbers in a hopper. . . .

The cop was sweating, too. He and Danny Hogan were alone, now, in the manager's office; and Danny had the cop's gun cocked. "One ticket at a time off the top of the pile," Danny told the uniformed man. "And read me the numbers as you go."

"Listen, you crazy fool, I can't—"

"You can. You will. Get at it."

It began, then, this long and maniacal task whose meaning was so terribly urgent but seemed so fantastically obscure. Tickets; more tickets. Each stub numbered. Each fragment important. Each one to be scrutinized and tossed aside. The pile of discards grew. First it was a little heap on the floor, then a larger heap; then the size of your two fists. Outside the theater, sirens whined as prowl cars raced past on errands whose nature Danny Hogan could well guess. He was being hunted, just as he, in turn, was hunting a ticket that meant murder.

"Keep going," he held steady aim at the sweating cop.

The patrolman cursed bitterly, deep in his throat, and continued to take single stubs from the unsearched heap. And abruptly, when it began to look as if the whole search must come to nothing, the cop rasped: "Two nine oh four five."

Hogan stiffened. "You're sure? Let's see it!" He took the red fragment. "God, it's one of them! What was with it?"

"In that part of the pile, you mean? All the numbers are over three thousand."

"Remember that, copper. Remember it, you hear me? And keep on digging." Hope was in Hogan's voice, and excitement.

The patrolman damned him savagely. "Listen, you crazy halfwit, I can't—"

"Dig, I tell you! Dig!"

And the cop started digging again. The discard pile grew larger, as big as a hat. Ticket stubs; hundreds of them. And then, at long last: "Two nine oh four four," he said to Danny.

"What's around it?"

Numbers in the same sequence, the cop said. Numbers like 29038 and 29041 and 29049 and 29053. "See for yourself."

Danny Hogan leaned forward, peering. The patrolman grinned an ugly, malicious grin and jumped him, hit him, knocked him sprawling; grabbed the gun. "Now!" he said triumphantly. "Now we'll see who's top dog. Get up. Get up on your feet before I forget myself and bust in your lousy skull. Up, meatball. We're going down to headquarters."

Hogan staggered upright. "That's where I want to go," he mouthed thickly.

HIS MIND was clear when he talked to the homicide lieutenant a little later, at the precinct station. "I had to do what I did," he explained. "It was the only way I could make you believe Perry killed Sylvia."

"Suppose you tell it clearer."

Danny's voice was firm, eager. "Perry said he bought two tickets to the Bijou Grand a little after seven o'clock and took some punk in with him to see the picture. Well, he was right about the time he

bought the tickets but he lied about taking a kid in with him. He must have lied, because the two tickets weren't put in the hopper together. We found one of them 29044, toward the bottom of the pile in the hopper, among others of the same series. But that second ticket, 29045, was nearer the top of the pile. It had been used later. Much later."

"I think I see what you mean, Hogan."

"Sure you do. Perry told you a lie about the kid to make his story sound convincing; it was the kind of touch that would look good. He knew you'd never find the punk he claimed he took in to see the show, but so what? His ticket stubs were still all the alibi he thought he needed. Only they were no alibi at all."

"You mean because he—"

"Look," Danny said. "He buys two tickets. He uses one to go in the theater. About eight-thirty he sneaks out a side exit and walks to the hotel. He kills Sylvia, steals the five thousand dollars she took from me, and then he sets the record player going. Now he goes back to the Bijou Grand and gets in again with this second ticket. He bought both tickets earlier so he wouldn't have to brace the girl in the booth twice; that way there'd be no possibility she'd remember him as a repeat customer. All he had to worry about was the doorman, and by keeping his head turned maybe that wouldn't matter much. The point is, we found his second ticket toward the top of the pile among the ones that were sold and used after eight-thirty. *After the murder.* Get it?"

"Yes," the homicide lieutenant said. "That's not bad figuring for an amateur. You did it the hard way, though. The unnecesary way."

"Unnecessary—?"

"Sure. You detoured. We traveled a straight line. Hell, chum, we've got ways of bringing out fingerprints on flesh. Perry had oil on his hands, maybe from the phonograph, when he choked this Sylvia dame. All we did was get the prints from her neck and compare them with Perry's and we had him cold. He confessed all over the place, and we even found the five grand cash on him. He'll be cooking in the chair inside a month."

Danny Hogan lurched drunkenly. "My God, and I kidnaped a cop! I took his gun and—"

"Aw, that's okay," the patrolman said. "I won't bring no charges. You was only trying to beat a bum rap. Skip it."

DANNY'S eyes were wide, confused. "But that girl, that Kennedy girl, I accused her. I tried to pin it on her when I knew she was innocent. I did it so I'd have a chance to run. Where is she? Did you let her go?"

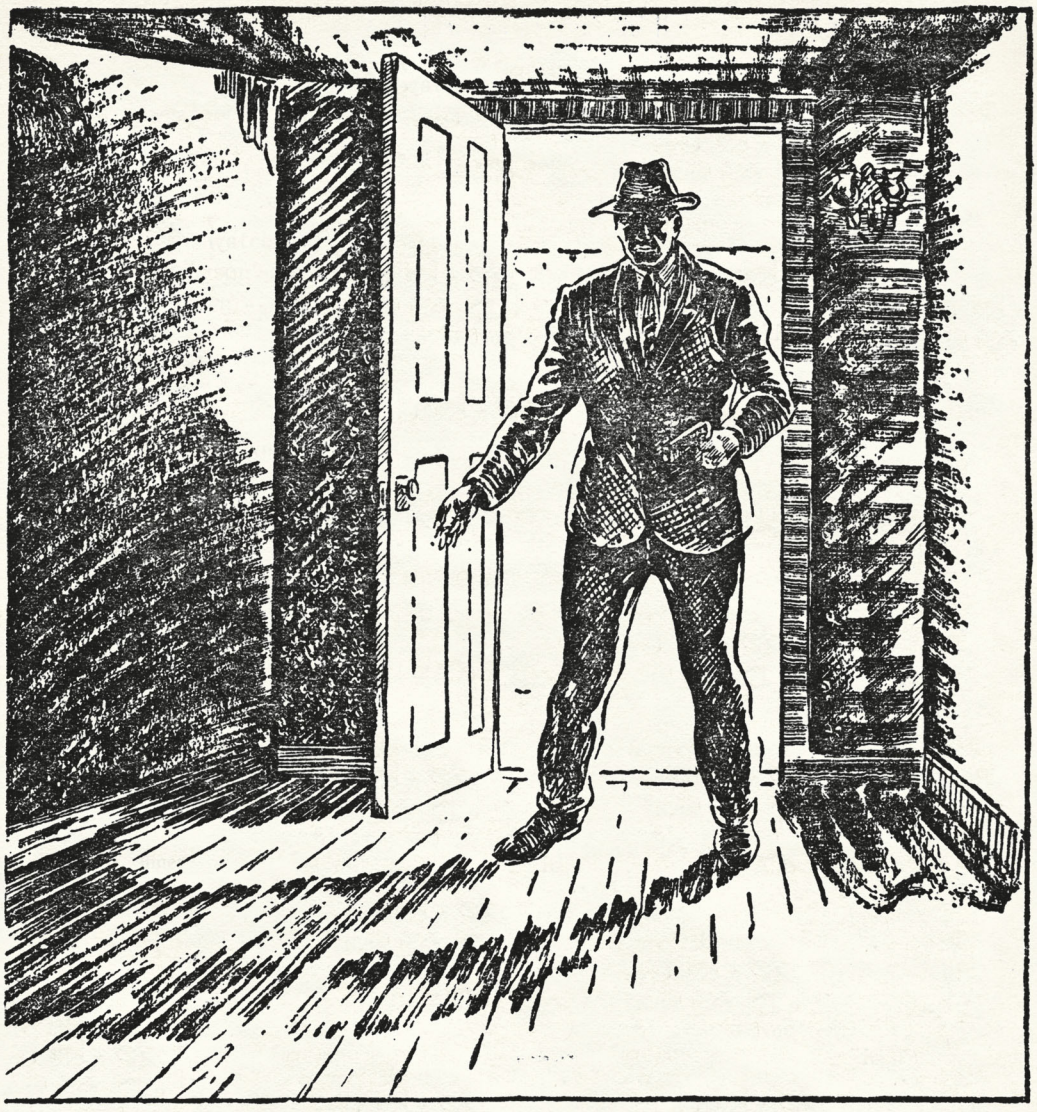
"Sure. We sent her back to the hotel."

"I've got to see her and tell her," Danny said. "I've got to apologize and explain." But when he returned to the frowsy hotel near the river, he learned that Mary Kennedy had checked out; had left no forwarding address.

Danny Hogan stumbled out into the night. The city was big and unfriendly and callous; he had discovered that when he was hunting for Sylvia. And he had found her, but too late. Now there was another girl he must look for, so he could make amends. It was like getting out of one hearse and riding in another. He kept remembering Mary Kennedy's sullen, cynical face, her tired angry embittered voice; he remembered how she had tried to help him when he was in a jam—and how he had repaid it by accusing her of murder. It wasn't nice to remember things like that.. What was it she had said to him? "I used to dream, too." An unhappy girl, Mary Kennedy; unhappy, and lonely, and friendless. . . .

"I'll find her," Danny told himself. He started walking.

DARK CORRIDOR



A man stepped into the dark corridor.

By ELIZABETH STARR

A strange plan for vengeance came to Steve Drake as he lay there wounded and dying

STEVE DRAKE had been in bed only a few minutes when he heard the slow, cautious sound of the doorknob turning. He stiffened, instantly alert. The small hotel bedroom was dark and very silent. He heard the sound again and got out of bed, a wave of dread washing coldly over him. Then, noiselessly, he moved to the corridor that separated the room from the door, and walked part way into the narrow passage; and stopped, standing quite still. The door was opening inward,

creaking just a little, spilling a spreading yellow fan of light in from the public hotel hallway. The light was partially blocked off as a man stepped into the doorway, looming tall in silhouette at the end of the dark corridor.

The man's arm moved, and glinting metal of a gun showed in his hand. Steve tried to cry out, putting up his arms instinctively as though warding off a blow; but he could not cry out. His throat was tensed, tightened into a miserable ache of panic. There was a dull plopping sound from the gun, and a bright spurt of flame. Steve swayed, reaching for the wall, clutching at it with his hands. He could feel the smooth painted surface sliding beneath his palms as he slumped down, his brain seeming to turn black with a sickening, frightening faintness. Pain filled his chest like a pouring stream of lava, searing into him, unbearable and overwhelming.

He lay on the floor huddled against the wall, and for an instant the blackness closed in and he was sinking in it, submerged and struggling, like a drowning man struggling through bottomless waters.

But something was filtering to him—some sound. A voice. A young voice, not far away.

"I promised Mr. Drake I'd bring him some cigarettes if I could, and now that I've got 'em, I'm giving 'em to him."

"I told you to give them to me." Another voice, sharp and decisive. "Mr. Drake's gone to bed. I'll see that he gets them. I'm a friend of his."

Footsteps, and the sliding clank of an elevator door. Then, after a minute or two, softer, quicker footsteps, going in the opposite direction. Toward the stairs.

Steve, lying on the floor of the dark corridor, groped for understanding. The blackness was clearing from his brain. At first there had seemed to be nothing left of him but the living, burning coal of agony in his cest. Now, dimly and confusedly, he found himself able to think; to recognize the first voice as that of Jackie, the small hotel's one bellboy. He must have come with the cigarettes while the other man was still outside the door—the man with the gun—It was hard to think straight, everything was twisted and wrong as he thought about it—Johnny had gone down in his clanking elevator—and the man had walked quietly because he had a gun in his pocket, and because one bullet was gone from it, and he was escaping—down the stairs—But it didn't make sense that Steve Drake was going to die. Not here, in the dingy, unlighted passageway of a hotel room, with the telephone table only a few feet away and he too weak to move a hand toward it—Not with a bullet in his chest—not now—

HE never had thought much about dying before. Now he knew it was the loneliest thing in the world, the most frightening, the most terrible. Tommy must have felt this way. Or worse, because he had been just a kid, too young to know what living was all about and too headstrong to wait and find out. . . .

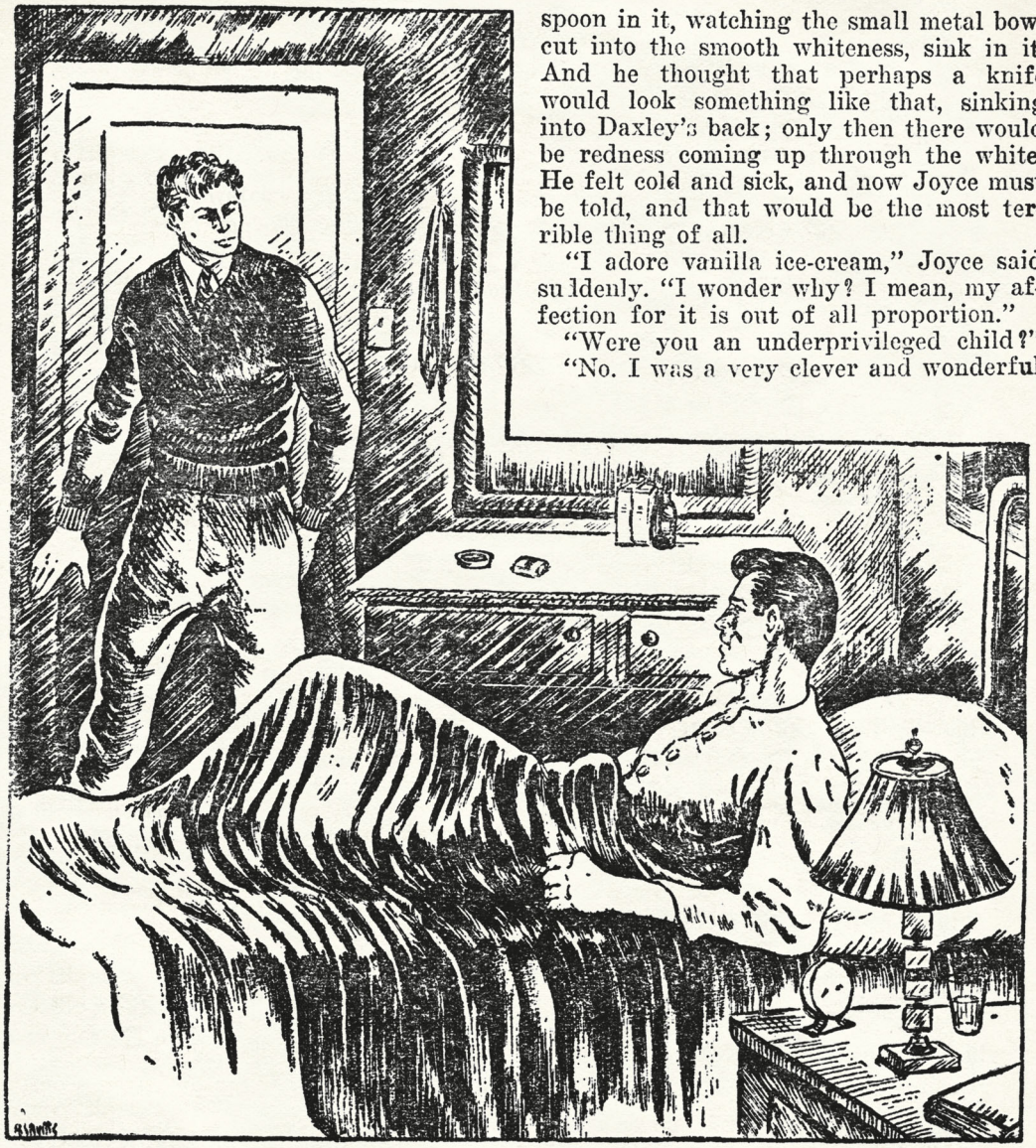
Steve writhed in a spasm of white-hot pain, his sweat-covered forehead pressed against the wall. Every tiny fraction of passing time was momentous, because at one of those fractions he would move suddenly over the edge of death.

If Joyce were with him . . . then it would be better, because she could stay with him right up to that ragged edge that was the end of his existence. And then he would not be so horribly alone, and he could look at her face again, after such a very long time; her bright, impudent, gay little face, with the tip-tilted eyes and slanted cheekbones, and hair like a gathering of autumn leaves. . . .

And he could say, "I love you, Joyce," because he should have told her that all along, and never had.

It was seven months since he had seen her . . . and seven months can be a day sometimest, and it can be a year sometimes, and without Joyce it had been a century; but the memory of that last time was fresh and clearly painted, like a locket hanging in his heart. He could see them together, almost as though he had been a spectator in that big, noisy restaurant, watching the two young people at the corner table. . . .

Steve Drake was twenty-six years old. He looked older than that, perhaps because there was humor in his face; humor both kind and ironic, which is not common in the young. It showed in the clear, frosty blue of his eyes and in the small smiling lines around them. Although he did not laugh often, he smiled a great



Tommy was standing near the closed door of the room.

deal. The easy, well-coordinated grace of his tall thinness was almost distinguished.

Sitting across the table from the small girl in the moss-green seat, he looked even older for his age than usual. All through dinner there had been a strain between them, because Joyce had sensed that there was something wrong, and he had known that he must tell her what it was. But not for a few moments more.

The ice-cream came and he dabbed his spoon in it, watching the small metal bowl cut into the smooth whiteness, sink in it. And he thought that perhaps a knife would look something like that, sinking into Daxley's back; only then there would be redness coming up through the white. He felt cold and sick, and now Joyce must be told, and that would be the most terrible thing of all.

"I adore vanilla ice-cream," Joyce said suddenly. "I wonder why? I mean, my affection for it is out of all proportion."

"Were you an underprivileged child?"

"No. I was a very clever and wonderful child, so I always got everything I wanted."

"Then I can't imagine." He smiled at her, not knowing how to begin what he wanted to say. So he added lightly, "Of course, very clever and wonderful children invariably turn out to be freaks, inclined to like anything."

"Am I a freak, do you think?"

He looked at her across the little space of table. Her red-gold hair was loose,

tumbling softly around her neck and spilling onto the green shoulders of the suit. The long, slightly tilted hazel eyes lighted her face with an almost visible glow, and her mobile mouth was curved upward in a grin.

"I think you're beautiful," he said quietly; but the quality of his voice made the words sound sad.

Joyce looked down at her ice-cream and finally she laughed, a shaky little laugh. "It's a funny thing about ice-cream, Steve. It goes to such extremes, and it goes so fast. A warm room melts it right down to soup, and an icebox freezes it hard as a brick wall. I was just thinking how people do the same thing, really. One atmosphere comes into their lives and they melt, and then something happens and they freeze tight, just as though they'd never known any warmth. But people hide it better than ice-cream does, don't they? Or they can try." She looked up, and he could see the ache of comprehension behind her eyes even as her mouth smiled. "You've been trying, Steve, all evening long, but you've frozen up and I can tell."

This was the time to explain about Tommy, and Daxley, and the whole rotten, tragic mess. But looking into Joyce's clear eyes, he knew he couldn't do that. She was too young, and too clean, even to know about it. It might frighten her, and it could not fail to worry her and make her unhappy. All he could do was tell her the main thing, the most important thing that meant they could not see each other anymore.

"Joyce, I'm going away. I'm going to another town, far away from here." His voice sounded strange as he said it, and he felt lost and miserable. "That's what I've been trying to say."

He saw that she was trying to keep her face steady and unchanging, even smiling a little. "I see. Are . . . are you leaving soon?"

"Tomorrow." He wanted to say, Darling, marrying you would be everything in the world that's wonderful. But in the past five years something has been building up inside of me, and it's been getting stronger and stronger. I'm not sane about it. I know that. I need revenge. I'm driven by the need for it. Do you understand? The revenge might be anything. I can't marry you, not knowing what I'm going to do or what's going to happen to me. But I love you. I love you so much.

Instead, he repeated, "I'm leaving tomorrow. Pretty early in the morning."

Joyce got up from the table, and her grin would have looked real except that the tilted eyes had tears in them. "Then let's get it over with quickly. Just goodbye, and no more words. Because that's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"All right. But remember something, will you? If you ever change your mind, call me. You can telephone me collect, if you want to. You can even call me long-distance, collect." She laughed. "See? That's the way I feel." She turned away quickly, threading her way through the other tables, a small, slender spot of green in that crowded place. Steve saw the squareness of her shoulders and the lift of her head. He thought he could never be so unutterably lonely again, as long as he lived.

NOW it was even worse, lying alone in the darkness of the corridor with a hot ball of pain in his chest. He had left her and lost her, and still the bitterness was with him, and the restlessness, and the longing for revenge. He had given her up for nothing, because now he was going to die and Daxley would live on imperturbably. It was all for nothing, everything he had gone through, everything he had suffered. He had wanted so much to make Daxley pay for Tommy's death. That was more important than Joyce, and the happiness he could have had with her. More important than the peace of slow forgetfulness. He had not let himself forget. Even now, with the wavering, weak incoherence of a dying man, he was remembering. . . .

His thoughts tumbled together, blurred by the pain, with only Tommy's face and Joyce's impudent grin emerging clearly. Confused fragments of memory floated in his mind. His home town, his mother, his kid brother, the apartment they three had shared; the dusty dark-green of the trees in summer, and the crystal patterns on the warm windows in wintertime. Tommy, as a little boy, boasting to the other kids, "My big brother kin lick anybody. I'm gonna

be like him when I grow up." And, in occasional explanation, "My pop's dead. But I don't need no pop. I got Steve, haven't I?"

Their frail, sickly mother was incapable of raising a lively boy like Tommy, so Steve, five years older, had tried to fill in for both parents. That had been gratifying at first, solving problems and pulling Tommy out of trivial childish scrapes. But at sixteen, Tommy had seemed to change from a tow-headed, light-hearted kid to an almost-hostile stranger. He rarely was home except for sleep or food. He stayed out late with cryptic explanations, evading Steve's worried attempts to pin him down. Until that night . . . the terrible, final night that Steve had lived over in his mind thousands of times since.

A hot night in August, when sleep was difficult. He had lain awake for a long while, listening subconsciously for Tommy's key in the door of the apartment, and had dozed off finally with a vague sense of uneasiness that the boy had not yet come home.

"Steve. . . ."

The frightened, whispered word awakened him abruptly.

"What is it? What's going on?"

"It's me. Wake up, Steve. Please wake up. I gotta talk to you."

"I'm awake. Tommy, take it easy. What's wrong?" He sat up in bed, switching on the bedside lamp and blinking uncertainly.

"Steve, I . . . I just got home . . . " Tommy was standing near the closed door of the room, his hands moving nervously.

"What time is it? What's wrong?"

"It's after three a. m. But I didn't make any noise coming in. Mom didn't hear me."

"Three!"

"Please don't be mad and bawl me out. I gotta talk to you. It's awful serious."

Steve sat up straighter, now fully awake. He saw that Tommy's blue eyes were wide and scared, his unruly blond hair was rumpled. The boy had excelled in sports at school, and as a result his body was hard and muscular. But now he looked weak.

"Sit down, kid. I'm not mad." His voice was reassuring, hiding a sudden feeling of dread. "Tell me what's wrong."

Tommy sat down carefully on the edge of the bed, his hands clasped together on his knees. He unbuttoned his shirt, then buttoned it again. He turned toward Steve with a childish look of bewilderment and fear. "I been doing something awful, Steve. I . . . I got all mixed up, and . . . it's kind of hard to explain. Maybe you wouldn't understand, because you never did anything bad."

"Tommy, I've done hundreds of things bad. Everyone has." Steve kept his tone calm and amused, his eyes smiling. But a little tom-tom beat of worry had started to pound somewhere in the back of his mind. He told himself that kids often ex-

Through dinner that strain had been with them.

aggerated their troubles, that there was some logical reason for Tommy to be out at this time of night, that nothing was really wrong. Nothing serious or irreparable. He told himself; but the pounding beat of worry remained and reminded him of all the times Tommy had been out late without explanation. It reminded him of how little he really knew of his brother's activities, and of the chasm, born of Tommy's evasiveness, that had grown between them in the past few months.

"Tell me what you did," he said calmly. "You know I won't waste time bawling you out if it's important."

"I know. Maybe that makes me feel even worse. You always treated me so swell, and I didn't even listen to you. You told me to watch out. You told me to be careful, and I wouldn't pay any attention. I thought I was so smart."

"Most people are like that at sixteen, and usually they get smart about all the

wrong things. Dangerous things, sometimes. Was it like that with you?"

Tommy looked away miserably. "I guess so. It didn't seem like anything much at first. I started going around with the wrong crowd. Not the kids from school, but a bunch of other guys who thought they were smart, like me. We must have been nuts. We tried to do grown-up things like smoking and drinking whiskey and hanging around pool halls. The whiskey made us feel sick and we didn't even like the cigarettes, and the pool halls were all dirty, but we didn't care. We thought we were being . . . tough, I guess."

"I know."

"I'm not trying to make excuses or anything, but honest, it didn't seem bad at first. Until we got all tangled up with Daxley. Remember Daxley?"

Steve had met them once on the street, Tommy and a dark-haired, hard-faced man of about thirty. A man with a harsh, quick voice and a coldly poised air that had aroused his dislike and mistrust. Tommy had seemed upset about the meeting, and had refused to discuss it afterward.

"I remember him. Go ahead."

Tommy got up from the edge of the bed and walked over to the window, standing in the hot, heavy stream of August air that was coming through it. The dim shadowiness of the room, lighted only by the single lamp, seemed to accentuate the defeated slump of his lanky young body. "Well, we saw Daxley a lot around the pool halls. He was friendly to us and maybe we were flattered, I don't know. He told us we were bright kids. He said we oughtta be making some dough for ourselves. He said he could show us how." Tommy was silent for a moment, and then his voice went on, tired and muffled, from where he stood by the window. "Well, he . . . he got us organized, sort of. We were gonna make a lot of money. I thought maybe I'd get enough so Mom could go away for awhile and get better. Some warm place, like Florida, even. I don't suppose you'll believe I wanted to do anything good with the money," he added humbly, "when I was acting like such a dope and a rat anyway. But it's true."

"I know it's true."

"Anyway, he made a . . . a gang out of us. We began stealing things, and he'd divvy everything up and keep some for himself. He gave us tips about what to do. Sometimes he went with us when . . . when we needed a gun. Like for stick-ups."

Stick-ups. . . .

Steve felt dry and numb with shock. This is my fault, he thought dully. I should have taken care of him. I should have watched over him, because all the time I knew he was mixed up in something. I knew it, and I kept feeding myself a lot of pap about trusting the kid and having faith in him and not tying him down too much. This is my fault, not his. It isn't a question of trust, with somebody who's too young to know what he's getting into. I did it to him by being such a fool. And Daxley did it, that dirty rotten skunk of a modern Fagin, twisting those kids' lives around as if they were no more than a bunch of pliable licorice sticks. I'd like to ram my fist down his throat. I'd like to smash his ugly face.

" . . . and tonight," Tommy was saying, "he took a couple of us with him in his car to . . . to hold up a gas station." The boy turned suddenly toward Steve. His face was white and shaken, and tears rolled down it. "A man got shot, Steve," he cried, sobbing. "Daxley shot him. A man at the gas station, who didn't want us to take his money. Daxley *shot* him, and he fell down, with blood all over his face. He was dead. Steve. . . ." The name was almost a wail, imploring help and comfort, as Tommy stood trembling and sobbing convulsively in the middle of the room.

Steve got out of bed quickly and went to him, sensing the helplessness of words as a weapon against the grief and horror that was welling from his brother. "Don't cry . . . please don't cry, kid. We'll fix it. You'll see." He could feel sweat cold on his face, and brushed at it hastily with the back of one hand. "Don't try to think about it now. Tomorrow we'll get it all straightened out, tomorrow morning. We'll . . . we'll go to the police and tell them about it, and they'll get Daxley. We'll round up the other kids who were there, as witnesses. Don't cry now . . ."

"I'm so tired . . . and he was dead, just lying there, with the blood . . . I saw him fall when Daxley shot him and I won't ever forget it, never, if I live to be a

hundred. Maybe if us guys had backed out tonight Daxley wouldn't of gone there and done it, and the man would still be alive instead of just lying there with blood coming down all over his face. And there was a bullet-hole in his forehead. . . ."

"Tommy, you've got to try not to think about it anymore. Not tonight." Steve had his arm around the boy's shoulders, and he could feel them shaking. He thought, I've done this to him, indirectly, and now there's no way to undo it. I can't wipe that sight out of his memory. I'll never quite understand him again, because I'll never be sure of how much this has hurt him and warped him. I can't do anything except talk and try to make him feel better. "Tomorrow morning we'll go to the police together, Tommy. Someday you'll see this wasn't your fault." You'll know it was mine, he added silently.

"And then I guess I'll go to jail, won't I? When we tell the police about the gang and everything, they'll arrest me."

"I don't think so. I think Daxley'll get plenty, but not you kids." He spoke quietly, patting Tommy's shoulder. "Just stop worrying about it now. Stop reviewing everything, because it won't do any good. It's so late. You're tired, and you want to be rested in the morning when we see the police."

"Steve, it isn't going to jail I mind so much . . . maybe I *should* go to jail, and then I wouldn't feel so bad. But it's having Mom know all about it. That's the worst part."

"I know. But we can't figure anything out tonight. I want you to go to bed now, get some sleep. In the morning we'll try to think straight. Maybe we can get out of telling her."

"Gee, you're swell to me. I feel like I should get my teeth knocked in. I feel—"

"I know how you feel, Tommy. All I want you to do is play it on the level after this. I want you to be a square-shooter."

"That's what I want to be."

"Okay." Steve pushed the boy toward the door, smiling at him. "Now get to bed. Even a reformed character has to sleep once in awhile."

But Steve could not sleep. Hours later, with the hot, sickly dawn showing in the frame of window, he got out of bed and went softly down the hall to Tommy's room. He would just look in and make sure the kid was all right.

The room was empty, and the neatly made bed undisturbed. With a swift stab of apprehension, Steve caught up the pencil-scrawled note that lay on the pillow.

"Steve," it read. "I thought about what you said about me being a square-shooter. I'm going to warn Daxley about us telling the police. Maybe it seems crazy, but the way I look at it that's playing the game on the level."

Steve looked at the note in a leaden panic. The panic was with him until Tommy's body was brought home, that afternoon.

The police had found it, battered and bruised and with the skull smashed in, washed up on the bank of the river. . . .

NOW, slumped on the floor in the darkness with the wall cool against his face, all the remembered hopelessness of grief washed over Steve, and with it bitterness and hatred for the dark-haired man named Daxley. He could imagine so vividly, as he had imagined over and over in these five years, the earnest, strangely gallant figure of Tommy confronting that man who had become his boss in a petty crime-gang; confronting and warning him, because that was a square thing to do.

Tommy had grasped one of the deeper rules of mankind, and had given his life for it: that a relationship imposed on you by your own actions demands loyalty, no matter how unworthy that relationship may be. He had been loyal to Daxley, recklessly, bravely loyal. And Daxley had responded by smashing his skull and throwing him into the river. . . .

How hard it had been—how desperately hard, not to show Tommy's pathetic little pencil-scrawled note to the police! How hard not to release his hatred in a blast of testimony that would convict Daxley on two counts of murder!

But always, the memory of Tommy's voice had come back to Steve, saying, " . . . having Mom know about it . . .that's the worst part. . . ."

So Mom, and the police, never would know about the boy's brief brush with crime. Even to have Daxley go free was better than betraying Tommy; but he

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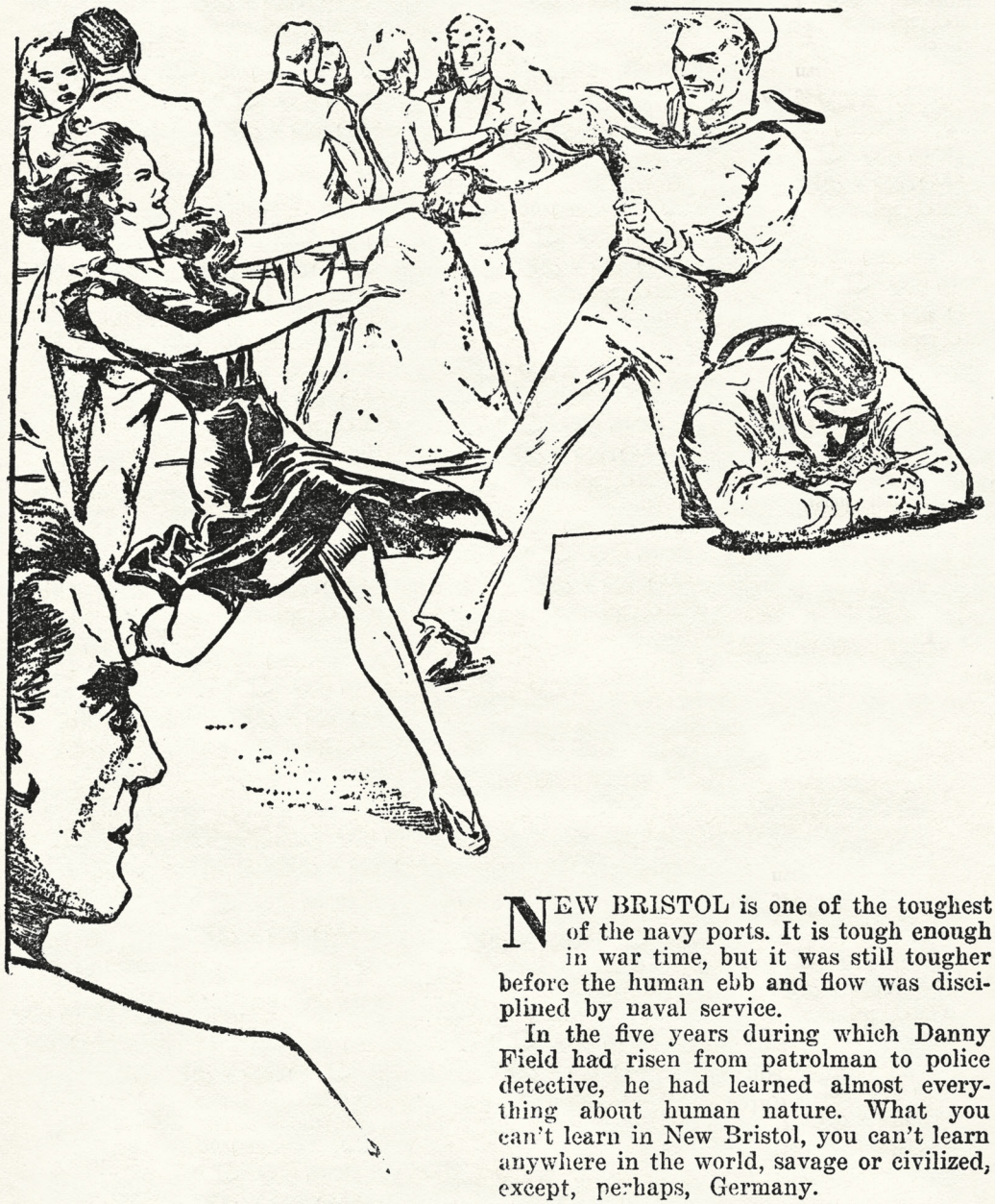
BELL—BOTTOM TROUSERS

By LEW MERRILL



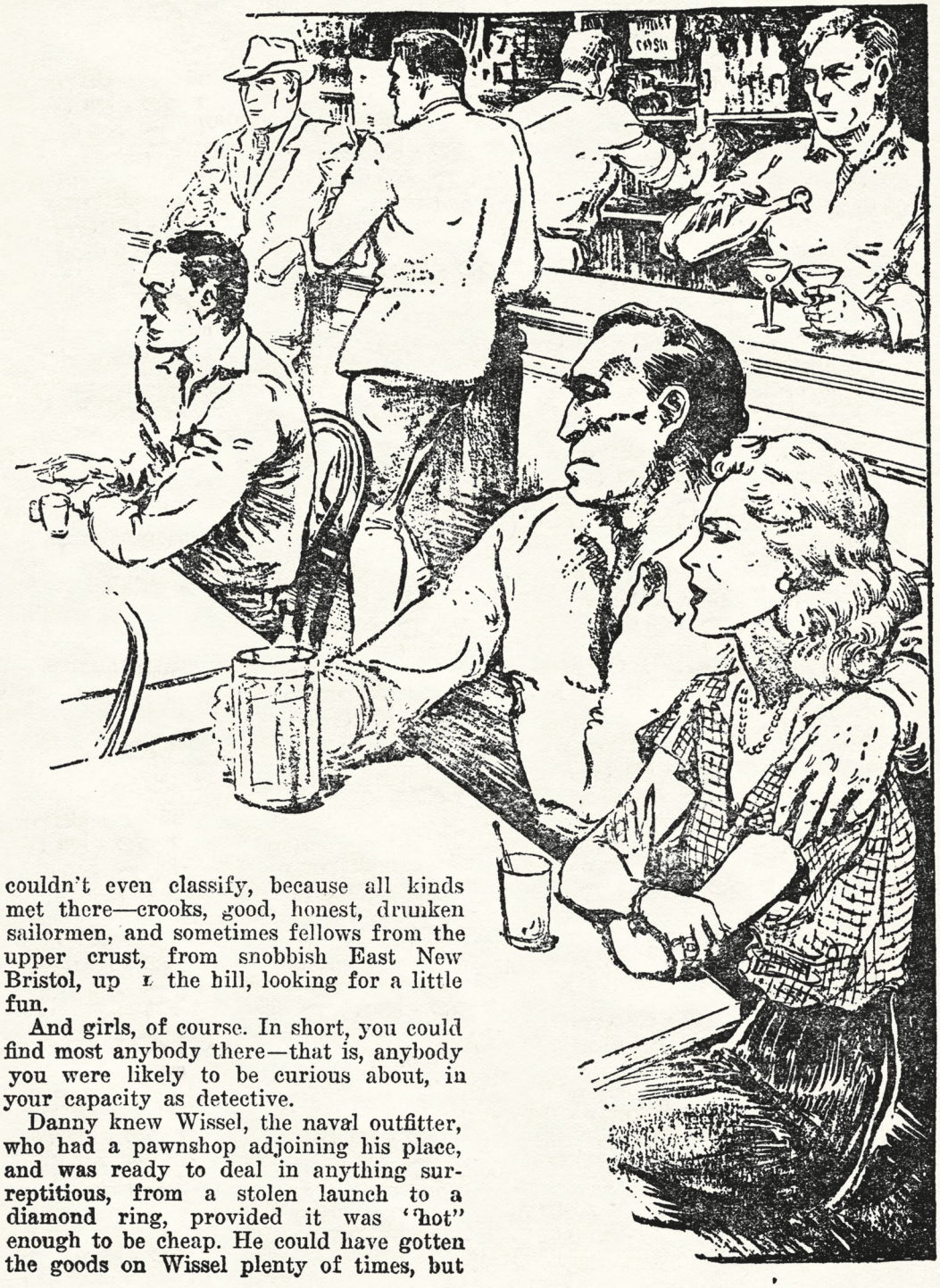
There was a nice looking sailor kid cutting loose with a cheap brunette.

NEW BRISTOL is one of the toughest of the navy ports. It is tough enough in war time, but it was still tougher before the human ebb and flow was disciplined by naval service.

In the five years during which Danny Field had risen from patrolman to police detective, he had learned almost everything about human nature. What you can't learn in New Bristol, you can't learn anywhere in the world, savage or civilized, except, perhaps, Germany.

Danny knew everybody. He knew the tough dives along the waterfront, such as Benny Liphooks's, for example, which you

It was a smart scheme to frame an innocent man for murder. But, in the end, it turned out to be the wrong thing to do



couldn't even classify, because all kinds met there—crooks, good, honest, drunken sailormen, and sometimes fellows from the upper crust, from snobbish East New Bristol, up the hill, looking for a little fun.

And girls, of course. In short, you could find most anybody there—that is, anybody you were likely to be curious about, in your capacity as detective.

Danny knew Wissel, the naval outfitter, who had a pawnshop adjoining his place, and was ready to deal in anything surreptitious, from a stolen launch to a diamond ring, provided it was "hot" enough to be cheap. He could have gotten the goods on Wissel plenty of times, but

the fellow was much more useful to the police as a stool pigeon than behind bars.

Danny knew everybody and everything. He knew that worthless Jack Quilling, whose millionaire father owned the biggest house on the hill, was due back from Europe. He knew that, before he died, Jack's father had paid the bank fifty thousand dollars not to prosecute his son for embezzlement, half of it going straight into the president's pockets. After that Jack had gone into the army.

Even there, his money had made things easy. He had become an officer in no time—not in the combatant ranks, but as a sort of glorified bookkeeper. He was coming home now, a major-bookkeeper, with a row of medals across his chest. Somehow he had wangled his discharge, after the old man died. He was coming home to have a good time.

DANNY FIELD ought to have been as tough as his town and his job. Instead of which he was a mild-mannered little man, with gentle ways, and not even his superiors had suspected the stuff he was made of, until he shot it out with the three looters of Clark's jewelry store, killed two of them, wounded the third, followed and grabbed and held him, with two slugs in his side. That was how Danny got to be a detective.

Most people liked Danny. Even the crooks had nothing personal against him. And some folks worshipped him, like young Alf Brodie, who had been dishonorably discharged from the navy for theft, of which Danny had always believed him innocent. He had served two or three minor sentences for drunkenness and assault since then. The cops were always looking for Alf Brodie, to pin something on. And they were sore at Danny because Alf was his friend.

Danny, helping Alf home to his squalid room on the waterfront, said, "Lookit, Alf, why don't you pull yourself together and get yourself a job?"

"Yeah? Who'd have me, with my record?"

Danny might have said, "But you don't have to stay in New Bristol. You could go where you won't be known."

He didn't say that. Instead, he took him home, and helped him to undress, and, as soon as Alf fell into a drunken slumber, he slipped two dollar bills into his pocket.

That wasn't right. Danny's wife could have used that. He had a wife and a three-year old boy. But Danny was too soft-hearted not to help a fellow like Alf, who stayed on in the town that was ashamed of him, because he was in love with a girl.

She was just as much in love with him. Maybe their relationship wasn't exactly platonic, but that made no difference, because the respectable part of New Bristol was just as much ashamed of her as it was of Danny. She fed him, and slipped him money out of her earnings in the cheap store where she worked, and she didn't care if Alf was a worthless bum and a drunkard. That was what Danny liked about the situation.

Besides, Nora Grogan took her baby to the creche every morning, and brought it back at night, when she returned from work. Danny liked that. He liked human decency.

And Nora's baby was the little son of Jack Quilling. All the town knew that, though Jack's selfish, worldly mother would never have admitted it.

It instanced certain discrepancies in modern civilization that New Bristol despised Nora Grogan, but didn't have a word of condemnation for Jack Quilling.

NORA GROGAN sat on a hard seat in the outer office of Rufus Small, attorney-at-law. Small put hard seats in his outer office in order to discourage those of his visitors whom he wasn't anxious to see.

Rufus Small was a mean little man, with a bristling red moustache, and possessed of a certain ready wit that enabled him to confuse staid, elderly farmers in the witness-box. His clerk, Sam Morris, was also a mean little man, but dark instead of sandy, and able to turn on the tap of good humor when it was necessary.

"How about that Grogan female?" asked Sam. "She's been sitting outside since two o'clock."

"She must have a cast-iron seat," said Rufus, and both laughed. "Okay, I suppose I've got to see her. Bring her in here."

Nora went in, trembling. Rufus Small, with an assumption of suavity, gestured her to a chair. She sat there, looking fixedly into the lawyer's face.

Rufus said: "You understand I repre-

sent my client's interests, and not yours, Miss Grogan?"

"Yes, sir,' said Nora in a weak voice.

"Well, this information of yours that Mr. Quilling is returning on the *Bahama* seems to be correct. There would be no point in denying it. And you are determined to bring this preposterous paternity suit?"

"I've got to, sir. I've got my child to think about. He's the father, and—"

"Come, come, Grogan, how many other men might be the father of that child of yours?"

A flood of scarlet dyed the girl's face. "I'm an honest woman," she rasped. "He promised to marry me. I was a fool—"

"I've heard that in the movies, Grogan. Let's get down to brass tacks. Admitted that Mr. Quilling was foolish enough to interest himself in you; admitted that you

"Sit down and don't act like a bigger fool than you are!" Rufus shouted.

think you can blackmail him, you little tramp—!"

"How dare you speak like that to me?" cried Nora, springing to her feet.

"Sit down, and don't act like a bigger fool than you are!" Rufus shouted.

Nora sat down, and began to cry.

Rufus was very suave now. He knew how to alternate between the bully and the kindly lawyer. His psychology was crude, but absolutely sound.

"Now listen to me. Your case would be thrown out of court, of course, and you would render yourself liable to prosecution for blackmail and perjury. Have you ever heard of blood tests to determine paternity? No, of course you haven't. Well, we'll skip that. The point is, you've got the power to bring scandal upon an honored name, the name of Quilling, which has represented all that is best in New Bristol since the earliest days of her history.

"When you first threatened my client with this suit, I communicated with him. He was at that time fighting for his country on the battlefields of Europe. It was with the greatest reluctance that I wrote him. It was to save a charge, during his absence, which might have shocked his aging mother. I also agreed, by arrangement with Mrs. Quilling, to pay you the sum of ten dollars weekly."

"Yes, sir," said Nora meekly.

"I have drawn up an agreement, which you will sign. When Mr. Quilling arrives on the *Bahama*, I shall invite him to sign it also. That will make this document a legal instrument. By this agreement, Mr. Quilling will pay you five thousand dollars in cash—not check—in return for your acknowledgment that you have no claim upon him. Inasmuch as the law requires a mutual obligation, in order to make such an agreement valid, the document states that this payment is 'for services rendered'."

"I didn't render him no services," said Nora.

"Good God," said Rufus to his clerk, "did you ever see such a fool of a woman in your life?" He swung upon Nora. "Do you agree to sign, or not?" he stormed.

Nora took the pen he handed her, and affixed her neat, small signature to the document.

ALF BRODIE and Nora Grogan sat side by side on the bed in Nora's room. In a clothes-basket in one corner the baby slept. Alf and Nora, two of the town's outcasts, looked more like two kids as they sat there, hand in hand.

Nora stroked Alf's face. "Isn't it wonderful?" she asked. "Five thousand dollars! We're going to leave New Bristol, and open a shop in some little town, where no one won't know anything about the past. And then—gee, we'll be married, Alf!" said Nora reverently.

"Yeah, but I'm not going with you, Nora," said Alf. "I may be plenty of kinds of skunk, but I ain't got down to living off a girl yet."

"Alf, don't be so foolish! You'll get a job, won't you? You're a machinist. You'll get a job in a garage. Or say, I hadn't thought of that! Suppose you took the money and opened a garage! You could start a garage with five thousand, couldn't you?"

Alf was sobbing. "Nora, I dunno why you'd want to do all this for me," he said. "I ain't no good—I guess I never will be. After they put me out of the navy for something I didn't do I didn't care what would happen. If I went away with you, just so soon as something went wrong, I'd go on the drink again."

"But nothing ever could go wrong, Alf, darling. Nothing ever has gone wrong between us yet, has it?"

"No, but we ain't married yet," said Alf. "Things are always going wrong when you're married."

"Not between us," said Nora. "Now stop grouching, Alf. Just think, the *Bahama* ought to be in any day, and then it's just a matter of collecting—"

"Where you going to meet that fellow?" demanded Alf, with a sudden spasm of jealousy.

"I don't know yet. Mr. Morris is going to let me know. He's been so kind to me, Alf, since Mr. Small has been in the hospital with that gall-bladder operation. Small was horrid. I—I almost hope he doesn't come back. But, Danny, you promise me you'll leave the drink alone, after we're married, won't you?"

"Yeah, sure, darling," answered Alf, kissing her.

IT WAS fortunate for Nora that she didn't remember what she had said about Rufus Small, because the lawyer collapsed and died within an hour afterward, from a blood-clot, the aftermath of his operation. If he'd lived, things would have been different for a good many people.

But Small was dead, leaving Sam Morris alone in possession of his secrets, his blackmailing projects, and scores of shady transactions. There was only one thing that Rufus hadn't left his clerk, and that was his money. There was a solitary checkbook—but Sam hadn't the gift of imitating another person's signature. Rufus had most effectively concealed from his clerk all knowledge as to his property.

Fifteen minutes after the news of Rufus's death had become known in town, Sam, in his room at a hotel, was being baited and badgered by several unpleasant individuals, who claimed that the dead man was under financial obligations to them on various counts.

"But I got no money," wailed Sam. That statement was true. He was a liberal spender, and now, with his funds cut off, things looked pretty black to him. He wasn't a lawyer, and couldn't carry on the business. Just the cheap ex-clerk of a dead shyster.

"You got to get it!" That ultimatum contained a definite threat. Snead was the strong-arm agent of the city boss. Danny Field knew quite enough to send Snead to the chair—had even tried, until warned to lay off, if his job meant anything to him. Having acquired a wife, a child, and a home, Danny laid off.

"You know the *Bahama's* coming in tomorrow?" growled Snead. "I got the tip a coupla hours ago. And millionaire Jack Quilling's going to be aboard her. And you know enough about that guy to make him bleed at every pore. How about that, Sam?"

Alf didn't see Nora the next day, because all New Bristol knew that the *Bahama* would be in that afternoon, and she had to wait in her furnished room for a communication from Sam. She didn't yet know that Rufus was dead, but that would have made no difference. Except for that one day in the lawyer's office, her contacts had always been with Sam.

Alf was out of a job. He couldn't get one in connection with the navy yard, of course. He'd worked at times as a laborer in a lumber-yard, as a dish-washer, as night clerk at a shoddy rooming-house hotel. But now a new life was opening before him. He'd hated New Bristol, but now he was about to shake its dust off his shoes forever—now, as he walked down Main Street in the sunshine, suddenly everything took on a rosy glow.

Alf blinked under the glare.

"Hiya, Alf, how are you? How about a drink?"

Alf stopped incredulously. He'd been given drinks sometimes, but there had never been such an air of friendliness. The speaker was a guy he knew slightly. Couldn't remember his name, and never had known what his job was, except that he was some kind of shady tout.

"Why—fact is, I'm busted," answered Alf.

"Don't let that worry you," said the other. "Listen, maybe I could put you on the track of a good job—"

They had several drinks together. They went from bar to bar. They talked to other guys, all of whom were friendlier than anything Alf had known for a long time. It was long after dark when Alf found himself in a hash-joint on the waterfront, eating ham and eggs, and drinking coffee.

Things had already gotten hazy. He remembered afterward that he and his friends were put out of one bar because of an early closing hour, and somebody

suggested another place that kept open after midnight.

Danny's night ended as peacefully as it had begun. He was standing at the bar—he was feeling very tired, going home after another drink—he sat down for a moment—

"THROW another pail over the bum, if he won't wake up!"

The splash of cold water on his face brought Alf back to consciousness. He groaned, and opened his eyes. He was lying in a pool of water on the cement floor of a police cell, and two cops were standing over him—Heany and Makins. Danny knew them both very well.

"Get up!" snarled Heany, rapping him on the soles of his stocking feet with his night club.

Alf staggered to his feet. His head seemed splitting. He had never felt so sick before. He began to remember those last drinks of the preceding night. He must have passed out in Liphook's. He leaned against the wall.

"Wha's matter?" he mumbled. "You look like you never saw a drunk before."

"Put on your shoes," ordered Makins, "and then get up those stairs."

They prodded Alf up the flight into the police station, into a rear room. Captain Dixon was standing there, talking to a lawman whose face Alf recognized. He had something to do with the prosecutor's office. At a window stood Danny Field, and Alf felt better at the sight of him, though he paid no attention to him. In spite of the sunshine streaming into the room, an immensely powerful electric light was placed on the table in the middle of the room.

"Get into that chair!"

Alf subsided into it with a groan of relief. He closed his eyes, dozed for an instant till he was pulled back by the order: "Open your eyes and keep them open!"

It was Captain Dixon speaking. Alf blinked under the glare. He saw Dixon on one side of him and the lawman on the other. The two cops and Danny Field were standing against the wall.

"Now, Mr. Crothers, would you like to examine the accused man?" asked the captain.

"I would," said the lawman. He was about forty years of age, and there was a certain importance about him, reflected in the deference with which Dixon had addressed him.

"Your name's Alfred Brodie, isn't it? You know why you're here. I'm advising you to tell everything you know. The cleaner you come, the better it will be for you in the end. How about last night?"

Alf gulped. "Well, I met up with some guys, and they bought me drinks," he said.

"What were their names?" inquired the lawman blandly.

"I dunno."

"Strangers bought you drinks?"

"They wasn't exactly strangers. I'd seen them before, but I never asked them their names."

"You drank with them in a number of bars, didn't you? Why should they have been so anxious to buy you drinks?"

"That's what I wondered," answered Alf. "I got an idea those last drinks was doped. Maybe they thought I'd got a wad of money. Maybe mistook me for somebody else."

"I don't want any 'maybe,' " rapped out Crothers. "Who was the man you killed, and why did you kill him?"

The room began to swim. Under the intense light, Alf could see five pairs of eyes, peering into his, scrutinizing each feature. He felt nauseated.

"I dunno what you mean," he answered.

Mr. Crothers said patiently: "We want to know his name to identify him. You stole his money and papers, everything he had, and passed them to your pals. Then they gave you a last drink, and drugged you, hoping to escape suspicion if they made it an open and shut case against you. We'll have the fingerprint reports in an hour or so, and of course your prints will be on the knife you stabbed him with. Now, how about it?"

"I swear I dunno what you're talking about," Alf babbled. "I never saw any sailor—not near me, anyways. Nor I didn't kill anybody. I don't care what—"

"How man convictions for drunkenness and assault?" Crothers asked Captain Dixon.

"Two. Picking fights in bars."

"Let's get this straight," said Crothers to Alf. "What I'm trying to find out is not

whether you killed this man. I know that. It's whether you planned to murder him, to get his money, or whether it was the result of a drunken brawl. For you it means the difference between the chair and maybe only a few years in the pen. Get what I mean?"

"I don't," roared Alf. "I didn't kill nobody, and you won't make me say I did, if you keep me under this light a million years."

"All right," said Crothers. "Do what you suggested, Captain Dixon."

ALF'S legs felt like stilts. He could hardly make his way out of the station, to the police car that was standing in front. It wasn't so much the knockout drops—his head was clearer now. It was the awful fear that the charge might be true, that he might really have killed the man in a drunken frenzy. And it was the thought of Nora. Why, that very day they might have started off together on that long awaited honeymoon.

Danny Field, who was sitting beside him, said, "Keep a grip on yourself, Alf. If you didn't commit the murder, it will all come out right."

Alf felt a surge of gratitude. He knew that Danny meant he didn't believe him guilty, but that he wasn't going to say as much in the presence of the two cops. The car went on along the waterfront, and stopped in front of Liphook's place. The shades were down, and a cop was standing on duty there. A little crowd had gathered, and was reluctantly moving on at the cop's orders, only there was always more of a crowd behind them.

There was a sort of gasp as Alf was hustled out of the car and into the saloon. It was empty. But there was another cop at a door in the rear, approachable also by an alley. Alf was certain he had never been in that room.

The door was opened. A switch, and a blaze of lights. A body was lying on the floor, which had not been scrubbed. It had been turned partly on its side, and a swatch of clothing had been cut away from the back, revealing the gaping stab that had extended into the heart.

It was the body of a sailor, a man apparently in his twenties, dressed in complete uniform, with bell-bottom trousers. There were no chevrons or other badge, and the face, at the top of the longish neck, thrust out from the sailor collar, looked bloated and dissipated, and at the same time mean, and without dignity.

"Stabbed in the back," said Crothers softly. "That looks bad for you, Brodie. How about coming clean?"

"I didn't kill him! I never seen him before! And that's the truth!" Alf shouted.

"I get the idea of your defense," said Crothers. "Intoxication and amnesia. But you'll be lucky if you escape the chair. All right, I'm through with him for the present."

Nora found Sam Morris at his hotel that morning, the office being locked. She walked up to his room on the third story. Sam was lying back in a chair, in a dressing-gown, with a bottle beside him, and he looked as if he had been up all night.

"Hello, who's here? Come in, dearie," he called. "What can I do for you?"

"You know what I've come for. I waited for you all yesterday."

"I suppose you haven't heard that Small cashed in?"

Nora gasped: "You mean he's dead?"

"Yeah, died suddenly in the hospital, night before last. You must have been dreaming, Nora. Everybody in town knows about it, excepting you."

"But—but—" stammered the girl.

"Well, that's why I didn't come to see you. Too busy with Quilling."

"He's in town, then?"

"Sure he's in town—or was, anyway. Naturally he refused to sign that agreement, with Small dead, and me not being a lawyer. The whole business will have to be gone over again. But I had a talk with him. I told him how you were fixed. And he's willing to pay you a hundred dollars a month until a new agreement is drawn up."

While Nora watched him dumbly, Sam reached into the pocket of his coat, which was hanging from a bedpost, and pulled out a wallet. From this he extracted three twenty-dollars bills, which he handed her.

"That's to last you till the first of next month," he said, "and then there'll be a hundred more, and so on."

"I won't take it. I'll sue!" stormed Nora.

"Which will take you some time, honey."

"I don't care. I won't be played with. Don't forget what Mr. Small admitted, about my power to bring scandal on his family."

"Oh, yeah, maybe. But what about this fellow you're giving the green light to, Alf Brodie? Ever stop to think you may have been just free enough to stop a jury from awarding you a cent on a paternity charge?

"Besides," he added, "it wouldn't look so good to any jury, your being mixed up with that brutal murderer."

"What do you mean, 'murderer?' How dare you call him that?"

"What, you still dreaming, darling? Mean you don't know Alf Brodie got blind drunk and brawling last night, and knifed a sailor?"

"NO, Miss Grogan," Danny admitted, "it sure don't look like Alf. He was a good boy, but he couldn't take it, after the world got down on him. What I always admired was the way you two people stood by each other. Alf liked to drink, and then he'd brawl, to make up for what he'd suffered. I understood all that, and I knew he'd make good, once he got away from New Bristol. But his prints were on that knife, and it sure looks bad. However, the grand jury's meeting on Monday, and it will be threshed out—"

"Do you believe him guilty, Mr. Field?"

Danny looked into Nora Grogan's gray eyes, and gulped: "No. I couldn't believe that of Alf. Leastways, if he'd done it, he wouldn't lie.

"Listen, Miss Grogan, I know you two kids are in love with each other, and I wanted for you to get out of town. I'm going to do all I can to save Alf, for the sake of both of you. I've got an idea—maybe it don't amount to much, but I believe I can break the state's case. But I've got to work it out for myself. And you must leave me alone, even if the grand jury sends the case for trial."

"Can't I see Alf for a minute?" pleaded Nora.

"Well, now, that don't rest with me, nor even Captain Dixon. The only person could give you permission to see him would be the public prosecutor, and he certainly won't give you leave until the grand jury has handed down its verdict.

"But keep your heart up, Miss Grogan. Why, it'll be only a little while before you two kids will be together again, and—"

Nora began to cry. "That's another trouble," she said. "Jack Quilling was going to settle with me for five thousand dollars, and now—"

She recounted her visit to Sam Morris. Danny tapped his fingers nervously on his desk. "You'll repeat that to the grand jury?" he asked.

"To the grand jury? You wouldn't shame me that way, Mr. Field?"

"If it means the freedom of Alf—you'd do it, Nora?"

"Of course I would. But what's that got to do with Alf?"

"Maybe nothing," said Danny. "And maybe a lot. I'm going to subpoena you, my dear. Now don't argue with me: I'm a busy man. What's that? Sure I'll give Alf your love, and tell him you believe in him. Now run away. Don't argue, I tell you. Yes, you'll have to testify, and you'll be glad to, because it's going to mean a devil of a lot to Danny, I think."

And he watched her leave, pondering over that single clue that might give Alf his freedom.

Of course Danny had known about Nora's paternity suit. She had placed the matter in the hands of a staid and respectable lawyer, who had entered it with much distaste, on account of the Quilling name being involved. Furthermore, he didn't care to come into conflict with a man like Rufus Small, with his tricks and chicaneries. Therefore the suit had languished, with the tacit understanding that a settlement would be effected when Jack Quilling came home from Europe.

As he ascended the hill on which stood the aristocratic residences of East New Bristol, Danny was conscious of a chilliness in the air. Everything seemed frozen, from the line of mansions, mostly built in the clapboard, scrollwork style of the seventies, to the faces of the persons who passed him. One of the oldest and largest of these mansions was the one in which Mrs. Quilling lived in state—not exactly solitary state, for, even in war time, she contrived to have a retinue of half-a-dozen servants.

A colored butler looked doubtfully at Danny when he asked for his mistress.

Danny's statement that he was from the police didn't improve matters, and Mrs. Quilling's face was the most frozen that Danny had seen when she swept into the small but ostentatiously furnished reception room where he awaited her.

A stately, elderly lady, with a well-corseted front, iron-gray hair, looking through Danny as if he was something not quite human.

"You're from the police department? Well?"

"Lawyer Small's death has kind of upset things, Mrs. Quilling. I mean, about Nora Grogan's case."

"Did the police department send you here to discuss the Grogan woman with *me*?" demanded Mrs. Quilling, in tones of outrage.

"No, Ma'am, I came on my own responsibility, to suggest your son's making a settlement—"

"Leave this house at once!"

"Now, Ma'am, that ain't the tone to take. I'm speaking for the sake of all parties concerned—"

"How dare you! How dare you! This is outrageous! I shall communicate with the head of the police force at once, and require that you be discharged!"

"Yes, Ma'am, but I'd like to speak to Mr. Jack before leaving. Might as well say, I don't intend to go till I have seen him. I know he came in on the *Bahama*, Ma'am, and—"

"Well, that's where you're wrong," she snapped. "My son didn't arrive on the *Bahama*. Now you leave at once, or I'll have you put off the premises."

With a scared and beaten look, Danny grabbed his hat and hurried out of the house.

By the time Danny reached the bottom of the hill, he had lost that scared look. He was grinning instead. He strolled into town, and found Sam Morris sitting in an alcove of the bar, with a brimming glass before him.

"Morning, Mr. Morris," said Danny, sidling into the seat opposite.

"Good-morning, Field," returned the ex-clerk. "Wanted to see me?"

"Yep, in a way," said Danny. "It's about Nora Grogan. Of course, everybody knows about that settlement Jack Quilling was to make on her. And, if it's been paid, I'm afraid she'll leave town, and we want her to testify at Brodie's trial. Of course we could detain her as a witness. But I'd sure like to suggest that Jack don't pay her, at least, not till after the grand jury meets."

"You can make yourself easy about that," answered Sam morosely. "That deal's off till Jack can get another lawyer. He's paying her a hundred a month *pro tem*. To stop her yapping."

"You being the intermediary, I suppose?"

"That's right," responded Sam. "Mighty nice of your being so interested, Field. Any other information I can give you?"

Danny leaned forward. "Fact is," he said, "I was up to the Quilling house, and saw Mrs. Quilling, and she said Jack didn't come home on the *Bahama*."

Sam laughed. "She would say that," he answered. "You see, the old lady had it all fixed up to give Jack a returning hero's welcome. All East New Bristol, church parade, tea-fight—everything but the town band, and maybe he'd have got that too. And Jack came ashore drunk as a coot.

"I picked him up in the street, got him up to my room, made him lie down for a coupla hours, and straightened him out with another drink or two. Then I told him about Small's death and the settlement he was to have signed in Small's office.

"Jack was lousy with money. He peeled off five hundred, and wanted to give her that for a stop gap, but I told him I'd hold it for him, and pay her a hundred a month until some permanent arrangement had been made. So that was that.

"He was pretty stinko again by the time he left. He was hell-bent on seeing his mother, who, you may know, is head of the State Women's Temperance Union. I tried to stop him, but he said he'd been overseas, and it was time he started broadening her mind, and he didn't care anyway, because he was going to New York for the fling of his life.

"I can guess just what happened—but, anyways, it's likely to be some time before he shows up again."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Morris," said Danny rising.

"Have a drink, Field."

"Not now," said Danny. "I've got to be on the job."

WISSEL was standing at the entrance of his outfitting shop, not far from the police station, with the object of intercepting any sailor who might be a little oiled, and dragging him inside. He was a little chap, with a pair of black hawk's eyes, and a quick and furtive manner. As Danny stopped he glanced at him in quick appraisal.

Danny said nothing for a moment—just looked, while Wissel retreated a few steps. "Anything wrong, Mr. Field?" he asked.

"I'm keeping an eye on you, Wissel, with all these sailors in port."

"Now listen, Mr. Field, you always got me wrong. Just because I handled some hot stuff once or twice, not knowing it had been stolen—"

"I'd like to look through your stock, Wissel."

"Sure, Mr. Field. Come in through the shop. I'll open my safe, too—"

"Not there," said Danny, as the dealer was about to lead the way into the pawnshop next door. " I meant, your outfitting shop."

"What, here?" Wissel seemed vastly relieved. It was one thing to have the detective look through his pawned goods for anything on the police list, and another to show the naval outfits. "Now what would you be looking for, Mr. Field? I don't handle hot uniforms—ha, ha!"

Danny was poking around the shelves, examining shirts, shorts, naval uniforms, a few civilian outfits, shoes—everything pertaining to marine life. "Who the devil wants to buy naval uniforms," he asked.

"You'd be surprised what a demand there is, all the same," said Wissel. "A fellow wakes up drunk, and finds he's had all his outfit stolen, and he's got to go on duty in a few hours. Or he's set his clothes afire with a cigarette. Of course, navals don't go as quick as civilians."

"You've had these some time, I guess," said Danny, indicating a pile of navy blue trousers. He picked up the top one and examined it.

"Maybe a year or two," said Wissel. "But they'll keep indefinite. However, they are worth nothing now, and I ain't buying any more."

"I see," said Danny. "That was a shocking murder in Liphook's."

"It certainly was," said Wissel with emphasis. "I always knew that Brodie fellow would commit murder some day. He ought to have been put away long ago."

"Think of him, do you, Wissel?"

"Why—" stammered the dealer—"why, who else could it have been?"

"I ain't quite sure myself yet," said Dan, and walked out of the shop.

The inquest was that afternoon; it was held just as soon as the fingerprint report came in. Alf's prints were, of course, on the handle. The proceedings were only formal—the report of the discovery of the body, and of Alf lying unconscious beside it. The testimony of Liphook's bartender to the effect that he had seen Alf go through to the back, in the wake of the sailor, both very drunk. The verdict was a foregone conclusion.

Dan said to Captain Dixon afterward: "I want to subpoena certain parties for the grand jury on Monday. It sure is lucky the jury's meeting so soon."

"Just who d'you want, Dan?" asked Dixon.

"Nora Grogan, and Sam Morris, the late Small's clerk, Liphook's barman. And Wissel, the outfitter."

"What in heck do you want them for?" inquired Dixon.

"And Mrs. Quilling."

"Dan, have you gone crazy? You suppose Mrs. Quilling had been running around with the dead man, who'd probably just come off the ship? Or that—say, Dan, you ain't implicating that Jack Quilling was in any way mixed up with the murder?"

"That's just what I do mean," answered Dan.

"But he didn't come back on the *Bahama*. I happen to know that, because—well, you know how things get about in a place like New Bristol. He was held for special duty in Europe."

"He always had a crazy streak in him," said Dan.

"And what about Wissel?"

"Now, look, Captain, I'm not saying anything till I've done some more verifying, and put the facts together. Maybe I am crazy. Maybe I won't serve those sub-

poenas. But I want them issued, in case I follow up my lead. Where's the body?"

"In the mortuary. We've been asked not to bury it, until the Navy's had the chance to check over the *Bahama's* passengers and try to identify it. A navy photographer is taking photos of it."

Danny nodded, and left in a hurry. He went downstairs to see Alf for a moment. He found him on his cot, face buried in his hands. He looked up gloomily as Danny approached the front of the cage.

"Hiya, Alf. I've got a message for you," said Dan. "Nora wants me to say she loves you and believes in you."

Alf got up and came to the bars. He laughed. "I guess she's the only person does, then," he said. "Not them newspaper guys who were shooting off lights at the inquest. Somebody's framed me. I didn't know I'd got any enemies who would want to do that."

"Your troubles are nearly over, Alf."

"Whatya mean?"

"I've got a clue. Wait till Monday, and we'll see some fireworks. Alf, you're going free."

"Hey, wait a minute—"

"Can't stop now," called Danny, retiring. "I've got to see a photographer."

THE grand jury took Alf's case first, as the most important, and they failed to notice the resentment on the part of the witnesses whom Dan had subpoenaed. Sam Morris, Liphook's barman, and Wissel sat in an uneasy group. On one side of the trio was Nora, on the other side, at the extreme edge of the bench, Mrs. Quilling, in a state of suppressed indignation.

It wasn't until the record of the inquest had been read that any of the jurors began to realize something was afoot. The foreman said to Dan: "You have evidence to submit, Mr. Field?"

Dan said: "Yes, sir. I'd like Nora Grogan to tell her story."

The jury listened impatiently while Dan drew out the account of her relations with Small and Morris. He just managed to get in the part about the agreement to pay her a hundred dollars a month, when the foreman intervened decisively.

"Mr. Field, you seem to be dealing with an entirely different matter," he said. "We cannot listen to any more of this. Is there anyone you wish to call, pertaining to the case on hand?"

"I'd like Mrs. Quilling."

That lady came forward indignantly. Dan found time to whisper to the skeptical Heany and Makins, who were on duty: "Have your guns ready, kids." He turned. Mrs. Quilling declaimed indignantly:

"This man seems crazy. He forced his way into my house and demanded information about my son. What have I to do with a brutal murder in a low dive? Or my son either, unless this man is insinuating he's the murderer. And my son never came back on the *Bahama.*"

"I'm afraid you are mistaken, Mrs. Quilling," Dan answered gently. "Do you recognize this?" He handed her a photograph.

Mrs. Quilling looked at it, and suddenly began to scream. Dan shouted: "Yes, the murdered man was her son, Jack Quilling! And those three men were implicated in the crime! Be snappy, boys!"

But it was only Wissel who, like a cornered rat, drew and fired, and tried to run from the room. Heany and Makins shot him down before he reached the door.

Dan said: "You see, gentlemen, Sam Morris was the guiding hand, but one of them will squeal, and we'll find who the actual killer is. Not that that will make any difference under the law. He knew that Jack Quilling was arriving on the *Bahama,* and that he'd be carrying a big bank roll, the way he always did. So they arranged to rob him, maybe murder him, if he put up a fight, as he evidently did.

"Easy to entice him into some low bar, and as easy to make him drunk as to make Alf Brodie drunk, and slip some knockout drops into his liquor. When they saw Jack was dead, they had to fix things so that he wouldn't be recognized.

"So they got a naval uniform from Wissel, stripped the dead man, and dressed his body so that he'd look like an unknown sailor, killed in a bar-room brawl. Everything was so nicely planned, it looks as if some wise guy was behind it, instead of those three dirty killers. They only slipped up on one detail.

"The corpse was wearing bell-bottom trousers, and, you see, bell-bottoms were discontinued in the navy some two, three years ago."

Sweet revenge can often become complicated. But Michael Kearn was stubborn and determined to put a slug in the guy who had murdered his brother

The gun poked at no one and everyone.

MORE MEN were needed. More men. A little trouble down at the mines.

The news spread fast and several had straggled in. Fedder looked them over. Some had credentials, others had been recommended by word of mouth—a phone message or a short "Yep."

The hiring was done in a cellar saloon owned by Fedder and his partner, Barron. A dozen or so men stood around smoking, drinking a few slugs of Barron's cheap liquor, and talking in guarded tones. A few sat in precarious-legged chairs reading tabloids which served to harden their half-considered convictions.

Fedder looked them over. He had a round, Napoleonic head; his legs were stubby, his eyes pale and calculating. He studied the tall, curly-headed kid who sat, besotted with drink, at a table in the far corner. His forearm covered his face. One arm dangled to the floor, and his breathing was noisy. Fedder noticed the dangling arm. Several inches of bandage were ex-

PAT HAND

By DAVID CARVER

posed by an open shirt sleeve, terminated by a leather-strapped wrist band. What good was a kid like that?

"Hi, Curly. Hey!" Fedder took hold of a handful of crisp hair and lifted the head. "Wake up."

The eyes rolled whitely and leveled with difficulty. They were brown eyes, young but blood shot.

Fedder sat beside him. "Looking for somebody?"

"Fedder"—somewhat thickly. "Looking

for guy named Fedder."

"That's me. What you want?"

"Job." The kid tried to stand but couldn't make it.

"I don't hire guys who drink on the job."

"I don't drink on the job."

"Who sent you?"

"I sent myself."

"That should be a swell recommendation. What's your name?"

"Just like you said—Curly."

"I see. Curly. That's fine. Now I know all about you."

"I ain't askin' to sing in your choir, Parson Fedder. That kinda work is out of my line."

Fedder laughed. "Some choir I'd have. You don't even open your mouth."

"You want to hire guys with mouths I'll show you plenty around the union halls."

"You know 'em?"

"Sure I know 'em. Didn't I let 'em talk me into this?" He took out a wallet. There was a union card under the celophane. It bore the name "Michael Kearn."

Fedder laughed again. "Boring from within, huh? Are you in business?"

"Not yet."

"What's the matter with your arm?"

"Sprained it playing a slot machine."

Fedder's eyes twinkled. "I see. Want to wait around? We may get a call and then again we may not. If there's a call it means trouble. Can you handle it?"

"With both hands."

"All right, then. Stick around. Lay off the liquor, too."

"Okay, Boss."

LATER Fedder asked Slappy what he thought of the kid.

Slappy's specialty was dropping bricks on people's heads from store roofs. He was good at it. He not only picked the right brick but the right man. It was better to stow some of them away in the hospital than meet them on the picket line.

Slappy spoke without hesitation. "He's a dick. Slick as a needle. Well, you asked me."

"You think he's a dick, huh?" Fedder threw his head back with silent laughter. "What for?"

"What for is something I can't tell you. Put it up to Barron. He knows 'em by the smell."

"Listen, Slappy, the police are as far away from this racket as the pole. They got their eyes the other way. You know that."

"I know. But this kid ain't no reg'lar fink."

"What does he want?"

Slappy shrugged in a figure-it-out-for-yourself manner.

"So he don't look like the old regulars—that's all to the good." Fedder scratched his trousers thoughtfully. "I'll put it up to Barron, just for the hell of it."

"You'll ask Barron. First, he ain't interested in this little sideline of yours. Second he wouldn't know no more about the kid then we do, and third, since when you goin' by what Barron says?"

Fedder worked at a boyish, innocent grin. "He's my partner, isn't he?"

That Fedder and Barron were partners did not mean they were crossed fingers about each other. If Barron ever stumbled under a Mack truck Fedder would pass out cigars; and if Fedder arrived too late at the hospital with a ruptured appendix, Barron would put money on a long-shot, certain it was his lucky day. Two thieves can work in temporary truce, like Hitler and Mussolini. It was more sensible that way, even at the cost of a little gypping on the side.

Of the two, Barron was the more treacherous and crafty. He had often stepped on Fedder's toes, and occasionally had struck the corn right on the core. But such differences could wait for settlement. There was the matter of that little Geraldine. A woman's no good to you if she wants another man. Geraldine wanted Barron—and Barron didn't seem to be finding her hard to take. Whenever Fedder thought about that, oil showed in tiny globules on his nose.

Some hardware had to be moved into the trouble area. Cases of vomit-bombs, tear-gas guns, and stuff like that. The union knew something like that was coming, but they seemed too dumb to be afraid. Fedder, dispatching the truck, told Curly to take the wheel, Slappy would ride beside him with his personal arsenal at alert.

It was a cold night. The cargo had a curious effect of conducting the cold. They didn't talk. Slappy wished for an extra sweater. He kept nipping short ones from the bottle. But the stuff didn't seem to warm him; it only brought the blood to the surface and left it there to freeze.

"Go easy," Curly warned him.

"It's cold."

"I know it's cold. You don't need to tell me."

An hour went by and Slappy finished the bottle. He turned to Curly who seemed to have his eyes glued to the road. "You got any more?"

"No."

"Yes, you have. Come on."

"You're happy enough. Wait'll we get rid of this truck. You can drink yourself cockeyed for all I care." He groped for the other bottle with the hand that was injured, took a pull, and tried to screw the cap back on. Slappy reached. "No you don't," Curly said.

"Nuts," said Slappy. "Gimme that bottle."

"I'll bend it over your ear," Curly threatened. "Nix."

"Come on!" He got it finally.

It trickled down the length of his chin. "My tongue's like an icicle." He looked at Curly intently, one eye becoming shrewd. Curly didn't say anything. The truck pounded along the dark road. "Dick. You're dick. Fool Fedder, but you don't fool Slappy."

"Light me a cigarette," Curly asked.

It was a complicated procedure but Slappy finally thrust the unlit end between Curly's lips. "But what I can't figure out—you'd try get me drunk if you was any kind of a smart dick." He managed to contact the cigarette with the lit match.

Curly sucked smoke.

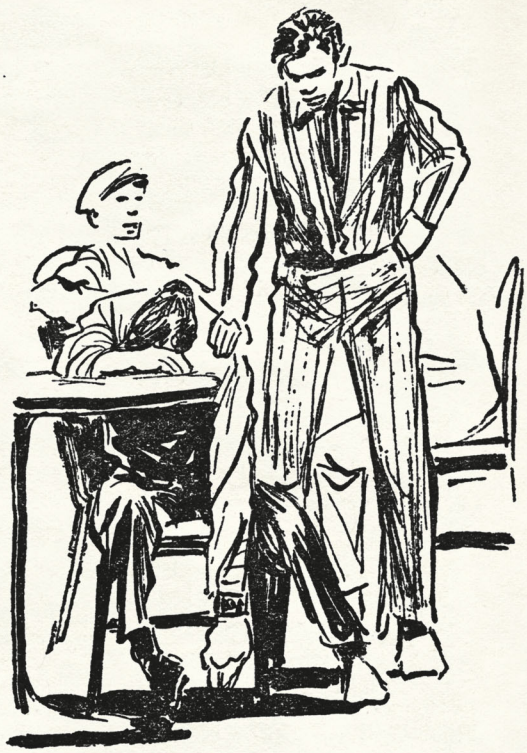
"I'm waitin'," Slappy informed him, "Just waitin'—that's all."

"Waiting for what?" Curly's eyes were on the road.

"For you to make a slip. You will. Try to get me drunk—shoot off my mouth. Oney I'm too slick for you. Too slick."

"I'm trying to keep you sober, chump."

"Sober?" Gleeful laughter. "Sober? Tha's wasso funny. I *am* sober—cold sober."



He shook the tall, curly-headed kid.

A pair of headlights coming toward them blinked out suddenly. Curly slowed. Vague figures struggled with a log. As the truck came on, the headlights played over the log-bridged road.

"Look." Curly pointed. Slappy tried to focus his eyes. What he saw he understood. He broke his thirty-eight, spun the barrel, making certain the chambers were full.

"You couldn't hit a freight car broadside," Curly snorted. He set his brakes at the shoulder of the road and helped Slappy out. Curly dragged him into the scrub. The cold air did what the remainder of the quart would have done. Slappy fell flat on his face and just lay there, out of the world.

SLAPPY remembered all these things when gray light streaked the sky. Curly's coat covered him. The truck was gone. There was nobody. Nobody but Curly. He

got me drunk," was his first thought. But it didn't stick. Curly had persistently refused to give him liquor. That wasn't very much like what a doublecrosser would do. Curly had kept him hidden from a bunch of angry miners, and had kept him from freezing with his own coat. But the truck was gone.

"The stuff gone?"

"About time you woke up. Come on, I'll show it to you."

They walked beyond the road to a muddy pond, where Slappy saw four wheels, just the hemispheres, turned to the sky.

"Must have been a bunch of 'em."

"Thirty-forty. Enough of 'em to toss the whole shootin'-match clear into the ocean."

"From here?"

Curly looked at him. "You're still fuzzy in the head. Come on. We have to tell Fedder sooner or later."

"Will he be sore! The fireworks *and* the truck. Boy!"

"Might've rushed 'em if you wasn't boozed up to the gills."

"Listen, pal—you ain't saying nothin'—are you? Huh? Fedder won't like it. You puttin' me on the spot?"

"Shut up. You make me tired."

"You won't, will you?"

"Look at him," Curly called upon an imaginary witness. "Don't be afraid."

A fellow wearing a gray suit asked for Fedder. He wore no derby or cigar in his mouth, but Fedder smelled dick a mile off.

"This is the information booth," he said.

"You're Fedder; I know you."

"All right, so I'm Fedder. My nose is clean."

The fellow showed him a picture. "Know this bird?"

"No, why?"

"It's on a general call. We got tipped he might be looking to tie up with—say, an organization like yours."

"Never saw him. But I'll tell you what I'll do—if he shows up here I'll give you a ring. Okay?"

"I'll appreciate that, Fedder. Some day I may be able to return the favor. Just call the office—here's the number, and ask for me." He wrote something on a card.

"Thanks."

"So long." When the man was gone Fedder laughed. He went downstairs and found Curly. "What I know about you," he said, sharpening one finger with another.

"What?"

Fedder told him. Curly looked bleak; his lips tightened a trifle.

"What is it?" Fedder asked lightly.

"None of your damned business!"

"All right, all right!"

Fedder and Barron went halvers on the bar and grill and a few other ventures for which no license is obtainable. But Barron hadn't bought in on Fedder's strike-breaking agency. Money in it, but Barron didn't want any part of it. He wouldn't even talk about it.

They were up in Barron's summer place in the hills. The two stone fireplaces that flanked the living room were giving off a welcome glow. There was Tommy Lido from Jacksonville, and Spinner from out west someplace, Breen, a New York guy, and Fedder. And Barron, of course. Just the five of them.

Fedder was still burned up about losing the truck but they had made the date for this poker game a couple of weeks before and anyhow, life goes on. Barron happened to be dealing. He dealt himself a very nice pat, and he kept taking pot after pot. Then Spinner won a few. Breen took one, and it went back and forth like that; Fedder was the heavy loser. He took it all right though. For him, that is. After all, they weren't playing marbles.

Barron opened for a hundred, and Fedder sat with three aces in his hand. Kings was the most he could have. Naturally Fedder upped it, and who took the pot?—Barron! He had drawn three fours to his pair of queens. That's the way it went. Fedder wasn't too happy, but Barron was having a great old time for himself.

Once Barron got dead man's hand—aces and eights, and he laughed so hard he spilled the whiskey out of his glass. "If I can go on taking pots like this I'll die happy," he said. And he won with the hand—a measly two pair.

About three o'clock, it was. Sounded like something scraping outside. Breen looked at the undisturbed blackness of outdoors framed by window's inadequate drapes. "What kind of wild life you got up here, Barron? Think it's maybe a

coupla jackals come to mate with your mitt?"

Barron looked up from his queens blankly for a second. "Nah, a skunk lookin' for some garbage at most."

"Now you're talkin' about Fedder's mitt," and Breen laughed heartily at his wit. Fedder let him have a half-hearted smile in the cause of good sportsmanship.

But it wasn't jackals, or skunks—exactly.

A minute later, as Barron raised his arms to pull in a very sizeable pot, the window smashed and there was a gun poking inward, pointed at no one and everyone. No one moved. Everyone's money was on the table.

"Up," said the guy with the gun. He worked himself in through the window. There was a black cloth over his face. If he was a local boy only Barron and Fedder would have known it.

Everybody came clean. What was the use? You die once, but that once is plenty. Barron let a big bill fall to the floor. It looked like an accident.

"You," said the guy.

"Me?" asked Barron.

"Take your foot off it."

"Foot off what?"

The man hit him with the flat of a second automatic he had been holding in his other hand, fusing Barron's upper lip with his nose. Barron spilled backward, striking his head sharply on an ashtray that stood like a stalk growing out of the floor. It wasn't enough to knock him out, but the pain and the blood dripping from his nose made him half insane with rage. The fellow in the mask had scooped up all the money and backed out the window by the time Barron had pulled himself up.

"After him," he yelled. He stopped only long enough to fix the others with a leer of contempt and rage. "Nobody can pull this on me and get away with it."

They all poured out the door, Barron in the lead, and Barron had a small automatic in his hand. It was too dark to see more than a vague shape scrambling over a fence far beyond the lawn. Barron's pants-leg tangled in some scrub and almost unbalanced him. At this moment the masked man turned and fired a shot. Barron took a leap forward with one arm raised, as if trying to bring down a piece of sky, and then he went headlong, his feet drumming a short tattoo.

The papers were full of it the next day, and Fedder and a number of other people chipped in and bought a bronze casket. The most expensive flowers were from Fedder.

They talked about it for days down at Fedder's place. Slappy, off on a bat for a week, didn't hear of it till Curly told him. He could hardly believe it. He just looked at Curly and said, "Well waddaya know!"

Later, when he and Curly were trying to get another truck through, he said: "Some take, I'll bet. Those boys don't play for pennies."

"Yeah," Curly said. "Where were you?"

"I remember at least three places I went to, then I lost track. I'm off the stuff from now on. I got rolled somewheres, too. It don't pay."

"And now you're off the stuff," Curly scoffed. "Pal, that's one trick you won't be able to pull."

"No? I can take it or leave it alone."

Curly passed him a bottle, and laughed at Slappy's vehement refusal.

They drove along without talking for a short while. "What's the bandage on your leg?" Curly asked casually.

Slappy pulled the leg of his pants down. "Cut it somewheres. Somebody coulda bashed my head in and I wouldn't remember."

"Let's see."

Slappy drew up the cuff. The bandage covered his leg from ankle to knee.

Curly stopped the truck. "Take off the bandage; let's see."

"Are you crazy? You want to see it *here—now?*"

"Yeah. Here. Now."

"You must be hopped up. Come on, let's get going. I'll show it to you if you wanna be morbid—some other time."

"Show me now." Curly had a gun. "Come on."

"What the hell's the matter with you?"

"You might of got your leg a little cut up on broken window glass is what I've got in mind."

"What's that to you?"

"I want to know."

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THE THIEF

By RAY CUMMINGS

ABOUT an hour after I registered at the little Inn of Wildwood, I decided I needed a drink before going to bed; and maybe a sandwich and a cup of coffee. The Inn was shabby and somewhat dilapidated—like myself at the time, as a matter of fact; and there was no chance of getting anything to eat or drink in it at this hour of the evening. It was a soggy night, with a chilly, cheerless drizzle. I put on my battered felt hat and well-worn raincoat, buttoning the coat up the best that could be done since several buttons were missing from it.

The Wildwood Inn was on an empty piece of the road, about what would be three or four blocks from the edge of the village. I had seen a restaurant there which probably would still be open. Wildwood had a nice name, but it was a poor looking little place. I had come by bus and was sorry I had stopped off; there didn't seem to be much chance of getting a job here, though I had determined to shave and spruce myself up the best I could and go after one in the morning.

As I left the Inn I saw a small closed car pull hastily up in the dimness off the road nearby. A man got out of it. He came toward the Inn entrance, passing me by the front gate. I didn't notice him particularly; but there was a light on a post

I knew something was rotten. But the whole situation was like a jig-saw puzzle—I couldn't figure out the answers until I had collected all the pieces

over us as we passed each other and apparently he had a good look at me. I was aware that he flung me a sudden startled glance; and then he called softly after me:

"You there—just a minute please."

I turned and found that he was coming toward me, almost at a run.

"Yes?" I said.

"Er—can I speak with you a moment? It's—it could be important to you."

He was breathless. It was dark where we met, with the dank mist and drizzle enveloping us. I saw him only as a man of my own height, clad in a big luxurious raincoat with a short cape to it. His soft felt hat was down partly over his face; a big silk muffler was a splash of cream-

His shot spat at me, the bullet sped into the opposite wall.

white under his chin.

"Important?" I said.

"Yes, it could be. Profitable maybe." He seemed to glance around us nervously, and then he added, "Shall we talk in my car? Get us out of this wretched rain." He gestured toward the dark blob of his little coupe where it stood nearby under a tree.

"Okay," I said.

He led me to the car. Its ornate chromium fittings gleamed in the murky dimness. He sat slumped behind the wheel with me beside him. The car was wholly unlighted; I could see him even less plainly than before.

"YOU look, well sort of down on your luck," he said.

"I am," I agreed.

"So I thought—it just struck me when I passed you out there that you're a fellow who wouldn't mind earning a little money—quick money—tonight?"

"You guessed right," I said. "A little money? How much, for instance? And what would I have to do?"

He sat for a moment pondering. I could hear his labored breath. One of his hands, encased in a chamois glove, went to my arm. I could feel that his fingers were shaking.

"Look," he said, "it's very simple, a favor you can do me. Take you maybe a couple of hours. A hundred dollars in it for you. In advance, right now as a matter of fact. And another hundred when you've finished. That interesting?"

"Very," I said.

"Good. What's your name?"

"Peter Franklin."

"Age?"

"I'm thirty-five."

"You live around here?"

"No, just passing through. I stopped off the bus, thinking I might get a job here tomorrow."

"And you're here alone? Nobody knows you around here?"

"On my own," I said. "Never saw the damn place before."

My answers seemed to please him. There was a ring of authority in his tone as he questioned me; the authority that comes to a man of wealth and position.

"Good," he said. "You're spending the night here? Registered here at the Inn? You've got a room here?"

"Yes," I agreed. "Such as it is. What do you want me to do, Mr.—?"

"I'm Robert J. Manners," he said, "of Jones Valley. That's a fair sized place, about twenty miles from here. My home is out in the country three miles north of it." He hesitated, and then he added with a queer breathless rush:

"You're wondering why I so suddenly decided I needed you to do me this favor? I had a look at you as we passed, over there under the light."

"Yes," I said. "I noticed you did. You seemed to be startled."

"I was. I'll show you why."

He took off his hat, reached and snapped on the car's interior light. I sat staring at him in numbed silence. He looked enough like me so that we could have been identical twins. He was well groomed, I was shabby, with a two day growth of beard. But the features were the same; the whole outline and cast of the face, almost the same; his hair was cut a trifle shorter, and neat and glistening with what I suppose was hair tonic, but it was the same color and style as mine.

He was smiling. "You see?"

"Yes, I see."

"I'm about your weight I imagine."

"You look it."

"You're thirty-five," he said. "I'm only thirty-two." His smile turned ironic. "I guess I look thirty-five all right."

He did, because there was a look of dissipation about him; a queer pallor. And something else, something I couldn't define. A sort of furtive look perhaps. And a nervous, almost twitching tenseness that I got the impression he was trying to master so that I would not see it.

"Mr. Manners," I said, "this wouldn't be anything too shady you want me to do? Or would it?"

He laughed. "Not at all," he said. "Don't be silly, Franklin. It happens, just at this particular moment, I'm in a bit of a puzzling jam."

"I can see that," I said dryly. "In a nutshell, what do you want me to do?"

"Take my car and go to my home," he said crisply. "I've just come from there—something—it's important to me—an envelope of papers. I overlooked it when I

I sat on the edge of the bed, staring at him as he slipped off his expensive tweed jacket.

"The papers are in my bedroom safe. There's no one at home but my butler. You'll shave, wear my clothes, take my car—Jennings will accept you as me—

left. Take my car and get it—bring it back to me here. I can't go myself—I—I have to meet a man here. A matter of vital importance."

"You'll pay me two hundred dollars for that?" I said. "You can phone home and have someone bring it. You can—"

"I'm not paying you two hundred dollars to tell me what I can do," he retorted. you'll hardly have to speak more than a sentence to him—"

Without bothering with all that, he could give me a note to Jennings. I started to tell him so, but he cut me short. "I'm trusting you with my clothes and my car," he said ironically. "And a hundred dollars in advance. Can't you trust me to know what I'm doing? If you want to make a

big mystery out of it, go ahead. Do you want the job or don't you?"

Two hundred dollars—and I've always been an adventurous fellow. It's gotten me into trouble more than once.

"Okay," I said. "I'm your man. You want me to impersonate you for a couple of hours. Just why—that's your business—"

"To open my own personal safe and bring me some of my personal papers. That doesn't sound—well, as you said, anything too shady, does it?"

Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. But my mind mostly, I'll admit, was on the two hundred dollars. "You spoke of an advance payment," I said. "At best this is sort of queer business—did you say a hundred dollars—now?"

"Of course," he smiled. He unbuttoned his raincoat, and from an inner pocket brought out a handsome wallet. He counted me out a hundred dollars—a twenty, and some tens and fives. "That all right? And that much more when you come back."

"Thanks," I agreed. "Your idea is, we go up to my room now and change?"

"Exactly." He snapped off the car light and opened the door. "You'll need a shave," he said. "And remind me to jot down the combination of my safe for you."

"That will be helpful," I said. "And a few other little details about yourself, don't you think?"

"Right," he said. "Lord what a rotten night. Raining harder than ever."

I SUPPOSE it was about half an hour later when, clad in the luxurious, fashionable clothes of Robert J. Manners, I sauntered nonchalantly from the Inn out into the rain, climbed into his handsome, high-powered little car and drove away. And upstairs, in the shabby room I had rented, I had left Manners dressed in my clothes, with my few meager belongings around him. The old Innkeeper had seen us come in, and had seen me leave. To him, of course, it had looked only as though Peter Franklin had brought in a rich man visitor, who had left half an hour later.

I drove north toward Jones Valley, drove swiftly because Manners said haste now was needed. And yet, just as I had left him—seated in my room, dressed in my clothes, looking weirdly the way I had looked as I registered at the Inn—he had shot me a glance and told me to wait at his home, in his bedroom, and that he would phone me there.

"I may want you to come back here," he had said. "Or perhaps to meet me somewhere else. I'll phone you."

I sat pondering it as I drove now through the murk and the rain. I must say my usual reckless spirit of adventure wasn't standing me in very good stead; already I was beginning to wonder if I had let myself in for something I'd regret. But what? Certainly I couldn't imagine. Queer loopholes in what little this man Manners had said began leaping at me. He couldn't make this trip to his home and back because he had to meet a man on something urgent right now at the Inn. But he was up in my room—to all intents and purposes he was Peter Franklin now, not Robert J. Manners. And suddenly I realized that while I had shaved, combed my hair in the fashion he wore his and put on his clothes, he had told me little about himself because I wouldn't need it. But he had questioned me a lot about myself—the mid-western town where my Aunt Emily lives; she, a woman in her eighties now, my only available relative who wanted nothing more than to have me settle down and stay with her for the few remaining years left to her. I recalled how Manners' eyes had gleamed when I told him that. . . .

Suddenly I was wondering whether this fellow was Robert J. Manners at all? Was he anything he said he was? It seemed so. I had all his miscellaneous papers in my pocket now, and his handsome, monogrammed wallet with the hundred dollars in it that he had given me. And his watch, stickpin, and an ornate, Oriental-looking ring which he had taken off his finger and put on mine. And I had his car. Why had he trusted me with all this?

The rain seemed increasing as I advanced. I took a highway that skirted the smallish city of Jones Valley to the north as he had directed. Apparently the Manners place, which he had said was called "Crestholme", was a fairly pretentious estate on a hill . . . I presently saw what doubtless were the lights of it, up in the rainy murk ahead of me . . . I was still

pondering my strange mission; my even more strange employer, back there in the little Wildwood Inn, with his unexplained furtiveness, his weird nervous tenseness. That pallor; that shaky, queer look to him. Did he take dope? I could well believe it.

And suddenly it vaguely seemed to me that the fellow was a thief; that I had lost something and that he had stolen it from me, right under my nose without me being aware of it. Stolen what? My Broken-down clothes? My battered suitcase? My fifty cent wallet, my old pipe and a couple of affectionate, worried letters from my aged aunt? He had all that. Worthless stuff. And my name? Peter Franklin. Who gave a damn about it in the world, except my old Aunt Emily?

But just the same I had the uneasy feeling that this man had stolen from me at least everything in the world that I had. And what had he given me in exchange? . . .

They were queer thoughts and I flung them away as through the murk of the dismal night my headlight beam abruptly disclosed a little ascending side road which went through an ornate flowered archway with the word CRESTHOLME across its top. My car pulled up the steep winding driveway in second. Then ahead of me I saw a big three story building—a lavish-looking country estate. Its upper windows were dark, but there were a few lights downstairs. I swung up to the side porte cochere, as Manners had directed, pulled up my car and climbed out.

The side entrance door had ornate leaded panes, with a soft-toned brocaded curtain and a dim glow of light behind it. I took out the key Manners had given me, rehearsing in my mind what he had told me of the layout I would find inside. And certainly everything, so far, was what he had said.

I could feel my heart pounding as I turned the key in the lock. The big door swung inward readily. I stepped into a softly lighted foyer, with the vista of a dimly lighted, big Baronial hall behind it. Mahogany paneled walls and ceiling; heavy Oriental rugs and somber brocaded drapes . . . I tossed my cigarette into a big ashtray. I was taking off Manners' big raincoat, with his grey slouch hat carelessly tossed on a hall table, when I heard footsteps behind me.

Manners had said that by no chance would I be able to get in without Jennings —who was the perfect butler always— hearing my car and coming to see if he could do anything for me before I retired. I turned at the sound of the footsteps. I tried to make it nonchalant; I suppose in reality it was sort of a guilty start.

The uniformed butler stood deferentially before me. Inwardly I cursed the sheen of light which was on me. It was a moment of horrible tenseness, and then I relaxed.

The butler said, "Is there anything you wish, Mr. Manners? Your hot toddy, sir, perhaps? Such a miserable cold night out."

"Eh? Oh—yes, quite so, Jennings. Miserable." I tried to make my manner of speaking what Jennings might have expected from his employer. "My toddy? Er —no thank you. I think not, tonight."

He took my raincoat. "Shall I put your car in the garage, sir? It's Allen's night off, you recall."

Allen was the chauffeur apparently. "No," I said. "Just leave the car where it is. I may be using it later." That last slipped out. I cursed myself for saying it. But Jennings evidently was accustomed to having his employer do unexpected things.

"Yes sir," he said.

I had started to light a cigarette; he produced his own lighter, with its little flame ignited before I could get out the lighter Manners had given me.

"Thank you, Jennings," I said.

I was starting up the big curved stairway. I turned back. "Leave my coat and hat there on the table, Jennings," I added.

"Yes sir. By the way, sir, there was a man here to see you a while ago."

What was I supposed to say to that? "A man, Jennings? W h o—what was his name?"

The butler frowned. It was the first sign of emotion he had shown. "He wouldn't give it, sir. A strange sort of fellow, if I may say so."

At my casual interest, the butler elaborated on it. Some rough looking customer— sort of "wild-eyed"—as Jennings put it, had come on foot through the rain, demanding to see Robert Manners.

"I told him you hadn't come home yet, sir," the butler was saying. "I hope I did right, not asking him to come in—he wouldn't give me his name—said you'd know it all right when you saw him."

"Oh, yes, quite so, Jennings."

"If he should come back, shall I call you, sir?"

Would Manners, if he were here, understand this better than the butler and I did? I had no doubt of it. "Yes, I suppose so, Jennings," I said.

"Very well, sir."

THE butler quietly moved back down the hall; and I went on up the curving staircase. One thing at least, I had learned. That employer of mine back in Wildwood Inn was Robert J. Manners all right. Certainly in that, he was on the level. The staircase, exactly as I anticipated, led me to a wide second floor hallway. Manners' bedroom, with its little wall safe behind an oil painting, would be the third door here on the left.

The door was standing open. It was a big bedroom, softly lighted, with rugs and drapes and luxurious bed and furniture. A big gas log was burning in a hearth so that the room was rather warm. For ventilation, the thoughtful Jennings had partly opened one of the casements of a French window. The drapes stirred in the draft of air from outside, where I could see a glimpse of a sort of balcony-patio.

The big oil painting hung where Manners said I would find it. I had memorized the combination of the safe; I'd open it now, get the big sealed envelope he had described, and get out of here in a hurry . . . I figured I wouldn't wait for Manners to phone me, as he had said.

"So you decided to come home tonight, Robert?"

It was a woman's soft voice from behind me. And I must say it startled me nearly out of my wits, so that I whirled around and stood gaping. A tall, slim, exceedingly handsome woman of about thirty, stood in the connecting doorway between this and the bedroom adjoining it. She was clad in a lacy negligee; her dark hair fell in waves to her shoulders.

"C-come home?" I stammered. "Why not? Of course I did." It was the best I could manage; Manners certainly hadn't given me any inkling of anything like this!

"And you're surprised to see me, aren't you?"

"Er—yes," I said. "That is, well—"

"I told Jennings not to mention that I had arrived. I thought it wouldn't hurt to come home a day ahead—unexpectedly, you know." Her tone was softly caustic. "Just to see what I might find my dear husband was doing."

I made a supreme effort to summon my wits. "Well, I'm here," I said. "Alone—no woman, if that's what you've got in mind."

She shrugged her slim white shoulders. "What difference, Robert? After what I know of the past. Anyway, I'm going to divorce you. I said it, and I meant it."

"Well—" I said lamely, when she paused.

She just stood looking at me. "I'm onto you, Robert. Your life of—we won't go into it. The bank's onto you too, as it happens. Just tonight—the bank examiners are working overtime there, as you know, I have no doubt. They phoned here for you about an hour ago."

"The bank?" I stammered numbly.

"Oh it's no news to me, don't look so blank about it," she retorted. "Do you think I blamed that poor teller for the first ten thousand shortage? Don't be a fool. *I* knew. And the next ten thousand. Those were driblets you thought you'd put back, weren't they? And now the examiners say it's a hundred thousand or more. And apparently you just took it, yesterday or today. That right, Robert?"

"Today?" I heard myself mumbling. "Just—today—" A bunch of queer thoughts were leaping at me. That jittery, furtive Manners, back there in Wildwood Inn—a fugitive?

"They're after you, Robert," the woman was saying calmly. "So when I heard that, I really didn't expect you back here at all tonight. Not ever, until you were brought back. You—"

Her words died away. She had been staring at me; and for my part I imagine I was standing gaping at her as though stricken of all the brains I ever had. I saw a sudden startled wonderment on her face; and then she gasped:

"Why you—you're not my husband? Why—why—"

She stood stricken with the realization. Whatever vague allegiance I had had for my erstwhile employer, certainly had been oozing away very fast. I knew I couldn't bluff this through anyway.

"No," I said. "Heaven knows that's true enough—I'm not."

"Not Robert? Not—" She took a step backward with fear in her eyes. "Then—then who are you?"

She could raise her voice and summon Jennings. And there was a telephone here on a little mahogany table. I saw her glance at it.

"I'm not a burglar," I said hastily. "Take it easy. I can explain—" I could get into a pretty nasty position, with Jennings up here and them summoning the police. I decided to make a clean breast of it. "If you'll listen to me," I said, "queer, I'll admit—your husband's clothes, his jewelry. I look like him—that's obvious. He gave me all this, he hired me. I left him, not more than an hour ago, in Wildwood Inn, about twenty miles from here."

SHE was a level-headed, intelligent woman. I told her exactly who I was and what had happened to me tonight. I told it crisply, succinctly, with what force I could muster. And she had to believe it, of course; there were too many things that fitted together, for her to doubt it.

"He's there now, at the Wildwood Inn?" she said.

"Yes, I suppose so. Unless he's already left." His get-away. A fugitive. I could recall now that he certainly had acted like that. Then I remembered that he had said he'd phone me here; I was to wait here for him. He hadn't known his wife would be here. He wanted me to wait here, presumably alone in his bedroom. Why was that? The only answer I could think of was that that would give him more time to get away from Wildwood.

"He left something in his wall safe?" she said. "Sent you here to get it?"

"Yes. That's what he said. An envelope. He said it would be sealed with sealing wax, and marked Personal."

The money and securities which now were missing from the Jones Valley Bank? She and I were both thinking it. The loot. She murmured something like that.

"Let's see," I said. I glanced toward the painting.

"He never told me how to open his safe," she said.

"He did me. Unless he was tricking me."

I lifted down the painting. She stood watching me silently as I twirled the knob of the little built-in-wall safe. It opened readily. But there was no envelope such as he had described here. We found nothing but a few odds and ends of papers, all obviously unimportant.

"Well," I said, "that's that."

Why had he sent me here? I couldn't answer it. But now abruptly I remembered something else that at least seemed explainable. When he had changed clothes, there in my room in the Inn, Manners had given me everything in his pockets, except one thing. A big bulging envelope. He had perhaps thought I hadn't noticed it, as he hastily shifted it from his jacket pocket

to mine. I saw it, but at the time gave it no particular notice.

He had the loot with him then, and had sent me back here on a fruitless errand. . . . Then his wife now was telling me more about him; the nine years that they had been married. He was the President of the Second National Bank of Jones Valley now, had more or less inherited it from his wealthy father. And then she was telling me of his nine years of dissipation —his drug addiction—mistreatemnt of her. . . . There are some women who will stand a lot from a man. . . . Gradually she had known—his gambling, criminal associates. . . . It was a turgid story, but of the sort which is all too commonplace. An outward respectability which she as his wife had helped him maintain, always hoping that she could change him, and then at last with no vestige of love for him left. And now, tonight, his bank had found him out. He was of course, a fugitive.

The drug addiction perhaps had started it all. But even five years ago when she found that out, there had seemed a vicious streak in this Robert Manners. He was entangled then with a gambler, crook and dope peddler named Jake Conner. The fellow had supplied Manners with dope for about a year. Then, perhaps over the price, Manners had quarreled with him. And for revenge, Manners had quietly tipped off the police, so that Conner had gone to jail.

"Your husband told you all this?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "He boasted of it one night. And then when he came to his senses he denied it. But I knew it was true. I heard it other ways. A—a woman who—who came here once to blackmail him. She seemed to know about it. This Conner, in jail, knew how it happened that he was there. The woman told me he was going to kill my husband when he got out. Conner was wild, just sitting there brooding, living for when he could kill the man who had put him there. The—the woman spat that at me, and told me she guessed my husband deserved it—what he had been to her, and now he was trying to throw her over."

"You bought her off?"

"Yes. That time. And then—then Robert handled her." Mrs. Manners was staring at me with her tremulous little smile. "I don't know—maybe he took up with her again. I never asked him. . . . Oh I know I've been an awful fool—"

"You have," I said. She didn't need any sympathy from me. She didn't want it; she was a thoroughbred.

"He's there now maybe at the Wildwood Inn," she murmured. "You—Mr. Franklin—what—what do you think we ought to do now?"

"You want a plain answer to that?"

"Yes. Yes, of course. I—I'm his wife—you're just an outsider. You—do whatever you think best."

"Okay, I will," I said.

SHE stared at me breathless, wide eyed and mute as I lifted the telephone, called the Jones Valley Police. I told them crisply that I was Robert J. Manners; that I had just learned a man named Peter Franklin, who looked very much like me, was at the Wildwood Inn. That I had reason to suspect that money and securities stolen from the Jones Valley Bank would be found on his person.

I got away with it, which certainly was simpler than trying to tell the whole thing. "When you pick him up," I said, "call me here at my home. I'll wait up for your call."

They would phone Wildwood at once, and go after Peter Franklin. I slammed up the receiver. And suddenly a startling thought occurred to me, so startling that I sat numbed, staring at Manners' wife.

"W-what is it?" she murmured.

"Jennings said a man had been here to see your husband tonight. A rough-looking customer—sort of wild-eyed. And now you tell me about a fellow in jail—that Jake Conner—who wants to kill your husband! Do you suppose he—?"

My words died away. Was that why Manners had so suddenly lifted some huge amount from his bank, this particular day, and was beating it? His previous embezzlements he knew would crash on him sooner or later. And now this Jake Conner being released today, coming after him to kill him? . .

I was suddenly on my feet with a rush of weird thoughts. . . . That man whon the butler had turned away, lurking out-

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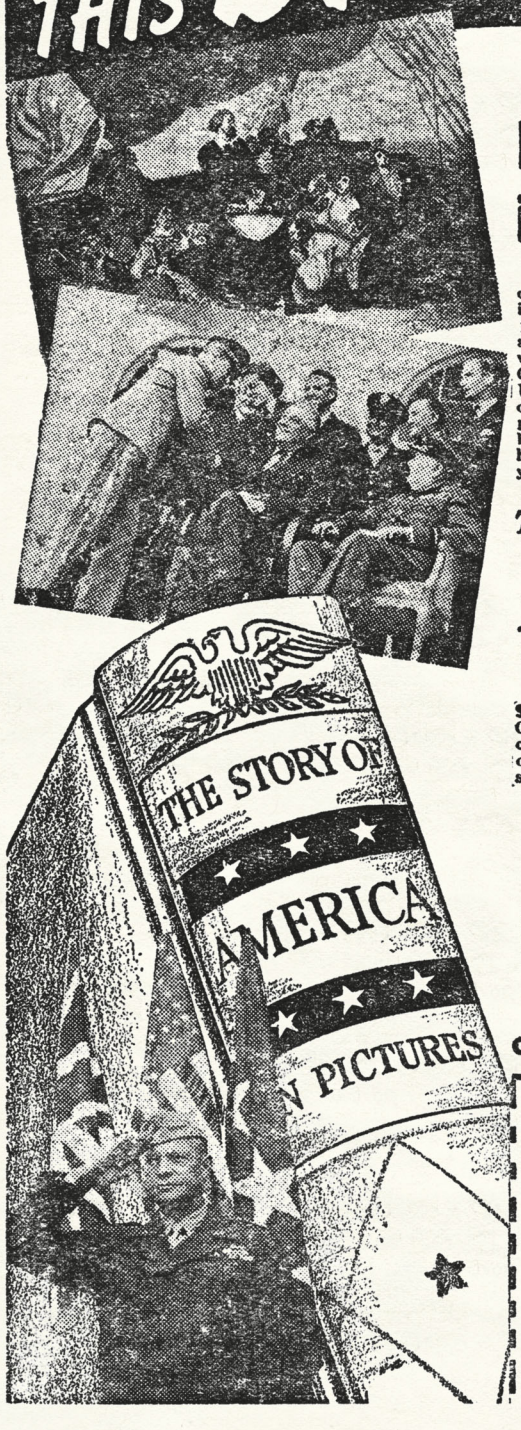

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side waiting. . . . He would have seen my car arrive. And our voices, and the light here in the bedroom, attracting him here. . . . I suppose it was merely the instinct of self-preservation. Or perhaps I actually did hear a noise outside the opened French window which was close behind us. Then suddenly a blob darkened it. A voice said:

"So I got you at last, you damned cur! What'd you do—forget that I got out of the pen today? Sure—I guess you did—"

All I saw was a man, soaking wet, with a dripping hat brim low over his eyes, and a leveled gun that was pointing at me. Mrs. Manners gasped with a suppressed cry, and he whirled on her.

"Shut that! You ain't gettin' hurt! But this damned rat here—I just want him to know who finished him up! He knows all right, and he's never even going to live to tell it—"

It could have been the last ten seconds of my life. "I'm not Robert Manners!" I gasped. "Wait—I—"

The telephone bell on the little table beside me suddenly rang. For the rest of my life I'll be thankful for that ring. It startled the man in the window. I saw the muzzle of his gun waver, turn for just that instant away from me. I leaped. His shot spat at me—a burst of flame and deafening roar; and there was the thud of the bullet as it went into the opposite wall.

And then I was on him. I've had quite a little practice in a rough and tumble in my time; and this fellow was smallish, he didn't have a chance. I knocked his gun clattering across the room and then he went down, with me on top of him. I was pounding him, but suddenly I found that he was limp under me. He'd hit his head against a radiator corner; he was out cold.

I climbed off him. Jennings was shouting from downstairs. The telephone bell was still ringing. I lifted the receiver. It was the Jones Valley police calling me back for some other details concerning the Peter Franklin at Wildwood. And I guess perhaps to verify, by calling Manners' home here, the authenticity of my former call.

I HAD quite a bit more to tell them now. They gasped and said they'd send men here right away. And a doctor for the man I had knocked out. Then the frightened Jennings was up here with us, gaping at the unconscious man on the floor whom he recognized as the man he had described to me; and gaping at Mrs. Manners and at me. We didn't bother to tell the dazed Jennings very much. Then after a time the phone rang again. The Innkeeper at Wildwood had described his erstwhile guest, Peter Franklin, who had hastily checked out and gone. But the police had picked him up down at the bus station where he was waiting to catch the last bus. He had the money and securities on him. He wouldn't talk; they were bringing him here to Crestholme. . . .

Manners' whole plot, which he had improvised so quickly to fit his own plans when he had seen me, was obvious now. He had sent me back here to be killed—Robert J. Manners, dead of a murderous jailbird's bullet. That would forever still the hue and cry after Manners, the embezzler!

Monstrous thief, who had tried to steal from me my name, my identity! A new life for him, in which he could safely hide, to indulge his drug addiction and enjoy his stolen money!

Mrs. Manners and I sat wordless, staring at each other, as we waited for the doctor and the police to arrive.

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STAKE-OUT KILL

(*Continued from page* 29)

the party, Wednesday, two weeks ago?"

He said: "Take me to the cops. You ain't cops."

Boroski told him we'd do for cops until some cops came along, then took a swipe at his other knee cap, missing on purpose. The little guy squealed like a pig and almost tied himself in a knot, trying to duck the smack.

I said: "We've got all day, Sonny. All you've got to do is talk. All we've got to do is see you do it."

He said: "All right, I was in it. Now take me to the cops."

I said to Boroski: "He plays that record all the time. I don't like it much. We take him down and they'll see there's a jail break if they have to engineer it themselves."

Dominic whimpered: "Take the dough and take me down to the cops. I'll say I done it. I'll swear to it and sign the paper."

That was the beginning of the end. Inside of half an hour we had the names of two more of the men who were with Freddy Nolan on the heist, with their addresses. That left two still unaccounted for, but I had a notion we'd maybe locate them through the two that Dominic was giving us. We didn't have anything on the little bum that would stand up in court, but I didn't expect that at that stage of the game.

All I wanted was enough to put him away out of sight. I'd wanted, at the start, to find Nolan through him, but the first fifteen minutes of questioning, if that's what we were doing, was enough to tell me he knew from nothing about Nolan or where he was. Boroski had had to clip him a couple of times more by then, and the little rat would have turned his own mother in to save himself from any more of it.

THE name on Boroski's list—one of the names he'd gotten from his drunken newspaper friend, was Sergeant Hankins, and Hankins was stationed at the 74th precinct station. Which took in a nice piece of farming land, almost out of town. I left Boroski in our car, a block away from the station, and went in by myself, and the first man I saw was a big, red-faced, beefy customer sitting at a desk behind a railing. Wearing sergeant's stripes and looking bored with the world. There were three uniformed patrolmen lounging around, and the set-up made me think of a two-bit town in the corn belt.

It was really rural.

I said: "I'd like to speak to Sergeant Hankins if I could."

The beefy man said: "You are, Mister. What can I do for you?"

"Give me a hand, Sarge."

The 'Sarge' got him. Out in the sticks like that the citizens either act like the cops are holy or are dirt under their feet. They don't go half-way. And, unless they are pals with the feet under the kitchen table and with beer mugs in their hands, they don't get familiar.

It must have been like old times with the sergeant.

He said: "Sure, Mister. But you got to tell me what you want a hand on."

The three patrolmen had given me an incurious look and gone back to their business, which was pinochle. One of them had just taken the bid for three-sixty and I wondered if he'd make it.

I said, keeping it low: "I hear you're one of the honest ones."

He said: "Now what's that?" and so sharply all three of his boys looked up and stared at us.

I repeated it.

He said: "Now look, mister! You shouldn't say such things. You're too fat to run and you'd fall all over your puss if a man made a pass at you. So don't crack at the cops."

That was a good sign. He was still loyal, even if he was out in the sheep herding belt.

I said: "No crack, Sarge. I've got something on my hands. He's too hot for me to hold. I haven't got time for him. I

haven't any place to put him. If I take him downtown he'll be sprung in an hour and I need him. I went to a lot of bother to get him."

He said: "Who're you?" but he had his voice so low I could barely hear it myself. His three boys went back to pinochle, probably thinking I was complaining about stock grazing in my front yard.

I showed him what dope I had and told him what I was working on. And that I'd baffled one of the boys who'd worked with Freddy Nolan on the Glendale job. And also said frankly that I knew the Glendale job was out of his bailiwick but that I thought he might be interested.

He said: "Why?"

I looked around his station and just waved a hand, and he got even redder in the face than was normal.

He said: "I get it! I get it! Another guy that's going to blow up the town. Right under the powers that be."

I said: "The powers that be, be damned. I've got a guy I want. I've got no authority to hold him. I got him in a way that's not exactly according to the rule book. I wanted to get at Nolan through him, but that's out. I've got a line on a couple of pals on the job though, and I hear Rome wasn't built in a day. I need help and maybe you can give it to me. If not I've made a bad step. You can sell me out to the Central Station gang and maybe go back there, I know that. Or you can go along with me and bust up Freddy Nolan's play house."

"You seem to have it pretty well in pieces the way it is," he said, nodding toward a paper on his desk. "It says here that the girl's leg is shattered. That she was attacked by a gang of armed robbers, who shot her with no provocation."

"I don't know how you class a .22 rifle in your town, Sarge," I tld him, "but where I come from we call it provocation. The kids shoot tin cans with 'em and all that, but I'm no tin can. You know Dolan?"

He tried for a goboon and missed it a foot. And acted concerned about the miss, which heartened me. I had a notion I was getting to him.

He said: "Yes."

"Well, there you are."

He sighed and called over to the pinochle game where, I'd heard it from the other side of my head, the bidder had melded a run, a pinochle, and a hundred aces. I'd thought, with part of my mind, that he couldn't have missed making his three-sixty bid if he broke both arms and had to pull cards out of his hands with his teeth.

"Dan!"

One of them said. "Yeah."

"Take over here."

"Sure, Sarge."

"I'll be back in ten minutes."

"Sure, Sarge."

Hankins got to his feet and put on a dented cap, then waddled through the gate to my side of the fence. He was even bigger than I'd thought he was—he must have tipped the scales at two-forty or thereabouts. He followed me through the outer door and didn't speak until then.

Then he said: "Where you got this find?"

I nodded down the street. He nodded across the street and said: "A beer, first, eh?"

I said: "Sure."

We took it in a booth, and I jerked my head toward the station and said: "The boys! What about them?"

He said: "Good boys. Dumb. A couple of old heads that got out of line. Nineteen more that don't know what it's all about. They'll never know. We spend our time looking for missing children out here. We always find them in Fishbaum's vacant lot, playing with one old cat, so it's no problem. Any policeman could find 'em, except my boys, and when I get the whole crew on the job they come through in time. Team work, Mister."

I told him not to be bitter and he coughed into his beer and said he should have joined the fire department in the first place.

Then we finished our beer and I led him down to where Boroski was taking care of Dominic.

CHAPTER VIII

Three Down

DOMINIC LOOKED THE worse for wear. We'd patched him together a bit but our repairs had been a little sketchy and hadn't really taken hold. His nose was broken and had swollen all over his face. His mouth looked as though he was holding a doughnut in his teeth. Both eyes were black—Boroski hadn't socked him there but that bad schnozzle had caused it. He couldn't walk because neither of his knees worked like joints. He was a little doubled over because Boroski had kicked him a couple of times in the belly—something I'd told Boroski, at the time, was a mistake.

I didn't want to turn anybody over with internal injuries. The other stuff would heal in due course, but sometimes a kick in the stomach moves things out of line.

Hankins looked at him with interest but no love, and Dominic looked at Hankins as if the cop was his guardian angel.

Hankins said: "So this is it?"

I said it was.

Dominic said: "I give up, Sergeant. I admit it. Book me and I'll sign the paper."

Hankins asked: "What paper's this?"

"My confession."

Hankins said woodenly: "I never seen you before. How can I book you when I never seen you. I'll show you where to drive him, Mullaney. Around to the back. I'll put him so deep he'll think he's in China."

Dominic said: "You gotta book me."

The sergeant reached in and finished wrecking what was left of his mouth, then went on to me, as though he hadn't moved.

"I'll tuck him away and then we'll go riding. I'll take the two guys that know the score. I can hold them other two and this one until the cows come home and some time after. Tis precinct hasn't been inspected since I been here—the chief thinks if he ever got this far out of town he'd never find his way back."

Boroski grinned and Dominic looked even sicker. Which was a good trick.

I said: "Sarge, this is Stan Boroski."

Boroski said he was glad to meet the sergeant and that he'd heard good things about him from a man named Hale, who worked on a paper. Hankins said he hoped that Hale would give him a break if no good came from the monkey shines he was aiding and abetting, but that he had little

hope of it. That he hadn't had a break since he'd found his lieutenant splitting marijuana take with his captain. He climbed in the front seat with me and directed me down an alley leading by the station, and then opened the back door and watched while we half-carried Dominic in and to a cell.

His instructions to the jailer were short and simple. He said: "This guy ain't here. No matter who asks this guy ain't here. You ain't got anybody here. You got that straight?"

The jailer stared and said: "I ain't got nobody here."

Hankins said: "Hold to it. If you don't, I'll put you out walking beat in Higgin's cow pasture. You watch it."

I took it Higgin's cow pasture was even farther out.

MANNY KREIBER lived with his mother and father and, maybe because of them, came with us like a little lamb. He was a little man, not much over five feet up, with starey eyes and hands that he couldn't keep still. He was dressed two steps ahead of the fashion, though, and had nine hundred and fourteen bucks on him, besides some small change.

He also had a Spanish made pistol, one of the nickel-plated kind that a man can hit a barn with once out of three times at fifty feet. .38 calibre, though, and one of the cheap damned things can kill a man as dead as a decent gun.

His mama and papa were all over us, telling us their Manny was a good boy and had been home all night, the night of Wednesday two weeks back, but Manny took it like a little man.

He said: "I want my lawyer."

Hankins said benevolently: "And I'll see you have one, Manny. This all you got out of the job?"

Manny's eyes flicked toward his mother. I saw it and so did Boroski. Boroski said: "The old lady's got some of the loot in her sock, Sarge. The kid just told me so."

Manny told Boroski something else and, if it was true, Boroski's mother and father had never stood before the priest.

Hankins said to one of the two old timers he'd taken with us: "Shake the

joint down, Milo. You and Tom. Tear it up if you want to—there'll be no squawk."

Hankins was wrong right there. There was a squawk both from mama and papa—one that could be heard blocks away. Papa even claimed that Hankins belonged to the Gestapo. Milo and Tom found a bracelet that was on my list as being taken from a pal of Mrs. Winters. Also a couple of rings and three wrist watches. The whole stuff was probably worth around a grand. And that, with the nine hundred odd bucks on him and what little he'd spent and given his folks, didn't look like good pay for the three years and up he'd do for armed robbery.

Boroski said: "You see, Manny! Like in the books! Crime does not pay. And here you've got your poor old gray-headed mother going to the pokey along with you."

"You can't take mama," Manny told us.

HANKINS said he hated to make any man out a liar but that mama was looking a stolen property charge right in the face. Along with papa. And that if that wasn't enough to hold them a harboring a known criminal rap would.

Manny said dully: "You guys win. What else d'ya want?"

I said: "Where's Freddy Nolan?"

He said: "I don't know."

Hankins said: "You mean to say you went out on a heist with a guy you don't know?"

"I know him. But I don't know where he is. He comes to me when I'm playing a little three-cushion and asks me do I want a job. I tell him yes. So I go. He fades. He gives me what stuff you got and a couple watches I hock. They got diamonds set in 'em and I get a grand for the pair. Freddy tells me that as soon as he clears some of the big stuff he'll see me and see I'm taken care of. But that the stuff's too hot to handle right now, the way it is. That makes sense so I wait. What the hell else do you guys want? I'm giving it to you straight but you give me a break, too. Leave mama and papa out of this. I tell mama my girl friend gives me this stuff to keep for her. Mama don't know from nothing, mister."

"Who else was with you?"

He said: "Freddy and a cabby named Dominic something or other. A guy named Alexis—a big blond guy that talked Russian or Finnish or something. A guy named Charley Smith."

We had Smith as the other man Dominic had named but this Alexis was new.

Manny went on with: "There was another guy but I don't know his name. They called him Deafy, that's all I know. He's deaf and dumb, but Freddy said he was okay in a tight."

Deafy was new to us, too.

I said: "Okay. Now where'll we find Alexis and Deafy?"

"I never seen this Deafy before. Alexis, he hangs out at the Recreation Bowling Parlors. I seen him there, but I don't meet him until this job. Do I win a break for my people, Mister?"

I looked at Hankins, who nodded. I said: "You do if this Alexis and Deafy lead checks out. If not, in they go. You play with us and we play with you. That's fair."

He turned and rattled something off to his mother—I suppose it was in old-country talk. She stopped crying long enough to nod, then went back to the weeps, and I got a hunch. And took Hankins to the side and told him of it.

I said: "Wait here, will you, Sarge, until I can get hold of one of the men I've got working for me? I want to put a tag on the old lady."

"Why this?"

"I'm suspicious when anybody says something I don't understand. They've got no phone here so she'll have to go out if she does anything. My boy can pick her up—she won't know him."

"How long will it take for him to get here?"

"Maybe half an hour."

Hankins sighed and said: "I suppose I can keep Milo and Tom looking over the place. It'll make the old lady just that much more nervous, too. If she's going to make a break, it'll speed her up."

That's what we did until Flint answered my phone call and took up a plant outside the house.

CHARLEY SMITH had a third floor flat in a four story building and, at the

start, we didn't expect to have any trouble. And if we hadn't had to make the pinch on the quiet we wouldn't have had any, but five men can't do much of a job of bottling up a place that's built as that flat building was. In the first place it was old—in any other place but Rockville it would have been condemned and torn down long before.

Each floor had an outside balcony and instead of fire escapes there were wooden stairs crawling between the balconies, two to the side and two to the back. The front of the place had been phonied up with cheap tile, to make it look a little modern. There were no bells in the hall leading into the scatter. Just tubes to whistle through.

Hankins went to the janitor—he called himself the superintendent, but a guy that works a mop in the halls is a janitor in my book—and gave it to him.

"Charley Smith," he said. "He in?"

The janitor leaned on his mop and said: "Sure. What you want him for?"

Hankins said that was police business.

The janitor said: "He's in. I seen him come in. And I hear his kid stop practicing her piano lessons so I know he's still in. Charley can't stand the kid doing do-re-mi all the time on that piano. I don't blame him—she's got me nutty, too."

"Family man, eh?"

"Four kids, mister."

Hankins looked sad and said: "A family man should keep out of stuff, Mullaney."

I pointed out that Smith hadn't kept out of stuff.

Hankins said to the janitor: "Who's on the side of him? Two flats to the side, ain't they?"

"People named Torrance. He's a bricklayer."

"Gimme a key to his place."

"You don't need one, mister. His old lady's home."

WE went upstairs then and Hankins knocked at the Torrance door and arranged to have Milo and Tom go through so they could cover the balcony and keep Smith from going through one of his windows.

And we rang Smith's bell.

One of the prettiest girls I ever saw opened up for us. Tall, blonde, filled out in just the right places and just enough, and with one of the sweetest smiles I ever saw.

Hankins goggled.

He said: "Your father in, Miss Smith?"

She said: "It's Mrs. Smith, officer. Why no, he isn't."

Hankins said: "Mind if I look?"

She said: "Well, as a matter of fact, I do. There's something wrong with the bathroom plumbing and my oldest girl is taking a bath in the kitchen. You know how the plumbing is in these old places, officer. Our bathroom is out of order all the time. I've complained over and over again to the manager but he doesn't do a thing about it. He . . ."

Hankins said: "It's all right about the kid taking a bath, ma'am. I'm a family man myself. I've seen kids with their clothes off, believe me."

Mrs. Smith smiled sweetly again and said: "But my girl's sixteen, officer."

Hankins got as red as fire.

I looked at the woman and decided she must be lying. That nobody that looked as young as she did could have a sixteen year old daughter.

I said: "The old stall, Sarge. I don't know how he's doing it but he's making a sneak."

Hankins reached out and pulled the woman into the hall and we stormed in. And Hankins went one way and Boroski and I the other. And we found that the lady hadn't lied. We heard Hankins yelp like a kicked dog and we turned back his way. He was standing outside a closed door, with the knob still in his fist, and he looked as though the place had blown up in his face.

He said: "There's a kid in there, standing in front of the sink and washing up. Uh . . . a bath."

Boroski reached past him and opened the door and took a peek. And said: "He's through the roof."

WE all looked, then. There was a ceiling trap door and it was open. Even as we looked it slammed down. The girl screamed. I said: "Come on!" and turned and dashed for the outer hall. Boroski and Hankins came after me, leaving the girl in full voice. I got to the door opening into the hall and started through it, and Mrs. Smith met me face to face, kicking me on the shins and doing her best to claw my eyes out. Boroski hadn't expected me to stop any more than I'd expected to stop, and he slammed into me from behind. Mrs. Smith got a nice full rake down my cheek because Boroski had cannoned me right into her. I got her by the front of the dress and held her off and measured her and then upset her, and we went past her to the stairs.

And we were up them in time to see Smith—it had to be him—just going through a door at the end of the fourth floor hall. We went after him and hit the fourth floor balcony, the one at the back of the place, and as I got to this he leaned over the roof and took a crack at me. He'd managed to climb the stairs to the roof while we were making it the length of the hall.

He was shooting down and I was shooting up but he missed and I didn't. I had his head and shoulders outlined against the sky, which helped a lot. He sagged over, both arms and head hanging down, and when he let loose of his gun it almost conked me on the head.

And Boroski looked up and whistled and said: "With Dominic and Manny, that makes three down and three to go. Ain't us Glendale boys having fun."

CHAPTER IIX

Alexis And Deafy

HANKINS WAS IN A MESS but there was nothing we could do about it. He was in Dutch with his heads, anyway. Here he was, out of his precinct and with a dead man to explain. Taking Dominic and Manny and keeping them in the tank was fair enough—he could keep 'em out of sight and his own boys wouldn't talk—but you can't just explain dead men away with a couple of words. But the old boy had started something and he was on it to the finish.

Milo and Tom came pounding up the stairs from the balcony below and Hankins said: "Mullaney, I'll have to stay here and tell 'em what for. The boys will be here in two minutes—this precinct station isn't four blocks away. You take Milo with you and pick up this Alexis and Deafy. You know where to get a line of Alexis, and Milo can find a deaf and dumb man, I hope. Some of the other dumbies will know him. Milo, you call in to the detective bureau and they'll tell you if they've got a deaf and dumb thief on the list. They won't have many—I'll tell you that. Mullaney, you get out of here before the boys come. Move, man! We started this and now we got to finish it or I'll be off the force as from now. And with a pension coming up. Move."

I moved. We went down the stairs, passing Mrs. Smith who was just where I'd piled her. Boroski panted out that he should stop and tell Mrs. Smith's oldest girl to come out and look after her mother, and I told him the kid hadn't had time to get into her clothes yet. He said he'd thought of that same thing. And I was too much out of breath to tell him he should be ashamed.

But I wasn't too much out of breath to stop in the lower hall, when we met the janitor.

We got out on the street and around the corner, just as a squad car pulled up in front of the flat building, and we stopped hurrying and walked along as decent people should, just for a change.

Milo said: "Wha'd you bust that janitor for, Mullaney? Huh?"

I said: "That was how Smith got wise to us going in for him. That janitor must have tipped him we were on the way up."

Milo admitted he hadn't thought of that.

Boroski said: "It was quick thinking, at that. He must have had that get-away all planned. Even to having the kid taking a bath. There ain't many men would walk in a room with a kid taking a bath like that."

I said: "But you did, Stan."

He grinned and said: "I did. Some kid."

THE Recreation Bowling Parlor was like most of the places. About a dozen

alleys. A bar at the side but with only a beer license. A half dozen pool tables and two billiard tables at the other. Pin ball and slot machines all around the place—Rockville believed in everything to separate the sucker from his dough. And a manager, or owner, who fitted the place like finnan fits haddie.

A big dark greasy man, smoking a big dark greasy cigar. Behind his beer bar, drinking whiskey from a shot glass openly—and as openly peddling the same stuff to the customers.

Milo was in plain clothes but the big bird still made him for a cop. Boroski looks like a thug and I look like an overweight business man, but Milo had copper stamped all over himself.

I said: "We're looking for a guy named Alexis. He hangs around here. Big blond guy."

"Don't know him."

"Why give me that."

"I got nothing for a cop."

Boroski reached across the bar with the flat of his hand and mashed the cigar against the greasy man's mouth.

And said cheerfully: "I got something for you though, baby. Where is he?"

The man was dancing up and down, pawing at his face. But he was watching Boroski and saw Boroski slip his sap from his pocket.

He said: "There! Playing pool! Second table!"

We saw a big blond dumb looking kid with a flat blank face and blue eyes that looked as though he was walking in his sleep. He was in shirt sleeves, bending over the table for a long shot, and if he had a gun on him it would have been in his hair, which was curly and bushy and stood up like a South Sea islander hair-do.

Milo just tapped him on the shoulder and said: "Come along," and that was that.

He put him in a cab to take him out to the 74th Precinct, with me paying for the transportation, and Boroski and I went back to the hotel, to wait for Milo to get in touch with his detective bureau and so get a line on the town's deafies and dumbies.

We thought that would probably take a little time and I, for one, thought I needed a rest.

And about four stiff drinks, taken one right after the other.

It had been a busy day.

IF you've ever tried to talk with a deaf and dumb man you know it can't be done. But we had a man with us who could do the finger stuff—some bird that Milo dug up—and it didn't take long to locate Deafy.

The guy had graduated from a reform school for a starter, and it must be torture for a deaf and dumb kid in a place like that. The sort of young hoodlums who get sent to one of those kind of places aren't the kind that have much pity in their souls, and they must have really piled it on the poor kid.

He'd done two little jolts, one right after the other, when he'd got out of school. Little stuff, like swiping things from peddlers' carts, but his reform school record was against him. It also probably hurt that he couldn't tell the judge about it except through a finger talk expert. He'd done five the next time—some jam he got in with a deaf and dumb girl. The girl must have been under age or something. Then he'd put in another three on a five year rap for breaking and entering and having an unlicensed forearm in his possession.

I felt sorry for the guy—he didn't have a chance from the beginning.

He was shacked up with three others like him, down by the river, and their place was as neat as four men could keep it. Pretty dreary, though. We walked in behind the hardware and our finger talker did his stuff. Deafy shrugged and wiggled his fingers in return, and our talker told us that meant the share that the guy had of the loot was buried outside the house, in a tin can. And that Deafy was pleading guilty already. He was just saving himself and everybody else trouble, at that. With his record any court in the world would have put him away.

WE sent him back to the 74th Precinct with Milo and went back to the hotel, and I heard our phone ring as I opened our door.

It was Hankins.

Hankins said: "I'm suspended, as of now. If we can locate that Nolan, so I can clear these guys out of my basement, I can beat it. I can turn it over to the opposition papers and get enough free advertising so they'll have to reinstate me."

I said: "Sure, Sarge. But where's Nolan?"

It was just as if I'd timed it. The door opened and Flint came in, blurting out: "I've found Nolan. I've found the guy."

I said to Hankins: "Come on down. We've found the guy."

"Where?" Hankins asked.

I said: "Where?" to Flint.

Flint said: "In a warehouse. Down by the railroad station."

I relayed this to Hankins.

He said: "Hold it and I'll be down. You want I should bring Milo and Tom? Milo just got in with Deafy."

I said: "The more the merrier," and hung up.

Flint said: "The old lady left about an hour after you guys took Manny away. She didn't even look behind her—a squad in uniform could have tailed her. She goes to this warehouse—it's boarded up—and she gives some sort of a double knock on a door at the side and Nolan opens up for her. By and by she comes out and goes to a store and buys a big sack of groceries. She takes these back. Then I guess she goes home—I take a plant on the warehouse."

"You should have called in and stayed there."

"No phone around there handy. The nearest one was at the store where she bought the grub."

I said he should have called from there then, and the big gawk pouted at me like a schoolgirl.

Then we waited for what seemed like two hours and was at least half that until Hankins and Milo and the cop named Tom came in. And then I had to listen while Hankins told me what had happened when he was found out of his precinct with the dead Charley Smith.

It seemed his captain did everything but shoot him.

In all, it was three hours after Flint had seen Nolan at the warehouse before our whole crew got there.

HANKINS broke in, using a crowbar to do it, and the rest of us piled in after him. The place was two stories high and chopped into various rooms and cubby holes for storing different things, and it took us another hour to make sure Nolan had flown.

And according to Hankins, his chance for re-instatement had flown along with Nolan.

We trooped back to the hotel and I sent Kline out for whiskey in quantity. Hankins needed it and both Milo and Tom had earned it. And then I got the happy thought.

I said: "Now look! Nolan's no sap. Manny's mother told him about Manny. He knows we almost got him at his girl's house, and he knows by now that she's in the hospital with a shot-up leg. He knows this thing is breaking up on him—that his protection in this town can't stand up under advertising. That his cop friends in the central station can't cover him if this mess comes out in the open. So what will he do?"

Hankins said: "I'll bite. What will he do?"

"He'll skip. And he'll have to have dough. He's got the same-as dough in the safe deposit vault at the bank. So he'll get the stuff out and take it to Heims and make the best deal he can for it. He'll know that Heims will rob him blind on a forced sale like that but he'll have no choice."

Hankins said: "How d'ya know he'll take it to Heims?"

"Heims is his fence. We know that because his girl went to Heims to arrange for the sale. Why else would she go there? All we've got to do is take Heims' place."

"If he's got to get the stuff from the bank, why not go there?"

"If there's shooting, the bank's no place for it."

Hankins said grimly: "If your figuring's right, that's the place for us to go. He might work it some way other than going to Heims' house. We can't take any chances—we've got to play it the simple way."

CHAPTER X

Picking Up The Threads

FREDDY AND HEIMS came in the bank together, with Nolan dressed the way I'd seen him last. Sport shoes and flannels and a tweed jacket. Heims was in gray, also as I'd seen him last. They made a nice contrast—Nolan looked like a rat and Heims looked so respectable it hurt.

They went down in the vault and I nodded over to Hankins, who was over by the first teller's window. And he met Boroski and me at the stairs leading down to the vault.

I said: "Good hunch, Sarge. Heims is with him. He'll appraise the loot right there, in one of the little booths they have for the coupon-clippers, and the deal will be over then and there. Nolan will take himself out of town as fast as he can make it. If we'd staked Heims' place we'd missed him for sure."

Hankins said: "It's all over then except for the shouting."

Boroski said: "Or the shooting, Sarge." It was the last.

We went down the stairs and Hankins had a little argument with the bank guard about going through the barred doors and into the vault. He was in plain clothes by then and had to flash his shield. With him suspended it didn't mean a thing, but the guard couldn't have been expected to know that.

In we went and to the cubby clear in the back.

It was Hankins' pinch and he was in front. He tried the door to the booth and found it locked. He said: "You in there! Open up! This is police."

Nobody answered and Hankins said, raising his voice: "Open up! Open this door. This is police, I tell you."

Then we heard a squeal from inside and the sound of something falling to the floor.

Hankins put his Police Positive against the lock and turned it loose and right then it sounded as though somebody inside was turning loose with a machine gun. It had to be Nolan, of course. He shot that little automatic of his empty just as fast as the

gun would function, putting them through the door at about waist level.

And Hankins took two of them through the belly.

He went down in a heap but he wasn't out. He shot up through the door from that position, and while he was doing this both Boroski and I joined in.

The idea being to get Nolan down before he could slip a spare clip into his gun. If he had one it would only take him a second to do it and we wanted him out of action before he could put either Boroski or me that way.

The vault was long, probably thirty feet in length but it wasn't more than ten feet wide. With Hankins and Boroski both shooting .38's and with me using a .44 Special, we were making lots of noise. So much so that I doubt if we'd heard it if Nolan had shot back. But I was watching the holes show through the door and I wasn't seeing any that had splinters coming our way.

We finished in a dead heat. All three guns came empty at the same time. I latched out the cylinder of my gun and stuffed fresh shells in it, all the time shouting at Hankins to find out how bad he'd taken it. And my ears were ringing so that I couldn't hear my own voice, much less any answer he may have given.

Then I slammed the cylinder back in place and opened the door.

Heims was on the floor and at first I thought we'd got him, too. Nolan was on top of him, but he must have fallen on the table, first, before going to the floor. The table must have held up in line with the cross fire the three of us had put through the door, because he was shot to pieces. He had four slugs through his chest, two in the belly, one through the throat and another had caught him under the chin and ranged up through his head.

From the size of the hole it had made, and the way it had lifted the top of his head, I judged it was from my own big gun.

The Winters' loot was on the table, covered with blood and brains. Another proof if one was needed that Nolan had fallen there first.

We pulled Nolan clear of Heims and found him unhurt, except for a welt along-

side the jaw. That accounted for the fall we'd heard. He'd probably tried to open the door and Nolan had clunked him to keep him from doing it.

After all, Heims was a business man, not a gun man.

About then about half the cops in town came storming down, thinking I suppose that somebody was trying to rob the bank. They had three bank guards with them. After the guards came the bank customers and then most of the bank personnel. They filled the vault, the stairs leading to it and I don't doubt the lobby above. There was such a crowd the cops had a time making way for the ambulance crew and their stretcher, for Hankins.

By the time this last outfit arrived the paper men were there—and we handed the thing to Hankins on a platter.

With the build-up Boroski and I gave him I could see he'd get a medal and a lieutenant's desk out of the thing if he lived, and right at that time there was some doubt of that.

The ambulance doctor told us it was about an even chance he would or wouldn't.

HANKINS made it all right. Before we got Mr. and Mrs. Winters through with their identification of their own stuff he was out of danger, and by the time the insurance company investigators cleared the rest of the loot he was howling for something solid to eat. He had some perforations and they're plenty bad, but he was a solid man and came through it like a breeze.

And we went back to Glendale, my whole outfit, except Swede Olson. We left the town being investigated by everybody from the Governor on down. With the chief out on his ear, along with just about all of the central station staff and with a few heads of the outlying precincts. With the town closed tighter than a drum and with crooks of various kind and calibre fanning out from there in all directions.

We also left Miss Simpson in the hospital and Lieutenant Down and Charley Smith in their graves.

Dominic, Manny Kreiber, Alexis and Deafy, went back to our state to stand trial for robbery at the point of a gun. And Heims beat a stolen property rap and went free. He wasn't even indicted by the Grand Jury.

I felt bad about that.

The worst thing about it was losing Swede. I put Boroski on the payroll—with what I nicked Winters for and with the cut I got from the insurance companies for recovering their stuff I could afford it—and he got Swede's old room, next to me in my hotel.

Which was a bad mistake. And one I should have known better than to make. Swede had always played fair with me but not so Boroski. Every time I snaffle a girl he comes through the adjoining door and steals her away from me and there's nothing I can do about it. He's too good a man to fire.

DARK CORRIDOR

(*Continued from page* 47)

has absolutely no chance against a war hero, who went across to fight with the British for his one time native Poland.

I'm just out of luck.

would not go free. For five years, Steve had held that thought relentlessly, and revenge was a bursting need that drove and ruled him. He would get Daxley himself . . . ruin him . . . kill him, if there was no other way . . . get him . . . get him. . . .

For that, he had given up Joyce whom he loved so much. For that, he had spent these years in searching, until he traced Daxley to this town. And here he had found him, an underground rat transformed into a respected member of the town, with a handsome house and a handsome wife and a handsome life built

around them. . . .

The sense of irony that flooded Steve was more painful than the agony of the bullet in his chest; more terrible than the wavering blackness that threatened to encompass him. After all those years . . . after the loss of Joyce . . . *Daxley had gotten him!* Standing there at the end of this corridor in the doorway, firing the gun, speaking to the bellboy in his quick, harsh voice. . . . It had been Daxley. And now Steve was going to die, and the murderer would go free again, like an untouchable, indestructible pestilence. Free to clad his respectable life without fear.

Because he must have been afraid. He must always have known that some day Steve would find him. He must have known, and waited, and planned as Steve himself had planned. And he had won. He had won again.

The sickening knowledge of that pounded at Steve as he lay helpless, fighting the blackness. The telephone table was so near that he could see the dark, gleaming instrument close above him when he turned his eyes slowly toward it, straining them through the dimness. It seemed to swell into a bloated, quavering shape as he looked at it, and then recede far into the distance. He tried to move his arm, and the effort swept him into a whirlpool of faint dizziness that dragged him down . . . into death . . . he was dying. . . .

SUDDENLY in that whirlpool, in the depth between life and death, Steve felt something flowing into him that was like a surging river, or a sweep of music from a great organ, or the rush of a wind from some high mountain. Strength, flowing into him. Strength, lifting him up from the darkness into hope. And as he felt it within him, all the weight of bitterness and hate was gone from him, because he knew he was not going to die. His revenge was less than a foot from his hand; the telephone. In a moment—only a moment more, he could reach the telephone. On a tide of triumph and relief, with fear behind him, he knew it. He was going to live . . . he was going to live.

But Daxley's respectable life and house and wife would be ruined, in that full, simple revenge. Steve would live, and tell the police about the attempted murder; and Johnny, the bellboy, would identify the dark-haired, hard-faced man who had been in the hall, outside the door at the time of the shooting.

Daxley had given him the simplest, most perfect opportunity for emerging almost unscathed from this revenge he had longed for. His bullet wound would heal. These last five years would grow dim in time, and the wounds from them would fade into faint, fading scars on his memory. But Daxley, serving time for attempted murder, would have lost everything that must now be important to him. It was right, and everything in the world seemed right to Steve. Even as he moved his arm and felt hot pain coursing through him, he grinned a little. As his hand closed over the cool smoothness of the telephone, he almost laughed in exulting triumph.

The characteristic humor was on Steve Drake's face, shining from his eyes in the darkness of the corridor as he lifted the receiver toward him. He was thinking that later on, when he felt a little better, he would call Joyce. He would call her long-distance, collect.

PAT HAND

(*Continued from page* 65)

"Listen, what are you? A dick? One of Barron's pals?"

"Well now, I couldn't be both, could I? Quit stallin'—let's have it straight."

"You're singin' off key, kid."

"I'll kill you, Slappy, and I'll say the union done it. I mean it."

"I don't get it—I can't figure your angle."

"I didn't have no trouble figurin' yours. You knocked off Barron, didn't you?"

Slappy didn't yes or no. He just looked at Curly blankly.

"You're a young guy, Slappy. You want to die?"

"No. Why should I?"

"All right, then. Talk." Curly weighed the gun in his hand. "So help me, this is your last chance."

Slappy weighed the look in Curly's eyes. He talked. He was the holdup. It wasn't for the money, though Fedder had let him keep half. Fedder was just sick of having Barron around. Barron was too lucky—about everything. "Did you ever hear about that Geraldine dame?"

"No," said Curly, "and I don't want to. Come on." He made a U-turn with the truck.

"Where to?" Slappy was scared.

Curly took his hand off the trigger so the gun wouldn't go off accidentally, and held the thing like an egg in his palm. The whole side of it struck in the temple. Slappy crumpled to the floor of the car and lay there motionless as Curly headed toward Police Headquarters with him and the truckload of Fedder's stock-in-trade.

THERE was quite a crowd at the murder trial. After all, it was a doubleheader. Fedder didn't look so good in green, but a man has more than his complexion to think about when his life is in the hands of twelve men. Slappy still looked bewildered. He eyed the men in the jury box. "Golly," he muttered, "them guys look about as sympathetic as a picket line on its second anniversary." Curly looked—well, you know how a flyer looks when he sees his load make a direct hit on his objective.

The judge had called a short recess and gone into his chambers. The courtroom buzzed with conversation, though it was too early in the trial to expect tenseness or uncontrollable excitement. Slappy, at one end of a long table with his lawyer, turned and said gloomily: "I still don't make him out. What is he? What's he get out of it? He lost a good job along with getting me and Fedder juiced."

"Fedder's outfit killed his brother during a strike-breaking party," his lawyer told him quietly. "Did you know that?"

"Nah. But some day I'd like to know why they strike in the first place."

"That's one of the things that'll come out in the trial, I'm afraid. But this brother of his—he wasn't a striker. He was just a sixteen-year-old kid, bringing a couple of lunch boxes to the pickets—"

"A tall, good looking kid? Now I know why I was always tryin' to place Curly! He looks just like that kid did only he's older and tougher. But how was I to know they was only lunch boxes? I thought they was guns or somethin'. He was comin' right toward me—" Slappy stopped suddenly and stared at the lawyer.

The lawyer eyed him calmly. "It's all right. I'm on your side, you know. The boy's death won't enter into this case at all."

Slappy slumped dejectedly. "So what? They got enough to burn me and Fedder without that."

Sometimes a guy like Slappy gets a clear picture of the future, even if it's too late.

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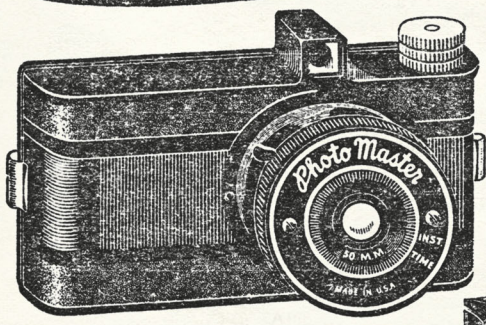

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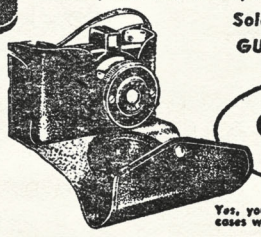

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MAYBE YOUR POSTMASTER HAS YOUR WALLET!

HAS YOUR POCKET been picked? Has some light-fingered "dip" relieved you of your billfold while you stood in a crowd? Then by all means report it to the nearest policeman, of course; and then it might pay you to call on your postmaster. He may have your missing wallet—minus its cash contents, though.

In a recent newspaper interview, a postal official in New York pointed out that, unknown to the general public, the Post Office Department plays a major part in the recovery of stolen wallets. He stated that hundreds of billfolds, which might not otherwise be returned to their owners, go back where they belong every year through the efforts of Uncle Sam's mail employes.

It was explained that pickpockets have a cute little habit of extracting money and valuables from stolen purses, then dumping the looted pocketbooks into the nearest convenient post box. In New York alone, for example, such stolen wallets turn up in post boxes at the rate of ten a day on the average.

A curious factor in pocket-picking is the weather, believe it or not. In the cold of mid-winter, dips are less likely to victimize you because you wear a topcoat or overcoat over your street clothes and it becomes difficult for a crook to get his sticky fingers into your pockets. Conversely, a continuous hot spell brings on an enormous increase in the activities of the light-fingered gentry, according to police statistics. This is because unusually warm weather makes you shed your coat and transfer your wallet to a back pocket of your trousers—where it becomes fair and easy game for a clever thief.

AS a result, the New York postal authorities state that the number of stolen and looted billfolds found in mail boxes will go as high as fifteen or twenty a day on very hot days—or whenever there are huge concentrations or masses of people, such as at parades and championship outdoor boxing matches. Postal colectors, finding these wallets in mail boxes, turn them over to the inquiry division of the Post Office, where they are inspected for possible identification of ownership. When the owner's name and address is established the property is forwarded to him. Otherwise it is held for a time, then destroyed.

It is no new stunt for dips to dispose of stolen wallets in letter boxes, according to officials. The availability of mail boxes, which are on practically every street corner, permits dips to dispose of the evidence almost instantly after the theft has been committed. Of course, some inexperienced pickpockets merely toss a stolen billfold into the gutter after looting it; but this is a dangerous practice in case a sharp-eyed cop happens to be anywhere within watching distance. Rubbish-disposal containers are likewise kept pretty much under surveillance by smart patrolmen, who watch to see if any furtive-looking individual drops a suspicious parcel that might be a wallet.

But a mail box is different. They're in constant use; everybody can walk up to them and slide something through the slot. The performance is so commonplace that dips make use of the same procedure, day after day, without arousing suspicion. So if you've been the victim of a pickpocket, better see your postmaster!

BRAZIL CURBED NAZI GANGSTERS

(*Continued from page 4*)

So frantic was the German bidding, and into such a turmoil was the South American diamond market thrown, that the Brazilian government—which was at that time still neutral—stepped in and clamped a lid on Nazi purchases.

IT was then that the Nazis began bootlegging. That is, they went into a sort of black-market arrangement. Unable to make open purchases, they offered as high as ten times a diamond's value if they could buy it secretly. But even this trick was soon stopped by Rio de Janeiro's police chief, Filinto Muller. He assigned detective squads to the job of wiping out the illicit diamond trade, within a matter of weeks eliminating it completely.

At this juncture the Germans pulled their second Chicago-mobster caper. They organized hijacking gangs, traveled to the Brazilian interior and robbed several shipments of rough diamonds which were being transported from the Minaes Geraes mines. In addition, they kidnaped a number of miners and attempted to intimidate them into supplying the Nazis with the needed stones. Brutal beatings were administered and there were several murders.

Once again the Brazilian police authorities acted swiftly. There were some eight thousand Axis nationals in the country at that time, and every single one was watched day and night—a staggering job for any force of cops, no matter how large. Yet Brazil did it, and did it with such thorough efficiency that around the first week in April, 1942, there was a round-up and a wholesale series of arrests which resulted in convictions. Hitler's diamond-buying gangsters were broken up, just as the gangster mobs had been smashed in the United States some years earlier. And the cops of Brazil thereby cut off Germany's last remaining supply of industrial diamonds.

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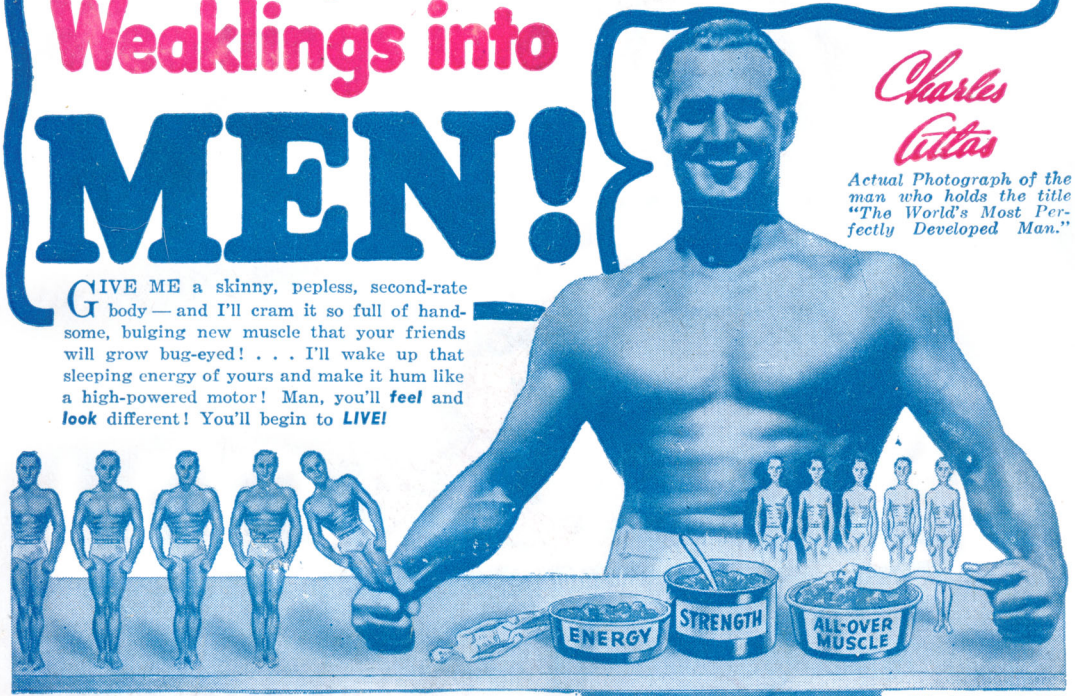

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