

# Cover





## **Publisher's Page**

For the past several years I have been OCRing stories from the pulps and sending them to PulpGen for reprinting. And then one day -- Poof! -- PulpGen was gone. For a time I wondered what I was going to do with myself since I enjoyed reading those old pulp stories. And then I got the idea to do this. A series of ePub collectins of the stories I had been preparing for PulpGen.

This first collection contains thirteen detective / crime stories by thirteen different authors and from thirteen different titles. Future collections will feature science fiction, westerns, adventure and other genres. And in time another collection of Detective stories. Below is a list of the stories, when and where they were published and how long each story runs. I hope you enjoy them. If you want to comment, make suggestions or requests you can contact me at:

beb01@sprynet.com

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1 The Ghost Wore Boots By Richard B. Sale. Detective Fiction Weekly, Feb. 2 1935. Art: unsigned Words: 8100.

2 Clip-Joint Adventuress By Frank Gruber. Detective Romance Jan. 1937. Art: Can't read. Words 7000.

3 Snatchers Are Suckers by Robert C. Donohue. Black Book Detective, March 1942. Art. Unsigned. Words: 4200.

4 Suicide Satchel By J. Lane Linklater. Secret Agent X, Dec. 1935. Art:: unsigned . Words: 4400.

5 Killer for Sale! By John Bender. Captain Zero, Nov. 1949. Art: Can't read. Words: 2000

6 Balance of Power by Jerome Severs Perry. Spicy Detective, June, 1936.  
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7 Satan Takes a Picture by Paul Ernst Detective Tales July 1937. Art: Amos Sewell. Words: 8900.

8 These Shoes Are Killing Me by Leroy Yerxa. Mammoth Detective May 1943. Art:Kohn Words: 6000.

9 Death Is Waiting by John L. Benton. G-Men Detective Oct 1943. Art: unsigned. Words: 5200.

10 Pop-off Rookie by Leo Hoban. Masked Detective Dec. 1941. Art: Unsigned. Words: 3400.

11 Death's Race by G. Wayman Jones. Thrilling Detective, July 1932. Art: Unknown Words: 7500.

12 An Order for Murder By Steve Fisher . Popular Detective, March 1936. Art: unsigned. Words: 1800.

13 Hideaway in Hell by Arthur Leo Zagat. Detective Tales, Dec. 1935. Art: "bib". Words: 2500.

total: 66,600 words

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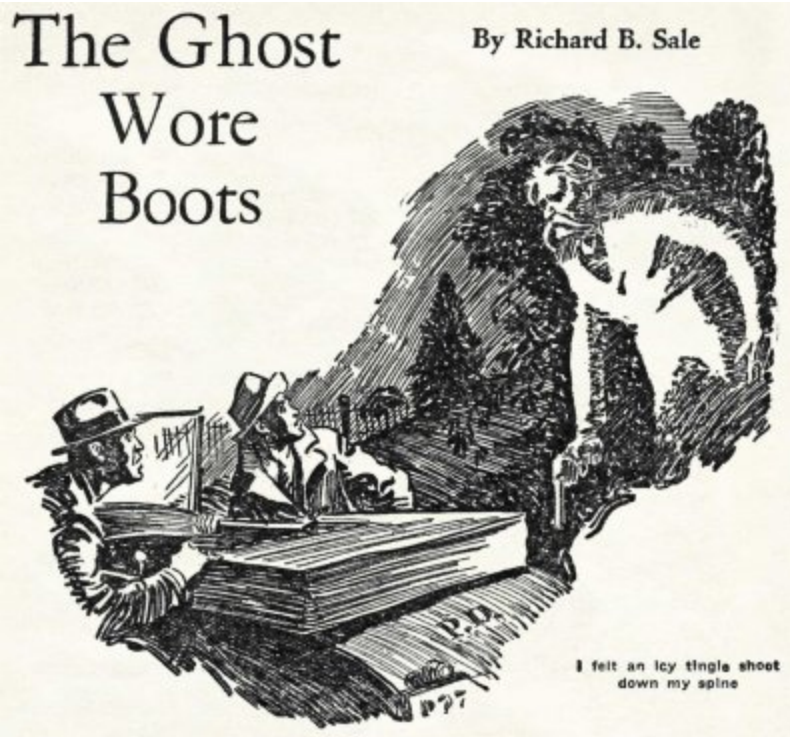
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## The Ghost Wore Boots By Richard B. Sale.



*Real Lead Bullets Came Out of the Gun of the Ghost That Forced Daffy Dill to Aid Its Supernatural Crime*

WHEN I eased into the Old Man's office he tipped back his green eyeshade and asked, "Daffy, did you ever hear of Wilson Quayne?"

I sighed. "Did I ever hear of Abraham Lincoln? Of course I have. Quayne's the steel magnate. You're Satan himself. And I'm Daffy Dill, who's had a hard day and is going home to date Dinah Mason. What is this, chief, a game?"

"You're going," said the Old Man, "out to Spuyten Duyvil to Wilson Quayne's castle after a story."

"You're going," I said, "to the bughouse."

The Old Man grinned. "I mean it, Daffy."

"What's the yarn about?" I groaned.

"A ghost."

"Ha-ha," I said sorrowfully. "What kind of a ghost?"

"A special kind. He was wearing boots and carrying an old Colt six-gun. You know--one of those grave-scratchers that Wild Bill used to make Injuns bite dust with."

"Who called in?"

"Now there," said the Old Man, "is the story! Van Lamont called."

"I know only one Van Lamont," I said, "and he tries to act, outside of being a first-class skunk and thinking he's Hollywood's gift to Woman."

"One and the same," nodded the Old Man. "He's one of Quayne's guests. And the others are Majorie Culpepper and Ian Norman. Names, Daffy, all names! And names make newspapers!"

"Just what happened?"

The Old Man shrugged. "Don't know. Inspector Halloran tipped me off that Lamont had called from Quayne's to say that they had all seen a ghost and that the shade was none other than old Major Culpepper himself. Halloran's sending Bill Hanley out to check."

"Listen, chief," I said, "Dinah's a swell girl and besides Shakespeare used the last shade when he struck Banquo in 'Macbeth.'"

"Don't you get the setup, Daffy?" The Old Man was in earnest. "Here's a famous steel man--Quayne. A notorious actor--Lamont. Here's Majorie Culpepper, who heads her father's munitions company with Ian Norman managing president. They all say they've seen Majorie's dead poppa! Is that a yarn?"

I got up. "Okay," I said.

I went back to my desk in the city room. I picked up the telephone and called Dinah Mason--who is bad for my bloodstream. Dinah is a sort of receptionist on the *Chronicle*. She's got platinum blond hair and starry eyes and every time I see her, I go Spanish and I hear the tinkle of wedding bells.

She opened up with: "Your nickel. Broadcast!"

"The date is off, my hourglass," I said sadly. "The Old Man is sending me out to No Man's Land to cover a story. So I'll see you tomorrow, my little cupcake, and no two-timing."

"Veddy well," she said, just like that, and hung up.

I sighed disconsolately and trudged down the stair of the *Chronicle* building to West Street where I hailed an ambitious hack-driver. "Head north up the Drive," I told him, "and don't stop until we hit Alaska."

WE'D been riding about an hour when the driver turned around and tapped on the dividing window.

"Are yuh sure this is right?" he asked hollowly.

"Sure I'm sure."

"Well," he said, "I guess you know."

"Why the question?"

"Not'hin'," he answered. "Only--this is the loneliest damn country I ever been in. Spooky as hell!" He shivered. "Where are we, anyhow? Up near Bear Mountain?"

"Be yourself," I said. "You're still on the twenty-four buck isle of Manhattan. And there's my stop down the block where those big stone cairns are sticking out."

"Thank God," he said, and slued into the curb.

I opened the door and got out. Then I walked up the long circular drive to Quayne's castle. The grounds were dark. There weren't any shadows because there wasn't any moon. I shivered at the bite of the sharp river wind and trotted up the stone staircase which fronted the drive. After banging the big brass knocker a couple of times, I waited, listening to the low whine of the wind as it came around the corner of the house.

The door opened A little major-domo stood there, looking a trifle startled.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Holmes," I said, "is the name. Sherlock Holmes of the homicide bureau. Inspector Halloran sent me."

"A-about the ghost?" he faltered.

"About the ghost," I nodded.

"Come in," he said. "Mr. Quayne is in the library. I'll tell--"

A voice broke out irascibly from a pair of double doors to the left of the hall:

"Boggs! Boggs! Who the devil is it?"

A tall, thin man stepped through the doors. He was in a tux and he looked immaculate. His hair was absolutely white. He wore a monocle in his left eye. He stared at me. Behind him I saw Bill Hanley's good-natured pan come into focus and grin at me.

"Who is it?" Wilson Quayne repeated sharply. "Don't stand there shaking, Boggs!"

"It's--a--Mr. Holmes, sir," said Boggs. "Mr. Sherlock Holmes from headquarters."

"Don't be an ass," Quayne said. He turned to me.

"What nonsense is this? Who are you and what's your business here?"

"Dill's my handle," I replied. "Daffy Dill."

"A detective?"

"A reporter."

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Get out of here! I'll not be made a fool of by any--"

"Take is easy," I said. "I'm not making a fool out of anyone. The yarn is public now. You called the cops."

"But it sounds crazy," said Quayne, horrified. "People will think that we were all drunk, or--"

"I know this guy," Hanley told him. "He ain't a bad egg, Mr. Quayne. Play square with him and he'll handle that yarn right."

"Sure," I said. "Hell, Mr. Quayne, I'm no sensationalist. All I want is the story--if there is one."

He considered this and then nodded.

"Come inside. I was just explaining it to Sergeant Hanley here. And Boggs--in the future remember that Sherlock Holmes is a character--not an entity!"

We went into the library and I said, "Let's have it from the beginning."

"Very well," Quayne clipped in that precise style of his. "We were sitting here after dinner at about seven-thirty. I was right where I am. Majorie was in the center there and Van Lament was on the other side of her."

"Majorie Culpepper, that is?"

"Yes. Ian Norman had been drinking before dinner. He felt tipsy, I suggested that he lie down on that sofa over there. He did so, and fell asleep. The rest of us were sitting here, talking. The lights were all down and only this fire illumined the room. At about a quarter of eight, I saw something whitish out of the corner of my eye. I turned--"

"Yeah?" I asked eagerly.

"Right over there," Quayne said, "directly in front of the tapestry, I saw him."

"Who?"

"Major Culpepper," Quayne said. "I'm as sure as death. He was right there--white and hazy and nebulous. As I stared at him--in some horror I must confess--he walked across the room towards the sofa where Norman was asleep. He was dressed in that riding habit of his and he had on his boots--"

"Halloran mentioned a gun," I said.

"Yes." Quayne nodded; he paled too. "In his right hand, he held that famous single action Colt of his. It was a .31, a relic of the boom days of the West. He carried it with him always. Eccentric on the point."

"I know," I said. "I had to interview him once when Culpepper Munitions was up before the Senate for inquiry. I remember him twirling the grave-scratcher around his finger. I was scared it'd go off."

"Well," said Quayne, "the last thing he did was aim that gun at Norman. Then he disappeared just like a flash! That's my story and I'll swear to it!"

"Did Majorie Culpepper see him?" I asked.

## II

"YES. Naturally when I saw the thing, I gasped. It really was a terrible sight, gentlemen. She and Lament saw it, too. She screamed and Lamont leaped to his feet. Then it vanished!" He shook his head. "Oh, it was the Major all right. I'd recognize that handle-bar mustache of his anywhere."

"You don't believe it was a spook?" Hanley asked gruffly.

"I--don't--know," Quayne said slowly. "It was nothing human. It was something I could see through. It was a man I know is dead, a man whose cold flesh I felt in his coffin."

"I can't arrest a ghost," grunted Hanley. "I think you've been tricked, Mr. Quayne."

"Maybe so," said Quayne. "But if I was, then I can't trust my own eyes any more. Nor my mind. It was Culpepper. I don't know if he was alive or dead or living-dead, but he walked! He carried the Colt and he had his boots on. I saw him!"

"It couldn't have been some one rigged up like him?"

"No, no! Majorie thought it was her father so completely," Quayne said, "that she is going to get an order to exhume his body tomorrow to make sure the corpse is still in its coffin."

"Some angle!" I said. "He was buried with that six-gun."

"And his boots."

"Did Norman go home too?" I asked.

"No," said Quayne. "He was too drunk. Boggs put him to bed. He slept through the whole thing. We had to carry him up. He doesn't know yet what happened."

"What was Lamont doing here?"

"The young ass is in love with Majorie--or she with him. I'm not sure. They're engaged, at any rate. I think he's a fortune-hunter. I wouldn't blame the old Major for walking in that case. But the ghost seemed to draw his gun on Ian, who was asleep."

"That's off the record--about Majorie," I said.

"Of course," said Quayne instantly.

Sergeant Hanley got to his feet and yawned. He was bored to death. He didn't have enough imagination to have a nightmare. You know, the kind of a guy who sees an ax murder and then has a hearty lunch.

"Somebody's kidding the hell outa you," he said, "We'll wait for further developments before we make a report at h.q. I've got to be going, Mr. Quayne. Don't take it too seriously."

"Thanks," Quayne said. "Hope you're right."

"I am," Hanley grinned. "Want a lift home, Daffy?"

"Them is kind words," I said, "and helps the ole swindle sheet along. 'Night, Quayne. Thanks for the yarn."

Hanley and I went down the steps to the drive and walked to the squad car which he had brought. "Poppa," I said as we neared it, "what you think, eh?"

"Nuts," Hanley said bluntly.

"Quayne--or the ghost?"

"Both." He sighed. "They're all kidding themselves."

"You don't believe the Major came back, then?"

"Daffy," he said gruffly. "I've been a cop for ten years. I never saw the stiff yet who could rise from the dead--and God knows I've handled enough of them. Aw, let's go home!"

He reached the car and put his hand on the doorknob to pull it open. He was on the driver's side across from me. He stopped and his eyes suddenly took on a stony glaze. I thought he was staring at me, but right away I could see that they were flicking over my right shoulder somewhere behind me. My own eyes fixed on his face. His lips tightened.

He croaked hoarsely: "God!"

I wheeled and followed the line of his gaze in dread. I don't know what I expected to see. Whatever it was--I didn't see it.

I gasped and felt an icy tingle shoot down my spine, studding my skin with goose-pimples and raising the hair on my neck straight out.

TO the right of Quayne's castle, there was a row of tall shrubbery. Right close to the line of shrubbery something was walking towards us, with a peculiar lumbering gait.

For an instant it looked like a cloud. Then, as I focused it more dearly, I saw that it was the ghost--the banshee in boots. Major Culpepper--whose corpse was somewhere in Woodlawn Cemetery--was walking right towards us across Quayne's shrubs. I could see the shrubs through him, waving from the river wind. He loped along, swinging that deadly grave-scratcher at his side.

He threw his head back and forth as though he were looking for some one. Then he straightened up and he glared at Hanley and me. He was hazy and gaseous and he looked like smoke. I could see his handle-bar mustache like Quayne had said. I couldn't open my mouth. I was frozen dumb with terror. The only feeling I had was the tickling of the sweat down my face even though the cold wind was hitting me there.

The ghost stopped walking and looked straight at us. Then it grinned. The Colt six-gun shot up without warning, and it fired at us. There was no

sound. There was nothing but a billow of white smoke from the mouth of the barrel and a heavy pall of silence.

Something went by my ear, buzzing like a wasp. There was a tinkle behind me. I didn't have to turn. I knew a slug had broken through the windshield of the squad car. I croaked:

"Poppa!"

Hanley moved. He came around the front of the car with his service revolver in his hand and as he went by me, he fired twice at the ghost. The flame from his muzzle looked deep-orange in darkness.

The next thing I knew, the ghost was gone into nowhere and Hanley was stomping around the shrubbery where it had been, his gun waving wildly in his paw.

The door of the castle squeaked open and Wilson Quayne shouted:

"My God! What's happened out there?"

Bill Hanley came back and put his gun away. He looked at Quayne and didn't know what to say. He was white as a sheet, and I was no help at all. I was sweating frost.

"What happened?" Quayne asked again. "I heard shots fired!"

"Naw," I gulped. "That was only this can back-firing."

"Y-yeah," Hanley said.

"But your engine isn't running!"

"It stalled," I said. "We got to see what was the matter with it. That's all. It stalled. Get in, Bill, and for God's sake, get the hell outa here!"

We reached Riverside Drive before we looked at one another and said anything. I broke the ice with:

"What--was it, Poppa?"

Hanley's paws were trembling. "Don't know, Daffy," he said.

"It shot at us."

"I know. Lookit that hole. A slug hit there, and it was a .32, if I'm a judge."

"Culpepper's Colt was a .31," I said.

"I--I know ... A hundredth of an inch ain't much difference. That's a .31, really."

"Was it a spook, Poppa?"

"I never missed a target in my life," Hanley said. "My slug went right through it, Daffy. If it'd been alive--it'd be lying there now. But there wasn't anything!"

"Then you believe--"

Hanley grunted and hunched his shoulders. "I ain't saying. I ain't saying a thing any more tonight, Daffy. Forget it."

When we got downtown, it was only eleven-thirty and I had plenty of time to get to Dinah's but I didn't go. I went home and went to bed, but I had screwy dreams. So I got up and had a couple of Old-Fashions.

At three o'clock, being sufficiently oiled to sleep without dreams, I went home to bed again. I thought how damn silly the whole thing was. No crime. No one hurt. No hero, no villain, no heroine. All there was to write about was: *One ghost--when last seen, it was wearing boots and carrying a Colt six-shooter.*

It just didn't make sense.

THE telephone next to my bed was jingling when I woke up. I reached over and picked up the receiver and said:

"Yeah?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Vanderastor," said the Old Man, "but did it ever occur to you that a newspaper known as the *New York Chronicle* pays you a salary each week to appear in its office around nine-thirty each morning and then make a pretense of working the rest of the day?"

"Hello, chief," I sighed, "What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" he echoed. "Nothing is wrong, my sluggard. I am only requesting that you report for work. It's eleven-thirty."

I looked at the clock. It was. "Holy, holy, chief," I said, "I'm sorry. I overslept. I didn't get to bed until--"

"Never mind that," said the Old Man. "Where's the ghost story? Every other rag in town has it but us."

"I didn't write it, chief," I said.

The Old Man is sharp. Instead of bawling me out, he muttered, "Then I was right. It's a bigger yarn than three sticks. That's all the space it got. What happened?"

"The ghost walked and I saw it."

"You saw it?" the Old Man yelled. "Are you sure?"

"Hell's bells, chief, I never want to be that sure again. I dreamt about the damned thing all night. It shot at us and fired a live slug through Hanley's windshield!"

"Daffy," asked the Old Man gently, "are you sober?"

"Cold," I said.

"You saw a ghost? Not a man. Not a trick. A real ectoplasmic ghost in boots and with a six-gun?"

"It was a genuine banshee," I said.

"We've got a yarn!" exclaimed the Old Man. "You know what's happened this morning? Majorie Culpepper got an exhumation order from the coroner's office. What does that mean?"

I jumped out of bed excitedly. "It means she's going to dig out the old man and see if he's gone zombi!"

"Get out to Woodlawn," snapped the Old Man. "Halloran told me she's due there at one. Cover that yarn. Break it in the Wall Street closing. And step on it!" He paused, "Got a camera?"

"I've got the Leica loaded," I said.

"Scram then. Get a hot shot."

I stepped on it. A little after one I was at Woodlawn, strolling towards a small cluster of people in front of a huge white mausoleum. I cut across the grass towards them and reached a uniformed flatfoot.

"Beat it," he said, waving his nightstick.

"Utsnay," I said, starting by.

He grabbed me by the shoulder and shoved me back.

"Hey," he said easily. "Maybe you didn't hear me. Beat it. This is private business."

"Listen, flatfoot," I bluffed, "maybe you don't know me. I'm Holmes of the bureau."

"Sure," he grinned, "and I'm Charlie Chan of the Honolulu police force. Scram, mister."

I sort of stared at him. He was the first guy I ever met who didn't fall for the Holmes gag. "But this isn't private, officer," I said. "Miss Culpepper took out exhumation papers. That's a public statement of intent to exhume a corpse."

"Don't tell me the law," he said. "Just beat it before I wrap, this stick around your neck."

"Hey, Bill!" I yelled.

Sergeant Bill Hanley turned around from where he stood in front of the tomb and caught sight of me.

"Call off your dogs," I said.

"Let him through," said Hanley.

The cop flushed as I stuck out my tongue and murmured, "Holmes of the bureau, my man. Step aside." I went up to the tomb. There was Hanley, and Wilson Quayne and Van Lamont--I recognized him from pictures--all slicked up like a Greek god. And there was also the girl and another guy whom I'd never seen before.

The cemetery caretaker was fumbling at the keyhole of the doors of the tomb.

Van Lament pushed his way towards me and snapped at Hanley, "Sergeant--who is this man?" His classic profile was slightly annoyed and his usual petulant expression was almost girlish.

"His name's Dill," said Hanley. "He's a reporter."

"A reporter?" Lamont exclaimed.

Majorie Culpepper looked me over at those words. She was a nice little brunette with bright blue eyes. She looked haggard. As though she'd been crying a lot.

I couldn't blame her. I had had the jitters all night myself from seeing that spook.

The man with her said, "But, Sergeant, a reporter! Good God, man, we're trying to keep this as quiet as possible. Don't you think--"

"Daffy's a good man," Hanley said, "Besides, he's in this as much as the rest of you. He's the guy who saw the thing with me last night out on Mr. Quayne's estate. He's holding the story back as long as possible."

"Maybe I won't break it at all," I said. "There's been no crime so far. I hope you noticed that the *Chronicle* was the only rag that didn't have a story on it this morning."

"Those asinine stories this morning!" Lamont sniffed.

Quayne looked at me. "Why did you lie to me last night?" he asked kindly. "You said the car back-fired."

"Two reasons," I replied. "One--I wanted to get out of there in a helluva hurry. Two--I didn't want you to be scared the rest of the night." I nodded to the girl. "This is Majorie Culpepper, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Quayne. "And this is Mr. Ian Norman with her. You know Lamont?"

"I've seen him," I said dryly.

IAN NORMAN was about thirty-four. He was holding his black felt hat in his hand. His hair was thin at the crest of his temples. He was losing it. He wore tortoise-shell glasses.

"I've got it open," said the caretaker.

Norman put his arm around Majorie Culpepper. "I don't think you should go in, dear," he said softly. "After all, he's been--dead over six months."

"Ian's right," Quayne said, "It won't be pleasant."

Lamont sniffed and went to her side. He looked pale around the gills. "Don't worry, darling," he said in the voice Hollywood should have outlawed. "I'll stay here with you."

"Maybe you'd better," I said. "We wouldn't want anyone getting sick in there."

The gal's eyes flicked on mine for a second as if in mutual understanding, then dropping quickly away to the ground as Lamont held her. I was puzzled. In the first place, I didn't see how anyone could fall in love with a Gila monster like Lamont, despite the fact that he had played the nuptial boards four times. Likewise he had established residence in Nevada four times. A much-married guy. Secondly, Majorie Culpepper looked like a swell kid to me, and not the kind of a gal who'd skid for such a ham.

Hanley had gone into the tomb. Then Quayne. Norman, nervous as the devil, waited for me. I smiled at him to cheer him up, because his hands were really trembling. He went in and I followed him. Then came the caretaker.

Now, tombs aren't exactly hi-de-hey spots and this one was no exception to the rule. It was darkish inside, but through the glass panels of the door, you could see the smooth cold contour of the marble walls. It gave me a shivery feeling.

The caretaker unlocked the hinge on a marble slab and dropped it down. Quayne was sweating like a soda glass. Norman was white and violently trembling. I thought he was going to let go. Hanley was a little nervous about it. I knew how Norman felt. When I was a cub and saw my first corpse, I was the same way--with that sinking feeling in the pit of my belly.

I helped the caretaker when he reached in and pulled out the coffin. It was a nice silver thing and it came out easily on rollers. It lifted right down to the portable stand the caretaker had brought without a bit of trouble. I was glad we didn't have any lifting to do. It looked heavy as lead.

The caretaker attacked the lid holders. I could hear Norman's breathing now, short and gaspy.

Finally the holders dropped down. It was a breathless sort of moment and I could feel the blood pounding through my head as I crowded in. I got the Leica out surreptitiously and held it in my right hand, sighting it by instinct between Hanley's and Quayne's shoulders. No one saw it. The caretaker lifted up the lid.

For a second or two, there wasn't a sound. Not even Norman's hoarse breathing.

Then I sighed and snapped the Leica. I snapped it again to make sure. I turned and went out of the tomb. On the grass, Van Lamont and Majorie Culpepper stared at me stonily, their mouths open, their faces frankly asking a question.

"Sorry, Miss Culpepper. I've got to break the story," I said. "It's the first time in my life I've ever scooped the city press bureau on a metropolitan story and I can't let it go." I took a quick snap of her with Lamont and stuck the Leica in my pocket. Then I ran like hell down the lane towards the administration building by the storage vaults.

The ghost who wore boots, you see, had turned into live news, easily worth a two column twenty-four point head.

Major Culpepper's corpse, and his boots, and his Colt grave-scratcher, had vanished completely from his silver coffin.

#### IV

BODY-SNATCHING still has that old ghoulish lure and when we broke that yarn we broke it proper. The Old Man laid it across the front page of the Wall Street closing edition and I even got there in time for a three column reproduction of the empty coffin, which cinched the yarn.

When it had come off the presses and I was admiring my by-line the Old Man called me in. I entered like Caesar returning to Rome.

"Daffy," he said, "that's a good story. It's going to shoot circulation tonight."

"It's not bad," I said, "but I had the breaks."

"For a follow-up," said the Old Man, "I'm going to use the ghost side of it more fully. You only insinuate in the story that the ghost Quayne and the others saw last night might have some connection. Now, you and I know it has got a good connection. Tomorrow I'm going to have you do a signed story, telling how you saw that ghost out at Quayne's estate, how you saw it was Major Culpepper and how it fired at you. It'll make a swell follow-up and the more weird you make it the better."

"Hell," I said, "I don't have to make it weird. It's the real McCoy. I'm just as interested in reading about it as the man on the street. The only thing is--I want more."

"That's the idea," said the Old Man. "Did you get a statement from Majorie Culpepper?"

"I was in too much of a rush," I answered.

"Well," he said, "run up and see her tonight. Not now. Every rag in New York is trying to see her now. Save it for tonight. And you might check the morgue and see if the corpse has turned up at all. Be thorough there. Any other ideas?"

"Yeah," I said. "I want the clippings on the gal and those on Quayne and Norman and Lamont too. There's something screwy there, chief. She's engaged to be married to Lamont, but she can't stand him. I could feel it. And Quayne seems worried as hell about something. And Norman is worried about Majorie. It's all as plain as day. I don't see what it has to do with the snatched corpse or the ghost, but it may tie in later."

"Good," said the Old Man. "Hit it. How do you suppose that stiff was snatched?"

"Easy," I said. "Master key to open the vault. Same for the crypt hinges. It can be done without much risk if you have a car waiting down on Webster

Avenue. You yank out the stiff, shoot the coffin back, relock the door and throw the stiff over the railing. Then climb down and pick up the stiff again, shove him in the car and lam."

"Sounds simple."

"It was simple, I'll bet," I said.

"You don't suppose the corpse is being held for ransom?"

"No," I said. "No ransom there. That's my guess. It's gone because it's supposed to have risen from the dead and come back to ha'nt somebody,"

"You don't know how long it's been out of the tomb?"

"Couldn't say. Not long, though. Just since somebody got this scatterbrained idea of the ghost."

"Okay, Daffy," the Old Man said. "Hit the yarn."

I got the clippings on the four of them and pored through them. I found four interesting facts:

One: Majorie Culpepper had been engaged to marry Ian Norman in November, 1933, but broke it off after a trip to Los Angeles where she met Van Lamont.

Two: Quayne had a reciprocal contract with the Culpepper Munitions Company in the use of his steel for shells and firearms.

Three: Major Culpepper designated the control of his company to his daughter, Majorie, with Ian Norman as chief adviser and executor of the estate.

Four: Van Lamont had a smelly rep for marrying rich women, divorcing them with nice cash settlements, and looking for new victims. This last was on the queer. Lamont had some way of hooking women--and not all by his personal charm--if any.

I put on my hat and coat and hied away for the city morgue. In the outer office, I stopped by Dinah Mason's desk.

"Hello, my hollyhock," I said. "Sorry about last night. Did you hear it all?"

"Hello, ghoul," she, returned. "I had inklings. What's all the chatter about ghosts?"

"On the level. I saw him myself. I wouldn't kid you, lady, but you nearly lost a close friend. The slug went by my left ear."

"No kidding," she said seriously, looking scared. "Daffy, are you all right?"

"Then you are nuts about me," I said. "When do we marry?"

"When you stop playing target and settle down to a nice steady job on the copy desk."

"But--"

"Move along, please," she said, smiling derisively. "You're blocking the aisle... Yes, madam? The advertising department is to your left."

I left the building marking an X down in my notebook for my fifty-fourth try at trapping her, and then took a cab down to the morgue. I made it in ten minutes. I don't like the morgue. It has a sort of deadish smell that gets into your lungs.

The place had a chill to keep the bodies from decomposing. It wasn't a nice chill. I made it short and sweet.

"I'm looking for an old one," I said.

"Sure, Daffy," said the guy in charge. Mike Claney was his name. "We got all kinds."

"This one I want, Mike, is pretty old. Six months at least."

"Say," Claney exclaimed mildly. He stopped and peered at me.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied. "Just sorta queer. The police boat fished out a stiff last night." He grunted. "It was pretty old, too. Six months easily."

HE led me across the chill room to one of the cabinets. He reached up and yanked on the handle. The cabinet rolled out without a squeak. A still figure reposed on the slab with a white sheet over it. Claney threw the sheet back off the face.

I looked. It wasn't as bad as I thought. The flesh was yellow and stretched over the cheek bones as tight as a drum skin. The eyes were sunken, the mouth drawn down. On the upper lip, beneath each nostril, there were short clumps of hair, as though a mustache had been snipped off with a scissors.

"Found this way? Nothing else?" I said.

"He was found nude," said Claney. "Know who it is? We want to identify him."

"No," I lied. "He's not the one I want. Thanks, Claney."

"We got others--"

"No, no, never mind," I said. I went out and telephoned the Old Man. "I found him," I said.

"The major?"

"Yeah. At the morgue. Fished him outa the East River last night. He's probably been in since last night. Maybe the night before. Better break it tomorrow, It'll make a good streamer."

"Okay. You tell Majorie Culpepper on the q.t. and get a statement tonight."

"Right." I hung up. I called Ian Norman. "This is Daffy Dill," I said. "I want to see Miss Culpepper tonight when she's clear of reporters. Something important. Think you can arrange it?"

"You'll not bother her with questions?" Norman asked kindly. "She's quite upset, Dill. Really she is. The poor child's all awry."

"I found something," I said. "She ought to know."

"Very well," he said. "Come up to my place at about eight. She'll be here. I'm having her stay here quietly. Until the fuss dies down. Please don't tell anyone else, on your honor."

"On my honor," I said sincerely. "At eight, then."

## V

NORMAN had the penthouse on top of an apartment building on Park Avenue and Seventy-second Street. There was a private automatic elevator, too. I took it up, glancing at my watch as the hands pointed exactly to eight bells.

I was a little surprised when Inspector Halloran let me in. I didn't think that he'd be there. Bill Hanley was there, too. They both looked worried. Lamont and Majorie Culpepper were on the lounge. She looked even more haggard and Lamont was comforting her in a slithery way. He reminded me of an eel--only more so. Wilson Quayne was there. And the host, of course, Ian Norman; who looked very tired, despite his attempted cheerfulness for Majorie's benefit.

I took a chair and sat down. I realized that everyone was staring at me.

"Hey--what is this?" I said.

"I told Inspector Halloran that you said you had found something vastly important," Norman said apologetically. "Sorry if I've ruined a scoop, but it's best that we work together on the thing, don't you think."

"Sure," I said. "I expected Halloran to hear it. But I didn't want it to get around or the morgue would be swamped."

Inspector Halloran said gruffly, "Daffy, you don't mean--"

I nodded. "Night before last. It's the major, all right. But his gun and his boots were missing. And whoever snatched the body, clipped the handlebar mustache of his."

"Thank God for that, anyway," exclaimed Quayne sharply. "At least we can put him back in decent burial where he belongs. I'm--at sea as to the purpose behind all this..."

Norman sighed. "Purpose? I hadn't even gotten that far. I'm trying to figure out just what is happening!"

"I'll run along," said Inspector Halloran, his big beefy face working excitedly. "You too, Hanley. Thanks, Daffy. The morgue?"

"Claney'll show you the body. You can make official identification in the morning, and rebury."

"Yeah," Halloran nodded. Then he and Hanley went out the door.

Majorie Culpepper cried a little. But it was a relieved sort of crying. She felt better that we had located the body. Van Lamont kept patting her shoulder and saying, "Bear up, my darling. Be brave and strong." He sounded like a movie sub-title.

I was sitting uncomfortably there, squirming a trifle and waiting for the girl to get in shape enough to give me a statement on the recovery of the corpse, when it happened.

The room we were sitting in was about thirty feet long and twenty feet wide. A humdinger, with a fireplace at the far end. We were all just sitting there, perfectly peaceable.

Then every single light in that room blew out as though a fuse had been shorted. We were all sitting down, mind you, and I could see the main light

plug across the room. No one was near it, not a soul. But those lights went out just the same.

In the second that we were plunged into blackness, I couldn't see a damn thing. I felt my eyes popping as I stared and half rose from my chair.

It took about five seconds for my eyes to see again, even in the darkness. Up here on the penthouse, it was really black without lights. There were no other glimmers to reflect into the room. A violent tremor shook me as I heard the others begin murmuring.

And the ghost walked.

It was the Major--the dead and gone Major--looking towards us right out of the fireplace, the Colt six-gun in his right hand and the army boots on his legs. He looked to the right and the left. It was hard to distinguish his face, he looked so ghostly and hazy. He moved like rolling smoke, and this time his ectoplasmic stream dug into the floor not far from where I sat.

I was scared stiff. I couldn't move. I watched, transfixed, and waited. On the sofa, to my left, I dimly discerned Van Lamont leap to his feet and choke out a terrified ejaculation.

The ghost stopped looking right and left. It looked straight ahead. It grinned. The Colt six-gun flung up--just like it had at me on the Quayne estate the night before. The hammer went down and a white cloud of powder smoke billowed out of the barrel.

There was a ghastly thud. I had heard those kind before--a slug hitting flesh. Van Lamont groaned shrilly just once. I saw him fall. He hit the floor with a thump which rattled the prints on the wall. I stared at the ghost. The Colt gun had dropped down and Major Culpepper was laughing heartily as though it were a huge joke. Suddenly, he faded from sight right where he stood. He just snapped into thin air.

MY voice returned. I let out a wild yell and got up from my chair. I heard Majorie scream once, then nothing. Quayne lighted a match and went to the light switch. He clicked it a couple of times. The lights didn't work.

"Short circuit," he muttered. "Ian--call the house manager! Get a new fuse installed downstairs quickly!"

Norman moved past me to the phone. He called downstairs. I listened to him ask excitedly for the electrician. He explained that the lights had gone out. Then he asked the operator to get hold of Inspector Halloran at the morgue and tell him to come right out.

I spied a candle on a sidetable in the flicker of Quayne's match. I ran to it and grabbed it. I knocked a square little box to the floor. I struck a match of my own and lighted the candle. I put the box back on the table, noticing it was a roll of amateur panchromatic film, unused. I stared at it for a second. Then I took the candle and went over to the lounge.

I bent down. Van Lamont had fallen on his face. I turned him over. Quayne and Norman were at my side. The girl was out in a dead faint on the lounge.

There was a welt in the middle of Lament's face, raised like a mosquito bite and flecked with a blue bubble. A slug had killed him instantly, gone through his brain. Yet there had been no sound. I was baffled. I knew you couldn't silence a pistol or revolver. The only thing you can put a silencer on is a rifle. And that makes a plop. This shot the ghost had fired didn't make even a ping.

Then somebody downstairs fixed the fuse and the lights were on again. We carried the girl into a bedroom before she could see what had happened. After that, we just waited, staring at one another's pale faces and wondering. I didn't even have the presence of mind to call the paper. I just wondered and kept wondering until Halloran arrived and found us there.

It was after midnight when we finally left. Questioning had gotten us nowhere. Each of us had seen the ghost. Each of us swore that he had seen the ghost shoot. Each of us swore we had heard no shot. It was an impasse. Halloran was stumped. Everyone was stumped. The Public Welfare boys

arrived after the medical examiner and took Lamont away. The M.E. said it was a .32 slug, and that was all.

What a headline it was going to make!

## GHOST KILLS ACTOR

And that was the way it would stand too! For Halloran couldn't shake the testimony, not even mine.

I left after they carted the corpse out. I went down the hall and then huddled up under a skylight near the roof and waited. After about half an hour, I saw Halloran and Hanley and Majorie Culpepper and Quayne leave the place and go down in the elevator.

I climbed down from the skylight and rang the doorbell. Ian Norman open it. He was surprised.

"I thought you'd gone," he said.

"I want to see you," I said.

I went in and he closed the door. I took a seat near the fireplace away from the bloody stain in the rug. He sat down opposite me, his face lined with weariness.

"Norman--let's lay our cards on the table," I said.

"I don't understand."

"I know you killed Lament," I said evenly.

"You're insane," Norman cried.

"I know how you made the ghost, too," I said.

He shot his hand into his shirt and whipped it out. I stepped forward out of my chair and clipped him neatly on the chin, not too hard. It knocked him over backwards in the chair and sent him sprawling on his skull. Then I dove on him, caught his right hand and took the gun he had in it away from him. I looked at it.

"Thought so," I said. "Pneumatic pistol. No wonder it didn't make any noise."

Norman sat up on the floor and stared at me. There was a reddish welt on his chin and he rubbed it painfully.

"You damned fool--what did you do that for?" I said.

"You said--"

"I know what I said. But if you kill me, you'll fry sure! You couldn't get away with that, not after Lamont."

Norman sighed and set the chair up again. He sat down in it heavily. "All right, Dill," he said. "You've caught me. But I don't care. I've done a good job killing that rat, a good job."

"Agreed," I said. "If ever a man deserved killing, it was Van Lamont. But you certainly made preparations. Let's take it slow. When did you plan first to get him?"

"A month ago," said Norman dully.

"Don't talk like the noose is around your neck," I said. "I'm an all-right guy. I like that kid, Majorie, as much as you do. I'm no cop. I don't have to turn you in."

"You mean--"

"Talk," I said. "That's all now. Just talk."

"SHE--told me a month ago," Norman said. "She was frantic then, because she hated him so. She didn't want to marry him. She thought I might be able to help her...."

"The rat had something on her," I said. "He was blackmailing her into marriage?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"She wrote some indiscreet letters. He framed her, and then he threatened her with a breach of promise suit and what not if she didn't marry him. He said he'd rake the whole dirty mess into a court room. She couldn't do a thing. She hated him then, of course."

"So?"

"When she told me a month ago, I was stuck. I didn't know what to do. I'd have liked to have killed him, but I didn't want the chair for a good deed."

"Go on."

"One night shortly after she told me, I ran off a couple of my old reels of film for myself. I'm an amateur movie-maker you know. I had this one of Major Culpepper. I remember when we made it. He was supposed to stalk prey, look right and left, and finally sight at the camera and fire.

"As I watched it and thought of how he would have felt if he had known of Lament's trickery. I was struck with an idea. If Major Culpepper could come back from the dead and kill Lamont--no living man could possibly be executed for the crime, not even myself. So I went to work. I blacked out the background on the film, leaving just the figure of the major. Then I threw him slightly out of focus and gave him that gaseous, hazy look."

I shivered. "It sure was realistic." I pointed to his leg. "And you got a small projector--one of those special palm-size models--and strapped it on your leg, running the light with batteries on your person, right?"

Norman nodded. " Then it was easy for me to lift my trouser leg, turn on the projector by a simple switch in my lapel and turn it off likewise. Then I had to add realism--to make it look as though the major had really returned. If I could make it good enough--and get a man like Quayne to certify the ghost's existence, it was sold!"

"So you snatched the corpse," I said. "And stripped it and dumped it in the East River. What did you do with the boots and Colt?"

"Dumped them into the river, too. That was the night before we went to Quayne's. It was a simple job. After that, I had to establish the ghost. I acted tight at Quayne's, and while lying on the sofa while the lights were down, I shot the vision of the hazy major on the tapestry opposite."

"It worked, too," I said. "But why in hell did you try to kill me out on the grounds when Hanley and I were leaving?"

"I was careful not to kill you," Norman said. "I shot at the car, just to make it credible that a ghost could fling bullets. I shot from my window. I had leveled the projector against the shrubbery from there, too."

"Why, though?"

"You were a reporter--to give the ghost the publicity and make it real. Hanley was a policeman--to make the police think there actually was a ghost that could kill."

"I see," I said. "After that, it was just a matter of letting the ghost kill Lamont."

"Yes," he said dully. "As it was, they couldn't get me. Then you found me out."

"Yeah," I said. "I found you out. Norman--you overlooked one thing in killing Lamont."

"What was that?"

"The evidence he has against Majorie. Where are those letters?"

Norman smiled craftily. " They were in his apartment. I got them. I burned them. That side is all clear."

I nodded. "Give me that projector." He pulled up his trouser leg and unstrapped the machine. It was a small, compact little thing, only about four inches long, built to take only about twenty feet of sixteen millimeter film. I stripped off the film and tossed it on the fire. It burned like a flash. I stuck the projector in my pocket with the pneumatic pistol. I got up.

"FORGET it," I said. "Your story--like mine and the others--that the ghost who wore boots killed Van Lamont."

"Wh-what are you going to--do with those?" he asked hoarsely.

"Dump them off George Washington Bridge," I said.

"Oh, thank God," he said and broke down in a series of quiet sobs. I never saw a man look so tired.

"One more thing," I said. "How'd you work the short circuit?"

"I had two wires from the lamp under the rug, raised above each other and scraped bare. I stepped on them and blew the fuse. Their own tensile recoil pulled them apart for the next installed fuse to work without my touching them.

"Smart," I said. "Fix it right tonight so there'll be no comeback when Halloran goes over this place tomorrow."

"I will," he said. "Why--why are you doing this?"

"Majorie's a good kid. And I like you."

"But--can I be sure--"

"I'll say you can! Listen, Norman, when my paper says a ghost killed Lamont instead of an ordinary man, the circulation will rocket. Just another reason for dumping these things in the Hudson."

"But how--can I be sure--?"

"Mister," I grinned, "if they get you, they can get me too as an accomplice after the fact. Aiding a homicide and all that." I waved good night.

When I did drop those things off the bridge next day, I thought how crazy the whole thing was and how it never possibly could have happened.

But it did--just the same!

**Clip-Joint Adventuress By Frank Gruber.**

## **Clip-Joint Adventuress**



*By Frank Gruber*

*When Special Prosecutor Bowers baited a dance-hall hostess for the witness stand, a clip-joint syndicate bought terror tickets in a murder game. And Bowers was blocked by a gun-blazing girl of gorgeous beauty. For that tragedy-marked girl was out to get him.*

THE Blue Room Ballroom was just off Broadway. It had a canopy over the sidewalk from which dangled blue paper half-moons. On each moon, in brilliant gold letters, was the legend, 5 ♦ A Dance.

Barney Bowers cocked his head to one side and looked up owlishly at the paper moons. He appeared to be slightly under the weather. The dark-blue suit he wore was new enough, but the collar of it was turned up in back, his necktie was pulled halfway to his left ear and his hair was mussed.

He walked wobbly to the entrance of the Blue Moon, a flight of stairs leading down into the basement. A uniformed doorman stepped up briskly. "Yes sir, right downstairs," he droned. "Bee-oo-tiful hostesses!"

Bowers started to descend, missed a stair and almost plunged down the entire flight. But he caught himself on the railing and navigated the remaining stairs safely. Downstairs he heard the muted strains of an orchestra. He essayed a double shuffle to the ticket window.

"Gimme a half dollar's worth of tickets," he said, and brought out a roll of bills fully two inches thick. The ticket-seller's eyes almost popped from his head.

Bowers peeled a five-dollar bill from his roll and shoved it through the wicket. The ticket clerk extended five tickets. Bowers counted them, rubbed his chin with an unsteady hand then counted the tickets again. "Hey," he protested. "The sign outside says five cents a dance."

"Sure, sure, mister," soothed the man in the booth. "But each ticket is good for two dances."

Bowers considered that a moment, then nodded his head. He wobbled past the ticket booth into the ballroom. A half dozen of the beautiful hostesses the doorman had recommended, stood in a row, smiling invitingly at him.

As an admirer of beautiful women Bowers' tastes were cosmopolitan. These girls seemed to him just a little too gaudily dressed and a trifle overpainted, and they showed their physical charms just a little too daringly. But as dance-hall hostesses went, Bowers guessed that they were up to standard. His eyes settled on a willowy blonde, dressed in a flaming-red evening gown.

The girl writhed sinuously toward him. "Dance, honey?" she asked in a sugary voice.

"Sure, why not?"

He held up his arms, and the girl snuggled into them. She pressed her body close to his. It was soft--and warm. They glided out onto a handkerchief-sized dance floor.

In one corner of the room was a four-piece orchestra. There were booths on three sides of the floor. Soft-blue lights in the ceiling dimly illuminated the dance floor. Tiny lights in the booths were shaded. Bowers caught a glimpse of two sailors and a pair of hostesses in one of the booths, wrapped in tight embrace.

The music stopped. So did Bowers, although the girl in the red evening gown still clung to him. He held out his tickets to her. She took all five. "Only five tickets, hon?" she asked sweetly. "You'll want to dance more than that, won't you?"

"Uh--sure," replied Bowers. "I'll get some more."

The orchestra burst into another number. Bowers and the girl circled the dance floor twice, and the music stopped. "Don't you want to sit out the next one, hon?" asked the girl. She moved suggestively in his arms.

"Sure," replied Bowers. "I--I don't feel so much like dancing anyway. What I need is a drink." He licked his lips thirstily.

"Gosh, hon, I'm sorry," said the girl as she steered him to a dimly lit booth in the far corner. "We ain't allowed to sell liquor here--on'y soft drinks."

THEY reach the booth, and the girl slipped into one of the benches. Bowers started to climb in on the other side of the table, but the girl exclaimed: "No, sit here beside me. I--I like you."

Bowers beamed as he slipped in beside the girl. She snuggled up closely so that her leg was touching Bowers' knee. Her hand under the table caught his and pressed it intimately.

"Gee, I'm thirsty," she said. "Would you buy me a coke?"

"Sure, if that's all they got." Bowers picked up a menu from the table and scanned it under the dim light.

He gasped slightly when he saw the price of cokes--twenty-five cents.

A waiter appeared out of nowhere. "Two cokes," Bowers ordered.

"Anyt'ing else?" asked the waiter.

"Tha's all," said Bowers, but the girl squeezed his hand. "D'you mind buying me a package of cigarettes? I'm all out of them."

"All right, bring the lady some cigarettes."

Bowers looked out over the dance floor. The orchestra was playing, but there wasn't a single couple dancing. Giggles and laughter emanating from the various booths, however, told that there was a fair complement of customers in the place. It seemed that the patrons preferred sitting out the dances.

"What's your name?" cooed the blonde.

"Uh--Barney. What's yours?"

"Trixie--Trixie Thompson," whispered the girl. "My, but I'm lucky. When I saw you comin' in I hoped you'd ask me to dance."

"Zat so? Why?"

"Because you looked so handsome. I just love men with broad shoulders like yours," Trixie brought her hand up from under the table and ran it around Bowers' shoulders. She hugged him.

A coke and a package of cigarettes--shucks, she was selling her company cheaply. Or maybe it really was his manly charms. Bowers was thirty-two, six feet tall, and he'd played football in his college days.

The waiter returned with the cokes and two packages of cigarettes. "Dollar thirty," he said, laconically.

"What?" gulped Bowers. "How much are cigarettes?"

"Forty cents a package."

Forty cents for thirteen-cent cigarettes! And the waiter was forcing a double order on Bowers. What a joint! Bowers pulled out his thick roll, peeled off a single and fished around in his pocket until he found a half-dollar, He handed it over, hesitated,

then said magnanimously: "Keep the change."

"I knew you wasn't a tightwad," cooed Trixie. Her eyes were glued on the bills in Bowers' fist. He looked at her, then put the roll into his trousers pocket--on the side away from Trixie. Her eyes glinted for just a second, but then she was smiling, and cuddly, again.

"How about dancing?" Bowers asked. "Must of used those five tickets by now."

Trixie coughed. "Uh--why, yes." She toyed with a heart-shaped card on the table for a moment, then passed it to Bowers. "You better read this, darling--just so there won't be no trouble later. But I know it won't make no difference to a swell fella like you."

Bowers turned the heart-shaped card over and read the printing on it:

*Hostesses are permitted to sit out dances with patrons but a charge of \$3.00 for each half hour or fraction is made for such time.*

Three dollars per half-hour; six dollars an hour! No wonder Trixie had suggested sitting out a dance or two. She couldn't have earned any more, if as much, dancing a solid hour.

"How long we been sittin' here?" asked Bowers.

"About eleven minutes. Why?"

"Uh, let's see, I gave you fifty cents worth of tickets. That entitles me to five minutes. I owe you--"

"Why, Barney," exclaimed Trixie reproachfully, "you're not going to be a tightwad! Don't you like me--just a teeny-weentsy bitsy?"

She leaned forward until her lips were less than an inch from Bowers.

"Uh, sure, I like you, baby. Only-- only it's warm in here, isn't it?" He drew away from her and fished for the silk handkerchief in his breast pocket.

"It is warm," admitted Trixie, "Gosh, these cokes are flat. And to think I've got all that nice cold beer in the refrigerator at home. Wouldn't that go swell now?"

"It sure would," said Bowers. "But it won't do us any good here."

Trixie's forehead wrinkled. "We could go to my place for a while--get cooled off and drink some beer...."

"Eh, they let you leave?"

"Well, ah, yes--but Tony makes the customers pay for the time we're gone. It's only ten dollars if I'm gone only an hour." Trixie slipped her hand down from Bowers' shoulder and caught his hand under the table. She pressed it promisingly. "Would you like to ran home with me for an hour--and have some beer?"

Bowers cleared his throat. "I'd sure like to do that."

Trixie threw up her head. "Tony!" she shrilled.

A swarthy, stocky man of about forty-five came across the dance floor. "Tony," giggled Trixie. "My friend wants to take me out for a little ride to cool off. Do you mind if I leave for an hour?"

"Well, we pretty beesy t'night, Trix'," hesitated Tony. "But if de customer make him right, why I guess it's hokay by me. Tony like ever'body have good time. No?"

Bowers struggled out of the booth. "Sure, Tony, how much you think would make it right?"

Trixie climbed out after Bowers and clung to his arm. Tony looked at his wrist watch and said: "Lemme see, you here now about forty min-oots. Tha'sa one hour. And ten dollar for take Trix' out. Make heem fifteen dollar. Awright?"

The sucker pulled out his roll and peeled off a ten and a five. "Fifteen dollars, and a dollar and a half for the cokes and cigarettes, and a half-dollar at the door. That's seventeen dollars altogether. An' I been here forty minutes--you say. But your watch goes too fast. Mine says I been here only twenty minutes."

Tony looked sharply into Bowers' face. "Wha--what you mean?"

BOWERS grinned widely. Suddenly he seemed to gain height His slouch disappeared, and the foolish, drunken expression faded from his face. It became hard, and his eyes gleamed with a fierce light. "I mean this is a clip joint--to give it a polite name," he barked.

"Barney!" cried Trixie. "What's come over you?"

"You'll see, baby." He jammed his hand into his coat pocket and brought out a police whistle. He put it to his lips and blew lustily on it.

"A cop!" gasped Tony. Trixie shrunk away from Bowers.

"No, I'm not a cop," said Bowers. "My name is Bowers--Barney Bowers."

Tony's mouth fell agape. "Special Prosecutor Bowers!"

"Right!" snapped Bowers. "I'm closing up this joint I've got enough evidence to send you up."

Heavy boots pounded the stairs outside. A moment later three men stormed into the dance hall. Two wore blue uniforms. The third was in civilian clothes. "Hello, chief," said the plainclothes man. "You got the goods on him?"

"I'll say I have," replied Bowers. He turned to Trixie. She was scared stiff. Her face was dead-white, strange in contrast to the vivid-red gown and the scarlet gash of her mouth.

"Nice work, Trixie," he chuckled. "Your technique was excellent."

"You're pinchin' me?" trembled Trixie.

Bowers shrugged. "Maybe. If you'll talk--be a witness--I might let you off. Otherwise, it's the woman's prison for you for some time."

Tony, the manager, suddenly recovered his composure. "What's dis talk about jail? You no send no one to jail."

"Is that so? Where do you think *you'll* be in twenty minutes from now?"

"I calla my lawyer. I get bail. You no keep me in jail. I gotta pull."

"Have you now? Well, call your lawyer and have him meet you at the station. Trixie, you come with me."

Leaving Tony in charge of the policemen, Bowers led Trixie out of the Blue Moon.

"How long have you been working in this dump?" he asked the girl as they walked to his coupe a block away.

"About three months." She turned to him. "Say, Mr. Bowers, did you really mean that I'll be sent to prison?"

"Unless you turn state's evidence."

"What does that mean?"

"Testify against Tony--tell about the joint, how you worked--and all that. You worked according to Tony's instructions, didn't you?"

"Yeah, sure. We were all told to work the suck--the customers, for all we could. We worked on a percentage basis."

"Well if you'll tell all that at the trial, I'll see that you get a suspended sentence. And say .... who owns the Blue Moon?"

"I don't know--but it ain't Tony. There's a swell comes around 'bout once or twice a month. Him and Tony always have long talks in Tony's office. I guess he owns the joint. He used to come around to the Danceland too, where I worked before I went to the Blue Moon."

"Could you identify him if you saw him?" asked Bowers eagerly. "I think he's the man I really want to get."

"I'd know him if I saw him," replied Trixie, "but I don't know his name."

"I'll try to find that out," said Bowers. "Meanwhile, what about it--will you testify?"

They had reached the car. Bowers handed her in and walked around to the driver's side. Before starting the engine, he waited for her answer. Her face was troubled. "I--I couldn't stand to go to jail," she said. "But I'm scared to squeal. Tony's a bad actor when he gets mad."

"You have nothing to worry about him," Bowers assured her. "I'll see that you're protected."

"All right then, I'll talk."

"Fine." Bowers stepped on the starter. Ten minutes later he parked his car in front of the precinct station. He led Trixie Thompson inside. Tony, the manager of the Blue Moon, was standing before the desk. A swarthy, excited man was beside him.

The desk sergeant saw Bowers and sighed in relief. "Mr. Bowers," he exclaimed. "Will ye talk to this shyster?"

"Shyster!" bellowed the lawyer. "I'll have your badge for that! I've got influence, I have."

"You won't have anyone's job, Dave Hampel," snapped Bowers. "I arrested this man, and I'm going to make the charge stick."

Hampel continued to bluster, but in a more subdued tone.

"We'll see about that, Mr. Special Prosecutor. We'll see whether your testimony has any weight in a court. It'll sound very swell in the newspapers, too, the special prosecutor going around to a dance hall and trying to bait the hostesses into doing illegal things--just so he could make an arrest. Wait!" He bounced off to a telephone booth.

"Fine specimen of our legal profession, isn't he?" said a voice at Bowers' elbow. Bowers turned, saw that the speaker was a tall man in evening clothes. Bowers knew him by sight and reputation, although he had never spoken to him.

James Faraday was a member of one of the city's oldest families. He was a lawyer, but had plenty of money. With him, now, also in evening clothes, was Deputy Police Commission McClintock.

McClintock smiled. "Mr. James Faraday, Barney," he said. "We were just coming out of the theatre when we heard about your--ah, arrest. We came over to congratulate you on your clever performance."

PROSECUTOR BOWERS shook hands with both Faraday and the deputy commissioner. "It was about the only way I could get anywhere, Mr. McClintock," he said. "My agents all seemed to be recognized as soon as they entered these dives, and while they were there, everyone acted as if it was a Sunday school social. But I've got the evidence on the worst of these

clip joints. I'm going to close it up--and all the others. I'm positive that further investigation will prove that most of these joints are owned by the same people, and if I can close one of them, I can close all."

"I certainly hope so," declared the deputy commissioner. "Our own men haven't been able to get anywhere because of lack of evidence and sufficient witnesses. I hope you have your own witnesses lined up pretty well." He and Faraday walked out of the station.

Bowers eyes roamed to Trixie Thompson. In the bright light of the police station, Trixie looked to be merely an overpainted, overdressed, scared girl.

Hampel, the shyster lawyer, stormed out of the phone booth. He cast a malignant glance at Barney, then began whispering to Trixie Thompson. Trixie listened a moment, then shook her head and glanced appealingly at Bowers, who came closer.

Hampel said loudly, "Okay, sister, your bail's put up. You can go."

The desk sergeant called to Bowers. It was about a minor matter, and when Bowers looked around Trixie had gone.

The special prosecutor decided that he'd done enough for the evening. He left the police station and climbed into his car, and as he was about to step on the starter, a big limousine hurtled past at terrific speed.

Bowers tried to catch a glimpse of the license number, but to his surprise the tail-lights were out. Then he heard the scream up the street, followed instantly by the screeching of brakes.

An icy shudder ran up his spine. He piled out of his car, started running up the street toward other running people.

The limousine with the darkened tail-lights was more than a block away, but the body that lay limp and huddled in the gutter told the grim story.

A wild, chattering crowd was already surrounding the body, and Barney had difficulty in forcing his way through, but then he did--and a fresh chill

swept over him. For the victim of the hit and run driver was Trixie Thompson. Her red dress was splashed and discolored with a red liquid--blood. Her body was smashed and bruised.

Bowers dropped down on one knee beside Trixie's body, but for a moment he did not see the body because of the haze that swept before his eyes. He had a miserable feeling that this had been deliberate murder--with himself as the cause. But why--how? He'd arrested Trixie not more than a half hour ago. No one but Tony and the shyster, Hampel, had known that Trixie was going to turn state's evidence. And Tony had been in custody all the while. Hampel--yes, Hampel had made a phone call in the police station. Had that been for the purpose of arranging this?

A heavy hand fell on Bowers' shoulder. He looked up into the face of Deputy Commissioner McClintock.

"Isn't that the girl you arrested in the raid?" asked the commissioner.

The special prosecutor nodded. "Yes, she just left the police station--on bail."

The commissioner shuddered. "Gruesome coincidence."

"Coincidence?" Bowers' eyes flashed. "This girl was murdered. She was going to be my star witness."

The deputy commissioner's eyes widened.

Bowers rose to his feet. "I've maintained all along that important money is behind these clip joints. And they're not going to stop at anything to keep them going. Those places are gold mines. Hell, they clipped me seventeen dollars for less than a half hour of--well, call it entertainment. And there're fifty of these joints in this town--most of them owned by the same people, I'll bet. No, they're not going to stop at a murder or two."

Police had piled out of the precinct station and were pushing back the morbidly curious throng. Two policemen brought up a stretcher, started to

cover up the body. But Bowers suddenly caught hold of one of the men. "Wait!" he exclaimed. "Let me look."

Something on the dead girl's face had caught his eye. He leaned forward and looked at it closely.

There was a strange design cut into the girl's forehead. It was shaped like a miniature hand. The half-inch outline was cut as sharply as if made with a die. How had it been cut into Trixie Thompson's forehead? It hadn't been there five minutes ago, when she had left the police station.

Bowers' forehead wrinkled, but after a moment he nodded gently. "All right, you can take it away."

The crowd began to disperse. "What now, Barney?" asked the deputy police commissioner.

"It looks like I'll have to start all over."

"Too bad," sympathized the commissioner. "Well, good night."

Bowers went back to his car. He drove slowly up Broadway to Seventy-second Street. There he parked his car and went into a restaurant. He ordered a dinner, but merely toyed with the food. He couldn't erase the memory of Trixie Thompson's dead face. After a while he paid his check, left the restaurant. He drove slowly to his apartment on West End Avenue.

His mind was still going over the evening's events when he let himself into his apartment. But it snapped back to the present when he found the apartment lighted and a girl sitting in a big armchair facing the door. There was a small automatic in her hand.

"CLOSE the door, Mr. Bowers," said the girl in a metallic voice.

Bowers pushed the door shut. "What can I do for you?" he asked, his eyes appraising the girl.

She was about twenty-four or five and was dressed in a white satin evening gown. She was seated, but he guessed that she was more than average tall. Her form was slender, but well proportioned. Her face and hair, however, were her striking points. The face had the smoothest skin Bowers had ever seen, and the finest chiseled features. The hair was a glorious mass of golden waves. There was something faintly familiar about her.

"Yes," she said in answer to Bowers' question, "you can do something for me. You can give me--your life!"

Bowers gasped. He suddenly knew why she looked familiar. She looked like Trixie Thompson, was her sister no doubt. But she was a different type of girl than Trixie. Trixie had been pretty, but in a cheap, shallow sort of way. This girl was different.

"You're Trixie Thompson's sister?" he asked.

Her eyes flashed, and for just a moment, her chin trembled. Then she regained control of herself, was again firm, cold. "Yes--I've just heard how she died. Because she was going to talk for you."

Bowers nodded soberly. "Yes."

His reply had an astonishing effect on the beautiful girl. She leaped to her feet. "You--admit it!" she blazed. "You admit that you're responsible for her death. You murderer!"

Bowers recoiled from her sudden fury, took a step backwards and tripped against a chair. That alone saved his life. The gun in the girl's hand had cracked, and a leaden pellet whizzed past Bowers' ear, missing it by less than an inch.

The discharge of the gun seemed to shock the girl. Bowers sprang forward and wrenched the gun from her hand. Then he pushed her back into the chair.

She began to sob softly. The special prosecutor judged by her dress that she'd been out somewhere for the evening when she heard of her sister's

death. Shocked, she'd come to shoot the man she believed responsible for it. But now, reaction had set in, and she had collapsed.

In less than a minute the girl stopped crying. She dabbed at her eyes with a lacy bit of handkerchief and essayed a weak smile. "I guess I was a fool coming here," she said. "I--if you'll let me, I'd like to go now."

"You can go whenever you like," said Bowers. "But, Miss Thompson, will you believe me when I say that your sister's death was almost as much of a shock to me as it was to you? You see, I promised her protection--and fell down on the job. The--accident happened before I quite knew what it was all about. But I made a solemn promise to myself to get the man, or men, who were responsible for it. You can help me, Miss Thompson. By telling me some things about Trixie--who her friends were."

The girl sighed. "I'm ashamed to say that I don't know, Mr. Bowers. I think the reason I went all to pieces awhile ago is because I realized suddenly that I was as much responsible for Trixie's life as anyone else. Trixie got off to a bad start. She wanted to be an actress, but couldn't make the grade. She drifted into that dance-hall work. I--I didn't know about it for a long while. We sort of drifted apart. Instead of looking after Trixie, I neglected her. I--I let my career immerse me too much."

"Career?"

"Yes, I'm a lawyer." She smiled at the look on Bowers' face. "Yes, a lawyer. That's why I was so interested in your work." She stopped and blushed faintly.

Bowers smiled wryly. "I'm glad some one is interested in my work. Everyone seems to think it's useless."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Trixie's sister. "People are much more interested than you suspect. At the office we've talked about it."

"Where is your office? I'd like to get in touch with you, if I learn anything..."

"The Hubert Building, Suite 2410."

"And your name?"

"Nell Thompson."

She picked up a mesh bag from the chair, rose to her feet. Bowers extended the little automatic to her, but she shook her head. "You'd better keep it. I really have no license to carry it. I--I'm sorry about what happened."

"I'm not," said Bowers. Then he realized that he'd blundered and added quickly. "I mean--about your coming here."

She smiled faintly and walked to the door. "Thank you, about everything. Let me hear from you--if you learn anything."

"I will."

THE morning papers commended Special Prosecutor Barney Bowers and condemned him at the same time. They praised him for having had the courage to go personally to the dance hall for evidence, but they censured him for not having furnished ample protection for his witness.

His eyes glinted when he was through with the papers. They glinted even more a little later when he received a telephone call from the city hall. The voice was that of the man who had appointed him to the special post.

"A delegation has just left my office," the crisp voice said. "I backed you up, Barney, but if you don't deliver--it's going to cause me considerable embarrassment. Do you understand?"

"Yes," gulped Bowers. "Give me forty-eight hours more, and if I haven't landed the king-pin of this gang by then, I'll resign."

"I wish you luck," was the reply.

Bowers sat slumped in despair for several minutes. He'd made a promise that looked very hazardous. Every dance-hall manager in the city knew by this time that the special prosecutor himself had made a raid the night previous, so they would be exceedingly wary for a while--wary that they clipped no one except very obvious suckers.

Well, he couldn't sit around mooning. Certain things he owed to Nell Thompson--and the memory of her sister. He hadn't asked about Nell's family, but guessed from what she'd told him that she had no near-relatives in the city. At a time like this, Nell would need help.

He thought of calling her on the phone, then realized that he hadn't been given her home address, nor the name of the firm with which she was connected. He'd have to go down to the Hubert Building. He took a taxi and ten minutes later paid off the meter before a tall office building.

As he started for the entrance, a tall, dignified man stepped out of a big limousine and hailed him. "Hello there, Mr. Bowers."

It was James Faraday, the friend of the deputy Commissioner, to whom Bowers had been introduced the evening before.

Bowers shook hands with him. "Going in here?" asked the wealthy attorney.

"Yes," replied Bowers.

"So am I .... The papers weren't kind to you, Barney. People are short-sighted."

They entered a waiting elevator, and Bowers said: "Twenty-four."

"That's my floor," remarked Faraday.

Suite 2410 was directly opposite the elevator. Bowers looked at the names on the door and his eyebrows went up. For the name on top was that of James Faraday.

"I guess I'm going still farther with you," he said.

"Eh, You're coming into my office?"

"Yes, it seems my friend is one of your associates, a Miss Nell Thompson."

They entered the suite of offices, and Bowers' eyebrows went up still farther when he saw the elaborate anteroom. Faraday turned to him. "So Miss Thompson is a friend of yours. Very interesting. She's the youngest member of our staff, but one of the most brilliant. Well, good day, sir."

He passed through the anteroom while Bowers turned to the girl at the switchboard. "Mr. Bowers to see Miss Thompson," he told the girl.

"I'm sorry, but Miss Thompson didn't come in this morning."

"Of course not; she had--things to attend to," Bowers said. "I'm a friend. Could you give me her home address?"

The girl frowned for a moment. "I guess it's all right," she said then. "She lives at 800 West 106th Street."

Bowers took another taxi to Nell Thompson's apartment house. But there he received another disappointment. The elevator operator informed him that Miss Thompson had left an hour ago and hadn't returned. Bowers gave the man a dollar and his office phone number. "Will you ask her to phone me just as soon as she returns?"

By one o'clock Nell Thompson had not yet phoned. Bowers called her apartment, but no one answered. He called four times during the next two hours, then decided suddenly to go again to her apartment.

THE elevator operator to whom he had given his card, was still on duty. "Yas, suh," he declared. "She came in 'bout an hour ago. I gave her your card. She went out again, half hour ago."

Why hadn't she called him? Had she, after thinking things over, decided again that he was really responsible for her sister's death?

He pulled out his gold shield and showed it to the operator. "I want you to let me into Miss Thompson's apartment"

The operator's eyes bulged. Without hesitation, he said, "Yas--suh!" and let Bowers into an apartment on the eighth floor.

It was a two-room and kitchenette apartment, attractively furnished. There were breakfast dishes in the sink, and the bed was unmade. Nell Thompson had had breakfast here, but had been apparently been in a great hurry to get out.

On the living-room couch there were several pasteboard boxes, wrapping paper stripped from packages. Bowers examined the paper and the boxes, and his forehead creased. One box had contained a cheap bottle of perfume; another, earrings. Still another had contained a dress. The sales slip in the box said Evening gown, \$19.75. The name of the store was one that he knew catered to a bargain-seeking clientele. The perfume and earrings had come from a ten-cent store.

He found the perfume bottle on the bedroom dressing table. It reeked of musk. It reminded him of Trixie Thompson.

He drew in his breath suddenly. The idea was fantastic--but it must be so. The purchases bore it out. Nell Thompson wouldn't buy such things otherwise.

And then he saw the classified telephone directory on the bed beside the telephone stand. It was open at Ballrooms, and the Blue Moon was the second name on the list. Below it was the name Danceland. The address was ringed in pencil.

Bowers was positive then. Nell Thompson was going to work at the Danceland. She hadn't picked the Blue Moon where her sister had worked because she feared recognition of her resemblance to Trixie. But Bowers had dropped the hint that he believed all the taxi dance-joints were secretly run by the same man or gang, and Nell Thompson was going to work in one. Hoping to get a clue to the person responsible for her sister's death.

A SAILOR who pranced into the Danceland was passed unhesitatingly by the doorman and the ticket seller. The Navy supplied a goodly percentage of the customers. Sailors weren't big spenders, but they were good for ten or fifteen dollars at a time and as long as their money lasted, they were welcome.

"Hello, sailor!" the line of girls Inside the door greeted the sailor.

He hitched up his bell-bottomed trousers and appraised the girls. His eyes ran from left to right, started with the girls' legs and worked up to their faces. He stopped at the golden-haired girl, second from the right. She was smiling--but the smile was just a bit frozen.

"How about dancin', baby?"

"Let's go!"

The sailor whipped the girl into his arms, and they trotted out onto the dance floor. The remaining girls broke ranks to wait for new customers.

"How did you know?" the golden-haired girl whispered into the sailor's ear.

"I tried to get in touch with you-- couldn't. Finally, I went to your apartment. I guessed the answer from your purchases and the open phone book. Nell, you shouldn't have done it."

"Why not?" Her whisper was fierce. "I neglected Trixie. The least I can do is bring her--her murderers to justice."

A glow spread through Bowers, This girl had the courage of her convictions. "I think you're fine," he whispered.

She flashed a smile at him. "Am I doing it right? You see, I told them I worked in a place like this in Chicago."

"I had some experience last night. I'll coach you. First thing is to sit out the dances."

He steered her to a booth at the side of the room, choosing the one with the dimmest light. Then he went through practically the same routine as he had the preceding night with Trixie Thompson. Nell played up gamely.

She sipped at the coke he bought for her. He moved up closer to her. "We've got to make things look right," he said and slipped his arm about her waist.

For a moment her body was stiff, but then it relaxed and Bowers drew her close. She was deliciously soft. His pulse quickened.

"A kiss might make it look even better," he suggested.

She turned and planted a sticky kiss on his lips. He wiped away the rouge from his lips and grinned at her. "Nice work if you can get it regular," he chuckled.

Her fingers jabbed suddenly into his side. Bowers turned his head and looked into the sleek face of a man in a dinner jacket. "Sorry to interrupt," the man said smoothly. "But you're wanted on the phone, Peggy."

Nell had evidently given a fictitious name when seeking employment here. She disengaged herself from Bowers' embrace. "Excuse me a minute."

He let her out of the booth. The manager smiled unctuously and followed her across the dance floor.

A girl with platinum blonde hair strolled up, swinging her hips. "Lonesome, sailor?" she drawled.

"Not yet," replied Bowers. "My girl just went to answer the phone."

"Okay, sailor--but if you get lonesome I'll be in the other room."

Nell was taking a long time at the telephone. Bowers smoked a cigarette and still she didn't return. He climbed out of the booth then and strode

determinedly out to the section where the girls were waiting for customers. The sleek manager sat in a chair before a door marked Office.

"The girl I was dancing with," said Bowers. "Where is she?"

The manager rose to his feet. "Oh, I'm sorry. Guess I should have told you. She had to go."

"Go?" echoed Bowers. "Where?"

"She got a phone call. Somebody in the family sick. Sorry--plenty of other girls though. Yes?"

"Yes," conceded Bowers, nonplussed. Something was phony. It was damned strange that Nell should tell anyone she was working here--and stranger that she should walk out on Bowers.

He swore under his breath. There wasn't any use hanging around, now. He started for the door.

"Going already, sailor?" asked a girl.

"Yeah, too tame here," snorted Bowers.

The Danceland was on the second floor. He descended the stairs to the street, stood out in front, uncertainly, looking up and down Broadway. A big car was parked at the curb, which was a violation of the law, for no parking was allowed on Broadway at this time of the evening.

SIGHT of the car angered Bowers. People with cars like that were always getting away with things. If it had been a small car, there would already be a ticket on it. Probably some petty politician's car. Out of curiosity Bowers walked to the curb to look at the front license number. Yes, it was a low number. Only politicians got the low numbers.

Bowers' eyes, attracted by gleaming nickel, came up and rested on the fancy radiator cap. He started away, then suddenly turned back. He'd seen a radiator cap like this before, not so long ago. He stepped closer to it.

For a moment he stared at the figure of the flying Mercury; then he drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and spreading it out over his hand, unscrewed the cap. He wrapped it in the handkerchief. Then with a fierce gleam in his eyes, he started back up to the Danceland.

He brushed past the ticket-taker, ignored the girls in the formation, and strode to the manager's office. The sleek manager was gone, but a heavy-set man, who might just as well have been labeled "bouncer," was in front of the door.

"Hey, you can't go in there," he growled.

"The hell I can't," said Bowers. He feinted at the thug's jaw, then smashed his other fist into his stomach. The man let out a pained whoosh and folded forward. Bowers dodged past him and pushed through the door.

Nell Thompson sat in an armchair, her face white under the heavy layers of powder and rouge. Standing over her, was the sleek manager of the dance hall, and to one side, his face scowling, was James Faraday.

The wealthy lawyer gasped when he saw the special prosecutor. "You--what are you doing here, Bowers?"

"Arresting you," Bowers snapped, "for murder!"

"Murder?" said Faraday. "Are you crazy?"

"He's the man you want, Barney," exclaimed Nell. "He owns this place, and he--"

Her words were cut off by the palm of the manager clapping over her mouth.

Bowers swore and stepped forward. He lashed out a sizzling blow at the manager's head. The man saw it coming and dodged, but Bowers' fist

caught him high on the head and staggered him back. Bowers sidestepped and opened the handkerchief in which he had wrapped the radiator cap from the car outside.

"This is going to burn you, Faraday," he said, crisply. "The hand of this flying Mercury hit Trixie Thompson's forehead when you ran her down last night. The handprint is cut into her forehead."

Faraday, already pale, staggered back. At that moment, the bouncer whom Bowers had slugged outside the door, burst into the room. He was accompanied by two more of his brethren.

"Shall we take him, boss?" cried the head bouncer.

"Yes," yelled the manager, "get him!"

The bouncers spread out fanlike and advanced on Bowers. The manager, behind Bowers, drew a leather blackjack from his pocket.

Bowers was in a tight spot. These men would kill him--had to, to protect themselves. Five against one, and three of them professional fighters ....

The special prosecutor sidestepped, to miss the blackjack in the manager's hand, and rammed a fist into the stomach of one of the bouncers. The man came back with a sledge-hammer blow to Bowers' head which knocked him to his knees. Shaking his head, Bowers looked out through the half-open door into the dance hall.

He saw a blue-uniformed figure out there, just about to dance with a girl, and a brilliant thought struck him. A sailor--and there were probably a half dozen or more out there. There had been that many the night before at the Blue Moon. Which had given him the idea of disguising himself as a sailor.

Bowers remembered a story he'd heard about sailors--How when one got into trouble, he yelled, "Hey, gob!" and all the sailors in the neighborhood would come to his assistance. It was the same as the circus battle-cry of "Hey, rube!"

"Hey, gob!" Bowers yelled at the top of his voice. "Hey, gob!"

One of the bouncers lashed out with his foot and kicked Bowers in the chest. He went over backwards, but yelled again: "Hey, gob!"

Another bouncer, who had no doubt had experience with sailors, sprang to the door to close it, but it was too late. A sailor was already in the doorway. He took one look inside, yelled, "Hey, gob!" and leaped into the fight

Bowers, encouraged at sight of his assistant, struggled to his feet. Weakened by the heavy blow and kick, he was content to feint and dodge for a moment. And then a veritable hurricane of blue uniforms tore into the office. For two or three minutes the room was a madhouse of thumps, yells and smacking of fists. And then it was all over.

THREE bouncers and the manager were stretched out on the floor. Faraday's age had earned him some consideration, but he was crouched on his knees in a corner, bleeding from a half dozen bruises on his face.

Seven grinning sailors ringed Bowers. "What ship you from?" asked a big tar with a nose that spread all over his face.

"None, boys," replied Bowers. "I'm not a real sailor. I'm Special Prosecutor Barney Bowers. I'm sorry to say that I'm closing this place."

"What?" yelped the big sailor. "We helped you so you could close this place? Hell, we spoiled our own fun."

Bowers grinned. "If you'll come to my office tomorrow I'll have reservations for all of you for a real party at the Astorbilt. All the champagne you want--free."

"Champagne!" chorused the sailors. "Oh, boy!"

Nell Thompson came forward. "And what about me? You've lost me my job."

Bowers looked at her warmly. "There'll be a better one in my office. And as my associate, I'll have to see you outside of office hours now and then ... Yes?"

Nell Thompson smiled happily. "Yes."

## Snatchers Are Suckers by Robert C. Donohue.




Suddenly Hannah's gun barked at me

# SNATCHERS ARE SUCKERS

By ROBERT C. DONOHUE

*Chauffeur Casey Wades Through a Vicious Kidnap Ring and Lets His Yellow Boss Cop the Glory--but Does All Right for Himself. Too!*

I, DENNIS CORNELIUS CASEY, am not the brightest  guy in the world but I can take a hint when it hits me between the eyes like a caveman's club. So when a surly growl answered me through the cracked door, saying, "Scram, fella! There's no phone here!" and the door slammed in my face, I went right back to Mortimer.

"They have no phone, sir," I announced.

Mortimer was annoyed. Mortimer was almost always annoyed. I think he was born that way--annoyed because the silver spoon in his mouth wasn't platinum. His old man runs a flock of newspapers and Mortimer is a big shot in the enterprise. But the old man does all the work. Mortimer spends the money.

"Nonsense!" he snapped with that superior tone of his.

For two years, I had been his chauffeur, and for two years I had resisted the urge to poke his elegant puss every time he gave out with his superior, annoyed "Nonsense!" I told myself that a moment's ecstasy wasn't worth a steady thirty bucks a week.

"They must have a phone," said Mortimer. "See the wires?"

I saw the wires. They were just visible against the darkening sky. Night was coming in a hurry. The lonely gray road disappeared into purplish haze at both ends. Sandy scrub land to the west glowed faintly under a smoky sunset. The ocean was on the east--nothing but the ocean, half-swallowed in the murk of dusk.

It was a heckuva spot for the car to quit, but that's how it is with these expensive foreign jobs. They're not at all considerate like a Lincoln or a Cadillac, which can be depended upon to break down near a garage--at least within airplane distance of some spare parts that will fit.

"Maybe their phone is not connected," I ventured.

"Nonsense!" said Mortimer. "You just didn't know how to ask them. I'll do it myself!" He threw an annoyed glance at the big, useless car and me and started for the shack.

IT was a crummy little place. You wouldn't think the tenants could afford a telephone. The shack was all alone--there wasn't another building for miles." It was located halfway between the road and the water. To reach it, you had to tightrope a narrow plank across the roadside ditch.

Mortimer negotiated the plank with me steadying the end of it. We stopped and studied the shack.

I didn't like it. In the dimness of fading daylight the scabby window shutters looked sinister.

"Do you hear anything?" whispered Mortimer.

"No. Very quiet folks. No lights, either. I think they are watching us from behind those shutters."

Mortimer started to say, "Nonsense!" but the sudden, incongruous jangle of a telephone startled us both. Light immediately filtered through the shutters, and the ringing was cut off as the receiver was lifted.

"See!" said Mortimer. "There's nothing wrong with that phone!"

I shrugged.

"I still think we ought to wait on the road for a car to come along. There's something phony about this place. The man gave me the impression that--"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mortimer. He walked across the rickety porch and knocked loudly on the door. He seemed very brave, but I knew he wasn't, because, when nobody answered his first knock, he beckoned me closer before he knocked again.

Finally, the door cracked open as it had for me.

"Whaddaya' want?" snarled that heavy, ugly voice.

"I would like to use your telephone for just a moment," said Mortimer, unabashed by the apparent hostility. "My car has broken down. I'd like to call a garage in the next town."

"Wait a minute."

The door closed. Mortimer looked at me. I shrugged. The door opened wide, and a man and a woman stared out at us.

I couldn't see their faces clearly because the light was behind them. The man was long and lanky. The woman was tall too. She had a loose mop of yellow hair.

"Okay," growled the man. "Come in and phone, but make it snappy!"

"Thanks," murmured Mortimer, stepping past them into the room. I eased in also, before the guy could close the door. I would rather have stayed outside, but I was supposed to be a bodyguard as well as a chauffeur.

THE room was just what I expected -- dirty and barely furnished. A rickety table held a new pack of playing cards, a half-bottle of bourbon and a couple of glasses. An old, brass-poster bed shared the remaining space with a frayed davenport.

On the davenport was what, at first glance, I thought was only a heap of blankets. But as Mortimer walked across the room to the telephone, the blankets moved, and I heard a moan. Mortimer stopped.

"That's my sister!" said the gal with the frowzy yellow hair. "She's sick!"

"Oh!" Mortimer glanced curiously at the blankets as he picked up the phone.

The couple watched Mortimer, and I watched the couple. The man's lean face needed a shave, except for a two-inch crescent on his right cheek where an old scar showed white in the middle of black beard. His stringy hair was oily and uncombed. His eyes were like dull black marbles. He fished out a pack of cigarettes, selected and lit one and never took those eyes off Mortimer.

The woman glanced my way a couple of times. She was almost as frayed-looking as the davenport. She was skinny. Too much cheap rouge emphasized the boniness of her coarse face. She might have been pretty, ten years ago.

Mortimer got Information, Information got Mortimer a number and Mortimer finally got a garage. As soon as the call was finished, the guy held open the door.

"Wait outside," he said.

"Of course," assented Mortimer. "Thanks for the use of your phone, old man." He went through his pockets for change.

"That's okay," said the guy impatiently. "You don't owe me anything." The bony blonde flicked nervous blue eyes at the davenport.

Again there was a weak moan. The blankets moved. A corner fell away, and I got a glimpse of auburn hair and a pretty face. The blonde hurried to the davenport. I grabbed Mortimer's arm.

"Let's go," I urged, trying to sound casual.

But Mortimer had seen that face, too. He was too shocked to pretend he hadn't.

"Barbara!" he gasped. "Barbara Stevens!"

The guy with the scar slammed the door and pulled out an automatic at the same time.

"What's Miss Stevens doing here?" demanded Mortimer of the blonde.

"I insist--"

The guy shoved his gun against Mortimer's ribs, and Mortimer closed his mouth abruptly to keep his heart from jumping out.

"Never mind about Barbara," grated the guy. "You can start worrying about yourself! Who are you? How come you know her?"

Mortimer wasn't annoyed now. He was scared stiff, fingertips pointing at the low ceiling.

"I'm Mortimer Allenby," he gulped. "I know Barbara Stevens through her family. Same beach club. What are you--"

THE guy pushed Mortimer into a chair. He waved the gun at me, and I, too, grabbed a seat.

"Didn't you clucks know she was snatched yesterday?" asked Scarface.

We shook our heads. The guy raised an incredulous eyebrow.

"We've been on a fishing trip," explained Mortimer as if he were afraid the gun would pop if he didn't make everything clear. "The radio was out of order, and we haven't seen a paper since we left the boat."

"When did you leave the boat?"

"An hour ago."

"Where?"

"At my cottage north of Bellport."

"Where were you going?"

"To New York, until the car stopped and this happened."

"What--?"

"Were you expected any place tonight?"

"No."

"How come you were off the main highway?"

Mortimer looked imploringly at me.

"I wanted to make time," I said. "There's hardly any traffic on this coast road. No trucks."

Scarface strolled to the davenport, keeping the gun aimed at me and my boss. I heard the blonde say, "Quiet all day--only move out of her--had to happen now!"

The guy shrugged and handed the cannon to the blonde. She kept us covered while he picked up the phone and murmured a number. He held that black-marble stare on Mortimer.

"Yeah, Midge, this is Lou again.... No, I didn't forget anything.... No, don't worry, Midge. Maybe this is good. A punk and his chauffeur just dropped in. The punk's name is Mortimer Allenby--droopy looking twerp, sandy hair, little red mustache, talks with a kind of a English accent.... Oh, you know him! ... Newspapers? That's no good, eh? Shall I bump 'em? ... I dunno. Wait a minute."

He scowled disgustedly at Mortimer for a moment.

"Allenby, do you think your old man would pay fifty grand to get you back alive?"

"Of course he would!" I butted in. Mortimer nodded vigorously.

"Yeah," said Lou into the phone, "Okay, you'll send it right away. Anything new on the girl? ... Okay, but she's a cute kid just the same.... Okay, okay, I'll do it. See you there later."

He gently replaced the receiver.

"We're leaving," he announced. "Going on a little boat trip."

"What about my car?" asked Mortimer.

"That's why we're leaving."

Lou stepped to the bed, reached under a pillow and pulled out another automatic. Now he and his girl-friend each had a gun.

I wouldn't have tried anything even if Mortimer hadn't been too scared to help.

The blonde waved hers at me.

"Okay, big boy," she said in a flinty monotone. "You got muscles. You can carry the debutante."

"It's an honor," I said.

"Don't try to be funny," growled Lou.

Barbara was apparently drugged, her pert face strangely white. I hoped they hadn't given her too much.

I MOVED the ragged blankets. Bright beach pajamas covered the sleeping beauty. Carefully, I slid my arms under her.

"Pick 'er up! Pick 'er up!" rasped the blonde. "She won't break!"

Barbara didn't weigh more than a hundred fifteen, but she was limp and awkward to handle. A man, I would have hoisted over my shoulder. Her head rolled disturbingly when I lifted her.

"Where do we go?" I snapped at Lou.

"Take it easy, flunkey!" Lou snapped back. "Follow Hannah."

The bony blonde who was called Hannah led us outside through the rear door. It was quite dark now--a black night with no moon. There was the smell of the sea and the soft thud of surf on the sheltered beach.

A low ramshackle pier stretched a hundred feet over the water.

"Watch where you walk," ordered Lou from the rear. "Some boards are missing."

He lit a flashlight, but it didn't help me because my burden prevented me from seeing where my feet were stepping.

But I made it to the end of the pier. We all did. Lou's light picked out a mahogany-hulled speedboat. He prodded Mortimer.

"You hop in first."

Mortimer hopped in.

"Now hand the girl to him," Lou ordered.

"I can make it," I said. And I stepped down into the bobbing boat without relinquishing Barbara.

"All right," growled Lou. "But next time I tell you to do something, you do it my way. Understand?"

"Sure. I'm just trying to be helpful."

"You're trying to be funny, and it's gonna get you in trouble."

Lou cast off the lines. He and Hannah got into the front seat. She faced aft, pointing her gun at us over the motor hatch cover. The starter whined. The motor coughed and roared. Lou headed the boat out to sea.

UNDER different circumstances, I could have enjoyed that ride. The throbbing motor lifted the boat high. Spray was a white spinning wall, and occasional drops flew against my face.

The bundle I tenderly embraced was no longer limp. Barbara was conscious. I knew it when I carried her from the shack into darkness.

Now, her lips were against my ear; her quick breath tickled my eardrums.

"Hello, Dennis," she murmured.

"Hello, Miss Barbara. I didn't hand you over to Mortimer. I was afraid he'd drop you."

"Thanks. You're safer, Dennis."

I took time out to grin. Barbara had once dated my boss. He had made a pass at her--to his immediate regret. I wondered if that was what she meant.

"How long have you been awake?"

"Long time. I've been faking. They grabbed me yesterday morning, forced me into a car and gave me the needle. I woke up last night in the shack, and they fed me a doped drink, but I managed to ditch most of it. All today, I kept my eyes closed and listened."

"Smart girl!"

"I heard plenty, but what good will it do? They're going to kill me tonight!" She said it without even a tremor in her voice. Barbara was no sissy.

Next to me, Mortimer was shivering, too scared to open his mouth.

"Miss Barbara," I said. "They won't kill you. Don't worry."

"If dad can't raise the money tonight, they will."

"He'll raise it."

"Dad's practically broke. Nobody knew. He can't raise much."

"Don't worry. This party's only beginning. Keep faking. We'll surprise 'em when the right time comes."

Lou seemed to know where he was going; I figured he was steering by the stars. Soon he cut the motor, and the boat idled to a low dark blot of an

island. Barbara and I stopped talking.

"Where are we?" blurted Mortimer.

"Shut up!" hissed Hannah.

The boat bumped gently against a small, makeshift dock. Lou scrambled out and hitched the lines.

"All out!" he ordered. "End of the line."

"I don't like that 'end of the line' stuff," I muttered.

It was only a few uneven steps from the crude dock to an equally makeshift hut. Hannah went in first and lit a kerosene lamp. The yellow light threw eerie shadows on driftwood walls. The room was damp and smelled of decay. A shabby couch occupied the far wall. As I carried Barbara to it, the floor's rotten wood crumbled under my feet.

"Now I'm gonna tie you two guys up," announced Lou.

"That's okay by me," I said. "Then maybe you and Hannah can put away those cannons; they make me nervous."

"Me, too," piped Mortimer unexpectedly.

HANNAH produced some rope from a closet in a corner. Then she held a gun on us while Lou tied our wrists and ankles to chairs. He took his time and made a tight job of it.

My only consolation was that I had picked out a chair that was close to Barbara's couch. She could untie me if she got a chance.

Lou stood back and admired his job. He turned to Barbara. "Hannah," he said. "Shouldn't this dame be awake by now?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Maybe we better tie her, too."

"No, you don't have to. She'll be too sick from all that dope to make any trouble." Hannah shook Barbara roughly, and the auburn head rolled as if it were on a string. What an act!

"You think we gave her too much?" asked Lou. He didn't seem worried about it. "You think maybe she won't wake up anymore, huh?"

"Geez! I don't know!" Hannah answered irritably. "Maybe she won't. I'm no doctor!"

"All right, don't get sore!" Lou walked to the door. "I'm gonna watch for Midge's signal."

For a while, there wasn't a sound. Hannah sat on the edge of the couch and stared at Barbara. I was afraid that Barbara might open an eye to see what was what and Hannah would find out she was faking, so I tried to draw the big blonde's attention away from her.

"How much are you getting for the girl?" I asked.

"Shut up!" snarled Hannah.

"You're a sweet kid," I countered.

"If you don't shut your mouth, I'll put a gag in it!"

"Aw, Hannah! Why be tough with me? I've got no hard feelings. Tonight isn't costing me anything. I don't care how much you get out of Allenby and the girl so long as I don't wind up in the drink."

"That's just where you will wind up," maliciously grated Hannah. "You're not worth anything. Just a nuisance!"

"I resent that! I've tried to be helpful. Didn't I lug the girl to the boat and from the boat? And didn't I sit nice and quiet while our pal Lou roped me to

this chair?"

"Sure, sure. With a gun in your back you were fine."

"Without a gun I'd be just as cooperative. Untie me, and I'll prove it."

A sour chuckle sifted between Hannah's thin red lips. It was strange how the soft yellow kerosene light took the hardness out of her face. The queer chuckle broke off, and she looked unhappy.

"This isn't funny," she said. "I'm sorry for you, big boy. When Midge comes over--after all, you're a witness. They'll use you and the girl, too, if Stevens doesn't produce--as an example to scare quick money out of Allenby. Yeah, I'm sorry for you, big boy."

"And I'm sorry for you, Hannah. You're not kidding me with your hardboiled act. I can see a lot in your face and in your eyes. You don't belong in this dirty game. You were never meant to--"

"Aw, cut the corn!" snapped Hannah. She moved jerkily from the couch and walked to the door. She stood there, watching Lou, on the dock.

A FAINT creak sounded behind me as Barbara shifted slightly. I felt her tugging at the rope around my wrists. If her dainty hands loosened those knots, it would be first cousin to a miracle. I didn't have much hope.

Hannah seemed very interested in whatever was happening outside. She didn't turn even when the old couch creaked again as Barbara tried my ankles. My wrists were bound as tightly as ever. The knots were too tough.

Suddenly, the pressure of the rope on my ankles relaxed. I stared at the back of Hannah's blonde head and kept whispering softly.

"Don't turn around! Don't turn around! Don't turn around!"

At a time like that, you grab at anything--even mental telepathy, which you ordinarily figure is so much hooey.

Barbara was again tearing at my wrist bindings. It must have been tough on her tender fingers, but she worked frantically.

Outside, Lou made a noise that sounded like a grunt. I could see the faint reflection of his light winking off and on. Hannah straightened, then walked outside and joined Lou on the dock. Now Barbara really went to work. I heard a fingernail snap, and a whispered exclamation that was unladylike, but excusable under the circumstances. All at once, my hands were free.

It was none too soon, either.

"Here they come!" Mortimer whispered, and a second later, Lou and Hannah were back. They looked extra glum.

"What's wrong?" I asked, hoping they wouldn't notice my loosened bindings.

Lou didn't even look at me.

"The girl's old man didn't come through," said Hannah.

Lou's weird eyes were fixed on Barbara.

"It's a shame," he muttered. "She's a cute kid."

The blonde looked a little frightened.

"How do you know he didn't come through?" I asked.

"Midge just told us--by flashlight from the shore."

"Maybe Midge is double-crossing you--scramming with the dough while you stick on this island."

Hannah shot an uncertain glance at Lou. Lou shook his head.

"Midge is on his way," he said. "He'll be here in an hour."

So we had an hour. We waited in silence. The lamp's dirty yellow light flickered against the brown walls and beat vainly against the blackness of the open doorway. I wondered halfheartedly whether a passing boat, police or coast-guard, might notice the faint light and investigate. But there didn't seem to be any passing boats. The silence grew heavy.

The blonde had been standing at the door. Finally, she came over to the couch. I could see her gun weighing down the pocket of her light jacket as she walked. She bent over Barbara.

"That kid will never come out of it," I said. "You've killed her! Every minute you hang around here makes it more likely you'll get caught. You'll burn for that. Kidnaping's bad enough, but for murder, you burn!"

"Shut up!" hissed Hannah. She went back to the door, glanced around, then walked out to the dock. I heard her high heels clumping back and forth.

Lou was nervous too. He smoked cigarettes chain fashion and paced the hut's rotten floor. The butt of his automatic, peeping from his hip pocket, gleamed dully.

THE hour was almost gone. Now was the time to make the break--before Midge arrived, and while the blonde was outside. But Lou would plug me as soon as I moved from my chair. I had to get him near me--where I could reach him without warning.

"Lou, gimme a cigarette," I begged.

"Shut up!"

I tried another angle.

"Lou," I mocked, "you're a sucker!" Funny how every crook would rather be called anything than a sucker. Lou stopped, glared at me, then went back

to his pacing and smoking.

"You're a sucker, Lou. Your pal has run out on you with the Stevens dough. And while you're wasting time here he's probably collecting from old man Allenby, too. You're a sucker, Lou!"

He didn't say anything--just kept walking, looking at me with his black-marble eyes.

I grinned at him, timed his steps, and murmured, "Sucker!" He heard it twice every time he crossed the room. In a minute, he was sick of it. He came over to me.

"I told you to shut up!" he snarled. He walloped me across the jaw with the hard palm of his big hand. I let him hit me once. Then I leaped from the chair.

My head butted his face. I felt the shock, even through my thick Irish skull, so I guess it didn't do Lou any good. Instinctively, he reached for his gun, but he never touched it because I bent him then with a left in the stomach. I corrected his posture with a hefty uppercut, then battered him across the room with every shot in the locker.

The wall stopped him, and the hut shook. I pinned him there and drove my right into his bloody face.

"Never give a rat a break," is my motto. Suddenly, Hannah was standing in the doorway, her automatic barking at me.

I let go of Lou and lifted my hand. Lou slowly slid down into a loose heap, his head bumping the rough wall.

"Put up your hands!" shouted Hannah.

"I got 'em up!" I observed weakly. She'd missed me when I was moving after Lou, but I'd be crazy to play my luck too far.

Hannah glanced anxiously at what was left of Lou. She gritted her teeth and glared at me.

"If you killed him, I'll kill you!" she said.

Believe me, the gal wasn't fooling. I kept my hands high.

"He's okay," I said. "Just tired. Well, what now? You're boss. I wasn't fast enough."

Hannah didn't seem quite sure what to do. She darted a suspicious scowl at Barbara who still pretended to be asleep, but the gun held an unwavering bead on my middle. My arms were getting tired when the drone of an approaching boat reached us, and every breath stopped for a shocked second.

"That's Midge!" cried Hannah. "*He'll* handle you!"

I didn't doubt it. Now, I'd be tied again. It seemed as if I'd skinned my knuckles on Lou's wire beard for nothing.

Lou groaned. He was huddled grotesquely. I thought of the gun in his pocket. "I'd better straighten him out," I suggested. "He can't breathe so well like this."

"Go ahead," nodded Hannah. Her eyes narrowed. "But keep away from his gun!"

I SLIPPED my hands under his armpits and lifted. Hannah circled into the room so that I wouldn't be able to use Lou as a shield. She was smart, but she didn't figure on Barbara. As soon as Hannah's back was turned, Barbara came to life and threw a pillow.

It glanced off the frowzy head. I ducked under the gun, grabbed Hannah's skinny wrist and twisted. The automatic spat harmlessly at the wall. Hannah screamed with pain. Her fingers stiffened, and the gun dropped. I kicked it toward Barbara.

All at once, everything was quiet, except for the roar of Midge's boat--going away! I chuckled.

"Your pal's running out on you after all! The noise scared the rat!"

Hannah slumped into a chair, sobbing--no fight left.

The ride back to the mainland was pleasant with Barbara snuggled close. Mortimer bravely kept the two guns aimed at sobbing Hannah and battered Lou.

That's the way he posed for the pictures that were wired all over the country. Maybe Mortimer's importance in the business had something to do with it. Anyhow, the papers made him a national hero. The stories skipped the fact that he had been only a spectator while the action was popping.

All of which was okay by Barbara and me. Reporters have to play politics once in a while just like everyone else. Usually, newspapers tell things right.

Soon, they'll be telling you about the wedding of an ex-debutante and an ex-chauffeur.

**Suicide Satchel By J. Lane Linklater.**

# **Suicide Satchel**

*By J. Lane Linklater*



*When Joe started out for his wedding, he didn't expect his gun-toting past would delay him. For Joe had resigned from the gang. But when he stumbled on a corpse, he found he was carrying a suicide satchel.*

JOE knew that he mustn't get caught. That was the first thing that banged into his head when the man dropped dead. He had to get away at once. But it all happened so quickly.

He was walking down the street, carrying the handbag. It was quite late; past midnight. The street was almost deserted. And Joe was thinking of Mary. He knew that Mary was expecting him in Baneville. They were going to get married. He was to take the morning train.

He was so absorbed with thoughts of Mary, that he didn't see anyone at first. Mary had given him a year's grace. He had told her of his past when he'd had a different last name. He had assured her that he had never really hurt anyone; that he never wanted to hurt anyone.

And he had figured it all out by himself that he couldn't be a crook without hurting people sooner or later--even if he only used his guns to throw a scare into the folks he held up.

Joe had told her all that. And she had believed him, without much difficulty. He was such a gentle-looking fellow, something like a piano-player is supposed to look; mild-mannered and soft-voiced. And he liked to read--especially history.

But, because she was wiser than he, Mary had decided that he must prove his worth by living one clean, honest year. He had done that. And she had written him that she was all ready for the wedding.

Mary knew. But nobody else--for Mary's sake--must know.

THEN it happened. He was walking down the street. He had almost reached a corner--carrying a handbag. A car was standing at the curb. On the sidewalk, near the car, was a young man. Joe had almost passed him when he recognized him. He tried to hurry by, but the young man stopped him.

"How're you, Joe?" he said, staring at him queerly.

"Hello, Louis," Joe answered, pausing for a minute.

Joe really hadn't wanted to see Louis, because Louis belonged to a past that he wanted to leave far behind. And, of all of his old associates, there were none he liked less than Louis, but, having stopped, it seemed necessary to be friendly.

"How's things, Louis?" asked Joe.

Louis' grin was barely visible in the darkness. "Busy as hell," he said. "Busy as hell."

Joe was uncomfortable. "That's swell, Louis," he said.

"How's things with you, Joe?" Louis said then.

"Couldn't be better," said Joe. He would not, of course, tell him about Mary, nor about anything else, for that matter. "Leaving town in the morning."

Louis didn't seem to be looking at him. But he kept on talking, musingly. "What's in the handbag, Joe?"

Joe answered promptly: "History, Louis. In four volumes. One large and three--"

And then it happened. Louis was paying no attention to Joe at all. Another man had swung around the corner, was a few feet away. He stopped abruptly as he saw Louis.

Something appeared in Louis' hand. Flame stabbed the darkness. Shots shattered the stillness of the night.

The man cried out something hoarsely, then sank to the ground.

A gun clattered on the sidewalk beside the fallen man. Louis was in the car instantly, and driving rapidly away. Joe stood quite still, unable to move. He was still thinking, wildly, of Mary.

ALMOST at once, another man appeared from around the corner. He was a large man, with a cunning face. He had, Joe somehow noticed, a long thin nose. He stared at the man on the ground. He seemed not to notice Louis driving away in the car.

Then it was that Joe realized in a flash that he had to get away. This man had seen him. There was a dead man on the ground, a gun alongside of him--and no one else but Joe.

And that would mean a murder charge!

There was the dead man--and there was the gun! Louis' fingerprints would not be on that gun, for he had worn gloves. Joe would probably find it impossible to prove that it wasn't his. If he were caught, he would be charged with murder; his past record would be brought up, and even if he managed to prove his innocence, his future with Mary would be destroyed.

Louis, of course, would have an alibi all ready; it wouldn't do any good for Joe to tell the police that Louis did it.

The man on the corner was still staring at Joe. Suddenly, two or three other men appeared from doorways across the street. Joe turned and ran down the block. He was far short of the next corner when another large figure appeared ahead of him--a patrolman.

Joe stopped short. It appeared to him vaguely, then, that several men were running in his direction.

He was standing in front of a two-story house. His eye caught sight of a card in the window: FURNISHED ROOMS. Running from the sidewalk, by the side of the building, back to the rear, was a dark walk.

Joe turned and ran swiftly down the walk.

He halted abruptly in a back yard. The yard was surrounded by a high fence, too high to climb without something to stand on. There was nothing to stand on.

Three steps ran up to a small porch and the back door of the house. Joe ran up the steps, tried the door. It was locked. Near the door was a small window. The glass window had been left open, but there was a latched screen.

Joe produced a knife, quickly pulled the screen as far away from the window as possible, inserted the knife and dislodged the catch. He swung the screen open, sprang up on the sill. It was a little awkward, because he was still clinging to the handbag. But he made it.

There were footsteps pounding down the walk toward him.

He slipped across the sill, dropped to the floor inside, pulled the screen down and latched it. He was in a small pantry. It was dark, but he could make out shelves and cupboards; close by was an open doorway.

Just outside, in the backyard, were sounds of heavy, lunging tramping. Then there was silence for a moment.

Joe squinted through the screen. Some one was playing a flashlight against the high walls.

"He ain't here," muttered a voice.

"And he couldn't of got over them fences this quick," said another.

"Maybe got in the house here some way," said the first.

Almost at once, the footsteps started again and came up on the back porch.

Joe moved quickly through the open doorway into a corridor. He stood there in the darkness for a moment as he heard some one trying the back door, at the end of the corridor. He stepped forward lightly then. The corridor ran straight through the house to the front door.

Halfway down the corridor, a stairway started up to the second floor. Probably the best thing to do, Joe thought, was to go to the front door, open it, glance out, watch for a chance to walk away from the house. He could pretend, if necessary, to be a roomer in the house, just going out.

He reached the bottom of the stairway, stopped suddenly. Some one was at the front door, just inserting a key.

SWIFTLY, Joe found the bottom step of the stairway, started up. He had reached the top when the front door opened. He paused there, out of sight from the bottom. The man who had entered made straight for the stairs. Joe slipped down the dimly-lit second-floor corridor. There were doors on each side of him. If only he could risk finding one room empty--

Soon he had reached the end of the corridor. The footsteps were coming deliberately up the stairs. There was only one small window at the end of the corridor, high up. It offered no escape.

Just to the right of him was a closed door. Joe seized the knob, turned it, pushed. The door opened. He entered the dark room noiselessly, closed the door again. He stood against the door in the darkness, waited.

The footsteps were coming along the corridor. Presently they halted. Then he heard someone knocking on a door--the door just across the corridor.

There was a silent pause, then came the low voice of the man in the corridor, talking to someone in the room there, through the door. "Hey, Post, open up!"

The man's voice sounded, excited.

Joe could hear the door across the corridor being opened, and the blurred sound of whispering voices. Then the door closed again.

Joe's sigh of relief was suppressed, and brief. He was in some one's room. He did not know, yet, if he was alone. His eyes tried to pierce the darkness, but he could see nothing but vague shapes.

He moved away from the doorway, slowly, his hand groping along the wall. Presently his fingers stopped against a light button. He thought a moment.

He could wait there in the darkness, or he could switch on the light. There were risks in either course. He decided quickly. He pressed his finger against the button.

The room was bathed in sudden light. There was no one but himself in the room. It was well-furnished; a bed, table, desk, divan, chairs. A man's room, evidently, for ties were slung over the bureau.

It seemed very quiet in the room. Joe moved about on tiptoe, put the handbag down on the floor, behind the divan, then sat down on a chair.

Suppose somebody came in, caught him there? He would claim that he had just made a mistake; say that he was making an urgent call on a friend, but that he had never been there before, and that he thought that it was his friend's room and had decided to wait for him.

It was a far-fetched explanation, but the best he could think of.

He began to think, then, of the man Louis had shot, down there near the corner. The dead man, no doubt, was a crook, like Louis. Society would not suffer from his passing. Still it was murder. It worried Joe to think that he was running from the law, holding back what he knew to save himself. But, he told himself, he was doing it for Mary rather than for himself.

Mary! She would be waiting for him in the morning. It was now about one o'clock. The train left at six, reached Baneville at nine. And now--here he was!

Joe reflected, a little bitterly, that he wouldn't be here now except for his anxiety to clean up the past completely before the wedding.

SO far, no one knew that he had seen, the killing--no one except the man who had turned the corner just after it had happened, the man with the long thin nose. That man was the only one who could recognize him.

But he couldn't stay in this room much longer. He decided to leave the room, go to the head of the stairs, and, if possible, make another try for the front door.

Joe got up, started toward the door. He had almost reached it when he heard the door across the corridor being opened, and the voices of two men. He heard distinctly the voice of one of the men, saying: "If there's any trouble, Carson will call me."

Then the door was closed again. Joe stopped, waited, listening for the visiting man to go back down the corridor to the stairs. Then, suddenly, he caught his breath. The man was not going down the corridor; he had crossed it, had his hand on the doorknob of this room!

In a dizzy frenzy, Joe rehearsed what he was to say to the man, about his visiting a friend, and the friend being out, and--

Abruptly, the door swung wide open.

The man standing there was the one who had seen him down on the corner-- the man with the long thin nose!

Joe stood speechless. The man in the doorway stared at him just as he had stared at him outside on the street. Even at a distance of several feet, he seemed to tower over Joe. A slow grin appeared on his face.

Then he called out, in a loud voice: "Heh, Post, come here!"

THE door was still open. Joe saw the door across the corridor open then, and another man appeared, bathrobe over pajamas.

"What's the matter, Stacker?" he asked.

He came across the corridor, stood by the side of the man called Stacker. He, too, stared.

"See what I found!" said Stacker.

"Who the hell is he?" asked Post.

Stacker laughed. "Why, he's the punk that drilled poor old Slausen!"

Joe was still silent. He noted that this Stacker knew the murdered man--noted it vaguely, still driven by the thought that he had to get away, somehow.

"I didn't kill anyone!" he said suddenly.

Stacker laughed again. "Post," he said, sharply, "you frisk this lug!"

Post, a short, strongly-built man with a block for a head, approached Joe carefully, ran a hand over him.

"He ain't got a thing," he said finally. "Not a thing that looks like a gat." He grinned at Joe.

"Guess he only had one on him," said Stacker. "That's the one he used on Slausen--and he threw that down on the sidewalk." He was looking at Post queerly. "You hang onto him, Post. I'll go get the law!"

Joe looked anxious. "But I tell you--"

"Aw, shut up!"

Post pushed him back, and he suddenly sat on the edge of the bed. Stacker looked at him once more, in his queer way, then turned and went out. Joe could hear him hurrying along the corridor, then down the stairs.

Post was standing over him. Joe could see that he was very powerful, in spite of his shortness.

Post grinned. "You look like a hell of a killer to me," he said. "Still you never can tell by a guy's looks. What you plug him for?"

"I didn't," said Joe. "I--I just happened to be around when it happened."

"Yeah? Then why did you beat it?" Joe couldn't answer that. It was because of Mary. It came to him again, with sudden force, that he had to get away. But Stacker would be back soon--in a minute or two--with the cops.

Instinctively, he started to his feet. Post pushed him in the face, forced him down again. Joe looked up at the man. There was no question that Post was much stronger than he. But Joe was quick--very quick.

"I climbed in a back window," he announced, suddenly.

"Yeah?" said Post, not very much interested.

"And I hurt my foot," Joe went on. He bent down quickly, as if to rub his foot. His hands reached out, caught Post by the ankles. He jerked sharply. Post spun in the air, crashed to the floor.

Almost before Post hit the floor, Joe snatched the clothes off the bed, flung them over Post--sheets and blankets. He was on his feet now, took the table and pushed it over on Post, now struggling in the bedding.

Joe ran for the door, slipped the key out of the lock on the inside, stepped out to the corridor just as Post was emerging from the bedding. Joe slammed the door shut and locked it, while inside Post was roaring like a bull.

Joe ran down the corridor, skipped down the stairs, light feet hitting the steps softly, reached the main floor hallway. He had almost reached the front door, which was partly open, when he heard steps and voices on the sidewalk outside.

Just beside him, to the left, was an open doorway. The room inside was lighted--one standing lamp. Instantly, Joe guessed that this was the landlady's room, that perhaps she had gone out to get the police with Stacker.

He stepped into the room, stood behind the door.

The front door was being pushed open. He could hear Stacker's voice, talking to the others: "I got a pal of mine watching him."

Then a woman's voice--probably, Joe thought, the landlady's--said: "The nerve of the fellow, coming up into my place like that!"

THEY all hurried past the open door, then up the stairs. There was a terrific clatter from upstairs. Joe knew that was Post hammering on the locked door. And he knew that he couldn't wait. He stepped back out to the hallway. The street door was still open. He paused a brief moment, then, as calmly as he could, walked out.

Just outside he was brought to a full stop; standing on the sidewalk was a uniformed policeman. The patrolman eyed him dubiously.

"Well," Joe said, rapidly, "they got him all right."

"Yeah?" said the patrolman.

"Sure," said Joe, lightly. "My pal, Stacker, left me to take care of him. It was a cinch--just a little guy, no bigger than me. They got him now. Sent me down to ask you to come up and help him."

The patrolman ran up the Steps to the house, not waiting for Joe, Joe walked away, trying not to appear to be hurrying. He reached the next corner, was just turning it, when he thought he heard a commotion back at the front door of the rooming-house.

He was out of sight now. He felt the urge to race away. But he knew that would be difficult. They would be after him at once.

He stopped suddenly. There, at the curb, was a taxi. Joe yanked open the door, jumped in.

"Hey," yelled the driver. "You can't do that. I got a fare. I'm waiting--"

"There's an alley right across the street," Joe cut in. "And I got plenty dough. I'm getting away from a tough guy. You go like hell!"

He had pulled his wallet from his pocket, was displaying it. The driver grinned, started the taxi, shot across the street and up the alley.

"Don't stop until I tell you," Joe shouted at him.

Joe was elated. It had been unexpectedly easy. The taxi was sliding away at top speed, skidding around corners, vanishing completely away from the scene of the murder.

Suddenly, Joe sat up taut. His lips went dry. Sweat dampened his forehead. The handbag! He had left the handbag up there in Stacker's room--They could trace him by that bag.

Joe leaned forward, touched the driver on the shoulder.

"Stop!" he yelled.

The taxi skidded to a stop. The driver turned and stared at him.

"What the--"

"Go back!" Joe said wearily. "Take me back to where you picked me up!"

THE driver muttered his astonishment, swung the cab about and headed back. He was taking his time now.

"Go fast!" urged Joe. "Fast as you can!"

In less than ten minutes from the time he had left, Joe was stepping out of the taxi. He paid the driver, stood on the sidewalk, thinking rapidly. He was thinking of what he had heard Stacker tell Post out there in the corridor--that some one named Carson would call him if there was any trouble.

Down on the next corner, away from the rooming house, was a drug store.

Joe speeded in that direction, entered the store, spoke to the clerk.: "Who runs the rooming house down in next block?"

"Mrs. Buzzel," the clerk said promptly. "But I don't think you'd like it there--she's a crabby old witch."

"Okay," said Joe. "That's all I need to know."

He stepped to the phone booth, thumbed the directory, found the number, dialed it. A lady's voice answered presently, rather irritably. Joe had torn a sheet from the back of the directory, held it over the mouthpiece, lowered his voice.

"Let me speak to Stacker," he said. "And tell him to make it snappy."

"Oh, all right," said the woman, grudgingly.

Joe waited. Soon came the sound of Stacker's voice: "Hello."

"Carson talking," said Joe. "Trouble. Come right over."

"But--"

"Can the chatter. Big trouble. Got to get it fixed up. Come right over."

He snapped the receiver on the hook, stepped out into the drugstore, killed a few minutes looking over the magazine rack. Then, disregarding the curious stares of the clerk, he stepped out, walked briskly down the street toward the rooming house.

The street was deserted now. Joe turned and walked up the front steps, tried the door. It was locked. He quickly walked down the steps again, then went along the alleyway by the side of the house.

He hesitated a moment. Everything was quiet. He climbed in through the pantry window as he had before. There he stood still, listened. The house seemed utterly quiet. In a little while he was walking noiselessly along the

second-floor corridor toward the rear. He stopped just outside Stacker's room, his ear close to the door.

There were no voices, nothing to indicate that there was anyone in the room. Stacker, no doubt, had left in response to the phone call. And the officers would have nothing to wait there for.

In a moment, Joe grasped the knob, turned it, pushed. The room was in darkness. He closed the door again. He jabbed the light button. There was no one in the room. He made for the divan.

The handbag was there!

A moment later he was walking quickly out of the room, carrying the handbag; down the stairs to the front door. He snapped off the night latch, opened the door, peered out cautiously.

There was still no one in sight. He was out on the sidewalk and walking briskly down the street in a few seconds--down toward the corner where Louis had killed Slausen an hour or so before.

JOE was breathing easier now. He was within a step or two of the corner. So he had slipped through, after all! He was thinking again of Mary, of the wedding in the morning, of their life together, of--

A large man emerged from the shadows, then another. The two men were directly in front of him. He found that he could not pass them, and he stopped.

One of them turned a flashlight on him.

"Say, Bill," said one of them, with a note of surprise, "this looks like the guy we're looking for!"

"Yeah," said the other. "The guy with the handbag. Come along with us!"

Joe found his voice: "With--with you! Where to?"

"Headquarters," said the man.

Joe was simply swept along. The two detectives had a car around the corner. They seemed to be having fun kidding him.

"Help the guy with the handbag, Bill," said the one who took the wheel.

Joe moved his hand back. "No," he protested. "I'll--"

But the one called Bill took the handbag from him, put it carefully in the back of the car. Then he got in with Joe. In a few minutes they were walking into a stone building. And before long they were sitting in a bare-looking office.

They were both looking him over, intently, from his soft felt hat to his small-sized shoes.

"Yeah," said one of them. "He answers the description, all right, Bill."

"Sure he does," said Bill, who was staring at Joe. "You ain't denying it, are you?"

Joe stammered: "But I--"

"Wait a minute." The phone bell had interrupted. The detective called Bill reached for the instrument, listened, chuckled, said "okay" several times, then hung up, grinned at the other detective, and turned to Joe again. "You ain't denying you seen that killing?"

Joe's lips moved, but he couldn't talk.

"Lemme help you," said the other detective. "It was this way. You was walking along, toting your handbag, and you run into a guy named Louis Delano. Delano sees a chance to frame a stranger, and he stops, you. Then another guy comes around the corner and Louis drills him and drives away. But another guy named Stacker pokes his long nose in--and you beat it!"

Joe nodded slowly. "I guess I have to tell you the truth--"

"Sure you do," Bill said enthusiastically. "You was a witness! Trouble is these witnesses to gang killings are always scared and beat it. But you're gonna do your part for law and order, ain't you?"

"Sure I am," said Joe. "But--"

"Attaboy! Well, this case is cleared up in a hurry. That's all due to the phone call!"

"Phone call?" said Joe, startled.

"Sure. We was up there talking to Stacker, and he was giving us a line about you. But we kind of figured him in on the deal. He was supposed to be a pal of Slausen's--the guy that got wiped out. But he really put him on the spot for Louis, see? Well, the phone call came for him and he went out and a couple of our boys tailed him and he went straight to a pal of Louis' named Carson. Louis was there, too. And our boys got the lowdown on the whole thing. The hoods figured it for a pinch and started shooting. But they didn't get away with it. Our men shot back, and Slausen, Louis, Carson--all of 'em were killed. Good thing. Saved the state trial costs." He paused. "That phone call done it!"

JOE drew a long breath. "Here's my address," he said, writing on a piece of paper. "And my name. I been working for Mosen & Rand, Wholesalers, for the last year. You can get me any time you want me. Can I go now?"

The two detectives exchanged glances.

"Okay," said the one called Bill.

"Any time after noon," said Joe. "I'm getting married--" he looked at the clock--"in six hours."

"Good luck. And don't forget your handbag," said Bill.

Joe wasn't forgetting it.

"What's in it?" asked the other officer.

"History," said Joe. "Ancient history. In four volumes--three small and one large. Goodnight!"

Outside he got in a taxi. The taxi took him to the entrance of the park. He walked in the park to the lake, stopped there, looked around.

He unlocked the handbag, opened it. His hand went in four times, and each time it came out his arm made a swinging motion.

Far out in the lake dropped three automatic pistols and a sawed-off shotgun.

**Killer for Sale! By John Bender.**



*The man who knew all about dying had one last lesson for the man who knew all about--killing!*

I SHOULD have known that Izzy would have picked a joint like this. A dirty little dive on the East side. The smell was awful, thick with garbage and the foul breath of the river. I'd run into some places like this in my time, but this one took the cake.

There was no sign on the bar windows, which hadn't been washed in a year, at least. The door slanted crookedly on its rust-eaten hinges, open to the street. As I started for it, a pair of alley cats ducked out of the trash cans in front of the place and slithered away from me.

Inside, a single overhead bulb did a bad job on the gloomy darkness. The bar was small, sour-smelling as the neighborhood. A fat man in a dirty apron stopped slopping with a dirtier rag long enough to look at me.

"Yeah," he said. Half-question, half-hello.

I looked around for the phone booth. "Noonan's place?"

The piece of suet he used for a face perked up. He looked me over. "Whaddya want, bo?" he growled, and leaned his weight forward, so that his belly rested like a pushed-in sausage on the edge of the scarred old bar.

"Whaddya want, eh, bo?"

"A drink," I said. "Just a drink, buster." And I let the half-dollar ring on the wood.

I checked my watch, then, and found I had made it in time. The call wasn't due for a few minutes yet; I could relax some.

I put my hand around the shot the bar-keep had poured. "Your phone work, pally?"

"You got some change there," he grunted. "Find out."

His eyes backed up first, his big body took longer to move. The liquor caught him anyway, slashing across the bridge of his nose and trickling down his pig-face. He spluttered and started a roar, reaching under the counter for the ice bat.

I didn't let him get it. The flat edge of my right hand chopped against his ear. I put my left fist, hard, into the target his belly made above the bar.

"Let's keep a civil tongue, buster," I said. And I let him see the butt end of my gun, beneath my suit coat. . . .

SO HE didn't know the gun had killed a man that afternoon. Or that in half an hour I was supposed to use it on a woman. But he knew enough to eye it carefully. Very carefully.

He got friendlier. He said, wiping his face with his hand, "No need to get tough now, is there, bo? No--"

"No offense?" I said for him. "Of course not." I pointed to the empty glass. "No more of that rotgut, the next time." I grinned. "Bad for the eyes."

He was still smiling uneasily when the phone rang. He made a move for it, but I shook my head and went over to the booth.

"Noonan's Bar," I said, listening to the important silence at the other end.

A voice managed finally, "I'd like to speak to Mister--er--Davis."

I had to smile at this business of a name. Very formal, for murder. "This is Mister--er--Davis," I mimicked. "You're late, Logan."

"I was unavoidably detained. Couldn't get away from the house as soon as I had planned, you see. My wife--"

"Get down to it," I told him.

There was a pause. "Of course," Logan said finally. "To be sure." He cleared his throat nervously. "Well," he said, "I'm out of the apartment, calling from the restaurant around the corner. She--" He stumbled. "She is in bed. The room directly on your left as you come in the small foyer."

"Fine," I said. "Anything else?"

"You--er--you won't be unnecessarily rough about it, will you, Mister Davis?"

"She won't know a thing," I said.

"And--and you won't forget about the rest? The furniture--"

"You don't have to tell me my business. You just come home in three quarters of an hour and call the cops. It'll be all set."

"Fine," Logan said. "That's fine. . . ."

I hung up.

"Here goes," I thought, and I wondered idly if my wife, Helen, would have to wait supper too long for me. She was getting fed up on these late minute jobs of mine, and I couldn't blame her. I hoped the kids wouldn't be in bed by the time I got home. . . .

I left the bar two minutes later, at eight exactly. Outside, I pointed the nose of my car uptown. Traffic had thinned out to the point where I didn't have to worry about it for the few blocks I had to go. I fooled around with the radio, but there was nothing there.

I checked my watch again. No hurry. According to Mr. Jonathan Logan's timetable of murder, his hired gun could squander time. His alibi---not that Logan planned to need one, of course--was solid until eight forty-five. Then he'd return to his apartment, find his home burgled and his wife, Martha, dead as she could be.

Logan's plan was simple enough. All I had to do was make it seem the apartment had been knocked over and that Mrs. Logan had been unlucky enough to get in the way.

Ten thousand bucks, I thought. The things that dough can buy. It was quite a bundle, but cheap at three times the price, the way Logan saw it. After all, a rich and invalid wife is something you don't get rid of every night of the week, when she doesn't want to cooperate. Not in New York State, at any rate.

Divorce, in such cases, is not allowed--I know the law and I can recite it down to the last comma. So could Logan, who was fed up with the wife who was good to him only if she were dead. ....

I found the place easily. The numbers were clearly and expensively marked in gold leaf on the wide glass doors. I parked and went into building, and the doorman didn't give me a second look.

It was a neat little lobby. The elevators were off to the right, around a jog in the thickly carpeted hall. Self-service--another helpful factor, a point in Logan's figuring. The doors closed smoothly after me as I pushed the button for the sixteenth, penthouse floor.

The last apartment on the hall, facing the elevator bank, turned out to be the one I wanted. Sixteen D was off the latch, as Logan had said it would be. I was relieved. But, simple or not, I wasn't taking any chances. The gun came easily and naturally into my hand.

The foyer was bright with light, silent as a tomb. The living room which faced the river was empty, and a quick tour of inspection proved the rest of the apartment was empty as well, except for the bedroom I had not looked into.

Even before I tried that room I could hear the heavy, natural breathing. The woman lay inside on the massive bed, and I made a point of timing my breathing with hers.

A small night light was strong enough to show her face, slack and flushed with sleep. She was younger than I had expected. And better looking. Seeing her this way, you couldn't tell she was an invalid.

As carefully as possible, I made my way over to the bed. . . .

AT PRECISELY eight forty-eight, Jonathan Logan reentered his apartment. He smiled at the disarray which met his glance. He was a tall, reasonably handsome man, blond, barbered and tailored very well.

He walked gingerly through the littered room, as if afraid to disturb any of the disorder. He threw a quick glance into his wife's room, and smiled his

way to the phone in the foyer.

He dialed and said, "Operator!" with more emotion than his face revealed. "I want the police!"

His voice was remarkably excited; he was an excellent actor. "My wife has been murdered! My apartment has been robbed!"

No doubt the desk sergeant told him to take it easy. Logan kept nodding, then he gave them all the details they needed to find the right address.

I waited until he had hung up the phone before I stepped out of the hall closet.

Logan whirled from the phone table at the click the door made. "Who-- what-- what are you doing in here?"

Perspiration fogged his forehead. He was frightened as a cat, and I thought, "They're all alike, they're all routine."

I said, "I figured I'd wait around for you, Logan."

He frowned. "Who are you? What do you want?"

I smiled. "Ten thousand dollars. Remember? That was the price agreed on, wasn't it?"

His eyes and mouth widened together, as if they were hinged. "What do you mean?"

"Mister--er--Davis," I prompted.

"You!" It was as if he had exhaled a ton of air. "But you are not David!"

"Izzy couldn't make it," I said to him. "He was spotted by a dick this afternoon, down at his hotel. He got panicky because he was hot, on the run, dodging two kill raps in Illinois and one in Pennsy. He went for his gun," I said, and opened my hands, spreading them apart in an ancient and easily understood gesture for bad luck.

"But I spoke to him, just a little while ago!"

"You spoke to me," I told him. "Same way you spoke to me this afternoon, when you called Davis at his hotel and arranged about tonight."

"But I thought--"

"That I was Izzy Davis," I said. "I know. I let you think so." I smiled. "You gave me the fill-in on this job--which explained why Izzy Davis was in town--and you told me you'd call me later at Noonan's Bar, when it was clear for me to come up here and knock off your wife. Right?"

Logan stuttered a couple of butts, then he stopped his mouth and just stood there, looking at me. He was breathing hard. He was surprised as hell. Despite his careful tailors and expensive barbers, he didn't look like much.

"Who--who are you?" he asked finally.

I said, "Why not ask your wife?"

He really felt the bang, then. The truth finally began to sift through to him. With a half-strangled sob, he threw open the door to his wife's bedroom; and by now she must have rearranged her position in the bed. I heard her voice, shrieking, tearing at him.

"He's a detective, do you hear! A policeman, Jonathan. They know all about your plan to murder me! Do you hear?"

Her cackled laughter was shrill enough to raise the hairs on anyone's neck.

Logan slammed the door on his wife's shrill screams.

"It's true," he husked. And he must have realized in that moment that we had him, just as we had got Izzy Davis, whom I had killed on a purely routine pick-up assignment and which had led me to this. . . . And that my testimony was going to hang at least an attempted murder charge on him; his phone call to the police was guilty knowledge.

"You're finished, Logan," I said, and let him see the nickel of my badge. "McGowan, New York City Homicide." I shook my head. "You've had it."

Maybe it was the full defeat, the helplessness of his position that did it. I don't know. You don't look for motives like you buy a pair of socks. All I saw was Jonathan Logan pawing at his pocket. And the blue-black flash of a small gun.

It was automatic, natural as breathing for me. I slapped my armpit, fell toward the carpet, and pumped the .38 at least three times before I began examining the situation closely.

Logan was damaged but not dying, coughing blood all over the front of his expensive suit.

Inside the bedroom, I could hear his wife sobbing wildly.

I went over to the phone and called my wife, Helen. She was nice about the late dinner we were going to have, and she said she'd keep the kids up till I got home.

## Balance of Power by Jerome Severs Perry

(pseudonym of Robert Leslie Bellem)



*She'd double-crossed him once--and now she asked him for help! Ben Tiffany wouldn't have her for a client if she were the last person on earth! Until she got herself bumped off in his office!*

"YOU might just as well pull down your skirt, sister," Ben Tiffany said to the brunette Margot Dixon. "I know you've got nice ankles, good legs, and dimpled knees. They don't intrigue me one damned bit. Nor am I interested in the color of your step-ins."

The Dixon girl flushed as she sat in the chair across from Tiffany's desk in his private office. She uncrossed her shapely legs and arranged her tight skirt more primly, so as to conceal the provocative enticements which hitherto had been rather daringly exposed. "When did you become a woman-hater, Ben?" she asked acidly. "When I was your private secretary, in the old days, you were always interested in the color of my step-ins."

Tiffany grinned a sour grin. "Yes. But you're just the same as rat-poison to me now, Margot. You double-crossed me once and caused my disbarment as a criminal attorney. That's why I have to make my living these days as a shystering private dick. I'm not forgetting."

"I'm not asking you to forget, Ben. And I don't blame you for being sore at me. But--well, I need a favor. And you're the only one I can turn to."

"That's a laugh. I should do you a favor!"

MARGOT DIXON flushed again. She bit her red-ripe, passionate underlip. She was a good-looking female, with more than her share of allure. But she seemed to understand that her feminine wiles wouldn't get her very far in this instance. She leaned forward earnestly. "Listen, Ben--"

"Yes. I'm listening." Tiffany's dark, aquiline features were expressionless, unmoving. A thin stream of cigarette smoke dribbled from his narrow nostrils. His eyes were black buttons, unwinking, like a snake's eyes.

"I--I'm in love!" the girl spoke softly.

Ben Tiffany grinned wolfishly. "Again? Who's the unfortunate guy?"

"It's Jerry Herndon."

"Not the son of old Felix Herndon, who just died? Felix Herndon, president of Consolidated Theater Enterprises?"

Margot Dixon nodded. "Yes. And--and I'm afraid I've got Jerry into a pretty bad jam, Ben."

Tiffany grunted. "That's a habit of yours, getting your sweethearts into bad jams. What's the low-down this time?"

"I may as well make a clean breast of the whole thing," the girl burst out impetuously, bitterly. "When Jerry's father died, the control of Consolidated Theaters passed to two separate groups. One group is headed by Aaron Abrams. The other is dominated by Victor Faber and his crowd. Each group holds forty-five per cent of the Consolidated stock." Ben Tiffany nodded. "That adds up to ninety per cent. Who's got the remaining ten per cent?"

"Jerry Herndon, the boy I love. His father left it to him."

"Makes young Herndon rather an important figure in the voting, doesn't it?" Tiffany observed. "Whichever group he strings along with, holds the reins. That it?"

The girl nodded. "Yes. And the Victor Faber crowd want to oust the present management, put in their own straw-man executives for the purpose of looting the company out of millions of dollars. I--I was hired by Victor Faber to become intimate with Jerry Herndon. The idea was to compromise Jerry in some way, and blackmail him into voting his stock with the Victor Faber group."

"Nice girl. That sort of work is right down your alley!"

The Dixon female blushed a little. "I know. You think I'm seven kinds of a rat. Maybe I am. But--well, now that I've done my dirt. I'm sorry for it! You see, I'm ... going to have a baby."

Ben Tiffany scowled. "Whose?"

"Jerry Herndon's. And Jerry wants to marry me."

"He must be screwy. Of course you grabbed him up?"

"No. I turned him down, cold."

"You're even screwier than Jerry Herndon. Why did you do it?"

"HOW could I marry him, knowing that I'd double-crossed him beforehand? I--I let him take me across the state line, into New Jersey, several times. We stayed at an Atlantic City hotel--registered as man and wife. The hotel-registry cards are part of the blackmail evidence. There's a batch of candid-camera snapshots of us ... in our room together. There's a half-dozen dictaphone records. The Victor Faber gang are going to spring that stuff on Jerry any day now. They'll use it to force Jerry to vote his stock as they dictate."

"Okay. Go ahead and marry young Herndon. Then all that Mann-act evidence will be washed out."

"True," Margot Dixon said slowly. "But if I marry Jerry, the Victor Faber crowd will spring that evidence anyhow. They'll give it to Jerry just to show him what sort of double-crossing wench he married. Jerry will kick me out on my ear. And I--I couldn't stand that, Ben. I--I Jove Jerry Herndon."

"So what? Am I expected to break down and sob?"

"No. But--but I thought you might help me."

"How?"

"By--by stealing that evidence from the Victor Faber gang."

Ben Tiffany shook his head. "No soap, sister. I'm not interested. You got yourself into this mess. Now get yourself out of it."

"Ben--you wouldn't turn me down--" The Dixon girl's words were suddenly, brutally interrupted. From an open window across the areaway of the building, directly opposite Ben Tiffany's office, there came an abrupt, barking report. A pistol-shot.

Margot Dixon screamed. Her hand went to the out-thrust mound of her left breast--a mound sharply delineated by her tight frock. She swayed; slumped forward slowly out of her chair. She sprawled on the floor.

"What the hell and damnation!" Ben Tiffany rasped. He leaped to his feet; hurled himself at the fallen girl. He rolled her over. Her eyes stared upward into his.

"Victor ... Faber's mob ... shot me to ... shut my ... mouth..." she gasped. A gush of red spewed from her flaccid lips. Her eyes walled upward; the whites showed eerily.

Ben Tiffany's hands went to the neck of the girl's clinging wool frock. Ruthlessly he ripped at the material tore it open almost to her waist.

She wore no brassiere. Her exposed breasts were softly rounded cones of feminine perfection. But over her heart there was a hideous, ominous smear of crimson.

"Right through the heart!" Tiffany grated. He made no attempt to feel for pulse-beat. There was no use. Instead, he straightened up; flung himself at his office door. He smashed his way into the outer corridor. From his shoulder-holster he yanked out his flat, blue-steel, snub-snouted automatic.

He pelted down the hallway, around a corner; whirled himself around a second square turn. Now he was in that part of the office-building across the areaway from his own quarters. He saw an open door.

It gave access to a vacant office directly opposite his own. Its open window looked across the air-shaft at Tiffany's window. It was from this empty office that the death-bullet must have come.

But there was no sign of the murderer, nothing but one or two cigarette-stubs, indicating that someone had been there not very long before. Ben Tiffany picked up one of the stubs. It had been crushed by a shoe-sole; but

its ashy end was still faintly warm. No doubt but that the killer had just departed....

Tiffany launched himself out of the vacant room, around the corridor to his own office. At his door he almost collided with a pert-looking red-haired girl.

The girl's face was pale. "Ben--what happened? I heard a shot--!" she gasped.

"Step aside, Midge." Tiffany shouldered the red-haired girl out of his path, slammed into his office. His eyes widened. He felt the short hairs standing at the nape of his neck. "For God's sake--!" he breathed unevenly.

The girl followed him into the room. "What's the matter?" she whispered.

Ben Tiffany pointed. "There was a dead dame on the floor there a minute ago. Now the corpse is gone!"

"G-gone? A d-dead dame--?"

"Yes. Gone! Get it? Gone! By God, they certainly worked damned fast!" Tiffany whirled on her. "Did you see anybody coming out of here when you came down the stairs just now?"

"N-no."

"Just what were you doing?"

"I was upstairs in our other office, listening over the dictaphone--the same as I always do when you have a client. I was taking down the conversation in short-hand. Then I heard the sound of a shot. I ran out, came down here as fast as I could. You bumped into me. That's all I know about it."

Ben Tiffany stared at the girl. "Midge Malloy," he said, "you're a damned efficient secretary. But you don't move fast enough. I ought to fire you."

"But--but you haven't told me what happened," the girl's violet eyes were wide.

"YOU heard the whole conversation if you were listening over the dictaphone. Okay. That shot you heard was a murder-shot. My visitor, Margot Dixon, got plugged through the ticker. I ran out to see if I could catch the murderer. The bullet came from that vacant office across the air-shaft. I missed the guy--he got away. Then, when I get I back here, I find Margot Dixon's corpse vanished. That's the layout. What do you make of it?"

The red-haired and diminutive Midge Malloy narrowed her eyes. "Obviously the Victor Faber crowd knocked off your friend Margot Dixon. And they sneaked off with her corpse. Without a corpus delicti, you can't call in the cops and charge anybody with murder. They'll probably destroy the Dixon dame's body. Your hands are tied, Ben."

Ben Tiffany's hard jaw shot forward pugnaciously. "My hands tied, hell!" he rasped. "I'm going to get those guys, and get them good and plenty."

"You mean--you're going to tangle with the Victor Faber outfit? But you can't do that! They're powerful--they'll smash you, Ben! They'll frame you for something or other if you try to make trouble for them!"

"That's my lookout," Ben Tiffany reached for his hat, grimly.

Midge Malloy blocked his path with her tiny, ultra-feminine body. "I won't let you go, Ben. That Dixon dame wasn't worth it, alive or dead! She double-crossed you once, in the old days. You've told me about that, many a time. I can't see why you should bother avenging her murder--"

Tiffany's thin lips peeled back in a smile that was completely without mirth. "Nobody," he said evenly, "can bump off a client of mine and get away with it."

"She wasn't your client. You'd just refused to help her."

"I'm changing my mind, Midge. Margot Dixon's dead; I can't bring her back to life. But I can throw a monkey wrench into Victor Faber and his crew."

'Oh, Ben--I'm afraid! Afraid for you--!'

He gathered her into his arms, pressed swift kiss upon her trembling lips. For the briefest of instants, her solid, boyish breasts--like hard little melons through her thin frock--were crushed against him. She panted a little....

"You're a sweet kid," Tiffany said. "But get the hell out of my way."

"No!"

He raised his open hand, slapped her hard across the face. The force of the blow sent her spinning, reeling away from him. "Ben--you damned fool--!" she cried out.

"So-long, baby," Ben Tiffany said. "Hope I didn't hurt you." And he went out, whistling that tuneless monotone which invariably indicated that a certain private dick was on the war-path.

BEN TIFFANY'S apartment was comfortable, cozy, intimate. There was a dim light burning, at the end of the davenport. There was a blonde, chippie-looking female in Ben Tiffany's arms.

"You haven't finished your drink, baby. Kill it off so I can make up a new batch," Tiffany said.

The blonde girl shook her head tipsily. When she spoke, it was with a tinge of alcoholic incoherence. "No more drink. I've had eight already. I'm swacked."

"You're not swacked. You're just feeling good. You feel plenty good to me," Tiffany added. His arm circled her waist, pulled her roughly against him.

She frowned drunkenly. "Funny!" she muttered. "I just met you this evening. Flirtation. Now I'm already letting you get fresh. What's the matter with me? I didn't know I had so little self-control." She raised her glass, drained it. "Why did I come up here to your apartment, anyhow?" she demanded hazily.

"To look at my etchings."

"You haven't shown 'em to me."

"I'd sooner look at you. You're much prettier. You're too pretty to work as a stenographer for Victor Faber. If he had any sense he'd put you in one of Consolidated Theater's stage shows."

"You think I'm pretty, do you?" the girl whispered coquettishly. She stretched her arms over her head, so that her full breasts pouted outward through her dress, strained at the silk.

"I know you're pretty." Ben Tiffany kissed her on the mouth, hotly and passionately. She responded; parted her moist lips and clung to him tempestuously.

"You kiss nice," the girl said.

"There are other things I do just as well," Tiffany smiled.

"Such as what?"

He grinned dangerously. His black, shoe-button eyes were like a snake's eyes--unwinking, glittering. "Don't tempt me."

"Why not? Can't you resist temptation?" the girl challenged him boldly.

"No. I can't." Ben Tiffany caught her around the waist, again drew her against him. Her voluptuous, feminine body was yielding and soft and warm.

He kissed her again. With his mouth he worked at her lips, felt them part. Her hot breath came in unsteady gasps.

"Isn't it too warm in here?" she whispered.

"Take off your dress and be comfortable, then."

"Mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

SHE stood up; unhooked the snaps of her frock. She whipped the silken, clinging garment upward over her head. It was like the unveiling of a statue in living white marble. The girl wore a lace brassiere and white satin panties that encased her hips like a form-fitting, glove-tight skin.

Her breasts were lush, arrogant, bold. They were firm and ripe and the skin of them gleamed smooth and white through the network of lace.

"Like me?" she whispered.

"Crazy about you!" He caught her in his arms, pulled her close.

She looked up hazily, let her lips touch his lightly.

Then she closed her eyes; put her white, naked arms about his neck.

LATER, when the girl was asleep, Ben Tiffany stole across the room and picked up her handbag. He rummaged through it. He found a ring of keys, abstracted them and shoved them into his pocket. One of those keys, he knew, would open the door of Victor Faber's downtown suite of offices. The blonde girl was one of Faber's string of stenographers. It was her job to open up the offices every morning. Tiffany had got this information out of her while plying her with drinks.

Now he took another look at the sleeping girl. He wanted to be sure she wouldn't awaken prematurely, discover the loss of her keys and warn Faber, her employer.

There wasn't much chance of her waking up, Tiffany decided. She seemed almost drugged, anaesthetized, by liquor and the lassitude of her exhausting emotions....

Ben Tiffany put on his hat and coat. He went out of the apartment.

He went downtown to the building where Victor Faber's luxurious offices were located. He let himself into the Faber suite, using the keys he had stolen from the blonde girl.

The suite was pitch-dark. Tiffany used his flashlight, hooding it with his fingers so that only a faint red glow showed through his flesh to light the way. He came to Victor Faber's private office, entered it.

There was a wall-safe. Ben Tiffany doused his flashlight, set fire to a cigarette. In the cigarette's faint glow he started working on the wall-safe's combination. He was so engrossed in the task that he didn't hear the soft sound of stealthily-approaching footfalls until it was too late.

Abruptly, a light smashed into glaring life. It almost blinded Ben Tiffany. He whirled; his hand dived for his shoulder-holstered automatic. A harsh voice said: "Better not try it--unless you want to shake hands with St. Pete!"

Tiffany stared at two men who stood on the threshold of the office. One was Victor Faber himself--gross, pig-like greasy. The other was a rattish, sallow man. He had hop-head written all over him. His fist was jammed ominously into his coat pocket, and Ben Tiffany could see the outline of an automatic through the cloth.

Victor Faber grunted, belched. "Damned lucky thing I forgot my briefcase tonight and came back for it."

Ben Tiffany grinned a wolf-grin. "Damned lucky thing you brought your bodyguard with you."

Faber scowled. "Just who the hell are you and what are you after? You don't look like a garden variety of burglar."

"Me? I'm Ben Tiffany."

Faber paled. He'd evidently heard of Ben Tiffany's reputation. He turned to his hop-head bodyguard. "Frisk that guy!" he wheezed. "He's a killer!"

The hop-head started toward Tiffany. Tiffany reached up casually, removed his cigarette from the corner of his mouth. Then, abruptly and viciously, he flipped the glowing butt--straight at the hop-head's eyes.

Sparks exploded, splattered. The gunman screamed suddenly as fire scorched his eyeballs. At the same instant, Ben Tiffany slammed himself at the gunman. He caught the fellow, wrenched at his automatic, got it. He brought the weapon up--and then bashed it down with callous savagery on the hop-head's skull.

The gunman slumped to the floor. Ben Tiffany leaned over him, slammed him again with the captured automatic--just to make sure.

Then Tiffany whirled on the grey-faced Victor Faber.

Faber was trembling, gasping. "My God--maybe you killed him--"

"Yeah. Maybe. And maybe I'll kill you, too. Just as you had Margot Dixon bumped off."

VICTOR FABER wheezed a startled exclamation of sheer surprise.

"Margot Dixon--bumped off? You--you're crazy!"

"Nuts. Don't try any innocent stall. You know damned well you had her killed in my office, and then swiped her carcass. That's okay. But now comes the time for evening things up."

"I--I--"

"You've got a package of rotten dirty evidence against a guy named Jerry Herndon. Mann Act stuff, which the Dixon dame helped pose for. I want that package. Pictures, hotel registry-cards and dictaphone records. Kick in." Ben Tiffany's tone was calm. His eyes were snake-like. There was grimness in the set of his jaw, the thin slit of his lips.

Victor Faber tried to bluster. "You'll never get that evidence from me! I won't turn loose of it."

"No? We'll see." Tiffany stepped forward, prodded the fat man with the automatic. "Sit down."

Faber sank weakly, protestingly, into a chair.

Tiffany unhooked the fat man's suspenders, used them to tie his victim to the chair. "Now, then, Mr. Faber," Tiffany said. And he doubled his fist, drew it back, bashed it square into Victor Faber's open mouth.

Faber gurgled a frantic curse through his fat, split lips. "You--you'd hit a helpless man--?"

"Yes. I'm nasty that way," Tiffany said. And he bashed home another savage, brutal blow to Faber's face. Blood gushed from the fat man's pulped, obliterated nose.

Faber squirmed frantically in the chair, tried to get loose. Ben Tiffany grinned sourly. "Keep still, pot-gut!" he remarked. He sank two swift, deadly punches to Victor Faber's quivering middle.

Faber retched; vomited bloody froth down his vest. "Damn you--!" he railed weakly, helplessly.

Ben Tiffany hit him again, in the ribs this time. "Ready to tell me where I can find that package of blackmail stuff?"

"Go--go to hell--"

"Sure. And I'll take you along for the ride." Ben Tiffany reversed the automatic, started belaboring Faber's shoulders and arms with merciless,

sledgehammer blows. Time after time the hard steel butt of the automatic sank into Faber's fat, quivering flesh. Faber was groaning with the hellish agony of his beating. But Tiffany paid no heed to groans or cries. He kept on smashing at the fat man.

It was a savage orgy of brutality; a hellish saturnalia of torture. Occasionally, as a variant to the routine, Tiffany drew back his foot and kicked relentlessly at Victor Faber's legs.

"Ready to tell?" Tiffany clipped out after bashing his knuckles once more into Faber's lacerated face.

"Y-yes ... Only don't ... hit me ... any more...."

"Okay. Spill it. Make it snappy."

"The package of ... blackmail evidence against ... young Jerry Herndon ... is in my private safe ... in the study ... of my house...."

"Fine. What's the location of the safe--and what's the combination?"

"The safe is ... behind a Goya print ... on the wall. The combination is six left ... two right ... five right ... ten left ... nine right ... one left ... one right...."

BEN TIFFANY was engraving the numbers on the tablets of his memory. "Six left, two right, five right, ten left, nine right, one left, one right," he repeated them over just once. "Okay. Now tell me what your gunmen did with the body of Margot Dixon."

"I tell you ... I didn't know ... she was killed...."

Tiffany grunted sourly. He turned, leaned over the sprawled form of Faber's hop-head bodyguard. He stripped off the gunman's belt, used it to tie the man's wrists and ankles together.

The fat Faber struggled weakly in his chair. "You're leaving us both here .. tied up...?"

"Yes. When I get that package out of your safe, I'm coming back here. By that time, you'd better be ready to tell me where Margot Dixon's corpse can be found. Otherwise I'll put a slug through your bodyguard's skull and frame you for the killing. You'll fry for the murder, even though I can't pin the Dixon dame's killing on you."

Victor Faber's bruised, blood-shot eyes widened. "God--I've told you I don't know anything about her murder--"

"Maybe your memory will be better after an hour or so," Ben Tiffany said grimly. Then he went out of Faber's office, snapping off the lights behind him. And as he closed the door of his suite, he could hear Faber's weak, ineffectual curses following him dimly....

IN the sumptuous study of Victor Faber's home, Ben Tiffany twirled the dials of the fat and crooked theatrical man's secret safe. At last the circular steel door swung open. Tiffany flashed his electric torch, saw a package. He extracted it, opened it, glanced swiftly at its contents.

His snake-like black eyes narrowed with satisfaction. The package contained what he was looking for. There were several hotel-registry cards; a batch of negatives which, when held to the light, showed the late Margot Dixon and a young man--evidently Jerry Herndon--in the intimacy of various bedrooms. The pictures were plenty hot, plenty undressed, plenty suggestive. Then there were six cylindrical wax dictaphone records....

Ben Tiffany grinned thinly, grimly. His next move would be to take all this blackmail stuff to Jerry Herndon, whom it concerned most. He would warn young Herndon against getting into any more jams with dames; warn him of Victor Faber's scheme to loot Consolidated Theaters. Young Herndon could block Faber's plot, now. By refusing to vote his stock Faber's way, the whole rotten scheme would collapse.

After warning young Herndon, Ben Tiffany would then go back to Victor Faber's office. He would beat a few more pounds of fat off Faber's greasy belly; compel Faber to tell where Margot Dixon's corpse had been concealed. Then Faber and his crowd would face a murder rap.

Poker-faced, Ben Tiffany re-wrapped the blackmail package which he had abstracted from Victor Faber's safe. Then, with the bundle under his arm, he went to the French window through which he had entered the Faber study. He climbed out into the night.

Something bashed down on his head, out of the surrounding darkness. Blinding, dazzling lights exploded inside Tiffany's skull. He felt himself pitching forward on his face; felt somebody yanking that blackmail package from under his arm. Then he didn't feel anything at all.

He was out.

WHEN he opened his eyes his head felt like an inflated balloon, and little shivery pain-devils were chasing one another around inside the vast globe of his skull. He groaned a little; mumbled a curse.

Somehow, he had the impression of traveling at a dangerous rate of speed through the night. His limp form was pitching and swaying; he couldn't keep his balance. Blearily, he stared--

He was in a careening coupe, roaring forward in the darkness. He turned his head, tried to focus on the driver beside him. He drew a sharp breath.

"Midge--for God's sake!" he whispered.

Midge Malloy, his pert little red-haired secretary, spoke out of the corner of her kissable mouth without taking her eyes from the road ahead. "I thought it was about time for you to be coming around," she observed.

"But--but what the hell--"

"I saw you getting conked. I dragged you to my car and stuffed you into it. Now we're trailing the guy who conked you. His name is Aaron Abrams."

"Aaron Abrams? Victor Faber's rival for control of Consolidated Theaters? But how the devil did he know I'd be coming out of Faber's house?"

"You'll see, soon enough." Midge smiled maliciously. "I might have yelled and warned you, but I happened to remember that slap in the face you gave me this afternoon. So I kept quiet, and got even with you."

Tiffany stared at her irregular, gamine profile; studied the swelling contours of her hard young breasts, sharply limned by her tight blouse. "When you stop this car," he announced, "I'm going to spank hell out of you."

"No. You'll be too busy doing other things," Midge retorted. She stiffened at the wheel. "Look--Aaron Abrams' car is stopping. We'll park here and sneak up on him." She drew the coupe to a halt in the shadows.

Up ahead, a heavy sedan had halted before an apartment building. A man got out of the sedan, a bulky, broad-shouldered man. That would be Aaron Abrams. "He entered the building.

"Know who lives in that joint?" Midge Malloy whispered.

"No. Who?" Tiffany asked.

"Young Jerry Herndon. Come on--let's get going. There's a fire-escape to be climbed if we want to see the rest of this show."

Still a little dazed, Ben Tiffany followed his red-haired secretary to the alley alongside the apartment building. There was an iron-work fire-escape. They started up.

They came to a lighted window at the third floor. The window-shade was partly drawn, but Tiffany could see into the room through a space at the bottom. He crouched down, stared in.

A good-looking young man was facing the beefy, hulking Aaron Abrams. The young man was Jerry Herndon. Herndon was speaking:

"No, Abrams. I won't vote my stock your way. You're a crook, just the same as Victor Faber's a crook. Each of you want the balance of power in Consolidated Theaters, so you can loot the company. As long as I refuse to vote my stock for either of you, the present management will remain intact. An honest management."

The hulking Abrams grinned. "You'll change your mind when I tell you I've got enough Mann Act evidence to put you in a Federal pen, kid!" he rasped. "I've got registry-cards, photos and dictagraph records of all the trips you made to Atlantic City with Margot Dixon."

Young Jerry Herndon paled. "I don't believe you!"

"No? Then I'll show you." Abrams raised his voice. "Hey--Margot! Come in here!"

And then the apartment door opened, and the brunette Margot Dixon entered the room, carrying that blackmail package.

Outside, on the fire-escape, Ben Tiffany gasped in bewilderment. "What the devil--!" he whispered.

MIDGE MALLOY chuckled at his elbow. "You thought she was dead, murdered, eh? But it was all a stall! As soon as you slapped me in the face and left your office this afternoon, I went out into the corridor, tried to catch you. I failed. On my way back, I saw your office-door open. This brunette dame walked out. Then I knew what had happened. That revolver-shot from across the air-shaft was a plant, a fake. The Dixon dame probably bit down on a capsule of red stain in her mouth, crushed another one on her breast. You didn't take time to feel her pulse--you just took it for granted that she was dead."

"But why--why--?"

"The answer was easy. It was a scheme to make you get that blackmail package from Victor Faber. You see, Margot Dixon had been working with Faber and his crowd. But being a double-crosser by nature, she sold out to the Aaron Abrams crew. It thus became necessary to get that blackmail package from Victor Faber and turn it over to Aaron Abrams. So the Dixon wench came to you, fed you a cock-and-bull story to gain your sympathy. She lied about being in love with young Herndon. Lied about having a baby. And when you still refused to help her, she pulled the fake murder act. While you were looking for the killer, she got up and hid in your closet until the coast was clear for her to make a get-away."

"The louse!" Ben Tiffany whispered.

"Yeah. When I saw her sneaking out of your office, I followed her. She went to Aaron Abrams' office. I managed to overhear the whole scheme. They put a tail on you, had you followed all afternoon and evening. They knew you'd get that package from Faber, sooner or later. And when you got it, they were ready for you. They batted you on the noggin and took the package away from you. Fortunately, I was trailing them; so I was able to save the pieces, after they smacked you silly."

"You're a damned sight better detective than I am, Midge, you red-haired wench!" Tiffany ground out. "Me, I'm only good for strong-arm work. And it's time for action!"

"Ben--be careful--!" Midge Malloy gasped.

"Careful, hell!" Tiffany grunted. And he slammed his shoulder against the window, smashed the glass inward with a hell of a clatter.

Inside the room, three people whirled in startled fear: Aaron Abrams, the brunette Margot Dixon, and young Jerry Herndon. Through showering shards of glass, Ben Tiffany catapulted into the apartment. "Now, Abrams, you rat!" the private dick snarled. And he reached for his shoulder-holstered automatic.

It wasn't there. They must have taken it from him when they'd hashed him silly, coming out of Victor Faber's study.

AARON ABRAMS grinned. His hand dived into his pocket, came up with Tiffany's own gun. "I'll teach you to butt in--!" he grated.

"No. I'll teach you to butt out!" Ben Tiffany said. And he lowered his head, hurled himself full-force at Aaron Abrams' middle.

His skull ploughed into Abrams' groin. Abrams doubled over in agony. Ben Tiffany wrestled the heavier man down; drew back his foot and deliberately kicked Abrams in the jaw.

From the smashed window, Midge Malloy yelled. "Ben--look out! The Dixon dame--!"

Ben Tiffany whirled. He was just in time to duck. Margot Dixon had picked up a metal book-end, slammed it at him.

The book-end whizzed past his ear. He said: "Oh, yeah?" and grabbed the brunette Dixon dame. He doubled his fist and sloughed her in the teeth.

"Now," he said softly as she slumped down, "it'll take two dentists and a plastic surgeon to make you beautiful again!"

Young Jerry Herndon stared. "Who--what--?"

Ben Tiffany grinned, and his snake-like eyes were unwinking. "Kid," he said, "take my advice and destroy what's in that package. And keep your skirts clear of dames after this. With that package destroyed, you've got nothing to fear either from Abrams or Victor Faber."

"Gee--thanks! I--I owe you a lot--"

Tiffany grunted. "The fee," he said, "will be one grand. I'll send you a bill in the morning. So-long."

He turned and climbed out through the window. Midge Malloy was waiting for him. They climbed down the fire-escape, went to Midge's parked coupe.

Ben Tiffany suddenly chuckled.

"What's the joke, dumb-bell?" Midge demanded acidly.

"I was just thinking how I left Victor Faber and his bodyguard all tied up. Faber expects me back to pin a murder frame on him. Wonder what he'll say when I don't show up?"

Midge sniffed. "I'm not interested in what Faber will say. I'm wondering about that blonde chippie you left in your own apartment!"

"How did you find out about her?"

"I went there a while ago, looking for you--to warn you. I found her dead drunk and undressed on your davenport. I can imagine what happened."

"So what?" Tiffany grinned.

"So you're not going back to her tonight! You're coming with me!" Midge snapped. "I'm tired of the way you chase around with everything that wears skirts."

"Jealous?"

"Damned right!"

Ben Tiffany chuckled. "Come on. Drive me to your joint. I owe you a spanking, and I'm going to give it to you."

She ground her heel angrily on the starter of the coupe. "Damn you--!" she whispered as he slipped an arm about her pliant waist.

"Like me?" he tickled her ear with his lips.

"Wait till we get to my place--and find out!" she answered pertly. There was promise in her tone....

## Satan Takes a Picture by Paul Ernst



*There are all kinds of crooks, but none worse or lower than the ones into whose hands fell Winnie Fay. And though Tiger Murray, internationally famous detective, was searching for her through hell's by-ways, he knew that the closer he got to her, the nearer she was to death!*

PRIVATE Operative Murray sidestepped a puddle on the sidewalk. Coincident with the move, he heard a soft, tearing sound and saw molten metal splashing down from a deep new pock-mark in the stone of the office building.

Private Operative Murray moved, and moved fast. He was two normal jumps from the office building entrance. He made it in one jump and darted inside. There, he looked at his ripped coat and cursed.

Murray knew death when he heard it, felt it, and saw its balked results. He had just missed death, by about eight inches, when he chanced to sidestep the puddle.

The nasty, soft, tearing noise of a high-powered rifle shell is distinctive. Murray had heard it often enough not to mistake it. Some one had shot at him from across the downtown street--and had almost got him.

"The son of a son," Murray said, staring out the building door and at the enigmatic rows of windows across the street. His blue-green eyes were narrowed and his long jaw was set, with the muscles a little white along it. He took a step back toward the door, then shrugged.

If he went across the street he knew what he'd find: A vacant office somewhere in line with this building entrance; a few cigarette stubs; a cartridge shell. The man who had fired at him would be long since gone--to try again another day.

Resignedly, Murray went to the elevators and up to his office on the sixth floor. He swung into his anteroom, six feet one, deceptively slender, deceptively well-tailored, and threw his tan felt hat at a hatrack beside a desk at which sat a girl with reddish-brown hair, a disapproving frown, and deep brown eyes. They were guileless eyes; but guileless in appearance only. Murray had known those eyes when their owner was a subtle tool of a most efficient jewel-pinching gang.

"Tige!" the girl exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" said Murray.

"Your coat!"

Murray stared at the long rip in his coat just under the left armpit. He had raised his arm a little when he sidestepped the blessed puddle.

"I know, damn it," he said. "This suit's practically brand new, too."

"What happened?" asked Winnie Fay, Murray's secretary since her jewel-purloining days.

Murray rubbed his nose.

"Have I put the clamps on any one lately who might turn nasty in his desire for good red vengeance, Winnie?"

"Only several dozen in the last year. Tige, what did happen?"

"Some gentleman with a very good pea-gun propped himself in some window across the street, and blew on me as I started to enter this building doorway. He ripped my suit, left a neat pit in the elegant cut-marble lintel, and no doubt stole angrily away."

"My God--you might have got killed!"

"I wish you'd hunt the gentleman up and tell him that," Murray said plaintively. "I don't want to seem unreasonable, but--"

"Tige, this kind of put it out of my mind, but you have a client in your office."

"New or old?"

"New."

"Male or female?"

"Female."

"Good looking?"

"Go to the dickens!" said Winnie.

"Okay. So she is good looking. Goodby now."

Murray went to the other door of the anteroom and opened it. The door was double, as were the walls. The office was well sound-proofed; people screamed in here sometimes.

SITTING in the red-leather visitor's chair beside a desk which was pretty ornate for a humble private detective, was a woman of twenty-nine or thirty, with distressed blue eyes, a face whose pallor could not hide its piquancy, and a round, attractive chin that began to quiver as soon as Murray came in.

Murray hastened into routine,

"I'm Tiger Murray," he said, quickly sitting down at his desk and looking distant and professional to stem the impending flow of tears.

The formula worked as it usually did.

"Tiger! *Tiger* . . . Murray? That's a nickname?"

"No, my real name is Tiger. My old man had a fond notion that I might be a prize fighter. So he named me accordingly. And I am talking to--?"

"Marcia Renier," the woman said, with her chin beginning to tremble again, but not, Murray was glad to see, as noticeably as before. "Mrs. Harry V. Renier."

"Your husband is Renier the architect?"

The woman nodded. Moisture glistened in her eyes.

"Yes. That is, he is now. He--he may not be in a few months."

"What might induce the change in status, if you don't mind the question."

"Harry will certainly divorce me if I can't--if you don't--"

"Help you?" Murray nodded. "Well, that's my job. And now let's hear the story."

Marcia Renier leaned forward over the desk. Her blue eyes fastened desperately on Murray's cool greenish ones.

"It's blackmail. An old story to you, I suppose. There's a picture...." She stopped, shivering.

Murray nodded. His eyes were very cold. One of the few things that could move him was this particularly slimy method of extortion.

"I see. You were with some sleek young gentleman, probably quite innocently. He surprised you by suddenly putting his arms around you. There was a flash. Next day you were shown a photograph of yourself in the gentleman's arms--with your clothes retouched out of the picture."

Marcia Renier nodded, upper lip clenched between her teeth.

"How much do they want you to pay to keep from showing the picture to your husband?"

"T-twenty thousand dollars."

Murray whistled.

"I could never raise it," the woman said desperately.

"The flame of the gentleman with you in the picture?"

"He called himself Anthony Atwell. I met him at a reception given by a friend one evening--"

Murray waved his hand. "These blackmail routines are pretty similar. Well skip it. Anthony Atwell--a phony same, of course. Can you describe him?"

"Yes. He is of average height, slim, with blond hair that is always combed very sleekly, and a small blond mustache, waxed at the tips. He has light eyes, blue or grey, and a trick of bowing from the waist that makes me think he is Russian, or something of that kind. He has a slight accent, too."

Murray reached for his phone and called police headquarters.

"Oh--don't!" wailed the woman, "The publicity--"

Murray's glance reassured her.

"Tom Phelps?" he said, when a voice finally answered after he had asked for Detective Phelps of the Bureau of Identification. "Tiger Murray talking. Could you give a Shamus a bit of information? Thanks. The cocktails are on me. Young fellow going by the name of Anthony Atwell. Blond, small waxed mustache. Bows from the hips. Foreigner, perhaps Russian. Blackmail stuff. Will you call back at the office and leave any dope on him you can find? Thanks again, Tom."

Murray hung up the phone and rose from behind his desk.

"Come on," he said.

The woman stared at him. "Where?"

"To your husband's office," said Murray. "We're going to let him in on this stuff."

"Oh, no! No!"

"Listen," said Murray. "I've handled lots of these cases. There's only one thing to do: go to the person you're trying to hide the picture, or note, or whatever, from. Tell him all. A detective with you will help. Another thing, in cases of this kind: No photographer can retouch a picture and make a naked body of a clothed one that will exactly correspond with the body of the person photographed! There is nearly always some distinguishing trait. Take yourself. Haven't you any mark or conformation on your person that is unique?"

Marcia Renier's face lit up a little with hope, for the first time.

"Why, yes," she said. "I didn't think of that. I have a small diamond-shaped birthmark on--"

She stopped, blushing furiously.

"That ought to spike the whole thing," nodded Murray. "Where can we find Mr. Renier at this hour of the afternoon?"

"Home. He has his office there."

"Right."

Murray led the way out of his office. He got his hat, and said to Winnie Fay: "Some information will come from Tom Phelps. I may phone in for it-- I may come back. See you later."

"Your coat--" said Winnie.

"I'll get a tailor to stick a stitch in it." He went out with Mrs. Renier, and got into his car around the corner in the parking lot.

But he walked circumspectly, with his eye on the windows across the street; and he moved with clumps of people so that never was his figure alone on the walk.

The Renier home was a three-story stonehouse not far from Central Park. Mrs. Renier fitted the key in the lock, and looked at Murray with pleading eyes.

"You're sure--" she faltered.

"I'm very sure," Murray said gently. "Exposure is the cure for these things."

Mrs. Renier sighed and opened the door.

"Harry," she called, looking up the stairs. "His studio is on the second floor," she explained. "Oh, Harry!" There was no answer. "The servants have today off. He may have gone out for a late lunch--"

Murray followed her up the stairs. And he began to frown a little. Not superstitious, he yet placed a lot of faith in the queer things called hunches. He had a hunch now that something was wrong. And the hunch grew as he followed Marcia Renier down the second floor hall.

At the end door she started to tap against the panels, then looked down at the threshold. Murray saw her face suddenly become ghastly in its bloodlessness, saw her throat cord with a scream that came from her blanched lips only as a croaking gasp.

He looked in the direction of her gaze.

From under the door was coming a thin trickle of red. Blood. It was already crusting at its edges.

Murray thrust the woman aside and wrenched open the door.

The room within was large, outfitted with shelving and cabinets and drafting boards. Near the door, dressed in a Nile green robe, was a body. It lay sprawled on the floor, with dead hands reaching out as though in supplication. A silver-handled knife stuck out from the corpse's chest, evidently the handle of a paper knife.

"My God," whispered the woman. "Harry ... murdered...."

The glazed, open eyes of Harry Renier, architect, seemed to stare at her as though in confirmation of the obvious remarks.

## CHAPTER TWO - Bucket of Blood

TIGER MURRAY whirled on the woman. His eyes were like jade.

"Did you come directly to my office from this house?"

"Yes," she whispered. Her voice was dull with a shock that presently would make a screaming wreck of her but which for the moment left her a numbed automaton. At least--that was the way it sounded.

"He was all right then?" snapped Murray.

"Yes."

Murray went to the body. The green robe, of fine flannel, was soaking up the red pool that had spread around the corpse.

"This man has been dead for some time," Murray said, his eyes piercing the woman's. "No doctor can tell within quite a few minutes, though..."

He stopped as his gaze caught something under the dead man's outflung left arm. He picked it up.

It was a cambric handkerchief, tiny, fine. It was slotted with red. Initials were on one corner. The initials, M. R.

"Yours?" said Murray, very quietly.

"Why--yes-- I-- Oh, I can't think! Can't talk! Harry--"

Murray grasped the woman's wrists, forced her to look at him. His face was rather frightening.

"Listen. You wouldn't try to ring me in on anything, would you? You wouldn't have done-- this-- yourself, and then have come to my office to establish an alibi on your time?"

"Oh, my God! Of course not! Harry--I loved him!"

"A blackmail picture," Murray said relentlessly, jade eyes piercing the woman's. "You couldn't pay. This morning a copy was given your husband. He threatened to divorce you. He's a rich man; you're his beneficiary. You killed him to get the fortune you'd lose if there was a divorce."

"I didn't!"

Murray looked down at the corpse in its green robe. Then he bent again. There was something flat in the uppermost pocket. He took it out.

It was the picture of a nude woman in a man's arms. The face on the woman's body was that of Marcia Renier.

She shrank back from him, staring at his face, at the photograph.

"So I'm the set-up," Murray purred. "Well, you'll not use me as an alibi!"

"Oh, God--I swear--"

THERE was the sound of a police siren in the streets outside. Murray leaped to the window.

"Squad car. *Stopping here!*" He stared at Marcia Renier with amazement beginning to cloud the cold fury in his eyes.

"Who could have called the police--except you? And why would you call them--if"

The woman said desperately: "I wouldn't! Can't you see that? What am I going to do? They'll electrocute me for this! The handkerchief and picture--"

There was a sound of banging at the front door, and a voice:

"Open this door in the name of the law!"

Murray's jaw clicked shut.

"I'll play along with you for a while. I think I knew a way to check on you ... If the cops get you, they won't hunt any further! Not with the picture and handkerchief. Any way out of this place besides the front and back doors?"

"No! Wait a minute--there's a door in the roof--used for gutter repairs and--I don't know if that will help."

"We'll see."

The pounding on the door was louder. The woman bit her lips and shivered. Murray pounced down on the dead man. One of the tassels of the robe's cord was in the blood pool, the other was dry and outside the pool.

He cut both off with his knife and put them carefully in an old envelope. In the same pocket with the envelope went the handkerchief and picture.

He stared deep Marcia Renier's eyes.

"Concealing important evidence, aiding a murder suspect in a getaway--with luck, that is. I'm sticking my neck out for you, Marcia Renter. If I find you're guilty, God help you."

They ran down the second-floor hall, up to the third floor. There was a crash of entrance as they got to the attic. Murray heaved up on the trap door in the almost flat roof. It creaked open.

"Aiding a murder suspect in a getaway--with luck," he repeated softly as they came out on the roof and he closed the trap behind them.

There was luck. On each side of the house towered an apartment building. Each had a fire escape zigzagging down the side. The one on the right hand building skimmed past the Renier roof within reach.

Murray helped the woman get to it They went up, to a door opening onto one of the apartment building corridors.

The building had a side entrance on the next street. Right across from it was a small hotel, the Sheldrake.

"Register there," Murray said. "Take the name of--of Mary Crayton. That's as good as any name. Don't go out of the place. Don't answer any summons at the door. Answer the phone, though, because that'll be me--nobody else will know the name and number."

"Thank you for--" Marcia Renier began, shakily.

"Thank me for nothing!" said Murray. "I'm checking on you." He touched the pocket in which was the envelope with the two dressing-robe tassels. "If it turns out phony--you go to the cops at once!"

He saw her enter the Sheldrake Hotel doorway, then jumped a taxi.

Behind him, near the front of the Renier home, he left his car. It was parked in a line of cars belonging to tenants of the apartment buildings. It might be found; it might not. In any event, he didn't feel like going back and getting

it, risking recognition by some of the boys hunting around for a killer to fit the corpse of Harry Renier. A lot of the men from headquarters didn't like him much.

He made one stop on the way to his office, and then breezed in after a look-around to make sure the police weren't already there waiting for him. In his hand he held a pint-sized paper bucket, of the type ice cream is packed in. But the bucket showed red near its folding top.

"What on earth!" said Winnie Fay, her brown eyes wide.

"New kind of clock," said Murray, gazing at the bucket. "Have our friends the police phoned or called in the last few minutes?"

"Detective Phelps did," said Winnie, still staring at the bucket. "Said he'd been delayed on getting the information you asked for, but would phone it in soon--if there was any to phone. What's in the bucket, Tige?"

"I hope he does make it soon," said Murray. "There's blood in the bucket."

"Blood?" gasped Winnie.

"Yes," Murray said. "A bucket of blood, literally."

He took the old envelope from his pocket and got out the two tassels he had cut from murdered Harry Renier's green robe.

"Blood," he went on to Winnie, "but nothing to get excited about I got it from the butcher down the street."

He measured the tassel which was dotted with blood. It had soaked up Renier's life fluid till two and three-eighths inches of the tassel was stained.

"Capillary attraction," said Murray, getting out his watch and laying it on Winnie's desk. He held the clean tassel from Renier's robe over the container of blood. "The number of minutes it takes this tassel to soak up blood enough to redden it for two and three-eighths inches, will tell me something I want badly to know."

"Such as?" Winnie said.

Murray looked at her. "Mrs. Renier and I left here to tell everything to her husband in a blackmailing case--as you must have heard on the extension."

Winnie nodded. "I made shorthand notes as I do of all your talks in there."

"Well, we got to the Renier home, and found Harry Renier murdered, with two very dirty clues pointing straight to Mrs. Renier as the killer."

"Tige!"

"Yes. Pleasant. To cap it, the squad car comes just as we are bending over the body. Who sent for that, I don't know. But I got her out over the roof tops, and parked her in the Sheldrake Hotel under the name of Mary Crayton. And now--I'm checking on the lady."

HE held the clean tassel steadily over the container of blood, with the tip of the tassel in the red fluid.

"This bloody tassel, from Renier's robe, fell with its tip in the blood around him. It started drawing blood up just after he was killed. Now, when the clean tassel is reddened to the precise length of the one stained with Renier's blood, I'll know within a couple of minutes the time that elapsed between his murder and the minute when I cut it off."

"And that will tell you?"

"Whether she could have killed her husband, and then have hurried here to say later in court that she was in my office at the approximate time of the killing the coroner would set."

Winnie's eyes were admiring--an expression she seldom let show when they rested on Murray.

"I'd hate to be back in the crook business, Tige--and have you against me. However, I'd hate to be back in it under any circumstances."

"Skip it," said Murray. "You were with a big-time jewel crowd. When I nailed 'em, at your promise that you were through with that kind of stuff, I eased you out of the picture. Now you're a respectable, if slightly lousy, secretary, and that's that."

"Lousy sec--" flamed Winnie.

Murray grinned.

"Looks like this tassel thing will take quite a little time," he said. "I'll drape the other end over the edge of the pail so it'll hold itself in place. Watch it. Don't let it slip. I'll be back in a little while."

"Where are you going?" said the girl.

"I want to get Johnny, at the parking lot, and have him slide uptown unobtrusively and retrieve my car. It's still in front of the Renier joint."

He went out, while Winnie sat and watched the tassel slowly soak up calf's blood...!

"Twenty-eight minutes!" Murray said, when the tassel showed red to the two and three-inch mark. He had been back from the parking lot for ten of them. "That clears Marcia Renier. Allow fifteen minutes for our trip to her house from the office, and another five minutes from the time we went in her door till I cut the tassel off Renier's robe. That's twenty. Renier was stabbed to death eight minutes earlier--and Mrs. Renier was in my office at that time. I'll go and get her at the Sheldrake, bring her back to this building, and park her in the vacant office two floors up that I use as a spare. Then I'll get Bill Keenan, of Homicide, over here. Bill will give an ear to what I've got to say."

"He'll jail you for cutting off those tassels and obstructing justice!"

"I think he'll agree to forget about that in exchange for my producing Mrs. Renier and giving him the time-information that'll keep the Homicide gang from making a so and so of itself by hounding the wrong person. Anyhow, I'll have to risk it."

"Tige," said Winnie, "who do you suppose did kill Harry Render, if Marcia Renier didn't?"

"That," said Murray softly, "is a very interesting question. Almost as interesting as the question: "Who put this rip in my coat with a high-powered rifle. The answers to both will come--I hope--after Tom Phelps kicks in with the dope on that blond lounge lizard posing with Mrs. Renter in the blackmail photo."

He waved and went out, hopping a cab to the Shel Drake Hotel.

He felt fairly well satisfied with events. The trail to the killer of Harry Renier hadn't even begun. But it was Marcia Renier who was his client and first consideration; and he had, with a little fast and risky work, kept her from a premature arrest that would have been disastrous for her.

He went to the desk phone in the lobby of the Shel Drake, mindful of his injunction to her to answer nothing but her telephone. She wouldn't open the door to his knock if he didn't phone up first.

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Mary Crayton, registered here about an hour ago," he said, when the switchboard girl had answered.

He stood holding the phone, waiting, And again his odd sense of hunches came into play. Something was wrong.

He saw the desk clerk stare at him, after he had given the name. Then the clerk walked slowly toward him, with narrowed eyes.

"You wanted to speak to Mary Crayton?" he said.

Murray nodded, staring at the man over the phone.

"I'm afraid," said the clerk, with frank hostility and suspicion in his eyes, "that you came too late."

Murray slowly put the phone back in its cradle.

"What do you mean, too late?" he asked.

"The police," said the clerk. "They came not ten minutes ago, and arrested her for murder. They called her Marcia Renier, and--they're looking for an accomplice of hers!"

With the last words, Murray became aware of two things: The clerk had his foot on something under the counter--and from the direction of the elevators a stocky man was hurrying with House Detective written all over him.

Something flashed in the clerk's hand.

Murray leaned across the desk, and a sound like a cleaver striking meat smacked out. The clerk went down like a log, with a .32 clattering from his hand to the floor. Murray darted out the door with the house dick bellowing to him to halt.

He got back into the taxi he'd told to wait for him, and got out of there. He eased the driver's alarm at their haste with a ten-dollar bill, and gave his office address again.

As he rode, he leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes. And on his normally careless, rather reckless face, fine lines began to appear. They were lines of pain.

This arrest of Marcia Renier was bad. Damned bad! It threw his hand--made any evidence he could produce smack of prearrangement. Before, he could have given the woman over to custody as a gesture of his good faith and his confidence in the exonerating alibi he had uncovered. Now he had no such, gesture to make; and the result was going to be correspondingly rotten for Marcia Renier.

But it wasn't this that brought the pain lines to his face.

Things were beginning to shape up in his mind, now. The death of Harry Renier while Marcia was in his office! The tip-off to the police as to her hiding place and the name she was masquerading under!

Yes, things were beginning to shape up. And the direction they were taking made Murray curse softly, wearily, under his breath.

### CHAPTER THREE - Photographer of the Fiend

WINNIE FAY'S face was very white as she looked at Murray across her desk in his anteroom.

"So you're accusing me of selling you out," she said, her voice flat and quiet.

Murray stared back at her.

"It was very shortly after I ordered Marcia Renier to make a clean breast of things to her husband, that Harry Renier was killed. It was at just about the time I was at the parking lot telling Johnny to pick up my car, that Marcia Renier was arrested at the Sheldrake."

Winnie looked at him, white, tense.

"That office of mine is sound-proof," Murray said. "Somebody wanted Renier killed the instant it was decided in here that he was to be told of the frame-up. That somebody wanted him killed to avoid prosecution. Also, the killer set the stage to make Mrs. Renier the goat, which was a plant I wrecked by getting her away from the cops. But the minute her name and address was spoken in here--the cops go to her hideout, ask for her by her fake name, and pick her up!"

"And you think I--"

"There is only one way talk can be heard outside of my office. That's on your phone extension at this desk. There's only one person besides myself who knew that Mary Crayton at the Sheldrake Hotel was Marcia Renier."

In Winnie Fay's white throat a vein pulsed, and was still.

"An old cop once told me that no crook ever really reformed," Murray said deliberately. He was as calm as ever; but his face looked ill. "I've never believed that. But now-- How much were you offered, Winnie?"

The girl said nothing.

"You phoned someone the minute I ordered Marcia Renier to confess to her husband," Murray said harshly. "You phoned again while I was out at the parking lot. As a result, Renier was killed, blocking prosecution for blackmail, and his wife was framed for the murder. Who was it you got in touch with, and how much is he paying you?"

Winnie Fay's pale lips moved.

"I'll be leaving this office for good, Tige."

Murray's short, hard laugh rapped out.

"Maybe you will. But you won't be going far. Not till you tell me what I want to know. You've fixed me up, all right! Marcia Renier will spill plenty! She'll lose her head and tell who got her out of the house when the cops broke in. She'll tell of the picture, perhaps even of the handkerchief I carried away. And they'll know, of course, who cut up that dressing robe. Out with it, now! Who--"

"If it's a lead you're after," Winnie said, in that flat, quiet voice, "I'll give you one as my last official act as your secretary. Detective Phelps called a few minutes ago. The man you asked about is named Feodor Korloff, with a dozen aliases. He has been mixed up in two known blackmail cases and half a dozen suspected ones in the past year."

Murray's greenish eyes bored into her brown ones.

"I looked him up under his real name," Winnie went on. "The cases he's been mixed up in are all cases in which Benjamin Zeit was suspected of doing the photography. And Zeit, you know, is supposed to work for Maurice Marquier."

Murray spoke very softly, eyes like jade. Winnie had seen them take on that tint before--but never when they looked out at her.

"Would this be a trap, sweetheart?" Murray said.

Winnie flinched as though he had hit her with his fist.

"Suppose I go to Zeit on that tip," Murray went on. "There wouldn't be a gang waiting for me, tipped off by still another phone call from you, would there?"

A queer sound came from Winnie's pale lips. It wasn't a moan; it wasn't quite that loud.

"God forgive you for that," she said. "I won't."

Behind tense jaws, Murray caught his tongue in his teeth. The look on her face was beating him down a little. But, damn it, no one else could have tipped off whatever blackmailing powers were against him in the way they had been tipped off.

"Maybe I--" he began.

He never finished. Loud steps sounded in the building corridor outside the door. With the first sound of them, he leaped to the door of his private office.

The anteroom door burst open. He saw two plain clothes men and a uniformed patrolman.

"We want you, Tiger Murray," one of the dicks said. "We want you on the Renier murder."

Murray slammed his door and locked it. Fists banged on it.

"Open up, you fool. You can't get out of this. The Renier dame spilled the works. And we listed your car in front of her house just after the killing."

Murray went for his window, opened it He looked down six floors sheer to concrete sidewalk But just under his window there was a stone ledge. It was very narrow. It seemed an impossible way of escape. But once before, Tiger Murray had had to thread his way along it, and he knew it could be done.

They were battering at his door, now, to break it in. He lowered himself to the ledge, worked his way to the end window of the building.

This window opened onto the men's room for the floor. He climbed in, darted across the corridor to the stairs, with the sound of a crash back in his office telling that his private office door had gone down.

He sped down the stairs and out onto the street.

Benjamin Zeit! Trick photographer in the employ of a big shot blackmailer known as Marquier--at least as far as police rumor went. So it was Marquier he was up against!

Murray got into a cab and went to a certain Eighth Avenue tavern. There was a barkeep there who was indebted to him, and who carried in his head a list of names and addresses that the police would have given much to know. He'd know where Zeit kept himself.

TWO hours and a quarter later, at seven in the evening, Murray slouched in a doorway on Third Avenue and stared at a dingy red brick building across the street. It was in there that Benjamin Zeit, crooked photographer, hid from the recriminations of a world that did not like his particular style of work. But for a moment Murray delayed entering the place.

His face still looked as though he were slightly ill The face of Winnie Fay burned in his brain; Winnie smiling, Winnie perplexed and curious, Winnie criticizing with valuable common sense some theory of his.

"And all the time it was only a question of how much," he breathed. "A blackmailer's dirty money could buy her."

He gazed at the building. In view of the circumstances, the treachery in his own office, it was almost certainly a trap for him. But he had walked into traps before, and had come out again. Besides the cops, following along the same trail, would probably be here soon--if, indeed, they hadn't already come--and they might get him out of a jam, even if it was only to take him to headquarters on the Renier murder.

He walked across the street and into the building.

The barkeep had told Murray that Benjamin Zeit's name now was Karl Sweitzer. That name was on a second floor mail-box. Murray went up dark stairs to the second floor, walking softly. He saw it as soon as he got to the top of the stairs--a door at the end of the hall that was cracked open a little. Light came out the crack, to lie in a beam athwart the dingy corridor.

A partially opened door. There'd be men in the room behind that door, watching the hall, watching the door opposite.

Murray tiptoed along till he had gone as far as he could without getting in the range of the door-crack. Then he flattened against the wall on the stair side of the door. Ten feet beyond the partly opened door, the end wall of the hall showed blank and windowless.

He wanted something heavy, something that would make a big noise. The only thing he had with him of that description was his gun.

With his lips thinning at the deliberate disarming of himself, he drew his automatic, set the safety more firmly, and tossed it butt-end first against the end wall.

It clattered against the wall and then crashed down on the bare board floor, making a devil of a racket. Murray heard curses from behind the partly opened door, heard a rush of steps.

Two men wrenched the door all the way open and jumped into the hall, with guns in their hands. They took a step away from Murray, toward the spot where the racket had sounded.

The father who had given Murray the first name of Tiger because he'd wanted his son to be a prizefighter, had gone farther than that in following his vicarious ambition. He had trained Murray in the use of his fists from the time he was six.

His left fist caught the man nearest to him on the side of the jaw in a blow guaranteed to put him to sleep for half an hour. The other man whirled as Murray went on. He snapped his gun up--doubled with Murray's right fist in his midriff, snapped back again as Murray's right got him under the chin.

The closed door opposite the one that had been watchfully open, popped wide and a rabbitlike face peered out in alarm at the sounds in the hall. It was an elderly face, with blinking, evil eyes behind thick lenses, and with a timid but vicious jaw.

Murray's hand flashed out. He stiff-armed the weakly cruel face. The owner fell backwards on the floor with a crash. Then Murray dived for his gun, and, having retrieved it, turned back to the door just in time to put his foot inside as the elderly man was trying to close it.

Benjamin Zeit, alias Karl Sweitzer, bleated in fright as Murray faced him.

"Back up to that next room," Murray grated. "Go on--now shut the door on yourself!"

The second door shut. Murray went back to the hall, dragged in the two unconscious hoods there, and handcuffed them to a radiator in Zeit's living room.

Then he called:

"Come out, Zeit!"

He stepped to the side, kicked out as the bedroom door opened and the elderly man with the thick glasses jumped forward. The kick landed true--against Zeit's right wrist. The revolver in the man's hand turned end over end in the air and slid along the rug ten feet away.

Zeit cowered, nursing his wrist. Murray stared at him. A warped genius at his line, which was photography and retouching, the man had probably caused more unhappiness than any other rat in the city. And Murray's contemptuous hatred was expressed in his voice as he said:

"Zeit, I've come here for some information. I haven't got much time. I want it quick. First, are you working for Marquier on the Renier case? And did you do the retouching on Mrs. Renier's picture?"

Zeit said nothing. Murray took a step toward him.

"I don't know anything!" Zeit cried. "I swear it! They keep me here like an animal in a cage, guarded, just to do the work they want done. I never get out, I never talk to anybody, I don't know anything!"

"Is Marquier behind the Renier case?"

"I--I--" Zeit screamed again as Murray's fist doubled. "If you mean the woman with Feodor Korloff, yes! I did it. And it was for Marquier."

Murray nodded. "Where's your darkroom, Zeit?"

The old man bit his lips. Murray, not waiting for an answer, strode toward the second door of the living room. Like a terrified rabbit, Zeit scuttled to get between him and the door.

"No, no! You don't get in there! You can't!"

Murray pushed him aside and went on in. There was no bed in the place. There was a complete dark room outfit, and a narrow, tall steel filing cabinet.

Murray went to this. "Probably what I want is in here."

Zeit's manner confirmed the guess. The elderly man was beside himself, mouthing curses, jumping toward Murray and then cowering away again. Murray pulled out the drawers of the cabinet.

There was an index, with names on it. Many of the names he remembered reading in newspapers--in connection with scandal. In the cabinet's drawers were folders, one for each name.

Swiftly, with Zeit's agonized mutterings sounding in his ears, Murray emptied the folders. In a moment he stood with a pile of negatives in his hands. Pictures! In each, a woman was held, nude, by a man. He looked at the first two, recognized one of the faces as that of a well-known society woman.

"Oh, my God," mouthed Zeit. "A million dollars' worth of negatives! Oh, my God! Eddie! Brace!"

But the two he called on were still lying inertly chained to the radiator in the other room. Murray, grinning bleakly, selected one of the folders and put the whole lot in it. Then he slid the folder under his belt.

"Where can I get hold of Marquier, Zeit?"

"Marquier's at 1210 Eastbourne Street!" whimpered Zeit. "Don't hit me! It's the truth! I swear--"

Murray released the man. Then, as Zeit scabbled at his belt to get at his precious negatives, Murray hit him as mercifully as possible, stepped over his prostrate body, and left--to go to Eastbourne Street.

## CHAPTER FOUR - A Room in Hell

WHEN he reached there he found that 1210 Eastbourne Street was a private residence, once ornate, now decayed and looking like a tenement, in appearance matching the shabby buildings around it.

Murray watched the entrance from the shadow of a parked sedan; and on his face the look of a man a little ill had increased. It had increased with the closing of the door of the place, two minutes ago, over three figures.

Till now, Murray had held deep within him a slight scrap of hope that he'd been wrong about Winnie Fay. But that scrap had been wiped out of existence.

For, two minutes ago, a car had drawn up before the entrance--and Winnie Fay had got out of it! With her were two men who were rats if Murray had ever seen rats.

Tiger Murray cursed deep in his throat to try to ease the lump there. Then he went swiftly in the shadows to the side of the tattered old house. He had spotted the basement window there as he looked over the place.

In the blackness of a narrow runway between Marquier's house and the blank wall of the next, Murray investigated the cellar window. His heart sank as his fingers encountered steel bars, rose again as the entire frame holding the bars gave in his hands. The iron frame had rusted through years of neglect. He lifted it, after loosening two segments of cracked cement, from its frame, and then slid back the rusty catch of the window itself with his knife.

Upward and ahead of him, he saw hairlines of light indicating an inner door from the basement. He started for it, then stopped in his tracks.

From somewhere upstairs a scream had knifed out in the stillness. It was a girl's scream, and Murray felt his heart give one great bound and then seem to stop altogether at the agonized sound of it.

"Winnie?" he exclaimed.

He began running toward the inner door, risking a fall in the darkness that would have brought Marquier's men--and death--with its resultant noise. But nothing caught at his feet. He got to the door, listened, opened it.

He stared into a kitchen, which was empty. Darting across it, he came to a back hall, with stairs across from, the kitchen. He heard another scream, then, which was cut off with ghastly abruptness.

He took the stairs two at a time, still maintaining a measure of silence but subordinating the risk of noise to his urgent anxiety to get to the source of that screaming.

At the top of the first flight of the rear stairs he stopped abruptly, retreated half a dozen steps, and lay so that the stairs hid him. He had heard footsteps in the second floor hall.

"Hell-cat!" he heard a man spit out

Another man agreed with a less printable word, and added: "She'll do it or else!"

"It'll have to be 'or else' anyhow," the first man said. "She knows too much now to--"

Voices and steps faded toward the front of the house. Murray came back up the stairs and peered into an empty hall. A door toward the middle of the corridor's length caught his eye. Light streamed from under it--and from under none of the others.

He went to the door, listened.

"--same thing every time you yell," he heard a man's voice say. It was a suave, even voice, but with deadly undertones, "Use that phone, now, if you know what's good for you."

Murray tried the doorknob, with infinite care. It turned, and the door moved a little. In the very headquarters of the Marquier gang it was evidently thought unnecessary to lock doors.

Gun in hand, Murray opened the door, an inch at a time. When it had opened eighteen inches he saw a sight that put red flecks in the whites of his eyes.

A girl was stretched taut against the side wall of the room--a barely furnished bedroom. Her ankles were bound together. Her arms, were extended stiffly up over her head--stiffly, because they bore the whole weight of her body.

She was suspended by the thumbs from an iron ring in the ceiling.

Beside her head there was a wall telephone. And standing next to her, with the receiver off but with the hook held down so that there was no connection with central, was the owner of the suave, deadly voice.

"You'll call Murray," the man said, dark eyes narrowed almost sleepily, dapper body relaxed indifferent, "or you'll see your own thumbs come out at the joints."

Winnie's toes stretched toward the floor to ease the strain on her thumbs. But she couldn't quite do more than barely touch the floor.

"Murray's got something we have to get back," the man said. "Something worth a million dollars or more. And you'd be surprised what we'd do for a million."

Murray tiptoed in through the door.

No sound came from the girl. Her shoulders were tense; the writhing of her body told of its agony.

Murray raised his gun, and the dark man, warned perhaps by a whisper of fabric, whirled toward him.

A strangled curse came from his lips, and then Murray was on him. And it was with a savage ecstasy of pleasure that he brought his gun down on the head of the man who could torture a girl as Winnie Fay was being tortured. The man dropped, and Murray had a conviction that he would never move again.

He leaped to Winnie.

"Tige," she whispered. "Thank God!"

He cut her bonds, lowered her gently in his arms.

"They got me--just as I left the building--" Winnie said, "A car--here--wanted me to get you here--"

"I know," said Murray. "Don't talk. My God. And to think I thought you came here of your own free--"

As the dapper torturer had whirled just before his death, so Murray whirled now.

Three men stood in the doorway of the room, staring at him.

One was heavy-set, dressed as though for a banquet, in impeccable dinner togs. And this was Maurice Marquier, known to be the most competent blackmailer in the city but never yet even taken to police headquarters. The two men with Marquier were of the type such men use: young fellows, handsome in a way, as sleek as cobras and twice as deadly.

Each of the three had a gun in his hand.

Marquier's jaw was open with amazement as Murray turned. But it clicked shut and a smile shaped the blackmailer's thick lips.

"By all that's holy! Tiger Murray! At least you seem to agree with the descriptions of Pendleton, here."

"That's Murray, all right," one of the two men said. "I had him over my sights, and got plenty of flashes of his face when I trailed him to Renier's."

Murray's jade green gaze centered on the man.

"So you're the gentleman I owe the slug through the coat to?" he said.

The man nodded, snarling a little.

"I was trailing Marcia Renier. We thought she'd cut up rough instead of paying. She did. She went to your office, and you were out so she waited

for you. I waited for you, too--in an office across the street with a gun in my hands."

"But I jumped a puddle, and got away," said Murray evenly. "So then you went to Renier's house and killed him."

The man shook his head.

"Not me. When I missed you, I went to your floor to try again. I couldn't get into your office unseen through the door, so I crawled to the window of it along a ledge on the outside of the building. I meant to pop you there. But I couldn't hang on to the ledge and still have a hand free. I heard you say you were going to tell Renier, though. So I beat it back into the hall and to a phone, I got the boys here, and they went over and nailed Renier--"

"And framed Marcia Renier for it," nodded Murray. "Then, still tailing me, you saw me put her in the Shel Drake Hotel and tipped the cops later. Which makes me the dumbest guy that ever lived. Because I thought--"

He stopped, Marquier had taken a step forward, and in his cold, arrogant eyes was death.

"We can dispense with the remarks, I think," he said softly. "We'll get to the point. Zeit phoned here, some time ago, and said that you'd looted his place of all his negatives.

"Those negatives are everything we have, Murray. They're our stock in trade, our sole reason for existence. It has taken years to collect them, and they are worth about eighty thousand dollars a month to us. I want them back. Where did you hide them on leaving Zeit's?"

"I gave 'em to the apple woman on the corner," said Murray. "She needs eighty thousand a month more than you do."

Marquier's expression did not change.

"We'll do things to you that you've never dreamed could be done to a living man--and still have him live--if you don't produce the negatives, Murray.

And the same goes for your little friend. Come to think of it, we'd better treat her first--with you watching. That ought to soften you up."

Perspiration came out on Murray's forehead. He was listening tensely, now, and trying not to show it.

"Well?" said Marquier expressionlessly.

"You're going to kill us anyway," Murray said slowly. "What good will it do to give you the negatives?"

"If you tell us where they are, we'll let the girl live. We can stand just one witness--it's only her word against ours. You'll get it, but you'll die painlessly and quickly."

Murray felt the drag of his gun in his coat pocket, knew he would fall with a dozen slugs in him before he could get it out and in his hand.

"If I could only have some guarantee that you'd do as you say," he muttered slowly. He thought he heard something now--the thing he'd been listening for.

"Damn you, you're stalling for time. Why, I don't know. We can fix your lights an hour from now as well as now--"

He broke off suddenly, and listened. So did the two men with him. And then the three stared at each other with tense, alarmed eyes.

From the street outside came the faint, far cry of a police siren.

"They can't be--coming here," mumbled Marquier. "It must be some other place. Look and see, Pendleton."

The smaller of the two men with him ran from the room.

The siren grew louder, then stopped. Pendleton's voice came:

"Mark! For God's sake! They *are* stopping here!"

Swearing, Marquier glared at Murray.

"You're responsible for this! You left word you were coming here-- something--"

And then the man with Marquier saw the thing Murray had been fearing for ten minutes that one of them would see.

"Mark! My God! The phone!"

He was staring at the wall telephone near where Winnie had been suspended. His eyes were starting from his head.

"The phone! Look! *We've been talking with the receiver off!*"

With his face livid, Marquier turned a little to look at the wall telephone. And Murray sprang.

The other man's gun cracked out, but the slug missed Murray. He got Marquier by the right arm and wrenched till the blackmailer moaned and dropped his gun. He heard another cry and his eyes flicked sideways long enough for him to see Winnie hanging to the gun arm of the other man with lacerated hands.

He tripped Marquier, leaped to aid Winnie. The man went down under the crack of Murray's fist. Then Marquier was on Murray again.

With the false strength of mania, Marquier got Murray down while his pudgy fingers fumbled for his throat.

"You tricked me!" he raved. "Got me talking! That damned phone--"

There was a crash as the street door was battered in, and then shots.

"I'll get you ... anyhow ..." panted Marquier, his plump face insane with fear and rage.

"I think not," said Tiger Murray.

His hand shot out to clamp over Marquier's hand, in the fingers of which a knife abruptly glinted. He twisted. There was a muffled snap. Marquier shrieked and sagged to the floor, holding his dislocated wrist. Heavy steps sounded up the stairs, and a bellowing voice:

"All right, now! Everybody! Stick 'em up and keep 'em up. You're under arrest!"

AT ELEVEN that night in Murray's office, Winnie and Murray dipped with paper spoons into a container of chop suey sent up from the neighboring Chinese restaurant.

Murray was not eating with any great appetite, and he was avoiding Winnie's guileless eyes.

"We'll get the negatives in the morning," he said. "When I left Zeit, I dropped into a drug store, sealed the folder containing the negatives with gummed tape, put stamps on it, and dropped it in a parcel post box addressed to me here. With them, and all the stuff that operator heard over the phone, the whole Marquier outfit is on ice."

"I'd forgotten all about the man dropping the receiver when you hit him on the head," Winnie said.

"Curious," said Winnie, eyes very guileless indeed, "how Marquier's man got along the ledge outside your window--and listened in on you. I wouldn't have thought any one but you was acrobatic enough to manage it."

Murray opened his lips, and shut them again.

"And trailing you to the Shel Drake, so they could tip the police that Mrs. Renier was there as Mary Crayton--which you thought I'd done! That was smart, too, wasn't it?"

Murray's eyes were almost entirely blue--a shade they took on only when he was not at all proud of himself.

"Funny about the gang kidnaping me, though," Winnie murmured. "They seemed to think I meant something to you--"

Murray's eyes lost their uncertainty at that. His hands found her shoulders.

"Mean something to me?" he repeated, a little hoarsely.

A little later he wiped lipstick from his mouth and said humbly:

"If you can ever forget what I said to you--thought of you--"

Winnie borrowed one of his own phrases.

"Skip it," she said, giving him more lipstick to wipe off. "I expect I'll be around here a long time after all. As your secretary--or something!"

## These Shoes Are Killing Me by Leroy Yerxa.



*Footprints all around the corpse; but they were all prints of the left foot!*

INSPECTOR JAMES HALL was, like his office, a classical example of unadorned simplicity. Hall didn't like puzzles and he didn't like details. Puzzles troubled his solid head, and right now, as he slammed down the phone, the toughest problem he'd faced in months sent three thick fingers scratching over his bald head. He sat very still for a few minutes, shaking his head back and forth like an angry bull. Then his thick fist crashed down on the desk top in sudden decision. When he picked up the phone once more there was a suggestion of a twinkle in the dark, deep set eyes.

"Hello! Sergeant? Listen! Send in Robert Case. Yes, the little wonder boy of the detective squad."

He listened impatiently as the receiver chattered back at him. His jaw hardened into set lines.

"Yes! Well, I think we've got something here that will keep little Robert Case busy for a while before he solves it. Quite a while!"

Inspector Hall dropped the phone and buzzed the main desk. Over the communication set he ordered a squad car to stand by. Tall and homely as a bald eagle, Hall unfolded himself from the chair and jerked on his overcoat. He was just pulling the battered felt down where it would conceal his lack of head shrubbery when a light knock sounded on the door.

"Come on in, Case," he shouted.

The door opened and a small, dapper individual entered. Robert Case had an innocent face that made him look like a choir boy who had just left church. He approached Hall with short steps and Hall was suddenly conscious of how carefully polished Case's shoes were in comparison to his own well worn boots.

"Bob," Hall began before Case could open his mouth. "I got troubles."

Robert Case was slipping into the soft overcoat he had carried on his arm. He smiled.

"Man or woman? Knife, gun or poison? Your troubles are mine, Inspector. Let's share them."

Hall leaned on his desk, extracted a Havana from his pocket and started to chew the end of it.

"Murder," he said shortly. "Murder by strangulation."

Robert Case seemed to deflate. A pained expression crossed his face.

"Look, Jim," he pleaded, "I'm not cut out for this rough stuff. Go get your man, convict him and burn him. I'll stay here and play bridge with myself."

He started to remove his coat.

"Wait a minute," Hall said. "I'm willing to get the murderer all right. There's just one point I thought might interest you."

Case said nothing. He was accustomed to Inspector Hall's build-ups.

"The man choked his victim and tossed her into the swamp just outside the city limits on Route 6. He left a raft of footprints all around the body. *Bob, every damned one of those prints were made with a shoe from the left foot.*"

Case watched him silently, but his wide, gray eyes narrowed.

"That would point to a one-legged murderer hopping around, fighting with the girl and finally killing her?"

Hall nodded hopelessly.

"For a while I was almost ready to believe that," he admitted. "But, by the saints, Case, it's impossible."

Robert Case grinned. He slapped a spotless hat over well combed hair, and turned abruptly toward the door.

"That's what I thought," he said. "What are we waiting for?"

ROUTE 6 crossed a section of muddy, reed grown swamp land just west of the city limits. Beyond the drainage canal, Inspector Hall saw the usual line of press cars, two squad cars and the death wagon. He pressed the brake pedal down gently and they rolled to a stop at the rear of the line. Down the steep bank a crowd had gathered at a respectable distance from the body. He opened the door, stepped out---and slipped on the clay bank. Robert Case, following at a more sedate speed, watched Inspector Hall take a complete turn on his back and land in the slime at the bottom. With no visible emotion on his face, Case went down the bank carefully. Hall was on his feet, face red and angry. Mud covered his overcoat.

"Jumping into this murder case with more gusto than usual, aren't you Jim?"

Hall muttered darkly under his breath and the men who waited parted to form a straight line between him and the girl on the ground. Hall, head

down, approached the body and walked around it in a wide circle. His eyes were on those footprints. The first 'phone report had been accurate. The girl was dressed in a white evening gown, low at the neck and covered by a short fur coat. Her dress was torn up one side, revealing a left leg. The throat was marked and bruised. Footprints were visible in the mud all about her. He went to his knees to study them, and felt rather than saw Case standing above him.

Robert Case's face was a study in dull anger. When he spoke, his words were low and choked with feeling.

"Yes! I see the prints. They're all from a left shoe. They're a damned clever start to what the murderer thinks is a perfect crime."

He paused, as though to catch his breath.

"Jim! I think the man must be a maniac to think he can get away with this. He's tried so hard that he'll trip himself into our arms by himself; and when he does . . ."

Hall stood up and tried to clean the mud from his clothing.

"That's all," he said quietly. "I knew when the boys called me that this wasn't the usual murder."

Case nodded.

"Tell your blood hounds to clean the place up. I want to know who the girl is. Make sure that strangulation was the real cause of her death."

He turned away from the figure on the ground and climbed carefully back up the steep bank to the side of the car.

Away from the body, he seemed to relax. Hall followed him, and reached the small man as he painstakingly scraped the last bit of mud from the highly polished shoes. Case looked up at the disgruntled inspector and the old smile came back.

"Just one thing, Jim," he suggested. "Don't look for a one-legged man. If you couldn't get down that bank with both pins under you, he could have never managed to force the girl to go down there."

ROBERT CASE had a headache. For a man who made his living tracking down killers, his heart was much too tender. He sat across from Inspector James Hall's desk, one knee crossed carefully over the other, his eyes glued to a two-page report. The details in black and white were even more horrible than the sight of the body itself. He read steadily for some minutes, then dropped the paper on the desk and stared steadily into Hall's puzzled eyes. The Inspector returned the stare.

"So she was Helen Kane," Case said slowly. "Helen Kane, age twenty-six, came from a decent family, worked in a down town office and lived for nights like last night when she could put on the only nice things she owned and go stepping out among the bright lights."

Hall said nothing.

"That still leaves us without the right foot to stand on," Case added. He stood up, brushed out the wrinkles on his trousers and folded the papers carefully into an envelope.

"If I'm not mistaken, Jim, we'll get along quite nicely by waiting for a few hours. These things never stop after the first round. Let me know if anything comes up that seems to link with Helen Kane."

Hall seemed to awaken from his trance suddenly, switched the un-lighted Havana to the far corner of his lips and grunted.

"Sounds good the way you put it," he admitted. "Unfortunately the department can't wait for murderers to hang themselves. We've got to go after this thing while it's hot. Every hour we wait will make the trail that much harder to pick up."

Case hesitated at the door, turned half around and slipped into his coat.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that if I were you," he said. "Being small the way I am, I've learned that sometimes pretty big things come to those who wait long enough for them."

The door clicked softly and he was gone. Hall swore aloud and slapped an impatient hand on the call bell. In three minutes he was dictating orders at high speed. Inspector Hall believed in action, and stressed it in every move of his impatient hands. To wait was to worry and worry could make him a driving maniac inside of twenty-four hours.

"I THINK we've got something here," Robert Case said, as the squad car lurched under them and slipped out into the foggy, rain spattered court. "You say the policeman found Helen Kane's picture on the wall of his room?"

Inspector Hall nodded grimly. In the rush from the office he had forgotten his hat. Under the pale light of the car interior, his bald head shone.

"Yeah. Sergeant Graves reported ten minutes ago that a man had been found dead in his room at the LaGrove Hotel. He didn't think much about it until he found this framed picture of Helen Kane on the wall. It was signed, 'With love to Glenn.' He called me at once, thinking I'd be interested."

"Are you?" Case's voice was innocent enough. "I mean, do you suppose there's a connection?"

"Connection?" Hall studied the smaller man at his side with eyes that questioned Case's sanity. "Good Lord, man, it's as plain as the nose on your face. This guy got rid of his sweetheart, and then committed suicide himself. I'll bet you . . ."

"I wouldn't!" Case held up a restraining hand. "Don't bet a cent, Jim. You've lost every bet we've ever made, remember?"

Hall stopped talking abruptly but the twinkle in his eyes grew more pronounced as they approached the downtown section. This time, he decided, Bob Case could pack up his bag of mysteries and jump in the lake. The case had been simple and to the point. He liked them that way. No headaches.

The LaGrove Hotel was a small, neat building sandwiched between two theatres. The night clerk took them up at once, beating a hasty retreat after he pointed out the door to the dead man's room.

Hall shouldered his way through the half dozen reporters and uniformed men who stood silently inside the door. Case, taking advantage of the Inspector's interference, followed in his wake.

They stood close to the edge of the bed, staring down at the figure sprawled across it. The coroner, young and impatient at his late visit, looked up from his job of emptying the dead man's pockets.

"Good evening, Inspector Hall. Suppose you want the details?" He held out a handful of trinkets, started to talk like a well-trained machine.

"Name's Glenn Halliday. Got that from his pocket book. Age about thirty-two. Was in good health. Died from a gunshot in the head. He held the gun close to his temple and fired it after stretching out on the bed and removing his shoes."

He stopped abruptly, and watched Robert Case go to one knee at the side of the bed. The little detective reached under the draped blanket and drew a pair of shoes into the light. Hall's breath sucked in quickly.

"I'll be damned," he said.

Case stood up, drew a handkerchief from his pocket and carefully removed dried clay from his finger tips.

"From the looks of this," he admitted, "that's exactly what you'll be for some time--damned."

The shoes were of average material, low cut and sporty. The left shoe was covered with mud, dried and flaking from the instep. The right shoe was clean and polished. It had not been worn enough to soil the bottom of the smooth sole.

THE men in the room were silent. Hall's eyes glued themselves to the shoes on the floor, then swept up suspiciously to the still, wax-like body stretched across the bed. The lips were cold and sealed tightly. He would never learn from them the mystery of the clean, right shoe. A low whistle escaped the coroner's lips. He stood up, passed the handful of trinkets from the dead man's pocket to Inspector Hall and put on his hat.

"He's been dead since last night," he said. "I'd set the time sometime between eight and ten o'clock."

Hall's head ducked mechanically, his eyes still staring at the body on the bed.

"Could it be possible . . .?"

An audible chuckle escaped Robert Case's lips.

"Jim," he begged, "don't say it. You're getting to the place where you actually believe the man hopped all over town on one leg."

Hall pivoted, facing the diminutive Case. His face was red with anger.

"Sure," he admitted shortly. "I'm crazy. The man has a muddy left shoe, there were left shoe prints all around Helen Kane's body, he has her picture on his wall, but he couldn't possibly have murdered her. If that's what you're trying to tell me, suppose I admit you're right. Just one point, Mister Case. How did he do it?"

Case shrugged his shoulders. "Damned if I know, Jim," he admitted coolly. "But if one of the boys will hold the door open for a quick escape, I'm going

to suggest that one of his legs might be short enough so it never touched the ground. I was never meant for this all-night murder business, and I'm going home right now and get a decent night's rest."

Inspector Hall's answer fell on unappreciative ears. Robert Case was beating a hasty retreat down the long corridor toward the single elevator.

PERCY WALLACE was a sincere, earnest young man. Attired in a neat brown suit, plain silk tie, and juggling a nervous Adam's apple, he awaited Inspector James Hall's pleasure. Percy Wallace had announced his presence in a rather meek voice, asked to see Hall about the Kane killing and now sat on the edge of the hard bench in the waiting room.

Somewhere in the hollow halls of police headquarters, Percy Wallace heard a voice thunder:

*"Well! What are you waiting for, you pin-head? Send him in! Call Case and get him in here. Start moving before your legs rust off!"*

A very red-faced police sergeant appeared before Percy Wallace. Some of Inspector Hall's wrath carried itself with him.

"Come on," he growled. "The Inspector says you can come in."

Mr. Wallace arose, stroked his Adam's apple tenderly and cleared his throat.

"Th-thanks."

He followed the blue coat of the law down a short hall, and found himself facing an open door. The door was very large and the room behind it did not look inviting. Percy Wallace stepped inside and faced the huge, bald-headed man behind the desk.

Inspector Hall stood up slowly, feeling stiffness in his bones. He scratched his head rather thoughtfully at the sight of his mild visitor and motioned him to a chair by the desk.

"Mr. Wallace?"

Percy Wallace nodded. Hall's great hand came across the desk top and folded over Wallace's hand. Percy Wallace winced and wriggled his freed fingers experimentally.

Robert Case came in silently, acknowledged an introduction and sat down. He picked up a law book from the desk, never bothering to take a second look at the slim young man with the bobbing Adam's apple.

Inspector Hall started chewing carefully on his cigar.

"Well, Mr. Wallace?" his voice was a little impatient. "I understand you have information concerning the murder of Helen Kane?"

At the mention of the girl, Robert Case's eyes darted up and over the newcomer, then returned to the open book.

At last Percy Wallace had something to grasp. Something he could talk about with interest and personal knowledge.

He nodded his head slightly and leaned forward in his chair.

"I'm a shoe salesman at the Regent Shoe House," he started. "Saturday I sold Mr. Glenn Halliday a pair of shoes."

"Halliday?" Hall shot forward, his hands outspread on the desk top. "You mean the man who committed suicide at the Hotel LaGrove?"

Wallace swallowed his Adam's apple, looked quickly at the little man still buried in the law book and turned back to Hall.

"Y-yes sir!" His voice was strong and determined, "I saw his picture in the morning paper and I read all about the shoes and I have a confession to make."

"Confession? You mean you're the murderer?"

PERCY WALLACE gulped in alarm, and Robert Case chuckled ever so slightly. He didn't look up. Hall's face turned red, and Wallace hastened to explain.

"Oh, no sir!" He would have to explain everything now, and in a hurry. The big man behind the desk frightened him badly.

"You see, it was like this. This man, Glenn Halliday, came in Saturday afternoon to buy a pair of shoes. He tried on a number of them but Mr. Halliday didn't seem easy to fit."

Hall nodded impatiently.

"Never mind the shoe business," he said. "Tell me only the things that have something to do with the murder."

Wallace looked surprised.

"But everything has to do with it."

Hall groaned aloud; and behind his book, Case suddenly turned red and started to read with renewed interest. Percy Wallace went on with his story.

"As I told you, Mr. Halliday had trouble with his feet. Well, at last I managed to find a perfect fit. The shoes were wrapped and he paid for them and left. As is customary, I took his name and address for my sales slip. It wasn't until closing time that I discovered the ghastly error."

Percy Wallace stopped talking, took a deep breath and swallowed his Adam's apple once more. Hall's face was livid.

"Discovered what?" he roared.

"Why, the two right shoes," Wallace explained. "By mistake I had given Mr. Halliday two left shoes. As soon as we closed, I packed away the opened

boxes and found two rights with no lefts to match. You can imagine how I felt?"

Hall shook his head.

"I can't," he admitted, "but go on."

"Of course there was only one thing to do. I rushed straight to Mr. Halliday, and took the correct shoe to him. I will say he wasn't a gentleman about it."

Robert Case emerged from the book and listened quietly.

"Mr. Halliday was in a rage. He said he had had to go out on a special errand and had no choice but to wear the two left shoes. I told him how sorry I was and although he had made both pairs useless, I insisted on leaving the other right shoe and taking the muddy one back to the store."

A deep sigh escaped Inspector Hall's lips.

"That's the song I've been waiting to hear," he said in deep satisfaction. "Well, Case, I guess that settles it."

Case smiled pleasantly.

"Never mind, Mr. Wallace. Drop in anytime."

He went out swiftly, never looking back to where the slim shoe salesman stood shaking hands with a completely self-satisfied Inspector James Hall.

"NUTS," Hall shouted. "That's the trouble with you, Case. Every time I get a murder all sewed up, you go digging up the pavement and upsetting the apple cart."

"Just the same," Robert Hall answered, "ninety per cent of the time you're wrong."

Hall walked around the edge of the desk deliberately, fists clenched. He strode across the room to where the unprotected Case had seated himself carefully, deep in the protecting seat of Hall's only comfortable chair. For a split second Hall wanted to lift the little detective by the scruff of the neck and toss him out the window. Then he remembered how many times Case had been right.

"Okay! What have you got on that pint-sized mind of yours?"

Case stood up.

"Nothing," he admitted. "It's just that easy way out you took. The simple explanation usually turns out to be the wrong one. I want to take another look at Halliday's apartment. There's something . . ."

Hall's fingers went unerringly to his smooth scalp. He shook his head.

"Let's go," he said. "The sooner you get this thing off your mind, the sooner I'll get some rest. Why I ever let you in on the deal, I'll never be able to figure out."

Robert Case dropped his book gently on the desk top and looked up with mild surprise.

"You don't?"

Hall chuckled.

"Come on, Sherlock," he teased good naturedly, "give up the ghost. This settles the whole thing. Halliday went out with these two left shoes on because he had made a date with Helen Kane. He knew he'd have the perfect chance to kill her and get away with it. He came back to his room and was going to commit suicide when Wallace came up with his other shoe. That would explain his anger at being walked in on. After Wallace left, he took the gun and shot himself. Open and shut case."

PERCY WALLACE was beaming.

"I-I hope I've been able to help you," he said.

"Help us?" Hall was on his feet, pumping the shoe salesman's hand. "All we've got to do is produce those other shoes and put your story on record. The whole thing is finished."

Robert Case arose and crossed the room to Wallace's side.

"What time did you leave Halliday's room?" he asked.

Percy Wallace looked thoughtful for a moment.

"I reached the hotel at nine-fifteen. It must have taken about fifteen minutes to go up, leave the proper shoe and come down again. Yes! I'd say I left about nine-thirty or slightly later."

Case nodded.

"It all adds up," he admitted. "Well, Inspector, guess you won't be needing me. Nice meeting you, Mr. Wallace. If you ever need a job . . ."

Percy Wallace shuddered and drew away.

"Oh! No thanks. The Regent people treat me very well. I'd never care to leave."

Case smiled up at him in wide-eyed innocence.

"Because you needed my help, remember?"

THE clerk at the LaGrove Hotel did not welcome their return. The LaGrove couldn't stand much publicity of the type the Kane killing had given it. They were ushered to the elevator and into Glenn Halliday's room. Once inside, Case started a systematic search of the dead man's belongings. The

bed was as it had been left the night before. Halliday was fastidious and evidently had lived a comfortable life. Helen Kane's picture was the usual portrait of a charming young girl, very much in love. Case took a quick look at it and turned away. The gleam in his eyes wasn't pleasant.

The shoes had been removed for evidence. In Halliday's closet Case found four more pairs hanging in a shoe bag, a half dozen neatly pressed suits, hats, and the usual attire of a man interested in life.

"Nothing here but clothes, a bed and a picture," Hall grumbled from his post by the door.

Case went on, searching the carpet, behind the dresser and finally with great reluctance he lowered his body and crawled about under the bed. At last, apparently satisfied, he returned to the door.

"The great Robert Case admits he's crazy, that the murderer wasn't hiding under Halliday's bed and that he's ready to pay up or shut up," Hall recited in a monotone.

Case went through the opened door and down to the lobby without answering. Outside, he turned and forced Hall to halt with him.

"Like to take a ride to the morgue?" he asked.

Inspector Hall maintained his usual uneven temper and a string of oaths escaped his heavy lips.

"What in the name of Saint Peter are we going to do at the morgue?"

Case started for the car.

"I'd like to take another look at Glenn Halliday," he replied calmly. "If you don't want to come . . ."

Hall hesitated, and then climbed in. He sat back silently as Case shifted the gears and pulled away from the curb. For a time they rode in silence. Finally Hall could contain himself no longer.

"Bob, for Heaven's sake, let me in on it, will you? I'll go crazy if you don't stop this silence strike and talk."

Case no longer smiled. His eyes were on the road ahead, and it wasn't the sun's glare that made them slitted and stone cold.

"Sorry, Jim," he said. "I don't know myself. It's just a feeling I get about these things. That girl didn't deserve to die. I just want to make sure we've got the right man."

With no more than the necessary delay they entered the cold death chamber of the city morgue. With the attendant, a dried up man of fifty, they went down the line of ice boxes set into the wall.

Hesitating before one of them, the man compared tickets, loosened the handle and opened the door to the ice box. Cold, odorless air swept out into the room. The dull, hollow scraping of metal on wood, a white sheet drawn back and Case started quickly to examine the stiff body of Glenn Halliday. He worked swiftly. The job wasn't a pleasant one for the mild little man. The head, neck, chest, the whole body was unmarked by any wound, except the bloodless hole in the side of the head. Hall stood by patiently until Case reached the up-turned feet.

"I told you you'd find nothing here," he growled suddenly. "Stop looking at his feet. The man doesn't even have a corn, not that it makes a hell of a lot of difference."

Case turned away. He held his hands at his side as would a doctor who is anxious to reach hot water and soap.

"That's just what I was afraid of," he said bitterly. "Not a mark on his body other than the wound in his head."

PERCY WALLACE, Regent Shoe House's best salesman, expressed pleasant surprise as Inspector James Hall and Robert Case opened the plate

glass doors and strolled in. Hall saw Wallace standing beside the cash register and approached him, smiling pleasantly.

"Good afternoon." Wallace held out his hand. "I don't suppose I can sell you gentlemen any shoes?"

The question was meant to be humorous, but from the expressions on his visitors' faces, he knew it had fallen flat.

"Mr. Case would like to talk with you," Hall said. "Just a few details to be straightened out."

Percy Wallace smiled pleasantly at the little man he had seen behind the law book at Inspector Hall's office.

"I'm very glad to help all I can," he said. "Shall we go into the back room? I'm not needed right now."

Case nodded shortly and the three men passed through a narrow aisle and into what seemed to serve as combination office and stock room. There were two chairs against the wall, evidently removed from the front of the store. Wallace motioned to them and Hall sat down. Case remained on his feet, walking up and down along the wall of shoe boxes. He seemed interested in them.

Wallace remained standing, saw that Case didn't intend to use the chair meant for him, and finally sank into it himself.

Case whipped around suddenly, looked straight into Wallace's weak eyes.

"You knew Helen Kane, didn't you?"

Wallace squirmed uncomfortably. This wasn't the question he had expected but with a quick gulp he managed to stammer an answer.

"I knew Helen-er-Miss Kane several years ago," he admitted. "That is, I knew of her."

Case didn't relax his steady stare.

"I think you knew her, not several years ago, but several weeks ago. In fact you knew her and were in love with her up to the time of her death."

Wallace tried to control himself. His hands on the arms of the chair were white and bloodless from the grip they had taken.

"You--you're wrong," he said. "It's true that Helen and I were friends. That's all it amounts to, I never met Halliday."

Case was relentless.

"What makes you mention Halliday?"

Wallace sprang to his feet, his face pale.

"I don't know. That is--you're trying to make it look as though I was mixed up in this case. I told you all I know. You can't rightfully accuse me . . ."

Robert Case was sure of himself now. He pushed his argument as a well-trained lawyer would fight for ground.

"Wallace, you've got something on your mind. Something that's going to haunt you straight to the electric chair. When I came down here I had a pretty good idea that you were the murderer. You've given enough away for me to prove it."

Wallace stood stiff and alert, eyes wide with terror.

Jim Hall was at his side, puzzled but ready to back up Robert Case when the little man needed him.

"Sit down, Wallace," Case said suddenly. "Sit down and let's see just how good a shoe salesman you really are."

His voice was silky, soothing as a snake charmer's.

LIKE a man in a dream, Wallace sank backward into the chair. He sat very still, his throat knotted and jumping.

"Take off your right shoe."

Hypnotized, Wallace reached down, managed the knot and removed the shoe from his foot.

"And the stocking."

Hall stood by, a completely bewildered man. He forgot to rub his scalp and his fingers jerked nervously at his side. Case was close to the shoe salesman now. He reached down suddenly and jerked up Wallace's foot.

"Look, Inspector," he said. "The man who killed Helen Kane was wearing two left shoes. Wallace claims Halliday did it. What happens to a man's foot if he wears an opposite shoe for an extended period of time?"

The room was dead silent. Wallace's breath was coming hard. Hall scratched his head and sudden understanding flashed into his eyes.

"Good God, man, you've got it! Halliday's feet were as smooth as glass."

Case nodded grimly, still keeping his hold on the shoe salesman's foot.

"And Wallace, who makes a business of perfect fitting, has a raw blister on his big toe and his whole foot is red and creased."

Wallace jerked away suddenly with all his weight.

"You're making a fool of me!" he screamed. "I had nothing to do with it. Nothing, you understand?"

His voice was high pitched and hysterical. Before Inspector Hall could reach him, Wallace dodged to one side and tried to dash for the door. There was satisfaction in Robert Case's eyes as he put out a quick right foot and caught Wallace. The shoe salesman went sprawling. Like lightning he was on his knees and trying to stand again. Case reached his side and with unholy delight planted a hay-maker on his chin. Wallace's head jerked

suddenly to one side as though hit by a truck. His Adam's apple bounced up and sank down again slowly and a groan of pain split his lips. He sank to the carpet with blood oozing from his mouth.

"Nice going," Hall said admiringly. "You may be a half pint, Bob, but what you can reach, you can kill."

Case rubbed his throbbing fist, flexing the fingers painfully.

"I wonder if it was worth it," he asked ruefully. "I won't be able to hold a book for a month."

PERCY WALLACE was safely in his cell before Hall and Robert Case retired to the warmth of Hall's office. The Inspector had been rubbing his classic dome for several hours now and was no closer to an explanation than before. With the door safely locked, he brought out a tall bottle of rosy, transparent liquid, and two glasses, and placed them on the desk before him.

"Fifteen-year-old stuff," he said lovingly and fingered the cork of the bottle. "Never get it out for anything but special occasions."

Case flopped wearily opposite him, crossed his legs and straightened the crease in his trousers.

"This is special, isn't it?" he admitted. "In a way, I'm sorry it's over."

Hall grinned broadly.

"You won't get lonely," he answered. "People get murdered every day."

He filled a tall glass and handed it to Case. The little man touched it to his lips and said soberly:

"Yet, if I could drink a toast that could be reality, I'd say, 'a toast to murderers. May they always murder their own kind.' That's what gets me, Jim. The innocent ones have to take it."

Hall was thoughtful.

"How about it, Bob? Shoot the works, will you?"

"The works?"

"Yeah! How did you first find out that Wallace was involved in the crime?"

Case drank deeply and placed the partly emptied glass on the edge of the desk.

"I didn't have a thing to do with it," he admitted. "Wallace convicted himself."

Hall's eyes were steady.

"Go on."

Case smiled.

"Remember I told you that if you left a murderer alone long enough, things would start happening? I wasn't satisfied with the whole thing. When Wallace came here, he was finishing his plan for the perfect crime. He made it so perfect that he walked into his own net. Wallace was clever. He even figured out a new way to kill and he based it on a trade he was accustomed to. He knew that Glenn Halliday had a date with Helen Kane. He picked up Helen and convinced her with some wild story that she should take a drive with him. He probably pretended that he was sorry for the trouble he'd caused her."

"Trouble?"

"Wallace loved Helen Kane. She turned him down for Halliday. Surely that's an old story?"

Hall nodded.

"Go on," he urged.

Case leaned back in his chair.

"Quite simple," he said. "Wallace met the girl and took her out Highway 6. He was wearing two left shoes. He murdered the girl, made a lot of confusing tracks around her body and returned to town. He already had two right shoes in his car. He went to Halliday's room, shot him in the head and made it look like a suicide. Then he planted a dirty left shoe and a clean right under the bed. Returning to the store, he turned in the shoes he had left and reported the transaction as he explained it to us."

For once, Hall forgot to bluster. "Case, I've got to hand it to you. All that on guess work, and because Halliday didn't have any bruises on his feet."

"Not quite," Case admitted. "To begin with, when we visited Halliday's room the second time, he had a whole shoe bag of practically new shoes hanging in his closet. That's the first definite clue I had. A man doesn't rush around in the afternoon buying shoes, then go out to murder a girl wearing two lefts, when he has several perfect pairs in his closet."

INSPECTOR HALL poured a second glass, stoppered the bottle and placed it gently away in his desk. "I guess we don't have to worry about smart shoe salesmen as long as our men are just a little smarter," he said softly. "When did you find out that Wallace had been in love with Helen Kane?"

"When Wallace told me," Case admitted. "After I figured out who killed Helen Kane and Glenn Halliday, it wasn't so hard to figure out why. Our friend Percy Wallace is going to spend a lot of sleepless nights wondering just how his perfect crime went astray." Case stood up, tossed down a last drop and passed the empty glass to the man behind the desk.

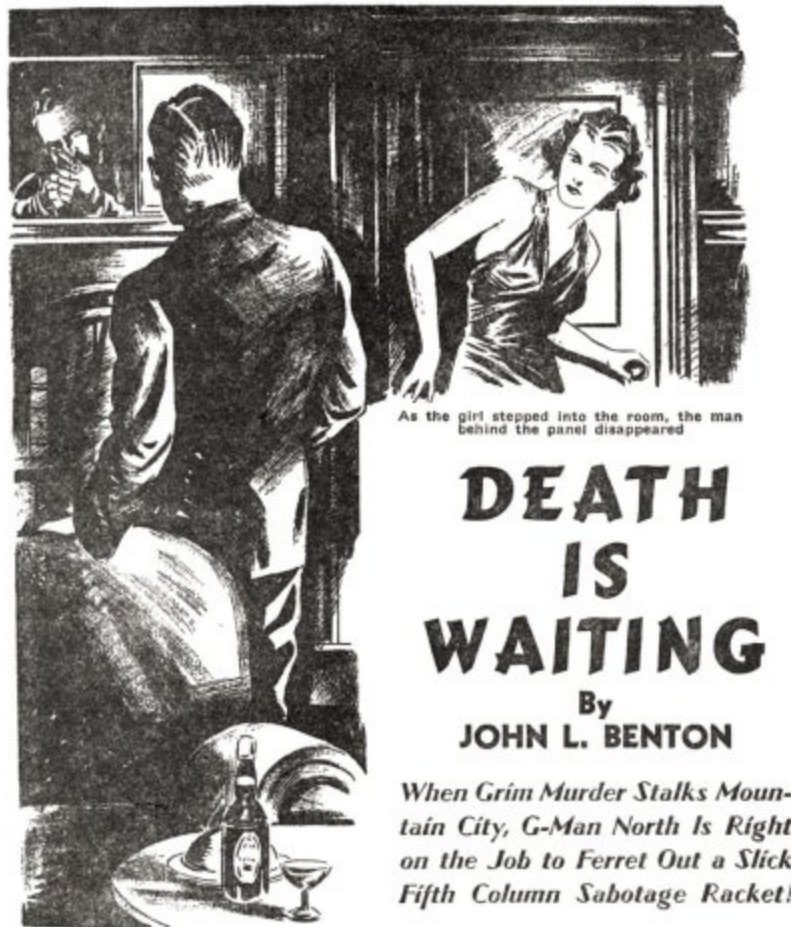
"I've got to be running, Jim," he said, and glanced hurriedly at his pocket watch.

"Relax," Hall urged. "We both need a rest."

Robert Case slipped quickly into his coat.

"Sorry," he said, "my feet have been killing me for the past week. I'm going out and pick up a new pair of shoes!"

**Death Is Waiting by John L. Benton.**



*When Grim Murder Stalks Mountain City, G-Man North Is Right on the Job to Ferret Out a Slick Fifth Column Sabotage Racket!*

THE library of Jefferson Rockland's mansion was a place of shadows. The light diffused from the table lamp seemed to hesitate and shrink away from the corners of the big room as though it feared the blackness lingering there, when two men paused in the doorway.

"Mr. Rockland wishes you to wait for him here, Mr. North," the gray-haired one, obviously a butler, said to the younger man he ushered in. "He will see you presently."

"Thanks," Bob North said, low-voiced. "I hope he won't be long?"

From the moment he had entered this house a few moments before, he had found something about the big old place that inclined him to speak in a hushed voice. As if it were an art gallery or an elaborate tomb.

He seemed rather out of place here in this gloomy spot, like some successful young business executive who had stepped off the beaten track. A meticulously groomed young business man whose neatly brushed, thick dark hair gleamed faintly in the mellow lamplight.

Young North stepped into the library and the butler quietly retired, closing the door behind him. North heard a faint click, as though a key might have been turned in the lock. He moved slowly, his eyes fixed on the closed door.

A hint of uneasiness swept over him. When a man has been with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for nearly ten years he frequently develops a sort of sixth sense that warns him when danger is imminent. North sensed it as he looked at the closed door.

He walked over and turned the knob cautiously. He had been right--the butler had locked that door. His hand slid into a side pocket of his well-tailored suit. The cold steel of the automatic there felt good as his fingers touched it. Then suddenly he stood stock-still, as a slightly muffled voice that seemed to come out of the air reached his ears.

"In the corner behind the big chair," it said, "death is waiting for you."

Bob North's eyes narrowed and his strong jaw tightened. His gaze slowly circled the room, probing into the black shadows, seeking the spot from which the voice had come. He stared at the panels of the oak wainscoting above the built-in bookcases along the east wall, waiting for the voice to speak again. But he did not hear it. Silence mocked him--made the hush that had hung over the mansion a nebulous, yet malignant thing.

Little details of his surroundings registered on his mind, though apparently they were unimportant trifles. For instance, the bottle of wine standing on the table, and the filled glass beside it. Things like that.

NORTH stared at the big chair at the far end of the room. It was half hidden in the shadows. The thick pile of the Oriental rug made his footsteps noiseless as he walked over to the chair and circled it.

And then he saw! A stocky, gray-haired dead man, clad in trousers, white shirt, and smoking jacket. A knife had been driven through the shirt, into the man's chest, and his blood crimsoned the shirt's whiteness.

"Jefferson Rockland!" the G-man muttered.

He stared down at the body of the millionaire who had been such a power in Mountain City, and thoughts sped quickly through the F.B.I. man's brain. With this man's death, it was as though the main cogs in many vital wheels had stopped. The newspaper that Rockland had owned, the local radio station that had been backed by his money, the war production plant of which he had been president--what would happen to them now?

"He hated crime," North thought grimly. "And now he's been the victim of some criminal--murdered!"

Bob North knelt and examined the body.

"Still warm," he muttered. "Hasn't been dead long."

North got to his feet, his brow furrowed with deep thought. Jefferson Rockland had phoned the local F.B.I. office in Mountain City and asked for a Government man to be sent out to his residence that night to talk to him. The millionaire had refused to say any more than that over the wire. Bob North had been given the assignment--his first case since arriving in town the day before.

The G-man's frown deepened. Here was irony for you. Only that day National Crime Prevention Week had started, and the citizens of Mountain City were eager to rid their town of all crooks and racketeers. Jefferson Rockland, one of the foremost citizens in making the reform wave a success, had been scheduled to do a series of broadcasts as part of the campaign. His paper, the Mountain City News had orders to play it up big all week.

"This is a job for the police," North decided. "If I knew where that voice I heard came from maybe I could give them something to go on."

He made a quick search of all the shadowy places around the big room, but found nothing. And all the time one thing was nagging at him--what a hard blow this murder would be to Jefferson Rockland's daughter, Nancy. She adored her father, from all that North had heard--and she was an only child. Her mother had been dead for five years.

North caught sight of something then, and his hand dropped to the automatic in his coat pocket. One of the panels above the bookcase had slid silently to one side and a man's head and shoulders were in the opening. He was covering Bob North with an automatic he held in both hands. And then he spoke.

"Call me Nemesis," he said. "If you don't let them think that you killed Rockland, you die!"

North's fingers tightened on his gun, but he did not pull the trigger. This "Nemesis" had him covered and while he might be able to put a bullet in that lean, sardonic face gazing at him through the opening in the paneling, there was a good chance of his dying as he did it. Which would do no good to anybody concerned.

HE WAS still standing as if turned to stone, his eyes glued to that sinister face above him when he heard the key turn in the door of the library, the only door leading into the room. It opened and Nancy Rockland stepped

into the room--a brown-haired girl in a dark evening gown that set off her slender figure gracefully.

"Mr. North?" she asked, as she closed the door behind her.

The panel above the bookshelves slid silently closed and the thin face of the man who called himself "Nemesis" disappeared. Bob North gave his attention to the girl. She had not seen the man in the panel.

"Yes, Miss Rockland," he said. "I'm Bob North, Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"Parker said you were here in the library," she said, a little disturbed. "But why should the door be locked from the outside?"

"Apparently a little whim on Parker's part--if he is your butler," said North. "I don't know why he locked the door."

"You haven't talked to Dad yet?" Nancy asked quickly.

Bob North hesitated before he answered. This girl could not see that still form lying behind the big chair at the other end of the room. And he was reluctant to tell her of the murder--now.

"No," he said truthfully. "I haven't talked to Mr. Rockland."

He wondered if Nemesis was behind the panel listening. It seemed quite likely.

"I want to help in the town's crime prevention campaign this week," said Nancy. "I've tried to talk Dad into letting me take part, but he refuses to listen." She smiled, and she was even lovelier when she smiled. "He says it is no job for a girl, particularly a girl who is engaged to John Clark."

"John Clark," North repeated. "Oh, yes. He's running for district attorney in the county election next week, isn't he, Miss Rockland?"

Nancy nodded. "And he must win!" she said emphatically. "For with John Clark and the rest of the Reform Party in office Mountain City will be a

better place in which to live. I think--"

She stopped short, startled by the sudden sound of gruff voices in the hall. She had started for the door when the gray-haired butler appeared. He drew his heels together and bowed from the waist. His square face was expressionless.

"The police are here," he said in a monotone. "In regard to Mr. Rockland's murder."

"Murder!" Nancy gasped, and clutched at the back of a chair. She clung to it as she looked around wildly. "Oh, no! You can't mean that--that Dad is dead!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Rockland, but it's true." North went closer to her and gently laid a hand on her arm. "Your father has been killed."

"Oh, no--no!" Nancy dropped into the chair, staring ahead dazedly. "It just can't be!"

But the next moment men from the Mountain City Police Department were entering the library. Four detectives and six officers in uniform. A thin-faced man had arrived with them, and North stared at him, wondering just who he was.

"I'm mighty sorry to hear about this, Miss Rockland," said the detective-sergeant in command of the police. "Can you tell me anything about it?"

"I know nothing about it!" wailed Nancy. "I--I've just heard about it!" She looked wildly about. "Where is he? Where is Dad?"

"Perhaps it's best for you not to see your father now," North said gently, and beckoned a frightened woman servant who was standing in the hall. "If your maid could take you to your room--I know what a shock this has been Miss Rockland, but if you'd go now--"

NANCY nodded and got staggeringly to her feet as he helped her. She walked out into the hall as in a daze. There the maid took charge of her and led her away.

"I'll phone Mr. Clark," Parker, the butler, murmured, as he stepped through the library door. "I should have done that when I called the police."

"Who are you?" the detective-sergeant demanded of North.

"Bob North--F.B.I.," the G-Man said, and produced his credentials. "You'll find the body over there behind that chair."

He glanced again at the thin man who had arrived with the police--and he knew that face then! The sardonic countenance of the man who had stared at him through the panel-opening and covered him with a gun. Nemesis--here in person! But there was no trace of recognition in the faces of either of the two men as they stared at each other.

The thin man must have thought it time, though, for him to say something, because he came over to Bob North then. "I'm Ralph Heath of the *Mountain City Blade*," he introduced himself. "Saw the police come in here as I was passing, so I figured something must be going on."

"There was--and is," North said. The police gave the body a hurried examination, then Detective-sergeant Olsen questioned North. The F.B.I. man told him that Jefferson Rockland had asked that a G-man be sent to the house that evening, and said that he had been alone in the room when he found the body. He said nothing of the voice he had heard, nor that Heath, calling himself Nemesis, had been hidden behind the panel.

The newspaperman, standing close by, did not appear much interested in Bob North's story.

"And you don't know what Mr. Rockland wanted to talk to you about?" asked the sergeant, when North had finished. "It must have been important, too. Kinda too bad you didn't get a chance for a few words with him."

"I wish I had," North said. "It would be a big help now. But I haven't the slightest idea what he had on his mind.

The coroner who had appeared now was examining the body. The ceiling lights had been turned on and the big library was no longer a place of shadows. Heath wandered over there idly and watched.

North did not miss a move the newspaperman made. Which was why he saw a piece of paper apparently slip out of Heath's pocket accidentally and drop to the floor. The reporter reached down and picked it up, and with the same move he picked up another piece of paper from under the big chair and thrust both into his pocket.

"I've got to get back to the office," North told the sergeant. "You don't need me here now, do you, Sergeant?"

"Guess not." Olsen shook his head. "We know where to find you if we need you."

Bob North nodded and left. The hush still lingered over the house as he got his hat and topcoat in the hall and put them on. Now he understood the stillness he had sensed when he had first arrived. It had been the silence of death.

It was dark on the porch and no police had been left on guard there. North stepped into the shadows at the side of the door, dropped his automatic into the side pocket of his topcoat, and waited. The door opened and closed as a tall, thin man stepped out onto the porch.

"All right, Heath," North said and the barrel of his gun prodded the reporter's back. "Suppose you tell me why you tried to frame me and pulled that Nemesis stuff?"

"You're crazy!" growled Heath. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Too bad." North breathed a sigh. "I hoped you'd be reasonable--now it looks as if I'll have to find a way to make you talk."

BUT Ralph Heath had no intention of "talking." Suddenly he leaped forward and raced down the porch steps. He seemed sure that North would not use his gun with the police so close, and the G-man did not. But he ran swiftly in pursuit of the reporter. They were some distance away from the house when North overtook Heath and brought him down in a flying tackle.

The newspaperman's head hit the sidewalk so hard it knocked him out. North carried the unconscious man to somebody's lawn, laid him beneath a big tree and went swiftly through the fellow's pockets. He found the papers the reporter had stuffed into the pockets and whistled softly as he read one of them with the aid of a pocket flashlight.

"So that's why Rockland wanted the F.B.I.!" North thought grimly. "Nice! Very nice."

Ralph Heath moaned, sat up dazedly, and saw North standing there with the note in his hand.

"You found it then," he mumbled.

"Jefferson Rockland," said North, repeating the note word for word, watching the reporter sternly, "this is to warn you that unless you persuade John Clark that it is not advisable for him to continue as candidate for district attorney your daughter will be kidnaped and we cannot promise that you will ever again see her alive." The G-man placed the note in his pocket. "You and that gang you're working with must be pretty desperate, Heath."

"What do you mean?" demanded Heath as he reeled to his feet. "That kidnap threat was just a gag to get John Clark scared into not running for district attorney."

"Oh, sure," said North. "And murdering Rockland was all in fun, too."

"We had nothing to do with that!" protested Heath. "And listen! About my being behind that paneling ... I ran across the floor plans of Rockland's

place in the office of the architect who designed the mansion months ago, and tonight I remembered there was a secret passageway leading from the cellar to the library. I--I went there--"

"Why?" demanded North curtly.

"Because I hoped I'd learn something we could use against Clark in the campaign," Heath said surlily. "I didn't kill Rockland--but I know who did it."

"I did, I suppose," snapped North.

"No." Heath shook his head. "It was that butler, Parker, I think. I heard him quarrel with Rockland about something but their voices were so low I couldn't hear what they said. Then Parker stabbed Rockland and--"

"You tell the police that?" demanded North.

"How could I, without implicating myself?" The reporter was badly frightened now. "When I peeked through the crack in the panel and saw you alone in the room I gave you that mumbo-jumbo about Nemesis. I wanted you to find the body. Oh, I was trying to frame you all right, but--"

"Sure, and you'd have kept on trying if you hadn't found out that I was a G-man," growled North. "You got scared when you discovered you were fooling around with a guy from the F.B.I."

"You're darned right," agreed Heath. "The bunch I'm working for on this election are in the saddle in this town and they plan to stay there--but they won't stand for murder."

"Why should Parker have killed Rockland?" demanded North.

"I can't figure out," said Heath, shaking his head. "Parker has no tie-up with the political crowd who are running Mountain City now. It's beyond me."

"So this," said North, "is one case where we know the butler is guilty and can't prove it unless we find a good reason for him killing Rockland. Under the circumstances, you'll be no good as a witness against Parker."

"You going to turn me over to the police?" Heath asked anxiously.

"Not yet," said North. "Run along and do your dirty work. I'll find you if I need you, Heath. I wouldn't advise you to try and get out of town."

"I'm not that big a fool," the reporter said shortly.

HEATH walked toward the street and North made no attempt to follow him. The G-man just stood there in the deep shadow beneath the tree branches. Bob North was no fool and he knew that Ralph Heath had a gun. But where the G-man was now he was not a good target.

He was thinking about all that Heath had told him. Wondering if the fellow's paper was back of him. Would the *Blade* approve of the way one of its men was working with a crowd trying to scare off John Clark, to keep him from running for office? North was not too interested in that local political angle, but there were a lot of other things he wanted to know about this town. He had learned a few things from the F.B.I. office, but there were others he had to know.

Obviously Rockland's newspaper, the *Mountain City News* and the *Mountain City Blade* on which Heath worked were rival sheets. The *Blade* obviously was controlled by the political party now in power in the town.

Bob North was thinking intensively about that gray-haired butler as he returned to his office. Was Parker guilty of the murder? One thing made North feel that the butler must be the killer. Parker had locked the door after ushering North into the library.

"The only reason for that must have been that Parker knew Rockland was in there dead," decided North. "And wanted to keep me there while he phoned for the police."

North sighed. All he had to do was find Parker's motive for killing his employer. He didn't want to report his suspicions to the police yet, but if

they had any reason to arrest Parker that would be fine. But North did not feel it wise for him to accuse the butler until he discovered Parker's motive--if he had committed the crime.

The news of Jefferson Rockland's murder put Mountain City in a state of turmoil. Too many people had depended on the millionaire for their livelihood to accept his mysterious death calmly. And such a murder certainly was not an auspicious beginning of National Crime Prevention Week.

By evening it was announced that, despite her grief over her parent's death, Nancy Rockland had become a member of the local crime prevention committee. She was going to talk over the radio at eight in a special broadcast at the local station NXY which had been owned by her father, and it was rumored that what she would have to say might blow the lid off the local political situation.

The editorial staff of the *News* had a field day. The paper hinted in articles and editorials that the men in City Hall were having a bad case of jitters.

At 7:30 that night Nancy Rockland was in one of the broadcasting studios at NXY. A white flower was in her hair and across the front of her red dress a big yellow ribbon declaimed "Fight Crime," in big black letters.

She was lovely--but defiant, because she knew she was in danger. Just half an hour before she left home she had received a mysterious phone call. A harsh masculine voice had warned her that if she dared go through with the broadcast she would die.

Even though she had been frightened, she had not reported the call to the police. All she wanted was her chance to speak over the air to tell everybody the reason for her father's murder. That was all that mattered.

"WE'RE all ready for you, Miss Rockland," Carson Garvey, the stout station announcer, greeted her. "We thought it might be wise to have you

broadcast from one of the smaller studios without an audience. So we'll use this one."

"Whatever you say," said Nancy, but she had already prepared for any trouble that might eventuate, for in one hand she carried a large handkerchief which concealed a small, fully loaded automatic.

She had an idea that stout Carson Garvey probably would be overcome with shock if he knew that.

Nancy had had difficulty in keeping John Clark from coming with her to the broadcast, but she had finally persuaded the candidate for district attorney she preferred to go alone. She had been relieved when finally her fiancé had reluctantly agreed to stay away from the station. She had not told even him about the phone call, for she did not want him to suspect she might be in danger.

Just a few minutes before she had reached Studio Number Two she had run across Ralph Heath and another man in the second floor corridor of the radio building. She had passed with head held high, and the thin-faced reporter had made no attempt to question her.

"You have a copy of your talk of course, Miss Rockland," Garvey said to her when they were alone in the small studio. "We have to keep such things on file, you know--and the control operator has to have a copy to check while you are on the air."

"Yes, I have it." Nancy handed him two typewritten copies. "I can remember everything I'm going to say, word for word, so I won't need to read my speech."

Carson Garvey frowned as he took the papers. "But working without a script is risky," he protested. "You might be cut off the air from the control room if you don't follow your speech exactly."

"I'll take a chance," said Nancy.

The announcer nodded, and took a copy of the speech to the man in the control room. When he returned he pointed out the mike at which Nancy was to stand and adjusted it to the right height for her. Then he seated himself at a table a little behind her and looked over her speech and his own announcement. There was a second mike at one side of the table into which he would speak.

Garvey tested Nancy's voice, with the control room operator listening, then the announcer nodded as he glanced at his watch.

"We're on the air in two minutes," he said. "As soon as I finish the introduction I'll signal you to start speaking, Miss Rockland."

Nancy nodded calmly. "I'm ready."

Yet as she stood there in front of the microphone, waiting, the two minutes seemed an hour long. She was growing afraid--of what she did not quite know, but the feeling that an unseen menace lingered somewhere close by could not be shaken off.

"As a special part of the Crime Prevention Week campaign in Mountain City," began Carson Garvey at the signal they were on the air, "Miss Nancy Rockland, daughter of the late Jefferson Rockland, brings you a message which we feel will be vital to all listeners. The next voice you hear will be that of Miss Nancy Rockland."

Nancy clutched the mike in front of her by the tubing as though she found the touch of the cold metal comforting, then quickly released it as she forced herself to speak.

"It is difficult for me to talk to you all over the air now because of circumstances which you know," she said into the mike. "I do so only because my father hated crime, and some criminal was responsible for his death."

SHE paused as though for breath before going on, but in that brief moment her eyes had grown wide. In some way Ralph Heath had entered the studio and had circled around in front of the table at which Carson Garvey sat. The thin face beneath the reporter's pulled-down hat brim was sardonic as he stared at her.

Heath placed his finger to his lips in a gesture of silence, but Nancy shook her head defiantly. Her left hand went quickly behind her back and the handkerchief covering the gun in her slender fingers floated to the floor unseen.

"I know that Jefferson Rockland died because he put too much trust in others," she went on bravely, her eyes fixed on Heath's face. "My father was murdered because--"

She faltered as she saw the abrupt hardness in Ralph Heath's thin countenance. With a small pair of wire cutters he drew from his pocket, he reached for the wire leading from the mike.

Behind Heath and the girl a hard-faced man stepped closer to Carson Garvey with an automatic raised to bring the barrel down upon the head of the stout announcer.

Nancy's left hand flashed out from behind her back, her grip tightening on the little automatic. The gun roared, the sound loud in the silence of the studio. Heath reeled, the wire cutters dropping from his hand unused--and fear whitening his face.

"Stop it, both of you!"

Nancy spun around as she heard the commanding voice. Bob North stood in the open doorway of the studio, his gun covering the man who was about to knock out Carson Garvey.

"Don't try it, Hogan," North said sternly.

For an instant the man he called Hogan stood there his gun raised above Garvey's head. Then he lowered the weapon and swung around to face the

F.B.I. man.

"Finish your talk, Miss Rockland," said North. "Everything is all right now."

"I hope you will all pardon the slight interruption," Nancy said into the mike, a little tremulously, but bravely. "That sound you just heard was merely something that dropped here in the studio, though it might have sounded like a shot over the air. And now I will go on with what I have to say.

"My father was killed because of sabotage in the war plant which he owned. There is not time for me to give you the details now--but the murderer has been placed under arrest. You will learn all about it in the *Mountain City News* tomorrow." There was a mocking light in her eyes as she looked at Ralph Heath, who stood holding his side where her bullet had creased his ribs. "I can assure you that the crime was not a political one though many of you may have believed that. Thank you, and goodnight."

Garvey signaled, and the studio was cut off the air. North was unwaveringly covering the gangster he knew as "Lug" Hogan with his gun, while Nancy's gun was steadily on Heath.

"Sabotage at the plant," the newspaperman said slowly. "So that was the reason for the murder. But I thought she was going to talk about that other--that's why we tried to stop the broadcast."

"And you even had a known gangster like Lug Hogan working with you when you tried it," North growled at him. "There has been sabotage at the plant--I investigated that today. Rockland knew about it, but he had not reported it to the police. And his own butler, Parker, was a member of the fifth column gang."

"Yes, he is," said Nancy. "Parker has been our butler only for the past six months, but my father trusted him--didn't even suspect him. Parker must have taken the job in order to watch Dad."

"And when Mr. Rockland phoned the F.B.I. and asked that a man be sent to the house Parker grew frightened," North said. "Parker thought he was suspected and killed Rockland to keep him from talking." The G-man smiled soberly. "When the police arrested Parker late this afternoon he broke down and admitted the whole thing."

"I've been a fool," muttered Heath. "District Attorney Lewiston got me into all this--gave me a thousand bucks to make sure John Clark didn't get elected. All the rest of the crowd at City Hall didn't seem to know anything about it."

LUG HOGAN said nothing. He looked worried as he stared at the gun he had dropped to the floor when North covered him.

"You were not only a fool but a cats-paw, Heath," said North, and at his signal police appeared behind him at the door. "Parker confessed that Lewiston was the head of the fifth columnist gang here in town. The F.B.I. have Lewiston now. His political party had nothing to do with it."

"Then the kidnap note to Rockland was all Lewiston's idea!" Heath said bitterly, his gaze bleak as he watched the police enter. "He sent it! He didn't care what he pulled as long as he stayed in office! He had to stay if he was head of that fifth column sabotage outfit!"

Bob North nodded. "And he must have been afraid to trust you too far or he wouldn't have had Hogan working with you. Hogan is a fifth columnist."

Lug Hogan started to protest, but lapsed into silence as two detectives grabbed him and led him out of the studio. Ralph Heath sighed as two detectives moved toward him.

"Just one question before I go," he said to North. "What made you think Parker was a fifth columnist?"

"First he locked me in the library," said North, "evidently hoping I would be accused of the murder, without guessing, of course, that you were behind the secret panel. What's more, he clicked his heels together when he bowed." The G-man grinned. "The Nazi influence no doubt."

"I've written plenty of articles proving that crime doesn't pay," the reporter said sourly as detectives led him away. "I should have believed it."

"John Clark will be elected now," Nancy said to North and smiled sadly. "Thanks for all you have done, Mr. North."

"It's my job," said North.

"My goodness!" Carson Garvey glanced at his watch and leaped to his feet. "I've got to announce the Murder Baffler program and it's on the air in three minutes in Studio Ten."

The stout announcer rushed away and Bob North smiled. Crime was the radio man's job, too.

## Pop-off Rookie by Leo Hoban.



*O'Rourke Knew Bert Miles Would Always Blow Up Under Pressure--but He Didn't Expect Him to Explode in a Killer's Face!*

IT'S too bad Bert Miles is such a pop-off," Captain Wallace said. He leaned far back in his swivel chair, until his heavy paunch protruded like an oversized barrel. "I had real faith in him when he joined the force. Now within two month's he's on the probationary list."

"And practically begging to be blackballed into dismissal," Sergeant O'Rourke added through teeth that were biting hard on an acrid-smelling black cigar. "I couldn't do anything with him last night in the cruiser car. I criticized every move he made, sneered at him, trying to prove whether he

can take it. We gotta know whether he can take it, whether he's got the nerve. A cop without nerve is no man to have around when an emergency arises."

"What did he do?" Captain Wallace's shaggy eyebrows rolled up and he leaned forward anxiously. He pushed deserving men as far as possible, but he had no use for those who couldn't help him build the finest police force in the world.

"He blew up, turned that lashing tongue of his on me. He deserted the cruiser to get himself a pack of cigarettes, while I was in a restaurant, eating. That's how we happened to miss the radio flash on that jewelry store stick-up. There was nobody in the cruiser to catch the call."

"Who ate first?"

"He did, while I sat watch. He was just sore. I guess I'd been riding him too hard."

Wallace leaned back again, his face hard and cold.

"Well, you won't have to anymore. I'm sticking his notice on the bulletin board. Bert Miles is through."

"Not yet, Captain," O'Rourke pleaded quickly. "You said you had faith in him once. I've been riding with him every night for two months. I ain't sure yet that he wouldn't know how to meet an emergency. Something is bothering him, making him nervous and irritable, causing him to pop off. But I've got a hunch that he'll turn out okay. Let me have him for just ten more days."

Captain Wallace's eyes, resting musingly on O'Rourke, lost some of their coldness. They had been rookies together, had often faced death side by side. They understood each other.

"You're a hard-bitten man, O'Rourke," Captain Wallace said. "And you always do make it tough on rookies--almost as tough as I do, till they prove themselves. But you're square and not too dumb. You can have the pop-off

for ten more days. And I hope, for my sake, that you're not making a mistake. Remember, I don't tolerate mistakes."

Sergeant O'Rourke rose, saluted.

"Thank you, Captain. I promise that in ten days I'll find out if he can take it."

"That you will, I hope," Captain Wallace said, extending his hand.

"Good luck, O'Rourke. Maybe you're right. Maybe Bert Miles has what it takes to make a good cop. But don't let up on him. Keep riding him into blowing up. We can't use pop-offs here."

Walking down the police corridor that was heavy with disinfectant, Sergeant O'Rourke felt a tremor of doubt. He'd placed himself on record that Bert Miles would produce, yet inwardly he believed Bert Miles was bent on making his record as black as was humanly possible.

BERT MILES sat behind the wheel of the cruiser in the police garage. He had the motor turning idly. Two frowning creases cut deeply into his forehead and his sharp jaw jutted belligerently. Off-guard now, his eyes were not keen, simply hurt. His broad shoulders were hunched like a man waiting for the sweep of the guillotine.

He knew why Sergeant O'Rourke was late in reporting. He was in with his side-kick, Captain Wallace. Bert Miles knew his fate had been sealed and he was scared. He needed this job. Not only was his self-respect at stake, but his mother and sister were dependent on him.

Silently he cursed the fate that had paired him with O'Rourke. Indomitable, unbending, an acid-tongued martinet, O'Rourke had hammered at him for two solid months. Seething fury had mounted in Miles until every nerve in his body was frazzled-edged, begging for action that never came. He was

being driven so frantic that now he doubted his ability to get out of a jam when under pressure.

He'd tried to shrug off the flood of pressure that O'Rourke's tongue had ignited within him, and failed. He'd taken to popping off, being smart alecky in unconscious defense. And with every wisecrack he'd uttered, he'd known shame.

The door on the far side was flung open and scowling Sergeant O'Rourke sagged into the front seat. As usual, his face was expressionless and the gray hairs at his temples seemed to bristle.

Miles hated him as he never had believed he could hate any man. He sat quiet, waiting for O'Rourke to spring the bad news.

"Well, numbskull, is our beat in this garage?" the sergeant growled. "Or maybe you feel safe in here, off the streets where jewel thieves rob stores while kid cops buy snipes in the cigar store."

His voice was low, yet in it was the crackling fury of a whip. Miles flushed, clasped gears and plummeted the sedan recklessly up the incline.

"Your partners before must have been rosy-checked Boy Scouts who didn't smoke," he snarled. "Just meek little yes-men who took a lot of loose lip so you'd make nice reports on them. What an ornery old buzzard you are!"

EVEN as he said it, Miles cursed himself for a fool. But ever since he could remember, he'd talked too much, bitterly resenting any criticism he thought unwarranted.

O'Rourke's face didn't change, his head didn't turn, but Miles saw the corded muscles along his jaw go taut.

"Now if you'll close that big mouth of yours," the sergeant said in a voice flinty as steel, "I'll tell you a hunch I have. Between Forty-third and Forty-

sixth, on Third, there's a man named Carson. The Department thinks he's a jewelry fence. His office is wherever he's standing at the curb. Give that district a play, swinging back to it as often as possible. Maybe we'll get a break that will give you the chance to regain part of your face in the Department. Understand, rookie?"

"Yes, sir," Miles replied suddenly meek.

He'd tried being meek on other occasions, but O'Rourke's savage comments had always changed that meekness into vitriol.

It was on their fourth swing through the district, with fitful gusts of rain bringing a midnight chill, when O'Rourke's stubby right hand gave a sudden jerk toward a dark doorway.

"That's Carson talking to some mug! Pull this hack up. I'm going back to look 'em over."

Miles braked the cruiser, his heart suddenly racing.

"Don't go back alone," he advised. "We'll both go."

O'Rourke's eyes grew ominous.

"I'm in charge here. You obey orders. Stay here and cover me--if you've got the nerve."

Miles tensed and he sat stiffly upright, both hands clenched tightly around the steering wheel. His knuckles were white, frantically battling to keep a fist from heedlessly slashing out at O'Rourke's smug face. He heard O'Rourke open the door and step to the curb. Only then did he trust himself to look in his partner's direction.

O'Rourke's hard heels slapped against the wet sidewalk, sounding ponderous and official in the quiet. Suddenly a shot was ear-splitting in the stillness, banging up and echoing back against the high walls of the office buildings.

Miles dragged his unwilling long legs across the gear shift. He grabbed hold of the jamb of the open door, propelled himself onto the sidewalk. But he fell flat, his legs trailing from the sedan.

His heart pounded furiously and he felt a growing paralysis of fear. Never in his youthful imaginings of police work--when he had naturally fought grimly and courageously and victoriously--had he expected a reaction like this in his first taste of action.

He saw O'Rourke down on one knee, his police positive thundering and lancing yellow-red flame. Plate glass tinkled around the doorway and three shots boomed a quick answer to O'Rourke's fusillade. O'Rourke pitched flat against the sidewalk.

Miles tried to scramble upright, but his legs were ungovernable things, as loose and weak as wet spaghetti. He kept jerking at the gun in his holster, despair growing with each leap of panic. He suddenly realized with a shock that in his fury against O'Rourke he had failed to loosen the safety strap.

THE men sprang from the protection of the doorway. O'Rourke's gun blasted again and one man went down. The other found protection behind a parked car and, bending low in the protecting darkness, he ran across the street.

Shaking, Miles got to his feet and began running after the vague form of the fugitive. As he passed O'Rourke, he finally succeeded in wrenching his positive clear from the holster. It seemed incredible that he should reach the corner so swiftly .... and more incredible that he should find himself totally alone.

The fugitive had disappeared.

O'Rourke came panting up, his mouth a twisted white line of fury.

They searched the block, avoiding each other's eyes. Miles kept muttering curses. O'Rourke remained grimly quiet.

When they returned to the man on the sidewalk, four nondescript night owls were crowded in a sadistic circle. O'Rourke pushed fiercely between them.

The hood's fedora had rolled into the gutter. The blue hole in his forehead bubbled blood upward against the raindrops. Miles unexpectedly felt weak and sick at the sight.

When the morgue wagon came, O'Rourke explained: "I shot him. His pal got away. It looked like Georgie Bernadino. They cut down on me before I had a chance to question them. Miles was backing me up from the cruiser. I'd told him to stay there. We'll make a full report in the morning, but right now we're going out to look for Berandino. Have a radio warrant put on him."

Cruising again, O'Rourke rode for three blocks in penetrating silence before saying in an impassive voice: "You kicked it, kid. You might have stopped the mug if you'd been on your toes. You didn't get the gat out until the mug was away on a safe lam. Scared?"

Miles' lips twisted bitterly. What could he say? By a queer paradox, he hadn't been scared for himself, but the suddenness of the attack had left him frightened. He had known a fear that any ordinary mortal might experience when guns boomed and bullets droned ominously in his first conflict.

O'Rourke seemed to understand. His face was not so grim, his voice almost affable.

"Maybe you'd better not answer."

Miles' shame pyramided into galling agony. O'Rourke chatted amiably of inconsequential matters, being strangely friendly and by his very politeness piling coals upon Miles' humiliation.

Suddenly Miles understood. O'Rourke was being kind, almost pitying, telling him without saying so that he was through. He hadn't made the

grade.

WONDERING grimly what O'Rourke expected of him, he felt his arm muscles tense in an overwhelming desire to fight.

"Berandino hangs out around Fifty-fourth," O'Rourke said. "Maybe we can pick him up.... You know, my wife's gonna have a birthday in two weeks. I can't figure out what to give her. What would you suggest, bud?"

It was idle talk, the kind two pals of long standing might make to waste away long, drab hours on a monotonous shift. Miles' mouth felt dry and furry.

"I wouldn't know, sir. I never had a wife."

"You should get one bud. You need one."

Miles' right foot pressed down viciously on the brake pedal. His right hand came off the gear shift as the cruiser skidded. When that hand came away from the gear shift, it was a balled fist that was shaking furiously under O'Rourke's nose.

"You sanctimonious old clown, you drove me haywire for two months! Naturally I fumbled a trick I wasn't expecting. I couldn't even think straight about those rats in the doorway, because I was hating you so much. And now you want to rub it in, be polite, tell me that you're a better man than I am. Sergeant, you're nuts! You couldn't carry my shoelaces, let alone by weight. Now, Mr. O'Rourke, how would you like to go to blazes?"

"I'll drive, instead," O'Rourke said calmly. "I gotta be sure that things are done right in my cruiser. And never forget, bud, I'm in charge. I give the orders here."

"Sure," Miles said venomously. "You give orders. I just sit still and take all the abuse you can dish out. Not any more, though. Another crack out of you

and I'll paste your mouth shut!"

"I want to explain something," O'Rourke said gently, almost resignedly. "What you been through happens to every rookie. We wanted to see if you'd blowup, or if you could control your nerves."

"And I can't, huh?"

"You can't. You blow under pressure. I'm sorry. Think something will happen that will make me change my mind?"

Miles kept silent. He knew that in the few hours preceding dawn, it was illogical to suppose that anything would transpire that would change his condemned fate. Perhaps O'Rourke was right. He was just a pop-off who shouldn't ever have been outfitted in an officer's uniform.

O'Rourke was piloting the cruiser in his heavy-handed, cumbersome way. After walking a beat for so many years, he would always feel out of his element in the luxurious efficiency of an automobile. He drove like an old woman who was afraid of frightening a team of horses.

He cut the corner leading away from the docks, had to yank viciously left on the wheel to avoid the onrushing red sedan. But one quick glance at the occupants of the sedan had been sufficient for O'Rourke. He slid from under the wheel, was out of the cruiser, yelling:

"Take over and drive! Berandino was in that sedan!"

MILES behind the wheel, gunned the motor and made the tires scream in a sharp U-turn. O'Rourke grabbed the handle of the other door as the machine completed its quick turn. He stood on the running-board, drawing his automatic.

The sedan's tail-light was a bobbing speck, heading into the warehouse district. Miles took the cruiser's speedometer heedlessly into the

stratosphere until the tail-light blinked out. He cursed. Perhaps the lights had been extinguished. Maybe it had made a turn into the maze of streets that lay ominously somnolent between the gaunt procession of soot-smearred warehouses.

His chance--and he'd muffed it again.

O'Rourke's fist pounded against the glass pane. Miles lowered the cruiser's window.

"Try Fourteenth Street!" O'Rourke bellowed. "Johnny Bernadino used to have a still years ago in an old abandoned warehouse down near Walnut. It'd make a perfect hideway."

For the first time in months, Miles' heart leaped gladly. He knew that district, knew it only as a wild kid knew a district that he'd played games in. He knew every byway, every pathway in and out of the abandoned warehouses.

His elation became acute disappointment. Fourteenth and Walnut Streets were deserted. No cars, not a person was in sight.

O'Rourke waved him down and leaped off the running-board to examine the driveway that led into an abandoned brewery.

Miles saw him wave his arms impatiently. He sprang to O'Rourke's side, looking down at the fresh tire tracks that disappeared behind the huge sliding doors, before O'Rourke had finished grunting his satisfaction.

"Here's your chance to vindicate yourself, bud. I'm guessing that inside we'll find Bernadino and the three mugs who were in the sedan with him. Scared?"

"No, sir," Miles said, loosening his gun. "If you'll take the front, I'll go in through the back. I know how to get inside."

"I'm giving the orders," O'Rourke snapped. "We're going to bust in through the old office door. Understand, bud?"

"Yes, and you're out of your head. You're going to get hurt if the jewel thieves are inside. It's dark, a perfect trap where they can spot you and you can't do a thing about it. I'm going in through the back."

"You're doing as you're told, pop-off, or else."

"It's or else, then. The rule book says to take as many precautions as possible. Why get yourself killed?"

O'Rourke glared, turned on his heel and made for the old office door. Miles began to run in the other direction. His breath was coming in agonizing gasps as he plowed through refuse in the areaway to the rear of the building. He knew the location of the air shaft entrance that would bring him inside from the second floor, but there was insufficient time to use the shaft.

HE raised his right foot and kicked in the window pane. The shatter of glass was deafening in the quiet.

He went head-first through the window as a gun banged and a slug droned hungrily near his head.

He hit the floor, rolling, and came up with his automatic clenched in a steady fist. A deadly calm held him. Here was the fight he'd been looking for. Here was surcease from galling insults.

Two guns roared up front. There was a yelp of pain, then silence.

Miles started forward on his hands and knees. He went for to the right, until his shoulder brushed the wall. A blurred figure passed near him, walking on tip-toe. Miles, smiling without humor in the dark let the man pass. Then he went forward with the sure memory of childhood guiding him, making a wide arc to his left.

The dim ray of light that peeked from under a crack in the doorway almost was indiscernible. Miles stood erect and moved back into the shadows.

"We'd better take him now," a voice said from the other side of the partition. "That partner of his will be bringing help. Let's scram."

"Last I saw of my partner; he was running like a scared rabbit away from trouble," O'Rourke snarled in a bitter, tight voice. "A cop--running away."

"Cops don't run away," the first voice said. "And it didn't sound like mice breaking that window in back."

"You don't know the cop I'm talking about," O'Rourke growled. "The yellow rat cracks under pressure. He's just a pop-off."

Miles, watching the dark blur approach from the building's rear, felt like laughing aloud. He supposed this was how a man felt, after being restored from the strange clutch of insanity that had held his mind in a vise.

The blur became a man, and the man tugged open the door.

Miles galvanized into action. An upraised foot sent the man spinning into the small room. Miles followed him like a hurricane, then blinked in the uncertain light.

Five men were there. One was O'Rourke, sitting on a chair and clutching a bullet-punctured hand. The four men all carried guns. One, easily recognized as dapper Georgie Bernadino, had two guns--his own and O'Rourke's.

On a table in the middle of the room, an open valise squatted. Divided into four even piles near the valise lay jewelry, gems.

"Get 'em up!" Miles started to say. "You're all under arrest for--"

The man with two guns tried a snapshot with the positive. Miles' gun bucked malevolently in his hand, and kept bucking. He felt the shocking impact of a slug against his right shoulder that drove him flat against the wall.

HE saw two men go down. Then O'Rourke came surging from his chair, swinging his one good fist. The room became a roaring inferno of deafening sound. Another man went down. Miles' gun clicked, empty. He threw it with all his remaining strength at the face of the dapper Bernadino.

The thug swung his gun-filled fists upward. But O'Rourke reached with one hand and twisted his positive free. There was one more shot--O'Rourke's and Bernadino was flat on his face on the floor.

O'Rourke spun about to face Miles.

"You'll never learn to obey orders, I suppose. But at least I know how you'll act under pressure. I was wrong, being so careless. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have--"

"But your orders were to break in the rear," Miles said innocently. "That's how my report will be made out."

O'Rourke looked levelly at Miles.

"Always popping off, eh, partner?"

"Yes, sir," Miles answered respectfully.

He wanted to ride the cruiser with O'Rourke for many years to come.

He knew intuitively that his new partner felt the same way.

"Pop off all you want, copper," said O'Rourke gently. "I'm beginning to like it."

**Death's Race by G. Wayman Jones.**

# DEATH'S RACE



*The Sixth of a Sensational Series of Stories of a Self-Appointed Avenger Making Single-Handed Fight Against a Powerful Criminal Group. An Alias Mr. Death Story*

NINE chairs stood about the long mahogany table of the room. Yet only four of them were occupied. A single but powerful electric bulb threw white searching light down from the ceiling, accentuating the emptiness of the vacant chairs.

At the head of the table sat a masked man. His two gleaming eyes shone through a pair of slits in the blackness of the hood which covered his entire face. For a moment his nervous gaze rested on the black countenances of three others in the room who were masked like himself, then for a moment

it scanned the empty seats. His forefinger drummed a nervous tattoo on the table.

An air of apprehension enveloped the chamber, as the three others sat silent, evidently waiting for him at the head of the table to speak. But their leader said no word. Instead he sat there, grim and silent, and despite the covering on his face it was apparent that some powerful emotion held him in its grip.

It was obvious that Number One of the Murder Club was afraid; and his fear had subtly communicated itself to the remaining three members of this nefarious organization.

Finally, a tense hoarse voice broke the sinister ominous silence of the council room.

"For God's sake, Number One, say something. I can't stand this any longer. Why did you call this meeting? What's wrong?"

Some one sighed with relief at the sound of a human voice; and the man at the head of the table seemed to cast off the silent spell which had held him in thrall.

Slowly he rose to his feet and spoke in a slow somber tone, the voice of a man who is weary of life, who is burdened down with terrible responsibilities.

"Comrades," he said solemnly. "I am about to make an admission that I never thought I would be compelled to make. We are defeated. We have been outwitted at every turn. The power of the Murder Club has been successfully challenged. We are impotent to deal with our deadly enemy. He has slain more than half our membership; and all our plans to deal with him have gone awry."

HE paused for a moment, and the man who had spoken first rose from his seat.

"You mean Alias Mr. Death, of course," he said. "I admit you're right. I admit that he's licked us at every turn. But what are we to do? What?"

His voice was high and contained a hint of hysteria as he spoke the last words. The other two figures looked eagerly at their leader as the question was propounded.

The man at the head of the table shrugged his shoulders and spread his palms upward.

WHAT, indeed?" he replied bitterly, "There seems little we can do against him. That is the reason that I have called this meeting. There are four of us left. Four out of our original membership of nine. We have lost more than half of our men and almost all of our power. I realize that since Mr. Death began his frustrating of our plans none of us are as wealthy as we had been. Yet we must keep our heads. We must not permit our rage at our enemy to sway us. He has beaten us, and there is but one answer."

"And that is?" asked someone.

"To get out. To quit. But before we do it, we shall pull one last job. One last job that will give us back all the wealth Mr. Death has cost us. Then we shall dissolve the Murder Club. Take our profits and get out. That is the only way we can save our lives. Are you gentlemen agreed?"

For a moment the terrible silence which had pervaded the room swept back upon it, and the four men sat there grim and quiet as their distorted minds considered if dissolution of their organization which for so long had controlled the destinies of Newkirk City was the only method by which their lives could be put out of reach of the long murderous arm of Mr. Death.

Then, suddenly, one of the hooded men nodded his head decisively.

"I agree, Number One," he said. "The strain of carrying on is too much. Not one of us knows when Mr. Death will strike us down; not one of us knows when we shall go to join our comrades. I agree with you. Only show us how to regain the fortunes that we have lost through the machinations of Mr. Death, then we will dissolve."

A MURMUR of assent went through the room as the leader rose once again.

"I already have made the plans," he said. "I have already taken the first steps. We should split about five million dollars. I believe it is Number Nine's turn for duty."

Number Nine stood up and bowed.

"Then, gentlemen," continued Number One, "I suggest you leave us. We shall discuss the plan in detail. If you are needed you shall be informed. If not, you shall be sent your share of the spoils. But no one must know more than is absolutely necessary. Hence I ask you to leave us alone while I give Number Nine the details of the scheme I have arranged."

Two of the masked men rose, and bowed toward their leader and the comrade whose turn it was to devote himself to the business of the Murder Club.

Soon the two men were left alone. Smoke from innumerable cigars thickened the air of the room as they talked far into the night. Plotting, planning, for the final job that was to outwit Mr. Death and restore the Murder Club's members to its former financial prestige. Daylight showed over the hills to the east of Newkirk before the pair of masked men stopped talking.

Following the custom Number Nine bowed and left the room, leaving the leader to himself. Number One seated himself when he was alone, and hummed a merry little melody. He was more at ease than he had been in

weeks. After all, he still had his life, and when his plan had been put into operation he would be a cool million dollars richer.

MAYOR Richman of Newkirk City sat at the huge desk in his office and puffed mechanically at a panatella. City Hall was deserted. It was long since the other employees had gone home. The building was in darkness save for the dim bulbs which lit the halls to show the watchman his way, and the blaze of light which shone from the chandeliers in the mayor's office.

The mayor suddenly jerked open a drawer of the desk and withdrawing a brown bottle and a tumbler poured himself a stiff shot of excellent French brandy. Yet even the warm glow of the alcohol coursing through his veins failed to banish the apprehension that was upon him.

For the fiftieth time in as many minutes he glanced down at a slip of paper on his desk and read the typewritten words thereon.

MR. MAYOR:

On Monday night you will remain after hours in your office until our representative calls upon you. Death shall be the penalty if you refuse to obey or set a trap.

(signed)

THE MURDER CLUB.

He puffed the cigar nervously, then suddenly froze to immobility in his chair, his eyes glued to the door of the office which was slowly moving

inward. His hands clenched themselves into fists and his eyes stared at the moving portal until they ached.

SLOWLY the door swung open. Gradually a black-garbed figure appeared. Two eyes gleamed from slits in the ebon hood which fell to the visitor's shoulders. Then the door slammed, and a metallic voice spoke.

"Good evening, Mr. Mayor. I see you received our note."

Richman nodded. His throat was too dry for words.

"Good," continued the other, as he drew up a chair. "Now let's get down to business."

THE mayor fidgeted as his unwelcome visitor sat down, and hoped that this call did not presage anything too serious. It was not the first time that the mayor had been honored by a visit from the notorious Murder Club. Far from it, the organization controlled the political destinies of the city, and thus far no public servant had ever dared to disobey, save one, and his only reward was the elegant words engraved on the tombstone which marked his grave.

"I have called," said the hooded man, "to discuss with you the new park which the city contemplates erecting. I know that the Board of Alderman have not yet selected the site. Further, I know that you control the board.

"I have come to tell you where the park shall be made. On the corner of Vine and Race Streets there are sixty acres of swampy land. Those sixty acres are owned by the Devine Corporation. You will purchase that land for the park. You will assay it at the sum of five million dollars which will be paid to the corporation. Do you understand?"

Richman gasped. Then suddenly found his voice.

"But good God, man! That swamp land isn't worth a nickel. The only place up that way that's worth anything are the two blocks which run on that hill through the center of the swamp. The rest is valueless."

"I am not here to argue," said the masked man with a sinister ring in his voice. "In fact I quite agree with you. The land isn't worth a damn, save for the three blocks of which you speak and which the Devine Corporation does not own. However, you will go through with the condemnation proceedings.

"You will give the owner of the three good blocks as little as possible. Certainly not more than ten thousand. The Devine people must be awarded the rest of the money. Is that thoroughly understood?"

For a moment, Richman's eyes lit with a gleam of hope. He nodded his head affirmatively. The expression in his eyes, however, was not lost on his masked visitor.

"I can guess what you're thinking," he said. "You imagine that all you have to do is to find out who the officers of the Devine Corporation are, then you know the identity of some of the Murder Club members.

"Don't bank too much on that. First, the corporation is in the hands of trustworthy dummies, and second, any overt act on your part will be dealt with as all the enemies of the Murder Club are dealt with. You understand your orders. Are there any questions?"

The hooded man rose, indicating that the interview was at an end. Mayor Richman turned an appealing face toward him.

"Do you realize you're ruining me?" he asked in agonized tones. "Do you realize that if I do this I am ruined in Newkirk City? My career is over?"

"I'm not interested in that," said the other. "You'll obey instructions. That's all I have to say. Good evening."

The door opened, then slammed, leaving the mayor of Newkirk City alone with his none too pleasant thoughts.

NOT for a moment, did the mayor entertain the slightest idea of disobeying the Murder Club. No, the organization was too powerful for that; and he did not have the least conception of how their power had been curtailed of late by the depredations of Alias Mr. Death.

True, he had heard of the phantom marauder who left his card at the scenes of his killings, but Richman had no way of knowing that Mr. Death's victims were members of the club, or that the phantom avenger was anything more than an ordinary, though unusually colorful crook.

Richman realized that if he pulled the raw deal that he had been ordered to do, he was ruined. Yet after all, it was better to have a career aborted and remain alive, than to be slaughtered in one's bed as had those others who had dared defy the organization which had just given him its orders.

With a heavy heart the mayor of Newkirk extinguished the lights in his office and walked slowly from the building to his home.

JAMES Quincy Gilmore, Junior, pressed the doorbell once more. As he heard the bolts shot he smiled, already anticipating the fresh young feminine face that would appear. The door opened and his smile vanished. Replaced by an expression of grave concern.

"Why Sally," he said as he entered the room and put his arm around the girl with the tear-stained face. "Why, what's the matter? What's wrong?"

Sally Fortune wiped her eyes on an absurdly small piece of Irish lace and fought for control of her voice, while Jimmy eyed her apprehensively.

IN all the years of their acquaintance he had never seen this girl give way to tears. At last she spoke. "I'm sorry, Jimmy," she said. "I'm sorry I called you. I suppose I'm silly to go on like this. But as you know my sole income, since daddy died, has come from those three blocks of buildings up at Race and Vine."

"Sure," said Jimmy. "What of it?"

"I'm going to lose it."

"Lose it? How?"

"It's been condemned by the city for the new park."

"Well," reassured Jimmy. "That won't do any harm. That land's worth real money. They'll pay you plenty for it. Then you can invest in something else. That's nothing to worry about."

SHE dried her eyes again. "But it is something to worry about," she said with tearful emphasis. "They're only giving me ten thousand for it."

"What!" Jimmy almost leaped from his chair.

Sally nodded. "Ten thousand," she said again. "That's all."

"Ten thousand! That's an outrage. That property's worth ten times as much."

"I know it is. But they sent me a letter today telling me it had been condemned and that they would pay ten thousand for it."

Jimmy Gilmore's face became suddenly grim. "Let me see their letter."

Sally Fortune crossed the room and took a letter from the desk in the corner. She handed it to him.

A frown crossed his brow as he read it. Then abruptly he rose to his feet.

"Listen," he said. "Let me handle this for you. And promise me not to worry. Of course, legally, we can't do anything, but I have a hunch and if it works out, things might be all right. Now promise me to stop crying, and let me attend to it."

She looked into his eyes. "Jimmy," she said earnestly. "I'll promise. If you'll handle it for me, I'll promise not to worry."

"Good. Don't mention it to anyone and don't do a thing about it until you hear from me. I'll call you later."

He strode from the room, a grim and bitter expression on his young bronzed face.

FOR more than two hours Jimmy Gilmore walked round and round the City Hall building. Through its long corridors he marched, his keen eyes searching through the crowds. He paid particular attention to the private office of the mayor.

There was an outer reception room before the sanctum of Newkirk's chief executive. The door was open and a secretary was busily bending over a desk. Evidently this sight interested Jimmy as time and time again he marched past the open door and shot a swift glance at the man working in the reception room.

Then on one of his many journeys through the building, the break for which he had been waiting came. The secretary rose from his desk and leaving the room for a moment marched down the long corridor to the water fountain at the extreme end of the hall.

Jimmy Gilmore lost no time. Casting a speedy look around to make sure that he was unobserved, he slipped through the reception room door, pulling it closed behind him. Then he did a peculiar thing.

He whipped a small black cloth object from his pocket and with a deft motion pulled it over his head. It was a mask which reached to his shoulders; a hood similar to that used by the members of the Murder Club, save that it bore a white skull painted over his right temple.

Then with a determined purposeful walk he strode toward the private office of the mayor and flung open the door.

Mayor Richman looked up from his desk and gasped as he gazed into the unwavering barrel of an automatic in the steady hand of a hooded man. In his excitement he failed to notice the painted white skull on the other's mask, and immediately took the intruder for the same man who had visited him a few nights ago.

"Good God!" he said hoarsely. "Has the Murder Club no better sense than to send a man here in broad daylight?"

Jimmy Gilmore smiled grimly. He had suspected that the club he had sworn to exterminate had had a hand in this business and the Mayor's words corroborated that theory. He closed the door behind him and turned the key in the lock.

"I'm not from the Murder Club," he said quietly.

The mayor stared at him, wonder and puzzlement on his face.

"Not from the Murder Club," he repeated. "Then what--"

Jimmy answered the question for him before he had completely phrased it.

"I'm Mr. Death. And if you make any outcry you shall see that I am well named."

But Richman was beyond calling for help. His jaw dropped. His face turned ashen. His fingers lay still and nerveless upon the desk.

MR. DEATH!" he said and the tremor in his voice indicated that he would have found the Murder Club's emissary more welcome than this stranger who held his threatening weapon firmly in his hand.

"Yes," he said. "Now we're going to have a little talk, Mr. Mayor, and--" He glanced significantly down at the gun in his hand. "I'd advise you to speak the truth. That remark you made as I came in the door when you mistook me for a member of the Murder Club was enlightening. In fact, it confirmed the hunch I had when I came here. You know what I'm here about, of course."

THE mayor shook his head. The stark terror that shone in his eyes reflected the state of his emotions. If he feared the Murder Club, he at least knew how he stood with them; but now facing the phantom Mr. Death at whose door half a dozen killings had been laid, he was in an abject paralysis of fear.

"I'm here," went on Jimmy, "About the condemnation proceedings for the new park."

Richman started.

"You too!" he ejaculated.

Jimmy eyed him shrewdly. "I, too," he said quietly. "I take it the Murder Club has a hand in this also."

Richman nodded miserably. The weapon in Jimmy's hand moved toward him threateningly.

"Then tell me, Mr. Mayor," he said in a soft voice that was belied by the look in his eyes. "Tell me all about it."

Richman's heart pounded wildly as he considered the unenviable situation in which he found himself. If he talked, the threat of the Murder Club hung over his head. On the other hand, if he refused to talk-- he stared at the automatic in front of him, and decided to throw himself on his captor's mercy.

"Listen," he said hoarsely. "What can I do? I'm between the devil and the deep sea. On one hand, you threaten my life. On the other, I face the Murder Club. What can I do?"

Jimmy Gilmore considered this for a silent moment.

"I'll tell you something," he said suddenly. "Something no one else in the world save the Club and myself know. I'm not the ruthless killer that most people in this town think. I'm masquerading as I am for one single purpose--and that is to wipe the Murder Club from the face of the earth. Every man that I have killed has been a member of that organization.

"I mean to go on until I have slain them all. They are powerless to work against me. I'm giving you your choice. Deal with me and I'll guarantee you my protection against them. Or if you think they can save you from me throw me in with them. All right, I'm waiting for your answer."

RICHMAN, never a particularly, strong character, stared blankly, at the unwavering gun muzzle before him and decided to throw his lot in with the man who sat before him. After all, it was Mr. Death who sat before him now. He could deal with the Murder Club afterwards. In a thin quavering voice he related the entire story of the condemnation proceedings.

When he finished his story he looked anxiously at Jimmy.

"Well?" he asked nervously. "What about it?"

"Simply this," said Jimmy Gilmore. "The scheme must not go through. I know as well as anyone else in this town that you control the aldermanic

board. You will call a meeting tomorrow. You will notify the press of this meeting. There you will rescind the resolution and offer the fair amount to the owner of the three valuable blocks. To this Devine Corporation you will offer ten thousand dollars which is about what their property is actually worth."

"All right," said Richman readily --too readily.

But his sudden acquiescence did not escape the masked man.

"Don't think you can pull any tricks," he advised dryly. "I shall sit with the audience in the aldermanic chamber. I shall have my gun ready. And if you say or do anything other than I have told you, I shall shoot you down where you stand."

Richman squirmed in his chair.

"But think of me," he whined. "What about the Murder Club? They'll kill me if you don't."

"They won't kill you at the meeting," said Jimmy brusquely. "For they won't know what it's all about until after it's happened."

"But then what?"

"I've given you my word, I'll protect you. You'll have to be content with that."

The mayor stared at the compelling eyes which returned his gaze through the holes in the mask and nodded his head. He had but little choice in the matter.

But somehow it seemed the man before him exuded an air of assurance, of confidence, that made him feel a little at ease. If ever there was a man who could save him from the vengeance of the predatory club, he felt it was the man before him now.

"All right," he said at last. "I agree. But for God's sake see me tomorrow after the meeting. The club will be after me sure by then!"

"You control the police," said Jimmy. "Surround yourself with a bodyguard. The club won't be able to get near you then. Anyway, I'll keep an eye on you."

He rose and walked to the door. "Pick up that phone on your desk," he said, "And send your secretary outside for a walk while I get out of here."

RICHMAN did as he was bid, and Jimmy hearing the footsteps outside, unlocked the door. He slipped the key into his hand. Then swiftly stepped into the reception room, locking the door of the private office behind him and leaving the key in the lock. Then he removed his mask and walked boldly down the long corridor whistling softly to himself.

Jimmy Gilmore returned to the huge house which had become so lonely since the death of his father, and seating himself at his desk in the study gave himself over to the study of the situation before him.

Ever since that bitter night on which his father had been slain by the Murder Club because he had been about to expose them, Jimmy had devoted himself to wiping out that notorious organization. He had already accounted for five of a total membership of nine, and now, he had stumbled upon another of their plans.

HE was glad now that he had used the character of Mr. Death which he had created, to protect Sally's fortune. It was the first time that he had assumed the role without being sure that he was on the trail of the Murder Club. His principal idea had been to frighten the mayor into explaining the park deal which obviously was crooked. And in so doing he had discovered that once again his trail had crossed that of the Murder Club.

And now once again he was hot on the scent of the quarry he had vowed to exterminate. Not that this fact filled him with any sense of elation. For

Jimmy Gilmore, in order to keep his terrible oath had given up all the worthwhile things in life. Though he loved Sally Fortune, he could no longer ask her to be his wife--the wife of a murderer.

No, everything had been surrendered, everything given up to the avenging of his father's death. He sighed as he lighted a cigarette. Well, five of them were already gone. There were but four left, and if his plans worked out, and he could come face to face with the member who was handling this land condemnation business, his work would be nearer its end.

FINALLY he went on up to bed. For a long time he lay there, awake and sleepless with a terrible bitterness in his heart at the man who had killed his father and made of him an outlaw, a man who could no longer take his rightful place in decent society. Eventually, when dawn thrust her gray fingers over the horizon, he slept fitfully.

Mayor Richman's night was even more sleepless than that of Jimmy Gilmore. He lay in a luxurious bed in an even more luxurious bedroom and pondered the position in which his own weakness and cowardice had placed him.

For years, now, the Murder Club had dictated the policies of the city unmolested, and thus far the mayor had not suffered by it. He had been well taken care of as long as he did what he was told. Now the club had demanded something of him which would wreck his professional career, and on top of that he had been visited by the phantom killer, Mr. Death.

For a long time he did not sleep, and when he did it was only to wake a short half hour later bathed in sweat, his mind a whirling vortex of fear from the nightmare which had seeped through his apprehensive brain.

Yet when he rose in the morning his mind had been made up. He had decided that the best gamble was to keep faith with Mr. Death. True, he did not underestimate the power of the club. But if he obeyed their dictates this

time he was ruined anyway. Whereas, by cancelling the unjust condemnation proceedings, he would save himself from political suicide.

Then again, it seemed that Mr. Death's protection was worth something. For the mysterious midnight marauder had thus far been clever enough to leave no clue behind him, to outwit his enemies at every turn, so perhaps, he could save the mayor from the long arm of the club.

However, before attending the aldermanic meeting which he had called for that afternoon he took the precaution of calling on his chief of police for a bodyguard of six of the force's best men. They stood about the rostrum of the aldermanic chamber when he addressed that body.

The room was crowded when the mayor made his speech. Jimmy, Gilmore sitting in the midst of the gallery crowd listened to the mayor with a grim ironic smile playing across his face.

RICHMAN backed water gracefully, explaining that a mistake had been made in their previous meeting, and rearranging the condemnation awards. The aldermen, like the well trained toadies they were, solemnly agreed and voted to sustain the mayor's about face.

After the new resolution had been passed the mayor bowed nervously to the crowd who cheered what they considered his open avowal of an honest error and passed from the chamber as his blue-coated bodyguard closed in about him.

That night the mayor's bodyguard was augmented by a score more policemen who surrounded his house. Yet even this display of protection did not render Richman free from fear.

He knew full well that the Murder Club had its spies posted in nearly every city department, and he sat apprehensively in his big living room wondering if one of the men who had been sent to guard him would actually be the man that the Murder Club might select for his execution.

THE aldermanic meeting had been concluded nearly eight hours ago. And inasmuch as he had not heard from the club yet, Richman began to regain a little of his courage. Still he dared not face the darkness, the loneliness of his bedroom. He remained seated in a Morris chair before the fire, sipping the whisky which fought the fear in his heart.

Hearing a footstep behind him, he started suddenly. He breathed with relief as his gaze saw the familiar blue serge trousers of a regulation police uniform, but then as his eyes traveled upwards to the newcomer's face, his heart stood still in utter horror.

For the man at whom he was looking, though wearing a complete policeman's outfit had a black-hooded mask which covered his face and hung loosely on the shoulders of his uniform!

"My God--"

"Silence!" Came a voice from behind the mask. "Silence, you fool. Don't you know who I am."

Then for the first time, Richman noticed the little white painted skull at the top of the mask.

"You!" he ejaculated. "You--Mr. Death!"

Jimmy Gilmore nodded behind his mask. His hand moved toward his coat pocket and a second later his automatic was in his hand.

"How--how did you get in?" asked Richman in a tremulous tone.

With a gesture, Jimmy indicated his uniform coat.

"I figured the house would be so well guarded that I'd be able to easily slip, in with a uniform. I kept under cover and put the mask on when I was inside the house."

Before Richman could reply, a discreet knock came at the door. Jimmy hastily moved to the side of the room.

"Answer that," he said in a whisper. "And remember I've got you covered. Handle it as though nothing were wrong."

Richman nodded and leaving his chair walked to the door. Jimmy heard a voice say: "Sorry to trouble you, sir. But a messenger boy just left this note. Said it was important."

The door closed and Jimmy looking across the room saw the mayor staring with glazed eyes at a piece of paper in his hand.

"What is it?"

For answer Richman handed him the paper. Then white-lipped and trembling, he fell back into the chair. Jimmy's eyes raced along the penciled scrawl.

MR. MAYOR:

You have played the traitor. And for that you die--tonight.

(signed)

THE MURDER CLUB.

A low whining moan came from the Morris chair.

"Oh, God, what can I do. I'm a dead man. I'm--"

"Rot," snapped Jimmy Gilmore. "How can the Murder Club get in past all those cops?"

"How did you get in?" groaned Richman.

FOR a moment Jimmy stood there in silence, then he nodded his head.

"You're probably right," he said softly. "That's just what they would think of. Now brace up, Richman, and listen to me. If you don't go to pieces, I think I can get you out of this."

The mayor looked up eagerly. "How?"

"Is there a closet in this room?"

"Over there." Richman indicated a door to the left of the entrance from the hall.

"All right. Get in there. Stay in there. Turn off all the lights save that small floor lamp. I'll take your place in the Morris chair. In that single dim light a man won't recognize me at once. And in that second, I can get the drop on him. Hurry now. They may be here any minute."

HASTILY Richman did as he was bid, then disappeared in the closet. Jimmy took his place in the chair. He sat there, his eyes glued to the door, his automatic held alertly in his hand.

The minutes ticked past. Yet Jimmy did not relax his vigil. Then suddenly he sat bolt upright as he heard a soft footfall in the hall outside. He leaned forward in his chair. He saw the brass door knob turn slowly. The door swung silently ajar.

The moving door jerked suddenly, then swung closed once more. A masked figure, wearing a hood similar to that of Jimmy's, faced the Morris chair from the threshold. In the dim light of the room the stranger could make out

a form in the chair, but the light was too tricky for his eyes to make out any detail.

"So, Richman," he said in a hard steely voice. "You crossed us, eh? Well, you've got a hell of a lot of nerve even if you haven't much judgement. Maybe you'd like to tell me why you did it before I bump you off."

Jimmy rose easily to his feet. The automatic in his hand was on a level with the weapon which the other man held pointed at him.

"I'm the answer," he said quietly. "I'm the reason Richman crossed you, I'm also the reason that you're not going to bump him off. Look more closely and you may recognize me."

The Murder Club member peered into the gloominess of the room. Then suddenly he saw the white skull on the other's hood. He fell back a pace.

"God!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Death."

"Yes," said Jimmy grimly. "Mr. Death -- and we meet once again, Mr. Murderer."

Number Nine of the Murder Club suddenly recovered from his amazement of meeting his deadly enemy here.

"Yes," he retorted and his voice was edged with venom. "We meet again Mr. Death--and may the best man live."

Two revolver shots rang out as one. Jimmy felt a pricking sensation in his shoulder. His arm jerked. The muzzle of his gun flew up, and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the wall behind the man who had fired at him.

In an instant he had recovered and his weapon came in a direct line on the other's heart. He heard a single click as his adversary pressed the trigger and the striker hit a defective round. Jimmy's own finger constricted on the trigger. But before he could fire, the Murder Club man, realizing the impotence of his own revolver, hurtled through the air.

TOO late Jimmy saw him. He tried to sidestep and fire at the same time. But the lunging black figure was upon him. He felt a sudden weight upon his bleeding shoulder and for the second time the whining steel from his automatic ate its way into the plaster wall.

The pair of hooded figures grappled desperately. Jimmy, feeling a hand at his throat, swung his right hand into the other's face. For a moment the clutch on his jugular relaxed and he tore himself free. But before he could bring his gun into play again, his adversary had followed up.

Jimmy could hear the other's breath coming fast as they stood toe to toe in the center of the room. Each straining desperately for an advantage that would turn the tide of the battle. Blood streamed down from the jagged wound in Jimmy's shoulder, drenching the clothing of both men. Still, despite the terrible wrenching pain of his wound he did not give way.

A leg crashed against his and Jimmy went down. For a moment the pair of them rolled over and over on the floor Jimmy's revolver clattered to the floor. Again he swung his fist into the other's face and muttered a curse as he missed the point of the jaw by less than an inch.

Then even in the midst of the struggle, Jimmy heard the sound of an opening door behind him. He heard a swift footstep in the room. Then Richman's voice called out.

"Boys. Quick. Help. Police, Come here!"

THE mayor ran across the room -- and disappeared through the hall door. Jimmy felt his enemy's grip relaxed for a moment as the Murder Club's emissary's mind grappled with this new problem. Swiftly Jimmy came to his feet. He confronted the other, and spoke rapidly.

"Listen," he said. "That was Richman. He's gone to get the cops. We are both finished if they find us. Let's get out. My car's below. We'll finish our little argument later."

Number Nine of the Murder Club nodded his agreement and the pair of them made for the big French windows on the other side of the room.

Like two cats, they dropped lightly to the lawn beneath, just as the lights in the room they had left flared full on. They heard excited voices above them and half a dozen blue caps thrust themselves from the window. A voice cried out.

"There they go!"

Jimmy lightly vaulted the fence which surrounded the mayor's estate and sprang into the roadster which he had parked beneath the shadows of the trees that lined the roadway. The hooded member of the Murder Club jumped in beside him.

THE engine roared to sudden throbbing life as Jimmy stepped on the starter and threw the car in gear. Up the road before them they heard the voices of the police. And as the roadster started up, the noise of other cars came to them from the rear.

Jimmy thanked the gods that he had retrieved his revolver from the floor before they had leaped from the window. He turned to his companion.

"Got your gun?"

The other nodded.

"They're coming after us. Get ready to use it."

Number Nine examined the weapon in his hand and apparently satisfied that it was now in working order, he glanced back over his shoulder. Two

shafts of light shot down the road behind them from the headlights of the first police car.

Number Nine carefully sighted his pistol and pressed the trigger twice. Jimmy keeping his eyes on the road ahead jammed the accelerator all the way down.

He listened eagerly for the sound of a puncture after he had heard his companion's shot. But the only reply was a devastating fusillade from the police car. Half a dozen angry slugs ate their way through the chassis of the roadster.

The speedometer indicated sixty-five miles an hour, as Number Nine hastily reloaded his weapon and promptly emptied it at the headlights behind, which were coming closer and closer.

There was suddenly a loud explosion, followed by the sound of shrieking brakes. Jimmy heard an elated voice in his ear.

"Got him that time. The front tire. We've stopped them."

"There's another one behind," said Jimmy laconically. "Maybe we can outdistance it."

Less than three minutes later another pair of headlights replaced those which Number Nine had put out of commission. Once more there was an interchange of shots. Jimmy heard something buzz past his head, as he vainly attempted to coax a few more miles per hour out of his already overtaxed engine.

HE glanced up at the roadside for a moment, and noticed that he was already on the outskirts of the city. Behind, the powerful police car was gaining momentarily. He turned once more to his strange ally.

"We'll drive right across the common," he said. "We've got more chance in a running fight through the trees than out here on the open road."

"Shoot!" said Number Nine.

Without decreasing his speed, Jimmy twisted the wheel to the right and the car left the road. It rumbled crazily over the rough ground of the field and charged like a live mad thing in the direction of the fringe of trees some hundred yards in the distance. The police car, taken completely by surprise, raced past, straight down the road, then came to a creaking halt.

By the time the cops had stopped their car and started up again, Jimmy's roadster was almost at the edge of the sparse clumps of trees for which he had aimed. He slowed down slightly and zig-zagged crazily between two gnarled trunks.

THEN applying his brakes gradually, he weaved a dangerous circuitous course through the foliage of the common. Of a sudden he came to a stop and listened intently.

"We're pretty well under cover here," he whispered. "They'll have to stop their car out there. It's too big. They'll have less chance of nabbing us here than out in the open."

The other man nodded and stepped from the car, his hot weapon in his hand. A moment later Jimmy followed suit, withdrawing his automatic as he stepped out upon the ground.

The pair of them, who such a short time ago had been bent on each other's destruction, stood shoulder to shoulder, waiting tensely for any footfall, any sound that would indicate the approach of their common enemy; the enemy that had, for the moment, rendered this strange hooded pair allies.

Number Nine suddenly seized Jimmy's arm as a crackling of underbrush came to their ears. Both of them stood steady and firm, their weapons ready

for defense. Then they heard a man's voice say in disgruntled tones:

"What the hell! We'll never find 'em in here. They've probably gone through and come out on the other side. Let's get back to the house. They might double back there to get Richman."

Another voice assented and the footfalls steadily receded through the trees. Jimmy waited until he could hear no further sound, then his eyes glinting hard through the slits in his hood, he turned to the other.

Number Nine was not taken unawares. He, too, turned to face the notorious Alias Mr. Death, the man who had slain his five comrades. Their guns were aimed unwaveringly at each other. A grim, tense silence enveloped them.

"Well?" said Number Nine. "Does the truce end or continue?"

"The truce ends," said Jimmy Gilmore in a cold, hard voice. "It was of mutual benefit for us to join forces for a while. But now that that necessity is over, we can resume where we left off."

Number Nine's eye gleamed for a moment. His finger pressed the trigger. A dull click sounded.

"My God!" he said in horrified accents. "My revolver is empty. I fired every round at the police car."

Jimmy Gilmore's trigger-finger relaxed on his weapon.

"THEN," he said, "we shall wait a moment. Don't think I'm being merciful. I'm not. No member of your murderous organization deserves mercy. But after all, you emptied your weapon in my cause as well as yours. Hence I'm giving you a chance. Have you any more ammunition?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall walk off six paces. I shall count ten slowly. By that time you should have reloaded. At the count of ten I shall fire. You are privileged to do the same, and to repeat your own words of earlier this evening, 'May the best man live!'"

"Thanks," said Number Nine simply. "You're a strange man, Mr. Death. I'd like to meet you under other circumstances."

"You may," said Jimmy grimly, "--in hell."

He turned abruptly and walked off six paces to the rear. Then he stood perfectly still and commenced counting in a low monotone. Number Nine of the Murder Club swiftly produced ammunition from his pocket and reloaded his gun. Then he, too, faced his enemy.

"Eight -- Nine -- Ten," concluded Jimmy.

And at that precise moment his finger squeezed the trigger softly. A staccato report ripped the silent night, followed a fraction of a second later by a similar sound. But the bullet from Jimmy's automatic had reached its mark, just as the other fired.

JIMMY heard the impotent steel from the other's weapon whiz by over his head. While before him Number Nine of the Murder Club fell to his knees, a dull red spreading stain over his heart.

Jimmy walked forward slowly. The dying man looked up at him and the fragment of a smile crawled over his pain-glazed countenance.

"You--win--Mr. Death," he said slowly. "Good-by."

He fell forward on his face and was still.

For a silent moment Jimmy regarded the prone figure at his feet, then putting a hand in his pocket he produced a small oblong card. But three

words were written on it. The moonlight from overhead revealed them:  
"Alias Mr. Death!"

Jimmy stooped over and placed the card on the dead man's back. Then turning silently, he walked back to his car. And despite the fact that he had once more exterminated one of the club he had sworn to slay, he felt no exultation. Rather, he felt a pang of regret that a victor feels when he vanquishes a gallant enemy, a man who has been worthy of his steel.

## An Order for Murder By Steve Fisher .



*The Pen, Benny Peel Decides, is Mightier Than the Gun!*

BENNY PEEL shoved his hands in his pocket and stared at his boss, wondering what in the hell was wrong. Benny wore a neat blue suit; he had a face that was as square as a wooden block, and on it were his eyes which were like little grey triangles. His nose was short and his lips thick. Most of the boys thought Benny was screwy; but Benny knew better--he knew he had brains.

The only thing that Benny lacked, in fact, was conscience. That was the only reason the boss retained him on the payroll; Benny failed to see why

anyone outside of himself should want to live, therefore he felt no pangs of remorse when he calmly knocked off a citizen or two with a .45 the boss had given him.

"What's the matter now, Joe?" he asked. "Kick-back on my last job?"

The boss shook his glossy head, jerked a fat cigar from his mouth and looked up, frowning.

"Nope," he said, "the job was perfect; too damned perfect. It's caused a terrific shake up in politics; three of our labor unions have busted and the strikers are back to work."

"That's not my fault," Benny said.

Joe puffed on his cigar a moment, then leaned his elbows on the nicked mahogany desk and leaned forward. "Benny, my boy," he purred very smoothly, "you've been popping off around here that you intend to be a fiction writer--that you want to write detective stories, and--"

"That hasn't anything to do with my ability to kill," Benny stated calmly. "Truth is--I've had a lot of experience. I'm a great man. How will anyone know about it if--"

"What have you been writing?"

Benny was startled by the sound of Joe's voice. "Nothing about us--that is, what I've written I've changed around; changed the names and so forth--"

"Have you sold anything?"

Benny beamed. "Nope. I had a terrible time at first. These editor guys kept giving me back my stuff and telling me I ought to go back to grammar school. They wouldn't believe I was a real crook." Benny's squarish face darkened. "But I got sore one day and I jammed my gun into an editor's stomach and told him he was going to publish the story or--"

The boss was smoking rings around the room. His face was coloring. "What'd the punk say?"

"He got very interested in me then," Benny continued. "He asked me to sit down, and he started asking things about me, and what I could do, and he mentioned something about a rewrite staff if I had some real good material for stories."

"Well?"

"I got an order to write a swell big article about New York rackets. It isn't done yet, but--"

"Listen, Benny," the boss said, "you tell me how much you're going to get for that article. I'll give you twice as much and have it published in a better magazine."

Benny looked skeptical.

"But right now," Joe said, opening the desk drawer and milling through a lot of papers, "I have another little job for you."

"Five hundred on this one too?" Benny asked.

"That's right," Joe told him. "And the guy this time is the dirtiest rat in town."

"He is, eh?" Benny replied. "That's fine. I like to kill rats."

The boss held a political job and he always spoke about the "kills" as though he were doing a great favor to humanity; this did his crooked heart good and gave him a little less feeling of guilt.

"This guy," he went on, "is in a room--or he will be--at 75 E. 98th Street. All you've got to do is open the door at the end of the hall, and you'll see him."

"What time?"

"One o'clock in the morning is best," the boss said. "He won't be expecting anybody then."

Benny wrote the address down.

"The boys will be waiting for you across the street in a car," Joe told him.  
"Now don't muff the job; do it right, see?"

"I've never muffed a job yet, have I?"

"No," the boss answered, "you haven't." He put the cigar in his mouth, and bringing his wallet from his back pocket, peeled off five one hundred dollar bills. Benny picked them up, smiling.

"Be seeing you," he said.

"So long, Benny."

BENNY left the office, walking down a long marble corridor. When he arrived on the street he looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. His bags were already packed; tomorrow he was shoving off for Europe. The town was getting pretty hot, anyway, and Benny needed a rest. The extra five hundred would come in nice.

He walked down the street, his hands still in his pockets, and his lips puckered. A faint melodic strain whistled through them.

Tomorrow -- tomorrow at nine o'clock in the morning when the boat sailed. He'd be a different guy after tonight and there was no use trying to get around that. There would be no more shooting--not that he minded, but the cops might get wise some time. Anyway--first thing in the morning, what was going to happen would change everything.

He caught a trolley and rode up Broadway to 96th. He hung around the drugstore here for an hour, playing the bagatelle machines. The fact that he was going to kill a man at one o'clock seemed to mean nothing to him at all. He remembered the instructions--opening the door at the end of the hall and seeing his victim. Benny was a polite hood who didn't bother about the

names of his corpses, and seldom knew unless he saw the account in print the next morning.

It was half-past midnight and Benny was sauntering up Broadway toward 98th when he passed the telegraph office. He stopped, looked inside, and then grinned. He hadn't told the boss the exact truth; he had a big surprise for him, but he didn't want him to know it before it happened. But what the devil, it'd only be a few hours now before he knew anyway. And Benny wouldn't be seeing the boss anymore after tonight.

He shrugged his shoulders. Might as well. He entered the telegraph office, sat down and started writing a message.

He noticed that it was ten minutes to one when he handed the written telegram to the clerk and paid for it. Hurriedly then, he left the office and headed for the address Joe had given him.

He entered the shabby-looking apartment building wondering what sort of a punk he was going to kill this time. "The worst rat in town," Joe had said. Well, Benny shrugged. What was the difference?

He arrived at the end of the hall. The door was a very narrow one. Benny drew the gun from his shoulder holster, quickly jerked open the door; he blasted three times at the shadowy figure that wasn't three feet from him. Then he turned and ran back down the hall. Behind him he heard a crashing of splintering glass.

His feet slapping in hard rhythm, he arrived on the porch of the apartment house, started down the steps. There was suddenly a hideous spurt of orange from a car across the street; it was accompanied by a spluttering tac-tac-tac-tac of tommy gun bullets.

Benny crumpled. He was cut almost in two; he fell the rest of the way down the steps, a bleeding wreck.

IT was one-ten, and two of the boys were standing in front of the boss, grinning.

"I knew he wouldn't catch on," Harry Laws said. "Benny was too dumb--he never did have any brains."

"I thought when he saw that mirror that was full length in the little closet, and he remembered that I had told him the guy he was to kill was the worst rat in town, that--"

"It doesn't make much difference," the third man interposed. "He thought he did his duty, and he came dashing out to get our bullets. He's dead now, and I guess there isn't anybody that cares."

At that moment someone knocked at the door. Laws and the other man backed, their hands in their coat pockets clutching guns. The boss got up, rubbing his shiny head. He opened the door a crack; was relieved to see a Western Union boy standing there with a telegram.

He signed for the message and closed the door. Laws and his companion gathered close as Joe tore open the envelope:

YOU ALWAYS THOUGHT I WAS DUMB STOP BUT I AM NOT DUMB STOP THE EDITOR OF THE DETECTIVE MAGAZINE SAYS I AM A GENIUS STOP I KNOW THAT YOU AND THE BOYS WILL BE PROUD OF ME WHEN YOU SEE MY STORY FOR YOURSELVES STOP IT WILL BE PUBLISHED TOMORROW MORNING STOP I AM LEAVING FOR EUROPE BECAUSE NOW THAT I AM AN AUTHOR I FEEL I MUST STOP WORKING FOR YOU AND DEVOTE TIME TO MY WRITING STOP BUT I LIKE YOU AND THE BOYS AND I HAVE NOT LEFT YOU ENTIRELY OUT OF THE GLORY I DIDN'T TELL YOU TONIGHT BECAUSE I WANTED IT TO BE A SURPRISE STOP I USED ALL THE REAL NAMES IN WRITING THIS ARTICLE ABOUT THE TOWN POLITICS STOP IT WILL BE A GREAT SENSATION AND I WILL BE A GREAT AUTHOR STOP IT IS ALL RIGHT WITH ME IF YOU AND THE BOYS DENY THAT IT'S TRUE BECAUSE BY THEN THE MAGAZINE WON'T BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT AND THE PUBLIC WILL ALREADY KNOW WHAT A GREAT AUTHOR I AM STOP BENNY

The boss' face was dead-white. His cigar had gone out. Weakly, he moved around to his desk, pulled open the drawer and brought out his gun. The boys just stared at him.

"Benny," the boss quavered in a weak voice, "he never did have any brains-you fellows were right."

Laws backed to the door, jerked it open, and slipped out. The other men were right behind him. They were halfway down the corridor when they heard the crashing roar of the gun resounding from the boss' office walls.

The suicide of the great politician and the other twisted circumstances would have made Benny Peel a great author, even though a dead one, but the fact was that the magazine had come to the conclusion that Benny was a "hop-head" and that they would get in dutch with the city if they published the article. They didn't. It may still be lying in one of the editorial drawers.

**Hideaway in Hell by Arthur Leo Zagat.**



*He was running from the law--not knowing that he carried Death with him as a passenger!*

DAN (Weasel) Walsh hunched his scrawny body lower into the clammy

shadows lying along the rust-streaked bricks that formed one side of the alley. His narrowed eyes peered at a pale-yellow slit where street lamp luminescence had momentarily silhouetted a bulky, tensely expectant figure. That was Marty Hogan, the precinct dick. He was out of sight now, but he was waiting to grab Weasel and send him back up the river....

Hogan wasn't coming in to take Walsh. He didn't have to, damn him. He had plotted the frame-up far too slickly for that. There wasn't any way out of here--no escape--except past him. The windowless wall of a warehouse made the other side of the passage and elled to block off the rear. The window above Walsh, out of which he had just dropped catlike, was too high for him to get back in again. A fire-escape platform projected from it, but it was not equipped with a ladder. Even from Squint-Eye Mocksy's shoulders, Weasel had had to chin himself up, had had to crouch on the platform while he diamond-cut the pane and worked open the lock.

Cords at the corners of the trapped man's nose drew his lip up and away from nicotine-stained, rotten teeth in a wolfish, soundless snarl. He fingered the greasy haft of a dagger in his pocket. If he ever got out of this, Squint-Eye would feel that steel. The lousy stool-pigeon...!

Marty Hogan was a cop and it was his job to get Weasel, no matter how. There was no quarter in the war between them--but there was no hate. Mocksy was different. Mocksy was a rat, a traitor to his own kind. Walsh knew that now, when it was too late, but he hadn't known it when Squint-Eye had mush-mouthed him into this lay. It was a pipe, he had insisted, a cinch. An old-fashioned tin-can Weasel could open without nitro--and five grand waiting to be picked up! The alley window was the only entrance not wired, but once inside Walsh could shut off the alarm and open a back door for a quick getaway in case Mocksy, playing lookout, whistled *Cucuracha*.

That back door was open now, but that's all the good it was to Weasel. Squint-Eye hadn't whistled. He had signaled Hogan and scrambled. If Walsh hadn't been quicker than the dick had expected, if he hadn't glimpsed the officer before he had a chance to get hidden, the prowler would have walked right into the cop's arms with five grand, hot, in his pocket. Not that it helped much. Marty would get tired waiting in a little while, would snap his flash down into the alley, and there Weasel would be....

Walsh jumped as something slapped him on the shoulder. He flailed out a frantic hand and something snakelike writhed around his wrist. His fingers closed on a rope. A rope! It was dangling from the platform of the unreachable window, and as he pulled on it, it came taut. Hell! He was all wrong about Mocksy. Squint-Eye had ducked around the corner, had come in through the getaway door. He had taken an awful chance to get Weasel out of this mess....

Thinking all this didn't delay Walsh. He was shinnying up the rope even as he figured it out, reaching for the iron-work with fingers that trembled a little. His shoe scraped against the brick and he was motionless, his scalp tightening....

His staring eyes saw no movement at the alley mouth. Naturally. If Hogan had heard that sound, he was thinking it was Walsh coming out, was ready to jump him. Weasel squirmed into the opening. His groping toes found the floor. Looking back, he saw Hogan starting down the alley with his flash on.... Just in time....

"Gees, Mocksy," he whispered to a vague apparition, formless in the darkness. "I thought...."

"It isn't Mocksy, Dan! Hurry...."

Walsh whipped around to a fear-shaken husk. "*Jimmy!* What the hell!"

"Hurry! Oh God!"

Weasel was noiseless, running after the light patter of the shadow that flitted through the office gate and dodged among high-piled crates in the shipping room behind. Jimmy! His kid brother! How in Heaven's name...?

"I HEARD you sneakin' out and I got up and followed." Jimmy Walsh was shaking, his peaked, hollow-cheeked face was pasty in the glimmer of the turned-down gas-jet. "I wanted to stop you but I was scared. I hid in a

vestibule across from the alley--then Hogan came out from the one next to me. He and Squint-Eye were right in front of me and I hear Mocksy askin' him did he have the back door watched.

"Hogan says 'no,' he's goin' to make a solo arrest. Mocksy says he's a damn fool and Marty boots him one. I get a chance to beat it when the dick goes, but you're already out when I get into the place. I squint you down below, and throw the rope down to you."

"Gee, kid, you'd make a swell prowler!" Weasel, sitting on the frowsy bed, tossed down a slug of whiskey, gulped, went on. "Whyn't you let me teach you to rip a safe...?"

"Dan!" The youngster put a clawed, grimy hand on Weasel's arm. "You promised me you'd quit. You promised me you'd go straight. Gripes, Dan. Don't you know you can't always beat the game? Hogan'll get you, sooner or later--Hogan or some other cop. And it'll be life this time. The fourth time it's life."

Walsh batted Jimmy's hand away with a hard fist, lurched off the bed. "Hell," he said, talking out of the corner of otherwise motionless, thin lips. "The cop don't come smart enough to get me." Alcohol heat curling in his brain made him forget the three stretches he had already done. "Not when there's no rat to frame me. And Mocksy's not gonna frame me no more. Mocksy's not framing nobody after I get through with him." His feet pounded on the rugless floor as he went toward the door.

Jimmy slid in between him and the paint-peeled panel. "Dan," he wailed. "No! Please. I--I won't let you do that. I won't let you!"

Weasel's face was a livid, expressionless mask, but his beady eyes were two tiny pits of hell-fire. "You won't, huh?" he lipped. "You sanctimonious, prayer-gabblin' pup. Git away from that door!"

"No!" The boy's shabby-sleeved arms were outstretched, his fingers clenched the jamb on either side. "You can't go!" His teeth chattered so he could hardly get the words out. But something stronger than the fear shaking his slight body held him there. "You can't."

Walsh's fingers bunched. His muscles unleashed and his fist crashed into the youngster's jaw. Jimmy slumped away from the door. He hit the floor so hard he seemed to bounce. Then he was a flaccid, quivering, pitiful heap--and there was no one else in the room....

The boy came up finally out of a welter of sick blackness. He sobbed with the pain that numbed all one side of his face, that whirled inside his throbbing skull. Somewhere a deep-toned bell sounded. Bonnnng! It seemed to hammer his head. Bonnnng! Bonnnng! *Bonnnng!*

Four o'clock! He had to get started. He had to get down to the Municipal Market. The farmers would be arriving at five and it would take him an hour to walk down there. God! The way he felt, it would be torture wrestling those heavy baskets around. But he didn't dare not show up, first day on the job. He'd be fired. After weeks and months pounding pavements looking for something do....

WEASEL WALSH stood spraddle-legged, looking at Squint-Eye Mocksy--at what was left of Squint-Eye rather. That wasn't anything very pleasant. Even Weasel's stomach turned over a little and his throat was dry. Maybe he shouldn't have put the mark of the squealer on him. Maybe he shouldn't have split his tongue. That would tell Hogan who had made the kill. Marty Hogan would come for him and--Hell! Nobody had seen him come here. Nobody had seen him climb the fire escape and get in through the window. Nobody could know he had been here except Mocksy, and if Mocksy did any more squealing it would be to the devil.

There was plenty of blood around, but there was none on Weasel--only on the gloves he had worn against finger-prints. And those would go down the first sewer. All he had to do was get home and he could tell Hogan to go to hell. That was easy. There wouldn't be anyone in the streets for an hour yet.

One of Mocksy's eyes stared at the ceiling, but the other one peered at Weasel. It was looking at him, laughing at him. It seemed to be saying: "You can't beat the game, Weasel. Hogan'll get you...." Gripes! It wasn't

Squint-Eye that was saying that. It was Jimmy. No! Jimmy had said that, he wasn't saying it now. Jimmy wasn't here. Jimmy was in the room, waiting for him to come back.

He hadn't ought to have hit the kid. He was a whining brat but he was a good scout at that. Look at what he'd done for him before. Only trouble with Jimmy was that the Salvation Nells had gotten hold of him and ruined him.

*"Hogan'll get you!"* Who said that? Walsh whirled. There was no one in the room. But he'd heard it! He could swear he'd heard someone saying it. God Almighty! He had to get out of here. He had to get away. What was he waiting for?

The back yards were still dark and the fire escape didn't make any noise under Weasel's skilled feet. But his insides were cold and quivery, even when he got into the street and saw the sidewalks grey and empty. Even the couple of cars, parked all night against the curb, were lightless and asleep. Home! Somebody might see him on his way home. And when he got there, Jimmy would look at him. Jimmy wouldn't say anything but there would be a black and blue mark on the side of his jaw.

*Bonnnng!* That was the clock in Misericordia's steeple. Half-past four. A burring roar in the sky and two drifting lights, red and green, told Weasel that was right. It was the mail-plane for Halifax. It stopped at the airport for thirty minutes, then took off again--took off for Canada, where Hogan wouldn't be able to find him! And he had five grand. Twenty-five minutes to get to the airport. He could make it in one of these cars. This Wabash was a fast job....

Weasel's mouth twisted in a humorless, silent laugh. Door lock, ignition-lock-- they were jokes to a guy who could beat the best safemakers. He was in the seat and the starter was whirring under his foot. The car leaped away from the curb.

No lights. No cops. No traffic. The car poured itself down the long street, careened around the corner. This was East Boulevard. Nothing now between Weasel and the airport except the big market. He'd have to slow

down when he passed that because the farmers' trucks would be coming in. But he could make speed here.

HOUSES whipped past, petered out. No headlights. No horn. Just a grey ghost of a car eating up road-ribbon. Running away from Hogan and from Jimmy's accusing eyes. From Jimmy's.

*Jimmy was looking at him, over the leaping hood of the car!* Plunk! He'd hit someone. He'd hit Jimmy. Jimmy was back there, a crumpled heap in the gutter. Mother of Mercy! He couldn't stop now. He couldn't go back. He'd miss the plane. He'd miss the plane and Hogan would come for him and take him away to burn. Hogan! Squint-Eye! Jimmy! *Jimmy!* JIMMY!

The car slewed around. Weasel hadn't done that. God knew he hadn't done it. It had gone around by itself. It was stopping by itself, alongside a dark, twitching mound in the emptiness of the Boulevard. But it was Weasel who was gathering a broken, bleeding body into his arms. It was Weasel who was putting Jimmy into the seat and who was back under the wheel. It was Weasel Walsh who was sending the car flying like a bat out of hell back to the heart of the city, back to Misericordia Hospital....

"God!" Weasel Walsh prayed, fumblingly. "Please don't let Jimmy die. Please don't! He believes in You and it isn't right that You should let him die. And while You're about it, God, maybe You could do something for me. Maybe You could keep Hogan from getting me. I don't want to burn, God. I don't want to burn in the chair!"

White-coated men came out of a dark door and took Jimmy away. Walsh whirred the starter, twisted the wheel and was driving across the courtyard to the big gate in through which he had come. But the gate didn't open.

Walsh had to brake. "Hey!" he yelled. "Open up. I'm in a hurry."

The gateman shook his head. "You've got to wait, mister," he said in a whining voice. "You've got to wait till the cops get through with you."

"The cops hell!" Walsh snarled. "I just picked the kid up in the road. I don't know nothin' about how he got hurt."

The man grinned, pointed at the roadster's bonnet. Weasel, craning, saw that the radiator was splashed with blood. "I guess they'll hold you anyway," the gatekeeper said. "For investigation."

Walsh's foot went from brake pedal to accelerator. The Wabash leaped forward, smashed into buckling, flimsy iron filigree. It went through. But it didn't turn into the roadway. It rocketed on ahead and exploded with a tremendous roaring crash against a wall of thick masonry that was a buttress of Misericordia Church.

High up in the steeple a bell boomed. Bonng -- Bonng -- Bonng -- Bonng --Bonng! The dying clangor was taken up by a burring roar from the distant airport, and a red-and-green light climbed into the sky, veered and vanished toward the North. In the hospital's emergency operating room, a sleepy-eyed surgeon said, "The boy is pretty well bunged up but I think we can pull him through."

Miraculously the wrecked car had not taken fire. The shaking gateman, first to reach the wreck, retched, glimpsing the welter of splintered bone and pulped brain where Weasel Walsh's head should have been. But even in his nausea, his shaking hand touched forehead and breast, shoulder and shoulder, as he saw the piece of black iron that jutted out of the mess. The piece of black iron, before it had entered the heart of the murderer, that had been a cross in the filigree of Misericordia's gate....