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SING A SONG OF MURDER

A MYSTERY NOVELET

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

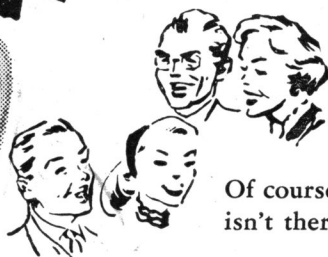
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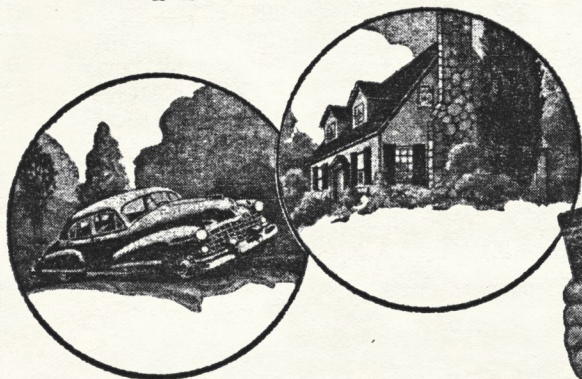
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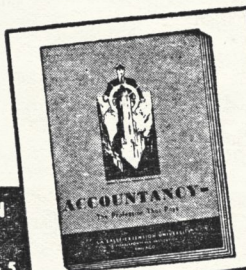
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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. LXV, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

December, 1949

Featured Mystery Novelet



SING A SONG OF MURDER

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

When the train taking glamorous singer Martha Leigh to a home-town appearance roars across Ohio, Martha oddly vanishes, and in her stead is found—a grisly corpse! 11

A Johnny Castle Novelet

DEATH IN A GUILT FRAME.....C. S. Montanye 38

The killer offered a front-page story—if Johnny lived to write it!

Seven Short Stories

SIX KIDS IN ASTORIA.....Tom Curry 29

Newspaperman Mickey Hale discovers he has a conscience

LADY IN DISTRESS.....Bruno Fischer 32

Harry Rice delivers the kayo blow that saves a pretty girl, but—

DEAD DOGS DON'T WHINE.....O. B. Myers 52

Detective Tony MacBeth follows the clue of the canine

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Vic Vio investigates the slaying of a big-shot racket chief

MURDER BY CANDLELIGHT.....Ray Cummings 73

Whether it's wax or electricity, crime will out!!

I, SAID THE FLY.....B. J. Benson 77

"—saw the murder committed, and so did ten other people!"

DEATH'S DUET.....George William Rae 85

Was a killer's love the destiny of Virginia Belle?

A Department

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The name of the yarn and the author—**DEAD GIVEAWAY** by Stewart Sterling.

Also let us assure you, there is nothing straightlaced nor freshly-starched about this novelet. You've never run into more action and *bang-bang* in your life. Furthermore, it fairly crackles with humor and effervesces like the bubbles on a glass of champagne.

We also have a lady who, as the cops say, "associates with Mary Warner". You'd be surprised at some of the people who stop at the ultra-ultra Plaza Hotel these days! In spite of all precautions, sometimes the management of the hotel doesn't even know who's there.

That's our hero's job.

It's a new type of hero, folks, and although we know we've said this before several times, we assure you you're going to grow very fond of him. Strictly speaking, he isn't even a detective. He's known as a Chief Security Officer. In the Plaza Royal's own code, that's polite language for "House Dick". Maybe you've seen him around. If you haven't—you will! His name is Gil Vine.

The Rajah's Suite

The best part of the hotel is the exclusive "Tower". The best suite in said Tower is what is known as the Rajah's Suite. It was

given that name because a most fabulous Rajah and his Ranee originally stopped there. Some of the things the gentleman brought with him, he left behind him, and it was all most ornate. What in blazes is pop-eyed Herbert Rapp of the Guernsey Breeders Association doing there in the Rajah's Suite? What is his wife, Monica of the Plungingest Neckline, the translucent black slinky pajamas, doing there?

That's what Art Bennett, assistant manager, wants to know. That is why he sends Gil Vine up there. Tim Piazolle, one of Vine's strongarm men, is supposed to be paid a salary to protect the VIP (Very Important People to you) from the machinations of hoi-polloi.

A Jackpot Winner

Above all, what's this roughneck, George Schmitt, dairy farmer of Binghamton, doing there—brandishing a gun and threatening to shoot somebody? Of course Mr. Schmitt explains that he has every right to be there. Didn't his wife, Hazel, win the Jackpot on the "Million Heiress for a Day" program?

One of the grand prizes is a day's stay in the Plaza Royal. He shows a clipping of said wife Hazel, floppy hat and all, from the newspaper. Mr. Schmitt's particular beef is, however, that Hazel has stolen thirty-eight thousand dollars from him. Furthermore, the lady in T.20 which is part of the Rajah's Suite, *isn't* Hazel, even though she is definitely wearing his wife's ring.

Incidentally—not only where is the thirty-eight grand, where is Hazel? The lady in the black silk pajamas with the green eyes—and the come-hither expression in them has been introduced to us as Monica, wife of Herbert

(Continued on page 8)

Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

A black and white illustration of a man in a suit sitting on a stool, working on a large drafting table. He is using a compass and ruler to draw a geometric design on the table. The table is tilted and supported by a tripod stand. The man is smiling and looking towards the viewer.

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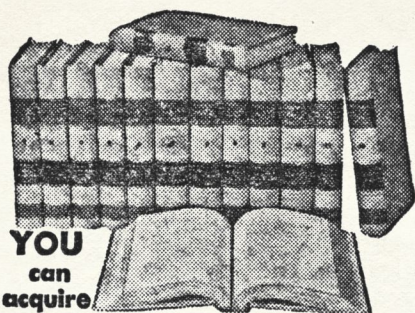
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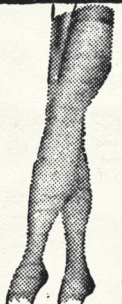
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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

Rapp. That's exactly who she is. Vine finds out much more about her, too!

Of course, a good part of all this is denied by the blond young man with the crew haircut. That would be Jack Ordney, promoter for the "Million Heiress for a Day" radio program. To the best of his knowledge and belief, the black-haired lady with the slinky pajamas and the green eyes, is Hazel and she honestly won the merchandise by answering the questions on the program. Of course, that is right after Gil Vine, by a simple trick, disarms George Schmitt and Tim Piazzolle takes him downstairs. Let us not forget that this is still the Plaza Royal—adverse publicity would be very bad for the tone of the hotel. Remember the code and the V.I.P!

Transfusion Needed

When Gil Vine next sees Ordney, however, and it isn't much later—the blond young man with the crew cut has had a knife in the back and is very much in need of a transfusion. So roll up your sleeve, Gil, for you have the Type "O" blood the young man needs. Perhaps they can pull him through. Of course George Schmitt has broken away from Tim Piazzolle. And what has happened to the Rajah's Suite?

No football team, convention nor proverbial bull in a china shop, has ever played such havoc with furniture, vases, bric-a-brac—what a wreck! Still where is Hazel? Where is the thirty-eight grand? Will they save handsome young Jack Ordney? Will Art Bennett let Gil Vine hold his job by allowing such shenanigans to come to pass within the sacred portals of the Plaza Royal—so magnificent and all the rest of it?

Be sure and find out, folks! You'll be glad you did!

A Nick Ransom Novelet

Also look who's back with us once again, replete with sparkling wisecracks—our Hollywood ex-stunt man. Yes, sir—that could be none other than Nick Ransom, late of Risks, Inc., and now as he so aptly puts it, in the "snoop" racket. So if you haven't met him before, shake hands with the irrepressible Nick, in **BLIND MAN'S FLUFF** by Robert Leslie Bellem.

Of course Nick has come across some "swell-lookin' cookies" out there in Hollywood, especially in the movie racket. He feels sure, however, that he has never seen the equal of the "pint-sized little muffin, in a white two-piece swim suit. A few inches less silk in the halter and Bikini shorts, would have made this redhead eligible for membership in a nudist colony!"

Sound familiar, folks? You all know Nick when it comes to scanning the gals! You also know him when it comes to solving crimes. You'll find him knee-deep in 'em in this one. Also his interest in the ladies never seems to cramp his style as a sleuth.

To begin at the beginning, however, all the cute little redhead does as we begin our story is to open the door for Nick in answer to his ring. Naturally he is expected and is shown into the patio surrounding the swimming-pool. What would a Hollywood story be without one? The layout of the house and grounds fairly screams the atmosphere of the Cinema Capital.

Cleaving the clear blue water of the pool itself, a handsome, bronzed and well-built gentleman dives from the springboard, for the "cookie" has told him of Nick's arrival. Straight and true he swims for the detective, and dripping, holds out his hand with which he wrings Nick's in a grip of steel. You would never suspect it unless you knew—and Nick, of course, knows only too well. Although considered one of the best scenario-writers in the colony, this would be Griff Borlund and he is stone blind!

A Girl Named Maggie

As for the "lovely muffin," Borlund introduces her as his secretary, Maggie Sullivan. In this particular case, Maggie isn't a nickname for Margaret. It's her honest-to-goodness name and so will Mr. Ransom find it in the telephone book—if he is interested!

Ransom soon learns that all the servants—including the various butlers, valets and attendants, have been dismissed for the day. That means that Maggie—under protest, must go too. Quite palpably, Borlund wants to be alone with the wisecracking but efficient private eye.

The senario-scribbler seems very sincere in his request that Nick "lay off" any romantic interest in Maggie during the present crisis. He also assures Nick that his only re-

(Continued on page 96)

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THR

JOE HARPOONED A SWORDFISH, BUT THEN...



GOT HIM! STAND
BY TO HEAVE THE
MARKER, SIS!

THEIR FAMILY CRUISER, SPECIALLY FITTED
WITH "PULPIT" AND "LOOKOUT," BETH BROWN
AND HER BROTHER JOE, TRY THEIR LUCK
AT HARPOONING A SWORDFISH...



THAT SWORD'S A LONG
WAY FROM TIRED. I
HOPE HE DOESN'T
TURN ON THEM

THINKING THE HUGE FISH TIRED FROM
DRAGGING THE MARKER, OUR
HARPOONERS USE THEIR DORY TO CLOSE
IN FOR THE KILL WHILE BILL BLANE
AND HIS FRIEND WATCH THE SHOW...



HER FOOT'S
CAUGHT!

KEEP THIS
BOAT CLEAR!
I'VE GOT TO CUT
THAT LINE!



SHE'S OKAY,
I THINK. JUST
SWALLOWED
SOME WATER

THANK HEAVENS!
THAT WAS MIGHTY
QUICK WORK ON
YOUR PART



I'M KEEPING BLANE
ABOARD FOR DRY
CLOTHES AND A
SNACK. WE'LL
MEET YOU IN
PORT

THIS WOULD
BE THE DAY I
DIDN'T SHAVE



...AND
HERE'S
A RAZOR
TOO

THANK
YOU, SIR



THIS IS THE BLADE
FOR ME! NEVER HAD
AN EASIER, MORE
REFRESHING
SHAVE!

THIN
GILLETTES
MAKE SHORT
WORK OF TOUGH
WHISKERS. THEY'RE
PLENTY KEEN



...SO NEXT WEEK
MY SHINGLE GOES
UP - "BILL BLANE
CONSTRUCTION
COMPANY"

WELL! JUST
IN TIME TO BID
ON MY NEW
PLANT

HE'S SO
HANDSOME



MEN, FOR BETTER-LOOKING SHAVES... QUICK AND
SMOOTH... TRY AMERICA'S LARGEST-SELLING
ECONOMY BLADES... **THIN GILLETTES**. THEY'RE
FAR KEENER THAN ORDINARY BLADES AND LAST FAR
LONGER. FURTHER, THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR
EXACTLY AND PROTECT YOU FROM NICKS AND
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NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

When the train taking glamorous singing star Martha Leigh to a home-town appearance roars across Ohio, Martha mysteriously and unaccountably vanishes, and in her stead is found—a corpse!

A Novelet by

G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



Sing

a SONG of MURDER

CHAPTER I

FEAR

SHE SAID, "I'm afraid." It slipped out. The words were the thought that had groped through her mind ever since the train had left Bellfontaine.

She did not say those words loudly, yet in the travel-weary hush of her

compartment it was loud enough. It startled her, and her eyes, blue, became blue-black and large.

Across from her, Lou Sabin—quick and cat-nerved—glanced up from his copy of *Variety*.

"What did you say?"

Lou Sabin Seeks a Lost Chord of Crime When

Martha closed her eyes briefly. "I didn't say anything."

"Yes, you did. You said, 'I'm afraid'."

She brought up her smile, her famous, wistful Martha Leigh smile. Which struck her as a rather futile mechanism to use against Sabin. She sometimes entertained the romantic notion that he was a Svengali and she another Trilby who sang when and as he willed her to sing. She was not entirely sure that he hadn't taught her to smile like that.

"But that's silly, Lou. Why would I be afraid? I must have dozed off. Don't tell me I talk in my sleep!" She laughed softly.

He looked at her out of yellowish eyes. With her straight, pale gold hair, her fresh clear skin, she was innocently lovely. When she sang out of your radio or from a Simco Record you knew the sweetness of her mouth. Your girl, smiling. Maybe you turned out the lights and imagined you were alone with her in the warm dark. That kind of a voice. Her Hooperating was tops, her Simco recording of *Remembered Love* the hottest selling platter in ten years. Why would she be afraid?

"Was it the guy back there on the platform when we stopped at Bellefontaine," Sabin asked.

THE MAN on the platform had been a kind of scarecrow figure, Sabin recalled, lean and tall and round-shouldered. He'd worn shiny blue serge pants and a light gray suitcoat streaked with dirt, its collar turned up against shaggy blond hair that grew down the back of his neck. He'd tried to light a cigarette but couldn't, either because of the wind or because he'd had too much to drink. He'd turned and peered through Martha's window, his eyes sullen, small. Then he'd said something, not audibly, that left the shape of an obscenity upon his loose-lipped mouth and staggered forward along the track, his breath a thin white ghost against the substantial gray of the winter afternoon.

"I didn't notice anyone," Martha said without looking at Sabin. She looked,

instead, at her slim hands where they lay quietly across the cover of the movie magazine in her lap.

There was a kind of desperation in her quietness that reminded Sabin of a rabbit frozen in a hunter's path, or of a child pretending sleep while frightening footsteps prowled the nursery.

"All right," Sabin said gently. She had a right to a life of her own, apart from her clamoring public. She needn't share it, even with Sabin who had deftly managed her to radio stardom.

Nodding at the cover of the movie magazine he abruptly changed the subject. "I'm going to put you there one of these days. Right there where Wyman is now."

"Oh now, Lou," she protested, laughing.

"Sure." He would either sell her to Hollywood, or he would fall in love with her. He could not, he'd decided, adequately attend to both. "I can put you there if we decide that's the thing to do. Why not? Give me one good reason."

It was there again, crossing her face like a shadow, that haunted look. Yesterday, in New York, she hadn't been like this. Something had happened. In Bellefontaine, Ohio, a man had stood outside her compartment—some young bum, dirty, probably drunk—and suddenly she was afraid. "There's a very good reason," she said. "I can't act."

"Huhm," he mused. Then he dropped it—for now—and looked at his watch. "We'd better have something to eat. You'll need your strength when we hit Indianapolis. You'll have to fight your way through—what do they call it—the Founders' Chapter of the Martha Leigh Fan Club?"

She shook her head. "I'm not hungry. I couldn't eat, Lou. Don't ask me to."

"Coffee?"

"No, nothing."

"Well—" He stood up, holding himself erect to make the most of his five feet and four inches. "I'll get a snack in the club car. We've got an hour or so. You might take a nap if you feel like it."

Gruesome Death Strikes a Discordant Note!

She did not move from her seat after he'd gone. She pressed her head back against the cushion and closed her eyes. She thought, Take a little nap! Lou, Lou, you're rather wonderful and sweet underneath that shell, but must you think for me?

YES, she thought, he must. Somebody has to think, and right now I can't. Was that Rex on the platform



LOU SABIN

when we stopped in Bellefontaine? He had those same up-to-no-good eyes, the same loose mouth—but then it couldn't be Rex.

Now Martha, she addressed herself scornfully, you're not trying to suggest that there could be somebody else like Rex Carmody? God wouldn't let that happen. God would have destroyed the blueprint after He observed the working model in operation.

But she could not relax. The train

plunged on through the gathering dusk, and the speed seemed to build up a kind of pressure within the compartment.

There was a knock at the door. Her head jerked forward and to the left.

"Lou?" she said faintly.

"Porter, Miss."

With a tray of food, no doubt, orders of Mr. Lou Sabin! Well, you could lead a horse to the trough.

"Come in," she called.

He came in with a lurch. The door slammed behind him and he fell back against it to stand with feet widely spaced and legs braced. Martha's eyes lingered on the broken counters of his black oxfords. Her gaze traveled up the legs of blue serge trousers as far as the baggy knees, skipped upward to the rumpled, greasy lapels of a gray suit-coat, the soiled white collar. And then the face.

"Rex!" she said breathlessly.

The same dissolute handsomeness—yet there was something different. Something in the eyes, the strange dull look they had. He's drunk, she thought. She stiffened, remembering what Rex was like when he was drunk.

"Get—out," she said. "Do you hear me? *Get out!*"

He pushed back against the door, staggered to the seat opposite her, and dropped into it. Down there on the floor somewhere were his feet, and they seemed to her like insurmountable obstacles, fencing her in.

"You wanna share your hour of triumph with your husband, don'tcha, baby?" he said. But his tone lacked acid. His words sounded like something he'd memorized and now gave out mechanically.

"Rex, if you don't leave this instant—" Her threat went limp and she left it like that.

He shook his head. "Can't, baby. I got hit. One shot hit me. Back there in Bellefontaine."

"I don't believe you." Her eyes narrowed scornfully. "I don't believe you, and I don't care particularly. And unless you leave immediately, I'll ring for

the porter and have you thrown out!"

"Do that—" He broke off and coughed—a loose, liquid sound. "Do that, baby, and I'll put one into you where your ribs meet."

In the sagging pocket where his hand was, she saw the shape of a gun.

CHAPTER II

GIRL MISSING



SABIN finished his coffee. When he had savored the last of its clean bitter taste he ripped cellophane from a slim cigar with his small, quick fingers. Outside the club car window the lights of Anderson, Indiana, slipped away as the train bored deeper and with increasing speed into the darkness.

He thought he ought to get back to his canary. They were getting off at Indianapolis, where Martha had been born, where "Martha Leigh Night" would open the annual ice carnival. There the sprawling factory that housed the Simco record presses was located, though the masters were cut in the company's New York studio. To make tomorrow night's event of even greater local interest, the ballad, *Remembered Love*, was the work of a previously unknown Indianapolis composer, Scott Barrons.

"Martha Leigh Night," Sabin reflected as he got up from the table, might turn out to be a pretty good gag. It ought to push *Remembered Love* over the eleven million platter mark for the Simco people. It would certainly sell Martha herself to a town notable for its acid-test attitude toward entertainment. It might even do something for Composer Scott Barrons.

Sabin would have felt as buoyant as his quick step seemed to indicate if he had known what was troubling Martha. Something was gnawing at her, and now it was gnawing at him, so much so that when he encountered somebody in the drafty vestibule of Car 17 he was genuinely startled.

It was a woman, and she wasn't doing anything except standing there, her back toward Sabin, her shoulders and wide brimmed black hat silhouetted

against the door glass. Sabin cleared his throat, but maybe she didn't hear very well. He touched her shoulder impersonally and said, "Excuse me."

She reeled on the swaying platform, might have fallen except that he clutched her arm. Her face was pale and long, bracketed by hair as straight and black as an Indian's. There was a blue-black discoloration around one of her dark, tragic eyes.

Sabin said, "You oughtn't to stand here." He let go of her. "The railroad doesn't like it. You might run your other eye into a door or something."

Saying nothing, she sidled away, and Sabin pulled the door open and went into Car 17. He stopped at the door of Martha's compartment. He knocked and at the same time glanced back. The woman with the black eye was still there, watching him. Then she backed, turned, and disappeared.

A voice spoke. "You after her autograph too?"

Sabin's head jerked all the way to the left. A plump young man, with close-cropped wavy black hair and a gay bit of handkerchief lolling out of his breast pocket, was leaning against the outer wall of the compartment. His smile was tentative.

Sabin didn't smile back. It had occurred to him that Martha had not answered his knock. His hand dropped to the knob.

"I've got her autograph, buddy," he said irritably to the plump young man. "On a contract. I'm her agent. Miss Leigh isn't seeing anybody right now." He opened the door, stepped briskly into the roomette, and slammed the door behind him.

His sharply indrawn breath was audible through set teeth. His eyes, shiny with alarm, gradually narrowed.

The train swept into a curve, lurching, and the head of the dead man on the floor wobbled over to the right. A little blood spilled from the corner of his open mouth and crawled down the side of his chin.

FIRMLY, Sabin hung onto the knob of the door. The knob was cold and hard and good, a thing of substance in a careering world of loosely joined un-



Sabin saw the two
plainclothes men clos-
ing on Martha

realities. Then his hand fumbled down to the key in the lock and turned it.

He moved stiffly to the door of the tiny lavatory which he opened. It was empty. He turned. Martha's traveling case was in the rack over the window. Her mink coat was carefully folded on one of the seats. Her purse was not there.

Getting down to one knee, Sabin laid hands on soiled gray coat lapels, and hauled the dead man into a sitting position, braced him in the corner formed by the car wall and the seat edge.

Sabin took his cold cigar out of his mouth and flung it away. What the blazes did you do with a corpse, anyway? Especially on a train. He jerked the flaps of the coat apart, revealing the soiled shirt front. There was a small puncture in the cloth, rimmed with dried blood. An ice pick, Sabin thought. Maybe a bill spike.

Sabin emptied the inner pocket—found a billfold and a marriage license issued to one Rex Carmody and Martha Stewart Leigh in June of 1939. She'd been eighteen then, just a dumb kid. The wallet contained an Indiana driver's license bearing Carmody's name and Indianapolis address, and not another thing.

IN ONE of the pockets, however, he found a fiber-tagged key to a room in the Lennox Hotel at Bellefontaine, Ohio. So the guy lived in Indianapolis, but had spent the night, or nights, in Bellefontaine where he had boarded the same train that had been carrying his bride of ten years ago.

Not coincidentally had he boarded that particular train, but with intent, having first made sure that Martha was aboard.

Martha.

Was she still on the train, or had she slipped off when they'd stopped at Anderson?

Sabin scooped up the wallet, marriage license, hotel room key, and dumped them into his own pockets. Somebody knocked at the compartment door. Sabin straightened to his feet and turned. He remembered the door was locked. He took a breath.

He said, "Yes?" his voice steady.

"Porter, Mr. Sabin. 'Bout fifteen minutes before we pull into Indianapolis."

"Thanks."

Oh sure, thanks! Thanks for fifteen rotten minutes in which to find Martha and get rid of a corpse.

Sabin stepped back to the dead man, stooped, got hold of the shoulders. He hauled and twisted Carmody around, let him rest a moment. Then Sabin hooked hands under Carmody's armpits, pulled the body into the lavatory. Carmody's legs extended through the opening, and Sabin had to step on one of them getting out.

He kicked Carmody's hat through the lavatory door, then stooped, picked up the ankles and jackknifed the legs against the lavatory wall in order to get the door closed.

FACE beaded with sweat, Sabin put a shaky hand up to the luggage rack and took down Martha's case. The case was locked, but he doubted if he could have got Martha's fur coat into it anyway.

He slung the coat over his arm, picked up the case, and left the compartment.

His own berth had been the adjoining lower. He swung Martha's case onto the seat, got his own Gladstone up beside it. Opening the Gladstone, he folded Martha's coat down on top of his own things. Then he put on his overcoat and gray felt hat, picked up both pieces of luggage and started toward the head of the train.

The smiling porter, eager to help, came toward him. "You've got plenty of time, Mr. Sabin, sir."

"I'd like a word with you," Sabin said, "about Miss Leigh." He let the porter carry the Gladstone as far as the end of the car where the man paused, not at all sure what Sabin intended.

Sabin put Martha's case down in the aisle and took out his wallet.

"Listening gets you twenty bucks," he promised.

The porter's teeth gleamed. "Yessir! I'm a mighty fine listener. One of the best!"

"Here's the pitch." Sabin's voice dropped. "Miss Leigh isn't feeling too well—and she doesn't want to fight her

way through the reception committee at the station. She'll stay in her compartment until the last possible moment while I'm trying to convince the crowd that she isn't on this train. You won't let anybody get past her door, will you?"

"No, sir!"

"Because you know how some of these fans are. They'd tear the place up trying to find her if they had a chance."

"They won't get by me, Mr. Sabin."

Sabin passed over the twenty, wondering how much time it had bought. Just about as much, he imagined, as he'd lost in explaining to the porter. Because when Martha didn't come out of the compartment and didn't answer the porter's knock, the porter was going to go in.

Sabin shivered slightly. He took the Gladstone from the porter, muttered something, and moved on into the next car. Some of the passengers there were stirring, ready to leave the train. One berth was already made up, in spite of the early hour, and Sabin got the notion that the green curtains concealed Martha. He didn't know how she'd managed a thing like that, but then she'd already accomplished a couple of things which he had not thought her capable of.

He slowed down in the aisle. He stared at the curtains. He was trying to think up a way to look into the berth when the curtains obligingly parted and a thick hairy arm ending in a hand that gripped a pair of big brown oxfords appeared.

Sabin thought, Of all the fool ideas . . .

She could be anywhere. She could be in any one of the women's lavatories, and there wouldn't be anything he could do about that. She could be back in Anderson, wandering the streets, shadowed by rustling fear, wondering where to hide. She could, conceivably, be on her way back to New York, leaving him with a corpse on his hands and a lot of explaining to do. When he thought of it that way, he began not to like the Girl With The Wistful Smile In Her Voice.

It was rather unpleasant not to like Martha, so he concentrated on another alternative:

She was on the train.
Somewhere.

CHAPTER III

INTO DARKNESS



THE train came to a stop. It groaned in sympathy with Sabin and then perversely hissed him.

He'd got as far as one of the coaches, was inching forward in the crowded aisle, when, about three heads in front of him, he saw Martha's spice-brown hat. He wanted to yell. He gouged with his Gladstone, and shoved and pushed his way to her.

But when his eyes traveled down the back of the spice-brown suit that matched the hat, they weren't Martha's ankles. They were thick. The girl was a red head, and all of seventeen.

He got past her, and then he was getting off the train, moving with the crowd along the platform beside an elevated track toward a dingy sign that read TO STATION.

He stopped then, let the bobbing faces pass. He saw the strange, thin-faced woman with the black eye. She went by, alone, not hurrying, not looking at him. He saw the fat boy in the bright blue suit who had wanted Martha's autograph. He saw a lot of others, but none of them was Martha.

He burrowed into the crowd that funneled down the stairway.

Downstairs they'd spread the welcome mat. There was the Founders Chapter of the Martha Leigh Fan Club, with signs. There were representatives from Simco, also with signs—enormous pasteboard disks painted to resemble phonograph records of *Remembered Love*. There was a rather stiff looking committee of three men holding a beribboned Key To The City in front of them. *Remembered Love* was being piped out over the loudspeaker system, and Martha's crooning voice had a strangely remote, almost ghostly quality about it.

Nobody paid any attention to Sabin. Nobody said, there's the little guy who made Martha what she is—and that was all right with Sabin. Now he was at the crowd's back, and it still watched with an eager, upturned face for Martha Leigh.

Sabin edged around a tile-faced pillar. A tall, broad shouldered man in a dark, shaggy coat, yellow gloves, and a soft brown hat came striding up the all but deserted ramp from Illinois Street. His face was massive, with a suggestion of softness about it—soft brown eyes, a downy brown mustache above a pliant mouth. He gave the impression of not knowing exactly where he was going but he was getting there with the speed of a charging rhino.

Sabin, small and quick, darted into Scott Barrons' path, dropped the Gladstone, and caught the composer by one shaggy sleeve.

"Sorry, but I'm in a hurry," Barrons said brusquely.

Sabin hung on. "Look, Barrons. I'm Sabin, remember?"

They had met only once, about six months ago. Barrons looked down, his expression vague. "Yes. Oh, yes. But where's Martha Leigh?"

"Not so loud," Sabin protested. Scott Barrons, now that he had *Remembered Love* out of his system, might well have taken up hog calling. "Let's go somewhere. Anywhere."

"But—but where is Martha?"

"I don't know. No, I honest to God don't know. But if you'll step out in the street a second, I'll explain. That's all it will take—just a second."

GOING down the ramp, they went through the door and into a night of sudden chill gusts and squawling rain. Barrons waved an arm in a gesture, and they cut across the street under the tracks, turned south for half a block, and ducked into a black Cadillac sedan. Then Sabin talked in neat little jabbing sentences.

When the porter opened Martha Leigh's compartment, he would find a man. But he wouldn't find Martha. The man wasn't doing anything. Not even breathing. Murder, they called it. Martha had vanished. But Barrons was in the clear. So Barrons could hang around here and find out what was what. If the cops picked up Martha, Barrons could stick by her.

"I want your car," Sabin explained. "I want to look around a little. Before the cops corner me and start pitching

questions, I want to collect some of the answers. Because if Martha killed that guy, she had a justifiable reason. She shouldn't have ducked out, but she apparently has, and it's up to me to do something for her." He made no mention of the fact that Martha had been married to the dead man.

Barrons was agreeable, if not enthusiastic. He put the ignition key into the lock and got out of the car. "If you want to contact me, I'm at the Halbirk Arms on Pennsylvania," he said.

"Right." Sabin started the engine. "And how do I get to New York Street from here?"

Barrons looked about confusedly. "Get onto Meridian—" He made one of his wide, flopping gestures. "Go sou—no, north. It's an east-west street, four, five, maybe six blocks north." His smile was small and sheepish. "Rats, I was just born and raised here, and you know I don't know exactly how far—"

He broke off as the high thin wail of a siren rode out on the damp air. Sabin gave his head a worried half-shake, put the car in gear. Scott Barrons turned and loped across the street, hurrying back toward the station.

At Meridian and Washington Streets, Sabin had to wait through a green light while two police cars came screaming down out of the east. Then the light turned green again, and he gave the Caddy the spur.

East New York Street was wide and smooth and it carried heavy traffic. Sabin fought the glare and confusion of lights, looking for address numbers, and when he found one that approached the address in Rex Carmody's wallet, he parked and got out.

The place he was looking for turned out to be a gray frame firetrap, three stories high and partitioned off into small flats. Rex Carmody's name was on a mailbox in the lighted entry. He climbed the stairs to the third floor. He touched the knob of the door of B-3.

The knob immediately turned beneath his hand. The door swung back. A little light from the hall revealed the inside of the room, showed rain-spotted brown oxfords and the spattered cuffs of bright blue pants, stepping back into the shadows.

"Come in" The voice was quiet but unsteady, the sentence punctuated by the snick of a gun hammer pressed into firing position.

Sabin's smile was slight. "Maybe you'll settle for my autograph." He stepped into the room.

"Turn around."

He turned, facing the half open door. He had a pretty good idea what was coming, but he hadn't supposed it would come quite as soon as it did. He thought there would at least be a warning *swish*, and Sabin, the quick and the cat-nerved, would have a chance to duck and to swivel around and lead with his left. But it was a very short blow and sufficiently hard.

He plunged into darkness and silence.

CHAPTER IV

ESCAPE



HE WAS going to be sick, he thought. But then, after a while, he felt better and rolled over onto his back. He rolled still farther, got to his knees. Pain stabbed him behind the right ear. He put a hand up to the spot and it came away warm and moist. He groped, found the edge of a table and hauled himself to his feet.

It occurred to Sabin that tables frequently have lamps on them. This one did, and he got the switch on. The first thing that he saw was a book, thin but of more than average length and breadth, lying on the corner of the table. *NORTH AMERICAN LAND BIRDS* was the title stamped on the natural linen cover. Also on the cover, was a nice set of moist red fingerprints—Sabin's own. He'd touched the book after touching the spot back of his ear. He made a mental note to take the book with him when he left.

The room was intended for living and sleeping. But now the bed had been pulled down out of the wall, the bedclothes torn off, and the mattress slit with a knife. The same knife had got into the one overstuffed chair. Drawers of the bureau had been pulled out and turned over.

Sabin took unsteady steps into the bathroom. He washed his hand and his face in a basin that apparently hadn't been cleaned in weeks. Then he had a look at the kitchenette. Here was more filth and confusion. He wondered if Blue Suit had found what he wanted, and what was it?

He went back into the living-bedroom, subjected Rex Carmody's possessions to some additional pawing without uncovering anything that would in any manner connect Martha Leigh with the murdered man.

He went back to the table and picked up *NORTH AMERICAN LAND BIRDS*. The book was the property of the Indianapolis Public Library, and according to the rubber stamp inside the cover lining, it was better than six years overdue.

Sabin put the book under his arm. He took out his damp handkerchief, gloved his right hand with it as he stepped over to the door. He took hold of the knob.

But the door was locked.

He remembered then that Rex Carmody's pockets had contained only one key—that to a room in a hotel in Bellefontaine. Yet Blue Suit had had a key to this flat, which could mean that Blue Suit had searched Carmody before Sabin had. Blue Suit had entered Martha's compartment on the train and probably had killed Carmody. But then why would Martha pull a disappearing act?

Sabin stared blankly at the locked door. Maybe she hadn't. Suppose she'd witnessed the killing. Suppose Blue Suit had quietly silenced her and managed somehow to shove her off the train. Thus suspicion would be concentrated on Martha for a while—until her body was found—and the real killer would have a chance to come here to Carmody's flat and get whatever it was he was after.

Sabin yanked on the knob, rattled it, and finally kicked the bottom of the door. He had to get out of here. Right now.

Across the hall, somebody opened a door. Sabin stepped back as heard the *tick-tack* of approaching high heels. Then a key scraped the lock, was

twisted, and the door opened.

It was the woman he'd noticed on the train, the one with the black eye and the coarse, straight black hair. She'd discarded her hat and the jacket of her suit. Her white blouse was soiled. She stood in the doorway for a moment and stared at him, then stepped across the threshold and closed the door behind her. Her mouth twisted sardonically after her eyes had completed a deliberate tour of the wrecked room.

"Find what you were looking for, little man?" She had a thin, abrasive voice.

"Nuh uh." Sabin sat down on the arm of the upholstered chair, rested the book on his knees. "I'm supposed to be looking for something, huh?"

SHE tipped her dark head back all the way to the door panel and made sounds like laughter. Then she gave out with a string of obscenities which she finally attached to the name of Martha Leigh. Sabin pushed his lips into a sickly smile.

"You don't like her much."

"Like her?" The woman crossed to the bed, dropped onto the edge of it. "Do you know what she is? She's—"

"You just told me," Sabin broke in. "That's just one girl's opinion. Let's talk about something else. Who gave you the mouse under your eye? Rex, maybe?"

She sighed, nodding. "Rough but sweet. We went 'round-and-'round just before he left for Bellefontaine."

"You lost, huh?"

She sighed again. "I always lost to that—" She had a word for Rex, too, that was probably apt, but the way she said it made it sound like a pet name. "He kept teasing me about going back to her. He kept saying he was going to meet her train at Bellefontaine, ride into Indianapolis with her, and get off with her on his arm. I didn't believe he'd have the nerve until he bought the train ticket. He showed it to me, and we had a fight. He went off to Bellefontaine to pick up her train. He went back to her, all right, and she killed him."

Sabin shook his head. "Maybe not."

"The devil she didn't!" The woman

looked up, her face defiant. "I tailed Rex, I'm telling you. I saw him go into her roomette. And then after a while, she came out, scared white, and beat it up the aisle. I looked in through the door. Rex was there, and he was dead."

Sabin put the book down in the chair. He took out his cigarette case, passed it to her. She took one, and he took one. He held his lighter for her.

"Try it like this," he said. "You were jealous. You tailed Rex to Bellefontaine and onto the train. He went into Martha's roomette. He tormented her with the threat that he might get off the train with her, maybe walk arm-in-arm with her past the reception committee at the station. He was mentally torturing her to get square for her walking out on him years ago and making a success of herself. So Martha was scared, like you said. She left the compartment, looking for me. You slipped in and killed Rex. How's that?"

"It smells." She leaned back on the bed. "So I was jealous and tailed Rex. Why make it tough for myself? I could have killed him in Bellefontaine, so why would I have waited until he got on the train? And do you know something, little man—I had a gun." She patted her thigh. "He wasn't killed with a gun, was he? You know what I was going to do with the gun? I was going to plug your sweet doll-faced canary."

Sabin stared at the rain-drenched window. "Let's say we're both liars. Let's try the same line of thought though on Blue Boy—the chubby lad in the bright blue suit. You saw him, didn't you? He was hanging around Martha's door when I came back from the club car. Also, he got himself a key to this place, because he's the guy who tore up the furniture. He must have got the key off Rex."

"He could have," she admitted. "I saw him go into the roomette. But that was after I came out. After Rex was dead."

"What's Blue Boy want?"

"I don't know. I never saw him before."

Sabin glanced toward the window again. Down in the street, a car moving east swung across traffic to pull up to

the north curb. With the white letters, I. P. D., on the door, the driver could get away with things like that.

Sabin picked up the book, slid off the arm of the chair. "Cops," he said to the woman on the bed.

"Well?" Her lips twisted. She stood up, her movements lazy and stretching. Then, with a sudden grab, she went for her gun.

When she had spoken about the gun, she oughtn't to have patted her thigh, for though Sabin was surprised, he wasn't nearly as surprised as he might have been.

He sailed "North American Land Birds" and the edge of it struck the arm that reached for her weapon. When she opened her mouth to scream, he closed it for her with a solid tap on the point of the chin. She fell back onto the bed.

Sabin recovered his hat and the book. He shoved the book in under his coat, stepped to the door, and moved out into the hall. Heavy footsteps pounded the wood treads of the stairs. Indecision rooted Sabin for an instant. Then he turned his back to the stairway, walked quickly to the rear of the hall. There was a tall, double-hung window there and beyond the glass the freezing rain glistened on the iron rail of a fire escape.

Sabin opened the window.

IT WAS a quiet little taproom on North Meridian Street—quiet, possibly, because the juke box wore a piece of gray cardboard: OUT OF ORDER. Sabin was pleased. There would be no *Remembered Love*, no wistfully smiling voice to haunt him. There was a white plastic radio on the back bar, but it was tuned down to a whisper.

He had a shot of raw whiskey at the bar to steady himself. Then he slipped down off his stool, hugging the book under his coat, and moved to the telephone booth at the back. He looked up Scott Barrons' number. After a three ring wait, the composer's voice roared at him out of the receiver.

"Have you found out anything?" Sabin asked.

"No, I haven't," Barrons replied emphatically. "I couldn't get near anybody who knew anything there at the

station. I've called Police Headquarters twice, but if they've got any information on Martha Leigh, they're not giving it out."

Sabin said that was about what he'd expected and hung up. He left the phone, went to the only vacant booth—and slid in behind the table. He ordered another rye and a ham sandwich. When the waitress had left, he brought out the bird book and opened it on the table. The paper was glossy coated stock, the illustrations in full color. The most remarkable thing was not the book itself but that a volume like that would be in Rex Carmody's flat. Unless you could make something out of the fact that two pages in the approximate center of the book had been cut out.

His drink and sandwich came. Sabin glanced up at the neon-framed clock above the bar. It was nine-thirty. He got up, taking the book with him, and returned to the phone booth. There he looked up the number of the Central Library. His call was answered by one of those nothing-can-ruffle-me feminine voices.

"I've found a book belonging to the library," Sabin said. "It's numbered L-six-five-oh-eight, titled 'North American Land Birds'. It was taken out July eight, six years ago. If you can give me the name and address of the person to whom it was charged, I'll be glad to return the book to the library."

"Just a moment, please."

Sabin leaned against the wall of the booth and waited. Somebody at the bar had asked for music, and the barkeep turned up the volume control of the radio. Lombardo's unmistakable sax section came crooning in.

Out on the sidewalk, a girl wearing a brown corduroy jacket and with a yellow scarf tied around her head, peered in through the steamy window. She had on black-rimmed harlequin glasses, and she appeared elfish—and cold.

The unruffled voice came again.

"That book was taken out of the library by Rudolph Henshaw and reported lost. Mr. Henshaw paid the library the price of the book. If you will return it to us, we will see that Mr. Henshaw is reimbursed in like amount."

"His address, please?" Sabin asked.

And when the woman had given it to him, he repeated it to impress it upon his memory.

He went out into the taproom, would have left immediately except for the crisp voice of a newscaster coming out of the radio speaker.

"Police tonight sought golden-haired Martha Leigh of radio fame who was scheduled to open the ice carnival here at Colosseum tomorrow night. Miss Leigh is wanted in connection with the slaying of Rex Carmody of this city whose body was found in the singer's compartment when the train from New York arrived at Union station at seven-fifty this evening. Carmody was the victim of a single stab wound possibly caused by an ice pick or similar instrument, according to Lieutenant Clifton Hale of the Homicide Squad . . ."

Sabin sidled into his booth and sat down. He was aware that somebody occupied the opposite side of his table now. A girl. The girl in the yellow head-scarf and harlequin glasses he had seen a moment before looking in through the window. And she seemed to be eating his ham sandwich.

CHAPTER V

"BRING YOUR GUN"



FROM the bar radio, the newscaster was continuing his crisp report.

"... Miss Leigh and her manager, Louis R. Sabin of New York, are both believed to be in Indianapolis and may be moving in company.

The radio songstress slipped through the welcoming crowd that awaited her at the station by means of a clever ruse in which she was assisted by Lois Harding, age seventeen, of Indianapolis. Under pretext of being too tired to face the throng of fans and autograph seekers, Miss Leigh suggested that she and Miss Harding change clothes. Miss Harding readily agreed, for she was not aware until half an hour ago that a crime had been committed and that she had played an unwitting party in a scheme of police evasion . . ."

Miss Harding—the kid with the thick

ankles and red hair, wearing Martha's spice-brown suit.

Sabin reached for his shot glass without taking his eyes off the radio on the back bar. He drank it at a gulp.

"... Mr. Sabin is described as thirty-five, about five feet four, slightly built, dark hair and light brown eyes. He was wearing a black or dark blue overcoat and hat. Miss Leigh is presumed to be wearing a plaid skirt, brown corduroy jacket, and a bright yellow head-scarf, all of which she obtained from Miss Harding along with a pair of harlequin glasses . . ."

Sabin's eyes jerked to the girl in the shadows on the opposite side of the table. He did a double-take.

"Good . . . Godfrey!" he breathed.

Martha put what was left of his sandwich down on the plate. She gingerly removed the harlequin glasses. Her blue eyes were slightly bloodshot, perhaps from the strain of looking through lenses she did not need, perhaps from crying. She'd applied lipstick heavily to disguise the shape of her mouth and the rouge had smeared.

"Lou—" Her mouth trembled. "Oh, Lou, I was hungry."

"That's fine," he whispered dryly. "You're in trouble up to here, and the first thing you say is that you're hungry."

"But—but I lost my purse."

"That's fine too. Go on, eat your sandwich. My sandwich. Just thank God it happens to be mine."

"But I—we—we can't stay here."

"Take off the scarf. We might just as well stay here. Radio gets in everywhere, remember?"

She pulled off the scarf, and her pale gold hair billowed down over her shoulders. She'd apparently lost whatever it was that had kept it neatly and simply arranged, or this was part of the disguise she'd adopted. She crammed the scarf into the jacket pocket.

"Lou, I ought to have told you. He—he was my husband. We only lived together six months, then I left him. He was everything that's low and mean and despicable."

He nodded. "But did you kill him?"

She stared at him, her lips just apart, and he knew the answer even before

she said, "Why, no. Of course I didn't. They—" she glanced furtively toward the radio—"they've got it all wrong. Everything wrong. He died in my compartment, and—and I couldn't think of anything to do but to run. Because of what he'd been saying, I suppose. He'd frightened me, and I lost my head. He insisted he was going to leave the train with me, and I'd have to face all those people with him at my side, taking bows. He had a gun, and he said he was going to make me do that. But then he died, and the last thing I thought of was that they'd think I did it. I simply wanted to get away. I didn't want anybody to know that I'd married him. But to be accused of killing him—"

She broke off, shivering. "Lou, he was shot before he got on the train. At Bellefontaine. He told me so. Somebody had shot at him, several shots, I gathered, but only one hit."

Sabin was shaking his head. "You heard what the man said—stabbed, not shot. With an ice pick."

"He said, 'One shot hit me.' Why would he lie about a thing like that?"

"I don't know. But the cops simply don't make mistakes like that."

HE GLANCED back over his shoulder. The taproom seemed to have become increasingly crowded, which was probably a good thing, since they would be less apt to be noticed. But all the while the feeling grew in him that they were being hemmed-in, trapped. He leaned far over the table to speak to her.

"We can't make it together," he whis-

pered. "We're sure to be spotted after a broadcast like that." Martha was nodding agreement. "What have you got under that jacket?"

"A blouse."

"Okay, shed the jacket. Right now. Just dump it in the seat there." He watched her squirm out of the wet corduroy. "Now go back to the ladies' room and see if you can't do something with that hair. And see if you can pick something to wear on the outside. Try that door marked 'Employees Only.' Maybe one of the waitresses has a coat hanging around." Noticing her frown of protest, he added, "Rats, this isn't any time for scruples."

"And meet you where?"

"I've got Scott Barrons' black Caddy diagonally across the street. If I don't pick up any trouble, I'll flash the parking lights once. If you don't get any signal, you're on your own again. Try to get to Barrons' apartment. That's the Halbirk Arms on North Pennsylvania. The street's one block east of here, but I don't know how far north the Halbirk is."

She hesitated. "Maybe you won't know me. How will you flash a signal, if you don't recognize me?"

"I'll know you," he continued, "because you'll stop just outside this place and make like you've dropped something. Just stoop down and right up again. I'll flash if the coast is clear."

For an instant she sat there, biting her overly accented lower lip. And then she gave him a gallant, tattered flag of a smile, slipped out of the booth, and moved unhurriedly toward the rear of

[Turn page]

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the room. Sabin scarcely looked back at her, fearing that his interest might be contagious. He got up, still hugging the bird book, sidled to the door, and stepped out.

Traffic along the street was heavy, but slow because of the icing rain. Sabin picked a break and jay-walked. When he neared Barrons' car, he slowed down, looking right and left at the other cars parked along the curb. All of them were unoccupied. None looked like police department property. He got in, rolled down the window, to get a better view of the front of the taproom. He waited for what his anxiety estimated was a year and seven days, his neck craned to catch glimpses of the front of the taproom between passing cars. When he saw her, she'd already stooped over. She had on a coat and a hat, and he wouldn't have known it was Martha. As she straightened, his hand went out to the light switch, stopped an inch short of its objective. A car had slipped up along side the Caddy to park with engine idling, rear fender to his front fender. Sabin hadn't seen any official mark on its side, but he noticed the long waving fishpole aerial, saw the chrome spotlight, not yet turned on, as it swivelled into position to cover the other side of the street.

Through a flickering break in the traffic, he saw Martha. She was moving south on the opposite sidewalk, taking her time, still hoping for his signal. Sabin groaned. Two men in plain clothes got out of the cop car. One started across mid-block, the other moved south on Sabin's side of the street, closing in on Martha. Sabin couldn't get the Caddy out of its spot. He couldn't signal to her that she ought to turn around and run the other way. He couldn't do a thing but sit there and watch them take her. And he wouldn't, he couldn't do that.

Scooting across the cushion to the right side of the car, looking back over his left shoulder, trying to catch another glimpse of Martha, Sabin didn't notice that he had company. He got the car door open a fraction of the way, and somebody caught it. He caught the gleam of brass buttons just

outside the door.

"How about just sitting tight for a minute, sir," the cop on the sidewalk said.

Sabin swallowed past the dryness of his throat. "Yes," he said faintly. "Sure. What's going on over there, anyway?"

"Nothing much. Some barfly just pinched a waitress' coat."

But that wasn't it. It couldn't be. They didn't send out the boys in plain clothes to handle a petty theft.

"Pinched a waitress' coat, huh?" Sabin said. "I always just pinch the waitress."

Nobody laughed.

SABIN stepped briskly across the threshold of Scott Barrons' bachelor apartment in the Halbirk Arms. Barrons, hugely bundled in a maroon wool bathrobe, dashed a big hand through an unruly shock of soft brown hair. He looked thoroughly fuddled.

"They've got Martha," Sabin told him. "They got her, and I had to sit there and watch them take her." He dumped his small body into a sage green lounge chair that must have been especially proportioned for Barrons.

"Well," the composer drew it out thoughtfully, "get a lawyer!" His round face brightened as though he'd just contributed a highly original suggestion. He flung out an arm toward the telephone.

"Look," Sabin said irritably. "You live in this town. I don't. How the devil would I know what lawyer to call? Don't you know of any?"

Barrons pulled an end of his downy mustache and blinked at the beige carpet. "No, I don't think I know any criminal lawyers," he murmured vaguely. "But I might find out from somebody else."

"That's a good idea," Sabin said.

He watched Barrons lumber over to the phone and start fumbling with the directory. Sabin couldn't sit still. His mind was with Martha down at Police Headquarters.

"Oh, rats!" He struggled up out of the chair and reached for his hat. "Skip it, Barrons. I can't sit here like this. I've got one more thing to try, and then I quit. I quit cold. I go downtown

and give myself up."

Barrons moved away from the phone. "Where are you going?"

"Delaware Street. I want to see a guy by the name of Rudolph Henshaw."

Barrons frowned. "That's vaguely familiar. Old fellow by that name used to teach music. But now—" He shook his head. "That one's dead." He took off his robe, started toward the door of the bedroom. "Just a second, and I'll be with you."

"If you've got a gun," Sabin said, "you might bring it along. I don't know what we're up against, but some of your citizens I've met tonight play it rough."

CHAPTER VI

NIGHTMARE



EXACTLY fifteen minutes later, they left the Caddy in front of a low brick wall beyond which a lawn extended for a hundred feet to the front of a tall old house. Sabin paused long enough to get "North American

Land Birds" off the back seat of the car. Then he and Barrons passed between gate-posts and onto a brick approach walk. The composer immediately slipped on the ice, would have fallen except that he clutched Sabin's arm.

Sabin wondered then why he hadn't insisted on coming alone.

They climbed to a porch. Sabin groped along the side of the door until he found a bell handle. He pulled it, but it was the kind that you had to turn.

He turned it.

"Henshaw, Henshaw," Barrons muttered. "I'm sure this is the place. Had a studio out back in a carriage house. Got burned out—"

He broke off as the porch light was turned on and the door was opened by a sweet-faced old woman with snow-white hair. She smiled pleasantly and said good evening.

"We were looking for a Mr. Rudolph Henshaw," Sabin said. He brought the book out from under his arm. "I have something here I think would interest

him." He didn't know that it would. It was only an opening wedge.

"My husband has been dead nearly three years now," she said not without a touch of sadness, but the smile did not fade. "But won't you step in? It's such a miserable night."

She led Sabin and Barrons into a parlor off the hall. Here was green plush and dark mahogany and the elaborate discomfort of the Victorian era. A coal fire glowed in a brass-faced grate. A gray cat was curled up on the glazed green tiles of the hearth. There was an old organ in one corner and on its rack a copy of—Sabin looked twice—*Remembered Love*.

Sabin introduced himself and Barrons. They sat down, Barrons on a spindly chair, Sabin on the edge of a loveseat, Mrs. Henshaw in the patent rocker.

"That book, Mr. Sabin," Mrs. Henshaw said, glancing at the volume, "certainly would have interested Mr. Henshaw. He loved birds. We have a regular sanctuary here among these old trees on our place. And, let me see, isn't that the book—I know it is!" Her white, fragile looking hands reached out, and Sabin let her have it.

"Mr. Henshaw borrowed it from the library," Sabin said.

She nodded. "And didn't return it, which was naughty of him. He hadn't been able to get a copy of that particular book, so he pretended that he'd lost it, paid the library, of course, but—" She seemed puzzled. "He thought that book was consumed in the fire, as were all of his things, all of his wonderful music. You see, he had his studio in the carriage house, and it caught fire shortly before he died."

"That fire was incendiary," somebody said.

Sabin glanced toward the hall door, and there was Blue Boy, his face chubby, scrubbed looking, a shiny pink.

"Yes," Blue Boy said, "I've got a pretty good hunch that fire was incendiary."

"Waldo, have you met these gentlemen?" the old woman asked.

Waldo struck a pose of importance, thumbs in the lower pockets of his vest. He bounced up and down a couple of

times on feet that were too small for the rest of him.

"Yes, yes, Aunt Hatt. Mr. Barrons over there, and Mr. Sabin. And it's rather late, Auntie dear. Oughtn't you to trot on upstairs to bed and let me entertain these—gentlemen?"

She glanced nervously about. "Well, perhaps—" She stood up, smiled at Barrons and Sabin, turned up a cheek for Waldo's kiss. Then she went out of the room and up the stairs.

Waldo said, "That's that." He stepped to the marble-topped table on which Mrs. Henshaw had put the bird book. "Do you want this?" he asked of Sabin.

"No." Sabin felt that the whole ugly business was coming to a head. Right now.

"Then I'll keep it," Waldo decided. "As a souvenir. My uncle always used it on the rack of his grand piano when he composed."

"That's a new angle," Scott Barrons' voice boomed. He rubbed his big jaw with his palm. "You mean he got inspiration out of a bird book?"

WALDO laughed unpleasantly. "I mean the music rack was done in scroll work, and Uncle Rudolph used this book as a writing block. Once, he did, anyway. Notice, it's about the same size as staff paper. I know he used it when he wrote the music for *Summer Night In Monaco*. Remember that one, Scott?"

Barrons scowled, dredging his memory. "Don't think I do. Don't remember Henshaw as a composer at all. He gave music lessons, I know."

"But for a while he composed," Waldo said. "He was having a pretty bad time financially, and he inserted an ad in a magazine, wanting song poems to set to music. That's where Rex Carmody came into the picture." Waldo chuckled. "One of those smart cookies, Rex. With Uncle Rudolph putting up the talent, Rex organized a vanity publishing house to nick potential lyric writers. The would-be writer sent in his song poem for 'consideration' and it was always accepted with glowing praise. He paid a substantial deposit, music was set to the words, a hundred copies were printed, the copyright obtained, and for the balance due on the contract, the

writer got the hundred copies."

"Nice," Sabin said acidly.

"The lad who wrote the words of *Summer Night In Monaco*," Waldo went on, "was in the war. He paid his initial deposit, the music was written, published, copyrighted, and then the GI either got killed or got wise. The hundred copies were in Uncle Rudolph's studio and were destroyed by fire."

Sabin said, "But you've got a copy. Pages ninety-five and six in the bird book. That coated paper recorded an impression of the notes your uncle wrote on the staff paper. That's what you were after, wasn't it?"

Waldo did not answer. He moved over to the organ, sat down on the stool where he appeared puffy with importance. He pushed aside the copy of *Remembered Love*, and beneath were the two pages torn from the bird book—one a portion of the text and the other an illustration of a yellow-billed cuckoo.

Sabin rose, took jerky steps to the organ, looked over Waldo's shoulder. The impression was faint, but it was there. The title showed up clearly in the upper margin—*Summer Night In Monaco*. Waldo had ruled light pencil lines on the pages so that the dimples that represented notes were now in their relative positions on a staff.

Sabin glanced around at Scott Barrons. The big man passed a hand over his face. His brown eyes looked miserable.

"I'm no musician," Waldo was saying, "but I've got a pretty good ear for the stuff, and I can pick out a chord or two in the treble—enough so that you'll get the idea of how *Summer Night In Monaco* goes."

Sabin knew what was coming. Now it was over. All over. Thank God, it was over. He heard the wheezing of the organ bellows and then the opening bars of *Summer Night In Monaco* which were not distinguishable from the opening bars of *Remembered Love*.

"Oh, stop," Scott Barrons said. "Lay off, Waldo." He tried to laugh. "I've heard that somewhere before."

Waldo stopped and wheeled around on the stool. "You bet you have. Rex gave you a copy of *Summer Night In Monaco*, wanted you to plug it with your

band. About that time Rex went up for a stretch in the pen on a fraud charge. And Uncle Rudolph died. So you changed the title of the song, and passed it off as your own. The first time I heard *Remembered Love* I thought it was familiar. The more I heard it, the more suspiciously familiar it got, but I'm no musician and I wasn't sure I could trust my own ears.

"I looked up Rex Carmody. He was out of jail, and some woman was keeping him in St. Louis. I made the mistake of telling him I thought *Remembered Love* was a steal. He quickly said it wasn't, that Uncle Rudolph never wrote a thing that was worth a damn. But I had an idea Carmody was up to some trickery and I kept my eyes open."

YES, Sabin thought, you kept your eyes open. You watched Rex Carmody and Scott Barrons. And when *Remembered Love* started to climb, and the dough began rolling in, Carmody put the pressure on Barrons for a pay-off. You found out what Carmody was doing—you're a smart boy, Waldo—but what you wanted was the evidence that Carmody was using for his blackmail—you could institute a copyright search and slap Barrons with a plagiarism suit on behalf of Uncle Rudolph's wife and heir. She'd be awarded full amount of the earnings and you, friend Waldo, would be amply rewarded when the old lady kicked off. . . .

Aloud, Sabin said, "You followed Rex Carmody to Bellefontaine, Ohio, and cornered him."

"How's that?" Scott Barrons rumbled.

"... Cornered him on the train. Waldo did. You thought maybe he had the evidence on his person, didn't you, Waldo? The evidence he was using to make Barrons pay off. Not finding any, you got his keys, searched his flat, when you got back to Indianapolis, and the bird book struck as the thing that didn't fit, just as it struck me."

Waldo was being agreeable. He was nodding and looking as though he thought he was a very bright boy. And Scott Barrons appeared confused, tugged at his mustache.

And Sabin thought, Why would Rex lie? Why would Rex tell Martha that

he'd been shot, when he was stabbed? It doesn't make sense—or does it?

"'One shot hit me,'" Sabin quoted the dead man aloud. And then suddenly he tipped forward and pointed a finger at Barrons.

"You killed him," he said flatly. "I don't know how you did, but you did. And before he died, Rex told Martha that you did it. Not 'one shot', but 'one-shot.'"

Sabin had an instant in which to regret that he'd ever suggested to Barrons that they might run into some rough play. If he hadn't said that to Barrons it might not have been rough at all. Barrons probably wouldn't have had a gun so handy.

As it was, Sabin had a nightmare to remember, and he lived through that nightmare again and again, in the hospital where they took him. Bounding at Barrons, he would strike out blindly against flame from a gun that seared the flesh of his cheek. That his blow always landed was scant satisfaction. Barrons stepped back voluntarily to take better aim. Then the thundering blast of that second shot.

And there the nightmare always ended. Sabin would awake with a start, and there would be Martha, her face through a mist, her smile.

"Love that gal," he would say and go back to sleep. Go back to dreaming the same nightmarish thing over, without actually knowing how it turned out. Except that if Martha was there, then it must have turned out all right.

It was all right. Finally, he was well enough to be told that everything was just fine. The Bellefontaine police had found an ice pick, stained with the same type of blood as Rex Carmody had. And this was the way it had happened: Barrons had slugged Carmody, had searched him, had recovered hush-money that he'd paid to Rex, then decided that the only way to end the blackmail was to end Rex. Which he did. With an ice pick.

But Rex wasn't dead. Rex had recovered consciousness, unaware that he was bleeding to death internally. Rex had boarded the train, intent on the business of squaring things with Martha. And there he died, in Martha's compartment.

Here Sabin was able to chime in with: "When Rex said to Martha, 'One shot hit me,' he meant the one-shot composer. Scott Barrons, see, produced only one hit tune, *Remembered Love*, which he stole. And the reason Barrons hurried the kill and left without making sure Rex was dead was that he had to beat the train to Indianapolis. In that Caddy of his he could do it. He could drive to Indianapolis in time to meet Martha."

"Well," this lieutenant from police quarters said, sidling out the door of the hospital room, "Barrons came so close to killing two people, it's not even funny. Or were you laughing, Mr. Sabin?" He did the laughing. "If Waldo Henshaw hadn't slugged Barrons with the organ stool when he did, well—" He shook his head and went on out into the hall.

Sabin looked at Martha. Her face wasn't misty today, except that maybe her eyes were a bit misty.

"What happened to 'Martha Leigh

Day'?" he wanted to know.

"That was yesterday," she said. "I wasn't there."

"A fine thing!"

"I couldn't, Lou. Not with you here. Even when I knew you were going to be all right, I still couldn't go there and sing."

He took a breath, and it didn't hurt as badly, down there in his chest, as it had.

"Look, Martha, I can sell you to Hollywood, or you can live in New York and be Mrs. Lou Sabin. New York or Hollywood—which will it be?"

She laughed softly. "You don't give a girl much choice."

"Well, hurry. I can't stand the suspense."

"New York," she said and bent over him, the tips of her fingers touching his cheek. "New York."

And for Lou Sabin that was better than any shot in the arm the nurses had been giving him.



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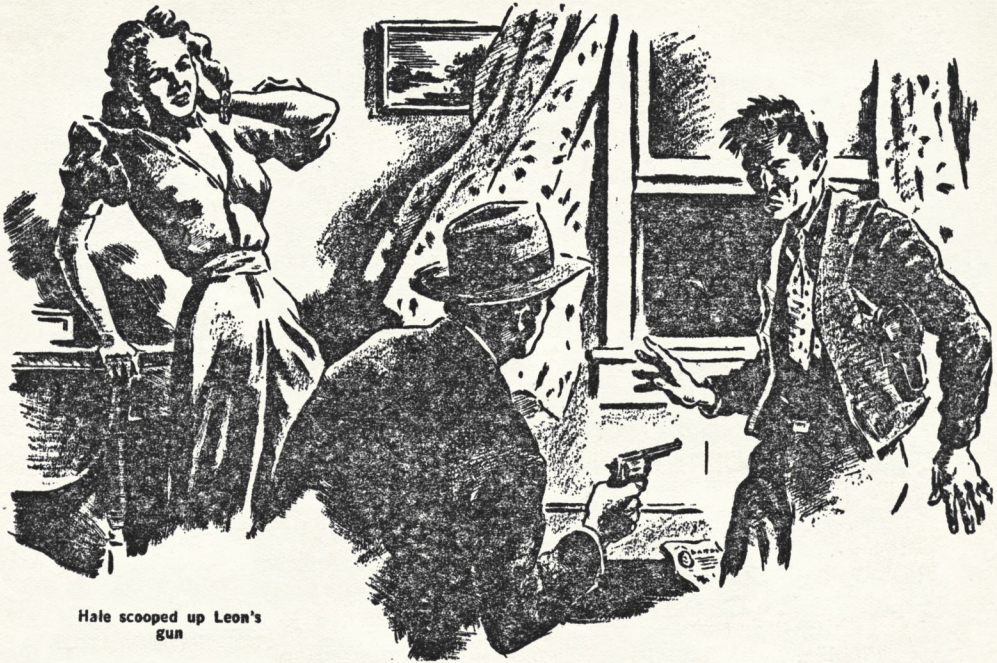
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Hale scooped up Leon's gun

Six Kids in Astoria

By TOM CURRY

Newspaperman Mickey Hale had his story—and a conscience!

THE basement door clicked and Mickey Hale glanced up from his "Canfield" solitaire. He was alone in the shack across from the precinct station. Days it was a plumber's den, but the district newspapermen covering Manhattan's West Side lurked there at night.

"Bull" Moran looked in. "Come on, partner. Someone just hit a guy over near Tenth Avenue."

Hale did not need to grab his hat because it was on his head. The address was poor and probably it would not amount to much but any homicide was worth a check. The burly Moran, a first-grade detective, was his friend. It was not the first time he had taken a mo-

ment to warn Hale something had broken. Moran's actual partner was Detective Thomas, home in bed with 'flu.

The motor of Moran's car was humming and they were off.

Mickey Hale had been on the district too long and knew it. He was only a leg man and after getting a yarn, phoned it to his office where a rewriter shaped it for publication. If the story warranted it, Hale would be taken off it and a general news reporter sent in. Hale was paunching out a bit. He had seen old fellows who for one reason or another, had failed to make the grade. He hated to get that way.

Moran had massive shoulders and a habit of bulling through. He was a

good police detective though he had a taste for whiskey. Over in Astoria, where so many cops lived, he had a wife and six kids.

A radio patrol car stood in front of the dingy tenement between Tenth and Eleventh, lights yellow in the pale mist. Hale trailed Moran and the slum smell hit them. A wooden stairs led up a peeling wall and the third-floor apartment door stood open. Uniforms were in and the cops had made a routine check of neighboring flats with no luck.

Moran would have this case until its solution, along with a man from Headquarters. He was boning for Downtown. The other road led back into uniform and retirement.

The dead one lay several feet inside the main room. He was fifty, and the gray-haired woman crying on the couch was his wife.

"Did you see him shot, lady?" asked Moran.

"No. I was working." She was trembling with terror.

"Any enemies? Any money on him? Who moved him—did you?"

"No, no— Wait— I only rolled him over."

Moran shrugged. People were always dragging corpses around. The victim had been shifted after he had fallen. The gray flannel shirt and old brown trousers were splotched with blood. Moran drew what there was with direct, skillful questioning while Hale absorbed the flavor.

No motive. Abe Rossman had been a night watchman, and the mystery of his murder might be good for a second-page run or even a two-column head at the bottom of the front. Rossman had no obvious criminal connections and there had been no robbery. The wife labored long hours in a cheap restaurant.

Moran gave Hale the wink. "Let's go, partner."

OUTSIDE, they crossed the street. A phone sign hung over the side entrance of a saloon and Hale knew Moran meant to go in. He said nothing for he knew Moran would have resented it. Moran was no doubt going to call his stoolies.

There was but one booth so Hale went around the corner and found another. He had his facts marshalled, name and address paramount. The mystery was corny but good as gold. "Wait a sec," said the rewrite after taking it. When he came back on the wire, he ordered, "Stick there. Johnny Kenney will be up."

Hale had presented the minor shooting in such attractive form that they were sending a general news reporter. That was the way. And Kenney, who adored himself, was Hale's bugbear. Kenney would take it and Hale would go back to the basement. "How jealous am I of that shoenail?" he wondered.

On the second-floor landing his foot slipped. It was only a stain but there were plenty. Yet this one was stickily damp. He went on up. Headquarters men had come and gone out on leads. Moran was not back yet.

Hale started down, thinking he would drag Moran from that bar. It could mean ruin for his friend. The damp spot held him. The body had been moved. If this was blood, Rossman might have been shot here. A door marked 2A stared him in the face. He banged on it and after while a woman sharply called, "Who is it?"

"Police!" At that time of night it was the best excuse.

When he saw the blonde who opened up, Hale inwardly jumped. She was plumpish but still good-looking. The silk robe, the flash of a jewel on her manicured hand, these were fine. "What's the idea, waking me up again?" she demanded. She was too shrill and her eyes did not look as though she had been asleep.

Hale racked his brain and made it. She was Tilly Somebody-or-other, a strip-tease favorite of a few years back. But the important thing was he had heard she had married Leon the Fishfry.

"Where's Fishfry?" he said confidently.

A spasm of fright crossed her face. "What?" she gasped.

"You heard me." She retreated before him. The place was furnished in style. Leon the Fishfry was wanted so much, a reward was posted for his cap-

ture. This was a typical hideout.

Tilly slapped Hale's face. "Get out. He's not here— No, Leon, don't! Run, I got him." She threw her arms around Mickey Hale.

A tall figure in gray pants and a black shirt, a shoulder holster under an arm-pit, straps across pigeon breast, streaked from the bathroom. He had the gun in his right hand. Leon the Fishfry did not shoot Hale because the woman was between them. He swerved for the fire-escape window. Hale had no rod and Tilly was clawing him. "Drill him, Moran!" yelled Hale. "He's coming out your way!"

Leon stopped. He dropped the revolver. Hale's trick made him think Moran was crouched on the fire escape, ready for action. He might get hurt.

Hale threw off Tilly, fisted a hand in his side pocket and scowlingly advanced on the Fishfry. He stooped, scooped up Leon's gun. From the corner of his eye he saw a bloodstained police circular with the criminal's portrait and description.

"Call your partner," growled Leon. He evidently thought Hale was a detective.

A harness bull came down from Rossman's to see what was what. He took charge of the Fishfry while Hale looked around. In a corner was a chair and above it a hole where the flooring had been clumsily cut to accommodate a steampipe. Hale could see that the opening had recently been enlarged and by standing on the chair he had a fair view of the upstairs apartment where Rossman lay. He saw Mrs. Rossman and heard her speaking.

LEON must have been spying through the aperture when Moran called him "partner." The Fishfry had sat tight, hoping to hide it out. But he had panicked when Hale had asked for him.

Hale galloped out and crossed the street. He had a really good yarn, the personal capture of a wanted killer, enough to impress even the calloused soul of a City Desk. Moran was at a table, chin on necktie. Hale roused him and gave him the story.

"Listen—Rossman had a circular with the Fishfry's mug on it. He kept it to himself, made a hole in the floor so he could check on Leon, hoping to take him and earn a piece of change. The Fishfry got wise. He bumped into Rossman on the second floor, shot him and toted the body back to dump it before Mrs. R. got home. Take over, Moran—take over!"

They went out. A flashy maroon sports model braked to a stop and a slim, stylish figure with a feather in its hat hopped out. "Howdy, Mickey. Is it big enough for me?" That was Johnny Kenney of GN.

Hale gulped. He had the whole story and he could do a job. It might mean the step he had hoped for.

Moran swayed, feeling the liquor. But he could pull through if Hale kept his mouth shut. There were the six kids in Astoria. If Kenney found out what had happened—that Hale had made the capture while Moran was over in the bar, he would blab it all over town. Kenney would be sore at having Hale beat him out. The thing would wreck Moran if Kenney spread it—and Kenney would.

"Ask Moran," growled Hale. "I just came along for the ride."

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By **BRUNO FISCHER**



Harry saw his face was
that of a madman

Lady in Distress

A HEAD OF HIM, on a lonely stretch of road, Harry Rice saw a man beating up a woman. As his foot came down on the brake pedal, his stomach contracted because he was being plunged into a nasty situation that it

seemed impossible for him to avoid.

Harry was one of those big, lumbering men who never seemed to know what to do with his hands at a party and who went to pieces when he met a woman's eyes. He was a minor executive at a

*Harry delivers the kayo blow that saves a pretty girl,
but it's Harry who's in a daze for the next six weeks!*

major plastic plant, and he lived alone in a midtown hotel and thought he liked it. All his adult life he had walked away from argument and fuss.

Now he had no choice. He couldn't drive past those two because they blocked the rather narrow road. Besides, a man wasn't supposed to pretend that the beating up of a woman was none of his business.

The man was holding her wrist with one hand and with the other was viciously slapping her face. Strangely, the woman uttered no sound as she struggled to break away. She was as tall as the man and quite pretty.

Suddenly the man thrust her away from him. She stumbled toward Harry's oncoming car. By that time Harry's car was only rolling. He applied more pressure on the brakes, bringing the convertible to a dead stop. The man leaped after the woman and slapped her so hard that she sprawled on the tar road. Her skirt hiked up toward her hips.

Harry yelled, "Hey!" and jumped out of his car.

He had hoped that his presence would break the scene up, but the man was so intent on hurting the woman that he didn't see or hear Harry. Or maybe he didn't care. What Harry could see of his face was, at that moment, a madman's face. He drew back his foot to kick the woman.

Harry punched him on the side of the jaw.

He felt his knuckles crack. In surprise he saw the man stagger to the shoulder of the road and with an effort maintain himself on his feet. Harry had never before hit anybody. It was incredible that a single blow of his fist could be so effective.

A strange thrill of physical conquest ran through him. He braced himself for the counter-attack.

IT DIDN'T come. The man was holding his jaw and regarding Harry with pale blue eyes that were sad rather than angry. He was slender and youngish and had a sleek blonde mustache. He no longer looked like a madman. He didn't even look particularly vicious. In fact, he seemed about to burst into tears.

The woman had sat up and was pulling

her skirt over her knees. A thin trickle of blood ran from her nose.

Having horned in this far, Harry didn't know what to do or say. He waited for some sort of explanation. There was none from either of them.

Without a word, the man got into the sedan parked at the side of the road and started the motor. It struck Harry that he looked familiar. He had seen him somewhere before, but he had no idea where.

The sedan eased onto the road. Harry realized that the woman was still sitting there, and he stirred to help her to her feet, but she was already getting up. The sedan rolled past her and past Harry's convertible, heading on down the road.

"Thanks," the woman said. "He might have killed me."

He had a chance now really to look at her. She was full-bodied and rather attractive in spite of the blood running down over her mouth, and her cheeks swollen and enflamed by the slaps. Her large brown eyes, almost black, had only a little fear left in them.

Harry fumbled out his pocket handkerchief. "Your nose is bleeding," he said.

Gravely she wiped away the blood with his handkerchief. Harry looked at the knuckles of his right hand and saw that the skin was cracked. That fact embarrassed him. Or maybe it was because he was alone with an attractive woman.

"Was that your husband?" he asked.

"George?" She removed the handkerchief from her nose and mouth and laughed raggedly, as if the question were fantastic. "He's only a man I went out with several times. We were driving along when he stopped his car here and—well, you saw what happened when I tried to run away from him." She shrugged her fine shoulders and said bitterly, "I should know by now that all men are alike."

"No," he said. "That's not fair."

She put a hand on his arm and gave him a smile. It was a somewhat lopsided smile because one side of her full, red mouth was numb, but it flustered him and made him quickly avert his eyes.

"I'm sure you're not like that," she

said. "Would you mind driving me home?"

He was on his way to have dinner at his Aunt Marge's and he was already late, but what was that, when for the first time in his life he'd been plunged smack into the midst of adventure? A man who had just rescued a fair lady in distress didn't simply leave her flat.

"Of course," he said.

On the way back to the city she told him that her name was Millicent Harris and that five months ago she had come from the Midwest to take a job as a dress model. She knew few people in the city, she said, and somehow the men she accepted dates with always turned out to be like George Latey.

"George Latey?" Harry echoed. The name was as familiar as the face.

"Do you know him?" she asked.

"I think I've seen him," he said. And then, during a silence, he wished that he had the words to tell her that he was not at all like the George Lateys, but her nearness to him in the car made him afraid to say anything much because he might sound stupid.

When he pulled the convertible up in front of her apartment house, she again gave him that half-numb smile and invited him in for a drink. But he didn't dare disappoint his Aunt Marge and he had to refuse.

ALL next day at the office Harry thought about Millicent Harris. According to the story books, there was no better road to high romance than rescuing a lady in distress, but last evening he had botched it by practically running away from her after he had made a hero of himself.

By late afternoon he had worked up the courage to phone her at her apartment. She said that she would be delighted to have dinner with him at seven o'clock.

Harry gawked rather foolishly at Millicent Harris when she opened the door. He remembered her as good to look at even with a bloody nose and swollen cheeks. Now, with her face back to normal, she was startlingly beautiful. Her full-fleshed body in a black, form-fitting, low-cut dinner gown had the heady effect of too much rich wine.

But her smile of greeting was disappointing. It was wan and stiff at the corners as if forced. As he followed her into the apartment, he noticed that her hands were agitatedly folding and unfolding a sheet of paper.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked.

"It's a personal problem," she said.

Awkwardly Harry ran his fingers along the brim of his hat. He drew in his breath for strength to be bold. "Maybe I can help you," he blurted.

"I wouldn't think of it. It's a money matter." She gave him her unhappy smile. "It's not a lot of money. I haven't worked in some weeks and I'm behind in my rent."

"I see," Harry muttered because he couldn't think of any other comment.

Millicent walked across the room. She had a pleasing feminine walk and with each step a nicely rounded knee appeared through the slit in the front of her long black dress. At the table, she turned.

"I couldn't possibly accept a loan from you," she said.

Harry blinked once. The idea of offering her money, even as a loan, hadn't occurred to him. Yet why not? Here was his second chance in two days to come to the aid of this lovely lady in distress.

"What's wrong with a loan?" he argued. "Friends always lend each other money."

Her face lit up with the glory of her smile, and it set his heart to pounding furiously.

"And we are friends, aren't we?" she said. "Of course it's not a great deal of money. Only one hundred and twenty dollars for two months' rent."

Harry hadn't expected it to be that much. He wasn't a man who particularly liked to part with money, and he didn't have so much to part with. But he couldn't back out now. She stood at his side as he wrote out the check. The tingling pressure of her shoulder was against his arm, and the pen shook a little in his hand.

When he straightened up, he found that they were so close together that their bodies touched. Her head was tilted back. Her eyes were dark pools into which a man could sink. Her full red

lips were parted. And, almost without volition, Harry found himself kissing those lips.

He had not kissed many women and certainly not one as awesomely beautiful. Though the checkbook was still in one hand and the pen in the other, he flung his arms about her. She gave him a tiny hug and slipped out of his embrace.

"I'm famished," she said. "Let's go for dinner."

He could not tear his eyes from her as she went to the closet for her coat.

THREE weeks later, Harry learned why George Latey had looked familiar to him. That was at the monthly luncheon meetings of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Harry was turning from the cloakroom when he saw the slender man with the blonde mustache watching him. Then Harry recalled that Latey was a certified public accountant. Momentarily, before Harry went on into the dining room, their eyes met, and each man kept his carefully blank.

During the meal Harry asked Bob Binder, the lawyer, if he knew George Latey.

"Went to college with him," Bob replied. "Salt of the earth."

Harry snorted and dipped his head to his fruit cup.

"Did you say something, Harry?"

"No," Harry said. There was no point in announcing that a man who was considered the salt of the earth by his friends had a few weeks ago savagely beaten up a sweet and lovely woman.

He was taking Millicent to a stock company show that evening and after that they planned to take in a nightclub that had just opened. They now went out together two or three times a week, and the intervals between were to him intervals of wasteful and impatient waiting.

It was always a stunning experience to see her again. This time she wore a strapless white evening gown that contrasted vividly with her dark eyes and hair and made her richly curved body a thing of wonder.

"Like the dress?" she said, turning completely around to display herself for his approval.

He was too awed to do anything but nod.

"I shouldn't have bought it," she said. "I can't possibly afford a dress like this."

Automatically he said, "How much?"

Millicent looked toward the other end of the room, turning her profile to him. "I hate borrowing from you, Harry, though I expect to be working again soon, and of course I'll pay you back. The gown was eighty-nine dollars, and with accessories—well, about one hundred and fifty dollars."

As he wrote out the check, she snuggled against him. "I'll never be able to thank you, Harry."

He didn't want thanks. What he wanted went far beyond dates with her and occasional fleeting kisses.

"Marry me," he blurted.

He had been thinking about that for two weeks, and now it was out and, not looking at her, he held his breath, waiting.

"I'm very fond of you, Harry," she said slowly, and stopped speaking, as if that were a reply.

"But you don't love me," he said.

"Maybe I do." She turned against him and kissed him quickly on the mouth. "Give a girl time to make up her mind." Then she was away from him, going into the bedroom to renew her lips.

He continued to feel the lingering sweetness of those lips. She hadn't turned him down. She had implied that perhaps in a little while she would accept him.

He begrudged the minute or two she was gone before she came back to him, carrying her coat over her arm.

ON AN afternoon some six weeks after after they had met, she phoned Harry at his office.

Her voice sounded as if she had been weeping.

"Harry, I have to call off our date for tonight. A few minutes ago I got shocking news. My mother has cancer."

"I'm terribly sorry," he said.

"Mother has to be operated on tomorrow at the latest. She's all alone in Elmont and hasn't anybody but me. I don't know where on earth I'll get the six hundred dollars for the operation."

Harry was silent. In six weeks his savings of nearly four thousand dollars had been cut practically in half. Another six hundred dollars wouldn't leave very much.

"You've been so kind to me, Harry, that I really can't ask you for another loan," Millicent was saying.

"You said six hundred dollars?"

"Actually, it's eight hundred. The doctor will have to be paid too."

"When must you have it?"

"I'll have to leave at six to reach Elmont tonight." Over the wire he heard her draw in a sobbing breath. "You're so sweet, Harry, and I hate to ask you for another favor, but could you let me have your car to drive to Elmont? The trains are impossible, and it will only be for a few days."

"I'll drive you there."

"I'd rather you didn't, darling. I'll have enough on my hands without having to take care of you. I'd love to have you, but with my mother so sick—"

"All right," he said. "I'll be at your place before six."

She was waiting on the sidewalk in front of her apartment house. She was holding a handkerchief to her face, the way she had been that evening when George Latey had given her a bloody nose. But now the handkerchief was to dry tears.

He choked up with love and compassion as she took his hand. "I could take everything off your shoulders if we were married," he said. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

Her smile was sadly tender. "Darling, you're an easy man to love, but right now I can't think of anything but poor Mother."

He felt like a brute for bringing up the subject at a time like this. He handed her the eight hundred dollars in an envelope and held the car door open for her.

She slipped in behind the wheel.

"The tank's full," he said. "Don't rush back because of the car. I hope your mother gets well."

She blew him a kiss and drove off. When the car disappeared around the corner, he felt more lonely than ever before in his life.

Back at his hotel, the room had never

felt so empty. The walls closed in on him.

He was rousing himself to go down to dinner when the telephone rang.

"Mr. Harry Rice?" a rumbling voice said. "This is the state police. Do you own a Planet convertible, license number 3H186?"

"Yes." Harry's big hand contracted over the handset. "Is anything wrong?"

"Your car's been in an accident on Route Six and Maple Lane."

"Was—was—" Harry had to clear his throat before he could complete the question. "Was she hurt?"

"I hear the woman's okay, though the man got banged up."

"Man?" Harry said. "What do you mean? There was only—"

But he was speaking to a dead wire. The state policeman had hung up.

HARRY caught a taxi in front of his hotel. The intersection was just beyond the city limits and in less than ten minutes he was there. The usual crowd of gawkers had poured out of passing cars.

Most of the people were gathered about the convertible which had crashed head-on into an electric pole.

Harry plowed through the crowd. A cop stopped him. "Where you going, Bud?"

"This is my car. The police phoned me."

"Oh, sure. Well, talk to the sarge." The cop frowned at the wreck. "Beats all. You'd think those two would be pulp, but the lady was hardly scratched. She was thrown clear out through the door and that bag after her."

The bag was at the side of the road. The gilt initials "D.B." were engraved below the handle.

"But the guy got internal injuries," the cop was saying. "Some dopes pulled him out of the car, then a trooper showed up and stopped them from moving him any farther. He's right over there."

Harry glimpsed an ambulance behind a parked police car. He looked inside the wreck. It was still daylight and he could see the motor jammed in under the steering post and in the wreckage there was another bag. This one was smaller

and pigskin. A couple of weeks ago he had presented it to Millicent on her birthday.

She hadn't had it when she had entered his car.

"How did it happen?" he asked.

"Those crazy drivers!" the cop said. "Driving along a highway with one arm wrapped around the woman and she practically sitting on his lap. Three-four different witnesses saw it. A car came out of Maple Lane, and the guy driving your car couldn't get his foot on the brake in time and couldn't control the wheel on account of he was using only one hand. If they was so hot to neck, why didn't they at least stop the car?"

Harry made his way through the crowd and saw Millicent near the ambulance. She was lighting a cigarette. A patch of courtplaster was on her left temple.

She lifted her dark eyes to him. Tragedy was etched deeply about her eyes and mouth.

Harry looked at the man on the ground. His eyes were squeezed tight and his thin lips were clamped as the ambulance doctor bent over him. He was a slender lad of maybe thirty. Harry had never before seen him.

Millicent said, "Dear God, don't let him die!"

She wasn't speaking to Harry. Maybe she had forgotten that he stood beside her. That was a prayer which she had uttered.

"Why not let him die?" Harry said. "What's he to you?"

Savagely she swung to face him, and the hate in her eyes was shocking. "Damn you!" she said. "He's a hun-

dred times better man than you!"

Harry found himself nodding wearily, as if in agreement. "At least now you're not lying," he said. "You've always lied. Your mother hasn't a cancer. Maybe you haven't even got a mother. You were going off with him in my car and on my money."

"All right, so I was." Nothing meant anything to her now except that the man she loved lay badly hurt on the ground. "Do you think I ever cared for a big, lumbering ox like you?"

His hand lifted. In surprise he saw her flinch, take a frantic backward step away from him. He had intended only to wipe sweat from his lower lip.

He looked at his hand, remembering George Latey slapping her six weeks ago.

"George Latey too," he said. "Me and him and how many other men?"

But he was speaking to her back. She was hurrying over to a cop standing nearby. She needn't have worried. Harry was never a man who would strike a woman.

He shambled through the crowd and down the side of the road. It was night when he reached the city. He stopped at a drugstore and looked in a telephone directory.

Then he walked some more.

He went up to the fourth floor of an apartment house and rang a bell. George Latey opened the door. His hand tightened on the doorknob when he recognized Harry.

"What do you want?" he demanded harshly.

"I want to apologize for having punched you," Harry said.

Message from Garcia

Texas Artist Tells Why It's
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SAN ANTONIO, Texas—Tony R. Garcia, San Antonio artist and illustrator, knows that it's *taste* that counts in a whiskey. "Tell everybody," he says, "that I switched to Calvert because of its *mild, and smooth taste*."



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a novelet by



Death

CHAPTER I

DEATH AND DISORDER

A LOT of beer money had gone out to buy the television set. It was big Pat Murphy's capper. It dragged more customers into his 48th Street bar-grill than you could shake a swizzle stick at.

The Giants-Pirates afternoon lawn party at the Polo Grounds had wound up in a 6-5 score for the visitors. I finished a beer and watched the crowd break and stream across the diamond.

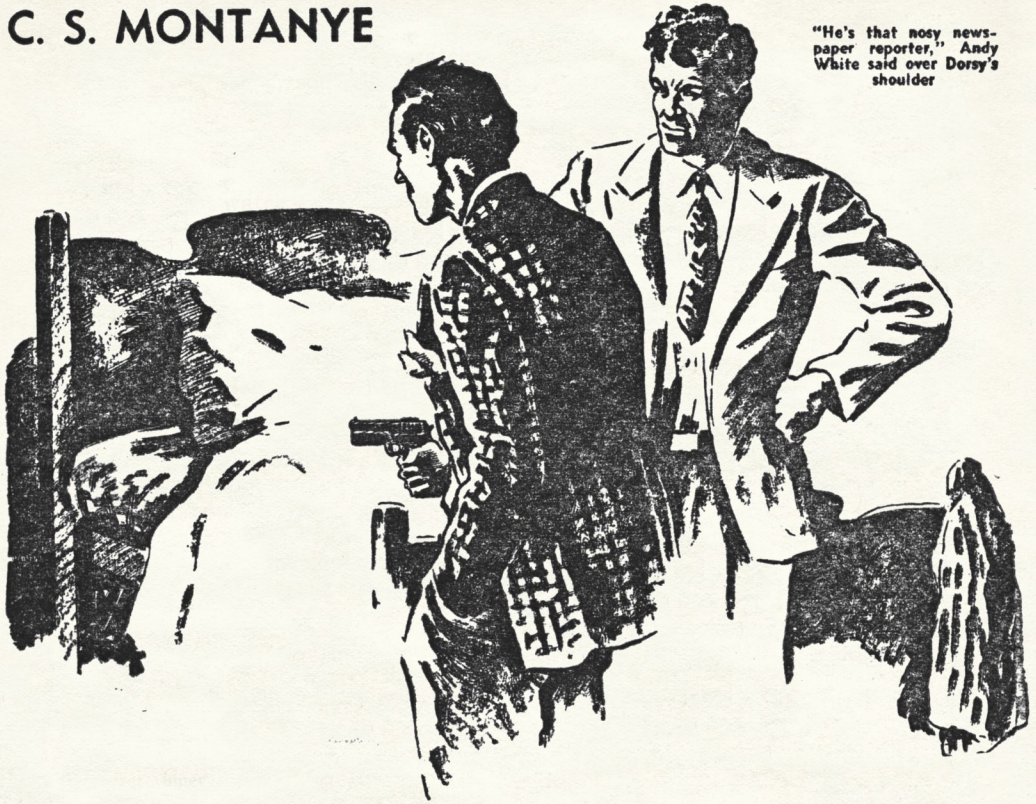
Video was wonderful. On the glass, the faces of the departing fans were so clear you could see their disgruntled expressions.

I watched the exit while the announcer repeated the score and other sad details. Then, all of a sudden, I caught a glimpse of a familiar pan.

It belonged to a little guy who looked like an ape and walked like a man. He had a couple of ears that hung out like

Johnny Castle Goes After a Killer Who Offers a

C. S. MONTANYE



"He's that nosy newspaper reporter," Andy White said over Dorsey's shoulder

in a Guilt Frame

bungalow awnings. His nose resembled a glob of putty that had been pushed in before it dried. He needed a shave and a new suit of clothes. I recognized him as "Bandy" Lewis, one of baseball's most ardent supporters and an ex-felony addict who had gone away for two all-expenses-paid vacations upstream.

It was only a flash before the camera swept up and centered on the billboard

advertisement of the cigarette company sponsoring the gambol.

I looked at my watch. It was exactly ten of five. Which reminded me. I had to get back to the *Orbit*, that metropolitan gazette for which I scribbled varied and sundry sports items. After that, I had an appointment with no less than Miss Libby Hart for a dinner party somewhere at somebody's apartment.

I stuffed the notes on the ball game in

Front-page Story—If Johnny Lives to Write It!

my pocket. Reporting a game by television was a new wrinkle in an old face. Personally, I couldn't see the difference between lounging on one of Big Pat's near-leather bar stools, watching the brawl by air or being staked out in a press-box at Coogan's Bluff.

I visioned a lot of similar afternoons, de luxe reporting via Pilsener.

THE dark-eyed, dark-haired descendant of the Harts of East Speedway, Ohio, answered my ring an hour later. Libby opened the door of her fourth floor apartment in the Seneca Arms. Instead of her usual rose-lipped smile she gave me a worried glance.

"Come in, Johnny. Don't stand there staring."

I followed her into a living room that must have been inspired by the party who designed the dime. It was part of a three-room rented job. Not bad, not good. Just a place to keep out of the rain.

Libby was tricked out in fancy scenery. A gold-and-black housecoat Chinese as tea. It had embroidered dragons all over it and sleeves big enough to hide an umpire. It set off her beauty like a frame.

I gave her a second look. She was upset. I said, "What's the trouble, honey? It can't be me—I'm five minutes early."

Lib nodded at the west wallpaper. "Do you know who lives next door, Johnny? Victor Grand?"

I didn't get it. Victor Grand, as everybody from New Orleans to Portland knew, was Broadway's smash romantic lead. Grand was current in a dramatic critics' rave entitled *Twilight Tears* which was aisle-rolling them at the Madison.

Vic Grand had hit Gotham like a cyclone with monsoon trimmings. A flop in Hollywood, some smart Times Square producer had seen gold in his fillings and dreamed up a clever three acts that introduced him to a panting populace.

Ably assisted by Brenda Bardette, a popular favorite of several years past, Grand was rumored to own a piece of the show. If it were true, Jack Carey, the *Orbit's* critic told me, Sucker Street's newest star had himself a half

million cold, eventual dollars.

"You, too?" I said to Lib. "What do you want me to do—knock on his door and ask for his autograph? How do you know he can write?"

Libby's dark eyes pinned me down. "Don't be facetious. I'm worried. Late this afternoon, I was taking a nap. Over there on the divan."

"Lucky divan."

"I kept hearing things. I thought it was part of my dreams. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. Things like low, angry voices. Then sounds that might have been fighting. Then—no sounds at all."

It was my turn to stare. It wasn't like the Pride of the Harts to feature emotion over something that had happened in a late siesta.

"What do you suggest?"

"I wish you'd knock on Mr. Grand's door and see if he's all right, Johnny." She came closer. I caught a whiff of her latest perfume. It was called "Lion's Mouth," probably because it took a bite out of you. "Just tell him his next door neighborhood was worried because of the noise she heard in there."

"You don't want me to invite him to dinner with us?" I headed for the front door.

Libby didn't say anything, but the way she rolled her eyes was answer enough. I had it pegged. Give a dame some curly hair, the glow of footlights, a shot of pseudo-romance and you had a custom built swoon.

GRAND'S door was a dozen yards down the narrow public hall. His name was in a slot over the bell. I pushed the button. Inside I could hear the hum it made. But nobody came to answer it.

I jabbed it twice more with the same result. Then, as a final gesture, I reached for the knob to give it a rattle.

It didn't rattle—it turned. The door opened, swinging quietly in and I followed through.

The layout was a duplicate of the Hart suite. Same little foyer, same small living room. Same type of furniture, draperies and rugs.

From where I stood in the foyer, facing double windows that let in the last slant of the setting sun, it looked as if

someone hadn't liked the furniture and drapes. Had liked them so little that they had torn down the curtains and started to break up the furniture!

The place was a mess.

Libby's dreams must have been deep if the riot in Victor Grand's apartment hadn't sent her screaming to the window. But the actual damage in dollars and cents faded when I caught a glimpse of the matinee idol.

He lay on the floor, half covered by a broken chair, the seat cushions from a chintz-covered, overturned sofa and a length of drapery.

He must have been dead for an hour, maybe more. And he didn't look his usual handsome, attractive self. Grand had been beaten literally to pieces. His face was a tomato-red pulp, his gray flannel suit ripped and bloodstained. Comedy had turned to tragedy and given him the leading role in a drama of violent death.

I felt a little queasy as I stepped back. It wasn't the first time I'd had a gander at murder. But this one was so ruddy that it made my stomach do a double Gaynor. I didn't mind finding a corpse with a neat bullet hole drilled in it. Or even a knife decoration. But to walk in on a killing that reeked of primeval passions was a trifle disconcerting.

Then, true to the traditions of the Fourth Estate, I got a grip on myself. This was murder but it was also front page news for the *Orbit*. It was news of terrific impact, of scoop proportions, to feed a palpitating public doting on crime of that kind.

Forcing a second look at the stiff Mr. Grand, I noticed something a couple of inches from his outflung hand. I pushed a soft cushion aside with my shoe, and reached and picked up a smoked-pearl button. It hadn't been pried off the actor's gray flannel suit. It might have come off a sport coat.

More important, it looked as if it had rolled from Victor Grand's hand when his last curtain had dropped.

I picked up something else. A small, snakeskin-covered purse-size cigarette lighter. An expensive gadget, with a gold shield and ABJ blocked on it.

With the button and lighter stowed

away in a pocket, I went back to Libby's next door apartment.

CHAPTER II

DIGGING FOR A KILLER



THE dinner party was definitely off.

For fifteen minutes I ducked Libby's demand for the lurid details, waiting for the Homicide detail to do something about the call I'd put in. Now that she knew

what had actually happened, she was all caved in because she hadn't done something about it—earlier.

"Just think, Johnny," she moaned. "I was only a few feet away and I—I let that lovely man get killed! It's ghastly!"

"You couldn't have stopped it." I patted her sloping shoulder consolingly. "The lovely man was on his way out and you couldn't have done a thing about it. By the time the help you would have summoned arrived, Grand's checks would have been passed in and cashed."

I was still trying to cheer her up when the large feet of the arriving law sounded out in the corridor.

I went to the door to play host.

The usual Homicide assortment was on tap. Headed by my long time friend and foe, Captain Fred Mullin, the rest of the entourage consisted of his two shadows, Lieutenants Hartley and Wilcox, a flock of shutter-and-flashlight boys, his fingerprint experts, a group of detectives and a couple of patrolmen picked up en route to play sentry.

Captain Mullin, short, stocky, with a pair of ice-cubes for eyes and an ear-to-ear leer, drilled me with a below-zero glare when I joined him in the hall.

"So you did the phoning in, Castle." There was enough gravel in his voice to cover a roof. "Every time anyone gets killed in this town, you're all I see and hear!"

"You've got the ears for it," I said, in the soft voice. "Looks like I was born under a murderer's moon. Next door down, Captain. I'll give you a statement at your convenience."

"It better be good," Mullin growled. "I'd sacrifice half my future pension to see you behind bars, Castle."

"Odd. Me observing you in front of so many." But he didn't register and the next minute Hartley, opening the door of Victor Grand's apartment, let the detail pour in.

I told Dave Wilcox where he could find me and went back to join Libby.

About a half hour passed. Mullin didn't send for me. That was strange. Usually, he had me on the grill before he went to work on a case. Another ten minutes crawled by and then there was a tap on the door.

Libby played maid and Lieutenant Hartley sauntered in.

"Okay Johnny." Hartley looked pleased. "Thanks for the tip. This is one of the fastest on record. The Captain says that you can go anytime you want. You're not needed."

"Sweet and thoughtful." I gave Hartley a suspicious glance. "Meaning you've found out who it was that took the place apart and tore up Vic Grand's contract with Abe Alexander?"

Hartley nodded. He tossed an admiring stare at the dragons on Libby's robe, rubbed his chin. "Right," he said. "We'll have him downtown in an hour or two."

"In the interests of Manhattan's newspaper purchasers," I asked, "how about slipping me the killer's name?"

"Sure. It's no secret. Before you can go to press we'll nail him. This is open and shut, Johnny. His fingerprints were all over the place, so was a blackjack with his initials on it." He stopped and grinned. "You know him by sight and reputation. Bandy Lewis, the monkey man."

My hair seemed to lift. I turned away so Hartley couldn't notice my expression. "What time did the M.E. write down for Grand's pass out?" I made it sound casual.

"Between four-thirty and five," Hartley answered.

Libby threw in a nod to make it even all around. "That's when the place got quiet." She pointed to a tiny electric clock across the room. "I noted the time."

Hartley wandered away and I fin-

ished a phone call to Bill Jamison, the chief murder and mayhem specialist for the *Orbit*. Then I lapsed into a deep and thoughtful silence.

I wondered why I hadn't told Hartley that I had glimpsed Bandy Lewis on the television screen at Pat Murphy's bar-grill—at the time he was supposed to have cut down Broadway's newest leading man. Or why I hadn't turned in the button and the lighter.

I wondered—smiling like a wolf.

"Where are you going?" Libby queried, when I reached for my felt and murmured apologies. "Didn't you hear what the handsome Lieutenant said—they know the murderer?"

"The question is," I told her, reaching for a kiss, "do I believe them? Or have I got notions of my own?"

Libby's arched brows went up. "Johnny! Not that—again!"

NEWEST of Manhattan's playhouses, the Madison had Victor Grand's name plastered all over the marquee and his pictures cluttering up the lobby. It was still early, but there was a line at the box-office. I slid past it and went up a flight of stairs to Abe Alexander's cubbyhole.

He and cigar were busy opening the day's last mail. He was taking out checks and money orders for ticket reservations. He was a shrewd-eyed, almost bald little man with bags over and under his eyes. If anyone had invited him to stop in and take pot luck, Abe could have brought his own pot. A snakeskin belt was around it, in addition to black silk suspenders.

He flicked the ash from his perfecto and said, "Hello, Castle. No Oakleys, son. I couldn't get my own mother a seat if she cried on my shoulder."

"It's sadder than that—what I'm going to tell you. Hold onto the desk. You're minus your drawing card." Then I let him have it. "Victor Grand is no more!"

"Always merry and gay." Alexander chuckled.

"Grand," I said, in the same voice, "was beaten to death in his apartment at the Seneca Arms between five-thirty and six today. Go on—chuckle now."

My face must have convinced him.

The cigar dropped to the carpet. Abe didn't pick it up. I put a foot over it to keep the fire department away and watched his complexion grow gray.

For a minute I thought he was going in for a heart attack. He gasped and made strange noises. Then he reached up to pull out some hair. Only there wasn't any there to pull. Then he started cursing.

"How do you like that? I pick Vic up—out of the gutter practically. He's got no more bounce than a dead whale. Hollywood wouldn't take him with mayonnaise. I get a play written for him, I introduce him to his wife, I get her to co-star with him. I—"

"Just a minute, pal. You mean Vic was married to Brenda Bardette?"

"Yeah, yeah." Abe was too upset to know what he was mumbling. "Married three months ago—right after we came back from the Utica opening. I get him this theater. I make him a rave. I give him a piece of the show. I—"

He was still blaring out the details of what he had done for the late Victor Grand when I left. He didn't know I'd gone. All the way to the stairs I could hear his rumble.

In the lobby I stopped the theater's press agent. He was a neat young guy named Wilson. He had done publicity for the Triangle Arena's last wrestling festival and knew me fairly well.

"Just a request, Buster. Where would Miss Bardette reside?"

Wilson said, "Hotel Eldon. Fiftieth Street. Why?"

"Read the *Orbit*—all the news, fit and unfit," I told him, and took a cab up and across to the inconspicuous, family hotel off Lexington Avenue.

A maid let me into a third floor suite after a mention of the *Orbit* worked its usual magic. Brenda Bardette breezed into the living room before I had my hat off.

I'd seen her a couple of times—from the balcony. A good looking woman, at least ten years older than Victor Grand had been, with a carefully enameled countenance, flashing black eyes and a curved mouth lipsticked in the latest shade of heart disease purple.

She was dressed and ready for the theater. Her smile was gracious. I

didn't change it. After all, I figured, Abe Alexander was her manager. Let him tell her what had happened. My call had a different angle.

"You'll think this strange," I said, "but would you tell me if you've ever seen this before?"

I pulled out the snakeskin lighter and handed it over. The smile turned to a frown as she looked at it. She lifted it to her classically Grecian nose and took a whiff.

"It smells familiar. *My Romance*, if I'm not mistaken. Right out of a lady's handbag. I've never seen it before and I don't recognize the initials. Should I?"

I thanked her and blew—leaving her to figure that most newspaperman were screwy or nutsy—or both.

IT WAS well after seven o'clock when Bill Jamison was back at his desk at the *Orbit*. Bill, a Yale graduate who couldn't find time to write the year's best seller and quit reporting to settle down on a Long Island estate to raise ducks, glanced up when I dropped anchor. Jamison didn't look overjoyed.

"Five star stuff and it doesn't jell, Johnny." He shook his head. "Your boozin' companion, Captain Mullin, didn't let any cats out of any bags. I got it from a Homicide detective I know pretty well. Bandy Lewis claims that he was at the ball game at the Polo Grounds all afternoon. That he didn't get back to his creep until almost six thirty."

"Bandy's got witnesses?"

"No. He can't produce a soul—or a heel—to back him up. He's probably lying. Either way he's a prospective client for the chair with the tingling seat."

"Bandy was at the ball game," I said. "I saw him there."

Bill Jamison stared. He whistled through his two best teeth. "Then why—"

"Look." I got confidential. "This is opportunity on a silver dish for the sheet to grab itself a sensation. All we do is dig up the real killer while Bandy gets a temporary rest in the Tombs!"

Jamison's gloom didn't diminish. "As simple as that? Just step out and finger

the muscle man who sapped poor Grand into permanent dreamland! You've got the prescription?"

"Part of it. A couple of clues I held out on."

He looked at the pearl button without much interest. The cigarette lighter did better. Jamison snapped it on and off and rubbed a finger over the snakeskin covering.

His eyes began to brighten. He helped himself to a drag out of a pint bottle of *Old Chickadee* which he kept in the bottom drawer, put it back.

"A dame?" he asked. "Not Brenda Bardette!"

"You knew Grand was married to her?" I sounded surprised and was.

"Sure. It was supposed to be a secret, but Carey told me about three months ago. Other stuff. Mebbe Mullins knows, mebbe he doesn't. Brenda had the dough. *She* angeled the show at the Madison, not Abe Alexander. But to get back to this lighter. It has facets."

"It's tough to trace," I said.

"Not too tough, Johnny." He up-ended it. "Notice the trademark. Product of the jolly and exclusive British firm of Bengal Brothers, Radio City, street level. They have no dealers, no agents. If you don't go in their shop you can't buy it elsewhere."

I got it. "Swell. When they open the doors tomorrow morning, I'll fall in with them."

"The button?" Bill made a grimace. "You can toss that out in the alley. Nearly everybody I know uses them."

"One more thing. What about the blackjack Lewis was supposed to have left in Grand's apartment? The one with his initials?"

"I don't know. My detective pal didn't say."

As I had told Jamison, I was at the double plate glass entrance to the high class emporium of Bengal Brothers—the London firm purveyors of accessories for tobacco addicts—ten minutes before they opened for business the following morning.

A beautifully groomed, blond clerk, minus monocle, ushered me into the manager's office. His name was Mortimer. He was as British as God Save the King with a waterfall mustache, an

Oxford accent and the aroma of staunch Scotch-and-soda clinging to his tweeds.

I passed over the lighter and explained.

"A bit of a task, y'know," Mortimer said, "tracing through the records. We sell thousands every year. Rather formidable, what?"

"Not too too. For one thing," I pointed out, "if you did the initialing—and I hope you did—it ought to be on the books. And the lighter looks brand new."

"Quite. Mind telling me why you're so taken with finding who owns the thing? You could advertise—lost and found column, city newsprints."

"Take too long." I took a shot at his vanity. "I've always heard that Bengal Brothers are a model of efficiency. Of course, if you're unable to put a tracer—"

"Say no more, old chap." Mortimer jabbed a button. "Have a go at it immediately. Help yourself to one of our Bengalettes." He pushed a box of cigars in my direction. "Hope you don't mind waiting."

CHAPTER III

DAINGEROUS IDEA



N HOUR passed before I got results. Back in the manager's office, Mortimer had a typewritten tissue in his aristocratic hand.

"Begin to see a light, y'know." He coughed. "Read about that actor chap this morning. The one who was murdered yesterday, beaten to death, all that sort of thing. He ordered the cigarette lighter by wire—from Utica, three months ago."

My ears began to protrude. "Good, so far." I felt my pulses begin to tick. "You wouldn't know what ABJ stands for?"

"Rather. You see, Mr. Grand asked us to deliver his purchase to a Miss Ava B. Janney, Essex Court Apartments, East River Drive. If you would care to see her signature in our receipt book—"

I was in a taxi and on my way before

Mortimer could say, "Pip-pip and toodle-oo!"

The lofty pile of masonry my hack rolled up before stood in a Blue Book neighborhood whose millionaire residents were as thick as pickpockets at a parade. It was one of those districts where you couldn't swing a feline without hitting a bank president.

I passed a brigade of gold-braided hall help and leaned on the pretty ear of the building's telephone operator.

She said, "Yes, Miss Janney still resides here. Apartment Eleven C. Who'll I say is calling?"

"Tell her it's a man from La Grange, Tobey and Chadwick," I said, naming one of the bigger and better Fifth Avenue firms of jewelers.

It worked.

I got out at the eleventh floor and into 11C in no time flat. Ava Janney opened the door herself. I remembered what Brenda Bardette had said about *My Romance* when I followed her into a small lounge room inferior decorators had run amuck in. Everything was extravagantly over-done, hyped to give gloss and glitter at the expense of good taste. A perfect setting for the pulchritude-packed Miss Janney who looked up at me with a pair of heavily fringed, elongated eyes.

She had hair that wasn't gold or russet, but a gorgeous combination of both. Her skin was as shimmering as the inside of an oyster shell, her mouth a bonfire. She was about nineteen and as lovely as a hashish dream.

Her house coat didn't have embroidered dragons. It looked as if it were made of solid gold sequins with a platinum sash. Her bare feet were in slender, transparent plastic wedgies. She looked sleep-warm and exotic.

"From La Grange, Tobey and Chadwick?" she murmured, in a fascinating, husky voice. Its intonation had a "gimme gimme" inflection under its sugar coating.

"Sit down, Miss Janney. I want to ask you a few questions."

She looked puzzled, but went along with the suggestion. She draped herself ornamentally on the end of a brocaded settee.

"Questions?" The fringe of lashes

went up and the eyes were a deep gray.

"When did you see Victor Grand last?" I tried to buff the blunt edge by making it careless.

"Night before last. Why?"

"You left your lighter in his apartment." I took it out and handed it to her.

The red lips parted. She stared from the gadget to me and wrinkled her tip-tilted nose. "I don't understand. I'm to have lunch with Vic today. Did he send this back with you? What's the idea?"

It began to filter through. Ava didn't know what had happened to Victor Grand! Or she was putting on an act worthy of Katharine Cornell!

I played the former for two bucks and said, "You've had your last date with him. Grand's dead. He was murdered late yesterday afternoon!"

The color drained out of her face like water from a leaky tank. She swayed, pressing a hand over her heart. I was just beginning to wonder where she kept her smelling salts, when she got hold of herself.

"It's a gag!" Her voice was like death. "You're trying some trick!"

"No trick," I said, going over to the settee. "I wanted to get up here before the cops. I'm a newspaper reporter. Sooner or later the police are going to find out that you and Grand were—friends. That lighter came out of his sitting room. I found it there after I found him."

Then the tears came. She didn't make a sound, but the gray eyes glimmered and the satin-smooth cheeks grew damp.

"He was afraid," I heard her mutter, half to herself. "The other night he spoke about some man he called Max Dorsy. Vic—he said that if anything happened to him, I was to tell the authorities—that Dorsy—"

She covered her face with her hands. The slender shoulders began to heave and sobs broke across the vivid lips. I left her huddled on the brocaded settee and rode the elevator down to the street.

As I started to pass the lace and gold braid, I noticed a man detach himself from the same switchboard over which I had been announced. The operator with the pretty ears nodded in my direction.

The man who had been talking with her started out—after me!

THERE was something menacing about him. Instead of tossing a hail at me he slowed down, when I was out on the avenue, and strolled along after me.

He was vaguely familiar, too. In the brief flash I'd had of him I noticed his general appearance. He was a big hulk of a guy in a gabardine suit and a dove-gray hat. A party with a lot of face, finished off with a jaw that stuck out like a tail board on a furniture van.

I seemed to remember him as an Andy White, a man who often hung around the Triangle Arena. I seemed to recall that White had a bone-breaker wrestler in tow, a third rate chump who never got anywhere except on his back.

The thought crystallized while I vainly looked for a taxi. There wasn't any so I kept on walking—west. So did Andy White. And with every street clicked off, I grew more nervous. The hulk wasn't tailing me for exercise. The big guy had a motive, some personal reason.

I didn't try to duck him until I was almost on Lexington Avenue. There I found a taxi, whipped into it and told the driver to put on some hustle. Through the rear window I saw White standing on the curb, looking pensively after me. . . .

Bill Jamison, our chief murder specialist, was back from Headquarters, when I returned to the *Orbit* office. And he was unhappy again. This time he came over to my desk.

"That Captain Mullin ought to be impeached. He has nothing on the Grand slay yet. How did you make out, Johnny?"

I told him. Bill lost his moodiness. This time he whistled through three teeth.

"You've made sparks, Johnny! You've found the dame in the case. Get the angle? Grand was playing around with this Ava Janney frail. Brenda Bardette got wind of it. She didn't like her new husband straying from the family fold. So what did she do? She hired a strongarm to step in and break it up. The arm got too enthusiastic. Instead

of giving Vic a lesson—"

"No good," I interrupted. "I showed Brenda Bardette the lighter. I was watching her closely as she looked at the initials. She didn't recognize them."

"She's an actress," Jamison pointed out.

"Not that clever a one."

Bill scratched his head. "It's got to be that pattern, Johnny. What other motive is there? Who's going to blot out an attractive young Broadway star for nothing at all? And where does Bandy Lewis' sap come in? It was there all right. You missed it, but Mullin's boys found it."

"The answer," I said, "wears the name of Max Dorsy."

Bill stared. "Who's he?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out." I added, "if I'm not exterminated doing it! Dorsy is somebody Grand was afraid of."

Jamison wanted more particulars. Instead of giving them, I reached for the telephone and called Libby. She was in between jobs, was at the Seneca Arms and slightly scorched.

"About time you called, Johnny. Where are you and what are you doing?"

"Wondering if you'd like to join me in a bowl of soup. At Hanley's at one."

But, unfortunately, she said she couldn't.

Bill had gone back to his typewriter when I hung up. I started on an intensive tour of the morgue and the files in search of a Max Dorsy. Two hours yielded exactly nothing. Then I did some deep thinking. The unknown Mr. Dorsy might have some connection with the bulky Andy White who had menaced me from the rear that morning. Which argued that through White I might possibly get to the Dorsy I was anxious to find.

And there was another angle—Bandy Lewis. But I knew that Mullin would never let me reach Lewis. Or would he? I decided to find out.

Captain Fred Mullin was at his desk at Headquarters. He looked smug and oafish. Not that I didn't give him credit for being capable. He was, but I didn't like his heavy-handed methods of crime detecting, his leer and lack of humor.

Mullin earned his pay, but not a dime more.

I could see him begin to bristle when I walked in. "What do you want, Castle?" he growled.

"Lots of things—a ranch in Arizona, a six months' vacation with pay—"

"Never mind the clowning. This is a business office. State yours and make it brief."

"I'd like to talk to Bandy Lewis," I said.

"What about?"

"A slight matter of murder."

Mullin shook a head that was hinged to his shoulders with four inches of bull neck. The neck was growing red.

"Not a chance, Castle. You're a sports reporter. Crime isn't your department though you're continually mixed in it. If you want to talk to Lewis, get a permit from the D. A." He stopped and gave me an owl's frown. "Know something?"

"What could I possibly know that you don't?" I said. "You've got your case on ice. Bandy's blackjack in the Grand apartment, nicely initialed. His prints all over the place. And of course you've got a motive. How about a confession? Did Lewis spill?"

MULLIN went frigid. He glared at me for a long couple of minutes. I knew what he was thinking. That I wouldn't be trying to get through to the monkey man unless I had a hot lead.

"If you know anything, Castle, maybe we can—"

"Never start a sentence with a proposition, Captain," I chided. "Let's drop the whole thing and forget it. Jamison was a little piqued because you clammed up on him, but that's all right. You must have a reason. Anyway, you've got your killer, and why should I take up any more of your time?"

I left him to brood over that and, on Lafayette Street, tried to figure the next move.

I had to find Max Dorsy. When I located him the *Orbit* would have access to someone Victor Grand had feared. Someone whose name the actor had told Ava Janney to pass along to the cops—

if anything happened to him.

But how to dig up this Dorsy?

There seemed to be one thing on my side. It looked as if Mullin and his merry men hadn't got a perfumed breeze of the Janney babe. Or if they had, they were handling it *pianissimo*.

Walking north, toward the nearest subway, I snared an idea. That took me into a cigar store and a phone booth. A nickel put me through to Brenda Bardette at the Eldon.

"I'm calling to ask what you know about Max Dorsy," I said when her cool, measured tone came over the wire.

"I've never heard of him," she answered. "Who is he?"

I went on uptown, via tube. Coming to the surface at Times Square, I made a fast discovery. The large job with the jaw had caught up with me again. Andy "Menace" White was on my trail for a second time!

Where he'd picked me up I didn't know. Maybe he had tailed me to the big badge house on Centre Street, and waited around until I finished my interview with Captain "Mule" Mullin.

I cut across Broadway and landed in a tavern. White took up a position near the curb—outside. I bought a beer and did some hard thinking. The net result I came up with wasn't exactly brand new and cellophane-wrapped. But I figured it might work. That was, I was going to operate a switch. Instead of letting White follow me, I decided to follow him.

At least, if he had any contact with the unknown Dorsy, there was a slight possibility of him showing his hand. A hundred-to-one shot in anybody's book.

I'd been in the tavern before. A short haul led me past the gent's washroom, down four steps and to a rear door. That opened on a fenced-in enclosure. Three adjoining buildings backed up on it—with three rear doors.

I picked the farthest and made my way through to Times Square, close to the corner. Andy White had moved in to the door of the tavern I had vacated. There were only a few elbow benders at the mahogany. He went inside, but was out again a minute later.

It wasn't hard to keep his big frame

in view. He walked four blocks and stopped a taxi. When his cab pulled out into the traffic stream, the rig I had ducked into did likewise—its cabby under wraps and orders.

Twelve minutes later the taxi I followed stopped. It braked before a familiar building in a familiar neighborhood. I blinked and looked twice to make sure I wasn't seeing things. Then, some distance away, I watched White pay off his clock's toll and saunter into the Seneca Arms!

A chill as frosty as Captain Mullin's eyes swept through me. My heart skipped a beat. I shoved a bill into my driver's oil-stained hand and bee-lined after White.

The elevator had gone up when I reached the lobby. I waited until it came down. The party who did the navigating was a friend of mine, a colored boy named Sam. He had a penchant for horseflesh, if swift. And the courage to back his convictions. The lift came down and Sam opened the door. He gave me a glance.

"You feelin' all right, Mister Castle?" he asked. "You sure look kind of peaked this mornin'."

"That big guy you just took up." I grabbed Sam's arm. "Where'd he get off?"

"Fifth floor." The boy looked at me harder. Then he began to chuckle. "He went up to see Mr. Taylor, but Mr. Taylor isn't home. He went around to the barber shop about ten minutes ago. I didn't tell the big feller that. I didn't tell him nothin'. He's mean, he is. Wouldn't tip his own hat."

The chill began to evaporate. "Taylor?" I reached for some change. "Who's he, Sam?"

"Been here about a month. Lives right over Miss Hart. Dunno much about him."

He broke it off when the floor-box in the elevator began to buzz. Sam looked in at it. "Fifth floor callin'. That's the big guy wantin' to come down."

"Drop me off at the fourth." I got into the cage.

Before I pressed the bell of Libby Hart's apartment, the cold shiver I had felt had given way to a sudden heat wave.

I had a brand new, if somewhat dangerous, idea!

CHAPTER IV

FACING THE KILLER



LIBBY didn't answer. I rang again. Still no answer. Sam hadn't said anything about Miss Hart leaving the premises. I knew she made a habit of using the stairs at least twice a day. Libby said that the climb up and the hike down was good for her figure.

The key was under the front door mat. She kept a spare there for emergencies. I slid it in the latch and went inside.

The place was neat as a pin. My photograph atop Libby's radio sneered at me as I hurried through the band-box living room and pushed up the window that opened on the fire escape.

There was a nice flight of iron stairs at my disposal, but it looked a little risky, using them in broad daylight. Hundreds of windows in the apartments hedging in the courtyard of the Seneca Arms gave the tenants an unobstructed view of what was a reasonable facsimile of breaking and entering.

I stopped on the ledge one floor above. The window I tried to push up was locked. But it wasn't too tough to solve. The blade of my penknife eased the catch back and a minute later I was between curtains and a duplicate of Libby's dime-sized living room. I stood still and looked around.

A clock ticked pleasantly. The sun was warm all the way from my ears to my ankles, behind me. The faint smell of cigarette smoke hung on the air. It was so quiet I could hear my own breathing.

My gaze drifted over the furniture. I went as far as the foyer and the adjoining bedroom. The occupant of the suite hadn't made his bed. Bright yellow pajamas were over its wooden footboard. A closet door yawned open and a pair of red Morocco slippers were on the plain gray rug.

There was a little writing desk in one corner. It was heaped with corre-

spondence, advertising literature, newspaper clippings and a deck of playing cards. Also a man's wristwatch with an alligator strap attached.

Like a moth my gaze went to the clothes visible through the half open closet door. I could feel the quick beat of my pulses, the hammer of my heart. I pulled the door wider and looked at the array of garments dangling on their wooden hangers.

I hadn't fingered through more than five hangers when I found something that sent an electrical current atoming through me. I lifted out a dark blue flannel suit and held it to the light that came through half lowered Venetian blinds. A nicely tailored set of threads, good material and hardly worn. Then my gaze riveted on the smoked pearl buttons on the front of the jacket.

One was missing!

I had the button Bill Jamison had scoffed at. With a hand that shook like a line of Monday wash I hauled that button out. Even before I matched it, I knew the one who owned the blue flannels was the one who had lost the button in Victor Grand's apartment!

Dorsy?

I had a look at the desk. I went through its pigeon holes and dug out a small pin seal memorandum book. It was full of accounts, of facts and figures, enlightening and fascinating. I was wading through it when, without warning, a door opened and closed.

The next minute a man was at the bedroom door.

He was small, dark and sinister. He looked like somebody who had had double pneumonia and hadn't lived through it. Against the charcoal smear of his thin eyebrows and the inky black of his hair his thin, chalk-white face was like freshly churned cream cheese. He wore tan slacks and a dark brown tweed sports coat over a shutter-green flannel shirt. Saddle buck shoes were on the smallest feet I'd ever seen on a man.

But I noticed those things last. What made an instant impression was the snub-nosed automatic that came out from under the tweed jacket in one easy motion. That covered me swiftly and thoroughly.

"Who are you and what do you want?" His voice was like silk.

"You're Max Dorsy?" I was surprised to hear my own voice. I thought it had frozen with my blood.

"That's right." He took a step further in. "Who are you?"

The door I'd heard before opened and closed again. Someone, behind the little guy, drew a rasping breath and answered for me.

"He's that nosy newspaper reporter I pegged coming out of Ava Janney's place!" Andy White said over Dorsy's slender shoulder.

A faint whip of color streaked the chalky face.

"I think we'd better ask him into the other room," Dorsy said. "It's more comfortable sitting down."

ANDY WHITE shoved me into a chair in the living room. Dorsy balanced himself on the arm of an opposite sofa. The gun seemed to get bigger and bigger in his hand. Andy White seemed to put on more weight and height.

Unpleasant thoughts that had to do with sad-faced morticians, sweet smelling flowers and somber, black hearses began to clutter up my imagination. I wasn't discounting any part of the danger I was up to my chin in. All I had to do was remember the disorder of Vic Grand's living room to feel my stomach drop down around my insteps. This pair, I knew quite well, dealt death in a messy manner.

"Make him talk," White suggested, his mouth tight as a Scotch miser's. "Let's hear what he's mopped up!"

"The thing I can't figure," I managed to squeeze out, "is Bandy Lewis' blackjack—and his prints in Grand's apartment."

Max Dorsy exchanged a look with White. The flicker of a sardonic smile crossed his cadaverous face.

"Bandy was downstairs at Vic Grand's—just before we called," he said. His silky voice didn't have a wrinkle in it anywhere. "Grand was going to buy Bandy—for protection." Dorsy glanced at White and they both laughed.

"But Bandy was at the ball game. I saw him—" I chopped it off.

"Yeah, two hours later," White rumbled. "So you saw him? But you didn't tell the cops, Castle. Playing Pinkerton on your own. Turning up the real sapper like a smart copper! Well, bright boy, you're going to get the same dosage I ladled out to Grand when he got cagey and tried to balk!"

"Wait a minute." Dorsy lifted the forefinger of his left hand. "Hold it a minute, Andy. I want to find out how far this amateur sleuth has gone. How he got here. He must have done some fancy figuring. I want to know where we slipped. Go ahead," he said to me. "Let's have it."

Anything was better than being expertly taken apart by Andy White—and not being put together again. Experience had taught me the element of time was always on the side of the joe in the jam. I needed lots of it to save my bones from being broken, my ears from being torn off.

"You were blackmailing Grand—using his 'romance' with Ava Janney for your gouge," I said. "I found that out when I looked into your little black account book. Grand's wife—with her substantial checking account—was too good for Vic to give up. She was getting the financial returns from the show she backed, he the fame—and fame doesn't pay too much overhead. I guess he had a job scraping up enough to pay you off regularly. You must have upped the collections—if he balked and was looking for a bodyguard."

Max Dorsy smiled again. White stuck out his formidable jaw and peered at me curiously. All of a sudden Victor Grand's exit came into clear focus.

"What else?" Dorsy asked, softly.

"Grand was afraid," I said. "He must have known Bandy Lewis. He wanted protection. So he called him in to talk it over. You knew Bandy had been in the apartment. Maybe he left his black-jack there. Or maybe you carved his initials on one of your own. That's not important. What pays off is that you haven't a chance. White knows I was at Headquarters awhile ago. I told Captain Mullin there that I was coming up here, that I had to have protection—"

Dorsy's teeth clicked as his mouth shut. White moved his big feet. For a

minute there was deep, reverberating silence.

"The punk's lying!" the big man snarled. "He wouldn't show the cops his ace! He'd want it for his yellow newspaper—"

"Go get him while I pack!" Dorsy ordered, sliding off the arm of the sofa.

White heaved himself across at me. I was out of the chair before he had taken two steps. I aimed myself at Dorsy. I put all the drive I could into my legs. Smacking into him like the Ringling performer who let himself be shot out of cannons, I collided with the little killer.

He stumbled into White. I kept on going, toward the foyer and the hall door. Behind me I could hear big Andy's oaths. I waited for the bark of Dorsy's automatic. It didn't come—but White's hands, both of them, did when I tried to turn the knob and get out of the place.

With a jerk that almost tore my head off, White yanked me away from the door. Dorsy crowded in behind us. The silk in his voice had turned to sand. He yapped orders, thick and fast—all of them having to do with a cessation of breathing—mine!

Then somebody turned off the sun.

I WASN'T dead.

Five minutes—or five years—later when I opened my eyes I found I was looking at two strangers. Both wore what the well dressed patrolmen featured at that season. They were busy with the firm of Dorsy and White and were paying no attention to me.

But Libby Hart was!

She knelt beside the sofa on which my recumbent figure was stretched. Her hands were like the wings of gentle doves and her eyes were full of brine. Her voice was choked with emotion and solicitude.

"Johnny!" she kept repeating. "Say something! Johnny, darling! Look at me! Speak to me!"

I reached for one of the tremulous hands. "Let's go home and spend a cozy evening, honey," I said between lips that felt like a couple of boxing gloves.

"Johnny!"

I sat up. My head went around and

so did the room. But it didn't matter too much. Libby slid in beside me and her arm was as steady as a steel girder.

"How did *you* get here?" I asked.

"I don't make the same mistake twice." Her cheek was so close that I could feel the warmth of the golden glow in it. "I came in and heard the same kind of noises that preceded Victor Grand's murder. This time I did something about it—with Sam's help. He ran out and got these gentlemen—" she nodded toward the law. "And just in time, thank Heaven!"

"Smart gal!" I patted her arm. "You'd better call Headquarters and tell Captain—"

"That's been attended to. He's on his way—with an ambulance for your exclusive use, Johnny!"

She had hardly finished saying it when the street outside was full of sirens. Then, a few minutes later, Mullin and Homicide played a return engagement at the Seneca Arms.

But this time to a live audience.

An ambulance surgeon tapped me here, tapped me there, and said I could move—under my own power. Mullin

took over with his usual hillbilly tactics and I filled in the chinks while Lieutenant Larry Hartley admired Libby's hairdo and grinned like a fox.

"By right, Castle," the Captain growled, "I ought to book you for obstructing justice. I ought to take you in on a disorderly conduct rap. This is the chance I've been waiting for."

"But all you're going to do," I mumbled, "is dust off the chair for that pair and let Bandy Lewis go back to his tree."

"I suppose so," Mullin said grudgingly. He turned away. "Beat it, Castle, before I change my mind."

"You should," I couldn't resist saying. "You could use another one."

Before he could crack back I had Libby by the arm and was en route to the floor below.

"I hope," she said, "this teaches you a lesson."

"It does," I assured her.

"What lesson, Johnny?"

I leaned for a quick one. The raspberry flavor was nice.

"To keep away from beer halls and television sets!" I told her.



When Griff Borlund, blind scenario writer, becomes the focal point of a murder-and-intrigue scheme that isn't in the script, Hollywood detective Nick Ransom is thrust into the center of a real-life mystery that defies detection in—

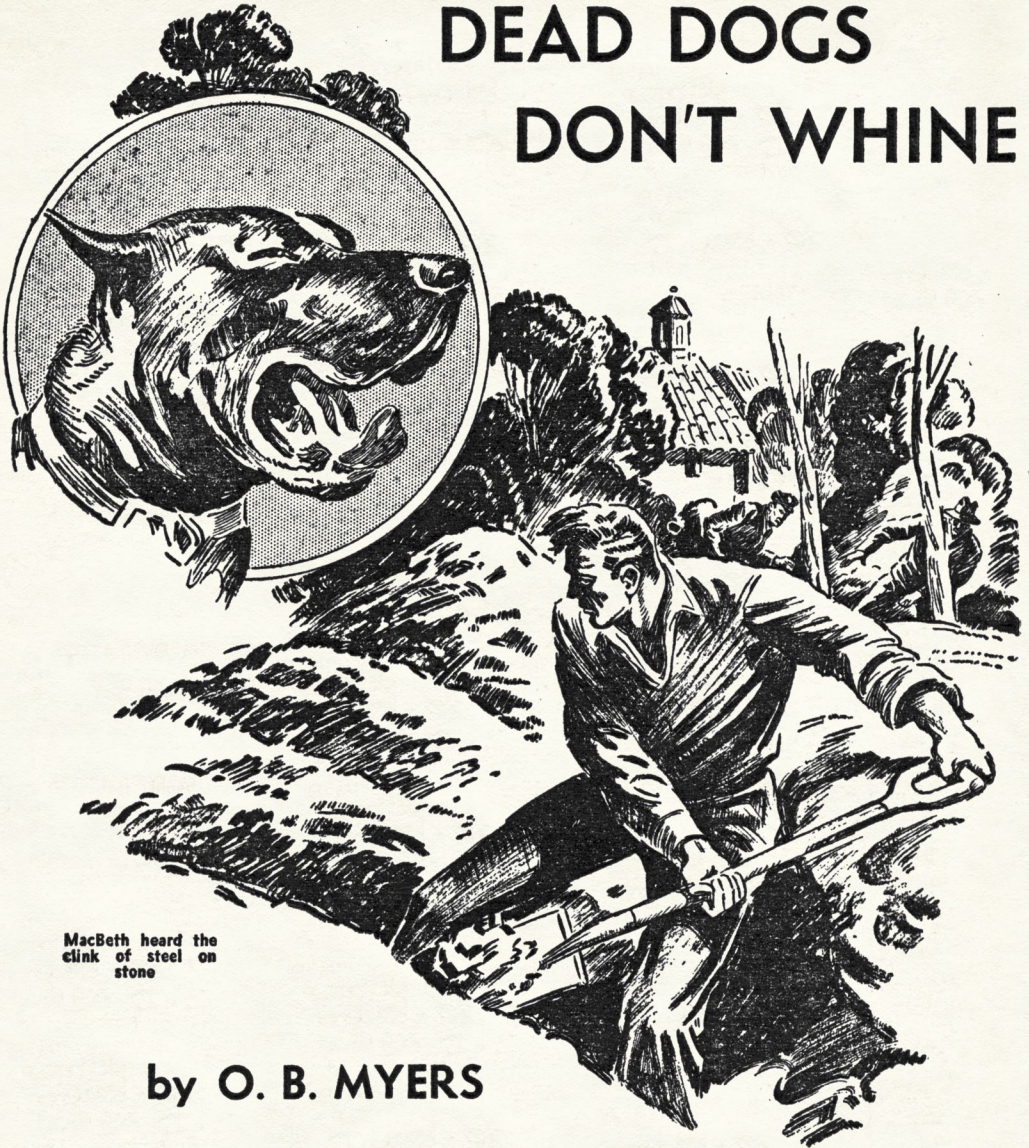
BLIND MAN'S FLUFF

A Swift-Moving Complete Novelet

By **ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM**

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE!

DEAD DOGS DON'T WHINE



MacBeth heard the
clink of steel on
stone

by O. B. MYERS

POLICE headquarters in the town of Waring was housed on the second floor of a compact brick building on the corner of Main and Chestnut. In the Indian Summer of late September the windows were wide open, so that when the phone rang, Lester Frye, the town drunk, loafing across

the street in front of the bank, heard it plainly and glanced up. He saw Tony MacBeth's russet-thatched skull veer sideways, as he leaned to reach the instrument, but he could not hear his words.

Even to George Higgins, sitting on the opposite side of the desk, the audi-

Tony MacBeth Follows the Clue of the Canine!

ble half of the conversation was not very revealing. It was mostly, "Yes . . . No . . . Yes . . . What time? . . . I see." Then a question, "Why didn't you tell me about it yesterday, when I was in there?" followed by, "Oh, not till last night, eh? What name does he answer to? . . . All right, we'll keep a lookout."

He cradled the instrument with an air of gravity.

Tony MacBeth was a New York cop, in Waring for the summer on a sort of exchange of scholarship arrangement set up by the chief of his bureau, who had come originally from this part of New England. Each year a local officer spent three months on duty in New York, his place being taken by a city detective. It was, the chief declared, a liberal education all around. The local dick learned the modern, scientific methods of the big city, while his counterpart discovered the simple, horse-sense routine of the small town.

"What is it?" demanded George Higgins eagerly.

Tony calmly crushed out the stub of his cigarette.

"Gene Bradley has lost his dog," he announced solemnly.

Higgins' ears started to grow pink.

"Gene runs that gas station out on Route 31," continued Tony with a quizzical grin. "Lives in the little shack behind it. The dog's a Boxer; a great big homely brute with a disposition like a gentle lamb. He wouldn't bite your little finger, but his ugly mug is enough to scare off the heist artists, or so Bradley figures. He's been missing since some time last evening Bradley thinks—"

GEORGE HIGGINS rose abruptly, crumpling the last page of yesterday's newspaper in his big fist. Winding up like a big league pitcher, he hurled it with all his strength down upon the bare floor. It bounced erratically, and skittered off under the desk.

"This burg!" he spluttered.

"What's the matter, George?"

"Nothin' ever happens! You see what I mean? What chance has a smart man got, with—with . . . A lost dog!"

Choking on sarcastic disgust, he

turned toward the door.

"I'm goin' out to the hinge plant," he growled over his shoulder. "Maybe one of their rats murdered a mouse, last night!"

MacBeth sat back, chuckling.

Since George had the car, Tony MacBeth performed his duties of the morning on foot. These consisted chiefly of strolling the few principal streets, looking in at the bank, relieving Tim Styles at the traffic intersection while Tim ate lunch, and then grabbing a sandwich himself. He incidentally kept an eye peeled for a big, coffee-colored Boxer with black ears, and asked a half a dozen people he met, but learned nothing.

When he encountered Higgins again, in the office after lunch, he asked, "See anything of Bradley's hound?"

George flashed him a look of infinite scorn. "Does that hound drive a car with a New York license?"

"I've never seen him do it. Why?"

"There's a big car parked a couple miles up Route 31, where the road swings out over the river bluff. A maroon two-door Chevvy, about 1940; no keys in it. Was there yesterday, too; I noticed it."

"Yesterday? That kills my theory."

"Huh? What theory?"

"I figured the Boxer might have driven up there, stepped out and committed suicide by leaping off the bluff. But Gene says his dog was still around yesterday. Besides, there's the keys. He couldn't have put the keys in his pocket before he jumped, because a Boxer has no pockets. No; got to try some other angle."

He leaned back and lighted a cigarette. George apparently considered such banter beneath notice; he did not deign to reply.

In identical tone MacBeth murmured, "Maybe the guy's fishing."

"There's no fish in that part of the river."

"You mean *you* never caught any there."

"I mean there's *no fish*," retorted Higgins. "The hinge plant drains galvanizing acids into the river, and it kills 'em."

"A guy from New York wouldn't

necessarily know that."

"You'd think he'd find out after two days."

"Yeah, these New Yorkers are usually pretty smart, aren't they?"

George grinned with delicate irony. "If that's the case, what happened to Bradley's dog?"

MacBeth shrugged. "Probably eloped with his girl friend."

He said no more at the moment, but actually his own remark had given him an idea. Finishing a short patrol in the car, later that afternoon, he managed to approach town by way of Elm Street. He also managed, as he crossed Maple, to slow down to a crawl, although traffic in this residential section was practically non-existent.

Yes, he was in luck. She was out in the front yard, playing with the beagle, the sun glinting pleasantly in her honey-colored hair.

He rolled past in second; then, as if the idea had just occurred to him, braked to a stop and stepped out. Crossing a strip of grass that needed cutting, he leaned on the low fence-post.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Bourne! Won't be with us much longer, will you?"

She straightened up, shaking back her blonde curls, smiling.

"No. I'm leaving on the train Thursday night. That's the last day of the month, you know."

"Yes, I know. I go down myself, Friday. Too bad."

She looked off up the shady street, but continued to smile as she said, "It wouldn't be worth while to change your plans, really."

Which was, he thought, a neat way of reminding him that she was married, and that he would be wasting his time making passes—if that was what he had had in mind.

"Couldn't change 'em if I wanted to," he murmured. "Business."

In a small town, by contrast with the city, a cop learned a great many more things about a lot fewer people. Thus in the course of his duties, Tony had learned that the Bournes were from New York, that they had rented this cottage for the month of September, that Paul Bourne, a short, dark man with a slight squint, had spent the first

two weeks of the month there with his wife but had since only come up weekends, and that Mrs. Bourne owned a beagle bitch named Bully.

HE HAD also discovered, simply by using his eyes like every other male inhabitant of Waring, that Cornelia Bourne had the kind of figure you see in the fashion ads, big smoky brown eyes, and full red lips that curved easily into a smile. Whether they puckered easily to submit to a kiss was something he had *not* discovered.

He said, "I stopped to ask if you'd seen anything of a dog," and started to describe the missing Boxer.

"Oh, you mean the Professor?"

"That's what Bradley calls him, yes."

"Oh, I know him! The Professor, I mean; not Mr. Bradley. I've only seen Mr. Bradley when we stopped for gas. But the Professor comes around here all the time, to play with Bully. Doesn't he, Bully?"

The beagle seemed to recognize the sound of the name; she wagged her tail and looked up, sniffing inquiringly.

"Have you seen him since last night?"

She pondered a moment. "No. In fact, we haven't seen the Boxer for two or three days—two, anyway. Oh! Excuse me a minute!"

Tony heard the long ring of a phone, and nodded. She dashed in the front door of the cottage, leaving it open behind her. The instrument was on a small table just inside the door, and across the few feet of lawn Tony heard her side of the conversation quite plainly.

It was evidently long distance; she said yes several times, repeated her name, and then paused. Then her tone changed abruptly.

"Why, no! He left here Sunday night. Isn't he there? . . . Why, I have no idea! . . . Yes, of course. I'll let you know."

She hung up, and emerged wearing a worried frown. The beagle frolicked unnoticed at her knee.

"No troubles, I hope?" ventured Tony.

"My husband—I can't imagine what he—" She paused, biting her lip. "He hasn't reached his office, in New York."

"No? Maybe he stopped somewhere,

on the way down."

"He wouldn't do that. All his business is right in the city. And he has no family in New England."

"You say he left here Sunday?"

"Yes, about nine or ten in the evening. He was going to drive all night, go to work Monday, that's yesterday, and catch up on sleep at the apartment, last night. But he never showed up at the office yesterday, or today either. That's why they called here."

"Maybe he had car trouble, en route."

"But he'd let me know, or notify the office, I should think!"

MacBeth nodded. "By the way, what kind of a car does he drive?"

"A Chevrolet sedan. It's rather old—1940—but we've never had much mechanical trouble with it."

Tony, recalling George Higgins' report, straightened up, but concealed his sudden interest. After all, he wasn't sure it was the same car, yet, and there was no point in raising a false alarm.

"Do you happen to know the license number?"

"Why, yes. I remember it because it's the same as the year I was born. It's C-1923. New York State, of course."

MacBeth scribbled the number on the back of an envelope. Suddenly she stretched out her hand to touch his arm.

"You're not going to send out an alarm, are you?"

"Well, not unless you want me to."

Her manner underwent a subtle change. She was still obviously worried and unhappy, but in a different way.

"Oh, no! Don't do that! It—it's not necessary."

He eyed her closely. "No? Why not?"

She was embarrassed, casting down her eyes nervously.

"Oh, it's nothing! But you see, we had a—little spat, before he left, Sunday night. Paul is terribly jealous; he imagines things that aren't true. Even if another man looks at me on the street. I can't help that, can I? But he flies into a tantrum."

Tony could easily understand why men looked at her on the street.

"So, you had a fight."

"Oh, it was silly! It started over

Bully. I'm crazy about dogs, Bully especially, but Paul doesn't like them at all. He told me I'd have to get rid of the beagle; said I only used her as a tool, to scrape acquaintance with strangers. He accused me of flirting all over town, the last couple of weeks while he wasn't here. I told him it wasn't true, and insisted I meant to keep Bully. When he left for New York, he was still very angry."

"So what do you figure he's done?"

She made a movement of unhappy impatience.

"Oh, he's probably holed up in the apartment, won't answer the phone, chewing on his ridiculous jealousy. He'll get over it, and go to the office tomorrow, probably. Or I may find him still there when I get down to the city, Friday, if the mood lasts. But it would be absurd to raise a big alarm; it would make Paul furious, I'm sure."

TONY MACBETH had reasons, of which she knew nothing, for doubting that her husband was sulking in New York, but he kept them to himself for the moment. Her insistence on glossing over the situation struck him as slightly odd. It was usually the distraught wife who cried for a man-hunt long before the police thought it necessary.

"Well, if you hear anything from him, let us know. In the meantime, I'll make a few quiet inquiries."

"All right; but I'm not going to worry about it," she declared firmly. Then she smiled at him as he turned away toward the car. "And if the Professor comes calling on Bully, I'll let you know."

"Yes, thanks. I'll be seeing you."

At headquarters Tony picked up George Higgins.

"Take me out and show where that Chevvy's parked," ordered MacBeth.

"You want to see if the guy's caught any fish yet?"

Tony eased into high. "The missing dog," he declared soberly, "has become a missing husband." He proceeded to relate what he had learned from Cornelia Bourne. George's eye glittered eagerly.

Outside of town the state road

climbed gradually. After a couple of miles it curved close to the river around the shoulder of a hill. Here was a level space on the left-hand side, dotted with a few trees and enough underbrush to half shield the car that stood parked there. As he pulled off the road, MacBeth noted immediately the New York license plate: C-1923. It was Paul Bourne's Chevy.

They looked first in the car itself, but found nothing to give a clue to its owner. The doors were not locked, but the grip on the back seat was. The glove compartment held the usual collection of small tools, a half-emptied pack of cigarettes, some road maps, and a New York Times four days old.

They scouted the area for fifty yards in both directions, but found nothing. Stepping toward the stream, Tony found himself on a shelf of rock which ended abruptly in mid-air. From the lip he looked down almost vertically to the surface of the dark and swirling river, which at this point ran fast and deep. It would not require a very strong leap for a man to clear the cliff entirely and strike the water. If he were not a swimmer . . .

When he turned back, George was hunkered on his heels a few yards behind the Chevrolet.

"Tony!" he called. "Come look at these tire tracks."

MacBeth peered down over his shoulder. The marks were fairly clear in the hard loam, four ribbons where the car had curved in from the roadside, and stopped. But about two feet to the left there ran another set of tracks, distinctly separate. These came in on a similar curve, showed deeper indentations where the car making them had been parked, and then swung back to the road again, above.

"Tony, this car's been parked here twice."

"This car? How do you know?"

"Those other tracks were made by these same tires. See—the tread marks of all four match up. There's a cut in that right rear, the one with the smooth tread. Here's the trace of that cut, just behind the car. And here's the same trace, over in this other track."

MacBeth, studying the evidence, nod-

ded agreement.

"Okay, he parked here twice. So what?"

Higgins grunted. "I don't know 'so what', yet, but I will. And remember that Paul Bourne hasn't been seen alive since Sunday night. It rained Sunday morning; all these tracks were made since."

Tony MacBeth turned thoughtfully back to the car. The left-hand door stood wide open; he saw a small printed sticker on the jamb just above the lower hinge. It carried the name of a popular motor oil, and several dotted lines. On the line marked *Mileage*, a figure had been scrawled in pencil. The figure was 58,422.

He glanced at the speedometer. It read 58,439. He wrote the two figures one above the other, in his mind. Seventeen miles.

"He had his oil changed pretty recently," he remarked.

"What does that prove?" demanded Higgins.

"I don't know 'so what', yet, either," muttered Tony. "Let's go back in to Gene Bradley's gas station, see what we find out."

Behind four pumps spaced out in a row, the station consisted of a low white building with an office in the middle, a shop in one end, a grease pit in the other, and a storeroom in back. Fifty yards behind this building stood the three-room bungalow where the owner lived alone. Of the area between, roughly half had been plowed to make a vegetable garden.

AS TONY pulled up on the hard-packed gravel and stepped out, Gene Bradley came out of the shop, wiping his hands on a rag. He was a man of less than middle age, with a wiry, powerful frame, who just missed being darkly handsome. His black hair was short and straight, and a stubble of bluish beard spoiled the heavy line of his jaw. His dark eyes were narrow beneath thick, bushy brows.

"MacBeth? Well, you locate the Professor for me yet?"

Higgins emitted a snort, but Tony shook his head gravely.

"Not yet, no. But we're working on it."

"Nearly five years I had the Professor. You get pretty fond of a dog, in that time. Like to get him back."

"Sure, I can understand that." After a couple of questions about the Boxer's habits, he asked casually, "By the way, you know a man named Paul Bourne? Rents the Wellmore cottage, on Elm Street?"

Bradley continued to wipe his hands carefully.

"Oh, that fellow from New York? Drives a Chevvy? Yes, he's stopped in here once or twice for gas, and service."

"Been here lately?"

The reply was unequivocal. "Sunday morning, was the last time. He came in to fill up and have his oil drained."

Tony nodded. "You talk much with him, then?"

Bradley shook his head. "Hardly any. I was busy with other customers; Lester took care of changing his oil."

"Lester Frye, you mean? He working for you now?"

The dark man made a grimace of disgust. "He was, off and on. But he hits the bottle too frequent. Came back after supper, Sunday, with a snootful, too drunk to unscrew a gas tank cap. I fired him off the place, told him he was finished. Ain't seen him since."

"And that's the last time you saw Bourne? Sunday morning?"

"That's the last, yeah," said Bradley evenly. "Seems to me he mentioned to Lester he was about to drive down to New York."

Higgins had strolled through the shop and into the office, using his eyes. He now appeared in the open door.

"This your pistol, Bradley?" he asked, holding up a small, .32 calibre, blue-steel revolver.

"Yes. Sure. I've got one of your permits for it, you know. Keep it in the desk, there, just in case. Never had any trouble with hold-ups, though, since I've had the Professor around."

Higgins sniffed the muzzle. "You ever fire it?"

The owner grinned stiffly. "I pop it off at rabbits, once in a while. Just to make sure it's in order. Never hit a

rabbit, yet."

Some minutes later, with his foot on the running board, Tony MacBeth asked, "Was the boxer around Sunday morning, when Bourne was here?"

Bradley was momentarily puzzled. "The Professor? Why, yes, he might have been. He runs loose, you know, but most of the time he hangs around the station, here. Lester would remember, maybe."

As they rolled into town on Route 31, Higgins said, "We'd better pick up Lester, and ask him a few questions, huh?"

MacBeth nodded. "You take the car, and look in the gin-mills. But first drop me off at the Wellmore cottage. I'll see you later."

The blonde had been getting herself some supper; she wore a short, starched apron over her pale blue slacks when she opened the door. She seemed surprised, but not unpleasantly so, to see the detective again, and invited him into a small living-room.

Her surprise increased as he told her, as tactfully as he could, about finding the Chevrolet. But though he watched her closely, he could not be quite certain the surprise was genuine.

"I—I just can't understand it at all," she repeated.

"I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily," said Tony. "But it's a hundred-foot drop from that cliff to the river. A man could—"

"Suicide, you mean? Oh, pooh!" She gave a brief, nervous laugh. "Not Paul. You don't know him. He makes a lot of fuss, and gets awfully excited when he's angry, but underneath—well, he just isn't the type to kill himself, that's all."

Under his adroit questioning, she covered the events of Sunday again in detail. They had risen late, and breakfasted in good humor. About eleven her husband had taken the car to the gas station to have it serviced for the trip. When he returned, they had sat around reading the papers until after three, when they drove to the Blue Stork, up at Medway, for dinner. Back at home at the cottage, they had spent the early evening in acrimonious and bitter argument until Paul packed his things and

left for New York.

"And what time was that?"

"A little before ten, as I remember."

"And you didn't see him again, after that?"

SHE returned his direct gaze coolly, levelly. "No, I haven't seen Paul since that moment, nor heard from him."

MacBeth nodded thoughtfully. "What business did you say he's in?"

"He works for a diamond broker; rough stones."

The detective's eye sharpened. "Does he carry diamonds with him?"

"Sometimes, yes. In the city. Not all the time."

"But someone who knew his business might think that he carried diamonds around with him?"

"Why, yes, that's possible, I suppose." Her eyes clouded. "Why, do you think—"

"I don't know." He rose; from the door he asked one more question.

"By the way, you haven't seen that boxer, have you?"

"The Professor? Why, no, I haven't. Is he still lost?"

MacBeth nodded. "I'm wondering if he and your husband could have disappeared together."

At headquarters he found George hammering the town drunk with questions. Lester Frye was in his usual bleary, dilapidated state, and was thoroughly frightened, but insisted he had seen nothing of Paul Bourne since working on his car Sunday morning. His replies were stubbornly evasive, and he constantly reverted to his claim that Bradley had fired him short three days' pay.

"I tell yuh I wasn't at the gas station Sunday night. Gene kicked me out, at eight o'clock, and he didn't pay me right, neither."

The following morning Tony was out early in the police car. He did a lot of driving back and forth between the Wellmore cottage, the gas station, and the turn-out by the river, and even drove up to Medway and back. He stopped at none of these places, but made exact notes of his speedometer readings, then studied the figures.

"Let's see; half a mile from Bradley's back to the cottage, in the morning. Then up to the Blue Stork and back in the afternoon; ten miles round trip. That's ten and a half, up to the time he left in the evening. From seventeen, that leaves six and a half. Hm-m-m."

From the gas station to the cliff by the river was an even two miles; from the cottage it was a half mile farther. Three times two-and-a-half: seven and a half—no, that was a mile too much. Finally, juggling the figures like blocks, they fell into a combination that could fit.

If the car, leaving the cottage at ten that night, had been driven first to the gas station, then out to the river, back to the gas station and out to the river a second time, it would have covered just six and a half miles, making the correct total of seventeen after the oil change in the morning. But why would Paul Bourne return to the gas station, *twice*, in the evening, after having had his car serviced in the morning? Tony could conjure up no explanation.

That afternoon he and George again drove up to the turn-out in the woods above the river. MacBeth got out and reached back behind the front seat to get hold of a leash.

"Come on, Bully! This is where you get out. Come, girl!"

The beagle leaped down, to sniff at the moist turf.

"Now give me that old coat; the one the Professor sleeps on."

Higgins dragged out a ragged, stinking overcoat.

"I think you're crazy as hell, Tony," he growled. "What do we care about finding that boxer, anyway? We got a man to look for."

"Maybe I am," muttered MacBeth, opening the coat out on the ground for the beagle to get a good smell. "But I've got a hunch that if we find the Professor, we'll find out something about Paul Bourne."

The beagle sniffed, and whined softly. She seemed to recognize in the garment the odor of an old friend. After a minute Tony threw the coat back in the car and slammed the door shut. Then he unsnapped the leash.

The dog nosed about his feet, then put both forepaws up on the running-board and whined. Tony seized her collar and led her off a dozen paces. She began nosing around again in circles. Both men watched. Suddenly, she stiffened, facing the road. Then she was off, nose to the ground, crossing the road into the woods on the other side.

When they caught up with her, she was whining and pawing at the remains of a dead rabbit that had been run over and tossed into the bushes. Tony led her back to start over again.

FOR an hour she alternately lay down and tried to sleep, or led them off on false alarms to a woodchuck hole, the charred remains of a campfire, an empty tin can that had once contained corned beef.

When they started back, Higgins was thoroughly disgusted.

"A dog's sense of smell may be sharp," he grumbled, "but a detective's common sense is sharper. Leastwise, it *ought* to be."

They stopped at the gas station to return the Professor's bedding, and to tell Gene Bradley of their lack of success. When they got out of the car, Bully got out, too; Tony had not refastened her leash. While the three men stood talking, she ambled about the shop, and then disappeared behind the building.

"Now where has she got to?" said Tony, when they were ready to leave. "I can hear her, but I don't see her."

They stepped round the corner of the building, where a lane led back to the house. Now they could see the beagle, out in the middle of the vegetable garden. She was crouched in one spot, pawing at the plowed earth, emitting short, eager yelps.

"Here, you!" shouted Bradley. "Come out of there!"

The beagle did not move. Tony whistled and called, but the dog continued to scratch at the soil without turning her head.

"Guess you'll have to go fetch her, George," said Tony.

Higgins strode back into the garden, and returned carrying Bully under his arm. She whined softly now, and

gazed at first one man and then the other with her sad, liquid eyes.

"What you got back there, that she's so interested in?" asked MacBeth.

The proprietor gave a short, brittle laugh. "Garlic, I had in that corner. Must be she's got some greaser blood in her!"

MacBeth chuckled without enthusiasm. "Well, she didn't find the Professor for us. Maybe we'll give her another chance tomorrow."

Disregarding George's pointed looks and nudges, MacBeth climbed in the car and started off toward town.

"Say, that dog had something there," protested Higgins. "She was all het up about that spot in the garden. The ground looks freshly dug right there, too, as if something might be buried. Why didn't you want to take a look at it, right then?"

"Didn't want Gene Bradley to see we were too interested in it," murmured Tony thoughtfully. "Besides, it might be only a bone that the Professor has buried."

"Well, it ain't garlic," stated Higgins definitely. "I know garlic when I see it growin', and his garlic is thirty, forty feet further over. Where she was, was bare, plowed ground."

But Tony seemed to have lost interest. "Think I'll take in the picture at the Palace, tonight. Come with me, George?"

Higgins shrugged disgustedly. "Might as well. We might see a mystery that a detective can solve—without no dogs."

They emerged from the movies a little before eleven.

MacBeth said, "Come on, George. We're taking a walk."

He turned off the Main Street on Cooper Lane, but after a short distance swung into a path that cut across toward the rear of Bradley's bungalow behind the gas station. When they came to a row of maples that marked the limit of the vegetable patch, MacBeth halted.

"You take that tree; I'll take the next one. Keep out of sight from his house. And don't light any cigarettes, remember."

George, grumbling under his breath, obeyed in silence.

Indian summer, pleasantly warm during the day, turned surprisingly cool by the middle of the night. Within ten minutes Tony had his hands in his pockets. He took them out later only to turn up the collar of his green suede jacket.

An occasional car zoomed along Route 31; after an hour or two these became scarcer and scarcer. Behind them the lights along Main Street, and in the few scattered windows, winked out one by one. Night lay like a blanket on the town.

The gas station had been closed and dark when they arrived. In one window of the bungalow a single dim light burned until some time after one o'clock. Then it went out soundlessly.

MacBeth looked to his right. George was a shapeless lump of shadow against the neighboring tree-trunk. Straight in front of him the uneven surface of the vegetable garden stretched away until it came to the lane that ran to the house. From that direction came neither movement nor sound. The minutes moved like molten lead.

BRADLEY must have come out of the back door; by the time Tony saw the vague figure, he was ten or fifteen feet out among the furrows. A flash-light blinked briefly, went out, blinked again. It seemed to be directed downward against the ground, as if the man who carried it was searching for a particular spot. He moved at an angle across the garden, slowly, his feet making no sound.

The light held steady for a moment, then disappeared again. Then it went out, the blackness seemed twice as dense as before. MacBeth instinctively narrowed his eyes. He saw only a vague blur of movement in the darkness; then he heard the clink of steel on stone.

Though he could barely discern the motions, he knew that the man out there was digging. When his spade struck a stone, there was no mistaking the sound. Unconsciously Tony's muscles tensed. But he had a long time to wait.

The digging went on for half an hour; three quarters. The figure out there seemed to grow shorter and shorter. Tony realized that was because the man

was standing in the bottom of the pit as he dug it. He paused; Tony could hear him pant for breath.

Finally he threw aside the shovel and crouched low, almost below the level of the ground. It was impossible to see exactly what he was doing, but he seemed to be struggling with a dead weight.

Then he rose and strode toward the back corner of the gas station. Here stood his jeep; he climbed in, started the engine, and drove it along the lane to the nearest point. He cut the switch, clambered out, and returned to the hole in the soft earth.

Whatever he was trying to lift was heavy and awkward. MacBeth heard a muttered curse. With his arms locked about a form that was indistinguishable in the gloom, the man staggered back toward the jeep. He loaded his burden in behind the front seat. Then for several minutes he stood there at the side of the vehicle, leaning in. It was impossible to see what he was doing, but twice Tony heard the ringing clank of steel.

Then he climbed in under the wheel and started the engine.

At that moment MacBeth moved.

"George!" he called. "Let's go!"

He vaulted a bush and started across the open.

"Bradley!" he yelled. "Hold it! Wait where you are!"

The jeep, unfortunately, had to back and fill in the narrow lane in order to turn around. The engine roared hurriedly. MacBeth yelled again, then began to run. Higgins was at his heels.

The vehicle straightened out toward the gas station, and the road, and its gears screamed angrily. Its wheels spun, throwing gravel.

Tony gave one last shout from twenty yards away. The man at the wheel gave no sign of obeying, though he must have heard. Tony dropped to one knee and yanked out his service pistol. He steadied his elbow on his other knee and squeezed the trigger deliberately.

He aimed purposely low. The light for good target work could not possibly have been poorer, but his second bullet hit a tire, which blew out with a resounding bang. The jeep lurched, and

came to a halt as the driver gave up in the face of hopeless odds.

As they both trotted up with drawn guns, Bradley from behind the wheel demanded, "What are you birds doing out here?"

"We're watching what you're doing out here," snapped MacBeth. "What did you dig up there? Throw your flash back here, George."

"It's none of your business," grated Bradley.

Higgins flicked on his flashlight beam.

The body in the jeep was stiff and cold, covered with clinging clods of dirt from three days under ground. A gaping bullet wound in the head was surrounded with matted blood and hair. An old tire rim was wired to the collar.

"The Professor!" croaked George.

"He's my dog, ain't he?" sneered Bradley. "So I got a right to kill him, if I want, and bury him, ain't I?"

"Maybe you have," said Tony slowly. "But after getting fond of a dog for five years, you don't shoot him without a pretty powerful reason. And why did you dig him up, after the beagle smelled him out?"

"All right; you tell me the reason, smart guy!"

MacBeth said sternly, "I'll tell you that at headquarters. You're under arrest for the murder of Paul Bourne."

Higgins gasped, but Bradley gave a harsh, sneering laugh.

"You're gonna have a tough time proving that, copper! Why, you ain't even got a corpse to show!"

Tony merely grunted, "No? Move over. You drive, George. I'll get in the back . . . Take it easy, on that flat."

At headquarters they took the sullen Bradley up to MacBeth's office, and pounded him with questions. Higgins phoned the local chief, Ed Cooley, who came in to help, bringing Tim Styles with him. They took turns in pairs, going outside between sessions to smoke and plan.

AT THE end of an hour Bradley was sweating profusely, gnawing his lips, and blinking his bloodshot eyes, but his replies were still stubborn denials. He admitted that shooting his own dog was inexplicable without a strong mo-

tive, but refused to tell what that motive was. He admitted that digging up the Professor's body and preparing to throw it in the river was equally strange, but declined to explain it.

Obviously his whole defense rested on the fact that there was no *corpus delicti*. They couldn't prove murder on him—or on anyone!

Tony and Tim Styles were with him when the phone rang. Tony scooped it up and clapped it to his ear.

"Who? . . . Chief Grunline, at Hagenport? Oh, yes! . . . You have? . . . Paul Bourne, that's right . . . Fine!"

His eyes gleamed with grim satisfaction. "Bullet from a .32 calibre, you say? . . . Yes, we'll want it for micro-identification. . . . Sure, I'll let you know. Thanks a lot."

He hung up and turned to the man across the desk. "Well, there's our corpse, Bradley. Floated up at the lower end of the lake, an hour ago. The rim you tied to his coat must have torn loose."

Bradley's eyes bugged from their sockets. He half rose, gripping the edge of the desk. Then with a rasping sigh he sank back. He broke, as suddenly and completely as a twig when it is stepped on.

"He threatened me!" he croaked. "He accused me of chasing his wife, and he assaulted me! I had to shoot him in self-defense!"

MacBeth nodded at Styles, who already had a sheet of paper in the typewriter. "Now give it to us slowly, Bradley, from the beginning."

It was after six and the sun was up when MacBeth and Higgins, having locked up their prisoner, went out for a cup of coffee.

"Your voice don't disguise so well, George," grinned Tony. "I recognized it right away; it was a little hard to give no sign."

"I figured you New York cops were quick on the uptake, Tony."

Higgins later went home to bed. MacBeth returned to the office and waited until eight o'clock, when he called Hagenport.

"Crunline? Remember that five-State alarm we put out on Bourne?"

"Seems to me I remember seeing it,

yes. Why?"

"We know now he was murdered. Got a complete confession."

"You have? What's the story?"

Tony outlined the relations between Bradley, Mrs. Cornelia Bourne, and the two dogs.

"Bradley knew that Bourne was in the diamond business, and had been watching for a chance for robbery. Bourne was intensely jealous, and the Professor hanging around his yard all the time focussed his suspicions on Bradley. When he left the cottage Sunday night, he went direct to the gas station and blurted out his accusations. Bradley denied them, but when the argument got rough, he saw his opportunity. He pulled his gun out of the desk and shot Bourne."

"What did he do with the body?"

"He was scared; a customer might drive up for gas any minute. Temporarily he dragged the corpse into the furnace room and locked the door. He took Bourne's keys, went through his bag, and lifted a wallet full of rough stones. Then after midnight, when it was safe, he went out back and started to dig a grave. But he found this tougher than he'd expected. It's quite a job to dig a man-sized grave, and he struck rock at about three feet. It got to be nearly daylight, and people here get up with the sun. Meanwhile he had another complication."

"What was that? An early customer?"

"No. His dog. The Professor was raising the devil at the door of the furnace room, scratching and howling. He realized that this would go on all day, if he left the body in there and finished the grave the next night. Also, if he buried the body in the shallow grave as it was, the dog would be constantly whining and sniffing at that spot, directing suspicion toward it. He loved his dog, but he was on the spot. So he shot the Professor, threw his body into the hole and covered it up. Then

he drove Bourne's car a couple of miles up the river, parked it, and walked back."

"Leaving Bourne's body locked in the closet?"

"Yes; it stayed there all day Monday. I passed the door myself, when I stopped for a bulb, and never suspected it—something no dog would ever have done. On Monday night he walked up, got the Chevy, drove it back, and loaded in the corpse. When he drove back to the river again, he tried to park it in the same place—but missed by a couple of feet. He tied a weight to Bourne's coat, and dumped his body over the cliff. Then he walked home."

"How'd you get a line on him, finally?"

"Well, we tried to use a dog to find a dog. The beagle was no help up at the river, but when she did a lot of sniffing in his vegetable patch that afternoon, he got nervous. When I spoke of giving her another try the next day, he decided he'd have to move the Professor's body. If we uncovered it, he could think of no way to explain why he'd shot his own dog, and then reported him missing. Maybe it wouldn't have convicted him of anything, but it would certainly focus suspicion—and a murderer is awful nervous about suspicion. So he dug it up last night, while we stood there watching him do it."

Chief Crunline snorted. "He'll plead self-defense."

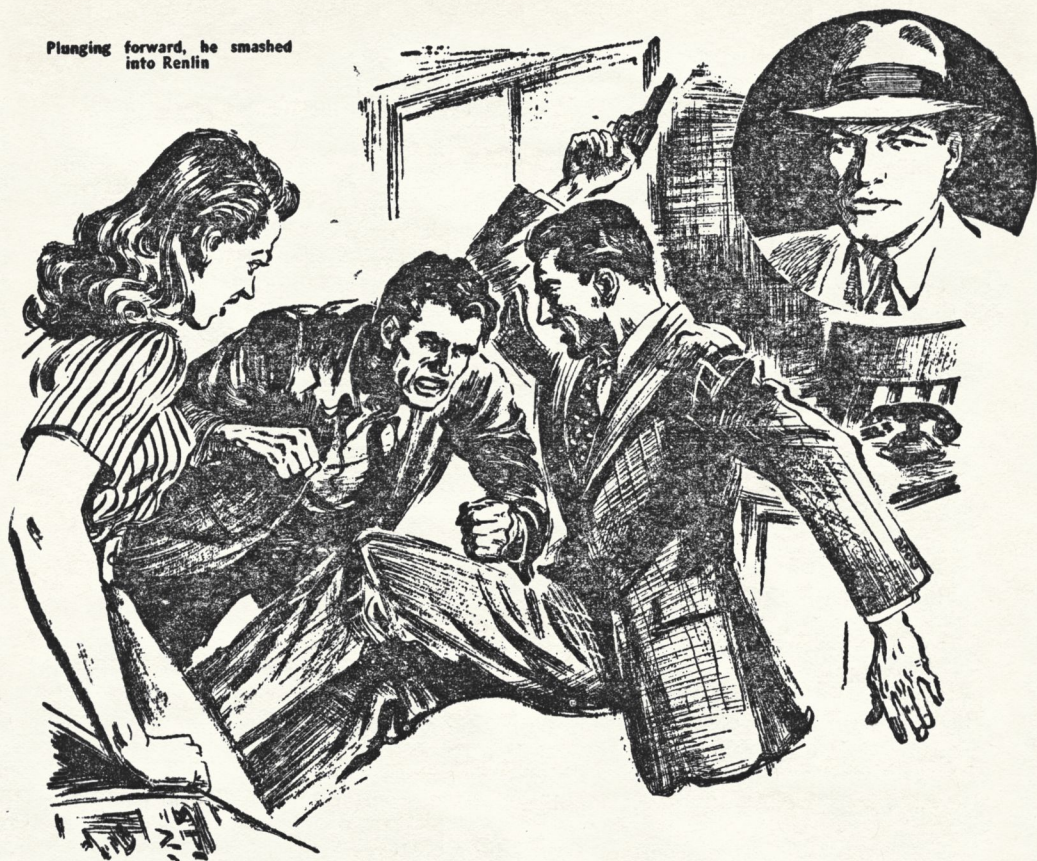
"Probably. But that plea won't weigh much with a jury when they're told he took Bourne's diamonds right after he'd killed him."

"That's right, too. Well, what can I do for you?"

"We'll drag for the body, but it might float up down there at your end of the lake. If it does, we can use the bullets in it to compare with the bullet that killed the Professor, and bullets fired from Bradley's own pistol. Keep an eye out for it, will you?"

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Plunging forward, he smashed
into Renlin



Murder a Day

By LEW TALIAN

*When Chicago's racket chief is slain, it's not the angles
that get D.A. investigator Vic Vio down—it's the curves!*

BILL BURTON had been as handsome as the devil. The heavy slug had crashed through his nose leaving him a bloody devil—without profile or face. Blue silk shorts trunked his body. He had nothing else on.

I looked away from the horrible attraction of his mashed features. Four reddish bruises, the size of quarters, marred his hairless chest.

Frank Luthers, my boss and D.A.,

gave me a smile. "Well," he said curtly, "what does Vic Vio make of this?"

"What caused the red marks on his chest?" I asked.

Captain Rust, who had remained with us, looked quickly over his shoulder, as if someone were behind him. But nobody was peeking into this large, handsomely furnished bedroom of the Tupper Hotel. The reporters and police workers had left. Only the tread of a

solitary uniformed patrolman outside was left to haunt this apartment of Chicago's best loved racket chief who, undoubtedly, had been killed by someone he knew. The racket chief kept no servants here, so he must have admitted the killer personally.

"Yes, those red marks are peculiar," said Luthers, who'd arrived ahead of me. "Doc Mauder says that Burton probably bumped against something. Those aren't burns and Burton wasn't tortured."

"Could be something else," said Captain Rust. "Bullets hitting a bullet-proof vest could have made those red marks."

Tom Rust was known as a good, honest cop, but he wasn't the brainy type.

I grinned. "Maybe those marks were caused by an itch. Maybe he was scratching himself."

District Attorney Luthers cursed irritably. "No jokes, please. You, Vic. Stand by."

"There's nothing Vic can do tonight—rather this morning," said Rust. "I have my men combing the city for anyone who has been connected with Burton. Hell, it's four A.M."

"Okay, Vic," said Luthers. "You can go. But be in the office early."

I went home and lowered my skinny six footage onto the bed. Before tumbling into sleep I told myself that I'd made a mistake in accepting an investigator's job with the D.A.'s office. At least I'd slept when I wanted to when I'd been a free lance private detective.

SIX hours later I was sitting opposite Frank Luther's beautiful blond desk, reading the newspapers, but I couldn't find a sentence on the red marks which had been on racketeer Bill Burton's chest. I mentioned it to Frank.

"I asked the boys to refrain from publishing that, Vic," the D.A. explained to me. "We haven't any logical explanation for it, so I wanted nothing said."

"What have we got to work on?"

Frank reached under the desk blotter and pulled out a piece of paper. "Here, Vic, check on these people."

I looked at the names on the sheet of paper:

Mirian Wanel.....Burton's current passion.

Chick Lewis.....Burton's private secretary.

Joe Renlin.....Burton's associate.

Lou Tangico.....Burton's bodyguard.

Frank smiled. "Wanel, the girl-friend, is a cute kid. Chick, the secretary, is a handsome ex-footballer. Something might be there. Or Renlin could be the boy. He was practically Bill Burton's partner. Tangico, too, might have something interesting to say. You see, he's blown town."

"Who found Burton's body?" I asked.

"Someone tipped the police from a public phone booth," Frank said.

Then Frank told me that I could find the girl, Mirian Wanel, at Burton's house on the Drive, and wished me luck.

As I tooled the coupe toward Burton's home on the Drive I couldn't help but think that a lot of big shots were going to miss Burton, including my own boss, Frank Luthers, who got ten Gs from him during his campaigns. I'd received little gifts from Burton too.

The Burton place was a vast, lawned piece of property with a modest ranch-type structure in the center of it. I left the car on the driveway and cut across the lawn. Almost immediately, a gray German Police dog ran toward me.

I didn't see where the dog came from. Standing stock still, I watched as he sprinted toward me. He left his feet when we were within talking distance.

I dodged to the right and I felt the bump of his hard coat as he whizzed past. I was still a good fifty feet from the house, but I made a dash for it. The dog came up fast from the rear and I knew I wasn't going to make it. I dived to the right again, and rolled. I came to my knees and held my gun ready.

I could hear the lash of the waves hitting the rocks along the rocky shoreline of the lake, which was about a hundred yards away. Storm clouds shadowed everything. And the dog was waiting for me to do something about him.

Then a car screeched on the driveway and somebody was yelling for "Duke." The dog backed off a bit then.

"Put away the gun," said a tough voice.

"Put away the dog," I fired right back, keeping the dog in sight.

A girl laughed and I turned slightly. I got a flash of brown hair and long brown legs.

The well built tough who had told me to put away the gun went to the dog, played with its head and gave it a playful shove. The dog raced toward the house.

The girl smiled. "Shall I say that he's a friendly dog when nobody bothers him."

I matched her smile. "Forgive me for not offering him my leg," I told her. "But I'm looking for Miss Wanel."

"I'm Mirian Wanel. Let's go into the house."

It was a large living room. There was a fireplace, expensive dark furniture and a desk. I identified myself and she sat a little bit of her sleek self on the edge of the desk and folded her arms in front of her.

"What can you tell me?" I asked.

Her tanned features slackened. "Nothing." She smiled, and the tired arch of her face softened. "Except that Bill's death means the road for me and Chick."

"Somebody mention me?" said the big guy, stepping into the room.

"What are your plans, Chick?" I asked.

"Something'll turn up," the dead racketeer's secretary said with a shrug.

I asked about Burton's bodyguard, Tangico, and Mirian glanced at me. It was just the curve of an eye, but she was acutely aware of my presence again.

"He pulled out," said Chick. "His record isn't good. When he heard the news about Burton being murdered, he left in a hurry."

Mirian frowned. "Bill didn't cart Lou with him all the time. He must've had an important engagement. Lou was here last night when the murder happened."

When I asked who would take over Burton's empire, they acted as if they didn't like the question.

"Renlin, Bill's partner," said Chick. "He's got the dough for it."

I was drinking some very nice Scotch with Mirian and Chick when Captain Rust and his assistant, Detective O'Ma-

ra, arrived.

"Hi, Vic," Tom Rust said. He smiled at Mirian. "Glad you're feeling better. Maybe you can answer our questions now."

"Thanks." She sat on the couch. Chick dropped beside her.

"I'll be seeing you," I said to them and went out.

The dog stood a couple of yards away. He was still looking for a free lunch. He growled, backing away as if he were about to spring.

"Get the devil away from me," I growled, taking a quick step toward him. He was as scared as I was, but he loped off into the distance, barking and circling me at a respectful distance.

I WAITED for Captain Rust. Pretty soon he came out, spotted me, and came to the car.

"That Wanel kid doesn't know a thing," he said. "The big pretty boy thinks he's tough. Tangico's gone." He paused thoughtfully, then added, "No use checking on Burton's partner, Renlin, Vic. We covered him. Renlin's scared. He thinks it might be Senneco's bunch who pulled the killing — that they're trying to move in."

I thanked him and drove away. Tangico, the dead man's bodyguard, was my last bet.

The West Side was doing business with a little more noise than usual. Everybody was enjoying the refreshing cool of the autumn winds. The Tangicos lived on a narrow street called Sheridan.

"Yeah?" said the curly headed, broad shouldered youth who admitted me. A bald old man was sitting at the table.

"When did Lou come here?" I asked. "He didn't stop here," snapped the kid.

"Dat bum," said the old man, "alla time he cause us too much troubles. Hang him." The old man continued in his native tongue and I replied in same.

"Italiano?" asked the old man, pleased.

I nodded. "I can help your brother," I said to the kid. "We don't want him for anything." I laid it on. "We think he's in danger."

They said what a swell guy Bill Bur-

ton'd been, giving them money when they needed it, and I said they were right. Burton had always given the little guy a break.

There was genuine fear in the old man's eyes. I said that Lou was in danger and had to be warned.

"Look," said Tony Tangico, the kid, rumpling his hair, "Lou gave me a number to phone. Yeah, he came here—to give us some money. If he wants to see you, okay."

The kid turned his back to me and dialed quickly. He talked, then hung up. "Lou'll phone back," he said.

"Everybody is a crook," said the old man bitterly. "I'ma old. I know."

The phone rang loudly and the old man jerked a bit. "Damma phone."

The kid answered it, rang off and told me to go to the Peer Hotel on Madison Street. "He wants to see you at one-thirty. He's in room Three-ten."

It was a quarter to one. I thanked them and left. It was a short drive to Madison and I took my time, stopping for cigarettes on the way. But a queer feeling pecked at my stomach as I walked down the hall, finally, toward room 310. The place smelled of bug spray and yesterday's perfume.

I knocked and nothing happened. I put the gun in my hand and tried the door knob. The door wasn't locked. I pushed it away from me and heard it crack against the wall of the room.

I put the gun away when I saw Lou sitting in the rocking chair with his head hanging over his right shoulder. The blood poured from the long jagged opening where the flesh of his throat had been. Somebody had neatly razored his neck.

I went to him and felt his pulse. *One . . . two . . . three . . .*

"Lou—Lou," I tried to shake a word from him. Just one word.

One . . . two.

"Lou," I said again, but now his eyes were open and staring over my hunched shoulder. His heart gave one more push and stopped working.

I turned at a sound behind me. At that moment, someone leaped on my back. A hard arm jerked my head back and steel crashed against my temple.

I tried to fall against whoever was

attacking me, but his arm was still locked around my throat. The floor banged against my back and a knee cracked into my jaw. Pain burned through my head and spine. . . .

SOMETHING bright was burning into my eyes when consciousness came back. I wanted to see what it was, so I opened my eyes. I closed them quickly. "Shade his eyes," somebody said, and I opened my eyes again.

"Who did it, Vic?" It was Luthers. Every square inch of me was aching.

"I dunno," I said. "Somebody jumped me from behind. Big boy." They gave me another shot of bourbon and I told them everything. How I'd got onto Lou's hiding place and, arriving early for my appointment, had almost caught the killer in the act. Then I saw the little alcove to the right where the killer had hidden and admitted my stupidity.

"Help him to his feet," Luthers said. I was nauseated. It was Doc Mauder, the M.E., who helped me. "Try to walk, Vic," he said.

I felt the tape on my temple and moved my jaw for a while.

"Some roomer peeked in here and saw you and the corpse," Luthers said to me. "We got here twenty minutes ago."

Captain Rust was trying to keep his hand in his pockets, but they kept sneaking up to his face, pushing into the ridges of fat under his chins.

"Can't you remember anything, Vic?" Rust asked me.

"No."

"Who did Lou Tangico's brother phone?"

"Lou, Cap," I said. "He phoned his brother."

Luthers cursed savagely. "Then our trail's stopped here."

"I'm going home," I said, and headed for the door, but my stomach was still unsteady, and I hung on to a chair.

"Come with me," said Rust. "My old lady has a mixture which settles stomachs fine."

I went with the Captain. It was a little house with red curtains and a smooth and level little yard with pretty flowers in it.

"The cure," he said to his wife, and

she returned in a few minutes with a tall glass filled with a blue, bubbling mixture.

Her bare arms touched me. "Drink as much of it as you can." She was big and warm and I liked her.

I drank it. For a minute I thought I was going to explode, but cool spots seemed to be floating in my stomach, and when I sat down I just had a bad taste in my mouth.

"What was in it?" I asked.

"When you're feeling better, I'll tell you," she said.

I was relaxing in the chair when the door bell rang. She let in some guy who wanted money for a bill that was due.

"It's impossible for me to pay you at present," she said. "Come back in a week."

"But, lady—"

The door closed, and she came into the parlor. "Those collectors never know the right day to come."

I made a long bitter speech about collectors, and Tom Rust joined us and we just tore into everything.

"Ready to shove on?" asked Rust after we'd drunk some coffee.

"Drop in for dinner—any night," she invited.

I thanked her and we left.

Rust left me in front of my hotel and I went to the phone booth in the lobby. I looked up the number and phoned the Tangico house. The kid answered.

"I was too late, Tony," I said. "Somebody got to him. He nearly finished me too."

"Dead?"

"Yes. Sorry."

The kid choked, coughed, then steadied down into a steady, wretched sobbing. I hung up and went upstairs.

WHEN I reported at the D.A.'s office for work the next morning, Mirian Wanel was sitting in my favorite chair.

"She has a theory," said Frank Luthers, rattling some pencils on the desk.

"They got Bill Burton and now Lou Tangico," she said. "I'm afraid somebody's out to get all of us."

"All?" I said.

"Yes." Her eyes were bright with

fear. "Lou was close to Bill. I was very close to Bill. Don't you see?"

Frank made his face show sympathy. "She may have something there, Vic. I'm putting a couple of boys on her place."

I nodded. "Which place are you staying at?"

"My own apartment—North Side."

"I'm going that way," I lied. "I'll give you a lift."

She thanked me and I waved goodbye to Frank.

She had a beautiful speaking voice, and we tongued about everything in general. I was getting the old feeling—that feeling that itches down my flanks and creeps inside me. I wanted to touch her. Nope, Vicey.

When we reached her apartment building, she gave me her hand and a gentle smile. "Come on up, Vic. I'll give you a drink."

I yipped her and we went into the cleanly designed foyer. We waited for the little elevator to come down to us. She punched the No. 5 button and we rose.

It was a big restful room. Double doors were ajar, allowing a view of a good sized bed. She smiled and went past a swinging door into a wedge of a kitchen.

I held the door away from her and she ducked under my arm. She set the tray on a tiny stretch of table and handed me a glass. She served smooth stuff. I knocked it off and felt it spread through me.

She wore a light gray frock and the long length of it made her a bit more interesting, if concealing. She sat on the couch and around came her legs into a soft X. She had to make everything very clear for me in that sack.

"What can I do?" she asked between sips.

"Nothing," I said.

We had another drink and she set the glass decanter on the rug. "Oh, I'm awfully hot in this shroud." She patted her knees.

"What kind of a guy was Burton?" I didn't play.

She pulled her legs under her and pouted. "Burton was very good, Vic-tor. Anywhere."

"Can't you think of anything that might help us, Mirian?"

She shifted to a more comfortable position. "Sit over here by me," she said.

I sat beside her and she relaxed. "All I can think about is them, Vic. They're after all of us."

I couldn't get annoyed with her. "Who?"

"I don't know, that's why I'm scared."

"You're protected, Mirian." She pushed closer to me. "Can't you give us some sort of lead? Anything squeezer about Burton? Anything?"

"There was one thing. Bill slapped me once—because I ran up to him and hugged him. He'd just entered the apartment and I was glad to see him. He said that I shouldn't ever do that again." She smiled grimly. "That he'd let me know when he wanted to kiss me."

I kissed her.

"Vicey"

"What did you do yesterday, hon?"

"Movies, walks, anything I could think of."

"Was Chick with you?"

"No. I didn't feel like being with anyone."

"Think Renlin might've ordered somebody to rub Burton?"

"Ugh. That cold fish? No. He depended on Bill. He backed Bill up with money."

We had another drink and she got to her feet, I followed suit.

"C'mon, I'll show you the apartment."

"I've got to be going, hon."

"Why?" She was swaying a bit.

"Because I'm awfully hot," I said, and went to the door.

Nothing happened. As I closed the door, she was splashing the fire water into a glass.

I got into the car and headed for the West Side. I felt like a ballplayer who'd hit a home run and forgot to tag second.

I PARKED on Sheridan Street and I went to the Tangico house. The old man admitted me. He didn't say a word.

"Where's Tony?" I asked.

"In bed. He no eat, sleep. Justa cry. Maybe you do some good."

I patted him on the arm, said I'd try

and went into the kid's bedroom. He was lying on the unmade bed. He was fully clothed.

"Don't get up, Tony," I said. "Cigarette?"

"They sliced him up like a chicken." His face was twisted into an expression of utter and complete dejection. "Who do you want to find dead now, cop?"

I lit a cigarette. I held out the pack again, and this time he took one. I lit it for him.

"Don't you want us to get his killer?" I asked.

His eyes were bright and bloodshot. I saw that he didn't want us to get anything. I left the room and the old man motioned for me to follow him into the kitchen.

"I can tella ya somet'ing," he said when we got there. "Lou wassa here oncet. He gotta drunk and he say lotsa t'ings. He says dat a guy called Chick played round wit' Burton's friend, Mirian. Chick make Lou promise he never tella nobody dat he caughta Chick an' Mirian kissin'."

"Anything else, Mr. Tangico?"

"Yeah. Lotsa crazy t'ings. Burton no allow his boys to spenda money dat he pay dem wit' right away. He beat up wana fella who buy new automobile. Burton never let my boy Lou go into his bedroom. He say, too, for him never to go into da bathroom while he dere. He little bit crazy maybe?"

"That all?"

Old Tangico shrugged. "When Lou get over dat little bit drunk, he make a us promise ona my wife's grave dat we no say all dese t'ings to nobody."

I thanked him and told him to get in touch with me if young Tony got out of hand. Outside, I started the car and turned onto Harrison Street, heading for the Loop. It was crazy, unreal, yet an idea was taking shape in my aching head—an idea as forceful and weird as Burton's behavior in insisting a woman ask his permission before hugging or kissing him.

I pushed the car a little harder than usual. My big idea could wait. I had a private debt to pay. I parked the coupe before the compact little building that Renlin, Bill Burton's erstwhile partner, used as his headquarters.

On the first floor, a little cigar store served as a lobby to the horse parlor in the rear. I entered and asked the good looking youth behind the counter if Renlin was upstairs.

"Who's calling?"

"Vic Vio," I said. "It's urgent."

He pulled a phone to him and conveyed my message to somebody. He replaced the instrument.

"I'll take you up," he said.

He opened a door and we went up a flight of stairs. He pushed open the only door at the head of the stairs and I stepped into a large, plainly furnished office. Chick and Mirian were there, huddled over a racing sheet. They paid no attention to me. Two large men in dark business suits stood near the only window. The door closed behind me.

Joe Renlin rose from behind the desk and waved to a chair. I shook my head. Renlin got right to the point.

"None of our people had anything to do with the Burton or Tangico removals," he said flatly. His pin striped suit was wrinkled. His lean face was pouchy from lack of sleep.

"Think Senneco is trying to move in?" I asked.

"Senneco and I had a meeting," he said wearily. "We talked for hours. He's clean. He's opening a place in Florida. Doesn't like Chicago."

I turned to Chick. "That was a sweet necktie tackle you threw at me in Lou's room, Chickie."

THE shrill silence lasted for a hatful of seconds.

"What do you mean?" Renlin asked briskly then. His eyes were on Chick.

"Ask Chick," I said.

Chick's eyebrows jumped an inch. He was on his feet in a blur and coming toward me with an eely smoothness. He was spitting distance away when I backed a step, set myself, and kicked him flush in the stomach. He went down to one knee, pulling air into his lungs with grunts of pain.

Joe Renlin came around the desk. He waved a .38 revolver, indicating Chick.

"Vic—" Renlin's voice was soft with anger—"you had a fight with Lou's killer. Is Chick the guy?"

"I'd say yes."

Chick came to his feet, but the two house boys had him in check.

"He's crazy," Chick said, trying to catch his breath. "I was here the night Burton was shot, and you know it, Renlin."

Renlin looked at me. "Chick's right. Him and Mirian were here all night on the night that Bill got it."

I moved to Bill Burton's ex-secretary and tweaked his nose. Chick got red in the face and the boys had to twist his arms before he stood still.

"But you killed Lou Tangico," I said.

"He's crazy," snarled Chick, looking at Renlin.

"You killed Lou," I went on, "because you were scared he'd tell that he'd caught you playing around with Mirian. Hell, that dame can't leave men alone. She tried to make me a little while ago."

"I didn't kill anybody," Chick said, his shoulders quivering with rage.

"But you killed Lou."

Joe Renlin coughed. "Why, Vic?"

"Because Lou might tell someone of Chick's games with Mirian and that someone might think Chickie killed Burton because of the dame."

Renlin walked to Chick. "Is he right, Chick?"

"No."

Renlin swiftly slashed the barrel of the gun in a downward arc. It cut across Chick's cheekbone. Chick screamed and tried to back away from Renlin, but the boys tripped him up and he looked up at Renlin from a kneeling position.

"For God's sake, Mister Renlin—" he began.

Joe Renlin was slowly lifting the gun again. Chick tried to twist his head away, and got it across the eyes. He screamed and twisted, plunging forward. He got clear of the two house boys and smashed into Renlin. They went over in a tangled duet.

The bodyguards swooped over the thrashing fighters. They grabbed Chick by the hair and arms. Renlin crawled away. Chick was a red mess. A gushing wound marked the line where one of his eyebrows had been.

"My eyes," moaned Chick. "My eyes."

Mirian dashed for the door. I stuck out my foot and she went down in a flutter of silk and fury. She lunged to

her feet and I grabbed her arms. She tried to kick, but I locked her closer to my body. She tried to bite my face. I let go of her arm long enough to slap her. She was hysterical.

Joe Renlin pushed a buzzer and pretty soon three men entered. One was gray-haired and with a nice smile.

"Talk to these people, Lurno," Renlin said to him. "I don't feel so good."

I gave Mirian to the other two guys who had entered and I gave the story to Lurno.

"It makes sense," he said.

Lurno walked over to the girl and without a wasted motion cracked her across the face with the back of his big hand. The welt marooned her face.

"No," she shrieked. "Please . . . no!"

He grabbed her cheek between his fingers and started to twist. The scream tore out of the side of her screwed up mouth.

"No," she mumbled, and her voice sounded as if it was coming from a barrel. "I'll talk."

Lurno let go and she talked. The boys had a hard time holding Chick as she did. He cursed and tried to pull free.

"Chick killed Lou," she said. "The D.A.'s boy was right."

The old gray head nodded. Lurno turned to me. "She could be lying to save her pelt."

"No," I said. "Ask Chick where he was from one to two yesterday afternoon."

Lurno turned to Chick. "Want some more?"

"You rats—you crawling, filthy swine! Yeah, I killed Lou, but I didn't kill Burton. I was here that night."

"That's right," I said to Lurno. "But let Chick tell you why he killed Lou—for the record."

Mirian cursed shrilly. "I'll tell you why. Chick near went crazy thinking what Joe Renlin would do to him if he even thought he had killed Burton because of me."

"Keep talking," advised Lurno.

"Look at Chick's face!" she shrilled. "It got smashed up anyway!"

"You better call the cops," I said. "That'll take care of Chick and Mirian."

The boys were pushing Chick toward the door. "Wait," said Chick very

gently. "Renlin—let me say good-bye to Mirian."

"Okay," said Renlin.

They released Chick and he walked toward her. She tried to wiggle away from the men who held her.

"Keep him away! Chick, please no, Chick. I love you—"

Chick smashed her in the face with his fist. He hit her with all his strength. Then he whirled and tried for the window. They caught him and dragged him away.

RUST and his crew of cops arrived. District Attorney Luthers brought up the rear. I repeated my story for them. There was nothing else to be done. Renlin and Lurno had done all of the questioning that had been necessary.

"How'd you know Chick killed Lou?" asked one of the house boys.

I told them about the phone calls at the Tangico house. "Lou phoned somebody he knew—to see if it was all right to have me visit him. I figured he'd phone Chick or Mirian. He'd been close to them. Chick thus found out where Lou was and got to him before I did. Mirian probably put him up to it."

"Yes," said Luthers, "and you did say that the man who jumped you was big. It would take a cool head and a man sure of his power to attack a man who'd just discovered his dirty work. An ex-football player like Chick fitted the bill, eh?"

"He used brass knuckles on me," I said. "That helped."

We followed the parade down the stairs and watched Mirian and Chick get the shove into the police car.

"Dammit all, Vic," grunted Luthers, "who could have killed Burton?"

"I think I know."

"Who?"

"Let's go to the office. I'm going to look over those statements made by the suspects in the Burton murder."

He swore, grabbing my arm. "No stunts, Vic, give it to me straight. Who do you think did it?"

"I know who did it. Captain Rust's our boy."

Luther whistled, but he knew better than to scoff at me without hearing what I had to say.

We returned to the office and I plowed through the sheafs of typescript on the Burton case. I flipped aside the reports on the male suspects, but carefully went over the statements of Burton's former girl friends.

Their statements, in part, verified the fact that Burton had had a couple outstanding peculiarities. For one thing, he hadn't allowed any of them to embrace him unless he made the first overture. Further, not one of his associates had ever seen him dress. He seemed quite all right in other respects.

"Did you notice the way Lurton treated his girls, Frank? How he wouldn't allow them to get close to him?"

He nodded. "A criminal's behavior can't be reasonable."

"Yes," I said, "but the peculiar way he treated his girls, plus another bit of *tangible* evidence, practically name the killer for us."

"So you say Rust is the gunner? But how will all of this stand up in court?"

"It will—if we work it in the usual manner."

He knew what I meant and didn't like it. But when I told him in detail how we could work it, he brightened a bit.

"That's different," he said. "Our office won't be involved."

I started the ball rolling by contacting Marty Crims, the police reporter from the *Morning News*. He'd been on the case from the start.

When he arrived, I shot the story to him.

"It's almost unbelievable," said Crims. "But how are you going to make it stick?"

"You're the one who's really going to make it stick," I said.

"Me!"

"Yeah." I gave him a cigarette. "You do just as we say, and you'll have an exclusive."

He nodded eagerly. "What do you want me to do?"

I told him what he must do.

AT EIGHT o'clock that evening Captain Tom Rust phoned in the news that Chick had signed a formal confession to the murder of Lou Tangico, stating that Mirian had fired him with

the idea.

Frank Luthers looked at me. There was a grudging respect in his tone. "What makes you think Crims can get away with pulling your stunt, Vic?"

"Because of the fact that if Crims is aware of Rust as a killer, Rust doesn't dare bump him. Rust wouldn't be certain whether Crims told anyone else or not."

"I still don't like it," said Luthers.

I didn't like it either, but it was the only way. If it didn't work out, we wouldn't have any proof of Rust's guilt and, more than likely, we'd have to start holing in for our lives.

Luthers and I were smoking and avoiding each other's eyes when the phone rang loudly. We both jumped. Luthers picked up the hand-set. He said a few "yes" words into the instrument and hung up.

"It's all set, Vic," he told me then. "Crims contacted Rust. Tomorrow night at seven we nail him."

"That proves I'm right," I said.

"Good night, Vic."

"I feel the same way," I said, picking up my hat and heading for the door. It was going to be the longest twenty-four hour wait of my life.

I didn't dream that night. . . .

The next day Frank was jumpy as a colt and it was spreading to me. At five that evening we went out to a little battered cottage out on Haim road. Luthers and I maneuvered our way up to its attic. The boards were weak and warped. I told Frank we'd better lie on our stomachs. That's what we did.

Through the cracks in the planking we saw the large, darkly clothed figure of Tom Rust moving about the room below. He was nervously puffing on a cigarette. Then Marty Crims arrived and went into his act.

We had our man. The detectives were strung out around the cottage. Anybody could enter, but they'd need the devil's own luck to leave.

"Have you got the money?" Crims asked Rust.

"Yeah, but you better keep your mouth shut about this, Marty."

"I will," said Crims. "Man, were you a sucker!"

"How'd you get on to me?"

Crims laughed. "Vio—the D.A.'s boy—told me about your theory of the four red marks on Burton's chest. You said that bullets hitting a bullet-proof vest would make those marks. I checked around and found out that all of his girls weren't allowed to hug him when he didn't give the sign for it. Lou, his bodyguard, wasn't allowed to go into the bathroom while he was dressing.

"I put two and two together, pal, and got a big four. *Burton wore a bullet-proof vest, but nobody knew it!* That's why he wouldn't allow any of his girl friends to hug him. They'd feel the hardness of it. He was a vain character, and he didn't want anyone to think he had to hide behind a bullet-proof vest."

Crims lit a cigarette. "It must've scared the spit out of you to be shooting at a guy's middle and he kept moving toward you. Lucky you blasted him in the face on the fifth shot."

Rust shrugged. "Okay. I should've kept my theories to myself. Here's your dough."

Rust's hand went into the breast pocket of his coat. I caught the flash of his gun.

I pulled the trigger of my gun and the big body smashed to the floor. That's what happens to them when a .38 slug knocks them down from pointblank range.

When we got to Rust, Doc Mauder was already fussing over him. Mauder looked up at us. "He'll live," he said.

"Can he talk?" asked Luthers.

"No." Mauder grimaced distastefully. "In twenty-four hours maybe."

WE WATCHED the boys carry Rust out. Marty Crims was pale, but excited.

"I did like you ordered," said Crims. "I phoned him, saying that I wanted a little hush money. He ate it up."

"And we have him," said Luthers. "I'll bet he tore off Burton's bathrobe—or whatever Burton was wearing—to see what kept him up. Remind me to ask Rust that one, Vic."

I nodded. "He probably needed money. He owed on bills. He probably braced Burton before. Maybe Burton got sore, threatened to bring out the news of Rust turning grafter. It could

have been for a hundred and one reasons. But in any case, Rust was trying to be crooked."

"How can you be so sure?" asked Luthers.

I looked around the room. I called O'Mara, Tom Rust's assistant.

"Hey, O'Mara," I said. "Remember the time at Burton's house on the Drive when Rust came to my car?"

O'Mara nodded.

"Did that dog bark or try to jump Rust?" I asked.

"No."

"Did the dog get frisky with you?"

"He sure did."

I told Luthers about the dog. "That dog tried to jump me when I entered and left the house," I said. "But when Rust came to my car to talk to me, the mutt wasn't snapping at his heels. In fact, the dog stood near the house. The dog knew him! Rust had probably approached Burton at Burton's Drive house before for some money."

"I can never understand it," said Luthers. "Rust has—had—such a fine record, never did a dishonest deed."

"An old man set me straight," I said. "He said something about nobody being honest."

"Hell," said O'Mara, "it takes one to catch another one."

We didn't argue the point.

When Rust was able to talk, he verified my theory. Yes, he had needed money desperately. He'd approached Burton and the racketeer had said that he'd see. Then at the apartment that night Burton told Rust that he thought that the cops were trying to get a case against him by sending Rust to pretend to graft.

He told Rust that he was going to phone the D.A. and give the D.A. the yarn. Rust shot and killed him.

Luthers was happy to hear that Rust had buried the bullet-proof vest, and burned the tattered dressing gown Burton'd been wearing. We found the vest, and that tied everything up neatly.

But I wasn't altogether pleased. I'll never forgive myself for not having procured the prescription for the bluish mixture Mrs. Rust had given me that day.

Occasionally, I could use some of it. . . .

Wilk whipped out
the gun



By RAY CUMMINGS

Murder by Candlelight

THE DARKNESS in the room came so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that it was startling. For a moment big Jake Wilk stood tense, frozen, by the mantelpiece. From his seat at the table across the small living room, young Tom Pierce said:

"Well! Here we are! Wait a minute, don't fall over anything. It'll probably come right back on again."

The window shades were up, but no

light came in from the heavily overcast night. Then Wilk realized that the lights down on the road beyond the little garden were out also. Perhaps you can hear more acutely in abrupt darkness, Wilk thought. The big, bull-necked, paunchy Wilk could hear the sucking in and out of his breath and his heart pounding against his ribs.

He took his hand away from the butt of the little gun in his pocket. In an-

WAX OR ELECTRICITY—CRIME WILL OUT!

other moment he would have pulled out the gun, with its silencer, and fired at the unsuspecting Tom Pierce.

Now there was only darkness, frightening darkness. Then the outlines of the table began to take form and the dim blob of the youthful, athletic figure of Tom. His white shirt was a faint splotch.

"Well, the light doesn't seem to come on," Tom said. "I'll call up the lighting company. I've got to finish these reports and orders to the branches and get them in the mail by ten o'clock." He was reaching for the telephone near him on the table. He added, "Light one of those candles, will you, Jake? One's enough. Let's have it here."

"Sure," Wilk said. "Okay."

TWO BIG, ornate candles, each in a small glass holder, stood at the ends of the mantelpiece. They had been there since last Christmas, had never been lighted. Wilk's hand was trembling as he lighted one and carried it to the table.

Young Pierce was calling the electric company. Efficient young squirt, Wilk was thinking. In his element when he was giving orders to somebody. Like just now, for instance. Stand still, Jake. Light one of those candles, Jake. Let's have it here, Jake.

Now he was telling the manager of the lighting company: "This is Thomas Pierce, Incorporated . . . Yes, I'm Pierce. I'm at home . . . Yes, I'll greatly appreciate it if you'll do that . . . It's all this West End section? And you think only twenty minutes? . . . Yes, if you will, please . . ."

It had always infuriated Jake Wilk, having a son-in-law like this. That, and the lack of money. Lack of any material gain which his daughter's important marriage should have brought him. All Wilk had gotten out of it was a piddling job as traveling salesman for the big hardware company which young Pierce had inherited.

But all that would be changed after tonight. The little gun in Wilk's pocket would change it in a hurry. Would have already changed it, if the darkness hadn't so suddenly come.

In the swaying yellow candlelight

Wilk stood looming over the table. Flabby, pot-bellied, panting. Behind him the light of the candle cast a monstrous gargoyle shape of his body on the opposite wall. An agony of indecision was confusing Wilk. More than anything, he wanted the thing over and done with now. Or would he miss in this light, even at such close range?

Then he knew that he had whipped out the little gun and that Pierce had seen it. The blond young fellow gave a startled cry. He tried to get out of his chair, his outcry mingling with the little plop through the silencer and the thud of the bullet into his temple.

It was enough. Just the one shot, quite enough. And now, in the swaying candlelight, Jake Wilk stood panting, triumphant. The body of Pierce lay in the chair, sagging with gruesome head. Pierce, the young executive, the boy wonder of the wholesale hardware business, just lying there all finished! . . .

Wilk shoved the gun back into his pocket. His fingerprints would be around here. Why not? He lived here. Except that it would be better if they weren't on the glass holder of the lighted candle. With his handkerchief he carefully wiped off the holder.

He had just returned a few minutes ago from a month's selling trip. His suitcase, hat and overcoat were out in the hall. He closed the living-room door and its spring lock clicked on the inside. The small room was really a sort of den. It had no other exit.

Wilk put on his overcoat and hat, picked up his suitcase and went out to his car. The motor was still warm from his so-recent arrival. He backed it out of the garage and drove away. There were no near neighbors, no one to see him come and go. And with the electricity still off in all this section, it was additionally dark.

Triumph was in Wilk now as he headed to detour the near-by village and approach it from the other direction. Mary was away for a week, visiting an ailing girl friend down in the city. Now she'd come back a widow, the sole owner of Thomas Pierce, Incorporated.

Mary could, and would, make the business seem pretty valuable to Wilk. A branch managership, at the very least.

And she'd be a rich woman. She'd do plenty for her old father.

Wilk was fifty-two. That, and his lame back, had never impressed Tom Pierce at all. But Mary was a very different proposition.

Wilk drove into the village from the east end. He tossed the gun into the river, at the bridge. He pulled his roadster up in front of Gray's liquor store and clambered out.

"Hello, Mr. Gray! A fifth—the usual, please."

"Why, surely, Mr. Wilk. Just getting back? Have a good trip? Missed you."

Of course he did. Jake Wilk, when he was around here, was one of the store's best customers.

"Yeah. Thanks. Tired, though." He took the wrapped bottle, paid for it and grinned. "This'll relax me." Then he glanced up at the store's big clock. "Nine-thirty, and I've been driving since noon!"

ROAD lights were on again when Wilk got back. He put his car in the garage. Lights in the house were on, too. Through one of the side windows, as he stood outside it, the living room was visible. The big white, gold-flecked candle was still burning on the table, with the gruesome dead thing slumped in the chair beside it.

Everything was the same as he had left it, except that now the electric lights were on.

From the extension telephone in the front hall, big Jake Wilk excitedly called the police, gasping out the news of what he had just seen through the living-room window.

Then the police came and told it all to this Police Sergeant Breen. It was so simple that Wilk knew he couldn't get it tangled. The place was noisy with policemen, now.

Wilk, after phoning, had waited in the hall. Then they had forced the living-room door and the policemen had gone in.

He was still in the hall, watching and listening quietly to what was going on. Breen was back in the living-room. They hadn't let Wilk cross the threshold. They were arguing in there now, softly, but loud enough so that he could hear

some of it. The big candle was still burning on the table. Sergeant Breen had done some telephoning. Now he was saying to one of the other men:

"The electric company night manager says the current failed at nine-one. He says Pierce phoned him within a minute, so Pierce was alive then. The manager promised he'd call back as soon as he could say when service would be resumed. And at nine-fifteen the manager did phone back, but Pierce didn't answer the call. So likely that's when he was killed—nine-two to nine-fifteen."

It fitted perfectly. As Breen came back into the hall, Wilk said, "Heard you figuring the murder time. It was about nine-thirty when I got to Gray's liquor store."

Somehow, Wilk was sorry that he had said it. It sounded as though he was trying to defend himself before he was attacked. Wilk had always figured that cops as a whole were a pretty dumb lot.

These were friendly enough. Breen had nodded and accepted everything Wilk had said. One of those gullible fellows. But now Wilk got a shock. As he mentioned what he thought sounded like an alibi, Breen shot him a caustic look.

"You could drive from here to Gray's, even by a roundabout route, in those fifteen minutes, pretty easy," Breen said.

It was startling. A sudden, unexpected attack. Wilk gulped. "Maybe I could, but I didn't," he retorted.

"Murder by candlelight," Breen said calmly.

SEVERAL other policemen had gathered here in the hall now, all of them expectant, all eying Wilk.

"Either the murderer or the victim lighted that candle when the current failed," Breen went on. "It hadn't been lighted previously. We can tell that by timing the rate at which it's burning down. It was new, like its unlighted twin on the mantelpiece there, and it was lighted just after nine o'clock."

"Very interesting," Wilk managed to comment. He hoped it sounded sarcastic.

Dump cops? They had eyes like gimlets boring into him. And now one of them laughed jeeringly.

"Go ahead an' tell him, Sarge. We've got him—"

"Got me?" It hit Wilk like a fist against his jaw, so that he recoiled. "What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"You weren't here in the room with him?" Breen queried.

"Of course I wasn't!" Wilk retorted hotly. "I haven't been in that room for a month! I just got back from a trip, I informed you. And when I got here, the room was all locked up. I told you—"

"I know you did," Breen said. "When you light a candle, you generally tip it sidewise. It lights better. And if you're shaky, because you know any minute you're gonna shoot a guy—"

The sergeant gestured down to Wilk's

feet, now. And then Wilk saw it. With the rush of his terror, there was Breen's calm voice again:

"Some of the hot wax dripped on the floor by the mantelpiece when the killer lighted that candle. And some of it fortunately didn't hit the floor. A very special kind of wax, Wilk. White and gold. You can see why we know it was you!"

Wilk could see it all too clearly. He sank into a chair here in the hall, like a flabby toad wedged down, as he gazed to where, on one of his shoe tops, the wax drippings had hardened into little, glistening white splashes flecked with gold!

He tried to speak. Desperately, he wanted to protest, but he knew there was nothing he could say.



A Guide to Top-Flight Mystery Fiction!

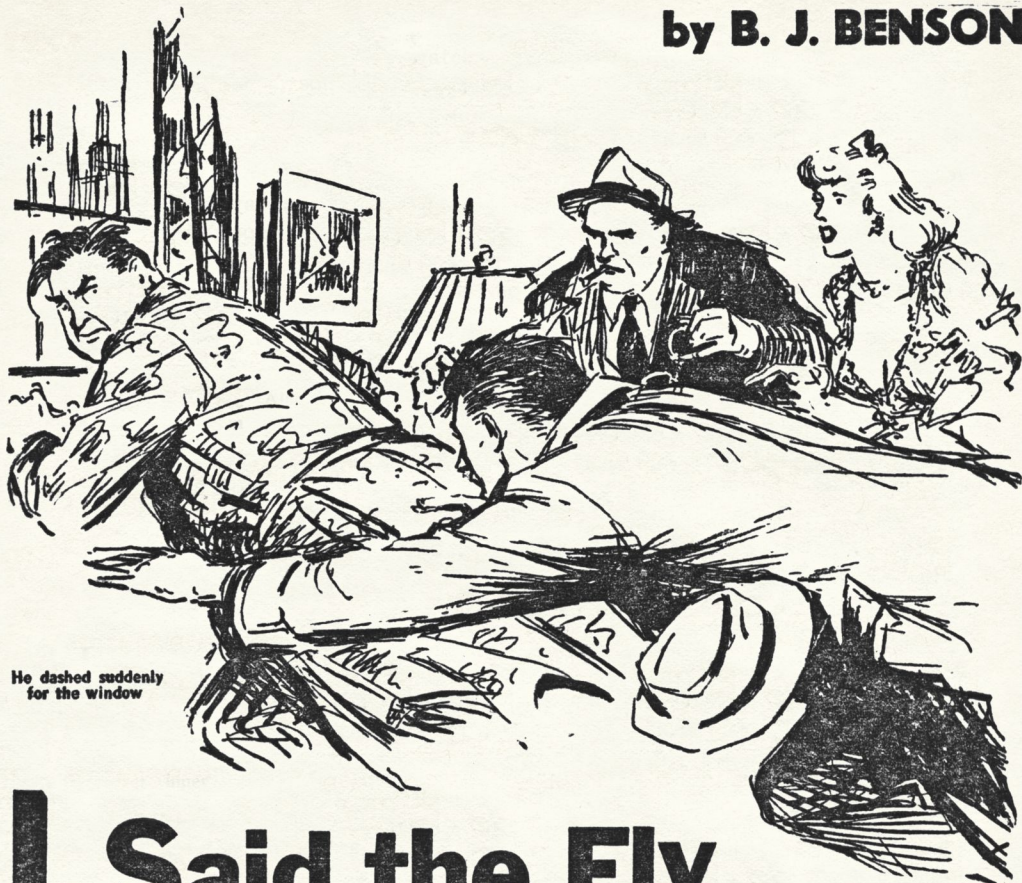
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by B. J. BENSON



He dashed suddenly
for the window

I, Said the Fly

*—to Detective Pebble, "saw the murder committed,
and so did ten other people right beside me!"*

9:32 A.M.

I HUNG UP the phone. "It's the Fourth Precinct," I said. "They tell me someone just saw a murder being committed. Those are the kind we don't get very often, Saunders."

Saunders reached up on the rack for our hats.

He looked a little nervous.

"Relax, kid," I said. "It's your first day, your first case. Right now you're new at it. Pretty soon it's going to be routine to you."

"It will never be routine to me, Lieutenant," he said.

"Sure, sure," I said as I got up from the desk. "I know. You just passed through the Detective School. You have a lot of ideas. You're not a cop in a squad car anymore. You think maybe you're in the big time because you're in Homicide. Sometimes you're going to wish you were back in harness again. Sometimes I do."

He laughed. "Not with your reputation, sir."

"I'm a hardbitten old man," I said, "so

never mind the blarney, Saunders. Let's go."

We left the Homicide office and went downstairs. The black Headquarters sedan was at the yellow curb in front. We climbed in. Saunders turned the key and punched the starter. He put the car in gear.

"Where to, sir?"

"Three eleven Elm. Down at the depot."

I took a quick look at him. He was only a kid with a college degree and some four years chasing Japanese in the Pacific. He wasn't married, but he probably had a girl who was proud of his tall figure and strong profile, and especially proud of his new job. Now they would think of getting married. The world was his and things looked good to him. I wondered how long that was going to last.

When we arrived down on Elm Street they already had the building roped off. It was a small, old four story office building and it faced the railroad station. There were three white squad cars there from the Fourth Precinct and an ambulance. I noticed a small coupe with markers on it from the Railroad Police. We were early. There was nobody around yet from the D.A.'s office or the Medical Examiner's, and neither lab nor photo men.

THE cop at the barrier saluted and let the car through. We pulled up to the entrance and went inside. An old colored man with a sad look on his face brought us up to the fourth floor in a rickety open cage elevator. The cop at the door saluted as we went in.

They hadn't touched anything. The body was lying halfway out of the open office window. He was about sixty years. The face was thin and lined and tired in death. He had gray hair that was white at the temples and he was wearing a gray worsted business suit, black silk socks and black shoes. The back of his head was badly dented and he was covered with blood.

The office itself had one typewriter desk and one flattop executive desk. There was a single five drawer filing cabinet and a few leather-back chairs. The place was bare but neat, and there

was no sign of any struggle.

I said hello to everybody I knew and shook hands with the ones I knew well. When that was over, Detective-Sergeant Nagle of the Fourth took me aside and handed me a cigarette.

"You're getting old, Maxie boy," he said to me. "Now they got somebody to hold you by the hand."

"You mean Saunders? The kid's breaking in. Me old? I'm just pushing fifty, Tim."

"You've been saying that for ten years," he said. "How's the wife and kids? How's the new granddaughter?"

"Cute. Everybody says she looks just like me. What's the story here? I understand it's an easy one. Somebody saw it done."

"You talk to the guy, Max," he said. "This ain't no easy one."

He nodded toward a door. I opened it and went inside. It was a small private office with a coral colored rug on the floor. Seated at the walnut desk was a harness lieutenant from the local precinct named Harry Bliss. He was talking to a big red-faced man of about fifty who was wearing a sharkskin suit, a camel's hair topcoat and a brown Homberg hat. The man kept wiping his fat face with a big white handkerchief.

Bliss rose. "This is Mr. Fly," he said to me. "Mr. Fly, Detective-Lieutenant Pebble of the Homicide Bureau."

"Take off your coat, Mr. Fly," I said. "You'll be more comfortable."

"I never thought of that," he muttered. "Thanks."

"Harry," I said. "I have a new kid named Saunders working with me. I wonder if you'd send him in."

"Sure, Max," he said.

He went out. I took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to Fly. He shook his head impatiently. Saunders knocked and came in.

"Now take it easy and make yourself comfortable," I said to Fly. "This may get monotonous."

"I've told the story a dozen times, Lieutenant."

"Once more," I said gently. "This time Detective Saunders is taking it down."

HHE TOOK a deep breath. "My name is James Fly. The man in there is my

partner, Arthur Melrose. I got off the eighty-forty-seven this morning. As I started to get off the train, I looked up at our office windows as I usually do. Just habit, I suppose. They face the railroad station. I saw a terrible sight." He stopped and covered his face with the handkerchief. His shoulders trembled.

I waited. He wiped his eyes and looked at me, then at Saunders.

"Sorry, Lieutenant," he said. "It's still very vivid in my mind. I saw a man beating Arthur Melrose over the head with a bronze paperweight. Arthur was trying to get away from him. He was halfway out of the open window and the man was raining blows on his head. I screamed and grabbed a passenger next to me. Just then the man disappeared from the window."

"Could you describe the man? Could you recognize a picture of him?"

"No. I don't think so. I couldn't see him very well. He looked big and dark complected. Dark suit, dark hat." He swallowed twice.

"The bronze paperweight," I said. "Did it belong in the office?"

"Yes. It came from Mr. Melrose's desk."

"What kind of business do you operate here, Mr. Fly?"

"The Fly-Melrose Corporation. We're real estate brokers."

"Any employees?"

"We do a small business. We have one girl and she's been on a few weeks' vacation. Her mother is ill."

"I'll want her address," I said. He gave it to me. "Melrose have any enemies?" I asked.

"No. Not that I know of."

"Married?"

"He was a widower. No children."

"Girl friend?"

His face flushed. "I don't think so."

"How long have you been associated with him?"

"Two years. We had separate businesses. We decided to merge."

"Business good?"

"I thought so. Melrose wanted more volume. We all do."

"I'll want your fingerprints," I said.

He looked at me in surprise. He seemed shocked.

"Process of elimination, Mr. Fly," I

explained. "We're going to try and find some fingerprints. We'll want yours and Melrose's and the girl's. Any others will be strangers."

"I see," he said. "I didn't understand."

"You may go home now," I said. "Please leave your address and prints with Detective Saunders here."

10:15 A.M.

I WAS still in the small private office. In the adjoining room, the Medical Examiner had come and gone and had taken the body with him. Men from the Technical Laboratory were still puttering around.

"There you are, Saunders," I said. "Ten witnesses. A Mr. Gordon tells me Fly was in a hurry this morning. Pushed by him in the aisle of the car. When Fly reached the platform and looked up, he almost passed out in Gordon's arms. Ten people looked up when he screamed. Ten people saw the body up there. Nobody was sure they saw a dark man. A Mr. Brady *thinks* he saw a shadow near the window. The eight-forty-seven from Belmont arrives here at nine-fifteen. The M.E. says Melrose died at around nine o'clock. Maybe ten minutes either way. What did you find?"

"The paperweight is missing, sir," Saunders said. "It doesn't seem to be a robbery either. Melrose's wallet was in his pocket. Nothing in the place seems to have been disturbed."

"What about fingerprints?"

"They don't think they're going to find any."

"No. No fingerprints. Science is sure wonderful, and that's great stuff you've learned at school. Find a hair or a thumb print or a torn letter and you have something to work on. Only," I said sadly, "people don't leave stuff around anymore. Some of them you have to crack by walking and talking and fitting pieces together. Sometimes somebody says too much and sometimes they say too little. You have to learn what to throw out and what to use."

"Yes, sir. We checked on Fly like you said. He's been married only a year. First wife died ten years ago. No children. Lives at Belmont Arms out in Belmont. No record except for some

traffic violations."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"There's a calendar desk pad with names and addresses on it."

"Let's see it."

He handed it to me, a brown bakelite covered thing with a push button to pop the leaves up. There were names and dates and addresses and figures all done in a neat fine handwriting.

"Business deals," I said. "It'll take days to check them. Here's one. Just a telephone number."

"Is that strange, Lieutenant?"

"Might be. Just a number and nothing else. A man might want to hide things, subconsciously and unknowingly. Algonquin four eight six eight eight. Check it."

He went out. I rose and went over to the window. Out in the depot in front of me an express company was loading some cartons onto a truck. Saunders came back. He handed me a slip of paper.

"*The Samba*," I said. "Nick Greco's place."

"That looks like a lead, sir," Saunders said.

"Don't be too sure. Fellows like Melrose like to kick their heels up once in a while in a night club. You might as well send in that elevator operator now."

The elevator man wore a neat gray uniform. He had a wrinkled brown face and white woolly hair. I looked at the card Saunders put down in front of me.

"Your name is George Halsey?" I asked. "You've been here fifteen years?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Halsey, there's only one elevator in the building. Therefore you see everybody who comes up or down."

"Yes, sir. On the elevator, that is."

"Take any strangers up this morning?"

"You mean before the murder, sir?"

"Before the police came."

"No, sir. All tenants."

"Any of the tenants big, dark complected? Dark suit, dark hat?"

"No, sir." He thought a moment and shook his head. "No sir. Mr. Desmond, he's small. Miss Thaelke runs the dancing school. Mr. Croopnick is fat and light skinned. He was the dental laboratory. There were the only ones who came up on the elevator."

AFTER a moment I asked, "Could anyone come up the stairs without you seeing them?"

"I expect they could, sir, with the elevator running. They'd have to come in and out through the basement."

"What time did Mr. Melrose usually get in?"

"Nine o'clock."

"And Mr. Fly?"

"About nine-thirty."

"Thanks, Mr. Halsey. That's all for now."

He shook his head sadly and went out. I peered over at Saunders. He was toying with the calendar pad and there was a thoughtful look on his face.

"Got any ideas, Saunders?" I asked.

"It's a funny case, Lieutenant," he said. "Have you thought about it? It's like that poem."

"You mean the nursery rhyme? The one about Cock Robin? I've thought about it."

"Yes, sir. That second stanza goes:

Who saw him die?

'I,' said the fly

With my little eye

I saw him die.'"

"It'd be pretty good if it worked out," I said. "But it wouldn't. Not for us. That would make it too easy. Besides, there's a lot of difference between a bow and arrow and a paperweight." I rose and grabbed my hat. "Here we are spouting nursery rhymes when there's work to do. Let's go down to the basement and talk to the building superintendent."

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Funny just the same," I said, "that someone named Fly should see him die."

We went out and took the elevator down to the basement.

The boiler room was hot and dark, with a smell of Deisel oil. We went past huge storage bins and down a narrow passageway. We came out onto a large room with a single lighted bulb hanging from the ceiling. There was a small bench with an orderly array of tools on it.

"I don't see him," Saunders said.

"I see him," I said.

I pointed under the bench. The body of a man was lying there. He was dressed in blue denim coveralls and on his bashed head there was a black cap

with a black shiny visor. The blood had run down along his face and onto the concrete floor. Beside his crumpled body there was a small, heavy, bronze statuette of a rearing horse with his two front legs up in the air.

I reached down and touched the wrist. There was no pulse. "Ice cold," I said. The face was twisted in horror.

Saunders looked. The breath came out of him. There was a pause. "It looks as if we've found the paperweight, sir."

"That's great," I said tonelessly. "This is the part that hurts, Saunders. This man here is the kind that has a family."

"Now I know what you meant before, sir."

"Okay," I said. "Now you know. You'd better go up and phone the M.E. again."

1:55 P.M.

THE house was not new, but it was well kept. The furniture was old, but proudly polished. The room itself was quiet. Outside we heard a car go by on the tree shaded street. On the living room coffee table there were three cups of tea, and nobody had touched a drop.

The girl's name was Irene Solodon. Black haired, small, eighteen years of age. Big green eyes, smoothly rounded face, tiny nose—and pretty.

"My mother is very ill," she whispered. "We'll have to keep our voices down."

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said softly. "I know all this has been quite a shock to you, so I'm going to be as brief as possible. How did the partners get along?"

"Fine, I thought. They seemed to like one another."

"Make any passes at you?"

"You mean Mr. Melrose?"

"Or Mr. Fly."

"Oh, no. They were both perfect gentlemen."

"Then there was reason for—say—a boy friend of yours to think so?"

"I don't even have a steady, sir."

"Did Mr. Fly ever ask you to do anything that wasn't ethical? Like, for example, not recording commissions?"

"No."

"Mr. Melrose"

"No, sir."

"Now the building superintendent—Mr. Gresham—did he have any personal or business dealings with the firm?"

"Mr. Gresham?" she asked in surprise. "Not that I know of, sir."

"Thanks very much," I said. "That's all, Miss Solodon. Sorry to have troubled you."

4:18 P.M.

BIG and plushy, the Belmont Arms was built in English Manor style. Big broadloom in the lobby with a floral design. Walnut panels on the walls, Chippendale furniture, and suits of armor in the corners.

The sleek looking desk clerk put a stack of cards down and ran a finger over a thin mustache.

"Very sorry, Mr. Pebble," he said as he looked me over. His voice had a little sneer to it. "Mr. and Mrs. Fly left instructions not to be disturbed by anyone."

"That's all right," I said. "What time does Mr. Fly usually come down in the morning?"

"I'm sorry, but we don't discuss our tenants."

I brought the leather folder out of my pocket and showed it to him. The gold plated shield winked in the light of the desk lamp. Behind me Saunders chewed his gum nervously.

The clerk drummed the desk with his fingers. He looked bored. "Mr. Fly," he said coldly, "usually descends the lift about seven-forty-five in the morning."

"Talk English, mister," I said. "You mean he comes down the elevator at a quarter to eight."

"That is correct, sir."

"How far is it to the railroad station?"

"A two minute walk."

"You don't happen to know if he has his breakfast before he comes down?"

A thin plucked eyebrow lifted. "I'm sure that is none of my affair, sergeant."

"Lieutenant," I said. "Let's put it this way, mister. Do you have a dining room here?"

"An excellent one."

"Does he eat his breakfast there?"

"I don't care to divulge our tenants' personal affairs, sir. We have a policy here of discreetness. We don't pry. We certainly don't allow others to pry."

"That's real nice, I said. "Well, my job is to pry. And if I'm not discreet enough we can go downtown and talk it over very discreetly in a small room. Then maybe we can go down to the D.A.'s office and have you talk under oath. Would that be more discreet, mister?"

"I—I think we can discuss it here."

"I think so. Now, does he have his breakfasts here?"

"Yes. Every morning."

"Same time?"

"Yes. He ordinarily finishes breakfast at eight-thirty."

"This morning," I said. "Did he come down at the usual time?"

"Yes."

"Did he go into the dining room as usual?"

"I—I don't really know. I presume he did."

"But you didn't see him."

"I have many duties," he said. "I don't believe I noticed."

"Where's the man in charge of the dining room?"

"The steward? In his office. To the left at the archway."

"Thanks," I said. "Detective Saunders will take your name and address."

We went in through the arched doorway and to a small leather covered door that said *Mr. Goyette*. I knocked. We waited a moment and the door opened.

The man standing there was fat and bald and well fed. I showed him the leather folder. He motioned us in and we sat down in the tiny office. He squeezed in behind his desk and pushed a menu aside.

"Mr. Goyette," I said. "Do you know a tenant here named Fly?"

"Very well. Mr. Fly fancies himself as a gourmet, an epicure. We strive hard to please him."

"They tell me he has his breakfasts here."

"Oh, yes. Fruit juice with sherbet, toast, four strips of bacon, two dropped eggs, a pot of coffee and finger rolls.

Sometimes he changes the style of the eggs."

"Every morning?"

"Every morning."

"This morning?"

"This morning? Let me see. As a matter of fact, I remarked about it to the captain of waiters. Mr. Fly just had his coffee and left."

"Does he do that often?"

"No. I think, three times since I remember."

"Thank you, Mr. Goyette."

We left the Belmont Arms and again entered the car. Saunders swung the sedan around and we headed for the city. There was a faraway look in his eyes.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"All I see," he said, "is a couple of corpses and a nursery rhyme. Maybe we'd be smart if we looked for a Mr. Sparrow with a bow and arrow."

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe not."

9:16 P.M.

WE FOUND the *Samba* small, but with a lot of glass brick and a lot of chrome and a lot of deep maroon carpeting. The booths along the mural-covered walls were circular and done in tufted maroon leather. The murals themselves were done in nudes. There was bar of glass brick with colored lights running through it. The bar ran the length of the room. It was attended by four thick-set bartenders in white coats and maroon bowties.

The place was half empty as yet, and through the foyer I could see two couples dancing on a floor the size of a small tablecloth. The band wore maroon jackets piped in white.

The hatcheck girl came over with a frozen smile. She wore a little maroon suit with silver buttons, a high choke collar, and a tiny flared skirt. Her legs were sheathed in bright red opera length silk hose and she had high heeled, red pumps on her feet. Her hair was bleached blond, and she was trying hard to look sophisticated.

"The owner here must like red," Saunders said. "I wonder if he wears red flannel underwear."

"Your hats, gentlemen," the girl said.

"Police," I said. "We'll keep them."

"Cops," she said under her breath.

I took Melrose's picture out and showed it to her. "He ever come in here?" I asked. "His name is—" I turned to Saunders and trailed off the rest of it.

"No," she said. "I don't remember any Mr. Melrose."

"I didn't say his name was Melrose," I said. "Let's hear more."

"He used to come here," she said sullenly. "Haven't seen him lately."

"Get dressed," I said. "Maybe you'll talk better when we get downtown."

Nick Greco came over then. Big, heavy and swarthy. Black, thick hair, dented nose and cauliflower ears. He was wearing a crimson carnation on the lapel of his dinner jacket.

"What do you want, Lieutenant?" he asked shortly.

"I have some questions to ask the girl," I said. "She doesn't want to talk here. I'm taking her with me."

"She stays here, Pebble," he said. "She's working on hats. Nobody takes my girls away from their jobs. Nobody."

"I'm taking her, Greco. You figuring on stopping me?"

"I can stop you, Lieutenant. All I have to do is make a little phone call."

"I don't like clip joints," I said, "and I don't like this one. You can call every ward heeler you know, Greco, but she goes with me if she doesn't talk."

He looked at me carefully. He flexed his knuckles. Saunders looked at him eagerly and expectantly. Greco shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a tough cop," he said to me. "Hard to get along with."

"Not me, Greco."

"I don't want no trouble, Lieutenant." He turned to the girl. "Tell him what he wants to know, Vicki."

He started to move away.

"Stick around," I said. "I might want to talk to you, too."

He sat down. I nodded to Vicki. "How well did you know Mr. Melrose?"

"He used to bring some clients here," she said. "I went out on a couple of parties to entertain them. Melrose was

a nice gent and he was easy with a buck."

"Did you know his partner?"

"I heard of him."

"The partner ever go out on the parties?"

"No. He never went along." She laughed coarsely, showing big yellow teeth. "Melrose said he was just married, and the guy was still in love with his wife."

"Where were you this morning?"

"We close here at four A.M. I sleep until noon. I think I can prove it."

"Give everything to Detective Saunders," I said. I looked over at Greco. "What about it?" I asked. "Any objection to Vicki going out on these parties?"

"It's good for business," he said.

"I mean otherwise."

"There's no otherwise. I don't fool around with the help."

"Where were you this morning, Greco?"

"Home, Lieutenant. I got proof, too."

"I'll want it," I said.

11:27 P.M.

THE NIGHT clerk at the Belmont Arms rose and rubbed his chin.

"Lieutenant Pebble to see Mr. Fly," I said.

He went over to the switchboard and pushed a plug in. He pressed a key down, once, then twice. After a while he spoke into the mouthpiece. He looked over his shoulder at me.

"Mr. Fly says it's rather late."

"This can't wait," I said.

He spoke into the mouthpiece again and put it down. "Tenth floor," he said. "Suite Ten twenty-five. The elevators are to the rear, sir."

We went up. The elevator boy held onto the lever and yawned sleepily. We got off at the tenth floor and walked down the hall. At the end of the corridor a door was open. When we came to it we saw Fly standing there in silk pajamas and silk robe.

"I was trying to get some sleep, Lieutenant," he said. "It's been a harrowing day."

"It has," I said as we went in.

A woman was standing at the entrance to the bedroom. She was wearing a lacy negligee and she looked sleepy. She surprised me. She was less than thirty years old and she had a smooth firm skin and ash blond hair.

"My wife," Fly said. "Celeste, these gentlemen are from the police."

"It looks as if we've wound it up," I said to Fly.

"You mean you have the murderer?"

"We have him. Get your things, Fly. We're taking you in."

"Me? For what?"

"For the murder of Arthur Melrose and Superintendent Gresham."

He looked at me glassily. Mrs. Fly's eyes were like two saucers. "You mean to tell me that James killed a person?" she asked.

"Two people," I said.

"It's preposterous," she said. "There'll be the biggest suit for false arrest in the history of the city."

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe not. Help him get his things, Saunders."

"I demand an explanation for this high-handed manner," she said angrily.

"Sorry," I said. "It's been a long, tiring day, and I didn't realize how it all sounds to you so sudden-like. I guess you are entitled to an explanation. You see, the D.A.'s office is checking the Fly-Melrose books. I'm afraid they'll find that your husband has stolen some money in these past few weeks."

"But why?" she asked.

"Why? The girl was away. There was his chance. That made it easier."

"I mean, why would he *want* to steal money?"

"Look around, Mrs. Fly. Look at the way you live. The money has to come from somewhere. The company doesn't do that much business. It had to come out of the capital."

"But you said he was responsible for two murders."

"Yes. Because Melrose found out, and Melrose had to be done away with. Your husband didn't want to go to jail, ma'am."

"That's ridiculous," Fly said. "Why I was getting off the train when the murder was being committed. I have witnesses."

I NODDED. "Sure," I said. "Ten witnesses, Fly. Ten witnesses that saw a body hanging out of a window and that's all. How do you buy your train tickets?"

"I use commuter tickets."

"You take the eight-forty-seven every morning?"

"Yes."

"Same seat?"

"Ye-es."

"You're hesitating now, Fly. You know the conductor gets to recognize the regular commuters pretty well. You know the conductor didn't see you on the eight-forty-seven this morning."

"I don't care about the conductor," he said. "People saw me getting off it."

"Sure, you got off it. A minute after you got on. You came down the elevator here at your usual time. But you didn't spend the usual time eating. You just had a cup of coffee—because you were in a hurry. You had to get an earlier train. You took the eight-twenty-nine and you arrived in the city at nine o'clock. You went in through the basement and up the stairs. You grabbed the paperweight and killed Melrose. After that you pushed him half out of the window. Then you went back down through the basement again."

"A bad thing happened there. You bumped into Gresham, the superintendent, and your whole plan was ruined. You had to kill him, too. Then you left the building through the alley and waited for your regular train to come in. When it did, you hopped on the rear platform and pushed through to the front. That's where you put on that act."

"It seems to be all speculation," Mrs. Fly said.

"Maybe it does—so far," I said. "But there's more. We'll find more now that we've started to dig in the right spot. There's that paperweight. Your husband couldn't describe the murderer in the window. He said he couldn't see him well. Yet he could describe a small object like a paperweight and he even knew where it came from." I turned to Fly. "Did I leave anything out?"

"No," Fly said. "That's everything."

He dashed suddenly for the window.

(Concluded on page 95)

Larkin was near the window, a gun in his hand



DEATH'S DUET

By GEORGE WILLIAM RAE

Was a killer's love the destiny of Virginia Belle?

VIRGINIA BELLE had considered the man in the next room. His face was honest and he was big and capable-looking. He could be—but she stopped right there. Men were all alike when it came to a woman. She should know. No matter how honest their faces were. She'd make out somehow.

She tried to walk, but could only manage a painful hobble. Her right ankle was red and swollen. Sitting back on the bed, she glanced at Joey. He was sleeping quietly in his nest of blue blankets in his bureau-drawer cradle.

"Sleep, honey, everything'll work out just fine," she whispered. Her voice had sunny Southern town in it and her

eyes a clean and shimmering touch of Texas sky. She was young, twenty-three, and not very tall, but slim and well formed.

The knock on the door brought her bolt upright on the bed. Her face slowly lost its color and a pulse began to hammer in her throat.

Texas was a long way off and everybody she knew was there. The knock came again. "Who is it?" She managed to keep her voice level.

"The landlord." The voice was loud and rough. Like his beastly rooming-house, she thought.

She hobbled to the door, turned the key. She stood blocking the door. "What do you want?"

The man was short and bald and dirty. His sweated stomach hung flabbily over his belt. "Now look, lady," he said, "you've got to get that kid out of here. I ain't tryin' to be tough or mean, but I just can't have kids in this place. This is no place for kids."

She met his eyes levelly. "I told you I'd get out when my ankle is better," Virginia said. "I sprained it on your unlighted stairs."

"They's been complaints about the kid cryin'," he told her. "Either get out right away or I'll get a cop."

Her eyes lost something at the mention of the police. The police meant losing Joey and she couldn't have that. That was why she'd put a thousand miles between Joey and Texas.

"Look, kid," the landlord said, "why don't you go back to your home town. I've seen a lot of girls like you, don't kid me. You're a looker and you'd make out. So you made a mistake, everybody does that once in a while!" He put a caressing hand on her shoulder. "Maybe you could stay if—"

His hand was swept off her shoulder and he was smashed back against the wall. The man facing him was broad across the shoulders and his eyes were chips of blue ice.

"Get your hands off my wife," the man said, "and get to blazes out of here. If I see you bothering her again you'll be chewing some knuckles."

"Your wife!" the landlord said. "Look, Mr. Larkin, I know only too well—"

Larkin cut in, "So we had a little

quarrel and took separate rooms. That's none of your business. Scram."

The landlord went mumbling down the dark, dirty stairs.

Virginia Belle looked at Larkin. He was too well dressed to belong in a place like that, and for all his honest face, she now noticed the hard wrinkles about his eyes and the way they had of flickering about like an animal that is being hunted. That would explain everything. Larkin was a criminal, hiding out.

But he had helped her and she was grateful. She thanked him and turned to reenter the room. Her ankle gave out and she was falling. He caught her, lifted her as easily as she lifted Joey, and carried her to the bed.

He bent over her, looked at the ankle, touched a finger to the swelling. Then he turned. At the door he said, "That should be bandaged. I'll be back."

When he closed the door, she lay on the bed suddenly very tired and very lonely. This draughty room was a long way from Texas and this was just the beginning of the road.

NOW she turned over slowly, while her eyes moved over the room, over the cracked ceiling and loud wallpaper and scarred furniture. It had been cheap, that's why she'd chosen the place, but the landlord was right, it was no place for a child.

Her eyes came to rest on Joey and they clouded over. Maybe he'd been right about going back. She shook that off. She wouldn't go back and give him up. He was hers and she intended to keep him no matter what the Court decided. She'd been wrong about his father and she'd paid for that and plenty! She had been granted a divorce, no matter what had been decided about custody. She was keeping Joey as long as she kept her life.

Virginia's eyes came to rest on the newspaper. It was three days old and she'd used some of it as a tablecloth, but the front page was still there and the headlines glared at her.

CONDEMNED MURDERER ESCAPES

In a daring courtroom escape dash, Frank Samuels, who, five minutes earlier, had been sentenced to death by electrocution, succeeded in eluding pursuit and vanishing into thin

air. Handcuffed to a deputy, Samuels overpowered his captor and knocked him unconscious. Using the deputy's key, Samuels freed himself from the handcuffs.

The escaped prisoner is believed to be hiding out somewhere in the city, as police immediately blocked all exits.

Samuels, police warn, is an extremely dangerous man, and will arm himself. Citizens are warned to be on the lookout for him and asked to notify police if his whereabouts is determined. Officers in all sections of the city were ordered to shoot to kill.

Samuels was found guilty of murdering a young girl cashier and an aged guard in a payroll holdup last May.

Footsteps were coming up the stairs. She stuffed the paper under the bed and turned suddenly dilated eyes at the slowly turning doorknob.

Larkin entered and closed the door. He held a large brown-paper bag in his arm. She watched him cross the room and set it down upon the table.

"Hi, kid, I'm back," he said. "Now we'll get that ankle taped."

Virginia swallowed, nodded, but couldn't speak. Her breath was locked within her chest. She thought of the printed words: "Found guilty of murdering a young girl cashier and an aged guard." He had propped a pillow under the calf of her leg and was winding two-inch gauze bandage around the ankle.

She watched his big hands. They were long-fingered, clean. They tore adhesive tape from the roll with easy strength. "How does that feel?" he asked, turning his head. Light touched his eyes. They were hard, but suddenly they were no longer cold. He smiled. He did not act like a ruthless killer.

"That feels fine," she said. "Thank you."

"Forget it," he said. She studied his face. It was a rugged, sharp-planed face, not handsome, she decided, but somehow pleasant. He had a wide mouth and thick lips and when he smiled, she noticed strong, white teeth.

Joey stirred in his bureau drawer. Larkin rose easily. There was something catlike about him, for all his size. This Samuels, the police had warned, was an extremely dangerous man!

Larkin walked over to Joey's nest and knelt beside him. Joey opened his eyes, stretched and grinned up at Larkin.

"Hi, kid, how's tricks?" Larkin said.

Joey laughed and stretched again. Larkin stood up. "Do you think the kid's hungry?" he asked.

"It's time for his bottle," she answered, and started to rise. Larkin pushed her back down on the bed.

"I'll get it," he said, and following her directions, he prepared the bottle, heated it on the electric plate and propped it up in the bureau drawer. With a contented gurgle, Joey feasted for a few moments and went back to sleep.

Larkin went to the table and reached into the paper bag. He brought out wax-paper wrapped sandwiches and cardboard containers of coffee. "How about you, Mommy?" he said as he grinned. "Me, I'm starved." This was scarcely the manner of the slayer of a young girl.

She swung her feet over the edge of the bed, fluffed her tawny hair and accepted a sandwich gratefully.

They ate in silence for a few moments. Somewhere in the ancient, filthy rooming-house, a radio moaned with a blues song. The raw November wind gnawed with sharp teeth at the window.

This was a large city, with many crooked streets and dark alleys and dingy rooming-houses where an escaped prisoner could be unknown. A man could hide for a time, but only for a time. He was bucking the percentage. Slowly, slowly, they'd close in and for her money, that would be the end of the one kind person she'd met since she'd left Texas.

Just her luck with men! That one back in Texas with his sweet talk and his darkly handsome face, who had caused the divorce. Now this one, an escaped murderer!

"What's in it for you?" she said.

He put down his coffee container. "In what?"

"Running," Virginia said.

He laughed harshly. "Not for long," he said. "What's in it for you?"

He had her there. She was running too. And maybe not for long, either.

They smoked a cigarette in silence and when he was ready to leave, he said, "Keep off that ankle as much as you can. I'll get your grub and bring it in."

"That's dangerous, isn't it?" she

wanted to know.

He smiled. "You're a smart kid, you know a lot," he answered. "Yeah, it's dangerous. Good night."

The door closed softly behind him. After a minute, she went to it and turned the key. She went back to the bed and sat there looking at the floor.

NEXT morning the swelling in her ankle was worse and it was far more painful than the night before. She could barely hobble about preparing Joey's bottle.

He came about eight-thirty, the man who called himself Larkin. He had another paper bag from the delicatessen. This time it was a quart of fresh milk, a half-dozen Danish pastries and more cartons of coffee.

She spread the table after Joey was given his bottle and they ate and drank. She sat on the bed and Larkin used the only chair in the room.

"How's the ankle?" he asked.

"Worse."

"You might need a doctor, its a bad sprain."

She shook her head. "Doctors ask questions," she said. "Questions lead to Welfare People, Welfare People gobble up kids—like my Joey. That's why I'm here. They tried it once."

So she told him all about it. He hadn't asked and maybe he didn't care. Anyway he hadn't asked and he'd been kind to her, this man who was evidently wanted for murder. She had seen the picture.

"Al was foreman on my husband's ranch. He'd always been nice to me, and we were good friends. But my husband got to thinking there was something between us. There wasn't. He got so mean and abusive I couldn't stand it any longer. Sometimes I think he did it because he wanted to be free of me. When I said I was going to divorce him, he didn't try to stop me, and that was that."

"The divorce was granted and he got part-time custody of Joey. But I was afraid he'd take Joey away so I planned to come here with the baby. Then the Welfare People got me and I managed to sneak away from them just when they were getting the commitment papers ready. Here I am—nicely framed, now

accused of kidnaping my own kid. Twenty bucks left, but here I am."

He thought about it for a while. "I don't like your husband," he said. "I don't like him a bit. He's the guy. He had no real evidence against you and that foreman. Even if he couldn't forgive you on account of the kid he was a thick-skulled old fossil let you get away from him." Larkin lighted a cigarette, gave it to her, lighted one for himself. "Some people never grow up," Larkin said finally and closed his wide lips tightly over his teeth.

"Like people who play cops and robbers?" she asked. "Or guys who try to get rich quick?"

She was sorry right after she said it and told him so. All Larkin said was, "Forget it," and he went out.

Two more days passed. On the third morning he was late getting back with the coffee and when he finally came, he put the coffee on the table and went to the window. His face was pale and hard and his eyes looked dangerous. More than ever, he reminded her of a great cat—a deadly, powerful cat now, playing a game for his life.

He stood at the window a long time, then he sat with her and they had their coffee.

He didn't say anything until they'd reached their cigarettes. She watched him covertly all through the meal. They've found him. For some reason the thought brought an icy hand to her throat. It wasn't fear of him, but fear for him. He meant something to her, more than she wanted to admit.

He handed her her cigarette. His hand was cool and steady when it touched hers. His eyes had gone cold again, cold and hard and distant.

"I'm leaving tonight, baby," he said. Smoke streamed from his nostrils with a long, harsh breath. He put a roll of bills in her hand, jerked a thumb at Joey, guzzling his bottle in the bureau drawer. "It says there that you and the little guy should have a better break."

She was on her feet and so was Larkin. Her arms went around his neck and she drew his head down and kissed those wide lips. She liked that kiss, she'd remember it a long time, longer than the empty words of those snooping

Welfare People. If he was a murderer it didn't mean a thing, not a thing, he'd always be the guy for her.

"Why did you do it?" she asked. "What's in it for you?"

"Do what?"

"Go out there. You knew they were there looking for you."

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe I've seen too many rotten things, maybe I wanted to be a part of something good, just once. Or maybe it's because I love you two, yeah, maybe that's it."

HE WAS gone! The room was emptier than it had ever been before, and colder, and lonelier.

She went to the window and looked down. The littered street was empty of life. The wind skittered an old newspaper along the gutter. Not a person was in sight.

But they're there, she thought, they're there all right. They can wait. They've got time. That's the one thing that they'll whip him with—time!

She wanted to help him. Just as he had helped her. In a way, she knew what it was to be hunted, to be on the outside of society. But she kept seeing the lines in the newspaper: "—found guilty of murdering a young girl cashier and an aged guard—"

The man called Larkin had been kind, even gentle, but she remembered the catlike smoothness of his walk, the big, bony-knuckled fists, the flickering eyes in their beds of wrinkles. Larkin had been kind, but he could be tough. Larkin could kill, she had no doubt of that. Perhaps she'd better forget Larkin and think of Joey and herself.

She walked over to where Joey slept, bent over him, cooing at him, fluffing the blankets. She walked around the room, straightening things here and there, and she wound up back at the window, looking down at that cold, empty street. The empty street that screamed danger with its very emptiness.

She couldn't forget Larkin. There was quality in Larkin. There was strength, even if it was a dark and deadly strength. He was all man. The kind of a man her grandpappy had told her

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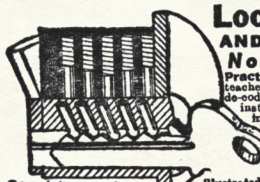
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She'd know then what she must do—help him or forget him. Men have been railroaded to the chair as she had been framed into a divorce by a sneak. Innocent men. Was he one of these?

She went out, down the hall, tapped on his door. "Frank," she said softly. "Come in," he said.

Virginia slipped in and closed the door. Larkin was sitting near the window, a little to one side of it. He had a gun in his hand, broken, and he was inserting a clip. It was a large, flat automatic. He handled it with the smooth assurance of one who has a complete knowledge of his weapon.

"Where'd you pick up that 'Frank', baby?" he said. Then he laughed, with his mouth, not his eyes. "Oh, you've been reading the newspapers and putting things together." He laughed again, this time a little of it got into his eyes.

"Frank, I'm going to ask you one question," she said. "You can answer yes or no, or not answer at all, but I've got to ask it."

The automatic made sharp clicking noises and he bent to the window, carefully scanned the street for a moment. Then, without looking, he said. "Shoot, kid."

"Did you kill them, Frank?" she whispered, the thing had her by the throat again, "that girl and that old guard—did you kill them?"

Anxious seconds ticked away. He didn't turn. She stood there, unable to move a muscle, feeling her heart pounding heavily, slowly within her.

Then he turned and the light from the window passed slowly over his face. The face seemed chipped from granite and the eyes were filmed and distant—smoky, dangerous.

"No." Just the one word. One clipped, icy word.

She felt her breath burst up and a sob

bubbled in her throat. Larkin hadn't killed them. Larkin had said so and Larkin was not a liar, he was a man, and men don't lie and won't lie. They can't.

"I'm going to help you, Frank."

"Larkin," he said.

"Okay, Larkin, I'm going to help you."

He was looking out the window again. "You can't help me, baby," he said softly, as softly as he had ever spoken to her, but the words were steel-lined, "there's nothing to do. Nothing but waiting."

She was beside him, kneeling on one knee, her hands moving over his face, her eyes locking with his. "There is, Larkin, there must be! You can't just sit here, like a coyote in a hole, waiting to be killed!"

"That's all there is to do," he said.

"No, Larkin! Maybe we could sneak out together. If we had the baby with us—"

"There'd be three dead people, instead of one," he cut in. "No go, kid, you tried. You're all right. If I thought I had a chance to pull out of this, you'd be sort of nice to have around."

He let it hang there for a minute, like he was tasting it, like it was some kind of sweet, forbidden wine. Then his eyes filmed over again, smoky and cold. He got up, took her arms as he would that of a child, gently, firmly. He led her to the door, opened it and firmly pushed her into the hall.

"It's no good kid, I've got to play this out alone," he said. "And it's going to be messy around here. Take the little guy and scram. You've had enough, you don't want any of this."

He closed the door. She stood in the grimy hall, anger and loneliness tight within her. She didn't leave. She waited with him. He in one room, she in the other and the minutes trickled by and dropped into eternity like the lifeblood from her veins.

Night crept up the littered street. The wind sharpened its teeth with an edge of coldness. Yellow street lights, one at each end of the block, merely tinged the dangerous darkness which hung thickly between them.

Through the long hours she had

[Turn page]

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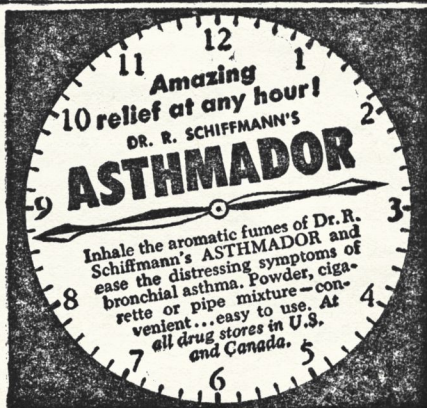
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thought of a hundred things to do that might save him, but discarded each thought with painful reluctance. Obviously calling the police was out, and beyond that, what was left? Larkin himself had refused to sneak away. There was nothing left, but to wait. To wait and to die slowly waiting for whatever would happen.

As darkness came, she saw to Joey and then sat, without lights, by the window. Time, their weapon, was numbing her and she nodded, caught herself, and nodded again.

EVIDENTLY, she must have slept. The swollen ankle felt ever so much better. There was a feeling of lost, elapsed time. The street outside was exactly as before, but the rooming-house sounds had died to silence.

What had awakened her? She held her breath, listening intently. Joey's quiet, uneven breathing whispered across the room at her. Then she heard the sound. A creak on the stairs. She rose swiftly, limped across the room to the door, stood beside it, her mouth open so that her very breathing would be silent.

The footsteps were dreamlike in their cautious ascent, but she could hear them as she would the thunder of doom. She opened her mouth wider, wanting to scream, but her vocal chords wouldn't respond.

She heard the footsteps reach the landing and pause. There was intense and hurtful silence for a moment, then she heard an oiled click as if a mechanical, metallic thing were being primed. She knew what it was. Any Texan woman knew that sound. It was the safety catch of a gun being released.

A chink of dim, yellow light came through a crack at the edge of the door, she pressed her face close.

The man stood opposite her door, his profile and entire left side facing her. He wasn't very tall, nor very dangerous looking. He was dressed in a dark overcoat and gray Homberg hat and his shoes were black and shiny.

As people often do in tense moments, she had a peculiar emotional reaction, "God help his wife." She looked that

thought over carefully. How could she know he had a wife? Well, most detectives did, she supposed. She was sorry for a woman married to a man who had to face Larkin in that dirty, dimlit hallway. That was no place for someone you loved—and the one she loved was there. Larkin was there!

That brushed away all extraneous thoughts. She screamed, "Larkin! Larkin they're here—" and she tore at the doorknob with stiff fingers, screaming and sobbing at once.

In the hallway she could hear swift movement. A soft, fervent curse. Then the shots, several of them. There was a harsh ripping sound and the sharp tinkle of breaking glass. She finally got the door open.

The Homberg hat rolled to her feet and the detective lay sprawled full length on the threadbare carpet. His right hand still clutched his gun and one of his knees was moving as if he were trying to crawl.

The thought stabbed at her again, this time like a dagger! God help his wife. Larkin stood down the hall before his door. His gun was in his hand and his face was dripping sweat.

She ran to him through the thin, acrid gunsmoke. "Get out, Larkin!" she cried, "while you've got the chance. The rest of them'll kill you, too."

"He's not dead," Larkin said. "I should've killed him—but I couldn't. He'll live."

She was pulling him toward the stairs. "Run, they'll be here in a minute! This is your only chance!" her voice was rising rapidly to hysteria.

Instead of running, Larkin took her into his arms and he was kissing her when the first bluecoated policeman charged up the stairs. There was an-

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other behind him and outside police whistles were keening shrilly on the wind.

She kissed him and kept on kissing him and clinging to him, waiting for the terrible shock of the bullets. But they didn't come. She heard the first cop say "Frankie Samuels!" and she turned to glare at him, but the cop wasn't even looking at Larkin.

The policeman was looking at the man on the floor. They were all mixed up. They were looking at the wrong man, several policemen now, all with drawn guns. They were looking at the man on the floor and saying, "Frankie Samuels—Frankie Samuels!"

LARKIN was looking down at her, Larkin was saying, "I'm sorry I couldn't tell you, baby, but I had to put you through the wringer. There's no way to keep a secret but to button up over it tight. The old guard in the holdup was my father. I was there, I was visiting him that day and I saw it all.

"I was the best witness the State had against Samuels. It was my picture, as that witness, that you saw in the paper. I wanted that rat to burn, but when he crashed out the other day, I thought I would like to kill him with my own hands, just like he killed my father. To put a whole clip of bullets in him and kick his face in while he crawled and died.

"I put the word out in the right places where he'd get wind of it that I was holing up here. He naturally hated my insides for putting him in the chair, there wasn't another witness.

"With me dead, he could've got a new trial and, who knows, might've wormed out of it or got a lighter sentence. He had to find me, I figured, he had to come

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to me, and that would give me my chance to kill him. But I guess I couldn't kill a man like that. Let the State have him. He'll be just as dead and I won't have him crawling around my brain for the rest of my life."

The cops swirled around them as they kissed again, oblivious of everything but each other. It wasn't until much later that she found out Larkin's business.

He handed her a business card, "Michael Larkin, Private Investigator," and a New York address.

She remembered her thought about a detective's wife!

"A man in that business with a wife and son?" she said. "Larkin did you ever think of ranching? Texas is big, you wouldn't have to be near my ex—"

Larkin was smiling and this time it was in his eyes as well as his lips.

"A man can keep a wife and son pretty nicely in that racket," Larkin said. "Think I can quash that kidnaping rap, baby. And the detective game's a soft touch, baby, a soft touch."

I, SAID THE FLY

(Concluded from page 84)

Saunders dived for him and brought him down with a flying tackle. They crashed heavily to the floor. I went over and snapped the bracelets on.

"Sometimes that's better, too," I said. "But our job is to bring you in."

Saunders rose and brushed his clothes. His face was pale.

"You don't feel good," I said to him.

"I guess I don't," he said.

"Feel a little sorry for him?"

"I don't know. It's a funny feeling, sir."

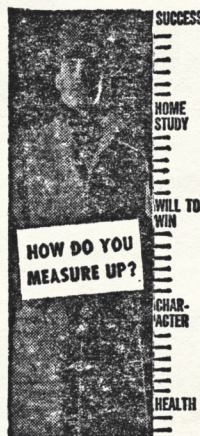
"I know how it is," I said. "I used to feel that way when I started out. Maybe I even do now, but I don't admit it to myself. I've got a cure for it thought."

"You have? What's that, sir?"

"Go down to thirty-one Canal Street. Go up to the second floor. Take a good look at the woman and the three kids who live there. Their name's Gresham. The old man isn't coming home anymore."

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 9)

lations are purely platonic. Who would want a blind man? With the aid of his keen sense of hearing however, Borlund is sure Maggie is in some kind of trouble with a criminal. It shall be Nick's job to find out what the trouble is and above all, the criminal's name.

Borlund suddenly shows that he hears something which is not audible to the detective and dashes, without apology, into the house. In another wing of the dwelling, there is no doubt about what Nick hears—that is a piercing shriek. Entering a stained-glass roofed apartment with a high balcony, Ransom finds the crumpled body of a tall willow blonde, who has either jumped or been thrown from said balcony. He later learns that this is Florence Byrne. She is quite dead.

The Price of Silence

Nick also meets the ferret-faced lawyer, Hiram Herkimer, in the ensuing hubbub. Nick, nettled, socks him one. Enter again now, Borlund and tells Ransom to forget everything about the trouble threatening Maggie Sullivan. In a sneak attack with a potted-palm, the lawyer in retaliation socks Nick one! The price for his silence, when he comes to of course, is a thousand dollars. Ransom pockets the money, but determines to do no such thing. You know Nick, especially when he really sniffs trouble—and large scads of same.

Then there is Donald Keenan, Borlund's nephew. But in this preview, folks, we're not only not going to tell you who commits the crimes, but we're not even letting out a peep as to who gets done in by whom. Afraid we're going to be mighty, mighty stingy about that preparatory peek under the curtain. To tell you too much would give the whole snap away.

You'll find Nick at his sockingest—as well as his cleverest, which, to say the least, is

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going some. There'll also be our usual line-up of top-flight detective and mystery stories by your favorite writers in this field, which, coupled with our lead novel already described, makes this an issue to conjure with. Be on hand to join in the festivities!

OUR MAIL BOX

EVERY issue, this problem of selecting letters for quotation gets tougher. Of course, we can't possibly find room for all the letters received, not having a magic wand handy. And so we must confine ourselves to quoting from a couple of typical missives each issue—but remember, every letter received is given the fullest and most grateful attention in our editorial offices.

We're particularly pleased when we get a postcard like the following:

More power to THRILLING DETECTIVE! It has the finest selection of stories to be found in any similar magazine. Keep up the good work.
—Morris U. Shorne, Springfield, Mass.

Thank you, Mr. Shorne. On the other hand, we appreciate criticism, too, especially when it's constructive. Like the following:

THRILLING DETECTIVE very frequently overstresses the first person singular. You have too many sleuthing characters who think too much of themselves and are proud of being "tough." I prefer stories of thought and deduction rather than strong-arm, slangy fiction. Aside from this fault, which does not always crop up, I am fond of THRILLING DETECTIVE and am a devoted reader.—Wilma Maribelle, Kansas City, Mo.

Well, this controversy of the socko detective versus the effete gentleman crime-solver has been going on for some time now. Here's another letter that touches the same subject:

Never mind whether I like knock-down-and-drag-out detectives or the guy who never moves out of his rocking-chair, or yet again anything

[Turn page]

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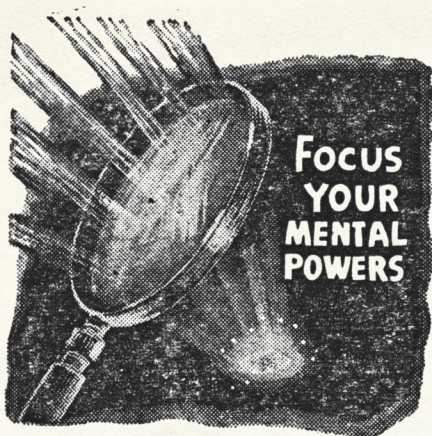
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halfway along the line in either direction. I'm at least glad to see you are getting some NEW ones and not keep harping on the old chestnuts. On the other hand, I was glad to see Johnny Castle back in "Crepes for Suzette." Where's he been? Of the new roughnecks, no one has approached the stature of Mr. Bellem's Nick Ransom—and he can hardly be considered new—can he? On the nonchalant, devil-may-care, or devil-take-the-hindmost side, I liked Mr. D. L. Champion's Shelton Spooner in "Man Without a Head." Also I always get a big kick out of Carl G. Hodges' Dwight and Gail Berke. Husband-reporter and wife-photographer is a nifty angle. Keep it up. Cannot say I was partic-impressed by Rocky Dillon. Just another roughneck!—Wyatt K. Blake, Newark, Ohio.

Thanks, Mr. Blake. All we can say is—you ain't seen nothin' yet! We can promise you one more Johnny Castle, already announced. There'll be Lou Sabin and Paul Mansard—and why should we go on? You probably know all about 'em by now. Just keep your eyes peeled!

Can quite agree with the gentleman from Cedar Rapids who wrote about keeping the propaganda out of your magazine. Have always found THRILLING DETECTIVE published for entertainment value only. Your stories are tops and your crime problems knotty. I always feel that I am the detective in trying to solve them.—Arthur Jeffcoat, Gary, Ind.

That's the way you'll continue to find us, Jeff, and thanks for your kind words!

Just keep your letters streaming along in, folks. We're proud and happy to receive them and here's a blanket thanks to all who have written. Send all letters and postal cards to The Editor, *Thrilling Detective*, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Thanks, everybody! Hope to see you all next issue and may we wish you all happy reading!

—THE EDITOR

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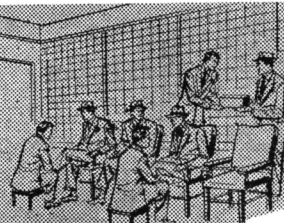
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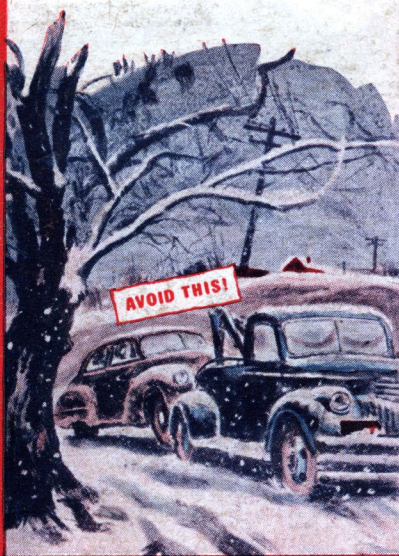
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