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DETECTIVE

Vol. LXXII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Fall, 1953

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How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there. Who knows, I might still be bumming Chesterfields instead of selling them.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it fast or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count



above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

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THE HAYLOFT

A Tragic Story of Crime

By JOHN L. BENTON

IN ALL the annals of murder there is no more heinous crime than one which occurred in the village of Altenmarkt, Austria, a decade and a half ago—nor a more wondrous example of the working of poetic justice.

In the first place, the victims of this abominable murder plot were children. Two little girls . . . Mitzi Federar and Marie Duerst.

Secondly, the man who had schemed their deaths was the father one of the girls—Alois Duerst. He was interested in obtaining the insurance the girls demise would bring. He rung in the other little girl in his murder plan on the theory that this would make the insurance angle much less noticeable.

In fact, he could not see how it could fail but be the perfect crime. A hayloft catches on fire . . . two little girl playmates are burned to death . . . obvious conclusion: They had been playing with matches, as children love to do.

There was still another thing that gave the matter a shuddery touch . . . the fact that Duerst was the hangman for the locality.

His wife had pleaded with him not to go through with the plan, but she lived in terror of the big, hulking brute of a man. And he would not listen to her.

"What good is a girl child?" he said to her. "Another mouth to feed. She will never be of much use in the field. And the insurance money will come in handy."

So one evening, furing the youngsters from their mud-pie making in the yard, he persuaded them to climb the tall ladder up to the hayloft. Then, grabbing each by



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the throat with one of his hands, he proceeded to choke them to death simultaneously.

The deed done, he climbed back down the ladder and said to his terrified wife:

"Now remember: You are to go up and set fire to the loft. Wait until I have reached the far recesses of the field, though. As I have explained, I want the neighbors to note that I was in the field far away from the barn when they come running to the fire."

And, with that, the husky hangman plodded his way out across the field.

HIS white-faced wife moved over to the foot of the ladder in the barn. But her legs would not respond . . . she could not make herself climb up it to the loft. Still, she knew she had to do her husband's bidding. Well, she told herself, she would start the fire on the ground floor of the barn instead it would do just as well. Which she

She did one more thing . . . a sort of spur of the moment act. She carried the ladder away with her. She brought it to an apple tree some distance away and leaned it against the tree.

Then she climbed the ladder and began picking apples from the tree.

No one had seen her. She relaxed just a little. When the neighbors started running toward the fire this is where they would find her.

She'd been at the tree only a couple of minutes or so when shout's of "Fire!" began to ring out and soon people were running toward the barn from all sides, Somebody shouted at her, "Frau Duerst, Frau Duerst, your barn is ablaze!" and she came scrambling down the ladder.

The two pitifully-charred bodies of the little girls were found in the ruins and the wails of the women folks could be heard far off. Even the hardened police spoke very gently as they talked to Herr Duerst and his wife. They asked the two if they could throw any light on the tragic happening. "I am afraid I can't," spoke up Duerst, staring at the ground as if he were stunned and shocked. "I was in a distant portion of the

field. I had warned them once or twice before about playing with matches. I can only guess what happened."

In a dull and barely audible voice, the woman said, "I had been on the ladder picking apples from a tree. I could see the children playing some distance away, making mud pies. The next thing I knew, people were shouting 'Fire'..."

There was a pause. Then:

"No."

"Did you leave the ladder at all between the time you saw the children making mud pies and the cries of 'Fire'?"

"No."
"You did not see the children enter the barn?"

When the officers left the woman to interview some of the neighbors, her husband sidled up to her and whispered gloatingly, "You see, as I told you it would, everything went well ... like clock-work ... soon we will have the money ... there is absolutely nothing to worry about now. "

But a few minutes later the police tapped the hangman's wife on the shoulder and told her, "You will have to come to headquarters with us. . ."

There, the officers told her, "There is something you said that casts a certain amount of doubt on the truthfulness of the rest of your statement..."

Do you know what it was?

THE officers pointed out to her simply,
"If you were on the ladder while the
children were still on the ground, and you
never got off the ladder until after the fire,
then how could the children have got up into
the loft?"

The woman broke down and the whole story poured out of her. And, shortly thereafter, the husky hangman was thrown into jail, charged with murder.

There was still another twist of poetic justice. In his cell, Duerst made a rope out of a bedsheet and hung himself. But, for the first time, the veteran hangman's skill failed him. He did a poor job' and suffered in agony for many hours before finally dying.

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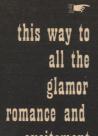






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CRIME

THE CRIMINAL MIND is capable of many vagaries, some of which provide a chuckle for the busy sleuth. Here we've rounded up a few of the more colorful items that have spiced the current crime news.

WASHINGTON, D. C., police recently arrested a burglar who'd robbed hundreds of apartments by keeping regular daytime working hours and commuting to his work daily from his home in the suburbs.

IN AUBURN, ME., a soulfully reminiscent prisoner received permission to paint the walls of his cell with pictures of outdoor scenes.

A CORPORAL COMPLAINED in Madison, Wis., that card sharps took him for \$48 and a wrist watch after he'd come down to town to check on reports that gamblers were cheating servicemen.

AFTER THE MAYOR of an Ohio town, reported nothing could be done locally about a man caught stealing goods because there was no town ordinance against burglary, the town council net in emergency session and passed ordinances against burglary, intoxication, indecent exposure, trespassing, discharging firearms, and allowing cats to go into the street without leashes.

WHEN A MOVIE HOUSE in Utah advertised a special midnight double-feature, but only one of the films was screened, it took a squad car of officers to keep the theater from being wrecked by the irritated patrons.

IN COLUMBUS, O., a man went to police to find out what could be done about refusal of a numbers house to pay off an \$8000 hit—whereupon said citizen was taken before a judge, who fined him \$100 and sentenced him to 10 days in jail for gambling.

A NEW JERSEY NEWSPAPER recently reported that the value of stolen property in a local township during the year was \$35,348, of which the police recovered \$44,608.



A BOGUS CHECK artist in Chicago had worked up such an extensive business, police discovered, that he had two men working on salary, helping him cash all his checks.

SEIZED FOR SHOPLIFTING at Newcastle, Australia, a lady told police she did it to get caught and go to jail so she could get away from her husband.

STOPPED FOR SPEEDING, a Barnstable, Mass, motorist informed Sheriff Donald P. Tullock that he was hurrying to court because he was the chief witness in an auto accident case.

AT NISHNABOTNA, MO., an inebriated individual was arrested for shooting up a meeting of the local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous.

SO YOU THINK you've got troubles! In Oklahoma, after a bowling alley safe was cracked and robbed of \$600, the proprietor got a bill for the burglars' tools! It seems the tools, found at the scene of the crime, had been taken from a department store, which was now claiming nawment for them.

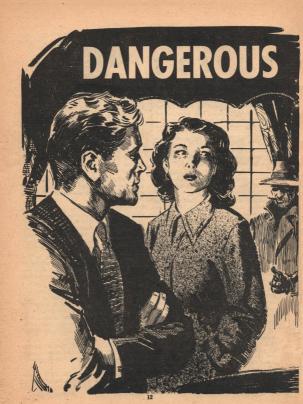
A GUNMAN ENTERED a store in Los Angeles, took \$60 and a bottle of whisky at gunpoint, and then, five minutes later returned, put back the loot on the counter and apologized!

AN INDIANAPOLIS HOTEL manager told police that he didn't mind so much when somebody made off with a towel but when somebody made off with a towel but complained about the following items being taken from one room: Four sheets, four taken from one room: Four sheets, four bellow cases, two bedspreads, two table lamps, two nightstands and two leather chairs.

IN LITCHFIELD, MINN., burglars moved an electric fan from a nearby room to cool themselves while they broke into the county treasurer's vault.

APPARENTLY THERE ARE some Manila burglars who aren't aware that this is the age of the zipper. They stole 576,000 buttons!

Harold Heljer



TO HANDLE

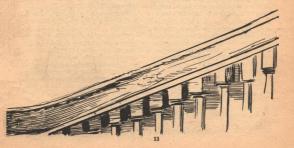
A Novelet by MARK REED

The dame was dynamite—and it was Steve McCoy's job to protect her from the vice-ring boys who didn't want her to blow up their racket

.

WALKED down the corridor to the District Attorney's office feeling as important as a Medal of Honor winner after his first salute from a general. I was wearing my dark blue suit, conservative tie, narrow-brimmed hat and my brand new badge which said "DETECTIVE."

I pushed open the door and ran into confusion wild enough to startle me. Clerks, cops and lawyers were running around as if the next sunrise depended on their work. Nobody paid the slightest attention to me. Something was happening all right—something big—and I was going to be a part of it because the D.A. had sent for me to come pronto.



All of which made me feel good enough to walk into the D.A.'s private office without knocking. There were half a dozen people clustered around his desk. Nobody noticed me at first until one man looked up and frowned.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded. "Steve McCov." I said. "Headquarters

Squad. Mr. Twitchell sent for me"

The D.A was one of those charmers in front of a jury. A white-haired, ruddy-faced man built like an Adonis and gifted with a silver tongue. But in his office he wasn't so charming, and now he looked absolutely haggard.

"McCov," he said. "Yes-yes, I think that's the name the captain gave me. Come here, officer. I don't feel like velling.'

I walked up to his desk quickly. He paused to take a normal breath. Two phones were clamoring. He let them ring. His eyes slid up and down my body until I wondered if I was supposed to model for something.

"You'll do," he said. "A trifle young, too damned good-looking, but you'll do. Now get this. McCov. and understand it well. What you are about to handle is a secret in the strictest sense of the word."

I said. "Yes. sir."

Some big murder must have broken and I was going to be part of the investigation. For a guy on the force four years and a detective only that many weeks, I was coming right along. I began conjuring up a mental image of what I'd look like in an inspector's braid.

The D.A. said. "Here it is briefly. We've been quietly investigating a vice ring. We've been on it for weeks, using stool pigeons and wire taps, and we landed the biggest vice overlord in history. This is no cheap combination, McCoy. It's a gigantic industry. Now then, we were certain there could be no leaks, but apparently there have been."

RATHER bulky man with his nose in a A sheaf of papers in a thick folder, looked un. He said, "If there are any leaks about the information being passed on to you now, we'll know exactly where it came from. Remember that."

I said, "Okay. What the hell do you think I am?"

"That'll do," he snapped at me.

"That'll do nothing," I parroted back at him. "You just about accused me of being a squealer. I don't know who you are, but-

"Inspector Dermott, Detective Division," he said. "Any more questions?"

I just closed my mouth good and hard, sort of threw my shoulders back, and the inspector's braid gave way to a nice tin badge and a long, long beat in the dead of night.

Dermott stuck his nose back in the file. The D.A. seemed impatient to get on with it.

I wished I was some place else.

The D.A. said, "Our Big Pig-our name for the bum who runs this racket-heard we were on his trail, and he did his best to clean things up. He didn't succeed, because we had too much of a start. Now, among other things we hold over his head, is a girl. Her name is Grace Bradley. I'll get you her address. This Bradley girl is our star witness, and what she can tell will help put Big Pig away. However, Big Pig knows we've got her-he just found out, from what we've learned-and he knows how dangerous she is to him. He'll do his best to eliminate her as a witness."

I said "I understand sir "

"Your job, McCoy, is to pick this girl up right away. She's under arrest now, but free on her own recognizance. Take her to the Thirty-second Precinct and book her on suspicion under the name of Martha Brady. Nobody at the precinct is to know who she is, understand?"

"I'll take care of it right away." I said. "The girl-will she object? Can I trust her

to keep quiet?"

Dermott elevated his nose again. "She's no girl, McCoy. She's a prostitute and it's up to you to keep her in line. You've got your orders- carry them out."

The D.A. said, "She may be watchedwe're not certain. That's why we're sending you, a young and virtually unknown cop, to pick her up. You'll look more like her date than a man sent to arrest her.'

"The address?" I suggested.

"Oh, ves. Go to Office Number Six. My confidential assistant, Roy Ward, will give it to you. Do this promptly, McCoy-and no slips."

I got out before Dermott could make any

more cracks, and found Roy Ward's office, He turned out to be a big guy, one of those round-shouldered, hulking men with long arms, no neck and a bullet head. He looked as if he could tear down houses with his bare hands for a living. I told him what I wanted.

"Grace, huh?" he said. "She's quite a girl, McCoy. Quite some girl. 'So she's to be picked up. Too bad. There ought to be a law that a girl like her couldn't be locked up. She lives at Two-two-three-five Seventy-ninth Street,

Apartment Eleven D."

"Thanks," I said. "I'd better be on my way."

"You're not going to like the job, son," he said. "She's a knockout."

"In the words of Inspector Dermott, she's also a prostitute," I said. "I don't go for that type.'

"Don't be too sure," Ward said. "Don't be too sure at all."

I hurried out of the building and hailed a cab. Even if it was going to cost me some dough. I'd handle this with all the speed the D.A. and Dermott wanted.

This wasn't what I considered a tasty job -merely picking up some round-heeled bum and transporting her to an outlying precinct. And yet, despite the simplicity of the job, it was vitally important. That girl had to testify, and this character known as Big Pig would do his damnedest to see that she didn't.

THE address was one of those "modest" apartment houses on Seventy-ninth. A large place with a pleasant lobby, attendants, and uniformed elevator operators. A swank place in my opinion, for a prostitute to live. I had her apartment number so I just stepped in the elevator and said, "Eleven."

The operator didn't move, the door remained open. "Who you seeing, Bud?" He

had a pimply, unpleasant face.

"My mother. I haven't seen her in fortyfive years. Take me up quick before I change in appearance and she won't know me."

"Wise guy," he said. "You ain't no fortyfive years old. You gotta be announced."

"Who is going to announce me?" I asked. "Do I wait in the elevator while you knock on the door?"

"You gotta be announced," he insisted.

I was in a hurry. I was a cop and I didn't have to take this. I grabbed his wrist, twisted it and him, until he banged up against the back wall of the car. I stepped to the controls, shot the door closed and sent the car rising in its shaft.

"Want to make anything out of it?" I asked unpleasantly.

"I hate smart guys," he said, and came at me with both hands stretched toward my neck

I let go of the controls, belted him in the pit of a generous stomach, doubled him up, and clouted him at the back of the neck with the side of my hand. He fell into a kneeling position and staved there, but as he went down a folded ten-dollar bill fell out of the ornamental sleeve cuff of his uniform. Nobody tipped ten bucks in a place like thisand never to a surly punk like this guy.

At the eleventh floor I got out, closed the elevator door, and moved down the hallway toward apartment D. I smelled trouble. Big Pig might have been tipped that the girl was to be arrested and could have moved faster than I. Maybe that elevator operator had been paid off not to let anyone up. I opened my coat and slid the little snub-nose .38 I carried in and out of its holster a couple of times. Then I rang the buzzer.

I could hear someone inside, but nobody answered the door. So I rang again, getting more and more worried. Finally the door opened and a slim, narrow-faced man with big, brooding eyes, stared at me.

I said, "Is Grace home? Grace Bradley?" He said. "No. she ain't. Beat it."

He almost got the door closed before I pushed a leg and shoulder inside. He made a quick pass at my jaw, missed by a mile, showing he wasn't much good at that sort of thing. But he did something with his right hand, and in a twinkling it held a knife. He was better at that. It wasn't a long or wide-bladed knife, but one of those swivel affairs that can open you up in a single slash. I hate knives and I hate men who use them.

I came boiling into the apartment so fast he didn't get time to raise the knife for a downward thrust, so he stabbed upward with it. I had to arch back fast. The blade made a whirring sort of noise as it slid by my face.

and it glittered like a thousand evil diamonds.

I couldn't afford to waste time with this guy. I hooked him alongside the jaw with a choppy left and followed that with a solid right to the proper place. It stiffened him. He fell backward and the knife slid under a chair.

I was standing over him when a door at the back of the room opened and a girl came out. She was wearing nylons, a brassiere and lace panties. She looked like something you see on certain calendars. I had never feasted my eves upon anyone as lovely.

"Who the devil are you?" she asked.

п



DIDN'T answer right away. I was too busy drinking in beauty. I guessed the girl was maybe five-feet-four or -five. She had copper-colored hair with dark highlights in it, and closely cropped. On her it looked fine. She had a cute, full face and great big eyes. Her mouth

wasn't small, but not too generous, either, and she had a smooth, creamy neck.

Down to the shoulders she looked like a kid, below that point she was all woman. Her legs were gracefully curved and loaded with sex. I thought her eyes were green, but they appeared to be labzing slightly now, so it was hard to tell.

"I asked you a question," she said impa-

tiently.

I moved toward her and she retreated quickly. "Are you Grace Bradley?" I asked. I hoped she was.

"Yes. What of it?"

"I'm a cop. There's been a little trouble and you're wanted downtown."

The eyes got bigger. "You're a cop? Listen, if this is a gag, you're in a lot of trouble. That man you socked happens to be a cop."

I whirled around, but there was no need to be in any rush. The guy was cold. I showed the girl my badge.

"That is no policeman," I told her.

"He pulled a knife on me, and cops don't use knives."

"He's got a badge pinned inside his coat," she said. "It says 'Police'."

I bent over him and opened his coat. She was right. I searched him and took away a

.25 caliber foreign-made automatic. I walked up to the girl again. "That badge he's wearing is a patrolman's badge. A lot of them are stolen every year. He isn't carrying cuffs, sap or persuader, and this Colt of his is the kind of gun no self-respecting cop would be caught dead with. He's a phony, and

that means we've got to move fast."

She backed up a couple of steps. "I sort of believe you," she said. "Segoda must have found out I'm in town, and that the District Attorney talked to me."

"Who is Segoda?" I asked her.

"You don't know? He's the man I—that is— Oh, hell, the D.A. wants him to spend about ninety-nine years in prison, that's all."

"Is he the Big Pig?"
She gave me a smal

She gave me a small smile. "That's the D.A.'s pet name for him. Now I'm sure you're on the level. Be with you in five minutes."

"Make it two," I said.

She closed the door. I made sure the punk on the floor was still cold, and searched him thoroughly for luck. He didn't have anything of interest on him.

I drifted over to a window overlooking the street, and it was lucky I did. One glance down to the sidewalk and I saw some interesting things. A car had pulled up and four men were getting out and moving in a big hurry. One of them got out of the car so fast his coat caught on the door and was pulled up so that I had a glimpse of a hip-holstered gun before he could get the coat down again.

They weren't cops. They were Big Pig's boys—this character called Segoda. Of that I was positive.

I ran to the door which Grace had closed and banged on it.

"We'll be trapped inside of two minutes!"
I called. "Let's go!"

She gave a cry of alarm and opened the door, buttoning her blouse as she came out. She wore a tailored skirt with a suit coat over one arm and a handbag was dangling from her shoulder. I grabbed her by the elbow and rushed her across the room, through the door. I stopped long enough to close it and make sure it was locked. That would stall them a moment.

A S WE reached the elevator shaft a car was coming up.

"I think one of the elevator men was paid to keep an eve out, and he must have tipped those guys," I said, "Where's the stairway?" She turned left and ran while I followed

her. When she pushed open the fire door we could hear someone coming up the stairs two or three floors below-at least two men, and moving as fast as possible. I motioned for silence, untied my shoes and slipped out of them, signaling for her to do the same. Then we started up the stairway and kept going for four more floors until we reached the top.

We put on our shoes again. She sat on a step, looking ruefully at a run in her stocking. All feminine legs, I decided, should have been patterned from the mold which had shaped hers.

She looked up at me. "So we're on the top floor. So what? How do we get down?" "The roof," I said. "It's still daylight, so

we can see what we're doing, and if I remember correctly, the adjoining buildings are the chance.'

"I don't know but what I'd rather face those men." she said.

I cocked an imaginary gun with my fingers and pointed it at her. "One look, baby, and boom-boom you're dead. They'd rather see

you in the morgue than the D.A.'s office." "You're right," she sighed. "I should have staved out of this entirely."

That drew a laugh from me. A loud, raucous, and sarcastic laugh, "As if you had any choice"

I thought she was going to tie into me, but we found the stairs to the roof about then and were too busy scrambling up them to talk or fight. On the roof I studied the situation. We had little time. Those goons would smash the door in if the lug I left on the floor didn't wake up and let them in. He'd explain. Since they had covered the stairway and the elevators they'd know only one exit had been open to us and that would bring them to the roof in no time.

I moved over to the roof edge. There was a space of about four feet to the roof of the next building and a drop onto it of about two feet. Not too bad-if this cheap little bum had enough nerve. She came over and stood beside me.

I said, "Well, there's our way out. If we hurry.'

She gave me a cool nod, walked away and for a moment I thought she was going to go back downstairs and take her chances with the punks. About the time I was ready to vell for her to stop, she turned around, took a quick breath, and came streaking past me. She cleared the space easily, landed on her feet and didn't even lose her balance.

I suddenly realized I had a beating heart again. It had stopped dead there for a second or two. I took the leap next, landed on one knee, scratched my hands on the rough surface of the roof and all of a sudden there she was, helping me to my feet

I said, "Thanks," without further comment. If she'd been anyone else, I would have given voice to the way I marveled at that leap she'd made. And without the slightest show of nerves

Instead, I grabbed her arm and rushed her same height as this one. We still have a to the door. We went down the stairs to the top floor and I rang for an elevator.

It was a self-service car in this building and we rode it to the second floor and took the stairway for the rest of the trip. I went out alone through the lobby to see if the building was being watched. Apparently it wasn't,

I stepped out into the street. Those lugs, except for the one I'd socked, wouldn't know me and I could afford to take this much of a chance. I called a cab, had the driver wait and then returned for the girl.

IN MOMENTS we were heading uptown. She looked as calm and cool as if she did something like this every morning before

breakfast. I, myself, was feeling a little shaky. I said. "My orders are to take you to a precinct-"

She made an objection for the first time. "Now wait a minute. I agreed to testify for the D.A., but with the plain understanding that I wasn't to be locked up. If you put me in a cell. I'll forget every damned thing I ever knew, including my own name and address."

I said. "Oh hell, what's a few days in a cell? For anyone like you it shouldn't even be a novelty."

She flushed slightly, "That does it. That settles the whole thing. I stay on the outside or I don't talk."

"But this man-the Big Pig, as the D.A. calls him-he'll have you murdered! Those mugs who came for you weren't going to take you dancing."

"I'll take my chances. I stay free, or no cooperation. That's final. And you can do what you like about it."

"I'll have to phone for instructions," I said, and leaned forward to tell the driver to stop at the next big drug store that we would come to.

When he did, I took the girl's elbow and gave her a gentle push.

"I'll stav here," she said.

"You'll come with me," I told her, "And that's final, too."

She showed her teeth in something resembling a smile. Even then she was breath-takingly beautiful. "Try and make me," she said sweetly.

So I snapped cuffs around her right wrist and my left. What else could I do? The day that I'd trust one of her kind hadn't dawned vet. She protested shrilly, she told me I was several things, none of which were nice, she resisted when I half-dragged her across the sidewalk, and then I pointed out that she was attracting attention. That made her cuddle real close to me so the cuffs would be hard to spot.

In the drug store I went straight to the phone booths, and pushed her into one. It was a bit crowded, with her so close to me, and she wore some kind of perfume that did my morale no good at all. I even missed dialing the first time, and that drew a snicker out of her.

Then I had the D.A. on the wire and I told him what had happened. He was a man who made snap judgments. Most of the time his decisions were excellent, but this one I doubted slightly.

He said, "All right, McCov, here are your orders. Stay with that girl twenty-four hours a day. Make sure she doesn't run off, and make even surer nobody gets to her. Keep on the move. Leave the city by the next train. Go to Philly and check into the Lawson Hotel. By tomorrow morning you'll get some money by mail. There will be more-all you want."

I said, "But this girl! If I have to stay with her-"

"Never stop in the same town twice. Keep moving. That's a system the Treasury Department developed during the years they were after big shots like Al Capone, and when witnesses were threatened with death. Lock the witness up and you get a hostile witness, but keep him or her traveling and it's okay. That's what you have to do. I want you following those orders to the letter. Is everything clear?"

"Yes, sir.

"It better be. If that girl is killed, or changes her mind about testifying, you'll be looking for another line of work. Pull this off, and I'll see that you're promoted. Keep in touch with me-and only me. We haven't been able to find the leak out of my office yet."

I said, "You'd better do something about that, because they almost beat us to the punch this time."

He said he definitely would and hung up in my ear. I pushed the booth door open and looked at Grace. My face was about half an inch from hers and I suddenly liked the phone company for making their booths so very cozy and snug.

I said, "We're going to Philadelphia right now-first train."

"But why Philly?" she asked.

"I'm to keep you traveling. You won't be locked up at any time, but I stay right with you."

Her eves had an amused look, "That sounds interesting. I think I'll like the arrangement, and I'll see the country as well. Yes, I like the idea very much, but if you don't take these damned handcuffs off me. I'll start screaming."

I took the cuffs off. The one around my wrist was uncomfortable anyhow.

III



WE REACHED Philly shortly after nine in the evening, and ate dinner in a nice place. Grace knew the town, and I didn't. Before long she was showing me around. I'm no stiff, uncompromising guy. I

like a good time as well as the next man, but I'd have enjoyed myself more if I hadn't known that this amazingly beautiful creature with me was a call girl. Just a plain, common tramp. It didn't seem possible, but I knew it was only too true.

We took in a late movie, which I didn't see much because I was too busy trying to get up nerve enough to hold her hand. It made me laugh. A bum—and I was afraid to make that much of an advance.

We had something more to eat after the show and a drink apiece. Then we walked slowly along the street toward the hotel. There weren't many people abroad. It was comparatively quiet for a big town and I doubted we were in any danger.

Grace said, "This is one of the few times in more than a year that I haven't been afraid." "Why didn't you leave town yourself—get

out of the racket?"

She gave me an amused smile. "You don't know Segora. Nobody quits his outfit, particularly girls, He has a nasty disposition. I've heard he's had at least twenty people

murdered."
"He's in a nasty business," I said, and the next instant was sorry I'd said it.

She flushed. "I guess I don't have to ask what you think of me. Oh well, perhaps it's better that way."

I had already checked into the hotel and I had the key to our room, so we walked past the desk and into an elevator. The operator kept smirking at me. Maybe he thought we were newlyweds—or maybe he could tell what Grace was on sight. I was more inclined toward that theory.

I unlocked the door and we went inside. It was a nice room with twin beds. I'd been specific about that. Grace threw her hat on the dresser, took off her bolero jacket, hung it

in the clothes closet and sat down. She kicked off her shoes, then peeled down her stockings. She did this without displaying the slightest sense of false modesty. It was I who finally turned my head.

If she noticed, she didn't comment. She said, "We sure planned this well. No tooth brush, no face cream, no nightgown—just the empty suitcase you bought in that second-hand shop."

"I'll get all those things tomorrow," I said a gruffly.

"You'd better, if you want me to cooperate. How are we registered, by the way?"

"Man and wife." My voice was even more

She laughed lightly. "All in the line of duty. You should get a medal for this, Officer. Well, I'm tired."

I got up fast and snapped off the light. In the darkness I could hear her laughing and I wanted to haul off and smack her one. This lousy bum!

What an assignment I'd drawn! Keep her traveling, on the move. But for how long? A cop is expected to do anything in the line of duty, but this I I doubted the D.A. gave any thought at all to these complications. I had to use my own judgment about the situation and if I was wrong it might be the foreumner to trouble. But I'd keep this trollop safe. Those were the only orders I had.

She said. "Officer—"

"Yeah?" I growled.

"What's your name?"
"McCoy," I said. "Steve McCoy."

"Thank you. I merely wanted to know with whom I was sharing my room. Good night."

I finally got into the other bed, but only because I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. I wondered if I ought to handcuff her to something, but figured she'd put up such a yow! it probably wouldn't be worth it. So I'd stay awake, or just doze. If she tried to get away, then I'd cuff her. And brother, it would be a pleasure!

I WOKE up with sunlight in my eyes. I lay there, wondering where I was, and then I remembered. The next bed was empty. I jumped up, getting myself tangled in the blanket and almost falling on my face. I

heard water running in the bathroom. She called out, "Awake, Steve?"

I said, "Yeah—yeah, I'm awake."
"I'll be right out I'm all dressed."

"I'll be right out. I'm all dressed."

I wasn't, and was red-faced with embarrassment. A man never feels as uncomfortable as when he's surprised putting on his pants. I sailed past her into the bathroom. There was a brand new razor, some cream, lotion, powder, tooth brush, paste and a comb lying on the shelf below the madicine cabinet. I stuck my head out of the doorway.

"Where'd this stuff come from?" I de-

manded.

"I went out and bought it." She was sitting in front of a vanity combing her hair. "You can pay me back if you insist."

I closed the door without slamming it, faced myself in the mirror and automatically rubbed the stubble on my face. Then I grinned a little. She'd gone out alone and come back. Maybe the job wouldn't be so hard after all.

I shaved, took a shower, doused on lotion and took special care with my hair. I had to put on a rumpled shirt. We'd both have to do some extensive shopping before long. That made me think of the money which should be at the desk by now.

I picked up the phone. She laid a cool, smooth hand on mine. "I stopped into the coffee shop and told them what to send up for breakfast," she said.

I smiled. I couldn't help it. Prostitute or not, this kid had something on the ball. She was unselfish, she had courage, and she was so damned pretty. I put the phone to my ear again, got the desk clerk and asked him if there was any mail. He said he'd send it up.

The mail came at the same time that room service showed up so I had to stand there with the envelope in my hand while the waiter fussed over the table he wheeled in. It was quite a breakfast, in five courses.

Grace handed me the check. "Put a good tip on it, darling," she said.

I penciled my initials and gave the waiter boucks in cash. I'd have a nice time explaining six dollars for breakfast to the comptroller's office. I opened the envelope. Ten one hundred dollar bills tumbled out. At least we weren't going to starve. There was a note too. It read:

McCoy: Hold to plans outlined. Keep moving. Realize discrepency in preparations so am sending a policewoman to meet you in Wheeling. Don't call me under any circumstances. Leak here very definite and unplugged. Have information girl will be murdered to keep her from testifying. If she is, you keep on going.

I handed her the note. She read it and shivered slightly, but mustered a grin some-

"So I'll have some stern, matronly chaperone from now on. Won't that be nice?"

I said, "It's a damned sight more legal anyway."

She laughed. "Legal, he says. I've heard a lot of things, but that one I'll never forget. Steve, am I that had to take?"

I scalded my mouth with the enormous drink of hot coffee I bastily swallowed. Then I started eating my eggs and bacon. She was having a fine time at my expense. To bell with her. From here on, it was going to be just business. I was a cop, she was my prisoner. Sure, I had to keep her happy, but I'd make the plans after this, and I'd stop catering to her so damned much.

But what the hell was the idea in sending a matron? We were on the run and two people move faster than three. I think I resented somebody butting in.

GRACE and I went on a shopping spree that in the morning and she had a great time spending taxpayers' money. I guess I idid well enough, too. After all, there was no telling how long we'd be on the road. In the middle of the afternoon we hundled up our stuff and caught a bus to Wheeler. There we checked into the biggest hotel. I asked if anyone had been looking for us, but was told no, so Grace and I went up to our room.

It was going to be a relief when the policewoman showed up, so I could have a room of my own. This business of checking in with Grace as my wife might develop some serious complications if it went too far. Suppose Segora's hawyer found out, and made a big thing out of this good-looking little bum who was guarded by a male cop who slept with her. What if they put nie on the stand and asked about that?

We had dinner and a couple of drinks, which relaxed me. Grace looked better than



ever across the table from me. It had got so I could hardly keep my eyes off her, and if some of those hotel Romeos didn't stop giving her the eye, they were going to get themselves sharpered.

selves slugged.

Grace said, "Steve, I wonder if we're being foolish running like this?"

"Orders are orders," I said. "Besides, that policewoman ought to show soon. You've got nothing to worry about."

"Who's worrying?" she asked. "I just think Segora won't try to get rid of me. He has no idea how much I can tell. He's going to be unpleasantly surprised when I take the stand"

I felt sore at the whole world for some reason. I said, "Yeah, I'll bet you know plenty."

son. I state, I can, I in the you know penny:
She scowled, and didn't talk much after
that. We finished our coffee and went upstairs to our room on the seventh floor. I was
unlocking the door when I heard the elevator
stop, heard someone get out, and heels elikeclacked noisily on the tile floor in front of the
elevator. There even made noise on the rug.

I looked around. She was a buxom looking woman with a square shape, a dark blue coat.

plain felt hat and shell-rimmed glasses. She might as well have worn a badge on her ample bosom.

She said, "McCoy?"

"That's right."

"I'm Martha Windmere, Headquarters Detail. I guess you know why I'm here. Is this the girl?"

I didn't like the way she said it, but I suppose a woman of her type must thoroughly resent one of Grace's kind. I wondered, though, which of them got the most out of life

"This is Grace Bradley," I said. "I'm glad you got here."

I had the door open by that time. Grace walked in slowly. The policewoman followed her. I stood in the corridor like a fool and feeling like one. Now that this woman was in charge of Grace, my close contact with her was gone. I hated that D.A.

I said, "Grace-" She turned quickly, almost eagerly. "I'll try to get a room close by, Thanks for not trying to run out on me.'

"Good night," she said, in a voice I knew forgave me for every stupid crack I'd made up to now.

IV



OWNSTAIRS, I signed for a single room on the same floor, but far down the hall from Grace's. I jiggled the key as I stepped out of the elevator, and I had turned toward Grace's room automatically before I realized

that mine was at the other side of the hotel. I let myself into a small, dreary room, sat

down without taking off my hat or coat and cursed the world in general and Martha Windmere, policewoman, in particular. I wondered why they all had to look the same. Oh, there were some who were mighty attractive, in a rather muscular sort of way, but they were used in detective work. Martha was the matronly type-the kind who could be put in charge of a prisoner and be sure that prisoner wasn't going to get away.

She could probably hit like a mule.

And the way they all dressed-too much like men. Why did they think, because they were on the police force, that they had to emulate men so closely? Now a few lady cops like Grace, and it would be a pleasure to get pinched. Martha, broad in the shoulder and beam, with severely tailored clothes, flatheeled shoes-

I suddenly gasped. Flat-heeled shoes! Hell, she'd been wearing spikes. They'd made the devil of a racket on tile and bare floor. But spikes were all out of character for her, and didn't go with the rest of her clothes.

I felt perspiration breaking out all over me. On little things like that, life or death can depend. I was out of my room in nothing flat and running like a madman down the corridor.

I slowed up when I neared Grace's room. however, and I fought to make my breathing more regular so that I wouldn't show any of this terror which had filled me so suddenly. If that policewoman was a fake, I wanted to get Grace out of there before I started anything. I had an idea that woman was sure poison. Besides, she could tell me where that leak in the D.A.'s office was coming from. If she was a crook, the leak must have grown bigger than ever because those racketeers were keeping up with me every time I made a move.

I rapped on the door. I waited about twenty seconds and knocked again. This time I heard someone coming to answer the knock, but I couldn't tell if it was Grace or the policewoman, so I braced myself for anything which might happen.

A key turned, the door opened half an inch and the policewoman looked out at me with a suspicion that would never have been shown by any policewoman I'd ever known. She'd changed, too. Her eves were narrower, her lips thinner. She was actually cruel-looking,

I said, "Everything okay?" "Sure. Why shouldn't it be?"

"I want to see Grace-Miss Bradley," I said.

"She's gone to bed."

"I still want to see her. I've got to check every so often. This is one of the times. Open up. What's the matter with you?"

"Why—nothing," she said. "Nothing at all." She stepped away from the door. "Come on in, Officer."

In I walked. Me, the detective. The man who was supposed to outguess criminals. Me, assigned to protect the life of a girl who was an important witness in an important case. Me, sap and sucker. About the time I saw Grace flat on the bed with her head hanging off the edge of it, a gun was poked into my back by somebody who stepped out from behind the door.

I froze, my eyes riveted on Grace. If she was dead, somebody else was going to die, too. That thought rattled around in my brain and refused to let go. For the first time in my life, I knew what a killing mood felt like.

THE policewoman dropped all pretense now. "Stay where you are, McCoy. The guy behind you hates cops like poison, and he'd love to blast your damn fool head off."

I said, "What happened to the policewoman who was supposed to have met me?"

"She's not coming, my friend. Remember, you're a dead duck if you move."

"Is she-dead?" I moved my head in the direction of the limp figure on the bed.

"Not yet," I was told. "Search him, Joey, but keep that gun against his back every second. I'll take care of the hum."

I said, "What are you going to do with her?"

The phony policewoman shrugged. "The way I got it figured, she goes out the window. It'll be suicide. A poor, misunderstood prostitute who couldn't stand being arrested."

The man behind me was trying to reach over my shoulder to get at my clip. He must have been a shrimp because he couldn't quite make it. His fingers would brush the edge of the butt and that was all. I gave him no cooperation. I held my shoulders up as high as I could get them though I was personally feeling mighty low.

The phony policewoman was beside Grace own and sliding a thick arm beneath her. The window was wide open. In about two minutes Grace was going to take a header out into nothing but air, with concrete at the end of the trip. It was all so damned cold-blooded. As a cop I should have expected people like this woman, but I thought her kind was out-and-out exaggeration on the part of someone who wanted to make an impression and win a medal. Yet she was going to pick up that lovely girl, ease her out of the window and let go. I knew well enough what they'd do to me. Leaving a cop as a witness to murder would be study.

Grace moaned a couple of times. I don't know what they'd done to her, but she was coming out of it. I prayed she'd stay blacked out—until I realized what I was praying for, and then I got mad. The rage started some place way back in my skull and surged forward, getting botter every second.

The little guy behind me was moving around toward the front now, so he could reach my gun. I still couldn't see him, but the pressure of his gun was temporarily released. Then he moved in front and jabbed my ribs with the gun while he reached for my poistol with his other hand.

But he made a small mistake there. He put his gun about four inches directly below where I was holding my right hand and he was so intent on getting my gun that he wasn't paying enough attention to me.

My land darted down. It was a crazy idea, and probably wouldn't work, but I was going to die anyhow, so I had nothing to lose. My fingers wrapped around his wrist, and, with the same downward motion, strong and unbroken, I pushed the gun muzzle toward the floor.

I must have squeezed his wrist so hard and unexpectedly that he couldn't even pull the trigger. He was a small guy, but mean-looking. I changed his face a bit by a direct short right-hand punch that flattened his nose.

The Amazon was trying to drag Grace toward the window and finish her before I could move in. But Grace must have been shamming, because all of a sudden she was fighting and struggling. They were at the window when I reached them. I'd never hit a woman in my life, but I hauled off and clottled this one with my best Sunday punch.

JUST to ease my conscience, it didn't knock her cold, but she let go of Grace, staggered back, then turned and raced for the door. So did the little guy. I got him before he was clear. I hauled him back, held him at arm's length, and rapped him on the snoot again. A longer, more powerful punch this time. He went down in a heap.

Then I turned and did what I'd wanted to do for so long. I grabbed Grace and held her in my arms. I held her tightly and I kissed her a dozen times and made a fool of myself while she cried and clung to me with surprising fierceness.

When we finally got our wits and our breaths back, she told me what had happened. The little guy had knocked on the door five minutes after I'd left, and the policewoman let him in. Then she'd poked Grace on the head with some kind of a sap and knocked her out. She had just been recovering when I came into the picture again.

I said, "Baby, this won't happen again. I promise it won't. It was my fault."

"Steve, she fooled me, too. I thought she was okay."

"We've got to move again. If she knew where we are, others will, too. When she reports back, they'll probably come for us. Start packing.' "What are you going to do, Steve?" Her

eves were brimful of tears, but she wasn't the real weepy kind. This kid had guts. "These rats"-I indicated the guy on the

floor-"have to take the same treatment they give. I'm going to make him talk. Get your things, and don't waste any time."

I bent down, grabbed the guy by the collar and hauled him to his feet. I held him there with one hand and slapped him silly with the other until he moaned and spat blood and stopped blistering my hide with curses.

I said, "You're all finished, and what happens to you now depends on how we get along. I'm asking you a couple of questions. I get straight answers with no hedging or I'll put a slug through your damned miserable heart. I'm a cop. I can do it and get away with it."

I thrust him away from me, pulled my gun and leveled it. He cowered back a couple of more steps, and clasped both hands over the area of his heart as if the fingers would stop a slug.

"Who sent you?" I asked.

He must have believed me because his answer was prompt. "Some of the boys who work for Segora."

"How did you know where we were?"

"I can't say, because I don't know. Honest, that's the truth. I was just told to meet Mazie here-she's the hefty dame."

"When did you get that information?"

"Last night. I flew out here this morning." "We weren't even here last night," I said.

"I wouldn't know, pal. Honest, this is straight stuff. I don't wanta croak. Give me a break, Officer. Please give me a break!"

"Do you know what happens now that you failed to kill the girl?"

He didn't answer that one, but I could tell he knew. I asked him again, gently, without threats, and all of a sudden he got his nerve back. The little rat spat in my face.

I rushed him and knocked him across the room, up against the wall. I grabbed his throat again and smashed the back of his head against the wall until his brains must have rattled.



RACE pulled at my J arm. She was telling me to stop before I killed the rat. I brushed her aside, doubled my fist and poised it an inch from his nose.

I said. "Once more I'm asking how you knew we

were here-then you get this! You may live, but you'll wish you hadn't every time you look at yourself. What is Segora intending to do next?"

"Lemme go and I'll tell you! Lemme have two minutes start. It'll be worth it.'

I said, "Okay-and it better be."

"He's sending Brock after the dame."

"Brock Guffin?" Grace asked in a voice that rasped a little.

"Yeah-him."

I said, "How does Segora get his information from the D.A.'s office? Where's the leak?"

"I swear I don't know, Officer, I swear!"

I gave him a shove toward the door. "If I ever see you again, I'll shoot you on sight. Beat it and crawl into some deep hole. Get out!"

He scurried like a crab and when the door slammed behind him, I fell into a chair and

started heaving great big gasps.

Grace stood before me. She asked, "This

Brock—you haven't heard of him?"

I shook my head. "Whoever he is, I don't

scare any more."
"Brock is a professional killer. Few people

have even seen him, and he does nothing but specialized work. They say he's killed fifty or more people. He doesn't care who they are or why they should be killed. He simply finds his victim, walks up and shoots him and then gets away. He isn't human, Steve."

"I feel less than half human myself," I said. "I'd like to meet the guy, but we won't sit still and wait for him. Are you all set?"

She nodded. "Yes. Let's hurry. . . ."
We arrived at Indianapolis the following

We arrived at Indianapolis the following noon, after a slow bus ride during which we doubled back twice, just to break the trail. We were dead beat when we checked into a small, moderate-pried hotel. In the room assigned to us, Grace fell on one of the twin beds and closed her eyes.

I pulled down the window shades, took off my coat, shirt, tie and shoes and crawled into the other bed. We were too tired to eat, or think about eating. I didn't even know if Grace was asleep.

I said, "If you can hear me, baby, don't even show it. Just listen, because I have to get this off my chest. I don't care what you've been or are. It doesn't matter at all who your friends have been, how you made a living, or any other danned thing. You can testify against Segora or you can refuse, it makes no difference. I've fallen for you so hard I feel silly. If you say a single word, I'll feel sillier. That's all. Good might."

I was rather silly at that, because it was about three in the afternoon. Grace didn't utter a sound. Maybe she had been fast asleep. The poor kid had been through a lot. I stuck one hand under the pillow so I could feel the comforting smoothness of

my gun, then I conked off

I thought I woke up first, because Grace didn't seem to have moved. I got up quietly and cleaned up. I was buttoning my shirt when I heard her sigh, and I turned quickly. She was looking at me and smiling with a warmth I could almost feel.

"Hello, Steve."

"Everything is quiet," I said in a businesslike voice.

She said, "That's good," as if it didn't matter much. "I just had a wonderful dream. Some day I'll tell you what it was. And I'm ravenous."

"It's eight," I said. "We'll go out and eat. It isn't possible that they've traced us here. We ought to be safe."

IN HER stocking feet she came just a little above my shoulders and she had to stand on tiptoe to kiss me, but that's what she did and, still humming, she went to get cleaned up herself. I just stood there feeling helpless and foolish and happy. Most of all, happy.

Pretty soon I'd get some sense and that solid reasoning of mine would inform-me of exactly what I'd done. I'd remind myself that this girl, sweet as she seemed to be, pretty as she undeniably was, had been bluntly—a bag. One of Segora's women.

Checking into a hotel room with a man was certainly no novelty for her, and now I'd travel to Alaska if she wanted that. I'd keep her hidden so she'd never have to testify. I'd give up my job, badge, and everything else just to be with her.

And when she came up to me and took my arm. I knew it would be worth it. I knew that I had to first of all save her life, and to do that I had to remain a cop.

I said, "We don't have to be in any hurry, baby."

"Maybe that's why I feel so good," she said. "Maybe it's because of something else. But I want a drink, and lots of food. How long will we stay here, Steve?"

"A few days at least," I said confidently. We had reached the lobby and were pass-

We had reached the lobby and were passing through it when I saw the desk clerk point our way, and a man at the desk turned around quickly. He was about forty, neatly dressed and stocky. He headed in our direction, and I got ready for trouble.

"Steve McCov?" he asked.

I nodded, not saying a word, figuring I could reach my gun faster than he could reach his.

"I'm Sergeant Price—Police. We've been checking hotels for you."

I said, "Let's see the badge, Sergeant. If I sound suspicious, it's because a phony cop has been rung in on me once already, and I'm taking no chances."

"Go around to Headquarters if you like," he said. "Here's my badge. I hope it looks authentic."

"We'll grant that it is," I said. "Who

wants me?"
"The D.A. back in your city. Call him

as quickly as possible."

"How'd he find out where I.was? I've been on the move."

"I wouldn't know that," he said. "But there was a general alarm on teletype for you. All departments were asked to check hotels."

hotels."

"I'll contact the D.A.," I said. "Will you watch this girl?"

He grinned. "Lucky guy. Were you born with that kind of luck or did you earn it, friend, to have a girl like her?"

"Some people think she'd make a better looking corpse," I said. "Believe me, she's as dangerous to handle as atom bombs."

"The pleasure of watching her is all mine," he said. "Don't hurry."

I gave Grace a reassuring nod, walked to a phone booth and called the D.A.'s office. I hardly expected to reach him at that hour, but he was there.

out he was there.

He said, "What do you mean, what do

I want? Where are you?"
I had a sudden feeling of panic. "Indianapolis. Didn't you ask Police Departments to check hotels for me?"

"Hell, no," he said. "I didn't want any contact between us."

I said, "Well, we're being outguessed too often. That leak must be mighty close to you. This is how Segora hopes to locate me and the girl, and I guess maybe he has. What about the policewoman?"

"What policewoman? I didn't order any

policewoman sent."

"You were going to," I said.

"Yes, but it was too dangerous. What's the matter, can't you take care of a girl by yourself?"

SURE, I was taking care of her all right, but I didn't want to emphasize this to him.

him.

I said, "A phony policewoman showed up and tried to toss Grace out of a hotel window."

"My God!" he exploded. "You must be falling down on the job. You're supposed to make sure that nothing like that happens."

"It won't," I said. "Not any more. Do you still want us to keep traveling?" "Of course I do. Right up until Segora

goes to trial. That's in three weeks."

"All right." I told him. "I'll get in touch

with you again in exactly three weeks. Right now I've got to run and get a head start." "A head start on whom?" he asked sar-

"A head start on whom?" he asked sarcastically, "You're a thousand miles away, from here. How can they catch up with you?"

"Look," I said patiently, "Segora's outfit is nation-wide, isn't it? So they have branches in every important city, and where he runs his joints, he keeps torpedoes on hand. In no more than the time it takes some lousy stool pigeon in your office to phone Segora and in the time i'll take Segora to phone this city where I am now, they'll be on my trail. That's how they do their simey work."

"Then get going," he urged. "Remember, nothing must happen to that girl."

I said, "If it does, the same thing happens to me. So long."

I hung up, hurried back to where Grace and the detective were talking and hustled her away from him quickly. We went to our room and packed again. I was getting deathly sick of running.

I said, "The D.A. didn't send out a teledtype request to look for us, but somebody close to him and high enough in importance to make an order like that stick, did send the teletype. By now, this man knows where we are. The D.A.'s phone must be tapped. That means this man is in action already, and if we don't move fast, we won't get far. But I'm beginning to yearn for some peace and rest."

"I'm sick of running, too," she said.
"Steve why can't we just stay here and face it?"

I shook my head, but there was admiration in my voice. "You've got what it takes, baby. I'd like that, too, but it's too risky. Segora will send his best man after us now, and that means Brock Guffin. You say he's plenty dangerous, and he probably is. Besides, he'll know us and we won't know him. That gives him the edge over us, so we—"

"So we keep traveling," she sighed. "I did want to see the country, but not under these conditions. All right, Steve, let's get out of here."

We decided on a fast train to the Pacific Coast. Once there, I'd stop using my own name, which I'd done up to now only so the D.A. could reach me if necessary. We'd vanish in a large city like San Francisco or Los Angeles and stay among the missing until just before the trial date. Then I'd charter a plane and fly her back. Somehow I looked forward to three quiet weeks with Grace as much as I dreaded the day when I'd have to take her back to testify at the trial.

I didn't dare phone the station for a reservation and when we got there, our luck had run out. There wasn't another train West for two hours. One hundred and twenty minutes during which Segora's far-flung organization could start ticking and fashioning a net around us. I had few doubts but that it was afterady closing in and I wished we could get out from under, fast

We checked our bags and went to the nearest movie. I had a weird feeling that we were being watched and I tried my best to spot a tail. But if there was one, he must have been good, because I didn't see him. I figured they'd had time enough to get a man over to the hotel and watch us depart. He'd report back, but if Segora was going to use Brock Guffin, Brock would have to be equipped with a jet plane to catch up with us now. VI



WE BOARDED the train at ten o'clock. We had adjoining compartments. Grace didn't comment on this arrangement, but it must have looked funny after we'd spent so much time together in the same hotel

rooms. We shared one compartment for a couple of hours, sitting side by side, holding hands and not saying much. I was beginning to get scared.

At eleven-thirty we made a station stop, Brock Guffin, if he'd been west-bound anywhere near Indianapolis, could have overtaken this train with a plane. I shrugged off the idea. It was too fantastic. I was beginning to iump at imaginary shadows.

Grace said, "You're worried, Steve."

I wouldn't lie to her. "I'm not smart enough for Segora. They should have sent someone with more experience."

"Nonsense. Nobody but you would have realized a matron in high heels wasn't kosher. You certainly handled that situation fast. I think you're swell. Steve."

"I'm too nervous to relax," I said. "Let's go to the club car and have a drink."

She nodded. "Steve, Brock Guffin doesn't know me. I'm sure of that."

I brightened somewhat. "I thought he did, the way you spoke about him. He doesn't know me, either, so that makes us all even. Now I really want that drink to celebrate. We'll get out of this yet, baby."

I gave her time to fix her face, then we made our way to the club car. The train was slowing for another station stop as we sat down in the deeply cushioned club car chairs and the watter took our order. He brought the drinks and the train started again. We were a little behind schedule and the engineer seemed to be making up time.

The conductor came into the car. He was holding a yellow envelope.

"Steve McCoy!" he called out. "Is Steve McCoy here?"

Without pausing to think, I raised my hand. The next second I knew I'd made

a bad mistake. Now Brock Guffin knew who we were all right. The conductor gave me the wire and said it had been sent to the last station. Not even the D.A. knew we were aboard this train, but Segora did. He'd rushed a man to our hotel with a speed that would have made the Police Department jealous.

The telegram was an innocuous thing signed by the D.A., and actually wired from New York. It told me to telephone for more money if I needed it. I crumpled the wire and stuck it into my inside coat pocket. Not because I used that pocket as a waste-basket, but when I withdrew my hand, the little snub nosed pistol was cradled in my palm and I could get the gun onto my lap without anyone seeing me do it. Even Grace hadn't noticed.

I said, "Brace yourself, baby. We're on the spot. That wire was sent so we'd be paged and show ourselves. Brock Guffin is probably in this car right now."

She gasped, but otherwise did a good job of retaining her outward composure. If she was like me, she was shaking on the inside.

She said, "Steve, it wasn't your fault. No matter what happens I want you to know that. Brock is dangerous. I used to hear them talk about the way he worked."

"Tell me again," I said.

"Well, Brock Guffin is known to few people. He gets away with all these murders because he remains anonymous. He gets his orders, spots his victim, and shoots without any warning. He always gets away."

"Always gets away," I said slowly. "How could he accomplish that in a train moving at seventy miles an hour, and which isn't due to stop for a long time."

GRACE was eying the people in the car.
There weren't many. For some reason
train travelers retire carly. Two men were
playing gin runmy, three others were reading. Two were staring out of the windows
at the darkness flashing past. Two women
were in the car, chatting and drinking.

Grace said, "If we'd only noticed who came into the car just before the conductor brought the telegram."

"We didn't," I said. "So now, if Brock works according to routine, he'll blast you and then me—or maybe the other way around. We won't know who he is until he starts throwing lead. Unless we can out-think him."

"But how?" she asked.

I gave her a sickly grin. "I get sixty-five bucks take-home pay each and every week because I'm supposed to out-think rats like Guffin. I'm beginning to believe I'm worth more than that."

She said a wholly unexpected thing. "Sixty-five a week net isn't too bad. People have lived on less."

lived on less."

I didn't get the point then. I said, "We're not slated to go on living, baby. We have no economic worries. Let me think. In heaven's name, there must be some answer! Guffin just shoots—no warning, Just a stranger walking up, and blooey. But Guffin always gets away. So he must plan well. Okay—I'm Brock Guffin. I've got a girll and a cop to rub out, but we're on a moving train. I can't wait long because I realize the cop knows the wire was a lake. I have to strike fast—and still get off this train. Grace, how many emergency cord signals do vou see in this car'?"

She glanced slowly from one end of the car to the other. "One at this end. That is, if you mean the cord with a wooden handle on it."

"That alone will bring this train to a stop," I said. "Guffin will head for it before he opens fire because once he shoots, he may have trouble reaching it. So, being a careful operator, he'll be close by. He may even pull the cord before he starts shooting."

"We'll have to watch it," she said. "Or maybe we ought to get up and go to our compartments. We could lock the doors."

"He'd like us to head back," I said. "He could follow, yank any cord any cut us down. So long as we stay here, he'll have to make an open move to reach the cord. We stay."

Ten agonizing minutes went by. A tall, good-looking man sauntered into the car and up to the little bar at the end of it. He paid no attention to us. A roly-poly little guy was sipping a highball almost across from us. A man who looked like a success-

ful traveling salesman had his nose in a magazine and rarely looked up. Any of them, any of the others, could be the murderer, Brock Griffin.

That slow, crawling fear was getting worse. My hands, gripping and covering the small gun, were soaked and slippery with sweat

Grace said, "Steve, darling, I can't stand this much longer. I'll go crazy."

"Take it easy, Beautiful," I said in a tight voice. "We're dead if we move. He shows himself first if we have to sit here all the way to Frisco."

"Don't pay any attention to what I'm saying, Steve. Not long ago I wasn't afraid to die because I didn't have anything worth living for. Oh, I had no suicide ideas, but living didn't seem important. It does now. It's very important now."

"Keep talking," I said. "It takes the edge off."

"Now I want to live—I want to so much, Steve. Because I wasn't asleep 'when you told me you didn't care what I'd been, that you were in love with me. That was when I woke up and realized what a wonderful place the world is when you meet the right guy. Maybe you didn't mean what you said. Maybe—"

"I meant it," I said gruffly. "Every word."

"Steve, get us out of this. Don't let him kill us."

I WAS watching the tall guy at the bar. He put down his empty glass, ambled through the car, almost kicked my ankles, and kept on going. He didn't reach for the emergency cord.

Another ten years went by. The roly-poly guy paid his check and walked past us. He gave me a polite, warm little nod, and looked Grace over rather carefully. That in itself wasn't suspicious because every man on the train had done the same thing. I followed him with my eyes. He didn't reach for the cord either that eliminated two of them.

I looked the others over. Guffin, to have engineered all those murders, had to be an ordinary-looking guy. Someone who could be swallowed up in a crowd easily, the kind to whom people paid no attention at all. The men still in the car all had some peculiarity which stood out. Grey hair, complete baldness, too handsome a face, too big a build. The roly-poly was the most nonexistent individual of them all. I'd almost forgotten about him myself. I turned my eyes toward the emergency cord pull and attempted watching it.

It was swaying slightly with the movement of the fast-running train. I started feeling sleepy. This was a hell of a time to have trouble keeping my eyes open. The lids kept falling.

Then, as if in a half-dream, I saw a shoulder move into view at the end of the car and an arm went upward while the hand sought the emergency cord. Roly-poly suddenly appeared. He had a big gun in his fist, and there was a savage expression on his-round butter-ball of a face. So he was the one.

I lifted one hand off my gun, fired two quick shots, and the savageness of his expression became a look of wild amazement. He hadn't even guessed I was ready, and that so was my gun. Both my slugs caught him in the chest. They made smacking sounds going in. He hälf-turned, as if he wanted to start running. Instead, he fell sideward against the car and slid to the floor.

In ten seconds I had my badge pinned to the lapel of my coat and I was standing up.

"I'm a cop," I said. "Everybody stay as you are, please. There's no danger here, at all."

The conductor was sent for. When he arrived, I gave him a rundown on the situation. He contacted the engineer and the train began to slow for a special stop at the next station. Meantime I searched the body and found enough to make positive identification of Brock Guiffin. He had two more guns on him, but he'd never use them. Brock was dead.

Later, I was told that both my slugs had exploded through his heart, which wasn't bad shooting for a guy who was shaking from head to foot. VI



THERE was the devil to pay, of course. At the next city the conductor called cops, the club car was detached and we all sat in comfort while the local police went into the affair. I didn't blame them. I'd have done the same

thing, but this wasn't the way I wanted it to happen.

Naturally, the publicity was going to be tremendous.

I identified Brock Guffin as the murderer of half a hundred or more people, I told how Grace's life had been threatened and how we had been on the move. I was careful to point out that she was only a witness. As if any of those news hounds cared! All they wanted was good cheescake shots of her, and Grace posed for them. Not too brassy, but they were good leg art.

Naturally, the D.A. back home was called, and so were my superiors. I spent an hour or so wondering what other profession might appeal to me. However, the furore died down almost as fast as it had flared up. In twenty-four hours Grace and I were pretty much on our own, but now the whole nation knew where we were.

I took her out to dinner that night, with a gum in my coat pocket and one hand around it. I even ate one-handed and got dizzy looking over the other diners. When we returned to the hotel, the D.A. was on the wire.

"Well, you bungled this good, McCoy. I ought to have your hide, but you're too far away. Now get this. Understand it and don't slip up. Keep the girl traveling. Follow your plan to go to the Coast. Hide in one of the big cities out there. Do anything you like, but the girl must stay alive."

I said, "What about the leak in your office? You're giving me orders right now that might be overheard, and if they are we'll be intercepted again."

"There is no longer a leak in my office," he said irritably. "We found the rat. A minor clerk with big ears and eyes. He's locked up, so there is nothing more to worry about."

I said, "Okay. We'll start moving right away."

Grace wearily got set for more traveling. I felt the same way she did. Maybe the leak in the D.A.'s office had been cleared up and maybe it hadn't. There was even a possibility that Grace and I had been under Segora's surveillance for hours. We would run and run, and finally we'd run right off the sharp edge of life to the tune of builtets. I said, "Baby, how's your preve?"

"All right—if you have something good to suggest, Steve."

"Suppose we just board a plane—not secretly—just get on it and fly back home." She brightened. "If we can get clear, they'll hardly think of looking for us there. Besides, Segora seems to know our destination every time we make any plans, so if we move fast, he might not find out this time."

"Then we'll do it," I said.

"Steve"—her hand rested lightly on mine

"your orders were different. If you disobey

them, you'll be in trouble."

I grinned. It was the first time I'd felt like smiling in quite a few days. I said, "Baby, could I possibly get into any more trouble than I've been in since I met you? Look, it's our lives we're gambling with. I think more of them than of my ioh."

She nodded. "You're right. Let's go back, quickly."

Two hours later we were on a plane headed East, with one stop at Chicago. We had two rear seats, all the privacy we needed, and I never let go of her hand from the moment we unbuckled our safety belts.

GRACE said, "Steve, this takes more of my nerve than facing Segora's paid killers, but I have to know. Did you mean what you said that—that time?"

I nodded. "Every word. Sometimes I feel like chucking everything and taking you away where nobody will find us. It's useless, though, because they would."

"Don't worry about me, Steve."

"But I do. You have no idea what they drag a witness through, especially during an important and juicy trial like the one they'll hit Segora with. It'll be tough, but if there's any consolation in it, I'll be right there to do what I can to ease things."

She leaned over and brushed my cheek with her lips. We hadn't even found time for any romancing. Here I had one of the world's most gorgeous creatures under my protection and all we'd done so far was run and run. I was twice as happy about going back

I reached into my pocket and took out the .25 automatic which I'd lifted off that punk in Grace's apartment — how many years are was it?

"Put that in your handbag," I said. "I should have given you a gun long ago. It's all set to shoot. You just push down this doohickey and pull the trigger."

She said, "If you want me to have it, Steve. I couldn't hit a wall at ten feet, though."

"Maybe you could if your life depended on it." I said. "Now try to get a little rest. We'll be in Chicago soon. I'm getting off long enough to send the D.A. a wire."

She showed a trace of fear. "You're going to let him know we're back?"

"Have to. It'll work out okay. They found the rat in his office who was spilling information to Segora."

I sent my wire from Chicago. We'd reach New York about eight in the evening when it would be dark. I planned to take Grace to an uptown hotel and there we'd stay come hell or Big Pig Segora.

Grace dozed, with her head on my shoulder. The stewardess offered me a pillow for her, but I waved it aside. I liked having Grace use my shoulder.

She spoke in a very soft, slightly sleepy, voice, "If we go through with this and I have to testify, it will be awful. The things I know will make sensational newspaper copy, Steve. If you stick by me, your friends are going to wonder, and perhaps laugh at you."

"I can take that—so long as they don't laugh at you, baby. That would be fatal for them. Stop talking about it. I don't give a hoot about anything except keeping you alive. We'll work out our lives. You can tace anything if you're honest about it." "Implying that I haven't been—with life in general?"

"I'm implying nothing at all. I said I didn't care about your past. Mine was no example for a Sunday School class."

She laughed a little. "I'll bet it was. I'd make book on it. You couldn't be bad if you wanted to."

"Shut up," I said roughly. "Remember that I'm a cop, and you're my prisoner."

She laughed again. "Doggone, I had forgotten about that. I think I like it, Steve." She really dozed after that, while I sat

She really dozed after that, while I sat there getting more and more uncomfortable as my shoulder went to sleep. I made what plans I could make. Not knowing exactly what I was walking into, I couldn't be specific, but I had certain ideas. I reached for Grace's handbag and tested it a couple of times. The snap worked hard, but it was better than a zipper. I bent one snap back a bit. That made it easier to open.

I WOKE her up when the warning light flashed on. We fixed our belts, we said nothing, and watched the plane come down for the landing. It turned and taxied along the strip to the point for unloading. Two men were pushing the gangplank in our direction. Grace gave my hand one final squeeze, a hard one as if to say she understood. That we were still in terrific danger and she'd accept it.

We were the last ones off. Halfway down the gangplank steps I saw Roy Ward moving toward us. The D.A.'s confidential assistant wasn't letting anyone block his path either.

Ward gripped my hand. "You're a crazy fool," he said, "but I admire courage. So this is the young lady. I envy you, McCoy. I envy every moment you've been away, including the times you had to fight for your life."

I said, "Listen, Mr. Ward, I want this understood. Whatever you have in mind for Grace, includes me. I go where she does. We're not separating."

"Good," he said. "Fine. I can see you've fallen for her, and I don't blame you. Personally, I'm glad, because a man in love will exert many times the vigilance of a cop just doing his job."

"What have you got in mind?" I asked.

"Not me, McCoy—the D.A. He's lined up-a place for you to stay. A big house in a residential section. Regular estate it is. We can plant guards unobtrusively and even if Segora does find out where you are, he'll have a devil of a time getting at the girl," "How about the leak?"

"A clerk who was intimidated and bribed. He made it a point to be around and find out what was going on. There was also a telephone tap on the D.A.'s wire, believe it or not."

I said, "I'd believe anything after what I've been through."

We went to a parking space where Ward had a sedan waiting. He drove, and Grace

and I sat in the back seat.

Ward said, "Knocking off that Brock Guffin was a nice piece of work. Inspector Dermott—you must have met him in the

D.A.'s office—practically did a jig for joy. Said he'd always had confidence in you."

"He didn't show it," I grunted. "We're

heading for Long Island?"
"Yes. This estate belongs to a friend of
the D.A.'s, and he's turned it over to us.

I think you'll be safe there."

"At least," Grace said, "it will be better than running."

Conversation died away then. After half an hour of driving Ward braked the car and began looking for the entrance to a driveway. When he found it, we were in a section devoted to fairly good-sized estates. We moved along a winding drive toward a large house which was dark except for one or two rooms.

Ward said, "You can readily see how we may appear be perfected by a guards around this place. Frankly, I always thought the D.A.'s idea of having you and the girl travel was crazy. But people like you and I don't argue with a D.A."

The car eased up to the front entrance. I got out first and helped Grace. We went up the steps with Ward behind us, chatting pleasantly. He had a key.

"You'll be alone in here," he said, "but I have an idea you won't object to that."

Grace and I walked in and found our-

selves in a beautiful reception hall. It was deeply carpeted, the walls were lined with beautiful paintings, and half a dozen uncomfortable looking chairs were further ornamentation. The hall was lighted indirectly and was full of shadows.

Ward said, "The door down at the end of the hall, McCoy. And if you feel like arguing the point, this is a gun I have pushed against your back."

Grace gave a little cry and hugged my arm. I gave a snort. "So you're the rat, after all."

Ward laughed. "You walked into it, smart guy. If you hadn't wired, I think you'd have got away with it, but I have been monitoring every wire, letter and phone call the D.A. has received these days."

Grace said, "You work for Segora, don't you?"

"You can put it that way."

"Perhaps we can make some kind of a deal," she suggested.

Ward said, "Segora is in that room where we're headed. He's the guy who makes the deals."

I walked as slowly as I dared. "You planted a sucker in the D.A.'s office and when the heat for a squealer got too bad, you sacrificed him. That satisfied the D.A.—and me."

"Funny thing," Ward said. "I didn't worry about fooling the D/A, but you gave mesome bad moments. When you knocked off Brock, I began to have more respect for you. Too bad, though. Brock was a good friend of Segora's, and he don't like it."

"That's too bad." I said.

VIII



ROY WARD gave me a sudden push. I was propelled a couple of steps while he came to a dead stop. When I turned around, he was far enough away so he could use his gun before I could reach him.

"You know the procedure, McCoy," he said. "They taught it to you at the Police

Academy."

I nodded, faced the wall, stuck my arms and leaned forward until I was completely off-balance and supporting myself with the flat of my hands against the wall. Ward frisked me and took the gun out of my shoulder clip.

"All right," he said, after he passed his hands along my sleeves and down my trouser

legs. "You're clean."

I straightened up. Ward gestured toward the door with his gun.

GRACE went in first. I followed her, and Ward came up third. He closed the door, put his back against it, and kept his gun on us.

It was a study and behind a great big desk sat Segora. It was the first time Hd ever seen this overlord of vice, and he wasn't impressive. In some ways the DA's name for him fitted well. He was thick-necked, bullet-headed, fat-lipped, and had small, mean eyes. He didn't pay the slightest bit of attention to me, but his eyes swept up and down Grace's form.

He said, "Hello, baby. It's been a long time."

Grace remained silent. Segora pushed his chair back and got up.

He came around the desk and moved up to her.

I said, "Hello, Big Pig!"

The crack was meant to make him forget Grace for a moment, and he did. Segora was vain. That name was anguish to him. He backhanded me across the mouth.

"It'll be a pleasure to knock you off, you cheap cop. One more crack and I'll finish you now." He turned to Grace again. His woice became gentle and coaxing, "Baby, I don't like to be treated the way you treated me. Wasn't I good to you? Lots of dough, and I didn't bother you much. But to run out and tell the D.A. I was no good. It breaks my heart, Beautiful."

Grace said, "I worked for you without knowing what you were until I was in too deep to get out. That didn't make me fall in love with you. Segora."

"But you will, baby," he said. "I got great plans for us. You ain't no run-of-the-mill babe. You're extra special. Yeah, I got plans."

Grace said, "Big Pig!"

Just two words, but the way she said them must have bitten like a white-hot iron. Segora slapped her. He slapped her damned hard. Grace gave a sharp little cry and grabbed at me. She wound her arms around my neck and clung to me.

Segora laughed. "So you go for the lousy copper. That's a laugh. Let go of him, Beautiful. Let go, or I'll have Ward put a

slug through his skull."

She stepped back and my right hand moved fast to my pocket. It palmed the 25 automatic which I'd dug out of her handbag while we were in the clinch. I shoved the safety off.

Segora said, "You go for a two-for-aningle to you have and the approximated for you, and I'm a bum. Too bad—because things could have been so easy for you, baby. I hate to shove you around, but if it's gotta be done, it'll be done. The first thing you oughta know is that if you did get on the witness stand against me, you'd take a ride. A nice long one, because I got you so mixed up with my racket they'd have to give you years, too. So you won't talk. You won't do anything except be nice to Segora."

I thought it was about time to end this. I said, "Before you start bragging, remember that I got Brock and he was supposed to be a clever guy."

CEGORA moistened his lips.

"Ward, are you sure you searched this punk?"

"He's clean," Ward said. "What kind of an idiot do you think I am?"

"How about the girl?"

Ward shrugged.

"She was his prisoner. He wouldn't let her carry a rod."

"Maybe he would," Segora said. "I'm

Segora asked for the showdown. It was no longer a question of waiting for the right moment. I let Segora grab her because I knew it would draw Ward's attention. Sure enough, he stopped looking at me and started grinning like an ape. I wiped the grin off his pan with a bullet that hit at the bridge of his nose. He was dead before he started falling.

Segora let go of Grace, nose-dived for the desk and got a drawer open. I said, "Go ahead and pick up the gun, Segora. Pick it up so I can kill you with an easy conscience."

HE pushed the drawer shut hard and raised his hands. Grace stood there, frozen in horror.

Ward's body was spread on the floor. I walked behind the desk, shoved Segora into his chair, opened the drawer and took out a long-barreled revolver. When I'd made sure it was loaded, I dropped the little automatic in my pocket.

I said, "This is a better gun for my purposes. Packs a bigger wallop."

"What you gonna do?" Segora asked. "What you gonna do?"

I said, "You were right, Segora, about the way I feel toward Grace. That puts you in a bad spot, because I wouldn't want Grace to be sent to prison."

"She didn't do a damn thing," Segora said. "I hired her at my office because she was a knockout. She didn't know what kind of business I was in. Honest—I swear it! But she couldn't see me, so I got her involved more. I took her to some of my places and, let her be seen there. A couple of fly cops spotted her. So she was listed as one of the girls."

"This information you have lined up in case she testified against you," I said. "That's lad. I want you to write me a full statement saying Grace had nothing to do with it. And you might as well make it a full confession of guilt, too. Then you'll have to cop a plea and there won't be any trial.

Segora said, "They'll give me ten years! I can't do no ten years!"

I laid the muzzle of the gun against his nose. "What did you say, Segora?"

He reached for paper. I said, "Start the statement this way. 'I, Segora, also known as the Big Pig—'"

"No!" he velled.

The gun muzzled his nose again. "Put it down, boy. Mention that you're known as

the Big Pig at least three times in the statement. Because you won't want that made public, and it will be if you don't plead guilty. Write it. Serora."

"I can't!" he groaned. "You're asking too much."

"Brock died in two seconds. Ward died in one. You'd never be that lucky, Segora. It might take you a long time."

He began writing. When he finished, I telephoned Inspector Dermott. It took him half an hour to reach the house with a squad to take care of any guards Segora might have around the place.

It was a pleasant half-hour. I threw the end of the rug over Ward's body so Grace wouldn't have to look at it. I sat beside her on a comfortable divan. I could only put one arm around her though. The other arm ended in the hand that was busy holding a gun on Segora.

JUST because I hated his guts I made him lie across his desk so that his head and hands hung off the edge. In that way I could pay some attention to Grace, and tell her I was sorry I even suspected she might be nothing but a cheap little twist.

"I don't mind," she said. "It shows you really do care. Steve, you knew this was going to happen, didn't you? That's why you brought me back."

I nodded. "I was pretty well convinced of it. It took somebody with authority to request Police Departments all over the country to look for us. No minor clerk could have done that, so I reasoned it had to be someone important. Someone like Ward, or even Dermott. But whoever it was, he'd have to show himself when we arrived."

"You also gave me that extra gun for an emergency," she said.

"I gave it to you for protection. Slipping the gun to me was your idea, and it saved our necks."

Segora groaned and looked at us with cowlike eyes. With his head hanging down, his face was getting redder and redder. I hoped the louse would get apoplexy. But with Grace beside me, and knowing she was in the clear, I couldn't really stay mad at anyone.



The Frightened Pawnbroker

By WILLIAM F. SCHWARTZ THIS, I told myself, was a job for the police. My job was to avrite about murders, and about Killers when, and if the coppers caught them. But the pudgy little guy with the fat belly and thick-lensed glasses lying on the floor in a pool of fiis own blood, had been sort of a friend of mine.

Sam Rosen, his name was, and he had owned this dingy neighborhood pawnshop, besides being in his own way a kind of master mechanic. One of the fly-specked signs in his window said

I FIX ANYTHING-EXCEPT A

That sign was the reason I had come to

know Sam when he was alive.

Making the rounds on my beat as a police reporter for the *Herald*, I had ripped my trousers on the torn fender of a battered jalopy, and had been cursing the luck when I'd first seen Sam's sign.

Sam had repaired the rip, and that might have ended my acquaintance with him—if he hadn't refused to take a penny for his work. That had puzzled me, 'because he'd looked like a guy who could use a buck or two. His faded trousers and once white shirt were threadbare, he needed a shave, and a bunion peeped through a worn-out shoe.

But I hadn't argued because something in his bulging eyes had made me think he was

anxious to get rid of me.

I'd shrugged and walked out, asking myself, what the hell? Why should he be afraid of me?

The next day when I'd walked past Rosen's he'd been staring out the window. I'd given him a smile and a friendly wave. He had looked startled. Then he had nodded. But there had been nothing friendly in his half-hearted smile. Again he'd looked scared of me. And I'd wondered why. I'd asked myself, is there a story here? And decided to find out.

The day after that I'd stopped in the shop to buy a new leather band for my wristwatch. The guy hadn't charged for that repair job, so why shouldn't I give him a little business?

Sam had been looking out the window again, but had ducked when he'd seen me heading for the door. And when I'd entered the shop, his face had looked a little pale under his stubble of beard.

"What do you want?" he'd asked, a kind of whine in his voice with its Central European accent.

I'D TRIED to be friendly. "I want a watch band," I'd told him pleasantly.

His stubby legs moved toward the window, and his fat little arm brought out a card to which the bands were attached by elastics, and handed it to me. At the top of the card the price—\$1.75—had been printed in pencil.

I'd pointed. "I'll take this one."

He'd nodded, pulled the band from the

card, his chubby hands trembling. His eyes had watched every movement of my hands, and he'd seemed to sigh with relief when I brought my wallet out of my hip pocket.

"You wish to pay for this?" he'd asked, surprise in his voice, and he'd looked down at the two one-dollar bills I shoved into his grimy hand, unbelief in his bug eyes.

And suddenly I'd been more curious than ever.

"What's wrong?" I'd asked.

"Nothing!" he'd said quickly, his teeth chattering. "Nothing!" He'd thrust the bills back into my hand. "I want no money!" And he'd backed away.

"What's wrong?" I'd asked again. "What's the matter, anyway?"

"Please—please!" he'd begged, wringing his hands nervously. "Don't ask me! Please, no questions!"

And although my reporter's instinct had been thoroughly aroused by now, he had seemed so terror-stricken that I'd pitied him. So I'd stopped my questions—for them—had thrown the bills on the counter and walked out. His bug eyes had been staring down at the money.

And here I was back in the shop again, at ten P.M., because I wanted to ask more questions, wanted to know why he should be afraid of me. But he wasn't afraid of me, Bill Barton, now. He'd never be afraid of anyone again. He was dead. But he hadn't been dead long. His blood on the floor was still thickening.

I stooped over and smelled the barrel of the 32 revolver that lay about four inches away from an out-flung grimy hand. It reeked of cordite.

Suicide, I decided. The guy had been plenty scared of something—scared enough, I guessed, to bump himself off.

He was flat on his face. T wanted to roll him over and see where the bullet had gone in. From the blood on the back of his vest, I figured he must have shot himself in the chest, Funny, I was thinking, because most suicides, if a revolver is used, shoot themselves in the temple, or through the roof of the mouth. I did remember about one guy down on Skid Row who had shot himself through the heart.

But I didn't roll Sam over, and I didn't

touch anything in the shop. I just worked with my eyes. What I was looking for, I didn't know. I couldn't see anything except the usual junk that clutters up a pawnshop.

There was a ragged green curtain stretched across the back of the shop behind the counter. I moved through it and into a small workshop. A bench. A vise. A hacksaw. "I fix anything—except a broken heart."

The repair shop was more littered with dusty junk than the front of the place. But the work-bench was bare, except for some tools and some cans of oil. One can—its contents smelled like kerosene—had been overturned. It dripped slowly into a puddle on the floor.

My eyes followed the drops. Then I saw them—parts of the insides of slot machines. Wheels with bells, cherries, bars and plums. I stooped over to examine them.

Wham!

Galaxies of stars suddenly exploded before my eyes. Then blackness. I dropped off into space. . . .

space. . . . woke up when somebody kicked me in the

"This one's alive," I heard a voice say from a vast distance.

Rough hands picked me up, the hands of two patrolmen. One was big, about fifty years years old. The other was smaller, and younger. A rookie, maybe. I didn't know either of them.

"This your gun?" the older one asked me gruffly. He was a beefy, red-faced man.

FOCUSING my eyes, I saw the gun that had finished Sam. The .32 was now in

the copper's hamlike hand.

"No," I said, "it's not my gun. I never

carry a gun."

"Oh, no!" he sneered. He grabbed me by the lapels of my coat, and, thought he was going to bust me in the mouth with the .32.
"You better talk! And talk fast, hood! A dead man in the front of the shop. You back

here with a busted head. Give!"

"I can explain," I said, and started to reach for my hip, "I'm a—"

"Keep your hands still!" the beefy one barked.

"- a newspaperman," I finished, but I

kept my hands still. "I only wanted to get my wallet, show you my identification."

The beefy's cop's eyes became slits of suspicion. "Joe," he said to his colleague, "get his wallet out. That's an old trick, Joe. Al-ways watch 'em when they say they're going for a wallet. It's a gun they could be going for, just as easy."

I stood still while Joe tapped my pockets.

"No wallet in them back pockets, Ed," Joe informed

"What?" I began, then said a little foolishly, as Joe probed my other pockets, "I guess I was robbed. I know I got whacked on the head—but good."

Ed ignored me. He was listening to Joe, who was turning my pockets inside out.

"A handkerchief," Joe was enumerating, "Some keys. Cigarettes. Some change. No rod. And no wallet!"

"Nice going," Ed congratulated Joe. "That was the way to search 'em." Then he looked at me again, and an expansive smile lighted up his face. "Call Headquarters, Joe. Tell Homicide we got a killer. We ought to get a promotion out of this, eh, Joe?"

Joe grinned. "Boy! A promotion already."
I couldn't hold myself back any longer.

"All I got to say," I told them, "is that you boys are in for a rude awakening. I am a newspaperman!"

"Shut up!" Ed snarled. "Before I paste you one."

Lieutenant Kent Fenton, of Homicide, came in answer to the telephone report of the young copper called Joe. I stood by while Ed explained the situation.

"Me and Patrolman Fleming here, sir, was on routine patrol when we saw this pawnshop door open after hours. We came in. We found this." Ed modded toward Sam Roseri's body on the foor. "Then we heard somebody groan back there, sir, behind that curtain. We went in and saw this—this reporter back there. So—well, we arrested him. We didn't know who he was. We didn't know he was a reporter, sir."

Lieutenant Fenton nodded impatiently. Fenton was a big guy in a blue serge suit. What hair he had on a semi-bald head was gray, and he had a bulky middle. I had been on assignments where I had run into him before, and he knew me as soon as he saw me. That's one advantage of being a police reporter. Most of the brass know you on sight, were if all the went on posterior death.

even if all the men on patrol don't.

Not that Fenton was friend of mine. Nor

Not that Penton was then of mine. Nor of the Herald's, either. There had been whispers about Fenton, but nothing had ever been proved. He had come clean after an investigation where other brass hadn't.

Fenton's pale eyes probed my face.
"What were you doing here?" he asked me.

"How come you were in that back room?"
"I came in here," I began. "I—"

"Why?" Fenton cut in.

I shrugged and started again. "I had

business—"
"Business?" Fenton interrupted again.

"What kind of business?"
"If you'd let me talk," I said, "maybe I could tell you something. I said I had some

business here—"
"Yeah?" Fenton jibed. A sneer was spreading across his lips. "I suppose you bought some things here, huh?"

I sneered back. "Yeah, I did. This watch band, for instance." Then, because I was getting sore, sick of it all, I said, "What the hell are you getting at? You don't think I knocked Sam off, do you?"

LIEUTENANT FENTON'S sneer deepened. "Just because you're a newspaper guy," he said, "don't prove your nose is clean. Even newspaper men can commit murder."

"I don't like that, Fenton!" I told him.
"Cut the malarkey. I'm not some hood you can push around."

"No?" he snarled. "We could book you as

a material witness."
"Try!" I challenged. "The Herald will

have something to say about that."
"The Herald's got a lot of things to say," he commented, his tone nasty. "About a lot of things."

"About slot machines," I said, and saw his face redden. "Speaking of slot machines, there were parts of"—I started through the curtains—back here."

He followed me through.

"Where?" he demanded.

But the cylinders with the bells, the bars, the cherries were gone!

"They're not here," I said, again feeling a little foolish.

"They ain't?" he mocked, "Maybe you was seeing things. Maybe they were never there. There ain't no more slot machines anywhere in this city any more. You should know that, You was one of them snoopers the Herald sent out to hunt for them, wasn't you?"

I nodded. I had been one of the men the Herald had sent out to investigate gambling conditions. Fenton knew that. And the Herald had been instrumental in cleaning up slots throughout the city. They had not been around for some time now. Not in public places, anyway.

I said, talking my thoughts out loud, "Maybe that was why that little old man on the floor got rubbed out. Maybe this was a repair shop for the slot machine racket. Maybe—"

I stopped. Fenton's pale blue eyes were boring holes through me. I reached for the telephone on the counter.

"What do you think you're doing?" Fenton demanded.

"I'm going to call my paper," I told him.
"And try and stop me." I thought I knew
now why that little pawnbroker had been
afraid of me.

I got Bill Tray, the night city editor, on the or a rewrite man, and I gave him enough for the late edition. All the time I was watching the boys from Homicide go over the place. Flash bulbs were popping.

I cradled the phone when they rolled Sam's body over. Fenton tried to step in front of me, but I pushed in close.

"What are you looking for?" Fenton growled.

"Powder burns," I told him. "When I came in here I thought it looked like suicide. The gun was right at Sam's hand." I wheeled on the beefy patrolman. "Where did you find this gun?" I asked. "Where?"

He looked at Fenton. "Do I tell him, Lieutenant?"

Fenton shook his head angrily. "Tell him nothing. It's none of his damned business."

I shrugged. "It doesn't matter," I said. "I know now that that gun was planted to make

Sam's death look like suicide. Now we know it wasn't suicide."

"Yeah?" Fenton said mockingly. "Who said it wasn't? You're the one that's doing all the talking. You seem to know a lot of things, and a lot about this."

things, and a lot about this."

I felt of the back of my head. It still hurt, but the blood had dried now.

"I know I was sapped," I said. "Probably by the guy who murdered Sam. Then the gun was put in my hand, maybe. Good thing I am a newspaper guy, or maybe I'd be on my way to a cell right now, charged with homi-

way to a cell right now, charged with homicide."
"Nobody said you was in the clear yet,"

I ignored him. I took out my pad, started to scribble notes, while Fenton eyed me bale-

"Now don't get ideas," he ordered bluntly.
"This is police business. Keep your nosey
newspaper nose outa this. When there's
something that should be in the papers, I'll
let you know."

"I know all I want to know—for now," I told him, and walked from the shop. His eyes were burning holes in my back.

I HURRIED down the street. I was about half a block away when I looked hack and saw that a plainclothesman was tailing me. I pretended not to notice. I walked into a drug store and ordered coffee at the counter. I drank the coffee and burned one cigarette while I thought it over, planned my next move.

The plainclothesman, a big guy in a brown suit who had been with the squad that had arrived from Homicide, peered at me through the window. He ducked back when I stared at him.

I walked over to the phone booths and thumbed through the directory until I found the address I wanted. Then I walked out into the street again. The plainclothesman was standing there, pretending to look bored, watching the traffic.

What a lousy tail he was! He was about as inconspicuous as a neon sign. A real brainy boy. I nodded to him, said, "Hello," and be damned if he didn't nod back. He even smiled, a little sheepishly. Somehow, this smile of his

reminded me of Sam Rosen's smiles. Somebody was on the hook. Was it me?

I had no time to waste, so I flagged a cab. My driver was just pulling away from the curb when the plainclothesman waved frantically at the taxi behind mine.

The man in brown followed me all the way to the *Herald* Building, and stared at me through the revolving doors while I waited inside for the elevator.

In the city room I hurriedly told Bill Tray what I wanted to do, and when he gave me the go-ahead I took the freight levator down the back way. I could hear the presses rumbling out the story of Sam Rosen's murder as I legged it into the back alley for one of the Herald emergency cars. I took the first one in line and headed fast for the late Sam Rosen's address. I wanted to get three panded of the police. I wanted to see if Sam had kept a record of the men for whom he had fixed slot machines. It was a wild stab, but it could pay off.

When I walked up the iron steps that led to the tenement where Sam had lived, there wasn't a police car in sight. And no sounds of sirens. I began to congratulate myself.

I rapped on the door of the first floor front that had a card, "Building Manager," tacked on it. A head popped out. A head with paper curlers and a bloated face that scowled at me. I didn't waste any time here, either. I shoved a fin at her.

"Quick!" I said: "Which flat is Sam Rosen's?"

She grabbed at the fin, and told me. I hurried up the stairs, still congratulating myself.

I was a little out of breath when I reached the fifth floor where Sam's flat was located. I was studying numbers on the doors in the dim light of a naked bulb dangling from the ceiling in the corridor when I saw the light under the door of Sam's flat. If Sam had a family—well, maybe it was still okay.

I knocked on the door. No answer. I tried the knob. It gave, and I pushed the door open.

I saw Lieutenant Fenton first. Then the .45 Police Special in his hand, I had congratulated myself a little too soon, but I was feeling more silly than scared.

Fenton said, "Come in and close the door."

I did, and he began to call me a lot of things. "Nosey," was the mildest epithet.

I said, "So you figured Sam was giving me a story about your tie-in with the slots, and you killed him. That's right, isn't it, Fenton?"

He cursed me and growled, "You're doing the talking. You and that lousy *Herald's* always doing the talking."

"But Sam wasn't doing any talking," I told him . "All I knew was that he was scared of me, and I wondered why. Now I know."

FENTON sneered, "You think you do! You think you know a lot."

"I think I know enough to send you to the chair, Fenton."

He laughed, as he brought the gun up, leveled it at my chest. "What makes you think you'll tell anybody? You're through talking."

"The Herald will still talk," I declared confidently, but I didn't feel that way.

I wasn't sap enough to think that, just because I was a reporter, he wouldn't blast me down, but I was stalling for time. Why, I don't know. Nobody would come looking for me. I hadn't even told Bill Tray just where I was going—only that I had a line on the Rosen murder I wanted to work on.

"Says you," Penton said. He wasn't scaring any. "Think I'm crazy enough to let you
go, now that you know the whole pitch?
Don't make me laugh. This is curtains for
you, cookie—I suppose you came here because you thought Sam might have some
records?" He pulled a little black book out
of his pocket. "He had records all right," he
said. "But one match—and they're gone.
Nobody will time mi with this."

fed. "You should have killed me in that back room at Sam's. Now the *Herald* knows I'm on the Rosen job and they'll tie the two murders in together."

"But you weren't smart, Fenton," I scof-

That sank in—a little. I could hear him grit his teeth. I poured it on.

"You shouldn't have sapped me, Fenton. You should have killed me then."

He snarled, "I didn't sap you. What do you take me for?"

"Then who did, Fenton?"

He didn't get a chance to answer. The door

swung open and my buddy, the plainclothesman in brown, came in.

He had a flattened nose, a cauliflower ear, and his eyes were a little glassy. No wonder he wasn't too bright. He looked more like a punch-drunk fighter than a copper. But detectives sometimes have to take clubbings in their line of duty, and this was the kind of guy Fenton would want for his odd jobs—a euw with his brains beat out.

And of course Fenton, being a lieutenant, could protect him, no matter how low his IQ dropped. But Fenton was giving him the old one-two now.

"You bum!" he blistered him. "You nogood, brainless bum! Didn't I tell you to hang onto this bird?"

The guy in brown clenched and unclenched his big-knuckled hands. Beads of sweat popped out on his forchead.

"He got away, Lieutenant. He went into the *Herald* Building. I thought he was going to write a story."

"You thought!" Fenton mocked. "You thought! How many times must I tell you not to think, Randall? Just do what I say." He wheeled on me. "Here's the guy who sapped you, the guy who chilled that pawn-broker!".

"But you told me to," Randall protested.
"You told me to go there and do it."

Fenton cursed him again. "I should have known better! All I tell you to do is get those slots, and fix Rosen so he wouldn't talk no more. Did you have to chill him? And why do you have to pick a time when this nosey reporter was snooping around?"

Randall looked saared now. "But you gotta protect me, Lieutenant! You said you would. I only did what you told me. I didn't want to rub him out. I told him I wanted alkthe slots, and the parts, and that we knew he was squealing to some reporter. Then the rat pulled a gun from under the counter, said he was thred of coppers telling him what to do. I grabbed the gun, and it went off. He flopped over. So I put-the gun alongside him so it'd look like he done it himself. I d'I just carried out the slots when this guy came in and saw where Sam had been fixing the slots. So I let him have it. I figured maybe we could pin it on him."

Fenton snarled in rage, "You figured! Who told you to figure?" He pointed the gun at me. "Now you got to shut this guy up, too. Get your gun out-chill him!"

RANDALL brought out his service .45, pointed it right at my chest.

"Don't be a sap!" I shouted at him, fighting for my life. "You're the sucker! You kill me, Fenton goes free, and you take the rap for both killings! Two dead guys-from one gun. Everybody'll be against you. Even the guys on the Force. Coppers hate a no-good cop worse than anybody else!"

Randall licked his lips, looked to Fenton

for help.

"Go on!" Fenton urged. "Close his trap for good! Nobody knows about this set-up but you and me. Go ahead-blast him!"

Randall lifted the gun, pointed it at my guts. Maybe I screamed. I'm not sure.

And Randall hesitated. He looked worried; scared, almost. Maybe what I'd say was slowly penetrating his dull brain. Suddenly he Nowered the gun.

"There is somebody else knows, Lieutenant," he croaked. "Sam said another copper's wise to our set-up. Sam said he was in a couple of times, snooping around. He bought a watch band-"

That was me! No wonder Sam had been scared of me. He'd thought I was another cop. I'm big, and maybe I look like a copper.

I said quickly, "Sure, there's somebody telse, Randall! Fenton just wants you to take the rap for him!"

"Shut up, damn you!" Fenton bellowed at me, and thumbed back the trigger on his own

gun. He wheeled on Randall. "Do I have to do everything myself?"

"I-don't know, Lieutenant!" Randall

wheezed. Fenton began again to shower him with curses. He was looking at Randall, had his

gun pointed that way. So I jumped.

I hit Fenton in a flying tackle. The gun boomed, and a slug tore into Randall's shoulder, knocking him down.

Fenton and I were fighting for the gun. I don't know what Fenton was yelling, but I was screeching. "Shoot, Randall-shoot. He's trying to kill you! Shoot!"

Randall's lips were twitching in pain from the wound in his shoulder. On his face was a puzzled look as he aimed the .45.

"Don't-don't!" Fenton was screaming when I tore myself loose, letting him have the gun. I was crawling frantically out of the line of fire when Randall made the squeeze with his trigger finger.

Two Service revolvers exploded at the same time. Randall spun around. The gun dropped from his hand. He was sneering at Fenton as he died, blood pouring from a belly wound.

But Fenton had no sneer on his lips. They had been ripped away, and a hole was gaping in the back of his head where the slug had come out

I stayed on my knees, numb with shock. Then slowly I lifted myself to my feet. I began to probe Fenton's pockets for Sam's record book.

But all I was really thinking about was what a story I'd have to phone Bill Tray.



Murder of a MAGNOLIA

a novelet by DOROTHY DUNN

The luscious Georgia peach had a come-hither look,
but nobody realized she was flirting with death...



A NYBODY from the North would probably have called George Harbin a professional Southerner.

His drawl was soft and lazy. His gait was slow for such a long-legged man, and his views and opinions were as narrow as the mountain roads that wound around the Georgia hills.

Personally, I was never sure about George Harbin, and I'd known him for the five years I'd worked on the *Banner*. I could scarcely blame Tom Feeney for labeling him a phony after Tom had been just one week on the paper.

George retained a few old-fashioned phrases, such as, "I'd horse whip any man who dared say a thing like that to any woman of mine!" In fact, he said those very words after one of Tom's lewd stories about the last woman he'd loved and left.

Tom was a great one for bragging about his conquests. He seemed to get a kick out of telling how he'd won a woman, in spite of her being engaged or married. There's one guy

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like that on every rag in the country. They're usually the newspaper bums. They don't stay long in one job.

The rest of us laughed Tom off. We let him rave. We put the girls up to giving him a pseudo-rush, so we could sit back and laugh as he preened. We got a kick out of it.

But George Harbin took him seriously and objected to his language. A Southerner, according to Harbin, understood the conquest of women. But all that bragging could be done using decent language. He wouldn't mind a man taking an innocent girl because that was the nature of things, but he couldn't stand by and listen to womankind being insulted by word of mouth, suh!

He nauscated me a little. I could just imagine him as a schoolboy, getting black eyes every time he was called a name on the playground. I could just see him explaining righteously to his teacher that he'd had to fight because his mother's honor was at stake.

Maybe Tom Feeney was right. Maybe George was just a big bag of wind. And maybe George Harbin was right. Maybe Tom Feeney was the damnedest Yankee that ever got on the pay-roll of the Banner. I wouldn't know.

ALL I know is that they clashed—and gave me a story as big as Appomattox. I got the five-hundred-dollar award for notable service in the field of journalism. I practically got pneumonia. I got a girl out of it, and a hangover that was the daddy of them all, with a head out to here.

What a pair of guys! They changed my whole life. Civil War? I'm inclined to think now that Grant and Lee were a couple of sissies, compared to these two products of the

atomic age.

It all started the second week Tom Feeney was with us. A girl, reputed to be strictly Harbin territory, came into the office one day, to pick up some ducats for a show or something.

There she was bending over George Harbin's desk like a magnolia hanging from a low bough. I wasn't even close to her but, so help me, I could smell a flower fragrance

just looking at her.

I didn't care whether she pronounced her "r's" or not. From where I sat, she was strictly a lush dish, and I thought to myself she was much too good for George Harbin. He was a stiff-necked gentleman who would think it more proper to seduce a girl than to pinch her.

I sat still, just looking and thinking.

But Tom Feeney doesn't sit still when he looks. He doesn't think. The whole city room froze as he got up and walked to George's desk.

Harbin, being a gentleman, introduced them. The introduction was poetic license for Tom. After two minutes' pleasantry, he had his arm around the Georgia peach. And Tom had the kind of arm that just naturally slipped for a low caress.

Fast worker. I've seen it happen in cocktail lounges, but never have I seen such a play effective at three in the afternoon, in front of the "intended" and the whole city room.

Maybe we had underestimated Tom Feeney, at that. He was good-looking enoughwiry black hair and the blue, blue eyes that some Irishmen have, firm lips, good build. Dash of the devil in his smile. That little magnolia blossom dropped right off the bough into his lap. It had taken his faintest puff to bring her down.

Being new. Tom had a routine outside as-

signment that afternoon.

They left together, Tom glibly yapping about how he'd see her down in the elevator, and Magnolia thanking George Harbin for the ducats, or whatever, in a high, hasty tone, It was the thanks-darling-but-I'll-see-youlater routine. And no intelligent woman uses that line on a man unless she's pretty excited about something new,

Even as far away as I was sitting, I could sense the silly excitement in her voice, as though a gland had burst and had thrown her hormones into a complete tizzy,

She left, flustered and flushed. Tom Feeney seemed to get cooler as her temperature mounted. His smile, as he got his hat from the rack, was a trifle smug. His movements were slow and deliberate.

She was in a rush to get out. He wasn't averse to taking it slowly, so we could all watch.

An audience. I knew right then that he might like an audience better than he could like a girl. And I wondered if he didn't enjoy telling about his escapades more that he enjoyed the actual experiences.

Of course, her name wasn't Magnolia. I just made that up because of her flowery look as she stood at George Harbin's desk.

I found out the next morning when the paper went to work on the story of her murder that her name was Bess Morris. I found out that her father was one of the town's most persistent drunkards, although his heritage was real Southern aristocracy, and the name was still a proud one, in spite of the way he had soaked it for so long in hundred-proof hourbon.

ITIS whiskers might be soiled and he might he lifted from gutters four nights a week, but he still had that superior tone of voice, still displayed the grand manner. And when they took him home, the weeds might be choking the steps, but the porch columns on the large house were still the best in Southern architecture. There was an old smoke house in back, and a cabin in which Morris slaves once had lived in another era.

That was where her body had been found. In the old cabin, now no more than a decadent structure that hadn't yet received the tender chinking of any historical society. It was just a few tilted logs, sagging like any ancient building that the owner doesn't use, but hasn't torn down.

Thistles were growing right through the mud floor of the place, and the creepers outside were almost heavy enough to cover the whole shack.

The Morris dog, a good hound with-a snoopy nose, discovered the scent of the fresh kill and bayed at the moon. And the girl's father, flushed with bottle irritation, had clomped out across the weeds in the yard to shut the beast up. He had wavered his flash-



light at the cabin. He had found his daughter.

They tossed the story in my lap as soon as the call came in from the only servant in that big Morris house. A Negro woman named Delia. She gave a garbled version of the howling dog, the raving master, and the dead Miss Bess.

Delia knew George Harbin and when she'd needed help quick, she had thought of shim. When she learned that he wasn't in the Banner office that morning, she got excited and spilled the whole story anyway. The paper got it before the police did.

Tom Feeney hadn't reported that morning, either, and the whole editorial department was jittery.

We all knew that George Harbin was a devil with a horsewhip, and we'd all heart Tom Feeney brag about how he affected the women he met. We were all thinking about the way Tom had walked out of the office with Bess Morris. But mostly, I was thinking about what a tough assignment I'd drawn. If there was anything I hated to do, it was go out there and look at a dead girl I'd have liked to pinch just yesterday. And then talk to an alcoholic father, pat a Sherlock Holmes hound, and listen to the sobbling accounts from an old black mammy who had reared. Miss Bess from a baby.

I was sure I could have written the story without having personal interviews. I was that sure of what they'd all have to say, including the dog.

But I was wrong.

I got there just a few minutes ahead of the police, who had been called by our city editor after he had the full story for the paper. I had my look at the body alone. And what little breakfast I'd eaten was tossed between a honeysuckle vine and a milkweed that had popped a couple of pods.

The nile green dress Bess had worn yesterday had been ripped from neckline to hem, and her shoes and stockings were missing. Her feet were toward the door and my eyes, traveling from them slowly up the beautiful white leg, saw that it was twisted slightly at the knee.

The next second a trembling started in my stomach. My eyes had reached her half-exposed breast. An ant, one of the whoppers we have in Georgia, was crawling across that mound of white flesh as if it were just another ant hill. My stomach lurched because of the stiffness of her, unmoving while that ant was stringing his way across her, unmolested.

For a brief moment, I thought how beautiful her body was. Then my eyes reached her face and her neck, with the stocking tightly knotted around it. The purple face, the swollen tongue. Her bulging eyes stared upward. The horror in them had been set permanently by the death glaze.

I TURNED away quickly toward the vines outside the shack.

I'd taken only a glimpse, really. But as I walked back to the house, with my stomach still protesting, I was thinking I'd found no clues, no nothing. All I'd done was just look at the body.

Let the cops hunt for clues, I decided.

They hadn't seen her walking and flirting with a new man just yesterday. They hadn't sensed the fragrance of magnolias as she'd walked by. She'd be just another stiff to them. Let them brush away the ants and pick up clues!

Sure, the reporter had arrived first and had had a wonderful opportunity to pick up evidence and become a journalistic detective. But this particular reporter didn't have the stomach for it. He'd be perfectly satisfied to wait for a routine police report on the body, and whatever was found in the cabin, if anything.

But of one thing I was sure—either George Harbin had done the murder out of jealousy, or Tom Feeney was an escaped maniac who always strangled the ladies he loved.

I was at least two jumps ahead of the police right there.

п



I PASSED Chief Bledsoe on my way back to the house. He gave me a raised eyebrow for being there first, then winked at my chalky face.

He said, "Stick around, Buster. We'll talk later." "Sure, Chief, But it's a mess out there. I'm warning you."

"Murder is always messy, sonny. Just ask Delia for a little bicarb."

I didn't like his calling me "sonny." I didn't like his implication that I'd never covered a murder story before. Actually, I'd covered several bloodier ones than this, but I hadn't known the victims, nor the suspects.

But, like it or not, I followed his advice and asked Delia to give me something to settle my stomach.

"You seen her," she told me, her large eyes rolling tragically. "You seen my baby out there! Poor dear lovey-lamb! The one who done this to her will not live the might out as sure as there's a God in His heaven! I've placed the dark of my darkest curse upon his head."

I could hear ancient tribal drums in the

fizzing of the glass she handed me. At the same time, I could sense the soothing power of the liquid, just as she could feel the force of a Christian faith around her.

"When did Miss Bess lose her mother?"
I asked her.

"When the baby was three. I been everything to her since then. Twenty years I kept her washed and fed and kept her clothes clean. I done for that baby like she was my very own and she loved me, she did., Mammy Delia! She always come laying her little burdens on my breast while she was growing up. "Which boy, Delia!" Which one for the dance? Jim Randolph, or George Harbin!" Which one for the dance? Which one for the weiner roast? Johnny, or Gerald?"

Delia's eyes were blinded by tears, and her voice was just a monologue of grief that seeks satisfaction in any remembered scrap of conversation. She wasn't telling me much.

I said softly, "Did you help her choose, Delia? Did you ever advise her to take George instead of Jim?"

"I never said. I just brush her hair and say, 'You got your pick, lamb. Take the one you like best."

"And who was that?" I prompted.

"She never said. She made out like as if they was all the same to her. 'That's my only trouble, Delia! I like them all the same. If I could ever like just one—'"

"But lately?" I asked. "It was George Harbin she liked best, wasn't it?"

Suddenly Delia realized again that her Miss Bess was dead and that none of this rehashing really mattered.

"She saw Mr. Harbin the most. That's why I called the paper. But she still liked then all and was looking for the one that would be everything. My little lamby-piel She don't need to worry no more! She's where the heavenly streets are fragrant with the breath of the Son of Godd 1896 s—"Deliad dropped her head to the kitchen table and satred sobbing.

I placed a hand on her shoulder and thanked her for the bicarb. I said, "Now, you've got to get hold of yourself!" Or something equally silly.

Actually, I ducked. Hearing deep, racking sobs like Delia's takes more out of me than I

get back on my pay check.

I walked through the once-beautiful house until I found Paul Morris. He was on a diagnam, whose upholstery had seen it last day. There was an empty bottle on the worn carpet.

I shook him, gently.

"Mr. Morris-"

He groaned, but his eyes opened. They were so full of misery that I was glad when he closed them again. But, even with his eyes closed. I knew he was awake now.

"Tm Steve Reilly," I said. "From the Banner. I'm sorry, sir, to be asking, but I know you're the kind of man who would like to see the man who did this thing hang. Do you have any idea who he might have been?"

THE man's eyes opened again and I saw an iris that was pale brown and a cornea that was deep pink. The face around the eyes was puffy and broken-veined. The hair framing all this was a wiry silver, cut close to a well-shaped skull.

"I have no idea. And I'll thank you to print no more than my daughter's obituary! Good

day! Please leave!"

Paul Morris closed his eyes again and heaved his large frame over on the left side. He buried his face in the divan cushion. Remorse? Dejection? Something none of my business? Or was this something much more private than Delia's sobbing?

I left, saying, "I'm sorry, Mr. Morris. Be-

lieve me, I'm sorry."

His groan wasn't really an answer. He

had been groaning steadily.

I went out on the wide gallery to wait for

I went out on the wide gallery to wait for Chief Bledsoe and check with the police. I sat down in a cane chair and rocked.

It was hot. Nothing can be hotter than eleven o'clock in Georgia, when the smells of earth rise with the heat. And nothing can be quieter than the heavily-scented air with bees and flies buzzing around a honeysuckle vine.

Even the thump of the hound dog's tail as he lay there on the porch, his pink tongue snaking out as he panted, seemed to make things quieter.

I wished the chief would hurry up and get through with whatever he had to say to me. I wasn't even thinking about my story. I was just thinking about getting away from there. I rocked until I couldn't stand the creak

of the chair. The dog seemed to get fed up with his thumping at the same time. He sat up, and I leaned forward and held out my hand automatically.

"This is a hell of a note, isn't it, boy?"

He got up and stretched. I puckered my lips and moved my fingers.

"Want to come and tell me about last night, fellow? About the way you found her?"

Nope, he didn't want to do that. But he came and sniffed me—feet, pants leg, and fingers.

"Smell good?" I asked

He didn't growl. He didn't go away. I considered that a compliment. I began to scratch his neck. He liked that. His hide was stiffer than it should have been. A bath would have made him feel like a million.

I kept talking to him about last night and what a shock it must have been to find Miss Bess, and he got friendly and nodded and rested his, head across my knee for the scratching.

Hound dogs aren't usually so quickly won. I wasn't kidding myself. It wasn't my fascinating monologue. It was the scratching where it was badly needed. Here, I thought, was the kind of dog that wanted a master's affection, and would be ready to give a lot of affection in return.

"Why aren't you in there?" I asked. "Why don't you go in and comfort the man who feeds you and hunts with you? Why don't you display some of this mysterious canine instinct we're always hearing about? You could lick his hand, or something. You're dirty, but warm. You'd be surprised how people in trouble like to have a living, warm thing beside them."

He snuggled closer—a nice dog. He panted his pink tongue toward my face and I drew back from a wet kiss.

"What's the matter, Mutt? Starved for affection?"

Suddenly, he bristled. I could feel his hackles rising under my caressing fingers, could feel him getting tense all over.

Then the screen door opened. Paul Morris stood there, a freshly poured drink in his trembling, blue-veined hand.

"Get the hell off my property!" he shouted.
"It's bad enough to have the police here. I can't do anything about that, but I don't have to put up with any lowdown snoopers. If you don't move in two minutes, I'll fill you full of buckshot!"

Drunk as he was, I knew he would, too. And mean as he was, I wasn't taking any chances.

POR I knew for certain that Paul Morris
was mean by the way his dog stiffened to
attention, growling deeply, and expressing a
cold hatryd that no human being would dare
express to another human being. In fact, no
human vocabulary could express hatred to
equal that which the dog was expressing in
animal sounds.

"Sorry, Mr. Morris. Chief Bledsoe told me to wait. That's the only reason—"

"Only reason, hell! You're waiting because you hope you can get some kind of scandal to make your paper rich from publicizing my poor daughter's death! If you dare print anything about it I'll sue the Banner for all they own!"

"Yes, sir. If you'd be kind enough to explain my departure to Chief Bledsoe, I'll be leaving."

He had taken a long pull at the glass and wasn't going to answer. His slitted eyes were liked wired openings; forced openings.

But the dog sensed something and I did, too. It was something not quite right, some thing a lot more dangerous than he was in his alcoholic state. Again, it was none of my business, but I felt that the trouble was something tied up with his inner self.

I started for my car, sweating, and listening for the promised blast of buckshot to hit my back.

But it didn't come. There was just the quiet and the noon heat.

I drove back to the office to write my story, what little I had to add to what was already in. I had interviewed Delia, Paul Morris, and the dog, for what it was worth. It didn't add up to much.

Chief Bledsoe? Let him look me up if he wanted to talk to "sonny!" I couldn't be expected to sit around and wait for a load of

buckshot in the spine! I'd hate to have to try being an invalid on my salary.

Once settled at my desk, I was besieged by questions about the murder from everybody in the office.

"Who did it, Steve? You were just out there, even ahead of the police," "What did you find out, Sherlock? What clues? What motives?" "The paper would like to go to town on this one. Old and respected Southern family!" "Who are your suspects? We'll do a real—"

I sat there, drained out, feeling that I'd already worked a full shift, although it was just shortly after lunch, which I hadn't had and didn't feel like having.

"Not sure," I stammered. "Not sure at all. Beat it. I want to get busy with this yarn while it's still fresh. Scram! Before I forget how she looked. And shut up!"

They scrammed. And, eventually, they shut up.

But the last two to leave my desk were George Harbin and Tom Feeney. My privateopinion suspects!

Both had overslept and reported late. With hangovers.

In fact, the story was going around that they'd had a mild saloon brawl over the lady that had ended with a few desultory drunken passes at each other. They'd called a practical truce for the practical purpose of having another drink, and had made an evening of it together. They'd gone down Main Street, arms locked like buddies, singing at the tops of their voices.

Two hours and four pick-ups later, they had arrived at George Harbin's flat. They had spent the night together, passed out until late morning.

According to rumor.

But I was still sure that one of them had met Bess Morris in the old cabin and left her as I saw her that morning.

Mean as Paul Morris looked, much as his dog disliked him, I didn't think he had killed his own daughter. Not the way she had been killed. My original theory still held water. I was sure the girl's killer had been George Harbin or Tom Feeney!

I sat there staring at them both as I batted out a story for the home edition.

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CHIEF BLEDSOE called me down to Homicide late that afternoon. For lunch, I had settled for a cheese on rye and a container of coffee in the office. I was looking forward to quitting time

and a few fast cocktails at the Sam Davis Bottle Club. Just to settle my upset stomach. Then I was going to blow myself to a baked potato and a big steak, to give me strength.

But I had to move my looking forward, forward.

It was five o'clock when I sat across from Chief Bledsoe and stared intently at the mammoth ash-tray he used for his dead cigar.

"Why me, Chief?" I asked him. "I was out at the shack for just long enough to peek in, then lurch out and toss my morning toast into the shrubbery. Can't tell you a thing!"

"I know," he said, with that irritating grin. "But I called you down here to give you some information, not ask for it."

"Since when do you ever hand out a favor for free?"

"Never, Steve. But I want the Banner to carry a certain story for me. I want you to write it a certain way."

"I write my own way, chum. So you're just wasting time. I reported to you like a good boy. My obedience ends there."

He got up and sat on the corner of his ancient desk. Friendly father. Nice old guy talking to sonny. He even started to put one

of his big lunch hooks on my shoulder.

I said, "Save it, Daddy. You work your racket—I'll work mine."

He got a couple of pats in before I moved away from him.

"Now listen, Steve. This is serious business and I'm asking you to cooperate. If you write just what you saw, it'll slow me down a lot. You've already described the murder scene. That's all right. But now I want you to confuse the killer, to get him antsy. By showing it up different from what it was. You know what we found out there to help us?" For information, I could sit still and act

"What, Chief? What did you find?"

"Nothing! Not a damn thing you didn't see yourself. She was strangled with one of her own stockings and the m.e. says it was a sex crime. Hard to pin down."

"Yeah, I know. I'd say her old man is in the clear, wouldn't you?"

As far as the murder goes, yes. But poor old Paul has been in a fog for years. Ever since his wife died. You've heard of men who never yet over it?"

"You known the family long, Chief?"

"All my life. Good stock, but proud. And Bess was always such a headstrong kid, I can't imagine her letting such a thing happen to her."

"Maybe she thought it was the one," I said. "The one who really mattered."

"Maybe.**4t least, I think she met the guy out there of her own accord. Expecting just a few light kisses, perhaps. Jim Randolph, one of her ex-flames, tells me that she was a great teaser, but wouldn't go far. Now I understand that there's a new man on your paper who has an idea he's quite a heavy lover. Like to tell me what you know about this Tom Feeney?"

"So that's what you wanted! Look, when Tom Feeney came to work this afternoon, we found that he and George Harbin had made a night of it together. Why didn't you call either of them down? I've got a date at the Sam Davis Club. A date with a bottle."

"Now, Steve, don't be so touchy. Surely you're a good enough citizen to want to help catch a killer if you can."

"Natch. Nothing I wouldn't do. But my opinion of Tom Feeney won't help you a bit. You must know already that Tom left the office with Bess yesterday afternoon, and that George Harbin was burned up about it. They brawled, they got drunk."

HE SAID, a little impatiently, "Sure Steve, I know all that. But one of them could still have done the job. I just want you to tell me if you could picture this Tom Feeney in the rôle of maniac killer. Along with all of his sex talk around the office, can you see a frustration that could lead to murder?"

"I'm no psychologist. Why don't you check his background? See how many young girls were killed in the last town he was in.

"We're checking. But that takes time.

Meanwhile, I thought you might-" "Put the finger on him for no good reason?

Just because of my private opinion of him?" "Not exactly. But, Steve, a man gathering information like you do, he keeps asking questions here and there. Sometimes you get a break and things fit. A lot of impressions

"If I turn up any facts, I'll give you a call.

from a lot of different people." But leave me out of it."

I stood up and held out my hand for a firm good-by. The old boy wasn't going to tell me a thing about any clues they might have found. I was sure there must have been something.

"Just one more thing, Steve, before you

"Yes?"

"About that story."

"What story?"

"The one I want you to run tomorrow." I was curious. Maybe I could guess something of what he knew if he told me what he wanted printed.

"Okay, let's have it. But that bottle is tapping its foot, getting anxious for me to

"Well, we're going to arrest Jim Randolph tonight. He lives next door to the Morris place and could easily have met Bess in the old cabin. But I want you to play it so that he won't have a damaged reputation when he's released."

"He's in on the gag? If it is a gag?"

"He suggested it. There's just thing-"

"There are a couple of things," I said. "But I'll listen to your one before I tell you what the others are."

"Just that you'll have to play it straight at the office. You mustn't let on to anybody that it's a set-up. I want Tom Feeney and George Harbin to feel that the case is in the bag. You see?"

"I see. And I'll do that, because it may turn out to be that way. But on Randolph, I give straight reporting and he can worry about his own reputation. I'm surprised at vou, Chief. Letting a guy who lived next door and could have done it dictate your police procedure."

Chief Bledsoe got red in the face.

"Damn you, Steve, you know I don't take dictation! I've known Jim Randolph since he was a kid. It's been a long time since he was interested in Bess Morris. And for the last two years he's been engaged to Tony Desmond. Anybody who has seen those two love birds together, would know Jim couldn't possibly murder another woman the way Bess was murdered. He's too happy, too wrapped up in Tony to bother."

"Impressions," I said. "You want to watch those impressions, Chief. Most of the time they pay off with a kick in the teeth."

"Okay, Steve. I'm not asking for advice. I just want to know if you'll take it easy when you write about Randolph's arrest?"

"Just the truth, Chief, Plain stuff, It won't kill him or cure him."

"But you won't go out of your way to be sensational?" "You mean digging up old snapshots of

Iim and Bess in lovey-dovey poses? Resurrecting a dead romance?" "That's what I mean. That, and old letters always seem dirty pool when you're not sure

I SAID, all full of loyalty, "Don't worry. The Banner never jumps the gun. Where are you going to make the arrest?"

"I had thought at his house, but if you're going over to the Sam Davis Club, I think I'll have Jim and Tony be there having dinner. Then I can take him quietly and it'll look real. And maybe when you see him with Tony it'll color what you write in his favor. You knew Bess Morris, didn't you?"

"Luscious gal."

the suspect is guilty."

"Then wait until you see Tony Desmond! You'll know Jim couldn't have done it!"

"I can hardly wait." I grinned. "Only get them there early before I'm fuzzy. I'm a two-drink man, mostly."

He said he would. He said I could eat, and be drinking coffee when he got there. He said if you couldn't take it you should have sense enough to let it alone. Look at Paul Morris, he said. Used to be a fine man, and now he was just a broken-down old sot.

I said, "Okay, Daddy," but when I got to the club the drink was a nice warm thing to curl up to. It set my thoughts spinning.

If Tony Desmond and Jim Randolph were such great big heart-beats, how come they'd been engaged for two whole years? Jim made plenty of money in his real estate business, and Tony Desmond's father owned most of the stock in the town's biggest department

So, why wait? Unless Tony wasn't quite sure of her man, unless she wanted a good long-range proof of his character before she wrapped him up as a lifetime possession.

Or maybe Jim wasn't sure of her.

I ordered another drink, and then another. They curled up warmer and I began to think about Bess Morris and the way she had looked with that ant crawling over her.

The steak didn't seem like such a good idea right then.

I was still sitting at the bar when Jim Randolph and Tony came in. Jim, a big, dark, stocky guy well over six feet, I'd seen around, and knew well enough to pass the time of day. But never this Tony Desmond.

Somebody should have prepared me for what I said.

She was as tall as the tallest model, but had more meat on her bones than a model is allowed. A big chassis, no doubt about it, but all the flesh allocated in just the right spots.

Her black hair was done up in a slick fashion that looked artificial, but it emphasized the good bone structure of her face, the porcelain skin. And the eye make-up was heavy, but on her it looked good. She had hig, deep violet eyes surrounded by the mysterious faint shadow she had applied so becomingly to the life.

A real knock-out, if you liked them sophisticated as hell, and if you were big enough and tall enough not to be dwarfed by an amazon like her.

I couldn't think of anybody aside from Jim Randolph who could fill that bill. They looked gorgeous together. She'd be a wise cookie to get him hooked, I thought, character proof, or not.

As soon as they got seated in a back booth,

I table-hopped over, which is all right to do at the Sam Davis Club. And evidently Chief Bledsoe had prepared Jim Randolph that I might do just that.

He greeted me like an old, old friend, al-

though I knew him so slightly. "Steve! How are you, boy?"

We shook hands and I picked up the cue. He had a nervous, scared look in his eye, and for some reason he wanted me right there in the inner circle.

"Fine, Jim. Where've you been keeping yourself?".

"Oh, here and there. Mostly with Tony. You two know each other?"

"No," I said. "This is a small town, but I'm beginning to think I've missed an awful lot!"

JIM gave a false laugh of appreciation. He was wound tighter than the rubber bands on the inside of a golf ball.

"Honey, this is Steve Reilly. Ace man on the Banner. And this, Steve, is Tony Desmond."

I bowed and smirked appropriately. She nodded and did likewise.

Jim signaled a waiter and did some lodgebrother waving at me.

"Sit down, Steve, sit down! What are you drinking?"

"Too much," I said, sliding into the booth next to Tony.

"Nonsense. A couple of quickies and we'll all put away a Sam Davisssteak. Tony and I have tickets to the Empress. Not the original cast, but supposed to be a good play just the same."

I got it. He wanted the arrest to look just right and hadn't told Tony what was going to happen. And, chances were, he wanted me to stick around and take Tony home after the Chief picked him up.

The waiter was waiting, "What'll it be, Steve?"

"Martini."

"Fine. That's for us, too, isn't it, honey?"

Tony nodded. "And since we're late, darling, how about making it a double?"

He went along, but I told the waiter to keep mine single. I had that much sense left and wanted to keep it. IV



THIS Tony seemed to be quite a gal. Quite a domineering type gal. And there was something more mysterious about her eyes than the shadow she used. They were a kind of sex pool, I thought, with a

martini slur. Then when I realized what my thought had said to me, I sort of smiled and thought I had originated a goody. Because there was a slimy something about her, in addition to the old s. a.

Impressions. These damn impressions!
And I had kidded Chief Bledsoe about them.
I turned the kidding toward myself now, and
I thought, she's a sweet, pure innocent girl,
Stevie boy. You stop thinking the thoughts
you're thinking.

I asked Jim how business was and he said good enough, but he'd like to drive the socialism school of operators out of town.

I'd covered a story on that once, so I understood his oblique reference to the real estate business.

I showed off. "Big tax on land owners, because the land was put here by God and should rightly be the heritage of the poor, too? Something like that?"

"Something. It'll never happen, but an idea like that could ruin my business if it took hold. People hate to pay taxes. If land gets to costing a fortune, I'd lose mine pretty quickly."

"Your modest fortune," put in Tony sweetly. She turned to me, all charm. "Jim doesn't have much of a money drive. He's been wanting the Paul Morris land for years, because it adjoins his own property. But does he do anything about it?"

She was halfway through her double, and I suspected that she'd had a couple before arriving. Jim, too.

I grinned. "He's probably just a big dope, honey. When he gets too poor, remember me!"

She gave me the proper pat, then gave Jim a dazzling smile.

"He is a big dope, but he's a darling dope, and I love him!"

Jim's answering smile looked a little fool-

People who drink say the damnedest things, I thought. They split themselves wide open like a dropped watermelon and think nothing of it. Or they get fatuous with beautiful dolls, the way I was doing.

But I wasn't too far gone to forget that Bess Morris had been killed. I deliberately set out to stick the needle in a good lead.

"Why do you suppose Jim has been so soft-hearted about the Paul Morris land?" I asked Tony. "If he really wanted it?"

The waiter picked that moment to arrive with the next round Jim had signaled for.

"How about ordering dinner?" asked Jim in a tight voice. I could imagine that all the rubber bands within him were about to snap. "Not yet," Tony said. "Let's finish his

drink first. You know how I hate cold steak."

I held my glass up in approval. "And love always one more drink?"

She seemed to like that. We were buddies

now.
"You know it, Stevie. Jim is such a glutton about eating. You're not that way, are

you, honey?"

Me, a two-drink man from away back, just went right along with her gag.

"Long as there's a drink, why eat?"

Iim gave up and shrugged the waiter away.

We settled down to fresh cigarettes.

"About that big dope you love," I prompt-

ed. "Why do you suppose he wouldn't take Paul Morris for a land ride?"

"Because he's a big softie. A big, Southern softie! Aren't you that, Baby Bear?" She reached across the table and clasped his paw. Baby Bear grinned and took a big swig of martini.

"I don't know why you're interested, Steve," he said. "But Paul has had some tough times. I'd like the land, but don't like to take advantage. I've even loaned the poor guy money. And now, God help him, he'll probably need more."

TONY didn't look pleasant as she said, "You mean now that his no-good daughter has been murdered?"

"Darling, please!" protested Jim. "You know this is in mighty bad taste."

MURDER OF A MAGNOLIA

"Because of Stevie? Don't be silly! He's a reporter, or did you forget? He probably knows more about Bess Morris than we do." She leaned against me. "Did you cover the

murder, Stevie?" "I sure did, baby, That's why I'm on this binge tonight. So let's don't talk about it."

was avid.

Jim flashed me a grateful look, but Tony "Did she look awful, Steve? The paper said she was strangled. I'll bet that made her face look awful, didn't it?"

"Pretty awful. But really-"

"That's right, Tony," said Iim. "Steve is out to forget the whole thing tonight, so lay off. Honestly, honey, I can't understand your sudden morbid interest in a cheap crime."

"Can't you?" She gave him a look full of meaning.

He dropped his eyes, "No, I can't," he said softly.

I wondered if he had done it, and that she knew about it. I wondered why he was so tense, why he had staged his own arrest with Chief Bledsoe. .

There's nothing to equal a Sam Davis steak. Crusty on the outside and juicy in the middle.

Thank goodness we had most of it down when Tom Feeney came in. The sight of him gave me butterflies and seemed to do worse to Tony

"Who is that man?" she whispered.

Jim looked and shrugged. "Dunno, honey. Why?"

By that time, Tom had spied me and was coming over.

"Fellow tramp," I explained hastily. "Works with me on the Banner."

Maybe Chief Bledsoe had put him up to coming, but I doubted it. He was well-oiled, belonging to the school, no doubt, that believed in curing a hangover with the same poison that caused it. And the Sam Davis was the natural place to come to get well, because it was quiet and served good food.

He leaned on the table, his muscular body swaving just a little, his eves encompassing Tony as he said, "How goes it, Steve? thought you'd be out detecting and looking for footprints and all. But here you are, having fun, Fine thing."

All the time he was talking, he was looking at Tony in that superior way of his. I introduced him

Tony didn't fall for his Charles Boyer eyes. and Iim didn't ask him to sit down. He swayed a couple of inches each way, gave me a broad wink, and went back to the bar.

Tony said, "He's staring at me in the bar mirror. I don't like it."

"Never mind, baby. He's the office lush. Thinks he's a devil with the women. Just a lot of wishful thinking."

Jim had time for dessert and one cup of coffee before Chief Bledsoe arrived.

It was the most inconspicuous arrest I've ever seen. The Chief sat down beside Jim and ordered coffee. He was going to put on a show for Tony.

"I'm sorry, Jim," he said when the waiter left, "to have to do this. But vou're under arrest. Just keep your voice down and nobody in here will know what's happened."

"Arrest? Are you off your rocker. Chief? What in God's name for?"

Jim was acting, too. In a way, so was I. I had to pretend surprise.

"Yeah, Chief," I said. "There's got to be a reason.

"The reason is murder, Steve. You might as well know now as later. We're booking Jim Randolph for the murder of Bess Morris."

Jim said, "You're a knuckle-head, Chief! Why on earth would I kill Bess? You know how it is with Tony and me!"

CHIEF BLEDSOE wasn't acting when he sounded insulted. I made a private bet with myself that "knuckle-head" hadn't been in the original script.

"Why you might have killed her," he said coldly. "I wouldn't know. But we've got some evidence says maybe you did. You coming quietly?"

"Sure," Jim said. "I'll come quietly. But I'll make a monkey out of your department and I'll sue the pants off the Banner if they dare print any of your false evidence!" He gave me a warning look.

"We figure the evidence will hold up, Jim." The Chief looked at Tony, "I'm sorry, Miss Desmond. Jim and I will just walk out together. Steve will see that you get home all right."

Under the heavy make-up, she had turned pale, and her classic features were drawn. Her face looked like a death mask.

Her face looked like a death mask.

"You're wrong," she said, her husky voice choked with emotion. "Iim didn't murder."

Bess. I know he didn't!"

"How do you know, Miss Desmond?"

Food hadn't quite dulled the effect of the martinis she'd had, but it had helped.

"Never mind," she said. "I just know he didn't."

Chief Bledsoe stood up.

"I know this is a blow to you, Miss Desmond, and it's only natural for you to stick up for Jim. If you know anything, you can come forward later in his defense. Let's get going, Jim."

Jim Randolph, the actor, was putting on a show of bravado now, being casually gay. He tossed me two theatre tickets.

"You kids go ahead and take in the show. And don't worry, Tony darling. Everything is going to be all right."

He leaned across the table to kiss her and she met him halfway.

After Jim and Chief Bledsoe left, she turned to me, and I saw real tears in her eyes. She really loves him, I thought. And a big gal like Tony would have a hard time finding another man cut to size.

"Watch the weeping, Tony. Makes your eyes look beautiful, but that stuff on them will run down to your chin."

She gave a couple of sniffs and lit a cigarette with trembling fingers.

"Order me a brandy, will you, Steve?"

I did, and one for myself.

Then Tom Feeney came over and slid

into Jim's empty place.
"What did the Chief do, kids? Arrest Jim

or something?"

"Yes," I said. "For the murder of Bess

His eyebrows shot up. "Well, what do you know? That's crazy, isn't it? How come they think it was Jim?"

Morris.

"They just do." I looked at Tony and she seemed under control now. I took a chance. "Jim was an old flame of Bess Morris's, wasn't he, Tony?" "Nothing serious, Steve. And don't you dare print that. Why, that little vixen was just a common tramp! No decent man would have anything to do with her." Her voice was shaking with her hatred.

"What about George Harbin?" I asked. "I've thought George sort of considered Bess seriously."

"That stuffed-shirt! She wouldn't have settled for a fish like George Harbin. She wanted to play the field, get them all!"

Tom Feeney gave a silly lauch. "That's a woman for you," he said. "Never believe what they say when they're talking about another one. You don't think that Bess had anything on Jim, do you. Tonv? Anything serious enough to make him kill her?"

"You know he didn't kill her!" she said, with a strange inflection.

His voice was mocking. "I know, haby."
"You fell for her line like all the rest,"
Tony said, scornfully. "And you knew she
was just a tramp!"

His face was mean looking. "How do you know I fell, Tony? Answer me that."

"Talk gets around. George Harbin is a good friend of mine."

HE LAUGHED. "That's pretty weak, baby. That won't hold water and you know it."

I said, "Will you two stop talking in rid-

des! What's the argument all about, anyway?"
"Never mind," said Tom. "Why don't you

run along, Steve? Tony and I want to get acquainted, gossip a little."
"Sorry Tony I've been commissioned to

"Sorry, Tom. I've been commissioned to see that she gets home safely. And I think it's about time we started."

Tom grinned at Tony. "What do you say, Tony? You want Steve to run along so we can carry on over the brandy?"

"I think that's a very good idea. More brandy. Steve can do what he pleases."

"Look, Tony," I said, "forget it. You've already had too much to drink, and I wouldn't trust Tom Feeney as far as I could throw Jim Randolph. Come on—let's get out of here."

"Let's you get out of here, Steve. I loathe Boy Scouts, and I want to talk to Tom Feeney. And I'll drink as much as I like. So good-by."

"Okay baby I guess you're old enough to

"Okay, baby. I guess you're old enough to take care of yourself."

"And certainly big enough," said Tom, with an insulting look.

I made a quick exit, without answering.

V



NOT until I was outside sitting in my car, lapping up the fresh air, did it hit me what all their double talk might mean.

Tony's intense hatred of Bess Morris. Her fear, perhaps, that Jim Randolph might have been

lured off the home front, her evident desire to needle Jim into taking over the Morris land. That would have got Bess out of the way, or at least farther away. But Jim was too soft to maneuver a deal. And Jim was a big, wonderful guy that she had to have all to herself.

But she drank. She might even be an alcoholic, which would account for Jim's putting off the marriage.

I wondered. She was such a big, strong girl. And Bess Morris had been petite and soft.

Maybe Chief Bledsoe hadn't been such a knuckle-head, after all. Maybe Jim Randolph had told him things he couldn't let me in on.

It all began to fall into place now—the trap; the false arrest to get the killer antsy. But I hoped Chief Bledsoe had provided some kind of a guard for Tony Desmond, and hadn't depended on me to see that she got home safely.

Sometimes the trap can snap right in your own face and the antsy killer can crawl away. Like the ant that had been crawling across

Like the ant that had been crawling across the rigid breast of Bess Morris.

Poor Bess! A nympho, perhaps, who had fooled even Delia into thinking that she just couldn't make up her own mind! George Harbin went up a little in my estimation. Could he have deliberately picked a quarrel with Tom Feeney, just to keep the bragging lush occunied? Could he have lost his own

dignity just to protect a girl who wasn't worth protecting? Surely, it couldn't have been jealousy, if Bess was used to tossing her charms at every man in town.

I just sat there in the car, letting the wind blow on my aching head. Something told me that I wanted to be there when Tony and Tom came out, that somebody ought to be there.

I must have dozed off, because it hadn't been raining and all of a sudden I realized that my arm, resting on the open window, was wet, and that it hadn't got that way just all at once.

I pulled it in and rolled up the window, peering through the drizzle to see if Tom's car was still on the lot. It was, one of the few that remained besides my own. I must have been out for at least an hour.

It was ten o'clock, but I had no idea what time it had been when I left the booth where I had become so unwelcome. It had been a little after eight when the Chief had arrested I im.

I lit a cigarette and fogged up my windows even more. My mouth had a jaded taste, but I promised it a long holiday after the night was over.

I'didn't know what was going to happen, but I was sure there was going to be some kind of a good story popping. And I doubted that Tom Feeney would cover it for the Banner.

He and Tony came out, finally, walking fast, heads lowered against the rain. Tony was as tall as Tom, and he wasn't offering her any pseudo gallantry. She was striding along without any help. They were like a married couple who have stopped caring about each other and just stay together looking out for themselves.

I'd thought Tony might come out staggering, or on a shutter. But she definitely had control of her muscles. Some drunks are like that. They reach a stage of cold precision and accurate movement. Slowed down, but otherwise going strong.

I followed Tom's car out of the lot, but at a safe distance. It was raining too hard for him to notice me, but he was a cinch to tail. His car had two of those tape reflectors on the bumper and they kept winking at me through the wet.

He veered over to Main Street and drove straight through town, passing up all the best places where they could get another drink. Then he made a jog that leads to the highway.

I lagged back a little. This had been my route twice that day. Ten miles out to the

Paul Morris place.

I WONDERED where they were going. Surely not to the nurder scene, and surely not to Jim Randolph's house, either!

Yet I was sure that Tony lived on the other side of town, in a newer, more fashionable section. And Tom Feeney lived in a hotel around the corner from the office.

The only other person I knew who lived out this highway was George Harbin. He had inherited a small, nice duplex with good grounds, and spent his day off polishing the brass that had been handed down along with the piece of income property. He rented the other half towa couple of schoolteachers who were away for the summer.

Sometimes, I'd thought that this additional income helped make him a stuffed shirt. He didn't quite know where he stood—with the landed gentry, or with the workers on a daily paper.

I couldn't imagine why Tony Desmond and Tom Feeney should be heading for George Harbin's house.

But they were. I saw the brilliant bumper lights wink out as the car turned into the Harbin driveway.

I drove on past and parked at the first wide piece of shoulder, noticing that I was pretty close to the Morris house. Either George or Tom could have walked across the grounds to the old cabin, and Jim Randolph could have walked it from the other side.

Pretty cozy for Bess any way you looked at it. And pretty much a shame that Delia hadn't kept a closer watch on her "baby." Goodness kaows who lived at the back of the Morris land. And goodness knows how many people knew their way here. Tony must have known, for one. Or Tony may have been visting Jim Randolph.

A lot of guessing.

I sank down in wet red clay as I stepped

out of the car onto the soft shoulder. The rain was really coming down now and I started walking back casually, knowing that my clothes would be ruined and that the Banner, bless their rich little masthead, wouldn't even pay the cleaning bill.

George hadn't bothered to draw the shades, and I found a soggy piece of sod where I could stand and keep on getting soaked and see the three of them in the living room.

Heaven help me, George was pouring brandy, probably at the domineering Tony's suggestion. And he looked pale and gaunt, as though he needed the brandy himself.

I realized, seeing him like this, without being able to hear what he was saying, that he probably was the only one who was grieving over Bess Morris's death. I felt sure that her father was sad, but only as regret is sad. He hadn't been a good father, he would be telling himself.

But George's face showed his grief. And Tony's showed gloating and hatred. In Tom Feeney's, worry and deceit were all mixed up together.

It was maddening not to be able to hear what they were saying, and I swore at the rain. Without the rain, it would have been a hot night and the window would have been open.

And I was getting cold—wet through, and cold. I couldn't even keep a cigarette burning. And the brandy looked good now. My well-fed drowsy moment was over, and I was sure that a whole bottle of brandy would be the best thing life had to offer. I began to feel an ache in my neck.

Maybe I had imagined too many things. Maybe they weren't saying what I thought they were.

Tony was doing most of the talking, and it must have been violent, the way she was swinging her arms around and casting scornful glances at Tom. And as she became more violent, George began to turn slightly purple.

Finally, he got up and walked toward Tom. He looked like a big jungle animal.

Or a big stuffed-shirt, outraged.

TOM'S weak face took on a sheepish expression, and I decided this was no time to stay outside and let Tony Desmond direct

the whole show. George was a simple soul. I shouldn't let Tony do this to him. He'd been used by Bess Morris. That was enough for any man—even a man like George Harbin.

I sloshed to the front door and rang the

I guess it was for ringing that bell that I got the five-hundred-dollar award for notable service in the field of journalism. I guess it was standing in all that rain that gave me pneumonia a few days later.

George opened the door, standing straddlelegged, with the stance of a man just interrupted in beating his wife. His was a belligerent, what-the-hell-business-is-it-of-yours attitude.

"Let me in, George. I'm dripping. And that amazon in there is about to make a monkey out of you."

"What do you know about it, Steve?"
"Plenty, Half of what she says is true. The

other half isn't. Tom Feeney didn't kill Bess Morris!"

He wilted. He put his big hands over his Arthur Treacher face and went to pieces.

Why I wondered do staid guys have to

Why, I wondered, do staid guys have to fall for trollops? They suffer so.

"Can you prove it, Steve?" he muttered.
"Can you prove anything?"

"I don't know. But I know a lot more than you do, George, Get a grip on yourself."

He tried. He said, "You're wet as hell."

I said, "Hell isn't wet. It's hot. Invite me in for a brandy. I'll settle their hash for you." He looked a bit wilted. I gripped his arm. "He didn't kill her, George! He may have

had her, but he didn't kill her! You wouldn't murder every guy that Bess went for, would you?"
"God, no!" he raspeds "But I thought

maybe the kid could settle down. I really had a feeling for Bess."

"I'm sure you did. But you don't want to wreck your life for trash like Tom Feeney."

Trash was just the right word to use with a man like George. It took him off his temper and mounted him on his dignity. He straightened up like a host, a Southern gentleman, a man of distinction.

"Come in, Steve. There's something dirty being pulled by these two lushes in here. Maybe you can help me throw them out!"

They were lushes all right. Both of them. Their eyes were glassy, but there was something else—bared fangs, and panic signs. It was going to be messy.

"Hi, kids," I said. "I didn't leave the party after all. Out of all that wet, I dropped in here for a nightcap. You pouring, George?"

VI



GEORGE poured, and I drank quickly to light a fire under my damp bones.

Tony said, "You're an idiot, Steve Reilly! I gave you credit for more sense."
"Yeah," said Tom.
"But now that you're here,

maybe you can keep George off my neck. Tony has been telling him lies. He's sore at me."

"You were there!" accused Tony vicious-

"I keep asking you to tell how you know I was there!" said Tom.

She was whooping it up inside of her skin. She was thinking about Jim and imagining it might go hard with him. She wanted to save the big guy, but she kept putting off saying the one thing that would save him.

I decided to help her out.

her.

"Tony knows you were there, Tom, because she saw you. She didn't know who you were then, but she recognized you when you walked into the Sam Davis tonight."

"That's a lie!" shouted Tony, squeezing her glass so hard I thought it would break. George was sitting up tensely, staring at

He said, "Were you there, Tony? Were you? Is that how you know so much?"

"They've got Jim, Tony," I said. "They've got him on some little piece of evidence you must have dropped. Something that belonged to Jim. Or something he may have dropped himself on some previous occasion. You don't want them to hang the whole thing on Jim, do you?"

I didn't believe there was any such evidence. I just thought that Jim knew about Tony.

She began to sob. Deep hunks of misery were being pushed out of her throat. A big, broken gal.

"Did you see Tom come to the cabin?" I asked her. "Or only see him leave? Just when did your fury toward Bess Morris get the best of you?"

"Stop it!" she moaned. "Stop it! I've got to think. They've got Iim. He didn't do it!"

"You did it, Tony," I said softly. "You'd hated Bess for a long time. You knew what she was, and that Iim was only human. The whole thing fell right into your lap. Bess's rendezvous with Tone was over. You saw him leave. You're big and strong. You strangled her, ripped her dress so it would look like a sex crime. Who would suspect a woman of doing a man's job? But the police took Jim, and you had intended for them to take Tom. That's right, isn't it, Tony? You killed her?"

She was holding her hysteria now

looked at me, wide-eyed, stunned.

"My God, Steve! Is that what you think?" "That's what I think. Tom Feeney had a rendezvous with Bess Morris and you came along hoping to catch Jim with her. The fact that it wasn't Iim made everything just lovely. It was a perfect opportunity to make sure that it never would be Jim. You knotted a nylon around her neck and strangled her!"

George was on his feet, pacing the room. He stopped close to Tom Feeney.

"Is any of that true," he muttered. "Did she go for you, Tom? Drunk as you pretended to be, did she-"

Tom seemed to be feeling better.

"Simmer down," he said. "The babe was used to playing it solid. But once I got there I didn't want any part of her. That damn cabin gave me the willies! I told her to go peddle it somewhere else."

Conversation one minute, chaos the next. George had one knee on the divan and had his big hands around Tom's throat, squeez-

ing. "You dared to say a thing like that to a girl like Bess! I'll choke the tongue out of you for that!"

Screwy, I thought-screwy George, Take a girl was one thing; insult her, and he'd certainly slap your mouth, suh!

FROM behind him, I put pressure on his upper arms to make him loosen his grip. Tom was beginning to get red in the face, to kick helplessly.

"Cut it out, George! Lav off that trash! Why not choke Tony? It was Tony who-" As soon as I'd said it, I realized how dumb I'd been

George hadn't been the least bit interested in my telling how Tony had killed Bess. George had just been interested in Tom and how far he'd gone. George had known about other men, sure. But Tom had done all that bragging at the office

Tom's tongue began to fly out, as though it were flopping around on a spring now, and he was gasping. His eyes rolled in desperation. Air, they said. Air, for God's sake!

I gave George a dirty knee in the back and let go his arms. I cut the nape of his neck with a terrific rabbit punch.

He let go of Tom and spun toward me. I gave him a dirtier knee than the first one and caught his folding head with an uppercut that practically broke my fist.

He fell to the floor, rolling in pain,

"You weren't interested!" I velled at him. "Who might have killed Bess didn't bother you! You knew who killed her. You did! When Tom came back after meeting Bess and went to sleep it ate into you until you couldn't stand it. You wanted to finish the whole affair once and for all. You'd been bighearted too long. You'd accepted other men because you couldn't do without her, and she'd never have settled down to just you. It ate so deep that the thought of Bess and Tom was more than you could stomach!"

Blood was dripping from his mouth, where I'd hit him, but he was beginning to get his breath back. I looked over at Tony to make sure I was right this time.

"You didn't, did you, Tony?" I asked

"You know I didn't! I talked to her, that was all. I thought it was Tom."

I looked at Tom. "What about it?"

He looked hang-dog. "Just the way I said, Steve, honest to God! I'm a phony, I guess. I walked out on her. Too much to drink before I met her.'

He looked sick about confessing it. He

knew what he was—a jerk. Just a jerk who had been building himself up with a lot of fancy talk. He'd be shoving along to another newspaper in another town now, where his bragging might keep them guessing awhile.

George was trying to get to his feet and I didn't want that. He was too big.

I pulled my sore fist back for another crack, but he held his hands up and cringed.

"Don't, Steve! No more! I'm tired. God only knows how tired I am. You've got most of it all figured out. I killed her! She's dead, and I want to die, too! I don't give a damn about anything now. She wasn't all bad."

I told Tom to call Chief Bledsoe.

I told Tom to call Chief Bledsoe.

I told Tony to help herself to a brandy.

I told George it was too damn bad. He wasn't a killer now. He was just a poor guy I'd worked with for five years, a dull, stuffed-shirt of a guy.

"It was partly her old man," he said.
"That drunken sot of a father. And just sentimental old Delia for a mother!"

I let him think that, I didn't tell him that maybe none of that made any difference, that perhaps the distribution of the genes had something to do with her unrest...

I HAD a moment with Chief Bledsoe in the hall, after they'd taken George out to the patrol car.

"They got antsy," I explained.
"Knew they would, sonny, and I knew
you'd stand by like a good boy. Jim figured
the pitch, because he knew Tony had talked
to Bess that night. But he couldn't drag
any information out of her. We figured
she'd spill it if it looked had for him. You
didn't slander Jim in your story, did you?"

"I haven't had time to write any story!" I said.

"Figured you wouldn't," said the Chief, popping his dead cigar back into his mouth. "But you copped a great one, kid. Write it any way you want!"

"I'll do that, Daddy."

Tom was leaving. He stood on one foot, then the other.

"Steve—"

"Never mind, Tom. I won't tell them."
"I've learned a lesson," he said.

"Sure."

"I like the Banner."

"Sure. Stick around."

Tony was last.

"This is where we came in," I said. "I'm supposed to see you get home safely." "Take me to Jim," she pleaded. "I've

got some things to tell Jim."

I know. The Chief said Jim would meet you at your place. He's got some things to

say to you, too."

We plodded up the highway, through the rain, to my car. I was still wet, but I was keyed up now. I wanted to get to a type-

keyed up now. I wanted to get to a typ writer—fast. "Steve—"

"What, baby?"

"I drink too much. I was jealous, that's why. And I'm not the jealous type. It bothered me so much that I just wanted to drink and drink"

"So you're quitting. So everybody's getting beautifully reformed!"

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to. Why don't you marry your big dope in a hurry?"
"You could drive faster," she said. . . .

The night watchman let me in when I got back to the office. Four in the morning, and an afternoon paper. I sat there in my soggy clothes and the story clicked out warm. All the facts, plus heart.

I left it on the city editor's desk and went

The next day the hangover hurt, and the day after that the pneumonia hurt. And I knew the hospital bill would be the biggest hurt of all.

But somewhere between all the pain, there was a nurse who used to come into my room at night, with a flashlight in one hand and a penicillin shot in the other.

The five-hundred-dollar award for notable service in the field of journalism came along much later, just in time to buy a few cans of pablum and some diaper service.

She's a good girl. A real good girl and she doesn't drink. And daddy likes that just fine, because he's lost his taste for the Sam Davis Bottle Club.

The steaks at home are much better. Crusty on the outside, and real, real juicy in the middle.

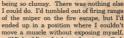
A KILL FOR



By RAYMOND DRENNAN

THE gun exploded like a small cannon in my face and I felt the lead tear through my sleeve. A shrill feminine scream split the gloom of the tiny apartment. I dived in the opposite direction, out of firing range, and tripped over the dead man.

Leather scuffed briefly on the iron steps of the fire escape outside the open window, but I couldn't tell whether the man was going away or just shifting position for another shot. I lay there in the darkness, just waiting and hating myself for



"Michael," a frightened voice called.

"Are you all right?"

It came from behind the sofa across the room and belonged to blonde Jill Hollister, my fiancée.

We'd entered the apartment just a few minutes earlier when we saw the body of the dead man, grisly in strong moonlight pouring in from the open window. We hadn't had time to turn on the light, to see who he was. But I didn't have to turn him over and look at his face to know it was Dick Hollister, Jill's brother, a fact which hadn't registered yet with Jill.

I crawled on my stomach to the window and maneuvered the curtains. After a moment, when nothing happened, I stuck my head out and looked down into the bright, moonlit alley one story below. It was empty. I no longer heard the scrape of leather and realized angrily that the

> hunter had probably taken off his shoes and crept away in his stocking feet.

> "I'm okay, Jill," I said, pulling the blind down. I turned on the floor lamp and watched her come out of her corner. "Did I hurt you?"

I'd given her a vicious shove between the shoulders sending her tumbling toward the darkest corner in the place. I'd done this to prevent one of the sniper's bullets from puncturing her, and, in doing so, I'd shoved myself off balance, tripping over the body.

"I'm all right, I think," she said uncertainly. "Did you see him?"

With a strong effort Jill forced herself to look at the dead man. The



sight caused her to stiffen in horror. Her white fist flew to her mouth as her eyes froze on the knife handle sticking out of the now familiar back of the corpse.

"Mike," she gasped, "it's-"

I moved to her quickly and put my arm around her. Then she jerked her face away from the corpse and buried it on my shoulder.

"Yes, it's Dick," I said. I held her tight, trying to contain her convulsing sobs. It was as if someone were twisting a knife in me. I loved her so much and yet there was so little comfort I could give her at a time like this. After a while, I eased her into the kitchen, found a bottle of Scotch and forced her to take some.

She looked up at me, her blue eyes moist and her chin quivering.

"Was it the murderer?" she whispered.

"Tm not sure," I said grimly. A sense of guilt gnawed deep down inside me. If I'd been a little smarter, a little more aggressive, maybe it wouldn't have happened this way.

"But if it wasn't the murderer," I promised, "he's going to give a very good explanation of why he was here and why he shot at us."

I left her sitting in the kitchen and walked back into the living room.

I STOOD over the corpse, staring down at it, trying to fix the details in my mind. Dick had been a tall, dark-haired young man, perhaps too handsome for his weak character.

He was in a dressing gown, sprawled flat on his stomach, his face slightly twisted to one side, his hands clawing at the carpet as though he were trying to hang on to something. From the position of the knife, it had probably been jabbed cleanly into his heart in one lunge, and he'd just simply fallen over dead.

I made a quick search of the apartment, not knowing what I might find, but prepared for anything. That was because I knew Dick. He'd been nothing but trouble for his father, since he was sixteen. Some boys come with bad streaks, regardless of their family background, and Dick was one of them. Judge Hollister was as fine as they come, and so was Jill.

In the desk, I found an address book loaded with feminine names, some circulars and a few bills which I knew Dick could never have paid without help from his father. In the lower drawer a half-filled stationery box held a few letters addressed to Dick. They were all signed Lorraine in a neat feminine handwriting.

I put the address book and the letters in my pocket. I didn't have any particular wish to beat the police and solve the case alone, but the letters could mean scandal, the type newspapers love to play up. The Judge was respected in the community, and Dick had already caused him enough public heartache. Besides, I didn't think the letters would help the police.

When I booked up, Jill was standing in the kitchen doorway watching me. She tried to put a smile on her mouth to show me she was all right. My heart sang when I saw her, as it always did. Jill had the usual standard parts, but I liked the way they were put together. And the little motor down inside her generated my own special Mike Warren current.

I sent her back into the kitchen to fix me a drink, and dialed Police Headquarters. Bill Shea was in charge of the Homicide Detail.

"This is Mike," I told him. "I'm in Dick Hollister's apartment on Marion Street." I gave him the essentials. "Judge Hollister asked me to do a job for him, but I'll tell you about that later. Jill is with me. Send a radio car to take over until you get here. Bill. I want to take her home."

"Thanks, Mike," he said. "Hang on until the car gets there." Mike and I had been friends on the force, and when I left to open my own detective agency, we remained friends. I'd always wanted to be my own boss, and I think Bill envied me a little.

The ride in the cool night air out to the Hollister home in Brundel Heights revived Jill some and cleared the mustiness out of my own thinking. When the Judge had hired me, he hadn't told me much. There wasn't much he could tell. Normally, I wouldn't have taken on an assignment as sketchy as that, but the Judge was different, and it wasn't because of Jill, either.

Dick had always lived in the family home, but recently he and his father had had a row over Dick's gambling, drinking and general carousing. The Judge had put his foot down and told the boy to go to work, something Dick had steered clear of since getting out of college three years ago. He was twenty-five and his father was still footing his bills.

When Dick moved to the Marion Street apartment his father asked me to keep an eye on him. He didn't want me to let it interfere with my usual routine, but he hoped Td get close enough to Dick to win his confidence. Secretly, I think, he was worried that the kid was already in some kind of trouble and needed a strong arm and a little sense to get out of it, qualities of body and mind the Judge knew Dick didn't have.

Though he tried not to show it, I knew the Judge blamed himself for Dick's weakness. "I've been too busy," he told me, wearily, one time. "After his mother died, 'I gave him everything but guidance."

A FTER WE got Jill to bed with the help of a hot toddy and a sleeping pill, we went into the library. I asked the Judge to tell me the whole story. "I can't help much if you don't," I said.

"I guess I haven't been fair to you, Mike," he began sadly. "When Dick moved out, we had quite a scene. He wanted five thousand dollars to pay a gambling debt he'd run up, and I refused to let him have it. I knew he was desperabe but I was going to give him the money later. I just wanted him to sweat a little, I thought it might teach him a lesson."

The old man was sitting at his desk, for the first time feeling the weight of his age. His normally clear bright eyes were now dull and lackluster; his mouth was painfully sad. The one hope that had always sustained him—that the prodigal son would one day return—was now gone.

"Who did he owe the money to?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied vaguely. "Do you think that's the solution to his murder"

I shrugged. "Depends on who held the IOU," I said. "Five thousand isn't a very large debt—to collect with a knife."

"Shall I mention that to the police, Mike?" "Tell them everything you can think of, Judge," I advised. "You can trust Bill Shea. He'll probably be around to see you in the morning." I walked over to the brandy decanter on the table and poured each of us a drink. "Is there any-thing else you can tell me?"

He looked at me, shaking his head slowly. "Dick didn't confide in me, as you know. You'll...?"

"I'll do everything I can," I promised. It was nearly midnight when I got back to Dick's apartment. There were a half dozen squad cars and an ambulance out in front. I guessed they were still taking pictures upstairs, so I stopped at the desk for a minute to talk with the night clerk.

"How many calls did Mr. Hollister have tonight?" I asked him.

He looked up at the row of letter boxes and drew out and handed me the single blue call slip in Dick Hollister's box. The time, 9:10 P. M., was written in pencil, and it was marked almost lilegibly to show that Mr. Potter had called. I didn't place the name immediately, gave the slip back to the clerk, and went on up to the apartment.

Bill Shea looked at me glumly. "No fingerprints on the knife or the window, Mike. Someone came prepared to do a job." He looked down at the corpse. The handle was still sticking up between the shoulder blades. "It's an ordinary chap hunting knife. Looks brand new. You can buy them in any surplus store."

"Did you find the bullet they sent after me?" I asked.

He nodded toward a hole in the plaster

beside the door.

"A .25 caliber slug," he said. "It was bruised pretty bad digging into the plaster, so I'm not sure we'll get any accurate bore marks. It carried a couple fibers which I imagine are from your coat sleeve." He frowned at me curiously. "You haven't told me what you were doing up here."

"Jill and I had gone to a movie," I told him. "Afterwards, we decided to drop in and see Dick. He and his father had quarreled when he moved here about a month ago, and we thought we might be able to patch things up. The Judge had asked me to keep an eye on him," I added.

"Why did they quarrel?" I passed along the gambling story Judge

Hollister had given me. "But I'd just as soon you'd get it from the old man." I concluded

"Five grand sounds like a professional game," Shea muttered. "In this town, that means Howie English. I'll look into him."

"Look clear into him." I advised.

HOWIE ENGLISH ran the Blue Falcon Club, a roadhouse just outside the city limits. There was no gambling at the club. Just dancing, drinking and a good floor show with good food. The games were floaters, moved to a different hotel room or apartment every night. Howie ran them, but no one had ever tied anything to him that would stand up in court. He was a smooth, competent operator and treated his suckers well, so there were few beefs again him.

It all added up to a strong doubt that he would kill the scion of a leading family for five thousand dollars. He could mark that up to operating expenses or public relations.

Any other night, it would have been a nice ride. The harvest moon was covering the good earth with a silver sheen and the air was brisk but pleasant. I didn't feel like sleeping anyway, so I drove out to the Blue Falcon and slid my car into the big gravel parking lot. I was lucky to find a slot. Even without the games. Howie English was coining dough. I dropped my hat on the velvet counter

and drew an admiring sigh. "Lo, honey," I grinned. "Is the boss

around?"

bar."

"I thought you'd come more often when you left the force, Mike," Zoe said. She was a long-limbed, high-breasted brunette in a little satin skirt and matching halter. She doubled as cigarette girl and hat check girl and was supporting her fouryear-old twins. Her husband, Johnny, had been killed in Korea that first winter.

"You know how it is," I said. "Yeah." she sighed. "Jill Hollister." She smiled as she shoved a pack of cigarettes into my pocket. "Howie's over at the

I dropped a bill on her tray. "There are a lot of school kids here tonight, Zoe."

"That's the way it is all the time now," she said. "They come to see Pat Davis sing." Zoe said they came to see, not hear. I walked over to the bar and climbed onto a stool.

"What'll you have, Warren?" Howie English asked. If you didn't know he was born in Massachusetts, vou'd have taken Howie for a Latin. He was in his late thirties and handsome to women.

"Brandy and soda." I told him. "How's crime, Howie?"

"Profitable, Mike, It's profitable," he repeated soberly. Then grinned. "The proposition I made you when you got off the force still goes, Mike."

"Forget it, English," I said. "I don't like your traffic and you know it. If I went on your payroll. I could never hang anything on you. You been around all night?"

He looked at me, surprised. "You know better than to ask a question like that, My office upstairs has an outside stairway. I go and I come and I always have witnesses to prove I was some place else." He slid off the stool. "Some day you'll wise up, Warren."

I watched him walk back through the tables to the dressing rooms, and wondered where he'd gotten the money to open the Blue Falcon. That he was a good showman, I had to admit.

A redhead, in a red gown and red shoes, came out into a red spot in front of the bandstand and started singing about the apartment the devil had given her in hell. Pat Davis wasn't much of a singer, but she had the kind of appeal that packed them in. She had, in a short time, become a local deity to the school kids.

Watching her gave me the same feeling every man there had. Then I went home.

BEFORE I went to bed, I took a look at Hollister's address book and the letters I'd taken from his desk.

They were what I'd expected. They were hot and bothered; Dick had had a passionate effect on a girl named Lorraine. The letters also had undertones of violence. In the most recent one, dated last Tuesday, Lorraine's husband had threatened her.

Moreover, and this made me reconsider the significance of the letters, Lorraine threatened Dick that if he did not stop seeing "that tramp," Pat Davis, she would spill the works.

From the tone and phrasing of the letters, I doubted that Lorraine, whoever she was, had the capacity for murder. Her husband, from what she said in her letters, seemed to me to be the one more likely to resort to violence. Lorraine was clearly frightened. It was apparent that this was her first venture into adultery, and I felt a little sorry for her. I decided not to let the letters out of my hands and risk a lot of nasty newspaper scandal, unless it was absolutely necessary—if only for the Judge's ske.

I fixed myself a nighteap and thumbed through the address book. It read like the roster of a commercial model agency. Pat Davis was listed under "D" as I expected, but I didn't hit pay dirt until I got to the "Ps." Dorraine was pioned up with Potter, the man who'd called Dick Hollister at 9:10 that night. I placed him then by the address. He was James Potter, a local building contractor.

That information seemed to confirm my tentative opinion that the letters wouldn't solve Dick's murder. Lorraine was merely an infatuated woman, whose husband was having trouble with her. Potter was brusque and direct, a shrewd kind of operator who would handle his wife bluntly and might have a talk with Dick. He might even slap Dick around some. But he'd be too intelligent to resort to murder.

I decided anyway to have a talk with both of them in the morning, and went to bed.

BILL SHEA was in his office when I walked into Headquarters. He tossed me a paper cup, nodded toward the pot of coffee on the hot plate, and asked, "Did you tell Howie English last night about Hollister's murder?"

"No," I said, as I helped myself to some coffee.

"He thinks fast then," Shea said. "He acted mildly surprised and said he'd been sitting in on a friendly game in one of the downtown hotels all evening. Herb Hughes, the city treasurer, and Bob Nelson, manager of the hotel, were in the game, and they reluctantly confirmed his alibi."

"I'm not surprised," I said. "They'd give him an alibi just to avoid being drawn into any scandal themselves. If they didn't, Howie'd threaten them plenty," I shrugged. "It's easier for them that way."

"You think the alibi is no good, Mike?" Shea asked.

"I didn't say that. It may be pure gold, but if anything else points to Howie, I'd certainly give the alibi a careful washing to see that there isn't any dirt in it." I got some more coffee and lit a cigarette. "Did you get anything on the gambling debt Hollister owed?"

Shea nodded. "English told us about it when we told him Hollister was dead. He said he was sorry to hear it, but was glad the kid had paid up before he got knocked off. When I asked him to explain, he said it was five grand and he didn't know

where Dick got the dough to pay it. He showed me his account book where he had made an entry a couple days ago."

"Could be," I growled. "But I wonder where the dough came from. I know the

Judge didn't put it up." "Maybe it was window dressing." Shea suggested.

"I doubt it." I said. "If English decided to kill Dick, he'd certainly have wiped the books clean in advance, so no one could prove a motive. But I don't think English would kill a member of an important family like the Judge's just for five grand. If he killed Dick, there must have been another more important rea-

son, Bill." I thought a minute. "Did the M.E. fix a time of death?"

"Pretty close to ten o'clock," Shea said. I thanked him and walked out, thinking of James Potter's call at 9:10. If Dick had been home then, he'd have gotten Potter's call and there'd have been no call slip in the letter box. Maybe Potter came over later though, intending to wait for Dick. . . .

JAMES POTTER & CO., General Con-tractors, had offices in the Chandler Building. He was a thick-bodied man in his late forties, with a brown, weatherbeaten face and sharp eyes that squinted appraisingly at whomever he was talking to.

"You've seen the papers?" I asked him. "About young Hollister's murder?" He nodded once. "What is your connection with the case?"

"I'm a private detective representing his family and working with the police. "You don't have to answer any of my questions, Mr. Potter, but it might be to your interest to do so. I'm interested in finding Dick's murderer with as little scandal as possible. The police might not be so considerate."

He nodded. "How can I help?" "Did vou see Dick last night?"

He shook his head. "I called him around nine, but he wasn't in. I left a message for him to call me, and let it got at that." He looked at me coolly. "You know what I wanted to discuss with him?"

"About his romance with your wife." There was no point in being delicate with him. "Have you ever talked with Dick about it?"

"I've never seen the man," Potter replied sharply. "I don't even know what he looks like. I guess it's just as well now."

"What do you mean by that?"

Potter eved me intently. "I might have gotten rough with him, Mr. Warren. He was annoving me."

I had a feeling he was telling me the truth, and stood up to go.

"Is your wife broken up about it?" I

His gaze narrowed. "She'll get over it." he said. "She'll be a good wife from now

"I want to go out and see her," I told He frowned quickly. "I'd rather you

wouldn't. Mr. Warren, unless it's absolutely necessary."

Jill was waiting for me when I pushed through the revolving door of our favorite restaurant. I slipped into the booth opposite her and felt the familiar warm glow come over me.

"You're early, Mike," she said, smiling. I could never get over the wonderful blue of her eyes. The smile faded and her face showed the anxiety she was trying to conceal. "Have you found out anything?"

The waitress came and we ordered lunch. Then I said, "Not much, but you might help. Do you know anything about Lorraine Potter?"

She shook her head. I handed her the letters, even though I knew it would be painful for her to read them, but I hoped they would give her an idea.

After a moment, she looked up, "What was it Lorraine threatened to tell about Pat Davis?"

"I suppose she was going to tell Howie English that Dick was playing around with her." I replied. "My guess is, however, that English already knew it. Not much escapes him."

Jill's evebrows puckered thoughtfully. "I don't believe that's it, Mike," she said slowly. "I think Lorraine meant there was something about Pat Davis that she was going to tell publicly."

"Possibly." I admitted, frowning. "But what kind of a threat could it be that would scare Dick? Surely not the fact that he was playing around with Pat. It must be something that would make some-

GUESSING GAME

AT PRINCE RUPERT, British Columbia police didn't think much of the name "Guess Who?" on a fishing boat. Instead of guessing who they scraped the name off and found another underneath, that of a boat reported stolen some time earlier.

-Bess Ritter

body-English, for instance-mad enough to take revenge on Dick."

"That's it." Jill cried. "Something Pat was doing that would make English very angry if it became known."

I thought about that through lunch, then told Jill to run on home and take care of herself. She promised she would, and I headed over to see Lorraine Potter. The idea simmering was a little complicated. but it came from Jill's interpretation of what Lorraine had meant. I figured Lorraine could tell me exactly what I needed to know.

The Potters had a nice brick rambler in Brundel Heights, not far from the Hollister house. There was mail in the box. the milk was still standing in the sun, and there was no answer to my ring.

I tried the door. It was unlocked and I went in.

I FOUND her on the kitchen floor, in a flowered silk housecoat. Once a cute little brunette, now her black eyes were popping and her face looked like a bloated violet balloon. She'd been garrotted with a piece of clothesline rope, knotted cruelly under her left ear.

I shuddered and gritted my teeth. I never could get used to looking at victims

of violent death.

I walked back into the living room, called Bill Shea, and got out of there. The motives in the case were bothering me. Bill could work on the clues, while I tried to run down the motives.

Somebody had shut Lorraine Potter's mouth because she knew something the killer didn't want spread around. If Jill was right-and, after seeing Lorraine's body. I was convinced Jill was right-then .mv next bet was Pat Davis.

The way I analyzed it, Howie English had his fingers in a lot of pies, and one of them was getting sticky. Pat Davis was mixed up with him in the sticky one. Lorraine Potter knew about it, and had threatened to spill it if Dick didn't drop Pat and pay more attention to her. It was strictly jealousy on Lorraine's part, but it meant Dick knew what the dirt was also. That's why Dick was killed.

Of course, all this was just a theory, What I felt sure of was that it was definitely a man's job, and that probably the same man had done both jobs.

That brought me back to direct, blunt James Potter. He could have killed Dick. I mused. His wife might have found out about it and used it as a club over his head. He'd told me, I remembered, that she'd be a good wife from now on. Some men I've known regard the only good wife as a dead wife.

When I got to my office, the phone was ringing. I keved open the door, picked the day's mail up from the floor and went to my desk. Bill Shea was on the phone.

"Mike," he snapped, "we can't find Potter. His steno says you saw him. Any ideas?"

"None," I said, "unless he's out toasting

his wife's reformation."

"He doesn't know she's dead yet," Shea

said, "unless he killed her."

I was sorting through my mail with one hand as I talked, and I'd just thumbed open a plain white envelope that hadn't come through the mail. It was unsealed and had been dropped through the letter slot in the door.

I heard my voice telling Shea, mechanically, "That's a possibility," and I put the

receiver down.

My forehead was clammy and icy fingers were running up my spine. It was a full length picture of Jill, clipped from the society page of a newspaper announcing our engagement. A hunting knife had been cut from an ad and pasted over her breast.

Beneath the picture was the story of our engagement. Eight words selected from the text were encircled with heavy red pencil, and lines were drawn to show the sequence.

The message read: Lay off the Hollister event, Warren, or else!

NUMBLY I dialed Jill's number. When she came on, I started breathing again.

"Are you all right?"

"Why, of course, Mike," she said puzzled. "What's the matter? Your voice is trembling."

"Nothing's the matter," I growled. I didn't want to worry her, but the panie was still with me. "I'd appreciate it if you'd stay home. Don't go out, for any reason, until we find out who got your brother."

"Why, of course, Mike, if that's the way you want it," Jill agreed, but she didn't sound too happy. "Are you worried about me?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I'm going to call Shea and have him send a cop out to watch your house. Just as a precaution," I added.

After I called Bill I ran down to the street and raced my car over to Pat Davis's apartment house. They could threaten me or take pot shots at me or

do any damn thing they wanted to, but they couldn't put Jill in danger.

they couldn't put Jii in danger.

Pat Davis had a corner apartment on
the first floor, with her own outside entrance along the side of the building. Fd
calmed down a bit by the time I got there,
-but when I used the knocker, the entire
door rattled. She opened it herself before I had a chance to knock again. It
was the same Pat Davis with that special
appeal customers went for a the Blue
Falcon Club. However, at that moment
I wasn't in the mood for that appeal.

"I'm-" I started.

"Mike Warren," she cut in, smiling-faintly. She opened the door an inch wider and I got a better look at her, but it was obvious she had no intention of letting me in. Then I smelled something, and knew I had to go in.

"I want to talk to you," I said and pushed on the door. She tried to stop me but I forced my way past her and walked into the foyer. I knew that now I was on the right track.

She had a few visitors. High school kids, girls and boys, were spread around the living room. My mind was racing on the answer I'd suddenly come up with, but I was careless.

As I stepped into the living room from the foyer, something crashed down on my skull like a load of iron. The last thing I remember, as I slid to the floor, is hearing one of the girls shriek:

"Timber-r-r-r."

I WAS chewing carpet, or I had been.
As I came out of it, I twisted and squirmed and knew I was lying on the floor some place.

"You feeling better, Mr. Warren?"

The voice seemed to come out of the ether. I climbed up to a stiting position and things gradually came into focus. Pat Davis was sitting on the sofa, her long limbs tucked up under her, cattike. She had on a green polka dot dress with white shoulder straps and her red hair flared out around her shoulders in a flaming cloud. Pat was the only one in the room. The ash trays were clean, and if it hadn't been for the lingering smell of marijuana in the air, I wouldn't have believed what I saw before I was put to sleep. I checked my .38 to see if it was still under my arm, then I slid my hand in my coat pocket. As I expected, Lorraine's letters were gone.

"Anything missing, Mr. Warren?" Pat Davis purred.

"Not a thing," I growled. I had a feeling of impending doom. My watch told me I'd been unconscious for an hour.

Pat Davis's handbag was on the table. I reached for it before she could stop me.

Inside the bag was a small automatic.

"They weren't worth it, were they?" I said.

"What wasn't worth it?"

"The letters," I snapped. "They didn't give you away after all. They just threatened to. You were after them last night. When I interrupted you, you took a pot shot at me with this."

I tossed the gun to her after taking the shells out. "From what Dick Hollister told you, you thought Lorraine had really incriminated you in the reefer racket, didn't you?"

The phone rang before she could say anything, and I nodded for her to pick it up. She listened a moment, said, "Yes, he's still here," and held the receiver toward me.

The word still froze in my ear. That meant they'd talked about me before while I was unconscious. A whole hour! Anything might have happened in that hour!

"Yeah?" I growled.

"You were warned to lay off, Copper," English snarled. "What are you going to do now?"

"Break you apart, English, and smash the filthy reefer racket you're running," I snapped. "Twe got the whole picture now. Lorraine Potter found out that Pat Davis was distributing the weed to high school kids, and she told Dick Hollister. That's why you cancelled his gambling debt, English. He blackmailed you into it. And, that's why you killed him, because you were afraid he'd talk."

"You've got things figured, Warren," English replied coldly. "But I don't think you'll want to follow up on it. One of my men is just outside my office playing games with your girl friend, Jill Hollister."

COLD sweat beaded my face and my throat felt raw. It was the only card English could hold, that I was afraid of. If it was true, if he had Jill, something must have gone wrong.

"I don't believe it, English."

"Hold the wire. Warren." he said.

"Mike! Mike!" Jill's voice was angry and defiant. "Come and get him, Mike." Then English was back on the phone.

"She doesn't know what she wants, Warren. What do you want? She wouldn't look pretty with her throat split open. Give me your word you'll drop the case, and I'll let her go. If you don't keep your word . . . my men know what to do!"

Sweat was running down my face as I stalled for time to think. But there was nothing to think about. "You're too smart to touch her, English," I said slowly. "Tm coming after her, and God help you if you hurt her!"

"You'll never find her, Warren!" I heard him say as I dropped the receiver.

No . . . of course I wouldn't find her, there in his office. At this point, I was the only threat to him. The only one who was able to break his racket. I turned to Pat Davis

"Where will he take her?" I demanded.

"To the warehouse," she said spitefully.
"That's where they'll take her. I'll tell
you, so they can take gou too. It's down
on Front Street, in Warehouse Eightyfour, where they keep the weed. It's all
there, you smart pig, but it won't do you
any good, because you'll be dead as soon
as you get there."

Her answer was too prompt, but it had to be true because it came from pure hate and a desire to see me dead. It took me ten seconds to tie her up and drop her in the bathtub.

The sun was dropping behind the mountains and there were long shadows as I slid out of my car and ran behind the long row of warehouses. Number Eighty-four was near the end of the deserted row.

Several boards were loose on the back windows. I pulled one of them out and a rusty-nail squeaked like an anguished mouse. Broken glass snagged at my coat as I slid over the sill. Someone at the far end heard the noise, and heavy footsteps were pounding toward me.

I moved up behind a packing crate and waited. A huge, gangling shape rounded the crate, headed for the dim light coming through the window, and I stuck my foot out. I caught him behind the ear with the butt of my gun as he stumbled.

The watchman, I figured, and he hadn't known I was coming or he'd have been more careful. I'd beaten English here. I started forward as the sound of tires chewing up gravel came to my ears.

I ran as quietly as I could through the stacked packing crates toward the entrance on the other side. The door opened as I squeezed in behind some empty barrels and two thugs came in. Behind them, I could see English holding Jill's arm.

One of the thugs reached up and pulled a cord. A naked bulb threw a spotlight of dim yellow light out from the door almost to where I was hiding. English was the last one in and closed the door.

"Hold it!" I yelled. "I've got you all covered."

THEY froze for an instant. The two hoodlums dived for cover in opposite directions, while English grabbed Jill.

They didn't know just where I was, but the guns of the two hoodlums blasted toward me. I hit one of the thugs in the side of the head. It was a lucky shot. I was trying to wing the other thug who was lunging toward me. But I didn't get him.

He took cover and started pouring fire at me. The crashing thunder of gunbursts echoed through the huge warehouse.

Howie English had locked Jill's arms

behind her, holding her wrists with one hand, while his other hand held a gun. They were standing right in front of the door, under the yellow bulb. He was a tall, heavily-built man and it looked as if his chin were resting on top of her head.

"Come out with your hands up, Warren," he shouted. "And don't try anything funny or I'll put a slug right through the broad's head."

"Shoot him, Mike," Jill shouted shrilly

I'd expected her to be hysterical by now, but her angry, defiant voice was steady. And she really wanted me to shoot him.

Suddenly my nerves were still, as if I didn't have them any more. My face stopped sweating and my hand was steady. My gun had been silent for some minutes now. I'd spent a lot of time learning how to use that gun.

I looked at Howie English's evil face leering at me above the angry, proud face of my blonde . . . and I squeezed the trigger!

He made no noise, no gurgle. From where I stood behind the barrels I saw the small dark spot appear on the racketeer's forehead, dead center above his eyes. He released his grip on Jill Hollister, and slid to the floor behind her.

"Holy cow! ..." a confused voice whispered hoarsely. It was the other hoodlum. "Don't shoot. Warren. ..."

His gun clattered to the floor and I saw him edge out from behind the crate, his hands in the air.

Then Jill was in my arms and I was shaking like an nervous puppy. The thug could have gotten away then, but he didn't know it. He drove us meekly down to Headquarters and turned himself over to Bill Shea.

Later that night, while Jill and I were discussing wedding plans in front of he fireplace, I remembered Pat Davis. I called Bill Shea and he crawled out of bed to go over and pull her out of the bathtub.

"You're thinking of her, darling?" Jill asked sweetly. "At a time like this. . .?"
"Sh . " I said. "M-m-m-m. . ."



NIGHT

By DEAN EVANS

A T ONE-FIFTEEN in the morning Ernie Lloyd, night clerk of the Mahkeen Hotel, put his palm to his mouth and killed off a yawn. The lobby was quiet save for the mutterings of an old electric clock on the back wall near the bird-cage elevator.

Across from the desk in the widest part of the lobby four rain-streaked windows formed a dirty black backdrop for a tall floor lamp with imitation candelabra like the limbs of a bleak fig tree in mid-December. Near the lamp were a few chairs upholstered in soiled blue mohair. Near the chairs was a sarred mahogany table which held torn magazines.

Ernie wrinkled his nose. The place had the smell of smoking stands butted at too many times, and warmed-over memories that nobody cared about

A hell of a night. He hadn't filled a room since the skinny dame with the kid—the dame who had signed herself "Mrs. Franklin Rogers"—had taken 402 at exactly ten-thirty. A hell of a night. A night when a puy could shoot up the block and nobody'd hat an upe. Or a night when you could let the Venetian blinds down a little too hard and two minutes later six prowl cars would carve up your front lawn. A hell of a night.

He yawned again, stretched, got up. and went around to the front of the desk. He leaned his back against it and listened. Except for the electric clock there still wasn't a sound. South Figueroa Street might as well not have been there at all. Well, you couldn't expect a guy to hear late traffic noises if there weren't any late traffic noises. Not on a rainy night you couldn't—or any other night.

He frowned, turned slightly to the left and his eyes picked out a bald-headed man slumped over on the stool inside the elevator cage. Ernie's upper lip raised off even white teeth. He banged his palm down three times on a punch bell on the desk.

"Hey, Curly! Front and center, dammit! Think this dump's a flophouse?"

THE bald-headed man jerked upright. He raised sleep-filled eyes and scanned rapidly, saw Ernie Lloyd standing alone at the desk. He shook his head, moved to lean back on the stool, and fell over on the floor. He cursed, got himself upright again, disgustedly flicked at trousers that needed creasing, and said harshly:

"You lousy creep! Wish it was eight A.M. so I could of been in bed a hour ago dreaming how I'm slitting your throat. What time is it?"

'One-fifteen. Get over here and take care of the guests as they troop in."

"'Smatter? Knocking off?"

"Yeah, I'm knocking off. In a pig's eye. Going upstairs to shake hands with a couple dozen door knobs. Or do you think maybe I should send up the regular houseman to do that?"

The bald-headed man pulled his nose, made an obscene noise, and grunted, "Yeah, the regular houseman. In a fleabag like this? You should live so long, Mr. Lloyd, There a bottle maybe behind your desk a guy could squeeze a little? Just for kicks?"

"No bottle."

"What I figgered. Hell! Well, hop along, Cassidy, ha ha."

The big glass-paneled entrance doors in the front of the lobby burst open and a man lurched through. He wore a rumpled and wet gray topcoat, gray bashed-down and wet porkiple hat, and wet shoes that were neither brown nor black. Inside the lobby he stopped. He swayed slightly to the left, halted, then pendulum-wise came back again to the right. He hiscupped loudly.

"One of them guests you mentioned, Mr. Lloyd," grunted the bald-headed elevator man.

Ernie Lloyd said nothing.

The man in the wet clothes took two uncertain steps, spied the blue upholstered chairs, mode a sensational turn on his right ankle and headed in a line that would take him in that approximate direction. He made the first chair, swung around and collapsed neatly in its exact center. Then he raised heavy-lashed eyes, grinned a little vacantly at Ernie and promptly fell asleep.

"Hell," said the elevator man, "the guy's plastered." He chuckled. "The lucky dog. You gonna give him the heave ho?"

Ernie sighed. "A night like this? Let him alone. You don't hear any squawks from the chair he's in, do you? Let him alone."

"Who said anything?" The elevator man hunched his narrow shoulders and turned his palms outward. "The lucky dog is all I said."

He watched Ernie get into the elevator, pull back the filigree ironwork of the door and grab at the control handle. The cage disappeared leaving only a tail of wire cable showing through the grillwork.

Ernie rode the car to Six-to the top. He

got out, propped the door back with the stool, took long strides down the bare hall. There weren't any guests up here on the top floor, but he had a duty anyhow.

He went directly to the end of the corridor, to the iron-clad fire door that led to the stairs. He pushed open the door, found the light switch and snicked it on, then leaned over and peered down the stairwell as far as he could see. Okay, but you never knew. Not that anybody would care either, but it was a job to be done, a ritual.

He flicked off the switch, let the fire door close behind him, and went back to the elevator, whistling. On the fifth floor he performed the same duty, and on the way back to the elevator touched door knobs quietly. Locked, as they should be. Three were permanents up here on Five, the only permanents in the house.

On Four, the layout was a little different. Some of the rooms had no bath, no lavatory. Instead, in two alcoves off the right wall were rest rooms with cracked white tile showers. He would check these on the way back from the fire door.

HE DIDN'T reach the fire door. Nearly at the end of the hall the door of Room 402 caught his eye. It stood open, light from the room inside making a sharp white patch in the hall and against the opposite wall. He looked inside.

Several things caught his eye at once. One was a little boy with bright, staring blue eves whose head stuck out of the sheets on the double bed. The others were an open suitcase on the floor near the dresser, and on top of the dresser was a small shinychrome electric hot plate that was plugged into a wall outlet. On the hot plate was a small, brand new steel frying pan in which two hamburgers sizzled

Ernie said quietly, "I'll be damned."

The woman who had taken the room, the skinny dame registered as Mrs. Franklin Rogers, wasn't there.

Ernie saw a loaf of bread on the end of the dresser. Beside the bread were two cheap white cups and an unopened can of coffee.

He turned to the bed. "Where's your mama, sonny?"

The bright blue eves got big. One arm, almost as white as the bed sheet, got itself out and the fingers on the small hand plucked at the cloth.

Ernie leaned over the bed. "What you got to say, soldier?" he said, smiling a little. "Where's Mama, huh?"

The bright blue eves began to blink rapidly and the little white hand went beneath the covers again. Red lips opened and a little scared voice came out at Ernie in a little scared whisper that said:

"Daddy

Ernie grinned. "Huh? Wrong number, soldier. Try again. Where's Mama? Hotel room doors shouldn't be left unlocked and open this time of night." His grin turned a little sour. He added, "Especially not in this hotel."

"Were you looking for someone?"

Ernie spun around from the bed. The skinny dame stood just inside the doorway. In her right hand was a shiny new percolator and she was holding it tilted a little so that some of the water was spilling from the

"Were you looking for someone special?" she asked again.

Ernie shrugged. "Not special, no. One of my jobs is to palm door knobs late at night. I found your door open and the kid in here alone. That's all."

The woman came into the room, went to the dresser, took the frying pan off the hot plate and balanced it carefully on one of the porcelain cups. Then she put the percolator on the plate and picked up the can of coffee and began to open it

She said slowly, "I was down the hall in the rest room. I left the door open so Frankie wouldn't be frightened. Is that all you wanted?" Her voice was flat. It reached Ernie's ears like a purposeless night wind drifting over cold dark sage.

"More or less," he said. "Sure. My job."

The woman nodded. "All right. Thanks. Now how about getting the hell out again?"

"Hey!" Ernie stared. "For two bucks you want a lot, lady." He flicked an eye at the electric plate, "It's only slightly against the hotel rules to make our rooms into a restaurant: You use that suitcase only to lug around your equipment?"

The woman's thin nostrils flared. She said bitterly, "In these days of atom bombs and H-bombs and private little crime waves on dark street corners this conscientious gentleman worries about hotel rules."

Her eyes bit into his, Lord, but she was thin! But it wasn't only thinness from not eating. It was something else. It was thinness from something dying inside like narcissus blossoms, perhaps, that for days on end are bright and fresh and then suddenly gone —crisp dead things without form, without beauty. Only her eyes remained alive, vibrant.

ERNIE sighed. "All right. So we forget. T suddenly get blind a little about the rigid rules we got here at the Mahkeen. Maybe something like this has been done before once or twice and maybe you and the kid are hungry. All right. So I'll go downstairs and shoot myself."

He turned to the bed again, looked down at the child. He said softly, "So your name is Frankie, soldier?"

"He's named after his father."

Ernie turned back. "Oh? Named after his father. Where is his father?"

The woman held his eyes for only an instant. Then she looked down at the percolator and said something that sounded like, "He's meeting us here. He's a successful beer salesman and he's on the road a good deal and he's coming in tonight and meeting us here. He'll probably be hungry. That's why the hamburgers and the coffee and—"

"And he's meeting you here."
"Yes."

Ernie shrugged. "You only registered for one, Mrs. Rogers," he said.

"So that's a crime?"

Ernie jerked a helpless little grin off one corner of his mouth. He said, "Lady, don't bite like that. If your husband is meeting you here later tonight what do I care? But you signed the register for yourself and the boy only, and you got the room for two bucks. You see what I mean?"

"No," she said carefuily. A little nervously, he thought. "I don't see. That's what you told me. Two dollars, you said. I paid it and I've got the receipt."

"Sure. But for wife and husband and child in one room—I mean, another buck" dady, please. There's a bright lad on the elevator downstairs and if he sees something that smells to him, especially when he hasn't a bottle he can cuddle up to, he begins to talk about it long and loud. And first thing you know the ears on the walls open up and suddenly good old Ernie Lloyd is drawing unemployment again. Another buck, lady, please."

She stared at him for a long time. To Ernie, the look in her eyes seemed to be coming across the room at him in a peculiar way as though her-eyes were traveling down a long and familiar road that had no ending.

She sighed then, nodded slowly, pulled out one of the dresser drawers and got out a black cloth handbag and from it took a crumpled dollar bill. She handed it over.

"My love to all the folks," she said quietly. Ernie took the bill, unwadded it, went to the door, then turned around to look at the bright blue eyes of the child in the big double bed. He winked and said, "Night, soldier."

The scared little voice whispered, "Daddy?"

Ernie shook his head, closed the door behind him. He touched more door knobs. A little later he took the elevator down.

The lobby was still dim, still quiet. The drunk in the blue mohair chair hadn't moved.

Ernie growled, "On your feet, Curly! And for God's sake stay on your feet. You give the place a bad name."

He got the big register, flipped it open and picked up a steel-nibbled pen that might at one time have been capable of more than unintelligible scrawls. He dipped the thing in a bottle of ink and inserted "Mr. &" in front of Mrs. Franklin Rogers. He turned around to the big, scarred cash register, rung up the dollar bill and pulled out a receipted slip.

"Successful beer salesman," he grunted.
Even before the big glass doors up front
opened inward Ernie had a feeling. He
pulled his eyes over to the drunk in the
blue mohair chair. Policeman. You could
smell it almost, even in a place like the lobby

of the Mahkeen. He took his eyes from the drunk, waited.

The doors banged back. There were two of them, one tall, spare, with a gaunt look; the other medium, in a neatly pressed dark worsted. Neither of the two were too wet, considering the night. They moved on down the lobby.

THE gaunt one flicked a scanning look over at the drunk in the blue mohair chair. He snorted softly.

Ernie lifted an eyebrow at the elevator man, jerked his head at the cage in the rear. The elevator man got up, shuffled back.

"Efficiency," muttered Ernie. "A drunk decides to rest a little and whaddya know—in five minutes the law is here. Efficiency."

"Huh?" The gaunt police officer raised a bushy eyebrow beneath the brim of a dark fedora that needed blocking. "A night like this we gotta run into a joker," he said. He jerked his head toward Ernie, showed his horse teeth to his partner in a grin, then his flat lips curled. "The register cards for tonight, sonny. Quick like."

Ernie stared. Then he looked at the other man, the one in the neatly pressed dark worsted.

That one said, "I am Joseph Harold. This is my partner, Lieutenant Hawks. May we see your register cards, please?"

"Sure." Ernie brought out a puzzled frown and let them see it. "Only you're placing us too far up. No cards. Just an old-fashioned register book." He dragged the book over,

register book." He dragged the book over, let the cover bang on the desk. The gaunt one thumbed. "The money this joint must be making," he grunted. "This all

for the night?"
"A little slow," Ernie admitted.

"Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Rogers," said the gaunt one, reading aloud the last entry. "Sounds like it belongs in the Wilshire Arms, don't it?"

"A name is a name is a name," said Ernie.
"My name's Lloyd and I've never even been to London." He waited, then said, "What's up that's so important on a rainy night like this?"

The gaunt one said, "Restless lad named Abe Hastings. Did a Quentin quickie this

aft. We're Homicide, sonny."

Ernie blinked. "So? And you camp in the

lobby of the Mahkeen over it?"

"We're psychic. We smell the bird coming here a mile away."

Lieutenant Harold cleared his throat, asked: "Where's the back door to this

place?"
"Behind the elevator," said Ernie. "But

look. If there's going to be any—"
"We're here to prevent that," said Harold.

He moved away from the desk, disappeared behind the elevator.

His gaunt partner got out a cigarette, struck a kitchen match on a big squarenailed thumb, and blew smoke in Ernie's face

"This Hastings is clever." he said. "Doing a fifteen to life in Quentin. Figures aning a fifteen to life in Quentin. Figures anigles. Gets his wife to phony up a pack of
smokes with a dynamite detonator cap inside one of the eigarettes. In the exercise
yard or some such place today they're playing
ball, see? Comes this mug's turn to hat. He
hands a lighted butt to a guard to hold for
him. Goes to hat. The butt blows up and
now the guard's got two wrists but only one
hand. Things happen. Whistles blow.
Everybody goes nuts, Next thing you know
San Quentin's minus a couple of joes."

"A couple?"

"Guy didn't do it alone," grunted the gaunt man. "Took a pal with him. Swiped a car, headed for L.A. We're on the ball and we spot the heap. Somebody starts slamming slugs. The heap goes up the curb and walks into a big supermarket, only not using the front door. Hasting's pal has one inside his gut by this time and don't go nowhere, but Hastings loses himself in the crowd in the supermarket. And there you are. You're drawing everything I know right outa my head."

Ernie leaned his elbows down on the desk. "So right away you figure the Mahkeen Hotel," he said softly.

The man spat out a crumb of tobacco. He snorted, "Look, sonny, this joint's a border-line case any day of the week. Only we got more than that. The pal talks before he blacks out. Maybe we sorta urge him, but he talks. He says Hastings is headed here to

hole up. Got it?"

"Yeah. I got something else, too. You got a prowl car outside? Sure you have, since you aren't wet. So this Hastings spots it and he don't come in."

"Smart, ain't you?" sneered the Homicide cop. "Listen! There are two submachine-guns out in our heap with hands holding them. All he's got to do is get in the neighborhood, and whop! Cut down just like that!"

ERNIE sighed. He closed the register. "You'll never get him."

"No?"

"Hell, no. You said he had a wife. He'll hole up with her, wherever she is."

The lawman's eyes slitted. He raised his flat lips away from his big teeth and said. "A smart cookie, that's what you are." But he sounded worried. "Oh, but wouldn't I like to get my hands on that dame!" He made growling noises in his throat. "She started this whole mess!"

He dropped his cigarette on the floor, ground it out underfoot. Then he moved away from the desk, went over to the drunk in the blue mohair chair. He reached down with his left hand and grabbed at the drunk's chin. He held it up, brought his right around, palm open, and let it flick twice against the man's cheeks.

Ernie growled, "Let him be!"

"Huh?" The Homicide man jerked around, glaring. "What the hell do you care? Slob's drunk ain't he?"

The switchboard behind the desk suddenly buzzed sharply. Ernie sat down, picked up the receiver and said softly:

"Hotel Mahkeen."

"Okay." The voice sounded funny, as though it were being strained through old burlap. "Look. A Mrs. Franklin Rogers got a room there?"

Ernie nodded at the board, said, "Yes."
"Now listen. There's a back door and back stairway in the hotel?"

Ernie blinked. "Yeah, but—" A clicking in his ear stopped whatever more he would have said. He took off the earpiece and whispered, "Successful beer salesman" softly.

The gaunt copper was back at the desk,

leaning over it, leering down at Ernie. "Somebody's little woman? I figure this it the kind of a dump get calls like that in the middle of the night. Hubby ain't home yet from that big conference at the office. Only the little wife ain't as dumb as she looks. Starts calling flytraps like this—the kind that don't give a damn about what goes in two-dollar rooms. Huh?"

Ernie said distinctly, "What kind of a place do you think this is, copper?"

The gaunt man showed his teeth. "What kind I just get through saying it was?" He turned on his heel and went back to the drunk in the blue mohair chair.

He got tired of slapping the drunk after awhile, shrugged, and flopped in another of the blue chairs right next to the drunk.

He called to Ernie, "The guy we're looking for has a voice like a foghorn ain't been oiled lately. Built heavy. Scar on chin. Lemme know if he comes in." He reached up to pull his fedora down over his eyes.

Ernie's fingers gripped suddenly on the edge of the desk. He thought, a rough voice? Voice like somebody had once bent pipes across his throat?

The clock in the rear wall muttered to itself. The lobby seemed very dim and very, very quiet and filled with shadows that shouldn't be there. One of the shadows—a ridiculously small one—looked at Ernie and a small, scared-sounding shadowy voice said in a scared, shadowy whisper, "Daddy?"

Ernie looked down at his fingers gripping the edge of the desk, then wiped at the sweat that suddenly was on his upper lip. He stood at the desk, not moving. There was no other sound in the place but the clock.

And then there was. The signal buzzer inside the elevator cage bracked off jarringly.

Just inside the cage, the hald-headed elevator man stood leaning on the filigree door. His mouth was open and he was staring into the lobby.

The buzzer bracked off again. A hat was lifted from a gaunt face. The elevator man slowly closed his mouth, let the door close, pulled the control lever. The car moved. The hat came down over the gaunt face once more. The elevator came down again and the filigree door opened. She was tall in addition to being so thin. Ernie watched her come across the lobby toward him, thinking he hadn't before noticed how tall she was.

She looked briefly at the two men sprawled in the blue mohair chairs. Briefly only. Then she said, "I was wondering what time it was."

The woman's eyes were different somehow than they'd been before. Then they were living, hoping, planning things in a tired, worn-out frame. Now they were still living things, but hope was fading from them, leaving them dulled, like hot paraffin suddenly chilled at an open window.

He said finally, "It's ten after two."

"I see." The woman's fingers scraped, rasping, in a little movement across the desk-top. She said, "Thank you," in a dead voice and made her way stiff-legged back to the elevator.

The gaunt man cleared his throat. "Who the hell was that?"

"Mrs. Franklin Rogers," Ernie said carefully.

"Oh." The hat came down, then up. The man got out of the chair, came to the desk. and asked, "Ain't she got a watch?"

Ernie shrugged, avoided the man's eyes. The fellow leaned over the desk. "This time of night she wants to know the time?" His voice was charged with something.

Ernie shrugged again. "Maybe wants to set her alarm."

"Yeah?" The lieutenant flipped open the register, studied the scrawled names. He said suspiciously, "Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Rogers."

"All right, dammit!" Ernie jacked a growl into his voice. "All right. So the Malkeen is a dive. So we got cheap bedrooms where things go on behind thin doors. Like you said. So maybe the guy's watch stops and he's worried about what time it is, what the old woman! asy when he gets home. So, damin it, all right! Now call up the Vice Squad and raid the dump!" He shammed a palm down hard on the top of the desk and glared.

It was a tableau. It was a still, projected on a screen and left there. And then it wasn't. The gaunt man's face began to break into an evil grin.

"Hell!" he said at last. "The guy must be blind. Notice how skinny she was?"

And then there was no more talking, no more noise, no more sound at all save for the mutterings of the electric clock in the rear wall.

It had to come, of course. Ernie knew that. A night gets to the brittle, fine-line edge of dawn like a road spreading out and leading from one town to the next. It had to happen—and it did at two forty-five. It happened quickly.

At first there was only the slight sounds behind the elevator. Short, scuffling sounds. And then there was the carefully furtive movements of feet that are taking a body into—what?

He was a big man. He was heavy-set, He had a scar. He was strong-looking, healthylooking, like a man is when he's been out in the open working hard for a long while. He didn't look like he had just spent a part of his lifetime behind bars.

He came around the corner of the elevator cage, cased the lobby with eyes that were used to doing things like that. He squinted at the drunk. He squinted at the gaunt man sprawled out in the other blue mohair chair, squinted hard at him, taking in little details like a fedora pulled down over a face, a fedora that needed blocking.

Then he came over to the desk. He said in a voice that sounded as though it were coming through rough burlap packing:

"Drunks?"

Ernie looked at him. He didn't say anything.

The man went on; "You didn't mention a squad car was outside, buddy."

Ernie still didn't say anything.

"You didn't mention there'd be a little surprise at the back door." The man across the desk from Ernie smiled—not an accusing smile, not any special kind of a smile at all. Just a smile.

"I surprised him more'n he surprised me."
The asthmatic voice chuckled. "Now he's resting kinda on the cement back there. Any more surprises around you'd like to mention?"

"Yeah," a voice behind him said. "One." Ernie let out a burned-out breath. He said to the gaunt man, "You certainly do

move quiet. I'll give you that."

The man with the asthmatic voice didn't more a muscle. An infinite sadness seemed to wash over his eyes momentarily, but that was all. He said gently, as gently as he ever in this world could with a voice like his, "Of course. I should-have known. These guys always come in doubles, don't they? I should have known."

Lieutenant Hawks showed his big horse teeth in a grin. He could afford to grin now. His Service revolver that was jammed into the man's back was guaranteeing he could grin.

"Where's your wife?"

The captured man slowly closed his eyes. He didn't turn around. He didn't say anything.

"Where's your wife, you—" The lieutenant shoved his gun muzzle with all the force of his right shoulder.

force of his right shoulder.

The man in front of the gun jerked, and a shadow of pain creased his mouth. He

still didn't say anything.
"Hey, whaddya know!"

Everybody jerked then. Ernie swung his head. The lieutenant jabbed again with the gun, leaned on it hard, then he, too, swung his head.

The bald-headed elevator man was standing twenty feet away, grinning. "Whaddya know! There's a copper lying outside in back, and he's gonna have a egg on his noggin, and his nice clean suit's getting all dirty and wet."

Nobody said anything to that. It didn't seem to need answering.

And then the man with the asthmatic voice said, "A deal, copper?"

"A deal?" Hawks snarled.

"Yeah. Up there I swore I'd make it to L.A. and all the way/across the city to this hotel. And I did. And now all I got to do to make it official is sign the register. You let me do that and I'll tell you where the wife is. A deal?"

The lieutenant exploded. "Damn it, can you tie that!"

There was a little silence, then the hoarse

voice said, "Work me over then, copper. Go on. I been handled before. By experts. But you'll never get me to tell. Or"—he paused slightly—"a deal and everybody's satisfied. It ain't much I'm asking."

A crafty, calculating look filtered into Lieutenant Hawks's eyes. He leaned on the gun, looked at Ernie over the man's shoulder, raised an eyebrow. He said in a soft, suddenly pleased tone:

"Yeah. Why not? All it takes is pen and ink and a little line on a dirty page in a big

book. Yeah. Why not?"

"Why not?" agreed Ernie. His lip curled.
"For a little personal gain while your partner lies sapped out on the concrete in the rain! What the hell's it matter? Glory's a great thing."

He pushed the register book over, picked

up the pen and ink bottle.

The man signed "Abraham J. Hastings" in a good hand on the line directly below that of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Rogers. He looked at it for a long, long time. Then he raised his eyes and looked straight at Ernie.

"Now," grunted Hawk.

The man sighed. He grinned strangely, took his eyes away from Ernie. He turned slowly, carefully, and faced the big hulk of Lieutenant Hawks.

He said simply, "Now you can go to hell, copper. You'll never know where she is."

ERNIE watched the mask of fury. He watched a big hamilike hand bring up the Service revolver. He watched that large hand bring the gun butt down. He watched the man with the asthmatic voice crumple in a heap on the floor in front of the desk.

"That dirty lousy doublecrossing-" he heard Hawks mutter.

In fitteen minutes you can do a lot of things. You can sweep the floor, or do the dishes, or shave, or light a cigarette and smoke it—or you can just stand idly by and watch policemen do things instead. It goes fast, time does.

Ernie sighed and looked across the lobby at the drunk. They'd left that. He sighed again and went around behind the switchboard to a small tin safe and twirled a dial. He got the door open, brought out a bottle, and took a long burning gulp and then banged the bottle down on the desk. He stared hard into the eyes of the bald-headed elevator operator.

He said, "Have a snort or five or seventeen. I'm going upstairs and shake hands with door knobs." He moved away from the desk

The elevator man grinned, picked up the bottle. He said, "With the register under your arm you're gouna shake hands with

door knobs?"

Ernie didn't answer. He took the filigree work elevator cage to Four, got out. He went down the hall to Room 402, knuckled the door gently.

The door opened and he looked into brown eyes that had a spark in them now. And he just stood there like that and watched the spark burn out and leave the eyes just eyes once more. Then he pushed the woman ahead of him into the room.

He closed the door. He looked at the bed, looked down at the small child who was sleeping there.

He said softly, "Put your teeth together hard. There's something I've got. When you came downstairs a while ago the lobby smelled had of police. You didn't realize that, but one of those guys was a licutenant from Homicide—one of the guys who was sprawled out in a chair. There was another at the back door and a car full out front."

He stopped, gave it time to seep in. He wanted to be careful. He didn't want any of it to splash over.

And then he said, "I didn't give you away, Don't ask me why. Maybe I'm just nuts." He took his eyes from the woman and looked at the sleeping child. "Or maybe, by God, I'm not at that! I wouldn't be exactly knowing."

He watched the woman's eyes get large. He watched her slump down on the edge of the bed and put her hand to her mouth. He waited.

At last she said, "What are you trying to tell me?"

He took a breath. "Bite down hard now. Now. The guy got here, after all. He even got in the lobby past the cop at the back door. He even made it over to the desk. And I think he wanted me to show you this."

Ernie carefully laid the register on the woman's lap. He flipped it to the right page.

"They clubbed him down, of course, but they didn't waste any lead. Cutting down on the city expenses they were. And they didn't get anything out of him, either. And they won't."

HE LET the woman look at the page a long, long time before he closed the book and once more tucked it under his arm.

"They wanted to know where you are," he said then. "They wanted to know pretty bad on account of a pack of smokes with only nineteen real ones in it instead of the usual twenty. But he didn't give you away, like I's ay. He looked like the kind of a guy who wouldn't ever."

The woman raised her eyes to his. She nodded dumbly. Then she said in a small and very tired voice, "Thank you. Not for that. Or maybe for that, too. But for the other. Thank you."

Ernic said, "Yeah," went to the door, went out and closed it behind him. Outside in the hall he stood motionless, thinking, there wasn't a sound here, not even the mutterings of an electric clock. There wasn't a sound in 402 either. He listened carefully for quite a little while, which was how he could tell.

After that he walked down the hallway to the end and looked out and down onto the slick pavement of Figueroa Street below. The rain had almost stopped.

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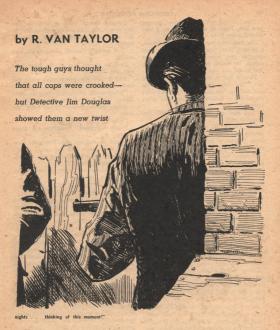


"Copper," he said, "I used to lay awake

EADQUARTERS DETECTIVE
Jim Douglas was passing the alley
by the pool hall when he heard the
trouble. Someone was getting slapped around
behind those crates back of the delicatessen.
He flipped his cigarette away and spun into
the alby mekin a slittle noise as possible.

He did not want whoever was behind those crates to hear his footsteps. Almost everyone in-the precinct knew the sound of them, and in his thirty-one years he had learned one thing for sure—that when tough guys heard a cop coming they usually ran.

Quickly he eased around the crates, and



stopped with his feet wide apart and his coat open so he could swing his arms if he had to.

"Break it up!" he growled.

He knew them all, just as he knew everyone around here where he had been born and brought up. There were five of them. High school boys. Two of them had been holding his kid brother-in-law, Danny, while another kid named Ferrelli worked him over. The other two were the cheering section.

"Cop!" one of them yelled. "Beat it!"
"Stay where you are!" Jim Douglas barked.

They couldn't get away without running past him. None of them looked as if they wanted to try it.

The two boys moved away from Danny, a slender, blond youth. He shook his head groggily and wiped his hand across his mouth. He looked down at the blood on it. But he did not look at Douglas.

Ferrelli had a semi-brave sneer on his face. "He called me a fighting name," he said sullenly. "He had it coming. But I don't expect you to believe that about your wife's brother."

"Did you call him that, Danny?" Jim Douglas said.

Still Danny did not look at him. "He wouldn't fight square," he said. "He told the other fellows to hold me. That ought to prove something."

Douglas had an idea about one thing that might be bothering Danny. If another boy had been concerned, the officer would have taken Ferrelli down to the station and thrown a damn good scare into him. But this was just what Danny didn't want. He would, worry about what the other kids would think.

Douglas thoughtfully rubbed his jaw. "The fight wasn't too fair, was it? What's the matter, Ferrelli—you afraid of Danny?"

THERE was no sneer on Ferrelli's face now. "Naw. Are you kidding?"

"Let's do this thing right then," Douglas said.

Danny looked at him then. There was a mouse under Danny's right eye and it made his face look a little funny as he grinned. But it was a good grin, and it said, Thanks, Jim. You're a swell guy.

Ferrelli was worried, though. He backed awdy as Danny, who was as tall as Doughas, but a string bean, brought up his fists and hunched his shoulders and set his jaws grimly, Danny jabbed with his left. Ferrelli threw up his hands. Danny blasted his right into Ferrelli's stomach, straightened him up with a left, and smashed his face with a hard right. Ferrelli crashed into a garbage can and slid to the pawement.

"Brother!" a boy's awed voice said. "Was

Douglas looked down at Ferrelli. The boy wasn't out. The officer grabbed him by his jacket and pulled him up. "You all right?"

"I'm dying!" Ferrelli moaned, his eyes rolling.

Douglas shoved him at the other boys and said, "Beat it."

And Ferrelli managed to move pretty fast for a dving man.

"What was it all about?" Douglas asked Danny. "Did you call him that name?" Danny glanced down. "Guess I did," he

Danny glanced down. "Guess I did," h said.
"Why?"

Danny shrugged. "Just one of those things."

"Come on—tell me why. You and I have always shot square with each other, haven't we? I gave you a break—now give me one. What touched you off?"

Danny kicked at a piece of trash. "You won't like it," he said.

"So what?" Jim said. "So I don't like a lot of things. Give."

"Well," Danny sighed, "you know about all that stuff that's been in the papers, about the big shake-up in the Police Department. About all those bribes, and cops being fired, and having to go to dourt and everything. And about that robbery down the street—people saying that the reason they don't get the guys is because the cops have been paid off. Ferrelli said all cops are crooked, that you are crooked, too." Danny showed his hands deep into the pockets of his jeans. "So I told him off."

Deep lines appeared on Jim Douglas's forehead as he reached into his pocket for a cigarette. There was a lot he could tell Danny about had cops and good cops and crooks and honest people, but it would sound like preaching to a kid who would be a high school senior next term. To boys like Danny, one bit of action proved more than ten thousand words.

"Let's get out of here," he said, and they began walking slowly away.

Both of them saw the man standing in the side doorway at the same time. He was a big fellow in an expensive dark blue pin-stripe suit, and he wore a small black mustache. There was a grin on his face but none in his eyes as they met those of the detective.

"Nice fist work, kid," he said to Danny.
"I saw it all from a window."

Danny grinned a little. "Thanks."

"A kid who can handle himself like you can is going to get along okay. Not much

weight, but the reach and the power's there."

Douglas growled, "Come on, Danny."

As they went toward the mouth of the

As they went toward the mouth of the alley Danny asked, "Who was that?"

"Scum," Douglas said.

"Yeah?" Danny shrugged. "Nice suit, though. Must have set him back plenty."

They parted at the mouth of the alley. Douglas headed for home. "Nies suit." The way Danny had said those words—as if that suit was something big! That was what he, Douglas, had meant about kids like Danny. Danny couldn't see the inside of that man's mind and see what made him tick. He saw only the suit. He had hardly noticed when Jim had said the guy was seum.

JiM DOUGLAS walked on. Past the shops. Past the fruit carts. Past the people he'd known most of his life. He smiled and nodded, and they smiled at him and nodded back.

At least they usually did, though for the past few days it had been different. It was now. The smiles were stiff and insincere, the nods curt.

It was because out of the hundreds of honest cops in the city, six rotten apples had smelled up the whole Department. The newspapers were making big graft, big corruption out of it. Six cops get caught taking bribes and the whole damned Department is crooked!

And there was the robbery, right in the middle of this whole mess.

The big shoe factory in the neighlorhood paid off in cheeks. But old man Winters, who ran a small grocery nearby cashed those cheeks for a small fee, and each Friday he went to the bank for the money. He kept it overnight in a big safe. About a week ago it had been cleaned out, and the old man killed.

After a couple of days, when the police hadn't made an arrest, some kind-hearted soul had started the rumor that it was because they had been "paid off."

That made it rough. Real rough. And what made it even rougher was that there wasn't a single clue as to who had pulled the Winters job. Not a dawn thing.

Yes, there was one thing: The bank had a list of the serial numbers of the bills Winters had got that day. Every cop in town had those numbers memorized, and they'd been flashed across the state and the nation. It was a slim chance, because the robbery had had all the earmarks of having been a professional job, and such professionals knew what to do with hot money. The chance of tracing that money to those guilty was so slim if might take weeks, months, years. The police needed to make an arrest now.

Douglas walked on. Passing the people. His people. He smiled, he nodded. But he wanted to yell:

"You see this suit? It's six years old. You think I'm taking bribes? You want to know how much I've got in the bank? Four hundred and thirty-eight dollars and twenty-six cents! How'd I get all that money? Bribes? Hell, no! Look. See this belt? I'm wearing it in a new notch now. Skipped a few lunches. Want to know why my eyes are so good? Simple. No movies. No television. No nothing?

But the stiff smiles and the curt nods and the silent lips said, You're not fooling us. We read the papers.

It got under a guy's skin.

And as if this were not enough, the past had suddenly been reborn. It had been reborn in the form of a big, flashy guy with a small black mustache, who wore a dark blue pin-stripe suit.

II



WHEN Jim Douglas reached the old red brick apartment house where he and Betty lived he was tired, though he hadn't done much that day. Anxiety had sapped what strength he had left. It had begun the moment he

had recognized the guy in the alley.

He let himself into the apartment, and could hear Betty moving around in the kitchenette, and smell food cooking.

"It's me," he called.

He tossed his hat onto the couch and went toward the smells and sounds. Betty, standing at the gas range, looked around at him and smiled. Blonde, pretty, but a little pale. She wore a simple housecoat and an apron, and it was plain that shortly there would be another little arrival in the apart-

. He kissed her, and his kiss said, I know it's tough for you. First kid and everything. But I'm with you every minute, honey. I love you. And Betty's kiss said, Don't let it get you down, Jim, what they're saying. Things will work out. I can feel it like I can feel my love for you.

She turned to the stove quickly, as a pot started to boil over. He went to the refrigerator, but checked himself when he remembered there wasn't any beer inside. He did this every once in awhile when he was preoccupied.

"Go ahead and open it," Betty said, her back turned to him.

He did, and saw the single can of beer.

"Champagne!" he exclaimed, opened the beer and filled two glasses. He sat down at the table.

"What did you do this afternoon?" he asked.

asked.

"Oh, I went down to the clinic, and on the way back I dropped in at Mama's."

"What did they say at the clinic?"
"They said everything is swell."

Douglas frowned and took a sip of beer. She was lying. He'd stopped at the clinic this afternoon to talk to the doctors, and knew they expected complications. They had asked him if he had fifteen hundred dollars. He told them that he hadn't. Why? Well, there was a specialist in such cases, but his fee—

Jim Douglas had never taken a bribe in his life, but if some hood had come up to him as he'd walked out of the clinic and said, "Here's a grand, copper, and all you got to do for it is kill the Commissioner," he would have been sorely tempted.

He looked down at his glass of beer. Now

he realized why Betty had bought it. She was keeping her mind off herself by thinking of him.

He relaxed his tense jaws. "How's your

mother?" he asked Betty.

"All right." Betty turned around. "Jim," she said thoughtfully, "you know that old brown suit you can't wear any more? I've been thinking maybe Mama could alter it for Danny."

"Why?" he said quickly. "Danny say

something about a suit?"

Betty nodded. "He's worrying Mama fo death about it. They can't afford to buy one for him. He hasn't any way of making any money himself. Dad tried to get him a job over at the shoe factory, but couldn't. I believe Mama could fix up that old suit."

Douglas tried to hide the way he really felt. The old suit was lousy. He doubted if he could even give the thing away. Danny wouldn't like it, no matter how it was altered. Oh, sure, he'd say, "This is swell!" But he wouldn't mean it. He'd appreciate the thought, but he wouldn't like the suit. It would just be a butchered hand-me-down.

"Well, what do you think?" Betty said.
"Sure it's a good idea," Jim said, and fig-

ured that Danny would understand.
"What's the matter, Jim?" Betty asked.
"You've got that vacant look in your eyes."

"Nothing," he said, trying to grin.

Betty cocked her head to one side and gave him that frank stare of hers. He looked down at his beer. He had never been able to lie to Betty with a straight face. Then grimness seemed to clamp down on him.

"I ran into Al Morrison today," he said.
"No!" Betty exclaimed softly. "What's he
doing back here? I would imagine that this
would be the last place in the world he would
want to come to."

DOUGLAS remembered how Al Morrison had grinned at him in the alley. There had been a challenge in Al Morrison's face—a silent, deadly challenge.

"I don't know what he's doing back here," he said quietly. "But it's a free country. A man can go where he wants to after he serves his time in prison."

That night, Douglas couldn't sleep. He

lay in bed with his hands behind his head, staring at the dark ceiling. He felt restless, like he sometimes felt on nights when there was going to be a sudden change in the weather. Only he knew there wasn't going to be any change in the weather.

The alarm clock on the dresser ticked too rapidly. A car being gunned down the street sounded too close. His restlessness grew.

He eased out of bed, careful not to wake Betty. He went over to the dresser and picked up the alarm clock. It was almost three o'clock. He rubbed the stubble on his jaw as he stood there, and restlessness gnawed at him.

He took his "tomorrow" pack of eigarettes from a dresser drawer, picked up an ashtray and matches, and moved over to the window. He smoked and looked down at the dark street. A cat was sniffing at something in the gutter. Then the cat went away and he was all alone with his thoughts.

Why would Danny be fooling around with a bunch of tough little cookies like Ferrelli and his gang? They were always in trouble—swiping things, shooting craps in the alley.

Just how badly did Danny want a new suit? A man couldn't take a boy aside and say, "Look kid, a suit isn't so important." A suit meant a lot to a kid of Danny's age, the uncertain age where a boy stands on the edge of a man's world he's got to enter. It's like going into the ring for the first fight. The kid's nervous. Scared. And everybody in the whole world's watching him. He wants to make a good show. It means everything to him.

But a guy can't make a good show without a suit.

A fellow could take a kid like Danny aside and say, "Sure a suit is important, but how you get it is just as important. You don't want to be shooting craps with Ferrelli and his gang, or teaming up with them to make some quick money. That's not the way to get that suit."

Sure, you could tell him that. Weak, though, when a guy hasn't any other way to get it.

Take Al Morrison, for instance. If a man had told Al that when he was Danny's age, Al would have laughed in his face. He would have said, "Who are you trying to kid? What chance have I got to do anything for myself without 'borrowing' something once in awhile? You think my folks would buy me something? A suit? Hell, no! My old man spends all he can get and what he can steal from me for booze. You think I like working in the brickyard so we can have working in the brickyard so we can have groceries? Nuts to that. It would, take a gillion years to save enough to get the things I want. Beat it before you have me bawling my eves out."

A desire to put on a big show and only one way to do it—lots of times that's what made men like Al Morrison. In a way a fellow could feel a little sorry for them. But the trouble they caused society overshadowed that sympathy.

Al Morrison had got his suit. Many suits. He was probably one of the best dressed men who ever went to state prison.

Douglas heard Betty say anxiously, "Jim?"

"Over here," he said.
"What's the matter?"

"A little gas," he said. "I'm coming to bed now."

He snuffed out his cigarette in the full ashtray and went back to bed. He put his arm around her and she patted his hand. Then he realized one of the important reasons why he was so interested in Danny.

In Danny he saw his own son at that age. He was going to have a son. Betty had guaranteed it. . . .

THE next morning things were slow down at Headquarters. Even the wisecracks were below par. Ever since the fracas in the papers, the life seemed to have gone out of the outfit. Morale was shot. They were like a ball team with everyone down on them.

There was a little speculation as to what Al Morrison had wanted to come back for, but the general consensus was that it was natural for an animal to return to its native haunt. Jim Douglas had a feeling that there was more to it than that. But he couldn't put his finger on it.

Funny thing, though—the more he thought of it the more his mind kept coming back to the Winters job.

Early that afternoon he investigated some minor troubles up on Haywood Avenue. When he got back Clancy told him that Betty had called. Douglas went over to his desk and phoned home.

"Betty?" he said, when he heard someone

"Iim! Have you heard about Danny?" Betty's voice was troubled.

His hand tightened on the phone. "No. What is it?"

"He's got a job! He's working for Al Morrison!'

"What? Where? What kind of job?" "The only information I have is what

Mama gave me." Betty went on, "I called her a few minutes ago to tell her about the suit. Then she told me about Danny, At noon he told them about it. He said that Al Morrison had bought the pool hall from Mr. Patello and was going to fix it up. He offered Danny a job and Danny took it."

"Doing what?"

"I don't know. Danny didn't make it clear, Mama said. Iim, she sounded worried. To tell you the truth I am, too."

"I'll talk to Danny," Jim said. He hung up. He stared fixedly into space for a minute. The muscles of his jaw flexed.

Ш



TIM DOUGLAS left Headquarters and headed down the street, walking quickly. Patello's pool hall-the same pool hall where Al had showed up yesterday-was six blocks down and over on the next

street. The detective needed the time it would take to get over there. He had to think.

A funny thing, he thought, remembering last night. Whenever he got that restless feeling the next thing he knew things weren't going so good.

Where would Al Morrison get enough money to buy Patello's pool hall and fix it up? Usually when a hood came out of prison he was fairly broke. Hoods thought they were pretty smart when they pulled a few

jobs and built up a big pile-and then they got caught. It cost them their pile trying to stay out of prison. Crime paid well only for the big shots the small-timers usually worked for.

Where had Al got the dough? How about the Winters job? Except that Al would be taking a big risk hanging around this neighborhood if he had robbed and killed old man Winters. Al wouldn't take that kind of risk -unless he had to do something else important here.

It was then that Detective Iim Douglas faced up to what was really making him restless, making his gut tense, boring into him and twisting.

What if Al had come back to seek revenge? Was that why he had hired Danny? Or was he, Jim Douglas, just imagining things?

He was a block away from the pool hall when he saw the activity going on in front of it. Men were unloading new equipment from a truck. That was like Al. When he started to do something he didn't let any flies get on him.

Danny was standing on the sidewalk with a clip board under his arm. He was wearing his baseball jacket and blue jeans, and was watching some men unload a new compressor. He saw Douglas approaching, grinned and nodded. He looked proud and happy.

Douglas walked up to him. "Hear you got yourself a job," he said, raising his voice above the noise the carpenters were making.

"Yeah-really something, huh?"

"What is your job?"

"Well, I can't work on the remodeling because I haven't got a union card, and Mr. Morrison don't want to do anything wrong. But he likes me and said I can be his personal assistant." Danny's grin broadened. "That's a high-class name for butt boy." Danny laughed. "What a break! Steady work."

Douglas didn't laugh, "How can it be steady, Danny, with school coming up in a couple of weeks? Maybe you should quit. huh?"

Danny screwed up his face in protest.

"Aw, Jim, don't you start that song. Mama sang that one to me all through lunch. But I told her I'd made up my mind to work for Mr. Morrison. What's the matter with everybody? Don't they want to see me get ahead?"

"Sure they do," Jim Douglas said. "But remember what I told you about Al?"

Danny glanced down at the sidewalk. "Yeah, and I know xohy you said that. Mr. Morrison told me you had him sent up for robbery once. But he wasn't sore about it. He says he isn't sore at anybody. He just wants the chance to set himself up in business and be a good citizen. For a guy just coming out of prison, that takes guts. You've kind of got to admire him."

Now Douglas glanced down at the sidewalk.

"Look, Jim," Danny went on, his face brightening, "Mr. Morrison's really a swell guy. And, boy, you ought to see the suits he's got! I'm going to get one like that blue pin-stripe of his. Won't I be something?"

Douglas's face was solemn as he met Danny's eyes levelly. "I want you to quit this job," he said. "Now."

"You're pinning my arms," Danny said, they boys hold me while he beat me up. That's lousy, Jim. Let me get in there and swing, do my own thinking or I'll never learn to think."

FROM the doorway of the building a gruff voice called, "Hey, kid!" and a chunky guy with a square, sullen face motioned to Danny. "The boss wants you."

"I've got to go, Jim," Danny said He smiled again. "Look, Mr. Morrison's okay. You'll find out." He hurried inside.

The detective stuck around for a little while, but Danny didn't come outside again. Maybe, Douglas thought, he should give Al the benefit of the doubt. Maybe Al really use going to try to go straight. He wanted to believe this. But he kept remembering the way Al had grinned at him in the alley.

And he kept remembering Winters. Then he got a crazy hunch. He knew it

was crazy, but he was going to check it anyway.

Frank Patello lived above the pool hall. Douglas took the stairs at the side of the building and knocked at the door of Patello's apartment.

A woman's voice asked, "Who is it?"

"Jim Douglas."

He beard a key turn in the lock and Patello's wife opened the door just enough for him to see her face. She was a short, heavy woman with bushy salt and pepper hair. Her face was strained, and her eyes reddened from loss of sleep or something.

"What do you want?" she asked. "I want to see Frank," Jim said

"Just a minute." She closed the door. It was a full three minutes before she opened the door again and let Jim in. Frank Patello came out of the bathroom. He was in his undershirt and his hig stomach hung over the belt of his trousers. He had on dark glasses and his face was covered with lather. The top of his bald head glistened.

"You caught me just as I was starting to shave," he said. "Excuse the lather. What can I do for you?"

"I hear you sold out to Al Morrison," Douglas said.

"That's right." Patello nodded.

It made Douglas nervous the way the man kept wiping his hands on a towel. He was going to rub the skin off.

"Did he pay you any cash?" Jim Douglas asked.

"Yeah. Why?"

"I want to ask a favor of you, Frank. I haven't any official right to ask it, but I'd like to see some of that cash."

Slowly Patello began wiping his hands again. In a moment he said, "Sure. Okay." He nodded to his wife and she left the room.

"Mamie will get it." Patello said. "Well, Jim, never thought I'd leave the old business. But when Al came to me with his proposition, it put me to thinking. They turn a horse into the pasture after he's done his work. That's what I've been, Jim. A work horse. I got to thinking that maybe it was time for me to be turned out to pasture."

Mrs. Patello came back and handed the detective a package of bills, mostly tens and twenties and fifties. He looked closely at the serial numbers. "Yeah, the pasture for me, now," Patello rambled on. "Mamie and I are figuring we might go down to Florida and—"

might go down to Florida and—"
"There's only a grand here." Douglas cut

in. "Is this all?"
Patello said, "Well, he's going to make

Patello said, "Well, he's going to make some payments."

Jim Douglas handed the money back to Mrs. Patello and walked straight to Frank who started to move back. Jim caught his glasses and jerked them off. Patello's right eye was almost closed. Puffy and blue. Jim took the towel out of Patello's hand and swiped it across the lather on the man's face. Patello winced. There was a bad bruise on the left side of his jaw.

"How'd you get marked up?" Douglas

asked.

Patello flushed. "Well, I'll tell you. I celebrated a little too much last night. I fell on the stairs as I come in."

"That's right," Mamie Patello said.

Douglas grimaced in unbelief. "Don't try to kid me," he said. "Al beat you up. He forced you into a deal."

"That's a lie!" Patello growled. But the police officer caught the flash of fear in the man's eyes.

PATELLO drew himself up defensively. "If you want to know the real reason I got out of business, I'll tell you," he said. "I "don't want to wind up like Winters. A man here can't expect any protection from the police. You've been reading the papers lately haven't you?"

Douglas hurled the towel against Patello's chest. He got out of there. He was mad.

He cooled off a little, though, as he went down the stairs. He sensed that Patello had aid that, not to hurt him, but to stop his questions and accusations. But was Patello so dumb he couldn't see when a man was trying to help him? If Patello had admitted that Al had used force on him, then Al would be low man on the totem pole. Damn it, couldn't Patello reason that out?

Then Douglas realized that his own reasoning power wasn't so hot. Reason was a sorry weapon against the brand of fear that Al Morrison dished out.

On the street, Jim Douglas turned into the

pool hall. He didn't see Danny. At one side of the room workmen were knocking down the old bar and moving it out. Near the rear, at a pool table, stood the fellow who had called Danny, idly bouncing a cue ball off the cushions. Douglas made his way to the man.

"I want to see Morrison," he said.

The fellow looked at him stolidly, then jerked his head for Douglas to follow him. He led the detective into a small cluttered office that also was being remodeled. The chunky fellow left him there alone. In a few minutes, Morrison came in.

He grinned, his thin mustache tilting at an angle. He kicked the door shut with his foot

"Hi, Jim," he said. "What's on your ind?"

Douglas's feet were planted solidly on the dusty floor. His hands were shoved deep into his coat pockets. His hands were fists. He did not return Al's grin.

"You've got Danny working for you," he

said. "I want you to let him go."

The grin left Al's face. He pushed out his lips thoughtfully and looked down at the left sleeve of his blue pin-stripe suit. He picked a piece of lint off the sleeve and watched it as it lazily drifted to the floor.

"I'm glad you dropped in," he said. "I've been wanting to have a talk with you."

He pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and held them out. Jim shook his head.

"I did a lot of thinking when I was upstate," Al said, as he if up. "You know, you did me a favor by sending me up. If you hadn't stopped me when you did. To of probably ended up in some alley with a couple of slugs in my belly. You saved me that, Jim. I appreciate it." He studied the burning end of his cigarette, then looked up abruptly. "Surprises you, doesn't it?"

Douglas shrugged. "Go on."

"Well, all I want now is to set myself up in some legitimate business—like I'm doing here—and try to make up for all the bad I've done. I want to be a good, honest citize. I know it's going to be an uphill climb, but I'm going to keep at it. You don't have to worry about me any more. I'm keeping my nose clean from now on. I'm going to run a high-class establishment here; I'm going to contribute to all the good causes; I'm going to join all the right civic organizations; and I'm going to church on Sunday. I'm not going to do nothing that's shady any more." I im said. "Patello's face is all marked up."

Al laughed. "Yeah, he told me be got drunk after we closed the deal and fell on the stairs. What a guy!" More soberly he added, "Funny how he got marked up like that, though, ain't it?"

Douglas's impatience grew. "Al, I'm here

to talk about Danny."

"Yeah." Al rubbed his jaw. "Here's the way I look at that. By now almost everybody knows Danny's working for me. If I let him go, it'll get around that you made me let him go. That wouldn't be so good for me, Jim. It would show you didn't believe what I've just told you. If you let him stay—"

"Al, I said I didn't want Danny to work

for you."

For a brief instant their eyes clashed. Then Al relaxed as he said, "Let's get Danny in here—let him decide for himself."

Douglas's tense impatience changed into an ache of defeat. He couldn't do that. It would make Danny feel like a little boy, and that would be the worst possible feeling he could have. And Al was smart enough to know that.

Jim Douglas started to leave. Al said, "Why don't you give me a break, Jim? It's damn hard coming out of prison and trying to go straight. I sure as hell wish you'd be in my corner."

IV



A FTER Jim Douglas left the pool room he caught a bus and rode to Headquarters. There he went to Identification and began looking through the files. He searched until dark, then headed for home. He had not found

what he was looking for—a card on the chunky, square-faced, sullen guy who evidently was working for Al. too.

At the door of the apartment he tried to check his mood, which was like the restless calm before a storm. But a digging little worry made that almost impossible.

What if Al had been telling the truth? What if he, Jim, had him figured wrong? What if Patello had told the truth when

he'd said he'd fallen on the stairs?

It was hard for a guy coming out of prison. A guy did need all the help he could get. And Douglas knew that if he were pinning Al's arms, Danny would hate him for it.

Jim let himself into the apartment. Betty was in the living room. At sight of the worry, lines on her face Jim's smile of greeting faded.

"Jim," she said, "Danny's left home."

"When?"

"Mama called about an hour ago. She said that Papa laid down the law about him working for Al Morrison, and that Danny got some of his things together and left. Jim, what's come over Danny?"

"Take it easy," he said. He put his arm

around her.

"I can't! I'm worried. Danny's never disobeyed Mama and Papa before. What's the matter with him?"

Jim's face twisted into a grimace that was half concern and half sympathetic under-standing. "He's hit a tough stage in life," he said. "He wants to grow up, but part of him isn't ready for it yet. He'll work it out okay."

"But he could get into serious trouble. Jim, what are we going to do?"

"There's not much we can do right now," he told her. "If we go looking for him he'll resent it. It'll just make things worse. To-morrow I'll find him, and talk to him. I'll tell him he can stay with us if he doesn't want to go back home. If we don't crowd him too much, maybe we can win him back."

They went into the kitchen to eat supper, but had not been at the table long when someone knocked on the door. Douglas got up to answer it.

It was Danny.

Jim Douglas felt relief when he saw the kid, but that left him quickly as he saw that Danny's face was flushed with anger.

"Come in," Jim said quietly.

"You come out here in the hall," Danny

said in a strained voice.

Jim nodded, stepped out into the hall and grinned at Danny.

"What's up, kid?"

He gripped Danny's shoulder. Danny pushed his hand away.

"You've been talking to Al," Danny said.
"That was a lousy thing to do! Do you think I'm in diapers?"

"Danny, nobody gets so big they don't need a little help once in awhile."

"Help! Help! Well, I don't want that kind of help. That's what I came up here to tell you. Stay out of my hair from now on."

"Calm down. Now I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to tell you why I don't like Al Morrison, and why I think he's scum."

Danny folded his arms and tensed himself defensively.

detensively.

"Back when I arrested AI," Douglas said,
"he tried to give me money—lots of money
—so I wouldn't take him in. Danny, a guy
who tries to bribe a cop is the lowest thing
there is in my book."

Danny laughed, a low, sneering laugh. "At told me you'd say that. But he also bold me you accepted the bribe—and arrested him anyway. He's got reason to hate your guts. But he doesn't. He thinks you actually did him a favor. That's because he's bigger than you are, Jim."

THE words hit Jim Douglas like a fist in the pit of the stomach.

"I'm not near as dumb as you think I am," Danny went on. "I can figure out why you didn't want me to hang around Al. You knew I'd find that out. Well, I did. And I'm beginning to think Ferrelli was right."

Douglas slapped him.

Danny grinned slightly, but his eyes were burning with contempt. He said softly, "That must really have gone home." And he disappeared down the stairs.

Inside the apartment, Douglas slumped against the closed door. He wished he hadn't slapped the kid. That would only prove to Danny that he had been right. The deterive wondered why he had hit him. Then he knew. He hadn't struck at Danny. He had struck at everything he hated—especially the

idea that if one cop was crooked, all cops were crooked. He had lashed out to slap some sense into a world gone crazy.

But all he had done was to drive Danny

from him.

"Jim?" Betty came toward him slowly.

Her face was pale, her eyes wide. "Jim,

what happened?"

He told her everything. He couldn't hide
this from her so metter how much he wanted

this from her no matter how much he wanted to keep her free from worry. "Why," Betty asked, "would Al Morrison

lie to Danny like that?"

"I don't know—yet," Jim told her. "But I think I've got a damn good idea now why Mr. Morrison came back here." Three days passed. Each was the same—

nothing but tension which caused more restless nights.

Each night Betty would ask, "See Danny today?"

And her husband would answer, "I dropped by Al's place. Didn't see him."

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Jim Douglas was sitting alone in a rear booth of Al's new bar and pool room, nursing a beer, and watching for Danny. And looking over the the new place. By working day and night, All bad fixed it up in two days.

A bartender called to Jim:
"You're wanted on the telephone."

Douglas got up and stepped to the booth, closed the door and picked up the receiver which was daugling at the end of the cord. He spoke. He heard the party on the other end of the line hang up. Shaking his head, he stared at the silent receiver.

When he returned to his beer he saw a small, wet fold of paper under his glass. Unfolding it carefully he saw that it was a note, crudely printed in pencil. It read:

IF IT'S WORTH A G TO YOU TO BE SICK IN BED TOMORROW NIGHT, FLUSH THIS DOWN THE TOILET IN THE IOHN.

SANTA CLAUS

Douglas felt his face grow hot with excitement. He looked up. None of the fifteen on twenty men in the place were looking his way. The bartender was busy behind the bar.

Who would pay him a thousand dollars to pretend to be sick? And why? It implied,

of course, that someone wanted him out of the way tomorrow night, probably to pull off some job. So what? Even if he were home there would be other cops. He didn't flatter himself that some hood thought be was so good he had to be put out of commission before some deal could go through. All the cops in town hadn't stopped the Winters job.

And with the thought of the Winters job, another crossed his mind. What if this promised thousand dollars should be some of the dough taken from the old man's safe? Unlikely, perhaps. But couldn't it be a frame

of some other kind?

For the first time Douglas admitted to himself that he was nervous. He got up and went back into the toilet, flushed the note into the sewer. There was no one else-in there, but he felt as if someone knew every move he was making.

When he got back to his table he found another note beneath his glass. It was simple and direct:

TONIGHT AT ELEVEN, WACKER WARE-HOUSE. ALLEY.

AS JIM DOUGLAS left Al's place and walked down the street, the knot in his stomach began a discordant blare of French horns. The uncertainty in his mind became the scream of wailing violins. The beating of his heart became a mounting, ear-splitting crescends of pounding kettle drums.

When he got home, Betty asked him, "Did

you see Danny?"

He shook his head. She turned away lifelessly and went back to the kitchenette.

After supper he made her go into the bedroom and lie down while he washed the dishes and cleaned up. He was worried. He was going to have to leave Betty alone tonight while he kept his "appointment." She would want to know where he was going, and he could not tell her the truth. With the worry load she was already carrying, a new one might be too much for her. Something might happen.

Yet if he did keep that appointment he had to tell her the truth. He wouldn't be able to contrive a convincing lie. Not with

He finished up in the kitchen a few min-

utes after nine. He had worked slowly, deliberately holding off the moment when he would have to tell her. He had to go. He was a cop. He had to know about this bribe. Who was making it? Would the money be hot? Did Al Morrison figure in it?"

The mystery of the entire business compelled him to go.

He was hanging up a limp dish cloth when he heard Betty call, "Jim!" Then louder, with fear in her voice, "Jim!"

He hurried into the bedroom. Betty was sitting on the edge of the bed, hugging herself. Her eyes were wide, her face contorted.

"Jim!"

He went to the phone and called an ambulance. Then he called the doctor who had charge of her case at the clinic. He got the over-night bag from the closet which had been packed and waising for this energency, and set it down by the door. He went back to Betty. He felt helpless as he watched her fight against pain. . . .

An hour and a half later, Jim Douglas paced the floor of the waiting room at St. Joseph's Hospital. He glanced at his watch. It was ten twenty-seven. He went over to the window and looked out. He saw nothing except his own thoughts in panorama.

His mind had told him he had to keep an appointment. Now his mind told him, you

can't leave your wife like this.

Which was the more important—a man's ideals or his wife?

He hated himself for even thinking there might be a choice. Of course there wasn't! He wished the doctor would hurry and come out. 'He had to know if Betty was all

right.

Again he looked down at his wrist. Ten

thirty-one now.

The muscles of his jaw tightened as he heard footsteps. He swung around from the window quickly and saw young Dr. Benson coming briskly through the door and toward him. The doctor stopped in front of him and dit a cigarette.

"False alarm," he said, exhaling a gush

of blue smoke.

Jim Douglas felt weakness go all through his body. "Can I see her?" he asked.

The doctor shook his head. "It wouldn't do you any good. She's asleep. I gave her a

sedative. I think it would be best if she staved here over-night so they can watch her. I'll check her again tomorrow, and if she's okay I'll send her home."

He looked at the tall detective and frowned. "Come on, fellow," he said kindly. "I've got my car outside. I'll drop you by your place. You need some sleep. And you can take it from me vou're going to need all the sleep you can get from here on."



FOLLOWING Dr. Benson out of the hospital, Jim Douglas got into the During the ride car. home he couldn't keep his eyes off his watch. It was ten fifty-three when the doctor pulled over to the curb to let the big

Headquarters detective out.

The doctor opened his bag and shook a couple of tablets from a bottle into Douglas's hand. "Take those," he said. "They'll make you sleep." As he put the bottle back in the bag he asked, "Did you ever see that specialist I told you about?"

"No," Jim said.

"Can't see your way clear, huh?" It seemed to Jim Douglas that a year passed before he was able to say, "I might

be able to arrange it." "Good," Dr. Benson said. "It's not that

I can't handle it, but I believe it would mean a lot to your wife. Give her confidence. Make it easier."

Douglas had opened the car door to get out when he suddenly changed his mind.

"Say, Doc," he said abruptly, "Mind giving me a lift a few blocks further-a little matter I forgot to attend to in all the excitement."

"Sure," said the doctor. "Anywhere you

"I'll tell you where to drop me off," Douglas said, and slammed the car door,

It was 11:07 when Dr. Benson let him out on the corner by a huge, abandoned warehouse. The doctor hesitated thoughtfully for a moment, looked at the detective strangely and asked, "Is everything all right?"

"Sure," Douglas said, "Good night-and thanks for the lift."

"Good night."

Douglas began walking slowly toward the alley, but as the doctor's car disappeared down the dark street his steps quickened.

The puzzled expression on Dr. Benson's face afforded the detective a grim sort of amusement. The doctor wasn't the only one who was confused. For one thing he himself had been so anxious to get here that he hadn't even run up to the apartment for his gun. Why had his desire to get here been so great that the few minutes that would have taken had seemed like an impossible expenditure of time? Anxiety, of course. He was late already. Every minute counted. Perhaps "they" had already gone.

Now that he was here, and if he did meet his mysterious note-writer, when he entered the alley would he be a cop who wanted answers that an offered bribe might give him-or would he be a man who loved his wife, and his wife needed a specialist?

He stopped at the mouth of the alley. He felt something sticky in his right hand and unfolded his fist. The two tablets the doctor had given him were a gooey mess.

The big warehouse had been abandoned ever since a fire had swept it. The south half had been demolished and was surrounded by a high board fence. The north half was still standing, though fairly well gutted. A dim glaze of light bounced off the bricks of the

alley from the street lights at each end.

Douglas walked forward slowly, and the board fence slipped by silently. Gaping windows stared down at him. As he approached the middle of the alley, he heard the moaning squeal of rusty hinges. A gate in the board fence swung back, exposing a black hole, Something moved in there. He saw a sleeve and a hand, and a small bundle landed in front of him.

A muffled voice said, "Keep moving!"

Jim's heart raced as he stooped down to pick up the bundle-money. That sleeve-it had been the sleeve of a blue pin-stripe suit!

Moving forward slowly, Douglas held the bills close to his face and flipped through them, catching the dim, reflected light. They were twenties. And they were from old man Winters's safe!

He thought, what would you do, Betty? I'd be running a chance, but I could use this money—Yeah, Betty, you're right. I could never sell you and my son and myself to the devil.

He felt a sudden, wonderful surge of relief. Now his course was crystal clear. He was a cop again.

He heard footsteps on the bricks behind

"You lousy scum!" a voice said.

DOUGLAS whirled. The man who had come through the gate stood in the alley with his legs spread and his fists clenched and hate on his face. The man in the blue pin-stripe suit.

"Danny!" Douglas said.

Something glistened in Danny's eye and spilled down his cheek. "And I didn't believe AI," he said. "After you slapped me, I got to thinking. I told AI I didn't believe you'd take a bribe. He said he'd prove it." Danny spat at the big detective. "I ought to go to Ferrelli and let him kick me all over town."

"You don't understand," Douglas said. From a dark doorway of the deserted warehouse a voice said, "Stay where you're at, copper! A gun's looking right at you."

As Douglas's muscles contracted he saw the surprise on Danny's face. The kid turned in the direction of the voice. Quick footsteps moved out of the darkness.

"I don't get it," Danny said. "Why are

you doing this, Al?"

Two men came up. Al Morrison held a snub-nosed .38 in his right hand. He slapped Danny with his left.

"That's for fouling everything up," he said.
"I told you not to let him see you."

The chunky fellow was behind the Headquarters detective, his rough hands searching for a gun. Hurt was in Danny's face as he stared at Al unbelievingly.

"You got his gun, Louie?" Al asked.
"No rod," Louie said.

"No rod," Louie said.
With his own gun Al motioned to the

gate in the fence. Louie shoved Douglas toward it. Danny said, "Hell, Al! What's going on

here?" 'Shut up!" Al said. "Get in there."

On the other side of the fence there was just enough light to make out dark shapes. Loose bricks were underfoot. Huge piles of debris cut jagged black holes in the night.

of debris cut jagged black holes in the night The four stopped just inside the fence.

"Okay, Al," Danny said, trying to speak casually, but there was uncertainty in his voice. "You've proved to me that Jim will take a bribe. You don't have to carry the gag further."

"Gag?" All laughed quietly. Too quietly, "You little fool, sure he wanted to take this bribe. Didn't you see him check that money? He wanted to see if it was hot—like I knew he would. You can always figure out what his kind will do. Always the honest thing. They never change."

"You're carrying me too fast," Danny complained. "If you knew this, why did you fix this up to make me believe he was crooked?"

"It wasn't done just for you, kid."
"Huh? For who else, then?"

"Me. You see, kid, most everybody around here is plenty willing to believe that your copper brother-in-law is crooked. And nothing would give me more pleasure than for them to keep on believing that." Al shoved his face to within a few inches of the detective's. "You can understand that, can't you copper?"

Jim Douglas understood a great deal. He understood why he was sweating in the cool night. He understood why his hands were balled into hard fists, but they were useless with a gun almost pressing against his stomach. He understood what revenge meant. And how perfectly Al Morrison had planned his!

And now Al Morrison meant to kill him. If he were found dead with that money on him, his death would not cause as much excitement as the fact that he was carrying old man Winter's money. That would mean he had been paid to lay off. Why was he killed? Who cared? Just another dishonest cop who got what he deserved.

Al would like that. And Al had Danny under his thumb, though Danny had ruined one of the more subtle twists to the plot by exposing himself. If he hadn't, his sister's husband would have died thoroughly discredited in his eyes. But Al could make up for this by forcing Danny to be an accomplice to the murder.

IT WAS tough for the kid. Under Al's domination he'd end up like all hoods eventually did. If he resisted, he'd end up like lim Douglas himself was going to.

Jim Douglas felt damned sorry for the kid. Then he thought about Betty. He knew what his death would do for her.

Al Morrison's face was mere inches away.

Douglas hated that face with every ounce of strength he had.

"Copper," Al said, "when I was up at that state rest home I used to lay awake nights thinking about this moment. God, how I thought about it! Now I'm going to squeeze every drop of pleasure out of it I can.—Pin his arms, Louie."

The chunky man grabbed Douglas. "Cut it, Al!" Danny pleaded. "Let's go

home."

"Shut up, kid. You're in the big league now. Do as I say and you'll have a hundred suits before long. Just keep quiet, and you'll learn about the care and feeding of lousy coppers."

Al hit Jim in the stomach. Danny grabbed Al's shoulders and jerked at him.

"Damn it, quit!" he yelled. "You're no better than that punk, Ferrelli! If you're

going to fight, fight square!"
"Kid," Al said in an even but impatient tone, "one of the first things you've got to

learn is never give a sucker a break."

Jim Douglas was numb with pain. He couldn't breathe. Louie was holding him up.

Al turned back to him again and he tensed

against the coming explosion of pain. But it didn't come. Danny hit Al. Al whirled. He hit Danny. Danny sprawled back into the darkness.

Douglas lashed out with his foot. Al screamed and bent double, grabbing at his groin. And as Louie jerked Douglas back, the detective threw his weight with the pull. Unbalanced, both fell to the ground.

Louie let go of Douglas to grab for his gun. But Jim's hand was on a brick. There was a dull thud—and Louie was out of action

Al was trying to straighten up and swing his gun on Douglas when Danny lunged at him and rode the ex-con to the ground. He had Al's gun and was beating him with it when Jim took the weapon away from him.

They stretched the two crooks on the bricks in the alley, and looked at each other. Danny's face was strained and dirty. Suddenly he said disgustedly, "Jim, you've got to take me in, too."

Jim grinned and brushed his knuckles across the kid's chin. "You haven't done anything that can't be chalked up to education," he said. "Get to a phone and call the station. Tell them to send somebody out here. I'll keep an eye on our friends."

Danny stared at the sleeve of his new suit.
"I'm going to burn this damn thing," he said.
"A suit is paither good par land." Danglas

"A suit is neither good nor bad," Douglas said. "It's the man who's in it that counts."

Slowly a grin spread across Danny's face.
"Jim, you're right. You know, that lousy rag you're wearing looks pretty good—just because of the guy who's wearing it."



If you liked this story by R. Van Taylor, you'll also enjoy the same author's tensely-dramatic murder mystery novelet—

A SHADOW NAMED DEATH



"Put down that phone . . . on . . . on the hook!"

FOG is Murder

By TEDD THOMEY

He shared the road with

a murderess—and death

had the right of way!

ACK REDDING was plenty mad. Fog whipped across his windshield like tongues of gray fire. He'd had to gobble his dimer so fast he'd hardly tasted it. French-fried chicken, too. And even so he'd be late for that meeting.

Again he cussed the fickle Southern Cali-

fornia weather. His headlights were puny things against this cottony foe. The stuff was murder. He knew there should be eucalyptus trees and telephone poles on his right, but he couldn't see them. He and the chromium goat on the hood were alone in the world.

Jack sneaked a glance at the speedometer. Twenty. Probably fifteen m.p.h. faster than he ought to be going but, dammit, Old Man Pettibone would skin him alive if he were

five minutes late.

He stared at the white center stripe, the only thing which proved he was still on the highway. And suddenly the stripe was gone.

The old club coupe's blue nose bounced and then tilted downward sharply. Jack Redding socked on the brakes. But nothing happened. The car sped downhill even faster. And then he realized why. He was off the highway, skidding down a steep, grassy slope. A fog-wet, grassy slope slicker than a greased chute.

Jack Redding's tanned young face went taut and grim. His dark eyes fought with the fog, striving frantically to see what lay ahead. He felt the muscles push against his dark brown sport coat as he twisted the plastic steering wheel trying to prevent the coupe from sliding broadside.

After a hundred agonizing yards, Jack caught a glimpse of pavement. Like a drunken ping-pong balk the car bounced off a curb and then the tires screamed against asphalt. The wheel bent under Jack's hands as he was thrown quickly forward. Finally, the coupe smoked to a stop in what he gathered was the center of a street. Relieved, Jack began to wipe the chilly sweat off his broad forehead.

And then through the cotton on his right flank, he caught a flash of two big yellow eyes.

THERE was a noise like ashcans caught in a cement mixer. The coupe leaped up. Door handles gouged Jack's ribs and his head snapped from shoulder to shoulder. When the coupe settled back to the pavement, he saw that the right door had a funny, squashed-pumpkin shape and was six inches closer to the handbrake.

He got out and ran to the other side.

A sleek, foam-green convertible had smacked into him. Only it wasn't quite so sleek now. Its headlights were cross-eyed, its front wheels were pigeon-toed and its grill was a chromium mess.

A girl stuck her head out of the window. It was a pretty head with long, brownish hair and a pert, purple saucer of a hat. It was also an angry head.

"Y-you biscuit-brain!" she yelled. "Parking in the middle of the street in a fog like

this!"

Jack swallowed his shock and surprise. He was prepared to apologize and take the blame, since he was obviously in the wrong—and, anyway, his insurance covered both cars.

"I'm sor-" he began.

"Shut up!" she snapped. She started her motor and tried to reverse the convertible. Its front wheels protested. Wedged against the crushed fenders, they refused to turn and their rubber squealed against metal and pavement.

The girl looked ready to cry. "See what you've d-done!" she shrilled. "How can I get out of here? It won't even run—it won't even. . . "

Patiently, Jack stood there and let her rave on. He looked at his watch. Sevenfifty already. At the meeting, he was supposed to tell the company brass how he'd broken all records last week by selling eleven refrigerators. Old Man Pettibone, his supervisor, had probably chewed his fingernails to the ellow by now.

The girl ran out of words finally. Jack got out one of his business cards and a pencil stub. He copied down the convertible's license number. Then he asked the girl's name.

"California's got that new law," he explained. "We both have to report this to some state office."

Fear kicked across her face then. She snapped, "No!" and slid across the seat to the right-hand window and peered out at the dented fender on that side. Jack wondered why she didn't get out to look. It would have been a lot easier.

Again he asked for her name. And she looked ready to scratch off his ears. He shrugged, opened the convertible's left door and sat on the red-leather cushion. He lit a match and prepared to copy the name off the registration slip which was clipped to the steering post.

The girl slid over and blew out the match. Jack Redding got sore then. His supper had been loused up. He was late for that meeting. His car was wrecked. And this girl

He fished some more matches from his pocket, lined them up carefully and lit about six at once. As they blazed up, the girl leaned forward and Jack moved them quickly across the seat, away from the reach of her hot breath.

And then he saw them.

was so damned stubborn.

Between the split in the seat-back. A man's fingers. Silent fingers stained with something redder than the leather seat.

JACK YANKED the hinged section of the seat forward and stared down at the floor. A man was jammed between the small rear seat and the back of the front seat. He had curly, gray hair; small, handsome features and two red holes in his coat. Only a dead man would have remained in such an uncomfortable position as that.

A network of cords tightened across Jack's lean back. The French-fried chicken flip-flopped in his belly. He drew in a big lungful of cold, foggy air and held it, while his brain went around and around. The whole thing had happened too suddenly. It was the first time he'd ever seen murder—all he could do was kneel stiffly on the seat and gape.

After a few moments he realized the girl was watching him. Then, locked in a fog which shut out the sounds of the city, they studied one another without speaking.

The fluttery match-light showed she was small and pretty and about Jack's age—in her middle twenties. She wore a purple coat with a high, swagger collar and large silver buttons. Her long, wavy hair glinted around her shoulders and her wide-set, grayish eyes swept fearfully from Jack to the dead man and back again. Her lips trembled and her cheeks were white, and moist from the fog.

Jack figured his cheeks were probably white, too. The matches scorched his fingers and he dropped them. Nervously, he ran his palm over his hard chin, his forehead and through his short, bristly black hair.

Again he blinked down at the dead man. He heard a click and when his eyes whipped back to the girl she was jerking a small, blue-steel gun from the glove compartment.

The hole in the barrel was small as a lead pencil and though the girl's slim, brown fingers shook a lot, most of the time the hole was aimed at the white geese on Jack's blue necktie.

"I'm giving you a choice," she said, in a taut, hoarse voice. "You can do what I say —or join our quiet friend there. Any preference?"

She looked ready to shoot if he so much as crooked an eyebrow the wrong way.

"I'll . . ." Jack paused and then said carefully, "I'll listen to you for awhile." He hesitated again. "You . . . did that to him?" He didn't know why, but the question made him feel a little foolish.

She didn't reply. One of the convertible's headlights still burned and her eyes, gleaming in its reflected light, whisked around the scene. She glanced at Jack's old club coupe and then up and down the fogged-in street.

"You know where we are?" she demanded.

Jack couldn't decide whether she was lost or whether she was trying to discover if he was. He shook his head. Which was a lie, because he was sure they were on El Toro, a little-traveled avenue on the southern side of San Diego's Point Loma. He recognized the yellowish mouth of the dirt road which intersected El Toro near his car. He was relieved to find his brain working finally and he was glad he had sense enough to lie. Anything he could do to cross up this hotheaded little witch would be to his own advantage.

She glanced again at Jack's coupe and seemed to reach a decision. "Your car ought to run," she said. "The door's all that's wrecked, so take him over there. And hurry!"

Jack hesitated. It occurred to him that if he delayed long enough another car might come groping along through the fog and help him by smashing into his car or hers. But the girl read his mind.

"Don't stall!" she said sharply, "Pick him up." Her lids had lowered dangerously till her eyes were thin as dimes. And her fingers clenched the gun so tightly they were white.

JACK leaned over the folded seat and grasped the padded shoulder of the dead man's gray-worsted coat. He felt the blood rush to his head, thumping wildly against his throat and temples. The dead man didn't weigh very much. Jack lifted him up a few inches and then he saw the L-shaped tire wrench on the floor.

He let the man settle back, explaining: "Need a better grip. . ." He reached down and grasped the tire wrench. Uncertainty lay heavily within him. The wrench would be a pitiful weapon against the gun. She was far over on the seat-hard to reach. It all depended on how desperate she was. And then the muscles in his arms and shoulders tensed as he realized she must be completely desperate. Obviously, she had killed this man. Jack had discovered her crime, so-to save herself-sooner or later she must kill him too. . . .

The thought struck off sparks of fear. And savagely he twisted in the seat. He flung the wrench as hard as he could. It shattered dials on the expensive dashboard and ricocheted, striking the gun and her wrist.

Instinctively, she jerked the trigger and a bullet went through the cloth roof.

Before she fired again, he was running, hunched over, beside the convertible's flank. Lead struck the pavement just behind him and wailed off into the fog.

For no good reason, his legs felt cramped. They flopped around like hockey sticks. He banged a knee on the convertible's bumper and had a frantic urge to jump into his old coupe. But he wasn't sure it would start right away. And, besides, the convertible's nose was still wedged into its side.

He jumped the curb and after a few strides the fog closed in around him, blotting out the yellow glow of the cars' headlights.

He ran downhill through wet weeds,

shucking off lavers of fear with each step. He was light-headed with relief. By God, he'd pulled it off! Escaped by a split

whisker!

Abruptly, an unseen root snagged his toe and he sprawled into the weeds, his chin digging a track in the moist dirt. His enthusiasm considerably subdued, he got up and started running again, aware now that he'd congratulated himself too soon. There was a lot yet to be done. If he worked fast, maybe he could phone the police and the girl would be caught before she got too far. She'd probably try to escape in his coupe.

After another dozen vards, he saw dimly that he was running beside a dirt road. He sprinted over to it, figuring it was probably a private road leading down to one of these swank Point Loma homes-and a phone. Four or five hundred vards later, puffing heavily, he saw squares of light ahead. Windows. He'd passed this neighborhood many times-it was probably that house all by itself on the knobby part of the hill.

FOG MASKED most of the building. But lack could see it was large and not in the usual California-stucco style. It was redbrick with a white-pillared porch and on clear days it undoubtedly had a \$100,000 view of San Diego's blue bay.

labbing the bell didn't bring immediate results, so he slapped his palms several times against the heavy white door. Just as he was ready to push it open and answer questions later, it was drawn back by a tall red-haired man in a wine-colored smoking jacket.

"Emergency!" puffed Jack. "Got to use your phone!"

Before a look of surprise could pop onto the man's face, Jack was pushing past him. He ran a few steps down the hall, glancing around, but he didn't find the phone until his startled host velped: "First door on your left!"

lack turned and found himself in a small. but elaborately-furnished sitting room. The phone was on a brown-sugar-colored endtable. He dialed "0" and told the operator to get the police station. After what seemed like minutes of clickings and buzzings, an authoritative voice announced quietly.

"Sergeant Withers."

"Murder!" panted Jack. "Back seat . . . car!" Until now he hadn't realized how hard he'd run. His words came together in spurts between the whistles and wheezes of his rapid breathing.

"Man or woman and take your time."

"Man. . . . "

"Are you sure he's dead?"

"Of course, I'm sure. He . . ." That was all Jack could blurt out because from the tail of his eye he'd seen a flash of familiar purple. He whirled around, still holding the phone.

The girl was standing in the doorway. Her face was white and her round chin quivered. She gasped: "That's him!" And out of the pocket of her purple coat came the gun.

"Put down that phone . . . on. . ." She was out of breath, too. "On the hook!"

Jack's insides ran together like cold crankcase oil. Incredulously, he realized that somehow in all that fog she'd managed to follow him. His hand lowered the phone slowly to its cradle and the sergeant's metallic "Hello?" ceased.

She walked toward him and then the redhaired men came through the doorway behind her.

"I don't know what she's been telling you!" Jack yelled to the red-headed man. "But she's a murderer. Killed a guy in a car... We've got to get her!"

At first the red-haired man seemed confused. Then his face grew stern. He stepped over to the girl. His hand went for the gun. My God! thought Jack. He's going to try taking it away from her! He wanted to shout a warning.

But the girl surrendered the gun without a murmur. And then the red-haired man was pointing it at Jack and saying smugly, though not quite calmly: "These days you just can't trust anybody..."

THE FIRST thing Jack did was close his mouth. He figured he looked stupid enough without his jaw hanging down over his tie. And that was all he did for a while besides stand there and stare at the man and girl. His nerves sang like musical tops and something was stinging his hands. He looked at them. Each palm had a row of red-purple half-moons where his fingernails had dug in.

But while all this was going on, his mind osurprisingly—was operating quite well. He could almost hear it sitting facts up there, discarding this, accepting that. And suddenly be understood how it had happened. The girl hadn't followed him through the fog. No one could have done that. The road was the clue. He was a fool—a hundred fools—for not realizing it sooner.

She had been turning the convertible into that dirt road when she collided with him, but he'd been so busy with all that other stuff he hadn't really noticed. This house—the only one around here—was where she'd been heading all the time. So naturally she'd come here right away and was probably just as surprised to see him as he was to see her.

"Sit down," said the red-haired man, pointing the gun at a fat, upholstered chair.
Jack went over to it, but the other two remained standing a few feet away. Jack watched them, wondering anxiously what they planned to do."

The red-haired man was a six footer—a couple of inches taller than Jack—and seemed in his late thirties. He stood erect and his shoulders filled the wine-colored smoking jacket well. His rust-red hair was combed straight back from an arrowhead widow's peak. He had a long, well-formed nose; enough jaw and pink-and-white cheeks.

Despite his size and bearing, the girl made it plain immediately that she was boss. She didn't seem at all nervous now.

"Walter," she snapped, "you had your little joke—give me back the gun." The redheaded man handed it over. She told him she had managed to load the dead man into Jack's coupe and drive it down to the house,

"Now here's what you'll have to do, Walter. ." She spoke slowly, but her gray eyes were confident. Jack had to admit she was pretty smart, even if she was the spoiled, rich-lid type. "Get the convertible off the street. ." She paused. "No. First you better carry Onderhurst into the garage. Then get the car off the street before someone runs just to it. . You used to be pretty good with tools, so you ought to get it moving all right. Pick

up all the glass and find that missing hub cap so no one will be able to tell the wreck happened on the street. Then drive the car down our road and make it look like it ran into a tree or something. Got it?"

Walter nodded and removed his smoking

jacket as he strode from the room.

During the next half hour, the chair was made of pins and needles. Jack sat there, squirming and fidgeting. Usually, he was a self-confident, breezy guy, throwing enthusiasm around, rushing out to sell people stoves and refrigerators. Now he felt like a kingsized moron. Desperately, he tried to dope out some kind of a reasonable escape plan. But every idea fizzled before it was half finished. The girl was alert as a hummingbird. Sitting on a sofa directly opposite Jack, she couldn't miss with that little gun.

Walter, wearing a tan, suede jacket, returned grinning, "In all that fog, it was a cinch," he said. "Nobody came by. Onderhurst's behind all those boxes in the garage. I pried the fenders away from the wheels and drove the convertible into the rock wall. It looks like you went off the road in the fog."

JOG, FOG, FOG. Jack felt mean enough to kick old Mother Nature in the head. She was damned unfair. Her fog had got him into this mess. And now it was helping these two plotters to get out of theirs.

The girl and Walter stepped across the room where they whispered excitedly. The girl kept the gun trained on Jack. Bits of conversation floated over to him. And then gradually they stopped whispering, seeming not to care whether Jack heard. He gathered that the brunette's name was Lorna. And Walter was her husband. They talked about Onderhurst, who obviously was the dead man.

Walter kept asking about five thousand dollars. He wasn't satisfied until Lorna opened her black, plastic purse and flipped through a sheaf of green bills. They talked on and on, reviewing an assortment of details, and Jack managed to piece together what had happened.

Apparently Walter was with one of San Diego's brokerage firms and was about to lose his job, reputation and partly-paid for house and car. He'd speculated with a client's money, losing five thousand dollars which was now due and which he couldn't beg or borrow and hadn't nerve enough to steal. Lorna had apparently master-minded the plan.

She had shopped around for a prospect and decided Onderhurst, owner of some kind of a manufacturing plant, was her man. Using another name, she'd worked the deal alone and it looked as if she'd thrown her charm around pretty freely. She'd persuaded Onderhurst that for five thousand dollars she could sell him stock market tips which would double his bank account.

To close the deal, they'd parked earlier this evening in her convertible out on the deserted point overlooking the ocean. Onderhurst handed over the money and she gave him the tips, most of which were fairly legitimate. And then Onderhurst had gotten nasty. He demanded back the money. Lorna refused. He tried to take it from her by force. During the wrestling, she'd shot him with the gun she'd brought along for protection.

Jack's ninth cigarette tasted like moldy cardboard. The more Walter and Lorna talked, the more uncomfortable he became, They mentioned "under the garage floor" and "Onderhurst" in the same sentence. meaning no doubt that the dead man was to receive an informal burial. And then suddenly they were talking about Tack in a manner which turned his spine into a stack of chipped ice.

Lorna spoke about killing him as if she were discussing the best way to rid dahlias of ants. Bury him with Onderhurst under the garage? Push him off the Coronado ferry into the bay? Dear me, no; too risky.

"He's going to be harder to get rid of than Onderhurst," she said, after a while. "His has to look accidental. . . .

"Why?" asked the red-haired man.

"Because maybe he was going to visit relatives right around here. Or friends." She paused and nervously toyed with one of the silver buttons on her coat. Then: "He may even live around here. So if he turns up missing, police will swarm around the neighborhood. They'll look for his car and when they find it, they'll see it's been in a wreck. They'll check over it. Then maybe some nosy somebody will find out we had an accident and tell the police. Maybe they'll find bits of strange paint on the door of his car. Paint off ours. See how risky it is?"

Walter saw, all right. And Jack saw something else. This girl was really tough and smart. She'd guessed about his Mom and Dad. They had a house about six blocks higher up on the hill. He'd just finished dinner with them a few minutes before the coupe went off the road.

Sweat was soaking Jack's white shirt. He ran his palm over his lean face and the skin was hot and haggard. He felt like hell. And a sudden anger rushed through him. Dammit, he wasn't going to sit here like a pig waiting to be stuck! She'd missed him once. Maybe she'd miss again.

He waited till she glanced at Walter and the gun was at a careless angle. Then he jumped up and ran.

The skin on his shoulders crawled weirdly, anticipating the bullets. He sprinted past the sofa, past the phone table. His ears almost hurt, they strained so hard to hear the gun's explosion.

He reached the doorway. And then his legs went out from under him and he was skidding on his belly across a fuzzy rug which burned his cheek.

Walter had made an awkward, but efficient, ankle-bone tackle.

Slowly, weak and frustrated, Jack got up. Lorna came over to him, clenching the gun tightly. There was wildfire in her eyes and her mouth was a twisted red ribbon.

Three times she slapped him—long, hard swings. Her hand stung like a small, wooden paddle. And the third time her red claws came out, cat-like, digging long gashes along his jaw.

An HOUR later, Jack Redding crouched on the small back seat of his coupe as it rolled slowly through the fog along Ft. Rosecrans Boulevard. Walter was driving. The girl ast sideways on the front seat, looking back at Jack. The gun rested watchfully in her gloved hand. Walter wore gloves too. Jack had no idea where they were going. He hew they would kill him within the next few minutes. And a radio was going to have something to do with it. He was sure of that because of the intense way they had examined the table-model-radio in the sitting room before leaving the house.

He wasn't surprised when the car halted around ten-thirty in front of his apartment house on Curlew Street. Nothing these two did surprised him any longer. They'd gotten his address and other free information when they thumbed through the papers in his wallet. They knew he wasn't married and where he worked and everything.

Walter left the coupe and vanished into the fog. In a few minutes he returned.

"No answer," he said. "So like we thought he probably lives alone."

"We can tell when we get up there," said Lorna. She turned to Jack, her face a grim shadow in the darkness. "Get out and don't try anything. One yell out of you. . ." She looked down at the run.

Jack knew what she meant and was in no mood to temph ter trigger finger. They both got out on the left because the right door was smashed shut. Lorna kept the gun inside her purple coat. They walked across the sidewalk. They met no one, and the fog—swirling thickly past the lighted entrance way—prevented anyone else on the street from seeing them. The small, self-operated elevator was available, but Lorna decided they should use the stairs.

Jack's apartment was on the fourth floor. They hurried in, locked the door and Walter made a quick search through the small living room, kitchenette and bath.

"It was a good guess," he told the girl. "One razor. One pair of pajamas. He lives alone, all right. . . ."

The lump of fear in Jack's chest got bigger and heavier. He wished he'd had sense enough to stay out on the point with his Mom and Dad and hadn't moved into town to be closer to the office. The feeling of doom jangled his nerves again. It was so dammed fantastic. Two people whom he'd never segn before were going to kild him. And he was help-less. They had all the time in the world. There wasn't much chance that any of his

friends might drop in. The boss would be sore because he'd missed that sales meeting, but he wouldn't bother to find out why—not till tomorrow morning, anyway. And then it would be too late, Too late, too late, too late. The phrase jumped around in Jack's head like a yo-yo.

Walter went into the bathroom and then Jack heard water pouring into the tub.

"All right," said Lorna, waving the gun at the ivory-colored bathroom door. "Get in there. . . ."

Jack went in. Walter stood beside the medicine cabinet watching the water rise in the tub.

"Take off your clothes," said Walter quietly. The pink had gone out of his cheeks and his square-tipped fingers were trenbling. Lorna was standing in the doorway, the gun aimed unsteadily at Jack's shirt-front. Her face was white, the gray eyes wide with apprehension. They think they can drown me, thought Jack. They think I'm a damned newborn cat or something!

SLOWLY, his arms sluggish and leadheavy, he removed his brown sport coat, sweaty white shirt, his tie, slacks and shoes. He stood there in his candy-cane striped shorts, shivering a little although the room was warm. "The shorts, too," said Lorna, smiling a little. "You think people bathe in their underwear?"

Tack hesitated.

"Oh, the shy type. . ." she taunted. She took a towel off the rack near the door and tossed it to him. "Use this."

Walter shot her a questioning look and she replied. "It'll be all right. We'll take it off later."

Jack knotted the towel around his middle and then took off the shorts. He felt foolish, embarrassed and angry.

"Dammit!" he yelled. "You two. . ." His voice trailed off. He couldn't think of anything more to say.

While he maneuvered with the towel, the girl had pointedly turned her attention to the tubs, the white tile walls and the heavy chromium rod which supported the yellowflowered shower curtain. After a moment, she glanced back at Jack and then to Walter. "He may get noisy," she said. "Better gag him."

Walter ripped up another towel and wrapped a section around Jack's mouth, knotting it at the neck. The cloth tasted like soap. "It's full enough," said Lorna. "Get in..."

Jack sat down in the tub stiffly and the water was warm but not very deep. Certainly not deep enough to drown in. The muscles stood out rigidly in his legs and he felt the tenseness across his shoulder blades. He kept his eyes fixed on Lorns

Walter turned off the water and left the room. He returned carrying Jack's small, brown-plastic radio. And Jack, seeing it, felt

like he'd been kicked in the eves.
Drownine he could fight. But not this, Accidental death—that's what it would look like. He'd be just another statistic—one of the hundred's of people electrocated every year by anoliances falling into bathtubs. Pfiffittl and it would be all over. The police would have little to investigate. His car would be parked out front as usual. They might wonder about the smashed door—and they might not.

Walter's nervous fingers fumbled with the cord and managed finally to plug it into the socket near the mirror. He switched on the radio and then he glanced intently at Lorna, little muscles lumping tightly along his jaw.

She nodded. Very slowly, deliberately.

Walter stepped over to the tub. He carried
the radio with the tube-exposing side toward
Jack. One hand held a corner of the plastic
case, the other touched the tubes.

Abruptly, a farm reporter began discussing the price of eggs.

Just as Walter leaned over, Jack catapulted himself up out of the water. A bucketful of spray hit the radio and Walter's bare wrists. Sparks flew, the red-haired man yelled and swayed stupidly, one arm twitching. The radio fell, bubbling and hissing, into the water.

JACK grasped the chromium shower-curtain rod and felt it sag under his offe hundred sixty pounds and threaten to pull out of the tile. He didn't think about the gun. All his concentration was on the deadly, splashing water beneath him. Every muscle fought to keep him from falling into it-or just touching it.

Walter stared at his numb fingers. Shocked, he staggered sideways in front of Jack just as Lorna rushed in with the gun. lack saw everything in a blur-Walter's

sudden drunkenness; the girl, her face warped with fright, the purple hat pushed over one evebrow. She was trying to dodge around her husband for a clear shot.

There was no time for thinking. Instinctively. Jack swung his body in a furious arc.

His wet neels struck Walter's chest and then the rod tore out of the tile and he was falling. But his momentum carried him out to the floor where Walter was stumbling back into Lorna.

Jack's flying body struck their legs and all three went down together. The gun blasted, Lorna was swearing and powder-smell stung Jack's nostrils. He fought his way to the top of the pile of wiggling arms and legs. And then the gun came into view, pushing past the sleeve of Walter's tan suede jacket, Lorna's gloved fingers probing for the trigger.

Jack's hand moved like a whip. He snatched at the gun just as it fired again. White chips flew from the tile wall and the barrel was hot against his palm.

He sprang up then, stepped on Walter's stomach and jumped out to the tiny hall. Little creeks ran down his legs from the wet towel. Shivering, panting, he stood there a moment until things crowded into focus, Then he ripped off the gag and backed out to the phone table in the living room. He dialed "O" and returned to the hall, carrying the phone and trailing its cord.

Walter, still stunned, was trying to sit up. Lorna was sprawled in the doorway, her nylons torn, surprise and anger lashing her features. She glared hotly at the gun now in Jack's right hand-and then sudden tears put out the fire in her eyes. Her head dropped across her arms and the shoulders of her purple coat began to quiver.

"Hello?" said Jack. "Operator, give me the police station. . . .

A familiar voice announced: "Sergeant Withers"

"Murder," said Jack, almost calmly. still want to report a murder. . . . '

NAMES in CRIME

A QUIZ

By JOSEPH C. STACEY

Listed below, with their first and last names scrambled, are 15 criminals. See if you can match up at least 11 of them correctly for a passing score; 12-13 is good; 14-15 excellent.

1. John (a) HARE

2. Vincent (b) MEANS

3. Al (e) KARPIS

4. Bruno (d) CHAPMAN

5. Sam (e) BARROW

6. Frank (f) DILLINGER

7. Jack (g) HAUPTMAN

8. Alvin (h) YOUNGER

(i) COLL

(k) CAPONE

9. Francis

11. William

12. Cole

10. Gerald (i) LEOPOLD

(I) CROWLEY

13. Gaston (m) DIAMOND

14. Clyde (n) BASS

15. Nathan (o) JAMES

The Answers Are on Page 113 If You MUST Look!



The payoff
can be
double trouble
when—

Death Works Overtime WADE BLAKE heard the mushy sound of tires on the gravel outside the station as he started to remove his overalls. He buttoned up again and -stepped outside, giving a routine glance at the black sedan parked just ahead of the last pump. He went around the rear of the car to the divire's side.

"How many gal-" Fear clipped off the unspoken words.

Wade felt the blood drain from his face as he stared at the hawk-nosed man at the wheel. Then he jerked his head around, and looked at the empty back seat, expecting to see Rick Corsetti there with a gun in his hand.

"I see you remember me, Mac."

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ACOLIN.

The hawk-nosed man gave a wolfish grin. "You don't look so good."

"What do you want?" Wade said it loud to push his voice past the tightness in his throat.

"A grease job. I'll pick up the car in a couple hours.

Wade pulled a rag from his rear pocket and wiped his hands to cover their trembling. "I can grease it in a couple minutes. It's

almost quitting time."

"A couple minutes? Maybe you better give it a paint job, too. I don't think Corsetti would mind a lighter color. Just before I come over here he says to me, 'Steve, this car looks like a hearse. Take it over to Blake's garage and have him work on it tonight.' Now I know the boss likes to bull jokes, but I can't figure why he wants you to work on it at night. Seeing as how it ain't dark vet vou better put some time on the car by painting it. I don't like this morbid color anyway. How about you, Mac?" The driver leered.

"Take the car somewhere else." Wade said, trying to put anger in his voice.

"Ah, you don't want me to do that. You put Corsetti in prison for a year stretch, and here he ain't out two weeks and you don't want to fix his car. What kind of a reception is that?"

The shock of seeing the hawk-nosed man put a growing ball of nausea in Wade's stomach.

He thought, they're just trying to scare me. This is all the revenge Corsetti will try to get. He'll keep after me if he knows I'm afraid. Work on the car as you would anyone else's.

"Drive it in the garage," Wade said.

The driver laughed out loud and said, "You're an obliging sort, Mac. And give it a coat of gray paint. I'll be back for it first thing in the morning."

WADE went to the elevator door and rolled it up, then he went into the station which adjoined the garage. He sat down at the desk, a small man with mild blue eyes, and brown hair neatly parted at the side. His hands didn't belong with the rest of him. They were big and strong. When the

nausea faded, he picked up the phone and called his wife.

"I won't be home for supper, Mary." "Is anything wrong? You sound odd."

"I'm all right. I got a rush job. I'll be

home late."

"Wade, don't work tonight. All day I've had a feeling that something terrible is going to happen. You said you wouldn't work at night any more. The garage would be just the place for-"

"Now, Mary, I told you a thousand times that there is nothing to worry about." It was something he had believed all along. But

He said good-by and hung up before the fear in him crept into his voice. No use in letting her suspect that Corsetti had shown his hand. She had worried enough in the past several weeks when Corsetti's sentence was drawing to a close.

Wade put on his coveralls, went through the side door of the station, and into the garage. The hawk-nosed man was gone. The car was parked in the middle of the big room. Shadows darkened most of it. The chrome on the luggage compartment gleamed in the faint light coming through the elevator door.

He felt his scalp crawl. A hearse! It looked like one.

Had Corsetti sent it just to scare him? Or had he sent it to keep him in the garage at night so he could come under the cover of darkness to kill him?

Wade went to the elevator door, pulled it down and shot the bolt. Then he went to the front door of the office and locked it. He'd be safe. There were no windows in the garage and so he couldn't be shot at from outside. He'd work on the damn car.

Back in the garage he turned on the lights, and went to the work-bench. As he picked up a grease gun, he heard a loud popping sound. He froze, and in the heavy silence that followed he heard nothing but the steady ticking of the office clock, and the hard irregular beating of his heart.

He spun about as the sound came again. Then smiled weakly with the knowledge that it came from the car, made by the buckling of a cooling baffle plate.

At the car he laid the grease gun down on the floor and got in, to drive the sedan on the grease lift. As he reached down to turn on the ignition he thought of the ten thousand dollars Corsetti had offered him. Was death to be his price for not taking it?

It all began on a warm Saturday afternoon. Mary had gone to the dentist, and he was sitting on the porch trying to read a newspaper while his six-year-old son, Tommy, scouted for Indians in the hedge bordering the lawn, shooting them with his toy gun and loud verbal bangs.

Wade heard a car coming fast beyond the high, banked curve that straightened out about a hundred feet from the house. A moment later he heard a wild screech of tires

He had heard the sound many times coming from the bend, and he always felt a hot rise of anger, for he hated fast, reckless driving. And there was the knowledge that a car could come out of the curve, out of control, and smash into the house, which sat back about fifty feet from the highway.

Now his thoughts were of his son. He called Tommy, but the boy gave no sign of hearing. He started to call again when he saw a yellow convertible rocket out of the curve swaying back and forth as though it were buffeted by a giant hand.

A BRUPTLY the car slewed across the road with the scream of applied brakes. Then it nosed down the slight embankment and came plowing toward the lawn.

Wade jumped off the porch and started for the boy who stood motionless watching the car plunge on. Wade hadn't taken six steps when the convertible smashed through the hedge. He closed his eyes in horror, until the car roared past. He opened them and saw Tommy sprawled face downward on the lawn.

He stood still for a long time on legs that had gone numb. He went to the boy and dropped down on his knees. His fingers plucked at the faded sweater, with the picture of Roy Rogers on it, as though he sought to prove it had no substance, that the whole thing was a dream.

"You all right, Tommy?" Dazed, it was

all he could think of to say, and he said it over and over again.

The boy stirred.

Wade grabbed him, his fingers rough because of his elation, and rolled him on his back

"You all right?"

The boy's eyes were open. He stared at Wade for a long while.
"My leg hurts, Dad,"

"Do you hurt anywhere else?"

"Just my leg."

"You'll be all right."

"You're crying, Dad."

"Yeah, I guess I am."

Wade got to his feet and looked in the direction the car had gone. It was sitting a hundred feet away in the adjoining empty lot. In swinging his gaze back to the boy he saw the timid old woman who lived across the street, peering out her front window. And then he heard the wail of a siren, and he knew she had called an ambulance.

Wade saw the pain in his son's eyes, and the unnatural angle of his right leg. Clenching his fists, Wade turned around and walked to the yellow car.

He caught the odor of whisky as he looked through the rolled-down window at the man slumped over the wheel, snoring lustily. Rage exploded in his mind. Saxagely he opened the door and pulled the man to the ground. He straddled the driver's chest and began to pound his face with his fists. The man groaned, and rolled his bead to evade the blows. Wade kept hitting him until someone vanked him to his feet.

"You crazy, feller? The guy's hurt. What do you want to beat him for?"

Wade whirled around and looked at a scowling young man in white uniform. "Hurt, hell! He's dead drunk. He ran down my boy!"

The ambulance attendant knelt down by the driver. After a moment he said, "He's drunk all right. Whew, he smells like a liquor store that got hit by a cyclone. I think your boy's got a broken leg. Other than that he seems okay. This guy will have to go to the hopsital, too, for a checkup. Never can tell.—Say, he's Rick Corsetti!"

Wade had looked up at his boy, and had

seen another ambulance attendant with him, when he heard the name. He looked down at the man on the ground. His mind cleared of rage, he saw the man clearly for the first time

Corsetti was still out. He mumbled and rolled-his head back and forth, as though he were still trying to get away from Wade's fists. His face was fat, thick-lipped; his hair black, and short-clipped. A trickle of blood ran from his broad, fleshy nose.

WADE recognized him from newspaper photos, and knew his character from the accompanying news items, and the editorials which hinted broadly that Corsetti had his finger in every shady deal hatched in town. The news items concerned Corsetti's in and out of court activities. He seemed immune to criminal conviction.

Wade went along with the boy to the hospital, where he learned that his son's only injury was a broken leg. He broke the news to his wife, tempering it by revealing how closely the boy had come to being killed.

The next morning Wade went to the police and filed a criminal negligence charge against Corsetti. That evening Wade answered a knock on the door. A hawk-nosed man stood on the porch.

"Corsetti sent me," the man said. "Corsetti wants you to forget about the accident. If you press the charge he goes to jail. The boss don't like iail. Mac."

Wade looked at the narrowed eyes, then down at the gun that appeared in the man's hand. Had anyone ever told him he wouldn't be frightened in a circumstance like this he wouldn't have believed it. He felt nothing but cold anger.

"Go to hell," he said.

"Say, you're tough." The man grinned, and put the gun in his pocket. "I was only kidding about the gun. Corsetti wants to kill you himself. And if you don't drop the charge he'll do it. Take my-word for it, Mac. Corsetti hates prison. He was in for three years once. He came out stir crazy. He still gets nightmares about that sentence. He's got a battery of lawyers all the time to make sure he don't get back in again.

"But he can't beat this criminal negligence charge you got against him and he knows it. Hitting a kid don't set good with no judge or jury. Play it wise, Mac. Drop the charge. Corsetti was just having a little fun the other night when he got liquored up. Just tell the police you don't remember for sure how the accident happened. Tell them maybe the kid ran on the road. Okay?"

Wade stepped back and started to slam the door. He saw the man's hand dip into his pocket and thought he was reaching for the gun. Wade let the door stay open.

"I thought I'd save Corsetti some money," the man said, with a shrug. He brought a slip of paper out of his pocket and handed it to Wade.

Wade looked down at it. A check for ten thousand. More money than he could save in a lifetime. He knew right away he wasn't going to take it, but awe kept him looking at it. Maybe if it wasn't a personal thing like the boy's getting hit he would have accepted.

"Corsetti came near to killing my son," he said handing the check back. "Tell him I hope he rots in iail!"

The man's mouth sagged open. He looked at Wade a long time, then said, "You'fe crazy. I'm telling you, Corsetti will kill you. I aim't lying. Think it over, but call the police. Fix it up and drop around for the check." He spun around and clumped off the porch.

Wade shut the door, knowing Corsetti was bluffing. If he was killed the charge he made would stick, for he had given the police the names of the hospital attendant who could testify that Corsetti was drunk, and the old woman across the street who told him she had seen the accident. The testimony of the attendant would suffice, and Corsetti would know it. Alive, Wade could drop the charge; murdered, the police would logically suspect Corsetti. Corsetti wouldn't risk a murder charge:

CORSETTI was sentenced to a year in prison, and Wade sued him for the amount of the hopsital and doctor bills and let it go at that.

In the passing months he nearly forgot

the threat Corsetti had made through the hawk-nosed man, remembering only when his wife spoke her fear that Corsetti might try for revenge when he got out of prison. He assured her they would never see or hear of Corsetti again.

And now the hawk-nosed man had brought the hearselike sedan to the garage.

After driving the sedan on the grease hoist, Wade turned on the air valve. He watched the car rise on the runway platform, pushed up by the shiny steel pillar which rose from beneath the floor.

He got the grease gun and walked under the car. He found the first grease fixture full, and so was the second and third. He stiftened suddenly as a whispering sound came down to him from the car. He jumped clear of the sedan and shot a glanne at the air release lever atop the compression tank, thinking it had been pushed down somehow, which would have eased the car back down. The lever was up. He heard the car springs groan, and jerked his head to look at the car.

His heart began to thump, and his fearweakened fingers let go of the grease gun. The lid of the luggage compartment was gising! It stopped. A man jumped out, hit the floor on a crouch, and straightened.

Corsetti!

Wade backed up, his eyes swinging from the gun in Corsetti's hand to the man's face. Corsetti's thick lips were thinned by a wide smile. Sweat coursed down his fat cheeks and dripped from his chin. His eyes gleamed as they had in the courtroom whenever he had looked at Wade. But there was more than hate in them now. Madwess!

Corsetti shuffled forward.

Wade kept moving backward until he was stopped by the wall. He tried to say something, but his lips moved soundlessly. Corsetti stopped ten feet from him.

"Scared, Blake?" Corsetti said softly. "Did you think I'd send the car here just to be fixed? In the car, I thought maybe the surprise of seeing me would kill you. A runt like your could drop off just like that. I'm glad you're still around. I've got a nice package of back payment."

Stir crazy! The hawk-nosed driver said Corsetti had reacted that way to prison. Wade gulped, and said, "Put the gun away. Kill me, and you'll go to prison for life."

Corsetti threw his head back, laughed

shrilly, and said, "See the silencer? No one will hear the gun go off. No one saw me come in. It will be night when I drive out."

"The driver?" Wade said. "What about the driver? The police will check up and find someone who saw him or the car in front of the station. Your car, your driver, Corsetti."

"But not me," Corsetti said, waving the revolver negatively. "Tve already got my alibi worked out. A half-dozen people will swear I was somewhere else. If the police come to me I'll say maybe hawk-nosed Benson did it. That the guy loved me like a brother, and might have killed you because you sent me to jail. Sure the police will figure I killed you. But where, are facts? Benson didn't even know I was in the car, so he can't prove I came here."

Wade looked at the gleaming gun, knowing he couldn't cover the distance between them without being hit a half-dozen times. His rubbery knees wouldn't even carry him that far.

His voice was thin, quavery as he said, "Don't, Corsetti. You were drunk when you hit the boy. You deserved that year."

"Did I?"

GOMETHING hit Wade's right thigh with the force of a sledge hammer. The leg went out from under him. He slid to the floor. He didn't actually realize he had been shot until he remembered the silencer on the revolver. He looked down at the blood rapidly staining the coverall leg. No pain. Numbness. He looked up, dazed.

"That's the first installment," Corsetti said. "Next it will be your shoulders. When I get tired of watching you squirm I'll finishr you off."

Corsetti shot a look at the front of the garage, then, looking narrowly at Wade, he backed away fast. Wade heard him rattling the bolt on the elevator door. He heard him go into the office, checking the door locks.

Struggling to get up, Wade felt the thigh bone of the injured leg grit. Broken. He looked wildly about, though he knew there was no avenue of escape, and nowhere to hide in the big square room. He plunged his hand into his pocket and brought out a small screwdriver. Not much of a weapon even if he got a chance to use it.

Then he saw the electric outlet in the wall, near the floor, a few feet from him. He hopped to it and slid to the floor as Corsetti came in view.

"Going somewhere?" Corsetti said gleefully. "Go on, and let's see how far you can get."

Wade groaned, feigning terrible pain, and grabbed his thigh. He writhed about until he was half-turned to the wall. He brought up the palmed screwdriver to the receptacle, and drove it into the opening hard. The lights flickered once and went out.

Wade threw himself on the floor. He heard Corretti curse, and saw the gun belch a finger of flame. A bullet thudded into the wall just above him. Wade planted his hands on the floor, pushed himself up on the good leg and dived along the wall. He hit scrambling, pulling himself along with his hands. Bullets whined around him. One hit the floor, peppering his face with bits of concrete, and went screaning over his head.

He didn't stop until sudden weakness dropped him. He lay there trying not to breathe, lest the sound give his position away. His heart hammered so loudly he wondered it Corsetti could hear it. He could see nothing in the blackness. He heard no movement. In his mind's eye he could imagine Corsetti pointing the gun right at him.

A strange drowsiness came over him after a while. The warm moistness below his knee, where the numbness was slight, told him what was wrong. How long would it be until the loss of blood took all his strength?

Corsetti laughed softly and said, "This is more fun than I bargained for. I know you're within thirty feet. Just where I don't know. That's why it's fun. I've got plenty of shells. Till keep shooting until I find you. Make a rush for me. I'll hear you and get you before you've taken two steps. Let's try one for measurement."

The gun belched flame. Wade heard the bullet thud into the wall, several feet behind him. "A miss, eh?" Corsetti said. "I'll keep trying. Like I said, I've got plenty of bullets. If I get tired of the game I'll get the flashlight out of the car."

Was he lying about the light? It didn't make any difference. Wade would just die a little quicker with the flashlight to pick him out of the darkness.

Maybe with luck he could get to one of the doors, but not without being heard. All Corsetti would have to do was close up on him. And, with the crippled leg to slow him down he couldn't rush Corsetti with any chance of grappling with him. Corsetti could just keep backing up and firing at the sounds.

THE screwdriver, which he still held, gave him another idea. He lay there, silently, his head watching for the flame of the gun that would mark Corsetti's position. Then the tiny spear of red darted out of the blackness. The bullet whined past, inches from his face.

With infinite slowness he sat up, and drew back his arm. He hurled the screwdriver. As it left his hands he pulled his good leg under him.

Corsetti cried out in pain. Wade shot erect and began to hop along the wall away from Corsetti, praying the gunman was thrown off-guard. Three steps. Four, A bullet burnt its way across the nape of his neck, another cut the air in front of his face. He kept going until he collapsed in utter weariness.

"Nice throw, but it didn't help you any," Corsetti said. "Nothing will help you."

Wade put his hands out and felt about in front of him. He found what he had sought. The wooden trash box. It was a little over a foot high, not high enough to protect him when he put his plan into effect. But with luck—

He reached into the box and picked out some heavy bolts and nuts. The slight noise he made brought a bullet whining over his head. He watched the gun flame, marking the direction in his mind.

"I don't hear nothing," Corsetti said and laughed. "Did you get plugged? Say something, Blake."

Silently Wade sat up, and hurled a bolt.

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It missed. He heard it hit the car window. There was no crash of glass. He hadn't the strength even to break it. He knew that should be succeed, by wild chance, to hit Corsetti in the head he couldn't throw hard enough to knock him out.

"So that's your game," Corsetti said. "It won't get you anywhere. Let's see if my aim

is better." The gun flamed.

The bullet caromed off something ahead of Wade. The compression tank. Wade picked up a nut and hurled it. It jit with a thump, and Corsetti cursed. Wadethad picked up another bolt when a violent dizziness seized him. He rolled to the floor. Weakness held him there when the vertigo left. He heard Corsetti move, and a burst of fear made him struggle up.

Was Corsetti tired of his game of shooting blind, and moving to get the flashlight from the car? He was moving back. Then the answer came as the gun flared, reflecting its gleam on something shiny. The fat steel pillar of the grease hoist. Corsetti had taken refuge behind it.

"Throw some more, Blake! Come on! This is fun. Or maybe you want to make a run for the door. You won't get far with that leg, and me with the gun. I can knock you off right now. I've been playing, so far. Say something. Bet I can put a bullet in your mouth."

Hell, Wade thought, he couldn't get to the door even if he'd had no gun to contend with. Even as he sat there with Corsetti's words buzzing through his mind, he felt his weariness deepen. His eyelids dropped. He pulled them up with effort. He became aware of the warm moistness on the floor under his hands. Blood!

How long would it be until the blood drained away, taking his life with it? Or would a bullet get him first? It didn't really matter.

The gun flamed and a bullet caromed off the compression tank between him and Corsetti, and went screaming away.

Corsetti laughed and said, "I'm getting bored, Blake. Liven things up by making a rush for me. It's worth a try, isn't it? Die trying—"

Wade didn't pay any attention to the rest

of Corsetti's words. A thought had burst into his mind forcing the weariness from it. He had a chance! Would it work?

He laid down on the floor and said, his voice weak like the rest of him, "Tm coming, Corsetti. I'm coming to push that gun down your throat."

CORSETTI gave a long, booming laugh and said, "Come on I I'm waiting. Maybe you think I'll blaze away until the gun's empty, then you'll have a chance to rush me. Think again, pal. But come ahead. Liven the party."

Wade started to crawl, using his arms to pull, and the good leg to push him across the floor. He knew he could not get within five feet of Corsetti without getting shot several times, but if he could only catch Corsetti unwaver—

"I hear you. Why so slow? Afraid? Ten to one I can put a bullet into you right now. But that wouldn't be sporting, would it? How's this for closeness?"

A bullet nicked Wade's ear. A cry of pain got past his lips.

"Hey! That was all right. Where'd it hit, Blake? No vital spot, I hope."

"You were lucky," Wade said.

Let Corsetti think he was coming for him. Let him hold his fire. Weariness dragged him to a stop. He put his face down to the pavement. He lay there a long time his body, his mind, fighting the urge to keep going. His eyelids dropped. He raised them with great effort, and brought his hands out before him to pull himself ahead. His arin muscles refused to work.

Finally he got going again. How far was it? Yards? Feet? His progress could be measured in inches. A bullet kicked up bits of concrete in front of him that stung his face. He saw the gun flame reflect on the hoist pillar.

When he felt that he could drag his vastly tired body no farther his fingers felt the smooth roundness of the compression tank.

"The game's over," Corsetti said suddenly.
"You don't have to come to me. I'm coming to you."

The words meant the end of Wade's one chance for life.

[Turn page]





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"You're yellow!" he screamed. "You're afraid to have me come to you!" His fingers grasped the tank, and he struggled to pull himself up. "You're yellow! You're afraid I might reach you in the darkness."

His fingers found the air release lever and

pulled it down.

His strength left him, Even as he sagged to the floor he kept talking, to drown out the slight hiss of escaping air, to keep Corsetti where he was. His voice sank to a whisper.

Then he heard Corsetti gasp, heard his shoes scrape the floor. A wild scream knited the air. The cry was cut off abruptly by a brief gurgle.

In his mind's eye, Wade could see the car continue its descent on the grease hoist, pushing Corsetti down, down. Corsetti must not have known, in the darkness, that he was under the car. Or maybe he had known, but hadn't realized that Wade was in a position to bring the car down.

Wade turned his head and looked through the blackness, where he knew the office was. Even the movement of his head required terrific effort. About fifty feet to get to the phone. He started to crawl, advancing by inches.

After what seemed hours, his fingers touched one of the car's tires. Just before he thought he was within ten feet of the office. Now he knew he had forty more feet to go.

He knew he could never make it. He could barely push his hands out in front of him.

Ironic. That one wild chance of killing Corsetti had worked, but he hadn't won out over death.

WADE opened his mouth to yell, hoping the people in the houses across the street might hear him. His voice was a mere croak. He wondered if he could raise the hoist and pull Corsetti out from under the car, let the car down and drive to the office. No. Even with normal strength, he'd have trouble moving anyone of Corsetti's weight. Wait! The gun!

He managed to pull himself under the car. His fingers found Corsetti. The hood was in a kneeling position, the weight of the car on his head and shoulders. Wade found the gun on the floor beside him, made sure the last bullet Corsetti had put in it was still there

He unscrewed the silencer and pulled himself back out. Holding the gun away from him, he pulled the trigger.

The gun roared.

He held his breath and waited, feeling the last of his strength ebb. Silence! Had the shot gone unheard?

It seemed hours later when the rattling of the office door penetrated his fading consciousness.

"Blake! Hey Blake, you in there?" He shook his head to clear it, pulled air into his lungs and yelled, "Help!"

The cry must have been heard. Wade heard the door being smashed open.

Answers to Quiz on Page 103

1-f. 2-i. 3-k. 4-g. 5-n. 6-o. 7-m. 8-c. 9-1. 10-d. 11-a. 12-h. 13-b. 14-e. 15-i.



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