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DETECTIVE



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Haunt Me NO MORE

A Mystery Novel
By EDWARD RONNS

SERENADE WITH SLUGS

A Nick Ransom Novelet
By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

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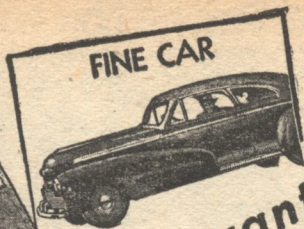
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Vol. LXIII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

DECEMBER, 1948

Featured Mystery Novelet



HAUNT ME NO MORE

By EDWARD RONNS

Washed ashore by the sea, the corpse of one of the Porter twins becomes the focal point in a baffling mystery of tangled identities!

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Two Other Complete Novelets

SERENADE WITH SLUGS Robert Leslie Bellem 54

Nothing could surprise Nick Ransom in that zany funeral home after the girl welcoming him at the door — and the corpse in the parlor!

WITH DEATH IN HIS CORNER Louis L'Amour 78

Kip Morgan wades through a battle of fists and knives when he sets out to deliver a hard-hitting knockout to his criminal foes!

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House Dick Arty Boyle knows his rackets — noisy or otherwise

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A true crime story taken from the archives of Scotland Yard

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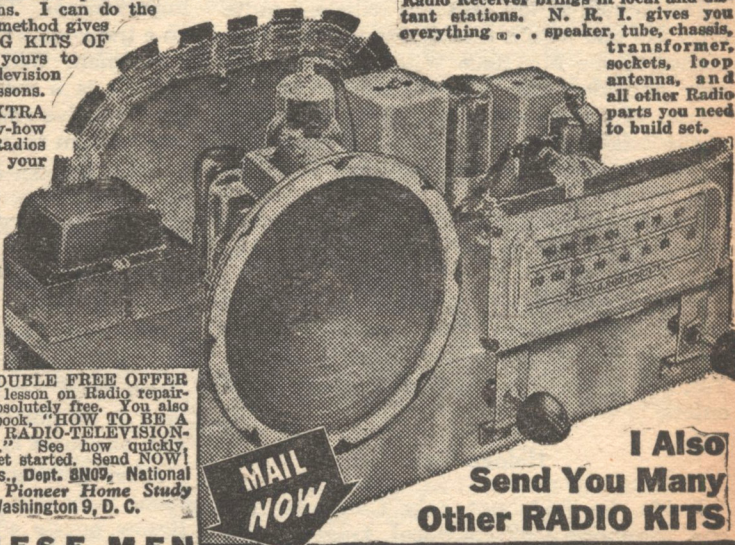
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Headquarters

GET READY to greet an old friend! We had that two-fisted, action-craving, devil-may-care private eye, Race Williams, recently on these pages in a grand yarn entitled "Not My Corpse." We understand everybody liked that. So now here he comes in **THE WRONG CORPSE**, by Carroll John Daly, next issue:

Swiftly, and with the singleness of purpose that always marks his goings and comings, Race Williams mounts the brownstone stoop of an ancient, dignified old mansion. A man's face peers through the window as Williams rings the bell. The butler opens the door slightly—there is an old-fashioned chain holding it partly ajar.

The rebuff is icy, but nevertheless quite firm. No one within that dignified old manse wishes to see Mr. Race Williams. That not only includes the alleged master of the house, Mr. Carlander, but also the heiress of the estate, Miss Janny Cort. In vain does Williams plead that the lady has sent for him.

"Close the door, Edwards," the masculine voice behind the butler says. "Tell him to go away."

Now, Race Williams is not in the habit of taking such rebuffs. Not when he has a man-sized foot and knows how to use it. Yes, sir, he kicks in the french window and enters!

Hidden Fear

Inside, he finds not only Carlander but one "Slippery Joe" Carmical, tagging himself "attorney for the estate." Williams knows him as a swindling lawyer par excellence. Also there is a big fellow named Cummings, who goes for a gun with one hand and produces handcuffs with the other. It is Cummings who realizes that it is Race

Williams they are dealing with. All bets are off!

Our pal usually gets what he goes after. This evil-acting trio send for Janny Cort. Williams is amazed at her cameolike, yet breathtaking beauty—a wilful girl, according to the papers, who likes to get a "snootful" now and then, but only in the right places. She amazes Williams by insisting on seeing him *alone*, downstairs in her "den." The girl acts as if she were suffering from a hidden fear!

In that small but distinctly feminine room, the girl tells the detective something which is as startling a revelation as he has ever heard. She is *not* Janny Cort, but only an impersonator! The real Janny is a passenger on a train—in a certain drawing-room aboard a Pullman. Williams *must* get in touch with her. It is a matter of life and death. But the detective must do something even more urgent than that.

"Give me ten minutes to get out that window and be on my way. I don't care what you tell them. Ten minutes is all I ask!"

A Blast of Gunfire

There is an ominous pounding at the door. Williams recognizes the voice of Inspector "Iron Man" Nelson. The detective stalls as long as he can. When he opens the door, the girl, of course is gone.

After getting rid of the policeman, Williams feels that much of the solution of this jigsaw puzzle will be found behind the icy, austere visage of Edwards, the butler.

Almost immediately, a good opportunity presents itself. The butler is walking down the street and invites the detective to join him in the stroll. Race Williams almost

(Continued on page 8)

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

reaches him, almost catches him by the arm.

A taxi whizzes by. A blurred, white face is seen inside. There is a searing blast of machine-gun fire and the butler, his body riddled with slugs, falls face downward into the dust of the street. Inspector Nelson, running up, says—

Hold on there, folks. You'll have to wait until next issue to get the real "inside" of all this intrigue. If you're a Race Williams fan—and who isn't—here's a breathless series of incidents in the career of our slam-bang sleuth for you!

Also get a load of this—

"Better come out to the house and see me fast," the hard, constricted voice comes over the wire. Frank Decker knows the voice. It belongs to none other than Al Champion, recently deposed political boss of the town.

And that's the start of our forthcoming novelet, LET'S HAVE SOME MURDER, by W. T. Ballard, also featured in the next issue.

The Death Desk

Rushing out to the elegant country estate, our detective, Frank Decker, of the firm of Decker and del Sigma, finds his worst fears realized. There are no servants to be seen. Naturally Decker knew that Kendell, Champion's bodyguard, no longer held that post. Champion was sitting calmly at his desk; but there was a tiny hole between his eyes. Al Champion is not only dead—but quite palpably murdered!

Reaching over to call the police, Decker notices on the desk, his own telephone number, written on a slip of paper and in a woman's hand. Later that day a woman comes to call upon the detective in his office—charming, dignified and refined. She introduces herself as Fran Champion, the dead man's daughter. She calmly announces that she knows who murdered her father. It is the man who has recently broken off his engagement to her—Tony del Sigma, Frank Decker's own partner!

You see, Decker has always been the workhorse of the firm—an ex-cop. Tony on the other hand, has been a lawyer—smooth, debonair, handsome, with a "way with wom-

(Continued on page 10)



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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 8)

en." Decker cannot understand the reason for the girl's accusation. He can understand his partner being attracted to so lovely a creature. He's more than attracted himself—he's completely fascinated.

Fifty Grand in Ice

That night, in his hilltop Los Angeles apartment, Decker is visited, and none too gently, by Kendell, Champion's ex-bodyguard—and by that spider of a man, his night-club partner of the moment, Joey Paul.

"We've got nothing against you, see," is the principal gist of their remarks. "We just want to know where's Tony and what has he done with the diamonds?"

So his smooth partner is not only accused of murder—but also of making off with fifty grand worth of ice! More than interested, Decker convinces this sinister pair that he is "leveling" in his unawareness of his partner's shenanigans. They leave.

Midnight—and a mysterious scratching at the door. Decker opens it to reveal a tired, haunted, disheveled and no longer handsome Tony del Sigma.

"Did you kill Al Champion? Where are those rocks?" snarls a sadly disillusioned ex-cop.

Well, folks—did suave and good-looking Tony commit this murder? Did he substitute those diamonds, that he was holding for Champion's ex-wife, for phony stones?

Frank Decker finds himself in a tough spot whichever way he turns. To try and save Tony will be against the wishes of the girl he knows he loves. To play the plodding, "honest cop" his friends have always known him to be and turn Tony in, will mean not only the breaking up of a successful business, but losing a staunch and trusted friend. What does Frank Decker do?

In our next issue, too, there will be another grand yarn in our "From the Archives of Scotland Yard" series. We present a bizarre poisoning case, where the culprit was so utterly unsuspected that more than half the townspeople in the little town of Hay, on the Welsh border, sprang to the gentleman's defense. The case is known as **THE UNSUSPECTED MURDER.**

(Continued on page 112)



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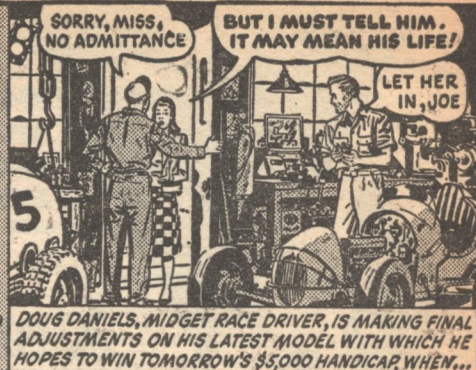
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haunt me no more

Washed ashore by the sea, the corpse of one of the Porter twins becomes the focal point in a baffling mystery of tangled identities!

by **EDWARD RONNS**

CHAPTER I

THE TOLL OF TRADITION

THERE was still a touch of March in the sea wind. It brushed daubs of white on the sparkling harbor water and now and then set the stays of the *Pallas* to singing. The yawl

tugged at her mooring, just off the Porter boat yard, as if impatient to be away for her summer's sail, and Linda Hayes, paint bucket in hand, frowned across her deck to the beach of Bar

Haven. She smoothed a lock of chestnut hair from her eyes, leaving a faint streak of white paint on her brow. She was not aware of it. She watched the gloomy little cortege of men on the rock-strewn beach, and fear reached inside her and squeezed hard.

Abruptly she abandoned brush and paint and pulled the dingy toward the point, near where the little lighthouse stood out white against the blue of the open sea. Few houses were out there, but in the opposite direction, beyond the boat yard where the New England hills were green with pine and budding sugar maple, the red roofs and the fishing docks of Bar Haven were peaceful and quiet under the springtime sun. The engine of a seiner rattled rhythmically over the water, heading out from the fish cannery dock, and a few gulls slanted tentatively after her.

Peace and quiet, Linda thought, and her young mouth was bitter. She rowed the dingy with swift, expert strokes, crossing the chop of flood tide to the beach beyond the yard. She was grateful for her dungarees and turtleneck sweater, which gave her unhampered movement, when she grounded and ran up the shingle toward the dark knot of men beyond, on the dunes. She was breathless when she topped the last rise, but not from the physical exertion; fear had left a metallic taste in the back of her mouth, and when the sea wind cut at her through the woolen sweater she shivered, but from an inner cold.

Amos Stillmeadow saw her first. Beyond the man's tall, gaunt figure, dark against the luminous sparkle of the sea, she glimpsed other townsmen gathered in the gully of a salt-water creek that followed a lonely meander to the harbor. Something dark and still was huddled on the ground. She stopped running and began to walk. Amos Stillmeadow's salty face was grave, his white hair blowing in the wind.

"Miss Hayes," he said sharply.

She paused for breath. She was trembling. "Have you found him?"

"Go back to the house," he said. "This is no place for you. What are you doing here?"

"I was painting the *Pallas*. You

didn't have any work for me, and I thought it would be a fine afternoon—" She broke it off, exasperated. "It's Danny, isn't it?"

"Perhaps," Amos said.

"It must be Danny!"

His smile was warped. He said: "Why not David?"

FEAR lived inside her. She felt ill, and only the gaunt man's calm, unsmiling face steadied her. Amos Stillmeadow had seen many a dead man in his years at sea, before he took up again the legal maritime practice he'd studied in his youth. Those were the days when Bar Haven sent its men to sea with only wind and sail to provide for them, and the whole width of the Atlantic to conquer.

The Porter house was filled with oil paintings of gallant schooners that had died on the Grand Banks, foundered on Maine reefs, or simply mouldered away in the mud of the Musquat River, their usefulness ended. An empire had been built on the brawn and bravery of men long dead, their memory obscured by the smell of diesel oil and powered draggers that now used radio-direction finders and science to help in plundering the sea.

Linda looked at Amos with blank eyes.

"David is on the Five Kings. You know that. And Danny's been gone for ever so long—"

"He's been dead for quite a while, Miss Hayes," Amos nodded. "He's rather difficult to identify." He turned her away, so that she couldn't see the dark huddle on the white sand. "Dr. Cooper says two weeks, approximately—since just before David went away, too."

"Mr. Stillmeadow, please—"

"These things must be said. The others are saying it already, back there. One of my nephews is dead, the other fled to sea."

Linda resisted his gnarled hand on her arm and twisted back to stare at the men grouped in the gully of the shallow salt water creek. A seagull screamed angrily overhead.

"It must be Danny," she whispered. "How did he—what happened to him?"



David's fist hit the big man's stomach, and it was like hitting a stone wall

"He was murdered," Amos said. His voice was flat, heavily burdened. "He was struck on the back of the head—the marks are quite evident—then shot twice. He has been in the water, as I said, perhaps two weeks. He is still wearing his wedding ring—one point for identifying the body as Danny's. On the other hand, no one has ever been able to tell Danny from David while living; it remains to be seen whether they can be identified with one twin dead."

"I could tell them apart," Linda said. She fought down the rising darkness inside her. "I've been able to tell them apart ever since I came to work for you, Mr. Stillmeadow."

"How?"

"I—I just knew," she said.

She couldn't meet the old man's faded blue eyes. She looked past him to the men at the creek, then out to sea. The seiner that had left the harbor was already out of sight. The ocean stretched without limit, the sun an aching glare on the blue water. Without warning, she turned from Amos and ran back the way she had come, as fast as she could. The soft sand clung to her moccasins, dragging her back.

She stumbled and went down, sprawling on hands and knees, and picked herself up again at once, going on. Her breath burned in her throat. Uphill from the waterfront she took the path that cut across the pine woods, circling above the inner harbor to the Porter house. Amos didn't follow. Tears stung her eyes, and she fought down angry sobs in her throat. She fell twice more before she came out on the graveled road that circled into the new spring lawn, and not until she stood before the house did she pause for breath.

ONCE she had thought the old house lovely, warm with generations of tradition steeped in the salt sea and alive with the vigor of a powerful family carrying on the ways of its ancestors. It didn't matter that David was a concert violinist and that Danny did nothing at all, while the reins of the Porter family and empire rested snugly and firmly in the rough, fisherman's hands of Uncle Amos.

But now the house was dark and ugly, perched like some bird of prey on the hilltop overlooking Bar Haven's roofs and harbor. For Linda, the charm was gone from tradition, and gracious living with the slow cycle of centuries was suddenly decadent, full of morbid evil and warped reasoning.

The big center hallway swallowed her small figure, touched with shafts of light from the big Palladian window over the white staircase. Her footsteps echoed sharply as she turned to Amos' study, sliding the doors to one side. She went straight for the telephone on her secretary desk, a miniature of Amos' massive mahogany. A car stopped outside on the gravel drive as she spoke to the operator, but she didn't turn her head.

"Boston, please. . . yes, the Porter Pier."

She listened to the operator's relay, and the receiver hummed in her ear. Footsteps clicked in the hall outside. She held her breath, and the footsteps were silent. She could hear the pounding of blood in her head. Fear came back, and she watched the closed study door with wide eyes, her young mouth tight with tension.

"Please hurry, operator," she whispered.

"Yes, ma'am. The Porter Fish Pier?"

"Yes. You have the number. . ."

The study door opened and Janet Porter came in. Janet's face was pale. It was clear from her expression that she knew what had happened down on the beach; she knew what had been found. She was a tall girl with a regal coronet of dark hair that added to her height. Her figure was lithe and slim in a gabardine spring suit, but her eyes were dark with tragedy as she looked at Linda.

"What are you doing?"

"Calling David," Linda said.

"What for?"

"He must be told," Linda said. "He must be informed of what's happened, he's got to come back—"

"No," Janet said. "Don't do that."

"But he—"

"You're Mr. Stillmeadow's secretary, but this is my house—or it was my husband's—" Janet paused and twisted

the wedding ring on her finger. Danny's ring. "I forbid you to call David."

Linda lowered the telephone, while the operator's voice rattled querulously. Her face went pale.

"But David must come back and tell them the truth!"

Janet said, "What is the truth?"

"David didn't kill Danny!" Linda flared. "You know he didn't."

"Perhaps not. For his own good, however, he must be kept away."

Linda said determinedly, "I'm going to call him, anyway. It isn't fair, not to."

THE other girl's face went cold. There were no traces of tears in her eyes. She started to say something, then turned her head as Amos Stillmeadow came into the room. The tall old man was wearing a boat captain's cloak. His white hair was thick and smooth, as if he had never been out in the wind. He crossed the room without a word and took the phone from Linda's hand. His fingers were strong on her wrist.

"Janet is quite right," he said. "David has suffered enough. A shock such as the call you propose, Miss Hayes, may thoroughly unbalance him."

"He isn't—"

"Unbalanced? Of course not."

"Then why do you say . . .?"

Amos spoke sharply. "You will please do as I ask, Miss Hayes." His face seemed to change, and lumps of muscle stood out on his clean-shaven jaw. "This is a family problem, and does not concern you. You will please go to your room."

Anger replaced her fear. She had a wild impulse to resign, to fling the job in the old man's face and tell them all what she thought. She didn't have to stay here. She could go back to Boston, get a new job with a legal firm, and forget Bar Haven and all that went with it. Then she thought of David and the anger went out of her, and when she looked at Amos and Janet, watching her, she was afraid again. Not for herself. For David. She looked down at the telephone on her desk.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I suppose I lost my head."

"Quite so," Amos nodded.

Janet said, "After all, Linda, it's a matter for the police. It's my husband who was missing, after deserting me, and I assure you that all proper steps will be taken to inquire into his death."

"Of course," Linda nodded. "I'll go to my room. I—I've been quite upset."

She went upstairs quietly, aware of Amos watching her from the study door. The house was silent. Old Pete, the cook, was inaudible in the kitchen in the back of the house; Marie, the Portuguese maid, was nowhere in sight. She crossed the upper hall with quickened steps, turned to her small room and stood for a moment with her back to the door, shivering. Sunlight flooded the casement windows. She could see through the little panes all the way down to the harbor, where the Pallas floated at her mooring fifty yards from the boat dock. She wanted to fling herself on the spool bed and sob, but she could afford no such luxury at the moment. The telephone on the bedside took her attention. She listened, but the hall was quiet. She crossed to the phone.

When she picked it up, an answering click came promptly from the extension downstairs. She started to speak, then just stood there, listening to the hum in the receiver. Someone was down there waiting for her defiance. She shivered again. The humming sound was full of unspoken menace.

Be careful, she thought. It wouldn't do if Amos discharged her. She would be of no help to David then. Already she had shown her hand too much. Both Amos and Janet would be wondering about her concern for David's safety. And Janet especially had seen too much in her eyes not to know how she felt.

She could call from town later. The thought turned her from the window, back to the door. Even as she moved, she heard the click of the door key, sliding the bolt home. She sprang for the knob, turning it angrily. The door didn't budge. She rapped sharply on it.

"Mr. Stillmeadow!"

There was no answer. She rattled the knob again. The door was sturdy oak, the lock snug, and there was no reply to her efforts. She breathed a little harder, staring at the barrier.

"Mrs. Porter!" she called.

The house was silent. Linda backed slowly toward the bed. It was incredible. They wouldn't dare keep her a prisoner. Amos was going too far. He couldn't hope to keep her silent for long. Was he trying to panic David into guilty flight? Danny was dead, murdered—but David was not responsible for it. Whatever happened, David had the right to defend himself.

She looked at the telephone and shrugged. She had to wait. The locked door wouldn't be locked forever; and whoever guarded the extension downstairs would soon go away. There would be the police, and others, visiting the house; they would have to let her out, and then she would tell, she would get word to him, at sea or wherever he was. She sat for a long time at the window, watching the day lower over the darkening sea. She thought: *Oh, David, be careful. . .*

CHAPTER II

FIVE KINGS MUTINY



HE schooner Five Kings dipped her spoon bow into a gray-green swell, hesitated, and plunged, rising with canted decks, her forefoot dripping with white foam. Her once-proud topmasts were things of the past, and in place of a cloud of white canvas she carried stubby booms and a wheelhouse aft. Guy wires and cables hummed taut with the strain of the long drag streaming behind her on the ocean bottom.

David Porter leaned on the rail and watched the red mark buoy, a half keg painted with the Five Kings' name, bobbing in the schooner's wake. The Five Kings had been making this set almost an hour now. It would soon be time to haul the bag, dripping and bulging with streaming redfish, inboard to the ice holds. To the east the sky was purpling, and there was nothing but a faint luminosity over the ocean wasteland where the sun had set. The raw wind cut through his heavy suede jacket and made him shiver. He looked down at his long hands and tapering fingers and grimaced. They were trembling, not

with the vibration of the laboring diesel in the schooner's hull, but with a shivering all their own, that never seemed to stop these days.

He turned his head as Captain Clint Fowler came out of the doghouse aft, crumpling a radio form in his meaty fist. The master of the Five Kings was a burly, red-headed giant with a ready grin and massive brawn. Under his ropy red brows his eyes were clear and intelligent, wise with the ways of land and sea. He had gone to the same university that David had attended, although five years earlier; he was thirty-five to David's recent thirty, and stood half a head taller than David's six feet, with more than fifty pounds additional weight.

"This will be the last set," he sighed, and leaned on the rail beside David's slender, dark-haired figure.

"What was the message?"

"We make port," Clint said.

"The Haven?"

"Boston."

David frowned. "How is that?"

The big man shrugged and dropped the crumpled ball of yellow paper over the rail. "Orders, Mr. Porter."

David watched the scrap of yellow paper disappear into the schooner's wake, then looked sharply at Fowler, seeking sarcasm in the other's tone. The skipper was moodily scanning sky and sea, leaning beside him with an easy familiarity that belied their positions of owner and employee.

David said, "We haven't got full holds yet. We could use two more days of dragging the Middle Ground."

"We make for Boston. Don't you want to go?"

David shrugged.

"How do you feel?" Clint persisted.

"No more jitters?"

David looked at his hands. "Not too much."

"Nothing like this sea air to put you on your feet again, David. You were in bad shape when your uncle first put you aboard."

"Nobody put me aboard," David said sharply. "It was my own idea."

CLINT laughed. "Anyway, there's no women out here. You ain't much

like Danny. He'd never stay away from land and skirts for two weeks running. For twins, you fellows look alike, but Danny, well . . ."

"Danny's all right."

"I didn't say he wasn't. I guess Janet Stone thought so, too. Funny thing, David. I always figured she was crazy about you."

"I didn't notice," David said.

"Well, Danny did. Maybe that's your trouble. Maybe that's why it hit you so hard, her marrying your brother. Kinda messed up your concert tour, didn't it?"

"There will be others," David said.

"Am I talking too much?" Clint grinned.

"Yes."

"Well," Clint said, straightening. "A couple more weeks at sea, and you'll be all right."

David turned. In the queer, half-light of evening, his face was sharply classical, finely chiseled in profile, cold and hard. The wind looped his dark, thick hair over his brow.

"We're going back to Bar Haven, Clint. Right now."

"We're going to Boston," Clint said. "Your Uncle Amos said—"

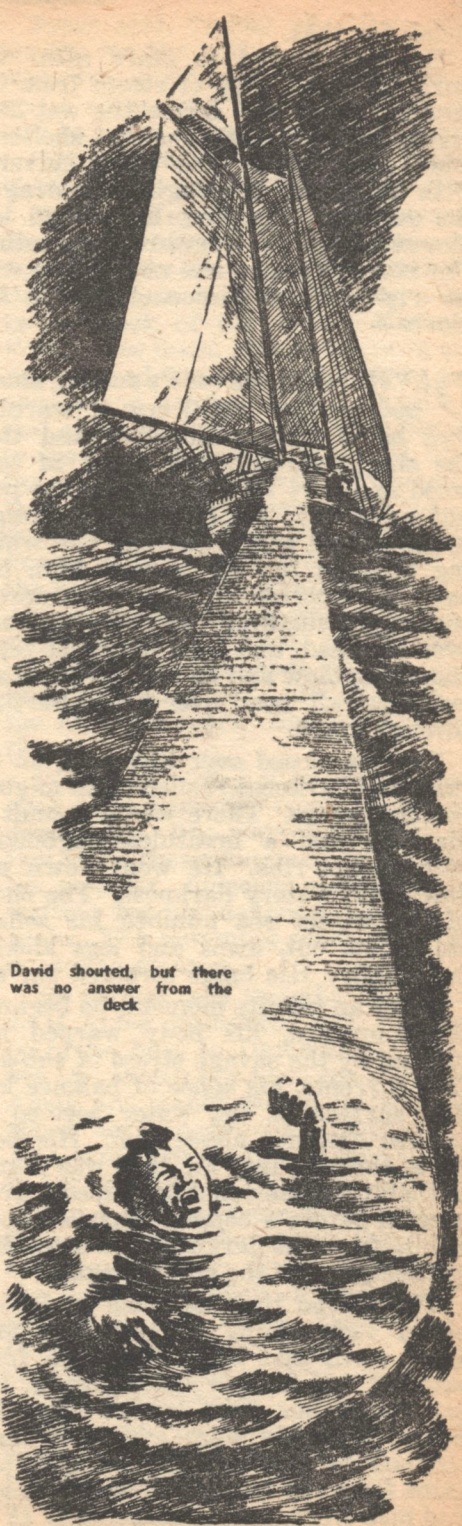
"This is my ship, Clint. You take orders from me."

The red-headed man looked angry. His massive hands clung to the rail, and he pursed his mouth, staring down at the heaving seas.

"Aye, aye," he shrugged.

He shoved away from the rail and a moment later his voice lashed out above the eternal muttering of the sea, making the crew jump. The donkey engine coughed and settled down to its rattling rhythm. The booms creaked and groaned, and grizzled crewmen clumped aft in their cowhide boots to ease the cables off the quarter bitts.

David ignored the activity, visualizing the great net bag that trawled the ocean floor, filled to bursting with thousands of pounds of fish. He looked at his hands again. They had stopped trembling. With his determination to return to Bar Haven, some of the nightmare that clouded his mind was slowly being dispelled, and perhaps he had Clint's strangely patronizing attitude to



David shouted, but there was no answer from the deck

thank for that.

He half turned to stare after the burly giant. A wisp of steam from the donkey engine slid across the wet deck and around the doghouse that sheltered wheel and radio. The boom shivered with the strain of bringing the drag to the surface. The Five Kings had lost almost all of her forward momentum. Her storm trysail—she was still in winter rig—flapped disconsolately in the gloom—

DAVID heard the man's sudden shout, and another shrill cry of warning that burst from amidships—and then the sharp, ear-splitting crack of torn wood and wire as the cable on the port bitt gave way. He had only a glimpse of the parted wires, slashing and whirling through the air toward him, like half a hundred broken, murderous snakes. Something whirled viciously over his head, and then his chest felt a slamming blow and he was thrown back over the rail, head over heels, hurtling through space.

The sea closed over him with an icy grip, and darkness rushed in on mighty, roaring wings. There was a tumult in his ears and a breathless, agonizing pain in his ribs. He went down and down into watery darkness. The shock of the winter sea numbed his senses. He lashed out, arms and legs kicking frantically. His lungs strained for air.

After an infinite moment, he began to shoot upward, his body warped and twisted by the savage stress of sub-surface currents, his sense of balance lost. The surface of the water seemed an endless distance above him. His head burst through into air that was warmer than the water, and he gulped a great lungful before a comber smashed down at him from the darkness and drove him tumbling below the surface again.

The second time he came up he had better luck, rising on the flank of a great swell that lifted him high for a moment and he saw the schooner, trysail aback, her stern toward him. The booms and nets were a tangled mess, touched by the last of the light that came from the west. The drag was lost, and men were cutting desperately at the confusion on her deck. No one seemed

to be aware of him. He shouted, and a wall of white smothered him, and he tasted salt in his throat as he went under again.

The third time he came up he could see nothing but the fast-settling night. The schooner was gone. He twisted frantically, sighted her behind him, and then something grazed his shoulder and his hand shot out, fingers clutching hard. It was part of the cable that still trailed from the vessel's stern. He clung to it, then began hauling himself hand over hand toward the Five Kings.

He shouted, but there was no answer from the deck. He swallowed water and shouted again. His fingers fast lost their grip on the trailing cable. He couldn't go on. He was done for. His ribs ached savagely, and a queer numbness traveled up his body, freezing his legs. He shouted a third time, and then a blaze of light suddenly shot over the dark water, swinging questioningly. He raised one arm and the light touched him, swept by, returned. Someone's answering hail reached him faintly as he let go and sank down into deep, quiet darkness. . . .

THE darkness lasted a long time. Occasionally the bleak passage of hours was shot through with gray light and the muttering wash of the sea, the murmur of men's voices and the taste of hot soup forced at regular intervals down his throat. He was content to lie still and not move or think about anything. His ribs seemed to ache a little less than before, and perhaps, he speculated, they were not broken. He wasn't worried about his ribs. It occurred to him that he might have hurt his hands and ruined his career, but he didn't bother to examine them even after he thought about it.

He watched the light that shone steadily from the brass gimbals overhead. He watched it for many minutes, and the light didn't move or sway, and the observation made him frown. The Five Kings was quiet. They were in port. He turned his head and saw that he was in the main cabin aft, in the port bunk. This cabin was all that remained of the Five King's former grandeur. A heavy mahogany chart table was bolted

to the deck, with a pot-bellied stove, cold now, and shining brass fittings everywhere, with carved dolphins adorning the corners of the cabin. The door was closed, and he was alone.

He sat up. Pain shot through him and he groaned, but he didn't lie back again. Moving with care, biting down on the pain, he examined the great mottled bruises on his right side. There was no tape or cast, so no ribs were broken, he concluded. That was good. He leaned back on his elbows, perspiring a little. The vessel was quiet, except for a rattle of water somewhere and a brief bumping along the hull. They were tied up to a pier, apparently deserted.

After a while he slid his legs off the bunk and stood up. The deck heaved under him and he grabbed for the table. He could see nothing through the glass. He found his boots and slid his stockinged feet into them slowly. Steps sounded beyond the cabin door. He went forward and tried the knob. It was locked.

"Hey!" he called.

The footsteps paused, hesitated, then came back. The lock clicked and Clint Fowler came in, ducking to clear the low overhead. His teeth gleamed white with his smile. He was wearing shore clothes, a neat blue suit and a dark felt hat and highly polished black oxfords. His weathered face looked ruddy. He shut the door with care behind him, his huge bulk crowding the cabin.

"Welcome back to the land of the living," he said.

"I'm all right," David said. "What's going on here?"

"Nothing. Maybe everything. Sit down and relax, David. You had a narrow one, this time."

"I know. Where are we?"

"Boston."

"I told you to make for Bar Haven."

CLINT shrugged. His shoulders were massive in the blue suit, which looked too small for his giant frame. He took off his hat and scrubbed his short red hair. His pale blue eyes were sober, regarding David with almost clinical interest.

David stood up again. "I'm getting

out of here."

"No," Clint Fowler said. "I've got some news for you."

"News?"

"About your brother Danny."

David said, "Go ahead. Tell it."

"Don't you know what it is?" Clint asked casually.

"How would I know?"

Clint said, "Well, I thought maybe you knew he was dead. He's been killed, David. Two weeks ago, it happened. He didn't run out on Janet. Somebody killed him."

David's face went white. He stared at Clint in silence, his mouth taut. He shivered suddenly. He wanted to sit down. He couldn't stand on his feet. He leaned on the table and didn't sit down.

"You mean Danny was murdered?" he whispered.

"Your Uncle Amos thinks you'd best stay at sea with me until he gets things squared away with the law."

"Who did it?" David asked.

Clint said, "I guess your Uncle Amos thinks you did it."

"I?"

"That's right."

"Why me? Why should I kill Danny?"

"You could answer that one, David."

"Your crazy. You act as if you were sure that I did it."

"I'm just taking orders—from Mr. Stillmeadow. He seems to be running things."

"Yes," David said. "He does."

He leaned on the table, fighting illness inside him. The overhead lamp cast a long, massive shadow from where Clint stood, watching him. The big man's face gave away nothing at all. David pushed back his hair and took a deep breath. It hurt, deep inside his chest, when he did that. The corners of his mouth were white.

"Clint, I'm getting out of here. I'm going home."

Fowler moved to the door. "I'm sorry, David. You're sick, you've had a nasty dunk in the sea. We lost all our gear, by the way, in that accident. But you relax. Stay here. I'll look out for you, David. I'll be back soon."

"Let me out," David said.

"I can't."

David started for the door. Clint turned toward him, his head lowered, bringing his shoulders hunched a little forward. He barred David's way. David paused in front of him and swung his right. The big man ducked, knocked his blow aside, and David staggered off balance. The cabin reeled around him. Clint put a big hand on his chest and pushed. David staggered back to the bunk.

"We're friends, David," the big man grinned. "You aren't well. Don't make me hit you." Clint opened the cabin door and stood before it. "It's for your own good. You can fire me later, if you feel like it, but just now I don't think you're competent to give me orders. Later, maybe. But not now."

David leaned against the bunk and waited for the cabin to stop swaying. His breathing sounded heavy in the narrow room.

"All right," he said. "Have it your way."

The door closed after the big man. The key rattled. David didn't move. He listened to Clint's footsteps on deck a moment later. Then he sat down on the edge of the bunk. He shivered. Part of himself felt as dead as his twin brother Danny....

HIS watch had stopped. When he became aware of it he got up and checked it with the chronometer on the wall. Two in the morning. Evidently the vessel's ice holds had been emptied during the day, for there was no activity from the crew. He paced the cabin restlessly, feeling better every minute, anger smouldering inside him. He tried the door, but it was tightly secured.

After a while he went back to the bunk and stared for a long time at the cabin floor. Then he suddenly laughed and crossed to the big chart table in the middle of the room. The outline of a narrow hatch to the bilges was faintly visible. He lifted it, dismissing the pain that tore at his bruised muscles as the trap came up. There was more pain when he lowered himself, inch by inch, into the yawning darkness below.

He needed no light. He knew the schooner as well as he knew the family house in Bar Haven. He closed the

hatch after him, the better to confound Clint later, then worked his way through noisome darkness that smelled of bilge water, fish, and old salt-eaten timbers. Forward was the engine room, and he groped blindly along the bulkhead for the opening. Dim light from a single lamp over the diesel suddenly bathed him in comparative radiance. He went up the ladder swiftly, found his way amidships, and five minutes later cautiously poked his head above deck.

Fog blanketed Boston Harbor. The Five Kings floated securely at her dock. The beacon atop the Custom House was a faint finger striving to pierce the night gloom. The damp air bit at him, and he shivered. There was a light in the doghouse aft, but no sign of a deck watch. Asleep, probably. David hesitated, then turned to the stern on silent feet.

There was no alarm.

Beyond the open fish holds, waiting for a new tonnage of ice, the booms and galluses of the drag were still a confused tangle of torn rigging, lacerated wood, and heaped and twisted wire. He frowned and skirted the wheelhouse. Someone was asleep in there, snoring heavily. He stepped with care to the port quarter bitt, and stood where he had been standing when the gear parted. He frowned again and looked over the side at the sleek, oily harbor water. A tug hooted somewhere out toward Deer Island. Fog moved in thick, greasy tendrils through the wet darkness.

Wire lay heaped at his feet, the cable end that had knocked him overboard. The torn and twisted metal gleamed whitely in the night. He squatted and stared at the neat severance, pinched as if by a pair of cutting pliers for two-thirds of the cable's diameter. His eyes were startled, and he didn't move. The watch in the doghouse still snored. The tug's hooting came fainter from the darkness of the harbor.

He shuddered and stood up. In another minute he reached the gangway and was running toward the watchman's cabin at the end of the pier, toward the safety and security of light and a telephone.

CHAPTER III

HONOR THE LAW



TWELVE hours later David finished showering and stood buttoning a fresh white shirt over his lean shoulders. Spring sunshine flooded the hotel bathroom, and the window overlooking the Common and the State House gave him a panorama of a fine day. Traffic hummed softly on Tremont Street, far below. He looked at himself with some satisfaction. He no longer had the jitters. No more shadow-boxing, he thought. The knowledge erased the harassed look from his eyes and put his mind back on an even keel. There were many things to be done, but he knew what they were now, and how they should be done. Beyond that, the future would care for itself.

His ribs no longer troubled him. There was fresh tape over his bruised muscles, professionally attended by the hotel physician. He knotted his necktie and went into the next room.

Linda sat in a chair by the window, waiting for him. Her chestnut hair was touched with gold by the sunshine that poured in from outside. Her blue eyes smiled at him. She looked small and trim in a navy suit, with a little round hat perched on the back of her head and a black shoulder bag resting in her lap. Her face was pale, but her smile lighted up warmly.

"Now you look human, David."

"I feel human, too," he said. "Thanks for bringing my clothes from the Haven. I thought I'd have to hitch a ride back."

"I wanted to see you, anyway, before you went back," Linda said. Her eyes were shadowed. She played with the gold catch of her shoulder bag. "David, listen to me. They don't want you to come back."

"I know that," he said quietly.

"They—Amos, anyway—went so far as to lock me in my room last night, to prevent my reaching you to tell you about Danny. He apologized this morning and said he merely wanted to exercise the utmost care, to prevent the

police from jumping to what he called inappropriate conclusions." Her voice was wry.

David said, "Uncle Amos has taken a lot into his own hands. He thinks I did it, doesn't he?"

"Yes," Linda said.

"And Janet?"

Linda looked away again. "I don't know. She wants to see you. She—well, she's taken Danny's death quite calmly."

"Just why is everybody so sure I'm guilty?"

"I'm not sure. These are only my thoughts, David, and I'm likely to be wrong about it. But they seem to suspect your breakdown—your sudden cancellation of the concert tour after Danny and Janet eloped, and they connect the time of Danny's death with the time you went to sea with Clint Fowler. They're also talking about a quarrel you had with Danny, and how you told some people you'd never see him again. Did you really say that?"

"Yes," David nodded.

Linda studied her gloved hands. "Then, of course, everybody says you were in love with Janet and jealous of Danny. Are you in love with her, David?"

"I was, then. At least, I thought so."

"But now?"

"Don't ask me," he said.

"I want to know, David. It's all right with me. Just make it the truth, that's all."

"I don't know," he said. "I'm all mixed up."

"But you're going back?"

"Of course."

David shrugged into a rough tweed jacket and studied a railroad time-table that Linda had brought. There would be a train in an hour, time enough for a bite to eat. He turned back to her, and she looked at him and shivered.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I'm afraid," she said. "Things have changed in Bar Haven. Everything is different. Your Uncle Amos—well, he frightens me."

"Me, too," David said grimly.

"Please be careful!"

"I will be," he said. "I've been warned. Somebody tried to kill me last

night, at sea. I don't know who cut that cable—maybe Clint, or maybe any one of the twenty men in the crew, acting on orders from Bar Haven. I wasn't alert at the time."

Linda was shocked. "But Clint's your friend! I always thought—well, you always sail together in the summer, you race the Pallas against his Gull, and you and he always seemed—"

"I know all that," David said. "But I don't know now who is my friend and who is an enemy. There's a lot at stake, Linda."

"I'm your friend," she said quietly.

"I know that." He picked up his hat and the suitcase and smiled. "Let's go."

AMOS STILLMEADOW stood with his back to the fire, his bony hands clasped behind his back. His thick white hair was carefully brushed, and there was an air of competent command in his gaunt face as he turned toward the others in the Porter library. It was night again.

"You've met the sheriff, David. Sam Peterson."

David nodded. Sam was a short, mild man with sandy hair, a perpetual cowlick, and a round bland face. His blue eyes were intelligent. His hands moved in a limp gesture.

"Smart thing you did, coming back," he said.

David was silent. Amos said, "I sent for him, of course. The town is full of ridiculous suspicions." He looked at David and met a tolerant smile. "I shall expect you to get to the bottom of young Danny's death as soon as it is humanly possible, Sam."

"That's why I been waiting for David," Peterson said. "Far as we know, he and Danny walked off from here the same day. We don't hear from Danny at all; you tell me now that David's been on the Five Kings, fishing with Clint Fowler. We can check that, all right. The main thing is to find out what happened the day the twins disappeared."

"Nothing happened, as far as I know," David said. "I took a site on the Five Kings, that's all."

"And cancelled your concert tour."

"That was my privilege."

"And quarreled with Danny over Janet."

"You are assuming too much on rumor," Amos put in. The fire crackled softly behind him. Beyond the tall windows, the harbor lights winked against the dark background of the night. Although the day had been warm, the sea breeze was blustery, and there was a constant murmuring in the trees surrounding the hilltop house.

Sam's voice sharpened. "I'm assuming nothing that can't be verified with witnesses. I got to look at all the facts. We know Danny married Janet mighty suddenly, and David didn't like it a bit. And we know that Danny and Janet had a mighty big quarrel of their own, four days after they were married. The fifth day, we figure it, he was killed and David lit out for sea. That's the way it looks." He spread his hands. "Unless, of course, you figure that Janet did it, herself."

"No," David said sharply.

"Well, what did she marry Danny for?"

"Why not?"

"She was in love with you. She still is, ain't she?"

Amos said, "She had nothing to gain by such a terrible act."

"No? How much you figure each of the twins is worth, counting the Porter fleet, waterfront properties, and investments?"

"I couldn't say off-hand," Amos said.

"Let's have an estimate, then."

Amos shrugged. "A million each. They inherited when they were thirty, six months ago, but they have permitted me to run the estate as originally arranged in their mother's will. That is a rough estimate, of course."

"It's good enough for me," Sam said. "Two million, all told — and Janet's worth one of the million now, as Danny's legal heir." The sheriff pointed a finger at Amos Stillmeadow's stiff figure. "But it goes deeper and dirtier than that. You know what I'm thinkin' of, Amos. They've been twins in the Porter family before, and two generations ago just about the same thing happened. Stark killed his brother Stephen for the family inheritance."

"You've been digging up old his-

tory," Amos said mildly.

"I've been considering trends and traits," Sam said.

"You're being ridiculous."

"I'm looking at it from all angles. What happened once could happen again."

"Daniel died at the hands of a vagrant," Amos said.

Sam shrugged. "I hope that's the way it was."

"But you don't believe it?"

"No."

David said, "Then what are you going to do?"

"Nothing," said Peterson. "Not just yet."

Amos Stillmeadow looked at David and sighed. "Sam, I'll walk with you to your car."

PETERSON looked angry. "I can find it alone. I'd just like to add one thing. The Porter family practically built Bar Haven. I admit that, and it's been a fine and respected family, for the most part. But the law says everybody is entitled to a fair and equal shake, and by the same token, I'm handling the case the same as if you were Joe Doakes in a shack on the waterfront, trappin' lobsters for a living. I don't like to be intimidated and I ain't going to be bribed. So now you know how I stand, Amos. You can bust me at the next election, if you feel like it—I know how you run this town and county—but the election is a long way off, and I'll get Danny's murderer long before then."

It was a long speech for Sam, and he seemed out of breath and confused when he was through. But his pale

eyes were determined as he fumbled for his hat and headed for the door.

"Very commendable," Amos Stillmeadow said. "But like most small people in sudden positions of authority, you seem prepared to abuse it."

David said, "Sam's within his rights, Uncle Amos. There's no point in antagonizing him any further."

Sam said, "Well, that's the way I feel. I ain't impressed and I ain't scared, being called up here like an errand boy to face the almighty Porters. Good night."

"Good night," David said.

He followed the small man into the outer hall, but Sam didn't turn around. The front door slammed after him. David's mouth drooped. He took a deep breath and looked down at his hands. They were shaking a little. He lit a cigarette and started for the wide, curving staircase to the second floor. Amos Stillmeadow came out of the library behind him. "David?"

He paused but didn't retrace his steps. "Yes."

"Have you seen Janet yet?"

"No."

"She's waiting for you in the music room."

"I know."

"Be kind to her, my boy."

David laughed harshly. He started up the stairs, then paused. "What are you doing about Linda Hayes?"

"Nothing, David. She acted in your best interests."

"If you discharge her, I'll hire her myself, you know."

"She is a very competent secretary."

[Turn page]

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I have no intention of discharging her, David."

"I'm glad to hear that," David said.

He went on upstairs. He put out his cigarette in a tray that stood on the hall table. His hands were still shaking. He looked at his thin, tanned face in the mirror over the table. He looked frightened. He thrust his hands in his pockets and turned toward his studio. Outside of Linda's door he paused, then shrugged and went on. The house was quiet. A nautical clock chimed four times, and he paused again to look at a marine oil on the corridor wall. It showed his yawl Pallas rounding a buoy, and a sloop on a long reach coming up fast—Clint Fowler's Gull. The scene steadied him a little. He went into the music room.

JANET was waiting for him, turning eagerly from the stand in the bay window, her hands going out to reach for his. She wore a black suit with a white tooled leather belt around her slim waist. Her face was pale. Her dark hair lay in soft, shimmering waves around her shoulders.

He closed the door behind him and she came quickly into his arms. He could feel her trembling as he held her. She looked up at him, but he didn't kiss her. He moved her gently away.

"Don't do that," he said.

"I can't help it, David. I'm so glad to see you. I was so frightened. I thought you weren't coming back."

He said roughly, "You knew I was coming back. That's not what frightened you."

"Well, there was Danny, of course." She looked at him along the line of her lashes as she paused. Her eyes were green and clear, smiling at him with secrets all their own. She said, "But let's not talk about Danny now."

"Who killed him?"

"I don't know, darling, I—"

"Was it Amos?"

"I'm not sure."

"Or you?"

"David!"

"I have to ask," he said. "I intend to find out."

She leaned toward him again. The room was small, very quiet, lined with

his books, furnished with his piano and deep, comfortable chairs and soft lamps. A record player stood in one corner, between shelves of albums.

"Do you love me, David?" she asked.

"No."

"Tell me the truth, David."

His voice was harsh. "Why did you marry him?"

"I can't answer that."

"You can't? Or you won't?"

"I prefer not to. It would do no good."

"Why did you quarrel with him?"

"I will not speak of it now, David. Now I can think only of you, and that you love me."

"I don't," he said. "I thought I did, but I don't."

"You know that I love you, don't you?"

He didn't answer. He wanted to get out of the room. She took his silence for acquiescence and came toward him again, her hands on his shoulders, twining around his neck. Her lips were soft and warm on his. There was a scent of jasmine in her dark hair. David lifted his head and looked over her shoulder as the door opened. Linda stood there, watching with startled eyes as Janet clung to him.

Her lips moved soundlessly a moment, before she spoke.

"I'm sorry," she said.

She turned and shut the door firmly behind her again. Janet took her arms from around his neck and laughed softly.

"She's shocked."

David felt sudden anger. "Let me go."

"No, David, you belong to me, you always have!"

He forced her wrists away from him. She withdrew a step, her breathing suddenly heavy, her anger matching his. He smiled without humor.

"I'll have to explain."

He turned to the corridor door, but Janet didn't follow. Linda wasn't in sight. Leaning over the balustrade over the center hallway, he saw that it was deserted.

He went back to her room and knocked softly on her door. There was no answer.

LINDA waited until the last knock ended and David's steps faded down the corridor. She scarcely breathed, standing in the darkness of her room, until she was sure she was alone and undisturbed. After a moment she heard Janet come from David's music room. Linda didn't move. She thought: *I must not cry. I must not be afraid. If I cry or give way to fear then the danger will be greater.*

Through the window she could see Lookout Cottage on the outer edge of the hill. Originally a gatekeeper's lodge, the little vineclad house had stood empty until Danny and Janet moved into it for the four brief days of their married life. Linda stared out of her dark window and fought down the doubts that tormented her. There was only one way to answer the hideous question that had risen in the last few minutes.

The hallway was empty when she looked out. From Amos' study in the front of the house came the mutter of men's voices, carrying an undertone of bitter anger. She thought she recognized David's voice, but she wasn't sure. From the table in the hallway she took a flashlight and went quickly down the servant's stairs in the back to the pantry. The rush of running water in the kitchen warned her, but too late, as she pushed through the swinging door into bright light. Old Pete, the cook, turned and stared at her sudden appearance. He was a stout, wheezy old man with a fringe of gray hair like a halo around his naked, freckled scalp. His belly looked enormous, wrapped in a chef's apron. He waved a wet hand at her.

"Evening, Miss Hayes. Have some coffee? Fresh made!"

"No, thank you, Pete."

"You going out now?" Pete looked at the brass-trimmed clock on the kitchen wall. "You going out alone?"

"Just for a short walk. I'll be all right."

"It's chilly out. You ought to get a sweater," the fat man said. "Whole danged house is chilly since David got killed."

"David?" she asked sharply.

Pete was flustered. "Meant to say

Danny, Miss Hayes. Sorry. Never could keep them twins apart, even after all these years. I miss David's fiddle playing, y'see."

She swallowed a sudden pain in her throat. "We all do."

She turned quickly to the back door and stepped out into windy darkness. Surf muttered at the foot of the cliffs on the far side of the hill, and the sea wind thrashed in the shrubbery. It was darker than she had thought. She turned her back resolutely on the lights of the town and strode briskly down the slope toward Lookout Cottage. She didn't use her flashlight. Once she looked back at the big square house behind her, and a light winked out in an upstairs window as she turned. She went on to the dark outline of the cottage that nested under the pines ahead.

The cottage had a dutch door, with an antique black thumb latch. It wasn't locked. She paused on the red flagstone steps and listened. There was no sound but the wind and the sea. No one had followed her that she could see. The cottage windows shimmered blankly in the pressure of the wind. She took a deep breath and pushed the door all the way open and stepped inside.

The big, pine-paneled living room felt warm and stuffy. Dim light filtered through the picture window that faced the sea, touching the fieldstone fireplace, the ship's wheel mounted in the opposite bay, and the little gallery that flanked the wall of the hearth. It was quiet in here. Linda closed the door and the darkness crouched a little closer, and she snapped on the flashlight, turning the beam in all the corners of the silent room.

SHE didn't know what she hoped to find here. The place seemed desolate, as if some life had recently gone out of it. Normally it was used only for summer barbecues and occasional guests, and it had just stood empty through the bleak New England winter, except for the four days of Danny's marriage to Janet Stone. She wished she knew more about Janet. She knew that she came from a neighboring family almost as long in tradition as the Porters, but the men folk had all been

lost at sea in recent years. Janet had grown up with the twins, Danny and David, and the town had always expected her to marry one or the other—David, everybody thought, until the startling elopement two weeks ago...

A sound from the gallery turned her light on the stairs with nervous haste. There was nothing to see. Then the quick scrabbling of a squirrel's paws scampering on the roof caused her to smile wryly. She turned to the steps and the bedrooms beyond.

There were two bedrooms and a bath on the upper floor, and she looked briefly in each before returning to what had obviously been the honeymooner's selection as a bridal chamber. A thin film of dust on everything testified to its complete desertion following Danny's disappearance. No one had been up here since.

Some of Janet's personal things, such as perfume bottles and toilet accessories, were still on the antique dresser, and a filmy nightgown hung in the cedar-scented closet beside Danny's coat. But nothing else. Linda turned away with an impatient gesture of defeat—and her heel caught on something just inside the closet door, crunching on a little heap of splintered wood. She lowered the flashlight quickly, then stood still, her eyes puzzled, her face queerly frozen and still.

She had stepped on a broken violin that someone had thrown carelessly into the closet. One of David's violins. The strings were snapped, and the finely polished wood was splintered as if by a savage heel, over and over again. Linda felt a sense of desecration as she stared at the little ruin. Some of her fear returned in a tight wave. There was something important about that broken violin, something tragic and terrifying. She picked it up with slow fingers and put it down on the bed.

The broken violin was not her major discovery, however. She found the marriage license five minutes later, while rummaging through the little desk that stood by the window. She had debated for several moments whether to invade the desk's privacy, then opened it and filtered through Janet's scented writing paper to find the certificate in

its manila envelope. It lay in one corner of the shallow drawer, and she was about to put it aside when a thought struck her and she took it back to the bed to scan it more closely under the light.

They had been married in Littleboro, on April 9th, by a minister named Peabody. The signatures of the minister and witnesses were unmistakably authentic. It was when she looked at the names of the bridal couple that the breath went out of her and dark terror rose up to engulf her.

The bride's name, Janet Stone, was perfectly normal. But the groom's name was not Danny's.

The groom was David Porter.

CHAPTER IV

LOOKOUT COTTAGE



HE didn't know how long she stood there, trying to absorb this new information. It didn't make sense. She didn't believe it. Panic clawed at her mind, and her memory whirled like a shifting kaleidoscope, bringing back Amos' old questions about the identity of the body, and his reluctance to have David return. And old Pete's slip of the tongue just now, referring to the dead brother as David, not Danny. Or was it a slip? She didn't know, and she felt cold suddenly, aware of a chill damp wind blowing through her, through the little house...

Through the house. The front door was open.

She doused the light at once and stood still, not breathing, all her senses straining through the darkness. From downstairs came a sharp click and then a soft footfall. She held the flashlight so tightly that her fingers ached. The sea wind stopped blowing through the house, and she knew that the front door was closed again. Suddenly she felt as if the room she was in was a trap, without an exit. She felt suffocated. She wanted to run, but she forced herself to stand still for another moment before moving.

The hall to the gallery overlooking

the lower living room was in deep, dangerous darkness. She moved without sound, a few steps at a time, careful of each step. At the rail she paused. A scratching noise came from the well of darkness below. She held her breath. Then a match flared with the explosive effect of a bomb.

She looked down at a disembodied face and head, at knotty fingers holding the match against the blackness.

"Mr. Stillmeadow?" she whispered.

His craggy, white-maned head started with surprise. The match jumped from his fingers and died. Darkness rushed in again. She ran quickly down the stairs, pausing at the bottom. She didn't want to be caught up above, without means of escape. Better to face him here, where with luck she might—

"Miss Hayes!"

"Yes, sir," she whispered to the darkness.

A match, then a lamp flared, bringing the room back into recognizable reality. Amos Stillmeadow turned from the table where he had set the lamp and faced her. His eyes were inscrutable, watching her, and his mouth was a harsh line across his face, a gash of irritation, anger and fear.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded softly.

SHE couldn't think of a plausible excuse. She moved from the stairs to the fireplace and stood with her back to it, her chin tilted slightly in defiance. The table lamp cast a dim circle of radiance around her. The corners of the room were in darkness.

"You know what I'm doing," she told him. Her words were pitched just above a whisper, trembling on the edge of hysteria. "I was trying to answer some of the questions you've raised."

"What questions?"

In the momentary silence before her reply, she heard the squirrel scamper back over the roof. She said, "I found one of David's violins here. And the marriage license. Have you seen Janet's marriage certificate, Mr. Stillmeadow?"

"Why should I?"

She said, "Because she didn't marry Danny! She married David!" She wanted to scream it at him, but her

voice sounded flat in her ears. His thick white brows went up on wings of surprise. "It's true," she said. "David's name is on the certificate."

"Indeed."

"And I've been asking myself which one is dead, Mr. Stillmeadow—and which is a murderer. Do you know the answer?"

He said harshly, "How does it concern you, Miss Hayes?"

"Because I love David," she said.

"Does he know that?"

"Of course not."

"Does he love you?"

"I don't know," she said.

He moved toward her, his broad old shoulders hunched a little in a belligerent pose of power. Lamplight shone on his thick white hair. He was wearing his boat cloak again, with the fine black-braided frogs holding it closed at his throat.

"What are you thinking of?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she whispered. "I'm frightened. Don't come any closer, please."

"I won't hurt you," he said.

"I'm all confused," she said helplessly. "Which one is alive? Is it Danny? Or is it David? Which one was killed, and which one went to sea? I can't tell any more. I thought I knew, but now I'm not sure about anything."

"You're upset," Amos said. "Let me take you home."

She shook her head mutely and backed to the fireplace as he advanced another step toward her.

"It is David who came back from Boston with you," he said.

"How do you know?" she flung at him. "Why doesn't he play the violin any more? Why did Pete say David was dead? Why did you ask me which one was dead when you first found the body in the creek?"

"Please," he said. "Miss Hayes—"

She felt breathless. "Janet knows! She married Danny, but she's not in mourning, is she? And I just saw her in his arms, kissing him! *What's happened to David?*"

"David is in the house. He has retired." Amos' voice was suddenly deep, menacing. "Don't ever think otherwise."

my child. . . ."

"Don't touch me!" she whispered.

His figure was tall, overwhelming her, his shadow across her as she backed away. Her foot kicked the poker stand and she snatched one of the iron rods, whirling to face him as he lunged for her. She had no time to bring the weapon more than halfway up before he was upon her, his bony hands grappling for her wrist, his fingers digging with harsh cruelty into her shoulder, twisting her backward, forcing her to drop the poker.

He was strong, far stronger than she had suspected. She felt herself being forced back and down. She tried to raise the poker once more, but he twisted agonizingly, and a tide of darkness welled up over her. Through the roaring in her ears she heard his voice, shaking with fury.

"Don't ever say that again! Do you hear? Don't even think it! That man in the house is David Porter, and Daniel is dead. It's David who came back!"

She tried to nod, but panic twisted her thoughts and distorted her senses. She thought she heard the door open, and she thought she heard quick footsteps behind Amos' brutal body, then came Janet's cool, surprised voice, winging questions. She didn't care. Darkness lapped around her in an increasing tide, and for the first time in her life, she fainted.

DAVID took the breakfast tray from Pete, the cook, winked at Marie, and carried it up to Linda's room. It was ten o'clock the following morning. The day was warm. Sky and sea were a clear, crystalline blue. He walked lightly down the hall, wearing old white ducks and a green singlet. At Linda's door he knocked, and when she replied he went inside, smiling. "Good morning."

She looked lovely, sitting in the spool bed, wearing her bedjacket. Her windows opened on the harbor side of the house and were framed with lilacs. She looked pale, and her eyes met his with sober questions. She didn't return his smile.

"I won't ask you how you slept," he said. "Doc Cooper gave you a double sedative last night and I checked almost

hourly. You slept like a log, Linda. How do you feel now?"

"Foolish," she said. "It was silly of me to faint."

David sat on the edge of the bed, meeting her grave gray eyes. She looked away from him after a moment, and he chuckled.

"You gave Uncle Amos quite a scare when you lifted that poker and took after him with it."

"I lost my head," she said quietly. "I thought he was going to hurt me. I was frightened."

"Why?" David asked.

"I don't know. He surprised me in the cottage, and I got panicky, that's all. It was very stupid of me."

He said casually, "What were you doing there, anyway?"

"Nothing. I happened to look in." She spoke briefly, and ignored the breakfast tray. "I suppose I let my imagination run away with me when Mr. Stillmeadow surprised me in there."

"Good thing Janet interrupted the proceedings," he smiled. "Anyway, Uncle Amos says you're not to think about it any more. You're to stay in bed all day today."

"Oh, but I couldn't—"

"Doctor's orders," he said firmly. "For amusement you can watch me painting the Pallas. I see Clint Fowler's Gull is all ready for a cruise, too. You're going to be my first crew, you know. Even though you are a little light to use as ballast."

She didn't smile or reply. He got up and stood over her, very tall, classically handsome. A muscle twitched along the line of his jaw. His shoulder was a little hunched where he was still taped up along his ribs.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked.

"Like what?"

"As if you wanted to ask me something."

She flushed. "Did Mr. Stillmeadow tell you what we spoke about last night before—before I got hysterical and thought he was going to attack me?"

"No," David said. "What did you talk about?"

"It's just as well that you don't know, then."

"Linda, what's the matter? You were going to help me."

"I am helping you."

"No, you're not."

"The rest of it is none of my business," she said.

"You're thinking of Janet. You saw her kiss me last night."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"Yes, it does. If it will help, I'll explain—"

"I don't want to hear about it," she said.

He looked annoyed, and puzzled. "You know my thoughts about Danny's death and Uncle Amos. You agreed yesterday, and you even warned me about Amos. Last night shouldn't have made this change in you. What happened in the cottage?"

"Nothing," she said stubbornly.

"Did he threaten you? Is that why you won't tell me?" She didn't answer, and he added, "Are you going to leave us, Linda?"

Her head came up sharply and she looked at him for a long moment. She seemed suddenly satisfied with her frank study of him.

"No, I won't leave you, David. Not until you tell me to go."

"No fear of that," he said.

SHE didn't answer. He hesitated, feeling that he was still unwelcome, that something was changed and would never be quite the same again between them. He watched her pour her coffee and felt the gesture as one of dismissal. He went out without another word.

Janet was waiting for him downstairs. She wore a dark blue slack suit and had her dark hair secured in a bright bandana.

He halted when she swung eagerly toward him.

"Where is Amos?" he asked.

"Gone to his office, in town. How is little Goldilocks?"

"Linda is quite recovered."

Janet smiled and linked her arm in his. The scent of jasmine floated all around her. "I'm spending the day with you, David, on the yawl. May I?"

She had never been interested in the boat before. He looked startled and asked frankly, "Why?"

"So I can be with you. To talk to you."

"We haven't anything to talk about," he said.

"Yes, we do," she smiled. "We can talk about you and me."

"It's finished," he said.

"Do you love me, David?"

"No," he said.

She sighed. "I suppose you think I'm heartless and brazen, and perhaps I am. I don't know. But you know, and everyone in Bar Haven knows, how long I've loved you, David."

"You're Danny's widow," he said harshly.

"But I'm going to marry you." Her lips were perfect, but a shade too thin and firm. "When you realize that you are in love with me and always have been, you'll agree. You can't hide it or run away from it much longer."

He didn't answer. He walked around her and out of the house and down the road to Bar Haven and the boat yard. The sun was warm, the breeze smelled of the salt sea. He avoided the short length of Main Street and the busy cannery dock; he wanted neither sympathy nor the necessity of countering suspicious looks and wagging tongues among the townspeople.

Once aboard the Pallas, he plunged into hard, manual work, with scraper, brush and paint, checking line, rigging and canvas. By lunch he had the sails bent on. The yawl to him was like a musical instrument, keenly in tune with wind and wave. He felt better for working aboard her, and his bruised ribs no longer ached. When he thought of his injury he thought of Clint Fowler, and then of the Gull, moored a cable length away.

AT noon he prepared lunch in the little galley and went on with his work. The sun was slanting over the mainland westward when a dory bumped alongside and Sam Peterson climbed aboard. The sheriff was wearing his usual blue serge, with a light tan hat and a black tie. His round face was friendly as he squatted on the deck where David was working.

"I figured you'd be in to see me at my office," he said.

"Why should I go to your office?" David asked.

"Ain't you interested in findin' out who killed your brother?"

David said, "I'll learn the answer for myself."

Peterson nodded. "I was thinking maybe you could help me, by answerin' some questions about Amos. I kind of flew off the handle last night, and when I heard about Linda Hayes gettin' hurt, I went up to the Porter pier this morning to ask Amos about it. But he ain't talking at all."

David stood up. "There's nothing to talk about. Linda is perfectly all right."

"Why did she think Amos wanted to kill her?"

"Who told you that?"

"Marie, the servant girl. She's been shopping in town, makin' a lot of ears flap. Including mine."

"There's nothing in it," David said, annoyed.

"If you say so." Peterson took out a thin cigar and chewed on it, then struck a wooden match on his thumb nail. His eyes didn't leave David's face. "What I really want to know is what you're going to do about what people are saying."

"What else are they saying?" David asked grimly.

"That you killed Danny, over Janet Stone."

"Is that what you think, too?"

Peterson shrugged his narrow shoulders. "I have no evidence. None at all, except hearsay, which ain't admissible in court. I'd like your opinion on who killed Danny, though. We got little to go on. The day he disappeared, he had lunch at home, after a quarrel with Janet that Marie and Pete heard all the way over from that cottage. Danny went into town straight after that, asked Amos for a hundred dollars, got it, and had a few drinks at the Mariner's Inn. He said he was lookin' for you. Then he went out, and he wasn't seen again till we found him in the salt creek way over by the point."

"I know all that," David said.

"Did you see Danny that afternoon?"

"No."

"You didn't quarrel or fight with him?"

"No," David said again.

Peterson frowned at his cigar. "Well, you didn't ship out on the Five Kings until dark that day. Where were you all afternoon?"

"In Boston, cancelling my concerts. You can check that."

"Well, it's true nobody's heard you play the fiddle in a long time, David."

David's face was hard. "What difference does that make?"

"Maybe none at all. I'd like to hear you play for me—not now, of course, but perhaps tomorrow."

"And if I don't?"

"That will be your privilege," Sam said.

HE hauled the dory alongside again. He was in the boat when he looked up at David's tall figure by the yawl's rail and added, "You be careful, son. Your Uncle Amos tries to convince everybody that some vagrant or drunk caught up with Danny—or maybe some town girl's boy-friend got annoyed with Danny's ways and let him have it the hard way. Anyway, you want to watch that the same feller don't get a notion to send you after your brother, that's all. If you know what I mean."

The little sheriff shoved the dory away and rowed ashore. David watched him out of sight, frowning, then went below and washed and stowed his working gear, the paint and brushes and palm and needle. Half an hour later, with the evening sun daubing the sea a bright vermilion, he reentered the Porter house, on the hill. Amos wasn't in his study; nor was Janet anywhere in sight. He routed out old Pete in the kitchen.

"Lobster for dinner," Pete said as he came in.

"Who's eating it?"

"Just you, it looks like. Nobody else at home."

"Where is Miss Hayes?"

"She don't log in and out with me, Mr. Porter. She's gone, like the rest of 'em. They don't appreciate a man's good cooking."

He ate alone in the high-ceilinged dining room, with flickering candles as his only light. The evening held in the warmth of the day. He ate rapidly, and there was still some daylight in the

sky when he showered upstairs. No one had come back to the house by then. The telephone was silent. He looked through the window across the sloping lawn to Lookout Cottage and frowned. He paced his room restlessly, pausing to examine the hall when he thought he heard Linda's footsteps. Uneasiness possessed him. He crushed out his cigarette and picked up his violin. The strains of the Franck D Minor Symphony floated in the back of his head. He put down the violin and bow impatiently and leaned on the window sill.

A fishing schooner was rounding the breakwater at the harbor entrance, its green hull touched by the last light from the west. Beyond it the sea was lost in a purple haze.

The Five Kings.

He put on his coat and quit the empty house and walked with long, purposeful strides down to the waterfront.

CHAPTER V

THE STRENGTH OF THE NET



THE Five Kings was already berthed at the Fish Pier when David passed the watchman's shack at the gate. Her dragging gear had been replaced, and her after-deck looked clean and uncluttered once more. Lights

flicked on along the cannery pier as he reached the gangway.

No one challenged him as he strode down the deck. An old Portuguese hand was just coming from the wheelhouse astern, and he touched his cap respectfully to David as he saw him.

"Evening, Mr. Porter."

"Hello, Carlos. Where's the skipper?"

"Cap'n Clint? He hit shore right away, along with the rest of the crew. Everything cleaned up in Boston, no work to do, so everybody go home quick."

"All right," David said. "Thanks."

He returned to the dock and walked along the glare of floodlights to the end of the pier. A heavy beam trawler was loading ice from the ice house on the other side of the wharf, but he ignored the shouts and the rumble of the sluices

to reach the radio shack perched with its slender tower over the dark harbor water.

The shack housed the transmitter used by all the Porter vessels and most of the other Bar Haven draggers, with a range equal to that of the Coast Guard station farther down the shore. It was used primarily to maintain contact with vessels at sea, to advise fishing captains on weather, market prices, and news. David went inside.

The little room was barren except for a battered leather couch, some wooden chairs, and the gleaming dials of the transmitter and receiver on a bench against the far wall. A small man with wet, sandy hair and a little mustache sat tilted in a chair, smoking and reading the Haven News. He brought the chair down with a thump and took the cigarette from his mouth.

"Hello, David. What brings you around here?"

"I'm looking for Clint," David said. "Was he around, Angelo?"

"Big Clint Fowler? No, I ain't seen him. He might be back on the Five Kings—she just rolled in."

"He isn't aboard." David crossed to the bench and opened the big leather-bound log. "Mind if I look through these messages?"

"You're the boss," Angelo shrugged. "Help yourself."

David flipped the pages under the light of the naked bulb shining in its wall socket. Under the proper date he leafed quickly through the penciled forms, and located the message he wanted, the one that was sent to the Five Kings just before the accident that had almost cost him his life. All he had ever seen of it was a crumpled yellow ball in Clint Fowler's big hand. He scanned it with narrowed, thoughtful eyes. It was brief and to the point.

Daniel dead. Keep supercargo at sea for further instructions. It was signed, A. Stillmeadow.

David straightened with a long sigh. Clint had known of Danny's death before the accident on the Five Kings, but he hadn't said anything about it then. He wondered if any others in the crew had seen the message. It would be difficult to find out now. He turned back

to the book, examining the last pages in the log.

There was another message even more brief than the first.

No more fishing repeat fishing until further orders.

This message, too, originated from his Uncle Amos. David frowned. The two radiograms seemed contradictory, but he was unable to put his finger on the point that troubled him. He looked at the operator's initials. They were an illegible scrawl.

"Angelo," he said. "Who sent these off?"

The small man got up and squinted through his cigarette smoke at the log book. "Not me. I wasn't on duty them days."

"Who was it, then?" David insisted.

"Must've been Duley. He had the shift then."

"When does Duley come on duty?"

"He ain't comin' in again. He quit yesterday."

David felt sudden excitement. "Duley quit? Why?"

"Search me. You'd have to ask him yourself. All I know is he got roarin' drunk around town yesterday, flashed a heavy roll of bills, and told everybody off."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Sure. India Lane, No. 10. That's Mrs. Olsen's place."

"Thanks," David said.

MRS. OLSEN'S boarding house was a big yellow clapboard box set without compromise squarely in the middle of a neat lawn bordered with rose bushes. Mrs. Olsen didn't answer the door herself when David mounted the porch and pulled at the old-fashioned bell. Quick, light footsteps raced down the inner stairs. The door was opened eagerly by a slim blond girl in a printed cotton dress. Her eyes were red with recent tears, and her anxious smile faded as she recognized David's tall figure. She was Joe Duley's wife.

"Oh," she said, disappointed. "Hello, David."

"I'm looking for Duley, Lil," he nodded.

"So am I," she said bitterly. She looked back into the hall and came out

on the shadowed porch, shutting off the cooking odors from Mrs. Olsen's kitchen. Her voice was a quick whisper. "I told Joe he'd get into trouble! He said he was too smart for any of you Porters, but I warned him. And now you're here already."

"Did he tell you where he's gone?" David asked.

"Not me. He took all that money with him, too."

"Where did he get it?"

Lil's red mouth drooped. "What do you want to know for? I ain't talking to you, David, if it gets Joey into trouble. God knows he thinks he's so darn smart, he's bound to fall over himself this time; but I'm not going to give him an extra push. Not even for you, David. I know you've got plenty of trouble of your own, with Danny bein' murdered and everybody talking about you and Janet, but I can't help you. Not if it hurts Joe."

"It won't hurt him," David said. "I want to help him. Where did he get the money, and why did he quit the radio shack?"

"He don't tell me anything," Lil muttered. "He just got drunk and beat me up when I asked him. He kept bragging that he had Amos Stillmeadow and all you Porters under his thumb, and that he was going to be rich—richer than anybody in town."

David said thinly, "When did you see him last, Lil?"

"Yesterday afternoon." Her face was pale and frightened in the shadows. "You don't think nothing's happened to him, do you?"

"Not yet," David said grimly. "Something will, though. He doesn't know what he's doing. You've got to help me find him, Lil."

She said reluctantly, "He called me from Boston a few hours ago. That's where he is now."

Disappointment sagged inside him. "Sure it was Boston?"

"That's what the operator said. He didn't tell me where he was staying, though. But he was all right then. Still drunk, still talking big. It scares me, David."

"What else did he say?" David demanded.

She looked away from him. "Nothing."

"You're lying, Lil."

Her eyes were luminous in the shadows. "Honest, I don't think I ought to tell you. I love the big dope, he's my husband, and he'll kill me if he thinks I interfered—"

"You have to interfere for his own sake," David said grimly. "Where did he get the money, and what does he have on my uncle Amos?"

Her whisper was scarcely audible. "He said he knows who killed your twin brother, David. That's what he knows."

His breath sighed out. "Did he say who it was?"

"No. I'd tell you the rest of it, if I knew!"

"When is he coming back?"

"I didn't say he was—"

"He's coming back to Bar Haven, isn't he? When?"

"Tonight," she whispered. "But not until midnight, on the last train. I asked him to come earlier, but he won't move unless it suits him, he's so full of liquor and big-shot ideas. Honest, David, if you can help him—"

"I'll try," David said. "I can't promise."

INDIA LANE was dappled with dark shadow under the elm trees that bordered the walk. David turned through the gate in the picket fence and headed for the waterfront once more. He didn't look back to see if Lil Duley was watching him; he didn't care. Excitement stretched his pace as he crossed the brick street to the opposite sidewalk. He was almost to the deserted Town Landing when he became aware of footsteps behind him. Not Lil's. A man's shoes, clicking purposefully in an effort to overtake him. He paused and looked back over his shoulder. Sam Peterson crossed a pool of moonlight between the elms and came up to him. David stopped with a frown of annoyance. The little sheriff nodded and they walked on quietly, side by side. Sam was smoking a thin cigar.

"I see you've started to get around a bit, Porter. Did she tell you where Duley was?"

"How do you know about Duley?"

David asked.

"Hell, he shot his mouth off all over town yesterday. I'd have told you about it earlier, but you didn't seem interested in what I was doing. Did Lil do any talking?"

"Joe Duley is in Boston. That's all she said."

"Joe knows who killed your brother," Sam said quietly. "At least, he thinks he knows."

"Then why don't you pull him in for questioning?"

"I've phoned Boston. The cops there are looking for him."

David said, "Let me know when you find him."

"If we find him," Sam corrected quietly. "And if he's in any condition to talk when we do."

"Have you spoken to Amos about it?"

"Amos ain't cooperating a bit," Sam said. "But like I told you last night, I got my duty to do, and I'll do it no matter who takes the fall for killin' Danny. Even if it's Amos Stillmeadow."

David halted. "What makes you think it's Amos? I thought you had me tagged and labeled for fratricide."

"You think it's Amos, don't you?" Sam asked.

"What I think doesn't matter."

"Where are you going now?"

"That doesn't matter, either."

Sam said calmly, "Well, I won't impose. Just remember to take care of yourself."

The little man turned and walked off. David swung into lower Main Street at the Town Landing and slowly circled the waterfront. The street was crowded with fishermen and early summer tourists. If he was aware of the looks and whispers that followed him, he gave no sign. He tried four bars before he came to the Mariner's Inn and asked for Clint Fowler. The place was crowded, built on a wide wharf that jutted out over the water. The air was stuffy with the smells of stale beer and fish-stained clothing. Old-fashioned wooden fans rotated lazily in the rafters ceiling.

The barman's name was Lonergan. He slid a tall glass of ale toward David and then leaned meaty, tattooed arms on the rail.

"I don't see him around any more,"

he said.

"How long ago was he here?"

"About an hour. He might be upstairs in his room, David."

DAVID nodded and finished his ale slowly. He took a pretzel from the wicker basket on the bar, snapped it in two between his white teeth, and went up to the second floor. Most of Bar Haven's single fishing captains made the Mariner's Inn their headquarters between trips to the dragging grounds.

A woman's shrill laughter came from behind the first door to his right. Beside each door was a bracket holding a stenciled placard indicating the captain's name on the occupied room. The last one to the front, with windows opening on the wide porch overhanging the water, was Captain C. F. Fowler's. David paused outside it and listened, but the noises in the corridor and from the bar below effectively muffled any other sounds there might have been inside the room.

He shrugged and knocked. Immediately from beyond the door came the startled slam of a bureau drawer and quick, panicked footsteps. Then silence.

"Clint?" David called softly.

There was no answer. No one was in sight down the length of the hall. His eyes were puzzled. He knocked again, harder.

"Clint!"

The juke box downstairs began thumping, and the rhythm made the floor vibrate. David turned suddenly to the porch at the end of the corridor. A screen door opened on the porch overlooking the dark harbor. He went outside, silently. The windows of Clint's room were to his right. He went only two paces when he became aware of dim movement behind the glass. A blur of white showed momentarily over the sill, then vanished. He flattened instantly against the building wall and waited, head turned to watch the window. Nothing happened. No one climbed out. Yet he knew someone was in there. He moved back a step and looked through the screen door into the corridor. The hall was empty, but whoever was in Clint's room obviously planned to escape through either door

or window, without being seen. He couldn't possibly watch both exits. David's pulse quickened. The hall door was locked, but the window was open, with a low sill above the porch floor. If he moved fast. . . .

He went through the open window in a low, crouching hurdle, clearing the sill by an inch, plunging into the absolute darkness of the room. His left foot slapped squarely on the floor; but his right knee found no such clearance. It slammed into something soft and yielding and he sprawled headlong, sliding on the rug. A startled gasp of pain greeted his thunderbolt entry—but there were no shots. He hadn't been exposed in silhouette against the window for more than a moment, and whoever the prowler was, he was taken completely by surprise.

DAVID scrambled upright, caught a grip on the bed, and swung quickly to face the other's attack. Nothing happened. He heard his own quick breathing and another's, equally swift and harsh, from the opposite dark corner. He held his breath. The room was silent. From down in the bar he could hear the thump of the juke box; and a man was arguing with a woman in the next room. In here there was nothing to see, nothing to hear—

Something flashed out of the dark, grazed his cheek, and shattered explosively on the wall behind him.

David spoke softly into the yielding darkness.

"You missed," he said.

A curse answered him. It wasn't Clint Fowler. David moved silently toward the door. The floor creaked faintly under his weight.

"Come out of it," he said. "I'm looking for Clint, that's all."

The other didn't answer. It dawned on David that he had hurtled himself into an awkward predicament, if the other man was armed and had homicide in mind. He recalled Sam Peterson's warnings about his safety. The memory did nothing to ease his tension.

He stood still, straining to locate the other man. His eyes became adjusted to the darkness of the room, and the window was a tall, luminous rectangle ad-

mitting a faint glow from the harbor lights. But the walls flanking the window were draped in deep black. He thought he saw a glimmer of white against the dark, but it didn't move, and while he studied it the floor creaked ominously beside him. He whirled. A fist shot out of the darkness and caught him on the side of the head. He reeled backward. His shoulders slammed against the door and he came forward again, swinging at a dim white face that loomed before him.

His knuckles made sharp contact with flesh and bone. A grunt puffed out of the dark. Something hit him in the stomach, and a heavy arm was wrapped around his neck, hauling him forward and down. David thrust his leg behind the other's and yanked. The man went flying forward, beyond him. There came a crash of springs and a scraping of wood, and then the hurried scrambling of arms and legs as the man tried to regain his balance.

David moved cautiously forward, breathing deeply and slowly. He swung again at a dark bulk sidling in front of him, and again his knuckles cracked sharply on flesh. The man grunted, and for an instant he was outlined against the window, tall and heavy-set, his arms grotesquely spread as he tripped and stumbled back.

"Duley," David said.

The man cursed and moved fast—but not toward him. His heavy figure flickered against the harbor lights outside, and then he was diving through the window to the porch. David was only a moment behind him. The big man was already at the rail by the time he came through the window.

"Hey!" David called. "Wait a minute!"

The man threw one leg over the rail and teetered on the edge of the porch, the water fifteen feet below. Light from the hall screen door touched his face. It was convulsed with fear. David sprang for him, but he was too late. The man dived headlong into the harbor, his body arching out of sight. There was a heavy splash, a flower of white in the darkness. David cursed and straddled the porch rail.

"Come back!" he yelled.

SOMETHING splashed below in the oily water. David poised to go after him, then hesitated. The waterfront was a jigsaw of piers, wharves and pilings. Even if he didn't crack his head on a submerged rock or jetty, it was impossible to catch up to his quarry.

He turned as footsteps sounded and a hand touched his arm. It was Sheriff Sam Peterson. The little man looked amused.

"Let him go, David."

He said angrily: "That was Joe Duley. He's not in Boston, he's here! If he knows anything, I want to get my hands on him—"

"Let him go. He came in on the eight-forty train. I missed him while I was with you at Mrs. Olsen's."

"What are you following me for?" David demanded.

"Maybe to keep you outa trouble. But I ain't succeeding."

David said, "Well, let's not stand here. Let's get Duley."

"I will. You won't. I'm takin' after him now. You're on your own from here on." Peterson turned back to the screen door and the bar below. He paused to look over his shoulder at David. "You find anything interesting in Clint's room?"

"Just Duley," David said.

"Well, that's interesting enough, ain't it?"

Sam wasn't in sight when David returned to the bar. The crowd of fishermen, town girls and tourists was thicker than before. The clock over the bar read five minutes past nine. Lonergan, the barman, shoved another ale at him.

"What's with the sheriff?" he asked mildly.

"Nothing," David said.

He drank his ale quickly this time and turned to the public telephone near the door. He tried Amos Stillmeadow's office on the waterfront farther toward the boat yard. The telephone rang without answer and he hung up, then called his own house. After another wait, Marie's lisping, accented voice replied.

"This is David," he said. "Is Uncle Amos there?"

"No, sir, he isn't."

"Let me talk to Linda, then."

"She isn't here, either, Mr. David."

"She hasn't come back?"

"No, sir, she—"

There was an interruption, a whispered conference, and then Janet's soft, calm voice spoke to him. "Is that you, David?"

"What's happened to Linda?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. She took her car out before dinner. Perhaps she's resigned and gone back to Boston." Janet's voice was amused. "Are you worried about her, darling?"

"Yes," he said. "Haven't you seen Amos, either?"

"No, David. When are you coming home?"

"I don't know," he said. "Later."

"I want to talk to you, darling. We have a lot to talk about. I'm all alone here, and—"

"No," David said. "Forget it."

"Please?"

"No," he said again.

"You're being dreadfully cruel."

"I'm being honest," he said.

HE hung up and quit the Mariner's Inn. The wind off the harbor felt cool on his face. He walked uphill along Water Street, uneasiness inside him. A sense of things happening, unknown but important and dangerous, trembled along his nerves. There was no sign of Peterson or Joe Duley along the crowded, noisy street.

It was darker, and deserted, when he came to the boat yard twenty minutes later. He crossed a rickety wharf with careful steps, avoiding rotten planking and circling between the giant spools on which the seiners dried their nets. He ducked under a string of tray buoys and around a pile of slatted lobster pots and entered the boat yard from the water side, crossing the marine lift and short-cutting through the dark, cavernous sail loft.

The tide lapped uneasily around the pilings that flanked the ways. A short distance out floated the white hull and tall masts of his yawl, the Pallas, and close alongside, moored to a parallel buoy, was the heavier Gull, Clint Fowler's sloop. No lights shone aboard either vessel. But there was a light in the window over the machine shop, and David

felt quick satisfaction.

Clint Fowler rented the upper floor of the building and used it for a combination work room, where he designed and drafted plans for racing sloops, and for makeshift sleeping quarters for use when the crowds at the Mariner's Inn disturbed him. The light up there meant that his search for Clint was over.

There was an outside staircase to the second floor, and he went up without any effort to be silent. The door was closed. He tried the knob, and it wasn't locked. He went in.

The room was vast, an attic over the machine shop below. A big stove stood at one end, near a cot and two wooden chairs. A drafting table stood against the window opposite, and a tin-shaded lamp cast a cone of bright light over the drawing paper tacked to the board. Nets, mounted swordfish, extra blocks and tackle, coils of line and a spare foresail, neatly furled and hanging from the rafter hooks, gave the big room a workmanlike appearance. But it was empty. There was no sign of Clint Fowler.

There was a door in the opposite wall, beyond the stove and the cot. He crossed to it and looked into a dark storage room, filled with miscellaneous tools and equipment from the Gull. When he turned back, the door at the far end opened and Clint came in.

The big man was hatless, his red hair dark in the glow of the lamp over the drafting table. His huge figure seemed to crowd the room. His dark suit seemed too tight for his bulging physique.

"I hear you've been looking for me, David," he said quietly.

"That's right."

"That makes us even. I've been trying to find you, too. I'd like to explain what happened on the Five Kings, and why I tried to keep you aboard. You were a little too smart for me, then."

"It's not important now," David said.

"Yes, it is. I want you to understand. We've been friends a long time, David, and you need some help. I was only taking orders, you understand, from your Uncle Amos."

"I understand," David nodded. "I'd like to know why Joe Duley was in your room in the Mariner's Inn a while ago.

You know Joe Duley. You've heard what he's been saying all over town."

"He's a rumdum. Just shooting off his mouth. You won't get anything from him."

"What was he doing in your room?"

"I don't know," the big man said. "You got any ideas?"

"I'm just asking."

Clint said nothing. He lit a cigarette and kept the match aflame, crossed to the stove, opened the door, and lit a ball of paper under the faintly glowing coals. He turned his back to David while he hunted up a coffee pot, filled it, and set it on the stove to boil. David straddled a chair and watched him.

"Clint, I'm trying to find out who killed my brother."

"Leave it to the law," Clint said.

"I can't. It's up to me to do something about it."

"All right," said Clint. "What are you going to do?"

"Do you know who killed Danny?"

Clint laughed. "I got ideas."

"Who?"

"Why not ask your Uncle Amos? He's running things fine. He's handling the fleet and the house and estate just dandy. He's got two million bucks in his hands. Ask him who killed Danny."

"I'm asking you," David said quietly.

The big man turned with vicious impatience, his face dark with anger. "Look, David, I sail for you as fishing captain, six days out of seven. It's not easy work, but I like it and it pays good. I can build the Gull and others like her, with what Amos pays me. So I don't ask questions and I take orders and I don't think about 'em. I like you, David, but you're not going to understand. I told you I was looking for you, too. I got orders about you again, tonight. I don't like them, but I'm going to carry 'em out."

David stood up. His face was pale. He felt a muscle twitch in the thigh of his left leg.

"What orders?" he asked.

THE big man breathed hard. "You walked in here. I didn't look for you, as I was told to. But since you're here, you're going to stay here. That's all there is to it. I'm keeping you out of

trouble." The big man laughed, without mirth. "I know you can take care of yourself, because I've fought you ever since we were kids, David, and I guess the score is even. But I'm supposed to see that you don't stick your nose into something that's likely to blow you to pieces."

David said, "I'm getting out of here."

"No. You're not."

He looked at Clint. "Are you going to stop me?"

"That's what I was told to do."

David said, "All right. Stop me."

Coffee bubbled in the pot on the stove. Neither paid any attention to it. David started for the door. His back crawled as he turned from the big man. Clint didn't move. He was halfway across the room when he heard footsteps on the outer stairs. A moment later Amos Stillmeadow came in.

The old man's weathered face was agitated. He had given up his boat cloak, in view of the warm night, and was wearing a white seersucker suit that made him look bonier than ever. He took off a panama hat and mopped his thick white hair with a trembling hand.

"David, thank goodness you are safe!"

David stared at him. "Why shouldn't I be safe?"

"I've just come from that idiot, Peterson. You must stay here, my boy, for your own good, until we can make other plans. Sam Peterson is getting a warrant for your arrest!"

Clint Fowler laughed. David took a step toward Amos.

"You're lying," he snapped. "Get out of my way!"

"David—"

There was swift movement behind him, a metallic click, and then the air was full of swishing sounds. He spun, glimpsed Clint against the wall, one arm raised—and then a cloud of net descended on him from the high ceiling, falling in fold after fold of tough, knotted linen cord. He lashed out furiously in rage and humiliation at the trap. The net was strong. He couldn't hope to tear it with his hands. He lunged for Amos, tripped, and sprawled. Footsteps thudded and he tried to

wriggle around, to free his arms of the great fish net. Something slammed into his back. Something else crashed down on his head. The last thing he was conscious of was a sudden sputtering from the stove and the sharp, pungent smell of boiling coffee that flooded the darkness and swept nauseatingly over him. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE WIND FRESHENS



AT six o'clock that evening, Linda Hayes turned her coupe off Main Street in Littleboro and parked in front of a small Cape Cod cottage with a sign staked in the green lawn reading, *Reverend F. W. Peabody*. She took a deep breath and walked quickly up the shell-bordered path to the front door. Her ring was answered by a chubby little man with an air of professional cheer on his round, pink face. A woman in a cotton print dress, with gray hair coiled in a bun atop her head, peered over the man's shoulder.

"Mr. Peabody?" Linda asked.

"Yes, indeed. Come in, please—come in."

She followed him into a small, neat room that obviously served as a marriage chapel. Potted palms graced the walls, and there was a little pulpit in front of a stained-glass window. She turned and spoke crisply to the man and woman.

"I know this is unusual, but it is of great importance that you permit me to examine your records of April 9th. It is a personal matter, for the bride is my sister. A great injustice has been done." She paused to observe the effect of the careful fabrication. It was taking well. The reverend and his wife wore properly anxious and sympathetic expressions. "My sister has been victimized by a cruel and heartless man, and the marriage, of course, is not legal at all."

"Not legal?" Peabody whispered. He blanched with concern. "That is impossible! I have all my records here to testify—"

"If I may see them, please," Linda requested.

"Martha," Peabody said. His wife produced a leather-bound book. "April the ninth, you said? And the couple's names?"

"Porter—that's the groom. And Janet Stone."

"Yes, quite. Here it is. Everything seems to be in order. David Porter, that's the groom. I assure you that I would never perform a ceremony if there was the slightest suspicion—"

"David Porter?" Linda asked.

"Quite. Here it is. His own signature."

She looked at the two names, written side by side. David. Not Danny. She felt confused again. Mr. Peabody was murmuring at her side, and his wife made clucking noises, but none of it was intelligible while she fought for the strength and faith she needed. The facts were before her, all too plainly; yet her inner conviction was that something was very wrong.

Her fingers shook as she took a letter from her purse, a routine business letter to David's concert manager in Boston, written the day he went to sea and never mailed. She paid no attention to the Peabodys as she compared the signature on the letter with that in the registration book.

She studied them a long time, while hope stood still inside her. They were the same; yet they were different. She couldn't be sure. At first glance, they looked alike, and a closer examination was inconclusive. She didn't dare linger. She turned abruptly to the Peabody's, and their murmuring and puzzled cluckings died.

"I would like to photograph this page of your register, if I may," she said firmly. "The signatures, you know."

Peabody looked frightened. "It's hardly regular. I would dislike publicity, and if there's to be a scandal. . . . The ceremony was legally performed and in the best of faith—"

"Of course," Linda said. "You have my assurance that you will not be exposed to any unfavorable notoriety."

SHE didn't wait for an answer. Her air was one of brisk professionalism

as she took from her purse a small camera, attached a portrait lense, and carried the register under the glare of a table lamp. It wasn't too satisfactory, but she took several shots at various angles and exposures, hoping for the best. If the signature was *not* David's—well, she would soon know.

She left the Peabodys fluttering among themselves and went back to the car for the long drive back to Bar Haven. It was almost two hundred miles over twisting, narrow highways. She drove fast, but competently, prohibiting the inner tension that bound her. The little car hummed and soared over the hills like a bird. The road was generally empty, for which she was thankful, yet it was midnight before she turned into the boulevard that led up the coast and around the southern shore of Bar Haven harbor.

During the day, the boulevard yielded a lovely, breath-taking view of the rugged hills, rocks and dunes of the New England coast. Now as she pushed the car along for the last few miles, the sea was a vast, dark emptiness, punctured by the rotating beam of the lighthouse on the end of the harbor breakwater. The red and green riding lights of a boat moving out to sea seemed to crawl across the dark water. She paid no attention to it until the lighthouse beam touched white sails and the sleek, double-ended white hull of a racing sloop.

It was Clint Fowler's boat, the Gull.

She had only a brief glimpse of it in the momentary glow of the light, then a series of sharp turns in the road forced her attention back on her driving. The next time she looked seaward, the Gull was moving slowly with the faint night breeze, sailing for the breakwater on a northeasterly course. Linda used her last view of the harbor to assure herself that David's yawl was still at her mooring, dimly visible against the deeper darkness of the boat yard. Then she was climbing the hill to the Porter house.

There were lights in the lower windows. The tires rumbled on gravel as she swung into the curve to the garage. Her headlights touched the tall shrubbery bordering the drive and settled on

the garage doors. They were open. Abruptly she tramped on the brakes.

A stout young man with a flushed face and wild eyes burst from the bushes and staggered across the road directly in her path. At the same moment a shout came from the house and then the sharp vicious crack of a gun. The running man twisted to look back. His face was alive with fear. His hair was awry, his clothing torn, wrinkled and damp.

Another shot cracked from the direction of the house. The man in the road spun with terror. Linda opened the car door and stepped out. At the same time Sheriff Peterson parted the shrubbery and came onto the road. He had a gun in his hand. The first man stood paralyzed with fear. The little sheriff was grim.

"Evening, Miss Hayes. Stand right there, Duley!"

Linda said: "What's all the shooting for?"

"This lush," Sam explained. "I been trying to catch up with him all day."

LINDA looked at the heavy-set young man. She could smell the liquor on his breath from where she stood. He smirked and weaved on his feet. Sam Peterson muttered something, his tone dangerously exasperated.

"Let's have it, Joe," Sam said. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanna drink," Duley mumbled, his voice thick and unsteady.

"Answer me!"

Duley said truculently, "I was conferring with Amos."

"Conferring," Sam said. "That's a good one. You been doing plenty of talking, all right." He didn't put away his gun. "What were you talking to Amos about?"

Duley leaned on the fender of Linda's coupe. His breathing was heavy. He looked sick. In the glare of the car's headlights his eyes swung shiftily to Linda, then back to the sheriff. He giggled suddenly.

"I was telling Amos who killed Danny Porter. I didn't know at first, y'see. But they were dumb, they tried to bribe me. I wouldn't have thought anything about that message I was told to send the Five

Kings—never would've thought of it, see?"

"What message is that?" Sam rapped.

"It's a secret," Duley snickered. "But when I'm offered a thousand bucks to forget something I couldn't even remember at first, then I got to thinking. And now I know the party who done it."

"All right," Sam said. "Tell us."

"I tol' Amos."

"Tell me."

"Go ask Amos," Duley said. His snicker faded abruptly and his face turned sick again. He started to stagger off, then clutched at the fender and slid down to a sudden seat in the middle of the road. Sam bent down and shook him violently. Duley's head sagged. Sam cursed and kicked at him. Duley snored. The little sheriff looked at Linda with haggard eyes.

"He's passed out. The rumdum. It'll take hours to make him talk sensible again."

Linda said quickly: "Let's get Amos—"

"He ain't there," Peterson said wearily. "Neither is Janet. They both been gone since early evening, according to the cook."

"And David?"

Sam said grimly, "He's gone, too. All of them. I don't know what to do now, except to work on Duley, here."

Linda looked out from the hilltop across the dark, midnight harbor. Fear curled and clawed inside her. She could still see the dim white sail of the Gull. The sloop was just rounding the breakwater, still on her northeasterly course. A sense of frantic haste, the need for a quick decision, a guess on which David's life might depend, turned her thoughts chaotic for a moment. When she turned back to Sheriff Peterson, her small face was pale and determined.

"I don't think we can wait for Duley," she said. "Neither can we hope to get the Coast Guard in time."

"The Coast Guard?" Sam asked, startled.

"There's only one vessel that can catch the Gull out there when the wind freshens." She pointed to the dim, rapidly fading lights at the harbor mouth. "That's the Pallas. We'll have to go on her. Can you sail?"

"I was born on the water. But I don't make you out, Miss Hayes—"

She pointed to the harbor mouth. "That's where they are. They must be! I only hope we can overtake them in time."

CHAPTER VII

NOT FOR LOVE



DAVID dreamed. There were voices in his dream, arguing and shrieking at each other in high, quarrelsome tones. There was the sound of the sea, the slow heave and plunge of the North Atlantic swells. Death walked through his dream and gibbered at him. The more he struggled to awaken, the deeper he plunged into the nightmare. Music was in his dream, wild macabre measures that danced a crazy rhythm to the high, cake-walking steps that Death took.

Janet and Amos fought in the back of his mind, and through it all he tried to find someone, running through long corridors to seek her out. When he found her, it was Linda, but she was afraid of him. She ran away from him and Death jumped at her from around a corner and snatched her away. David sprang to her rescue, and one grim, bony hand dashed across his forehead, threw him down. He fell. . . .

He woke up with blood on his forehead, where he had slammed his head against something in the convulsions of his dream. He looked down at the smoothly polished planks of a floor, a deck, and it heaved under him, lifting him up and then dropping him down at a sickening rate. He shook his head and a drop of blood spattered the floor between his hands. He hunched back on his knees and looked around.

He was in a ship's cabin, at sea. He could hear the rush and hiss of the ocean swells against the vessel's hull, and the creak and slap of canvas on rigging. For a moment, time was confused in his mind and he thought he was back on the Five Kings. But this cabin was far more luxurious than that of the fishing schooner. He looked back at the bunk

from which he had fallen. Water smashed with green fury against the glass porthole in the bulkhead, then washed away in white scud and admitted the faint gray light of early dawn. He shivered, although the cabin was warm. He struggled up to his feet, hauling at the bunk and the white blankets. A huge gray and white bird was woven into the white wool, and suddenly he knew where he was. The forward cabin of the Gull.

He stood quite still, fighting illness inside him, clinging to the bunk post, staring at nothing at all. Then slowly his vision cleared again, and his swaying body grew rigid. He pulled his hands sharply away from the polished mahogany bunk rail.

His hands had left bloody imprints on the shining wood.

There was blood on the floor at his feet, too, stiff and congealing, dark in the light of the little overhead bulb.

He whirled, but the cabin was empty. The door in the bulkhead was closed. The sounds of sea and wind cut off any noises from the deck. He looked at his hands, then touched the fresh cut on his forehead. It was a small wound; it had stopped bleeding already. It couldn't account for the blood on the bunk and on his fingers.

He said aloud: "Take it easy."

HE LOOKED at his watch. It was seven o'clock, and the light in the porthole was morning light. He had been unconscious for a long time. There was a queer taste in his mouth, as if he had swallowed something bitter, and he wondered if he had been drugged as well as beaten. His jaw ached a little, but otherwise he felt all right. He told himself he felt fine. He felt good and sore. He had an account to settle with Clint Fowler. With Amos Stillmeadow, too. Dear Uncle Amos. Fragments of his dream came back to him, and he shivered with an unaccountable fear.

Something ran down the post and slowly halted, the liquid stiffening in a previous track. He turned his head and looked at it without moving his body. His glance swung upward from the crumpled blankets in the lower

bunk. The mattress above sagged, as if someone or something were lying in the double bunk above.

"Well," he said softly.

There was a thick, dried trail of blood down the post from the upper bunk. He straightened, his mouth white, down-curved at the corners. He looked at the body in the bunk over his head.

It was Amos Stillmeadow.

The gaunt old man lay on his back, head upturned. He had been brutally beaten and battered, and his thick, smooth mane of white hair was dark and crusted from his wounds. His cheeks looked sunken, the weathered look gone from his hard, aristocratic face. His seersucker suit looked much too big for him now.

He was quite dead.

David didn't touch him. He stared at the body, not moving, not even thinking, absorbing the fact of death in the cabin with him, letting murder seep into his consciousness until he could accept it and face it and get ready to do something about it.

It didn't make sense. Always in the back of his mind before there had been the conviction that Amos, with control of two millions in his hard grasp, had been the cause of all his misfortunes, of Danny's death and the focus of suspicion that had pointed at himself. Now Amos was dead, too, and it was as if the whole fabric of the world had shifted, gotten queerly out of focus....

Now he didn't know what to do.

THE cabin door wasn't locked. He had expected it to be locked, but it opened at his touch. He knew his way about the Gull almost as well as he knew his own vessel, the Pallas. No one was in the narrow corridor aft from the forward cabin. The thud and wash of the seas lessened as he moved away from the bow.

In the little galley amidships he paused. The sloop was running well into the wind, on a steady course. The night breeze had freshened and he knew from the feel of the canted deck that the Gull was carrying all the canvas she could bear. He leaned over the tiny aluminum sink to look through the porthole.

At first he could see nothing but an angle of the gray sky, a lowering overcast that turned heaving ocean and whistling wind into one color. No land was in sight, nothing but the waste of high, running seas. Then he glimpsed a triangle of white, a sail astern on a parallel tack. His eyes narrowed and he whistled soundlessly. He could recognize that other sail anywhere. It was his own, the mainsail of the Pallas.

Action guided his movements now. He searched the quiet galley swiftly, found the cutlery in its polished wooden rack, and selected a short, sharp knife with a hand-wrought grip. He slid it under his belt, out of sight, and turned away from the galley. At the same moment there came the sound of soft footsteps from the main cabin just forward.

Janet Stone stood there.

She was wearing her dark blue slack suit, and her long dark hair was tightly coiffed under a red bandana. She looked tall and slim and poised as she watched him from under smiling, lowered lashes. Her voice was calm and amused as he swung toward her.

"I see you have awakened, David," she said.

"Not very pleasantly," he told her harshly. "Why am I on the Gull? And where are we going?"

"Nowhere, at present. As for being here, it was your idea."

"It was not."

She shrugged. Her glance touched his, and there was a softness in her eyes that belied the hard lines of her mouth. "Come, David. You need a drink. Or perhaps you'd prefer breakfast?"

"I'd prefer an explanation. I want to know who—"

"In a moment," she interrupted. "I have some coffee ready. With a little brandy, you might be able to listen intelligently." Her voice sharpened a bit. "You wouldn't listen to me before, when I tried to speak to you. Now you have no choice. Come in here."

"Where is Clint?"

"Up above," she said. "Very busy running this ship."

on the table, and he sat on the edge of a leather seat against the bulkhead and watched her pour coffee for him from a thermos. His face was pale, expressionless, his eyes veiled over his thoughts.

Janet handed him a cup. He noticed that her fingers were trembling slightly. His own were steady.

"Have some yourself," he said.

"I just did."

"Have some more."

She looked at him along her lashes, shrugged, and poured coffee from the same thermos. He waited until she had started to drink before he tasted his own.

"Now tell me," he said.

"You understand you're a prisoner here?" she asked.

"And you?"

"In a way. Not in quite the same manner as you. Whether we both return to shore alive is up to you." Janet put down her coffee. Her face was serious. "Please don't be angry with me, David. I did what I could, for both of us. Things went a little wrong, that's all."

"You mean Amos," he said flatly.

"You found him?"

He said grimly, "Who killed him?"

"You did," Janet said softly. He laughed without mirth. She added: "That's the way it stands now, at any rate."

"You know I didn't kill Amos," he said. "Who did?"

The girl sighed. "There is so much to tell you, darling."

"Did you do it?"

"No."

"Clint?"

She smoothed the material of her slack suit over her long legs and sat down on the companion bench of red leather across the cabin from him. She didn't look at him for a moment. Daylight touched her dark, shimmering hair. Green seas raced in a swift wash against the porthole behind her, then fell away in white foam.

"I love you, David," she said. "Everything would be so simple if you understood that. If you loved me, too." When he didn't reply, she said, "Perhaps it would be better if I tell you why I mar-

HE FOLLOWED her into the main cabin. The vessel was sailing steadily enough to permit cups and saucers

ried Danny. Then you might understand."

"Is it important now?"

"Yes. That's what started it." She still didn't look at him. He wondered why he was willing to sit there, when Amos' murder hammered in the back of his mind. He ought to get up on deck, if he could, and see what he could do with Clint Fowler. But he sat there and listened to her quiet words, spoken in a flat monotone.

"You see, Danny always loved me the way I wished you would love me. Many men have loved me, David—men you never knew about. Clint Fowler, for instance. But you never paid much attention. Maybe it's because you knew how I felt and lost interest in me. Danny asked me to marry him many times, but I always refused. I never said, 'Yes'."

"You said, 'yes,' the last time," David said.

"No." She spoke quietly. "I thought I was marrying you."

"Me?"

"I thought it was you, David—not your twin brother. Not Danny. *You*. And I was happy to elope with him."

He felt incredulous. There was conviction in her voice, a sincerity and determination that he believed and that he had never found before. She looked at him with eyes that were strange to him.

"I don't understand," he muttered. "It isn't possible."

She said earnestly, "You know how Danny was. Not like you. He lived a fast life, for fun and excitement. He hated you because I loved you, and not him."

"I know," David said. "I always felt it."

"And he determined to get me, under any circumstances. He proposed to me as you, David. I thought it was you."

"No," he said. "We may be identical twins, but you'd know the difference between us. He couldn't fool you that much."

"You were away!" she said fiercely. "He wore your clothes, he imitated your mannerisms, he even fooled Amos and Pete! Even then, I wouldn't have been sure, and I didn't believe it until he played the violin."

David was pale. "Danny couldn't play the violin."

"But he did! He must have practiced, secretly. It was only a short piece, I don't even know what it was; but he looked like you, he played like you, and I was convinced. And we eloped."

DAVID said nothing. It was not impossible. Danny had always taken an obscure delight in confusing others by posing as himself, as David, since they were children. He could have practiced enough on the violin to fool Janet. It was typical of Danny's warped, practical jokes. Looking at Janet's pale, earnest face, David believed her. He glanced at his watch and listened to the thud and hiss of the sea. The Gull was making heavy weather of it. She was carrying too much canvas in her effort to pull away from the Pallas. He thought of Clint Fowler, and felt his shoulders crawl with tension. He looked at Janet.

"So when you found that your husband was Danny, not I, you killed him," he said quietly.

"No!" Janet cried. "I didn't!"

"That's what your famous quarrel with him was about, wasn't it? The one everybody in town knows about."

"Yes, but I didn't kill him. When I learned he was Danny, I told him the marriage wasn't legal, but he said it was. I said I wouldn't stay with him, anyway. We quarreled, yes, but it was only words. Then he dashed out of the house and I never saw him again." Janet leaned forward anxiously. "David, I love you and I always have. That's why I'm risking my own life to give you this one last chance. Clint wants to kill you."

"Is Clint the murderer?"

She looked away. She said, "Clint wants to fix it so that we can go back and tell the sheriff you forced us to sea at the point of a gun when we caught you killing Uncle Amos."

"And what would happen to me then?"

"You'd be dead," Janet said. "That's the way Clint wants it."

"And you?"

"We can blame Clint." Janet's breath came faster. Her lips were parted. "You

can kill *him*, David. I'll help you. We can say Clint did it and reverse the whole story." She sounded eager. "It's the only way to save yourself, David. Peterson is half convinced that you're the killer; he thinks you want all the family inheritance for yourself, and he knows you were jealous when I married Danny."

"And what do I pay for this break?" he asked grimly.

She looked at him. "You know why I'm doing it. Because I love you. If you marry me, David, we can be happy, we can enjoy all the good things we've ever wanted—"

"That *you've* wanted, not me," he corrected. He stood up. "It won't do, Janet."

Her voice was curiously flat. "You refuse me?"

He said, "You're Clint's girl, aren't you? You always have been. And Clint is the murderer, isn't he?"

Janet nodded.

"Yes," she whispered.

DAVID went on quietly. "It took me a little time to get it all straight. You and Clint almost convinced me that my Uncle Amos killed Danny and was framing me for it, so he'd have the family fortune. I was sure of that until the end, figuring Clint was just one of Amos' hired hands. But it was the other way around. Amos was so concerned about me that he played right into Clint's hands—until he suddenly learned the truth and Clint killed him."

"In Clint's sail loft," Janet nodded. "Clint lost his head. He said something about how he should have killed you on the Five Kings. And Amos suddenly realized what Clint had been doing."

David said, "Anyway, it worked out right for you. It fitted your plan of pinning Danny's death on me. You killed

Danny because he taunted you and probably refused you his money and told you that you would never get me."

"He said you were in love with Linda Hayes and didn't know it," Janet nodded.

David looked up at the cabin skylight. The sloop was pounding heavily into the tormented seas. He heard a restless footstep on deck, the creak of rigging and the whistling whimper of the wind. He wondered if the Pallas was closing the gap between them.

"Are you in love with Linda?" Janet asked.

David smiled thinly. "Yes. You see what that does to your plans, Janet. After Danny was killed, you figured on either winning me or framing me to get rid of me and having the Porter fortune for yourself."

Anged flicked in Janet's eyes. She took a quick breath. "It wasn't me. It was Clint. I was his girl, and he still thinks I am. He won't let anybody else have me. When I married Danny, thinking it was you, Clint wanted to kill him. I was so bitter and humiliated that I told him to go ahead. He hates you all, you know—all the Porters. He's jealous of your position in town, of your wealth, of the fact that he has to work as a fishing captain for you."

"He figured he and I could step right in and inherit, through my marriage to Danny. After he killed Danny, I couldn't help myself. But now I'm glad, in a way. Clint plans to kill you, and that's the only thing to do. We didn't plan it like this, but Amos interfered; we had to kill him, anyway. But that can be blamed on you, too."

She stood up suddenly, her mouth quivering. David watched with astonishment as tears sprang to her eyes.

"David, I don't want you to die. . . . I hate Clint! Why don't you help me against him? Why don't you kill him for me? You and I could be so happy, I'd be so good to you, I—"

She swayed toward him. David's eyes were queerly indrawn, watching her. Her hands touched his shoulders, crept around his neck, drawing him close to her. He didn't move.

He looked over her shoulder. He said, "Come in, Clint. Join the party."

NEXT ISSUE

LET'S HAVE SOME MURDER

A Novelet by W. T. BALLARD

AND OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER VIII

WORTH TWO MILLION



JANET'S reaction was instantaneous. She sprang away from him, her breath hissing out, color draining from her face as she swung to the cabin door. David still didn't move. Clint Fowler stood there, huge, implacable, his red hair grazing the overhead, his shoulders hunched forward a little. He had a gun in his hand. David wondered if he was going to be killed now. It needed only a word, a spark. He wondered how it would feel to be dead, with Danny and Uncle Amos. There would be no more Porters in Bar Haven. He wondered what Linda would think. She'd know the truth and be unable to do anything about it. They'd get away with it. There would be suspicion, but no proof. The town was almost convinced that David Porter was the murderer. Amos' death would clinch it. He felt his legs tremble as he looked at the big man.

Clint said heavily, "I need you both topside."

Janet's voice was blurred. "Clint, did you hear...?"

"Yeah, I heard."

"I was only trying to stall him. He woke up suddenly and was going to kill us, and I had to distract him—"

"Sure," Clint said. "Come on up on deck."

"Don't you believe me?" Janet screamed.

Clint said quietly, "No. Let's go."

He moved his gun slightly. David stirred. He followed Janet out of the cabin, with Clint behind him. He waited for a shot in the back. Nothing happened. Janet stumbled on the ladder and made a sobbing sound.

Clint said, "Step on it. I made the mainsheet fast. It won't hold forever."

Rain dashed in a fine spray along the tilted deck, pelting down out of the low overcast. David paused in the hatchway, searching the gray seas. There was no land in sight. But off the starboard quarter were the taut sails of the Pallas, considerably closer now, edging

in on a tack that would cross the Gull's bow at a future point. He felt a momentary thrill of pride as he watched the yawl sail. Then Clint's gun prodded his back.

"Your funeral escort," he said grimly. "You handle the mainsheet a while. I'd rather not kill you with them so close."

They moved after to the cockpit and wheel. Great seas raced down on the laboring sloop, and David cast an eye aloft. He wondered how long mast and canvas could stand the strain. He turned his back to the cold, pelting rain. He was soaked to the skin in a moment. At the wheel, Clint was like a giant, primitive incarnation of the elements, out of some Wagnerian theme—stripped to the waist and bare-footed for a better grip on the slippery deck. Janet huddled in the cockpit across from him. The rain and salt spray disheveled her hair and plastered her thin slack suit to her body. David could see the spasms of shivering that wracked her.

He spoke to the big man at the wheel.

"You won't get away with it. The Pallas can outrun you in this weather, if you don't lose your sticks before that."

"Then you'll die all the sooner," Clint grunted. He had the gun stuck inside his wide leather belt. "It's that fool girl, Linda, and the sheriff. They picked me up before I was clear of land."

"Then they know I'm aboard," David said.

"Yes. But they don't know why. And you won't be around to contradict me when I say you killed Amos and forced us to sea with you."

David said, "I thought you were my friend."

Clint Fowler laughed. "A man oughtn't to count his friends when he's got two million dollars."

"What about Janet?" David said. "She was willing to cross you up for me, only a moment ago."

"I'll attend to her later." Clint didn't look at the wet, terrified girl. "I'm not forgetting anything."

"How can you trust her?" David persisted. "She'd knife you in the back as soon as look at you."

Janet said fiercely, "Shut up, you!

Shut up!"

Fowler grinned. "That won't work, David. You can't make us fall out now. Me and Janet are in too deep. She knows better."

"If you kill me, they'll know I'm not the murderer."

"They can't prove anything," Clint shrugged. "It will be a light rap for manslaughter, at the worst. It's worth two million. Because Janet isn't going to cross me, are you, baby?"

"No, Clint," Janet cried. "Never!"

Clint said, "So say your prayers David. And haul that mainsheet closer and see if we can shake your yawl down off the horizon. I'd rather not have witnesses so close when I kill you."

DAVID did as he was told. He considered lunging for the big man, and weighed his chance of getting at Clint's gun before Fowler made it. The chances were no good. He looked over-side at the lee rail, at the water boiling and smashing along the sloop's hull. He considered diving overboard. But he wouldn't get far. Even if he survived in the sea, Clint would shoot him, regardless of witnesses on the yawl. He had to. But he didn't want to die. He looked at Clint's hard, weathered face, and knew he was going to die. There wasn't anything he could do about it. He tried to think of something, but there wasn't any way to get at Clint's gun.

He said suddenly: "You're forgetting about Joe Duley."

Clint looked aside at the Pallas before replying. The yawl was still coming up, rapidly and steadily. A girl's slim figure was visible now at the wheel—Linda. Clint looked at David from under ropy, wet red brows.

"Duley doesn't mean anything," he said.

"He knows who killed Danny," David told him.

"Duley just thinks he knows. He's a rumdum."

The sloop lurched, and both men's gaze leaped to the mainsail. The bow rode high over a sea, and as the vessel hesitated, the huge canvas spilled some of her wind, then refilled with a thunderous crack.

David said, "Don't you realize what it is that Duley knows?"

Clint shrugged. "It isn't important."

Janet said, "Shut up, David. Don't listen to him, Clint. He's still trying to make trouble between us."

The big man looked surprised. He cocked his head toward the wet, shivering girl. The sloop heeled far over as he adjusted the wheel to the wind, and white water boiled over the lee rail to within inches of the cockpit.

"Why is Duley important?" he asked finally.

"Because of that message you received on the Five Kings when I was aboard with you. The message that told you Danny was dead, and then the second one that warned you about me, the supercargo." David took another turn with the mainsheet. Spray dashed over him, drenching him. But the rain was slackening. There was sunlight on the sea far ahead. "Amos didn't send either of those messages."

"So what?"

"It was Janet, wasn't it?"

Janet said, "Shut up!"

Clint said, "Go ahead, David."

"Janet isn't as smart as she thinks, or she'd have had you do another murder for her. She should have killed Duley, the radio operator, instead of bribing him to forget she was the sender of those messages."

Clint turned red under his tan. His neck seemed to swell. His giant body swiveled as he looked at the girl.

"You did that?" he demanded.

"I thought it was best—"

"You fool," he said. His eyes widened. "That's why Amos came charging in. Duley's talked to him—and probably everybody else by now. That's why Amos said you did it—"

"Clint, I—"

At the moment when they both stared at each other, David took the short, stubby knife he had concealed in his trousers and slashed with one stroke through the mainsheet.

WHAT followed was chaos. The huge main boom, released from its restraining line swung far outboard, spilling wind from the sail with a great slatting of canvas. The sloop promptly

lost way, her bow fell off, and she lurched like a wounded animal, yawing around to fall into a trough. A green sea smashed down on them from windward. The sloop shuddered and recoiled. Long before she had a chance to recover, David was moving—fast.

He hit the big man hard, driving him back across the wet deck. White water boiled between them. He could feel the terrific tug at his legs. He saw Clint grapple for the gun in his belt and lunged again. Clint forgot the gun and swung at him. David ducked. The blow whistled over his head. His fist hit the big man's stomach, and it was like hitting a stone wall. But Clint's breath came out with a rush and he fell back, staggering as the Gull wallowed between green seas.

David drew a deep, struggling breath. Wind and sea became one, a white smother of foam that filled the space between him and his life-long rival.

The big man came crawling along the gunwale of the cockpit. Then he dived for David. The impact of his body was like a battering ram. They both went down, Clint on top, sliding headlong over the deck. There was no rail to stop them. David felt Clint's fist slam into his ribs, and he arched his body convulsively. From somewhere he heard Janet's high, frightened scream. A wall of water engulfed them, and Clint's hands touched his throat, tried to find a grip, and then slid away. David rolled free, hooked his foot against some obstacle, and stood up, coughing.

Janet Stone was standing at the hatchway, forward of the cockpit. She didn't see her danger. She was watching Clint crawl laboriously back on deck from a precarious perch on the gunwale. The giant main boom, swinging without control, crashed inboard toward him. David tried to call out, swallowed water, and lurched toward him. He ducked just in time. Janet didn't. The heavy spar caught her in the back of her head and she was gone in a twinkling, hurtled from the deck into the sea like a limp rag doll.

David felt sick. He grabbed at a halcyard, braced himself against a wash of water. The sloop rolled like a helpless

log in the heavy seas. He glimpsed the Pallas' sails, suddenly enormous, towering overhead as the yawl jogged alongside the derelict. He looked for Clint. The big man was clinging to the Gull's wheel. He looked dazed. His face was empty. He kept watching the sea where Janet had disappeared. She didn't come up again.

David called to him, fighting the breath into his lungs.

"She's dead."

Clint looked at him vaguely, then nodded as if it were an enormous effort. His hands came off the wheel and he sat down and put his head between his hands and remained there, not moving, the fight gone out of him. His shoulders quivered a little, but he didn't look up, not even when Linda's hail came across the water, followed by Sheriff Sam Peterson's bellow. There were other men aboard the Pallas, fishermen hastily recruited from the waterfront in the hurried moments before they sailed.

David didn't answer their hail. He felt empty, as if he were the defeated man. He thought of his twin brother Danny, of Amos Stillmeadow, and Janet. He pumped air into his exhausted lungs and watched the big man who sat bowed behind the wheel of his wrecked sloop.

IT seemed a long time before he was aboard the Pallas again, before Sam Peterson stopped asking questions, and the Coast Guard cutter that had plowed up in the Pallas' wake had taken the derelict sloop in tow. It had stopped raining. The sun was out, and the vast expanse of seas racing southward was filled with light and shadow. The wind swung around southerly and lightened, so that the Pallas moved at a leisurely pace on a broad reach for Bar Haven and home.

Linda was at the wheel. She had refused to relinquish it after learning that David was all right. He stood beside her, watching the way the sails were drawing. Up in the bow, Sam Peterson's voice was a rising and falling mutter as he talked to the Coast Guard ensign who had remained aboard. The cutter was far astern,

slowed to a crawl by the Gull in tow.

Linda said, "How do you feel, David?"

He looked at her. She was slim and lovely, an embodiment of fair winds and favorable seas. She looked wonderful. When he studied her, the back of his mind was filled with the strains of all the love songs he had ever played.

"I feel all right," he said.

"What will they do to Clint?" she asked.

"I don't know. It's up to the courts. He confessed to the murders."

"Do you think he really did them?"

David shrugged. "He killed Danny and Amos. But he wasn't the real killer. It was Janet who made these things happen."

They were silent for a moment. He thought of the Porter house on the hill overlooking Bar Haven. The house would seem very empty now. He didn't want to go back there to live. Then he

though that if Linda were there with him, as Mrs. David Porter, it might not be so bad. It was a question for the future. There would have to be other questions asked before that.

When he looked down at the girl by his side, he knew what the answers were going to be.

On the forward deck, Sheriff Sam Peterson and Ensign Thomas paused in their discussion and looked to the stern as the Pallas fell off and her sails slapped impatiently. The two figures standing at the yawl's wheel looked like one.

"They're certainly taking their time," Ensign Thomas said.

Sam grinned. "It don't look that way to me."

The ensign flushed. "I meant about sailing home."

"What's the hurry?" Sam drawled. He looked forward at the sea ahead. "There's plenty of time now."



AN ACE INVESTIGATOR PLUNGES INTO A WHIRLPOOL
OF MYSTERY AND COMES UP WITH A FISTFUL
OF MURDER AND BLACKMAIL EVIDENCE

IN

THE WRONG CORPSE

An Exciting Race Williams Novelet

By CARROLL JOHN DALY



FEATURED IN THE NEXT ISSUE!



As I drape the coat over the body I decide that this murder is now the police's baby

Alibi—With Sound

By ROBERT WALLACE

House dick Arty Boyle knows his rackets—noisy or otherwise!

AT THE Hotel Lanceford it is one of those Saturday nights that turn a house detective's hair gray. First a dame in Six-twenty gets screaming drunk and starts throwing stuff out the window—and she doesn't bother to open the window. So I have to go up and quiet her down. Then a man and his wife start a fight in Eight-sixteen. It is Marty Boyle's job to take care of that, too—and that's my name and I'm the house detective.

The man is shouting a lot of words

that my grandfather would never admit he knew, the wife is yelling right back at him when I knock on the door of Eight-sixteen. They are making so much noise that they don't even hear me, so I really pound the panel.

"Cease, desist, shut up!" I called. "It is the caribinare." Me and my education!

The silence is like that when you switch off a radio. The door opens and a little bald-headed guy peers out at me. Behind him stands a stout dame

who is head and shoulders taller than her noisy husband.

"Go away," the little man says. "We haven't got your canary."

"Never mind giving me the bird," I say. "I'm the house detective, and you'll have to quiet down."

"Sock him in the nose, Eddie," says the human model for a transport.

I'm about average size, but I'm tough. They don't hire you as a house detective on one of those hotels around Times Square, like the Lanceford, because of your youth and beauty. If the little man socks me he will be sorry.

"It is all right, mister," says the little man. "Sorry, if we disturbed anyone."

"Sock him in the nose, Eddie," says the dame with a one-track mind.

I glanced into the room. There is a half-empty pitcher of beer standing on a table and two empty glasses beside it. It strikes me that getting as stewed as these two apparently are on that little to drink takes talent, a weak constitution, or something.

"Be quiet, Martha," says the little man.

The dame sinks into a chair and sits there like a pouting Buddha, only she is fully dressed. So fully that I wonder if Omar, the tent maker, turns out her apparel. The husband is wearing a white linen suit, a green shirt and a pink bow tie. For a couple staying in a hotel room on a hot July night they sure are all dressed up.

"See that it doesn't happen again," I tell them in my politest tone. "Any more noise from you two and you go out of this joint on your ear."

WITH that I close the door from the outside and go down to the lobby. Harry Lang, the night clerk, is behind the desk, talking to John Fairfield, the assistant manager.

"Everything all right, Arty?" Fairfield asks. He's a tall, dark-haired man who always wears double-breasted suits and a simper for the guests. "What was wrong in Eight-sixteen?"

"A lovers' quarrel between a rowboat and a battleship," I says, then I look at Lang. "What's the name of that couple, Harry?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Edward Brown from

Chicago," answers the night clerk. "And if you get them started they will talk your ear off."

"Nice unusual name," I says. "Smith is good, too."

When I see Jimmy Drake, one of the bellboys, hurrying toward the desk I have a feeling that trouble is coming. Drake has been a bellhop too many years to move fast unless there is something wrong.

"The guy in Eight-twenty," Jimmy says as he reaches us, and for a bellboy he is almost excited. "He's up there lying on the floor—dead."

"Which is all I need to make it a perfect evening—in spades," I says, and then I look resignedly at the night clerk. "Who has Eight-twenty, Harry?"

"Craig Homer," says Lang. "You know him, Arty. He always stays here when he is in town. He's a diamond buyer for some firm out West."

"Now tell me he was murdered for the crown jewels and I'll upchuck," I says, glancing at the bellboy. "How do you know Homer is dead, Jimmy?"

"I felt for his pulse, and there wasn't any," Jimmy says. "Whoever stuck the knife in that guy's back wasn't fooling."

"Knife in his back," I says. "Then it is murder. I'm going upstairs. Fairfield you better call the boys from Homicide."

"Phone the police, Lang," says the assistant manager. "Ask them to try and arrive quietly—the publicity you know. Bad for the hotel. I'm going up with Boyle."

"Come along, Jimmy," I tell the bellboy. "You might remember something you overlooked."

Fairfield, Drake and yours truly go up to the eighth floor in the elevator. The door to Eight-twenty is standing half open when we reach it—which don't strike me as too bright upon Jimmy Drake's part. There are quite a few people in the rooms on the eighth floor, and hotel guests love to see how the other half of the corridor lives.

As we reach Eight-twenty doors start opening up and down the hall and three or four guys who have been waiting for things to start happening step out of their rooms.

"If we had known you were coming,

we'd have held a wake," I says, giving the innocent bystanders a frosty glance. I noticed my loud-mouthed pal, Mr. Edward Brown, is not among those present, and across the hall Eight-sixteen holds a lot of silence behind a closed door.

"Keep these lugs back," I say as I step into the room. "Jimmy, you and Fairfield keep them out of here."

The assistant manager and the bell-boy stand at the open door holding the onlookers back as I examine the corpse. Craig Homer is lying face downward on the floor. He is fully dressed except for his coat and there is a lot of blood on the back of his white shirt from the knife wound that killed him, but the knife is missing.

"Say, the knife ain't there," says Jimmy Drake. "And it was sticking in him when I first seen him a little while ago."

I pick up Homer's coat and drape it over the body. From here on this murder is the police's baby and they can take care of it.

"Stick around, folks," I says to the men outside. "We'll have the police question you as soon as they arrive."

Apparently the bunch of eager beavers don't care for that idea. They retire to their rooms post-haste, leaving the hall deserted. I sigh and close the door of Eight-twenty from the inside, and then look at Jimmy and Fairfield. They don't seem any happier than I am at the moment.

"Homer told me early this evening that he was carrying fifty thousand dollars in uncut diamonds in his brief case," Fairfield says. "I suggested he had better put them in the hotel safe, but he just laughed at me."

"He ain't laughing now," Jimmy Drake says. "Wonder what happened to the knife. It was a fancy-looking thing with a white handle."

HOMER'S brief case is lying on top of the bureau. I examine it and find some business letters and papers in it—but no diamonds.

The Homicide Squad arrives, so does a detective from our precinct, a man

from the D. A.'s office, and the whole works. I take the captain in charge aside and talk fast.

"You might have something there, Boyle," he says. "Let's investigate."

We go across the hall and I knock on the door of Eight-sixteen. Edward Brown opens the door and then Captain Carson and I step right into the room. The stout dame is sitting in a chair and she glares at us.

"Sock 'em in the jaw, Eddie," she says. "Throw 'em out of here."

I looked at the pitcher of dark beer. It is still standing on the table, half-empty.

"Your wife is a rotten actress, Brown," I says. I pick up the pitcher and hold it to the nearest light. There were a lot of what looked like little gray stones in the bottom of that pitcher, but I knew they were the unset diamonds that had cost Craig Homer his life. "And your alibi was too noisy."

The captain is nosing around the room and he finds a traveling desk set, all made of ivory with a paper knife that has an ivory handle. For that sort of a knife it has a sharp steel blade with a couple of drops of blood on it—that the Browns overlooked.

"A test will show this is Craig Homer's blood," says Captain Carson, and then he looks at me. "You were smart in suspecting these two, Boyle. How did you happen to do it?"

"They were making too much noise for a couple who had only had half a pitcher of beer to drink," I says. "That worried me right from the start when I first came to this room to make them quiet down. And the dame would have to be awfully stewed to keep insisting that her husband hit me like she did."

"You and your bright ideas," says Brown, glaring at the big dame. "Insisting that we stage a family row so we would have an alibi for about the time of the crime."

"Yeah," I says. "And if you had just kept quiet, no one would even have suspected you." I grin at him. "Sock her in the jaw, Eddie."

And you know what—he does just that!

Serenade **WITH**



a novelet by
**ROBERT
LESLIE
BELLEM**

SLUGS

Nothing could surprise Nick Ransom in that zany funeral home after the sweet chick welcoming him at the door—and the corpse greeting him in the parlor!

Nick careened to the French windows



CHAPTER I

A GUN SNEEZES

THE blonde said, "I'm sorry. You can't see Mr. Needham this morning. He isn't—prepared."

"Then run along like a good girl and prepare him."

"Oh, but I don't do that work. I—"

"Tell him it's Nick Ransom."

Her blue eyes looked startled. "Did you say *tell* him?"

"That's what I said. I said that." I smiled down at her from

my six-foot plussage of altitude. She was a small, fluffy chick: fluffy golden hair, fluffy yellow Angora sweater, a quiet air of fluffy young innocence. Twenty-one or so, at a guess, and not to sure of herself or of her job as receptionist. She seemed somewhat out of place in the cool oak-beamed Gothic room. Her coloring was too vital, too gay, for such embalmed surroundings.

She fluttered a smooth little hand, nervously. "But—"

"Look. Just tell Needham that the private detective he phoned for is here."

"Private detective he phoned for?" The blue eyes widened. "You're teasing me."

"I'd love to tease you when I've got more time, kitten. Right now, though, I'm in sort of a hurry."

She pushed her chair away from the reception desk and stood up. "Do you realize what place this is?"

"Natch. It's the Decker-Pasadena Funeral Home. I had a phone call about an hour ago over in Hollywood asking me to bestride my horse and blip here to see somebody name of Needham. So here I am. Tell him I'm waiting for him, eh, hon?"

"I can't. He's a—" She fumbled for a word. "He's a case here."

"A case?" Then I got it. "You mean he's a stiff."

"In the undertaking profession they prefer us to say deceased," she answered primly. "Somebody must have slipped her a rule book to go with the desk, the chair and the job."

I BEGAN to savvy why she had said Needham wasn't prepared; why her finely plucked eyebrows had gone up when I suggested that she go prepare him. In morticians' language, the word probably meant something gruesome.

I also began to get sore. Practical jokers are okay in their place, but a corpse emporium is not the place. Somebody had obviously picked me for a patsy—and I didn't like it.

Being sore wasn't going to get me anywhere, however. And the fluffy doll with the golden tresses had nothing to do with it. So I gave her my polite smile, the one without the leer in it.

"Maybe there's been a mistake," I

said. "Those things happen, you know. That's why they put rubber doilies under spittoons. Sorry I bothered you, baby."

It didn't go over. She sensed that I was seething. "Would you care to speak to Mr. Decker?"

"If Decker's the boss of this layout, sure."

She started toward a door beyond the desk. Her ankles and gams were worth a second look. I was looking at them when the door opened ferninst her and a tall, cadaverous character popped out.

"Oh," the fluffy chick said. "Here's Mr. Decker now."

"What is it, Linda?" the cadaverous guy said. He sounded like a man talking from the bottom of an oil well—deep, hollow, resonant and unctuous. He wore a midnight blue business suit, so dark it could have passed for black, and he shaved the same color. His gray silk necktie had a small black pearl stickpin in it, and his eyes had as much expression as the stickpin.

Little blonde Linda indicated me. "This is Mr. Ransom. He—"

"Ransom? The private detective from, ah, Hollywood?"

"Yeah," I said.

Decker said, "Mr. Needham is, ah, expecting you."

I didn't buy that. Under the circumstances, who would? Evidently Linda didn't buy it either.

"But Mr. Needham is dead!" she protested.

"His brother is not," Decker said, and fixed the disapproving focus on her. "You may go back to your desk, Linda."

He muttered something about the inefficiency of modern office help.

"I apologize if she confused you, sir. You see, it is Mr. Paul Needham who is, ah, deceased. His younger brother, Mr. Max Needham, is the one who phoned you. He requested me to keep an eye out for you and bring you to him as soon as you arrived."

"Fair enough. Lead the way."

"You, ah, really are Nick Ransom, the, er, detective?"

"According to my birth certificate and gun permit." I gave him a look at my special badge. "Next time you're in Hollywood, drop by my office and I'll

show you my license. I keep it framed on the wall to remind me I've switched professions. I used to be a movie stunt man. Next question?"

"I beg your pardon," he said icily. "I didn't intend to be nosy. But at a time like this"—he gestured delicately—"one must be careful not to intrude upon a bereaved person's sorrow. Asking you for identification was merely a precaution."

"A precaution against what?"

"Well, ah, newspaper reporters, for instance. Mr. Needham especially asked me to keep out the press."

"These Needhams," I said. "Would they be the wealthy brothers with a mansion on Millionaires' Row here in Pasadena?"

"Their home is on South Orange Grove Avenue, yes."

"Hermits, sort of?"

"Well, ah, you might say they have been recluses, in a sense." Decker repeated the delicate gesture. "That is, not given to mingling socially with their neighbors. Every man to his own eccentricities."

I said, "From what I've read of them, they're not eccentric. They're downright punchy."

DECKER permitted himself an underprivileged smile. "That perhaps explains why Mr. Max Needham hasn't yet released the news of his brother's sudden, ah, passing last night. It explains his aversion to reporters. The newspapers have had a lurid habit of cloaking the family in spurious mystery and printing a great deal of, ah, drivel concerning them. Most regrettable. Most unfortunate."

"I take it you don't like newspapers."

He lifted a shoulder. "I always try to defer to the wishes of our patrons."

"Well, let's see this Max Needham then."

He was liking me less and less. He glanced toward the reception desk. Fluffy Linda was giving her complete attention to an earnest young bozo whose sandy hair was hatless and whose chunky framework looked even chunkier by virtue of his casual tweeds. He had a sun-bronzed face wreathed in a fatuous smile, and it was very appar-

rent that Linda's innocent loveliness stirred a mighty yen within him.

Decker sniffed audibly. "Hmff!" He turned on his heel, ankled down a silent, softly carpeted hallway. I tagged along. Presently we came to a doorway and Decker stood aside for me.

"One of our repose rooms," he said. "Mr. Needham is in there, waiting for you. As soon as his brother's remains are, ah, prepared, they will be brought in."

"Try to delay it till after I'm gone," I cut in. "I'd just as soon not hold a business conference in a room containing a corpse."

I grasped the door's L-shaped wrought brass handle.

Simultaneously, from beyond the closed portal, there came the bellowing yammer of a gun sneezing: *Ka-Chow!* It was followed by the inevitable cliché of a dull thud, as of someone falling down.

I pushed against the door. It resisted me.

Decker yelped, "Good heavens—what—what was that?" and attempted to haul me aside so he could tackle the door personally.

I gave him an elbow in the short ribs. Then I shoved at the portal with my full hundred and ninety pounds of heft. Reluctantly, gradually, it opened inward with a dragging noise.

Long before I plunged over the threshold I realized what caused that resisting pressure. I was pushing against a murdered man.

The room was small and formal. Angling across one corner was a waist high bier draped in black velvet, but there was no coffin on it now. Opposite, there was an overstuffed settee or davenport, likewise unoccupied. Two stiff, hard-back chairs completed the furnishings. Long, narrow French windows stood open behind one of the chairs, and a vagrant breeze stirred their tapestry drapes.

The sharp odor of burned gunpowder came pungently to me. On the floor in a huddled heap lay a guy in old fashioned gray serge, the kind of suit they used to tailor for bankers and brokers in the gay nineties. The pants were narrow of leg, the coat high of lapel,

and the vest had white piping. A tall choker collar encircled his skinny neck, a massive watch chain sagged across the vest, and he wore button shoes that belonged in a museum. He had been serenaded through the left ear with a bullet of very large caliber, and the gunshot had rendered him deader than yesterday's hamburger.

Peering over my shoulder, the cadaverous Decker character uttered a stricken, "It's Mr. Needham—I mean Mr. Max Needham—that is, the one who's alive."

"Not any more," I snapped. "Somebody repealed him by one vote from a gat." Then I added. "Hold down the fort," and careened to the French windows.

CHAPTER II

SURPRISE ARREST



OUTSIDE the windows was a sort of inside patio complete with tiled walks, flower beds, and an ornamental fountain centered by a marble angel, female, with folded wings. A stream of water spurted erratically from her mouth, falling into a mossy pool infested by vast quantities of goldfish. The goldfish were feeding at the surface until they lapped me barging out through the windows.

I took a rapid look at the rectangular patio and saw nobody who might be a murderer. I saw nobody, period.

The patio was enclosed on all four sides by the building itself. You needed only one glance to realize there were no exits except through the so-called repose rooms like the one where Max Needham had just been killed. Including that room, there were three of these rooms on the north side, all with French windows. I gave the remaining two a fast frisk and I still saw nobody.

But the killer couldn't be very far ahead of me, and his only possible avenue of escape was the route which I myself now followed—back along the inside corridor to the front of the mortuary where the reception desk was located. Heading in that direction, I

almost collided with little Linda of the fluffy golden coiffure. With her was the chunky, sun-bronzed fellow in tweeds.

They'd heard the shot, too, and were hurrying along the hall to see what the commotion was all about. I stopped them.

"Who passed you kids just now?"

Linda blinked at me, uncertainly. "Passed us?"

"Somebody ran this way," I said. "It's the only way anybody *could* have run."

"But there hasn't been anyone—" She hesitated, looked at the chunky fellow with her. "Did you see anybody, Stevie?"

"No."

"People just don't up and vanish in a cloud of smoke," I said. "Not even murderers."

"Mur—murd—"

"Yeah. Max Needham just got shot."

The tweedy youth gave a strangled gasp. "Uncle Max? Murdered?" Then he zoomed by me to the repose room where Needham's remains were being dubiously guarded by Decker, the undertaker.

I started to trail him then thought better of it. "Linda, we need some law. Better phone headquarters."

"Yes, Mr. Ransom."

"And Linda."

She halted.

I said, "You had a clear view of the hall. Are you sure nobody came from any of the doors?"

"Positive. I was at my desk, talking to Stevie. You had gone with Mr. Decker, and then there was a noise like a gunshot, and you and Mr. Decker went in that room. Stevie and I waited a minute, then started to see what the trouble was. But we didn't meet anybody until you came along."

"This Stevie," I said. "Who is he?"

"His name is Steven Horne. He works in Hollywood. He produces short features for Altamount."

"Know him pretty well, do you?"

She blushed. "Quite well."

"He seems plenty upset by Max Needham's getting killed. Called him Uncle Max. How come?"

"He's Mr. Needham's only relative. A nephew. He—"

"Hm-m-m. Okay, go phone the police."

A sudden look came into her blue eyes, calculating and at the same time fearful. "Wait a minute. Just because Mr. Needham's been killed and his brother died last night and Steven is their only heir and you're a private detective, that doesn't give you the right to accuse—"

"Hey, nix," I said soothingly. "I didn't accuse your precious Steve. He was with you at your desk when the shot was fired in the repose room. Decker and I saw him leaning over you whispering sweet nothings. That clears him." I grinned. "He couldn't ask for a prettier alibi."

She caught the compliment, fielded it with a blush and thanked me with a demure smile. Her eyes also thanked me for relieving her of the worry that her boy friend might be held for plugging his Uncle Max.

Turning, she went back to her desk, dialed the phone and said something into it. Then I heard her voice lift. "It's already been reported—?"

Whereupon, as she hung up, a sedan screeched to a stop outside the joint and a plainclothes dick came bouncing in-doors with fire in his eye and a gat in his fist. He saw me standing there.

"I'm Cassidy. The law," he said politely. "I was cruising and got it on my short wave. Where's the kill and where's the killer?"

"Ransom," I answered him just as politely. "Private op. In one of the repose rooms. Vanished into thin air."

HE was a youngish red-haired guy, this Cassidy, a modern cop who moved fast and had probably been promoted out of brass buttons his first year on the force. At least he didn't look like a copper who'd spent much time pounding pavement.

He gave me the rapid once-over. "Would you be trying to kid somebody with that double talk, bud?"

"Not at all. You introduced yourself. I did the same. You asked me where the kill was and I told you—in one of the so-called repose rooms. You also asked me where's the killer. I said he had vanished into thin air. Sorry if the

bright crisp dialogue annoyed you."

"Okay, okay. You're a private man, eh?"

"Yeah."

"Well get this. Headquarters will be here in a minute. Until then, I'm in charge. And I don't want you to horn in. Got it? Now show me where the thing happened."

I steered him to the little room where the somber Decker and the sandy-haired Steven Horne were standing guard over the mortal remains of Max Needham. Decker, in his unctuous undertaker's voice, started talking. Young Horne started talking over him. Between the two of them you couldn't understand a thing being said.

Cassidy began to look mildly rattled. He had holstered his gun and unlimbered a pencil and notebook, but all he'd managed to write was the time he picked up the radio call and the time of his arrival at the Decker-Pasadena Funeral Home. That was everything he had—and it was a wonder he had that much, with Horne and Decker bleating at him.

I felt sorry for him. "Quiet!" I yeped in a helpful way. "Be still and let the poor guy take notes. Who phoned headquarters?"

"I did," the chunky Horne fellow said, and indicated a phone in one corner of the repose room. "I figured—"

"All right," I interrupted him. Then, to Cassidy, "Here's the way it happened. Max Needham's brother Paul died last night and it was kept out of the newspapers. This morning Max phoned me, asked me to come over from Hollywood for a conference. I got here a few minutes ago. Max was waiting for me in this repose room. The door was closed. Just as I opened it, there was a shot."

"Got a short memory, haven't you?" Cassidy said. "I told you not to horn in."

"But I'm only trying to help you—"

"This is Pasadena," he said through his teeth. "I don't give a tiny little whistle how they do things in Hollywood, but over here we have an efficient police department. We don't need help from smartalec private snoops."

Indignation commenced to fester in

my brisket. "You mean you don't want to hear the lowdown?"

"Out of you I want to hear nothing but silence."

I said, "You're passing up a chance to win yourself a reputation, sonny. All you have to do is make a frisk and listen to an important piece of information the goldfish told me."

"Goldfish?" He narrowed his glims. "Talking goldfish, eh? Now I know I'm being ribbed." He put his palms on my chest. "Out," he growled. "Out, before I give you a nose full of lumps." He shoved me over the threshold into the hallway.

I don't like being shoved. It does something to my ego. I was about to barge right back and flail him to a white blister, but a timorous touch on my elbow stopped me. Little Linda was at my side, trying to calm me down.

"Please, Mr. Ransom—don't!" she whispered. "Things are bad enough already."

She looked upset, frightened. I put a hammerlock on my resentment, got my ire under control.

"Yeah, hon, I guess you're right," I said. "We'll wait until some headquarters brains show up. Then I'll speak my piece."

Whereupon I made a mistake. I slid an arm around her enticing slender waist and we walked together toward her desk in the reception foyer.

The mistake was in letting young Steve Horne see me do it. He packed too much jealousy in his chunky tonnage, and he evidently considered the blonde chick his private property.

Three minutes later Cassidy came striding from the repose room, his pencil and notebook stowed away and his service .38 once more in his capable fist. He prodded me with the muzzle.

"You're under arrest," he said.

"Me?"

"You. On suspicion of murder."

KIDNAPED



HE absurdity of the charge left me momentarily flabbergasted. Presently I got my second wind.

"Now just a minute!" I caterwauled. "Either you've got a screw loose or somebody's been feeding you

opium. Where did you get the idea I croaked Max Needham? I never even met the old gaffer. He phoned me to hurry over here to see him, but he was shot before I opened the door to the room where he was waiting."

"That's just it. Young Horne says he thinks the shot was fired *after* you opened the door to the repose room."

Then I caught wise. The chunky bozo was sore because I'd put my arm around his golden-haired girl friend, and this was his way of getting even. He knew the beef wouldn't stick, but he was counting on giving me a few uncomfortable minutes before I wriggled off the hook.

"So that's how it adds up," I said.

"Right you are." Cassidy nodded grimly.

"And did you ask Decker for his version?" I demanded. "As one of your town's leading undertakers, his word ought to carry considerable weight. He was with me outside the room when I reached for the knob. He heard the blast inside the door before I opened it."

"Mr. Decker seems a trifle confused. He can't seem to remember whether the shot was before or after. Now stop gabbing, while I search you." And he started to reach under my coat for the cannon I tote in an armpit rig.

I stood still, knowing that my little blonde pal Linda had seen me outside the repose room door at the time of the kill. Her testimony would alibi me the same as it would alibi her ever-loving Stevie Horne. And the cadaverous Decker would confirm this when his memory got back on its track. In fact, the four of us—Linda, Horne, Decker and myself—would be banded together in a mutual protective alliance. All of us could swear that none of us had put

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RACE WILLIAMS

in

THE WRONG CORPSE

by CARROLL JOHN DALY

a bullet through Max Needham's head. Moreover, I could furnish character references from my friend Ole Brunvig of the Los Angeles homicide squad, whose fat I'd pulled out of the fire dozens of times during the past many years.

Sure, this Cassidy copper would be in hot water up to his adenoids if he persisted in pinching me. I licked my mental chops, anticipating his squirming apologies.

Then the blow fell.

Linda was the dizzy dimwit who innocently did the dirty work. Looking at her, you would practically see her dubious mental processes going into high gear. First she glared down the corridor toward that repose room where Horne and the unctuous Decker guarded Max Needham's lifeless husk. Realization was filtering into her head that her sweetie had deliberately dumped me in the grease for spite. And she apparently thought I was in a genuine jackpot as a result of Horne's ridiculous accusation.

No doubt motivated by an earnest desire to help me, and at the same time put Horne in his place, she pulled an unexpected fast one. She grabbed a paperweight off her desk and pitched a strike on Cassidy's ginger-red thatch. The paperweight maced him unconscious and he dropped in his tracks. Then Linda fastened herself to my arm and started tugging me.

"Come on, Mr. Ransom. I'll show you how to escape!"

I balked. "Now, cut that out!" I said. "I'm in no danger. Or anyhow I wasn't in any until you conked the copper."

"But you are too in danger! Look!"

I LOOKED. Eleventeen of Pasadena's finest were thundering into the mortuary.

One of them spotted Cassidy on the floor, and at the same instant Cassidy opened a bleary eye.

"Guy named . . . Ransom . . . hit me . . . with a blackjack . . ." he mumbled.

He had it all wrong, of course. But that did me no good at the moment. Those bulls would swarm over me before I could deny Cassidy's confused

charge. They'd run me through the grinder without giving me a chance to tell my side of the story. Besides, even if I told it, I would place Linda behind the eight ball. Caving in a policeman's steeple is considered extremely bad form.

Linda was the one who needed assistance now. I quit being obstinate. I started moving fast, taking the chick with me.

"We've got to hole up until the excitement subsides, baby," I said. "Which way is out?"

"Here." She angled us to a side door, and abruptly we were racing across a sort of paved parking lot alongside the funeral chapel. Back of this lot was a low, wide garage big enough for a couple of hearses and several funeral limousines. She raised her voice. "Tom! Tom Tolliver!"

An ancient gnome popped forth from the garage. He wore stained blue jeans and a grease-streaked flannel work shirt that had seen better days, probably in the McKinley Administration. His face had three more wrinkles than a seedless raisin, and his mouth was industriously gumming a wad of cut plug.

"Yeah, Miss Linda?"

"Oh, Tom, it's terrible. There's been a murder, and I knocked a policeman unconscious, and they think Mr. Ransom, here, killed Max Needham, but he didn't, and—and—Tom, we've got to make a getaway!"

"Max Needham, hey? J'ined up his brother, hey? Both dead, now. Allus knowed vengeance'd strike 'em down. Couldn't miss." With astonishing celerity he scuttled to one of the limousines, flung himself into the front compartment, did things to the starter and the gears. The car streaked out backward. "Hop in, kids. Ain't got no livery, but I sure kin still chauffeur a Cad good as ever."

I boosted Linda into the tonneau, followed her. The ancient Tolliver raced his motor and we made a wide, sweeping circle on the paved lot. When he slowed for the driveway, though, Linda opened the door on her side and jumped out.

"I'll explain to the police!" she called. "You get going!"

"Hey!" I erupted. "You crazy little fool, come back!"

I might just as well have shouted my protest to the wind.

"Cling tight, brother," Tom Tolliver said, and widened his throttle to full speed ahead.

We roared to the street and skirted around a garbage truck with less than an inch to spare.

"Tolliver!" I strangled.

"Nice drivin', hey, brother?"

"Turn back! Turn back, confound it!"

"Now you jest ree-lax. You're in the hands of a expert. Grease monkey I may be now, but they was a time when I was the best dang chauffeur in Pasadena. Wore the snappiest livery this side o' Denver, I did. Drove for the Needham brothers. For years. That was before Max got looney and fired me along with all the rest of the hired help."

"Max got looney?" I choked. "Are you sure you could get by an alienist yourself? Slow down! Turn back!"

TOLLIVER laughed gleefully. "He-he-he! Great kidder, ain't ye? 'Course I could get past an alienist. Me, I got a mind sharp as a tack." Then, as I moaned at the way he went around a corner on two wheels, "The trouble with you, brother, your nerves is bad. Still an' all, mebbe you're entitled to the jitters when ye jest kilt a man."

I felt the back of my neck coming to a red burn. "You idiotic old goat, I didn't bump Max Needham!"

"Miss Linda said ye did."

"Get the wax out of your ears!" I screeched. "All she said was the cops thought I killed Needham. But they were wrong."

"Then why are ye runnin' away from 'em?"

"I'm not," I said. "I want to go back, but you won't take me. It was only on Linda's account that I started to scam. She'd beaned a dick on my behalf and I was trying to yank her out of the mess. If you don't turn this chariot around and get me back to that funeral joint I'm a cooked goose. The law will think I really did kill Needham."

"Ne'mind what the law thinks. The

fix you're in, brother, it looks like you got to lay low a while. And me, I'm gonna help you do it. Not that I hold with murder," he added piously. "But Max's time had come, anyhow."

I YANKED out my .32 automatic. "I'm tired gabbing. Wheel this crate around or I shoot."

Tolliver grinned. "I don't think you'd do it, not when we're travelin' so fast." He squirted a brown streak of tobacco juice out the window and it flashed by the limousine like an amber comet. "Put away the hardware, brother. You're only frazzlin' your nerves for nothin'."

Frustration flowed through my viens, filled me to the brim with a feeling of weary helplessness. I began to consider the situation from a new angle. I began to wonder why Tolliver seemed so intent on whisking me away from the scene of the kill. Maybe he realized it would put me further in wrong with the law.

Could it be that he himself had something to do with Max Needham's violent demise? The theory had possibilities. After all, he had just admitted that Max had fired him from one of the best chauffeuring jobs in Pasadena. Now, as an old man, he was reduced to the status of grease monkey for a mortician. Maybe he'd seized an opportunity to get even.

Or maybe he was honestly trying to do me a favor, innocently doing what Linda had asked him to do. Suddenly I started thinking about Linda. Why had she pulled that insane stunt of conking Cassidy the cop?

Why had she yanked me out of the funeral home, installed me in this limousine and then slipped away before it started on its journey?

Was it an act of bravery on her part? Or did she have a deeper and more ulterior motive?

The cogs went around and around inside my skull and the car's wheels went around and around on the Pasadena asphalt.

I threw nothing but snake-eyes with my efforts to think. The limousine, however, did better. It reached a destination.

CHAPTER IV

FILTHY RICH



WE were on South Orange Avenue—the broad and famous thoroughfare known as Millionaires' Row. We whammed past the Wrigley mansion, the Adolphus Busch estate, the smattering of vacant lots where once-palatial residences had in recent years been torn down to save taxes for remnants of families whose wealth had dwindled. Then Tolliver gave his steering wheel a twist to the right, and we turned onto a long curving driveway that slanted gently upward into what looked like a tropical jungle.

Once this jungle had been a garden, but now the formal lawns had gone to lush weeds and the untended hedges were past all pruning. Profuse plantings of bushes had clumped up to the size of trees, and the real trees had grown and spread to the dimensions of a forest. Through all this thicket the driveway bored like a tunnel, skirting a three-story mansion not quite as vast as Grand Central Station.

All the building's windows were closed and shuttered. Some of them were even boarded over with scabrous lumber, crazily nailed. We stopped in a rear courtyard with vegetation so dense it almost concealed what formerly had been a coach house, garage and servants' quarters. Tolliver turned off his motor, latched his parking brake and hopped out. He opened the limousine's tonneau door with a flourish.

"Well, brother, here we be. This here elegant layout is the Needham premises." His eyes grew rheumily reminiscent. "Lived here for many a year, I did. Jest like comin' home. Makes me sorta sad."

I told him where he could stuff his sadness. "I've got to get back to the cops and straighten things out," I rasped.

"Suit yourself, if you feel like stickin' your neck out. You'd be stickin' it in a noose, though. Or rather, the gas chamber. It looks to me like this'd be a perfect place for ye to hide a while until

things simmer down. Who'd ever think to hunt for ye in the house of the guy ye bumped off?"

"Blast it, I didn't bump Max Needham!" I shrilled. "I was accused by a jealous jerk who thought he was being smart. Maybe he was smart, at that. Maybe he was covering his own guilt. Horne, I mean. Steven Horne. The Needhams' nephew."

"Little Stevie, hey? I 'member him well. Ye think he could be the guilty guy, do ye? Mebbe ye got somethin' there. But if so, you're up against a plenty smart fella. Better take my advice and hole up here a while. I still got a key," he added. "You want to look the place over, jest in case ye change y'mind?"

"No."

"There's whisky, brother. Pre-war Scotch. By pre-war I mean pre the first World War. Cases o' the stuff, that Paul bought as a young man when he found out we was gonna have prohibition. Laid in a supply, he did. Then after he took sick an' lost his sight, he never drank no more. An' Max was a teetotaler. So I reckon the goods is still there." Tolliver licked his lips, dribbling a little tobacco in the process. "Me, I could sure stand a dram or two. That drivin' I jest did give me a powerful thirst."

Well, rats. I'd been forcibly compelled to lam from a murder rap that wouldn't hold water. But by appearing to run away, I had been installed in a jackpot. A few more minutes, one way or the other, wouldn't alter the situation. And that talk of Tolliver's about 1917 Scotch intrigued me.

"Okay, let's go," I surrendered.

TOLLIVER'S key got us in through a basement doorway. We plunged into a cool dark area that smelled pungently of generations of musty disuse. My pencil flashlight sliced a weak gash in the gloom, revealed acres of cobwebs festooning rafters and mammoth hot-air heating pipes which led from a huge antique furnace. Ducking a horrendous cargo of ugly black widow spiders, Tolliver shambled straight toward a cache of wooden cases marked *Produce of Scotland*.

When I opened one of those dark bottles I felt so reverent I almost took off my hat and bowed. And when I let a snort gurgle down my gullet I didn't have to take off my hat. It flew off by itself. That stuff was as smooth as oil and had a wallop like nuclear fission.

"Want to see the rest of the house?" Tolliver asked.

I nodded, and we climbed wooden steps into a kitchen equipped to feed the California National Guard. Judging from the dust, it hadn't been used for cookery since the days of silent pictures. I trailed Tolliver into an immense dining chamber whose furniture was swathed in ghostly linen covers, and then we reached what he said was the ballroom.

"What the devil!" I wheezed. And no wonder. The room was as big as the Rose Bowl and its walls were fantastically papered from floor to ceiling—with stock certificates!

I began to realize why the Sunday supplements had devoted so much space to the Needham brothers and their screwy eccentricities. It was whacky enough that they'd become hermits. But here was evidence of crackpot characteristics beyond anything the newspapers had ever printed. You've heard of people papering rooms with shares of worthless stock. But this ballroom was papered with a fortune—for every certificate on the wall represented an investment in a profitable concern. There were government bonds, stock in manufacturing enterprises, real estate deeds and mortgages, a controlling interest in textile mills and radio chains and phonograph record companies.

"Dizzy, ain't it?" Tolliver grinned. "Max Needham, he took the idea off a Edgar Allan Poe story. You got something valuable to hide, you put it right out in plain sight and nobody'll see it. Max, he was allus scared of bein' robbed of his negotiable securities. So he pasted 'em on the walls."

"Wow," I said weakly.

"And then his worthless stuff, he kep' it in that safe over in the corner," the old grease-monkey went on. "Bales of shares in outfits that folded up. The idea bein', if a burglar busted in to steal anything, why, the safe would be

robbed and all the thieves would get would be junk. Funny part is, the vault is nothin' but a movie prop."

"Movie prop?"

"Sure." Tolliver indicated a batch of shares papering the area over a huge marble fireplace. "The Needhams own a majority interest in Altamount Studios—where their nephew Stevie works as producer of short subjects, y'know. There's a word for it in Hollywood, givin' jobs to relatives."

"Nepotism," I said.

"Yeh. Edjication, it's wonderful. Want to look at some of the bad investments the Needhams made?"

Without being answered, he trotted to the property safe in the corner. It was made of papier-maché and plywood, painted black to look like steel. You could have rammed your fist through it.

He hauled the pseudo-heavy door open and revealed stacks upon stacks of stock shares, gilt of edge and beautifully printed and worth whatever waste paper would bring on the open market. I picked up a bundle of certificates tied with twine.

"Sterling Lead and Amalgamated Silver Mines, Incorporated," I read aloud.

Tolliver giggled. "Cost Max Needham a couple hundred grand, I understand. A swindle. That was back in 'Twenty-eight or so, jest before the big crash. The guy behind the deal done time in a Pennsylvania jug, but nobody never got none of the dough back. President of the company spent it all on bootleg booze and wimmen and the dice tables down Mexico way."

ACCORDING to the gaudily engraved shares, this errant president signed his name Norman X. Norman, with a small "x" in place of a period after his middle initial. That made two x's, possibly an unwitting symbol of the double-cross that followed when the mining concern blew up. I tossed the packet back into the spurious vault.

"Very interesting," I said.

"How'd ye like to see some more craziness in this here private madhouse?" Tolliver went on. "May as well. Ye got lots o' time." And he fastened

his gnarled mitt on my arm, drew me toward an ornate grand staircase con-fected of marble and gilded wrought-iron. The gilt was tarnished, the rails flaking rust and the marble treads cupped with years of wear. We went to the second floor and encountered chaos.

I've seen more orderliness in a city dump. Every hall, every room, was crammed with refuse and debris. Pack-ages of old clothes spilled their insides through broken wrappings, like disem-bowled animals. There were littered heaps of busted furniture, hunks of machinery, fragments of statuary and bundles of newspapers. Particularly there were bundles of newspapers. They were piled in high profusion, stacked so tightly that you had to thread your way past them through narrowing angling aisles. With every step I took I ex-pected them to come crashing down on my noggin and engulf me to my ever-lasting doom.

"Kind of pathetic, them papers," Tol-liver commented as he guided me through the twisting maze. "Notice they're from all over the country? Max Needham, he used to buy all the out-of-town sheets he could lay his hands on. He started it after his brother Paul went blind."

"Why?" I said.

"Well, sir, his reasons may sound nutty to you, but I guess he figgered they was valid enough. Y'see, he knowed Paul wouldn't never regain his sight. But he didn't let Paul know it. He kept tellin' Paul it was only a temp'rary condition which'd get better in a few years. Paul, bein' blind, couldn't tell the differ-ence between day an' night. So Max, he figgered out a scheme to make time sort of stretch out."

"Oh," I nodded. Then I said, "I don't get it."

"Sure ye do. Max would buy all the out of town papers an' lay them by. Then he would read 'em out loud to Paul, pretendin' like they was the local Pasadena sheets. He'd switch the names and dates around so's not to mention the news was from other cities, an' that way he had enough stuff so he didn't have to read the *modern* things. He made his brother think twenty-four hours was only twelve hours. Two

weeks were only one week to Paul, who was in darkness and couldn't know no better. By an' by, as the months went on, Paul lost a whole year. And an-other."

"Good Heavens!" I said, awed.

"Yeh. The way it worked, Paul never did know he'd been blind twenty-five years. Max made him think it wasn't much more'n twelve or so, and kept promisin' him he'd soon have his sight back. Fed him gallons of orange juice, pretendin' it was for the medicinal ef-fect. Actually it was to keep Paul from gettin' hungry at regular mealtimes, which would be the only true way he could reckon the passin' of time. Mat-ter o' fact, Paul would eat breakfast at mebbe ten in the mornin', then lunch at eight o'clock at night, an' supper the followin' sunrise. That's what I meant when I said Max schemed a scheme to make time stretch out. Why, here it is Nineteen Forty-Eight, and Paul was livin' in about Nineteen Twenty or so when he died last night."

BY NOW we had ascended another flight of stairs to the third floor of the stash. Tolliver led me into a neat, clean bedroom—a room comfortably furnished and as spick-and-span as if it had just been housecleaned.

"This was Paul's room," the old ex-chauffeur said. "There's a newspaper on the table. Let's see. The *Tulsa Tri-bune* for January Fifth, Nineteen Twenty-one. Reckon that's what Max was readin' to him when he passed away."

I wasn't listening. I was staring at something on the floor by the bed; an object that prickled my hackles and grew a crop of goose pimples on my spine big enough to hang your coat on. It was an old fashioned hatpin such as dames used to wear, only someone had honed and sharpened it to a glittering surgical finish, like a special scalpel.

It wasn't a hatpin now. It was a thin and deadly stiletto—a weapon about eight inches long and stained with a brownish gummy substance that could-n't be anything but blood.

And even as I reached this startling conclusion, Tom Tolliver peered out the bedroom's dormer window and called,

"Guess I'll be going, brother. The cops is arrived."

CHAPTER V

THE KILLER AND THE QUAIL



LLUNGED over to him, squinted past his skinny shoulder. The window looked down on Orange Grove Avenue through a thicket of screening trees which allowed me to sneak a glance at the newcomers without being noticed. Sure enough, Tolliver had called the turn. There was a prowler car at the curb and a couple of dicks in plainclothes piling out of it.

"Lucky they didn't come up the driveway," Tolliver said. "If they ever seen my funeral limousine in the courtyard I'd be hooked for aidin' a fugitive to escape, the same bein' you. Well, so long. Happy landings."

I grabbed at him. "Wait. Where the devil do you think you're going?"

"Outa here. There's another driveway from the courtyard leadin' around the old coach house and down to a back gate on La Loma Road into the Arroyo. I'll go that way. Reckon nobody'll notice me through the underbrush and stuff. 'Bye now." He slipped out of my clutches, scurried to the bedroom door.

"Hold on," I called. "I'll go with you!"

"You'll have to hurry," he shouted back. "I ain't aimin' to be nabbed here with no suspected killer. Of course mebbe they ain't searchin' for you. Mebbe it's just a routine frisk. But me, I ain't waitin' to find out." He started down the stairs.

I followed him, buckety-blip. Routine frisk or not, I craved to be long absent when those coppers poked their smellers in the Needham house. There were things I wanted to find out, now that I had seen that bloodstained hatpin. There was information I yearned to dig up and spread out to dry. And I couldn't do it if I got salted away in the Pasadena pokey.

Tolliver gained the second floor, scuttled through the maze of passageways in the high-piled stacks of news-

paper bundles. I kept after him—and then I made a wrong turn. I slammed into a blind alley, and a precarious stack toppled. "Yeeipe!" I caterwauled.

The next minute I was buried alive.

"Too bad, brother," Tolliver's voice said, receding in the distance. "Can't stop for no rescue now. If ye get loose, try prowlin' the garage. They's a old Lancia speedster ye might use if its tires is still holdin' air. Of course its battery'll be dead, but a strongarm guy like you ought to be able to crank the engine. Magneto will give ye all the spark ye need, and I remember leavin' a couple gallons o' gas in the tank."

Then he was gone.

I struggled against the weight of newsprint that flattened me, swelled my chest against the crushing pressure. Even in my palmiest stunting days I'd never been in a fix like this. But at least you had to keep in shape as a stunt man, and my muscles hadn't got too flabby since I'd switched to snooping. Presently I fought clear, staggered upright, found my bearings and went galloping to freedom.

It was a narrow squeak. I barged out through the back door as a crash told me the front portal had been forced. In the rear courtyard, Tolliver had taken time to open one section of the garage before lamming in the limousine. I saw the Lancia.

In its day that jalopy must have been hot stuff. Its imported swankiness dated back to Noah's Ark, probably, and it had slightly less brass than Sousa's Band. But its high-wheeled tires were all in shape—a little pudgy, but not flat—and somebody had taken the trouble to cover the body with old newspapers as protection against accumulated dust.

I yanked the papers away, scattered them hell-west and crosswise. All except one. It was a *Philadelphia Bulletin*, dated in July of 1928, and there was a two-column picture on the front page—a man's mug with a caption under it.

"Norman X. Norman Sentenced To Five Years In Mining Swindle," the type-lines proclaimed. Then I remembered that was the name of the guy who'd signed those worthless shares of Sterling Lead And Amalgamated Silver

I'd found in Max Needham's imitation safe.

SHOVING the paper in my pocket and wiping the dust on my pants, I seized the Lancia's projecting crank and gave it a couple of rapid twirls. It didn't resist me too much. The motor was loose with age. I scuttled to the dashboard, found the ignition switch, flipped it to "magneto" position and raced again to the front of the car. Then I made like grinding coffee.

The twelfth or fifteenth twist got results. There was a bark, a cough, a wheeze, a rattle, a roar and then a steady clattering purr. I inserted myself behind the steering wheel, clashed the elderly gears, tried them out with tentative touches on the clutch pedal until I found which way was forward. After that it was duck soup. I went rolling out of the garage, across the courtyard, down the back driveway through a tunnel of foliage and out through the open rear gates to La Loma Road. The Lancia didn't have the speed of my own vee-eight coupe, but it moved.

When I finally reached Hollywood, it wasn't so bad. I was just as conspicuous as ever, but Hollywood is used to it. People probably thought it was a cinema scene being shot. I confirmed the impression by driving straight to the Altamount lot.

There was a guy I knew in the front office, an executive who owed me favors. I got to him after passing a couple of dozen secretaries. I found out that young Steve Horne would come into full control of the movie foundry now that both his uncles were defunct. I also found out that Steve's employment in the capacity of short-subjects producer hadn't been nepotism, after all. There was a letter in my friend's file, signed Max Needham, stating that the Horne punk was to be fired without notice if he failed to cut the mustard with his pix.

Moreover, Horne's last two or three films had died like dogs at the box-office. He was slated to have his option dropped. Or that was how it had been until his two uncles kicked the bucket. Now he was in clover.

I thanked my pal for the feed-box in-

formation and sallied forth again in the Lancia. This time I headed for my bachelor apartment. I needed a bath, a change of raiment and a slug of Scotch to keep me on my toes for the task ahead.

What I got was my pal Ole Brunvig of the homicide squad.

Tall, skinny and dyspeptic-looking in dark serge plainclothes, he barged at me with a sour scowl as I parked in front of my home address.

"Well, Hawkshaw, I was right," he greeted me.

"Right?"

"I had a hunch you'd show up here sooner or later. How's for trying on these handcuffs for size? There's a reader out on you from Pasadena, and you're under arrest."

Before I could give him an argument, there came the venomous *ka-Chow!* of a gun sneezing from somewhere near the mouth of the alley alongside my building. A bullet serenaded a hole in my hat and nipped a neat nick in Brunvig's left ear.

He clapped an agonized hand to the spurt of gravy, screamed that he'd been stabbed in the back, yanked out his own gun and pivoted toward the alley for a return shot.

Then, of necessity, he held his fire. This was because a guy and a girl came pelting from the apartment lobby. The quail was fluffy and curvaceous in a yellow Angora sweater, and the guy was a chunky bozo in tweeds. In brief, I had visitors—Steven Horne and little Linda, the undertaker's receptionist.

CHAPTER VI

FAST FINISH



MOMENTARILY, chaos frothed over. Brunvig catapulted to the alley in search of the unseen gunsels who'd nicked him. The gunsels were gone, either through the other end of the alley or inside the apartment building by its side door. In fact, Horne himself could have been the trigger artist, or, for that matter, Linda. It would have been easy enough for either of them to

have fired the shot, scurried indoors and then out through the front portal.

The blonde girl tottered toward me, face pale. "Mr. Ransom, somebody tried to kill you. I saw a hole in your hat—all of a sudden there was a hole—"

"What about the hole in my ear?" Ole screeched. "Blast it, sympathize with me for a change. I'm the one who's losing all the blood. Besides, who are you and who's this guy with you and what do you want and why doesn't somebody say something?"

The Horne fellow picked up the conversational ball. "Mr. Ransom, I want to apologize. I didn't mean to accuse you of murder. I—I was just sore, and—well, anyhow, you're out of trouble now. Honest you are. I changed my testimony to the Pasadena police."

"Yes, and I confessed knocking Cassidy unconscious," Linda added. "So you're in the clear, Mr. Ransom. And now Steve and I want to make amends."

"You do?" I said. "How?"

"We want to hire you to find out who killed Max Needham. I mean—that is—well, Steve is wealthy now, you know. He'll pay whatever fee you ask."

I studied the guy. "Got a checkbook on you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Write me a check for a grand." When he obeyed, I slipped the green voucher into my pocket and turned to Ole. "Let's use your sedan. We're off to Pasadena and a showdown."

He beetled his brows. "My badge is no good in that town."

"I don't want you as a cop," I said. "I need you for a chauffeur." Then, not waiting for him to argue, I prodded Horne and Linda into Brunvig's car, bounced my own heft on the front seat. "Come on, Ole time's running out."

Grumbling, he slid under the wheel and we went away from there with siren screaming. We roared over Los Feliz, through Glendale and Eagle Rock to Pasadena proper. It was a thirty minute drive to the Decker-Pasadena Funeral Home. We made it in fifteen.

At the undertaking emporium I noticed a limousine on the paved lot along side the building. The ancient grease monkey, Tom Tolliver, was just taking charge of the car as the unctuous

Decker got out. I yanked my gun from its shoulder rig. "Freeze," I yelled. "This is a murder pinch."

Cassidy, the Pasadena dick, came out of the funeral joint. He had a dazed look, his mouth hung open and he sported a bandage on his red thatch.

"What goes on here?"

"I'm giving you a murderer," I said. "Keep everybody covered. I'll be back in a minute." Then I dashed indoors, made a fast inspection of something unpleasant and emerged again. "The case is closed and there's the guilty guy." I pointed.

TOLLIVER quivered indignantly.

"It's a lie!" he shouted. "I never kilt nobody!"

"I was pointing beyond you," I said. "At Decker."

The mortician stiffened. "I could always sue you for slander, of course," he said in a hollow voice.

"Not from the gas chamber," I answered. "It so happens I ran across an old picture of you in a Philadelphia paper dating back almost twenty years. Your name was Norman X. Norman in those days. You were convicted on a silver mining swindle."

He sagged. "You—y-you—I—"

"But let's take it step by step," I suggested. "Paul Needham was incurably ill, and blind. Maybe he suffered a lot of pain. A devoted brother, name of Max, took care of him for years. So much for facts. The rest of this will be guesswork, but I'm basing it on a hatpin I found by Paul's bed."

"Hatpin?" Decker whispered.

I nodded. "I think Max Needham made a decision last night. I think he decided to put Paul out of his misery—a mercy killing with a sharpened hatpin. It's easy to stab a guy under the left armpit all the way to the heart; and the wound won't show on casual inspection. Such a death might easily be ascribed to natural causes."

"You're insane!"

"No I'm not, and neither was Max Needham, for all his screwy eccentricities. I think he pulled this mercy killing, and had you take charge of the body. Then I think you discovered the wound as you—what's the word?—pre-

pared Paul for burial. You realized the score, and maybe you figured to blackmail Max instead of reporting your discovery to the proper authorities."

"Preposterous!"

"Yeah? Well, I just examined Paul's remains and I saw the hatpin stab."

Decker's eyes widened. "No! No, you—"

"So let's assume I'm correct up to this point," I said. "Then came a dizzy coincidence. Max had invested in your silver swindle, years ago. When you were sentenced to the jug, he saw a newspaper picture of you. Now, suddenly, he recognized you. Here you were, a supposedly reputable undertaker, putting the blackmail bite on him. And he tabbed you as Norman X. Norman."

Decker gulped, seemed to shrivel.

I kept talking. "What would Max do in a case like that? Sure, he was guilty of a mercy kill. Maybe he thought it was justified. He had whacky notions. But I think he was smart enough to fight fire with fire—or rather, blackmail with blackmail. Instead of paying you hush money he probably told you he recognized you as a jailbird and offered you a deal. He would exchange his silence for yours. How'm I doing?"

"You're out of your mind!"

"Yeah. Well, you knew Max had the power to wreck you by spilling the truth about your past. True, you could send him to prison for killing his brother, but then he'd be certain to expose you. Moreover, he'd phoned for me to come see him here. That may have been a bluff on his part, to keep you in line, just some of his clever strategy. If so, it backfired—because you got so frightened you murdered him."

DECKER had the shakes. "It's a lie! You and I were together, outside the repose room door, when the shot was fired!"

"It was a gimmick murder," I said. "I think you'd knocked Max senseless in that little room and left him in line with a planted gun. I think the gun's trigger had a string tied to it; a thread running to the door's L-shaped handle. When I twisted the handle from outside, I tightened the string and pulled the trigger. Mine was the hand that

fired the shot, but yours made all the arrangements."

"You—you can't prove that!"

I leered at him. "Remember how I hunted a killer who'd vanished in thin air? Remember how I mentioned something the goldfish told me? When I ran out to the patio, those fish were feeding at the surface. I scared them. They ducked for cover."

"So what?"

"So if a murderer had run out there ahead of me, those fish would already have been frightened and hiding. But nobody had disturbed them until I showed up. Therefore nobody had run out into the patio before I did. Consequently the kill had been worked by remote control. I tried to tell Cassidy, tried to make him frisk you and Steven Horne. Each of you'd had plenty of time to pocket the death gun and string. A search would show which of you had the gun, and he would be the guilty guy. Unfortunately, Cassidy wouldn't cooperate."

"My error, Mr. Ransom," the red-haired dick said.

"Yeah. So I had to do some probing to unearth this stuff. It pointed straight at Decker. I think he was afraid I suspected him, which was why he drove to Hollywood and tried to bushwhack me."

Then, to prove my guesses, I clinched with the undertaker, went through his pockets. Sure enough, he was packing a gun—the gun he had fired at me, as it turned out later, the one that had killed Max Needham.

For an ex-swindler turned mortician, the guy was strong. Suddenly he got loose from me and ran. Ole Brunvig unlimbered a service .38.

"This is out of my territory," he said, "but that son of a monkey nicked my ear." He fired, and Decker went down with a punctured hind end. It probably made him very uncomfortable indeed, a couple of months later, when he sat in the cyanide seat up at San Quentin.

Meanwhile, I cashed Steve Horne's check for a thousand and earmarked ten bucks of it for a wedding present when he married Linda. That's me all over. generous to a fault.

THE GREAT

The amazing true story of England's most famous

robbery—and the brilliant detective who pitted

his skill against a half million dollar jackpot!



FOR some unexplained reason, fiction writers always have considered a jewel robbery a most romantic crime. In many of these tales agents of Scotland Yard performed feats of derring-do to return the ruby with the fatal curse, or win back the diamond encrusted bracelet with a history of violent deaths.

In real life, most jewelry robberies are solved by private investigators

rather than police. This is due to the fact that insurance companies are most anxious to obtain the return of the stolen gems and they have crack investigators on their staffs who swing into action the moment a theft is reported. The Jewelers' Security Alliance, which is the protective association of most of the leading jewelry shops and manufacturers in this country, retains the services of the Pinkerton detective agency to investigate any loss reported by a member.

Perhaps the fiction writers gained their inspiration from a jewel theft solved by Scotland Yard, a theft which required brilliant planning and execu-

PEARL THEFT

by **JACKSON HITE**

tion on the part of the criminals, but which fell apart at the end because of the equal brilliance of the men of Scotland Yard, who, by sheer deduction, hit upon the clues that led to breaking the case.

In every country there are several noted jewelry shops that cater to a most select clientele and where purchases in six figures are made without causing a ripple of excitement. Tiffany and Cartier are such famous stores in this country. In England, before World War I, there was the establishment of Max Mayer with shops in London and Paris. To his salons came men of great fortune, members of royal households, and wealthy visitors from every land.

The story opens in the month of June in 1913 at the Paris store of Max Mayer. The branch manager held up a strand of perfectly matched rose-colored pearls and examined them with loving care. It was one of the rarest necklaces in the world and worth a king's ransom.

Finally the manager laid the pearls in a small wooden box lined with cotton batting and wrapped it in plain brown wrapping paper. With great care he heated some sealing wax and at nine strategic points on the tiny parcel he

placed the blobs of wax. He then unlocked his desk, removed the firm seal—an oval with the letters MM engraved in the center—and pressed the seal firmly into each mound of soft wax. When the wax hardened, the letters MM stood out sharply and had been so placed that if the wrapping was removed from the package the letters MM in the seals would break.

A Startling Discovery

Satisfied that the package was tamper proof, the manager took it to the main post office where he had it sent by registered mail to the firm's main headquarters in London. The manager timed his appearance at the Paris post office just before the mails closed for the latest steamer to London so the package would be placed into a mail pouch that would be locked immediately and taken to the steamer.

The necklace, destined to become the property of one of India's fabled maharajahs, had taken many years to assemble and was of striking beauty, being a faint pink instead of the customary off-white. Each of the fifty-seven pearls in the strand matched perfectly, not

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF SCOTLAND YARD

The mere mention of the words "Scotland Yard" conjures up a picture of a busy and efficient center of crime solution, highlighted by memories of great detectives and famous cases. It brings back to mind Sherlock Holmes and Baker Street, countless heroes of fact and fiction, enveloped in an aura of mystery and glamour. In this new series of stories about the Yard, we bring you the true facts—an actual "inside" glimpse into the workings of the organization, based on authentic cases—not legend!

only in color but in size gradation. Each side of the necklace contained twenty-eight pearls with a large one in the center. The clasp had been fashioned from a flawless diamond worth fifteen thousand dollars alone. The necklace itself was insured for one hundred ten thousand pounds, equivalent to half a million dollars, and the insurance did not cover the full value of the pearls.

The following morning the package, having arrived across the English channel, was delivered to the Mayer shop in Hatton Garden, London. A clerk took the parcel from the postman, examined every one of the nine seals before signing a receipt accepting delivery. The package was brought to the office of Max Mayer, head of the noted jewelry firm. Mayer, a cautious man, also examined all the seals and when he was satisfied that everything was in order, he opened the package at one end, sliding out the wooden box. He stared in incredulous disbelief when he swung open the lid of the wooden container. Instead of the valuable necklace nestling on the cotton, there were several small lumps of ordinary coal.

Mayer lost no time in taking the parcel and the wrappings to Scotland Yard where he was interviewed by Sir Basil Thomson who had just become head of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) the previous month. Sir Basil had been warden of two of England's most noted prisons, Dartmoor and Wordwood Scrubs.

The news Mayer had to report was startling indeed. Somewhere between the postoffice in Paris and the store in Hatton Garden, one of the most valuable pearl necklaces in existence had vanished from a package on which the special seals still were intact.

The Mystery Deepens

Chief Inspector Ward, a veteran of many years with the Yard was put in charge of the case with Sir Basil Thomson taking an active part. The loss was doubly serious, first because of the great value involved, and second because it meant that no other packages of valuables could be considered safe if sent through the mails. News of the theft

created a sensation in England, on the Continent and in this country when a report was cabled here.

An investigation was launched both in London and Paris. In the latter city, members of the Sureté interviewed the branch manager and retraced the necklace from the time he brought it to the post office until the pouch was deposited in the hold of the channel steamer. The manager's story was substantiated by several clerks who had watched him wrap the necklace.

The locks on the mail pouch had been examined before being placed on the steamer and showed no signs of having been opened. Because of the rapid-fire passage of the parcel from the post office to the boat, members of the Sureté were convinced that the theft had not occurred in France.

Checking Every Detail

The English investigators were equally baffled as to where the crime could have occurred. Scotland Yard men traced the particular mail pouch from the time it was removed from the channel steamer until it arrived at the General Post Office in London without finding any break in the chain. The lock still was intact when the clerk opened the pouch in the London post office. He had counted each parcel and the tally checked. The clerk gave the package to the letter carrier assigned to the Hatton Garden district and he acknowledged receipt of it. The carrier, a member of the postal service for more than twenty years, had an excellent reputation. He had signed a receipt for the package when he received it and he obtained a receipt for it when he delivered it. Yet somehow the necklace had disappeared to be replaced with lumps of coal which tests showed weighed as much as the necklace.

Known jewel thieves were questioned, receivers were watched, without any results. Informers, hungering for the large reward being offered by the insurance company, scurried through the underworld, but there was no information or lead as to how the crime had been committed.

Scotland Yard had earned its world-

wide reputation because of its adherence to painstaking detail, checking thoroughly into every little item no matter how unimportant or irrelevant it might seem. From such gossamer-like threads its famed detectives have woven evidence resulting in the cracking of baffling cases.

The Yard went to work with its usual eye for details in this case. The coal in the package was weighed. The wrappings were examined for fingerprints, but the only ones found belonged to the various men who were known to have handled the package. Technical experts examined the seals to see how they had been repaired, only to find no signs of any break in the MM letters. The puzzled detective admitted they were in the dark as to how the switch had been accomplished.

The tests were continued. The seals of both the Paris and London stores were examined and found to be similar. Further chemical and microscopic tests of the sealing wax convinced the experts that several of the seals at one end of the package had been opened and then resealed. This meant the thieves had to have the official firm seal, but there were only two in existence and both were kept under lock and key.

All information uncovered pointed to the possibility of an inside job. Detectives made up dummy packages of the same size and began to experiment with melting the wax seals at one end, slipping the necklace out of the box, substituting the coal, replacing the box in its original wrappings, melting additional sealing wax for the damaged seals and then resealing them with the MM engraving. They found they could do all the operations in about five minutes.

The detectives checked on the time the letter carrier had delivered the registered parcel and just when the clerk brought it to Max Mayer's office. They learned that the clerk had done so in less than a minute and he had been under the observation of other employees all the time.

Chief Ward conferred with Sir Basil. The new head of the CID shook his head when the other reported on the progress of the investigation.

"Everything you find out points to the

fact that nobody had an opportunity to commit the crime, but the fact remains that the necklace is gone. We must find out how it was done."

A New Theory

Ward stirred in his chair, a thoughtful look on his face. "I wonder if we haven't been placing the cart in front of the horse," he remarked. "Everything points to inside information and so we have followed that possibility only to find it leads nowhere. But there is no real reason for us to continue thinking it was an inside job."

"Don't forget the matter of the seal," the CID head reminded.

"The seal is what has been throwing us off," Chief Ward countered.

He visited the Mayer store and asked the head of the firm what was done with the wrappings from packages. "Why they are placed in the dust bin for disposal," was the reply.

"Do you destroy all the seals on the wrappings before they are thrown away?" was the next question.

Mayer shook his head. "It's just waste paper."

Chief Ward returned to Sir Basil's office. "I think I know how the seal was obtained," he informed his superior officer. "We're up against a clever group of thieves and they planned this theft most carefully. The easiest part was getting the seal. One of the members simply rummaged through the waste paper put outside for disposal until he found a perfect impression of the Mayer seal. The gang then had the engraving duplicated and were ready for business."

"You may be right at that," Sir Basil agreed, "But that still doesn't tell us how the substitution was made."

"We'll find out," the other replied.

Men were sent out to canvass all the engraving houses in London and the suburban area. At a firm in Hammer-smith an engraver said that several days before the theft a man had entered his shop with an envelope containing a wax impression of an MM seal in an oval. The caller explained that the emblem was the seal used by his office and they had lost the original. He asked the engraver to make an exact duplicate from

the wax impression and said that his firm was in a hurry for it since they needed the seal in the usual course of their business.

Since such requests are not out of the ordinary, the engraver did not find it suspicious and had the seal ready the following afternoon. The man paid cash for the work and left with the seal. The engraver had not bothered to take his name or address since the man had not requested a receipt. He reasoned that the caller was employed by one of the business houses in the nearby area. The best description he could offer was that the man was short and dark.

Five Fatal Minutes

While the episode showed that Chief Ward had been correct in surmising the method used by the clever thieves, it also ended any possibility that the theft had been committed outside of London.

Chief Ward held another conference with Sir Basil. He pointed out that while it was theoretically possible for the theft to have occurred in the General Post Office in London after the locked mail pouch had been opened, he discounted it because of the limited opportunity a clerk would have had of tampering with a package. The experiments in timing showed that the thieves needed five uninterrupted minutes, hardly feasible in the busy clerk's room at the post office.

"That leaves no one but the man who delivered the registered mail," Sir Basil remarked, "and after some twenty years on the job an honest man doesn't turn crook overnight. The letter carrier had no way of knowing that the package contained the valuable necklace."

Chief Ward nodded. "I agree on that, but he would know that any package arriving for the Mayer establishment would have jewels in it worth a fortune. I'm thinking more along the lines that he may have been an innocent dupe in this whole affair."

Sir Basil Thomson stared at his shrewd assistant. "Just what do you have in mind?" he inquired.

"When a postman leaves on his rounds in the morning, he has many

packages in his delivery bag," Chief Ward pointed out. "Delivering registered mail is much more complicated than dropping letters through a door slot. The parcel must be examined, receipts have to be signed, and the procedure may take several minutes. Suppose the person whose signature is needed is busy on the telephone or had stepped out for a moment and the mailman may have to remain there a good five minutes."

"Go on," urged Sir Basil.

"We know that five minutes is long enough for an accomplice in an office to slip a parcel from the postman's bag, switch the pearls and return the package without the carrier even being aware of it. Those bags are heavy and the normal procedure for a mailman is to put the bag down on the floor or a table whenever he can ease the load on his shoulders. It would be simple enough for the clever men we're up against to have distracted the carrier's attention while one member obtained the package destined for the Mayer firm. The theft occurred while the carrier was on his rounds and before he reached the Mayer store."

"It's a thought worth investigating," the head of the CID agreed.

Location of the Switch

For the next few days the investigation went along routine lines. As a precautionary measure all employees of the Mayer jewelry firm were investigated and given a clean bill of health. Then one evening just as Sir Basil was preparing to leave the Yard, Ward hurried into his office.

"I think I have found the place where the switch took place," the Chief Inspector exclaimed. Sir Basil left immediately with him. On the way, Ward explained what he had learned. A check had been made of all concerns receiving registered mail from the carrier on the day of the theft. At one place the investigator failed to find anybody, even though they returned there several times. It was a small office on the top floor of a regular office building and had been rented just a week before the disappearance of the pearl necklace.

The building manager was questioned and said he had rented it to a man who said he was a diamond cutter. As far as the superintendent knew, the office was hardly ever used. He was certain that no one had been there since the theft of the necklace had been reported. The man who had leased the space had paid his rent in advance and gave his name as Silverman. A registered package for Silverman at that address had been delivered on the day of the theft by the same letter carrier before he arrived at the Mayer establishment.

The manager of the building agreed to allow Ward and Sir Basil to inspect the office of the mystery tenant and promised to keep their visit a secret. He took them up five flights of stairs and opened the door with a master key.

The Scotland Yard officials found themselves in a small office that was scantily furnished. On a table was a jeweler's lathe and scales. Several chairs were around the table. There was no telephone or desk. The room smelled musty and the table was covered with a film of dust. Alongside a small fireplace was a scuttle filled with pieces of coal, several of them about the same size as had been found in the necklace box. If they had found the place where the thieves had made the switch, then the meaning of the jeweler's scales was clear.

Sir Basil pointed to the small lathe on the table. "Why would they need that if this place belongs to the thieves?"

"That's used in cutting diamonds," Chief Ward replied. "I'm beginning to think that the thieves were not so lucky after all."

Unlucky Loot

The head of the CID was puzzled. "I wouldn't call the theft of a necklace worth over one hundred thousand pounds a stroke of bad luck for the thieves," he remarked.

"I'm not so sure," Ward persisted, and explained his theory.

He pointed out that the thieves had made elaborate plans for stealing a parcel. They had obtained an impression of the seal in order to have a copy made and had rented an office in a

building to carry out the theft of the jewels. But at the same time they had no way of knowing what would be in the package they slipped from the mailman's bag. They couldn't rummage about and would have to take the first one they could get.

The plan was to seize any package being delivered to the Mayer firm since any one would contain valuable jewels, and the lathe for cutting diamonds indicated that the men had been hoping to find such gems in the parcel they took.

"That necklace won't be easy to dispose of," Ward continued. "Its value lies in the fact that the pearls are perfectly matched and are so rare. That makes the necklace readily identifiable and receivers of stolen goods won't be so anxious to buy it, particularly now when the newspapers are filled with stories about our search for it. If the filched package had contained diamonds, the thieves could have used that lathe to cut the stones into new shapes or sizes and sold them without any fear of identification. They probably have cut up the diamond in the clasp and sold it but I'm fairly certain that the men we want still have the necklace."

Detectives were assigned to trace the man who had rented the office and soon learned that there was a diamond cutter named Silverman who had an unsavory reputation. He also answered the description of the man who had employed the Hammersmith engraver to make the MM seal.

Expert shadowers from the Yard were ordered to follow Silverman and learn with whom he was associating. They followed the diamond cutter to a subway station in the West End of London where he met three other men. It was an obviously planned rendezvous. The quartet went to a restaurant and had lunch together. When they left the dining table they separated, with a man from the Yard trailing each one of them.

Hide and Seek

That night the shadowers reported to Chief Ward and Sir Basil Thomson. It began to look as if they were on the

trail of something. One of the men shadowed was identified as James Lockett, a thief with a police record. The others were a Belgian named Gutwirth, and a man known as "Cammie" Grizzard. All except Lockett were diamond cutters with reputations for shady dealings.

The combination of three diamond cutters of ill repute associating with a well known thief spelled the necklace robbery to Scotland Yard.

The investigators learned that the diamond cutters left London frequently on trips to Belgium and Holland, the diamond centers. None of them, however, had been outside of London since the theft.

"If they took the pearls, the necklace still is in this country," Sir Basil remarked. He smiled and then added, "Unless they trust the mails."

A check was made on all parcels mailed from London to the continent without turning up the names of any of the suspects.

A grim game of hide and seek began as the four men were watched day and night. Interest centered on Cammie Grizzard because of the many precautions he took whenever meeting the other three. A stocky man with dark curly hair and a drooping mustache, he would change taxis several times and reverse the directions in which he had been traveling. It was the typical procedure of a man trying to shake off any possible shadowers. Such tactics, of course, failed to fool the experienced men of Scotland Yard.

"He probably has the jewels and may be the leader of the group," Chief Inspector Ward reasoned when he received a report of the man's actions.

The cat and mouse game continued but suddenly the Scotland Yard sleuths had to change their tactics. One day the detectives trailed the men to an A.B.C. restaurant, a chain of popular eating places with branches in many sections of London.

The men stood in the doorway as if waiting for somebody. Finally an elderly man with a beard shuffled by and the four men hurriedly separated. One of the watching officers recognized the bearded man as an ex-convict, and the

officers realized that he, too, had been trailing the others, but as a lookout against any Scotland Yard men. He must have recognized one of the shadowers, slipped the quartet a signal and they dispersed.

The detectives began using trucks with narrow peep holes in following the suspects. They trailed them to another meeting and observed that the same aged ex-convict was patrolling the area. When he passed by the doorway and gave no signal the men entered the restaurant.

Sir Basil knew that the shadowing could not be continued too long without the possibility of the suspects getting wind of it, and so he consulted with his assistant.

A Tough Problem

Ward pointed out that while they had enough on Silverman to warrant holding him on a charge, they did not have any evidence at all against the other three men. If a raid was made and failed to produce the pearls, then the chances of ever recovering the necklace would be exceedingly slim since the suspects would dump them in a sewer rather than risk being caught with them.

For several hours the men discussed the chances they would have to take. Both officials were convinced that they had the thieves under their sights, and finally Sir Basil Thompson ordered that the men should be picked up the next time they met.

The order was carried out the following afternoon. The four men were shadowed to a new rendezvous at still another subway station. As they met, they were surrounded by detectives who grabbed them before they could dispose of anything in their pockets. The men were rushed into separate taxicabs and taken to the nearest police station where all their clothes was removed and each item of apparel carefully searched. The missing necklace was not found. Other detectives were sent racing to the homes of the four men, but also returned empty-handed.

The bad news was flashed to Sir Basil. It appeared that the Yard had failed. The head of the CID recalled that in all

the reports he had read about the quartet meeting, Grizzard frequently interrupted his luncheon to make a telephone call.

"He probably had those pearls stashed away at his home and when he failed to make his call, somebody removed the pearls," he informed the others.

Street cleaners were ordered to check all rubbish stations in the vicinity of Grizzard's home. One sweeper noticed a small wooden match box in the road not far from Grizzard's home and picked it up. Instead of being empty or containing matches, it was crammed with beads. The sweeper thought they were of little value. That evening he turned the box of beads in at his local police station with the remark that they

probably belonged to some child who had lost them.

An alert officer who knew of the search notified Ward, who took the box of beads to Max Mayer. The jeweler looked at them and shouted, "They're my pearls."

The diamond clasp was missing, but otherwise all fifty-seven pearls were in the small match box. Mrs. Grizzard later admitted having placed the pearls in the street when she failed to hear from her husband. The pearls had been in the gutter when the searching party arrived at the Grizzard home. With the finding of the necklace, the four prisoners confessed and were given lengthy prison terms, while Scotland Yard marked "closed" to one of the greatest jewel thefts in England.



The Calendar of Crime

COMplete in the Winter MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE—a new detective novel by Will Oursler, *THE LADY IN QUESTION*, which hits a new high in thrills and suspense! In the same issue, *THE WRONG ENVELOPE*, a Lieutenant Trant novelet by Q. Patrick, and many other outstanding stories. Now on sale, 25c at all stands.

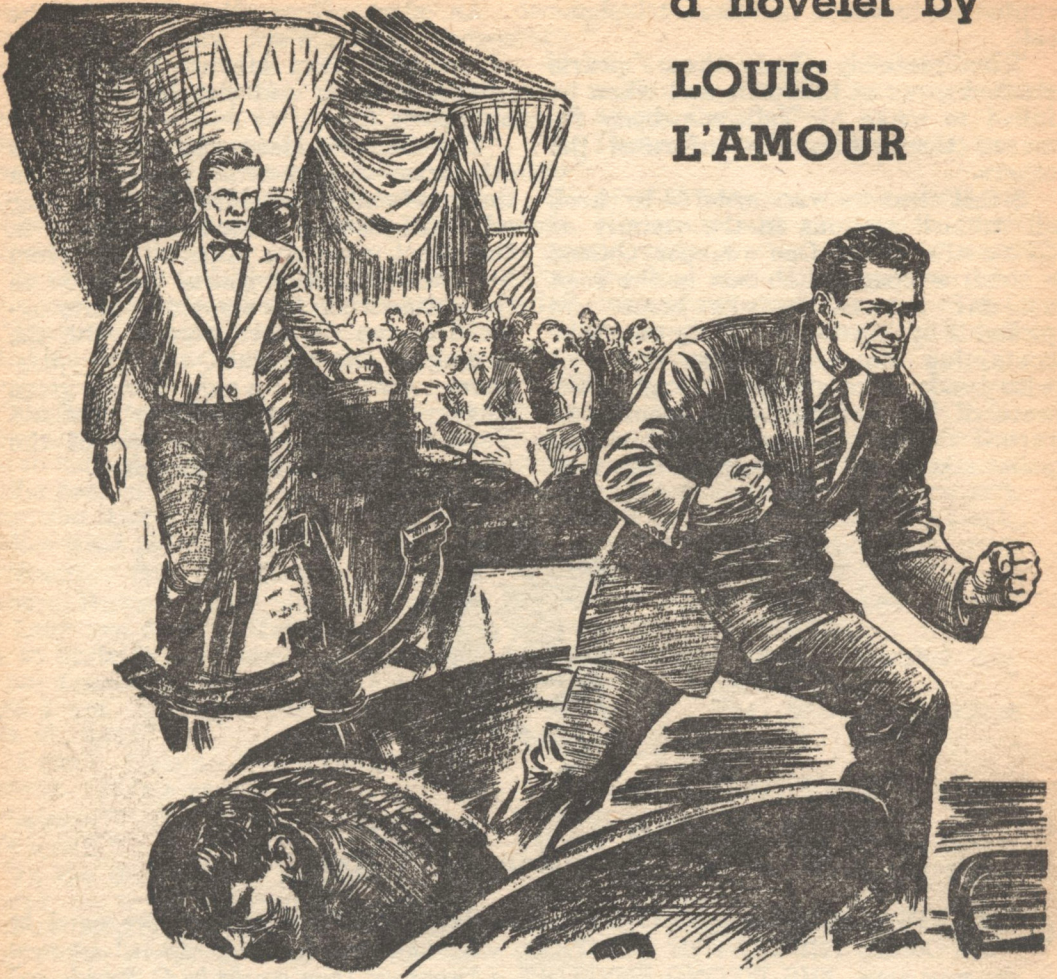
READ the Fall issue of *TRIPLE DETECTIVE* for these three great novels of crime and mystery—*POISON IN JEST* by John Dickson Carr, *ABOUT THE MURDER OF GERALDINE FOSTER* by Anthony Abbot and *POP GOES THE QUEEN* by Bob Wade & Bill Miller. A big quarter's worth at all stands.

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a novelet by
**LOUIS
L'AMOUR**



Morgan lunged to his feet when he saw that Milly was free,

WITH DEATH

CHAPTER I THE KID'S LAST FIGHT

THE ghost of a mustache haunted his upper lip, and the soft blond hair rolled back from a high, white brow in a delicately artificial wave. He walked toward me with a quick, pleased

smile. "A table, sir? Right this way!"

There was a small half circle bar at one end of the place, and a square of dance floor about as big as two army blankets. On a dais raised about two feet above the main floor, a lackadaisical band played desultory music. Three women and a man sat at the bar, and

Kip Morgan Wades Through a Battle of Fists



while the other hoodlum clawed at his pocket for a blackjack

in His CORNER

several of the tables were occupied. From the way the three women turned their heads I knew they were all looking for a pick up. I wasn't.

A popeyed waiter in a too tight white jacket bustled over polishing a small tray suggestively. I ordered a bourbon and soda, and then before he could get

away, I let him have it. "Where's Rocky Garzo?"

The question brought him up as short as if he'd been slugged in the wind, and he turned his head slowly as if he was afraid of what he'd see. "I don't know him," he said, too hastily, "I never heard of the guy."

and Knives for a Hard-Hitting K. O. of Crime!

He was gone toward the bar before I could ask him anything else, but come what may, I knew I'd started the ball rolling. Not only did this lad know Garzo, but he knew something was wrong. One look at his face had been enough. The guy was scared.

He must have tipped a sign to the tall blond headwaiter because when he came back with my drink, the blond was with him. "You were asking for someone," he said with a slight edge on his voice, "what was the name again?"

"The name was Garzo," I said, "Rocky Garzo. He used to be a fighter."

"No, I don't believe I've ever heard of him." He smirked. "I don't meet many fighters!"

"I wouldn't think so," I said sarcastically, "but it's odd you haven't met Garzo. He worked here."

"Here?" The voice rose into a falsetto, then steadied down, but the boy was worried, I could see that. Whatever trouble Garzo was in, it must be plenty. "No, you're mistaken, not here!"

"That's very funny," I said, "very funny. You and Social Security don't agree. They told me he was working here, or had been until a day or so ago!"

His lips tightened. He didn't like that, and he didn't like me. "Well," he said impatiently, "I'm sure I can't keep track of all the help. I hope you find him!"

"You don't act like it. But I will! Believe me, buddy, I will!"

QUICKLY he turned away from the table and seemed anxious to get distance between us, and I couldn't figure any of this. All Rocky's letter had said was that he was in trouble, and would I give him a hand. Rocky wasn't a guy to cry for help unless it was something beyond his depth. It began to look like my hunch was right. Also, I was beginning not to like the stall I was getting. I'm not a guy who gets mad easy, but I displease. Boy, do I displease!

Now, Rock Garzo was a boy who had been around. A quiet Italian lad from the wrong side of the tracks, but a simple-hearted, friendly guy who could scrap. He wanted no trouble with anybody, and except as a kid, never had a fight in his life that didn't pay off. I've

heard people call him everything they could think of, and he would just wave a hand at them and walk off. But listen—could he throw them? Listen, in the days when—well, that's a long story, but he fought the best of them.

The fleshpots got him. He was a kid who never had a thing until he got into the money in the fight game, and he liked good food, flashy women, and clothes. The money just sort of dribbled away, and the easy life slowed him down and softened him up. Then the boys began to tag him. It was Jimmy Hartman who wound him up tighter than a drum with the flashiest right hand on the Coast.

He quit then. He went to waiting on tables here and there. He was a fast moving, deft handed man with a smile—and he quit drinking. The result was that he did all right—until something happened here at the Crystal Palace.

There was a pretty girl sitting at the table next to me. She was with a bald headed guy who was well along in his cups. She was young, and shaped to be annoyed, if you get what I mean. The new look didn't keep the boys from giving her the old look—not with the set of fixtures she had.

All of a sudden she is talking to me, she is talking without turning her head. "You'd better take it out of here," she said. "Your number's up, and these boys play rough—even for you, Kip Morgan!"

"What's the catch?" I didn't turn my head, either. "Can't a guy even ask for his friends around here?"

"Not that one. He's hotter than a firecracker, and I don't mean with the law! Meet me down at the Silver Plate in a half hour, and I'll ditch this dope and tell you about it."

"Okay." This place wasn't getting me anywhere. The waiter was pointedly ignoring my empty glass and in these joints they are generally taking it out of your hand before you can put it down. I took a gander at Algy and saw him talking with a hefty looking lad at the door. This character had bouncer written all over him, and looked like fun. I hadn't bounced a bouncer in a week.

As I passed them, I grinned at Algy.

"I'll be back," I said, "I like to ask questions."

That was the cue this bouncer wanted. He straightened and walked up to me, menace in every move of him. "You've been here too long an' too much," he said, making his voice ugly. "We don't want you here no more! Get out, an' stay out!"

"Well, I'll be swiped by a truck!" I said, grinning. "Pete Farber!"

"Huh?" he blinked at me. "Who are you, huh? Who are you?"

"Why, Pete," I said, "you mean you don't remember? Oh, but of course you wouldn't! I'd forgotten that our acquaintance was so brief, and you couldn't see very well through all that blood. I had just hung that eyebrow down over your right eye with my left hook, and had you set up for the pay-off. Naturally you didn't see me afterwards because I was home in bed before you came out of it!"

"Huh?" Then his eyes hardened, but they grew wary, too. He had a memory, that guy. "Morgan! Kip Morgan!"

"Right again, and if you'll remember, Rocky Garzo and I used to team up in the old days. He was going downhill and I was coming up, but we were pals. Well, I'm a man who likes his friends, and I'm very curious about this pushing around I'm getting."

"You get smart!" he said, his voice nasty. "Stay out while you're all in one piece. This is too big for you. Also," he came closer, "I got no reason to like you. I'd as soon bust you as not!"

That made me chuckle. "Pete, what makes you think you could do something now you couldn't do six years ago? You're fatter now, Pete, an' slower. Me, I'm hard as nails. If you want a repeat on that job at the Olympic, just start something."

PETE FARBER'S next crack stopped me short.

"You beat me," he sneered, "but you dropped a duke to Ben Altman. Well, you forget Garzo, because Ben's still a winner!"

When I was outside, I puzzled over that one. What was the connection between Ben Altman, former crack light heavyweight, a tough egg, and my diffi-

culty in finding Garzo?

Then I began to remember a few things. There had been a recent shake-up in the mobs that ramrodded the racing wires and the reefer racket, and Altman, a boy from the Alberta section of Portland, had come out on top. He was now the big wheel.

So Rocky didn't work here any more? I climbed into a cab and gave the cabbie the address of Rock's rooming house. He turned his head and gave me a double take. "Chum," he said, "I'd not go down there dressed like that! That's a rugged neighborhood!"

"You're telling me?" I grinned at him. "Let her roll, Ajax. I cut my fistic teeth in a lumber camp, an' any guy who shakes me down is entitled to what he gets!"

He was disgusted. "Braggin' don't get you nowheres," he advised, "all men are equal at the point of a gun."

"Almost," I admitted, "but not quite. When anybody starts making his dough with a heater he has already admitted he hasn't the nerve to make it honest. He's already whipped."

"Sometimes I figure it would beat hackin', but I don't know."

"Listen," I said, "I do. A few weeks ago I was readin' some figures. Somebody took an average of all the boys in a state pen for larceny. The average sentence served was seven years! The average take for the jobs they went up for was twenty-one bucks!"

"Chees!" he said. "That figures to three bucks a year! I'll stick to hackin'!"

The rooming house was on a corner. It was a decrepit frame building of two rickety stories. The number showed above a door that opened on a dark, dank looking stairway. The place smelled of ancient dinners, sweaty clothing and the dampness of age. I hesitated a moment, then struck a match and began feeling my way up to the second floor of this termite heaven.

A door at the top stood open about four inches. Inside was darkness and the feeling of someone watching. "I'm looking for Rocky Garzo," I said.

"Don't know him." It was a woman's husky voice. I could picture the woman.

"Used to be a fighter," I said, "a

busted nose and a tin ear."

"Oh? Him! End of the hall. He came in about an hour ago."

MY SECOND match had flickered out so I struck another and went down the hall, my footsteps echoing in the emptiness.

The walls were discolored by dampness and ancient stains probably left by the first settler.

A door at the end of the hall stared blankly at me. My fist lifted, and my knuckles rapped softly. Suddenly, I had that strange and lonely feeling that comes to one who raps on the door of an empty house. My hand dropped to the knob, and the door creaked and protested faintly as it opened into a dark room with only a faint grayness to outline the dim shape on the bed, a grayness from a dusty window.

"Rocky?" I spoke softly, and when there was no reply, reached for the light button. The light flashed on, and I blinked.

I needed no second look to know that Garzo had answered his last bell, and from the look of the room he had gone out fighting.

He was lying on his right cheek and stomach, and there was a knife in his back, buried to the hilt low down on the left side with the point inclined upward.

The bedding was mussed and a chair was tipped on its side. A broken cup lay on the floor. I stepped over and picked up his hand, and it wasn't cold, but wasn't warm either.

Then I saw his knuckles, and they were skinned.

"Anything wrong, Mister?" It was the woman from down the hall, and now she was behind me, in the light of the door. She was a faded blonde who had lost the battle with gray hair. Her face was puffed from too much drinking and only the eyes showed a memory of what her beauty must have been.

She was sober enough now, and she clutched a faded negligee about her.

"Yeah," I said, and something of my feelings must have been in my voice, for I saw a quick sympathy come into her eyes, "Rock's dead. He's been murdered."

THE PARTY GETS ROUGH



SHE neither gasped nor cried out. This woman was beyond that. Murder was not new to her, nor violent death. "It's too bad," she said softly, "he was a good guy when he had it. In fact," she said, "he was always a good guy."

My eyes took in the room, and I could feel the old hard anger coming up inside me. Rock had been a good guy, one of the best. There had been two men—no one man fighting with Rock ever got behind him. He had been slugging one and the other had stepped in from the hall with the shiv.

"You'd better get out, Mister. No need to get mixed up in this."

"No, I'm not getting out," I told her, "this boy was a beat up ex-fighter. He's been murdered. Maybe he wasn't in the chips. Maybe he wasn't strictly class, but he was my friend."

"You'd better go," she persisted uneasily, "this is too big for you."

"You know something?"

Her eyes veiled and she started to turn away. "I don't know anything. I never know anything."

"Look," I protested, keeping my voice gentle, "the boy was my friend. You're regular, I know that. I saw it when I looked into your eyes—you're the McCoy."

I waved a hand at Rock. "He was a good guy. It isn't right for him to go out like this."

She shook her head. "I'm not talking."

"All right, then you call the cops. I want to look around."

She went away then, and I heard her dialing the phone. Then I turned back to Rock. He was a good Italian boy, that one. He could throw a wicked right hook, and he liked his spaghetti. "Pal," I said softly, "I'm still in your corner."

Without touching anything I gave the place a gander. One hood must have come in and circled to get Rock's back to the door, and Garzo must have known what was coming, but he wasn't prepared for the lug in the dark hallway

who closed in from behind.

When you know about fights, it wasn't hard to see. I could picture it. Rock had come in, taken off his shirt, and then the door opened. He turned on the hoodlum, the fellow circled away from him, and Rock moved in, slugging. Then the shiv in the back.

But those knuckles. "Rock," I said, "you put your mark on him. I'm looking for a hoodlum with a busted face. The left side. Maybe the right, too."

The woman came back up the stairs. "I've been trying to place you. You used to work out at the old Main Street Gym. Rock used to talk about you. He figured Kip Morgan was the greatest guy on earth."

She looked down and twisted her hands. Once they must have been beautiful hands. "Listen," she said pleadingly, "I've had so much trouble. I'm just scared now. Don't tell anybody what I said, but it's like this. There were two, and they followed him upstairs. They were both well dressed. One of them was tall, with broad shoulders. The other was heavy, much heavier than you."

The siren sounded, then whined away and died at the foot of the steps. Detective Lieutenant Mooney was the first one up the steps. "Hi," he said, "you, is it? Who's dead?"

"Rocky Garzo. He was a fighter." "I know he was a fighter. I go out nights, myself. Who did it, you?"

"He was my friend. I came out from New York to see him."

They started to give the room the business, and I gave what little I knew to Mooney while he stood there, looking around. "If you want me," I said, "I'll be at the Plaza."

"Go ahead," he told me, "but don't leave town."

A QUICK gander at my watch told me it was forty minutes since I'd left the Crystal Palace, and I was ten minutes late for my date. The cab took ten more to get me there, but the babe was patient. She was sitting over a cup of coffee and three cigarette stubs.

She smiled quickly, and it was a pretty smile, a smile that did things to a man's heart. "I thought maybe you de-

cided not to come! And that lug I had was harder to shake than the seven year itch!"

"If you can help me," I said, "it would mean a lot. Garzo was my pal."

"Sure, I know. I'm Mildred Casey—remember? I lived down the block from Rock's old man. You two used to fix my bike."

That made me look again. Blue eyes, the ghosts of freckles over the bridge of her nose, and shabby clothes, but an effort to be gay with nothing much to be gay about, and little enough but great courage. She had that, with a fine sort of pride. There was hurt there in her eyes where her heart was—eyes that kept looking at men and wondering if this was the one.

"I remember," I said, she had been a knobby kneed kid with stars for eyes. "How could I forget? It was your glamour that got me!"

She laughed, and it was a pretty sound. "Don't be silly, Kip! My knees were always skinned and my bike was always busted!"

Her eyes went from my face to the clothes I was wearing. If I do say so, they were good. I'd always liked good clothes, liked the nice things that money could buy, and sometimes it hadn't been easy to get them because I also liked being on the level.

"You've done well," she said, "and I'm glad."

"Kid," I leaned toward her, "tell me about Rock. You've got to think of everything, and after you've told me, forget you've ever talked about it unless the police talk to you."

Her face went dead white then, and her eyes grew larger. But she took it standing, and I knew she understood what had happened. She talked quick and sure. "Rock worked at the Crystal Room for three weeks. He was a good waiter, but after the first week there, something was bothering him. He used to talk to me sometimes, and I could see he had something on his mind. Then one night he quit suddenly and never even came back for his money."

"What happened that night?"

"Nothing, really. Some people came in after a rather quiet evening, and they sat down at one of Rock's tables.

Horace—he's the blond boy, made quite a fuss over them, but I saw nothing happen only all of a sudden Rock went by me toward the door, stripping off his apron. He must have gone out the back way."

"You don't know who they were?"

Milly hesitated, concentrating. "There were four of them. Two men and two women. All very well dressed, and the men flashed big wads of bills. One of the men was a big man, larger than you, and he wore a dark suit. A blond girl was with him, very beautiful."

"The big guy—was he blond, too? With a broken nose?"

She nodded quickly, remembering his eyes. "Yes! Yes, that's right! He looked like he might have been a fighter once."

For a minute I thought about that, and then let her have it. "You know anything about Benny Altman?"

Her face changed as if he'd slapped her. It went pale to the lips, and then the color slowly came back and her eyes turned to his. "So that's Ben Altman?"

She sat very still, her coffee growing cold before her. "He knew a friend of mine, a girl named Cory Ryan." She thought that over. "The other man was shorter and very dark, but if you want to know anything about Ben Altman, see Cory. He treated her terribly!"

"Where is she now?"

"She went to San Francisco about two weeks ago, or maybe it was three weeks. I had a wire from her there."

"Thanks. I'm going to blow now, and the less you're seen with me the better. I'm going into this up to the ears."

"Be careful!" she warned. "He's dangerous. He was always bragging to Cory about what he could do and how much he could get away with."

WE parted right there, after exchanging phone numbers. But I grabbed a cab and over a drink at the Plaza, I thought things over. Some of the gang were around as always, talking races. Ed Roth and Al Holcraft for two, and Doc Baker. Tonight I wasn't listening, much. The story would break in the morning, but in the meanwhile, I had a lot of figuring to do.

Rock was strictly honest. At the Crystal Palace he must have tumbled to something that was out of line. That was the only way it could be pegged, and the coming of Ben Altman must have somehow been the payoff.

During the war and the years that followed I had seen but little of any of my friends on the West Coast, and had known very little about the activities of Garzo, Altman, or any of the others.

"What are you so quiet about?" Al asked me.

"Remember Rocky Garzo? He got killed tonight. I used to work out with the guy."

"Isn't he a brother of that kid that was shot about a year or so ago?" Ed asked. "You know, that Danny Garzo? He was shot by the police in some sort of mixup. I think he was on the weed."

On the weed — Garzo — the reefer racket—Ben Altman.

"See all of you later!" I said suddenly, slid off the stool and went out into the lobby and headed for a phone booth. Bill would be on the job at the *News* office.

It was right on the tip of his tongue as I knew it would be. "Sure," he said, "I remember. Danny Garzo, eighteen years old. He got hopped up on the weed, knifed some guy in a cafe, and then tried to shoot his way out of it and was killed. And he was Garzo's brother."

"What do you know about Ben Altman and the reefer racket? Peddling marihuana?" I asked him.

"Brother," he said, and I could fairly see the seriousness of his face, "if you want to live to be a good old man you'd better lay off! That's hot! Very, very hot!"

"Then keep your eyes and ears open," I told him grimly, "I'm going to walk right down the middle of it!"

Now it was beginning to make sense. Rock's brother gets high on marihuana, and gets himself killed when he goes crazy and starts cutting people into little pieces. Rock Garzo loved his brother. And Rock, I figure, starts out to find out who and why. His finding out takes him to the Crystal Palace, then Altman comes in, and seeing Garzo, has a hunch why he's there. May-

be more than a hunch.

Maybe that was right, and maybe it was wrong. The next thing was to tie it to Ben Altman if that was where the trail would lead. It began to look as if I had the right hunch, and I had another hunch that Mooney wouldn't be far behind me, and maybe away ahead of me. It was a job for the law, and I believe in letting the law handle it.

For two days I sat tight and nothing happened. Then one day I ran into Mooney. He was drinking coffee and I walked in on him.

"What happened to the Garzo killing?"

He looked up at me and the expression wasn't kind. "I'm on another case. We ran into a blank wall."

"You mean you've dropped it?"

"We never drop them."

"I think Rock had something on Altman. I think he was sticking his nose into the marihuana racket because of what happened to his brother."

"Who are you? Sherlock Holmes? Sure, we thought of that. It's obvious. Altman has an alibi. So have his boys. The worst of it is, they have good alibis. Moreover, he has good lawyers. If we could get some of them where we could talk to them, maybe they would give, but before you arrest a man who has a good lawyer, you'd better have more than just suspicion to go on. We haven't.

"It looks like Altman. It could have been Altman. We would like it if it was Altman—but there we're stuck."

"Fool proof, is it?"

Mooney looked at me. "Look, Kip. I know you, see? I know you from that Harley case. I know you have a way of barging into things, and I like you, so don't mess with this one. It's bad. And don't worry about Ben Altman. We'll keep after him."

Sure, they would keep after him, and eventually they would get him. Crooks win battles with the law, but they never win the war. But I like to finish them quick. Like I did that night against Pete Farber—say? What about Pete Farber? What about candy pants Horace, the blond headwaiter? Did they have alibis?

Then I thought of something else. I thought of Corabelle Ryan, Milly's

friend who had known Altman. How much did she know?

ONE of the greatest instruments in the world is a telephone. It may have caused a lot of gray hairs, and in the hands of an elderly lady with nothing much to do, it can become the nearest thing to perpetual motion ever achieved—still, it saves a lot of leg work.

Thirty minutes on the telephone netted me this. Cory was still, apparently, in 'Frisco. Milly hadn't heard from her again. No, she had no definite address, although Corabelle had said she would be at the Fairmont for a few days.

The Fairmont had no such party registered. No such party had been registered there. The Mail Desk? Yes, there had been a letter for her. The only one, and from Los Angeles—that would be from Milly—and it had been picked up.

No, not by a girl. By a man, but he had a note of authorization from the girl. He was a short, dark man.

"Cory," I muttered as I crawled out of the booth, "I'm afraid you did know something. I'm afraid you knew too much!"

When it was dark I changed into a navy blue gabardine suit and a blue and gray tie and grabbed a cab for the Crystal Palace. I knew exactly what I was going into, and it was trouble, nothing but trouble.

Horace was not in sight when I came in, nor was Pete Farber. That was all to the good. I got a seat in a prominent position, got a bourbon and soda, and began to study the terrain. If all went well before the evening was over they were going to get sore and try to bounce me out of the place.

A door from the office opened, and blond Horace came out talking with Farber, and they looked around and saw me at the same instant, and as they saw me, the door opened and two men walked in, and between them was Milly.

That didn't strike me at first, but something else did. They didn't stop at the hatcheck counter.

Now no night club, respectable or otherwise, is going to let two men and

a woman get by without a protest, but the girl just looked at them and said nothing. To me that spelled one of two things. Either these two were hard-boiled and came often but never left their hats, or they were not guests but employees or somebody close to the management. And that was the order I was going to buy.

Particularly when I looked at Milly's face. Her cheeks were dead white, and her eyes were large and much too bright. If ever I saw a girl who was scared it was Mildred Casey. They came up to me, headed for the office, and I knew that Milly was in trouble, but plenty.

CHAPTER III

THE REFEREE COUNTS TEN



BEHIND me I heard a grunt from Pete Farber and knew he was coming through the tables for me. It was a moment for fast operating and I took it. Just as the two men and Milly came up to pass my table, I got up quickly.

"Why, hello! Don't I know you?" I said, smiling at her. "You're the girl I saw at the Derby last week! Sure, you are! Why don't you all sit down and have a drink?"

"We're busy!" The bigger of the two men snapped it at me. "This is a private party, bud, so roll your hoop!"

Pete's arm slid around my neck from behind, which I had been expecting. With my left hand I reached up and grabbed his hand, my fingers in his palm, my thumb on the back, and with my right hand I reached up and grabbed Pete's elbow. It was a rapid, long rehearsed movement, and as I got my grip, I went to one knee and jerked hard on that arm!

Pete went over my shoulder and hit the table beyond me with the small of his back. He weighed all of two twenty, so table and all went down with him, and I, being on my knees, reached out and grabbed the legs of the nearest of the two men with Milly and jerked hard!

He came down with a thump, and I

lunged to my feet, seeing Milly jerk free as the other guy clawed at his pocked for a blackjack. It was a bad move. I was in there feeling good and liking this rough stuff as I always had, and my right went down the groove with everything on it but my shoe laces!

When a man grabs suddenly at his hip, his face automatically comes forward. Brother, it was beautiful!

THE hoodlum shoved his face forward as if it had a date with my knuckles, and it was a date they kept. You could have heard the smack of that fist on flesh out in the street, and this guy's feet slid out from under him as though they'd been jerked from behind, and he hit the floor on all fours.

Naturally, I didn't kick him. Such grossly unfair tactics rarely read well in police reports of fights, but if when I went over him, my knee came forcibly into contact with his temple and ear, that merely was what might be termed a fortuitous accident.

Garzo had gone out the back door, so there must be one. I grabbed Milly and started for it. Blond Horace was somewhere behind, and he was screaming. My last glimpse of the room was one I'll not soon forget. It was a glimpse of the face of a big Irish lumberjack, staring down at those three hoodlums with an expression of such thorough admiration at the debacle I'd brought about, that it was the finest flattery that was ever offered any fighting man.

The kitchen clattered and banged behind us, and then the door.

We raced down the alley, and Milly had her new look gathered in both hands to do the running. Unfortunately, I was so busy moving myself that I was unable to give the situation its deserved attention. We reached the street slowing down, but just as we reached it, a car swung in and stopped us cold.

It was a shock to them as well as to us, but I'll hand it to Ben Altman. He thought fast, and there was no arguing with the gun in his mitt. "Get in," he said, "you're leaving too soon."

"Thanks," I told him, "but do you mind if we skip this one? We've got a date and we're late."

"I do mind," he said, he was taking

it big like in the movies. "We can't have our guests leaving so early, especially when I came all the way across town to see the lady!"

Milly had a hold on my fingers, and I could feel the shock that gave her. She knew what Belt Altman was, having heard all about him from Cory, but that gun was steady. If it had been leveled at me, well, I'd have gambled.

A man has to hit a bone or put one through your head or heart to stop you when you're coming at him. There have been cases of more than one man shot four or five times with a .45 without being stopped—and at that moment I hated Ben Altman so bad I'd have chanced it, but he wasn't so dumb. The gun was aimed at Milly.

"All right," I said, "suppose you take us along? What then? The cops will be on your tail within a matter of an hour or so."

He smiled. "I'll have an alibi." I could hear footsteps coming up the alley behind me, and the next thing I knew a gun was jammed into my back so hard it peeled the hide. "Tough guy, huh?" It was Farber. "Get going!"

We went. And Milly beside me, game as they can be, but white and scared, too. Just why they wanted her, I wouldn't know, but maybe they figured she knew something, being a friend of Corabelle's.

Once in the office over the Crystal Palace, the two I had worked over came in. Or rather, one of them walked in and the other was half carried. Farber was probably only bruised from the throw I'd given him, and the one I'd tackled had a lump like a goose egg on his head, but the one I'd hit was a sight. His nose was broken and he was groaning out loud. Also, his ear was swollen to twice its normal size. I looked at him with a really professional interest. It was certainly something to look at.

So there we were, these three plug uglies, Ben Altman, Milly and myself.

Now Benny was a lad who could scrap a little himself, and with Benny I had an old score to settle. He got a decision over me in the ring once, although I had him on the floor three times in the first four rounds. He had a wicked left, and I think I could have

beat him on any other night. The one that counted found me not doing well enough, and it always griped me because Ben Altman was one fighter I never liked.

"Looks like you banged the boys around a little," he said, "but they'll get their own back before this is over!"

"What's the matter, Ben? Have to hire you're fighting done now?"

BEN ALTMAN didn't like that. He walked over to me and stood there staring at me out of those white blue eyes. "I could take you any day in the week and twice on Sunday," he said, "so why should I bother now?"

"With the right referee, you could," I told him, "but there isn't any referee now."

He ignored me and walked over to Milly. "Where's that diary?" he demanded. When he asked that question a great light broke over me. So that was it? And why hadn't I thought of that! Cory had kept a diary!

"I don't know anything about it!" Milly said proudly. She held her head like a queen and I never saw anybody more poised. "If Cory kept a diary, I don't know where she had it. Why don't you ask her?"

Altman's face turned ugly. "You'll tell me! Or I'll break every bone in your body!"

"He can't ask Cory because he's killed her."

Milly's face went white, and Altman wheeled on me. "Shut up, blast you!" he shouted.

"Had help I'll bet," I persisted, trying to distract his attention from Milly. "Ben Altman never saw the day he could whip a full grown woman!"

He wheeled on me then, and his face a mask of fury, lashed out with a wicked left. He wasn't thinking or reasoning. He just peeled that punch off the top of the deck and threw it at me, and I slipped the punch, letting it go by my ear. "Missed!" I taunted. "Your timing is off, Ben!"

With a kind of a whining yelp he wheeled and grabbed a gun from the desk drawer and jerked it up, his face white to the lips. In that instant I wouldn't have given a flip of a coin for

my life, but Pete grabbed him. "No, Ben! Not here! These walls are almost sound proof, but they could hear a gun! Let's take him for a ride."

He must have caught the expression on Milly's face out of the corner of his eye, because he turned on her suddenly, her hand was at her mouth, and the expression of horror and fear on her face was plain to read. "Why, no, Pete!" Altman was himself again. "We'll keep him here. I think he'll be a good way to make this babe talk. She might be easier to handle if we start burning off this guy's toes."

He turned on Milly and little Milly Casey, cute as she could be usually, was a mighty sick looking girl. "Now tell us where the diary is, and we'll let both of you go."

"Don't tell him a thing, Milly," I advised, "that diary's our ace in the hole."

Farber looked at me, disgusted. "Shut up!" he said. "Don't you realize when you're well off?"

"Sure," I told him, "and I'd like it if Benny blew his top again and started shooting. There'd be coppers all over this place quicker than you could trip a blind man."

Altman was mad, but he was cold mad now, and dangerous. He was thinking hard, and the big ex-pug may have had a temper, but he also had more than an ounce of brains.

As for me, I had some ideas of my own. I'd guessed right about Corabelle. I'd give two to one that she was dead, but was that murder as carefully covered as that of Rocky Garzo? It had been out of town, and maybe not quite so smooth. It was an idea. Also, two men had done the job on Garzo. The question was—which two?

IN ANSWER to my question, the short, dark man who had been with Altman came in again and when I saw the side of his face I knew he was one of the two men. But who had used the knife?

Altman? That didn't seem logical, for Altman was too smart to do his own work, and anyway, he was a fist-and-gun man. He wouldn't use a shiv. Yet the man had been tall with broad shoulders, and who else fitted that but Benny the ex-pug?

"Let's get them out of here," Altman said suddenly, "we'll take them where we can handle them as we like. If not, we'll get rid of them and then hunt for the diary. It must be in the apartment where this babe lived with Cory Ryan."

"Okay, boss!" That was from Farber, and he must have acted without waiting, because the next thing I knew something slugged me behind the ear and I went down. But the wallop with the blackjack didn't quite do the job. I faded out, and must have gone limp as a wet necktie because I remember them complaining about my weight.

Then I was in a car, dumped on the floor boards, and two guys were in the back seat with me, both of them had their feet on me like a footstool. All this while I wasn't really conscious or quite unconscious. All that happened was vague, like something happening in a foggy dream, and my head throbbed like all get out.

At last, I must have blanked out because when I opened my eyes I was lying sprawled on the floor of a small cabin somewhere in the woods. That made me think I wasn't completely out all the time, as I had that feeling as soon as I awakened, and there was no doubt in my mind that we were in the woods.

My eyes opened, then closed. There was a slight movement in the room, as of someone in a chair. Then a door opened and I heard the click of high heels on the board floor, and then a heavier man walking. "Leave the babe in here with him, Joe," Pete Farber said. "Let's get some chow. I'm hungry as a wolf!"

"Is he still cold?" Joe asked, getting up. "I ain't looked at him."

"He's cold, all right!" Pete said, chuckling. "I clipped the guy that time, an' I've wanted to do just that!"

They went out and closed the door, and I opened my eyes with caution. Yet scarcely were they open before hands were laid on me, and I was turned over very gently. That was nice, and praise be I had sense enough to close my eyes quickly. The next thing I knew my head was lifted and Milly was kissing me, and calling me a poor dear fool.

Now in one sense that isn't flattering, but when a good looking girl holds your

head in her hands and kisses you, who's to complain? I stayed right in there, taking it very gamely, and then when she kissed me again I decided it was time something was done about it and responded, and Mister, I mean responded!

Milly let out a gasp and tried to pull away, and finally made it. "Oh, you—"

"Ssh!" I said, grinning at her. "They'll hear you!"

"Oh, you devil!" she said. "You were conscious all the time!"

"Honey," I said, "if I'd been dead for two years and a dame started fussing over me like that, I'd come right out of my coffin!"

SHE was blushing, which was nice to see, because Milly was all right. She was a good looking kid, and she knew how to do things with her lips, too. A matter I intended to investigate somewhat at a later date.

"How many of them are here?"

"Just two. Pete Farber and the one called Joe. He's the one you tackled. They are waiting for Altman to come back. Kip, what are we going to do?"

"I wish I knew!" I sat up, holding my head with both hands. "If we could only get away and lay hands on that diary! If there's anything in it, we might get it to Mooney and then the lid would be off. Do you know where we are?"

One quick gander around the room assured me there was nothing there I could use for a weapon. Carefully, I got to my feet and had to lean against the wall for a minute with my head going around in circles. Milly watched me, and I could see she was worried, yet I knew that despite the way I felt, there was no time for delay. If Altman came back with another man we'd be sunk, for I had no illusions about what he would do.

"Listen," I whispered, "you open the door and walk out there. I'll curl up in a knot—no, I'll wait by the door. You go out there and beam all over yourself. Turn on the charm, see? Tell them you're hungry, too, and then keep out of the way."

She went out without a second's hesitation and as she stepped through the

door, I heard her say, "What's the matter? Do I have to starve, too? Why don't you boys be big about this and let a girl eat?"

"Eat?" Farber's voice was hearty. "Sure! Come on out, babe! It may be hours before the boss gets back, and—" I could just imagine the smirk on his face—"maybe we can make a deal, you an' me. I don't think the boss is goin' about this in the right way."

"You better have a look," Joe warned, "n' see if the chump is still bye-bye."

"You have a look?" Farber said. "When I hit 'em they stay hit!"

CHAPTER IV

A NICE FIGHT



WHEN I heard Joe's footsteps and the door opened again and he stuck his head in. Brother, that was all I needed. I swung one from my shoulder, an overhand punch that dropped right behind his ear!

Joe never even grunted. He just started to fall. I grabbed him before he made it, and slugged him in the wind for good measure.

"How's about it, babe?" Farber was saying. "Ben's a tough cookie, but why should you get knocked off? You talk nice to me, an' give me the right answers, an' maybe we can figure out something. An' let me tell you, I'm the only chance you got!"

With Joe's necktie I quickly tied his hands behind him and tied his ankles with his belt. I'll give it to Milly. She was game and she was keeping Pete busy. "Hey Joe!" he yelled. "Come on out! This dame's okay!"

I stepped through the door. Joe's gun was on my hip, but I wasn't thinking about using it—yet. Milly was sitting on Pete's lap and had his head turned away from the door.

Something warned him, probably the extended silence. Jerking his head around, he opened his mouth to yell, and there I was. Milly went off his lap like she was shot, and he lunged to his feet, but he lunged right into a left hook that smeared his lips into his teeth.

Farber wasn't in shape to take it or dish it out, but he tried. He didn't reach for a gun or a sap, just came in throwing them, but Farber was a lad who never should have been a fighter. His reflexes were too slow. I followed that left with a bolo punch that lifted into his solar plexus and the wind went out of him with a gasp. Then I hung a left hook on his mouth with his jaw wide open and he went over into the corner.

One instant I waited for him to get up, but he just laid there moaning with his jaw busted, and I went out of the door right behind Milly.

There was no car. There was a road to the highway, but we didn't take it. Rather, we ran into the woods at a right angle to the direction of the road, and we continued to run as long as we could. Milly's face wasn't white when we stopped.

From there I moved into the lead and led off into the woods, going downhill as the logical direction. Almost before we realized it, we reached a highway. The first car that came along, stopped. He listened to me talking, and didn't ask any questions. One look at Milly and I seemed to satisfy him and he headed right for town.

Once in town, I spotted a Yellow Cab. "Stop here!" I said. "Milly, you go on down to Headquarters and get hold of Mooney. Tell him all about it."

"Where are you going?"

"To your place, after that diary!"

ALL the way out to Wilshire and La Brea I sat on the edge of my seat, and when we got there I gave the cabbie directions. On the way I checked the gun. It was a .38 Colt automatic and the clip was fully loaded.

Paying off the cab, I went up the walk and into the apartment house. I had Milly's key, so I opened the door and walked in. She had insisted all the way into town that she didn't know where the diary was, but I had some ideas of my own.

Corabelle Ryan hadn't gone to San Francisco by accident. It was my hunch that she knew she was in a spot and took off in the hope she could get away from Altman. She hadn't made it, but her diary hadn't been with her. If it

had been, they would now have it. Result—it must be here, where she had lived with Milly. But where? That was the next thing.

Wherever it was, I had very little time. From now on things were going to move fast. Either there was plenty in the diary that Altman knew about, or the ex-pug was afraid of what it might contain. Maybe Corabelle Ryan had tried to hold it over his head for her own protection.

But Ben wouldn't be far behind me, I knew that. He had brains of his own, and he would come for this place but fast, now that we were free. If Milly and I had done anything at all, we had at least started things moving again. That always could offer a chance for Mooney and the cops to move in.

It was a two-bedroom apartment, a living room, kitchenette and bath. Milly's room I located at once by some clothes I remembered from the previous night, and the fact that it was obviously in use. The other room showed no signs of occupancy for several days.

The bureau offered nothing that a quick search could reveal. The pockets of the clothes left in the closet went fast, the boxes on the shelf, under the carpet, behind the pictures, the bed itself. I checked her make-up kit, a small black case of the type carried by show girls. Nothing there.

For thirty minutes I worked, going over that apartment like a custom's agent over a smuggler. And then I heard the lock click. Just the smallest sound, and when I looked around, I saw a hand closing the hall door from the inside!

I stood there just an instant on the balls of my feet, poised, and my brain working a mile a minute. And then a figure stepped into the door from the living room—a tall man with broad shoulders. It was Horace.

Candy pants, the blond headwaiter, and he held a knife low down in his right hand, the cutting edge up, and there was no lovelight in his eyes as he moved toward me.

It got me, that did. It was like a French poodle suddenly baring his teeth and revealing fangs four inches long.

But Horace didn't say a word, he just started across the room toward me, his eyes set and deadly. Something odd struck me then, and for an instant, I didn't get it, and then I did. Candy Pants Horace was all reefed up! He was hopped up on the weed, and I knew that a man smoking marihuana often loses all sense of time, place and pain.

His eyes fixed on mine, he closed in. It was like me that I didn't think of the gun. Peculiar? Not really. All my life except in the war I'd fought with my hands. It was automatic, instinctive. In a tight spot it was always my hands that I used, and it was my hands I was going to use now.

From the moment he came through the door all this went through my mind in a flashing instant. The weed made him dangerous, but something else told me plenty. This guy, hopped up as he was, could handle a shiv. He knew how to use a knife, and he was going to be mean to handle.

I moved around him, eyes wide and hands ready. His tongue went over his lips, and his eyes were on my stomach. If you're afraid of getting cut, you've no business fighting a man with a knife. Actually, they aren't too tough to handle if you know your stuff, but this cookie was mean business. I fainted a grab at him, thinking I might draw that left hand away from his side, or get him to move the knife wrist out, which was the one I wanted.

He didn't bite. He just circled me, his eyes on my stomach so that I began to feel sick. This cookie was planning to cut me wide open and he wasn't kidding. He took a step nearer, and I fainted again, and his knife hand whipped out like a striking snake. I felt the point take me in the thigh, and then jerked back, and swung a left. The punch caught him on the ear, and it saved me, for he staggered.

THAT punch put him off balance and I moved away to get that knife out of range. I didn't know how deep the knife had gone, or how much time I had. He wheeled, catlike in his movements, scarcely dazed by the punch. And then I remembered something a cop told me once. The only place to hit

a guy hopped with weed was in the stomach. Make 'em sick.

He was blood hungry now, and his face twisted. He moved after me but fast. I grabbed a pillow and snapped it at his face, but he ducked and lunged.

It was the chance I wanted. I slapped that knife hand of his toward his left side, dropped my right hand on his wrist and jerking it forward, swung my left leg across in front of him and with an arm lock on his knife hand, flopped him over my leg.

He hit on his shoulder with a broken arm, and he hit hard. The knife went out of his hand and slithered along the floor under the bed. Even then he tried to get up, sobbing with deep gasping breaths, but I slugged him in the wind, and he went down, gagging and sick.

I went after that knife, and as I lunged to pick it off the floor, my shoulder hit Corabelle's makeup kit. It crashed to the floor, scattering powder, lipstick, and—my eyes fastened on the mirror, and on a sudden hunch, born of an apparent looseness in that mirror, I ripped it out of the box. There, behind it were several sheets covered with writing, obviously torn from a diary. I grabbed them, and straightened.

"All right, I'll take them!"

"You will like fun! I—!" Then it dawned on me that Horace was not speaking. I turned and Ben Altman was at the door and he had a gun.

The makeup kit was in my left hand, and I threw it back handed at him, and then went for him in a headlong dive.

The gun barked, and it would have got me sure as death and taxes if I hadn't tripped over Candy Pants. My foot hooked over his body and I went sprawling. Ben kicked at my head, and I rolled over against his anchoring leg and he went down. We got up together and he swung the gun toward me as I jammed the paper into my pocket.

By that time I was mad clear through and I went into him fast. The gun blazed and something seared my cheek like a red hot iron. The next thing my right caught Ben on the side of the neck and he staggered. My left hooked for his wind, and I slapped down at the gun wrist with the edge of my hand.

I heard the gun hit the deck, and then

both of us were throwing them at point blank range. Suddenly the apartment was forgotten, Horace on the floor and all the knives and guns. The killing of Garzo, the marihuana, Corabelle—all were forgotten and it was like we were back in the ring again.

He knocked me back on my heels, then I caught my balance and ripped off my coat, while he did likewise, and then we went at it. He slipped my left, and the right he dug into my middle showed me that whatever else he might be doing, he hadn't lost the old sock. I belted him a stiff one in the wind, hooked high and hard to the head, and took a smashing left to the body again.

I got both hands into his midsection and then caught him flush on the mouth with a right that filled his mouth full of teeth and blood. He spat out a face full of broken teeth and I finished what he had left with a wild left hook that had everything and a prayer on it. Crook he might be, but the guy was game and he could punch. I slammed a right into his wind, hearing a far off siren whine and praying that I could lick the mugg before the cops got here.

AS for Benny, I don't believe he even heard the siren. We walked into each other slugging like crazy men, and I put him down with a right and started for a corner before I realized where I was. He was up, and he came on in, that wicked left finding my face again and again. Then I caught the left hook with my right forearm and chopped down to his cheek with my fist. You could have laid your finger in the cut I opened with that one.

He tried another left and I gave him the same order, putting plenty of weight on it. His knees buckled, and I whipped a left hook, half uppercut, into his wind to straighten him for a right. He took it coming in. When Mooney and the cops busted into the place you could have counted a hundred and fifty over the guy without him moving an eyelash. He was cold enough to keep for years!

Mooney looked at me, then he frowned. "Blazes, man! What saw did you fall into?"

I turned toward the mirror, then

looked away quick. Altman had been hitting me with that left, all right.

Automatically, I reached into my pocket for the sheets from the diary and shoved them at him. "That should help," I said, "and unless all my wires are crossed, Candy Pants in there was the one who used the shiv on Garzo. Take the weed away from him and he'll probably talk. And he'll probably talk about Corabelle Ryan, in Frisco."

Mooney nodded. "We've got Farber on a kidnaping charge and the rest of that outfit with him." He glanced at the pages from the diary. "Yes, there's enough here to do us some good."

The door burst open and Milly rushed through the people who crowded about. "Oh, Kip! Are you all right?"

"Sure!" I took her arm. "Let's get out of here. Mooney's got everything under control."

At the door I glanced back. A husky cop had Horace by the collar of his shirt, and now, with his coat off, the broad shoulders were gone. He looked pale and sick. Altman was slowly coming around under the heavy handed slaps of another minion of the law.

"I'm hungry!" I said. "Let's go someplace and eat while they get things straightened around."

She squeezed my arm. "I could do with some coffee, Kip. I really could!"

It was going to be nice, drinking coffee and forgetting about all this, but one thing I knew now. Rocky Garzo would rest better, and his brother would, and as that thought came to me I seemed to hear Rocky's voice again, saying as he had said after so many fights back in the old days. "I knew you could do it, kid—you fought a nice fight!"

"Thanks, pal!" I said aloud. "Thanks for everything!"

"What in the world are you talking about?" Milly said. "Are you punchy, or something?"

"Just thinking about Garzo," I said, "he was a good boy."

"I know," Milly was suddenly serious. "You know what he used to tell me? He'd say, 'You just wait until Kip gets back, then everything will be all-l-l-right!'"

Well, I was back.

*Railroad detective Lanman is
all ready to break up the Yule
festivities, until—*



After trimming the Christmas tree, the tramp put
a battered coffee pot over the small fire

Tramps' Christmas Eve

By Johnston McCulley

BEING a railroad detective attached to a division point on a transcontinental line, Jim Lanman had about worn out his eyes looking for tramps and watching them after they had been found.

He hated tramps. He hated them because he resented the seemingly care-free existence they enjoyed and because

they appeared to live without working, whereas Lanman had to serve regular hours and obey orders. But mostly he hated them because their kind caused him considerable professional concern, not to mention downright exasperation.

Tramps used railroad property illegally, and Lanman considered railroad property sacred. They trespassed on

rights of way, used old ties for fuel, rode the rods and worried trainmen, and some were not above breaking a freight car seal and stealing goods, despite the fact that such an act is a felony.

As Lanman patrolled the yards at the division point, he was like a hunter on a hot trail, and he lugged many a tramp up before a magistrate and had him condemned and sentenced to a short term in the county workhouse.

He charged them with trespass, vagrancy, malicious mischief — until word was passed along tramps' mysterious lines of communication for all their kind to avoid the town, or at least its railroad yards.

There was a night yard watchman, but Lanman, who ranked him, often usurped his duties so he could continue his warfare against tramps. He was doing so this Christmas Eve.

"You stand duty during the afternoon, and I'll carry on at night and give you a chance to spend Christmas Eve at home with your wife and kids," Lanman had told the watchman.

The watchman had thanked him, but he knew Lanman had not shown his friendliness because he wanted a man to be home with his wife and kids. It was because Lanman thought he would have a good chance on Christmas Eve to grab a tramp or two.

IMBUED with holiday spirit, tramps might even resort to larceny to get Christmas presents for themselves and their friends, Lanman believed. He hoped he would catch one breaking the seal on a freight car and have him given a few years in prison.

At dusk on Christmas Eve, then, Jim Lanman left the division headquarters office building and stepped into what was to be a starry night. The wind had a sting in it, but there was no snow.

The principal business streets of the town were gay with Christmas trimming and colored lights, and the sound of little bells tinkling and a loud-speaker system broadcasting carols traveled around on the breeze.

Lanman buttoned his thick topcoat around his portly form. He had a revolver in one pocket and a blackjack

and handcuffs in the other. Lanman was a huge, strong man, and at forty was a past graduate of the school of brutal fighting.

His heavy shoes ground cinders along the main line for a distance, then he started to cut across the yards where chugging switch engines were moving cars and making up trains. He stopped to watch a sleek streamliner limited slip out of the yards and disappear up the track into the gathering night with switch lamps and semaphores blinking their clear-way signals.

Lanman continued his patrol, keeping in the deep shadows, moving as silently as possible, constantly alert, like a beast of prey searching for quarry upon which to pounce.

Suddenly he crouched beside a freight car in the darkness. He had heard shoes grinding upon cinders and gravel, and now he saw a shadow floating along between two parallel lines of rails. The shadow stopped in a streak of light that came from a switch lamp. Lanman made out a man carrying a bundle beneath his arm and something else upon his back.

Far down a track, a switch engine's headlight cut the night's blackness and the beam clearly revealed the man Lanman was watching. He looked like a tramp. The bundle he carried beneath his arm was wrapped in newspaper. The thing upon his back was a small Christmas tree.

The path the man was traveling did not lead toward any shantytown or group of poor dwellings where unfortunates lived, so this was no poor but honest workman on his way home to make a sort of Christmas for his family.

Down that way was the yard limit, where a deep and wide gully crossed beneath the railroad right of way. The gully was a known rendezvous for tramps, a place to which the city police always went first whenever they began a systematic roundup of suspicious characters after some crime had been committed.

The man Lanman was watching walked on, bending forward like a man weary of life and its burdens. Lanman

(Turn to page 96)

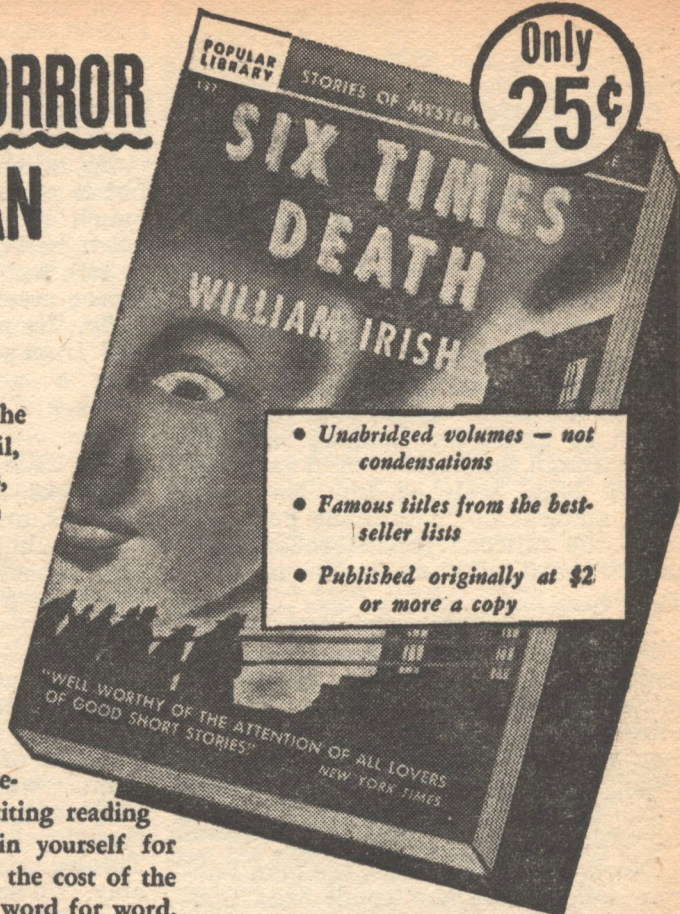
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tailed him at a safe distance. He did not want to stop the man and question him, but decided to wait and see where he was going and what he would do when he got there. A tramp carrying a bundle and a Christmas tree—that looked suspicious.

On down the tracks and through the yards Lanman tailed the one ahead. The quarry was plodding along wearily, stumbling at times. Half drunk, Lanman thought. No doubt he was on his way to the gully to meet other tramps, perhaps to have a sort of Christmas Eve feast of stolen food and drink.

The tramp turned down a spur track toward the gully, as Lanman had expected he would do. Lanman saw him pass through the circle of light cast by a switch lamp, watched him leave the track and cut down into the gully beneath the railroad trestle, following a narrow hard path made by countless tramps.

The railroad property line, posted with the usual signs, ran along the opposite side of the gully. If tramps gathered in the bed of the gully, where a fire would be sheltered from the wind, they were on railroad land and could be taken in for trespassing. He might make a good haul tonight, Lanman thought.

Down among the rocks, the man Lanman followed built a small fire. Lanman made himself comfortable behind a clump of dry brush to watch. The fire would attract other tramps. He would wait until he could make a good haul before showing himself, Lanman decided. Possibly he would do more this Christmas Eve than grab a few tramps; he might even pick up some man badly wanted by the police.

The fire blazed up after a time, and the man in the gully piled on more fuel. Burning old railroad ties, Lanman supposed. Possibly new ones, for all that. The light from the fire made it possible for Lanman to see what occurred.

The tramp in the gully propped up his small Christmas tree with rocks. He unwrapped the bundle he had been carrying. Lanman squirmed around in his place behind the brush and watched with mingled suspicion and wonder.

From the bundle, the tramp was

taking stuff with which to decorate the tree. He had glistening strings of imitation icicles, colored balls, strips of red and green serpentine paper, even a star which he fastened to the top of the tree and which glittered in the light from the fire.

He wrapped the bundle again and put it aside on the ground. Going to a bunch of rocks, he unearthed a blackened, battered old coffeepot and filled it with water from the trickle of a half-frozen creek that wriggled through the gully. He put the coffee-pot on the fire, and from a pocket of his ragged coat took a small sack which contained coffee, and put coffee into the water.

RETURNING to the cache among the rocks, he returned with four small tin cans, undoubtedly to be used as cups for drinking the coffee. So company was expected, Lanman thought. This was to be a tramp party, not a one-man show.

As the tramp knelt beside the fire, Lanman had a good look at him. He was a large man with a large head. His hair was heavy and gray. His face looked like that of an intelligent man, and his manner was that of a leader.

Educated hobo maybe, Lanman thought. Looks mighty sure of himself. Thinks he's king of the tramps, probably. He's waiting for somebody, so I'll do a little waiting, too, and see who comes and what happens.

Boots crunched on gravel not far away. The man beside the fire stood up quickly and stepped back into the shadows. Lanman saw another man going down the narrow path to the floor of the gully.

When he got within the circle of firelight, Lanman saw that he was a huge Negro, dressed in ragged clothing.

"Evenin', Professor!" the Negro greeted.

"Evenin', Pete! You're the first to come. Make yourself comfortable by the fire. Coffee's on."

Lanman drew in his breath sharply. Professor! So the man who had arranged the Christmas tree was the tramp Lanman had often heard about and often had wished to meet. An educated tramp about whom there was a

sort of legend.

He had been a famous lawyer once, rumor said. But some domestic affair had wrecked his life and he had become a vagabond, wandering over the country, associating with tramps and giving them advice. There'd be a small measure of glory for Lanman if he could arrest the Professor and take him in and have him sent up!

The Negro sat on a rock not far from the fire. He, too, had a bundle which he put down beside the rock.

"Comfortable, Pete?" the Professor asked.

"Yas suh. Dis hyar Crimmas business—long time since I fussed around with a tree and sich."

"I always celebrate Christmas, Pete, wherever I am," the Professor said. "Once I celebrated it in jail. Made a speech that brought down the house." He chuckled at some humorous memory.

"We uns may do it this year if that Lanman man happens by," Pete warned. "Been told he's powerful mean."

"The railroad detective stationed here? Oh, I presume he only does what he thinks is his duty. Some men have strange ideas about their duties. Let us hope he is enjoying his Christmas Eve pleasantly somewhere."

"Yassah. I couldn't bring much, Professor, but I brought a little."

"Nothing you stole, Pete?"

"Nos suh! I did me a mite of wuk, he'pin' wrassle boxes and crates for a big store. What I brought I paid for with hones' money, Professor."

"Good! The day must not be profaned by theft."

"Got some sardines and a hunk of baloney and a pint of gin," Pete explained. "A little gin in hot coffee warms a man's bones."

"Very true, Pete."

"Bought y'all a can of pipe tobaccy."

"You needn't have done that."

Boots ground the gravel again. From his hiding place, Lanman watched closely. A third man strode into view and entered the circle of firelight.

"Evenin', Saul," the Professor greeted.

"Evenin', Prof."

(Continued on page 103)

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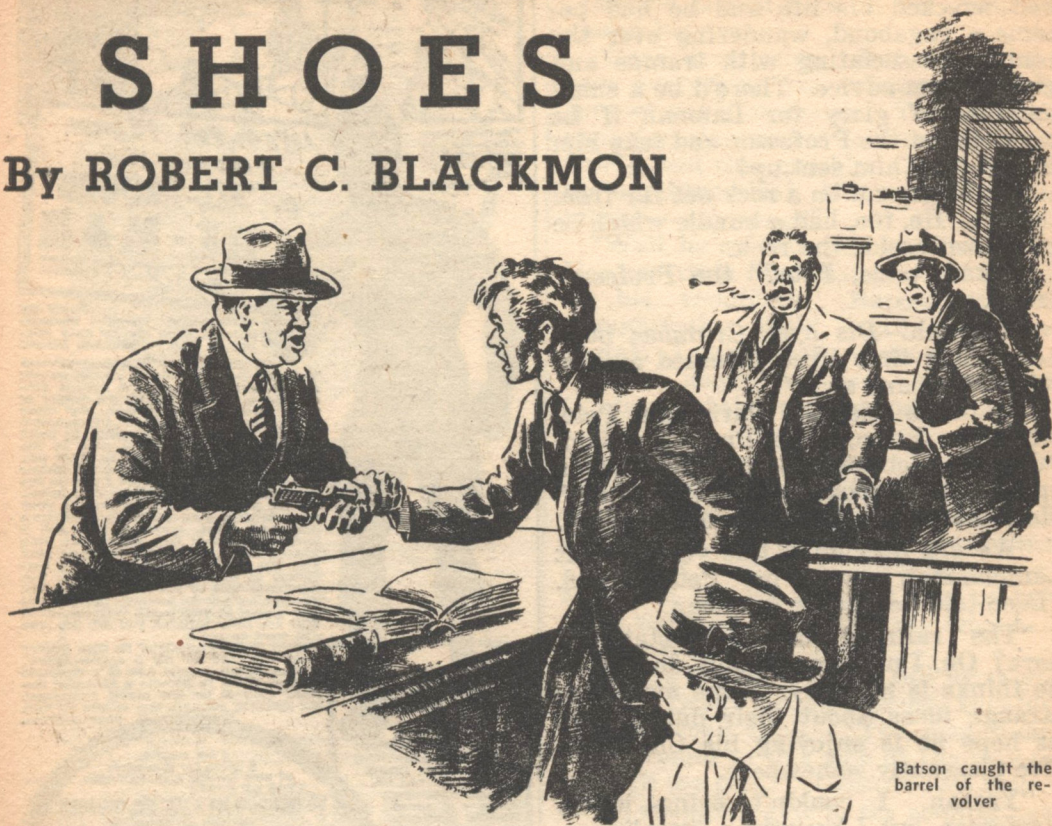
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The Killer's SHOES

By ROBERT C. BLACKMON



GEORGE Batson heard Mark Rutledge, his employer, explaining to someone:

"Mrs. Rutledge and I were going to a dinner, drove past the office, saw the lights, and I stopped to see why the boys were here so late. The door was open, Batson was unconscious, Maxwell dead, the safe open, and about ten thousand dollars in currency gone. I got the patrolman whom I had seen in the next block, and he called you."

Batson opened his eyes a little.

Rutledge and a stubby, blue-eyed man in a wrinkled brown suit and brown felt hat were looking down at him. Rutledge's broad face was red and he was mangling his usual frayed cigar.

Batson moaned a little and stirred.

"Take it easy." The stubby man knelt. "Get some water, Mr. Rutledge. What happened, Batson?"

The stubby man helped Batson to sit up as Rutledge hurried into the little washroom opening off the office and water splashed into the lavatory beneath the metal medicine cabinet.

Before Batson could say anything Rutledge came back with the water and he sipped a little, then looked about the Rutledge Real Estate and Insurance office where he had worked five years as bookkeeper.

There were three other men in the office, looking at the open safe, Maxwell's body on the floor near his desk, the red-

Detective Grady Tangles With a Slick Slayer!

flecked stapling machine which had killed him.

"Say!" Batson said that with great surprise. "Roy Maxwell isn't — he —" He looked at Rutledge and the stubby man with wide, shocked eyes.

"Take it easy." The stubby man helped him to a nearby chair. "I am Detective Dan Grady of Homicide, and the others are detectives too. Maxwell is dead, skull cracked with the stapling machine. What happened?"

Batson brushed at the slab of tow hair hanging over his narrow forehead. It matched his brows. His wrinkled gray trousers bagged about thin legs. His eyes matched his shirt, a pale and faded blue.

HALTINGLY, he explained that Maxwell had come into the office last, and had evidently left the door open. He had been working at the breast-high counter which separated the entrance from the employees' section. His books needed some extra attention and Maxwell had said he'd stay late too, to get some extra work done.

"I worked about an hour," Batson explained. "Then a man came in the door. I thought he was a policy-holder or a real estate customer. He stopped at the counter in front of me, and I asked him what I could do for him. Then he said it was a stick-up and held a nickled revolver in my face. I — it sounds fantastic — have a distinct recollection of grabbing the gun and trying to take it away from him. Then he hit me on the head and —" Batson shrugged a little and touched the bump on his forehead just above the hair line.

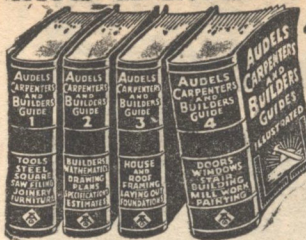
Detective Grady grunted.

"That checks," he said slowly. "We found the nickled gun, with your prints on it." His brown felt rode the back of his head and his hair was brown with touches of gray. His eyes were a clear, hard blue. "You can describe the man?"

"Yes." Batson spoke very carefully. "He was about thirty years old, broad shouldered, gray-eyed. His hat was gray felt and his suit was gray. His shirt was white, with blue stripes. His face was red and bumpy and I caught the shine of a gold tooth on the left side as he talked.

[Turn page]

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His tie was blue with red figures. He wore gray fabric gloves. I believe I'd know him again if I saw him."

Batson leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes.

"Good description. But we ought to have everything you can remember before we put it on the air. The better description, the quicker he'll be picked up." Grady said that quickly. "You remember anything else? His walk — way he talked — anything?"

"Well, he walked with a sort of a limp. Not exactly a limp, but more of a hitch to his shoulders." Batson frowned thoughtfully. "His voice was very hoarse. I think that's about all."

"How about his feet, his shoes?" Grady asked that very quickly.

"Oh, yes. His shoes were odd. I remember them because they were so narrow and pointed. They were brown and very brightly polished. His socks didn't show, so I don't know about them. I'm sorry I can't remember anything else. I'd like to do all I can to help catch the man who killed my friend. I —" Batson's voice broke.

"That's all right. You did what you could." Grady patted Batson's shoulder with a broad hand. "The man didn't come around to this side of the counter through the gate?" Grady's eyes flicked to the swinging gate in the counter near the door.

"No." Batson was very positive. "He came right to me, stuck the gun in my face, as I told you." Batson smiled a little. "If he came in later, which he must have done, I didn't know anything about it." He touched the bump on his forehead and frowned.

"Sure. That's right." Grady laughed a little, softly. "Now, I want us to re-enact this thing. Maybe that'll make you think of something else we can use to get this fellow. All right?"

"Certainly. I am glad to do anything I can to help catch the man who killed my friend." Batson got to his feet, swaying a little.

"We'll go through everything but him hitting you on the head." Grady went out through the swinging gate and turned to face Batson at the door. "I'm the man, now. Get where you were when he came in."

Batson moved to the opened ledgers on the top of the solid, breast-high counter about eight feet from the door. Grady came along the outside of the counter, moving toward him.

"Say what you said then," the detective told him.

"Well — I said 'What can I do for you, sir?'" Batson finished at about the same instant Grady reached him.

"This is a stick-up!" Grady said that sharply, and Batson found himself looking into the black barrel of a Police positive revolver. He could smell the sweetish odor of oil on the gun. "Go ahead, do what you did."

"Well, I caught the gun." Batson raised his hands and caught the barrel of the revolver, pulled it a little. "I pulled it like that, then the man struck me and after that I —"

BATSON'S voice stopped abruptly as Grady's left hand came up and caught his right wrist. The detective's fingers were like steel. His blue eyes were icy and hard.

"Now, tell me where you hid the ten grand from the safe, Batson!" he said harshly.

Mark Rutledge's suddenly exploded breath finished wrecking the cigar and tobacco bits sprayed the office floor. One of the detectives grunted in surprise and all three of them turned to stare.

"I — I don't understand what you mean." Batson's voice was shrill and jerky, his eyes wide.

"Sure you do." Grady laughed jarringly. "You've probably been planning this for weeks, maybe months or years. The nickled revolver was picked up somewhere out of town, maybe. We'll trace it to you in time. You waited until there was enough money in the safe to make it worth murder."

"Largest amount in the safe last night in years." Mark Rutledge stared incredulously at Batson.

"No!" Batson shrilled. "There was a man who did it!"

"The man exists only in your imagination. He was created to give the Police something to hunt for, and to keep you in the clear. You planned to work here a few months, then quit, taking the

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money with you. It is hidden somewhere in the office or washroom, where you could pick it up within a few minutes. You were smart, Batson, but — What kind of shoes am I wearing?" Grady shot the question abruptly.

"Why, they —"

George Batson glanced down, and breath caught in his throat, choked him. The broad top of the solid counter concealed Detective Grady from the chest down. No one on this side of the counter could see the feet of a person standing on the other side. He could not see Detective Grady's shoes.

A whimpering sound came from Batson's lips, and terror filled his mind as he thought of the ten thousand dollars hidden behind the medicine cabinet in the washroom. Four screws held the cabinet. It would have been the work of but a few moments to get the money.

"Answer my question!" Grady's voice was as cold and hard as his eyes.

Frantically, Batson tried to pull away, but Grady held him despite his struggles.

"You can't see my shoes, Batson. You couldn't have seen the robber's shoes, if there had been a robber." Grady's words struck with the force of bullets. "You stand in the killer's shoes, Batson, and will until you come to the end of the last mile. Take him, boys, then we'll find the money. Maybe it's behind the medicine cabinet in the washroom."

George Batson screamed shrilly as hard hands gripped his arms.

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TRAMPS' CHRISTMAS EVE

(Continued from page 97)

"Glad you came, Saul. Coffee's making."

Saul sat down on a rock and put a bundle on the ground. Lanman could see him plainly. He was younger than either the Professor or Pete. His Jewish face was thin as if from privation and worry, and his clothes were rags.

"Nice tree," Pete said.

"Yeah," Saul agreed. "Seems funny for me to be here like this. Christmas—well, it ain't for my kind."

"You're wrong there, Saul," the Professor declared. "At first, what we call Christmas was a pagan festival in ancient Rome. When the Christians were persecuted by the Romans, they wanted to celebrate the birth of their Lord, and they celebrated on the day of the pagan festival. The Romans didn't know they were celebrating the birth of their Lord but thought they were honoring pagan gods."

"Mighty slick," Pete judged.

CONTINUING his little lecture, the Professor said, "You know, our song 'America' is to the tune of 'God Save the King.' During the American Revolution, patriots hummed the music in front of English redcoats, but thought the words we use today. How could the redcoats know what they were thinking? They couldn't punish the patriots for humming 'God Save the King,' could they?"

"Slick!" Pete repeated.

"Look at the three of us. Pete and I are considered Christians. Saul is a Hebrew. I'm of Anglo-Saxon descent, Pete is an African and Saul is a Polish Jew. Different races and different religions. But why can't we celebrate together? We're brothers in poverty and misery, and they make a close brotherhood."

"How this man can sling talk!" Pete said.

"Yeah," Saul agreed.

"There's too much senseless fuss made by folks over race and religion," the Professor continued. "It's what a man's got in his heart and mind that

[Turn page]



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counts. And what he can do. I'm better educated than either of you—so what? Pete can shoot craps better than I can, or Saul. And Saul has a native shrewdness in his make-up that overshadows us."

"Yas suh," Pete said.

"Christmas is a feast day—so let us feast together. That tree is a symbol of friendship, of gift giving. Any decent man of any race or creed has the right to look at that tree and dance around it."

The other two were silent. The Professor tested the coffee and poured some into three of the cans. Pete got out his small bottle of gin, and each of the three poured a little into their coffee. They began sipping the hot brew.

"Sure warms a man's bones," Pete said. "Think I'll stop bummin' and git me a steady job somewhere—yas suh! Reg'lar money in my pants pocket. A little steady wuk won't hurt a man."

"I'm makin' for the West Coast," Saul said. "My health—it's not so good. I'll get a light job of some kind when I get there."

"Each man to his own trail," the Professor told them. "And when trails cross it is time to stop for a moment and clasp one another's hands in friendship. My trail has been a wandering one—and will continue to be."

Behind the clump of brush, Lanman moved to adjust his aching body. What am I doing here, hiding behind this brush and listening to this rot, Lanman thought. I'll wait to see if anybody else comes before I make a move. When they get to drinking and eating, maybe they'll loosen their tongues and spill something that'll give me a chance to nab 'em for more than vagrancy.

Once more, shoes crunched gravel. The three at the fire turned and glanced at the end of the path that came down into the gully. Lanman watched it also. A fourth man stumbled into view.

He was tall, skinny, looked to be middle-aged. He acted furtive. Any police officer would have taken him in for investigation at sight.

He shuffled toward the fire and made a gesture with his right hand. Watching from his hiding place, Lanman identi-

fied the gesture. It was one a professional tramp uses to indicate to others of his ilk that he is one of them.

"Saw the fire," he told them. "Thought some 'bos might be around. I'm called Jaybird 'cause I chatter so much. Mind if I come into camp?"

"Welcome, friend," the Professor said. "We are about to have a feast. Want some coffee?"

"With gin in it?" Pete added.

"Very fancy, very fancy," Jaybird praised. "I'll take a gulp, yeah. Heavy with the gin."

"I'll make more coffee, and we'll get ready to eat," the Professor told them.

He poured the last of the coffee, filled the pot at the creek again, and emptied his coffee sack and put the pot on the fire after adding more fuel. The Professor unwrapped his bundle.

"Loaf of fresh bread, a small apple pie," he chanted. "A hunk of cheese—"

"Very fancy," Jaybird said.

"I brought sardines and baloney and the gin," Pete added. "Did a mite of wuk."

Saul undid his package. "Can of beans, can of peaches, can of chili we can heat," he reported. "I didn't have much money, Professor, and couldn't bring much."

"You did well, Saul."

JAYBIRD'S eyes widened with surprise. "Money? Mean you bought the stuff?" he asked.

"No stolen food on Christmas Eve," the Professor told him sternly.

"Christmas! Huh! Means nothin' to me!" Jaybird declared.

"Whatever your faith, you can celebrate with us."

"Faith? You guys believe in any of that religion stuff? You're thick in your heads. Get sense! I believe what I can see and nothin' else."

"A pagan!" the Professor judged. "You must have an idol to worship. You can't carry your religion with you wherever you go. However, you are welcome. As I was remarking a short time ago, Christmas, as we call it, was first a pagan festival."

"Anyhow, it's time to eat," Jaybird

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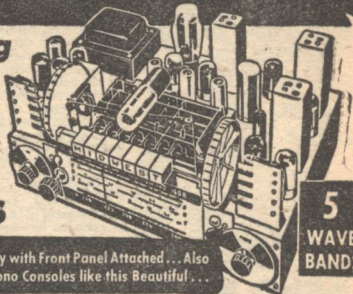
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said. He reached for a large inner pocket of his ragged coat. The watching Lanman had seen many pockets like that. A baggy coat, a large inside pocket into which loot may be dropped by a clever pickpocket or sneak thief.

"Thought somebody'd have a fire in the gully tonight, so I brought a couple of steaks," Jaybird told them. "The butcher shop was crowded with folks buyin' their damned turkeys, and it was easy pickin' these up. Thick, juicy ones, too."

"You stole them?" the Professor demanded.

"Why not? An easy pickup. Nobody but me knows where I got 'em, and it's hard to identify a steak. Got a quart of whisky, too. Liquor store was crowded. Get your cans ready, boys. Wet your whistles right. Steak enough for the four of us. I didn't pick up little thin slabs of beef."

The Professor suddenly towered over him.

"Take your steaks and your whisky and get away from my fire!" he ordered. "This is Christmas Eve. No stolen food will be eaten here. No stolen drink will be swallowed—"

"Are you nuts?" Jaybird squawked, a little alarmed at the Professor's beligerent manner. "What is all this? I thought this was a 'bos' fire. You guys got religion?"

"On occasion, some of us may pilfer a little," the Professor admitted. "But we eat honest food when we're sitting beside a Christmas tree. That's the agreement here—Jew and Gentile, black and white. For one hour out of the year, at least, we can be decent without it hurting us."

"Yeah, you're nuts!" Jaybird judged. "Suit yourselves. I'll cook and eat my own steaks and drink my own booze—and good stuff it is!"

"You're welcome to eat some of our honest food, but you won't cook stolen stuff at this fire!" the Professor declared. "Nor drink stolen liquor. We're forgetting differences in race and creed here tonight—but a thief is a thief in any language."

"A little more of your soundin' off like that, and I'll be gettin' mad," Jaybird warned.

Watching closely, drawing his feet beneath him so he would be ready to spring up, Lanman prepared for action. He knew the man who had called himself Jaybird was ready to jump to his feet. And he saw Jaybird's right hand creep toward a hip pocket in his ragged pants, and Lanman guessed a knife or gun might be there. He did not move, but continued to listen.

"Christmas Eve is not a proper time for a man to lose his temper," the Professor was telling Jaybird. "But you might as well understand that, for the moment, I'm the boss man here. I built the fire, decorated the Christmas tree after lugging it here from town."

"I suppose you bought and paid for the thing?" Jaybird asked.

"I did. They were closing out their stock. It was a branch tip off a big tree, and I got it for twenty-five cents, if you care for details. And I bought the decorations, too. Some of 'em were a little marred and I got 'em cheap. If you want to stay at this fire and eat honest food, it's all right. But you won't cook stolen meat or drink stolen whisky here. Pete and Saul will bear me out in that."

PETE and Saul were bobbing their heads to indicated that they would, Lanman saw. But he was watching Jaybird the greater part of the time. And now, just to be on the safe side, Lanman got out his gun and held it ready.

The railroad detective was upset mentally. The Professor was a tramp, but there was a certain dignity about him. Pete and Saul were behaving themselves. The three of them had gathered here, had a decorated tree and were preparing to eat of an unbalanced meal—they reminded Lanman of how, when he had been a boy, he had gone with other boys into the woods to build a fire and have a feast.

Jaybird was the disturbing element in the setup. He had confessed to stealing the steaks and the bottle of liquor. He had talked against the things the others respected. Not all tramps were alike, Lanman admitted to himself

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grudgingly. Some of them kept in line, at least partially.

Jaybird was up on his feet, bending forward slightly, his hands upon his hips. The Professor stood straight and strong a few feet in front of him, nothing of fear in his manner. Saul and Pete were a little off to one side; they appeared ready to rush to the defense of the Professor if such a move became necessary.

"You're makin' too much big talk, and I don't like it," Jaybird was telling the Professor. "You ain't runnin' this gulch, as I've heard."

"Not trying to run it. But I am running this fire for the time being and everything that happens around it."

"Yeah? Your balmy, if anybody asks me. Messin' around with kid stuff like Christmas trees. For a thin dime, I'd smash the thing and toss it into the fire."

The Professor's eyes gleamed in the firelight. "Don't try it, friend," he replied.

"Who's to stop me? You? The chocolate drop and the Hebe? I'm goin' to cook my steaks at this fire, and I'm goin' to drink my liquor while they're cookin', and afterward, and nobody's goin' to stop me."

The Professor regarded him steadily and said nothing. Saul and Pete moved in a little closer, their fists clenched. Jaybird glanced around swiftly at them all.

"We aimed to have a nice peaceful little party tonight, and why should you spoil it?" the Professor asked finally. "It's three against one to say you're welcome here, but not to use the stuff you stole. What special power do you have, to say that one outvotes three?"

"Right here's my special power!" Jaybird barked. His right hand moved swiftly toward his back pocket and reappeared holding a stubby gun.

The Professor did not move. Pete and Saul gasped and froze.

"Don't you know," the Professor asked Jaybird, "that it's a prison offense to pack a gun unless you have a permit?"

"I'll take care of myself! Stand back! I'm goin' to cook my steaks.

Bother me, and I'll do what I said—toss your fancy Christmas tree into the fire. Stand back!"

Lanman was upon his feet behind the clump of dry brush. The time had come, he decided, to interfere. The Professor did not seem to be the sort of man who would back down; and Lanman certainly didn't want gunplay and possibly a killing when he was in a position to prevent it.

"One side!" Jaybird yelled at the Professor.

Lanman emerged from behind the brush.

"Hold it!" he barked. "Get your hands up, all of you! This is the Law talkin'!"

He half crouched as they whirled to look at him. The light from the fire revealed him and the gun he held ready. All except Jaybird slowly put up their hands.

"It's dat Lanman man," Pete said, like a man who suddenly has lost hope.

Jaybird snapped a shot, doubled over, started to run past the fire and across the gully. The bullet zipped past Lanman's head with only inches to spare. Lanman fired and missed. Then Jaybird was behind some rocks, in the darkness, crashing through the brush.

Lanman charged down the path toward the fire. The three there were standing motionless. As he ran past them, dodging the fire, Lanman shouted:

"You three stay right here!"

He went on behind the rocks, half expecting a shot from the darkness. But none came. Stopping to listen, he heard feet pounding the hard ground along the main railroad line. The sounds indicated that Jaybird was rapidly putting as much distance as possible between himself and the fire.

Pursuit was useless, Lanman knew. He was not a fast runner, and fear of capture and imprisonment was putting wings on Jaybird's feet. Panting, Lanman stood for a moment clutching his gun, then turned to retrace his steps.

WHEN he walked around the pile of rocks, he was surprised to see the three still standing as he had left them

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beside the fire, except that they had lowered their hands. Gun still held ready, Lanman strode up to them and looked them over.

"I'm a railroad officer," he announced, to make it legal. "How come you didn't skip out while you had a chance?"

"We have been doing nothing wrong—only having a little Christmas Eve party," the Professor replied.

"I've been watchin' ever since you came here," Lanman told him. "Saw and heard everything."

"Then you know we have done nothing wrong," the Professor said. "I decorated a tree, and we have some things to eat. You are welcome to our little party—"

"A Gentile, a Jew, a Negro. Then a crook—and now a cop," Lanman said. "Any of you wanted men?"

They all shook their heads.

"We have no homes, but that's no crime," the Professor replied. "We're poor, but so are thousands of others. We're—oh—what you call tramps."

"I've heard of you, Professor. You've got quite a rep. That Jaybird—I'll have him picked up. He won't get far away. He can't run around packin' an illegal gun and threatenin' everybody."

"And what are you going to do with us?" the Professor asked. "Must we spend Christmas Day in jail? We could have run while you were after Jaybird, but we didn't. As I said, we are doing nothing wrong."

"No? You're trespassin' on railroad property, buildin' a fire on it, messin' around eatin' and drinkin' and stickin' up Christmas trees!" Lanman informed him.

The Professor turned toward Pete and Saul.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, boys," he told them. "I suppose we'll have to spend Christmas in jail."

"Who said you had to spend Christmas in jail?" Lanman bellowed at him. "But you'll stop breakin' the law when I'm around. You see that railroad sign."

"I see it, sir," the Professor said.

"It says that the land on this side of it is railroad property. But beyond that sign isn't. Anyhow, there's a better

place there for a fire, and the rocks keep the wind off. Pete, come here!"

Eyes bulging, the Negro advanced.

"I'm trustin' you, Pete, and heaven help you if you turn crook on me! Here's five bucks." Lanman handed him a bill. "You hit for town and buy some more grub and a few bottles of beer and hurry right back. While you're gone, I'll help the Professor and Saul move the Christmas tree beyond that sign. And I'll help 'em start another fire over there. Coffee will be ready by the time you're back—"

"There's no more coffee," the Professor interrupted.

"No? You buy coffee, Pete. And hurry!"

"Yas suh!" Pete disappeared up the trail and behind the brush.

"Let's get busy!" Lanman told the two others. "You move the tree, Professor. Saul, you help me put out this fire and gather fuel to start another up by those rocks. I'm acceptin' your invite to the party. But we'll hold the party over there where you won't be trespassin'. I'm a cop, and I can't help you smash the laws."

Smiling slightly, the Professor went toward the tree. Saul blinked rapidly and prepared to put out the fire. Lanman turned aside to see if there were some old boards scattered around that could be used for fuel.

"I must be goin' crazy," he muttered to himself. "Don't know what's got into me, that I'm doin' this. Kinda makes me feel good, though."

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 10)

Of course the famous "Yard" get very much on the job in their own quiet and unassuming way, in spite of the prominence of the people involved.

In addition to these headlines, our next issue will contain a splendid selection of short stories to round out a top-flight number you'll long remember.

OUR MAIL BOX

YOU'D be surprised how much you can get on a postal card. For example, here is a postal card from one of our friends in the Dairy State. He's put a clean, concise and to-the-point message on it.

I would like to compliment you on your recent issue of THRILLING DETECTIVE. I think it is one of the better publications on the market. I like the stories packed with rough action, but I think Race Williams gets out of hand once in a while. Otherwise your magazine is great.

—Frank Herre Jr., Milwaukee, Wis.

Thank you Frank. Nicely and compactly said. Wonder what your reaction to Nick Ransom is? Here's another *billet doux* not quite so complimentary, yet it isn't really a brickbat:

Why do you publishers of action and adventure magazines, make your villains, or "heavies" as they are known, usually so ugly physically? I can always tell when the baddie moves in, by the "yellow, fanglike teeth" or his "low, beetle brow" or yet again by his "pale, faded eyes" or eyes that are "lustreless and muddy color." Or perhaps he limps, or carries a heavy cane, or wears a "neatly-trimmed" black mustache. That's harking back to the old 10-20-30 melodrama days. If you will look up your history, you'll find most villains were good-looking men.

—M.J.G. Griggs, Bronx, N. Y., N. Y.

Do we do that with our villains, Mr. Griggs? It's all news to us. We'll have to be on the lookout and head off such giveaways. We think your references are isolated cases, but perhaps it's only natural for writers to make their heroes better-looking than their villains. Anyway, thanks for an interesting letter.

A lady down in the Bayou country writes as follows:

I think your THRILLING DETECTIVE mag-

azine is just wonderful. It is stimulating to the brain to try and match our wits with your clever detectives. We always know the crimes are going to be solved successfully, although sometimes it looks as if they aren't, right up to the end of the story. To keep track of all the clues, while we suspect first one and then the other of the characters, makes all the fun and suspense of reading good detective fiction. Keep up the good work.

—Mrs. Bertha F. Kane, New Iberia, La.

Thank you Bertha—we'll sure try to. And thanks to all of you other kind and thoughtful ladies and gentlemen who have written in. Wish we could quote from all your epistles, but the above are typical of many others received.

Kindly send all letters and postal cards to The Editor, *Thrilling Detective*, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Every communication is carefully read and studied, and we're grateful for them all—so please keep 'em rolling in.

We'll get together again next issue and, meanwhile, happy reading to everybody!

—THE EDITOR.

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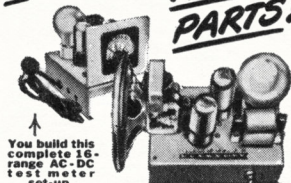
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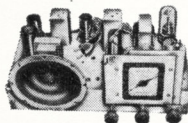
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