

PRIVATE

November 15¢

IND PRIVATE DETECTIVE

STORIES

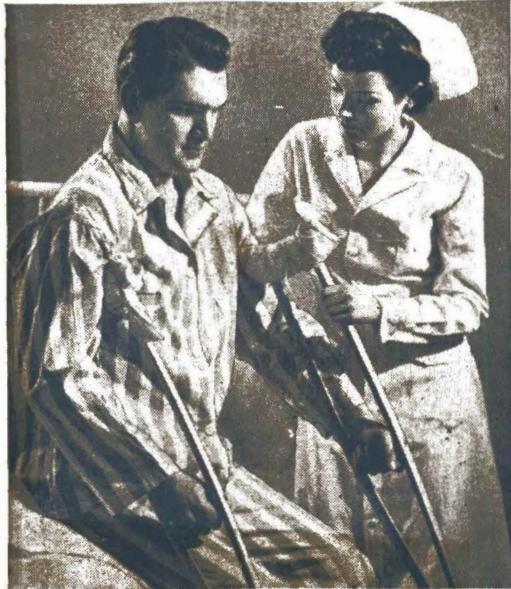


OLD LADY IN THE LAKE

BY

Roger Torrey

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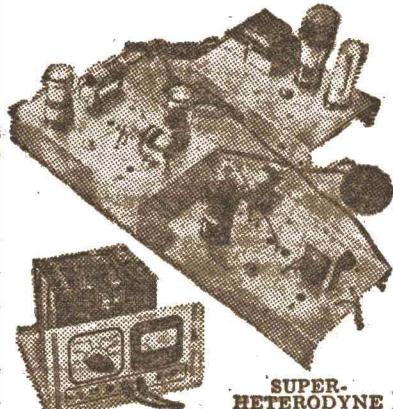
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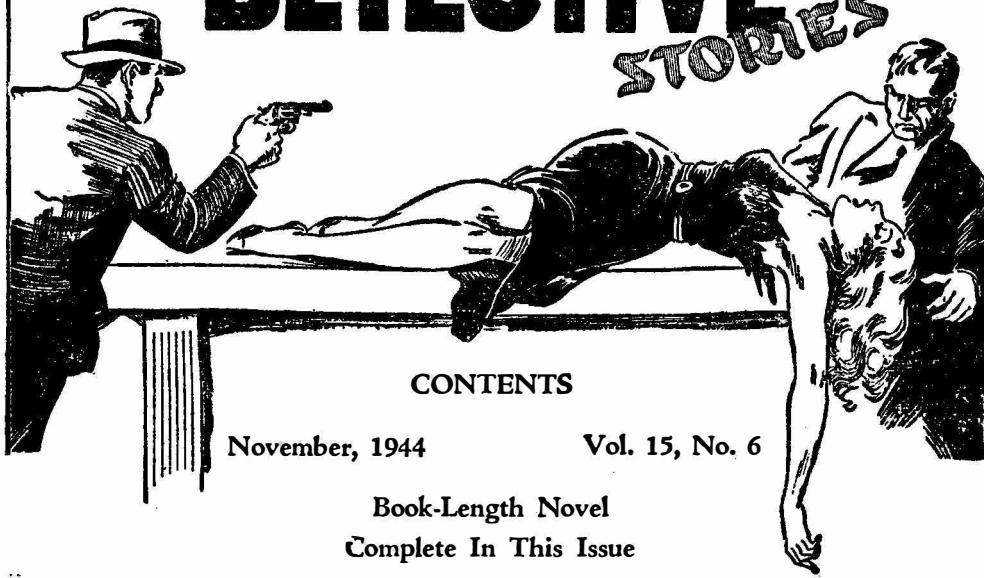


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PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES



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The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance, either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.

PRIVATE DETECTIVE STORIES is published monthly by Trojan Publishing Corp., 125 East Forty-Sixth Street, New York 17, N. Y. Michael J. Estrow, President; Frank Arner, Secretary and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter August 25, 1938, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Subscription: Yearly, \$1.50; single copies, 15¢. Canadian and foreign postage extra. Manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Copyright, 1944, by Trojan Publishing Corp. Title registered U. S. Patent Office.



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OLD LADY



HE JAIL was pretty bad, even for that part of the country, and, by and large, the South has the lousiest jails in the world. Crime don't pay down there—not if you're jailed. This one not only had the usual jail smell of disinfectant, poor plumbing, and worse cooking, but it smelled dirty, as well.

It should have smelled that way—it was filthy. It had four cells and all of them busy.

The first held two colored boys, both of them drunk. One of them had a fair baritone

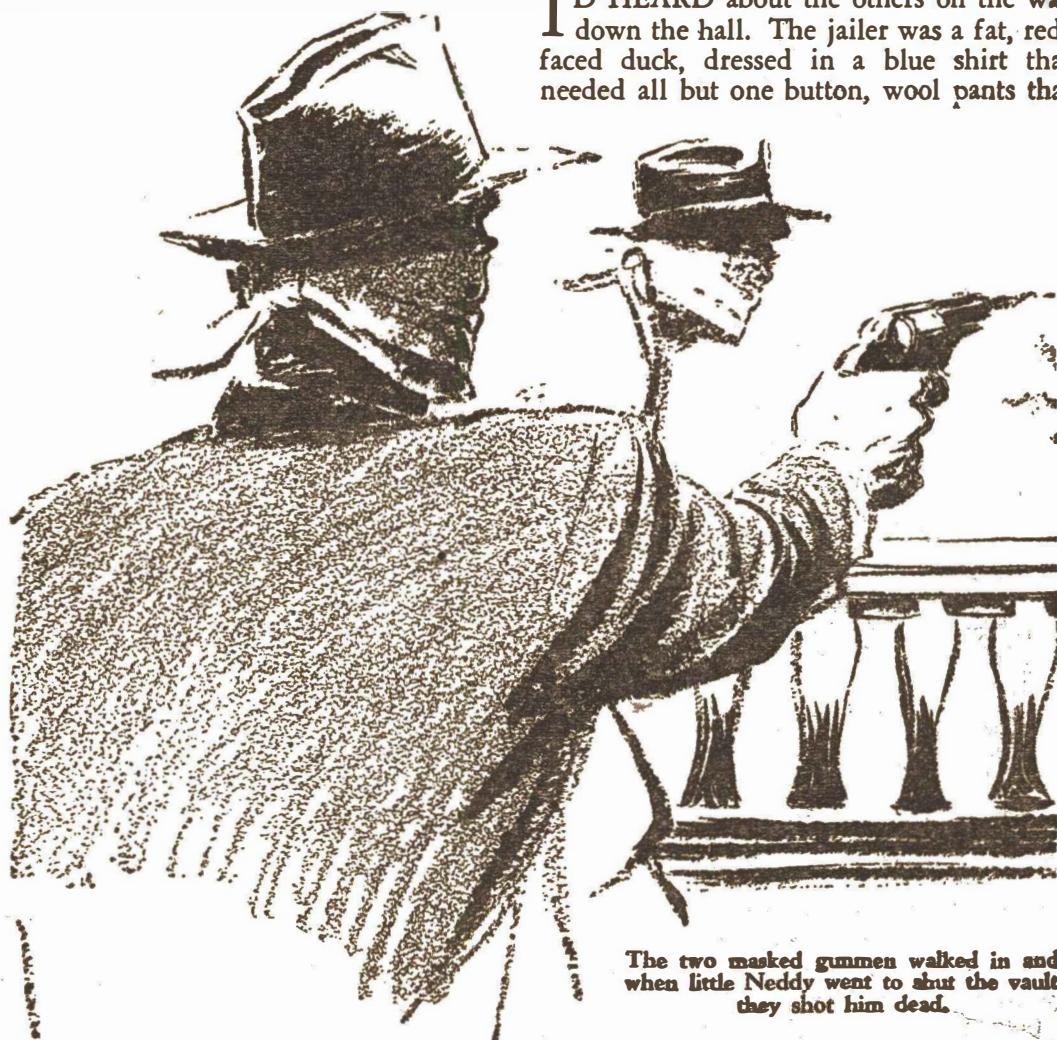
and the other a terrible falsetto, which he was trying to sing second with. The song was *Two Old Doxies from Canada*, and it's something that's never heard on the right side of the tracks.

The second cell had a colored girl with a bandaged face and neck. A big fat wench, who looked cheerful in spite of the taping.

The third had a white man, who was on the floor instead of on the cot.

And the fourth was my client's home from home, and my client was sitting on his cot with his head in his hands.

I'D HEARD about the others on the way down the hall. The jailer was a fat, red-faced duck, dressed in a blue shirt that needed all but one button, wool pants that



The two masked gunmen walked in and when little Neddy went to shut the vault they shot him dead.

IN THE LAKE

By ROGER TORREY

That small town appeared deader than the diary-keeping female who'd gone for a swim with a steel rail tied to her feet—but Phelan's private-detecting eyes came wide-awake when he tied into the skein of cuttin', bashin' and bushwhackin' which were proof of the town's very deceptive appearance indeed!



didn't meet by four inches at the waistband and which were apparently staying up just by the grace of God, because of him having neither belt nor suspenders on them, and this rig bottomed off with carpet slippers.

Both the jailer and his clothes were as

greasy and dirty as his jai. Just by looking at him I could tell how I was going to like Jamesville.

He'd said: "Now these first two boys they's just drunk. They work for old man Whiting, when he can find 'em."

I said they certainly could harmonize and he said, and seriously: "They's been some talk of puttin' them on th' air."

He said: "Now Susie, heah, she's in fo' a cuttin'. She and Maudie Parker they went to it and so heah is Susie."

I asked where Maudie was and he laughed cheerily and told me Maudie was laid out—that she'd be three feet underground the very next day.

Apparently it was a good joke on Maudie. Or on Susie, maybe—I couldn't tell.

The third man, the old one, the jailer just passed. He just waved a hand and said: "Tolliver!"

And then he jingled the door of the last cell and said: "Hey, Mister Lambreth! Heah is that man from up North."

Of course he didn't talk that way. He ran some words together and drawled others and mispronounced every one possible and some I didn't believe could be mangled, and, all told, was harder to understand than somebody from the Greenpoint section in Brooklyn.

At least most Brooklynites try, and this fat slob just opened his mouth and let the words dribble out.

I said: "Thanks, jailer," and handed over a buck.

This slug reached for the buck so fast I thought he was going to take my fingers with it, and he ducked back away from me as though he was afraid I'd change my mind and take it back.

And he bowed, so help me, and touched a finger to his forehead.

"Thank you, suh, thank yuh, suh," he said.

And bowed out of the presence.

By this time Lambreth was off the cot and by the barred door. It was screened as well, with heavy, close mesh, and so I couldn't shake hands with him. I just nodded back toward where the jailer had scuttled.

"The guy's a character, no less," I said. "Oh, Pete's all right."

"If the wind's the other way, maybe."

"Well, maybe he is a little ripe," Lambreth admitted.

"And what a pokey!"

"I beg your pardon!"

"I mean what a jail."

This time my client looked puzzled. He said: "Well, Jamesville isn't very big, you know. We don't really need larger quarters. This is Sunday, you see, and the jail is more crowded than usual because of Saturday night. On week days it's often empty, Mr. Phelan."

"I see," I said.

I wasn't lying. This poor dope didn't even know that jails are supposedly kept in a fairly sanitary way.

"You are Mr. Phelan, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Of course I'm Philip Lambreth."

"Sure."

"Mr. Hickey told me he'd been in touch with you."

"Sure."

"And that you'd be here this morning. He said he'd arrange for you to see me."

"Sure."

I waited and he waited and it looked as if we were going into a Mexican stand-off. He broke it first, though, which was what I wanted. I didn't want his story by leading him through it with questions—I wanted it just as he told it.

He said: "Of course Mr. Hickey told you what has happened?"

"Some of it, I guess. He guaranteed my expenses down here and back, even if I didn't want any part of it."

"Outside aid is my only hope, Mr. Phelan. The local officers are convinced I'm guilty."

"Are you?"

"Why of course not."

I didn't know whether I believed him or not, but I listened to his yarn as though I did.

And it was a lulu, I will say.

HIS name was Philip Lambreth, he was a teacher in the Jamesville school, and he was single, but . . .

I stopped him then.

I said: "What d'ya mean, you're single, but?"

"I—uh—well, I'm engaged. That is, in a sort of fashion."

"Well, you are or you aren't."

"It's not quite like that. It's an understanding of a sort."

"Who's the girl?"

"Does it make any difference?"

It was then about eleven in the morning. The jail was by itself, stuck out in a clayey field, and the sun was beating down full blast. They'd cut the dinner from the train sometime during the night, and I'd had no breakfast. And if I'd had, I'd have certainly lost it before then—what that heat was doing to the jail smell was really something brutal.

I didn't like what I'd seen of the town and I wasn't feeling too friendly toward my client, who was definitely not my kind of people. From what I'd heard and read of the case he was as guilty as a dog caught in the chicken yard with blood and feathers still on his chops.

So I could be excused for being a little snappy.

I said: "Look, mister! If I didn't think it made any difference I wouldn't ask you. What the hell is this? If you want help, you'll give with the details. You'll tell the truth and all of it, that is, to me and your attorney. If I don't take the case, I'll keep my trap closed about what you've told me, that I promise. And that's all I will promise. Now who's the girl?"

"Minerva Stiles."

"A pretty name."

It was his turn to get sore but he didn't. He just said: "The Stiles are an old family in Jamesville. In fact, Lester James, who founded the town, married a Stiles girl."

"And the Minerva part of it?"

"Minerva is named after her great-aunt. It's a family name, Mr. Phelan."

I thought oh what the hell and let it go. It sounded like something out of "Gone with the Wind," that family business, but it was Lambreth's affair and none of mine.

Of course that was before I'd seen Minerva.

I told him to go on with the yarn and he did.

His grandmother, Mrs. Orville H. Lambreth, had come into town to call on him in regard to this rumored engagement of his.

I stopped him there.

"She came into town from where?"

"From her farm, Mr. Phelan. She has—or had, I should say—a farm about ten miles out on Twisted River."

"How'd she come to town?"

"Why, the usual way. A colored boy named Jasper drove her in. He always

drives, or rather, drove, for grandma."

"Go on."

"She talked with me for an hour or so, and left. That was about seven in the evening."

"That was two days ago? Right?"

"Why, yes."

"And this Jasper drove her away from your place?"

"Why, yes."

"Go on."

"THAT same evening they opened the gates on the Callendar Dam and the gate tender found grandma out in the lake. Callendar Lake. She was just above the dam, you see, and he saw her hands above the water. She'd been covered but when the water lowered, her hands came in sight."

"That was that same evening?"

"Well, no. He opened the gates in the evening but he found grandma in the morning, when he went out to close the gates again."

"I read something about this part of it in the papers, coming down here. Were they right?"

"I suppose so. She was naked—they'd taken every stitch of clothing from her and wired her feet to a piece of railroad iron. A rail, you know."

"I knew. I'd seen pictures of the rail and of the wire that had tied it to grandma, but they'd cut grandma out of the scene."

"That held her upright in the water, you see, Mr. Phelan, but her arms were above her head and they showed above the water when it was lowered."

"They find her clothes yet?"

"Not as far as I know."

"Wouldn't you know?"

He shrugged. He said: "The sheriff has what he is sure is an absolute conviction in my case. As has the prosecutor. I doubt greatly if they're bringing out anything that could be used in my favor."

"Mean they're railroading you?"

"It's not quite like that, Mr. Phelan. I honestly think that if they found something that would point suspicion toward someone else, they'd work on the matter. But they are convinced I'm guilty and will do nothing to weaken their case."

"Are they crooked?"

"Well, they're politicians. That's as far as I'd go with a statement."

"Mixed up in politics yourself?"

"Just the petty, school-board kind."

"How's this Hickey you've hired? Your lawyer."

"He's supposed to be good, Mr. Phelan, that's all I know. He's not from Jamesville, of course, but from the county seat."

"How big's that?"

"About four thousand, I'd estimate."

I said I bet that Mr. Hickey would be a ball of fire and let it go at that. I told Lambreth to keep his chin up, only chin wasn't just the word I used, and that I'd see Hickey and then decide if there was anything I could do that would help.

That was about all I could say at that stage of the game. I had to find out more about what went on.

CHAPTER II

Local Big Shots



HE jailer was in his office, which was as filthy and as smelly as the rest of the jail. He had his feet on a battered table and the one button on his shirt opened, so that I could see a fat, hairy, and sweating chest. I waded through litter to the chair that faced him and came out with one of the ten-cent cigars I'd bought for the purpose.

"Try this, sir," I said.

He had fishy little eyes, and the fat on his cheeks bulged so it took me a moment to see the eyes were a flat gray.

He took the cigar and bit a third of it off, then put the remainder in his shirt pocket. His jaws started a steady grind, but he managed to mumble a "Thank you, suh," in spite of the action he was getting.

I sat down and took off my hat and fanned myself. And with the other, brought out my billfold and laid it handy on my lap.

He watched this and I could see a little more of his eyes. They were starting to bug a little.

I said: "Hot, eh?"

"Yes, suh. 'Bout like most times this time o' year."

"I suppose a man gets used to it."

It seemed I'd walked right into one of his jokes because he laughed so hard his belly shook. He said: "I been born and raised here, suh, and I ain't never got used to it yet."

I laughed, too, and took a five-spot from the wallet, folding it the long way. Then I looked out the window, never being a man who particularly liked seeing stark greed on another man's face, and started the business.

"I'm a stranger here, you know."

"Yes, suh."

"That makes it kind of tough. You know—I don't know what I'm running up against."

"That's a fact, suh."

"A man in my business has got to know facts. Nothing else will do."

"I can see that, suh."

I folded the bill again and let it drop to the floor, looking back from the window in time to see his eyes follow it down.

"It would certainly be a help if I knew some local man. I mean well enough to ask him questions. Of course it would have to be a man that could keep his mouth shut, and that's the rub. I can get a lot of gossip up and down the street, but that's not what I need."

He was dumb as an ox but he caught on. He said meaningly: "Now you seem to me, suh, to be a right friendly sort of man. I would be glad to help you, suh, in any way I can."

"And I'll certainly appreciate it. What kind of a lawyer has young Lambreth got? This man Hickey."

"Judge Hickey, suh, is the best in the country. He had argued his cases before the Supreme Court, suh."

"He is a high-priced man?"

"He is indeed."

"Young Lambreth got money?"

"I wouldn't say so. He's a savin' boy, but that's about all. O' course with his grandma's money—only he won't get it now—he'd be right well-to-do."

STUPID as he was he knew a killer can't profit legally by his killing.

"If he was cleared, though, he'd be in the dough. About how much, would you say?"

"Gran'ma Lambreth's farm's worth fifty or sixty thousand dollars, suh. That there

farm's been in the family as long as they's been people in Jamesville."

"But cash? I hear farming's slow pay."

"Gran'ma Lambreth had cash in the bank. When the bank was robbed, it all came out. They was bonded or somethin' and nobody lost any money, but they was afraid they would and everybody said how much they had in. Gran'ma had sixteen thousand dollars in, suh, she said so. That old lady didn't lie, neither, not about nothing."

I'd found out my fee was safe—that is it was safe if I cleared the kid, and that was something. The kid's lawyer could have told me the same thing, but I wouldn't have believed him. It doesn't pay to rely too much on what an interested party has to say.

Then I thought I was seeing things. My fat pal winked, so help me, and lifted his right elbow up to shoulder height. I didn't get it and must have shown it by the way I looked, because he put it into words.

"A little snifter, suh?"

The heat and the jail smell was getting me, and I didn't see how anything could hurt me much more.

I said: "Sure."

He got up and locked the door to the street. And then came back and dug a bottle from the lower drawer of his desk. The bottle had originally held Pepsi-Cola and was two-thirds full of a yellowish mixture, and this he shook.

And then said apologetically: "I ain't got no cup or glass, suh. Drink hearty."

I tipped the bottle and swallowed, and in spite of the way I felt, I didn't say a word. I couldn't. It was just as though I'd swallowed the business end of a blowtorch.

He said, and this time proudly: "Tha's Twisty River corn, suh. The pure quill."

By that time the water had stopped coming out of my eyes and I could breathe, in a strangled fashion.

I said: "Boy!"

"I ain't cut it a bit. She's the pure quill, just like she came out o' the worm."

He shook the bottle then in turn and he lowered the fluid at least three inches and didn't even blink.

I knew then that I was looking at a man. He was dirty, dumb, and a disgrace to his office, but he certainly was no panty-waist.

I LEFT there an hour later with three more drinks of that high-powered hootch under my belt, the address of a boarding-house, which my new pal assured me was better than the town's one hotel—and a line on just about every man of any importance around. And with more than a little dope on the ladies, as well. Or the "womenfolk" as my pal called them.

Lambreth's fiancee was a high-stepper, according to Pete, which was the jailer's name. Not that he knew anything against her, suh, but a man's got a right to his own personal thoughts, by gollies.

From the way he talked about her, he could have been arrested for his thoughts, if his dreams ever came true.

My landlady, if this boarding-house keeper would take me in, that is, allegedly talked too much. Pete put that very nicely, too, I thought.

He'd said: "That old fussbuttons runs off at the mouth like two regular women. You mind what you say in front of her, Danny, if you don't want everybody in this town to know it inside of an hour."

He touched on a few other young ladies as well as Lambreth's promised one, and if what he'd said was true, they were a high-stepping lot. And I'd said as much.

I said: "Maybe this town isn't as dead as it looks. Maybe I just didn't know what to look for when I got off the train."

I'd almost got him sore with that crack. He even choked on the drink he was taking. He said: "Danny, you don't understand little ol' Jamesville, tha's all. We had a bank robbery, no more than three months ago. Held up, just like they do in the cities all the time. Gran'ma Lambreth was talking to Don Nealy, he's the cashier, when it happened. During noon hour, it was. They was just the three o' them in there—gran'ma, Don Nealy, and Neddy Hanks, who used to run the bookkeeping machine. Then in walks these two masked fellers with guns and little Neddy goes to swing shut the vault and one of the fellers kills him deader than hell, then and there."

This was interesting and I said so. I got told the bank lost twenty-two thousand dollars, in even figures, and that for a while there was a threatened run on the bank, but

that this was staved off by hardy souls like the late Gran'ma Lambreth who had brains enough to see that a bank run would lose her what chance she had of getting her money back.

I also heard that during the last year there'd been twenty-six cuttings—they'd call 'em stabbings up North, and that five of them had turned out fatally. That there'd been an even dozen shootings, ten of them done with shotguns, and that eight men had gone to what my pal Pete called "A better world."

He'd also told me that no Saturday night went by without from three fist fights on up, these mostly taking place in three beer joints the town afforded or in the blind pig, this last something that nobody in town was blind to.

I'd got this far along in thinking what

I'd learned from Pete when I came to the cab stand, the only one in town. I woke the driver up and had him take me to the depot, where I retrieved my bag, and then to the address Pete had given me.

The cabby said: "Ahyo! You going to stay at Mrs. Parsons', hey, mister?"

"If she's got room, I guess."

"She's got room."

"I hear it's pretty nice."



"Better than the hotel, mister."

"That's what I heard."

"Y' see the hotel's got bedbugs and they can't seem to get shet of 'em, so there ain't nobody likes to stop off there."



Maudie and Susie went at it with serious intent. It was quite a cutting match.

I said I could understand that.

"And Mizz Parsons, her place's clean, all right. On'y you can't smoke or nothin'. Can't even take a drink."

"Prohi, hunh?"

"Oh hell, no. You can't bring liquor in the house 'cause Mizz Parsons is on it like a kitten on a dish o' cream. Tha's all. She can guzzle more liquor than any two men in this here town."

We stopped in front of what I gathered was the Parsons place, and I got out of the cab just in time to meet the half dozen men that came down from the porch.

THE spokesman was a dapper little squirt, who stood all of five feet three in his socks. He was fat and pudgy and he smelled to high heaven of some particularly loathsome hair tonic. About thirty-five, I thought.

He said: "Are you Daniel J. Phelan, sir?"

"Yeah! What did the boys do with their instruments?"

"Instruments?"

"Isn't this the town band? To welcome me?"

"Don't be funny, Phelan."

I hadn't had any breakfast and that broncho liquor really had had room to work. I was feeling no pain at all but I certainly didn't feel like listening to double talk from this little stranger.

I said: "Look, little fatso! I don't know who you are and I care less, but get the hell out of my way. I have business inside."

"We have business with you, Phelan. This is a business man's committee. We represent the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Phelan."

"Now I know you're lying, little fatso. Why the hell should this town have anything like that? It isn't big enough, for one thing, and there isn't a man in town with ambition enough to run it, for another."

"I am president, sir."

"Well, you get my point then. No Chamber of Commerce would elect a little fat man like you president, so it shows there's no such Chamber. Don't you try to fox the city boy, you slicker, you."

One of the others, a big raw-boned horse-faced bird that would go up well above two hundred, came into the thing then. He jammed his face next to mine, almost as close as he could get it, and stuck out his jaw and really made a job of looking tough.

"Funny, ain't you?" he said.

I said: "Oh, not very," and braced myself and put my hand in his face and shoved. I had one foot back against the running-board of the car, and I shoved hard. He went back through his crowd like a rock through a window, and he sat down on the steps leading up to the Parsons house so hard he shook them.

I turned around and gave the hacker a half dollar and got my bag.

And marched through the reception committee and up to the house, with the man on the steps scuttling out of my way like a little bunny rabbit.

Lots of hard guys aren't so hard, when the jump's taken on them.

MRS. PARSONS was a little withered-up woman who must have been at least sixty-five. And I looked at her and thought of what the jailer had said and didn't believe it. It had been one of the few funny things he'd said, too.

It was: "That old sister, that Mizz Parsons, she just nach'ly drink her husband to his final death."

She opened the door for me and she was grinning so widely I could see where her false teeth began and ended. She said: "My, my, my! What a long tail our cat's got. You certainly made that man sit down, Mr. Phelan."

"How'd you know my name?"

"Pete called me. He said you were coming over."

"Nice of him."

"I gotta pay him off," said the old lady. "You stay a week and he gets a quart of liquor."

I said: "The hell you say!" and then apologized for the swearing.

"Think nothing of it," she said. "My husband was a cursing man and I'm damned if I ever saw how it hurt him any. Sure. That Pete, he drinks liquor like it was his mother's milk

"You want the front room, I guess. You can eat here but I gotta know when you want it ready. I'm damned if I cook meals for any man that ain't ready for 'em when they're ready for him."

She really had me by that time. I carried my bag into the room she showed me and found it clean, and nothing else. A brass bed.

A rag rug in front of it, about three feet long and half that wide. One kitchen chair. Hooks set in the wall in one corner, with a sheet hanging in front of them for a dust cover. A green window shade and no curtains.

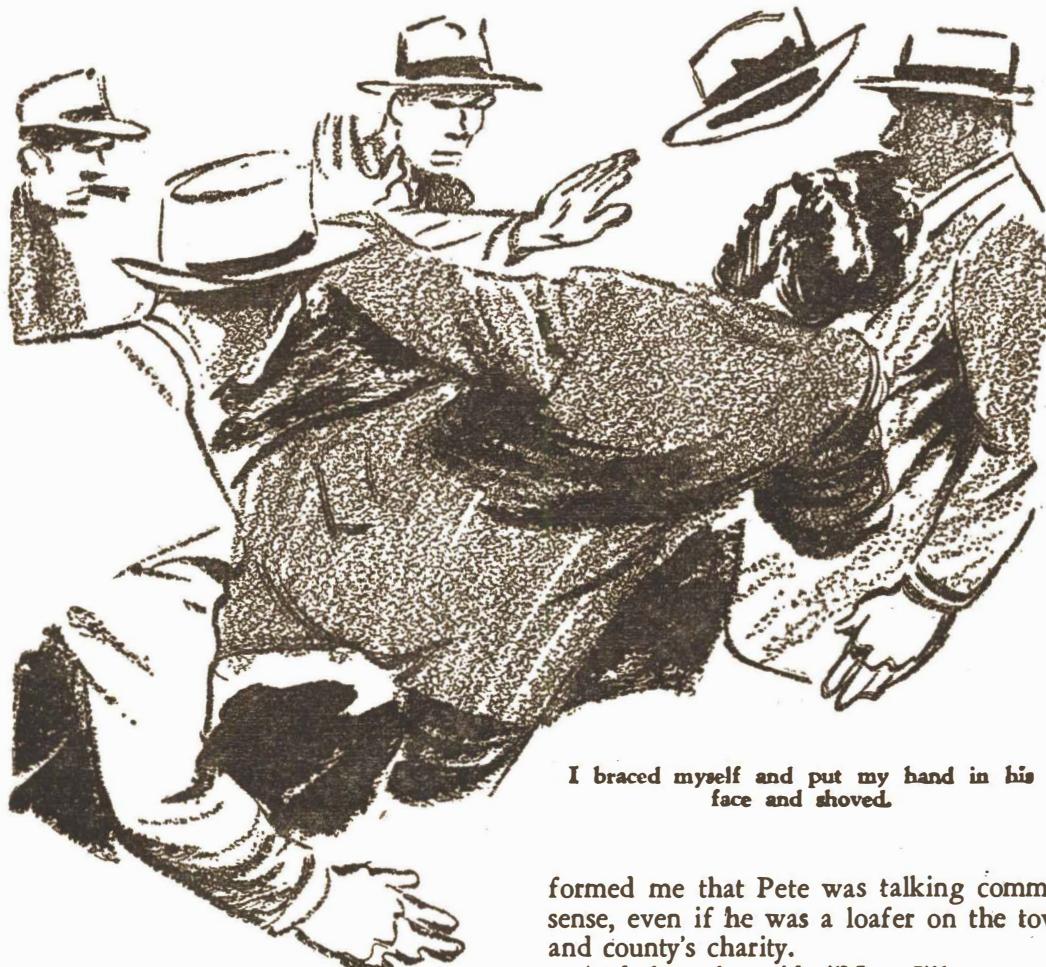
The old gal said: "It'll be three dollars a week, mister, in advance. That's 'cause you may not stay out the week. My, my, my! You get off the train at ten o'clock and already by noon you ain't wanted."

"Is that what those guys were waiting to tell me?"

"Certain sure."

"I wonder why?"

She put her hands on her skinny hips and stared at me as if I was a half-wit. She said: "And you look half bright, too! They don't want a stranger in here and raising hell, mister. That young Lambreth is guilty as a dog and they want to see him hang. Gran'ma



I braced myself and put my hand in his face and shoved.

formed me that Pete was talking common sense, even if he was a loafer on the town and county's charity.

And then she said: "Now I'll get you a snack of dinner. I suppose you'd like a snort or two while you're waiting, mister. Most men do."

"I'm fresh out of the real stuff, Mrs. Parsons."

She said handsomely: "It's on the house, mister. I'll get some of the stuff from my own 'legger for you, any time you say, but this first couple nips is on the house."

And the old gal went out and then came back with a two-gallon, straw-covered jug that held the same lightning Pete had already served.

So help me, when lunch was ready I didn't even know what I was eating, and I had to take a two-hour nap afterward to get sober enough to go back downtown and look up Judge Hickey.

And my stride wasn't up to my athletic best.

Lambreth was well liked in this country, mister, and they're afraid you'll get her killer off."

"What if he didn't kill her, Mrs. Parsons?"

"My, my, my! Who else would? Who else'd gain? She didn't have chick nor child, other than that young loafer. He'd get her hard-earned money, wouldn't he?"

"Maybe she was killed for some other reason."

"Folks are always killed for money, mister. Money's the root of all evil. Me, I never got my roots in deep like Gran'ma Lambreth. He, he, he! But you mark my words, mister, gran'ma was killed for her money and young Lambreth is the only one that can possibly gain."

I said that everybody, according to Pete, the jailer, thought as she did, and she in-

CHAPTER III

Law Officer?



ICKEY was a lot of man one way and only half a man the other. He was the widest man across the shoulders and paunch I'd ever seen, and he wasn't over five feet tall. The man that wrote that jingle *Mister Five by Five* must have imagined something like the judge.

He was in the town's one decent-looking office building, a three-story affair made out of red brick, and I could hear him cursing as I opened the outer door of his office. He was inside a door marked private, but as this was half open I could see both him and the person he was talking with. He was behind a big flat desk and facing him was a scared-looking colored man, standing and twisting his hat in his hands.

The judge looked out and saw me and called: "Be with you in just a minute, Mr. Phelan, sir!" and then went back to the colored man.

He said: "Now, Willie, I'm not going to speak to you again. Don't you bring me any money. You bring me corn, or so help me, I'll put you back in jail myself."

The colored man said: "Yassuh! But jedge! I's sold out. The women, they just sold me out, the time I was waiting in jail. My wife she done sold every drop I had in the house and my oldes' daughter went out in the barn and dug up what I had buried under the back stall and they done sofd that, too. I can't make 'nother run 'til the mash get ripe and that won't be fo' three or fo' days yet."

"I don't want any excuses, Willie. I want that corn. Now take that money and get out and come back with that corn."

I saw the colored man pick up a wad of money from the desk and then he shuffled out past me. I went in and the judge winked at me cheerfully.

"Gotta keep 'em in hand," he said. "Now that lying boy don't know that I know he's got better'n two hundred gallon grounded under his hen house. 'S a fact! Deputy Sherril laid out in the brush and watched him bury it."

This was a little fast, even for me, and I've got few illusions about law officers.

I said: "Why the hell didn't he arrest him if he saw him burying the stuff? There's still a law about moonshine, isn't there?"

"It wasn't old enough then," the judge explained. "That stuff's supposed to age six months in the wood at least. It's about ripe, now. I'll put you down for a piece of it, if you like."

I just stared.

"Deputy Sherril will leave him the most of it, o' course. Just take enough for evidence and maybe a few gallons for close friends and the like."

"It's a nice way to work it."

"'S better than having the boy on the county, Mr. Phelan. I hear you had callers waiting, when you went to Mizz Parsons."

"Yeah! How'd you know?"

"This is a small town, Mr. Phelan. Pete called me and told me where he'd sent you. Only I want to warn you. Don't light any cigarettes in Miss Parsons' house."

I'D SMOKED all the time I'd been there and said so, and the judge looked astonished. He clucked a couple of times, like an old hen, and then said: "That means, Mr. Phelan, that she's taken a liking to you. That doesn't happen often, I assure you. She shot at Pete, the jailer that you met, four times with the automatic shotgun her husband died and left her, and it was only by the grace of God and a corn crib in between them that she didn't hit him."

"She talked like they were pals."

"Pete thought she was at services and went in to steal her whiskey. She had a right to shoot at him, I figure."

I decided I'd better get down to earth.

I said: "You wired me, judge. How'd you happen to pick on me?"

"Got your name from the phone book. They got one, down at the telephone office. You didn't have any ad in the book so I figured you wouldn't charge as much money as some of them that had."

I grinned and he grinned back. He said: "I found out I was wrong. How come those fellas advertise and you don't?"

"They take any sort of case. I don't. I specialize."

"How?"

"I won't take divorce cases. Most of 'em do."

He nodded and said that divorce was the curse of the world and that he didn't believe in it. That if a man or woman made a bed they should lie in it. And then he spoiled this moral thought with a straight face.

He said: "And besides, the laws in this state are so strict that all the business goes outside. I don't have a divorce case once in six months on an average."

I said: "What about Lambreth? Is he guilty?"

"He says not."

"What d'ya think?"

"As his attorney it's my duty to believe him."



The guy's second slug tore the wood just above my head.

"Outside of that?"

"Guilty as a dog, Mr. Phelan, sir. Who else profits by that poor woman's death?"

"Then why are you hiring me?"

"He's entitled to every chance the law allows, Mr. Phelan, sir."

"Has he got enough money to pay me?"

"He will have."

"If he's convicted, he can't benefit as an heir."

"He won't be convicted."

"You just said he was guilty."

THE judge leaned back in his chair and beamed at me. He said: "Mr. Phelan, sir, I know every man that can be drawn on a jury list in this county. If I can't hang every damn' jury the prosecutor can select, I'll start farming, myself. Don't you fret about your money at all, sir."

We went into what had happened then, and I got the same story young Lambreth had told me. And it was the same screwy thing.

The old lady had been found stark naked in the lake just above the irrigation dam, and there was no reason why she should have even been around there. Her own farm was eight miles from there in an air line and twice that by road. And she was in her seventies, and old ladies like that are usually found dead with their clothes still on.

Even in bed they wear a nightie.

I said: "This colored driver of hers named Jasper? What's he got to say?"

"Nothing. They can't find him."

That was the answer, of course, but the next words of the judge spoiled the thought somewhat. He said: "The sheriff searched gran'ma's place, of course, but all they found in Jasper's room was one hell of a lot of blood."

"Maybe that's where he killed the old lady?"

Then he gave me what spoiled the thought.

He said: "The old lady was strangled, Mr. Phelan. They'd gagged her, but she was a mouth breather and just couldn't get enough air in through her nose. It must have taken her an hour or more to die, the doctor says."

"It must have been a terrible death," I said.

The judge said that was about the only thing that was bothering him. He said, in fact: "I can get the young sprout clear, that I know. But whether I can keep him away from a lynch mob after that is something else again. And to tell you the truth, Mr. Phelan, sir, after I get the old lady's will probated, and the young fellow gets his money and you and I get paid for our time and trouble, I don't much care. I liked Gran'ma Lambreth, sir, as did all who knew her."

I could see that public sympathy was all

one way—the wrong way. And that this was going to make it that much tougher for me.

I wasted what was left of the afternoon in the poolroom and learned nothing that Judge Hickey hadn't told me. The place was half filled with the usual young loafers, everyone of whom seemed to know who I was. I was treated like I was suffering with leprosy—that is, until the boys found that I'd buy them a drink if they'd open up and talk.

Oh, yes! They sold that liquid fire right along with the soft drinks and the owner charged twenty cents a shot for it and apologized for the price.

He said: "I gotta get that for it, mister. By the time a man buys it and pays off the sheriff and two deppities, not to say anything of the constable, why, they ain't no profit in it at less money."

I told him that, back in Prohibition, drinks at as much as a dollar a copy had been heard of, and he gave me a true word.

He said: "But that was different stuff, mister. If you asked a man a dollar for a drink in this country he'd come out with a gun and shoot you. These boys in this part of the country are some different from most folks."

He was his own best customer for his trade goods, and I bought and he returned the favor. I told him that from what I'd heard he was in a lively little town. That between, cuttings, shootings, bank robberies, and old ladies found dead with no clothes on, the city had nothing to offer that they didn't have more than their share of.

The bank robbery was fresh in his mind. After all, it had happened only three months before then and the boys had pulled it off in Wild West fashion.

Three of them had walked into the bank and just taken it over. They'd killed the bookkeeper, scared the cashier half out of his pants, and taken every bit of cash in the place with them. If it hadn't been for the old lady who'd later been killed, these wouldn't even have been a fair description of them—the cashier was so flustered he hadn't remembered even how many heisters there'd been.

I said: "This cashier must be a pretty flighty guy."

"You met him, mister."

"The hell I did!"

The poolroom man chuckled heartily. He said: "I'd have give a pretty to see that, suh. 'Course I heard about it—everybody in town did, I guess. The head of the committee that waited on you, suh, was Don Nealy. He's the bank cashier and he fancies himself as the high mucky-muck of this here town. The guy that you hit is Jethrow Wooding and he's one of the directors in the bank."

"I didn't hit him. He acted as if he was going to kiss me and I just shoved his face away."

"Ho, ho, ho! Just wait 'til I tell that one on Jethrow. He and Don Nealy are thick as two thieves. Jethrow runs the hardware store—you seen it just as you come down the street. Sort of a combination hardware and sporting-goods store, it is."

"I understand the bank paid off all losses."

"Oh sure. Insurance and bonding-company stuff. Like o' that. The robbers got twenty-two thousand dollars, suh."

"Lots of cash for a little bank to have on hand."

"It is at that."

I'D made the remark without thinking—I just saying something to keep the man talking on, but when I came to think about it, it *was* a lot of cash for a small-town bank to carry. The town had no payroll and what money was in circulation really circulated, as it does in all small communities. The butcher pays the baker and he pays the vegetable man and he pays the carpenter and he gives the same dough back to the baker again, and they're right back where they started.

I said: "There seems to be quite a lot of cutting scrapes here, too."

"A fair amount, suh. It's this corn 'shine, I honestly do declare. One of the colored boys gets loaded up on this here stuff and he thinks he's pure plain hell on wheels. He comes out with that blade and starts in to prove it on somebody and he either proves it or gets cut right down to size."

"There's a girl in jail, right now. She's supposed to have used a knife on another colored girl."

"Tha's Susie Meadows, suh. She cut Maudie Parker bad enough so that Maudie

died the next day. And over as no-account a boy as ever lived. Jasper Twine, the same that worked for poor old Gran'ma Lambreth."

I had a notion I was maybe striking pay dirt in a place I hadn't expected to find a trace of gold.

"This Jasper wasn't much good, eh?"

"Not worth a damn, suh. Harmless but just sort of lazy. Nobody but gran'ma would keep him on the place, but she stuck up for him."

"Was he playing around with this Maudie that got killed?"

"No suh, he was Susie's man. On'y Susie got a notion that Maudie wanted a piece of him, I guess. Anyway, they went to it with knives and Susie came out ahead."

"What'll they do to her?"

He shrugged indifferently. "Not too much. Usually they get five years for a thing like that that turns out wrong. 'Course if she'd have cut a white it'd be a different matter—they'd sock it to her then."

I said it was all very interesting and then noticed the poolroom man's eyes were on the door.

"Here is the constable, for a fact," he said.

I looked at the door in turn.

THE constable was a weak-looking little man in blue serge pants that hadn't been pressed since they'd been bought, a white dress skirt, the kind that has no collar attached, sort of garter arrangements on his arms, and the biggest badge I've yet to see out of a comedy picture. The shirt had no collar but sported a collar button. The little guy had a droopy mustache that hung well below his lower lip, washed-out blue eyes that looked scared, and a sidling walk like a crawfish cutting under a bank.

He came up to me, hesitated, and asked: "Are you Mr. Phelan, suh?"

The poolroom man said: "You know right well he is, Sam. What you want to ask for?"

"There's a way to do these things," said the constable. He brought out a folded paper from his pocket, opened it, and began to read it in a laborious fashion. It was a warrant, of course, for my arrest on the charge of assaulting one Jethrow Wooding with a

deadly weapon. It was issued in a justice court and was probably as legal as anything else in the town.

I said: "Well, now you've read it to me, what are you going to do?"

"Why, arrest you, Mr. Phelan."

"Oh, you can't do that."

"The warrant says I got to. It says I got to take you in custody."

"Sure, but I'm a law officer, just as you are. That makes it different. You can see that for yourself."

He took out a clean handkerchief and mopped at his forehead. His shirt was clean, also—he was the cleanest man I'd seen since I'd been in town, for that matter.

"Seems like that would make it some different," he admitted.

"Sure. Bound to. It comes under that part of the law headed personal courtesy."

I tipped my head at the poolroom man and he nodded.

I said: "Well, now that's settled, officer, why not forget it all and have a drink with me? A man don't often get a chance to have a drink with a man in his same line."

"That's right, suh. Seemed to me it was a mistake, right along."

The three of us had a drink and then another and then a third.

I even let the constable use his money and pay in his turn—on the ground that he was getting a break as much as I was.

We were fellow officers, weren't we?

He left and the poolroom man looked at me consideringly.

"That right?" he asked.

"What's right?"

"About that courtesy business. About one officer not being able to arrest another officer?"

"It was the best I could think of at the time. Maybe it's so in this state, too—I wouldn't know."

"Hell! It can't be right. You can't even be a law officer in this state—you ain't a resident long enough."

"Well, the constable didn't think of that, I guess."

"Sam ain't right bright, at that. Well, I'll be damned. Just wait until he tells what you said to Don Nealy and Jeth Wooding. Ho, ho, ho!"

I laughed, too, and we had a drink on it. And again I felt no pain as I went home to Mrs. Parsons.

CHAPTER IV

Bushwhackers



ND again she was waiting for me right at the door. She sniffed approvingly and said: "You been drinking, mister."

I admitted it—I'd have played hell trying to do anything else.

"A little liquor's good for a man," she told me. "It sort of livens 'em up. I made free, mister, to get you a jug of your own. I had an order coming in this afternoon and I thought of you first thing. In case somebody came calling on you, you'd have to offer them a sip, and I'm damned if I'll have you traipsing around my kitchen looking for my own cache."

I asked her if she'd join me in a little snifter and she smiled lovingly at me and allowed she could see her way clear to doing just that. She introduced me to my jug, which was waiting under the head of the bed for me, and brought in two water glasses and a jug of water while I was wrestling the cork from the jug.

This stopper was made of a piece of wood, whittled into shape, and it had been soaked in either water or whiskey so long it was as soft as cork.

Mrs. Parsons pointed out this feature to me when she came back with the tools.

She said: "That's why I like this 'legger of mine, mister. He takes pains. None of this slipshod, hanky-panky work for him. Now some of the boys just take a piece or corn cob and slam her in, but it evaporates and you lose your goodness."

I thought that the stuff was high enough in proof to stand a little loss, but I kept the thought to myself.

And then I happened to look up in time to see the old lady taking her snifter down, and I had one hell of a time to keep quiet, believe me.

How I'd missed it when I'd taken the drinks with her before lunch I'll never know. I must have been tighter than I thought I

was on those few drinks I'd had with the jailer, because, if I'd ever seen what I was seeing then, I'd have never forgotten it.

THE old sister held her glass, and the glass held a sizeable slug of hootch in it, in her right hand. Then she just sort of slipped her left hand in front of her mouth and lifted the glass and took the liquor down. Then she made the same quick movement with her other hand, and her false teeth were back in place.

It went just zip, gulp, zip, and she was back in shape.

It startled me so much I just stared and she grinned at me, showing me the crockery all very properly in place.

"I swallow 'em crossways once," she said confidently. "Hell of a note, it was. I got the lower ones halfway down my gozzle and the upper ones got in the way so I couldn't cough 'em up. If it hadn't been for my husband, I'd have strangled sure as God makes little green apples."

"It's a good thing he was handy, all right."

"In the poolroom it was. I went down after him, the scut. Late for dinner, he was, as always. And so I took a little snort with him and with Bill Gorham that runs the place and he had a batch of liquor that was raw and he didn't warn me about it. I smacked his dirty face when he laughed at me, too, the damn' fool."

"He speaks highly of you, Mrs. Parsons."

"He'd better. Fried chicken going to do you for supper?"

"Sure."

"It's what you get, anyway. And it'll be four dollars for that whiskey, mister. In advance, like always."

That was cheap enough for a gallon of whiskey and I said so. I was getting so I could take a slug of it down without feeling as though I'd swallowed a live coal.

I came out with four dollars and we had another drink and she retired to the kitchen to fix the chicken, and I sat down in the kitchen chair—it was as soft as the bed at that—and wondered whether I'd better take another drink before dinner or let well enough alone. I had a busy day planned for tomorrow—I wanted to go out to the Lam-

breth farm and look over the colored boy's room, for one thing, and I wanted to see the dam, where old Mrs. Lambreth's naked body had been found.

Why somebody had stripped her like that was bothering me more than any other thing.

I was in front of the window, with the shade up, and I'd just decided to let the liquor alone. I'd had plenty for one day, I thought—and it hadn't been a bad day's work at that. I'd met my client, met his lawyer, worked a pipeline into the forces of law and order through Pete, the jailer, and heard more than a little of the local gossip.

The gossip was all against my client but it was a good thing to know.

I'd apparently got on the wrong side of a good percentage of the local citizens but I wasn't worrying about that.

And the next second I started worrying about this last in earnest.

THE window starred, in the very place I was staring at. Then it started crashing on the floor, but it fell in sections. The center of it went first, then the top and then the bottom. I was on the floor by the time this last chunk of glass had jangled down. It was perfectly light outside yet, it being only a little after six, and the only reason the shooter missed me as he had was that the room was dimmer than outdoors and I'd just shown against the window as a blur.

I had my gun out and ready, but when I peeked out around the corner of the sill, I couldn't see a thing. The house was at the edge of town and the vacant lots across from it were filled with underbrush and little trees, and a platoon could have hidden there safely, much easier just a single man.

I also made a mistake in sticking my head up that near the now-open window. The shooter across the way could see it clearly, and he proved right then he was no green hand with a gun. His second slug tore the wood just above my head and one splinter from this raked across my temple.

I heard the back door slam then but paid no attention to it.

I had a brand-new box of shells and could see no reason for saving ammunition. I kept in the same place, figuring the shooter would think I'd move, and I looked out and shot

into that brush across the road six times, lining the slugs out evenly across the hundred feet or more I had to cover.

It was hopeless as far as hitting a man was concerned, but I thought it might scare him away. Two rifle shots—though it had sounded like a small-calibred gun, followed by six pistol shots, ought to bring the local lights out in a rush, I thought. I shoot a heavy gun, a .44 Smith & Wesson Special, and it bangs out as much noise as a small cannon.

I ducked back well away from the window and latched open the gun and stuffed fresh shells into the cylinder. And went back to the same spot. That time I was positive the shooter would figure me for a move.

And I was wrong and it was almost the worst mistake I ever made.

The guy had changed his tactics. Instead of shooting at my head, which he could see when I'd duck it up in that corner of the window, he started shooting at the wall of the house, where he knew my body would have to be. The first bullet this way burned me right across the back. The second wasn't more than three inches over me and I was as flat on the floor as I could get by that time. I was squirming away from that hot spot like an eel when the third one came, but when I heard the heavy boom of a shotgun across the way, and the wild yell that followed it, I took a chance and got to my feet and went for the door.



ONCE heard, Mrs. Parsons would be remembered. Her voice was thin and high and snappy, and I recognized it even at that distance and even if it was raised in a sort of howl.

I went out the front door as fast as I



could run, and I felt as big as a house when I got into view. I was in the middle of the road when I heard her sing out again, and I placed her then as being at my right and turned that way.

And sure enough she was.

She was standing by a man and holding a twelve-gauge automatic shotgun. She had the gun on him with a finger on the trigger, but it wasn't necessary—I could see that as I came dashing up.

The man was on his face with both arms and legs spread out so that he looked like

a starfish. There was nothing but blood and brains where the back of his head should have been.

I said: "Boy! How far away from him were you when you turned it loose?"

"About fifteen feet, mister. I come up behind him but he never heard me. He was so busy shooting my windows out he didn't hear a thing until I spoke."

"You spoke?"

"I said 'Drop it' and he started to turn, bringing his gun around. I let her go right then."

"You just about had to."

"My husband always said that if you ever pulled a gun on a man, you should use it. I'll be damned if John wouldn't think I'd done a first-rate job here."

Two men came running up the road then,

and three women. Then two cars stopped.

Inside of five minutes half of Jamesville was there, with Mrs. Parsons holding firmly to her shotgun and telling them one and all to keep the hell and gone away from the body until the law got there.

She was right, too, of course. The man had a rifle still in his hand. He was using a little gun, as I'd thought—a .25-20 lever-action Winchester carbine. He had his right-hand fingers in the lever even then, and the action was half open, showing he'd just been pumping another shell into the chamber when he'd been killed.

It was as clear a case of self-defense as could be and there were enough witnesses to testify to the way things were. The old lady was as safe as though she was in God's pocket—the combination of the man shooting up her house and the proof of his doing it right in his hands would have cleared her in front of any coroner's jury in the land.

The audience was guessing who the dead man was when the sheriff came up. A big heavy man, but not fat—and one who apparently was no friend of Mrs. Parsons.

He said: "Oh, you, Ellie!"

She said: "Is this part of your work, Giles?"

I didn't get it—not for a moment.

THE sheriff wasn't alone. He had a young fellow with him, not a bad-looking guy and one that didn't look at all country. He looked more like Joe College, with five years tacked on for luck.

The guy looked at the dead man and said: "My Lord! It's Sherril!"

It took me a moment to place the name, though I knew I'd heard it just that day. Then I remembered Judge Hickey and the tale he'd told about the colored moonshiner and the deputy-sheriff who'd laid out in the brush and watched the liquor being buried under the hen house, without doing anything about the matter.

Then I knew why Mrs. Parsons had suggested the sheriff had sent the man.

The sheriff and his pal started to move in to the body and I said: "Now let's get this straight, men. I want you to look at everything. Now, before you move a thing—before you even turn the man over."

"Who the hell are you?" the sheriff asked.

"If you don't know, you're the only man in town that don't."

"Phelan?"

"Of course."

"I'll get to you in a minute."

I picked a bright-looking kid and took him to the side. "You know Judge Hickey?"

"Sure, mister. Everybody does."

"Think you can find him?"

"Sure."

I took a dollar from my pocket and handed it over and said: "Then get going."

And then the sheriff was back, and with him his pal.

"This is Mr. Carr, our prosecutor, Mr. Phelan," he said, this time with more friendliness. "What's your side of this? This dead man's a deputy of mine."

"He was trying to kill me through Mrs. Parsons' front-room window. He shot at me, let me see, five times. You can find the evidence all over my room—he took the glass out of the window with the first shot, a piece of the window casing with the second, and he put three through the wall."

"Oh, come now, Phelan," said the prosecutor, in the chiding tone teacher uses with the bad little boys. "You don't expect us to believe that a deputy sheriff, a sworn officer of the law, would try to bushwhack you through a window. You don't expect us to swallow that."

"Not you, Mister."

"What does that mean?"

"I expect you to believe everything his nibs here tells you to believe, that's all. If you had a mind of your own, though, I'd expect you to believe it."

"That's telling 'em, mister," said Mrs. Parsons, coming up at my side. She still held her shotgun and her little black eyes were as bright as jet buttons. "I already told Mr. High-and-Mighty here what happened. I heard him shoot and heard the glass go in the window. I'm not a fool and I knew they were laying for you, so I took the scattergun and went out the back way. I crossed the road right beyond the bend there and come in behind the backshooting fool. And it's well I did—the county ought to pay a bounty on people like that instead of hiring them to enforce the law."

"Now, Ellie," said the sheriff.

"And don't now Ellie me, Giles. You're as bad as Sherril was. I'll be damned if you ain't worse—you're smarter. You can't tell me, Giles, that you're buying houses and such like stuff on what the county pays you. You can't tell me or nobody else that and make 'em believe it, mister. You got a new house and a new car and stock in the bank, and your wife, who's no better than she should be and you can tell her I said it, has got a new fur coat that's paid for. You done all this in two years, on a salary that ain't more than big enough to keep you in eating tobacco. And don't answer me back or I'll slap your dirty sneaking face."

THE sheriff said: "Come on, Carr," and went away from there, fast.

The old lady said: "I guess I got him told, hey, mister?"

"You don't seem to like him."

"Why, the dirty back-biting heathen has raised the price of whiskey a dollar a gallon since he took office. He gets a share out of every run that's made, whether it's paid at the still or in court. And the judge is as bad."

"Who's the judge?"

"Old Timothy Nealy. Don Nealy, the bank cashier's old man."

"Is he like the son?"

"He's like the son will be when the son gets old and nasty. That give you the idea?"

It did indeed and I said so. She went over and told the sheriff we were going back to our house for supper, and that if he wanted to look at her front room and see where his hired killer had shot up the place, why he could damn well do it in the morning.

The sheriff said he'd be calling at ten the next morning and then Hickey came steaming up, shoving through the crowd like a big truck through traffic.

He said: "What's this? What's this? You need me, Mr. Phelan, sir? Well, Sherril finally got what he's been asking for, I see. A good job well done, Mrs. Parsons. I will take pride in representing you before the coroner's jury, ma'am."

"Thank you, Judge. Will you come over to the place with us?"

"I will indeed. Just a word with our sheriff first."

He fixed the sheriff with his eye and said: "I represent both Mr. Phelan and Mrs. Parsons, sir. I will appreciate it if you will keep that fact in mind at all times."

"Why certainly, Judge."

I whispered: "Why do they call him judge? Is he one?"

"Oh, hell, no," she whispered back. "In this country they call every lawyer that's over forty judge. Like they call everybody in Kentucky a colonel."

We went over to the house and I got my new jug and we all sat out in the kitchen, where Mrs. Parsons could cook chicken and take a drink at the same time. Judge Hickey was staying for supper—he didn't even bother with an invitation—and after I saw and tasted how the chicken turned out, I didn't wonder.

A man would be a fool who wouldn't invite himself to a meal like that one was.

CHAPTER V

Poor Jasper



RAN'MA LAMBRETH, or what was left of her, was in the undertaking parlor, and I went to see her before going out to her farm. She'd been a stern-looking old lady

and the undertaker, who was also the coroner, had done a pretty good job on her. Much better than I had expected, to be honest. People that have been in the water after death get a floated, discolored look, and they don't have to be in it very long for this to develop. If it had with gran'ma, the guy had covered it very well.

She'd been a tall, thin woman, I could see. She looked a little like her grandson, but where he was weak and showed it, she had a chin.

She looked very calm and I thought of the horrible strangling death she'd had and I wondered.

I asked: "Did the doctor do an autopsy on her?"

"He certainly did," the undertaker-coroner said briskly. He was that kind of man—short and plump and as chipper as a sparrow. "Gran'ma certainly didn't keep any secrets from him, either. The direct cause of death

was heart failure, caused by insufficient oxygen. She breathed through her mouth instead of her nose, mister, like lots of people do. About half and half, you know—they take in half their air supply through the nose and half through the open mouth. Usually caused by adenoids, in childhood. There's a definite malformation in the nasal—"

I didn't doubt but that he could go on forever in this fascinating way.

I said: "Oh, sure. What I meant was this. Was she tapped on the head or anything before she was gagged? Or didn't he look?"

"He looked. Not a mark, not a scratch on her body. And mister, you could see all of her at a glance. She was as naked as a babe when they brought her in. The damn' fools didn't even cover her up with a blanket—they just put her in the back of a car and brought her in the way they found her."

"With the stuff that was tied to her, too?"

"You bet. It's in my back room, right now. Want to see it?"

I did, and said so.

There was a piece of rail about six feet long, light stuff that the coroner said had probably come from some abandoned spur track on the main line that ran through Jamesville. Baling wire was looped around this a half dozen times, wire as rusty as the rail was. Both ends of this wire had been brought together, leaving about six feet on each end free. This the coroner pointed out.

"This stuff was wrapped around her, up to her knees. You see? I guess they didn't have wire clippers, neither—you can see where they had to cut the end of this piece off with a chisel of some sort."

I'd already noticed what he was getting at. One end of the wire as it had been for years, rusted into nothing. The other showed bright nicks where the tool that had been used to cut it had slipped, and that end looked chewed and haggled, as though whoever had cut it had had a hard time doing it.

I said: "The sheriff should have taken this for evidence."

"He's got lots of time—it's safe enough here. And everybody knows young Lambreth did it, so what's the difference?"

"Because of him being the one to benefit, you mean?"

"Why, sure. And he's no good anyway. Why ain't he in the army, where he belongs?"

"Maybe he couldn't pass the physical."

"Hell! Strong as a bull, that one is. Now with me it's different. I'm only in my thirties, in the prime of life you might say, but I suffer from weak lungs. 'S a fact."

"You don't suffer with 'em, mister. You enjoy 'em."

"Hunh?"

"Sure. Don't they give you something to talk about when the other girls talk about their operations?"

"Hunh?"

"Let's forget the whole thing. Was the old lady hard of hearing or anything like that?"

"She was not. She was as bright as a new dollar, old gran'ma was. Eyes and ears as good as a young girl's, by golly. And she really spoke her mind—when she didn't like a thing, she said so then and there."

"Does her grandson?"

"That sissy! Lord, no. He jumps if you say boo to him."

I'D THOUGHT that when I talked to young Lambreth but I was making sure. And the more I made sure of this, the surer I was that he hadn't killed his grandmother. It takes nerve to kill anybody, even an old lady who can't fight back very much, and I didn't think the boy had it.

It wasn't proof, but it was a point that seemed to be overlooked by everybody but me.

I said that was all and thanked the man, and the coroner beamed at me as though I was his long-lost friend.

"Hope I helped you," he said.

"I think maybe you helped young Lambreth."

"Oh, him! I'd pull the rope that hangs him, mister. I liked gran'ma—everybody in this country did."

I said I'd heard that, too—and went outside to the car I'd borrowed from Mrs. Parsons.

The Lambreth farm was ten miles out toward Twisted River and the country was lush and rolling, mostly orchards on the swells and seasonable stuff in the valleys between. Even I, and I'm no farmer, could

see it was good country to live in, and I even began to faintly understand why people had lived in that same spot generation after generation. I stopped three different places to ask for directions to the Lambreth place, and in each instance was asked to join the family—once for lunch, once to help eat a watermelon that had just been brought up, dripping, from a cold deep well, and once for a drink of the usual dynamite.

I took the last, although the watermelon looked interesting. If it hadn't been for wondering how whiskey and watermelon would mix, I'd have gone for it like a shot.

It was like that, though. Friendly—both

the people and the land. It was almost impossible to think of the old lady being tied, naked, to a piece of rail and dropped into water over her head. It was even more of a job trying to think of the kind of people who'd let her strangle as she had—taking an hour, probably, in that miserable death.

The Lambreth farmhouse was back from the road about a quarter of a mile, and just before I reached it I passed a half dozen little houses, all shabby, all with littered yards and in need of paint and patching. Four of the houses had washing on the clotheslines and colored kids in the yards, but the other two stood blank and silent.

She gasped and her voice quavered:
"D-d-don't shoot, mister."



Just past these the main farmhouse stood, and the contrast was startling.

It was trim and white, with neat green shutters back against the walls and with a well-kept yard. There were two oak trees in

front, standing higher than the two-storyed house. A big and very red barn was in a sort of hollow, well behind the house, and there were a dozen more outbuildings around it. It looked like what it was, a prosperous well-looked-after place, and while I had no idea of how much land went with the buildings, I could see the thing was worth some honest actual cash.

I parked in front of the house and a middle-aged colored woman came around from the back and to the car. She said: "Yassuh?" and made a question of it.

I said: "It's about Mrs. Lambreth."

"Yassuh."

"I'm another officer. I want to look around."

"I never seen you before, mistuh."

"I'm working for Mr. Lambreth. I don't think he killed his grandmother and I'm trying to find out who did."

"Mr. Lambreth, he wouldn't kill nobody," the woman said, as if speaking of something she'd put a lot of thought on. "That man wouldn't hurt a fly. He wouldn't do like they done to gran'ma."

"I don't think so either."

"You look all you like."

"Now about Jasper. Anybody heard of him?"

"Nossuh! I heard some talk about how maybe Jasper could have done this thing, but not Jasper. That boy he get drunk and he lazy, but tha's all."

"He shouldn't have ducked out of sight."

MAYBE not, maybe so, mistuh! If people evah thought he done that to gran'ma, they'd have him on a rope fas' as lightnin'. A colored boy don't have a chance, when it's anybody like gran'ma tha's got killed and they think a colored boy done it."

"You maybe got something there. Where did Jasper live?"

"You pass the place. Fo'th house down the road."

"There was blood in it, I hear."

"The do's open, mistuh. You can see."

"Now what's this about Susie Meadows?"

"Susie's Jasper's girl. She cut the livin' hell out of that Parker wench."

"I heard that, too. Now where's this Susie live? And the Parker girl?"

"Susie, she live next place up the road. Her and her family work that farm on shares. Ain't much good, that farm, so the white folks let the colored people share-crop it."

"And the Parker girl?"

"She work for the people beyond. In the house, on'y she was a field gal by rights."

"I see."

"She fool with Jasper one time too much."

"So I heard."

"Susie, she's good-natured and no harm in her at all, but she get mad like anybody else. Tha's all."

I'd found out what I wanted to know, so I got out of the car and looked all over the Lambreth house. With the colored woman at my heels, telling me what a fine old lady Gran'ma Lambreth was. How she done right by everybody and expected everybody to do right by her.

I said: "It's a funny thing about her having no clothes on when they found her."

"It's a shame and a disgrace, mistuh! That would hurt gran'ma more than being killed, suh, I do believe. She was an honest-to-goodness lady, gran'ma was."

"Jasper brought her home that night, all right, I understand."

"That's right, mistuh. 'Cause I made tea fo' her. Jasper and me had suppah in the back. That boy was a mite drunk but he had his appetite."

"He have anything to say?"

"Jus' as always. That he was going next place an' see Susie. On'y po' little Susie is already in the jail, on'y we didn't know it. She cut that Parker wench two hours befo' and the high-sheriff he already got her."

I left right then. I had a hunch and a good one, and it was plain enough that I wasn't going to find anything at the Lambreth house itself. I stopped at the fourth cottage back toward the highway, and found blood and plenty of it.

And I parked my car and started through the woods that separated that house from the neighboring farm, the one that Susie and her folks were share-cropping, and I knew what I'd find but not just where to find it.

If it hadn't been for the buzzards, I'd have missed it, too.

HIS name had been Jaspar Twine but nobody could have identified him from what was left, except by the clothes he had on. He was in a little gully, maybe fifty feet long and ten feet deep, and there was a little stagnant water in the bottom of this. He was in the water.

The weather had been hotter than the hinges of hell and that alone wouldn't have done him any good. He'd have been bloated beyond all recognition, probably, just from that.

But the buzzards, those sickening things, had been working on him and he had no face, no hands, no belly or chest, and all he was, was a shapeless mess of flesh, bones, and clothes.

Buzzards, I found out then, are no more particular about their personal habits than they are about what they eat.

They'd even eaten his finger bones away—or at least there were none on what was left of his hands. They'd torn and ripped open his shirt—he'd been wearing no coat. Most of his arms were gone, also—they'd been able to go through the flimsy shirt he was wearing as though it had been made of tissue paper, but his pants were of heavier stuff and were still holding together. His legs had swelled inside these so they were as tight as sausage skin.

I saw all this from above him, on the bank. I couldn't get any nearer. The combination would have turned off anybody. I looked long enough to make sure of what I was seeing, and went back to my hired car. I was still so sick that I could barely drive the car.

Hickey was in his office and I told him what I had found before notifying the sheriff.

I said: "You can figure it out for yourself, Judge. Here's the old lady, strangled. The sheriff finds this colored boy's cabin with blood all over the floor. It can't have been the old lady's blood because she didn't have a mark on her."

"The sheriff figured that there's where Susie and Maudie Parker had their battle."

"Why should he? Susie told them where that battle happened. Between where Maudie worked and Susie's place where her family sharecropped. In between there. That's where they found the girl, I understand.

She was cut up so bad she couldn't even get back to her own place."

"Susie told them that, that's a fact."

"Why didn't they believe her then?"

"The law officers don't always believe what the colored people tell them, Mr. Phelan, sir. And the sheriff knew that Lambreth had killed gran'ma and why should he make work for himself? He figured it that way, all right."

"And just let that blood in Jasper's cabin go? Without checking on it at all?"

"He's a hard man, Giles is, Mr. Phelan. I guess maybe he figured it was just more trouble and why bother it until it bothered him."

I thought there was more to it than that but I let it go. I thought that Hickey might know his own people and that undoubtedly they had different ways of thinking about things than we did up North. But I also thought that, in the main, people were the same the world over. And that one law officer would act as another law officer would, leaving out the personal element, that is.

And murder's murder the world over, too. There's got to be a motive, and nine times out of ten it's money.

THE judge backed me up, right then.

He said: "Y'see, Mr. Phelan, sir, young Lambreth's got to be the one that did it. You can't get away from it—he's the one that'd get gran'ma's money and farm. He's the only one could benefit by her death. And with him wanting to get married, and needing a lot of money to do it, why, he just went ahead and killed that poor old lady. He just couldn't wait for her to die in her bed."

"Why would this marriage of his cost so much money?"

"You haven't met Miss Stiles, I take it?"

"Not as yet."

Hickey looked at the ceiling and put his fingers together in steeple shape. He said: "You have an experience due you, Mr. Phelan, sir. It's my advice to you now, however, that you notify the sheriff. He wouldn't take it kindly, you finding a body and not telling him about it."

"He should have found it himself. He would have if he'd looked."

"He didn't bother, Mr. Phelan, sir. Have you as yet any idea of why Deputy Sherril fired on you?"

"Sure. I think the same thing you do." "Now what is that?"

"Why be foxy? He was hired, of course. But I don't know who hired him, though I'm beginning to get a few ideas."

"Care to tell me them?"

"Not yet. Who'd get the old lady's money and farm if the grandson can't inherit?"

"The state, Mr. Phelan. He's the only relative left as of record. At one time a large family, sir, but years ago, in the early twenties I believe—the eighteen-twenties, of course—there was a smallpox epidemic that decimated that clan. They've never prospered since, except in a material way. A small family always, Mr. Phelan."

"I see. Well, I'll drop over to tell the sheriff about what I found."

"Do that, sir. And Mr. Phelan!"

"Yes, Judge."

"If I was you, I'd get so stinkin' drunk tonight your own mammy wouldn't know her boy. From what you tell me it must have been a horrid sight, that colored boy down there in that wash. You look bad yet, Mr. Phelan. If I was you I'd take my mind right off it."

"Thanks, Judge."

I started for the sheriff's office, wondering whether the lawyer was a fool or a very smart man. He kept insisting young Lambreth was guilty, which made him a fool in my book, but in every other way he was acting pretty canny. He kept emphasizing the money angle and he wasn't doing it to hear himself run off at the mouth—he talked a lot but every word meant something.

I got to the Sheriff's office just in time to hear him raising hell with some deputy about letting me leave town in my hired car.

It seemed I was a suspect, too, only I didn't know what of. It couldn't have been for killing his other deputy, Sherril, the night before, because Mrs. Parsons not only was taking the blame for that but was bragging about it.

I put it down that I was a suspect just on general principles.

And that could be disquieting to a stranger like me.

CHAPTER VI

A Lady with an Idea



HE old lady and I sat in the kitchen—it was handier to the water tap, and that liquid fire demanded chasers—until my jug was almost empty. There wasn't more than three inches of whiskey left in the bottom of it, and by that time I couldn't have hit the floor with my hat.

The old gal had taken drink for drink with me and acted as sober as a judge.

I said: "Here's how it stacks up to me, Mrs. Parsons. Somebody followed gran'ma and Jasper when they left town. They probably gave 'em plenty of time to get home and get settled, because that colored girl out there told me she'd fed Jasper in the kitchen and made the old lady a cup of tea. Then Jasper went to his own place—he said he was going over and see Susie, his girl. He didn't know she was already in jail, because of this fight with the Parker girl over him."

"Right as rain," Mrs. Parsons said, pouring us both another drink. "Then what happens?"

"This killer, or killers—I think there were at least two of them and maybe more—walk in on Jasper. They kill him, either with a knife or with a club. In some way so he bled a lot, anyway. From the way his body looked, nobody will ever know unless these killers tell just how. Outside of a fractured skull, which will still show, there's no way of telling by looking at the poor guy—those buzzards haven't left enough of him to do a post-mortem on."

"My husband used to say they kept the country clean."

"I'd rather have it dirty."

"Me too, mister. Go on with this story."

"Then they carried him over to this gully—it's only about four hundred yards from his place and I understand this Jasper was a smallish man. Two men could handle him easily enough. They figured nobody would find him for a little while, anyway, and maybe not for a long time, just depending on whether any effort was made about it."

"They'd get pretty bloody, packing a body that distance, mister."

"What's the difference? It was at night and who'd see them?"

"Well, maybe. But it's a certain sure thing that Jasper would have been found right away if anybody looked for him. Them buzzards eat fast, but it'd take 'em some time to do away with a full-grown man."

"That's proved. But nobody looked for the poor guy—if I hadn't got curious there wouldn't be anything left but bones and clothes in another week, and the first big rain that filled that gully would have washed that stuff away. It would have at least scattered it from hell to breakfast and maybe even buried it."

"That sounds all right. We know the sheriff didn't look for Jasper, anyway."

"Then these killers went on up to the Lambreth place and grabbed gran'ma. They knew there'd be plenty of search made for her, if she turned up missing, so they took her a long ways away before they tried to hide her body. It was just luck that that dam tender lowered the water in that reservoir and so happened to see her."

THAT ain't luck, mister, that's irrigation," Mrs. Parsons said severely. "Luck don't enter into it—that's an example of poor thinking. They should have known that reservoir would be lowered."

"Maybe they thought they were putting her in deeper water than they did. The part that puzzles me is that they stripped her naked before they put her in the water."

"I've got some common sense," said Mrs. Parsons, acidly. "That's something you seem to be fresh out of, mister. Of course they had to strip her."

"I don't get it."

"Now, look. She'd been home long enough to either be in bed or to be ready for bed. You've forgotten all about that time she had after she got home. She'd have on a nightgown, of course. They'd have to carry her, wouldn't they? Of course they would. They'd already killed Jasper, hadn't they? They'd carried him to this wash by that time, hadn't they? They'd be covered with blood, wouldn't they? Some of it would be on gran'ma's nightie, wouldn't it? So they'd have to take her nightie off her so that nobody would think of her and Jas-

per being killed the same night. She died by strangulation, not by being knifed or by having her head smashed in or by anything that would cause bleeding—so they had to keep all blood away from her. That's just plain common sense."

"You've got it there. That's hitting it on the nose."

"Of course. They couldn't even slash her dead body because a doctor can tell whether a wound is made before a person's dead or after. I read that in a book once."

"You're right. But why did they kill the colored boy and why did they tie up Gran'ma Lambreth?"

"That I don't know, mister. You're the detective, not me. I'm just an old lady that runs a sort of boarding-house. I'm no detective."

"The hell you're not."

She looked pleased. She said: "One thing, mister! It certainly looks like young Lambreth had help, the way you tell it. You might see who was around that would help him. His friends are as wishy-washy as he is."

"That's the one main reason I began thinking he didn't do it. He hasn't got the nerve."

Mrs. Parsons snapped her fingers and put so much into it that the cat let out a startled meow and jumped out from behind the stove.

She said: "And me talking about common sense. Why that boy and all his pals haven't got nerve enough amongst 'em all to do a thing like that. I should've thought of that."

"Try and think of some reason why gran'ma was killed. You can do it if anybody can."

Mrs. Parsons said she'd certainly put her mind on it and poured another little snifter around.

It was about half an hour later that I staggered off to bed.

IN SPITE of the load I was laboring under when I went to bed I heard my caller on the porch. There was some sort of a noise that woke me, and I could then hear excited breathing just outside my broken-out window.

I sleep with my gun on the floor up by the head of my bed. Putting a gun under a pillow is all right for some people maybe, but it's no good if you're caught in bed. You can't get at it—you'd have to wiggle around like a fish to get a hand on it.

With it on the floor, all you've got to do is reach down and grab.

And I did.

I thumbed the hammer back, taking up on the trigger at the same time, so that there'd be no betraying click as it came to full cock, and then lined the gun on the dim square of open window and waited.

And sure enough, by and by something filled up part of that space and started into the room.

I said: "That's far enough."

There was a gasp and it didn't come from a man. A voice quavered: "D-d-d-don't shoot, mister."

"Who're you?"

"M-m-minerva Stiles."

That would be young Lambreth's fiancee, with the trick name.

"What you after?"

"You didn't come to see me and I have to talk to you."

"Well, come on in and talk."

"If Mrs. Parsons hears me she'll skin me alive."

"Why?"

"She says I'm a limb of Satan and no better than I should be. She says it's girls like me that are giving American womanhood a bad name. She says I'm a stench in the nostrils of every decent woman in Jamesville."

"The old gal speaks right out in meeting, don't she? Well, come in or stay out."

"I'll come in," she decided, and did so.

She came over to the bed and saw the light shine on the big gun. She said: "I do believe you would have shot me, wouldn't you?"

"I would. I'm not exactly popular in this place."

"That's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. Don said that you'd either be dead or out of town by tomorrow night."

"Don?"

"Don Nealy. He's the bank cashier."

"Oh, sure. When was this?"

"Tonight. When he took me out to the Sixty Club."

"This Sixty Club's a new one on me."

"It's a sort of roadhouse, about ten miles from here. They call it the Sixty Club because they say you can have a good time there if you're not over that. Over sixty, I mean."

"That's not a bad gag."

"Don takes me there every now and then."

"I thought you were engaged to young Lambreth?"

"I am, of course. But I go out with Don once in a while, too. A girl shouldn't tie herself down to one man."

"You'll find a lot of men who can give you an argument on that point, sister. What's this you want to see me about?"

She was standing by the bed and we were whispering, but now she sat down by me.

She said: "Because I bet I know why Gran'ma Lambreth was killed. That's why."

"Why?"

"Because she saw those bank robbers, that's why."

It was an idea at that, and I said so. But there was a flaw in that reasoning and I brought it out.

"Then why was Jasper, this colored boy that used to drive her to town, killed? I found his body today, myself. He was killed the same evening Gran'ma Lambreth was, the way it figures out."

"He was in the bank, too, of course. He saw what gran'ma did."

"Nobody mentioned that. The story is that just this friend of yours, Don Nealy and the bookkeeper who was killed, and gran'ma, were in the bank at the time the robbers came in."

"That's because nobody notices colored people, Mr. Phelan. They just look at them and forget they're there."

"Are you sure Jasper was in the bank, too?"

"I asked Don. Don said he was sure he was."

"That's about the only thing that Don seemed to remember about the thing, if what I hear is right."

"I guess he got excited."

"Gran'ma didn't."

"Gran'ma Lambreth didn't get excited about anything. She never was excited in

her life. She didn't even get excited when she was locked in her cellar and her house burned down. She didn't even get excited when there was a terrible cyclone that blew the barn away when she was in it and put it almost a quarter of a mile from where it had been."

"How d'ya know all that? Did she tell you?"

"Why of course. And I read it in her diary. Gran'ma kept a diary since she was a little girl. She put everything in it—pages and pages of stuff about everything that happened. Even things like when they put in the crops. Like the date they planted winter wheat and the date they planted corn and the date she planted sweet peas and how they did and all that. She'd look back and know what year the blight hit the apples and what year the cutworms ruined the cabbage crop all over the country. She put it all down, and if there was an argument about anything like that, they'd go to gran'ma and she'd tell them who was right."

I lit a cigarette and in the match flare saw that my little Minerva was black-haired, black-eyed, pretty, and as dumb-looking as a young calf. Her conversation was backing this last thought up, too—all except where she'd said that the old lady was so careful about keeping the diary on a day-to-day basis.

I said: "Where'd she keep this 'thing? It must be as big as a dictionary by this time. If she'd kept a record of everything since she was a little girl, I mean."

"There are books and books of it. She wrote it down on tablets, like the kids use in school, and as soon as one was full she'd put it away with the others and start a new one. There must be a hundred of them—she showed them to me when I went to visit her a couple of times."

"Where'd she keep 'em?"

"In a hall closet, out at the farm. She kept them handy, because she used them to settle arguments all the time, you see."

"Then everybody around here knew she kept that sort of record?"

"Oh, of course. Everybody knew gran'ma. You see I bet she had a notion of who the bank robbers were. They had to be somebody from around here, of course."

"Why, of course?"

"Silly! There are only two roads away from here. That is, main roads. The sheriff had those and all the other roads blocked, right after the robbery. And all this country is settled, and some farmer would have been sure to have seen the men if they'd left a road and started just walking across the fields."

The kid had a point, all right—and it went nicely with the ideas I'd been forming. And it gave a motive for the murder of both Jasper and the old lady, something that Lambreth didn't have. He could have had a reason for killing his grandmother—he was her heir—but he certainly had no reason for killing the colored boy.

This new thought put the colored boy and gran'ma in the same boat—and it filled out perfectly.

Then the door opened and the light snapped on and I saw Mrs. Parsons, standing in the doorway looking like a combination of pioneer woman and Carrie Nation. She was holding that deadly shotgun of hers at the ready and leaning forward on it like Dead-eye Dick getting ready to snap-shoot an Indian.

When she spoke, though, she sounded like outraged womanhood.

"I didn't expect this from you, mister," she said, sounding sorrowful about it. "I take you into my home and—I overlooked your smoking, you being a stranger and a smooth-talking man, but this is too much, in the home where my husband and I lived in peace and quiet for fifty-three years."

"Peace and quiet my eye!" said Minerva Stiles. "The only time there was peace and quiet in this house was when you and your old man were both too drunk to talk. I'll admit that was often—he was the only one in town who could drink as much as you can."

"You get out of my house right now, you trollop."

The kid showed she had a better education than I'd given her credit for. Or maybe she'd read a book and remembered one of the longer words.

She said: "Certainly, you old harridan!"

I said: "Now, Mrs. Parsons! Miss Stiles has just come to me with some very important information about the case. I honestly

think she's given me the lead that will solve the matter."

"The idea!" Mrs. Parsons said. "You sticking up for her. You should be ashamed, mister. I treat you nice and you make a shame of me. Get out o' here, you little—"

She actually raised the shotgun and the kid scooted out the window as fast as if the old lady had actually shot her in the panties with a load of rock salt.

And then the old lady chuckled. So help me.

She said: "I been right outside that door, mister, since that little witch came through the window. I didn't miss a thing. I sleep sort of light, anyway, and since they been trying to kill you I've been sleeping even lighter than usual. He, he, he! Wasn't it funny the way that little hussy skedaddled?"

I said it was funny, all right, and asked her why she was picking on the poor kid.

"I don't like 'em, mister," she explained clearly. "None of them little heifers. They don't wear enough clothes. They ain't decent." Then: "D'ya really mean you know who killed Gran'ma Lambreth?"

"Just about," I stated. "I've got one of them in mind for sure and I know who was back of it. Once a thing like this starts breaking, it breaks fast. Everything starts to fall in place. One thing leads to another and it all fits together like a puzzle does."

"You'd better get some sleep," the old girl said. "You've got a busy day ahead of you. Don't you remember what that little tizzy said? About how Don Nealy said you'd either be dead or out of town by tomorrow night?"

"I do now that you mention it again."

"Then you'd better get some sleep if it's to be your last day in Jimtown," she said sternly. "I'll be damned if you ain't going to be busier than a little bee all day tomorrow."

"Sure."

Her parting shot was: "You bet you. You'll be busy either getting killed or packing up to leave."

Then she left, taking her shotgun with her. She looked virtuous and grim and moral and nicely triumphant. Quite a female, that Mrs. Parsons. I think I approved of her, in my own way.

CHAPTER VII

Busy Indeed!



HICKEY looked at me as though I was crazy. He said: "It seems to me, Mr. Phelan, sir, that you've got too much of 'It has to be' and 'It must have happened this way,' with a guess here and a guess there, to have anything that would stand up in front of a grand jury, much less in front of a court."

"It's this way, Judge—it has to be. You know yourself that Philip Lambreth hasn't got nerve enough to back a thing like this has turned out to be. This answers everything—there isn't a loose thread in the whole thing, the way I've figured it."

"And there's not a particle of proof, either, Mr. Phelan, sir. And proof's what you have to have in front of a jury. You realize whom you're charming with this, I hope."

"I do indeed."

"And you'll take full responsibility?"

I got it then. The old fox had figured things just about the way I had, but he wasn't going out on a limb.

I said: "I certainly will. But I've got to have some local citizens of good character to go along with me while I hunt for proof that will stand up in court. If I go alone, they'll swear I planted evidence on them."

"I'll do better than that," he said, scooping up the phone. "I'll get you the State Police Barracks. I'll personally introduce you to the captain in charge, but you understand you'll have to take the onus, if this backfires on you."

"Certainly."

He got the barracks and I talked to the captain in charge. And then I waited. I had a splitting headache and was plenty glad the thing was breaking then. I figured another four or five days of that four-dollar liquor would have me in a hospital bed, no less, if the way I felt right then meant anything.

Then two troopers came, young fellows, both of them, and both of them caught the idea right away.

They both knew Hickey, which was also a help.

And Hickey even went with us, which surprised me a little.

Our first call was at the sheriff's, but we didn't go up to the front door and announce ourselves. We went in through a back lot, passing a railroad dump, which I pointed out to the troopers. The sheriff had a barn and chicken house as everybody else in town had; and I headed for the junk that was stacked behind it.

I said: "My theory is that they gagged and tied the old lady out at her farm. But they had to go through town, here, to get out to the dam and the reservoir, and they'd stop here for something heavy to tie on her feet so that her body wouldn't come to the surface. If they used a piece of rail from that dump, they'd naturally get the wire they used to fasten it to her from some place handy. This is the handiest place."

Hickey grumbled: "It's all theory, Mr. Phelan, sir," but I noticed he was grinning at the troopers when he said it.

The wire was in the pile all right. I could see where a piece of it had been pulled from a loose roll of the stuff, and even could see where the thing that had been used to cut it had made the same kind of marks on it that were on the piece that had been cut off and used to wire the old lady to the rail.

Both troopers witnessed the find—that's why I'd wanted them along. And they both got very enthusiastic about then, seeing the theory was beginning to sprout and grow.

One said: "Fan out, Harry, and look around. You go that way and I'll go this. Maybe there's some bloody clothes around the place."

They wandered off, looking behind and under everything they came to, and that left Hickey with me. He was at the side of the barn, leaning against it, and just beyond a door, and when this slammed open it shut him off from sight completely.

It was the sheriff, wearing slippers and in his undershirt, but he was all dressed up as far as a gun was concerned. He had one as big as mine and it was aimed at my middle.

"Snooping, eh?" he said.

"Putting the last nail in the scaffold, mister," I said. "I mean the scaffold they'll hang you from. Mrs. Parsons saved the

state some trial money, when she killed that deputy of yours, but you'll hang for both of you. And Nealy along with you."

The sheriff was in the doorway with Hickey behind the door and I was praying Hickey had brains enough to give me the help I needed. Both state troopers were well away from the barn by then and couldn't see what was going on.

The sheriff snarled out: "You're on private property, mister. I heard a commotion and ran out and hollered at you to stop, but you started to pull a gun on me so I blasted you."

"Nealy said I'd either be dead or out of town today. It makes it handy, doesn't it?"

He called me a dirty name and his finger tightened on the trigger of his gun, so much that I could see it whiten from the pressure.

I talked fast, trying to keep him from shooting right then. I said: "You played it a dumb way, Sheriff. You shouldn't have worked it with Nealy like that. You gave yourself away, both of you, all of you. In the first place, Nealy was too vague about that robbery. You and that Deputy Sherril were the two masked bandits who robbed the bank—and the old woman and Jasper may have suspected it. Nealy didn't remember a thing, but Gran'ma Lambreth did. So did Jasper, the colored man. It didn't look so good, both of them knowing what had happened and Nealy not knowing anything at all. Then Nealy made another mistake when he talked a committee into telling me not to interfere. That was another tip-off. He's a big enough shot to get a crowd to go along with him, but that was just plain damned-fool work. Who'd be scared out of town by anybody like him or by any committee he could raise?"

"It wasn't my idea," the sheriff said.

"You did as bad or worse. You shouldn't have taken any chances with Jasper's body. You should have buried it ten feet deep. If you guys had been smart you could have laid the blame for the old lady's death on him. You could have made it look as if he'd killed her and skipped out. But no! You had to try and put it on the Lambreth kid. I still don't see just why."

"Nealy's idea again," the sheriff snapped. "The old lady had sixteen thousand in the

bank, and Nealy was going to put a phony note against that balance."

"I hadn't thought of that. You made another mistake when you let Sherril try to bushwhack me at Mrs. Parsons' house. If those things miss they backfire. That one missed. It put you in it deeper than ever. I had a notion it was you because you didn't try to find out any reason for the blood in Jasper's cabin. You'd have checked on that first thing, if you'd been really trying to do anything about the mess. You wouldn't have let anything like that slide, with the old lady being killed and all."

"You're smart, all right. Just too damn' smart."

"And I'm willing to bet that if you hadn't stumbled onto me like this that I'd find that diary of the old lady's in your house."

"You'd lose. That's burned."

I saw a movement at my side and the sheriff must have seen it at the same time. He swung up his big gun and I dropped toward the ground and a shotgun blasted out, all at the same time. The sheriff jackknifed in the middle as though something had cut him in two, and we found afterward that was just about what happened. He pitched ahead on his face and I turned my head and saw Mrs. Parsons at the corner of the barn. She still had the shotgun up to her shoulder but she took it down when she saw the sheriff was out of action for all time.

"Seems like all I do is get you out of trouble, mister," she said. "I been hearing all he said."

"So did I," said Hickey, stepping out from behind the door. "So did I. I was going to slam the door against him, Mr. Phelan, sir, but it wasn't necessary. Mrs. Parsons acted first, as usual."

Both troopers were running up with guns out and ready.

I said to the first: "It's all over but the shouting. The shooting's certainly over—young Nealy won't go for gun play. All we've got to do is pick him up—the sheriff admitted it was all true in front of two witnesses. And that's all there was to it."

SIX months later I was back for the trial and again staying with Mrs. Parsons. The old lady had had a bunch of write-ups

in a lot of Sunday papers, with them calling her everything from a one-woman clean-up force to Mrs. "Killer" Parsons.

And she was plenty proud of them. She'd even subscribed to a clipping bureau, to keep track of her own progress.

She and I and Hickey were in her kitchen and she was pouring a drink, just like old times. I'd already found that I had to get used to that dynamite all over again, too. Every time I took a shot of it down I had to hold on to my chair to keep from sailing out the window.

Hickey said: "Well, the jury's out. It's just a question of whether they'll get the rope or get life. It'll be one or the other, mark my words, Mr. Phelan, sir."

Mrs. Parsons said "Happy days," slid her left hand across her mouth and zipped out her teeth, took her drink down fast, and zipped the teeth back again as smoothly as she'd taken them out.

It was a swell trick and one that she was getting better with day by day.

I said: "It's worked out fine."

"It's worked out better than Philip Lambreth's marriage," said Mrs. Parsons tartly. "I told you, mister, that the young girls these days are no good. That marriage proves it."

"How?" I asked.

Hickey said mildly: "I thought they were getting along very well, Ellie."

Mrs. Parsons said: "I'll be damned if that fool girl hasn't got a shower bath in the bathroom in this house they built with gran'-ma's money from the bank. And, mister, you wouldn't believe it. I wouldn't have believed it myself, but I seen it with my own eyes. It just shows what young girls these days are really like."

I said I liked shower baths myself.

"It ain't that, mister."

She paused then and made it impressive.

"That shower bath that little heifer's got has a glass door to it. So help me it has!"

I still didn't see the harm in it and said so.

She said: "Mister, if a lady takes a bath behind a glass door it ain't no better than if she did it in front of an open window. I'll be damned if a bath ain't something a person ought to take by themselves."

Both Hickey and I laughed and the old sister couldn't see just why.

I said: "One thing, Judge. Whatever happened to Susie? You know—the colored girl that killed the other one over Jasper. She was in jail when I left, waiting for trial."

"She got five years," said Hickey. "But now she's out and working for me. Mrs. Hickey isn't as well as she used to be and I had to have help. I figured if I could get Susie out, she wouldn't be able to quit when Mrs. Hickey raised hell with her about something. So I got her paroled."

I said: "Then that settles everything." Mrs. Parsons poured us another drink and put in the last word.

She said: "Here's to happiness to one and all."

And zipped out her teeth and took her drink and zipped her teeth back again where they belonged.

She was really a swell old lady—I always thought I liked her better than I'd have liked the old lady whom they fished out of the lake.

"Murder!" They Cried

By R. STEWART SCHENLEY

THESE celebrated crimes rocked their world and changed the course of subsequent history. Some were punished here, others received judgment elsewhere. All were sensational. How familiar are you with the names of the people involved? Score one point for each answer. Count 12 to 15 as Good, and 10 as Fair in rating your crime lore.

1. What was the first murder on record?
2. Who borrowed his listeners' ears to cry, "Murder!" as he delivered a funeral oration over the body of his friend?
3. What condemned woman succeeded in stabbing a revolutionary leader as he was taking his bath?
4. What American Vice-President killed a cabinet officer?
5. What empress mounted her throne over the murdered body of her insane husband?
6. What Greek king who fell in love with his mother and murdered his father has a psychological complex named for him?
7. What assassin shouted, "Sic Semper Tyrannis!" as he shot his victim before the eyes of hundreds of horrified spectators?
8. What great king fell in love with a married woman and sent her husband out to be killed in battle so that he could wed the widow?
9. "Choose," said cruel Queen Eleanor as she offered a dagger and a cup of poison to her husband's sweetheart. Who was her victim and who was her king?
10. Why is the name Leon F. Czolgosz infamous in American history?
11. The bloodless bodies of hundreds of Hungarian maidens called for revenge. What depraved noblewoman was responsible?
12. Can you fill in the blanks in this old ballad:
 'My name is Charlie Giteau,
 It's a name I'll never deny,
 For the murder of _____
 I am condemned to die.'
13. What Russian monarch had his own son condemned to death for treason?
14. What emperor drowned his mother and kicked his wife to death?
15. King Henry VIII had six wives—how many of them did he have executed?

(Answers on page 90.)

KILL ME AGAIN

That Bolivian mining stock was falling and rising curiously in value, and corpses were falling without arising. It occurred to Joe Lake and Bumps McCarthy, the two newspaper snoops, that there must be a very menacing connection in those facts—and dynamite danger for themselves!





EAVE us go 'way and make like you have not been called by this *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez*," moaned Charles (Bumps) McCarthy, sweat popping all over his round, red face. "The *senorita* would not anyway stay in Mountain Park by the statue of the Covered Wagon after she saw this—this—"

But Joe Lake, who had made homicidal history in the columns of the *Portland Telegram*, was padding toward the body of the woman. The crumpled corpse was picked

out by the light beams of the police reporter's coupe, parked only a few yards away.

The shapely figure, partly exposed where the cloak and dress had been torn away, lay in a pool of the Oregon drizzle of everlasting August rain. Even at first glance Joe

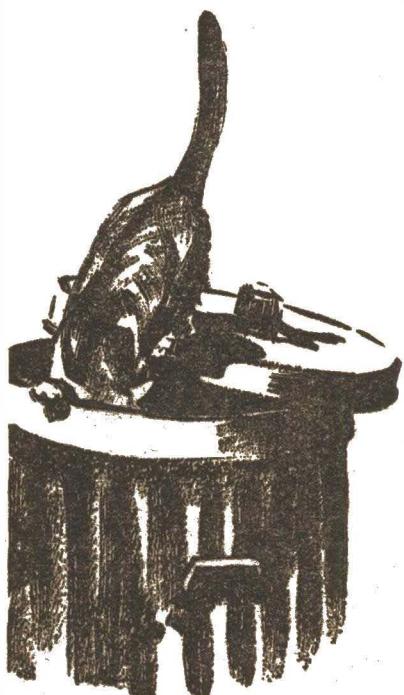


The chopper's muzzle pushed through the car window and it had a bead on Bumps McCarthy.

Lake saw that the dark, oval face had been beautiful, still was. But the slim neck was bent horribly, lifting the features beseechingly toward the twin lights that the glazed eyes never would see.

Bumps McCarthy, the plump staff photog, renewed his appeal as Joe Lake bent over the dead woman.

"Look, Joe! Maybe the killer that mugged her is lurking out there in the rhododendrons and he won't like for us to be horning in," groaned Bumps. "See! We arrived too soon and he didn't have time to snatch that other earring or that diamond off her right hand. He will see we are only a couple of newshounds and—"



"In that case, Bumps, you could stick here an' flash a pix," remarked Joe Lake dryly, studying the contours of the corpse and the muddy ground surrounding the shallow pool in which the body lay. "And while you flash the pix, I could hide out and pot the guy with my police thirty-eight if he shows up and gets rough."

Bumps McCarthy swallowed hard. "You really wanting a pix, Joe? Old Ward didn't like the last pix of a corpse I turned in. He said, what with the war art and all, it was too gruesome."

JOE LAKE'S long, quick fingers explored. He estimated the remaining eardrop at worth twice his year's pay. The other jewel was missing from a torn ear lobe.

"It looks as if the killer was a prowling thief who was interrupted by our car lights," said Joe Lake thoughtfully. "And rings have been ripped off two fingers. Her purse is open and it contains no money, only these other things and her cards. She was hit from behind, then her head was twisted."

"If it looks like that, Joe, leave us hurry up and call the police," put in Bumps McCarthy nervously. "You will not now meet this *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez*, the mystery tycoon of Bolivia, who has never been mugged and who has gone away after she saw—"

"We have kept our appointment with the *Senorita Hernandez*," interrupted Joe Lake, narrowing his gray eyes as he stared at a card from the dead woman's purse. "This card reads *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez, President, Hernandez Mining Corporation*. Apparently, Bumps, we are the first citizens of Portland to meet the famous tycoonette of Bolivia, discoverer of what are reputed to be the world's most productive tin mines."

"You mean, Joe, that she is her, the *senorita*?" gasped Bumps. "An' she was killed while she was waiting here to give you the first exclusive interview, an' some wandering thief saw her?"

"I said that was what it looks like, Bumps," replied Joe Lake, his voice taking on a hard edge. "But that is not what it is. *Senorita Hernandez* was dead when she

arrived. The ground has not been trampled, so there was no struggle. She was carried and tossed into the rain pool. It was meant that we—"

"No, Joe, no!" Bumps McCarthy cut in, choking on his own sudden panic. "I don't like you looking like that. We can't have an exclusive story. It's only nine o'clock of the evening, and when we call the police the *Morning Oregonian* has twelve hours before the *Telegram* could pick up the yarn on our afternoon edition time. No, Joe, not this time. You can't—"

But Joe Lake's mouth was a grim slash. His face was set in determined lines.

"We can, and we will," stated Joe Lake. "Look, Bumps. The *Senorita Hernandez* called me as a newspaperman, saying she saw my by-line over a story today. She said she liked my style and she wanted me to write an interview introducing her to Portland, and telling for the first time of still more and richer tin mines which she has not previously announced. So what she wanted, she gets."

"Joe, you won't—I ain't—we can't—there is no way to prevent her body being discovered by night shift war workers going through the park on their way home," argued Bumps, his plump hands reaching out as if he would push away the idea he knew was in Joe Lake's mind.

"There's a way, Bumps. This isn't what it looks like. We will make it less so. It was meant that I should find the body. I'm a police reporter, not a financial writer. My by-line was over a murder story, and that was why I was called. Not because the *Senorita Hernandez* liked my style, as the voice said over the phone. Get it?"

"I do not want to get it," complained Bumps slowly and with conviction. "I want to go away from this place as of now. Joe, if the *Morning Oregonian* beats us on the yarn, then you won't have to write it and become mixed up in this murder."

But Joe Lake was stripping off his rain-coat. He bent down quickly and turned the slight figure of the corpse over, as Bumps swore soulfully, mopping his moon-like face and peering furtively at the black shadows of the surrounding shrubbery.

"This time, Joe, I'm not—" Bumps began.

"Open the car trunk, Bumps," said Joe Lake tersely. "The keys are in the ignition. I think we may be watched, so take my gun and don't hesitate to shoot at the first movement."

Joe Lake hefted the woman's corpse in his long, lean arms, and marveled at the slight weight, hardly more than that of a child. For so small a person, the *Senorita Hernandez* had been swinging much weight in war production and financial circles.

Her reported discovery of the new Bolivian tin mines promised to make America forever independent of all that had been seized by the little yellow killers of the Rising Sun. That being true, Joe Lake had suddenly determined to protect this unexpected "murder scoop" with all that he had.

Bumps McCarthy grumbled and protested through chattering teeth. But he gripped Joe Lake's .38 in sweating fingers and unlocked the trunk of the *Telegram's* official police car.

"Where we goin' and what're we gonna do with her, Joe?" gulped Bumps. "Y'mean we're just gonna ride around an' around, an' not call the cops? Cap Murphy will lock us up for the duration, an' old Ward won't lift a finger to help us out."

"We're not riding around much," said Joe Lake, taking the wheel. "We're taking the *Senorita Hernandez* to our rooming house. We will then figure out what is best to do. Possibly we have not been watched, or the killer might have interfered."

"Y'mean we're takin' her up to your room, Joe?" Bumps had a quiver in his voice. "Look, Joe. Mrs. Donnelly ain't gonna like this. Remember, she jumped you only today about you being behind with your rent, and—"

"We are putting the *Senorita Hernandez* in your room, Bumps," stated Joe Lake very calmly. "It is nice that you are always paid in advance, so Mrs. Donnelly won't be barging in."

"No—I won't—for gosh sakes, Joe! They will give me life, I'll lose my job, and Mrs. Donnelly will blacklist me with all the land-ladies in Portland."

Joe Lake only smiled grimly, keeping an eye out for a possible trailing car as he drove over the Willamette River Bridge and then turned into North Portland.



S a friend, Joe, let us don't. Leave us just park the car as is. We will then go in and try to sleep until morning. Then we will go back to Mountain Park before daylight and replace the body by the statue of the Covered Wagon."

Joe Lake did not reply. He was unlocking the car trunk. The tree-darkened street in front of the tall rooming house was deserted in the rain.

"You will take one arm, Bumps," directed Joe Lake. "With my raincoat down to the heels, the *Senorita Hernandez* will look like one of the boys who has taken on too much."

By this time Bumps had arrived at the speechless stage. The rotund photog moved like a robot with shaking hands. The limp figure of the late *Senorita Hernandez* could easily have been a fellow newshound who had passed out in his cups.

That way, the corpse between them, they entered and reached the broad stairway to the second floor. Bumps was breathing with a rasping wheeze when they were halfway up.

A door opened on the first floor. The angular and sharp featured Mrs. Donnelly was revealed by the light. Her nasal twang sliced the silence of the lower hallway.

"An' what do the pair o' ye think ye're doin'? Who is that scalawag ye're draggin' between ye?"

Bumps swallowed audibly, but no words came. Joe Lake laughed lightly and spoke.

"I'm sure glad to see you, Mrs. Donnelly," he said as if no financial impasse lay between them. "Y'see, Mrs. Donnelly, we were having a bit of a time with our city editor, celebratin' his having upped my pay. I wouldn't be surprised if I could pay you a month in advance—"

"Ye're too smooth with your glib tongue, Mister Lake!" snapped the landlady, coming toward the stairway. "An' what do ye think ye're gonna do with the filthy drunk?"

"You see, Mrs. Donnelly, I'll be glad to pay you a week extra for permitting our city editor to sleep it off," said Joe Lake quickly. "An' if you'll come up as soon as we put him to bed, I'll take care of that month, and the week, too."

"Well, now, an' if the poor man's sick an' ye'll be quiet an' he's out of here the first thing in the morning—"

Mrs. Donnelly's tone was suddenly modified.

"I'll be right up, Mister Lake, as soon as ye put the poor man to bed."

Inside Bumps McCarthy's room Joe Lake thumbed beads of sweat from his own brow. As Mrs. Donnelly's rap came at the door, he had the corpse covered in a lifelike manner in Bumps' bed.

Bumps had slumped into a chair, shuddering.

"You will have to let me take a twenty until payday," said Joe Lake. "We cannot be having Mrs. Donnelly getting down upon us."

"I knew it," whispered Bumps hoarsely. "Sure, we can't have Mrs. Donnelly getting sore at you."

Mrs. Donnelly took the twenty and said acidly, "Remember, he gets out the first thing in the morning. I won't have ye disgracin' my house no longer than that."

Joe Lake closed the door softly, having held it open but a few inches.

"Look, Bumps," he said cautiously. "I'm leavin' the car out front for you, just in case. I'm going back to the office and stick with the graveyard shift. Something might happen. But I don't think we were followed, and everything will be all right."

"You're leavin' me alone with her? No. Suppose somethin' does happen? What'll I do? If Mrs. Donnelly—if the police—if the killer—?"

"Take it easy, Bumps, and you can keep my gun," reassured Joe Lake. "If anything happens unexpectedly, you can phone me at the office. You stick right here and don't run out."

He left Bumps McCarthy sitting rigidly in a chair with the gun gripped in his hand.

It did not seem likely Bumps was in shape to run into fresh trouble.



OE LAKE made but one phone call before reaching the *Telegram* office. The Columbia Hotel desk replied.

"Did the *Senorita* Hernandez talk to any newspapermen before retiring tonight?" asked Joe Lake. "We made an effort to reach her and we were told she would not give out an interview before tomorrow."

The room clerk at the Columbia was highly sarcastic.

"You're the *Telegram*, huh? Well, I wouldn't know about the *Senorita* Hernandez. No news reporters were permitted to see her during her short stay here. None of us here have seen her."

"Her short stay?"

"Yeah. The *senorita* and her party checked out late in the afternoon. She did not take us into her confidence as to where she was moving."

"The *senorita's* party?" questioned Joe Lake.

"Yeah. Her two men secretaries, or so she said. And her sister Ramona Hernandez, or so she said. And their two maids, or so she said. She talked on the phone. She was veiled when she went out."

It was clear that the clerk of the swanky Columbia Hotel was irked by the mysterious goings-on of *Senorita* Hernandez and what he called her party. Joe Lake desired to avoid suspicion, so he did not pursue the matter. But he had to find the *senorita's* party.

At the *Telegram* office two dozing rewrite men and one copy-reader with a half empty bottle were evidence that no report of a murder or other big local story had come in. Joe Lake grinned to himself, stretched his long legs on a desk and prepared to grab off a few hours of sleep.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when the phone on the city desk buzzed insistently. A swearing rewrite man called Joe Lake.

"It's that damfool Bumps, an' he sounds like he's crooked," imparted the rewrite man. "Says he's gotta talk to you, Joe. An' what's cookin' to bring you around here anyway? Maybe you got locked outta your room?"



Joe hefted the woman in his long arms, and marveled at the slight weight.

Joe Lake grunted. He picked up the phone with a sick sensation that all was not well. It wasn't.

"Joe? Joe?" Bumps McCarthy was gasping hoarsely.

Joe Lake slanted an eye over at the corner where the switchboard lovely of the early morning shift had made the phone connection. The girl was Margie Devlin, a slim

and desirable Irish trick for whom Joe Lake had cherished a serious yen for many weeks.

Joe called her "Earful" Devlin for the obvious reason that the switchboard girl knew all that passed to the rewrite men when she had the time to listen in. This was one of the times.

"You get the tickets, Bumps?" said Joe Lake carefully, hoping to cover up, and

watching the switchboard girl's pretty face.

But Bumps was past the stage of unrehearsed tactfulness.

"Tickets, Joe?" he gulped out. "Look, Joe! It ain't a time to be kidding! They got it—I mean they took the body, Joe! No, they didn't take her—Joe, look! I got the willies, an' I put the corpse back in the trunk, an' a big car run me off into a ditch an' smashed hell-an'-all out of the trunk so's the lid wouldn't open, an' then—"

Joe Lake could see the quick, wide-eyed horror spreading over Earful's vivid face. The girl was staring across the room at him and he had to think fast.

"You been drinkin' some more, Bumps?" rapped out Joe Lake. "When I put you to bed, I thought you'd stay. What kind of nightmare are you having now?"

"Is this you, Joe?" Bumps appeared to be choking to death.

JOE LAKE kept an eye upon Earful Devlin. She was a smart girl. Smart enough to know that Joe was stalling. She left his phone connected, took off her headset, and went over to a corner desk.

"Look, Bumps," said Joe Lake quickly. "Where's that car? An' where are you?"

"Ain't I been trying to tell you?" moaned Bumps. "The car's at the bottom of the Willamette River and—"

"Hold it, Bumps!" snapped Joe Lake. "You said you were run into the ditch an' the corpse was locked in the trunk and it could not be opened. Now you say—"

"Joe, I gotta hurry—listen, if you please. The trunk lid was buckled but the engine was okay. The big car went on. I got the coupé out an' headed out too fast. There was a dead-end street as I went that way, and—"

"Went off the dead end into the river, hur? There you were drowned, the woman's body was lost, and this is your ghost?"

"No—Joe—I am not yet a ghost, but the big car must've tailed me, an' I'm at a corner phone—Joe! There's two spicks an' a dame with a dark face—Joe!"

The phone receiver pounded Joe Lake's ear like a shot.

"Bumps? You still there? What—?"

Bumps McCarthy evidently was not still there. Joe Lake put the phone in its cradle, got up. He heard a muffled gasp.

Earful Devlin was staring at him with wide, stricken eyes. Her pretty face had become a queer shade of grayish green. She forgot to put down the phone she had been holding to her ear at the desk to which she had moved.

Joe Lake swore under his breath. Earful had tricked him. She had plugged in the phone she held on his conversation before she had left the switchboard. She looked at him as if he were a red-handed murderer wading in gore.

Joe Lake was well aware that the case of the mysterious *Senorita Hernandez* from Bolivia should now go to the police. He could envision the face of Captain Murphy, of Homicide, who always had disliked Joe Lake for his rough and ready, and too successful dealing with little matters of murder.

Earful Devlin was trying to speak. Joe Lake laid his fingers on his lips and walked to her.

"Little gals who want new wrist watches hear nothing, see nothing, and say nothing," muttered Joe. "Things are not always what they seem."

"Who—who is—was she?" stammered Earful, her blue eyes big and dark. "Did you—have to—to kill her, Joe?"

"Oh, Allah, give me strength," grunted Joe Lake.

With the eyes of the room upon him, Joe spread his hands. He was saved by the bell. Or rather it was the rattlesnake buzz and the glowing red light on the switchboard.

Earful Devlin moved her lovely ponies and reached the board like one in a trance. Her voice was like a doll talking.

"Yeah? Yeah? Who? Uuhu! He's here! Mr. Lake! Captain Murphy is on the line!"

Joe Lake pulled in a deep breath. Had the cops been called when Bumps McCarthy's car had crashed in the ditch? Or had a report been made of the car plunging into the river?

Perhaps they had found Bumps. That could have been a shot he had heard over

a dial phone he had not had time to trace. Joe's dry throat caused his voice to rasp.

"Yeah, Cap Murphy?"

"I'm not wantin' to be doin' you any favor, Joe," growled Captain Murphy, of Homicide. "Only the boys at the station said you hinted you was meetin' this here Spanish dame from Bolivia tonight, an' she was to spill to you something that was to make you a big scoop. That so, Joe?"

HERE it was. Then the cops had got onto Bumps' trail. Likely when the car had been wrecked in the ditch. They must have trailed Bumps and now had the body out of the river.

Joe gave out with the best he could in a pinch.

"Yeah, Murphy, that's so. The *Senorita Hernandez* called me and said she would give me an exclusive story. But when I called the Columbia Hotel tonight, she had checked out without leaving an address."

"So?" Joe did not like Cap Murphy's tone. "Sure you hadn't a date to meet the *senorita* somewhere, Joe?"

"Well, yes. But she didn't meet me—"

"Was it Mountain Park where this *senorita* was to meet you, Joe? Maybe by the statue of the Covered Wagon?"

Anything he could say now would be used against him with all of Cap Murphy's long nurtured dislike. Cap Murphy knowing this much made it certain that the police had somehow been tipped off to at least part of what had happened in Mountain Park.

"A'right, Murphy! It was Mountain Park, but *Senorita Hernandez* didn't meet me with the story she had wanted me to write. Like I said, I called the Columbia Hotel—"

"That'll do, Joe," interrupted the Homicide man. "Suppose you hop out here to Mountain Park and we'll go on from there. Maybe the *senorita* didn't meet you, an' maybe she did. Maybe she wouldn't give you a story, an' it made you mad. Maybe that's why she's dead."

"Dead?" Joe tried to simulate surprise.

"As she'll ever be," snarled Cap Murphy. "An' maybe you'll say she was disappointed at not meeting you, an' took poison. That's why she just dropped dead without a mark

on her or maybe she had a heart attack. Get out here, like I said, Joe!"

Joe Lake pronged the phone. He glanced at Earful Devlin. The girl was sitting back in her chair. She had fainted. At long last her persistent listening in had been amazingly rewarded.

Joe Lake did not want to be present when Earful revived. He grabbed his hat and went out.

"Dropped dead—without a mark on her—now this is getting screwy—her having her skull broken and her neck twisted—being in a car wreck and in the river besides—"

Talking to himself, Joe Lake debated whether he should go to Mountain Park or sneak down to the docks and stow away on some war laden ship about to sail for the other side of the Pacific.

Training and instinct prevailed. Also, there was Bumps McCarthy. Cap Murphy had not mentioned the staff photog. Joe Lake hailed a taxi and said, "Mountain Park, by the statue of the Covered Wagon."



HE *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez* was dead again.

Joe Lake shivered as he approached the shapely figure lying in the shallow pool of the rain drizzle near the Covered Wagon statue in Mountain Park. Beefy Cap Murphy glared at him.

"This *Senorita Hernandez* who was to meet you, Joey?" demanded Murphy with sarcastic implication. "And did you or didn't you meet her?"

Joe Lake's breath caught. The dead woman now being examined by Doc Sammons, of the police, had a dark, placid face. She appeared to have been smiling when she had died.

But she was not the same woman whose corpse Joe and Bumps had removed only a few hours before. Her dress was not torn and it was a different garment. Her neck had not been twisted and there was no mark of violence on her smooth black hair.

"Well?" barked Cap Murphy at Joe Lake's delay.

Joe could only counter with, "You have

identified her as *Senorita Hernandez*?"

"That's what cards and papers in her purse tell us, Joey," said Murphy almost softly. "I'm waiting for answers."

"I never saw the *Senorita Hernandez*," said Joe Lake, picking his way carefully. "No one but her own party has seen her face in Portland. Or so I was told by the Columbia Hotel. She was here on the business of seeking priority for ships to carry ore from her company mines in Bolivia."

"We know why she was here, Joe," snarled Cap Murphy. "If you didn't see the *senorita*, maybe you can tell us why?"

"I was told she had checked out of the Columbia Hotel this afternoon," said Joe. "She had called me, saying she liked a story I wrote, and she wanted to give me a line on some new tin mines—"

Joe Lake stopped in the middle of the sentence. All at once it had dawned upon him that it might not have been *Senorita Hernandez* who had called and made an appointment. Someone had wanted him to find the "*senorita*" dead, murdered, apparently for her jewels and money, believing this would insure an immediate report of the crime to the police.

Because he had wanted to keep the exclusive story for his paper, he had spoiled the whole murder plan. So *Senorita Hernandez* had to be murdered all over again, and quickly.

The killer or killers might not have wanted the story of the new mines to reach the American public. Why?

"Yes, about the tin mines, Joe?" coached Cap Murphy caustically.

"Find out who did not want the mine story written, and you'll have the murderer," said Joe Lake quietly. "What does Doc Sammons say caused the *senorita's* death?"

Doc Sammons looked up from the body with a twist to his mouth.

"Perhaps this slight scratch under the left ear is the answer," he said. "I can't tell yet. But it could be a swift poison. It could be *curare*, the deadly stuff they tip their weapons with in South America. An autopsy will tell."

Cap Murphy swore.

"If you are still suspecting me," said Joe,

"I know nothing of the use of *curare* or any other similar poison. But I would say you will have to find the others of the *Senorita Hernandez*' party."

"We'll do that checking on our own," said Cap Murphy. "And you will stick around, Joe. Also, don't let us find you in our way when we pick up these Bolivians."

BUT Joe Lake was paying slight attention. Two reporters of the morning sheet had already phoned in their story. The murder of *Senorita Hernandez* would be a scare head in an edition within the hour.

"I won't get in your way," said Joe Lake grimly. "I'm writing my own story and my own tickets on this killing. I'll stick around where you can find me, but don't fall over me. Have you checked on the taxis that must have taken the Hernandez party from the Columbia?"

Cap Murphy glared and muttered.

"Maybe you already know about that, too. All the hackies say that party must have left the Columbia Hotel in some private car. No cabs were called."

Joe Lake had his own idea now, and it was big, bigger than anything he had ever stumbled upon. In the back of his mind he had shaped the probable motive for this murder, and for the other killing, about which the police as yet know nothing.

He could not now tell the police of the other murder. Nor of the mysterious disappearance of Bumps McCarthy. Not if he wanted to keep his freedom.

He had to get into this, but there was not anything into which he could put his teeth. Once again Joe Lake studied the trampled ground about the corpse as the police photogs finished their work and the body was about to be moved.

That brought him to the lines of morbidly curious faces of the two hundred or more persons attracted to the scene. There were war workers. Some had dark faces. These were of a few Mexicans employed in a war plant above the park.

Then Joe Lake saw the other dark face. It was that of a man in a long raincoat, but whose hat was new and whose collar was white. Unless he was too much on edge,

this man had been lingering near enough to have heard all of the conversation with Cap Murphy.

As Joe remarked he could be found at the office and started to move away, the dark-faced man also faded back into the crowd. On the taxi ride back downtown, Joe was sure this time that a car was tailing the taxi, but keeping almost a block back on the still nearly empty streets.

"And the minute I put myself in the same position as Bumps when he phoned, it's an even bet I'll be picked up," mused Joe. "It may have to be. If this is what I think it is, the killer knows I don't dare talk about the other murdered *Senorita Hernandez*, and there is even more reason to know that Bumps McCarthy can't talk."

Joe Lake said nothing to the taximan. He saw that a sedan had parked half a block away as he entered the *Telegram* office.



HE financial page editor had not come in. But Joe Lake found what he was looking for. Because of the mysterious visit of *Senorita Hernandez*, there was a short story about her in the market column.

The story had this concluding paragraph:

"Hernandez Mining Corporation was quoted at 68 today. The stock is on the active preferred list. If *Senorita Hernandez* announces other producing mines, as predicted, the stock may be expected to skyrocket. There has been some advance buying on speculation, but blocks of the stock are scarce."

There was an item about some high trading the day before.

Joe Lake walked slowly back into the main editorial room. He was greeted by the snappish, cynical voice of one Ulysses Ward who would have fired his best man instantly if he had called him by his first name. The graying city editor had just arrived.

"Why, there you are, Joe!" saluted old Ward, looking over the glasses that always hung from the end of his bulbous nose. "I suppose you have a follow-up yarn on this *Hernandez* thing? I suppose you already

have the solution of the crime? I suppose it is all written and ready for the first edition? I—"

"I'm working on it," interrupted Joe. "I've just been looking up some data. If the *Oregonian* doesn't have this angle, it will be a new story—"

"New story, hah?" snapped old Ward. "I suppose you've been up all night thinking about it? I suppose you don't know what's in your addled brain has to be put into words, and they have to be put into type, and—"

"Mr. Ward! There's a call for you!" Joe heard Earful Devlin and he saw she was trying to avoid looking at him.

"I'm not here! I don't want any call! You know I don't talk to anyone outside of the staff before the first edition!"

Old Ward yelled across the room and turned back to Joe.

"But it's a—a woman, Mr. Ward," said Earful. "And she sounds burned up."

Joe Lake had a definite premonition of impending disaster.

"I'll give you a short follow and get busy outside," said Joe hurriedly, starting toward his desk.

"Wait, you!" Joe ignored old Ward's bark and crossed the room. Then it came.

"But Mr. Ward," Joe heard Earful say. "This isn't your wife. She says she's a Mrs. Donnelly."

"Mrs. Donnelly? Devil take the siwash! I don't know any Mrs. Donnelly! Tell her to write a letter—"

"I'll take the call," put in Joe Lake quickly, trying to keep his throat from drying up.

"You'll take what?" shouted old Ward. "Gimme that call, Devlin!"

Joe Lake let his lanky body slump into his desk chair. He wanted to leave at once, but he was rooted to the spot by what Mrs. Donnelly might have found out. Perhaps Bumps had been seen removing the corpse of the first murdered *Senorita Hernandez*?

If that was so, he might have to throw everything into the hands of the police to try and rescue Bumps, if Bumps was still alive enough to be saved.

"Yeah—what?" That was old man Ward.

Earful's bright blue eyes were widening again. She was staring at Joe Lake. Joe hammered suddenly at his typewriter.

Old Ward yelled louder.

"Say that again! You're Mrs. Donnelly? My muddy feet? On your best bedspread? What in the name of heaven are you talking about? What? Who was drunk? Who? In Bumps McCarthy's room?"

Joe eased cautiously from his chair. Old Ward's shouting had become hoarser. Every other word was profane.

"Sue me? You old fool! I ain't been out with—you said Joe Lake, didn't you? Hold the wire Mrs. Donnelly—just hold the wire for one little minute—just one little minute—"

Old Ward barged to his feet. One of Mr. Hitler's robot bombs never was launched with more terrifying effect. He waddled toward Joe Lake's desk, his glasses dancing on the end of his bulbous nose.

Earful Devlin was scared. She meant to be helpful. Perhaps she thought she could save Joe Lake.

"Oh, Mr. Ward!" called out Earful. "That Mrs. Donnelly is mistaken. There was—I mean it couldn't have been you who put his muddy feet on the bed in Bumps McCarthy's room—I mean at Mrs. Donnelly's. It was the woman that was dead—so Joe Lake wouldn't have told Mrs. Donnelly it was you—"

Old Ward stopped in mid-waddle, turning toward the helpful switchboard girl.

Joe Lake chose what might be the lesser of two evils. Down in the block he judged a sedan would still be parked. A killer or the emissary of a killer probably was waiting there.

Up here was old Ward. There was nothing Joe Lake could say in explanation without telling it all. And old Ward would think only of scooping the pants off of the *Morning Oregonian*, if it sent one member of his staff to jail for life.

If he told any of it, he would have to write the whole yarn from the beginning. That would mean dooming Bumps McCarthy if he were still alive.

"And by all that's holy, it might mean another murder," muttered Joe Lake, heed-

less of old Ward's shouted oaths to stop. "This time it might be the killing of *Senorita Hernandez* again, and I mean the real *Senorita Hernandez*. Up to now I'm the only bait that could possibly save Bumps, perhaps the *senorita*, and upset the slickest big-time grab for millions this old town has ever seen."

If I can only stay alive to do it, thought Joe Lake.



HE hit the head of the stairs to the street, Joe Lake saw with some relief that he had been given a brief respite. Earful Devlin had obligingly fainted again.

Old Ward was raging, waving one way to have Joe Lake stopped, and the other to have Earful Devlin revived.

Joe's yen for the cheerful little Earful had not lessened. But he had an inward resolve to let heaven wait until such time as he could pin back her lovely, listening ears.

Then as he took the stairs three at a time, he was aware that he was unarmed, having left his .38 in possession of the scared Bumps McCarthy. Not that it would do him any good now, was Joe's thought.

As he hit the gray, rainy street in front of the office, Joe decided he would be as well off without a weapon. If there was but the one dark-skinned man tailing him, Joe felt fully competent at this moment to choke the truth out of the Bolivian.

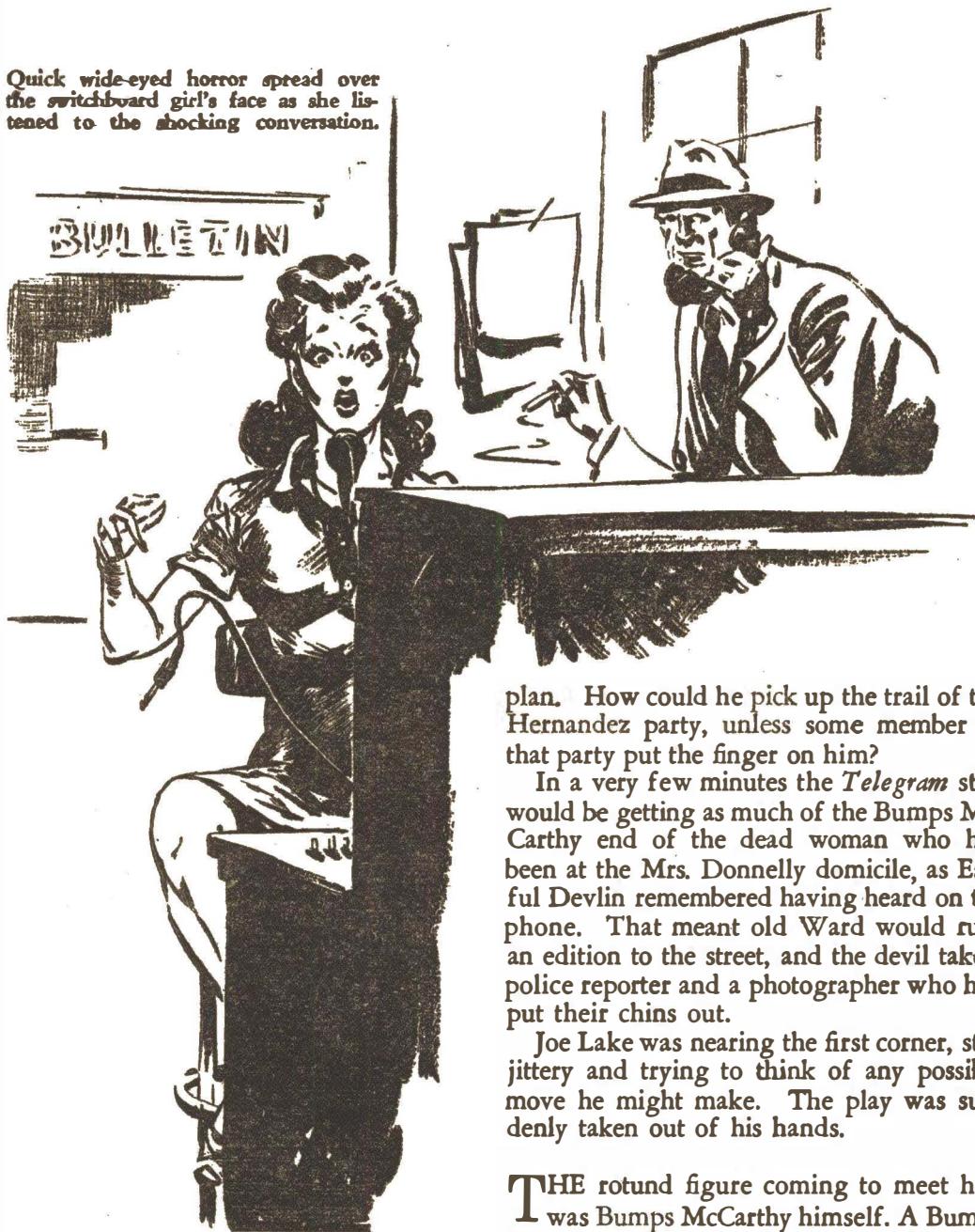
Yes. That is what he would do. Put himself in position to be picked up, then show this guy a thing or two he would not know about a hard-boiled police reporter.

None of the staff had made a move to follow him as yet. That fainting habit of Earful Devlin had given him a chance. The morning street was almost deserted. Up on a distant corner a newsie was yelling, "Read all about it! Woman murdered in Mountain Park!"

The *Oregonian* was out with the story of *Senorita Hernandez*.

Joe Lake peered both ways. He swore with disappointment. He did not see the black sedan he had hoped would still be parked and waiting.

Quick wide-eyed horror spread over the switchboard girl's face as she listened to the shocking conversation.



plan. How could he pick up the trail of the Hernandez party, unless some member of that party put the finger on him?

In a very few minutes the *Telegram* staff would be getting as much of the Bumps McCarthy end of the dead woman who had been at the Mrs. Donnelly domicile, as Earful Devlin remembered having heard on the phone. That meant old Ward would rush an edition to the street, and the devil take a police reporter and a photographer who had put their chins out.

Joe Lake was nearing the first corner, still jittery and trying to think of any possible move he might make. The play was suddenly taken out of his hands.

THE rotund figure coming to meet him was Bumps McCarthy himself. A Bumps McCarthy who seemed to appear from nowhere and to come plodding toward Joe Lake as if his legs were operated by remote control. They were just that, only the control was not so remote.

"Bumps?" Joe lengthened his stride. "Boy howdy! Where'd you come from?

Bumps' round face was working as if he had ants in his pants and all the ants were pinching him.

Still none of the staff had appeared in pursuit. Joe Lake grinned as he thought of old Ward sweating over the revival of Earful Devlin, until which time he would be balked in digging further information on the remarkable information she had started to spill.

Joe Lake, believing the car that had tailed him was gone, had to think out some other

"Joe—Joe—I gotta do it—" Bumps McCarthy pushed out the words with a thick tongue, and Joe saw that Bumps had one eye swollen shut and a bruise across one fat cheek.

"Got to do what?" Joe wondered if Bumps had been through something that had made him a little wacky.

"Gotta—take you with me—Joe! Don't try to get away—and don't make a fight—see, Joe! Over there!"

Over there the black sedan moved at crawling pace. The slim muzzle pushed a few inches through the window had a cutting bead on Bumps McCarthy. Joe Lake could just make out the bulky figure of the driver.

Joe took Bumps' arm, muttered in his ear.

"Okay, fella. C'mon. Where'd they take you?"

Bumps' reply was a husky whisper.

"Up river near falls. Cottage in Milwaukee. Joe, don't—"

"I won't," promised Joe grimly. "You keep buttoned up, no matter what I say."

The muzzle withdrew for the door to open. Two dark-complexioned gents, probably Bolivians, were in the wide rear seat. Joe got in and was squeezed beside Bumps. Two rods were substituted for the chopper and tickled their ribs as the sedan took on speed.

Joe saw that the driver was a white American. Anyway, he was white-skinned outside. But he was all mugg inside, and one whom Joe had seen around now and then.

The Bolivians had black murder in their dark eyes, but Joe saw they kept looking to the driver as if he was the guy who gave out orders. Joe judged then he had the setup fairly well fixed. This mugg driving was only the tool of another man, a big shot in his own line.

It was well that I had a look at yesterday's financial page, thought Joe. It gives me a faint idea, but one that has to work. If it doesn't, we may wind up cemented to the bottom of the Willamette.

The sedan crossed the river, turned eastward toward the suburb of Milwaukee, a section of trim cottages along the river falls.

The Bolivians had talked in low voices, speaking Spanish. But they could and did speak clear English when Joe made his play.

"Before you guys go too far, believing I haven't spilled anything about the first *senorita* murder and the abduction of the body, there's something you ought to know," said Joe calmly. "You bank on the redhead here and me being in a jam that has kept us buttoned up about the two killings, and you're right. But it won't stay that way."

The dark eyes of the Bolivians flicked from Joe to the driver. The mugg turned his head to look at Joe.

"Nuts!" he said. "You bozos sewed yourselves in a sack when you snatched that first corpse. You couldn't sing any and keep your pants out've a cell."

"But, my fine friend, you forget that I'm first of all a reporter," drawled Joe Lake. "As an example, Mister, yesterday your big boss unloaded a helluva block of Hernandez Mining shares at the top of sixty-eight. In a few hours your boss expects to have his men buy back those shares and a lot more at half the price."

THE driver swore, pulling the sedan to the curb of the quiet street.

"Go on, dumbhead," he grated. "You interest me. And having wised up on that, what could a body-snatcher do about it? It's sure you ain't hepped the cops to what's in your car at the dead end of a North Portland street. All you've done is put us to the trouble to repeat the bump-off of *Senorita* Hernandez, knowing that you had to keep clammed up."

But the mugg's voice became less sure, even as he talked. Joe had counted on that.

"As I said, I'm a reporter," pointed Joe. "Figuring something might happen, I wrote all of the yarn I had, including the kidnapping of a corpse, just in case I might not be around when the ten o'clock edition hits the street. That yarn is spiked on my desk, marked to go. The city editor will find it when he begins to suspect I'm not coming back in time for the edition, and has a look at my spiked copy like he always does."

The look of doubt in the driver's pale,

shallow eyes told Joe he had scored. One of the Bolivians addressed the other.

"I have been a journalist, Concho, and that would be what he would do, so we must make sure."

Before Concho could reply, Joe grinned and put in, "And any rubout you have planned, as of now, means you'll ball up the works for your boss, Thorsen, the Portland broker."

"Look, wise guy!" rasped the driver. "You've just signed your ticket by that crack! Thorsen won't—"

The driver clammed then, cursing. Joe said softly, "Then it was Thorsen's office pushed over the blocks of Hernandez Mining stuff yesterday at sixty-eight."

The driver reached under his arm. Bumps McCarthy lost his head. He lurched forward. One Bolivian conked him with the barrel of his rod, but did not quite put him out.

"You're the dumbhead, mugg," grated Joe to the driver. "If I hadn't seen a chance to take a cut on the payoff, already being in this up to my neck, I wouldn't have walked into your trap. I came looking for your car, knowing it trailed me."

Concho was a smart man. He said quickly, "What is wrong with that, Lacy?" He addressed the driver. "This journalist is only human. If what he says is true, about him having a story ready for the next edition, we have to take some measures to prevent it being published."

Lacy, the mugg, was not too quick on the uptake.

"Whatcha talkin' about, takin' measures? Once we get this wise guy to the cottage, we'll take out his toenails one at a time. We'll get that yarn, if there is one."

"You won't get the yarn, and it would be too late," stated Joe, restraining his rage over the way Bumps had slumped down in the seat. "Give me your word I get a healthy cut, and take me to a phone. I'll get that yarn off the next edition spike for you without anyone in the office knowing about it."

"You think we're screwy—" That was Lacy, the driver.

"That is one measure we can take," interrupted the smarter Concho. "There is a

phone we used last night in the rear of the poolroom. We will take him there. Perhaps, Joe Lake, you will inform us how you intend to have the story brought to us?"

The other Bolivian's eyes were watchful, suspicious, but he nodded.

"The *Telegram* switchboard operator is my special friend," said Joe, and noticed that Bumps was conscious and gasping. "She is off shift at nine o'clock, a few minutes from now. She will get the story and bring it here. Otherwise, that yarn will be spread and all of your trouble and all the killing will net exactly nothing, for I wrote all of what the stock sale play would be."

"I'll call Thorsen," said Lacy. "If he says so, it'll have to be that way. But he won't."

Bumps McCarthy was muttering. "Joe—Joe—they'll grab Earful Devlin—they can finish what they've started, but I won't be a party to—"

Joe hated to do it, but he reached over and gripped Bumps by the throat, appearing to exert more pressure than he did.

"Shut your yap, redhead!" grated Joe. "I've been waitin' years for a chance to cash in on the police job! You play along or—!"

"*Buena!*" exclaimed Concho, and Joe turned his eyes from the stricken look in Bumps McCarthy's eyes.



ACY, the mugg came back from a phone at the rear of the poolroom. There were only two men cleaning up the place at that hour. Their attitude toward Lacy and the Bolivians offered no chance for a break.

"The boss says go ahead," growled Lacy. "An' listen, wise guy. We're waitin' for you to make one wrong move. Try it and you get the works here and now."

Joe Lake saw something that chilled him more than the mere pressure of a rod in his ribs. One Bolivian had produced a small, sharp dart. The point of it was covered with a dry, gummy substance.

"This will be very quiet, *Senor* Lake," said the Bolivian. "You will speak plainly and slowly. You saw what happened to the second maid—or, as your police say, *Senorita* Hernandez."



Lacy lowered the muzzle to blast Joe's head off. The chopper flamed.

"I saw it," admitted Joe. "Don't be careless with that sticker."

"The carelessness will be all yours," smiled the Bolivian.

The point of the *curare*-gummed dart sent a shiver down Joe's spine as it touched the



back of his neck above the collar line. One prick with that little dart would be enough.

Earful Devlin replied to his dialing.

"Do not ask questions, Miss Devlin," said Joe quickly. "Just listen, sweetheart, and then do as I tell you. There is a story on

the noon edition spike on my desk. I do not want old Ward to get it. You will—"

"Joe? What're you talking about? Where are you? Ward has gone crazy—"

At the girl's interruption the dart seemed to Joe to be entering the back of his neck. He cut off Earful Devlin.

"Understand this, baby—I am at number three-five-four, the Falls Boulevard, the third cottage in the block above the falls. You will take the only story on the noon edition spike and bring it to me without telling anyone—not anyone, sweetheart."

Joe realized it was fifty-fifty whether Earful Devlin would scream, faint again or be shocked into silence by his next words.

"And listen, darling. Getting that story to me will give us the money we've been waiting for to be married, understand? If you don't—or if you tell anyone—anyone—I will be killed as soon as the story is on the street."

Joe could hear Earful's rasping breath, her little exclamation of fright. He hurried his final words.

"Don't take a bus, darling. Borrow *Hank's* car. But don't mention to Hank where you're going. He always lets you take the heap and I won't squawk about it this time. Drive straight out here and make sure no one sees you take the story off my desk and that no one follows you. Got it, sweetheart?"

"Yeah—yeah, Joe! I'm quitting in five minutes! I'll start right away!"

JOE pulled in a long breath. Perhaps he could expect a miracle. At least Earful Devlin had not fainted. And there was no one named *Hank* connected with the *Telegram*. Here was where Joe had been compelled to depend upon Earful's long-time habit of listening in to many calls.

There was but one *Hank*, and its owner hated the name. Because of that loathing for his own monicker, Joe always called Captain Hank Murphy of Homicide by the nickname whenever he wanted to rile the captain to profane anger.

Moreover, there was no story of any kind impaled upon a noon edition spike on Joe's desk. There was no such spike.

Joe's neck muscles were cramped as he closed the phone.

"She is starting right away," he said, looking into the pale, suspicious eyes of *Lacy*.

"*Si*," affirmed *Concho*, the Bolivian. "I could hear the *señorita* saying that."

Joe took his first long breath as the poisoned dart was removed from touching his skin. The feel of the rod against his side was actually comforting now.



UMPS McCARTHY'S one good eye was filled with reproach. The plump photog kept looking at Joe Lake as if he never had seen him before.

They were in the basement of the cottage near the Willamette Falls. The steady thunder of the water would have drowned all other sound, including shots.

Lacy, the mugg, had remained upstairs. He had said he thought *Thorsen*, the boss, would be along. Joe Lake had an idea that *Thorsen* would remain as far away from this cottage as possible.

The two Bolivians were guarding Joe and *Bumps*. And the one other prisoner, one of the cutest Spanish tricks Joe had ever seen. One of the type with glossy black hair and contrasting blue eyes. Big, accusing eyes that kept turning to the Bolivian called *Concho*. Eyes that talked sorrowfully, that displayed anxiety and disillusionment.

"Make sure the dame don't let out a squawk!" called out *Lacy* from the stairway into the basement. "She's your woman, *Concho*! You keep her quiet!"

Joe was trying to piece this together. She was the only woman in the cottage, so far as he could determine. At first he thought she must be the *Señorita* *Carla Dolores Hernandez* herself, although on the record it would seem that *Señorita Hernandez* had already been twice murdered.

But *Concho* said, speaking to the bound woman whose lips had been taped tightly shut, "Everything will be all right, *Ramona*. If you had been reasonable, we would have let you remain free. But as soon as we have all the money, we will go away. Your brother then can keep the mines, as was intended by *Car* a before she died."

Carla? Joe Lake's quick mind questioned. Then this prisoner, evidently enough the wife of the crooked Concho, was the sister of *Senorita Hernandez* whose death had been important to the mining stock swindle. She was Ramona, and the *Senorita Hernandez* had indeed been murdered. A brother had become the owner of the mines.

Joe had been on edge, listening. Every nerve was taut, ready for the break that must come. The moment when this cottage beside the roaring falls would have visitors, or a visitor.

For Joe knew that either Murphy, of Homicide, would head the visitors, or that Earful Devlin had not quite understood him and might come alone as he had apparently instructed her.

Joe risked gaining some information from the Bolivians. Concho held a rod loosely in his hand. The other Bolivian sat close to Bumps McCarthy and he toyed with the pointed dart that was never more than inches from Bumps' body.

"So *Senorita Hernandez* really is dead?" said Joe softly. "I am curious to know if she is the one in my car at the bottom of the river?"

Ramona's blue eyes were liquid suddenly with tears. She made murmuring sounds behind the tape over her mouth. Concho smiled as if the little matter of the *Senorita Hernandez* dying was something of a joke.

"*Senor Lake* is curious?" said Concho. "Now that you have made yourself one of us, you may be informed that *Senorita Carla Hernandez* died suddenly several days ago in Mexico City, but for our own purposes we kept her death a secret. My wife, Ramona, is the only *Senora Hernandez* remaining."

"Then it was *senorita*—I mean, the *senora*, your wife, who called to say she would give me a story of the unannounced mines?" questioned Joe. "If so, I am grateful to the *senora* for putting me in the way of being cut in on your clever scheme. But I take it that the brother inherits the mines?"

CONCHO evidently was greatly pleased with himself.

"That is so, *Senor Lake*," he boasted.

"Also the brother has the secret of the new mines that had been known only to *Senorita Carla* and himself. But the brother is away for a month in the interior, and all of this will be finished before he can learn of the *Senorita Carla*'s death, supposedly here in your city of Portland."

"Good grief, Joe!" blurted out Bumps. "I don't like to think I ever knew you! Earful Devlin will soon be here! You think you'll be cut in on this blood money, but they'll—"

"Shut up, Bumps!" snapped Joe. "If you had any sense, you would take a reasonable amount and we'd call it a day! This way the smart cops will be a long time finding out about that body in the river, if they ever do!"

Bumps groaned. Concho showed his white teeth.

"You are indeed wise, *Senor Lake*," he said slowly. "Your *compadre* is the fool. Should we do with him as we had to do with the two maids on which we placed the identification of *Senorita Carla*?"

From the stairway came Lacy's hard voice.

"Keep on your toes down there! A car's turning the corner with a girl driving! She's looking at the house numbers!"

Joe Lake looked into Bumps' burning, accusing eyes. He glanced at the fear-filled face of Ramona whose contempt for him appeared almost to override her terror over the murders that had been, and of what she must know still lay ahead.

Yet Joe Lake had to gamble, take the long chance. He feared now that Earful Devlin had not understood. Lacy had said a car was in the street, driven by a lone girl.

Joe Lake went all the way. He laughed shortly, as if he imagined he had become one of the plotting killers. One of those who would share in the stock swindle, the beating down of the mining shares and the bringing them up again when it became known that a brother of *Senorita Hernandez* had the secret of the new, enormously rich mines.

"Sure, Concho," said Joe lightly. "I never trusted this redhead, and you can't. Get it over with before my girl friend comes in

with my story. I wouldn't want her to see him."

"Joe? In the name of—" Bumps' shocked voice was something that cut deep.

Then Concho laughed softly and raised his hand to the other Bolivian, the hand holding the rod that had been carelessly centered upon Joe Lake.

"Drop, Bumps! Down! Roll!"

Joe Lake's warning yell ripped from his teeth even as he dived from his toes, projecting his lanky body from his chair and shooting forward in a perfect knee-high tackle.

His shout and movement caught Concho off guard. Bumps had instinctively tried to duck the poisoned dart in the hand of the other Bolivian. Bumps and the Bolivian rolled to the floor together at the instant Joe hit Concho's knees.

Concho screamed out a *diabla*, snapping his rod back and down. Its explosion seemed to Joe Lake to have torn out the back of his skull and furrowed a path down his bent spine. But his fist connected with Concho's shrinking stomach and his hard head went up to smash into Concho's dark face.

Concho fell backward, but the other Bolivian, spilling Spanish oaths, had given Bumps some respite by whirling toward Joe Lake with his poisoned dart. Joe saw the killer coming, saw his descending hand aiming death at his throat.

JOE'S long fingers trapped the wrist of the hand holding the dart and he landed on the floor with the Bolivian pounding at his face. He clung desperately to his one hold, hearing the bones of the wrist crack.

Concho was up now, groping for the rod that had fallen from his hand. From the stairs rasped the hard voice of Lacy.

"Freeze! Alla yuh! So that's it! An' the boss said to make it clean! He don't need you guys no more!"

Joe Lake was on his knees, the poisoned dart transferred to his hand. He had no other weapon. He was spared by Concho when the Bolivian killer turned to face the slim snout of the chopper Lacy was holding upon the basement.

And Lacy was not wasting time. The ma-

chine-gun jetted blue, smoky fire and rattled death downward. Concho turned on watery legs to sit down. The other Bolivian was rolling, but he just straightened out and Joe Lake hurled himself across Bumps McCarthy and toward the flaming weapon in Lacy's hand.

It was no good. Joe Lake saw that. Lacy's mocking smile was all killing lust, of the kind that makes the murderer want to taste of his blood thirst to the full. A lust that held Lacy's trigger finger, as he lowered the chopper muzzle to Joe's face, waiting until he was closer to blast off his head.

The chopper flamed, or Joe Lake thought it did. The stairway of the cottage was filled with the reverberation of the explosions. Joe could not understand why Lacy spread out his hands and performed a flying-eagle dive that hurled his weight upon him.

Then Joe's face smashed into the cement floor. He had a vague glimpse of *Senorita* Ramona still bound to the chair. He had an idea that Bumps McCarthy was shouting, but that was all mixed up with the roar of the river falls that blacked out his senses.



E HAD half a dozen men crossing lots, and we were hidden in the car driven by Miss Devlin," said Captain "Hank" Murphy. "She is one smart girl, too smart for a dumb, lawless news snoop. You know, Lake, you're gonna be in jail so long they'll throw the key away."

Joe Lake tried to shake the fogged ache out of his head. He saw that Bumps McCarthy was beginning to smile again with what face he had clear of bruises.

"Yeah, I know," stated Joe Lake resignedly, glancing at old Ulysses Ward, the city editor, who had accompanied the cops in person. "What was Hernandez Mining quoted when the market opened in New York this morning?"

"That's another thing—" Cap Murphy began and old Ward finished.

"Hernandez Mining opened at thirty, Joe, but you haven't said who is behind this bloody stock manipulation?" said old Ward, his shrewd eyes narrowed. "We've tried to

get it out of this *Senora* Ramona, but she is suffering with shock and can't talk. We have to know right away—for the extra edition, Joe."

"So Bumps and I are gonna be in jail a long time," sighed Joe, disregarding old Ward's question. "That makes it too bad. The real brains instigating these murders will have to wait."

"Joe!" snapped old Ward. "They can tie you up with being an accessory after the fact in that first murder of the maid whose body you abducted. I could use the influence of the *Telegram*, but seeing you are stubborn about telling everything, I have to wash our hands of it all."

Joe Lake appeared to be studying the ceiling of the cottage living room.

"As soon as the man behind all of this gets the news of what has happened to Lacy and the Bolivians, he will give orders to buy up all possible Hernandez Mining at thirty," said Joe softly. "Then when the news comes out of the brother who knows all about the rich new tin mines, the stock will likely go away up past its original sixty-eight. It may hit a hundred, quite a killing."

"Look, Joe Lake," thundered Captain Murphy. "We can make it a lot easier for you an' Bumps. We might even make it so it looks as if you was in on this with the police."

Joe grinned. "I'd have told you, anyway," he said. "Grab Thorsen, the broker. *Senora* Ramona was not in on the killing of the maids. She was under her husband's influence."

"Yeah—yeah!" exclaimed old Ward, a gleam in his eyes. "It's a great yarn—great! I'll get on the phone and order the extra!"

"Just a minute," commanded Murphy.

"You'll hold up the extra until we have Thorsen. I'll phone right away."

Old Ward and Murphy glared at each other.

"Look," suggested Joe Lake. "There's only one phone. Why don't you both use it together?"

Old Ward and Cap Murphy muttered, and Murphy's face turned redder than usual.

"Okay," assented old Ward. "Come on, Murphy."

Joe Lake winked at Earful Devlin who had been bathing his head.

The voice of old Ward floated in from the phone in the cottage hallway.

"Yeah, put through my order to buy all the Hernandez Mining stock to be had at thirty—yeah—keep buying up to forty—and make a notation that any profit or loss is to be split fifty-fifty between Captain Murphy and me—yeah—I'm holding up an extra edition until I hear from you—when the edition hits the street, Hernandez Mining will probably climb right back to sixty-eight where it closed last night, maybe to a hundred—"

Joe Lake snugged one long arm around the cuddlesome Earful Devlin.

"There goes the body-snatching case against Bumps an' me," grinned Joe. "An' when I demand a third of what those two evaders of the law make out of that stock rise, Earful, I think we'll have enough to maybe buy us one of those cottages up here by the falls."

Earful Devlin's wide, blue eyes grew wider, staring at Joe.

"But Joe," she murmured sweetly. "It doesn't seem quite right for us to do that."

"Darling, there's nothing quite right in this hard-boiled world," stated Joe Lake.



Go Ahead—Jump!



HEY remained in the car for a little while, making sure that all was clear. If cops came along and got curious, why, they would merely find a young fellow and his girl, and tell them to move along. The cops were usually nice about it. The fact was that lovers were always getting held up and even murdered now and then in remote lanes.

Marie Gilette had been Clarence Sneed's girl for a long time, and tonight she was impatient. They would get married without delay if tonight's deal went through without a hitch, as it promised to.

She said: "Look, I tell you everything is all right. I've been here lots of times, and I've never seen a soul around. Let's go into the house. I want a drink."

"I'd like one, too," he admitted, "but wait a while. There's plenty of time before she comes. And we don't want to mess this up any way."

"How can anything go wrong now?" she asked. "You said everything was fixed up just like finding money. We've gone over it again and again."

"One more time," he said worriedly. "I just wish there was some way I could steal the stuff."

"Don't be a halfwit," she said, exasperated. "You'd get caught. And besides, everything is set for us to be married tomorrow. It's too late to change any plans now."

"Impersonating a federal officer," he ruminated. "Well, she isn't setting any trap for me. She can't prove a thing."

"Come on," she urged.

There was plenty of time, and he could squander his thoughts. He was thinking of twenty thousand dollars—all the traffic would bear—in dandy, old, leathery banknotes.

Here they were, and he told himself that this was it; probably he would never again make such an easy bundle of cash. He and

Kneeling, he pushed her head under and held her under until the bubbles stopped coming up.



By ROBERT A. GARRON

The glamorous woman had illegal gold, a fortune, hidden in her ice box. And Sneed knew it would be dangerous to steal that kind of loot. To use it as a basis for extortion and blackmail—without murder—there was the smart idea! But the unforeseen is ever a hazard difficult to beat



Marie would spend a piece of it celebrating tonight.

They were parked in a glen on a smooth slope of grass. There was strong moonlight and very little mist, but the car had been driven under trees next to an old stone garage and couldn't be seen. The way in here was via a short but winding dirt lane, and not even the house could be seen from the highway. Neither could Clarence Sneed and Marie Gilette see the highway from their concealment, but they could hear the swish of cars going by fairly often with tires singing. Sneed had his little car parked so that in the rear-vision mirror he could see down to the first turn in the lane. Around here the country was heavily wooded.

THIS was the Carl Leonard place, consisting of about a dozen acres of land between the highway and the river, which was a small stream, stony along here, called the Viromilion. The owner was an amateur architect and made his own blueprints, building on the stone ruins of an old mill. On the farther side of the house a stone dam impounded enough water to form a small, long lake with a maximum depth of some thirteen feet. There was a brick terrace in the corner made by the dam and the wall of the house, and a springboard for diving. At this time the Leonards were in New York on their annual jaunt.

Marie worked for them as a part-time maid, three times a week, and occasionally served when there were guests for dinner, being a presentable girl. The keys had been left with her so that she could keep the place clean during their absence, ready for the usual celebration on their return. Leonard kept a well-stocked cellar, and had gotten her drunk a couple of times when his wife was away.

Marie had permission now to help herself to gin and whiskey, but was requested to leave alone the wine and fancy labels. So Marie and Leonard intended to have a few drinks on the house and have a moonlight swim after tonight's job was done. It was another convenience in the plot, for Leonard posted his pool for the use of neighbors during certain hours when he was at home,

and at all hours when he went on a trip.

Her other part-time job was in the city, the same work, for Clare Bannon. This Bannon girl was about Marie's age, and belonged to an old family whose wealth had "dissipated." She picked Marie, whose recommendations were excellent, from the same agency where the Leonards got her.

Miss Bannon had a brother in the Navy somewhere, but no one else. She sold the family mansion and bought a much smaller house, at a considerable profit, since she let the big house go with all the handsome furnishings except those needed to supply the little one. There were a number of antiques, for which she cared not a whit except for their money value.

She was a money-conscious dame, and never tipped. She paid Marie by the hour, and even begrudged her carfare. And of course she never once offered Marie anything to eat, which was her undoing finally. She even checked up, when the refrigerator was cleaned or defrosted, to see whether anything had been taken, as though she had hired taking maids before. It was a gas refrigerator. Then, in a kind of lobby or closet, Marie found a large electric refrigerator, a huge one, which was not in use for refrigeration.

Inside the large one were stored canned goods, jamming the box. There were stacks of unobtainable beluga caviar, truffles, imported pastes, olives, dainty fish packings, pearl onions, and such delicacies, barricaded behind such ordinary stuff as canned tuna and salmon, potato salad in jars, and pickles.

Marie asked about cleaning out the box, and was told not to; it was just stored stuff. There was something funny in Clare's voice, which Marie barely sensed, but remembered when she got hungry one time.

It had been mentioned to her that the electric box was not being used because it cost much more to run than the gas box. Such was not the case, altogether. Marie was so hungry that her tummy was making noises; she decided to snake a can of tuna or at least a small bottle of olives out of the electric box, when Clare wasn't around.

Then Marie had gotten curious about the enameled vegetable tray on the bottom

shelf. She thought it was stuck, but she brought it forward by pulling hard. The reason for its being on the bottom was that it would have dropped right through a wire tray. It was brimming with gold pieces. It was a good old-fashioned miser's hoard. It consisted mostly of U. S. coins, but there were a few British pounds and Mexican aztecas. There were several rare three-dollar pieces and a handful of ones, which probably had a premium value.

When Marie got through trembling from her discovery she went about her work, her hunger forgotten. No doubt she could have stolen a few coins and not been discovered, but the money would have done her no more good than counterfeit. She couldn't pass it, any more than the gold certificates also wadded in a corner of the vegetable bin.

That night she had seen Clarence, and immediately the wheels began to spin. For they were in need of money, and soon.

First, it was necessary to detach Marie from the job.

He took this chance: He phoned Clare Bannon and represented himself as a government agent, giving a phony name. He said, "Miss Bannon, my work involves checking bank records." He was a smooth talker, and paused. "Now, it is unfortunate that there are such spiteful people in the world, but your father had enemies. He foolishly let it be known to this supposed friend that he did not intend to turn in his gold, and this man recently came to me. There is positively no record of any such gold transaction, as required by law. I think you know what the penalties are."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" she exclaimed. "My father never mentioned any hoarded gold."

"Unfortunately, my source of information is quite unimpeachable." *There* was a word. "Please be lucid," and he added her name suavely, "Clare. You needn't worry about consequences; these things can be arranged."

She didn't miss the use of her name, and waited, saying nothing.

He proceeded: "Do you think twenty thousand would be about right? For . . . myself?"

"You're amusing," she answered, "and

stupid. There doesn't happen to be any gold, and I could turn you in for attempted extortion. If there did happen to be any, you'd simply come back for more and more, if I kept the gold."

"What gold?" he asked innocently.

He waited a while, and at length she said cautiously. "I don't quite know what you mean."

"Once I accepted that twenty thousand," he explained, "you would have me by the . . . ah . . . short hair."

"That would be interesting," she said, drawling savagely.

"A standoff."

"I see."

She had no choice. The man might be waiting only a short distance away, to come on the run and search her house before she had time to move the heavy gold. And she had another batch of coins in rolls in a safe-deposit box, which the federal man must know about. Twenty thousand was cheap, a bargain. Her eyes narrowed and her mouth smiled with speculation on how much "Mr. McCue" had picked up in extortion during his travels. And she knew how attractive she was to men. . . .

Intuitively Clare Bannon knew that her hoard wasn't a secret any more, but it really didn't occur to her that her maid had betrayed her. She was convinced by Sneed's manner, and being unscrupulous herself she was not surprised to come upon graft anywhere. There was his quiet voice and surety. She realized that he was risking nothing. If she complained to the government he could call her a liar and be cool about it. When people get caught they commence making accusations promptly and get very vindictive indeed. She wouldn't be believed.

What really worried her was going to prison. She couldn't stand that. The idea of it gave her the crawling meemies.

Sneed suggested, "I can tell you confidentially that the government is going back on to the gold standard. Naturally it wouldn't be very wise of me to give you the exact date. Time is short . . . Clare. I've been talking too long."

"All right," she agreed.

Thereupon he gave her general instruc-

tions, timing the route she was to take. She was to arrive within five minutes of the time he set. Directions were printed on a note concealed in a specified place. This note instructed her to proceed to another spot miles away, where she would find a second note. This one directed her to follow a numbered highway out of town southward until she passed a telephone pole, on the right, which had an old car fender wrapped around its base like a horseshoe "ringer." She was to turn left at the first lane or road beyond, stop at the first house (there was only one, Leonard's), and knock out a dot-dash "V" on the door. That was all.

However, at the first stop, Sneed and Co. would be watching from a handy place of concealment to make sure Clare wasn't followed, trying to pull the old doublecross. After waiting a reasonable time, to be certain, they would take a short-cut to the Leonard place.

All the elaborateness was wasted brain-work, because Clare Bannon was playing the game straight.

AT THE Leonard house now, Sneed said, "Well, let's go in."

Sneed and Marie left the car and started for the house. The moonlight gave the wet grass a sheen, and bats were flying silently in crazy loops and skirmishes, as though frightening themselves by their own shapes. Marie was superstitious, and clasped her hands over her thick black hair.

They climbed a flagstoned path of shallow steps, and mounted a stone porch, where she selected a key from a small bunch and opened a heavy door. The door had a handsome knocker—a club hitting a man's head.

Inside, they proceeded to the kitchen in the rear, where the sound of water falling over the dam onto boulders down below was strong and pleasant. First Marie looked out the window to make sure no one was using the pool, and then, with the door closed, turned the light on.

There were a half dozen bottles of gin and cooking whiskey in a cupboard. Sneed got a tray of ice from the refrigerator, and soda. He made a couple of tall, stiff drinks.

There would be plenty of time for one drink apiece, but no more.

"Are you going to wear a mask?" she asked.

"Hell, no," he said positively. "Not until I start robbing banks, and I'm not starting."

They sat in Leonard's living-room, which was a spacious place two stories high. The roof was fully skylighted, and the clear moon furnished illumination that seemed greenish. There was a fireplace large enough to take a railroad tie.

"You made them stiff enough," she remarked.

"One stiff one is better than a pair of weak ones," he commented. "Look: how far is the side entrance from here?"

She told him.

"All right," he said. "When she comes, you go out that way and around to the front. If she isn't alone, or if there's another car, or she blocks the lane, anything suspicious at all, you know what to do."

"Throw a handful of sand at the window."

"Yes, and meet me at the car. If the road is blocked, we'll take the path along the river."

They would have to cross the dam; that was easy enough, because it was two feet wide at the top. They would merely get their feet wet when they reached the spillway in the middle. They would have to abandon the car, if Clare Bannon pulled a double-cross. There was no place to park the car between the garage and the highway, and on the highway it would be sure to be investigated by any cop wheeling by.

"Then we'd be fugitives, because they'd trace you through the car."

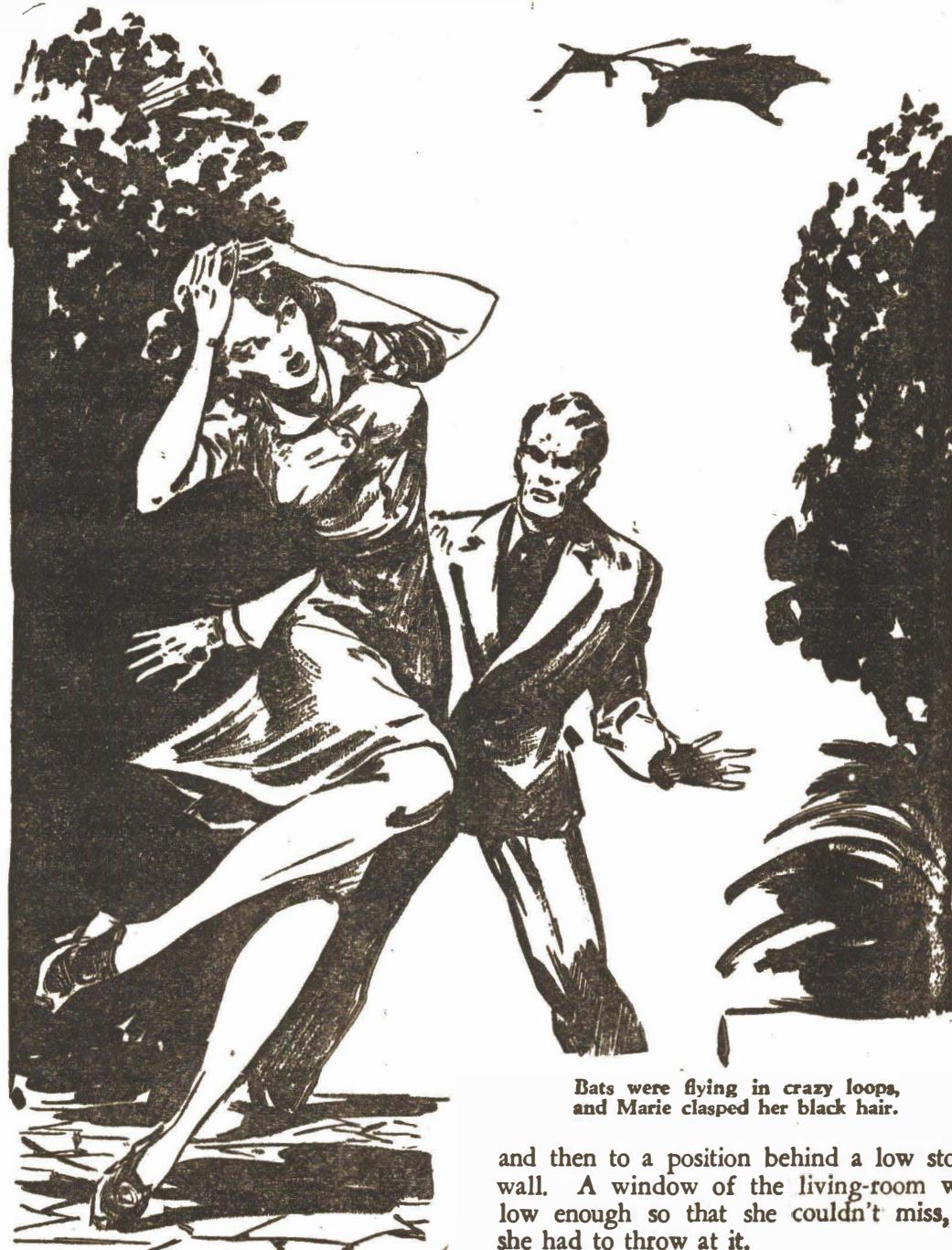
He shrugged. "They might not notice the car where it is, or they might think it's Leonard's. The motor's cold now, in case they lay a hand on the hood."

"No," she objected. "It will take only seconds for us to undress. We'll simply go down to the water and slip in, and swim down to the dam. If there's a bunch of detectives, let them actually 'catch' us. It will throw them off the track, finding us swimming around peacefully. I work here and have keys. I have a perfect right to

bring my boy friend here for a midnight swim."

He thought it over, and agreed.

All at once the drinks were gone, and time was up. Marie rose and walked swiftly, knowing her way. Letting herself out, she slipped around the side of the house,



Bats were flying in crazy loops, and Marie clasped her black hair.

and then to a position behind a low stone wall. A window of the living-room was low enough so that she couldn't miss, if she had to throw at it.

There was sand here, and she made a pile of it, because she took her job seriously. She was going to be ready. Then she knelt and waited, watching over the top of the wall.

Clare Bannon arrived a good five minutes early; she was a fast, impatient driver. Marie heard the car coming up the narrow lane before she saw it, the wheels skidding and throwing pebbles. Then there was the twin blast of the headlights which made her close her eyes for a second. She picked up a handful of sand, and waited to throw it while Clare drove into the garage apron and turned around to face toward the highway. The car stopped with a jerk; the emergency brake had been yanked hard, and the sound was harshly audible. Marie crouched, listened, and stared down to the turn in the lane.

Clare got out of the car and slammed the door, and strode up the flagstoned path to the porch. She had a brisk, smart carriage of a girl going places. Her hair was yellow and stirred on her shoulders as she moved. Her dress was some dark color, of thin wool, and Marie noted that her slip showed when she moved fast.

Under her arm Clare carried a large, in fact bulging, leather purse. On the porch she surveyed her surroundings curiously, causing Marie to duck, then approached the door and examined the brass knocker with interest before she used it. She let the club strike the head lightly three times, then hard.

In a few long seconds the lock clicked and the door opened. She entered the house fearlessly, and the door closed. Marie still waited, looking all about and listening. Only the normal sounds were in the night; Clare was alone. And at length Marie breathed a sigh and let the sand sift from her fingers. She stood up, stepped over the wall toward the house. A pair of bats were careening off to join shadows that were standing still. She thought she heard a sound like someone handling leather, and clapped both hands over her hair again. She hurried up the slope, and waited near the side door of the house.

The transaction would be short, barring trouble, but it seemed to Marie that she waited a long time. She worried and got nervous, walked a little, and heard stealthy

night sounds that she hadn't heard before. There was a gentle *tap-tap-tap* from the woods. Then again. It could be an owl wiping his beak on a limb after devouring a field mouse, or anything imaginable. There were furtive squeaks, and a long, stealthy sigh that she could hear even with the background of falling water.

The side door was screened, and Marie heard subtle scratching there as the wires were scraped. Her scalp tightened, and she chilled with gooseflesh immediately. *There was somebody there*, signaling to get in,

She was concealed by a bush, and moved aside, tensely poised to run, to see who it was. From the upper half of the screen hung two bats, upside down. They looked like nasty little, black, wrinkled leather pouches hanging there on drawstrings. One of them sidled, scratching again, dropped and took flight, and became a fleeing shadow that scooted along close to the ground in speedy hops and flourishes. The other promptly followed suit and went batting after.

Marie's heart was missing beats, rippling, stopping, then pounding until she thought it would burst. She had cramps inside her elbows.

This was taking too long. She was sure of it. She waited, didn't hear Clare's car start, and knew without any mistake that it was too long.

And still they were all alone; nothing could have happened. Except that she knew something had.

IN THE house, Sneed heard the signal—the triple tap on the door, then the heavy knock. The sound of the car's arriving was audible, of course.

He had put the glasses away, and returned to the living-room; now he got up from the leather sofa and went to the hall, where he could either let Clare in or run for the side door. He waited for the slashing sound of sand against the window-pane, but it didn't come. For a second he was frightened. Suppose that Marie had left the house and walked directly into the arms of the cops. If that were the case, he was caught, too. So he ambled to the front door, unlocked it, and opened it.

The girl was standing there. *She was there*, and now everything was all right; he took a slow breath. Clare was much like Marie, but was fashioned in smoother lines. Clare carried herself with the arrogance of an heiress. Her perfume made him think of girls of luxury.

She tossed the ball, saying sardonically, "Mr. McCue, I presume?"

"Won't you come in?" he responded.

He closed the door gently and took her arm, which made her look at him quickly, and led her into the living-room. There she looked around with interest when he released her arm. Clare made throaty sounds of comment, as though she approved of the owner's taste.

Her self-possession was complete, and he waited on edge for the sound of sand whipped against the window in warning.

This Bannon girl was beautiful, though her face somewhat hard with experience. Her lips had been put on with unkissable exactitude, her face was too symmetrical, and her complexion was flawless. An unreachable girl, as far away from Clarence Sneed as a star in Hollywood.

She danced professionally, and had a dancer's smoothly modeled body, with exceptional legs. There was a lot of material in the thin wool of her skirt, and it swung when she turned, as though she were doing a dance step.

The dress was a deep gold in color, like gold dusted with soot. The fit of the dress made her shapeliness pronounced.

The carpet in the room was thick. It was so silent when Clare came back to Sneed that he could hear the light clicking of the mannikin's beads.

"You have a very interesting place," she said, opening her big purse. "You ought to see mine sometime."

"Perhaps I shall," he suggested.

HE ACCEPTED the pack of banknotes from her, rifled through them, but didn't count. He guessed from the denominations he saw that the amount was close enough to twenty thousand.

The moonlight was strong, angling down through the glass roof, and they stood in

a patch of it on the rug. She took a step toward him. Then they stood motionless, while he wondered whether she wanted to make something more of this.

But she was just looking at him intently.

Abruptly she laughed in a way that scared him, and said, "I know who you are."

"You do?" he asked. His voice was weird, almost a croak. He cleared his throat.

"I have a maid who calls herself Marie Gilette," she said. "Do you know her?"

Sneed just looked, frowning.

"Oh, yes, you know her," Clare insisted, her voice hardening. Her eyes were big and shining now. "Marie is a nice girl, and you're lucky, but you shouldn't have tried this."

"Marie? Who's Marie?" he asked.

"My maid. I thought you looked familiar when I saw you in the doorway, just now. The moonlight is the same now as it was that other night, and you're the same man. I don't suppose I'd recognize you in broad daylight."

"What are you talking about?" he asked casually.

"Your name is Clarence Sneed. I check on phone calls, and have an extension. Marie has called you several times, and frankly, I've listened in with great enjoyment. She made an arrangement with you, and I was there, just to see what would happen. Do you remember the hedge that divides the lawn in back of my house? I pretended to be busy, and she slipped out to meet you. I was behind the stone fountain near the fence."

"A stone fountain?" Sneed inquired doubtfully.

"And now, if you please, I'll take back that money."

There was no doubt about it—she knew who he was.

"Sorry," he said moderately. "It doesn't matter who I am. It's a stand-off; I'll just keep this money, and you can go."

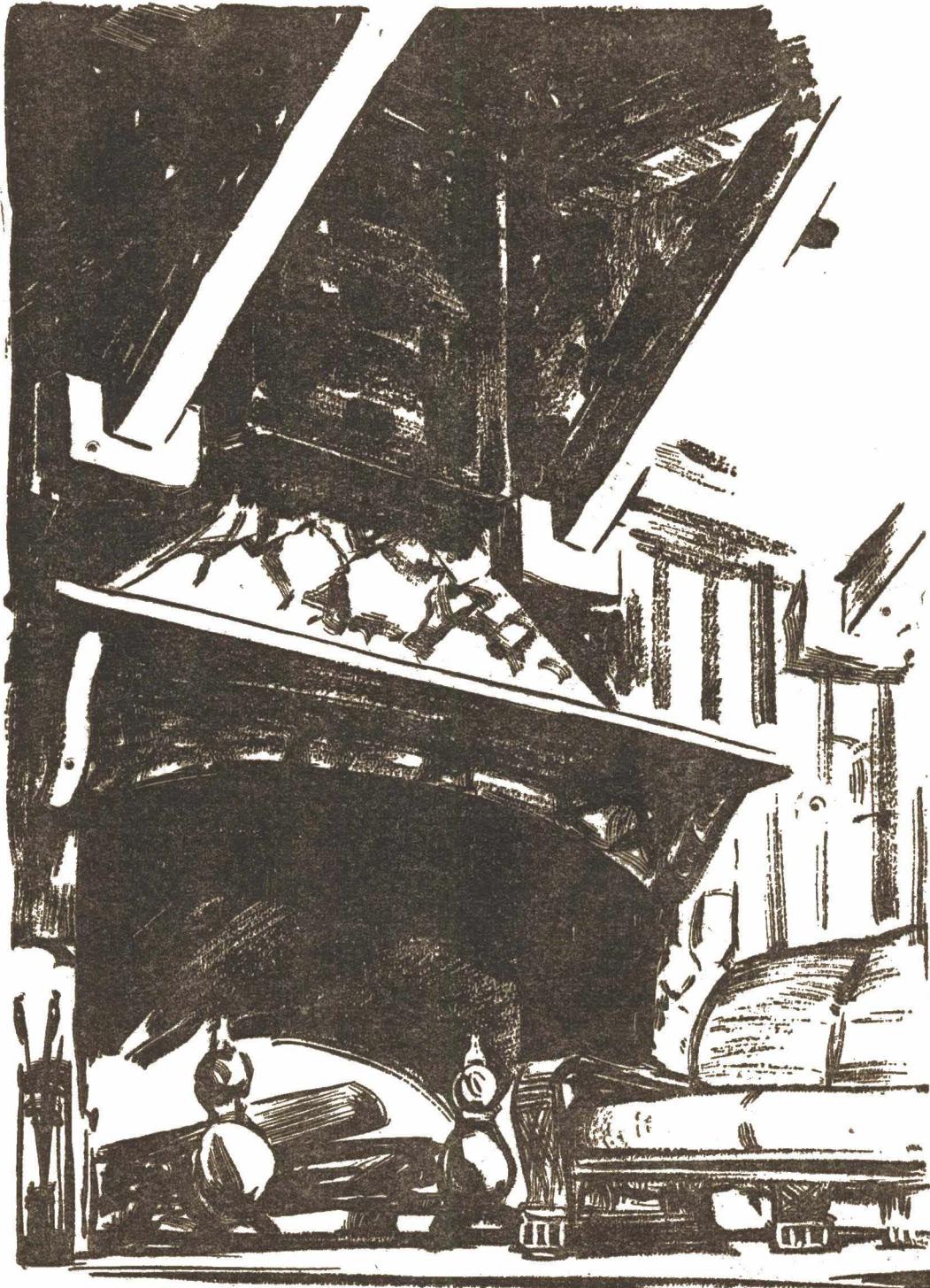
"Oh, yes?" she said, showing her teeth in a smile. "No!"

Moving with unbelievable speed, she snatched the wad of bills from his hand, and sprinted for the front door. Her high heels struck a piece of bare floor, and she skidded,

nearly losing her balance. Sneed caught her around the waist, wrenched the money from her hand and threw it over his shoulder.

The bundle of currency went spinning through the air all the way to the leather

sofa, where it bounced and tumbled off to the floor. Clare tore herself free and then sprinted back after it. Likewise, Sneed ripped himself loose from his paralysis, and tried to get there first.



The moonlight had shifted its square outlines on the rug, and the pack of currency was lost somewhere in the shadows. If Marie had looked through the window she would have wondered what was going on, because Sneed and Clare Bannon were dancing around, looking, and shoving each other roughly like kids playing a game at a party.

CLARE found the money first, whipped it off the rug, and again darted away swiftly toward the front door. She didn't get very far. Sneed threw himself after her in desperation, in a flying tackle, but couldn't hold her. His shoulder struck her, and his

own momentum loosed her and pitched her forward.

She flung her arms out, throwing the money away as she tried to keep her balance. She was turning as she fell, so that she sat down hard and was stretched flat. Her legs rose in the air, and came down to bang her heels on the rug.

Hurriedly Sneed hunted for the bunch of currency, found it, and started to leave. Then he paused, in a quandary, staring at the figure lying with arms and legs spread in such a relaxed position on the floor.

She was lying with her eyes closed and her perfect lips parted. Her breast fell, and

Sneed threw himself after her in desperation, in a flying tackle, but couldn't hold her.



lifted slowly in a tired rhythm. He knew that she was breathing, because the angle of the moonlight made a shadow that advanced and receded on her dress.

As though the block of banknotes were a carton of cigarettes, he placed it on the mantel and crouched. He couldn't find any pulse in her wrists, but he could swear that she

was breathing. She was just knocked out. In a moment, simply because he couldn't help it, he lowered himself to kiss her squarely on the mouth. There was no response whatever, but at least he found that she was alive. Her breath brushed his cheek. He stood up and took the money from the mantel.

Then Marie came bursting into the room, extremely worried.

"What's the matter?" Marie asked.

"She recognized me, and I had to knock her down."

"She recognized you!" Marie exclaimed. "She never saw you before in her life!"

"Oh, yes, she did. You remember that night, don't you? In her garden, she was wandering around, and she spotted us. I guess she must have been back of the lilacs. Anyhow, the moonlight was pretty strong that night, like tonight."

Marie was staring down at Clare, and Marie's lips were dry and parted slightly as she looked at Sneed.

He got down on his knees, a little impatient.

Clare's heart was beating; but she had been unconscious for quite a while. He combed his fingers through her yellow hair, feeling her skull. He got up, sickened. The back of her head was soft, though there was no bleeding externally. When she fell, her head had struck one of the massive andirons jutting from the fireplace.

Marie let out a cry and jumped, pulling up her skirt. "Step on it!" she exclaimed. "Kill it! Kill it!"

"Kill what?"

Then he saw the thing on the floor, and almost did jam his heel down on it. It was a little cherrywood mannikin, with arms and legs a dangle, the head bent as though with a broken neck.

He picked it up to throw it into the fireplace when Marie recognized it.

"No," she said. "That's her favorite piece of jewelry. She wears it all the time, and everybody knows it."

"I'll put some newspapers in the fireplace and burn it up. Where's some paper?"

"No! We can't. Someone would see the smoke."

"All right," he said impatiently. He knelt astride Clare Bannon, bent the catch as it ought to be, and pinned it through the cloth over her left breast, where it had dangled before.

WHEN he lifted Clare, he guessed that she weighed about a hundred and twenty pounds. Beautiful though she was, she was heavy to carry. With one arm hooked under her knees and the other slung around her back and under her left armpit, he lugged her through the house, down the stairs, through a door and onto the flagstones which bordered the pool around the house. Now they were in the direct moonlight. There was a square stone platform on which the diving-board was mounted.

Just beyond, where the dam joined the foundations of the house, Sneed heaved Clare's body into the water. She made a splash that was startlingly loud, disappeared, and came to the surface strangling feebly.

"Don't do that!" Marie gasped. "Please. Don't do that!"

Kneeling, Sneed pushed Clare's head under, and held her under until the bubbles stopped coming to the surface.

He turned his head to listen to the splashing, tumbling water below the dam. Sneed was about to give Clare a hard shove downward and leave her, when a flashlight snapped on. He was caught in the bright, direct beam of it, so he plunged his arm deep in and caught her by the dress, hauling her to the surface.

"Give me a lift," Sneed said, breathing hard.

A man joined him, and between them they hauled Clare out of the pool. They stretched her out on the flagstones, and the stranger worked on her.

After quite a while the man got up and said, "It's no use. She's drowned. What happened here?"

"I guess she tripped over the bottom of the diving-board and fell in," Sneed suggested. "There was a hell of a splash."

"What are you doing here?" the stranger asked.

"What are *you* doing here?" Sneed countered.

"Why, I'm Herb Morrow. I'm a detective, and Leonard hired me to keep watch on this place while he was gone." He was quite pleasant about it. "I've been down the road having a few beers, and just got back."

This was horrible. Marie didn't know about any detective, because she usually came to the house in the daytime to do the cleaning and dusting. The Leonards hadn't told her about Morrow. They didn't trust her completely; they wanted the house clean, but they didn't want her to get a van and haul away all the furniture in the house while they were gone.

"And now, who *are* you?" Morrow asked.

Marie had nerve, but Sneed was trembling. His voice was steady, however; he said: "My girl works here. We were going to have a midnight swim. We thought it would be all right."

"How about *this* girl?" The detective indicated Clare Bannon. "Is she with you."

"No, she isn't. You know, Leonard lets people use his pool. We were sitting and having a cigarette when we saw this girl fall in."

"Well, we'll have to go down to Headquarters," Morrow said. "Help me, will you?"

SNEED helped him to carry Clare's body, dripping through the house. Out on the lawn was Morrow's car; the detective had arrived without a sound.

They went to town, to Headquarters,

When he went through the police mill, Sneed got the idea that he was being treated with deference. He sat on a bench, and

cops nodded to him when they passed by. A boy came along and wanted to give him a shoeshine. Sneed said okay.

He smoked cigarettes after that, with a cop at a desk glancing at him now and then, for two hours. He ached.

This was going to be all right; he kept thinking of the twenty thousand dollars on the mantel of Leonard's fireplace. He'd go back and get it. He wondered whether they had let Marie go home, so that she could get some sleep. He really thought of her, and he got more and more restless.

His cigarettes were gone.

He sighed and closed his eyes, and was asleep when two men picked him up and took him into a room. One of them said, "Hey, you're falling asleep. You've got to take your girl home."

"Okay. I'll take her home. I'll take a hack."

"Why did you kill her?" a big cop asked suddenly. He meant Clare. . . .

Sneed didn't know anything about it until he had been questioned for five hours. He held out that long, till dawn, and then told everything.

It was that little mannikin that Clare was wearing. It had fallen off when he struck her, and he had pinned it back onto her dress. He was in a hurry, and he stuck the pin through her flesh, without realizing it. The policewoman couldn't get her dress off until they removed the pin.

Sneed thought back now; he wondered, but he decided that things had to come out this way anyhow.

So. . . .



BRAIN-BUSTER

IT WAS CERTAINLY hard on little Field, when Dr. Zairoff took his wife away from him, and Zairoff, who was a generous soul, recognized that fact. Zairoff came back from their three-day honeymoon to the offices on Park Avenue,

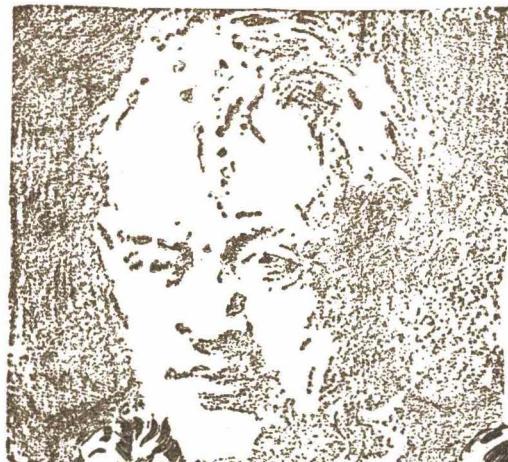
with their Persian rugs, mahogany furnishings, overstuffed chairs for waiting patients, and Miss Susan Warner, the nurse. He came back determined to pacify little Field, his



By **LEW MERRILL**

junior partner. After all, he had pulled the little man out of the gutter, where he was starving, in spite of his having headed his class in Johns Hopkins, because he hadn't the approach a fashionable physician has to have.

Zairoff had gone into the medical profession with little Field, because he needed just that sort of partner, who would do what he told him, and accept twenty-five per cent of the gross. It was a beautiful racket, pro-



Dr. Zairoff was a genius in his own field, but his greed was his undoing. Practicing medicine honestly was too slow a way to make money for a man of his tastes, and it didn't take him long to discover how to make a racket of his job



vided you knew your stuff. Zairoff certainly did. He was a medical graduate of Vienna, and had taken post-graduate courses at Oxford and Geneva, in the days when he didn't dream of medical rackets. That ideal only dawned on him after he managed to get a passport to America, and realized what plunder offered itself to the intelligent man.

As old Marshal Blucher, who after Waterloo, became an honored guest in England, looked upon London, and said "Gott!

"I'll not be treated like a common criminal," he said. "Turn off that light."

What a city to loot!" so Zairoff looked upon New York, and found it good.

An office on Park Avenue, Persian rugs, and a pretty nurse, and the money came streaming in. But you had to have a partner like Field—whom Zairoff had pulled out of the gutter, figuratively—to do the constructive work. You had to have a certain solid quality, a first-class surgeon who could take out tonsils and adenoids, while you were devoting yourself to shady practice. To lifting the faces of the wives of millionaires at five-figure fees. To overdosing cancer patients with lethal drugs, when they were in their eighties, and changing their wills every week. To every form of medical malpractice. Oh, it was the grandest racket Zairoff could ever have dreamed of!

But there was always the need of little Field, whom he cheated out of his twenty-five per cent, by not divulging the extravagant fees paid him by desperate fathers and wealthy murderers. Field got about six thousand a year, and Zairoff had about ninety. But then, as Zairoff told himself, he'd pulled little Field out of the gutter.

AND Zairoff was a kindly man. He had really, honestly done the work he was paid for—even though it was contrary to all medical ethics. He felt he was a public benefactor. And everything would have been all right if he hadn't fallen for Leila, little Field's wife.

She was a luscious blonde. Not fat, not buxom, not more than twenty-five. Just the woman a man like Zairoff found irresistible. And why she had married little Field, God only knew.

She had been a schoolteacher, and perhaps Field's six thousand a year had seemed a dazzling lure. Or perhaps she had really been in love with the little man. Perhaps he had symbolized for her a certain social standing, which eight months of marriage had dissipated. Leila had discovered, in those eight months, that her husband was merely a moral front for Zairoff's activities.

She was a nice girl. It was only with reluctance that she accepted Zairoff's advances, and then because she was so disillusioned with little Field, his timid ways, his stupidity. When Field was taking out ade-

noids under a local anesthetic, with a frightened small child in the chair, he was at his best. Then he rose to dignity. Then he could quiet the terrors of a child, and joke with her—even while his clamp was on the obstruction, and make her laugh, and restore her to the arms of her father or mother.

But then he was only acting as a shield for Zairoff, and it was Zairoff who got all the credit. Zairoff was a name on Park Avenue. But not among the decent practitioners there, who knew a good deal about him, and were resolved to put him where he belonged.

When Leila agreed to leave little Field, with a divorce in prospect, she was utterly infatuated with Zairoff. It didn't need too much persuasion on his part for her to agree to the week-end honeymoon at Zairoff's fishing-camp in Maine. She just told Field that she was leaving him.

Miss Susan Warner watched the whole proceedings with a professional calmness. She knew almost everything about the office but Zairoff had seen to it that she had no detailed knowledge about any of his extra-legal work.

It had been his habit to engage a succession of nurses, picked rather for their looks than for their ability, and to dismiss them after a month or two, as soon as they began to discover what was going on. But Susan had been so efficient. When Zairoff discharged her, after two months' service, she said to him: "I don't want to go, Mr. Zairoff. I like it here. I'd be much more useful to you as your nurse than as an unemployed person."

Zairoff caught her meaning instantly. He kept her on, and raised her salary to seventy-five a week. He had sometimes wondered whether he had been wise.

ZAIROFF went into the office on Tuesday morning, and little Field was there. Zairoff said: "Leila and I have been off on our honeymoon. I guess you knew."

Little Field nodded, and Zairoff continued: "You know, old man, I'll always stand by you. It's too bad things like that have to happen."

"That's all right," said little Field.

Zairoff said: "There's old Mrs. Bartlett's

sinus operation this afternoon. It's good for a thousand. Small pickings, but it's the little sums that mount up. I told her she had polypi. She thinks that's some form of cancer. Snare them out with the loop, Field, and groan each time you get one. What a racket, boy, what a racket!"

Field didn't say anything, and Zairoff looked at him, studying him, as he might have watched some unknown germ under the microscope.

"You're not sore about Leila, old man, are you?" he inquired.

Field looked up. "Why should I be sore? I'm glad to be rid of her, if she loves you. I hope you'll be happier than I was, Zairoff.

Zairoff clapped him on the shoulder. "Now that's the way I like to hear you talk," he answered. "We've always stood together, Field, and after the end of the year I'll—well, I'm thinking of raising your share to thirty-three per cent. But don't forget to play up to old Mrs. Bartlett. She will be good for a gall-bladder operation in a few months, unless my hand is failing me.

"And, strictly by the way, you don't have to be too confidential with Miss Warner. I've never altogether trusted that woman. I ought to have fired her, but I misjudged her. If I can ever reach a frank understanding with her, she'll be a useful member of our outfit, Field."

ZAIROFF went off beaming, quite unsuspicious of the fact that District Attorney Evarts had devoted most of his afternoon to him. Evarts wanted to become the next Governor of New York State, and hence a presidential possibility. That was why he was death on rackets.

And District Attorney Evarts, a handsome, smartly dressed young man of forty, knew his stuff. He had been gathering evidence ever since the complaints of the old-style medical practitioners along Park Avenue had begun to come in.

He had been in conference with the police commissioner, his assistant attorney, several doctors, and three or four other persons.

"Field blew the works Saturday night," he said. "It seems that Zairoff took his

wife away from him. Now I think we've got that crook where we want him. Field will tell all he knows, in return for immunity."

The police commissioner asked: "May I look at his deposition?"

"There's no deposition yet," said the district attorney. "Field came to my house in a state of near collapse, and blurted it all out to me. Unfortunately, I had no stenographer handy. He'll be here tomorrow at eight. We'll get everything then. Mr. Commissioner, be very careful not to let Zairoff have the least suspicion that we're on his trail."

"He won't learn it from me," answered the commissioner. "So Field blew the works because Zairoff took his wife away from him."

"Exactly. We'll pull her in, and that Warner woman, the nurse. It's going to be sweet, Mr. Commissioner."

"**D**ARLING," said Leila, "Field is a mean little rat. Are you sure you can trust him?"

"He made six thousand out of me last year," said Zairoff. "That's big money for a fellow like him."

"It wasn't big money for me," said Leila, snuggling to him. "You've been taking a lot of chances these past two years, haven't you?"

"Sure I have. You've got to take chances to make ninety grand a year. I'll pass the century mark this year. What's on your mind, Leila?"

"Ever occur to you that you've aroused a whole lot of professional jealousy?"

"Oh, sure, sure! But what have they got on me? Warner won't talk. I admit I ought to have fired her when she began to find things out, but she's not going to throw away seventy-five a week in order to hurt me. Besides, I've told her I'll raise her to a hundred after Christmas."

"Suppose my ex-husband talks?"

"He wouldn't dare. I pulled him out of the gutter, and I can push him back there."

"He loved me," said Leila pensively. "You can't tell about a man like him. Anyway, I've found something out. Brace yourself for it, darling. I had him watched.

And he has been to the district attorney."

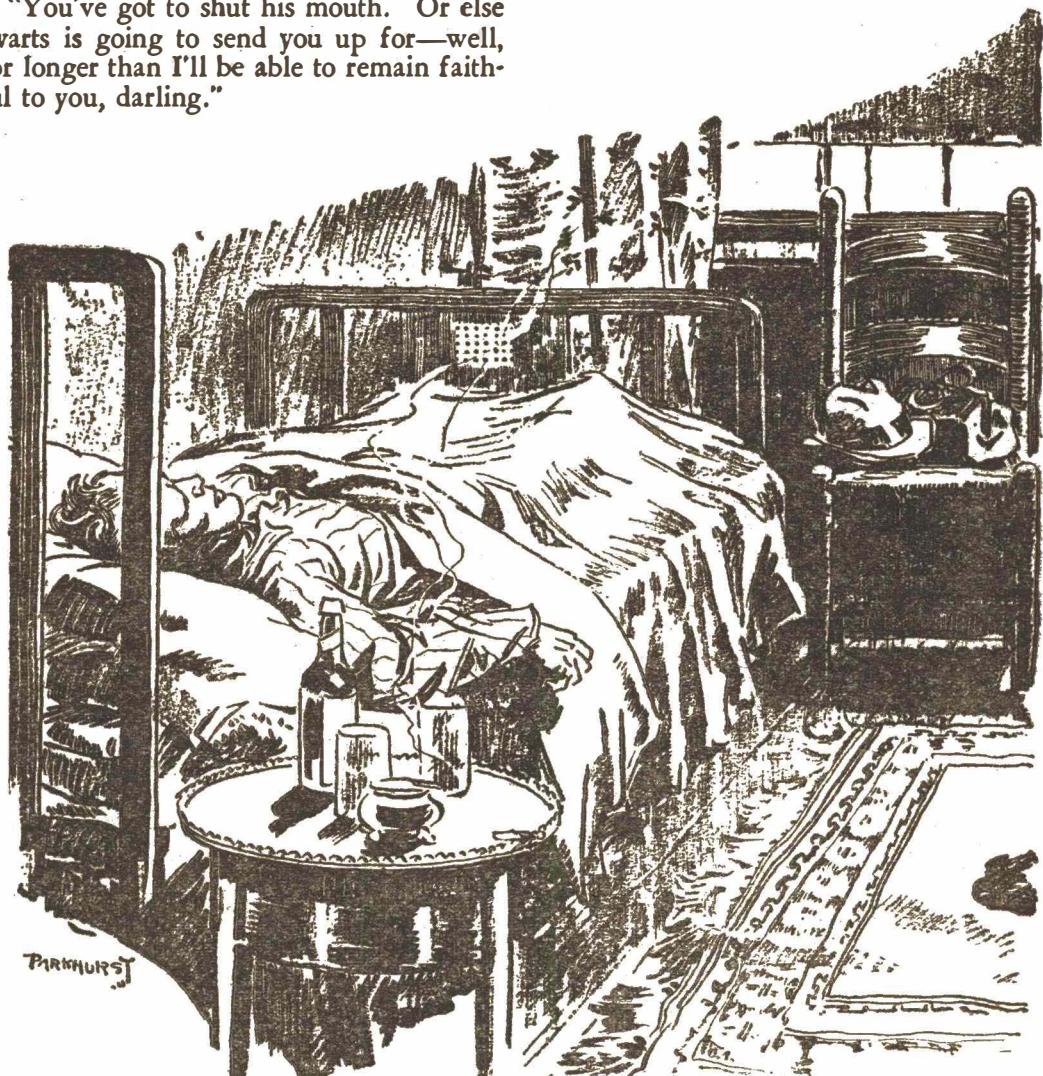
"What?" shouted Zairoff.

"Yes, to his home, darling. I guess he's told everything."

"The damn' little rat," said Zairoff.

"You've got to shut his mouth. Or else Evarts is going to send you up for—well, for longer than I'll be able to remain faithful to you, darling."

me. You've saved a lot of money, haven't you? I can't face a murder trial. And Evarts will crack down on you." She shuddered. "Remember how he sent Four-Eyes Frankie to the chair?"



"HE'S living alone in the apartment? No other woman, Leila?"

Leila laughed. "He's still all mixed up about my leaving him. You see, he loved me. And a man like Field has a lot of trouble finding a soul-mate."

Leila put her arms about him. "I don't like the idea of murder. Frankly, dearest, I think it would be best to come to terms with him, whatever the price. Or, if you can't, drop everything and come away with

"If I shut Field's mouth, that finishes Evarts?"

"I—I guess so. Even if he's made a deposition, it's only words. Evarts can pull it out of the bag, but it wouldn't go over with a jury—if Field wasn't in court to corroborate it."

"I'll take care of him."

"How?"

Zairoff grinned. "I didn't study under Klein, the brain specialist, in Vienna for



It took quite a struggle before the woman got him to replace the instrument in his pocket.

nothing," he answered. "How do we get into the apartment?"

"I've got a key."

"I'll handle your ex-husband tonight."

"Darling, what are you going to do?" she asked in alarm.

Zairoff chuckled. "I've seen Klein reduce an intelligent dog to a lump of magma by a single movement of a knife," he answered.

"You won't kill him?"

"Kill him? I don't want the poor devil's life. I want him to live, and understand just what he's lost, and to be unable to communicate that understanding to the outer world."

"Darling, I've got to know just what you're planning to do. He—he—well, I once loved him. At least, I thought I did. I don't want him to suffer."

Zairoff explained. "He won't suffer," he said.

Zairoff thought a lot about Field during the intervening hours. Field had been with him for eighteen months. He was a wizard at operations. Field didn't let his left hand know what his right was doing, for he was ambidextrous, and his movements were sure, and lightning quick.

"Leila, you'll go into the apartment tonight and ask him to take you back," said Zairoff.

"But I've broken with him forever."

"Nonsense! Any woman can make a man think she loves him if she wants to."

"Why do I have to come into the picture at all?"

"Because I need your help, and I'm working for both of us. Field will go on living, so you don't have to worry about him. It will be supposed he's had a stroke. He'll be happy in some institution or other. Knowing exactly what's happened, and utterly unable to explain himself. And he's brought it all on himself, because he didn't know he was well off when I picked him up."

"You want me to pretend that I've come back to him?"

"That's the idea. Swallow your pride, and think about what's going to happen to him, for what he's done."

"I've got to know just what you're going to do. I mean, you gave me an idea, but—"

"Listen! Try to get him asleep by the time I come in. I've got some curare. It's hard to get, but I guessed the day was going to come when I'd need it. I'll give him a shot while he's asleep. He'll hardly have time to yell. It's a refined product, and works like a miracle. It will paralyze his voice and motor nerves, without dimming his understanding in the least. That's well, because I want him to know what's coming to him. I'll explain it all, while he's under the influence."

ZAIROFF opened the door of the apartment very gently, went softly along the hall, into the bedroom. Leila was sitting in a chair in lounging pajamas, and Field was asleep. From the expression on his face, it was evident that he had forgiven his wife for leaving him, and that all was peace and harmony again.

Zairoff went softly to the side of the sleeping man. An expert in medical legerdemain, he had his needle almost instantly in the large veins of the elbow bend, and had injected the drug before the sting produced the reflex action of withdrawal of the arm.

Field sat up and stared into the face of his nocturnal visitor. Zairoff said: "Take it easy, Field. I just looked in to see if we couldn't come to a better understanding."

He was stalling, while he watched Field's face, to see the reaction of the drug. If Field yelled, he'd have to gag him. But the reaction ought to be very quick. It was. Field's voice was already husky as he answered:

"What the devil—what the devil—you mean—?" The rest was only a gurgle, and Zairoff smiled. "That shot of curare will hold you, Field," he said.

A frightful spasm ran through Field's body. He tried to struggle, and ended where he had begun, flat on his back, his head upon the pillow. Field's voice had failed. All his attempts to free himself had become reflected in the quivering of the tortured limbs. Gradually these subsided. Now Field was lying still, looking helplessly at Zairoff. He was unable even to crook a finger. The motor nerves were paralyzed; the sensory nerves remained. Exquisite torture could be conducted. But Zairoff wasn't a cruel man. He didn't want to torture Field.

Luscious in her pajamas, but greatly frightened, Leila was leaning forward.

"How do you feel now, dear fellow?" Zairoff inquired. "Because you do feel, you know." He pinched his arm. "You feel that perfectly. You see, there's a shot of curare in your system. You've been under a sort of nervous strain of late, haven't you, Field? Ever since you went to Evarts?"

There was not the flicker of response in the white and mask-like face staring into Zairoff's. Field couldn't frown, couldn't laugh, couldn't do anything that required motor activity. He could only feel, and understand.

There was a snarl in Zairoff's voice. "I dragged you up out of the gutter, Field, and we did good business together, until

I found I loved Leila. It's just too bad, dear fellow. It's an unfortunate situation that has happened half a dozen times in the history of humanity.

"If you'd shot me, Field, I'd have called it quits. But you went to the district attorney—you rat! And now you're going to pay. I don't know what you've told him, but you're not going to give any evidence in court.

"You're a good anatomist, Field, and I don't have to describe to you the structure of the brain. But I'll run over it briefly, because it is going to interest you enormously. I'm pretending, for the moment, that you are one of those stupid students who have to have their anatomy hammered into their skulls. I'm pretending you're a simple innocent young student, who'll never amount to anything, but has to have a vague knowledge of cerebral anatomy.

"Man, Field, is like a duplex apartment. He was created a double. He has two arms, two legs, two eyes and ears—when one of each would have been ample. He's got two kidneys, but only one liver, and one heart. Two lungs—Lord, what an erratic process on the part of the Creator.

"Two brains—two distinct brains, Field, united by a thin band of tissue. That's where the Creator seems to have flopped. Because he needs only one brain, and, for all practical purposes, he's got only one brain, on the left side of his head. The right brain is just unorganized tissue, perfectly superfluous, like either of the kidneys, ears, or eyes. Are you interested, Field?"

But Field was lying back on the pillows, perfectly immobile. He might have been a waxworks creation, except for the look in his eyes, fixed on Zairoff's face in deadly hate. Leila was crouching at Zairoff's side. Her hand was on his arm. She seemed to be trying to deter him from pursuing his vengeance to the ultimate point. But Zairoff was hardly conscious of her presence. He was talking to the man who had betrayed him.

"Of course, you know all that I'm telling you, Field. But I'm pretending you're an innocent young student. All the faculties are concentrated in the covering of the

brain, and especially in Broca's Convolution, over the eye.

"How did this convolution come about? It's always fascinated me, Field. At some late stage in human evolution, God, Nature, or the Creative Spirit decided to make a little place in which all the higher faculties of the mind would have their home. Thanks to Broca's Convolution, that little lump of brain tissue above the eye, you read and write, you speak, you recognize your friends. That lump of nervous tissue is you, the real you, Field.

"And it's over the left eye, because the fellow who thought up the joke of the human body, decreed that the wires should cross. Because speech and the use of the right hand are so closely connected, he decided to have a common center for each, over the left eye. The other half of the brain, above the right eye, is just unorganized tissue. I could scoop it out with a spoon, without interfering with the human ego. I could extract the whole hemisphere of your right brain, and you'd never know it. You'd go on being your natural, dirty, crooked little self, betraying your benefactor.

"It's only in left-handed persons that the right brain works. With them, the left brain its unorganized matter. A hideous joke of the Creator, Field. But now you are beginning to get my meaning.

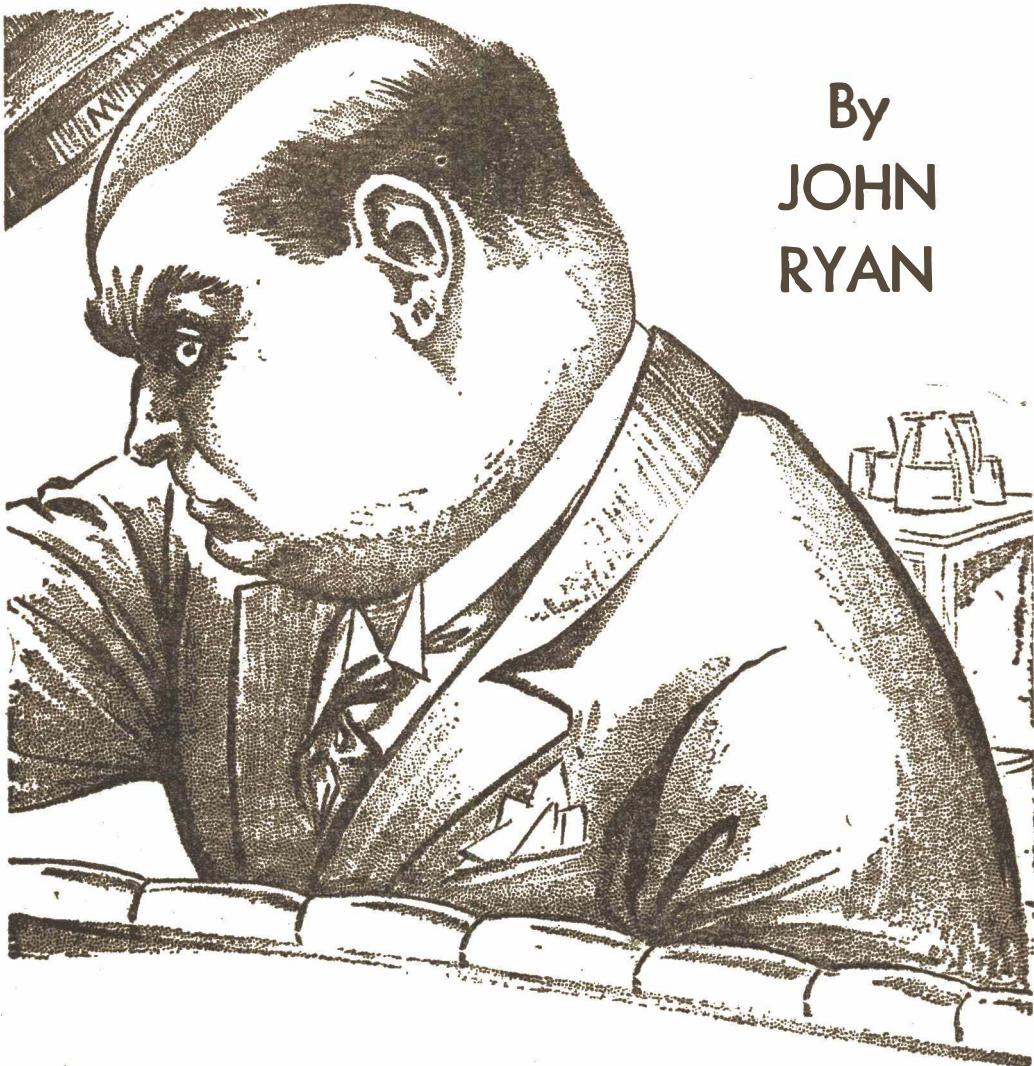
"I'm going to pierce the thin bony plate above your left eye that protects your Broca's Convolution. It won't hurt, Field. I'm going to stir that little node of nervous tissue into a mess, Field. And with it will go the faculties of speech and writing, reading—in short, all the latest additions to the mental organisms that Nature invented, in a spirit of jest, some hundred thousand years ago."

ZAIROFF drew a little pointed instrument from his pocket. Leila caught at his arm. "Don't do it," she whispered. "He understands. He won't go any further with Evarts. He—"

Zairoff sneered, and shook her off. He plunged the point into the bony plate above the eye of the helpless man. He twirled the point around. Field remained motionless.

(Continued on page 91)

Bury the Dead



By
JOHN
RYAN



HEY hauled me off the plane in Melville to let a second looie take my place on to the Coast. I didn't feel too bad about it, though. The kid had been on furlough, had a string of ribbons across the front of his blouse that weighed it down, and he was going back to service.

It wouldn't have made any difference if I'd felt bad about it or not, of course. That kid would have rated a priority over a full

colonel, unless the high ranker was going to as much active service.

The air line office informed me I'd have a three day wait, unless I wanted to go on by train, and they also advised me that if I rode the train, I'd sit up for the trip. That there wasn't a chance for reservations on a Pullman right at that season.

So I said hold a plane seat for me for the third day and took a cab up to the town.

The town wasn't a bad place to wait over at all. About twenty-five or thirty thou-

Private-eye John Ryan would have figured ordinarily that a guy who was buried alive underground—even though it was an advertising gag for burial vaults—would be reasonably immune to trouble. But this guy had to go and make himself a permanent customer for the vault—and then the motives appeared, abundantly, linked to some very ornery suspects!

I said: "Look, Mayor! Suppose you get the hell away from me and let me eat in peace." He left talking to himself.



sand, I thought, and the Melville, where I checked in, would have done credit to a town twice that size. It wasn't so big, they advertised a hundred and sixty rooms all with bath, but it was modern and it had a pleasant little bar and a coffee shop which actually was a swell little restaurant.

There was little manufacturing in the place—it was in the center of a farming country and the biggest trading center in that whole section. Because of having few war industries the town wasn't crowded, and that was a change from where I'd been and where I was going.

It was really peaceful. I don't mean that the people didn't know there was a war going on—I mean that the streets still had room to walk on and you didn't have to fight your way in and out of restaurants and bars.

And they took a personal interest in you at the hotel. I signed in; the clerk told me he had something he thought I'd like on the sixth, in the back where it would be quiet, and then looked again at my name.

He said: "Say! You wouldn't be the John Ryan that cracked that Milner case, back in Hartsford?"

I said: "Guilty."

"You know I followed that. That sabotage business is bad stuff now. I read every article in the papers about that."

I'D FOUND out who was doing a bit of sabotage in a Hartsford war plant and the papers had given me quite a bit of space on the job. It was good advertising for me—the OWI approved of it because it gave other plants a tip on what to watch for—it made a little news for the papers, and so everybody was happy.

I said: "It was all in the line of business. The FBI would have done as well and done it faster, but there's only so many of them and they can't cover everything. It was just a job."

"I never thought I'd meet the man who did it, Mr. Ryan, just the same. It maybe was just a job to you but it was a great thing to read about."

He called the boy and I went up and looked over the room, which was okay. The

boy gawked at me as if I was Dick Tracy himself, and he dashed around opening up windows and checking towels like a wild man. He brought me up ice water without being asked, and that's service in anybody's book.

I went down to the bar and had a couple of drinks, then tried out the coffee shop and found it better than I'd expected by far, and then wandered back through the lobby and asked my pal, the clerk, what was doing in town. It was only about three in the afternoon—too early to do any serious lushing—and I didn't want to spend the rest of the afternoon in some picture house.

The clerk thought seriously and said: "I don't know whether you'd like it, Mr. Ryan, but there's a sort of funny stunt being put on right now. It was scheduled to start at noon. They're burying a man alive, and there's been quite a lot of talk about it."

I knew it was an old carnival stunt but I'd never happened to see it done. I mentioned this and the clerk went into details.

"It's not a carnival stunt this time, Mr. Ryan. It's an advertising scheme. The Winston Burial Vault Company put up a plant in town here and builds these vaults. They were depending on selling them to the local trade, I guess, and the local trade buys caskets instead. The vaults cost more and the people around here are conservative by nature."

"I've heard most farmers are."

"They are for a fact. Well, these Winston people wanted to do something to show the people what the vaults are really like, so they're putting on this demonstration. D'ya know the man who's doing the stunt is living right here in this hotel. That is, his wife is. Of course he's buried under ten feet of ground."

I said it might be a way to waste an hour or so and he told me where to go to find the lot where they were putting the act on. And then he stopped and jerked his head forward.

He said: "Here's that fella's wife right now. I mean the wife of the guy that's being buried alive. Only the fella with her I don't know—he's not the guy that's buried; that's sure."

I TOOK my time in turning and saw a blonde wench not over twenty and a farmer's daughter if there ever was one. I don't mean she wasn't pretty—she was as pretty as a picture. She just had a country look—it's impossible to either describe or miss it. Her clothes were new but they were flashy new, and she looked a little out of place in the hotel. She looked like she'd saved the butter and egg money for awhile and spent it on a spree in the big town.

And she was scared—that was evident.

She was talking to a big, tough-looking lad probably five years older than she was. And he was laying the law down to her and she was shaking her head defiantly and looking like she was going to break down and cry any moment.

The clerk said: "That fella hadn't ought to talk to her like that. Maybe I should do something about it."

He weighed about a hundred and twenty and the one talking to the blonde kid would go a good fifty pounds heavier. And the clerk had been friendly and time was hanging on my hands. So, although I don't believe in interfering in what doesn't concern me, I stuck my neck out.

I said: "Want me to break it up for you? I don't mind."

"Gee, Mr. Ryan! Thanks!"

So I swelled up my chest and proceeded to play my hero. I strutted over to the guy and gal and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned and glared at me.

I said: "Look, Mister, I wouldn't bother the lady. That isn't manners."

He snapped: "Keep your damn' nose out of what don't concern you. This is my sister. Trot along or I'll hang one on you."

I asked the girl: "That right? He your brother?"

She said: "Yes, sir. He's my brother."

I said: "My mistake."

I went back to the desk and the clerk and I'm willing to bet my face was as red as the rag they flag the bull with. I told him what had happened and we agreed that a man that butts in somebody else's affairs is a fool, and I stopped in the bar for another drink and started for the place where the burying was going on. I felt silly enough

to half wish I was the guy that was under the ground in that vault.

THE burying ground was a vacant lot almost in the center of town. It had been neatly fenced in and there was a gate with a ticket seller and taker at one corner. Admission was twenty-five cents, and I judged there were at least two hundred people milling around the lot. I paid my quarter and headed for the center of attraction, which was also the center of the lot.

It was in no sense a fake, though the man down in the vault certainly had trained himself in muscle control. He was down ten or twelve feet and there was a tube leading down to him. This thing was about three inches across and it must have had some sort of magnifying device at the other end, because by looking down it I could see the man's face and chest. I couldn't see the man's chest move as he breathed, but the attendant that was standing by explained that—by telling us the man threw himself almost into a coma.

That also wasn't hard to believe. The yogis do that trick all the time. During the time I peeked down the tube I saw the man move his mouth, open his eyes and blink up at me, and I swear he winked.

The attendant was making a regular spiel of it. Telling us the man got air through the tube and that he also was fed through it once a day. Thin soup, he said—no solids.

He also made a spiel about the vault itself, explaining that the embalmed corpse that was placed in one of them would last indefinitely—and always look natural. He drew a nasty picture of the ordinary body in a casket—of decay, worms, dampness, and the rest of the things that can happen to an unprotected body in the ground.

He said: "Wouldn't you want your loved one to have the best? Wouldn't you rather think of him safe in an air-tight, water-tight, beautifully lined burial vault than rotting in the ground, a prey of worms and decomposition?"

I always thought that when a person was dead that was all there was to it. That to brood about him was morbid. And that



She was talking to a big, tough-looking lad. And she was scared—that was evident

cremation was the best way out of a sad thing—but a thing that happens to everyone in time.

However, I kept the thought to myself—I couldn't see any reason I should try to spoil any man's sales talk. Instead I wandered around and listened to what the customers were saying about the show.

I PICKED Winton, the man that made the vaults, right off the bat. He was bustling around doing a bit of selling for himself—I suppose he had a line on those who had

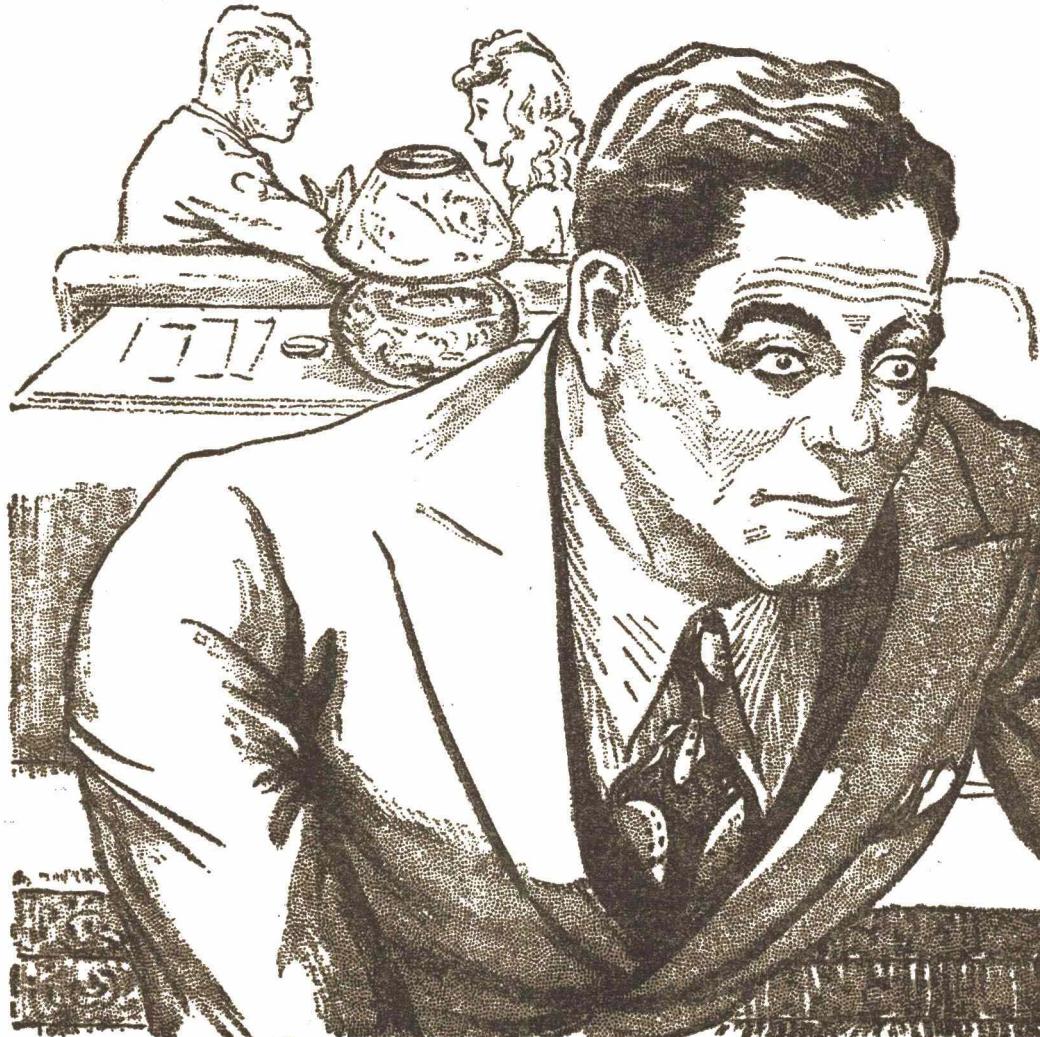
either old or sick people in the family. He'd buttonhole some geezer and go into vault details, and about half of those he picked on would listen to him with a buying air about them. They'd be really interested and I decided the show was a success, or would be as soon as people started to die at a paying rate.

Of course he didn't do as well with everybody. He'd get some other man by himself and the guy would scowl at him and pull away. I heard one of these tell Winton that the affair was a disgrace, against common decency, against the Bible, and that the vaults cost more than a poor farmer could afford. Opinion seemed about evenly divided.

And then I saw a big, portly looking bird collar Winton, instead of it being the other way around. And this big man was mad—so mad he could have been heard all over the lot and probably was.

He said, and with a bull voice, that the thing was a disgrace to the fair city of Melville. Also that it was a dangerous thing and that if anything happened, the buried man's blood would be on Winton's hands. He said the thing was against nature and common decency—that a man shouldn't be buried until he was dead. He said the earth should be sacred to the dead instead of the living—that it was an insult to the very dead, and a mockery as well.

Winton kept trying to get a word in but



he didn't have a chance. The big man shouted him down until he just naturally ran out of voice. And then left.

I found out who he was before he left, though. Some man next to me, grinning to beat the band, said: "I bet poor Winton plays hell trying to borrow money from *that* bank. Old Murphy will heave him out on his ear if he even asks for a loan."

The bird he was talking with said: "Winton probably already owes old Murph some money. If he ain't he's about the only one in the town or country that don't. Remember how he campaigned for mayor? He just said he'd call the note of every man that didn't campaign for him, and the old _____ won in a walk."

I said: "Pardon me, gentlemen? Wasn't that Mr. Murphy, the banker? The mayor?"

They both told me I was right, and one of them went so far as to say that he'd like to see the so-and-such in the ground deeper than that man down-there in the vault.

I left, deciding that Melville didn't have a popular mayor, even though it was a nice little town. I hate a stuffed shirt, and the mayor certainly had the earmarks of one.

I WAS in the bar when the bell boy who'd taken me up to my room brought me the evening paper. He was grinning all over his face, but when I saw what was pleasing him I got sore.

I had a write-up and on the front page, too. The paper really went to town. According to the article Melville was honored in having the greatest sleuth in the world in their midst. I was a combination of Sherlock Holmes, Nick Charles, J. Edgar Hoover, and Hawkshaw, and I combined the best qualities of all in what, so help me, the paper said was in a "modest, pleasant manner." It said I was "well set-up and handsome" but the newspaper cut they ran with the article made them out liars.

The cut showed my nose had been broken a couple of times, showed the scar on my cheek and another across my chin, and even showed where one eyebrow had been half torn off. I suppose the poor dopes who read the article would imagine that last had

happened in a battle with desperate criminals, but it had really happened in a bar-room brawl where a guy clunked me with a bottle. The two scars were there because I was fool enough to get mixed up with a Portuguese gal who was handy with a knife when she was jealous, which was most of the time.

I wasn't flattered by the article and I said so. I also said I'd like to know just how the hell the paper got the information about me being in town, and the bell boy looked at me, big-eyed, and told me that was due to the clerk.

He said: "He ain't talked about a thing except about you being here, Mr. Ryan. He thinks you're, well, like a sort of hero. He reads detective stories all the time, and he's always said that all the book detectives couldn't even compare with what you did in real life. He thought you'd like it—he called the paper to tell them you were here. Gee! He wouldn't have done it, I know, if he'd thought you wouldn't like it."

That cooled me down. There'd be something wrong with a man who wouldn't puff up a bit when somebody thinks he's quite a guy.

I said: "Well, hell, it don't make any real difference, I guess. Don't tell him I got sore—there's no reason for hurting his feelings. He's a pretty good guy."

The boy told me the clerk was a good fella to work with, which was quite a compliment at that.

I stayed there for another hour and I was about half tight when I went upstairs. Not lushed up but feeling happy. Enough so that when my telephone started ringing just after two o'clock I fell over a chair getting to it, and I was swearing when I lifted the receiver, not saying hello.

A voice said: "I beg your pardon. I guess I didn't understand you."

That seemed a funny way to start a conversation and I said: "What didn't you understand?"

"It sounded as if you called me a dirty name."

I explained that I'd fallen over a chair and was speaking about that and the voice said it understood.

And then: "I'm George H. Winton." That was about the only name I'd heard

in Melville, which was probably the only reason I remembered it.

I said: "Oh yes! The burial vault man."

"That's right, Mr. Ryan. Could I see you?"

"When?"

"I'd like to see you right now if that's possible."

I SAID it was quite late and he said it was very important so I told him to come on



She screamed suddenly, and I turned just in time. The big guy was getting a gun out of his hip pocket.

up, to tell the bell boy to bring up some ice at the same time. Then I got the lights on and my clothes picked up from where I'd dropped 'em, and got straightened up a bit for company.

And then Winton came in with the bellboy, the last with the ice. Winton introduced himself in a jittery fashion and when I proposed we have a drink, he almost jumped at the chance.

He said, while I was making highballs: "I saw the article in the paper about you, Mr. Ryan. It was like a sign from Heaven."

I said he shouldn't believe all he read in the papers.

"No, I mean it, Mr. Ryan. I've got a problem that will take a man like you to solve."

I said: "Nuts! I just stopped over here because they pulled a priority on me and took me off a plane. I'm on my way to the Coast—I'm not working."

"I put on a little advertising stunt, Mr. Ryan, and it's backfired on me. I'm afraid I'm in for serious trouble unless I can get help at once."

I'd seen the burial show and it was fresh in my mind. I said: "Something happen to the guy that was buried?"

He said: "When the attendant went back, after having a bite to eat tonight, the man was dead. How, we won't know until after he's been, well, dug up and an autopsy performed, but I'm almost certain to be accused of contributory negligence in the matter, if not worse. I—ugh—I have enemies in town—in fact one of them would like to see me in that sort of trouble because of taking over my business."

I said: "It's an old stunt and there shouldn't have been any danger in it if it was properly put on."

"We did exactly as the man advised us to do."

"What d'ya think happened?"

He said: "I think murder."

HE GAVE me the dope while we were having another couple of drinks. He needed them and I thought I might just as well keep him company with them.

The man, his name was Joe Mills, had

come to town and propositioned Winton on the deal. He was supposed to be buried alive in the vault—which of course had to be fixed up in a special way—for seven days. Mills was to get a share of the gate receipts, as well as three hundred and fifty dollars. With what Winton took as his share of the gate it figured to be just about free advertising, so he went for it.

He arranged the vault just as Mills wanted it and Mills' own attendant was to look after him. It looked like good business to Winton, as he had no responsibility and Mills had assured him he'd been doing the act for more than ten years with no trouble. Even in that first day he told me he'd built up his business a hundred per cent, and in addition had made a little extra because of all the crowd that came to see the buried man.

I told him I'd dropped in, also out of curiosity at this point and he went on with the rest of the story.

Things had gone all right since the show started, at noon. Mills had told Winton that he'd learned the trick of throwing himself into about half a trance, and willing himself to wake up at feeding time, which was always after the lot had been closed for the night.

In this case the time was supposed to be at eleven — the lot being cleared at ten o'clock sharp. The attendant went out and got a bite to eat for himself, then went back with some soup for Mills, at eleven, when he was supposed to go. And he couldn't wake Mills and called Winton to tell him something was wrong, and Winton had gone down to the lot.

I said: "Did they have some way of waking the guy up in case he went into too much of a trance?"

"The attendant said he always kept ammonia for that purpose. But that it didn't work. You see part of that tube that the people look down through is removed at the time the man is fed, and then things can be put down through it. That part of the thing belonged to Mills—I just furnished the special vault."

I said: "Who'd know the lot was to be cleared at ten and that the man was to be fed at eleven?"

"Probably everybody who came to the lot. There was no secrecy about the matter. We didn't claim the man didn't breathe and eat. We only tried to show how the vault was a protection. You see only the upper part of the vault was glassed in like that. The lower part was built as our standard vaults are built."

I was remembering the guy's wife and brother and already I was getting ideas.

I said: "What kind of a guy was this Mills? I'm taking it for granted that the man's dead and has been murdered."

"I didn't like him, personally. He was one of the fast talking kind. He told me he'd played carnivals most of the time that he'd worked his act, and a lot of those carnival people, while possibly not dishonest, are well, sharp. Do you see what I mean?"

I said I understood. And told him to run along home and that I'd see if I could do anything about it.

I thought he'd break my hand he shook it so hard when he left.

I GOT up about eight the next morning and got the telephone call while I was still under the shower.

A very dignified voice said: "This is Cornelius Murphy, Mr. Ryan. I wish you'd call and see me."

I remembered Murphy and I also remembered I hadn't been impressed.

I said: "Just why, Mr. Murphy? I don't believe I know you."

"I'm president of the Farmer's and Merchant's National, Mr. Ryan. I'll be in my office at any time after nine-thirty."

"I'll be busy, Mr. Murphy."

"May I also say I am mayor of Melville."

"Sure you can."

"What's that?"

"You can say you're the mayor of Melville. It's all right with me."

I heard him grunt as that hit him. I judged that few of his fellow citizens ever needled him like that.

He said: "It's necessary that I see you, Mr. Ryan."

"Then drop around."

"I—ugh—when, Mr. Ryan?"

I said: "I've got a busy day. I'll be here in the hotel for about half an hour. In the

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coffee shop. If you can get here before then, I can spare a few minutes, I guess."

He said he'd meet me in the coffee shop before half an hour was up and hung up the phone. He didn't put it up—he hung it up and hard.

I decided I'd have fun cutting him down to size.

I WAS just ordering when he came in and I told me who he was—and I started out very pleasantly with him. I asked him if he'd join me in a bit of breakfast, and when he told me he'd eaten, I almost forced a cup of coffee on him. And he started on me even before the waitress had time to bring it to him.

He said: "Mr. Ryan, I understand that Mr. Winton called on you last night."

I said I never could remember names.

"And I can imagine the reason, of course. I know about the occurrence of last night, Mr. Ryan. There's no reason for secrecy. Naturally I know of the result of the autopsy performed on that unfortunate man."

"How did you know it?"

"As mayor of this city it's my business to know such things."

"And as mayor of this city, is it your business to keep track of my callers?"

He got a little hot on that one—or at least a bit red in the face. He said stiffly: "It just happened that one of our police officers observed Mr. Winton going into your hotel. With what had happened, it was easy enough to assume he was calling on you. You're a well known man, Mr. Ryan."

"Too well known, Mr. Mayor."

"I'm here to give you some advice, sir. Keep out of this. Melville will handle its own business with no help from outsiders. The man died of suffocation, due to improper arrangements, of course. I don't propose to have Mr. Winton prosecuted for murder, though I feel in my own heart that he is guilty of a form of it, but I do propose to see he is prosecuted for contributory negligence at the very least. Our district attorney, I may say, agrees with me."

"He owes you money, too?"

"I resent that, Mr. Ryan."

I said: "You fat dope. So you resent it,

do you? Well, I resent your coming to me and telling me what to do and what not to do. Now I'll ask you one. What's your idea of raising hell with Winton over this? What d'ya make out of it?"

"I warned Mr. Winton, sir, that trouble would come from a circus act like that. He brought this on himself and he should be held responsible."

I said: "Look, Mayor! Here comes the gal with my breakfast. Suppose you get the hell away from me and let me eat in peace."

He was talking to himself when he left me.

MRS. MILLS was in her room but I wasn't announced. I just knocked on the door, put my foot in it when she opened it, and shoved in past her. She stood there with one hand up to her mouth and the other clutching a too fancy negligee around her.

I said: "Come on back and sit down, sister. I've got a notion you're in for big trouble."

My pal the clerk had told me she'd been told of what had happened, but if she'd been crying about it it didn't show on her, in any way. Her eyes weren't red and her nose wasn't swollen, and I've never seen a woman yet that didn't show a spell of the weeps those ways. She came back, I thought warily, and sat down across from me.

She said: "I—I remember you now. You are the man who spoke to my brother in the lobby, yesterday."

"Where's your brother now?"

"He—he isn't here."

"I can see that. Where is he?"

"I don't know, Mister."

I said: "You might as well break down and tell me, sister. You weren't married to the guy, were you?"

"Why—why, of course I was."

"For how long?"

"Three—three years."

"You can take your choice, sister. You can tell me about it now, or I'll take you down to the cops and have them put a tracer on you while they hold you in the can on a murder rap. How'll your folks like that?"

"You—you wouldn't do that."

"The hell I wouldn't. Try me."

She looked down at the floor and said: "I wasn't married to him. I ran away from home with him. Two weeks ago. My brother managed to trace us."

"Was the guy married?"

"He said he wasn't but my brother found out he was. That's why he followed us—I told them we were going to be married right away—in the next town."

"Where's his wife?"

"Here in town somewhere. I don't know just where. My brother said she was going to sue him for a divorce and name me in it. My brother said she was awful mad about it."

"When did you last see your brother?"

"Last night. About eight o'clock, I guess."

"Got any money?"

"No. Oh I've got three dollars and something. Joe told me to charge things here at the hotel until the job was over and he was paid."

"How far away d'ya live?"

SHE named some little town I'd never heard of and told me it was about a hundred and fifty miles away. And she also told me that Joe Mills had a car in the hotel garage, and that he'd left the check for it in the room. So, sucker that I am, I shelled out fifteen bucks and handed it to her.

I said: "Get that car and go home. I'll see your hotel bill here is paid—I've got a man paying me expenses and that'll go on it with some other things. Now get going before the cops come up here and stop you."

"I don't want to run away, Mr. Ryan. I did wrong and I'll stay and face it."

"You'll get out of here if I have to carry you out, you little chump. This is a one man town and you'll be the patsy if you stick around. That mayor will have you in the can and charged with murder if you don't watch your step."

I was just trying to scare her out of town but she gave me something then I didn't expect. She curled her lip and spilled a lot of beans.

She said: "He won't do a thing to me, Mr. Ryan. He'd be afraid to—he'd be afraid I'd tell on him. That nasty old man!"

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"Come away and harder, sister."

"Why, when Joe and I were in . . ." She named another town between where she'd joined the guy and Melville . . . "we saw him there with the most awful looking girl you ever saw. We knew him as soon as we saw him here, and we saw the girl, too. She's married and so is he. Joe said he could shake him down for plenty if he wanted to, and I'll just bet he could."

"Did he remember you folks?"

"Why, of course. He was at the carnival, where Joe was working. They were just digging Joe up when he was there, and he was drunk and stood around making mean remarks about Joe. Joe almost busted him in the nose."

"What about the man that came along with you? The one that took care of Joe when he was buried?"

"He lives at the Star Rooms."

I said: "Okay, kid. Get dressed and get out of town fast. I'll be seeing you."

And I'll be a dirty name if she didn't give me that certain look and coo at me.

She said: "When, Mr. Ryan? Gee, it's certainly swell of you to look out for me like this. I really appreciate it. Will you come down and see me when I get home?"

"Sure. If I have time."

"You don't really mean it. Look! The clerk said you're taking the plane out to the Coast. Why couldn't I stay near here and then you and I could take Joe's car and drive out there instead."

"And have your brother after me?"

"He won't know where we are."

I said: "Sister, you'd better get out of town right quick or you'll go out with a set of black eyes. That guy Mills was a heel, but you're a bigger one. Now get."

I started then for the Star Rooms.

THE place was a dive, but it had a phone in the hall and no less a person than Mayor Murphy was busy on it. He didn't see me coming but kept right on with his call, which apparently was to the police station.

He said: "Yes, send the squad to the Star Rooms, room one two seven. The man's stabbed, I think. Yes, I came here to ques-

tion him about the Mills case but he was dead when I walked in."

I kept right on past him until I came to room one two seven, and I walked right on in. And I saw the mayor was right. The man had been stabbed—blood was still welling from the wound in his neck. Not much of it but it was still flowing and the guy hadn't lost a degree of body heat.

I got out of there fast and caught the mayor before he was through with the phone, though when he saw me coming, he hung up in a hurry.

He said: "Ah you, Ryan! You wouldn't, by any chance, have been hiding in an empty room until you thought the coast was clear, would you?"

I gave it back to him. I said: "Look, fat stuff! There's one out. Claim you don't know anything about how Mills died and plead self-defense on this one. You can tell the court this guy was trying to blackmail you and that you quarreled about his demands. If your lawyer is good enough he can maybe make the jury think this guy killed Mills so he wouldn't have to split the take with him."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Ryan."

"Hell, man! The guy hasn't even quit bleeding yet."

"I still don't understand. I found his body and reported it to the police."

"You reported it too soon. Though it wouldn't have mattered. I'd have caught you in the room if you'd waited."

I'D BEEN watching him because I didn't know whether he had a gun or not and I wasn't taking any chances on him making a wild play. Now, when a voice spoke right behind me I jumped a foot from the floor.

The voice said: "The big fat stiff came in about ten minutes ago, mister, and he didn't leave. He went in one twenty seven and I saw him do it. I been listening and watching and I'll swear to it."

I turned and saw a big frowsy woman who nodded at me and said: "That's right! I run the dump. I've paid this fat buzzard the last dime of interest I'm ever going to. He charged me twelve percent interest on a two thousand buck loan, and by golly I had

to give him a two hundred dollar bonus to get it at that rate. I had to sign a note for two grand but he only gave me eighteen hundred of it and put the two hundred in his one way pockets. I said then I'd get even with the — and I'm sure going to do it."

I said: "Lady, I didn't need you but I can use you. You'll save me having to chase down a dizzy young guy and proving an alibi for him."

She screamed then, suddenly, and I turned just in time. The big guy had found enough nerve to try to get a gun out of his hip pocket, and if his rear end hadn't been so fat that it bound the gun against the cloth he might have done it.

I hit him in the stomach twice and then stepped back so he wouldn't fall on me, and the woman did everything but cheer.

Then all I had to do was wait for the cops. Him going for the gun like that was

the same as a confession, though the last was something I didn't need.

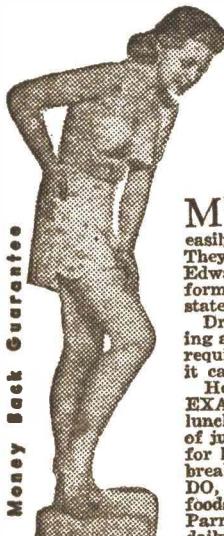
WINTON wrote me about how it all came out. I had it figured exactly right. Mills, before he let himself be buried alive had gone to the mayor and given him the proposition. Either the mayor paid off or he'd tell about seeing him drunk, and with a woman, at that carnival he'd worked. And he'd prove it with his wife—or who he claimed was his wife—and with the man who worked with him.

So the mayor cleaned house. He waited until the attendant went to eat, then stuffed something in the end of the pipe so that Mills got his air line stopped and smothered.

The attendant was as bad. He came back, found what had happened, and cleared the pipe. He was undoubtedly in on Mills' blackmail scheme and figured he'd collect just

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double his share. He'd have his and Mills', both.

I doubted if it had worked out that way. I'll always think the country wench would have taken him for both his share of the loot and Mills' as well. I know damned well she'd have cut in on it some way.

Because of the blackmail angle—and probably because everybody in the country owed him money—the guy got off with a ten to twenty, which was easy.

Winton paid the very reasonable fee I asked and wrote me that I was without question the best detective in the business. If he'd had said the laziest I'd have agreed with him. I'd short-cutted all over the case and it was because luck was with me that it had broken as fast as it did.

The proper way for me to have worked it out was simple. I should have traced the girl's brother and made sure he had an alibi for that time the attendant was away from the lot. Then I should have traced Mills' deserted wife and checked her alibi. There were two with real motives for killing Mills.

Instead of that the kid had cracked wise

and I'd headed for the attendant to check her yarn, before accusing Mayor Murphy of Mills' murder. I'd just happened to stumble into the other one, right after it was done.

Of course, I had plenty against Murphy. He'd tried to pull me off the case. During the time I'd been at the lot the day before I'd heard him building up, in public, the notion that the trick was dangerous and likely to backfire.

And then with a blackmail motive in addition I had reason for going after him. A big stuffed shirt like he was dreads being shown up as a louse a lot more than an ordinary man—and that I figured in the thing, as well.

I always did sort of regret I didn't take the kid up on her proposition. That ride to the Coast should have been something for a man to remember all his life.

Though she'd probably have given me a Mickey, rolled me, and made the trip with a younger, better looking guy. That wench would have taken the gold from a man's teeth and I knew it.

So maybe I worked it the best way after all.

ANSWERS TO "MURDER!" THEY CRIED

(Continued from page 35)

1. The death of Abel by the hand of Cain.
2. Mark Anthony over the body of Caesar.
3. Charlotte Corday who stabbed Marat during the French Revolution.
4. Aaron Burr fatally wounded Alexander Hamilton in a duel.
5. Catharine the Great.
6. Oedipus.
7. John Wilkes Booth.
8. David—the woman was Bathsheba, mother of Solomon.
9. Fair Rosamond and Henry II of England.
10. He was the murderer of President McKinley.
11. Countess Elizabeth Bathory, who bathed in the blood of maidens to preserve her youth.
12. James A. Garfield
13. Peter the Great.
14. Nero.
15. Two—Anne Boleyn and Katherine Koward.

BRAIN-BUSTER

(Continued from Page 75)

There was no cry, no reaction. Slowly, Zairoff withdrew the instrument. A tiny speck of blood followed it. The puncture was otherwise invisible.

Leila screamed: "You've killed him!"

But Field showed no reaction at all. He just watched Zairoff with a face as frozen as a mummy's.

"What are we going to do? What are we going to do?"

"Just get dressed, darling. We're getting out of here. Poor Field had a stroke tonight, and, if we'd only known about it, we'd have done something about it. Hurry up, darling."

Field, in the bed, continued staring at Zairoff. The eyelids, paralyzed by the curare, ought to have closed. But nobody understands exactly the workings of that South American drug. Perhaps the eyelids had got fixed in some way, paralyzed, inert. What worried Zairoff was the message in Field's eyes: "I'll get you! I'll get you!"

Now it may be a myth that the pupil of the eye can indicate emotion. Probably this was all nervousness on Zairoff's part. And yet, looking at Field, while Leila was getting ready to go out, Zairoff couldn't help feeling a certain dread. The message in those pupils was so ominous.

He raised an eyelid. The pupil was fixed, expanded to the point where personal recognition was impossible. A pupil like that was like a pupil artificially distended by atropine, in the course of an oculist's examination. Field could see nothing but light and vague outlines. He wasn't able even to recognize Zairoff's face.

Yet Zairoff could read Field's deadly hatred in those hugely expanded, motionless pupils.

There was the contrast: Field lying there, utterly paralyzed and helpless. And the interior Field, the man himself, watching, pitiless, merciless.

Zairoff was seized with panic. He couldn't face that murderous hate, shining out from those enormous pupils. One little thrust between the ribs, and Field would cease to ex-

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ist. This silent, mocking image would disappear for ever.

He took out the little pointed instrument. Field saw it, recognized it, but that mask of a face remained impassive, and the eyes still reflected hatred. Zairoff raised the instrument. And then his arm was caught from behind.

"No, No!" pleaded Leila. "I'll never face a murder charge. Leave him alone. Haven't you done enough?"

ZAIROFF had broken down. It took quite a struggle before Leila got him to replace the instrument in his pocket. And all the while Field watched. Zairoff hadn't calculated on that situation, on being watched by the mocking mask of a man, with a spirit behind it.

Leila was ready. She was trying to calm Zairoff. "It's all right, dear," she said. "Pull yourself together. He's had a stroke. Well, nobody knows we were here. In the morning, when he doesn't show up, we'll send Miss Warner to inquire about him. Everything's all right."

Zairoff let her lead him out of the apartment. When they were in the street, he breathed more freely. Nobody knew that they had been there. The elevator didn't run after midnight.

Whatever Field had told the district attorney, so long as he was unable to repeat it in a court of law, no jury would convict. Zairoff was free. He held Leila's arm as they walked across town toward their apartment, which was two blocks from his office.

Leila said tragically: "It's terrible, what you did to him. He's going to be a helpless paralytic all his days? And he was such a nice little man."

"Sure he was—until he got ideas. Didn't he rate it? The rat! I paid him more than six thousand dollars last year. And now he's going to lie on his back, knowing everything, understanding everything, and unable to speak, or write, or get in touch with humanity. Because he's got no brain, Leila. That little spot, that left-side Broca's Convolution was Field's approach to existence. He rated it—I tell you, Leila, he rated it!"

"But he wasn't so bad," she sniffed. "I didn't treat him too well, darling."

A man in plainclothes stepped forward from the vestibule of Zairoff's apartment house. "Mr. Zairoff? Yeah? I'm taking you in."

"What's this? What do you mean?"

"Charge of illegal medical practices. Now hold it," he said, as Zairoff began an angry protest. "You can tell all that to Mr. Everts tomorrow. You're wanted too, ma'am, as a witness. My car's outside. You'd best come along and make no trouble. No, I don't want to hear anything. I've got my orders."

Zairoff had been canny. When they put him at a table, and turned a 120-light on him, he said: "Gentlemen, I'll oblige you to the best of my ability, but I won't be treated as a criminal. You'll turn off that light, and then I'll answer your questions."

Rubber hose, in police stations, is only used for gangsters. The D.A. said: "Okay, turn off the light. Now, Doctor Zairoff?"

"At your service," said Zairoff.

"Your partner, Field, has admitted to me the commission of a large number of illegal practices in the course of your medical activities. Zairoff, I advise you to make a complete confession, thereby saving the expense of a prolonged trial, and the feelings of many of your ex-patients. If you care to take this step, I'll recommend leniency. I'll lower the charge of homicide to one of malpractice. My sole desire is to rid the medical profession of persons of your character."

"Homicide?" asked Zairoff, turning white.

"Yes, the Walters woman, twelve months ago. She died—didn't you know? Perhaps you don't follow up your cases with scrupulous interest, Zairoff? I'll admit to you that, to conceal the facts, her family physician gave a certificate of death from natural causes. Consequently, it would be a little difficult to press a charge of second degree murder against you."

"I'm being quite frank with you, Zairoff. The charge will be reduced from homicide to malpractice if you choose to make a written confession. The sentence—I know the judge—will be five to ten years. You'll get out in five. Do you want time to think it over?"

"No, I don't," blustered Zairoff. "Show me Field's deposition under oath, and I'll answer you right now."

"The deposition, Carey," said the district attorney. In a moment the text was placed before Zairoff. He studied it.

By God, the little scoundrel had told everything! He'd shot the works! Zairoff read the lengthy document in increasing terror. Then, at the end, "Subscribed and sworn to before me—" and nothing more.

"It's all a lie," Zairoff shouted. "A lie, because I took his wife away from him. That's the sum and substance of it all. Try me for that, Mr. District Attorney, and make yourself the laughing-stock of New York. Laugh yourself out of the governorship!"

THAT was a nasty one for the D.A. Even the assistant police commissioner looked queerly at him. Zairoff went on:

"I asked for the deposition. Any fool or liar could have had this typed out. Where's Field's signature?"

The D.A. swallowed, and said: "Did you suppose I was going to put the original document in your hands, Zairoff?"

"Not if you had it. But you haven't got it."

"What makes you think that, Zairoff?"

"That's my own business. I'm taking you up on your proposition. Malpractice or homicide?" Zairoff laughed. "I'll stand the gaff. You've got no case. Do I go free?"

The assistant police commissioner looked in astonishment at Zairoff. It looked as if he was going to make good on that bluff. Zairoff looked triumphantly at the circle of faces around the table.

"You took notes of Field's chatter, when he was upset about his wife," he said. "But Field will never sign a deposition."

"How do you know, Zairoff?" There was an undertone in the district attorney's voice that chilled Zairoff, just for a moment.

"Because it's all lies, and he's not going to commit perjury," shouted Zairoff. "Well, where's your evidence? The Walters woman's doctor? Is he going to admit that he gave a false certificate of death?" Zairoff grew bolder. "If you're counting on my nurse, Warner, she'll never swear, because



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BACK

THE

ATTACK—

BUY BONDS!

I always took good care that she shouldn't know."

"So you admit that you've been guilty of malpractice, Zairoff?"

"Of course I have! What doctor hasn't? But that's between ourselves. You can't bring a general statement into court as evidence."

"You know your law, Zairoff."

"I know you've got no case. I'm not to be bluffed or intimidated."

The district attorney said: "You've had your chance, Zairoff. Take him back to his cell."

THREE weeks had gone by since Zairoff's arrest. Despite his confidence that he could beat the charges, he had had plenty to worry about.

In the first place, of course, his career as a fashionable doctor was at an end. He'd have to work *sub rosa*, or change his name and make a fresh start in another city. Fortunately, he had salted away a hundred thousand dollars. Enough for him and Leila to live on for a long time.

Next, he was worried about Leila. He had heard nothing about her since his arrest. He supposed she had been detained as a material witness. However, Leila didn't know anything definite about his activities.

As for Warner, of course, she might be able to do him some harm. But no jury would convict on the vague allegations of an uncorroborated witness. No, Zairoff was safe. But what perturbed him most was the wonder whether Field had lived. Zairoff had never disorganized a man's brain tissue before. Not even the greatest brain specialist knows surely how the brain will react to injury. Sometimes the least puncture produces instant death. And sometimes you can amputate practically the whole cerebrum without fatal consequences. What worried Zairoff most was that the district attorney had made no reference whatever to Field's state of health. And that was one subject he himself hadn't dared bring up.

However, if Field was dead, there could be nothing to link him with his death. And, if Field was alive, he was a helpless, mute paralytic, who would never be able to open his mouth to testify.

Zairoff took new courage as the days went by.

The district attorney had no case. The judge would throw it out of court, if ever he was arraigned. He didn't believe he ever would be.

When he was invited to be represented by counsel, Zairoff laughed. When told that counsel had been appointed for him, he laughed again. When Mr. Elphinstone came to him in his cell, and asked him about his defense, Zairoff dismissed him. "They've got no case," he said. "I'm standing pat."

Mr. Elphinstone said: "That's one way to meet the indictment. But there's this deposition of Mr. Field."

"Field? He's a cripple, a paralytic!"

Mr. Elphinstone looked shocked. Probably he had his suspicions. "That night—in his apartment"—he stammered. "You were the last person saw him before his stroke. The janitor—"

"To the devil with the janitor?" stormed Zairoff. "So he was snooping around? Well, it all boils down to this: they have nothing on me."

He drove Mr. Elphinstone from his cell. He'd never trusted those court-appointed lawyers. . . .

THEY took him from his cell into the crowded court. Zairoff looked at Miss Warner. He looked at the lawyers. He looked at Field, walking in on Miss Warner's arm. He looked incredulously at Field, whose left frontal brain he had reduced to a mass of magma. How could the man walk?"

But then, locomotion came long before speech. Locomotion was one of the most primitive functions of the brain, and was in part controlled by the semi-lunar auditory canals. It was quite possible that uninjured portions of the brain had been able to take over that function.

Zairoff stood in a daze, hardly hearing the formalities of the court proceedings, until he discovered that it was a charge of homicide that was being preferred against him; until he was required to plead. Until he found Mr. Elphinstone still representing him.

Field was speaking. It couldn't be. It couldn't be Field on the witness stand, very

cool and collected, testifying to their professional dealings, telling about the Walters woman, talking like a sane man, and disclosing everything.

Not a word about the curare, or the operation on his own brain. Just the normal Field, explaining his own and Zairoff's professional relations. Field, reciting a list of cases in which Zairoff had acted illegally. Field with office memoranda that Zairoff had supposed secreted.

Miss Warner, at Field's side, in her nurse's uniform looking at Field protectively. No Leila. She would be admitted later, presumably. Elphinstone interposing objections that the judge brushed aside.

How could Field's disintegrated brain have reconstructed itself? Zairoff broke. He shouted incoherently. A policeman clutched him as he stood swaying in the pen.

Field was gesturing. He was gesturing with his left hand. And suddenly the meaning of it broke upon Zairoff.

Field was ambidextrous. Actually, he was left-handed. It was therefore the right Broca's Convolution that controlled his speech and movements, instead of the left. Field's left Broca had been unorganized, and this was what Zairoff had destroyed. He had operated on the wrong side of Field's brain!

Mr. Elphinstone said: "Your honor, I ask for a recess until my client can be restored to consciousness."

The judge looked at Zairoff, sagging in the arms of two policeman.

"Court recessed until tomorrow," he pronounced.



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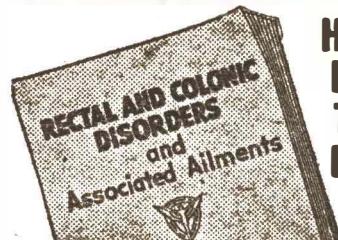
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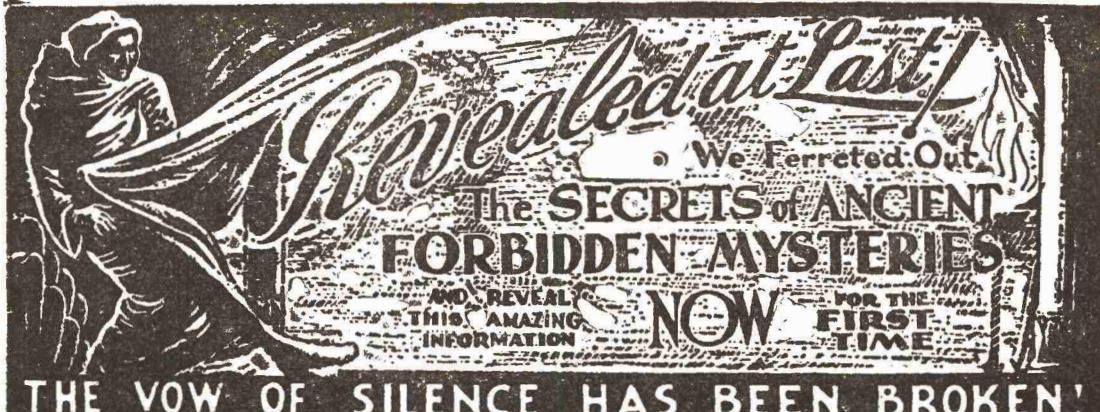
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