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# MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1962

Vol. 12, No. 1

A Long F. B. I. Novelet

## MILLIONS IN BLOOD MONEY

By BRUCE CASSIDAY

*Tracking down hot money can be ringed about with risks, for a crime-smashing apparatus that's just plain allergic to a two-million dollar heist can make a killer mad-dog dangerous . . . . . 56 to 104*

### A NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

MIRACLE OR MURDER

BRETT HALLIDAY . . . . . 2

### THE FEATURE NOVELET

CHANGE OF MURDER

CORNELL WOOLRICH . . . . . 36

### SHORT STORIES

DEATH UPSTREAM

KENNETH MacGOWAN . . . . . 33

THE BROKEN WINDSHIELD

FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS . . . . . 105

EARLY OF A SUMMER EVENING

T. C. McCLARY . . . . . 110

THE COCKTAIL STICK

STEPHEN PAUL . . . . . 125

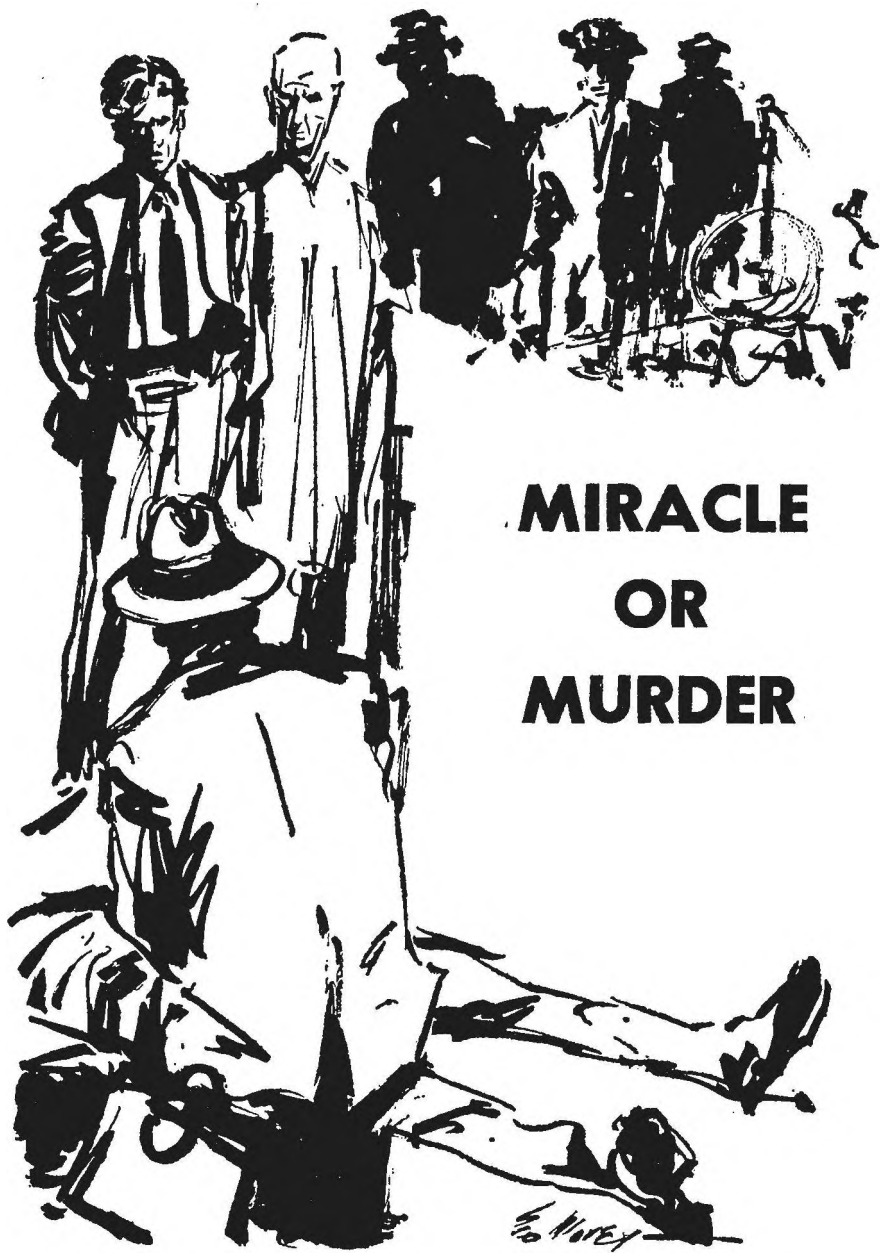


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# MIRACLE OR MURDER



*To patients with a fatal illness Dr. Norris seemed a miracle worker . . . until a shocking news story and a brutal slaying made his new drug suspect. And Mike was right in the middle!*

THE  
NEW COMPLETE  
MIKE SHAYNE  
NOVELET

by  
**Brett  
Halliday**

MICHAEL SHAYNE ignored the ringing telephone. The red-headed detective knew who it was, and what it was about, and he sat back in the armchair in the living room of his apartment and reached one large hand for a glass that held four fingers of his favorite cognac. His long legs stretched out, Shayne settled his big frame in the chair, drank off a finger of the Martel, closed his eyes, and heaved a sigh of pure pleasure.

The telephone continued to ring. Shayne mentally castigated Tim Rourke and opened one eye to stare impatiently at the cradled

handset. He drank another finger of the cognac. But it was no use. With a shrug of resignation Shayne picked up the receiver.

"Mike?" Tim Rourke asked.

"I told you *no*, Tim," Shayne said. "Hire a bodyguard for your friend. I don't do that kind of work. You've known me long enough to know that!"

Shayne hung up. Immediately the telephone started ringing again. He drank another finger of brandy before snatching it up, this time almost angrily. "Gentry can handle it, Tim. How many times must I point that out to you?"

"The guarding, yes," Rourke's voice said. "But we want to find who's writing the letters."

"Cranks," Shayne said. The bottle of Martel was far across the room and his glass was almost empty.

"You've seen today's paper?" the voice of the detective's best friend said. Shayne could imagine the grim expression on the lean face of the reporter.

"I've seen them," Shayne said. At his feet he saw the paper spread out on the floor. A small headline, but front page at the bottom.

#### WHEN DO YOU CALL IT MURDER?

*Does a man have to pick up a knife and plunge it into a person's back to be a murderer? The law says he does, but the people of Florida will say that Dr. Reuben Morris, the rich and famous man of science, has found a new way. I call it legal murder. Sue me, Doctor, if you dare! I say . . .*

"Why doesn't he just sue?" Shayne said into the telephone, his eyes still looking at the bottle of cognac across the room.

"He hates publicity, Mike, because he's a serious-minded scientist. He just wants it to blow over."

"So he hollers for protection?" Shayne said.

Rourke's voice was edgy. "Six threatening letters and news stor-

ies like that in today's paper. He wants it to blow over, but he's not crazy. Mike, Dr. Morris is a great man. Twenty years ago, when he was just about dry behind the ears, he made a discovery that's saved thousands, maybe millions, of lives. Now he needs a little help. We owe him that, Mike, all of us."

The low afternoon sun of Miami slanted through the window of Shayne's apartment and seemed to shine like a gold halo on the cognac bottle. And while he looked at the bottle it seemed to fade in front of his eyes along with the redhead's vision of a quiet afternoon and a good dinner alone. The detective sighed.

"Okay, Tim, you win. You're right about our debt to him. I still think it's cranks. Great men in the news bring out the cranks like moths around a searchlight."

"Maybe, Mike. But Gentry's got four men on the job."

"Will always was nervous," Shayne said, and grinned, "But don't tell him I said so, he'd bite my head off."

"You'll go talk to Morris?"

"I'm on my way. But I must stop off at my office first? I've got paying clients, too."

"Be my guest," Tim Rourke said.

Shayne hung up, drank the last drops of cognac in his glass, clapped his panama in his shock of red hair, and left his apartment. He rode down in the elevator to

the lobby of his apartment-hotel. He strode across the lobby, nodding to Pete at the desk.

A tall, thin man sat in a chair in the lobby. Shayne barely noticed the hatred in the man's eyes. He walked out, got into his car, and drove to his Flagler Street office.

Lucy Hamilton's pretty eyebrows arched in surprise as Shayne strode into his office. She paused in her typing to look up and frown at him.

"You were going to rest, Michael," his pert secretary said. "You need a quiet evening."

"You know it, angel, and I know it. But try to tell that to Tim Rourke, the one-man crusade for Dr. Reuben Morris."

Lucy wrinkled her pretty nose. "Is he the man who has the miracle drug he won't let people use?"

"That's right," Shayne said.

"I think he's terrible!"

Shayne paused in the doorway to his private office and turned of look at Lucy. "Why angel?"

"Well he *has* the medicine and people need it," Lucy said. "I mean, he's a great doctor, but he should help people."

"What makes you think he can?"

"It's in all the newspapers, Michael."

"Don't believe everything you read, angel," Shayne said. "I expect he knows what he's doing."



"Do you really think so Michael?"

"It's *his* miracle cure."

"I suppose you're right."

Shayne continued on into his office. He threw his panama onto the hatrack and sat down at his desk. The detective was opening his first file of unfinished cases when the telephone rang. It was Tim Rourke again.

Annoyed, Shayne snapped, "One hour, Tim. Your cranks'll keep for an hour."

His best friend's voice was hard. "My cranks won't wait at all, Mike. It's murder now. Someone just killed Horace Latimer, the doctor's assistant."

"How?" the redhead asked.

"Rifle shot," Rourke said. "And, Mike, it was meant for Morris himself, I'll stake a year's wages on it."

"Meet you at the lab, Tim," Shayne said.

## II

THE LABORATORY OF Consolidated Drug and Chemical was far out on La Jeune. When Shayne arrived at the three-story white brick building, Tim Rourke's shabby coupé was already parked in front. The lanky reporter was waiting in his car. As Shayne drove up, Rourke got out and stood on the sidewalk.

"Gentry's inside," Rourke said.

"I'm sorry, Tim, I should have listened to you."

"Between you and me, I wasn't completely sure it was real myself."

"It looks real enough now."

"At least the guy missed the Doc."

"This time," said Shayne.

Rourke led Shayne into the building and up a flight of stairs into a large, white laboratory. The police filled the large room like a wave of blue. Shayne heard the gruff voice of Will Gentry the moment he stepped into the laboratory. The grey-haired Chief of Police, the perennial black cigar clamped in the corner of his mouth, was talking to a tall, thin

man who wore a white lab coat.

Gentry's lips tightened when he saw Shayne. "Some bodyguard you are, Mike."

"I hadn't started."

"You're lucky you've got anywhere to start," the Chief of Police said, drily. "You know the Doc here?"

"Not yet," Shayne said.

Gentry introduced Shayne to the tall, thin man who said, "I wish you'd been here, Shayne, I've heard a lot about you. If anyone can get to the bottom of all this, I believe you can. I don't mind telling you it's shaken me up. Horace was a friend as well as a good assistant. Besides, this is holding up my work badly. I must get back to it without much delay."

Tim Rourke said, "You can work now, Doctor. Mike will see nothing happens."

"I certainly hope so," Dr. Morris said.

Shayne studied Dr. Reuben Morris. The Research Chief of Consolidated Drug and Chemical was a tall, broad-shouldered man who carried himself with a slight stoop. All that was left of his hair was a thin fringe at the base of his long skull. His eyes were dark and set deep under thick brows and a high, broad forehead.

Shayne turned to look at the dead man. The Medical Examiner was working over the body, and the redhead saw at first glance

that the slain assistant was almost a dead ringer for Dr. Reuben Morris. In their white lab coats, the two men would have been virtually indistinguishable at a distance of thirty feet.

Shayne turned to Gentry. "Fill me in, Will," he said.

Miami's Chief of Police chewed on the stump of his black cigar. "Dr. Morris was working over that microscope. He went across the lab to check on something and told Latimer to take a look at the slide. Latimer had been standing there for possibly a minute when Doc heard a shot, and some glass breaking.

"When he turned around, Horace Latimer was lying sprawled out on the floor. The Doc tried to revive him, but the guy died instantly, shot right through the heart from the back. Dr. Morris got on the phone to the police, and you know the rest."

"What kind of slug?"

The M.E. looked up from the body. "High-powered rifle, I'd say. It went right on through. Neat shooting from that distance."

"What distance?" Shayne said.

The M.E. shrugged. "Hard to say with a rifle. Take a look out the window."

Shayne looked out. The Research Laboratory was built in the center of an open, Park-type area. The nearest building was at least five hundred yards away. A low building of four-story apartments.

Beyond that building a taller one rose at least seven stories.

Shayne turned to Gentry. "Find the slug, Will?" he asked.

"Sure," the Chief of Police said. "Mashed up, the hole there shows where it hit the wall. We found it on the floor across the lab. Figuring the angle from where it hit the wall after it went through the window and Latimer we've pretty well pinpointed the room. Fourth floor, that first building. Sergeant Moss is over there now checking."

"What candidates have we got?"

Gentry scowled. "A barrel of them. Do you know how many diseases that new drug of the Doctor's will either cure or retard? Possibly fifty—diseases that are usually fatal. You figure he's still got many friends after what that two-bit reporter wrote about him?"

"I get the point," Shayne said.

The telephone rang. It was Sergeant Moss. Gentry grunted and listened attentively for a moment. When he hung up he said to Shayne, "That's the room. Moss found the cartridge case, thirty-thirty. Looks like an Army Springfield. The window was open. Moss dusted for prints."

"He's lucky he found the cartridge case," Shayne said.

"Yeah," Will Gentry agreed sourly. "Well, you can start body-guarding, Mike. I've got work."

Shayne started to answer when



the whole laboratory seemed to shake. The explosion threw Shayne against a hard lab bench. Gentry vanished. Red lights flashed behind the detective's eyes. Holding hard to the bench Shayne did not fall down. His head cleared, and he saw Will Gentry lying on the floor, sprawled across the cursing figure of the M.E.

One policeman was bleeding. Six others lay on the floor. Tim Rourke was just getting to his feet. He looked dazed. He was swaying unsteadily and blood was trickling from a small gash at the side of his face.

Shayne lurched toward the prone figure of Will Gentry. The redhead's big frame still shook from the force of the explosion. As Shayne reached the police chief, Gentry swore volubly and angrily struggled to a sitting position.

All through the large room badly shaken men were getting back to their feet. No one seemed seriously hurt. And Shayne remembered Dr. Reuben Morris. He whirled to find the Doctor. Morris was on the floor, moving and sitting up. Beyond the Doctor, all the way across the laboratory, a hooded workbench used for dangerous chemicals had been blown apart. The glass door of the enclosed hood hung shattered.

Shayne checked Dr. Morris. The Doctor was unhurt, only the

wind knocked out of him. Shayne went to help up Tim Rourke. The lanky reporter had been cut when his head struck the corner of a workbench. The policeman who was bleeding was the only other casualty and he had only cut his hand on a glass beaker as he fell. Gentry checked everyone. No one was hurt by the explosion.

"Pretty lucky," the Chief of Police said. "Fortunately, none of us were near that hood when it went off."

"Real lucky," Shayne agreed. He turned to Doctor Morris, "What was it? You certainly must know."

Morris was examining the shattered work area. "Sodium peroxide. We use it in our work and it could have been an accident. With all this on my mind, I could have made an error earlier."

"You believe that?" Shayne asked.

"No," Dr. Morris said.

"Could it have been tampered with?"

"It looks that way, Shayne," the Doctor conceded.

"Is there any way to time an explosion like that?"

The Doctor nodded. "A chemist could, probably. It's a miracle we weren't near it. If Chief Gentry had left two minutes earlier, I could have been back at work right next to it."

They all looked at what was left of the work-area.

## III

IT WAS DARK outside when Dr. Reuben Morris finished his story. Shayne slumped his big frame low in a lab chair. Tim Rourke swore softly. "And that guy Carson calls himself a reporter! You know, Mike, I'd like to get my hands on him alone."

Shayne said, "All right, Dr. Morris, let's see if I've got it all straight. You've been working on this new drug for ten years. It's all ready to use, but it hasn't been tested. In fact, no one except you and Horace Latimer knew any thing about the formula or what you're pretty sure it will accomplish. But you have to make periodic progress reports to your company, so a great many people were aware that you were working on it, and that it was close to being ready. Right?"

"That's about it," Dr. Morris said. "Within the company, most executives knew it was in the final test stage. I didn't think anyone outside the company knew much about the detailed, step-by-step progress I've made so far. I did mention it, however, in a talk I gave a year or so ago at a medical convention."

"Someone obviously knew about it," Shayne said. "How long then before it will be ready?"

"Three years, perhaps more."

"That long?"

"Medicine takes time, Shayne.



I couldn't even be sure it would ever work."

Tim Rourke said, "You mean after all those years it could turn out to be a bust?"

"That's right, Mr. Rourke—a complete failure. Human testing is the critical factor."

"All right," Shayne said. "So then this reporter got on to the story."

"Frank Carson," Rourke said. "He used to be a first-rate man, by-lines and the works, up in New York. He got into trouble with a story about ten years ago and no big town paper would touch him. He's been working in Florida ever since on a small daily upstate."

"You think he's behind all this?" Shayne asked.

Dr. Morris shrugged. "All I

know is that he phoned me about a month ago. He said he'd heard of the drug and two women in his community were on the verge of death. He wanted me to attempt to save them by using the drug experimentally.

"I turned him down, of course. After that he started writing those stories. He succeeded in making people think I *could* save them. He made the husbands of those two women feel I was a murderer. A man like that should be put away. I have too much important work to do."

The Doctor's thin face was angry. "All those slanderous newspaper stories, the publicity. How can I do my work with so much furor? Do they think I deliberately let those women die? I have to think of millions of people, not just one or two. My work is vital. Twenty years ago I found a miracle drug, it worked. All I ask is to be given the time to find another."

Shayne waited until Dr. Morris had calmed down, and then said, "Why couldn't you have let those women have the drug? There was no hope for them otherwise."

The Doctor swung around in his chair to face the windows and the darkness outside. For a full minute there was silence in the room. When he swung back to face Shayne his expression was grim.

"I'll tell you exactly what I

told Carson," he said. "We have the drug. We've synthesized it and tested it on rats and monkeys. It seems to work on the animals. But that is all we know with any certainty.

"If we used it now on human beings, anything could happen. Anything! They could linger horribly. They could become insane, or helpless, life-long cripples. Even if the Government would allow us to use it, even with permission from the patient, I wouldn't take so great a risk. I couldn't. It could set back our work ten years."

"All right," Shayne said. "We've got Frank Carson as a possible killer. Who else?"

"The two husbands," said Tim Rourke. "A lot of people read those stories, but only those two from Carson's town got mad enough to threaten. At least as far as we know."

"They threatened Dr. Morris publicly?"

Tim Rourke nodded. "Publicly—and in a pretty violent way."

And Dr. Morris burst out: "You've got to find him, Shayne, and stop all this! I have important work to do, but I can't work at all when I'm under this kind of strain."

The Doctor was shouting now, and Shayne said quietly, "I'll do the best I can."

Dr. Morris suddenly calmed. "I know you will, Shayne. I like

your style. With you on the job, I think I can carry on."

"Fine," said Shayne and stood up. "Come on, Tim. We've work to do ourselves. I've a better understanding now of a few things that puzzled me."

Outside the Doctor's laboratory, Shayne and Rourke passed the two uniformed guards, left by Will Gentry, and walked down the stairs and out into the Miami night.

Shayne pulled on his left earlobe. "I think I'll have a look at the room where the shot came from. And, Tim, check on that big discovery Morris made twenty years ago. You never know. The killer might not have anything to do with the present drug."

"Will do, Mike," the reporter said. "Just one more thing. I've heard rumors that someone in Consolidated was putting pressure on Morris to get the drug ready for market as fast as possible."

"Then you'd better check on the company's financial position. It could pay off."

"Right," Rourke said.

Shayne watched Rourke get into his shabby coupé and drive away. For another minute he stood in front of the laboratory building, white and ghostly in the night, and tugged hard at his earlobe. Then he turned and strode across the park-like grounds toward the apartment house, five hundred yards away.

He cut straight across through the trees, his mind working overtime on the problem of protecting Dr. Reuben Morris from what could be a few hundred potential killers.

Shayne saw a sudden face thin and twisted with hate. He saw the flash of something coming down at him through the night air. He lunged sideways and the club thudded against his shoulder. He reached to grapple with the vague figure in the night, but the force of the blow on his shoulder had him off balance.

The man pushed and Shayne went over, caromed off a tree, and his big frame hit the ground hard. Reaching he caught the attacker's ankle and twisted. A howl of pain rewarded the detective's efforts. The club swung again. Shayne ducked and the heavy weapon slammed against a tree.

The redhead twisted the attacker's ankle in his big hand, and something kicked him in the face. He felt his lip split but held hard to the ankle. Then something harshly smashed against his hand and he let go, rolled. As he leaped to his feet the attacker was running away fast.

Shayne ran after the sound of heavy breathing and rushing feet. He crashed through the bushes, bouncing against unseen trees. When he burst out of the bushes onto the lighted street in front of the apartment building a man was

just getting into a shabby sedan.

Shayne sprinted and reached the car. His big hand went in the open window. With the other hand he opened the door. Angry and kicking, a small, balding man was dragged out by the detective's hand.

In the light of the streetlamp Shayne surveyed his catch. The man was short and fat and flabby. It was not the man who had attacked him. But there was fear in the small man's eyes. Whoever he was, the small man was scared.

Shayne held him at arm-length and said, "Talk, mister."

"Get your hands off me, Shayne!"

"You've got the advantage, I'm afraid. Just who are you?"

The man sneered. "That's for me to know, and you to find out."

"I'll find out," Shayne said, "the hard way if you're dead set on putting it to the test."

The man cringed. "You lay off me! I know you, Shayne, I read all about you. You wouldn't hit a little guy like me. I know all about you, you stay away from me! He killed my wife!" The small man seemed to be finding some courage. "He could have saved her—"

"How do you know?" Shayne said.

"I can read, can't I? He had the stuff. The newspapers said so."

"Which one are you?"

"Halstead—Max Halstead," the man said, hate contorting his pale

face. "What right have you to protect a man like that! You're as bad as he is!"

"I'm pretty bad," Shayne said wryly. He let the little man go, and watched him smooth his coat and glare in anger.

Shayne lit a cigarette. "You're from upstate. A lot of hunting up there."

"Sure, I do hunting."

"Probably have a couple of high-powered deer rifles?"

"What's so strange about that? Everybody up there has a deer rifle."

"And you're a pretty good shot?"

"I get by," the little man said smugly.

"Through windows?" Shayne said. "You like to shoot through windows maybe? What are you doing here right now, looking for a cartridge case you forgot?"

The small man sneered. "Both of my guns are up home, Shamus, and if I'd done the shooting I'd have hit the right target. I've been here a while, watching and listening. If it was me I wouldn't have shot the wrong party. It wasn't me, but I'm sure glad it was someone. That assistant probably had it coming anyway."

Shayne had an urge to hit the cocky little redneck, but he fought it down and said, "State police'll check your story, Halstead. Meanwhile don't go anywhere in a hurry."



"I ain't goin' nowhere, Shamus."

"And keep away from the lab."

"Make me, big man—just try and make me! I got my rights!"

Shayne said, "You know, Halstead, maybe your wife was lucky. She got rid of you."

Shayne watched the angry little man get into his shabby sedan and drive furiously away. Then he walked into the apartment and up to the fourth floor. A patrolman was on guard in front of the door. Shayne identified himself and went into the room.

The apartment was empty. Shayne crossed to the window that was open. He walked carefully. Directly under the window the redhead kneeled down and looked at the dusty floor. He ran his finger through the dust and began to tug on his earlobe again. He looked at the open window. From here it would be an easy shot for a marksman with a telescope sight.

Shayne leaned forward and looked at the thin film of dust that covered the entire windowsill. Then he began to mutter to himself. He was still talking to himself all the way home in his car.

#### IV

THE WOMAN WAS already waiting in his office when Shayne arrived in the morning. Lucy Hamilton was wearing her disapprov-

ing look. The look could mean only two things: that Shayne had forgotten to do something, or that the woman waiting for him was pretty and Lucy knew how susceptible he was. As far as he could remember he hadn't forgotten anything.

"A Mrs. Foster," Lucy said. "She's bleached."

"Tsk-tsk, angel," Shayne said, grinning at his pert secretary, and passed on into his inner office.

Bleached she was. When the detective was settled behind his desk he told Lucy to show in Mrs. Foster. Bleached blonde and tall. A beauty-contest figure. Shayne would have staked his year's income that ten years ago Mrs. Foster had been Miss Some-State-Or-City. The woman sat down and crossed an elegant leg.

"Miss What-once?" Shayne said.

"Des Moines," Mrs. Foster said. "That was a long time ago and I lost. But I liked Florida. At least I liked the Mr. Foster part of Florida. Is that enough small talk, Mr. Shayne? I'd like to get down to business."

"And what is business?"

"You haven't been doing your homework, Mr. Shayne," Mrs. Foster said. "The late Mr. Foster was president of Consolidated Drug and Chemical."

Shayne's face was impassive over his surprise, and Tim Rourke's mention of pressure at



Consolidated to get Dr. Morris to release his new drug leaped into his mind. He said, "And a big stockholder? Am I right about that, Mrs. Foster?"

"Yes, a big stockholder," Mrs. Foster said. "You've been doing some homework after all. I rather expected you would have dug out my interest in marketing Reuben's brain-child. That's why I came in to you before you came to me. I have nothing to hide. I'm a large stockholder. I'm interested in making money. Reuben's drug

should be a goldmine, and the sooner the better."

"Reuben?" Shayne said.

Mrs. Foster laughed. "Yes, Reuben. It won't take much detecting to find out that Reuben and I are more than business friends. In fact it was Reuben who introduced me to the late Mr. Foster."

"He don't exactly look like the scientist type," Shayne said.

"Reuben isn't always a scientist. As a matter of fact, he's a rich man and pretty lively around town when he wants to be."

"But not as rich as the late lamented Mr. Foster?"

"Not as rich as Mr. Foster," Mrs. Foster acknowledged.

Shayne said, "So you've been putting pressure on Dr. Morris to market the stuff? Did he like that?"

The woman seemed to consider this, her short blonde hair catching the morning sunlight through the window, her long legs shining in the sun. Shayne had begun to envy Dr. Reuben Morris when the woman said, "I suppose it depends on what you mean by 'like'. Reuben's been giving us glowing reports for years. He likes money almost as much as I do, but whenever we mentioned marketing the product he just about flew into a rage. I suppose you'd say Reuben is torn between his businessman side and his scientist side."

"So far the scientist wins," Shayne said.

"So far," Mrs. Foster said.

"You don't mind if I ask you where you were yesterday afternoon, say about four o'clock?"

The woman's eyes flashed angrily. "Yes, Mr. Shayne, I do mind. But I'll tell you. I was working in my office at the laboratory. Now is that all? I came to let you know I had nothing to hide, I suggest you do your slouching down more fruitful roads!"

The woman stood. A very good looking woman, Mrs. Foster. When she stood Mike Shayne decided that she could probably be Miss Des Moines again any time she wanted to, and this time she'd probably win in Florida. Time had been kind to Mrs. Foster. Time, or money, or both, and she looked like a woman who wanted and needed money very much.

It would not be the first time a suspect tried to throw him off the track by appearing to be very co-operative. Shayne heaved his big bulk from his chair and smiled pleasantly at Mrs. Foster.

"I might do that," he said. "But I'll be calling on you again, I expect."

"Any time," Mrs. Foster said. "But I'd suggest you leave your working clothes in the office when you call."

"I just might do that too," Shayne said.

"My pleasure," Mrs. Foster

said. "Perhaps a boat trip, on my yacht. It has all you'd need for a very long trip."

"Sounds restful," Shayne said.

When Mrs. Foster had gone, and Shayne had stopped looking at where her figure seemed to still be hovering before his eyes, he called Tim Rourke. The reporter was in his office for a change.

Shayne said into the telephone, "How about that stuff on Morris and Consolidated?"

"I've got it Mike."

"The company?"

"Bad shape. They've been covering up, but I'd say they were close to being on the rocks."

"That's about what I figured," Shayne said, and he told Rourke about his visit from Mrs. Foster. "Find out what you can about Mrs. Foster, and about the Doctor. The way she tells it he's something of a spender and man-about-town in his off time, so maybe there's an angle there. I don't know why, Tim, but I've got a hunch we might be on the wrong track."

"What track should we be on?"

"I don't know that yet. But check into the private lives of Foster and Morris. Okay?"

"Where'll I find you?"

"If I'm not here I'll be over at Will Gentry's office," Shayne said. And he began to pull his earlobe alone in the office with the black telephone in his big hand. "There's something about that shooting

last night I don't like. Try to meet me at Gentry's in an hour."

## V

MICHAEL SHAYNE left his office, after he told Lucy if there were any calls he'd be at *Felipes* on Fifth Street. He walked the few blocks from Flagler Street to *Feltpes*. It was too early for a sidecar, and *Felipes* made the only decent coffee in downtown Miami.

Shayne was drinking his third cup of coffee when he became aware of a man staring at him. He casually raised his eyes to the bar mirror. It was the same man who had been in his apartment-hotel lobby the previous afternoon.

The man still looked at him with hatred. The man was tall and thin, and there was something very familiar about the face and the hate on it.

Shayne remembered in the same instant that the man realized that Shayne was watching him in the mirror. It was the face he had glimpsed in the dark of the Laboratory grounds last night. The face behind the arm with the club. And the face was already on its way out the door.

Shayne tossed a bill on the bar and raced after the vanishing man. On Fifth Street he saw the man walking fast a half a block ahead. His mind racing to out-guess his quarry, Shayne ducked into a cigar store he knew, walked

through under the wide eyes of the cigar store owner, went out the back door and across an alley to the street.

He reached the street just as his quarry came into sight. He waited in the shadow of the alley until the man came hurrying past. Then he stepped out, touched the man on the shoulder. The man turned in surprise.

Shayne stepped very close and moved his fist six inches to the point of the man's chin. The man slumped in his arms. Shayne held the man up and walked him down the alley and into the back room of the cigar store.

He left the man there and went out front to tell Mordecai Slonsky, the owner, that he was using the back room for a while. Mordecai did not argue, he knew Shayne too well. By the time Shayne returned to the back room the man was groaning and coming around.

Shayne sat on a packing case and lit a cigarette. He smoked rapidly. The man opened his eyes. Shayne said, "That was for last night. You'll be Carson, right? Frank Carson, hot-shot reporter."

The man struggled to a sitting position. "Shayne you can't . . ."

"I just did," the detective said dryly. "Now, do you talk about it, or do we go another fast round?"

Frank Carson had less courage than the little husband Max Halstead. At the sight of Shayne's hamlike fist Carson began to

whine. "Don't hit me, Shayne, don't touch me. I'll tell you anything. Who cares anyway, it's all shot to hell."

"Start telling."

The eyes of the reporter were like the eyes of an insane man. Wild and too bright. "It would have been my comeback. Damn him to hell! Ten years I been waiting for the big break on that two-bit rag upstate. This story would have meant New York for me again. I begged Dr. Morris! I pleaded with him. I told him I'd make him famous. You know what he said? He said he was famous, and didn't need any assistance from a two-bit reporter!

"I begged him to help that Halstead dame, and the Brown dame, too. Not him. He was too high and mighty! It would've been a miracle, you know? And I would have had the story. I was going to sell it to every sheet in the country. It would've been New York sure for me! Damn him!"

"So you decided to get even and kill him? Is that the way it was?"

But Carson was not listening. He was off somewhere in the crazy dream of glory. "I told him I'd get him. I wrote that last story, *When Is It Murder?* Oh, I got him good. He screamed like a stuck pig and hollered for the cops and you. And I'm not finished! When I get finished he won't get a janitor's job. He won't be safe on the

streets after the story I'm going to write."

Shayne said, "But you couldn't wait. You decided to kill him first and write the really big story afterwards. As a confessed murderer it would get you banner headlines."

This time Carson heard, and fierce protest flamed in his eyes. "You can't pin that on me, Shayne! Sure, I jumped you, because I hated your guts when I heard you was going to help him. Sure, I'd have been glad if someone had done the job for me. It was my big chance to get back, and he ruined it. But I didn't kill him! I don't even own a thirty-thirty."

"How do you know what calibre the rifle was? It wasn't in the paper. The paper just said a rifle shot."

"I listened!" the reporter almost screamed. "Sure, I was there. You know that. I was on a ladder outside the lab window. I heard you and Gentry talking. I was following you. I was going to do a story about how the big important Doctor was hiring a private shamus to protect him. You can't pin it on me, Shayne. I'm in the clear. You saw me in that lobby. I'm sure of it."

"That was a good hour before the shooting," Shayne said grimly. "You had a world of time."

Carson was sweating in rivers, the sweat pouring off him and



sending up a rancid odor of fear. "That explosion could have blown me apart. Would I have taken a risk like that?"

"If you had a ladder you could have rigged that explosion before Gentry got there. Dr. Morris probably left the lab."

Carson was shaking with fright. "Listen, Shayne. It's Brown you want. He was there too. He was crazy when his wife died. He was really there when it happened. He told me he was outside that window, down on the ground, and he heard the shot and then he heard the window break. He says he waited a while, maybe five, ten minutes. Then he heard the Doc on the telephone calling Gentry and lit out fast."

Shayne sat up rigid on the packing case. He snapped, "Say that again!"

Carson blinked fearfully. "Say what?"

"What Brown told you! Quick!"

"He was outside the window down on the ground and he heard the shot and the glass break and—"

Shayne interrupted Carson, said, "He heard the shot first? Then the glass breaking?"

Carson seemed puzzled, then his pig eyes and thin face became sly. "That's what he said. But he must be lying. From five hundred yards he should have heard both sounds together, seeing he was right under the window. Maybe the

glass should have been shattered first, before he heard the shot."

"You're sure he said it that way?"

"Yeah, it sort of stuck in my mind."

"And the Doctor didn't call right away?"

Carson nodded, his thin face still tense. "You ask Brown. He must be lying."

"Someone's lying," Shayne said. "Maybe you. Where are you staying?"

"The Radcliffe," Carson said, naming a run-down rooming house in the old and poor section of Miami Beach. "That's where bums like me are supposed to live, so it's in character, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't let you inside the city limits," Shayne said. "Where's Brown stopping?"

"Same place, next room."

"Let's go."

## VI

SHAYNE TOOK NO chances with Frank Carson. He drove across Venetian Causeway with the reporter in the car beside him. The thin man seemed to be thinking of his lost chance for glory, sunk low in his seat with a sullen look on his thin face.

Shayne studied the man, but Carson seemed indifferent to where they were going, and did not seem nervous even when Shayne parked in front of the

shabby rooming house that still liked to call itself a hotel. Carson was either telling the truth, at least about Brown, or Carson knew there was nothing to worry about.

In the house the redhead said, "Okay, which room?"

"Second floor. I'm in five, Brown's in six."

The detective knocked on the door of room six. There was no answer. Shayne knocked again.

Carson began to shout, "Open up, Brown! We know you're in there. Open up you fink!"

Heads appeared in doorways all down the dingy hall. An irate old woman wrapped in flowered cotton, her hair ragged and grey, came padding up in bedroom slippers.

"What's all the racket?" she called out. "Carson, I told you if you got drunk again out you go! I mean it! If you—" and the old woman stopped and stared at Mike Shayne. Her eyes popped as she took in the big frame and the red hair.

"I know you," she said. "You're Mike Shayne the detective. I read about you. What's he done?"

"Let's find out," Shayne said. And he raised one big foot and kicked in the cheap door. They all rushed into the room.

The old woman screamed and fainted dead away.

Brown was there all right. A big man—or he had been. Now he



wasn't a man at all. Brown was hanging from an iron light fixture in the center of the room, swinging in a faint breeze and very dead.

"God Almighty!" Carson said. "He's hung himself!"

Shayne moved rapidly to cut the dead man down, and stretch him out on the bed. The marks of the rope were livid on Brown's neck. His face was blue with strangulation. Shayne bent close over the body. There was a large lump just above Brown's right temple, and the body was still warm.

Shayne straightened up and sent Carson to call Peter Painter, Miami Beach's Chief of Detectives. Then lit a cigarette and sat on the bed and surveyed the room.

It was a ratty little room. On the floor near a shabby dresser Brown's one suitcase was open and half filled with dirty laundry. The dead man's extra suit, a bargain basement suit from the look of it, hung in a closet without a

door. The only straight chair in the room was overturned directly under the light fixture with the cut rope still hanging from the fixture.

Shayne smoked and tugged on his left earlobe. The barren little room had not been touched. The bed had been slept in and was still unmade, and the chair was just where it should have been for a suicide. Shayne stood and climbed on the chair to examine the rope. The knot was tight, but not pulled so tight he couldn't unknot it.

By the time Shayne had finished his cigarette he heard the snarling voice of Peter Painter coming down the hall. The dapper little Chief of Detectives was rubbing the pencil mustache on his face as he came into the room.

It took him only a moment to grasp the implications of what he saw. "Friend of yours, peeper?" he said, nodding his head to the body on the bed.

"I loved him like a brother," Shayne said. He didn't like Painter, and Painter didn't like him. It was, in the main, a fair and openly acknowledged antagonism, but Painter was not incapable of hitting below the belt.

Painter waved his M.E. to the body, posted a guard on the door, chased the spectators away, and turned to Shayne. "Give it to me."

"Shayne and me figure he was our killer," Frank Carson said.

Painter smoothed the lapel of his neat blue suit. "Who's your friend, Shayne?"

"I wouldn't have him for an enemy, Painter," Shayne said.

He began to fill Painter in on the case so far. Painter listened carefully, but at the same time his small eyes were studying the room. Shayne always admitted that Painter knew his job most of the time. When the redhead finished the story of Dr. Reuben Morris and his troubles, Painter nodded.

"I know about most of that. You believe Carson about what Brown told him?"

"That's a hard one, Painter," Shayne said. "Normally I wouldn't believe Carson if he said the Earth was round."

"A window don't break after the bullet goes through," the Chief of Detectives said. "Brown had to be lying. If it's a suicide it looks like he did the first killing."

"Is it suicide?"

"You tell me," Painter said.

Shayne pulled on his left ear. "I can't prove it isn't. The set-up is right. The only thing that bothers me is the bump on Brown's head and the rope. The knot isn't tight enough around the fixture. A guy struggles when he's choking."

Painter snapped to his M.E., "Any indication that he put up a fight?"

The M.E. looked up from the body. "Not that I can see. Looks like he just strangled in peace

and quiet. No rope burns on the neck. The rope didn't move much."

"How long ago?" Painter wanted to know.

"Maybe three hours," the M.E. said, "not more."

"That gives Carson time before he came after me," Shayne said.

Carson began to squawk like a wounded chicken. "Me? Why me!"

"Maybe Brown never told you anything," Shayne said. "Maybe it was you there when the shot was fired. Maybe you made the whole thing up, Carson."

Painter said, "You look like a man who'd knock a guy on the head and hang him up, Carson. Place, opportunity, and motive. I think we'll hold you a while."

"On what charge!" Carson cried.

Painter shrugged. "Material witness. You were a friend of the deceased. Take him out."

After Carson had been hauled away, Shayne left Painter in the room and called Tim Rourke. The reporter had information which he started to discuss but Shayne cut him short. "Meet me at Gentry's office, Tim," he said. "I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

In fourteen minutes he was sitting in the office of Miami's Chief of Police. Will Gentry chewed on the black stump of his cold cigar and listened to the redhead. Tim Rourke slumped his lean body in

a hard chair. Shayne got up and paced the police chief's office.

"Cut and dried, all of it—until you scratch the surface and then it's not so simple," he said. "Take the woman, Mrs. Foster. Okay, she admits right out in the open that she was putting the screws on Morris to market his new drug. Fair enough. Only she forgets to tell me the whole company is on the rocks and *any* officer and stockholder might want to get Morris out of the way, so they can market the stuff."

Gentry said, "And she turns out to be an Annie Oakley, crack shot all her life, with a house full of guns. Moss says he checked and found she won third place a couple of years in a row in National Woman's shooting when she was younger."

"She also took a big interest in chemistry," Rourke said, "to get to know the business. Only she knows enough to have made that sodium peroxide explode on time."

Shayne sat down and lit a cigarette. "She was out of her office twenty minutes at the time of the shooting, Tim. That makes her a prime suspect. Only I checked the other officers, and no one has a decent alibi. They all wanted Morris to market the stuff. With all the publicity any psycho with a sick wife or husband could have shot at the Doc."

"A psycho wouldn't have killed

Brown," Gentry said. The rugged face of the Chief of Police was dark with irritation at the blank walls they had run into.

"No, but maybe Brown was a suicide," Shayne said. "Let's say Brown was killed. Why? Was he lying, and killed for that? Or was he telling the truth, and killed to silence him? For that matter, someone could have put Brown up to doing the shooting and killed him later to protect himself. That would fit Carson. We only have Carson's word Brown said anything about the shooting.

"Then there's Halstead. He was there, I tangled with him. Carson was there. Mrs. Foster was there. It turns out both Carson and Halstead know enough chemistry, too. And no one has an alibi for the time of Brown's death. To top it off Tim comes up with a lot about Dr. Morris we didn't know. The guy turns out to be a playboy after dark, with maybe a hundred more enemies."

Tim Rourke stretched his long legs in front of him where he sat in the hard chair in the silent office. "A big spender and big with the girls. That Mrs. Foster is the steady, but only the steady. I never knew he made so much out of that first discovery. A fortune and still coming in, some of it. Who knows, the family of the other guy could be out to get Morris still."

Will Gentry shifted his cold

cigar in his grim mouth. "We checked that deep. The two of them worked together on that first medicine, and when the other guy died of natural causes, a heart attack, the Doc split right down the middle with the dead man's family. Morris could have taken all the loot. There were no papers to prove the other guy was a partner, but he split right down the middle, fifty-fifty. You know, two men make a discovery and then one dies and the survivor plays it real fair. That's not bad. Twenty years the Doc's been playing fair with the other man's family."

Shayne sighed and lit another cigarette, blowing smoke hard into the air of the dim office. "So we're back where we started. And the killer is still loose to really get Dr. Morris next time. Damn it, Will, we're missing something. I feel it. What about that room again?"

Gentry shrugged. "We found the cartridge. No prints on the window or sill or door except the super and the agent for the building. The guy was so careful not even the dust was touched."

"There's something about that room," Shayne said, and was about to add more when the telephone rang.

Gentry picked up the phone. As the Chief of Police listened his rugged face darkened and then suddenly became grim. Gentry hung up the telephone.

"That's it, Mike," he said. "Hal-



stead, that husband, just tried to kill the Doc. Attacked him outside the lab. My men stopped him. They've got him. Said he acted crazy as a loon."

Tim Rourke jumped up. "I figured it was the drug! Revenge all the time."

"Maybe," Shayne said. "But I'm far from sure of it."

## VII

MAX HALSTEAD, short and fat and flabby, his bald head shining in the light of the hall in front of the laboratory, was shouting. Held by two burly policemen, the struggling man was still so shaken by rage that the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcords.

"I'll get him! You see! I'll get him yet! He deserves to die! Why didn't you let me kill him! He killed my wife just as surely as if he'd put a bullet through her heart!"

Dr. Reuben Morris stood alone in the hall and looked at the fat and flabby man who had tried to kill him. The Doctor's face was sad, sympathetic. "Shayne, I know how he feels. Sometimes I wish I'd never been a research chemist. It's too hard seeing them hope and then have to tell them there isn't any hope."

"You saved plenty of people with that first drug, Doc," Tim Rourke said.

"Yes, I suppose I did," Dr.

Morris said. "But there's so much more I have to do. I've got another twenty years of good work in me. I suppose I should think of that."

Shayne watched the police drag Max Halstead away. The fat little man shouted all the way down the stairs and out to the patrol car.

Gentry closed his notebook. "I guess that does it, Mike."

"Did he admit the shooting?"

"No," Gentry said. "But he will."

"Maybe," Shayne said. He turned to Dr. Morris. "I'm thinking about the other husband, Doc. Brown was supposed to have told a story about being outside the lab when that shot was fired yesterday. He claims he heard the shot a few seconds, before the window glass broke."

The Doctor smiled. "That's impossible Shayne, you should know that. Light travels faster than sound. If he was under the window he would have seen the glass break at the same time, or a split second sooner."

"That's how I figure it," Shayne said.

"Isn't Brown dead?" the Doctor asked. "A suicide?"

"Carson told me what Brown said."

"He's lying, Shayne."

"Which one? Brown or Carson?"

"Maybe both," Dr. Morris said.

Tim Rourke said, "How about giving me the whole story of the

attack, Dr. Morris? He got the axe from the fire box here in the hall, right?"

Dr. Morris turned to talk to Rourke. Will Gentry was leaving. Shayne walked after Gentry. The Chief of Police looked at the red-head's grim face. "What's on your mind, Mike?"

"It doesn't fit," Shayne said. "A man who sets up a planned killing with a rifle, and sets up a chemical explosion, doesn't switch to an axe in the open."

"You never know what a psycho will do," Gentry said.

"Even a psycho follows a pattern, Will. This doesn't fit." And Shayne froze. Gentry froze. Inside the laboratory there had been a small, sharp noise, as if someone had struck a pane of glass with something metallic.

Apparently neither Dr. Morris nor Rourke had heard it, for they didn't even look startled. The red-head motioned Gentry to silence and stepped to the swinging doors of the laboratory.

Gentry held a gun right behind Shayne who pushed the doors open and moved swiftly and silently into the shadows of the darkened laboratory. Gentry was in the shadow on the other side of the doorway.

In the laboratory there was a faint stir of movement. Shayne listened. Seemingly someone had become alarmed by the intrusion and was breathing low in the

dark. Ducking low, Shayne crept through the room in the shelter of a work bench. Gentry watched the door behind the red head.

Shayne collided with an impediment in the dark and swore. The impediment moved. Shayne saw a shadow cross the faint light from the open window. He lunged and felt soft flesh, thin cotton material, and realized that he was holding a woman. She struggled and Shayne called for lights.

The lights went on. Gentry stood at the switch with his gun pointed. In his arms Shayne held Mrs. Foster, her blonde hair hidden under a turban, her voluptuous figure firm in his arms. He released her and stepped back. The woman calmly lit a cigarette and sat on the edge of a work bench.

"You caught me," Mrs. Foster said. "You get a gold star."

Gentry walked from the light switch. "All right, Mrs. Foster. What's the story?"

"Story? What story, Mr. Gentry? I own this company. I can go where I please."

Shayne said, "In the dark with gun and flashlight? That bulge under your dress should be a thirty-eight Police Special tucked into your girdle."

Mrs. Foster bristled. "I never wear a girdle, Shayne. It's a thirty-eight tucked into my garter belt. I have a permit."

"A little target practice?" Shayne said.

"Persuasion and protection, let's say," Mrs. Foster said.

There was an admiring glint in Shayne's eyes. The woman was a cool one, no doubt of that. Apparently Mrs. Foster had nerves of steel and a determination to match.

But Will Gentry was not amused or admiring. "Trespassing I can't get you on, Mrs. Foster. But burglary is another matter, even in your own factory. What were you after?"

Mrs. Foster sighed. "The formula. You know I want to start marketing. I was in my office, and when I heard the commotion over here I came to see what it was all about, a few minutes after you arrived. There was so much talk and confusion I didn't think I'd be acting unwisely if I took advantage of it to have a good look for that medicine."

"So you just happened to bring the gun and flashlight?" Shayne said.

"All right. I planned it. I heard the rumpus and decided to try for the research details."

Shayne said, "You mean you actually don't know what Dr. Morris has been working on all these years?"

"I do mean that. All Reuben ever tells us is what he thinks the new drug will do."

"Isn't that a bit high-handed," Will Gentry wanted to know.

"Very," Mrs. Foster said, "but



you don't argue with a man of Reuben's reputation, not at the salary we pay him. He calls it Product X, and that's all we can get out of him."

The voice of Dr. Morris came from the doorway. "And that's all you'll ever get out of me until I'm ready. Really, Maxine, I'm surprised at you. Do you think I keep copies of my work just lying around?" And the Doctor laughed. "You'll never find out anything about Product X until it's perfected. I won't have any money-hungry laymen marketing an unfinished product."

"We pay you for work!" Mrs. Foster snapped.

"You pay me for my knowledge, for my name!" The Doctor became thoughtful. "I wonder, Maxine. Could it be more than money? You don't really need the money, do you? I know you can always use more, but you really

don't need more. No, I wonder if it's just revenge? Perhaps my unknown assailant is you after all."

Mrs. Foster paled. "What are you talking about? You have your killer! I saw him taken away."

"Maybe we do, and maybe we don't," Shayne said. "What's all this about, Morris?"

The Doctor sighed. "It has to come out, I'm afraid. You'd have found out sooner or later that Maxine and I broke up about a month ago. Nothing special. We just called it quits."

"That's a lie!" Maxine Foster cried. "Oh, we broke up. But it was more than a month ago and it was plenty special. He was two-timing and I caught him cold! One of his admiring little students. Did you know that Morris has proteges? Oh, he does. The great Doctor has a lot of little girls who sit at his feet in the lab. I imagine they do more than sit at his feet when he gets them home. At least one did. I found out about her and it was the last straw. I hate his lying guts! But he isn't worth killing."

"You didn't have to make it so did, Maxine."

"And you didn't have to mention it at all!"

"They would have found out. I was simply trying to protect you. I know you wouldn't do anything foolish."

"You were thinking of me? How sweet! Can I go now? You can't

charge me with anything, Mr. Gentry. I know the law."

Mrs. Foster departed without looking even slightly concerned, and Shayne and Gentry left Rourke still interviewing Dr. Morris. Once outside in the night the Chief of Police turned to Shayne.

"What do you think, Mike?" he asked.

"About the woman? She's as cool as they come. She has enough steadiness of nerve to put her on the suspect list."

"You can say that again," Gentry grunted.

"She hates him a lot more than she lets on," Shayne said. "Still, you know what gets me most about this case? Every time we get close, every time something new happens, it gets more complicated. We pick up one good suspect, and Dr. Morris hands us another. He seems to have more enemies, and more reasons to get himself killed, than any two men I've met."

"Maybe they're all after him," Gentry said.

"Maybe," Shayne said. "There's one thing has been puzzling me since I started on the case. No one is supposed to know what Product X is—no one outside the company, anyway. Yet Frank Carson got hold of enough information to bust it wide open in the newspapers."

"Where'd he get the dope?"

Shayne stared at the rugged face

of Will Gentry. "You know, I never asked."

"Neither did we," the Chief of Police said.

"I'm on my way," Shayne said.

"If he'll tell you."

"He'll tell me," Shayne said in a grim voice.

### VIII

FRANK CARSON was in his room in the run-down boarding house elegantly misnamed the Radcliffe Hotel. And there was no trouble at all.

Carson looked up from where he had been lying on the bed reading a comic book, and said, "Sure I'll tell you. I got an anonymous letter. The letter said there was this drug. It could save the lives of Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Halstead, and maybe I'd like to know about it. It said the cases were considered hopeless but that Dr. Morris' new 'miracle drug' could cure people in the last stages of diseases that always ended fatally, cases no other drug could do more than retard."

Frank Carson hesitated a moment, stared directly at Mike Shayne. "And you can be damned sure," he went on, "I didn't waste any time. Maybe I'm not much any more. But once I was one hell of a good newspaperman in my day."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "You say it was an anonymous

letter! That doesn't help so much."

"I still got it if you want to see it," Carson said.

"Hand it over."

In itself an anonymous letter gave Shayne no help. But if the letter, the original, was in his hands there could be traceable clues.

Carson handed him a worn piece of letter-size, pale blue note paper, faintly perfumed. It was the kind of stationery a woman would use, but that told him no more than he already knew. Mrs. Foster, or one of Dr. Morris' little girls might well have been vindictive enough to write such a letter, knowing how much he disliked publicity. The paper was dirty and creased.

The writing was not writing and not typing. Block letters unevenly spaced, as though the printer had used his left hand. The paper was a common brand sold everywhere. The only mark was a small yellow stain in the upper right-hand corner. As if something had been spilled on the paper, or it had been accidentally set down in some yellow liquid.

"What did you spill on it?" Shayne asked.

"I kept it in my pocket since I got it. That little mark was on it when I got it."

"Don't go away yet," Shayne said as he strode from the room, his heavy tread shaking the old house.



He drove back across County Causeway and straight to Will Gentry's headquarters. Gentry was out, but Sergeant Moss sent the paper down to the police lab for him. Then Shayne sat down, lit a cigarette, and waited with his big foot tapping the floor.

Thirty minutes later a patrolman brought in the report.

Moss read it and said, "Penicillin. Does that help?"

"Maybe, maybe not," Shayne said.

"They make it out at that Laboratory, don't they?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "They make it."

He drove to the Laboratory. The guard on the door let him in-

to the large room that was Dr. Morris' private lab where all the action had taken place. Inside, he hesitated. A thought was buzzing in his mind, but he was not sure where to start. Then he began to search. He found small bottles of penicillin on all the work benches. He found a bottle on the desk of Dr. Morris, and on the desk of Dr. Horace Latimer, the dead assistant.

Shayne sat down, puzzled. The letter could have been written by someone in the lab, but who? If it had been Dr. Morris himself he was setting himself up as a target. If it had been Latimer, what did he have to gain and who had done the shooting?

Abruptly Shayne stiffened and a startled look came into his eyes. The words of Carson, the words the dead Brown was supposed to have said, buzzed in his mind. He walked to the far wall away from, and directly in front of, the window where the shot had come through.

Shayne found it about twenty feet away from the other bullet mark on the wall. A small newly-plastered and painted spot on the wall. With his pen knife he carefully picked out the new plaster that had been put in very quickly and was a different, quick-drying type. When he stood back Shayne was looking at a ragged hole where a .30-.30 rifle bullet had struck the wall.

"Can I help you, Shayne?"

Mike Shayne turned to see Dr. Reuben Morris standing in the center of the laboratory. The Doctor was smiling at him with a puzzled expression. And the Doctor's eyes were looking at the hole in the wall the detective had dug out.

Shayne said, "Why did you do it, Doc?"

"Do what, Shayne?"

Shayne sighed. "It won't play, Doc, I know all about it now. That anonymous letter in Carson's possession had penicillin on it. The hole I just found is where the bullet that killed Latimer really hit. Carson and Brown were telling the truth. The shot never came from across the street. That's why you had to kill Brown. I suppose you saw him down there. You didn't know he had told Carson. You set up the whole thing to cover up killing Latimer.

"I think I can guess why. That first big miracle discovery of yours. It wasn't really yours at all, it was that other guy, the one who died. He was the real brain and he died and you took the credit. You've been riding on it ever since. I guess there isn't even a Product X at all, or was Horace Latimer your brain?"

Dr. Reuben Morris laughed, but his lips were thin and unsmiling. There was sweat on the Doctor's high forehead. "You're whistling in the dark, Shayne. Latimer wasn't even a second-rate chemist.

I'm the biggest name in my field. They'll laugh at you."

"Not after I get Gentry to have your records analyzed. It won't take a real scientist five minutes to find out about Product X, will it?"

And then suddenly Mike Shayne was staring into the muzzle of a high-powered rifle. He saw the Doctor bend, lift a long section of the vinyl tile floor, and come up with the rifle. The telescopic sight and the small opening of the muzzle seemed as big as cannons to him.

"You'll never get away with it," Shayne said warningly. "Morris, that cop outside, will be in here before the echo stopped."

"Through a locked door?" Dr. Morris said. "Yes, I locked it. By the time he gets it open, or I open it, I'll be screaming murder and you'll be dead and this little toy will be back under the floor. You'll notice the window is open. No one will think to look for the rifle in the lab this time any more than they did last time."

"You planned this a long time," Shayne said.

He talked, his eyes searching for escape. The nearest work bench was three feet away. And he was unarmed. On the bench he saw a heavy mortar and pestle.

"Latimer must have been bleeding you," Shayne said.

"The fool took four years to find out, and then he settled for peanuts," Dr. Morris said. "Until

that stupid Maxine started telling him how much the formula meant and he realized he could bleed me white. . . . Don't move!"

The detective had taken two short steps before the Doctor saw the movement. One lunge and Shayne would be behind the bench. He said, "You can't afford to miss, Morris. You know that. One shot, there won't be time for two before that cop's in here. One shot. You've got to make it close."

"Don't move!"

And Shayne lunged. He was behind the work bench. Dr. Morris was running toward the work bench to get a clear shot. Shayne reached up, took the heavy ceramic pestle in his big hand, and as Dr. Morris reached the bench he threw with all his strength.

The pestle caught the Doctor full on the arm. The gun fell to the floor. Shayne took two steps and hit the Doctor flush on the nose. The Doctor went down like a tree falling, blood spurting from his broken nose.

Shayne looked at the still form of Dr. Reuben Morris, and then went and unlocked the door. The policeman in the hall was already banging on the door after hearing the noise.

Then Shayne called Gentry.

## IX

IN WILL GENTRY'S office Tim Rourke paced up and down while

Shayne and Gentry sat silent. Rourke said, "I can't believe it, a man like that."

"He was all reputation," Shayne said sourly. "That first discovery was made by the other guy and Morris took the credit. Oh, he was an average chemist, maybe better than average, but after that first big discovery he was paid like a genius and he liked it. He was good enough to talk a big game, but Latimer found out there wasn't any Product X at all. He bled Morris for a while, and then Morris knew he had to kill Latimer if he was to keep his reputation.

"His reputation meant a lot to the Doc, especially money. He liked being a genius, living like a rich genius. So he wrote that anonymous letter. He knew it would start enough trouble to make him need protection, make it look like someone was after him. Those threats were real, sent by cranks. And he got a lot of publicity. The Doc really wanted publicity. If you talk about something long enough people really believe you. Product X was a big thing. People would've waited ten more years, and he could always say things had gone wrong."

Will Gentry said, "What tipped you, Mike? He had me fooled good."

"It was a lot of things. I guess the first was that it was too easy, too many suspects. They were all so guilty looking they had to be



sort of sincere. Remember when you said it could be all of them? I guess my mind added it could have been none of them, too.

"I wondered about that room. I mean, a killer so careful he doesn't disturb the dust or leave a single print anywhere doesn't figure to be careless enough to leave a cartridge case around. It didn't fit, you know? When I heard Carson tell what Brown said it began to fit. Someone wanted us to be sure to identify that room as the spot where the shot came from. I

You, me, Tim, just to make it ready for someone to try to kill *him*. Then he took that rifle across to the room and fired it through the open window to make a mark on the wall in the right place. The next afternoon he shot Latimer, making sure the real bullet hit a long way from the first.

"He smashed the window. He had the quick plaster and a paint spray can ready. That was why Brown didn't hear him call the police right away. He hid the rifle. I don't know when he saw Brown,

Mike Shayne Leads Next Issue's Headliners with—

## MAYHEM IN MIAMI

*When two men and an unusual woman gave  
Death a chance to ride high . . . the redhead  
could hardly have stayed on the sidelines.*

By **BRETT HALLIDAY**

guess too much didn't fit until I thought of Morris himself. Then it all fitted fine."

Shayne reached into his pocket and drew out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. Took one and lit up slowly. He went on: "When I found that other bullet hole I had him. He set the whole thing up.

but he did. He was pretty sure Brown would be too scared to say anything for a while. Later he went and killed Brown.

"The explosion was an extra-added gimmick to really convince us. It damned near did. Only I wondered about that, too. It was almost too much luck that it went

off when no one was near it.”

“You make it sound simple, Mike,” Tim Rourke said.

“It always sounds simple afterwards,” Shayne said.

Will Gentry said, “Halstead just wanted to get revenge. The Doc almost had Halstead going for him.”

“He probably hoped someone would jump him, it was almost certain someone would after all the trouble he got Carson to stir up. You know, when it came to picking people he damned near was a genius.”

“Except when he had Tim pick you,” the Chief of Police said.

Shayne finished his report and left Gentry’s office with Tim Rourke. The reporter looked depressed. The two men walked in silence until the redhead saw the sign of *Felipes*. He led the reporter into the tavern. Shayne ordered a double rye highball for his friend and a sidecar for himself.

Shayne said, “A man starts with a big lie and ends up a double murderer.”

“I knew him a long time, Mike,”

Rourke said. “I admired him. He seemed like such a very great man.”

“Maybe he could have been,” Shayne said, “but an accident made him look like a genius too early. It was too easy and he liked being a big man. He never let himself find out what he could really do.”

“He didn’t want to work, he just wanted the reputation and the money,” Rourke said.

“There’s a lot of people like that, Tim,” Shayne said.

“Well, he’s through anyway.”

“Yeah,” Shayne said. “I guess he started to think he really was a genius, could pull off a perfect murder. He was wrong. Killers usually are.”

And Shayne waved to the waiter for another sidecar and double rye highball. He didn’t feel very good this time, he was thinking of all the people who had believed there really was a Product X and it had given them hope.

Maybe Dr. Reuben Morris had committed a bigger crime than murder.



*A grim crime thriller . . . for  
mystery addicts on the 5:15.*

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## **DEATH UPSTREAM**

by

**KENNETH MacGOWAN**



**D**ETECTIVE LIEUTENANT Sam Morgan turned to Sergeant Davis. "Well, at the moment it looks like an accident," he said. "Death while swimming. A total tragedy—in three little words on a police blotter."

Sergeant Davis nodded. "Just another statistic to add to the summer's toll of deaths," he said. "Too bad! Simons was only twenty-four years old. And he had a first rate reputation as a swimmer."

Davis hesitated a moment, then said, "Maybe I shouldn't even mention this. But I had a strange feeling when I talked to Parry Richards that his words of sympathy didn't quite ring true. Even what he said about doing his best to save his friend."

"What makes you think that?" Morgan asked.

"It's just the way it struck me, sir. There seemed to be little genuine sorrow on Richard's part. It was just a feeling I had, but I'd like to follow through on it."

"Very well, Davis, if you have a hunch, carry out a full investigation. Visit the club and see what you can find out about both of them."

Two hours later Sergeant Davis returned. Everything, as far as the club was concerned, seemed to be above board and there was no apparent reason why Arnold Simons should have taken his own life.

One thing Davis did learn, however. Both Simons and Richards had entered their names in a forthcoming swimming competition, and there was a prize of five hundred dollars at stake.

Armed with this information,

Davis had another talk with Richards. The drowned man's friend discussed the contest freely and admitted that the only ones considered likely to have a chance of winning were Simons and himself. They both had fast times and, barring accidents, one of them would be almost certain to win.

It was the word "accident" that kept nagging at Davis' brain. So much so that he could hardly sleep that night.

The following morning he reopened the subject with Lieutenant Morgan. "The inquest will reveal if there's been any foul play," the older man assured him as they climbed into the car and headed for the river.

A half hour later they drew up outside the club house.

It was early morning and there were few people about. "Let's go for a walk along the bank," Davis suggested.

They were just turning from the car when a tall, athletically built man emerged from the clubhouse. It was Parry Richards. He greeted them cordially and volunteered to accompany them to the scene of the tragedy.

They walked along the river bank in tight-lipped silence for about a quarter of a mile. Then Richard pointed ahead. "There—that's where it happened," he said.

"Tell me precisely what you saw," Morgan said.

"I was walking along the bank,

on my way to join Simons, when I saw him struggling in the water. He was quite far out, and was being drawn along very swiftly by the current. Just as he was being carried upstream I dived in and managed to get hold of him. I pulled him out. But it was too late. I could do nothing to save him."

"It must have been quite a shock to you," Morgan said. "I hope I haven't upset you too much by making you—well, go over it all again."

"Forget it, Lieutenant. Glad to be of assistance."

They parted.

"I see what you mean, Davis," Morgan said, as they returned to the car. "Your suspicions were justified. The man was obviously lying. But we may have a hard time proving it."

Later in the day the medical report was received at police headquarters. Morgan glanced through it. "Nothing unusual," he said, as he tossed it over to Davis.

"Perhaps I was mistaken after all," Davis admitted, in a puzzled tone.

"Wait a minute," Morgan said. "Pass me that almanac. Now—what did Parry Richards tell us this morning? Didn't he say that Simons was swept *upstream*?"

"That's right!"

"He's lying," Morgan said. "According to this report the accident took place at three-fifteen p.m., or almost on low water. So the tide

on the river would have been flowing in the other direction." He thought for a moment, then said, "Have Richards brought in for questioning. We'll charge him when he cracks."

Parry Richards broke down when confronted with the evidence. He was taken away sobbing.

Morgan turned to Davis. "He

held Arnold Simons down until he knew his lungs would be full of water," he said. "He was counting on the medical report to clear him."

"All for the sake of five hundred dollars!"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," said Morgan. "But a good many desperate men have killed for less than that."



"I'VE REACHED MY VERDICT!"



*The murder alibi was planned so carefully the crime itself seemed just routine . . . until Destiny's big, revolving wheel jammed. A high-voltage suspense thriller by a mystery and detective story great.*

# CHANGE OF MURDER

**AN OUTSTANDING NOVELET**

*By*

**CORNELL**

**WOOLRICH**

**B**RAD DONLEAVY, early one Chicago evening, went to pay a serious business call upon his friend Fade Williams. He was dressed for the occasion in a dark blue overcoat, snap-brim hat, and armpit-cuddling .38. It being a windy evening he would have caught cold without any one of the three, particularly the last.

He and Fade had known each other for years. They had so much on each other they were of necessity the best of friends. The .38

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was just habit and no precaution. Fade, to be accurate, was not his given name. Although he had been known to vanish, seemingly into thin air, for long stretches at a time, his nickname didn't derive from that magician-like accomplishment either.

It was borrowed from the lowly pastime of shooting craps, in which the expression "fade" means one player is willing to match the other's stake—by putting up an equal amount—in other words, to back the hazard.

Not that Fade ever played craps; there were bigger and better ways of earning money. He was a professional alibi expert, and first-rate set-up arranger. Although fancy fees figured in his adroit juggling of times, places and circumstances, his amateur standing must be granted. He wasn't listed in the yellow pages of the telephone red book and he had no neon sign out advertising his services.

Fade had to know you. You couldn't just walk in off the street, plank down a retainer and walk out with an alibi all neatly wrapped up in polyethelene.

A too-frequent appearance in the witness chair, helping to clear persons "mistakenly" accused of committing crime, might have caused Justice to squint suspiciously at Fade after awhile.

But Fade's batting-average was so consistently good that arrang-



ing a deal with him was like buying immunity at the outset. Which was why Brad Donleavy was on his way to him right at that moment, having a murder on his mind.

Brad would have been indignant to hear it called that. Murder was the name for other people's killings, not his. Not one of the half-dozen he already had to his

credit was an unjustified killing as he saw it. He never killed simply for the sake of killing, or even for a profit. It was just that he had an almost elephantine faculty for holding grudges.

Yet relentless as he could be about wiping out old scores, there was also a wide streak of sentimentality in his make-up. *Mother Machree* could bring tears to his eyes if he had enough beer in him. He had been known to pitch rocks through shop windows in the dead of night simply to release the imprisoned kittens locked behind them.

Anyway, he found his way into one of the lesser joints that infest the Loop district, the designation THE OASIS flaming above it in red neon lights. It was not a club or cabaret, simply a beer-garden used by Fade as a front. A TV provided what entertainment there was.

The bartender tilted his head to inquire, "What'll it be?"

"It'll be Fade," said Brad. "Tell him Donleavy."

The barkeep didn't move from the spot, just bent over as if to take a look at what stock he had lined up below the bar. His lips moved soundlessly, he straightened up, and a thumb popped out of his balled fist.

"Straight through the back," he said. "See that door there?"

Brad did and went toward it. Before he quite made it, it opened

and Fade was standing there with his stubby-fingered hand outthrust.

"Well, how's the boy?" he said jovially.

"I got something I got to talk over with you," said Brad.

"Sure thing," said Fade. "Come inside."

He guided Brad through with an affectionate arm about his shoulder, looked back to scan the outside of the establishment once more, then closed the door after them.

There was a short passageway with a telephone booth on each side of it, ending at the open door of Fade's office. The booth on the left side had a sign dangling from it—*Out of Order*. In brushing by Brad dislodged it and it fell down.

Fade carefully picked it up and replaced it before following him in. Then he closed the office door after them.

"You always could appreciate a swanky setup, Brad," he said. "How do you like my new place. Plenty smart, isn't it?"

Brad looked around. On the desk that Fade had recently been sitting at lay a .38, broken open. Near it was a scrap of soiled chamois rag, and a little pile of bullets that had come out of the gun.

Brad smiled humorlessly. "Weren't expecting trouble, were you?"

"I always do that, like to fool around with 'em, keep 'em clean,"



said Fade. "Helps me pass the time away, sitting in here by the hour like I do. I've got quite a few hanging around, sometimes I take 'em out and look 'em over. Makes me think of the old days."

Fade sat down, scooped up the bullets in the hollow of his hand, and began to replace them in the gun one by one. "What's on your mind, Brad?" he said, poring over his task.

Brad abruptly sat down opposite him. "Listen, Fade, I got a little thing on for tomorrow night," he began confidentially. "You be the doctor, will you? Set me up good and foolproof!"

"A kill?" asked Fade without even looking up at him. "What again?"

"Why, I haven't raised a gun in eighteen months," protested Brad virtuously.

"Maybe so, but you was in stir the first twelve, or so they tell me. Why don't you lay off once in a while, give it a rest?"

"I wasn't up for no rubout," said Brad. "You ought to know that! You squared my last one for me. They got me for knocking down an old lady. I was practicing learning to drive a friend's car."

Fade clicked the reloaded gun shut and put it down. "Which reminds me," he said, getting up and going over to a small wall-safe. "I think I got something coming to me on that Cincinnati cover-up I did for you."

"Sure enough," said Brad placidly, tapping an inner pocket. "I got the dough with me right now."

Fade apparently wasn't taking his word for it unsupported. He opened his little built-in strong-box, drew out a cluttered handful of papers, and scanned them one by one.

"Yeah, here it is," he said. "One-fifty, made out to look like a gambling debt. You gave me the other one-fifty the night before the rubout, remember?"

Fade thrust the rest back into the safe, brought it over to the desk with him—without, however, taking his hand off it.

Brad was laboriously counting out ten dollar bills, moistening his thumb. He pushed the pile across the desk when he was through. "There you are."

"Want me to tear this up for you?" said Fade, edging the I.O.U. forward with one hand, and pulling the money toward him with the other.

"I'll tear it up myself," said Brad. He looked at it, folded it, and carefully put it away. "It might slip your mind." He said it in a matter-of-fact way and Fade displayed no animosity. "Now, how about it? Will you cover me for tomorrow night?"

Fade picked up the .38 and the rag once more, went back to cleaning it.

"You're getting to be a bum risk, Brad," he complained be-

tween puffs of breath on the metal. "Once or twice it's a pushover, but you're starting to go in for it too often. If I keep appearing in front of you each time, it starts to look bad for me. They were already suspicious in Cincinnati that time. Kept coming around questioning me for weeks afterwards."

He went on scowling for awhile. "It's going to take five hundred this time, Brad," he said. "It keeps getting tougher to make it look right all the time."

"Five hundred!" exclaimed Brad heatedly. "You must be off your rocker. For five hundred I could go out and get a half-dozen guys paid off, without having to do it myself!"

Fade jerked him impassively toward the door. "Suit yourself, pal. If you feel that way, why did you come to me?" Brad made no move to get up and leave. "You know as well as I do," Fade went on, "whoever you hired would break down and talk after just one session with the cops in a tank room. And another thing," he added shrewdly, "it's the satisfaction of doing it yourself that appeals to you."

Brad nodded vigorously. "Damned right. Who the hell wants to get even by remote control? I like to see their eyes when they glimpse the slug with their name on it coming out of the gun. I like to see them fall and turn over, kind of slow the way they do."

He shuffled through the remainder of the money he was holding. "Give you two hundred bucks now," he said. "That's all I've got left on me. I guarantee you the other three hundred the minute the heat's off. You couldn't expect the full amount beforehand anyway. Nobody does business that way."

Brad flipped his thumb across the money again, enticingly. "What do you say?" he said. "It's a pushover, a natural. Hell, you can fix me up with one hand tied behind your back." And by way of professional flattery, "I could've got him in Gary last week, but I kept my hands down. I wouldn't pull it without you to alibi me."

Fade put down his cleaning rag, shapped the wad of bills back and forth a couple of times under his thumbnail, finally whacked them against the edge of the desk by way of consent.

"Give me a little dope on it," he said gruffly. "And make it your last job for awhile, will you?"

Brad hitched his chair forward eagerly. "Why I don't want him around any more is my own affair—it's personal. This guy has stomped all over my pet corns. You don't need to know who he is and I ain't telling you. I followed him here from Gary early in the week, like I said, and I've been keeping close tabs on him ever since. He ain't even been expecting something to happen to him, which is

what's so beautiful about the whole thing."

Brad clasped his hands, spit between them, and rubbed them together, eyes shining. "He's at a hole-in-the-wall dump on the North Side. And the way the lay-out is, he's practically begging for it. I've been drawing diagrams all week and I got it by heart." He took out pencil and paper and began to scratch away.

Fade leaned forward, a warning look in his eyes. "Keep your voice down."

"The building is seven stories high and he's got a room on the top floor. Now I don't even have to go in and out or pass anybody to get at him, see! The window of his room looks out on an air shaft that dents in the side wall. There's no fire-escape, nothing—just a drain pipe running up and down the shaft.

"Now across the shaft is a six story tenement smack up against his building. It's such a stinking place they don't even keep the roof door locked. You can walk right up from the street. I've been up there all week, lying flat on my belly and looking into his room. I got a plank hidden away up there right now, waiting for me to use it to get across on. I even measured it across to his window ledge while he was out of his room, and it reaches with about a foot of board left over."

Brad stared at Fade and saw



that he was listening intently. He went on. "My guy's on the seventh floor. The flat's six stories high, so the roof is only about a yard above the top of his window. There ain't even enough incline to the plank to make it difficult getting back across again.

Brad spread his hands triumphantly. "I plug him with a silencer, and they won't even hear it happen in the next room, much less on the street!"

Fade stroked his right cheek judiciously. "It's got points in its favor and it's got points against it," he said. "Watch yourself on that plank. Remember what happened that time at Hopewell."

"I didn't even have to bring it into the house with me," said Brad. "It was half off and I yanked it out of the backyard fence."

"Suppose the guy sees you coming across on it. Won't he duck out of the room?"

Brad shook his head. "I'm getting in while he's out. I'll be laying for him in the closet when he comes back. He leaves his window open from the bottom each time to get air in the room."

Fade was still skeptical. "How about other windows on a line with his? Somebody might stick his head out and see it happen and get a good look at you as you cross over."

Brad snorted. "Didn't I tell you, there's no dent in the wall of the flat. That means there's no window on that side at all. On his building's side there's just one window to a floor on the shaft, all straight under his. The room under him has been vacant since day before yesterday. No one there to see."

"From the fifth floor down I don't think they could see the plank that far away against the night sky," he went on thoughtfully. "It's painted dark green and the shaft is in almost total darkness even in the daytime. That's my end of it and I think it's damned good. Now let's hear what you have to say, showing how I wasn't even there at all to do it!"

"How much time to you need?" Fade asked.

"I can be there and back and leave him stretched out cold behind me in a half hour," said Brad.

"I'll give you an hour, starting

from here and coming back here," said Fade. "Now sign this I.O.U., and then pay close attention to what I'm going to tell you. If it goes wrong you've only yourself to blame."

Brad read the slip of paper Fade Williams had filled out. Like the last transaction of this kind between them, it was disguised as a simple gambling debt and had absolutely no legal value. It didn't have to possess such value. Brad knew what the penalty for welshing on one of those innocuous little scraps of writing would have been.

It had no time limit, but Fade was surer of collecting on it in the end than a creditor backed to the hilt by all the legal red tape ever devised. Not a doubt concerning that did he entertain.

Brad laboriously scrawled *Brad Donleavy* at the bottom of it, mouth open, and returned it. Fade put it with the two hundred in cash, and closed the safe again without bothering to lock it.

"Now come outside with me a minute," Fade said. "I want to show you something."

In the passageway between the two phone booths Fade said, "Get this and remember it. You're paying five hundred for it and I hate to see dough tossed away. There's no way in or out of my office except through the front, like you came in. No windows—nothing. Once you're in, you're in—until

everyone outside there sees you come out of my office again."

Fade dug his elbow into Brad's rib. "But here's how you leave. And here's how you come back in again when you're all squared up over there."

Fade unhitched the *Out of Order* sign, tucked it under his arm, and folded back the glass slide of the booth. "Step in," he said, "like you were going to make a telephone call. Then shove hard against the back wall of the phone booth."

Brad did so—and nearly fell out into the open on his car. The wall was hinged like a door. He took a quick look around him, saw that he was at the back of a dimly-lighted garage. The nearest light bulb was yards away.

The outside of the door was whitewashed to blend with the plaster of the walls. The battered hulk of an old car, with the wheels removed, was standing in such a way that it formed a screen for the ingenious exit.

Brad got back in again, and the door swung shut after him. He stepped out of the booth. Fade closed it and hung the sign back in place.

"I own the garage, too," Fade said. "But just the same don't let the guy out there see you come through. He ain't hep to it. Neither is the bartender on this side. The booth's a dummy I had built for myself."

"Can I open it from the outside to get back in again?" Brad asked.

"Not unless you leave a little wedge of cardboard under it on your way out, like a shoehorn," Fade said. "But not wide enough for any light to seep through. Now, what time are you showing up here?"

"Ten o'clock," said Brad. "He always gets in the same time every night, round ten-thirty."

"Okay," said Fade. "When you get back you ask for me out front, like you just did. I come out there and we slap each other on the back, and toss off a couple together. Then we wander back here and somehow we get into a friendly little game of two-handed draw poker. I send out for drinks and the barman brings 'em in and sees both of us in here, in our shirt sleeves.

"We yell a lot at each other, so that everybody in the place can hear us. I'll make sure that the TV isn't working tonight. Then we quiet down, and that's when you duck out. I'll raise a howl every once in a while, like you was still in here with me. After you get back, we both stroll out again and I see you to the door. We keep making it look natural.

"You won heavy, see, and to prove it you stand everyone in the place to a drink before you go. They'll remember you by that alone, don't worry. There's your set-up and there's your alibi."

Brad looked at him admiringly. "Fade," he said, "it's worth the five hundred bucks just to hear the way you tell it!"

"Hell," said Fade lugubriously, "I ain't making enough profit on it you could sneeze at. Installing that fake telephone booth alone cost me a pretty penny."

Fade sat down at the desk once more, taking up the .38 and rag, and resumed his fancy polishing. "Another thing," he said, "if you're riding back, zig-zag and change cabs, don't give 'em a chance to trace you in a straight line back to the garage. I own it, like I told you."

Fade squinted down the bore of the gun toward the handle, blowing his breath along it.

"Watch yourself, you've already reloaded that thing," Brad said jumpily. "One of these days you're going to blow your own head off if you monkey around so much that way. Well, I'm going on home and get a good night's rest, so I can enjoy myself tomorrow night."

He saluted from his eyebrow and departed.

THE FOLLOWING EVENING when Brad Donleavy walked in he heard a barfly ask the bartender: "What the hell's the matter with your T.V. set? Doesn't it work?"

An unusual silence hung over *The Oasis*, although they were lined up two deep before the mirror.

"It ain't working," said the bartender curtly. "It's got to be repaired."

The barman saw Brad coming and ducked below the counter without waiting to be told, put his mouth to the intercom Fade had rigged up between the bar and his office. The back door opened and Fade Williams came out, booming cordial greetings. Every head turned his way.

Fade and Brad each slung an arm to the other's shoulder, made a place for themselves at the rail.

"Set 'em up for my pal Donleavy," said Fade. Brad tried to pay. "Forget the shelling out," said Fade. "This is on the house."

After several minutes of this kind of by-play at the top of their voices, the bartender placed a pair of dice down before them. They clicked busily for a while, idle eyes watching every move. Finally Fade cast the dice away from him impatiently.

"You got my blood up, Brad," he said. "This is too slow. I know a better way to take it away from you. Come on back in my office. I'll go you a few rounds with the cards."

The door closed behind them.

"They'll be there all night, that's for sure," said the bartender knowingly.

Once Brad and Fade were behind the door all their labored cordiality vanished. They went to work in cold-blooded silence.

Fade stripped the stamp off a new deck of cards, strewed them across the table. He stripped off his coat and hung it on a peg. He then rolled up his sleeves. Brad did the same, revealing his shoulder holster, which he carefully took off and placed out of sight.

They each grabbed up five cards at random, sat down at opposite sides of the desk.

"Get some money up," muttered Fade, tapping the table.

They both hauled out fistfuls of change and singles, flung it down between them. They both relaxed, scanned their hands.

"Play with what you got," mouthed Fade. "The barkeep will be in with drinks in a minute."

The second door, between the office and the phone booths, had been left open. Brad flipped down two cards, reached for two more. The outside door suddenly opened and the barman came in with two glasses and a bottle on a tray. He left the door open behind him, and they were in full sight of those at the bar for a few minutes.

The bartender put down the bottle and glasses, then paused to glance over his employer's shoulder in wide-eyed astonishment. Fade was holding a royal flush. It had just happened that way.

"Okay, Jim, you can go," Fade said. "And don't come back unless I call you. We've got to concentrate!"

The man edged out with the



empty tray, closed the outer door after him, and went back to tell the customers about the phenomenal luck his boss was having.

Fade instantly turned his hand around so Brad could see it. "Raise a racket," he said, "and then get going—but fast! Don't forget the wedge under the booth or you'll not be able to get back in again."

Brad was busy putting on his shoulder holster, coat, and topcoat and buttoning himself into them. He smashed his fist down on the desk with enough force to shatter it and let loose a roar of startled profanity.

Fade matched him bellow for bellow. Both of their faces were stonily impassive.

Brad downed his drink quickly, clasped his own hands together

and shook them at Fade, pushed back the door of the booth with the *Out of Order* sign on it, and sandwiched himself into it.

He closed it, tore the cover off a folder of matches and pleated it together, then pushed the hinged door ajar on the other side of him and slipped through. The wedge held it on a crack; there was just room enough to get a nail-hold.

The back of the garage was steeped in gloom. Brad edged forward around the decrelit chassis and peered ahead. The single attendant was way out front at the entrance, standing talking to the owner of a car that had just driven in.

Brad skittered along toward them, but stayed close to the wall, screened by a long row of parked cars, bending double to bridge the gap between each one and the next. One car had been run in too close to the wall. He had to climb the rear bumper and run along it like a monkey to get by.

The last car in line, however, was still a good fifteen or twenty yards from the mouth of the garage, and there was a big, bare, gasoline-soaked stretch between him and the open street ahead. He skulked waiting where he was, in the shadow cast by the last car.

In about a minute more the customer went away on foot, the attendant got in the car and drove it past Brad's hiding place to the back of the garage. It was an ideal

chance to leave unseen, better than he had thought he would get. He straightened up, sprinted across the remaining stretch of concrete, turned from sight at the entrance, and went walking unhurriedly down the street.

At the second corner he came to he got into a cab, and changed again half-way to his destination. He went into a small candy store and bought himself a bottle of coke. He emerged some five minutes later and hailed another cab. This time he got out two blocks from where he was going, at right angles to it.

The taxi went one way and he went the other, around the corner. He headed straight for the dingy flat, as though he lived in it. He didn't look around going in and above all didn't make the mistake of passing it the first time and then doubling back.

There was no one on the stoop to watch him go in. He pushed the unlocked door in, and went trudging slowly up the stairs, just like anyone coming home tired. Everything was with him tonight. He didn't even meet anyone the whole six flights, although the place was a beehive of noise.

Someone came out and descended the stairs heavily, but that was after he was two floors above. After the top landing, he put the soft pedal on his trudge and quickened it. The roof door, latched on the inside, didn't squeak any more.



He'd oiled the hinges himself two nights before. He eased it shut behind him and found himself out in the dark, moving silently across graveled tar.

The plank was still there where he'd left it, on the opposite side from where he was going to use it, so no one seeing it in the daytime would connect it with the window across the air shaft. He brought it over, set it down, flattened himself on his stomach, and peered over the edge.

He treated himself to a crooked smile. The room behind the window was dark, for its occupant hadn't come in yet. The lower pane was open a foot from the bottom, to let a little air in. Just the way he'd told Fade Williams it would be!

The window below was blank. They still hadn't rented that room. Even the second and third ones down were dark. There wasn't a light above the third floor, and this far up it showed no bigger than a postage stamp. The whole layout was a lulu, made to order.

Brad got up on his knees, hauled the plank across the low lead coping, and began to pay it out aimed at the window. He kept pressure on it at his end with one foot, so it wouldn't sink below the window ledge in mid-air with its own weight. It extended across the ledge without touching it and pushed the curtains back under the open window.

Then Brad let it down very slowly and carefully and the gap was bridged. He made sure it extended far back enough over the coping, lest it slip off after he was on it. Then he released his hold on it, brushed his hands, stood up, and stepped up on it where it rested on the coping. He balanced himself gingerly.

He wasn't worried about it snapping under his weight. He'd tested it plenty before now on the roof itself. He bent down on it, grasped one edge with each hand, and started across on his hands and knees. The distance wasn't great, and he refrained from looking down, keeping his eyes fastened on the window ahead. There was a very slight incline, but not enough to bother him. He saw to it that it didn't tip by keeping his weight in the middle as much as possible.

In fact, he had everything down pat, couldn't miss. The window pane came to meet him until it lay cold across the tip of his nose. He hooked his hands onto the bottom of it, flung it the rest of the way up, and cork-screwed down under it into the room. It had been as easy as all that!

The first thing Brad did was lower it again behind him to its original level. He shoved the board back a little, so the dent it made wouldn't be so noticeable against the curtains. But he left it in place. He didn't have to put the lights

on. He'd memorized the exact position of every article of furniture in the room from his vantage point on the roof opposite.

He opened the closet door, shoved the clothes on their hangers a little to one side to make room for himself. Then he took the .38 out from under his arm, went over to the room door, and stood listening. There wasn't a sound from outside.

He reached in his topcoat pocket and pulled out a large raw potato with a small hole carefully bored through it. He jammed this onto the muzzle of his gun for a silencer, tight enough so it wouldn't fall off. Then he sat down for awhile on a chair in the dark, holding the gun in his hand and looking at it.

AFTER ABOUT fifteen minutes an elevator door clashed open somewhere in the distance. Brad got right up, stepped backwards into the closet, and swung the door to in front of him. He left it on a slight crack, a thread of visibility, just enough for one eye to see through.

That crooked smile had come back on his face without his knowing it. A key jiggled in the room door. Then the door opened wide. showed against the lighted hall. It closed again and the lights went up in the room.

For a split second the face that turned was in line with the crack of the closet door, and Brad nod-

ded imperceptibly. The right guy and come home to the right room, and the last possible, but unlikely, hitch to his plan was safely out of the way. He'd come home alone.

Then the face passed on out of focus. The key clashed down on the glass bureau top, an edge of a dark coat fell across the white bed, and there was a click and a radio started to warm up. The guy yawned once out loud, moved around a little out of sight. Brad just stood there waiting, muffled gun in hand.

When it came it was quick as a camera shutter. The closet door was suddenly wide open and they were staring into each other's faces, not more than six inches apart. The guy's one hand was still on the doorknob, the other was holding up his coat ready to hang. He dropped that first of all.

Brad didn't even bring the gun up; it was already in position. The guy's face went from pink to white to gray, and sort of slid loose like jelly ready to fall off his skull. He took a very slow step back to keep from falling, and Brad took an equally slow step out after him. He kicked the guy's coat out of the way without looking at it.

"Well, Hutch," he said softly, "the first three out have your name on 'em. Close your eyes if you want to."

Hutch didn't. Instead they got big and round as hard-boiled eggs. His mouth and tongue moved for

a whole minute without getting anything off, finally the words formed, "What's it for, Brad?"

Brad only heard them because he was so close.

"Keep turning slowly around while I remind you," he said. "Hands loose like a dog begging for a bone."

As Hutch tottered around in one place like a top riding for a fall, hands dangling downward at shoulder level, Brad deftly slapped him in just the right number of places to make sure he was unarmed.

"All right," he said, "that was the last exercise you'll be taking."

The other man stopped rotating, buckled a little at the knees, then just hung there as if he was suspended from a cord.

The radio had finally warmed up, and a third voice entered the room. Brad's eyes flickered over that way for an instant, then back to the doughy face in front of him.

"I get out of stir six months ago," he snarled, "and the first thing I do is come back looking for my girl Mildred. You used to see me with Millie, remember?"

Hutch's eyes began rolling around in his face like buckshot.

"No sign of Millie anywhere," said Brad. "So I ask around, and what do I learn? That a rodent named Hutchinson, who was supposed to be a friend of mine, has stepped in and walked off with

my woman while my back is turned. Now get me right"—he motioned the gun slightly—"it aint the dame that's troubling me. They got no sense anyway and I wouldn't want Millie now even if I could have her."

Brad waved the gun again. "But no guy does that to me and gets away with it. Understand! Don't matter if it's business, or a dame, or just passing remarks about me. I don't like anyone that crowds me. This is how I get squared up."

The creases across the knuckle of his trigger-finger began to smooth out as it started bending back. Hutch's eyes were on them, dilated, like magnifying glasses.

"Don't I get a word in?" Hutch said hoarsely.

"It won't do you any good," Brad said, "but go ahead. Let's hear how you try to lie your way out of it. The same answer will still be ready for you—behind this potato."

Hutch began to shake all over, in his anxiety to get the greatest number of words out in the shortest possible length of time.

"I don't intend to lie to you," he said. "You've got me and what good would it do? Millie was starving, because the cash you left with her ran out." Even in the midst of the panic that gripped him his eyes found time to gauge Brad's reaction to this.

"I know you left her well-heeled. But—somebody lifted it, cleaned

her out," Hutch said, trying to correct himself. "When she came to me she didn't have the price of a meal on her, didn't have a place to sleep in. I—I started looking after her, on account of you were my friend."

Brad snorted disgustedly. Sweat was pouring down Hutch's face. The voice on the radio had been replaced by thin weepy strains of music now. Again Brad's eyes shifted to it, lingered for a moment, then came back again.

"You know you'd have done the same thing for any girl in that kind of trouble yourself," Hutch said. "Wouldn't you have done that yourself? Then, without meaning to, I guess we kind of fell for each other."

Brad didn't bat an eye, but the gun was pointed a little lower, at Hutch's thigh now, not his chest; the weight of the potato may have done that. Hutch's head had followed it down, his eyes were on it. He seemed to be staring contritely at the floor.

"We knew it was wrong. We talked it over many times. We both said what a great guy you were." A shade of color had returned to his face. It was still pale but no longer gray.

He kept swallowing. It could have been either overpowering emotion or the need for keeping his throat well-lubricated. "Finally we gave in. We just couldn't help

it—we got married." A slight sob thickened his voice.

For the first time Brad showed some surprise; his mouth opened a little and stayed that way. Hutch seemed to find inspiration in the pattern of the room's rug that met his eyes.

"Not only that but—but Mildred has a kid now. We have a little baby." Hutch looked up ruefully. "And we named it after you."

The gun was pointing straight down at the floor now; the opening between Brad's nose and chin had widened. His mouth softened.

"Wait, I have one of her letters right in the drawer here. You can read it for yourself. Open it," Hutch insisted. "So you won't think I'm trying to get out a gun, I'll stand by the wall."

Brad reached past him, pulled at the drawer, looked down into it.

"Get the letter out," he said uncertainly. "Show it to me, if you got it."

Hutch's hand had rested idly on the radio for a moment; the volume went up. "Just a song at twilight," it lisped. Hutch fumbled hurriedly in the drawer, brought out an envelope, stripped it away with eager fingers. He unfolded the letter, turned it toward Brad, showed him the signature.

"See," he stammered. "It's from her—Millie."

"Show me about the kid," said Brad gruffly.

Hutch turned the letter around, pointed to the bottom of the first page. "There it is—read it. I'll hold it up for you."

Brad had good eyes, he didn't have to come any closer. It stood out in black and white. *I am taking good care of your baby for you. I think of you every time I look at it.*

Hutch let the letter drop. His jaw wobbled. "Now go ahead, Brad, do what you said you were going to do," he sighed.

Brad's narrow stretch of brow was furrowed with uncertainty. He kept looking from the radio to the letter on the floor, and back to the radio again. "Still to us at twilight," it crooned, "comes love's old sweet song—"

Brad blinked a couple of times. No moisture appeared in his eyes, but they had a faraway, misty look. Hutch didn't seem to be breathing any more.

There was a *clop* and the potato dropped off the down-turned gun and spilt on the floor.

"And you named it after me?" he said. "Donleavy Hutchinson?"

The other nodded wistfully.

Brad took a deep breath. "I don't know," he said doubtfully. "Maybe I'm wrong about letting you get away with this. Maybe I shouldn't. I never changed my mind before." He gave Hutch a disgusted look. "Somehow you got me out of the mood now."

Brad tucked the gun back un-

der his arm, took possession of the room key on the bureau top. "Go stand outside the door and wait there. I ain't going out the front way. I'm leaving the way I came in, without anybody being the wiser. You can tell 'em you locked yourself out. I don't want you in the room back of me while I'm crossing over."

Hutch was half-way through the door before Brad had finished speaking.

"And don't try anything funny, or I may change my mind," Brad warned. He thrust one leg through the window, found the plank, then turned his head to ask, "What color eyes has it got, anyway?"

Hutch hadn't waited to discuss the matter any further. He was far down the hall by that time, mopping his face on his sleeve as he ran.

Brad, dragging his feet after him like a cripple across the plank, muttered glumly to himself, "How could I pull a gun on him when he named his kid after me? Maybe Fade was right. I ought to let up once in awhile. I guess I've bumped enough guys. It won't hurt to let one off. Maybe it'll bring me good luck."

It proved to be much easier going back than it had been coming over. The tilt of the board helped. Brad vaulted down over the low parapet onto the roof of the apartment house. He hauled the board over after him. Then he

took Hutch's room key out of his pocket and calmly dropped it down the shaft. He brushed his hands with a strange new feeling of nobility, of having done a good deed, that none of the actual killings he'd committed had ever been able to give him.

He gave his hat a shove in back, went in through the roof door, and started down to the street. He didn't care if anyone saw him or not now, but again no one did, just as when he'd come in.

He came out on the sidewalk and looked around for a taxi to take him back to Fade Williams. He wanted his two hundred bucks back, of course. He didn't need any alibi now. He hoped Fade wouldn't try to get petty-larceny about it. But he could show his gun, fully loaded, to convince him he hadn't done it, if necessary.

It wasn't exactly a neighborhood in which it was easy to find a taxi. There weren't any in sight, so he started walking along, waiting to pick one up. He gave his hat another tug from behind.

"Hell, it gives you a funny feeling," he mumbled, "to have a kid named after you."

BY THIS TIME Hutchinson was back in his room again. The landlady had given him another key; but admonished him about not losing the new one. He had the door closed, the window tightly

latched, and the shade drawn. Just to be on the safe side she was checking out, sleeping elsewhere, as soon as he could get his things together.

But for the time being he was helpless. He couldn't do a thing. He just leaned there against the bureau shaking all over and with his head bobbing up and down. He wasn't shaking with fright, but with uncontrollable, splitting laughter.

In his hand he held Millie's letter that he'd picked up from the floor. At the bottom of the first pages it said, just as Brad had read, *taking good care of your baby. Think of you every time I look at it.* But every time he turned the page to the other side he went into a fresh spasm of hilarity.

It went on: *I'm sure glad you left it with me, never can tell what might turn up while you're gone. There's nothing like having a .32 around when a girl is by herself. Don't forget to pick up another in Chicago for yourself, in case you run across you-know-who!* The proud parent had to hold his sides, if he laughed any harder he was going to bust a rib.

BRAD GOT A taxi about three blocks down. He didn't bother changing half-way, but out of consideration for Fade, he didn't ride straight up to the garage with it. He got out a short walk away from his destination. He could have

gone back in the front way through *The Oasis* just as well as not now. But after all, that trick-out was Fade's bread-and-butter, so why spoil it for him? Why give it away to everyone at the bar? They'd be bound to find out about it if he did that.

The garage entrance yawned as wide open as ever, but even the attendant wasn't in sight this time. There didn't seem to be much business. He went in just like he'd come out, squeezing along between the wall and the line of parked cars, walking the bumper of the one that was pushed in too far, unseen by living eyes.

When he got considerable distance past the open office door he could see the guy sitting in there, reading a paper. He circled the wheel-less chassis, found the slight ridge in the whitewashed wall that the outthrust booth made, got a grip on it with his nails, eased the wedge out from under it, and opened it.

He stayed in the booth until the wall had closed tight behind him, then looked out through the glass. The door to the front room was still closed, the door to Fade's office was still open waiting to welcome him. He stepped out of the booth, and closed it behind him, sign and all. Then he stopped to listen.

They were making an awful lot of noise out there—everyone's feet seemed to be running at once.



Somebody was pounding on the door from the outside. They wanted Fade—he hadn't got back a minute too soon! He could hear the bartender hollering through, "Fade! Are you all right, boss? What's the matter, boss?"

Brad twisted around and ducked into the office.

"I changed my mind," he

gasped. "Just made it back. They're calling for you, Fade. What do they want out there? Wait'll I get my—" His fingers went racing down the front of his topcoat; jacket; unbuttoning, he shrugged them both off his shoulders, together, and they slipped down his back. They caught at his elbows and stayed that way, half-on, half-off, while he blinked and stared across the table.

The set-up was the same—the cards, the drinks, the money—only Fade Williams had dozed over it waiting for him to come back. His chin was down over his chest and his head kept going lower right while Brad was looking at him, sort of hitching a notch at a time.

There was a funny bluish sort of haze in three horizontal lines hanging like a curtain right over Fade's head. And there wasn't any cigar around that he'd been smoking.

Brad leaned across the table, gripped Fade by the shoulder, felt the warmth of his body through the shirt.

"Hey, wake up!" Then he saw the gun in Fade's lap where it had dropped, and the tag-end of the haze was still lazily coming from it. The chamois rag was down below on the floor.

Brad knew the answer even before he'd picked up the gun, tilted Fade's face and looked at it. Fade had cleaned one of those guns off his once too often. When his head

came up he only had one eye, it had gone right through.

The door out there slammed back and they came pouring through, everyone in the place. The room was suddenly choked with them. They saw him like that, straightening up across the desk, the gun in his hand, coat half-on. He felt somebody take the gun away from him, and then his arms were being held at his sides.

And the bartender was saying, "What did you do to him?" and sending out for the police. The hell with keeping his secret now. Fade was dead! He struggled violently, tried to free himself, couldn't.

"I just got in!" he roared. "He did it himself. I tell you, I just got in!"

"You been arguing and shouting with him all evening!" the bartender said. "Just a minute ago before the shot I heard him bawling you out. So did everyone else in the place. How can you say you just got in?"

Brad staggered as though an invisible sledge-hammer had hit him, and slowly turned numb where he stood. He could feel unidentified hands fumbling around him—cops' hands now—and kept trying to think his way out. He kept trying to think while they compared the I.O.U. he'd taken back from Fade with the new one he'd given him afterwards.

He shook his groggy head, try-



ing to clear it. "Wait, let me show you," he heard himself saying. "There's a dummy telephone booth right outside the door there. I came in through it right after it happened. Let me show you!"

He knew they'd let him, all right, knew they'd go and look at it. But somehow he already knew what good it was going to do him.

No one had seen him go and no one had seen him come. Just try to get Hutch inside to help him!

As they led him away, body straining downward toward the floor, Brad kept saying to himself: "Six guys I killed and they never touch me. The seventh I let live, and they hook me for a killing I didn't do at all!"

Good things happen  
when you



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# MILLIONS IN BLOOD MONEY

by BRUCE CASSIDAY

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*It was the kind of heist that could rob a Federal agent of sleep and make him run a fever. And the girl angle was just as hard to ignore as the grooved-in gunplay.*

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## PRELUDE

I HY BRANNON, declare under oath that this is the true and accurate account, from inception to completion, of the assassination of Johnny Blood, an agent of the F.B.I. It is also a true and accurate description of the other principals involved in the killing, to the best of my knowledge and information.

Here follows a complete description of each individual of importance:

No. 1. HY BRANNON. Age 35. Height, 5' 9". Weight, 180. Dark hair, brown eyes, dark complexion. Thin tanned face, with two

gold teeth in front. Chain-smoker, inclined to be nervous and erratic under strain. Excellent pistol shot.

No. 2. MORNA WARWICK. Age 30. Height, 5' 3". Weight, 102. Red hair, blue eyes, freckles. Husky voice, tough in speech. She is inclined to be quick on the trigger, with or without a gun. And she can shoot about 1000 when nothing spoils her aim.

No. 3. MR. JOHNSON. Age 45. Height, 6' 1". Weight, 210. Gray hair, some of it missing. Blue eyes, light skin. This gentleman dresses well and has no trouble

passing for a well-educated man. Carries arms under his double-breasted jacket. He wears dark shirts and brightly colored canary yellow ties. His name is a phony. Real name is unknown.

No. 4. JOHNNY BLOOD. Age 30. Height, 6'. Weight, 200. Blue eyes, curly blond hair. Fast with a gun, fast with his fists. This man is an F.B.I. agent, and is a dangerous and deadly opponent—quick to spot an advantage and take it.

I have a habit of drinking liquor when it's handy, and prefer a choice but not too expensive label when I can get it. The same goes for women. I took both my preferences with me to the *Seven Palms* night club in Miami one night in August and got to talking with a friendly girl named Morna Warwick—a fill-in singer in the floor show.

Tom Moore, an old army buddy of mine, runs the *Seven Palms* and he introduced me to her, saying I was a nice guy. Before that he had told me to take a good look at a hard-to-duplicate number in the blonde department.

I did just that and immediately tried to latch onto the kid the easy way. But she wasn't having any of that. She had me pegged all wrong for a crumb. I wasn't spending the usual amount, on account of I had been strictly on the square since I'd almost lost my shirt at a rigged poker game.

But I hung around anyway,

sopping up Tom Moore's rotgut booze and cracking wise with the kid every time she'd finish a song. I kind of was her type, and she got to laughing at me. As the evening wore on I think she kind of went for me anyway.

Next day down on the beach while I was lying down under a big umbrella a shadow passed over me, and when I looked up, it was the kid. Morna Warwick was tucked into one of those smooth, tight bathing suits, and I let out a whistle that flagged down trains as far as Tallahassee.

"Hi," she said with a grin and dropped down beside me on the sand.

I practically ripped the seams of my trunks hopping up to place a blanket under her shapely bikini. She just shook her head and dug her toes into the hot sand.

"I keep myself warm this way," she said, smiling up at me.

We chatted about this and that, and smoked a pack of Kent's, and finally I invited her to come with me out to the raft. There was a big one anchored about a hundred feet from the beach, and I figured it would be a good idea to cool off in the water and maybe ease out a nice delicate invite for the evening.

She took me up on it right away and we swam out through the surf. Nobody paid much attention to us, for there was just about thirty people on the beach in all.

So we got to the float and climbed up. She had trouble hauling herself up, and it wasn't because of excess weight. She had it where it belonged.

I reached down and dragged her aboard without any trouble and we gabbed awhile on the float. Finally I came to the big question. I asked her, not mincing a word. She kind of drew back a little, looking at me slantwise across the knotted handkerchief she had tied across her chest, blinking those great big brown eyelashes at me.

Then she said a funny thing. "Don't say I didn't warn you." She hadn't warned me at all. But she laughed and I figured it was on. It was on, all right—hot and heavy.

I had the little bungalow court I rented all fixed up with the lights down low, the record player nibbling into a stack of long-playing records, the windows open just wide enough to get the benefit of the warm sea breeze rustling through the palms. Pretty soon the moon would be out. And I'd be in paradise.

Morna came inside, lovely as a TV commercial. She dropped out of her green jacket and sat down. I plied her with liquor and charm and she took it all in for awhile, listening to the music and commenting now and then on life in general and on me in particular.

Nothing much had happened,



but it was just about to, and I knew when to move in. I moved. I sat down next to her and set my liquor glass down on the arm of the couch. I started to launch a frontal assault, and then she said it.

She said, "October twenty-eight, nineteen fifty-eight."

I laughed, but cold shivers shot like sparks down to my toes and back. I took her shoulder and turned her towards me. "Is that your own special way of making love to me, kid?"

She shook her head. "Does that

date ring a bell, *Mr. Grandon?*"

I moved in toward her, and I could smell the sweet scent of the perfume on her skin. I could smell the sweetness of her hair. I could sniff the sulphur and brimstone curling up from the bottom of hell. I touched her cheek with my lips.

She didn't move. "You remember the date, Mr. Grandon? Do I have to repeat it once more?"

I moved my mouth and found hers. Her lips were soft and yielding. Suddenly I backed off and looked at her. Just as I had suspected, the kiss had been a deception and a snare. I was completely sure now.

She was staring at me with calculating, hard blue eyes. Her red hair was swept up on top of her head like a stack of wheat, and she did not move from where she sat. Coolly she lifted the glass of liquor and sipped it.

"Booby trap," I said finally.

I reached around and got my own liquor. I moved away from her and sat there, looking out through the window at the drooping palm trees and the lousy stinking ocean beyond the miserable tropical hibiscus park in front of the bungalow.

Then I said, "Cop, huh?"

She licked her lips with her tongue, and when she finished doing that I could see she was smiling. She shook her head, well pleased with herself. "Huh uh. No cop."

"So how'd you know about that particular date, honey?"

She stood up and moved around in front of me, moving so I had to watch her, moving that gorgeous, body of hers back and forth and round and about. I had trouble drinking my liquor, I was watching her so hard.

"When a business man wants to hire an employee, what does he do, Hy? He studies the man's background, and if he's satisfied with it he hires him. He's taking a chance, sure. But at least he knows his man's background."

I kind of sat there not moving much, wondering what she knew. I figured she knew plenty. "That's mighty interesting," I said. "You going into some kind of business or something, kid?"

She picked up a cigarette from the box at the end of the couch and lit up. The flame cut out a silhouette of her head in the darkness for a moment, and then she turned to me, her blue eyes gleaming like emeralds.

"In a manner of speaking, Hy. And you're going to be my office force."

I stood up and moved toward her. "Oh?"

"Five thousand, Hy? Is that enough? That's what I'm going to pay you."

"Pay me?" I said. "What're you going to pay me for?"

"There's a man who has to be killed, Hy Brannon. You're going

to kill him for me, or there isn't going to be any Hy Brannon running around free on the beaches swimming out to rafts. He's going to be in jail with an electrode taped to his skull."

"Blackmail?" I asked, standing close to her—close enough to see the soft beauty of her cheeks, of her throat, of her body in that flowing, clinging dress.

I reached out and touched her cheek with my hand. She turned to me, her eyes bright.

"His name's Blood," she said calmly. "Johnny Blood. You'll find him at the *Seven Palms* tomorrow night after the show. You won't shoot him there, Hy. You'll follow him to my apartment and kill him on the way, before he gets there. Do you understand?"

I turned her chin up and touched her lips again with mine. She was like a statue—a cold, granite statue in a museum.

"The cops, Hy," she said. "I'll tell the cops who you are if you don't get rid of our friend Mr. Blood. Is that perfectly clear to you?"

I guess I sighed and picked up my drink again. Right back into the old routine. There wasn't any way to jump off the merry-go-round now. I was on it, but good. I nodded to her and she got up and opened the door to go. I tossed off the rest of the liquor and thought about murder and women and bad whiskey and I sat

down on the couch and listened to the door shut behind her.

I sat on the couch and looked out the window at the silhouette of the palms and the hibiscus bushes down by the ocean. And I knew I'd have to turn the clock back and kill again.

HE WAS A cool customer, this Johnny Blood. I sat in the *Seven Palms* and watched him operate. He didn't know I was watching him because I was looking in the backbar mirror. He didn't know anybody was watching him operate, and so he operated. He was good.

Then the kid Morna Warwick came out on the stage and started to sing. This Blood guy relaxed and pretended he was listening to the singing. But he wasn't. He was sizing her up in his little mental black book.

I didn't know what kind of trouble Morna was in, but I knew it must be big if she was messed up with the F.B.I. I hated to think I'd be mixed up in it too. But that was the risk of being a good hired gun.

I'd ventilated a brace of troublesome lads in my time, and I was capable of one more. Even one of the F.B.I. I knew my stuff. That was the trouble. I knew my stuff, and other people knew I knew it, which explained why Morna had tagged me for the job.

I'm a curious guy by profession,

and I decided to see what was really wrong with Morna Warwick before I dusted off this federal lad. I eased out of the main room of the *Seven Palms* and went for the big john. Past the big john with the white lavatories and the two bootblacks there was a string of dressing rooms for the performers.

I had somehow gotten curious about what was in Morna's dressing room. Maybe she had some papers and purses and things in there that would show who wanted her to have this gentleman from the F.B.I. erased.

Her dressing room door was closed. I opened it and went inside. There was a man sitting in one of the chairs and he half stood when I closed the door behind me. I put on an icy stare and looked at him. I'd swear he was crouching for a pounce on me.

He was gray-haired, and no longer young, but his face was rather firm still. I'd say he was in his early fifties. Not used too hard, but beginning to fade a little around the edges. He looked like he could handle himself.

I figured he had a gun or two stashed away under his shoulder. Guy his size doesn't usually wear a double-breasted suit unless he wants to drape some hardware underneath his armpits.

I nodded cordially and said, "Waiting for Miss Warwick, too?"

He sat down again and edged

around in his chair so he could get at his irons. I edged around so I could get at mine, too, and we stared at each other. He didn't say anything at all.

So I said, "Thought I'd come back and ask the little lady to join me in a drink. If you haven't got priority, Buster."

He smiled faintly, the edges of his teeth just showing beneath his lips. He said quietly, "You did call me *Mister*, didn't you?"

"My name's Hy Brannon. How do you do, Buster."

"Johnson," murmured the man with the gray hair and the double-breasted arsenal. "Mr. Johnson from Duluth."

"Well, if Miss Warwick has a date, there's no use of me hanging around here, is there? If you'll tell Morna Mr. Brannon left his card, I'd be much obliged."

The big man nodded thoughtfully. "I'll tell her when she comes in."

I opened the door and got into the hallway. There was just time to duck down the hall and into another dressing room before the big guy pulled open Morna's door and peeked out into the hallway. He looked one way and then the other, and then he stepped up the hallway. He disappeared out the back door of the *Seven Palms* and I followed him.

This was the guy who wanted John Blood killed, I cased it. He was here to check with Morna to



find out if the goods had been purchased. Now he was scared I'd recognized him and might decide to shake him down. I don't work that way at all. I got ethics. Besides, I didn't really place him. But he acted like the hottest guy on the Gobi desert.

He pulled his big bulk into a convertible and raced out of the driveway like a jet pilot on a Rome run. I gunned my own Chevvy after him. He was headed north toward West Palm Beach up the coast, and I could see him ahead of me. I pulled my lights off and went after him.

Somewhere I lost him, but figured I might as well go on anyway. Then out of the corner of my eye I saw his car, pulled up into a side road, sitting there with the lights off, waiting for the coast to clear. I went on a mile, pulled up. I turned around, coasted down the road half a mile. I got out and palmed my gun.

I walked the half mile to the side road. The car was still there, and I could see a little red glow in the driver's seat. Mr. Johnson was sitting there smoking and waiting. I got down behind a bunch of big ferns and moved quietly toward the car.

The red glow went out, as if he'd taken the cigarette out of his mouth. I got the gun ready, and moved over to a spot where I was perpendicular to him.

Lightning flashed everywhere,

and I could feel a ton of Bethlehem's best flatten out my skull. How was I to know Mr. Johnson had picked up a buddy somewhere whose job it was to lower my hair line? I went sick all over and the earth heaved around and turned over on top of me and I knew no more. I was out colder than the northern lights . . .

I WAS ALL alone and the frogs were croaking when I came to. I wasn't much older, but I was wiser. Everything was gone—Johnson and his car and the guy he'd picked up to help him. But there was a note pinned to my jacket lapel. The note said:

*Hy Brannon:*

*This is a sample. Tend to business and do what Morna Warwick says, and you'll be safe. You know the project. Carry it out. Or you won't have that egg shell to carry around on your shoulders any more.*

*Mr. Johnson.*

That was enough for me. I touched my head and laid my handkerchief over the whites of my brains and staggered up the road to my car. I got in and drove straight to Morna Warwick's apartment. According to the plans, Morna had invited Johnny Blood to her place after the last floor show. She'd play it so Blood would arrive alone. That was

where I came in. I was supposed to furnish the slab.

I was docile now. I wasn't going to mess around any more, trying to play Mr. Johnson against the Warwick wench. I was going to wrap up Mr. Blood the way I was supposed to wrap him up, and deliver him—sealed and rigor mortis—just the way they wanted him. Then I could maybe play the Warwick girl against the mysterious Mr. Johnson from Duluth.

I stashed myself in an alleyway by the big apartment that said *Tallahassee Arms*—they were all some kind of Arms along that street—and waited for John Blood to appear. By this time it was twelve-thirty and he was scheduled to arrive about twelve-forty-five.

I leaned against the building and looked up at the stars and the moon and let the breeze roll over my face and neck. It relieved tension, steadied me. Finally I heard a car stop, and tensed up again. I looked out at the street. It was Mr. Blood in an old Ford.

He got out of it and looked up at the *Tallahassee Arms*. He looked both ways up and down the street and started to case the apartment house. I had to pull way back into the shadows because sure as hell he'd spot me too. He almost pinned me.

Then he moved over across the street onto the sidewalk, and looked along it again. He was

about ten feet from me. I could have touched him with a fishing rod. He started to walk diagonally across the sidewalk, toward the entrance of the *Tallahassee Arms*.

I lifted the gun and squeezed the trigger. I remember thinking this was a hell of a way to earn a living. I squeezed it anyway and the gun fired. This Blood jumped and whirled just as I shot. It was uncanny, the way he felt it coming. He must have sensed it instinctively, like a mind reader.

I fired again, quick, because I got panicky and was afraid I might have missed him with the first shot. The second bullet hit the cement and *whanged* off into the dark, ricocheting like a buzzing hornet. I was jumpy, and the second shot went wild. I let out a curse and shot again. That one got him.

But now someone above us in the apartment house was firing a gun. I felt the lead rip into my coat and threw myself flat. But I could still see the sidewalk. The F.B.I. man was lying there, trying futilely to rise. He kept flopping up and down like a lizard panting in the sun, and another shot rang out from upstairs in the apartment.

I heard Morna Warwick scream hysterically.

Normally I have no love for F.B.I. agents, but I could see he was finished anyway and there's nothing to be gained by killing a

dead duck. I yelled up at her to cut out the firing, because he was dead. I couldn't hear what she called back. But she shot again, and this time she fired straight at me. The slug bit into my shoulder and I fell to cussing her right out through the skylight of that two-bit apartment.

Just before I passed out the buildings seem to cave right in on me. That's all I know about the dead F.B.I. man. I come to a couple hours ago in the hospital. You guys swarmed down here and started nailing my hide to the wall. Boys, I've had it. I'm finished and I know it.

There's nothing to add to 'the deponent states' part, to the best of my knowledge, and so forth. And I hope it satisfies you and makes you happy.

HY BRANNON.



## I

DAN YOUNG, head of the South-east District Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, took the paper folder handed him by the man in the hospital bed and shoved it back in the brief case leaning at his feet.

He looked over at the bandaged man and said, "What about it, Blood? That seem the correct dope to you?"

Blood grinned. "Everything's okay except the greatly exaggerated story of my death, Dan."

Dan Young nodded. "Who's this Mr. Johnson?"

Blood shrugged, wincing a bit as his bandaged shoulder twinged. "I didn't catch a glimpse of him. Wish I had. If Brannon's story is true, Johnson must have been waiting for Morna Warwick in her dressing room. I wasn't playing it so smart, that's for sure. I was out in the audience when I should have been snooping."

Dan Young shook his head. "Don't let it worry you, Johnny. We'll pick up the tag ends of this thing if we play along."

Blood put out his good arm and touched Young on the shoulder. "Let me handle it, Dan. I'll be out of this plaster cast monkey suit in a day or so."

Young looked at Blood. "You'll be in on it. We're just trying to get a line on Morna Warwick. She disappeared the minute she heard that shooting in the alleyway."

"What about Brannon? Will he sing any louder?"

Young grinned. "He thought he was dying, Blood. That's why he spilled all he did. He really will die when he finds out he's going to live long enough to sit in the electric chair."

Blood looked carefully at the closed door and then at the windows. "Anything new on the Gauches case?"

Young opened the brief case again and pulled out a paper. "Reason I came here, Johnny. We picked up some early traces of Gauches."

"Before the Miami affair, huh?"

"Before he was killed by person or persons unknown in Miami. He lived in New York, just off Washington Square. Some kind of an art set-up, according to Agent Bowles who's working up there now. Apparently the art deal was a cover-up for some kind of questionable work. Had a lot of models coming up to the place. Photographs maybe. French post card stuff. Who knows! Bowles can't be sure."

Blood licked his lips thoughtfully. Nothing fitted together yet. Photographs and models didn't fit together with money—big money. It didn't fit in with the big rackets boys over in Brooklyn, or with the small fry in lower Manhattan.

"None of the Price's Armored Car stuff has turned up in New York, has it?"

Dan Young shook his head. "That piece of marked money from the Prince's heist that showed in Miami just before the Gauches murder was the only sign of it in the U.S., Johnny. The only sign of it in the world, so far."

Blood nodded. The girl. Did you trace her—maybe to New York?"

Dan Young laughed. "Can't keep anything from you, Johnny. We traced her back. Name isn't really Morna Warwick. It's Grace Greenleaf. Whatever's wrong with Grace Greenleaf, I don't know."

Blood propped the pillow up behind him. Now if this Morna Warwick tied in also with Jim Gauches back in New York, and not merely down in Miami with the Prince's marked money link-up—

Dan Young went on. "We can't put our finger on her exactly. But we do know she used to live in Greenwich Village, not far from Jim Gauches' studio. But don't go jumping to conclusions, Johnny. A hell of a lot of people live in New York, and have lived there."

"Damned interesting. Any tie-up between Grace Greenleaf and Jim Gauches' dirty picture racket?"

Dan Young shrugged. "Jim Gauches was quite a wolf with the ladies. Used to hold soirées and invite all the clean young kids for miles around. From what I've heard of Grace Greenleaf, I've got my doubts she was the clean young kid type. But maybe she showed at one of two of his Village caper parties. She was going to a singing school run by a Madame Konstantina Kovak."

Blood grinned. "Of the Notre Dame backfield."

Dan Young smiled. "Checked a narcotics angle here, and Madame Konstantina is as clean as a whistle. No vice tie-ins, either then or now. White Russian immigrant way back in the Twenties. She's kept her skirts and panties clean, Johnny. And she's sure to be a good lead."

"Who else?"

Dan Young scowled. "What do you want—a map of the heist? That's enough to work on now. And anyway, we may dig up more before you leave for Manhattan."

"The tie-up between Morna Warwick and Jim Gauches is definite, down in Miami, though—right? She did visit him at his flat the morning of the day he was killed?"

"Yeah. I'd forgotten you didn't

know about that. The Warwick woman was evidently trying to get the hot double saw back from Gauches. But Gauches had already passed it. We grabbed it in that fish market the afternoon he floated it, and it took us two days to trace it back to him. And we found him dead. Day after that we found out Morna Warwick definitely did call on Gauches the day he was killed."

Blood pursed his lips. "This thing was set up close, Dan. Morna Warwick contacted Hy Brannon the night before he tried to shoot me. She must have found out we picked up the bill way back before Gauches' murder. Gauches was killed, so we couldn't trace back to the man who passed it to him. Then the Warwick girl tried to kill me, too. She must have been afraid I'd gotten to him somehow."

Dan Young tapped a cigarette with his finger. "You're right! Morna Warwick didn't show up in Miami until after we grabbed the bill. Then she showed, uncovered Gauches before we did, had him killed, and set up Brannon's play on you."

Blood waved a feeble hand. "Which proves nothing."

Young shrugged. "If anything turns up, I'll let you know. Get well, Johnny, and be ready to travel as soon as you've cracked out of that plaster armor."

Blood grinned. "See you, chief."

## II

NOTHING TURNED up on the Morna Warwick angle, and no more of the Prince's money showed. Johnny Blood would have been surprised if it had. But some definite clue would be better than cooling his heels in this dismal little music school, Blood thought, shoving his hands into his pockets and pacing back and forth on the battered rug of Madame Konstantina Kovak's House of Music.

Madame K. had called twice through the brocaded curtains that she was on her way. She spoke with a good thick accent that even many years in New York had apparently not changed.

The curtains parted and the Madame made a dramatic entrance, standing there suddenly in front of the swaying lengths of brocade, her arms folded in front of her prominent chest, her head raised, her eyes squinting at Blood down along her nose.

"You are Meester Blahd?"

"Madame Kovak," Blood muttered. "I'm Mr. Blood."

"You weesh to take moosic lesson, no? You are serious man about moosic, or is it with you that you are only recreation?"

"Offhand I'd say I'm here about another matter, Madame. Now, if you'd be so kind as to—"

She shook her head vigorously. "With Madame Kovak, it is first

of all to discover if it is with you serious man about moosic, or recreation. With you, Meester Blahd, it is what, if you please?"

"Another matter—a woman, Madame."

Madame Konstantina Kovak's eyes shot flames and her hair rose. "With you, Meester Blahd, whole affair is meestake. Good day! Weemen, indeed! Madame Kovak does not merchandise weemen! Moosic, Meester Blahd—nyat weemen! *Weemen!*"

Blood held up his hand defensively. "I'm looking for a Miss Grace Greenleaf. She used to take lessons here."

Madame Kovak unfolded her arms and relaxed. She frowned several times and studied Blood with her shrewd black eyes. Her face was small and almost monkey-like with high cheekbones and deep eye sockets. Her hair was black and tightly pulled down to her head. She was short and a little stout, but she had a body. She had a body and she stood straight and proud to show it off, her lips slightly parted.

She said, then, without a trace of accent, "Well, why didn't you say so? Grace Greenleaf. Friend of yours?" She looked at Blood's face guardedly with her dark little eyes.

Blood grinned disarmingly. "Mrs. Kovak, it's an old story, and you may have heard it before."

She smiled primly. "If it's good, I'll laugh when I'm supposed to."

Blood spread his hands. "When I was stationed at Fort Dix some time ago I used to come into the city on weekends, Madame Kovak. So one evening I met a girl named Grace Greenleaf singing in a night club down on Fourth Street. She claimed you used to teach her singing lessons."

Madame Kovak pursed her lips and considered a moment. Blood had the uncomfortable notion that she had recognized the name of Grace Greenleaf instantly, and was merely toying with him. He didn't let on, of the skepticism show, however.

"She was about five three, kind of plump, not too much," he said. "Red hair. Blue eyes. Kind of freckled. Wise-cracking kid. Know anything about her? I'd like to look her up. Promised to when I left for my hitch overseas."

Madame Kovak's eyes twinkled. "Took a long time to hunt her up, didn't you, Mr. Blood?"

Blood grinned. "Took a long time to get back to the States, Mrs. Kovak."

"Grace Greenleaf," Madame Kovak mused, pacing back and forth on the dingy carpet. "Grace Greenleaf."

"She sings under the name of Morna Warwick, Mrs. Kovak. That mean anything to you?"

"Oh, but of course," Madame said, her eyes lighting up. "Grace

Greenleaf, Morna Warwick. She was Miss Hiller's reference."

Blood sucked in his breath. Another woman! "Miss Hiller?" he said.

Madame Kovak turned quickly. Her alert little eyes wandered over Blood's face, perhaps wondering why he was so interested in the name of Miss Hiller. "Boots Hiller. She takes lessons from me. She came to me on the recommendation of Morna Warwick, back about four years ago. Grace Greenleaf—Morna Warwick—recommended Boots Hiller to me for lessons, and Miss Hiller has been studying under me ever since."

Blood's eyes lighted up. "Where can I get in touch with this Boots Hiller? It's possible she may know where Morna Warwick is now."

Madame Kovak crossed the room on the torn carpet. "I'll phone her," she said abruptly. She had her hand over the cradle of the receiver when Blood stepped quickly in back of her and covered her hand with his. She turned around, startled, looking up into Blood's sharp blue eyes.

Blood shook his head slowly. "Let me go see her myself, Mrs. Kovak."

Mrs. Kovak nodded, not sure why she should obey this tall man with the curly blond hair and the piercing blue eyes.

"Certainly, Mr. Blood," she said.

Johnny Blood smiled and said, "And now, if you'll give me Miss Hiller's address and phone number, Madame Kovak?"

Madame Kovak was pleased to do so.

### III

THE SPOTLIGHT hit her hotly in the center of the darkened bar-room, and the blonde girl with the fair skin and the green eyes smiled about her into the eyes that she could not see past the blinding spotlight. Then she opened her mouth to sing. Her voice came out low and soft. She sang about her man who'd left her, chased after another gal, left her to the blues and the river, chased after some other gal.

Johnny Blood watched her from a far table in the shadowy depths of the *Club Bistro* on Fourth Street. The clouds of smoke piled up against the ceiling, and the air was heavy with soot. He squinted through it along the sagging cement roof and watched the girl.

Boots Hiller was slim and small and neat, and her hair was bleached blonde, but her green eyes were real and she was as beautiful as girls are supposed to be. Johnny Blood realized this was a wonderful thing—this being as beautiful as girls are supposed to be—and he watched her sing her song.

It was an inane song, with a routine tune, and an unimaginative accompaniment, and a sentiment that was strictly flat. But when she sang the words, they suddenly meant something, and the insinuating melody of the piece got into the blood and warmed the pulse.

Her face was haunted by the shadows of the lights and by the shadows of herself. She was wise in the eyes, unchipped in the body. Young. And old. Very wise.

And then her song was ended and ten minutes later she stood over him, bending slightly at the waist, staring down into his eyes. Boots Hiller. They were green eyes, green and clear and questioning. And gentle.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Blood?" she asked.

Blood smiled. The smile was inadequate. It was hard and studied and flat. He wished he could smile some other way—a gentler, more persuasive way. "Sit down," he said, pulling a chair out for her. He lit a cigarette and offered her one.

"Thanks," she said. She smiled at him, her eyes holding his with some inexplicable magic. "Would you like to buy me a drink? Is that what this is for?"

"What kind do you want?"

"I'll take a martini," she shrugged delicately.

He knew somehow she didn't care for liquor much. She ordered



it because it was the thing to do when a man asked her to his table.

"Forget the drink," Blood said. "Let's talk about Morna Warwick. Ever hear of her?"

Her eyes opened with surprise. "She's my very best friend. Of course I know her."

Blood's eyes narrowed, his mouth tightened up. Go easy with this number. She's the best friend to the handiest little murderess on the Eastern Seaboard, and it would be a dangerous thing to forget.

He tried to smile. It didn't work. Too much of his own wariness and stealth crept into it. He looked at the thin-faced girl and tried to bluff it through. "I was passing through town, and I thought I'd see if I could find her. I met her a couple of years ago. I rather liked her. I'd like to see her again."

Boots Hiller's face lighted up happily. "She'll love to see you!"

Blood drew back a second, sucked on an unlit cigarette. "Yeah?" He doubted that. "What makes you think so?"

"I know! She's so awfully glad to see her old friends. She'll be dying to see you again. Mr. Blood, is it? I'll telephone her and—"

Blood rose, reaching out to take her thin arm and pull her down. But she hadn't made a move to rise. Blood settled down into the chair.

"Forget about the phone call, Boots. Let's surprise her, shall



we?" Blood tried to smile, and it came like a studied grimace.

"Right after my last number, Mr. Blood," said the strange, thin, haunting girl named Boots Hiller.

She stood up and walked down the aisle toward the dressing room where she would wait until her next and final number for the night. Blood watched her go and cursed himself up and down for no reason at all.

Now what the hell's gotten into me, he wondered. He lit the cigarette and puffed it and looked at the smoke and the sordidness of the *Club Bistro* and wondered what he was doing in a place like that with—with *her*. Yeah. With *her*!

## IV

SHE LIVED IN a five-story walk-up on Waverly Place, off Washington Square. The street was deserted and quiet when their cab pulled up in front of it.

The driver said, "This is it, buddy."

Blood got out and fished in his pocket for a bill. Then he leaned inside and handed Boots Hiller out after him. He slammed the door shut and the cab rolled away from the curb. Boots Hiller walked for the front porch steps just as Blood glanced up.

For some reason he looked squarely at one of the darkened windows on the third floor across the street. A movement of some kind rustled the darkened curtains. And at the same instant he heard the mushrooming shot of a rifle.

Blood threw himself flat instinctively, and then spun around and pulled the girl off her feet.

"What is it?" she sobbed.

Blood pulled out his gun and fired once toward the darkened window across the way. Another rifle shot blasted out, and a third. Boots Hiller pulled over closer to Blood and lay beside him, trembling.

"Behind the lamp post," Blood called to her. She looked at him a moment without understanding what he meant, and then she saw the lamp post five feet away. "Get

behind it. They can't hit you there."

She crawled along the cement and crouched behind the lamp post. The street was beginning to come alive. Lights were snapping on, windows opening. Somebody shouted at them from down the street.

Blood fired again at the darkened curtain on the third floor. There was no answering shot. Blood swore to himself. The gunman must have panicked. The shouting and the firing had flushed him out of his hiding place.

Johnny Blood rose to his feet cautiously, but there were no more shots. He ran across the street at a crouch. He pulled himself into the protection of the big flying buttress supporting the porch roof. Nothing. He moved for the front door and pushed it open. The interior of the hall was deserted, and the stairway empty.

Pushing his way up the stairs, gun drawn, Johnny Blood moved swiftly and easily. But there was no one in the halls. He came to the third floor and banged on the door to the front room. No answer.

He pushed on it, and it opened. It was dark inside the room. Blood flicked on the lights with the barrel of his gun. The room was deserted. A rifle lay across a chair—the rifle that had been fired at him. But the gunman was gone.

As Blood turned and came into

the hallway he was confronted by a huge, bosomy matron of about fifty with wild violet colored eyes and red hair. She was dressed in a bright purple kimona, and she was gaping at him. Blood didn't even need to check her bank book to tell she was the landlady.

He smiled and said, "Sorry to bother you. Could you tell me where your roomer is?"

The big woman looked at the identification card in Blood's hand and stared up at his face. She turned white. "The F.B.I.," she gasped. "Why, no. The man who rented that room from me just today was a stranger. He only wanted it for a week. Traveling man, he said."

"Traveling man just about covers it," Blood murmured. He sighed. "Here's my card. If anything turns up on your roomer, will you call this number?"

"Who'd he kill?" the woman asked eagerly. "Anybody I know?"

Blood gazed at her a moment without comment. He turned and made for the stairs.

"What'd he do, mister? What'd he do wrong?"

"He shot at the wrong guy," Blood said.

Boots Hiller was standing just where Blood had left, a stunned look on her face. She turned her wide, worried green eyes on him with a questioning, silent entreaty.

"Nothing," Blood said.

"What happened? You had a gun. Were they shooting at us?"

"They were shooting at me," Blood told her quietly.

"You in trouble, Mr. Blood?"

Blood smiled. "I'll tell you more about it when I find out."

Boots Hiller looked at him slantedly. "That's no answer."

Johnny Blood took her arm. "Come on," he urged. "We can't stand here all night. We'll have the gossips in the neighborhood talking."

Boots Hiller opened the front door and they climbed the stairs to the fifth floor. "Morna must have heard the shooting."

Blood looked at Boots closely. "Yeah, she must have," he said. She might have planned it, he told himself. But how had she found out that Blood was on her tail again?

Boots Hiller put the key into the door and opened it. "Morna," she called out. "Are you decent? I've got a guest."

There was no answer. The lights were on.

"I guess she didn't hear," Boots said. "Let me look, Mr. Blood."

Boots Hiller went into the next room and turned on the light. Blood glanced around quickly while she was gone, but he could see nothing out of the ordinary. The living room looked like a regulation apartment room for two bachelor girls—neat, and

filled with beat-up furniture from another generation.

Suddenly Blood looked up and saw Boots Hiller standing in the doorway to the next room. She was holding herself up, clutching the door jambs tightly. Her face was white as flour. Her mouth was open, but she could not say anything. She swayed, almost fell, and then came into the room.

"It's Morna," she whispered. "She's dead."

Blood ran past her into the next room. Morna Warwick lay across the bed, sprawled there lazily, as if she were napping. But she wasn't asleep. There was a bullet hole through her forehead, and another through her chest. Crimson blood had seeped out onto her dress. There was blood on her face. She lay there in careless abandon, with oceans of brown hair fanned out around her face, like a halo in amber.

Johnny Blood backed away slowly and reached for the telephone.

## V

BLOOD GLANCED UP at the clock on the building and checked his own watch. It was six minutes of two. Johnny Blood looked up and down the sidewalk on Greenwich Avenue and then turned in at the Avon Music Shop. The Avon was a small hole in the wall that vend-  
ed records, hi-fi and record players.

The manager of the Avon was a solid man of about forty with a highly developed paunch and an underdeveloped sense of humor. He nodded what he thought was an affable greeting and said; "Can I help you?"

Blood looked at the rack of record albums on the counter and picked one out at random. "Like to play this through. Anyplace I can be alone?"

"Booths at the rear. Man's using one now. You take the other."

Blood nodded and walked to the back of the store. It was now five minutes of two. He could see the big clock at the back of the store. The manager turned and greeted a woman who had come in the place behind Johnny Blood.

Blood glanced into the occupied booth at the man. Then he looked back to the front of the shop and saw the manager and the woman talking. Blood opened the closed door of the booth and pulled it shut behind him.

A big red-headed man was leaning against the back wall, smoking a cigarette. Blood nodded briefly, opened the album under his arm. It was a new European pressing of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Blood put the first record on and turned the volume up big.

Then he moved over close to the red-headed man and said; "This is a hell of a time for Washington to call me off the Warwick case, Jerry. What's wrong? I may

be able to get a line on this Mr. Johnson. I'm convinced that he was the one who killed Morna Warwick. And I'm just as sure he was the one firing at me from that apartment on Waverly Place."

The red-headed man grinned and flicked some ash off his cigarette. He leaned close to Blood and yelled over the rousing cacophony of the Stravinsky music; "Forget it, boy. Something's turned up. It might tie in and it might not. Boss says to let Boots Hiller go for today. He wants you to hop a plane to Trinidad and meet a Counter-Intelligence Agent named Chester Mason."

"*Trinidad!* Now what the hell would I be doing in Trinidad?"

Jerry Bowles grinned maliciously. "One of the hot Prince's bills turned up in Trinidad, Johnny. From the same packet that one in Miami came from. They checked the serial numbers on it."

Blood pursed his lips. *Trinidad.*

Jerry Bowles smoked another cigarette leisurely. "Wish I could make the trip for you, Johnny. I understand there's some mighty interesting sub-tropical stuff down there in Port of Spain."

"This is crazy as hell. We're working with the C.I.C. on this one, I know that. But why do I go out of my jurisdiction and pal up with this Chester Mason? Can't he handle the trail himself?"

Bowles shrugged. "Haven't the least idea. I just decode the

TWX's, Johnny, and hand 'em to you. That's the story, and you're stuck with it. Although, frankly, I can't see why you're so damned upset about flying down to Trinidad. Tropical paradise, waving palms, black-eyed señoritas—Brother!

Blood said, "What about the Boots Hiller trail? Should I drop that dead, or leave an opening so I can come back? What did Washington say about that?"

"You're just taking a trip out of town, Johnny. Keep all the contacts here. You're still on the same case. This is just a check-up from an outside angle. Might be some tie-in with Miami."

Blood shrugged. "Probably way back there somewhere, along about Adam and Eve. That money could have passed through a lot of hands before it got to Miami and Trinidad."

Bowles stubbed out his cigarette. "That's the news, Johnny. I'll be seeing you in a couple days. Luck."

He shook hands with Blood and went out of the booth. Blood stood in front of the record player staring down at the spinning record. The music beat wildly in on him, but he did not hear it at all. Oddly enough he was thinking about Boots Hiller. He didn't want to leave her for a jaunt to Trinidad. He wanted to stay and be near her.

He bunched up his fist and

struck the sound-proofed wall. It dented in a little where his knuckles had hit. He looked at the dents absently. Then he reached over and shut off the player. The silence in the place was deafening.

THE PLANE BUMPED over the runway and came to a stop outside the operations office at the airport on Trinidad. Johnny Blood and several passengers got off the ship and headed for the operations shack.

Halfway across the field a short bald-headed man came toward Blood with his hand outstretched. "Mr. Blood," he said. "I'm Chester Mason, Counter-Intelligence. We've got quite a way to go to get to Port of Spain, so perhaps we'd better hop in my car right now."

"Okay by me," Blood murmured.

He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. The sun was beating down heavily, and the trip from Miami had been a long one. He could feel his shirt and coat jacket already damp with perspiration.

Mason laughed as he led the way to a gray limousine parked next to the operations building. "You'll get used to the heat. Quite possibly it'll rain before we reach Port of Spain."

"Rain?" muttered Blood, looking at the merciless sky where there wasn't a cloud in sight.

"Rains every afternoon this sea-

son of year, clouds or no clouds," the Intelligence man explained, grinning. "Come on. Pile in."

They got into the car and Mason drove until finally they were on a macadam highway, winding through jungle-covered land. The mugginess of the tropical heat washed over them.

Blood loosened his tie and took his coat off. The air felt better, but it was wet and hot and it didn't dry up any perspiration.

"You must think it odd I sent for you," Mason said after awhile. "Understand you're on the Prince's Armored Car heist in St. Louis."

Blood grinned. "Who isn't? You too?"

"We'd been alerted, but didn't really think much about it. You know how it is. Never think hot money is going to turn up in this out-of-the-way hole. But we keep looking for it anyway—a matter of routine. U.S. money brings pretty good prices down here. Not as good as it used to, but good. So we thought there might be some kind of money racket on—well, selling it here at a profit. But I don't think that's the real story at all."

Blood leaned back, letting the muggy air fan his sweaty face. He could see the unpainted shacks of the farmhands lining the side of the road wherever man had been ambitious enough to hack his way into the ever-encroaching jungle.

"The money was found on a merchant marine, and an American," said Mason. "So naturally I was interested when the British Police told me about it."

Blood opened one eye warily. "Told you about what?"

"The killing of the merchant seaman." Mason shrugged. "Those things do happen and we try to keep out of it as much as possible. Let the Maritime boys battle it out, you know. But there were peculiar circumstances this time, and so I poked in Uncle Sam's nose."

"Seaman, huh?"

"Stabbed in the back. Routine killing, really. Brawl in a bistro. Women, liquor, all that."

"What about the money, Mason? Did he have it on him?"

Mason pulled out a pipe and knocked it against the dashboard as he drove along. "Two bills. Two twenty-dollar bills. Enough for a pretty good evening—by Port of Spain standards. There were some ones and fives, but the twenties were new. Routine check, you realize. They matched the Prince's Armored Car money."

Blood closed his eyes again. "Well, who killed him? Another merchant marine? A girl?"

Mason pulled out his tobacco pouch and one-handedly loaded his pipe. He kept watching the road ahead, concentrating on the pipe job, and he couldn't answer for several moments. They hit another road and turned left. There



were buildings and a store at the intersection of the highways. Raggedly dressed urchins of doubtful lineage stood about staring at them.

"There's some confusion over that, Blood. Always is, naturally. Somebody apparently just came up and slid the knife into his back while he was chatting to this girl."

"And the girl?"

"Oh, we've tried to drag it out of her, but she won't spill. Possibly she doesn't know anything. Says she was sitting there talking to this fellow—Joe Briggs was his name. Suddenly a man came up

behind Joe and stabbed him before anybody could say anything.

"The girl screamed and the man disappeared. Joe Briggs slid to the floor. The girl seems to have a clean record. Tart type. Nothing unusual. Never been out of Trinidad in her life."

"Was the killer white, or a native?"

"It was dark inside the place," Mason replied, lighting a match to his pipe and dragging deep. "The girl couldn't see the man's face very distinctly, but he seemed to be dark-complexioned. But you know how little that means. He may have had smudges of stuff on his face if he was actually white. Or he might have been a hired killer. A local boy."

"Um. Briggs have any stuff with him? Anything that might give a motive for his murder?"

"We checked all that," Mason drawled. "Nothing much turned up. Just the regular stuff a merchant seaman carries with him. Pictures of his family and all that. Letters from a girl in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Foreign money—small amounts of it. Regular seaman's booty."

Blood sighed. "What kind of ship was he on?"

"Freighter. It was a tramp steamer, unassigned. The hold was full of farm machinery bound for Brazil. We checked the invoice."

Blood pursed his lips. "Did you

check the cargo, too? The money might be on board, too. Two million in bills was a bulky load."

Mason said, "We tore apart half the boxes in the hold—much to the concern of the skipper. Nothing, old man. It was farm machinery all right. Harvesters and tractors. Nothing sinister like loads of bills. We'd thought of that, too."

The sweat trickled down Blood's face and he mopped it off again with his handkerchief.

Suddenly the rains came and swirled down in torrents. The streets ran with water. It poured onto the car and seeped in through the closed windows. Blood looked out at the gray desolation and wished he was back in New York. He wished he was with Boots Hiller and to hell with the two million dollar heist of Prince's Armored Car and the murder of Joe Briggs, merchant seaman, connoisseur of the hottest dough in the world.

## VI

IT HAD STOPPED raining by the time they got into Port of Spain. Chester Mason drove his car into an *official Parking Only* zone and he and Blood got out. The sidewalk was drying off already, and the sun was making curls of vapor rise. The sidewalks of the town were covered with overhangs from the office buildings, giving a protective spread for shoppers.



Mason and Blood walked into the U.S. Consulate and entered Mason's office. It was a small room with a desk and several chairs. There were Venetian blinds on the window overlooking the city street. The high indirect lighting was turned on, and the blue light was reflected down onto Mason's desk.

On the desk were spread a number of articles and papers. Mason hung his hat on the hat rack and sat down, puffing on his pipe. He glanced up at Blood and said, "Better come over here, old man, and look at this. This is exactly what we found on him. Money, pictures, and handkerchiefs. The other stuff came from his duffle bag on board ship."

Blood nodded and came around beside Mason. He picked up the money and looked at it thoughtfully. "It's the Prince's stuff, no doubt about it," he said. Then he put it down and picked up a couple photographs from the blotter. "We can check into these people, too."

Mason smiled. "Already have. The reports are coming to us here, and to your office in Washington."

Blood didn't hear much of what Mason was chatting about. His eyes were on a rumpled, folded piece of drawing paper. It was the type of paper artists call charcoal paper. And there was a drawing on the charcoal paper. It was the profile of a boy, obviously Seaman

Joe Briggs. Down at the right hand lower corner there was a signature—the signature of the artist who had done the far from amateurish sketch.

*Jim Gauches.*

Blood picked up the paper with trembling fingers. Mason glanced up in the middle of a sentence, realizing that he was not being listened to. He stopped talking and watched Johnny Blood's face.

"You seem to have latched onto something," Mason said. "That picture? A sketch of the dead sailor."

"Yeah," Blood said. "Done by Jim Gauches, an artist in Miami."

"Gord Lord! You've heard of the artist?" Mason raised his eyebrows.

"That's right. He was killed ten days ago in Miami. He was the one who passed that other Prince's bill. They killed him because somebody was afraid we could trace them through him."

Mason snapped his fingers. "Our sailor paid for the picture with this money, and when the artist passed the money on, you boys went after him. The artist was killed to cover the trail of the bill, and Briggs here was killed for the same reason. But where did Briggs get the bills?"

Blood shook his head. "Possibly the Prince's heisters didn't want to kill Joe Briggs in Miami too. So they let him go on down here with his ship. They figured if they



killed him here, nobody'd be any wiser."

"The Prince's hold-up men are down in Trinidad, then, Blood? Is that the way you figure it?"

"There was another killing up in New York two days ago," Blood said. "Morna Warwick, a singer. She was killed because she knew who shot Jim Gauches, the artist. I was on her tail, and everybody in town must have known it. This is a big caper, Mason. Lots of individuals are mixed up in this two million honey pot. The man who killed Gauches killed Morna

Warwick. The man who killed our sailor here is somebody else—maybe somebody hired from Joe Briggs' ship—or somebody who followed him down from Miami."

Mason frowned. "But how did Briggs get the money in the first place? Is he one of the original neisters?"

Blood shrugged his shoulders. "That's the big puzzler. Maybe he stole it, Mason. Two million is a hell of a lot of long green. It's feasible to assume the heist boys broke up the load into small quantities for the purpose of shipment. Maybe our sailor boy lifted one of those bunches of twenties on a routine break-and-enter."

Chester Mason pulled open a drawer and read from a sheet of paper. "Here's the ports of call of *The Yankee Flyer*," he said. "Maybe one of them is the place where the rest of the bills are. Mentions Miami, next stopover, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and then Port of Spain, Trinidad. Ship goes to Rio, the Cape, and then on to Hong Kong, China."

It added up, Blood mused. Seaman Joe Briggs had lifted a packet of the hot stuff from one of the original robbers, or from one of the big fences. By passing one bill in Miami, he had almost ruined the Prince's caper. He had been spotted, followed to Trinidad, and killed.

"*The Yankee Flyer*," Blood said. "Is there anything to stop us

from going down and boarding her right away?"

Mason shook his head. "I thought you'd want to," he said. "I've already made arrangements. Come on. We can make the docks in five minutes."

Three hundred seconds later they were ushered aboard the freighter *The Yankee Flyer* by a nervous first mate whose name was Harry Grinnell. He took them into the ward room and served them coffee.

Blood asked for a list of the seamen who had signed on in New York, the original port of call. Grinnell pulled out a typewritten sheet and handed it to Blood. He glanced down it. His eyes traveled back to the top of the list—the four passengers who had paid for a trip around the Caribbean, tourist first-class.

One name caught his eye. Mr. Jackson of Duluth. *Mr. Johnson of Duluth*. That was the name the unknown stranger had given Hy Brannon—the man who had ambushed Brannon and almost killed him the night Brannon had been scheduled to murder Johnny Blood. Was Mr. Johnson Mr. Jackson?

"Where's this Mr. Jackson of Duluth, Minnesota?"

Grinnell looked uneasily at Johnny Blood. "Gone, sir."

Blood glanced swiftly at Grinnell, and then at Chester Mason. "Gone where?"

"He took his bags and left, sir. I have no idea where."

Blood stood up, stunned. "You let him shove off this ship after something like this happened to Joe Briggs? Didn't you realize that he might have been the one who killed Briggs—pulling out like that? What kind of slowed-down thinking is that?"

Grinnell stammered out a few words, but they didn't mean anything. "But you see, sir," he went on miserably, his face white as chalk, "he got off the ship at San Juan, Puerto Rico. He wasn't on board when we docked at Port of Spain."

Blood sat down. "I see. Why didn't you say so?" He turned to Mason. "It's somebody on the ship, Mason."

Grinnell was nervously tapping the desk with his finger. Blood turned to him and said, "This Mr. Johnson give you any indication where he was going from Puerto Rico?"

Grinnell shook his head. "He had a few bags—not many—and he just got off the ship and disappeared. He took a cab, I think and—"

Blood pursed his lips. "May have headed right back to the States." He turned to Mason and spoke in an undertone, inaudible to Grinnell. "He had the stuff all right, I'll bet on that. He may have stashed it in Puerto Rico, or he may have carried it all the way

back to New York. Or it may still be on board."

Grinnell anticipated the question which he seemed to feel Blood was about to ask. "We've checked the ship from top to bottom, and we haven't found anything yet that didn't belong. If you wish to make out a search order—"

Blood looked at Mason. "Put out a call for everybody on board this ship to report back. I'll bet you one man won't show up. That's the man who killed Joe Briggs. He was hired and paid by Mr. Johnson before the boat got to San Juan. Then Johnson got off the ship and beat it back to New York."

Mason nodded and Grinnell sipped his coffee. The first mate seemed uncomfortable. But Blood wasn't looking at either of them. He was thinking about Mr. Johnson.

Johnson's next move was fairly certain. He'd go after Boots Hiller. Could Blood get there in time to stop him? And cajole Johnson into tailing him in place of Boots Hiller?

## VII

IT WAS NIGHT when Johnny Blood got into La Guardia from Miami. He'd flown by army transport from Trinidad to Miami, and from Miami to New York in a regular airliner. He climbed down

the big stairway and headed across the field to the baggage office. He was tired and needed a shave, but first of all he had to make a phone call.

There was a phone booth in the lobby of the baggage room. He saw a man inside and stood by to wait.

The man's face was completely unfamiliar but somehow Blood had the feeling that he had seen him before. Or possibly it was the way his eyes traveled around the baggage check room without meeting the F.B.I. man's gaze directly that aroused suspicion in Johnny's mind.

Blood peered into the booth curiously. He could see the phone's receiver in the man's hand, held to his ear, but somehow the man didn't appear to be talking. He held his face close to the mouthpiece, and hunched his shoulder up to cover the lower half of his chin.

Johnny Blood felt the flesh along the back of his neck move up and down. The man in the phone booth had been waiting for him, had known he was coming in on the plane, had known he wanted to use the phone. It was a most convenient way to keep Johnny Blood from making a call.

Blood glanced around and pushed his way through the crowd. In front of the baggage check office stood a long black limousine. It said, *Terminal, 39th Street, on*

the front. Blood walked past it and hailed a taxi. The driver backed up obediently. Blood opened the door.

"Washington Square," he said, "I'm in a hurry, so try to make it as fast as you can."

The driver nodded and the taxi shot out into the traffic. Blood looked through the rear window and rather expected to see a car behind him. It wasn't a taxi. It was a two-door sedan, black and new. It stayed directly behind the taxi and didn't try to pass at all. Blood's driver headed for the Queensboro Bridge and the car still stayed right behind them. Blood said nothing, his lips set in tight lines.

They left the bridge and headed down Fifty-Ninth Street. "Hey bud," the cabby said suddenly. "Guy's following us."

Blood moistened his lips. "Don't worry about it," he said. "It doesn't bother me."

The cab driver drove a while in silence, his expression troubled. Suddenly he asked in a strained voice, "You a cop?"

Blood nodded. "Something like that."

Ten minutes later the taxi turned left into Waverly Place from Sixth, and gunned down the street. Blood thrust a bill into the driver's hand. "Let me out on the run, Jack," he said.

"Good luck!" yelled the cab driver, easing across the intersec-

tion of MacDougal and Waverly Place.

Blood leapt from the car and zig-zagged for the Washington Square Park entrance, making hurriedly for the first big tree on the right.

He heard the car behind him screech to a sudden stop. A man jumped out of the back, yelling, and as Blood ran for the tree, the first bullet whizzed through the air past his shoulder. Another shot followed the first.

Johnny Blood was shielded by the tree when his own gun blazed. He could see a crawling shape moving along the edge of the park walk, coming up on the flat grass in front of him. He fielded two bullets at the shadowy hump, and the man gave a twitch and held still.

The black car had pulled in at the curb half way down the park. The front door slammed, and a figure streaked across the park grass, and headed for the center walk that came in at Blood's back. Blood swung about and took careful aim. His gun roared again.

The shadowy form stopped dead in its tracks, crumpled to the walk. Blood fished inside his belt and pulled out more shells, loading them into the clip of the .38.

He turned around, looking for the first man who had been coming in on him from in front. He had disappeared. Blood scanned the darkened ground carefully un-

til he saw the wounded gunman staggering toward the parked car. He had just about reached the sidewalk when Blood fired again. The reeling figure lurched a bit, and then stumbled toward the car door, pulled it open and fell inside.

A moment later the black car was rushing off in the direction of Washington Square North. Blood felt the sickening burn of a wild shot that had grazed his right leg, and he clung to the tree for support. But then everything righted itself and he felt okay again.

### VIII

A HALF HOUR later Agents Jerry Bowles and Johnny Blood of the F.B.I. stood looking at the remains of the black sedan piled up against one of New York City's indestructible metal lamp posts. Their eyes followed the flow of crimson drops down the sidewalk and into the brown-stone entrance. They followed the dried drops and climbed the steps of the West Broadway apartment building.

They were soon inside a room on the second floor lately shared by two men—now shared by a pair of New York cops and a plainclothes detective. The plainclothes detective punched back his hat from his forehead and looked at Blood and Bowles. Then he looked at their Bureau badges

and waved his hand around the room.

"It's all yours. We've got the body out in the meat wagon. I'll leave Sergeant Casey in charge. If it's all right with you, I'll take off and file my report."

The harried detective lieutenant waited for an answer and Blood nodded. "Sure thing. Thanks for informing us right off. We didn't know if the officers had located the car or not."

"*Located!* Didn't need to locate it. Everybody in the neighborhood heard the shooting and the car crash. Piled up right outside these two dead men's apartment. Stuff's all on the table there. Casey's got all the junk out of this Emil Jenks' pockets. Also from Mike Smith's pockets, too."

The detective lieutenant disappeared out the door and Blood heard his feet moving steadily down the hallway and onto the stairs.

Bowles and Blood pawed through the contents on the desk while Casey finished cataloguing the contents of Emil Jenks' pockets. Finally Sergeant Casey handed Johnny Blood the list and the articles in a huge brown envelope.

Blood sat down at a card table in the corner of the room and poured the objects out. The first thing he saw was a cablegram to E. Jenks. It was from Trinidad.

JENKS:

SIX FEET, CURLY BLOND HAIR,

BLUE EYES. FLEW OUT OF HERE  
FIVE P.M. TO MIAMI TO NEW  
YORK. MEET YOUR UNCLE DUD-  
LEY. NOTIFY J. SAM

Sam had undoubtedly killed Joe Briggs in Trinidad, and had tried to warn the heisters of Blood's return trip to New York. J. was Johnson-Jackson. That meant Mr. Johnson was most decidedly in New York—and on the prowl.

Blood looked up to see Bowles staring fixedly at a telephone bill. "Johnny," he asked. "What do you make of this?"

Johnny Blood put the cablegram back in the brown envelope and crossed over to Bowles' desk. Bowles was holding the bill and looking at the slip of paper attached to it. TOLL CALLS AND TELEGRAMS, it said. The list contained all long distance calls and telegrams made during the month. One telephone call was marked: HONGKONG, CHINA.

Blood pulled out a pack of cigarettes and got one out. He tapped it thoughtfully on the fingernail of his left hand and then inserted it in his mouth. He pulled out a match and lit it.

Then he said, with great caution, "This may be it, Jerry. The missing link. That may establish the correct pattern. *The Yankee Flyer* had been bound for Hong Kong, China. And so had Mr. Johnson, before the trouble in Miami with the marked bills. So

had the money. Now the money and Mr. Johnson were both back in New York, awaiting a more convenient boat for China. Or had they already left?"

Bowles rubbed his chin. "That's how I figure it, too, Johnny. The dough's too bulky to fly over to China. Mr. Johnson's trying to get passage on some obscure freighter. He wants to get the money there slow and safe—especially safe. Once it's there, he's pulled it off, he's rich for life."

Blood leaned over the desk in front of Bowles and rustled the scraps of paper with his index finger. "The way I figure it this is shaping up as the classic case of its kind. This guy Johnson is proving to be quite the smart lad. It was all planned well in advance. And the dough they've got now is the hottest kind of hot money. The kind you can't dump anywhere in the United States even if you're willing to turn over nine-tenths of it to someone reckless enough to make a stab at passing it.

"And trying to fence that dough even in London, Paris, Rome, or anywhere in South America would be like buying yourself a round-trip ticket to Alcatraz, tearing up the return half and scattering it over San Francisco Bay, along with the extradition papers you've had plastered to your hide."

"Johnny, you're damned right," said Bowles. "But in Hong Kong

you can get rid of a haul like that without any trouble—if you're willing to accept just a big cut and no more. You simply have to go there and make arrangements in advance with the right people. And that's what Mr. Johnson did. We checked through in Washington and found that a passport was issued to a Mr. Jackson of Duluth. And that he flew to Hong Kong almost a year before the big heist. Lucky for use he uses either Johnson or Jackson, and always Duluth."

"It figures, Jerry," said Johnny Blood. "Mr. Johnson didn't pull that heist all by himself. He planned it with dependable and efficient personnel, men and women he could trust not to squabble over their share of the loot. That's why we never got a rumble from the underworld. And you can bet he closed the deal in Hong Kong and then came back to pull the heist: Getting rid of hot money in Hong Kong in a percentage deal is as easy as rolling off a log in the Yellow River. And in that place of undercover intrigue it was easy for him to line up big business men who know how to move the stuff all over the East."

Blood moistened his lips and grinned. "But he didn't count on one thing, though, Jerry."

"What's that?"

"He didn't count on Joe Briggs, a cheap two-bit housebreaker who lifted some of his hot dough and

began to pass it around. Briggs ruined the biggest heist in the history of the United States."

Bowles tapped the desk with his fingers. "Not yet, he hasn't Johnny. We've got to cover all transportation out of New York. Alert San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Boston, New Orleans—anywhere boats might leave for China. And pick up Mr. Johnson of Duluth."

"First," Blood said, "I've got to make an important phone call."

Bowles stared into Johnny Blood's eyes. Then he said, "Didn't I tell you, Johnny?"

"Tell me what?"

Slowly, reluctantly, Jerry Bowles shuffled the papers in front of him, and then looked Blood in the eyes again.

"Boots Hiller has been missing since three o'clock this afternoon, Johnny. I had a tail on her and she vanished into thin air. Somewhere between her apartment and the Fourth Street joint she works in. No trace of her."

Blood sank down into the chair. He felt cold all over. He was probably too late to save her. Mr. Johnson had already moved in and taken her. Mr. Johnson or others in his international mob.

## IX

BOOTS HILLER ran a questioning finger over her cheeks and stared into the mirror again, looking



closely at her face. Without makeup it was fuller and rounder. Without the eye shadow her eyes were much brighter and healthier. Without the severely cut dresses she looked quite buxom and youthful. She stared at herself in the mirror with distaste and frowned. "If he could see me the way I really am," she murmured to herself, "he would like me so much better. He likes me now, he feels like a father to me, and that is the way they want it. But if he knew me the way I really am—without the blonde hair dye and the eye shadow and the wrong makeup to make my face look thin and pinched, then he would like me the way I want him to."

She sighed deeply and pulled on her slip. She shook it down over her and looked again in the mirror. Her green eyes stared directly back at her.

"Phony," she said aloud. "Lousy little phony. Lousy two-timing phony."

It didn't do any good. She thought about Johnny Blood and the curly blond hair she wanted to run her fingers through and the blue eyes and the long lean frame. She felt the same way she'd felt when she'd found the dead body of Morna Warwick, her best friend, sprawled across the bed in the apartment the night before.

She felt cheap and crawling and lousy with self recriminations.

She finished dressing and went out into the kitchen. She got out the coffee pot, and dumped some coffee into the percolater. Then she sat down at the table and peeled an orange.

Why'd they have to kill Morna Warwick? she asked herself again. Why'd they have to get rid of her? Boots could have handled her. They were afraid of Morna because she wasn't like the rest of them.

When the Hong Kong trip had blown up in their faces, hadn't Morna Warwick hopped the first plane out of La Guardia to Miami and tried to straighten everything out right away? It wasn't her fault the whole thing had turned into a stinking mess.

Boots got up quickly and moved into the living room. She lifted her handbag off the couch and opened it up. From it she took out the .25 Colt and let it lie in her hand. She strolled slowly back into the kitchen. The water was boiling.

She put the gun down on the kitchen table and poured the boiling water into the percolater. Then she put the lid on and the pot over the flame. She turned the gas down a bit and went back to the table, still moving without haste, but in a tensed-up way.

The door to her apartment suddenly opened. She heard it close again. She did not turn around. The footsteps crossed the living

room rug and came into the kitchen. Still she did not look up.

"You're just in time for coffee," she said tonelessly, crossing to the stove without looking at the man behind her.

The man laughed. He sat down opposite her at the tiny kitchen table and picked up the .25 she had laid there. "Target practice, Boots?" The man from Duluth grinned. He fondled the .25, removed the clip, studied it, and then inserted it again.

"Want to hire yourself out for a steady job as a bull's eye?" Boots asked him.

She poured herself a cup of coffee. She set the pot on a tile and reached into the cupboard for another cup and saucer. She set them in front of Mr. Johnson, and poured the coffee into the cup. The steam rose from the two cups.

Boots Hiller sat down. The pungent smell of coffee filled the kitchen and mingled with the odor of burnt gas. She poured some cream in the coffee, and took a spoonful of sugar. Mr. Johnson stirred his coffee idly and sipped it black.

"Well, do you think it's wise to be seen up here with me?"

Mr. Johnson shrugged. His black eyes wandered briefly over Boots Hiller's sweater and face. Then he set the coffee cup back in the saucer.

"I took the precaution of enter-

ing by the back way," he said. "Over one roof, through two hallways, into a basement. Then out another basement, across a courtyard, into your back door. You don't for one instant think I'm a fool, do you, Boots?"

Boots Hiller looked into Mr. Johnson's sadistic blue eyes and she shook her head. Mr. Johnson's gray lips flattened against his teeth and he lifted the corners of his mouth in a slightly mocking smile.

"Excellent coffee, Boots," he said.

"Okay, out with it," Boots Hiller snapped. "You've come here for a purpose. Get the business over with and beat it out of here. I don't have to put up with you any more than I want to."

Mr. Johnson's eyes narrowed, and flames filled the black pupils. "Sure, sure, Boots. Always playing the wise kid. You've been pretty distant lately. Even some of the boys have mentioned it, and that's very much unlike them. Let me tell you one thing, Boots."

Mr. Johnson leaned forward against the tiny kitchen table and the coffee in the cups jiggled over the brims. His heavy, thick body pressed in against the edge of the table. "You don't fool me one bit. But you're going through with this to the bitter end—regardless."

Boots Hiller felt cold fear crawl through her. She'd felt his massive hands on her body be-

fore, and she knew there was strength and weight there. His hands were as strong as claws, the weight of his physical energy enough to crush the life out of a person. She'd felt the strength of his body before, and now her stomach curdled at the thought of it.

"You've been pretty hard to get along with lately, Boots," Mr. Johnson said. "You ought to know by now you can't get out. You're in until the end and it won't be long now!"

Boots Hiller sighed. "Same old record, same old song. Give me the orders and get out of here. I'm tired."

The gray skin of his face bent into a smile. "You're going to nail him all by yourself, Boots. You're going to kill him—or we'll liquidate you."

Boots Hiller stopped breathing. She didn't smile. Who did Johnson think he was? Putting the finger on her to kill Johnny Blood.

"Where?"

"It's not that easy. It's a kind of a con game you have to play, Boots. And there's something else you're going to take care of."

"What's that?"

"The money."

"Yeah? All of it?"

"You're going to take it with you."

Boots Hiller let out a hollow laugh. "You may never see it again if I do."

"I'll be there, close by. You're escaping from us, get it? That's the play-script. It's a double con game: conning the conman. Your bags are packed, and the F.B.I. man helps you escape. You know, you're being pursued by Mr. Johnson's international gangsters. So you sucker the federal man into taking the train with you, subtly letting him feel it'll be a perfect patsy game to flush out Mr. Johnson's crew of racketeers.

"You get on the train together and you kill him. Then we dispose of the body, and I use his credentials for the rest of the trip. In San Francisco we grab the first jet to Honolulu, both of us, and from there we take a steamer to Hong Kong. It should be a cinch."

Boots Hiller picked up her cup of coffee. She tasted it. "It's as cold as a granite slab," she said, staring down into her cup at the dregs.

Mr. Johnson stood up, his huge bulk looming over her, his double breasted suit coat hanging open at his thick-muscle stomach. She could see the two shoulder holsters strapped around him, filled with .38's.

"One slight move like you're on the double-cross, kitten," he said, "and it's the end of the glory road for you."

Boots Hiller shrugged her shoulders and backed against the wall. "Beat it."

Mr. Johnson came close to her,

lifted her face up to his, and kissed her on the lips. He took his mouth away, and looked into her green eyes. She stared back at him coldly. He kissed her again and she hung limply against the wall, her hands dangling at her sides.

Mr. Johnson backed away, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "That's what I like," he chuckled. "Plenty of fire and defiance."

## X

BOOTS HILLER stepped out into Waverly Place, walking west toward Sixth Avenue. She glanced at her wrist watch, and confirmed the time. It was ten minutes of three. She had prepared everything, carried out the instructions given her by Mr. Johnson in a very thorough way.

She'd given the suitcases to Johnson, and she'd phoned in her reservation for the San Francisco train. She'd arranged the exact spot on Fourth Street where she'd step into the car parked at the curb, the car driven by Mr. Johnson.

She glanced back as she walked swiftly down Waverly Place. The man with the gray hat and the gray worsted suit stepped out from a restaurant nearby very nonchalantly and started down Waverly in the same direction. She smiled to herself. It was the same

man who had been on her tail now for three days.

She turned the corner into Sixth Avenue, turning south and proceeding down toward Fourth Street. Behind her the gray-suited F.B.I. man plodded along unconcernedly. He could have been a typical tourist out for an afternoon stroll in Greenwich Village for all the interest he showed in Boots Hiller.

She went left on Fourth Street and the man in gray followed. To make it less obvious that he was following her, the F.B.I. man usually stopped at the hot dog stand on the corner and sat at a stool on the end to watch her go down Fourth and turn in under the orange awning of the *Club Bistro*.

And finally, after munching through his red hot and Coke, the F.B.I. tail would crawl off his stool and slowly traverse the distance between the *Club Bistro* and the hot dog parlor. Then he would take up his post outside the club and smoke cigarettes for amusement.

This afternoon the F.B.I. man did as usual, turning into the hot dog stand and obediently ordering the same—a red hot and a bottle of Coke. Boots Hiller noted this with a slight backward glance, and continued down the street. There were several cars drawn up before the cellar dives directly west of the club, but she did not look into any of these.

She was interested in the dark green sedan parked near the club. In this car Mr. Johnson sat, grinning into the rearview mirror, chewing a toothpick. He had the engine started even before Boots Hiller opened the door, and he pulled out the instant she'd slammed it behind her.

"Boots, you did well," laughed Mr. Johnson, driving the green car swiftly around the corner.

In the rearview mirror Mr. Johnson glanced down the street into the hot dog stand, where an amazed and frustrated federal agent gaped blankly out through the dirty window.

Boots Hiller snapped, "Shut up and let me out. Every cop in town will be looking for this car. Where you going to dispose of it?"

Mr. Johnson grinned. "Don't worry, Boots. I've got angles. You just get out and into the apartment, and I'll be right along."

Boots Hiller dropped out on McDougal two blocks south and hurried up the stairs of the beat-up brownstone on the west side of the street. She let herself into the apartment with her key. The shades were pulled down and there was a musty, unused quality to the air.

She put her handbag on the couch and crossed over to open the windows. She let the shades hang down just the way they were. The air coming into the room was fresh and crisp. It had

been a long time since she had been in the apartment.

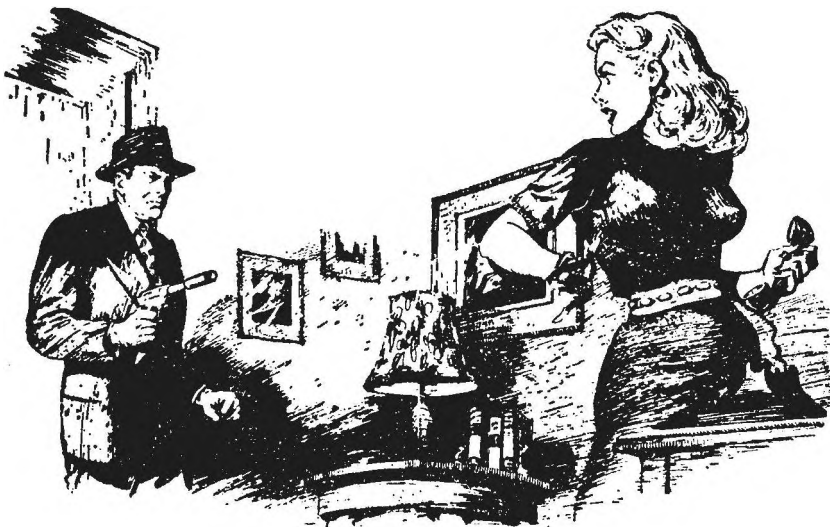
She made herself some coffee and sat waiting for it to boil. She got up restlessly and went prowling into the bedroom. Three suitcases and a gladstone bag stood next to the door, tightly shut and ready for the long haul to Hong Kong. Loaded with millions in hot cash.

Curiously she moved over to the straw-colored leather suitcase. She pulled the snaps and opened it. It was loaded with shirts and petticoats. But when she pulled back the top layer she saw the tightly packed bundles of twenty dollar bills and paled a little. Twenties and hundreds. She shook her head and snapped the latches shut again.

She thought of Johnny Blood. It would be so simple, she realized, to call the police. She'd tell them she'd just found the two million accidentally in the apartment here. She'd rented the apartment and here was this money packed in suitcases.

She marched into the living room and picked up the phone. She listened for the tone and reached down and dialed the number of the police department. She heard the buzzing on the other end.

She didn't even hear anyone enter the room. What she heard was worse. She heard a hissing, flaring swoosh—and a bullet



whistled past her ears, imbedding itself in the wall behind her. She dropped the receiver with a scream and turned around, staring open-mouthed at the doorway.

It was Mr. Johnson all right. He had just entered, and he was closing the door behind him.

He smiled a flat, gray-lipped smile, his black eyes glittering. He held the deadly little pistol in his hand—the target pistol he had reconverted into a silenced gun. The heavily ventilated arrangement attached to the barrel of the pistol was ludicrous in appearance, but lethal in performance.

"So you thought you'd sing," Mr. Johnson whispered, advancing on Boots Hiller. "You thought you'd sing a song to the cops."

He threw the pistol on the couch and came over to her. He took her shoulders and grasped them tightly. He shook her then furiously, shook her till her teeth rattled. She closed her eyes and let herself go. It didn't hurt so much that way.

He let her go finally and she slumped down into a chair, not even looking up at him. He walked over and picked up the receiver. He hung the receiver back on the phone and came over to where Boots Hiller sat.

He slapped her across the face once, twice, three times. The girl's face turned violent red. She didn't say a thing. She didn't even whimper. She sat there, stunned and wondrous-eyed.

Mr. Johnson sat on the couch and carefully reloaded his one-shot target pistol. Then he sat there and read a magazine quietly with the gun on his lap pointed at her. Every so often he would look up at her and there would be a twinkle in his slitted eyes.

## XI

BOOTS HILLER was gone, Johnny Blood knew, and he might as well face it. He stood just past the hat check room in the *Club Bistro* and let his eyes move over the room. It was early yet and most of the tables were deserted. Several customers had come in—mostly tourists out for a thrill in Greenwich Village after dark.

Some beatniks clustered in one corner, talking over the decadence of modern literature. Blood moved slowly over to the bar and end stools. An agreeable bar-pulled himself up on one of the tender named Ed Krupp wandered over and wiped a glass in front of him. Blood's eyes kept moving around the room and Krupp watched him.

Then Krupp said, "Terrible thing about Morna Warwick getting shot like that, ain't it? She used to sing here, you know."

Blood's eyes narrowed on Krupp's face. He said, "Did you know Morna Warwick?"

Krupp shrugged. "So she used to come in here once in a while

and make some bucks warbling songs between Boots Hiller's."

"Um."

"Hope Boots Hiller isn't in any trouble either," he said. "She didn't turn up today." Krupp shrugged elaborately.

Blood said, "Give me a rye and water."

"Sure thing, feller." Krupp got the rye and water and slid the drink down in front of Blood. He came back and stood there, wiping more glasses. "Just hope Boots ain't in a serious jam, too, that's all."

Blood's eyebrows lifted. "Just what are you driving at?"

"Couple guys got killed last night—big street fight off Washington Square. One got dropped right in the Park, and the other cracked up a car over on West Broadway, a stone's throw away."

"Hoods?"

"So no one knows who they were," Krupp said. "No police records. They got blasted down, though. Lot of secrecy about the whole thing, you know. Cops clammed up. Papers played it down." Krupp grinned. "Cops thought they might of been pushers or diamond smugglers. Didn't find a damned thing on 'em."

"That's funny all right," Blood said.

"Sure hope Boots ain't in that kind of trouble. She's a nice kid."

Krupp walked down to the middle of the bar where a nervous

thin man was signalling him. Krupp talked to the man a moment and then looked down at Johnny Blood.

"Hey, feller," said Krupp. "Your name ain't Blood, is it?"

Blood looked at Krupp a moment, then at the thin scared guy with the beat-up hat and the baggy pants. "Yeah," he said. "Why?"

Krupp looked at the thin man. Then he said to Blood, "Guy here has a letter for you."

"A letter?"

The thin man came over to Blood. "I found this letter on the sidewalk. Middle of McDougal Street. Had a finn rolled around it, and said to deliver it to Mr. Johnny Blood at the *Club Bistro*."

Blood took the envelope and the man went. Krupp watched Blood out of the corner of his eye. Blood pulled the letter out of the envelope and read it.

*Johnny.*

*They're after me—the same men who killed Morna. I'm hiding down at nineteen McDougal, fourth floor. I'm afraid they'll kill me. A man was following me all day, and another picked me up in his car. I got away. I've got to get out of the city. I'm all packed. Come quick.*

*Boots*

Blood's mouth twitched. It sounded like a trap. Even from Boots it sounded like a trap. Blood moved over for the phone booth and opened the door. He closed it behind him and reached

in his pocket for a dime. He put the dime in the slot.

And yet, he thought suddenly, what had the F.B.I. done for Boots Hiller?

He banged the receiver onto the hook and fished out the dime. He put it in his pocket and sat there another moment or two. This one he would handle alone. Boots Hiller was more than just another contact in a case. She was that extra special something.

He pulled down his hat tight on his head and got out of the phone booth.

## XII

JOHNNY BLOOD turned into McDougal and walked down the street. It was dark, but there were kids everywhere playing stoop ball and screaming at each other. Over-sized matrons waddled down the sidewalk carrying groceries, and men with open-collared shirts walked along with beer cans in their hands. Nobody noticed him.

He found 19 and turned in. A black-haired kid shot out of the stairwell and rammed into Blood's legs, turned up startled eyes, and ran out into the street making like a jet rocket.

Blood managed a grin and mounted the stairs. Fourth floor. He pressed the buzzer. After a half minute the door opened a slit, and a green eye peered out at him. The door opened quickly.



and Blood stepped inside. The room was pitch black, with the shades drawn and the lights off.

Boots Hiller closed the door behind him quickly and Blood reached out to touch her. He couldn't see anything.

She was in his arms instantly, sobbing with terror and relief. Blood held her in his arms and reached down to kiss her cheek. She moved her head and kissed him on the lips. She clung to him like that until her sobbing and tears stopped. She trembled and then held still in his arms.

"Oh, Johnny," was all she could say.

She turned and led him in the darkness to the couch. He could make out the interior of the apartment now. A couch, a couple chairs. There were several suitcases stacked in the corner near the couch. The door to the bedroom was closed.

"How long have you been here?" Blood asked.

"All day and all night," Boots Hiller said. "It was awful. A man tried to kidnap me. I jumped out of the car and ran over here. He didn't have a chance to follow me."

Blood fished out a cigarette and lit it. He handed it to Boots and lit himself another. "The man. What did he look like?"

Boots let the cigarette burn a moment. "He had a hatchet face, Johnny, and a brown suit. He

looked like a bookie or a race track man. You know. I'd recognize him if I saw him again, but I hope I never do. Oh, it was awful! I think they're trying to kill me because I knew Morna Warwick."

Blood nodded. "You've been shadowed by the F.B.I. every minute since the Morna Warwick killing, Boots. Did you know that?"

Boots Hiller gasped. "Why didn't the F.B.I. man stop me from being kidnapped yesterday?"

Blood shook his head grimly. "Fortunes of war. I'm going to try to help you out of town, Boots. The men who killed Morna think you'll stay here hiding. They can't cover the whole country, anyway."

"That's what I thought, too," Boots said eagerly. "I've already phoned for train reservations to San Francisco."

"San Francisco!" Blood stared. "Why so far?"

"I have an aunt out in Berkeley, Johnny. It will be so much better for me to get away from New York, for good."

Blood nodded. "Okay. Come on. I'll get your bags to the train, and see you off."

There was an awkward silence.

Then Boots said, "I got two reservations, Johnny. I—I thought you might go along with me, just to be sure."

Blood smoked in silence. He'd

have a lot of explaining to do to Jerry Bowles and to the boss in Washington, but maybe it was the best way. Moving swiftly now would deal a definite blow to the Johnson mob. If they were smart enough to tail him on the train, he could locate them and force a showdown right away. It would be a perfect way to flush out the mob—and he'd point that out to Bowles and Washington later.

"Phone for a cab, Boots, and we'll head for Grand Central."

They weren't followed—Johnny Blood could have sworn to that. They boarded the train as it sat by the platform in Grand Central, and put the bags in their drawing room. Blood stepped outside and stood in the vestibule of the drawing car.

He watched the passengers as they straggled along the platform. He could swear none of them were heeled. Nor did he recognize anybody he would classify as a hood. Blood felt certain there were no gun-toters among them.

The train started up and Blood went back to his compartment. No one had followed them on board the train—he was confident of that. He went in and sat down with Boots Hiller. She was trying to read a magazine and was watching the lights flash by as they roared through the tunnel under Manhattan out to 125th Street.

Blood settled back in the seat

and closed his eyes, keeping his arms folded across his chest where he could reach his shoulder gun.

It wasn't long before the conductor called out: "Harmon."

Vaguely Johnny Blood listened to the conductor's footsteps moving down the deserted passageway outside the compartment. Boots Hiller stifled a yawn and leaned back to close her eyes.

Blood sighed and dozed in the gentle motion of the decelerating train. The long line of cars came to an easy halt. Boots Hiller reached up and carelessly pulled down the curtain on the dirty, grimy window.

Johnny Blood opened his eyes a moment, watching her hand pull down the shade, and then he closed them again. It was rather odd that she should choose that moment to pull down the curtains, but then, he told himself, maybe the lights were in her eyes. The sun had set, and the electric lights from the station were coming in through the grimy windows.

Boots Hiller gasped. Blood sat up and looked at her with a frown. Her face was white with fear. She was staring at the window. The shade wasn't down at all. It had come apart in her hands. The whole green shade—clasp, runners, and roller—were hanging down limp from the window.

Johnny Blood glanced at the window and grinned. Then his

hand tensed and went for the gun inside his jacket. He was staring through the grimy window out onto the Harmon platform. The train jolted to a stop, and he could see plainly the two men standing not five feet away from the window of their compartment.

One of the men was huge with a heavy build and a gray double-breasted jacket. He wore a canary yellow necktie, and his shirt was dark blue. His hat was expensive and freshly blocked. He was staring down at the end of the train and he did not see Johnny Blood or Boots Hiller.

The man with him was a small bird-like individual with high cheek bones and a triangular shaped face. His skin was dark and wrinkled. He looked strangely like an Indian mummy in a museum.

The words had been imprinted on Blood's mind for weeks now:

*No. 3. Mr. Johnson. Age 45. Height, 6' 1". Weight, 210. Blue eyes, light skin. This gentleman dresses well and has no trouble passing for a well-educated man. He wears dark shirts and bright-colored, canary yellow ties.*

### XIII

BLOOD DREW BACK from the window, half crouching. His gun was in his hand, laid flat along the wall of the compartment. So that was their game, he mused. They'd

watched Johnny Blood and Boots Hiller get on board that train, and then they'd managed to drive to Harmon ahead of the train. And now they were climbing on board to take the girl and Johnny Blood.

"Stay right where you are, Boots," whispered Blood.

He backed out of the compartment. He slid along the passageway, keeping close to the compartment walls. There was no one in the passageway. He kept his gun in his hand and edged along to the vestibule. He moved over to the side of the entryway and looked out onto the platform.

At that instant the man called Johnson glanced at Blood, his frozen blue eyes lighting suddenly as he spotted Blood's curly blond hair and his own wary eyes. The big man drew smoothly and swiftly, pulling himself sideways in a dance-like step, and catfooting away backward from the spot he had been standing.

The bullet clipped the edge of the steel car frame an inch from Johnny Blood's head. The bullet smeared against the pressed steel and bounced back and forth inside the small vestibule.

Instantly the bird-like man with the dark face moved out of range in the opposite direction from the big man.

The bird-like man drew and fired a shot at Blood. Blood fired first at Johnson, who was halfway

to the station entrance. The bullet missed and imbedded itself in the wooden framework. Somebody shouted on the platform, and a woman screamed.

Blood crouched and pulled his gun on the bird-like man who was moving swiftly down the platform away from the station entrance. At the end of the platform there was a sign: *Taxis*.

Blood fired a shot, but the bird-like man was zig-zagging so much the bullet fanned the air. The bird-like man whipped around and fired another shot at Blood. Then he was gone.

The Federal man darted across the platform to the station. He raced across the waiting room and emerged through the street entrance just in time to see a taxi out of the corner of his eye. It was pulling out away from the station. Johnny Blood could not see inside of it.

He ran until he reached the passenger loading zone of a local bus. He watched the taxi and saw a man's face look out through the back window. The man wore an expensive gray hat that had been neatly blocked.

Another taxi came toward him, and he crossed to it in three long strides. "Follow that cab," he cried.

The taxi driver sucked down a gallon of air and nodded.

"I'll try not to shatter your windshield, but I may have to,"

Blood shouted. "You'll be adequately reimbursed.

A moment later the other taxi was squeezing through the light traffic in Harmon and heading into open country. As yet Mr. Johnson and his birdman partner hadn't fired from the cab, but Blood was sure it would start soon enough.

The road leveled out into woods and fields. The cab in front suddenly lurched to the side of the road and slowed down. The rear door opened and the bird-like man leapt out. He was thrown off balance for an instant, but recovered his equilibrium almost instantly, and bounded for the woods at the side of the road and disappeared.

"Keep following the cab," Blood shouted.

The taxi up from screeched into a crossroads and slowed. The other rear door flew open and Mr. Johnson piled out. He jumped into the road and kept running fast. The cab suddenly skidded and lurched into the ditch. It turned over onto two wheels, wobbled to one side, and went over onto its roof.

"Stop your cab," Blood ordered.

The driver brought the taxi to a stop, his face yellowed by the sight of the cab in front of him. Blood leaped out and ran for the crossroads. He crouched and half ran, half hopped across the crossroads. He hit the ditch just as a

shot came. Mr. Johnson had picked himself out a tree, and he was making the most of his shelter. Two more shots and Blood had to pull himself into the muddy ditch to keep from being sliced in two.

Blood lifted his .38 and fired once into the trees.

"Come on out, Johnson," he called out. "You're not going to get away. The whole state police force will be out here in two minutes. Come out with your hands high."

There was a laugh from the blackened clump of trees. "What about Sam, Blood? Sam's coming up behind you. You saw him duck into the trees, didn't you? What'd you think he was doing, running away? He'll be here long before the state troopers, Blood. May as well say so long right now."

Blood licked his lips. He lifted his head and tried to make out the silhouette of the cab he had come in. If only the idiot had enough initiative to clear out fast and call the police—

The cab started up, made a wide turn in the road, and raced out for town. Then, as Blood watched a flame of fire stabbed out from the woods on the opposite side of the road. The cab slowly veered to the left across the highway, ran straight out into the middle of a weed-choked field and jolted to a stop.

Blood slid on his stomach in the grass and edged his way from the gulley toward the clump of trees Johnson had just given up. But in the middle of the field, before he could reach the shelter of the trees, Johnson saw him. There was a soft laugh and a blast of gunflame not ten feet from him. It was followed by the sound of running feet, and Sam's jubilant voice, "You got him, Jay! You got him good!"

Johnson chuckled off to the side and fired once again. Blood lay still, an agonizing pain in his forearm. One of the bullets had hit him, and his hand felt paralyzed. Gritting his teeth, he slid his left arm around and gripped the .38. He was only a fair shot with his left, but he could still make them jump a little.

Sam the birdman appeared suddenly, silhouetted in the blackness of the night. He was holding his gun directly down on Blood. The Federal man flipped over with his left hand and fired. Sam recoiled in surprise and ducked.

Blood fired again, this time lower. Sam screamed, and sank to his knees. The long grass concealed him for a moment, but Blood knew that he had scored a hit.

Only—Sam was still moving. Blood could see him now, crawling toward him, a crimson froth bubbling from his lips.

Blood lifted his .38 again and

aimed it steadily at Sam's head. Sam lifted his own gun and stopped crawling.

"Shoot, Sam," cried Mr. Johnson, his voice quivering. "Kill him! Can't you hear me, Sam? You're close enough!"

Sam turned his head, looking across the field at the spot where Mr. Johnson lay. Then he slowly turned his head back to Johnny Blood, and his mouth relaxed in an idiotic grin. The gun dropped from his hand and he slumped to the ground, as if he were laughing at a huge, monstrous, ugly joke on his friend Mr. Johnson.

Johnson leaped to his feet with a wild, despairing cry, pulling the trigger of his own weapon twice. The bullets landed close to Blood, but they didn't hit him. Johnson turned then and ran across the field for the coverage of the woods.

"Stop, Johnson!" Blood cried. He stood up and trained the pistol on Johnson's running figure. "Stop!"

Johnson didn't stop. Blood fired, and Johnson went down.

Johnny Blood fired once more with his gun, left-handed. Then the ground swirled about him, and he also sank slowly down in a spiral, folding quickly and easily.

#### XIV

THE STATE POLICE gave Blood a shot of liquor and some first aid

for the flesh wound in his wrist. They told him Sam the birdman was dead, Johnson seriously wounded. They told him that he'd better get some rest himself before he tried to file a full report.

Blood shook his head. "Bandage me up. I've got to get back to the Harmon station."

The police shrugged, bandaged him up, and drove him back to the station.

He knew Boots Hiller would be there. He knew she'd be sitting amidst the suitcases, waiting for him. He saw many things now, and he saw them clearly for the first time. He saw himself, too, and he wondered why he'd never realized how it was before.

Boots Hiller was sitting on the long bench, waiting. The bags were piled at her feet, and her eyes were enormous with worry. She stood up as he came in through the entrance of the station. She ran over to him while he walked slowly and deliberately over to her.

"Johnny," she said. "What happened? Did you get hurt?"

She looked at the bandages and tears filled her eyes. He grinned flatly. "I got hurt. I got hurt all over. Sit down and we'll listen to my bones knit."

She shook her head, her eyes tear-filled. "Do you think those men are the last ones? Are they dead?"

Blood shook his head grimly.

"They're dead, Boots. They'll never bother you again."

Her face lighted up, her green eyes were bright, her lips were moist and desirable. "Oh, I'm so glad. It was such a horrible nightmare running away from them, Johnny. I hope you can understand that, and put yourself in my place."

Blood nodded his head slowly. He reached in with his left hand for a pack of cigarettes. "I've been putting myself in your place, Boots. That's exactly what I've been doing."

He got out the cigarette and clumsily lit himself up. "Why'd you do it?"

Boots Hiller looked slowly up at Blood's face and watched him carefully. There was a sudden anxiety in her face, a sudden tension all through her. There was doubt, and fear, and wariness.

"Why'd I do what Johnny?"

Blood stared out into the darkness through the window of the station. "Why'd you pull down that shade, Boots?"

"Wh-what shade?" Boots Hiller drew away from Johnny Blood. She glanced suddenly out the window at the station platform, and then over at the magazine stand in the corner where a wizened old man sat. She clutched the handbag in her lap. She had turned very pale.

Blood turned and looked in her eyes. "The shade on the compart-

ment window. So I couldn't see Mr. Johnson and Sam."

"Sam—and Mr. Johnson?"

"Numbers three and four of the Prince's heisters," Blood said. "They all wore masks at the Prince's job, Boots. And so did number five. Funny I never thought of it that way—that number five didn't necessarily have to be a man."

Boots Hiller looked down at her handbag and reached inside it. She smiled at Blood. Her smile got tired. She saw the .38 Blood had in his left hand, pointed at her. She sagged a bit.

She pulled out her lipstick and made up her lips. "I—I guess I've been biting off my lipstick worrying about you," she said brightly. "What's the gun for?"

Blood kicked at the suitcase with his foot. "So you claim you don't know what's in those suitcases, Boots?"

Boots Hiller frowned. "Clothes," she said. "Clothes and—and things."

Blood stood up slowly, still holding the .38 on her. "You don't mind if I have a look at those 'things', do you, Boots?"

Boots Hiller gripped her handbag suddenly and her hand shot inside it. Blood fired. The bullet from his gun tore the bag out of Boots Hiller's hands and sent it clattering to the floor of the station. A neat little .25 automatic slid out onto the wooden floor.

Blood stopped over and picked it up. He dropped it into his pocket with a wry smile. He looked coldly down at Boots Hiller's hand. One of them was covered with blood. She was holding it tightly, and her face was white with shock. She didn't say a word.

"We'll get you bandaged up in a minute, lover," Blood said.

He stooped over and picked up a key from the contents of her handbag. He fitted it into one of the suitcases, but it didn't go. He tried another. That one fit.

He opened the suitcase and fished around inside. It was full of underthings and dresses and many feminine frills. Nothing else.

Blood stood up, a tight grin on his mouth. He turned to Boots Hiller. His eyes were flat green. He said, "I guess you're right, Boots. I take it all back." He continued, blandly, "I guess you were telling the truth."

Suddenly Boots Hiller looked up. She had been paying no attention to the suitcases. She looked down at the scattered underthings, and her eyes flamed with rage and anger.

"Why, those two-timing, double-crossing bastards!" Her eyes blazed and she turned to Blood. "How do you like that? *They* double-crossed *me*! They had it set up that way from the start—so I'd be next to go, right after you. How do you like that?"

"Boots," said Blood softly.

She turned to him, her eyes still blazing, her face flushed with anger. She turned and looked down at Blood's hands.

"Yes," she said. Blood fastened the bracelet on her right arm and linked the other to his. "Can you imagine that—those two-timing ugly sons! I'm glad they got wiped out!"

Blood led her across the station. He grinned down at the handcuffs. "A lot like being married, isn't it?"

They walked out of the station into the waiting police car. One of the cops in the front seat whistled as he saw Boots Hiller's shapely legs.

"Shut up," she said, "or my boy friend will smash you over the head with our marriage license."

They climbed in the back seat and the car started up on the long, lonely trip to New York.

## XV

BIG RED-HEADED Jerry Bowles sprawled out in his easy chair and knocked an ash off his cigar into the BB shot tray on the arm of the chair. He tipped his head back and gazed up at the ceiling.

"And that's it, Johnny," he said quietly, watching the smoke from the cigar spread along the ceiling. "The dough was right where Mr. Johnson and Sambo left it—in the apartment down on McDougal. They never intended for



Boots Hiller to get it at all. The two of them intended to carry the money to Hong Kong and get rid of it from there."

Blood sighed. "Boots was done for, and she didn't even know it."

Jerry Bowles laughed. "They didn't trust her, Johnny. And you know why they didn't?"

Blood shook his head. "Constitutional disability to level?"

think she had a couple of wrinkles up her sleeve—if you hadn't caught on at the station. I figure she was going to try to get you into lighting out with her, and then see if she could talk you into a cozy little deal. Two million in folding money could be attractive—even to a nice guy like you."

"Nerts," sighed Blood. "Don't

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## THE SOUND OF MURDER

A COMPLETE ED NOON NOVEL

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

*The murders were chilling and sinister, for each victim had died in a red room to the strains of Ravel's Bolero and each victim had been a young girl. And there were almost too many suspects, all moving in a half-world that completely baffled the police. A top-flight mystery shocker by a master of suspense.*

---

Bowles blew smoke out. "No. She was in love with you, and they knew it. They didn't trust her because they thought she'd run out on them and leave them holding the empty Prince's sacks."

Blood shrugged. "Turned out they were wrong."

Bowles frowned. "Maybe. I

build up any romantic angles. She was just plain bad, Jerry."

Bowles shrugged. "I know, I know. Case closed. Now, how about that martini I promised you?"

Blood closed his eyes. "Good idea. Your wife's been rustling around in the kitchen for fifteen

minutes. She must have brewed up ambrosia by now. Tell her to bring on the drinks."

Bowles smiled, letting the smoke drift about him. The door to the kitchen opened and a red-headed girl moved slowly into the room. She was dressed in green, and her eyes were a strange and luminous shade of gray. Her legs were long and slim, and her knees almost showed. She was smiling when she set the drinks down on the arm of Johnny Blood's chair.

Blood opened one eye and looked up at the very attractive face peering down into his. His eyes moved along her long arms, and the green dress that clung to her body as she bent over him.

The redhead said, "I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Blood."

Johnny Blood stared at the girl for a moment, and then the shock of her beauty and her attractiveness slackened a bit. After all, he and Jerry Bowles were two civilized men. He grinned at his host.

"Damn it, Jerry, you have all the luck. Now, why couldn't I have latched onto something like that lovely wife of yours? Instead I have to pick out the wrong kind of woman—one with green eyes. Myself, I always did go for gray."

Bowles tapped another bit of ash off his cigar. He looked dreamily out the window into the darkened night. "It's time for me to take my evening walk, I think," he said. He stood up. "Forgot to tell you one thing, Johnny. Carol's not my wife. She's my sister."

Bowles leisurely sauntered across the room and puffed on his cigar. At the door he turned, looked at Johnny Blood.

"My unmarried sister," Bowles said.

Blood gazed over Carol Bowles' unmarried, shapely shoulder, dumbfounded. Jerry Bowles grasped the door knob and twisted the door open. He gave a broad, friendly, very amused wink and slammed the door behind him.



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# The Broken Windshield

by FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS



*An Inspector French story just has to be on the brilliant side, for Freeman W. Crofts has created a British police officer who's five-ways famous.*

STRANGE AS IT may seem, I've always had at least the rudiments of a social conscience, so I'm going to tell you, as a sort of warning, exactly what has brought me to this very uncomfortable death cell. My advice is, stay away from murder. No matter how clever you think yourself, there'll be a flaw in your carefully planned scheme somewhere.

It was my urgent need for more money, of course, that transformed me, John Rollett, from a respectable butler to a thief and a murderer. I had a good job with Vincent Playford MP, a rich bachelor living alone. The indoor staff were myself, a housekeeper-cook, and Jenny the housemaid.

Jenny was as attractive a girl as you'll find in service, and I fell hard for her. She said she'd marry me when I had a pub of my own. Well, I'd always wanted a pub, so the only problem was how to get one.

That was where the money came in. I hadn't enough to buy a pub. Jenny said I must do better, and of course I realized that if I didn't I'd lose her.

The house was like a museum,

full of all sorts of small valuables, jewelled Eastern ornaments and that sort of thing. They were piled on tables and set out in showcases.

Playford was careless about them. I suppose as a sportsman they weren't in his line. At all events he never seemed to check them over, as he should have done, from time to time.

Well, you can guess what happened. One day I slipped a gold snuffbox out of a case, rearranging the rest of the things so that its absence wouldn't be noticed. I'd have taken it to a fence if I'd known where to find one, but I had no difficulty in pawning it. I told the pawn broker it had been given long ago to my mother, and he nodded in quiet understanding. It brought in quite a sum.

After such a success I couldn't lay off the thing and one small object after another followed the snuffbox. I inquired into the prices of pubs and found that with reasonable luck I would have enough to buy one in less than a year. It made me feel keen, and I stopped worrying about the possibility that the thefts might be discovered.

Then two months ago the blow fell. Playford called me and said he was giving a set of miniatures in gold locketts to a nephew as a wedding present, and would I get them out and polish them up ready for packing.

It was a blow because I'd pawned three. I tried to get them

back, but the redemption period had passed and they'd been sold.

I won't bore you with the struggle that took place in my mind. On the one hand discovery, loss of the job, loss of Jenny and the pub—and a long stretch in prison. And after I got out poverty and unending misery, for I'd never get a decent job again. On the other hand—

Well, I decided to kill Vincent Playford. I believed he alone knew what was in the collection and that if he was out of the way no suspicion would arise. I soon devised a plan.

As you no doubt remember, a lot of cars had their windshields broken about that time, apparently by some sort of pellet striking them. I don't think they ever found out just what it was.

Playford lived at one of the worst places, on the Portsmouth Road not far from Esher. I decided to use the idea in the hope that the fatal outcome would be put down to the original joker.

The gun would present no difficulty. As I said, Playford was a confirmed sportsman and he had several. All I wanted was a steady hand, and I had that. Best of all, the scheme was safe—absolutely foolproof.

I knew that the very next morning Playford would be going to town, returning in time for lunch. I decided I couldn't have fallen heir to a better opportunity. As

soon as he left I started cleaning the silver; then before he was likely to turn up, I went to the gun-room and removed his small rifle from the eight-weapon rack.

I didn't know whether he had ever used that particular gun for sport, or whether it was some kind of officers' service weapon. But it was a handy little tool and would just serve my purpose.

I moved the other guns so he wouldn't notice that one of them was missing, loaded the rifle, and with it under my old gardener's coat, went down through the trees toward the road.

Playford's ground was on the side that cars took coming from town. I went through on to the common, hid behind some shrubs close to the road and waited.

Presently I saw Playford's car coming. He was alone in it and not driving very fast. I aimed carefully and when he was close by let him have it. I saw the spot on his forehead where the bullet went in.

The car bore left, crashed into the wood and overturned. I crept back through the bushes unseen. I didn't dare bring the rifle into the house, for I knew I wouldn't have had time to clean it before the music started.

So I climbed a tree I'd already selected, and tied it on to the top of one of the upper branches where it wouldn't be visible from below. A temporary measure, of course. I intended to drop it into

the River Wey during the night. I hurried to the house and before the news arrived I was busy again with the silver.

Well, as you may guess, after that the police wasted no time in starting their investigation. The place was black with them, snooping around and asking a great many questions.

They found out from their list of licenses that the rifle was missing and of course, they asked me about it. But I was ready for them. I said Playford had taken it with him on his last trip to Scotland and must have given it to someone, for he hadn't brought it back.

For some reason they seemed reluctant to accept that explanation. But when I added that I distinctly remembered packing it in its case, and loading it in the car, they appeared considerably less skeptical.

The investigation dragged on and on. The police were seldom out of the place. I couldn't begin to figure out what they were after. But they let me alone—alone, that is, until the day when they said that some more information was needed. They'd have to ask me to go with them to headquarters to answer a few additional questions.

Well, I went. The inspector, a man named French, started interrogating me with the tenacity of a bulldog.

"Now, Rollett," Inspector

French began, "we've found out a great deal more about this affair. The nephew to whom Mr. Playford had promised the miniatures noticed that the set wasn't complete. This made us think, and we got an old inventory that had been drawn up when the stuff was originally insured. It showed that quite a lot of it had disappeared.

"It had the look of theft, so we advertized and found that some of the miniatures had been pawned. In fact, we recovered a number of the actual articles. What do you think we found on some of them? Your fingerprints."

The reference to the insurance inventory had shaken me, but this more direct accusation looked like a complete knock-out. Then I saw it wasn't. I explained that I was continually cleaning the collection, so my prints would naturally be on some of the jewelry. Inspector French nodded, and went on:

"We also learned considerably more about you. We learned that you were planning to be married and had been inquiring into the price of pubs. It all seemed suggestive, Rollett, and well—it made us particularly interested in the rifle. You see, the doctor tells us that the deceased was killed with

a bullet from that make of rifle. We know from the licence that Mr. Playford had one and now it's disappeared."

Inspector French stopped and looked at me so intently that I felt a sudden panic. I thought they'd found it, for I'd never been able to get it down from the tree. But no: he went on normally: "You say Mr. Playford took it to Scotland and didn't bring it back?"

"Yes, I'm absolutely sure of that," I answered.

"Well, we've inquired from his Scottish friends and no one there saw it. However, let that pass. I think you said you packed it in its case and put it in the car with the other guns?"

"Correct."

"Is this the case?" Inspector French asked, drawing it out from behind his chair.

I was growing reassured. It looked as if they hadn't found the rifle after all. "Yes, that's it," I agreed.

Then suddenly my blood ran cold. The case! I'd forgotten to destroy it. I'd sworn I'd loaded it for Scotland, but there it was, giving the lie to my entire defense.

After that they searched until they found the rifle.

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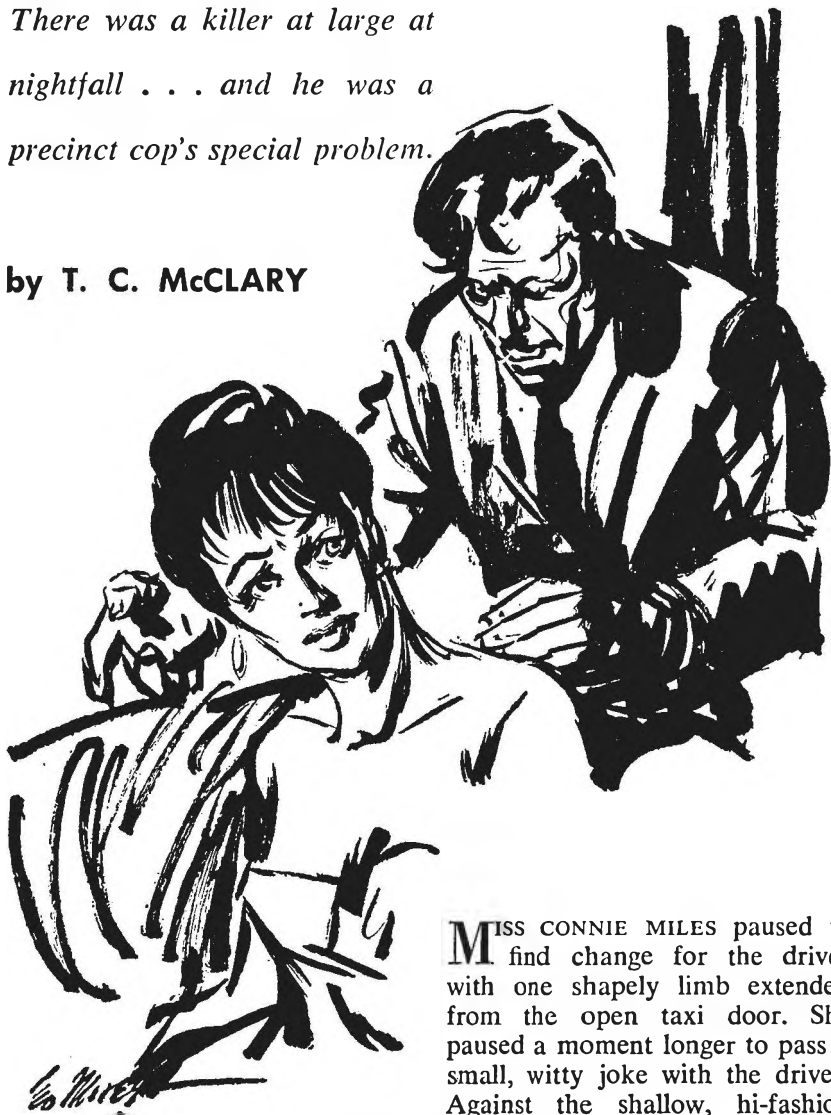
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DEC.-62

# Early of a Summer Evening

*There was a killer at large at nightfall . . . and he was a precinct cop's special problem.*

by T. C. McClary



MISS CONNIE MILES paused to find change for the driver with one shapely limb extended from the open taxi door. She paused a moment longer to pass a small, witty joke with the driver. Against the shallow, hi-fashion

© 1962, by T. C. McClary



vener of the Sutton neighborhood, she had the distinction of being regular—a plain man's woman without wish or necessity to look like an animated mannequin.

From the drugstore doorway at the corner, Detective Neale Buell watched her with somber approval. *She could have been any one of them*, he thought. *She could be the next.*

The idea put sweat clear back between his shoulders. He watched her vanish into her apartment doorway and watched her balcony until he saw the glint of her French doors opening.

It was only afternoon, of course. So far, the strangler had shown a nice dramatic appreciation by never killing before dusk. *Early of a summer evening*—Buell remembered one of the tabloid descriptions. Always between June fifteenth and July thirtieth. Four consecutive years of murders without any other clue, except that the victims had been women living alone in this exclusive neighborhood. Last year there had been two strangled women.

Today was July sixteenth and Buell had been released to General Duty, which meant, in effect, crime prevention. He tried to create a mental picture of what the killer might look like, and came up with a kaleidoscope of assorted types.

The experts at Homicide had been more definite in their specu-

lations. They conceived of the killer as a tall, long-armed man with powerful hands—an imaginative, dramatic type who might be an actor, a phoney cult leader, or a gigolo of sorts. Homicide had him tagged as a psycho, with some fixation against women who lived alone. The Homicide experts accounted for the dates as 'the cycle of compulsion.'

Buell wasn't up on all that stuff. He thought the killer might look like—and be—almost any man in the whole neighborhood. And that he picked his victims simply because they were alone with handy necks. He thought the experts might have picked the wrong fixation. In his experience, crackpot killers sought out a particular type with a close similarity of age, figure, hair, occupational background.

But the women he had slain had possessed nothing physical or moral or occupational in common. To Neale Buell the summer murder dates were the key, but not necessarily a compulsive period in the sense that Homicide used the term.

Homicide's theory was that the killer would feel that he had to murder some woman or women during the summer weeks to give him appeasement. Buell thought there was some non-psychotic criminal motive, such as attempted extortion, and that they might not have been murdered at all if they had capitulated to his demands.

In Buell's book, the strangling had been too damned neat and efficient and devoid of any personal feeling for the victims. They had been accompanied by no brutality, no slightest sign of sexual deviation. Apparently, the women had been in the midst of a conversation with the killer when he had snapped their heads back by the hair with his left hand and strangled them expertly with the right hand.

The killings had taken place so unexpectedly that only one victim had had sufficient opportunity to realize her danger and put up a struggle.

But neither the Homicide experts, nor Earle Buell had come up with the necessary 'common motive' to explain the murders. The only points the numerous slayings had in common were the dates, the neighborhood, and the fact that the women lived alone—single or separated or divorced.

He watched Tommy Taylor walking a wobbly Scotty up the block and thought of one other common factor. All the women had owned pets of some kind. But practically every woman in that neighborhood owned pets, either for companionship and because they loved animals, or for display purposes.

Miss Honedew Childer, for instance, changed her pets on a fashion basis. She recently bought white poodles, so that she could

dye their fur pink, blue and purple to go with her many colored costumes.

Buell hailed Tommy, who said that his boss, Willy Ottomyer the veterinarian, wanted to see Buell about a stolen dog. Buell nodded and asked, "Isn't that Mrs. Donant's Scotty that she was all broken up about?"

Tommy nodded. "We saved him," he said with gentle satisfaction. The Scotty looked up at him and wagged its stubby tail. Tommy smiled and said, "He's coming along fine."

"Mrs. Donant will take a special plane from Bar Harbor when she hears he's well," Buell said. "That's for sure."

Tommy shook his head. "Not her. She's got sense. She'll leave him here, and let him enjoy all of his favorite smells and familiar spots until he's in really good shape again."

Tommy Taylor frowned with aggravation. He was fifty years old, with an elf-mat of grey hair, but he had the body and features of an adolescent boy.

"Most of these rich women won't listen to reason about animals," he complained. "You can't move animals when they're still part sick, Mr. Buell. They've got to have their home cave, their neighborhood. But you can't tell that to these women because they won't listen. They want their pets with them so they can show them

off, or have something to pass the time with—”

He broke off, scowling, and looked aggrieved. “Society women are mostly too self-centered to give a damn. If they were all like Mrs. Donant, you wouldn’t have so many dogs dying when there’s no need.”

Buell masked his sympathetic humor. Tommy was no simpleton, but he was passionately devoted to sick animals. He had saved scores of pets that Ottomyer had given up from the veterinarian standpoint. Once he had quelled a mad dog by the sound of his voice alone and had taken it captive with his bare hands, which was supposed to be impossible.

Buell said speculatively, “Most of those women who got strangled had pets, didn’t they?”

Tommy nodded. “They all did. Those Homicide men questioned me something awful about going up to Mrs. Mason’s to take her dog back the night she was killed.”

“What did you find there?” Buell asked curiously.

“She didn’t answer the doorbell. She was dead, I guess,” Tommy said.

“Well, that excuses her for not answering,” Buell said. “She couldn’t have had a better excuse.”

He knew about Homicide’s investigation of the local trade and delivery men. Tommy Taylor had been shaken down like baking flour over the Mason incident. In fact,

the neighborhood had grown pretty angry at the police treatment of him. Everybody knew him, and he was about the only really mild and gentle character in that area of pride, fashion and wealth.

“Why do you think those women were killed?” Buell asked idly.

“I suppose they did something wrong,” Tommy said. He puzzled on it like a boy. “You don’t always know all about women, Mr. Buell,” he said finally. “Most of them seem awful nice. But then they get so excited about going away they do things that are plain crazy.”

“How’s that?” Buell asked with sharpening interest. It had occurred to him that a man in Tommy’s spot might know something or see a very different side of the pet owners than the one the world was familiar with.

“You take Miss Devoe,” Tommy said. “You know, the TV star with the French poodles. Well, ordinarily she’s one of the easiest-going customers we’ve got. But she was dead set on taking her dogs to Hollywood, and she had me up working on them all one night, reshaping their coats, very special, the way she had sketched out for me. I told her it wouldn’t work. Their coats just weren’t long enough to re-style. But she refused to listen.”

“So she jumped on you for botching the job?” Buell suggested.

“In a way—yes. After all that rush work, when she saw how they



looked, she wouldn't even take them."

"Was she nasty about it?"

"No, she wasn't," Tommy admitted. "She just said it didn't matter. She didn't need them along anyway. But if she didn't need them, why all that rush. And why didn't she listen to me in the first place."

Tommy looked at Buell intently. "Maybe I'm not making it clear. See, she was all right again by then. But day before I couldn't talk

sense to her. She was goofy with the excitement of going away. She'd have taken them then if they had been sheared like the Count de Boni's Mexican hairless dogs."

Buell lighted a cigarette, nodded thanks, and headed for the drugstore on the corner. It might have been an utterly inconsequential conversation. Both neighborhood cops and dog walkers picked up hundreds of useless bits of gossip and opinion. But there just might be something in that vacation angle, he told himself, now that he thought about it. A TV star's last night at home, no telephone calls or reminders of an indiscretion to worry about, for instance.

It could change the aspect of the cases considerably. Right now, the assumption was that whoever the killer was, he had known a wide variety of neighborhood women intimately enough to have friendly access to their homes. But suppose that he hadn't known them at all, or only casually, and that they had invited the attentions of a prowling maniac under the excitement and indiscretion of going away the next day?

When Buell arrived at the drugstore he made his way to a phone booth and called a friend at Homicide. "Just checking those summer stranglings," he said. "I was wondering if all of the women had vacations planned?"

"If you've got an angle you'd

better let us handle it," his friend growled.

"I haven't got one. I'm just hunting," Buell said.

"Well, we've done a little hunting ourselves," the friend said sarcastically. "It might surprise you, but we even found they were taking vacations, all of them, and we checked out every damned possibility that might tie in—boy friends they might have been breaking off with, possible one-night stands they wouldn't want to be bothered with after they left town, men who might be vacationing at the same resort spots themselves. We found plenty of leads, but they all came out clean."

The Homicide detective paused, then suggested grudgingly, "You might keep an eye on that whacky count you've got up there."

"De Boni?" Buell grunted. "He's too busy chasing women to take time out for murder. Society women alibied him four times, didn't they?"

"Yeah, society dames," the Homicide detective grunted cynically. "But also, one of your local call girls that your precinct can't get the goods on said that if de Boni couldn't get a woman alive, he'd take her dead. That guy is a real cuckoo."

"Will do," Buell said.

"And if you get an angle, call us," his friend said. "We don't want this case messed up by amateurs. We've got to break it a hundred

percent or you'll be pounding the sticks and we'll be in the ocean."

Homicide hung up. Buell sat on in the booth smarting at the slur. With its modern laboratory and criminal psychology specialists, Homicide was getting the idea a precinct cop should be limited to drunks and hoodlums and lost children.

"De Boni!" He thought of Homicide's brainstorm with disgust. Why hell, that male peacock would be so busy if he got close enough to strangle a woman that he'd leave marks all over her, even if he did kill her. That little call girl hadn't been far wrong.

Of course, there was always the chance of the odd quirk in human nature, the angle so out of character that it might be overlooked.

He came out of the booth and stood looking over the rack of paperback best sellers. Sex on every cover, sadism and raw, brutal violence in most stories. Too many millions of readers hopped up with sex and murder like a bunch of hoodlum kids jagged on bad horse. It was a wonder there wasn't a sex murder on every corner every night.

But—the stranglings had not been sex murders. They had been so efficient that if there had been a possible underworld angle, it would have looked like the work of a syndicate of the Murder Incorporated type.

Downstreet a flurry of move-

ment drew his attention from the books, and he looked through the window to watch de Boni sally forth from his apartment, the count's three long-leashed Mexican hairless dogs leaping frantically. The count wore a spotted bowtie, and a carnation in his coat lapel. Not only was he dressed impeccably. The dogs were a gimmick trained to ensnare any but the most alert and nimble of females.

Buell frowned. The count just didn't have the murder smell. Criminal assault, blackmail, poison-pen letters—Buell could think of a dozen major crimes that he might suspect him of automatically. But psychopathic murder almost invariably tied in with some sense of inferiority, and Buell could imagine nothing that might penetrate the count's ego and arrogant vanity.

Then something clicked in Buell's mind. Wise little men like Tommy could stir up some odd thoughts, sometimes. The one thing that might have caused some of the slain women to invite a man like the count into their homes was the excitement of going away, and the assurance that he couldn't become a day-after-day pest.

And the one thing that might penetrate the count's vanity was the sudden knowledge that he'd been made a fool of, that he had been 'enticed' in for amusement, and that the victims-to-be were secretly laughing at him in their self-

assurance that they would be beyond his toils before he could achieve amatory victory.

Buell watched the count give considerable attention to Connie Miles apartment entrance across the street, and then look up at her balcony, where the curtains on her open French doors fluttered in the breeze. Then the count straightened and his chest swelled, and Buell could picture a smirk of anticipation on his vulture face.

Buell didn't like it. Maybe, he thought, because he did like Connie Miles, and under less economic and social difference, would have made a point of knowing her more personally. Nevertheless, he still didn't like it, and he was a direct-thinking guy, and he moved down her block for two reasons. One, to let the count see that he was around. Two, to check the layout of her apartment house.

It was a small, exclusive house without a doorman. There were big double doors at the street entrance, the front pair open until midnight. There was a well-lighted foyer with three marble steps, which held the apartment bells and mailboxes. The inner doors were always locked. The inner foyer was large, well-lighted, and could be seen from the street through transparent door-drapes.

The elevator was self-operated, with emergency controls that would make it possible for a killer to bypass a stop at any interven-

ing floor if the button were pushed during his escape descent. The service elevator and fire stairs could practically be ruled out. A prowler would have to be admitted by the superintendent.

Buell thought of using some small excuse to ring Connie Miles, then decided that a personal wish to see her safe and sound had nothing to do with his policeman's job of tracking down a killer. He had the key to the Trelawny's, who lived immediately above her. They had already left town for the summer, and he had promised to keep an eye on their jade collection, and water their balcony plants occasionally.

He went upstairs, opened the Trelawny doors to air the place, watered the plants, and then stood on the balcony enjoying a cold beer and smoke. Leaning against the balcony rail, he could hear Connie Miles on the telephone in her living room below. She was giving orders for her furniture to be covered for the summer, and told the service she would leave the key with the super.

So she was going away, he thought, and felt a wave of conscious relief wash through him. At least she'd be out of the killer's path for the time being. He thought of Tommy's comment upon women who were leaving town, and grinned to himself, wondering if Connie Miles would be crazy enough at this point to date a cop.

She was a real piece of woman. Not TV star or society-set glamorous. That was something else.

His cop's mind returned to less personal angles. It was a fair bet she was using the telephone beside the couch, sitting at the balcony end. He had been up to her place twice—once when she'd reported the theft of the mink coat, once when he'd brought her home from identifying it. She'd given him cooled beer in a chilled mug, which was the way it should be served, and a hamburger spiced of garlic.

All of the strangler's victims so far had been sitting on their couches when murdered. Apparently, they had been chatting amiably with the killer with no suspicion of the danger they were in. There had been no indications of preceding argument, such as a cigarette mashed out in temper.

The victims had not even suspected harm when the killer moved near enough to grab their hair. They might have been talking with somebody like himself. And if there was no motive other than psychopathic compulsion to strangle, then it could happen to Connie Miles as easily as to anyone else.

He felt the mist of sweat on his brow again, and thanked God that she was going away. He finished his smoke and beer, gave the big shrub the last of the water, and prepared to leave. There was no sound from the apartment below

now, and he leaned over the rail, listening more intently. Lord, it sure seemed a long way to the sidewalk when you looked straight down!

Then he saw the girl moving toward the avenue, saw her ensnared by the count's leashed dogs, and saw her disentangle herself but stand on chatting volubly a moment before she parted company with him. Buell frowned, remembering the half-dozen times he had seen her frost the count before, and Tommy's comment about women leaving on vacation springing into his mind again. She had certainly not frosted the count just now, and there had been a perkiness in her walk when she'd left him.

Buell tried to define his irritation as official worry or personal chagrin, and couldn't decide which of the two emotions it was. But it made him conscious again of just how damned much he liked the girl. He closed the balcony windows and left the apartment, drifting two blocks west to find Willy Ottomyer standing on the curb outside his pet shop. Presumably, he was taking the air, but what he was actually doing was keeping out of the middle of a discussion between Connie Miles and Tommy Taylor.

Tommy was saying stubbornly, "But Miss Miles, your little parakeet still has scales on its legs!"

"Then dip them in kerosene, the way we used to do with chickens!" she said with exasperation. "Good

heavens, Tommy, you act like you'd hatched it!"

"Let me treat it once more at least," Tommy pleaded.

"All right, but have it at my house between eight and nine tonight, and no more silly excuses. You hear?"

Buell glanced sidewise at Ottomyer, who shrugged his heavy shoulders. "He gets stubborn when they're still sick," the vet said. "But he's right. Pets shouldn't be moved until they're well. Still, he does get over-sentimental."

"What's he think when you have to destroy pups and kittens?"

"Ho-ho! Then comes the revolution in the basement! But usually, he ends up doing it himself."

"He kills them?" Buell asked with wonder.

Ottomyer nodded with a chuckle. "He won't trust me. I'm just the boss. He remembers that before the new deep-sleep serum, I used strychnine and monoxide."

"Is this new serum gentler?"

"Yes. It just puts them to sleep and they never wake up. It's like jugular strangulation. The brain dies before the body. That's what used to worry Tommy. He feared that the animals knew what was happening to them."

"I can dig that myself," Buell grunted. "Once I was shot dead. It took them forty minutes to get my heart and lungs going again. I wasn't conscious for more than a few seconds, but it was long enough to



know my body was already dead, and it was more terrible than any pain I've ever had."

Then Buell asked, "This stuff easy to get?"

"Like an atomic bomb!" Ottomyer laughed. "And it would take a very big dose and leave a purple splotch on a human Detective Buell. You don't have to worry."

"Just curious," Buell said.

They both turned at the tap of Connie's heels coming through the open door. "That assistant of yours!" she told Ottomyer. "Thank God, it isn't my child he's treating or I'd never get it back!"

She looked at Buell and her vexation vanished and she smiled with liking. "Why, it's my master sleuth! You never came back for another hamburger. I must be a stinking cook."

"No," he said. "You're the only decent hamburger cook since my mother. Now, if you're going away, I won't have the chance to use my rain-check."

"If you're on duty tonight—" she said and then screwed up her nose. "Damn! I needed a man to take down suitcases and invited that bore, Count de Boni, up at nine!"

"Just when I sign off," Buell said. "I'll bet I could sit him out."

"Well, you just trot up and do that then!" she said enthusiastically. "I can handle wolf, but it's a hot evening for it. Only I do have to have suitcases down to pack."



Buell grinned. He felt better. So she was thoroughly alert to the count's behavior, and had only asked him up because of the suitcases.

"I'll probably come in right on his heels," he said.

She nodded and beamed. "That will be fine with me! I'll put the mugs in the freezer when I go back."

She gave Ottomyer another look, a customer's warning look. "You be sure Tommy brings my Princess over! He's got more excuses than a tax dodger, and I won't have time to worry about it tomorrow."

"I will make sure he does before I leave," Ottomyer promised.

"But not before eight," she added. "I won't be home."

They all nodded pleasantly and she left, moving off with her striding, yet so-womanly gait.

"A vigorous lady," Ottomyer

noted. "Flesh and blood. I should be twenty years younger."

"You were doing all right the night Mrs. Mason was killed," Buell noted. "I had to check that myself."

The veterinarian laughed wryly. "It was lucky I could be checked!" He spread his husky hands. "I have the hands, the knowledge, and I knew all of the poor women."

"Well, Homicide even checked the precinct detectives," Buell grunted. "Everybody around here got a thorough going over."

"So the count was complaining." Willy Ottomyer laughed. "Or maybe it was boasting. You see, he has a very special worry, if it happens again."

"Yes?" Buell tilted his head down as he lighted a cigarette.

"Yes. He is afraid he will not be able to remember which of the neighborhood beauties he was visiting at the time." Ottomyer clapped his hands to his middle and guffawed.

"He told me that himself," Ottomyer went on. "He said, 'What happens if I think I was with the lovely new tenant at four-fifty-six when I was with an old one at the River House? *Mon Dieu*, I cannot be expected to get married just to have an alibi the next time for where I am when people are committing murders.'" And Ottomyer chuckled again.

Buell grinned grudgingly. The

count was so damned taken with himself that it could be amusing. But his thoughts were somber. Six twenty-eight and growing dusk, July sixteenth, and the count had a date with a lady who was going away and who would laugh at his ardor in any case. His date was for nine, but suppose he was smart and would show up early?

Buell was sweating again. He wished to God that Connie Miles were married. Right at the moment, he wished she were married to anyone, but preferably to himself.

He made automatic inquiry of Ottomyer about the stolen dog, then took off fast to locate Connie Miles or Count de Boni. He found the count first, over his head, for once, in his own foils. His dogs had snared three knockouts in one bundle, and the count was going crazy trying to decide which one to flirt with.

He came out of the melee badly. The only name or address he might have gotten from any of them was that of their lawyer.

He stood watching them leave as if he had been struck with undeserved affliction. He called upon heaven to witness that he had done nothing except extricate the three ladies like a gentleman, and ask the size of their nylons to replace them. He swore—

And then he saw a single silhouette against the street light at the corner. Sly, elegant of move-

ment, stepping from a taxi with the unhurried decorum of a lady stepping from a carriage. The count straightened, adjusted the carnation in his lapel, and was off like a beagle on the scent.

It was obvious that he was a one-woman man. He snared his lady and, shortly, escorted her into a swank cocktail bar, undoubtedly to get the dimensions of her nylons.

Buell grinned in spite of himself. At least, the dapper Casanova was accounted for for a few minutes. He took the break to grab himself a hamburger at a coffee pot and pick up his car. It was a better cover for trailing, and he meant to keep the count under close surveillance until nine.

At seven-thirty, the count was still at the lounge bar with the lady, evidently ordering dinner. Buell relaxed and took a brief tour around the neighborhood. If the count was in pretty company, he was anchored. It would take him at least an hour for the kind of dinner he would order.

At eight-twenty, Buell was on his way back to watch for the count when he spotted Ottomyer trudging heavily up the avenue toward the subway, which was five long blocks away.

The streets were still hot, and it was a laborious hike for a heavy older man. Buell tooted at him, and pulled up to give him a lift.

The veterinarian took it gratefully, wiping his brow after he got in.

"I stayed late to be sure that Tommy took up Miss Miles' parakeet," he said. He shook his head. "It it not worth it these hot days. But he would argue with the Almighty if an animal is sick."

Buell chuckled. It never ceased to amaze him how stubborn shy, sensitive, overly-gentle people could get. He remembered a boy in his own combat company who had cried when the company bully intentionally squashed a butterfly. Cried like hell, and then knocked holy hell out of the bully.

Ottomyer was saying, "I was thinking after you left. Maybe in my humor I did an injustice to Count de Boni."

"How could you?" the detective asked with irony.

"Well," Ottomyer explained, "it is that maybe he has earned the right to his little vanity. You see, my name is German, but I am from Alsace. I am French. And during the first of the war there was no braver man in France than de Boni. He blocked a Panzer brigade for eighteen hours single-handed. He was one of the great French commandoes. And then with the Occupation, he went underground, and again he was a terror to the Germans."

Buell didn't answer. His back had gone ice cold and his mouth was grim. The unexpected side you never thought of until you knew

about it—a mincing poppingjay who had lived under intense danger and learned, perhaps, the thrill of killing with bare hands.

Ottomyer said with surprise, "But you can let me off here, if you have forgotten something!"

Buell rasped, "I'll bring you back," and touched his siren as he gunned in a U-turn.

Two minutes later he slammed on the brakes in front of the restaurant where he'd left the count. "He just left," the doorman was quick to inform him, in response to an urgent query. "With a young lady."

Buell thought, that could mean anything. Maybe a setup alibi if she considered her reputation precious and he was planning to rejoin her after a brief absence. A married woman, for instance, who'd spent the night with a man would be a sucker to swear later that they'd gone to the movies during the period when they hadn't been together.

He jumped in the car and raced for Connie Miles, who was now his chief worry.

He let himself in the street door with Trelawny's keys. He had to fight against an impulse to stop the ascending car at the floor of Connie's apartment. If he crashed in prematurely he'd only make a fool of himself—and of her. Quite possibly he had guessed wrong and at best, he was not likely to catch a killer. Either he'd bust things up

by intruding, or he'd give the man a getaway chance if he was still there.

He went up to Trelawny's apartment, stripping off his coat and unholstering his gun as he moved to the French doors. He paused for one brief, anticipatory look at what he meant to do, and then was over the balcony rail, his fingers clawing through the wire netting. He heard Connie's voice then, raised in brittle irritation and a wave of relief swept over him.

It was gone in an instant, for when he took one glance beneath him, he felt a breath-stopping belt in his solar plexus. The height was sickening. Ottomyer was on the pavement far beneath, staring up and gesturing with bewilderment. There was a street light almost over him, but he was so far below that Buell could not make out the veterinarian's expression.

He swallowed and sucked a long breath and pulled his thinking into coordination. The wire mesh was cutting through his fingers, and there was another problem. The mesh was shaped in diamond openings, and the wedge-shaped bottoms trapped his knuckles. Midway of the mesh, he could bear his weight on one arm to free the other. But at the bottom where he had to swing, if his knuckles caught for an instant, he'd be swung back and out into empty space.

He saw the cement deck rising toward his face and knew that his

lips were free of the deck already. He could hear her voice even more clearly now and intermixed, a man's tones—strange, almost hysterical. Then he knew it was Tommy Taylor's voice. Tommy was still there, pleading for her to leave the parakeet until she got back.

Buell felt the relief at the same instant that he felt the chill breath of personal terror. He had no feeling left in his fingertips, and because of it, he had been trapped, hung up. He had only seconds of muscular coordination left at best.

He looked up grimly at the last handhold. *Ever try climbing when you couldn't feel what you were doing?* He could see the deck through the bottom of the mesh, though, and maybe—just maybe—he was in luck. The mesh overlapped the deck, and his fingers would be stopped before they jammed into the edge.

He took his last hold with his numb finger, prayed and swung out. Then, as he started to swing back in he gave his hands the message to let go. But he had no way of knowing what they did, and there was that terrible instant when he was sure that they had caught in the mesh.

Then he was dropping. He felt the bar on Connie's balcony graze his back as he landed on his feet by a small wrought-iron table.

The lights were bright enough inside to see through the drapes.

The French doors were wide, and now he could hear the conversation.

Connie was saying, "Now Tommy, I've had enough of this! I appreciate your worries, but I am taking the bird away with me."

"Please, Miss Miles—just leave it until you get back!" Tommy was pleading.

"I'm not coming back," she said. "I can rent the apartment from overseas. I've quit my job, thank heavens, and now maybe I can live for myself for a change."

Even then, Buell thought, it is odd how one part of the brain can filter something out and take it to pieces at a time when the whole brain should be concentrating on the matter at hand. He knew what she made—twenty thousand a year. She was no liar. And living by herself—that was the key.

He supposed there were thousands of women in New York trapped by their own careers. She knew hundreds of eligible men, but no one man who'd stop around to take her to a neighborhood movie, or sit on her balcony and eat a stinky hamburger.

Buell straightened up and flexed his hands and shoulders. He was damned glad that it was Tommy Taylor and not the count in there. But he was going to look like one big damned fool himself when he walked in. With her ironic humor, it was going to sound swell—chasing a notorious psychopathic stran-

gler, and winding up busting in on the tears of the gentlest creature in the whole neighborhood.

But suddenly now, Tommy had been reduced to something beyond tears. He had come from his chair opposite to Connie, so abject in his pleading that he had forgotten to straighten at the knees and hips. He was blubbing and repeating "Please—Please—"

Connie Miles was decently trying to quiet him as she would a child. But he was crossing to her, still crouched, his hands gesturing, until his knees were touching the couch beside her.

Then Buell got it. What method of destroying the animals had they used at Doc Ottomyer's when Willy himself was still using strychnine? What method before the new serum made the destruction of a pet more merciful? What method other than jugular strangulation?

Buell moved forward to the open doors just as Connie screamed "Tommy! Go back! Tommy—"

Her voice trailed off into a garbled sound. Tommy had her by the hair now. Her head was bent back over the top of the couch, and his right hand was clamped like a python's mouth around her throat.

Buell knocked him clean over the other end of the couch with his shoulder as he struck.

CONNIE MILES rubbed her red streaked throat and wouldn't look at Tommy. "It was always him?"

Buell nodded, his face grim. "Yes," he said. "It adds up!"

Tommy Taylor was whimpering with emotional agony, "But they were going to take their little pets away when they were still sick!"

Connie said, "It wouldn't do any good if I didn't press charges?"

"None," Buell said heavily. "He will be charged with murder. This was the only attack that didn't end that way."

She said, "Well, Tommy, I've changed my mind, some. You can keep Princess until she's well—if they'll let you."

Tommy stopped whimpering. He gave her a look as if she had given him the world. Connie looked over at the balcony beyond the open doors.

"A little beyond service and duty, Earle—wasn't it?" she said.

"No," Buell said. "I would have crashed in and learned nothing on my own. This was duty, strictly."

Buell moved to the phone and called his precinct for uniformed police. Then he put through a second call to Homicide. "I think I've caught the angle," he said. "Courage you can't expect beyond the call of duty from amateur precinct cops."

Homicide crackled agreement with that.

"Oh, you can handle the whole works from here on," Buell added. "His name is Tommy Taylor. I'm taking him in now for booking."

(Concluded on page 128)



# THE COCKTAIL STICK

*At cocktail time . . . even  
a killer can relax a bit.*

by

**STEPHEN PAUL**

I HAD BEEN the first to arrive for the dinner party. "Just an informal affair," John Carson had told me on the phone.

I was chatting with Anne Carson over a drink when Stratton came in. John brought him over to us.

"Anne," said her husband. "This is Fred Stratton. I've been wanting you to meet him."

They shook hands and mur-

mured the usual greetings. I noticed she seemed a little flustered, but he was completely at ease. I decided she must be a little on the shy side.

The other guests arrived together—the Johnsons, a quiet couple who lived in an apartment building on the same block, and a man named Davies and his sister Susan.

Stratton and the Johnsons drifted over to a window seat, and

Anne started showing Susan Davies some knitting she had been working on.

Carson busied himself with the drinks and Davies introduced himself to me.

"Stratton and I work in the sales department under Carson," he said. "He's only been in New York a few months, but he's making out very well, apparently."

"What's he like?" I asked. "Carson seemed eager to have Anne meet him."

Davies hesitated. "Carson's convinced he's a very nice guy. But just between us, I don't particularly like him. He thinks too highly of himself."

I didn't have a chance to pursue the point because Carson picked that moment to beckon to Davies. "I'd be grateful if you could help me with these cocktails," he said. "I'm not too expert a mixer."

I stood by the fireplace watching Davies juggle with the cocktail shaker. Carson was spiking cherries on little sticks.

Davies took three of his concoctions over to the window seat for himself and the Johnsons. Stratton handed drinks to Anne and Susan and then we started talking about a murder case the papers were full of.

"I still can't see how the killer did it," remarked Carson.

"It's dead easy to kill anyone and get away with it," said Stratton. "But few people realize that."

"Really," I said, taking a professional interest. "What makes you so sure?"

"All you need to do is to keep your eyes open. Observe your victim, learn his habits, and sooner or later a completely safe method will suggest itself."

"You ought to go into partnership with Zack Wilson here," laughed Carson. "He's a private eye."

I thought Stratton looked a bit taken back, but it was probably my imagination.

He took Carson's glass. "Another?" he asked, turning to me.

I shook my head. The stuff was pretty strong and I didn't want to get stoned so early in the evening.

Davies operated the shaker again and Stratton put cherry-spiked sticks in the glasses. A few minutes later they came back with refills.

We were talking about foreign-make cars when it happened. Carson went white and swayed. He lurched to the mantelpiece and put down his half-empty glass. He pressed his hands to his stomach as he fell.

Davies and I got him on to the couch. One of the women gave a little cry. I glanced over my shoulder and saw Anne Carson slip forward in her chair.

"Quick! Anne's fainted!" cried Stratton.

He seemed about to go to her and then didn't. Davies's sister and



Mrs. Johnson tried to bring her around. Johnson got a glass of water.

Stratton came across to the couch. "I'll phone for a doctor," he said.

I leaned forward. Carson's breathing was shallow and jerky and his face was darkening. There was a faint familiar smell of almonds on his breath.

"Better phone the police as well," I said quietly.

"Good Lord!" muttered Davies, turning pale.

A few moments later Carson was dead of cyanide poisoning.

In the confusion that followed I unobtrusively moved Carson's drink behind a picture, touching it only with my fingernail to avoid smudging a possible giveaway print the killer might have left on the glass.

But first I sniffed at it. It smelt horrible—but only of Davies's special.

On the floor I found Carson's fountain pen which must have fallen from his pocket when he collapsed.

I picked it up and put it on the mantelpiece. The cap was pitted with teeth marks. Evidently Carson was a nervous type.

Davies and Johnson covered the body with a blanket, and I wandered out into the hall.

The telephone clicked and Stratton said: "Doctor's on his way—and I've phoned the police as you

advised. What makes you think something's wrong?"

"He's dead," I said. "Poisoned."

"Good heavens—what a ghastly business! Awful shock for Mrs. Carson," Stratton said.

"Was it?" I said. He stared at me in tight-lipped silence for a moment and then went back to the sitting room.

I started my search and I'd just found what I wanted when the police arrived. I was on my hands and knees under the hall table sniffing a small wooden object. I emerged and stood up.

Detective-Lieutenant Pearson eyed me suspiciously. He doesn't approve of private detectives. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what the devil you were doing on the hall floor, Wilson?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant. I was looking for the cocktail stick that held the cyanide. It's under the table with the telephone, where Stratton tried to hide it. I think you'll find that it's hollow."

Pearson was not impressed. "Stratton? Come off it, Wilson. It was Davies who mixed the drinks."

"I know that. But Stratton fixed the cherries for the last round."

He said nothing for a moment. Then his brow furrowed. "And just what makes you so keen on the idea that Stratton wanted to kill Carson? And what has the cocktail stick to do with it? People don't eat them. Now if you'd said the cherry . . ."

I lit a cigarette. "I don't know why he wanted Carson out of the way. But I think you'll find that he and Anne Carson know each other much more intimately than they wanted any of their friends to suspect.

"As for the stick," I went on, "that was one hell of an ingenious way of making sure that Carson would get a lethal dose of cyanide. Stratton told me earlier it was no problem at all to kill if you know your victim's habits."

"Well?" Pearson asked.

"John Carson was an inveterate chewer. He could be relied upon to bite his cocktail stick as surely as he chewed his fountain pen, and probably his fingernails whenever he was laboring under even a little tension. And he probably suspected what was going on between Stratton and his wife and must have been under plenty of tension."

Lieutenant Pearson snorted. He believed me, all right, but he didn't seem particularly grateful for my help.



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## Early of a Summer Evening by T. C. McClary

*(Concluded from page 124)*

The doorbell rang. A moment later, Count de Boni entered with elegance, his arm stacked with nylon boxes. At least, he'd left his three little hairless dogs at home.

"I needed a tall man," Connie said.

"Obviously," the count agreed, casting a displeased glance at Buell.

"But I needed a medium one too," she added. "If he comes back this time for his hamburger. With his rain check in his hand!"

"Lady," Buell said metallicly, "this is going to be the fastest check in on department records!"

He took Tommy Taylor out with a scowl, but he was feeling pretty good.



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When Milo March heads for Hong Kong in search of a stolen jade necklace, DEATH threatens at every turn!

### THE CANNIBAL WHO OPERATE

by Hugh Pentecost

Aubrey Moon's one desire is to hurt people. Now he constructs an eerie Moon trap to DESTROY them!

(See other side)