

# HOMICIDE SANITARIUM

FREDRIC BROWN  
IN THE  
DETECTIVE PULPS

VOLUME 1

1984

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## INTRODUCTION

The pulps, those gaudy-covered, cheap-paper, jack-of-all-fiction magazines that flourished during the first half of this century, provided a training ground for dozens of writers who eventually went on to bigger and better literary endeavors. William E. Barrett, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Horace McCoy, and Tennessee Williams wrote for them. So did Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Max Brand, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Zane Grey, Robert Heinlein, John Jakes, Louis L'Amour. And so did John Dickson Carr, Raymond Chandler, Erie Stanley Gardner, Dashiell Hammett, John D. MacDonald, Rex Stout, Cornell Woolrich--and Fredric Brown.

Brown was working as a proofreader for the *Milwaukee Journal* when he sold his first pulp story, "The Moon for a Nickel," to *Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine* in 1938. This first taste of success was all the impetus he needed; before long he was selling regularly to a wide variety of pulp markets--crime stories to *Clues*, *Detective Fiction Weekly*, *Detective Tales*, *Dime Mystery*, *Phantom Detective*, *Popular Detective*, *The Shadow*, *Strange Detective Mysteries*, *Ten Detective Aces*, *Thrilling Mystery*; science fiction and fantasy stories in *Astounding*, *Captain Future*, *Planet Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Unknown*, *Weird Tales*; even a couple of westerns to *Western Short Stories*. By 1948, his success in the pulp marketplace--coupled with the novels he had begun to publish in 1947 with *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, winner of the Mystery Writers of America Edgar as Best First Novel of that year--allowed him to devote his full time to writing.

He continued to sell to the pulps until their paperback original- and TV-induced demise in the early 50s--in all, publishing more than 150 stories in that voracious medium. Although fantasy and science fiction were his professed first love, the bulk of his output was in the mystery and detective field: upward of 100 stories. Some three-score of these were reprinted in his two hardcover mystery collections, *Mostly Murder* (1953) and *The Shaggy Dog and Other Murders* (1963). Several others--novelettes and novellas, for the most part--were later expanded or combined into novels. For instance, "The Santa Claus Murders" (*Detective Story*, October 1942) became *Murder Can Be Fun* (1948); "The Gibbering Night" (*Detective Tales*, July 1944) and "The Jabberwocky Murders" (*Thrilling Mystery*, Summer 1944) were combined into *Night of the Jabberwock* (1950); "Compliments of a Fiend" (*Thrilling Detective*, July 1945) was developed into 1949's *The Bloody Moonlight* (not into the 1950 novel also called *Compliments of a Fiend*, as some people suppose); and "Obit for Obie" (*Mystery Book*, October 1946) became *The Deep End* (1952).

But there are still more than 60 of Fredric Brown's pulp stories that have never been reprinted anywhere since their original magazine publications, or have only appeared in obscure anthologies or in digest crime magazines in the 50s and 60s. To be sure, some of these stories are badly dated; and others, written hurriedly for money and under deadline pressure, are of mediocre or poor quality. Still, more than a few have merit, some considerably so. Minor Brown they may be, but they are nonetheless deserving of disinterment from their crumbling pulp tombs for the enjoyment of modern readers. Seven of these comprise this long-overdue book--the first but not, Dennis McMillan and I both hope, the last such collection.

My personal favorite here is "The Spherical Ghoul" (*Thrilling Mystery*, January 1943), which has a typically wild and wonderful Brown plot--its ingredients include a morgue at night, a horribly disfigured corpse, mayhem aplenty, and a classic locked-room mystery--and one of the cleverest (if outrageous) central gimmicks you're likely to come across anywhere. It puzzles me why Brown failed to include it in either of his own collections. And why no one (except *The Saint Magazine* in 1962, and yours truly in a 1981 horror anthology called *The Arbor House Necropolis*) has ever bothered to reprint it.

The lead story, "Red-Hot and Hunted" (*Detective Tales*, November 1948), is also very good Brown. It utilizes one of his favorite themes: the madness, or

apparent madness, of either the protagonist or another main character--in this case, a stage actor named Wayne Dixon who may or may not have murdered his wife. The hallmark of any Brown story, aside from its unusual plot, is the maintenance of a high level of suspense; "Red-Hot and Hunted" has this quality in abundance.

"The Cat from Siam" (*Popular Detective*, September 1949) is another variation on the madness theme, with that same quality of suspense and a beautifully eerie tone. What Brown does with the Siamese cat of the title, and with such simple devices as a chess game, some gunshots in the dark, and a new kind of rats-bane, should provide a *frisson* or two.

"Listen to the Mocking Bird" (*G-Man Detective*, November 1941) makes use--as does another of my favorite Brown shorts, "Whistler's Murder" (reprinted in *The Shaggy Dog and Other Murders*)--of old Vaudevillean characters; in this story, a mimic who specializes in bird calls. Its plot is both solidly plausible and satisfying, making the story one of his pre-World War II best.

The flute was Fred Brown's favorite musical instrument; he played it often if not well, for pleasure and relaxation. His love for the flute and for music in general are evident in "Suite for Flute and Tommy-gun" (*Detective Story*, June 1942). Again, a clever plot and an unusual blending of its various components make this an above-average story.

"The Moon for a Nickel" is hardly one of Brown's strongest yarns, but the fact that it was his first published fiction makes it important from the historical point of view. It also demonstrates that from the very first, he had all the tools that would later make him so successful--the fast-paced storyline, the wry style, the eye, ear, and feel for the unusual.

Brown wrote relatively few stories featuring private detectives--prior, that is, to his creation of the team of Ed and Am Hunter in *The Fabulous Clipjoint*. "Homicide Sanitarium" (*Thrilling Detective*, May 1944) is one of those few, and another neglected gem. Any number of fictional private eyes have taken undercover jobs in sanitariums, but none for quite the same reason as pint-sized and newly married Eddie Anderson: he's hunting an escaped homicidal maniac, and what better place for a lunatic to hide, after all, than in a private loony-bin that allows its patients to come and go as they please? The plot twists are numerous and baffling, and the delightful surprise Brown springs on the final page is surprising indeed.

Fredric Brown was one of the best storytellers of his time. These seven vintage tales from his pulp years may be minor, as noted earlier, but that doesn't diminish their value in any way. They're pure entertainment, from a writer who understood the meaning of that word as well as--if not better than--any producer of popular culture.

What more could a reader ask?

Bill Pronzini  
San Francisco, California  
January 1984

## RED, HOT, & HUNTED

### Murder Role

My back was pushing against the door, but the doorway was shallow and the yellow glow of the street light across the way caught me full in the face.

Adrian Carr saw me; he stopped theatrically. Everything Adrian Carr does he does theatrically. Adrian has never spoken a line on stage, but he has more ham in him than any odd dozen of the actors he hires. And more money than the hundred most successful actors in the business, if there *are* that many successful actors on the legitimate stage.

His eyebrows went up half an inch and he stood there, arms akimbo under his opera cape. He said, "Trying to avoid me, Wayne?"

I laughed a little, trying to make it sound convincingly uncon-vincing. I said, "Not you, Adrian. The police."

"Oh," he said, "the police. That I can believe. But an actor trying to avoid a producer . . ." He shook his massive head. "Maybe it's just as well, Wayne. I haven't a part you'd fit."

"You're still type-casting, then," I said.

"If you were casting I suppose you'd hire Henry Morgan to play Othello."

"Want to bet," I asked him, "that he wouldn't do a beautiful job of it?" I looked over his shoulder and there was no one else in sight so I stepped out to the sidewalk beside him.

He smiled, "Touché. I believe Henry would, at that. I chose the wrong example. Ah--what was that line about avoiding the police? They don't jail one for debts nowadays, my boy. Or have you done something more serious?"

I said, "I have just killed my wife."

His eyes lighted. "Excellent, my boy, excellent. I've often thought that you should, but it would have been indelicate to suggest it, would it not? Ah--let's see--I haven't seen Lola for weeks. Did you commit the deed recently?"

"An hour ago," I told him.

"Better late than never, if I may coin a phrase. I presume that you strangled her?"

"No," I said. "I used a gun."

I took it out of my pocket and showed it to him. It was a nickel-plated .32 revolver.

From somewhere, blocks away in the night, came the sound of a siren. I don't know whether it was that sound or the sight of the gun, but I saw a startled look cross Adrian Carr's face. I don't know how my own face looked, but I ducked back into the doorway. The sound got louder.

He laughed heartily as he peered in the direction from which the sound came, and then turned back to me. He said, "It's all right; it just crossed this street two blocks up. Not coming this way."

I stepped back down to the sidewalk. I said, "That was foolish of me; I

shouldn't call attention to myself by ducking that way, I know. Probably they aren't after me yet. It's too soon."

He leaned forward and whispered, "Haven't they found the body?"

"I don't think they have."

"Where did you shoot her?"

"In Central Park," I told him.

He clapped me on the shoulder with a heavy hand. "Perfect, my boy, perfect. I can't think of a more fatal spot. Ah--you did a good job? You're sure she's dead?"

"Very sure. The bullet went into her right breast, but at an angle. It must have gone through her heart. She died instantaneously."

"Capital. Shall we have a drink to celebrate? I was going home, but--"

"I could use one," I admitted. "But at some quiet place where I'm not known."

"Around the corner at Mike's?"

"I don't know it--so they don't know me. That'll be fine."

Mike's turned out to be a place whose neon sign proclaimed it to be The Hotspot, but despite that boast, it was quiet. There was a juke box in the rear, silent at the moment.

We sat at the bar and ordered martinis. Adrian Carr said, "You live near here, Wayne. Why not call up Lola, if she's home, to come around and have a drink with us?"

"Why?" I asked. "You don't like her."

"I admit that. But she's good company. And she's beautiful. Just maybe, Wayne, she's the most beautiful woman in New York."

I said, "I don't think I'll call her, Adrian."

"Why not?"

"She's dead. I killed her tonight." I glanced at my wrist watch. "An hour and a quarter ago. In Central Park. With a gun. Remember?"

He nodded. "Of course, Wayne. It had slipped my mind. As one grows older--How old are you, Wayne?"

"As an actor, twenty-eight. Thirty-seven, off the record."

"A callow youth. At forty-nine one begins to mellow. At any rate, I'm beginning. And how old is Lola now? Wait, let me figure it out. She was--ah--twenty-two when she was with Billy Rose and that was ten years ago. I knew her pretty well, then."

"I know that," I said, "but let's not go into it. That's past, long past."

"And let the dead past bury its dead. How wise of you, Wayne. But--" he held up an impressive forefinger--"the present. Do you mind when I talk to you like a Dutch uncle?"

"Yes," I said.

"I know you do. But don't you see that that woman has ruined your career as an actor? You might have gone places, boy. You still might. I can't give you the role I know you want, but--"

"Why not? In words of one syllable, Adrian, why not?"

"Damn it, Wayne. I know your arguments about type-casting, and maybe you're right. But then, too, maybe I am, and I'm the one of us who does the picking. I'm the one who loses my shirt if that play isn't cast right."

"I haven't read the play. Heard only a bit about it. Just what does the role take?"

"You've heard enough about it, my fine friend. You're acting the lead role to the hilt, or trying to. Try to tell me you don't even know it's a Bluebeard theme, a man who kills his wife."

"I knew that," I admitted. "But still I ask, what does the role take?"

"A nice touch. A touch you haven't quite got, Wayne. I'm sorry." He made wet circles on the bar with his martini glass. "Remember *Arsenic and Old Lace* and how howlingly funny it made murder seem? Well, this--although it's a different theme--starts out with the same light approach, but we're experimenting. The whole thing is a gradual change of pace--starts like a comedy drama and ends in sheer horror, with a gradual build-up in between."

"Do you think that will carry?"

"I don't know. It's a hell of a gamble, to be honest with you.

But I *like* it. I'm going to give it every break, including the best casting I can do--and friendship ends there, Wayne. I'm sorry."

"I understand that," I told him. "I don't want it unless you think I can handle it. But it happens I can. I lied to you before. I have read the play. Lola's a friend of Taggart; he lent her a carbon of it and I read it. I think it needs a stronger third act, but I like the first two. The first is definitely good: this mild-mannered guy, a little off the beam, trying to convince people he's killed his wife and not being believed--I can handle that. You still don't believe I killed Lola tonight, do you, Adrian?"

"Let's drop the gag, boy. You've milked it, but it's wearing thin. What I don't think you can do, and do right, is the second part of it--from the point in the middle of the second act where the other characters--and the audience--begin to wonder."

I said, "This has just been the first act--of tonight. I can make you begin to wonder."

"Look, boy, I'd *like* to give you the part."

I put my martini glass down on the bar, and turned a little on the stool to look at him squarely. I waited until I caught his eye.

I said, "Adrian, I *am* pulling your leg--about the part in your play. I won't be able to take it."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it, Wayne. Because--well, I did hate to turn you down. Got another engagement?"

"I may have," I said. "With a chair, Adrian. You see--I wasn't kidding about the other thing. *I killed Lola tonight.*"

He stared at me for what must have been ten seconds before his face changed and he started to laugh, that hearty booming laughter that one always associates with Adrian Carr.

He clapped me on the shoulder again and I almost lost my precarious balance on the bar stool.

He called out "Mike!" and the bartender shambled toward us behind the bar. Adrian said, "Two more martinis, Mike, and use that special vermouth you've got. You didn't on those last two ones, did you?"

"Sorry, Mr. Carr, I forgot. Coming up."

"And have one with us, Mike, while you're mixing them. Mike, I want you to

meet a pretty good actor who's trying to pretend he's a pretty bad actor. Wayne Dixon, Mike. He just killed his wife."

I reached across the bar to shake hands with Mike. I said, "Glad to know you, Mike."

"Likewise, Mr. Dixon."

He put ice in the mixer glass and three jiggers of gin. He said, "Always wanted to kill mine, Mr. Dixon. How'd you do it?"

"With a gun," I said. "You've got a nice place here, Mike. I live only five or six blocks away. How come I never discovered it?"

"Dunno. Been here three years. But then there are a lot of bars in a radius of five or six blocks in New York. Yeah, we run a nice place. Quiet tonight, though."

"Way I like it," I told him. "And if you start that juke box I'll shoot you."

He looked back at it and frowned. "Me? No. Got to have one for the customers who want it, but me, I never touch the thing. I like music. Say, there's one good record on there, though, if you get in the mood. An early Harry James, before he went commercial."

"Later, maybe. Which one?"

"That one he plays straight trumpet solo and blue as they come. *Sleepy Time Gal.*"

Something twisted inside me; I hadn't been set for it. It had been Lola's favorite tune. I could still hear her humming it in that low throaty voice. Mike put the glasses in front of us and filled them from the mixer. He'd guessed short, but that didn't matter because he filled his own last and a bartender always drinks them short.

He said, "Here's to crime."

I wanted to down mine at a gulp, but I took only a sip. I had to stay sober. I thought, one or two more--that's my limit.

Adrian Carr said, "Mike, you've met Mrs. Dixon, Wayne's wife. Been here with me--ah--two or three months ago. Remember, I introduced her to you as the former Lola Harcourt, used to be with Billy Rose. Blonde and svelte--you can translate that as gracefully slender, Mike--and still fairly sober. . . ."

"Sure," Mike said. "Sure I remember her. She's the best looker ever was in here. No kidding, Mr. Dixon, is that really your wife?"

"She was," I said.

"Oh. Divorced?"

I said flatly, "Dead. I killed her tonight. Remember?"

He grinned. "Oh, sure."

Carr glanced at me. "Did Lola mention running into me that night, Wayne? First time I'd seen her in a year or so. I was sitting in my car waiting for a green light, to cross Fifth Avenue, and she saw me from the sidewalk and came over and got in beside me. I bought her a couple of drinks here and then dropped her off at your place. She said you weren't home so I didn't drop up."

I laughed a little. "That sounds like a lot of explanation for something so innocent, Adrian. But yes, as a matter of fact she did mention it. That's when I first heard about the Bluebeard play. It was later that she borrowed a copy of the script from Taggart. How's he doing, by the way?"

"Not too well, I'm afraid. He was so head over heels in the hole that the

advance I gave him on this play didn't do him too much good. Of course if it goes over, he'll be all right. But you know how that is. One play out of ten really makes any money. And even if this one has a fairly good run, I have a hunch it won't ever hit the movies. The theme, you know. The movies don't like to be flippant about murder."

"Having read it," I said, "I think you're right, Adrian. It'll run a few months, though. And it'll mean a lot of prestige to the actors with the fat roles."

He nodded thoughtfully. He said, "Wayne, I've just been thinking, seriously. I want to talk to you. Let's go over and sit in a booth, eh?"

"About Lola or about the role?"

"Both."

"Okay," I said.

We crossed over and Adrian Carr hung his opera cape and top hat beside one of the booths and we sat down across from one another. Under the cape, Adrian was in impeccable full dress; his shirt front gleamed immaculately white, adorned by chastely small star sapphire studs.

He called out "Mike!" and I caught Mike's eyes as he looked toward us. "Just one, Mike," I said. "I'll skip this round."

Then I looked across at Adrian. I said, "Let me talk first, will you? Let me say for you what you were going to say about Lola. If *I* say it for you--well, that's going to be different than if you do. Can you understand what I mean, Adrian?"

"I can, Wayne. Maybe it's better that way."

"You were going to tell me I should leave Lola, divorce her. That she's no good for me. That her thoughtlessness and her extravagance and her drinking and running around have held me down, have spoiled my chances on the stage--or anywhere else."

He nodded slowly, not quite looking at me.

I said, "You were going to tell me she is both petty and vicious."

"And, Wayne, I don't know which is the worse of those two."

"I do," I said. "I know now. I used to wonder."

### Trouble --On the House

I stopped talking as Mike brought Adrian Carr's martini. Adrian said, "You're sure you won't have another, Wayne?" and when I said I was sure, Mike went away.

I said, "You were also going to tell me that she isn't faithful to me. Maybe you were going to tell me she's in love with some-one else. Were you?"

"I'm not sure of that last, Wayne. Her being in love with some-one else. But--"

"Let's skip it, Adrian. I've said it all for you and saved you from being a Dutch uncle. And there are two things wrong with it. First, I know it all already and I loved her anyway. Call it chemistry or call it insanity or call it what you like, but I loved her in spite of all that."

"Loved?"

"She's dead, Adrian. I killed her tonight, remember? That's the other thing that's wrong with all the things you were going to say--the tenses. I used the present tense because I was quoting you, what you would have said. You still don't believe

that I killed her, do you?"

"Damn it, boy, I wish you'd quit that line. You're beginning to give me the creeps. Keep it up much longer and I'm going to phone Lola and ask her to join us, just to be sure."

He stared at me for a long moment. He asked quietly, "You *are* acting, aren't you. It *is* a gag, isn't it?"

I laughed and I could see the tension go out of his face. I said, "I did make you wonder, Adrian."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "You did, at that. Just made me wonder. You didn't convince me."

"I don't want to convince you," I told him. "This is only the second act, for one thing. And for another--well, skip that. I didn't really want to convince you."

"You talk strangely tonight, Wayne. How much have you been drinking today?"

"Two highballs this afternoon, hours ago. And two martinis with you, just now. That's all. I'm sober. I think I'm soberer than I've ever been in my life. Maybe that's why I'm talking too much. . . . You're still wondering a little, aren't you, Adrian?"

He chuckled. "I guess I am, a little. You wore me down. The old Nazi and Communist technique--tell a lie often enough and people will begin to believe it, no matter how obvious a lie it is. Tell me about ten more times and I'll probably call the police."

"Would you, really?"

"I don't . . . know. Look, boy, if by any one chance out of ten million you were telling the truth, you're being a damn fool. You shouldn't sit around telling people you did it and waiting for the police to come and get you. Look, boy, *if* you did and it is a--what's the phrase I want?--a rap you can't beat, you'd better get out of town fast. Head for--well I wouldn't suggest where and I wouldn't want to know where. And if you're broke, I've got a little over two hundred dollars with me. You're welcome to it and you can send it back some day, if and when."

I leaned across the table and tapped his arm. I said, "Adrian, you're a good joe. But I don't want or need any money. Tell me, do you really think by now that I killed Lola?"

"Of course not. But on the thousandth chance --"

"A minute ago it was one chance in ten million; you're coming down. I know you'd like it better if I recanted, but I'm going to be cussed about it. That's my story and I'll stick to it a while. I killed Lola tonight. Now what are the odds? One in a hundred?"

"Cut it out, Wayne." His voice was sharp.

"All right," I said amiably. "I won't say it again, but I won't recant it either. Settle for that? And now--about this part in your Bluebeard play. Can I handle it?"

I saw him sigh with relief. Then he smiled. "That's just as good as recanting, isn't it? I mean, you wouldn't be interested in that if--"

"Not unless I had a special reason. But let's skip that. Yes, I want the part. You haven't actually signed anyone else for it, have you?"

"No. Taggert wants Roger Deane. What do you think of Deane?"

I said, "He's good. He could do it nicely."

Adrian Carr chuckled. "Won't even run down a rival. You'd make a hell of a criminal. You won't even say Deane's getting old. He is, you know."

"Across the footlights, with make-up, he can look thirty."

Carr gestured helplessly. "So you think I should get Deane?"

"I didn't say that. I say he's good, because he *is* good. I want you to think I'm better. I'm sweating blood to make you think I'm better. Listen, Adrian, I know you won't give me a yes here and now, because I know you always give your playwright and director a say in things. If Taggert wants Deane for his play, you wouldn't hire me without giving him a chance to argue you down first. And Taggert *is* going to direct this thing for you, as well as having written it, isn't he?"

"Yes, Taggert's going to direct, too. I'll take you to see him tomorrow--or have you both over at my place. Mind you, I'm not saying yes myself. It's just that--well, I'm willing to consider you. I'd like you to read a few of the lines--the high points--for me and Taggert. Okay?"

"Almost," I said. "I want to see Taggert tonight. Sure, it's almost midnight but he's a night-owl. Goes to bed at dawn and sleeps till after noon."

"What's the rush?"

I said, "You're not saying yes, but I've got you sold. Right now. Tomorrow you might weaken. You might forget the beautiful his-trionics I put on for you. You might forget you just offered me two hundred bucks to help me skip to Mexico. Besides, I'm an impatient guy; I hate to wait."

He laughed. "Also you're the highest-handed buccaneer who ever hit me for a role. What makes you think he might be home?"

"Maybe he isn't. A nickel finds out. I've got one. I'd you phoned him, though, Adrian. I know the guy only slightly."

Carr sighed and slid out of the booth. "I'll phone him," he said. "God knows why I let you bulldoze me like this, Wayne. Maybe you've got me a little scared of you."

"Just so it gets results," I told him.

He stood there. He asked, "What's that smear on your coat just under the lapel?"

"Blood," I said. "I tried to sponge it off when I washed up in the subway station. It wouldn't all come out."

He stood there looking down at me for what must have been ten seconds. Then he grunted, "Third act, huh?"

"Is there blood in the third act? I don't remember."

"There will be. I'm going to tell Taggert to put some in. It's a nice touch."

I said, "I've known nicer. But it's always effective."

As he turned to walk toward the phone, I asked, making it very casual, "Are you going to phone Taggert or the police?"

He glared at me and I grinned at him. Then without a word he turned and walked to the phone booth at the back of the bar.

I sat there and sweated, wondering which call he was going to make.

He came back and I knew by his face that it was all right. Adrian Carr is two-thirds ham, yes, but he can't act. If he'd called the police, if he'd really believed

me at last, it would have stuck out all over him.

He said, "Taggert's home and going to be there. He was working on the third act. Said to come over any time."

"Good," I said. "Want to go right away?"

"Let's have one more drink. I said we'd be there around one, and he said fine, he'd have the rewrite on that third-act curtain ready to show me. So we'll give him time to finish it."

I glanced at my watch; it was five minutes after twelve.

"If I'm going over there," he said, "there's something I might as well take--some scene sketches I got today from Brachman. He's going to design the settings for us. Taggert will want to see them."

"Nobody in the business works as closely with a playwright as you do. You give him a real break, don't you?"

He shrugged. "Why not? Particularly in this case. Taggert isn't just a writer; he's directed and acted and knows the stage inside out. Besides, in a way he's got more to lose than I have."

"How?"

"If the play flops I'm out a piece of change; but I've got more. But Taggert's broke and in a hole; the one chance out of ten of this play's going over is his one chance out of ten of making a comeback. He's had two flops in a row--and he isn't prolific."

"He gets his advance, anyway."

"He's had it and it's gone; he was in the hole more than that. After me for more, but I'm not a philanthropist. You want to wait here while I go the couple of blocks home and get those sketches? I'll bring my car around, too; this is a bad neighborhood to catch taxis in."

"Okay," I said. I didn't want him to get suspicious again and think I was sticking close to him to keep him from calling copper. Give him every opportunity, and he'd figure it was all right not to.

He took the last sip of his martini and slid out of the booth. He put on his top hat and tapped it down with a resonant thump. He said, "Exit, throwing his cape about his shoulders," and exited, throwing his cape about his shoulders.

The bartender came over to collect Carr's empty glass. He asked, "Another for you?" and I shook my head.

He stood there looking down at me and I wished for that moment that I'd gone with Adrian. Then, almost reluctantly, he walked away and went behind the bar.

I kept thinking what a damned fool I was, wondering whether it was worth it, what I was going through.

There were easier ways. There was Adrian Carr's two hundred dollars--and almost a hundred of my own in my pocket--and the open road and a job in a hamburger stand somewhere in Oklahoma or Oregon. Never again, of course, to act.

And there was the gun in my pocket. But that was too easy.

I heard the heavy footsteps of the bartender walking toward the back, toward the juke box. I heard the snick of the slide as a slug went into the machine. I heard the soft whir of the mechanism starting, the needle hitting the groove.

He'd said, "Say, there's one good record on there, though. Trumpet solo and

blue as they come. *Sleepy Time Gal.*"

It was.

I was set for it, but again something twisted inside me. I couldn't take it, not tonight. The trumpet wasn't a solo at all; it was a trumpet plus Lola's voice, singing inside my head. Once on our honeymoon singing it to me and switching the words a little, running in a little patter: "*Sleepy time gal--you don't like me to be one, do you, darling? Maybe some day I'll fool you and stop turning night into day. I'll learn to cook and to sew; what's more, you'll love me, I know . . .*"

Only she never had, and now she never would.

And all of a sudden the hell of a chance I was taking just didn't matter any more at all, and I didn't want to hear any more of it. I couldn't take any more of it. I stood up and walked--I kept myself from running--back to that juke box. I wanted to smash my fist through the glass and jerk the needle out of that groove, but I didn't let myself do that, either. I merely jerked the cord that pulled the plug out of the wall.

Then there was sudden silence, a silence you could almost hear, and the bright varicolored lights quit drifting across the glassed-in bottom half of the juke box and it stood there, dark and silent and dead, as though I'd killed it. Except that this time somebody could put the plug back into the wall and it would come to life again. They should make people that way. People should come with cords and plugs.

But now I'd done it. I hadn't liked the way that bartender had looked at me before; what was he thinking now?

I took a deep breath before I turned around, and I strolled up to the bar as casually as I could.

"Sorry as hell," I told him. "My nerves are on edge tonight. I should have asked you to turn that off, but all of a sudden I just couldn't take any more of it and--well, I took the quickest way before I started screaming."

I knew it wasn't going to sell. If he'd looked angry, if he'd glow-ered at me, then it would have been all right. But his face was quiet and watchful; not even surprise showed on it.

I sat on one of the bar stools. I made another try. I said, "Guess I can use another martini. Will you make me one?"

He came down behind the bar and stood opposite me.

He said, "Mister, I used to be a cop. I was on the force eight years before I bought me this tavern."

I said, "Yes?" with what I tried to make sound like polite disinterest. It was still his move.

"Yeah," he said. "Look, that gag about your killing your wife. You said you shot her?"

"I strangled her with a knife," I told him. "What's the matter with your sense of humor, Mike? Don't you know all actors are a little crazy?"

"A little crazy I don't mind. All Irishmen are a little crazy. But a psycho--you've been making like a psycho, mister. You damn well *could* have killed someone tonight. I don't like it."

I leaned my elbows on the bar. I felt the pitch of my voice trying to rise and I fought it down. I said, "Mike, get this straight before you make a fool of yourself. Adrian Carr's got a role open for a murderer. He thought I couldn't handle the part.

I've been putting on an act for him and I've got him sold. Ask him when he gets back. And how's about that martini? I can stand one now."

"You were putting on an act then--or are you now?"

I said, "Mike, I'd walk the hell out on you if it wasn't that Adrian's coming back here to pick me up. But if you don't like my company I can wait for him out front."

"Murder's nothing to joke about."

I let my voice get a little angry. I said, "Nobody was joking about it. Can't you get it through your head I was acting a part? Is an actor joking about murder when he plays the part of a murderer on stage--or at a tryout for the part? Maybe you think it wasn't good taste; is that it?"

He looked a little puzzled; I had him on the defensive now. He said, "You weren't acting for Mr. Carr when you jerked that juke box plug."

"I told you my nerves were on edge. I apologize for touching your damn juke box. Now let's settle it one way or the other--do I get a drink or do I wait for Adrian outside?"

He wasn't quite sold, but I'd talked the sharp edge off his suspicion. He reached for the gin bottle and the jigger. He put them on the bar and then put ice in the mixer glass. He put a jigger of gin and brought up the bottle of vermouth. But he moved slowly, still thinking it out.

He put the drink in front of me and leaned on the bar, watching me as I took the first sip. He'd filled the glass fairly full but I managed to drink without slopping any out, keeping my hand steady.

I was starting to say something foolish about the weather; I had my mouth open to say it when I saw his face change.

He said, "What's that stain on your coat?"

I tried to grin; I don't know how the grin looked from outside, but it didn't seem to fit quite right. I said, "Catsup. I tried to sponge it off, but didn't do such a hot job. Don't worry, Mike, it isn't blood. Not even mine."

He said, "Look, mister, I'm just a dumb ex-cop, but I don't like the look of things. Is your wife home now?"

"She might be. I haven't been home this evening. Are we going to start this all over again?"

"You're in the phone book?"

"No, it's through a switchboard. I can give you the number, but why should I? Quit acting like a dope."

I could see it didn't go over. Maybe it was the smear on my coat, maybe it was the grin that hadn't fitted my face when I'd tried it, maybe it was just everything put together.

Mike walked to the front end of the bar and around it. Before I realized what he was going to do, he was at the front of the tavern, turning a key in the door.

He came back, but on my side of the bar. He said, "Stick around. I'm going to make sure. Maybe I'm making a dope out of myself, but I'd rather do that than let a psycho loose out of here."

I made one more try. He was already walking toward the phone. I said, "This is going to cost you money, pal."

It did stop him a second. Then he said, "No, it won't. I heard you say you did a murder. That's reasonable grounds, even if you didn't have a blood stain on you. Just sit tight."

### Date With Death

If it hadn't been for that bright idea of his of locking the door I could have walked out. I could have got away; he was twice my size but I was faster, I think. But he hadn't left me that choice.

I did the only thing left to do. I took the revolver out of my pocket. I said, "Don't go near that phone," and pulled back the hammer. The click, which sounded almost as loud as a shot in that still room, stopped him suddenly. He turned around slowly.

He licked his lips again. "I can make you turn around," I suggested, "and tap you with the butt of this. But I might hit too hard. I've never sapped anyone before. And I'd be afraid of hitting too easy. Any better ideas?"

He hesitated, then said, "There's a closet off the back room. Key's on the ring."

"Turn around and walk there, slowly."

He did and I followed him. He stepped inside and turned around facing me, his face rigid and white. I don't think he expected to live through his experience. He thought this was the payoff.

I closed the door, found the right key, and locked it. I called through the panel, "I'm going to stick around till Adrian gets back. It may be a long time. Don't get the idea of hammering on that door for a long time or I'll put bullets through it."

He didn't answer and I went back to the front of the room. I unlocked the front door and sat at the bar again. I drank the rest of my martini at a single gulp. I caught sight of my face in the mirror back of the bar and realized I'd better get calmed down and straightened out before Adrian came back, or before another customer came in.

I closed my eyes and took some deep breaths. Again I heard the far siren of a police car, but it wasn't coming this way; it died out in the distance.

I sat there and it seemed like a very long time. It seemed as though I'd been sitting there for hours. I looked at my watch and saw that it was twelve thirty-five. Adrian had left half an hour ago. He lived only three blocks away; he should be back before this unless he had misplaced the sketches he went back to get. Or possibly he'd had to go somewhere for gasoline for his car. Or something.

I wanted another drink, but I didn't want to chance going behind the bar. Someone might come in.

Someone did. A man, about fiftyish, and a woman of about thirty-five in a mink stole. I glanced at them as they came in, and then pretended to pay no attention to them.

They sat at the bar, the man two stools away from me and the woman on the other side. After a minute the man asked me, "Where's Mike?"

I jerked my thumb vaguely toward the back. "Back there," I said.

Maybe it was the sound of voices that gave him the idea, but he chose that

moment to start thumping on the closet door. Not too loudly, and he didn't yell; I guess he was too scared for that. He was just thumping tentatively to see if he'd get any reaction.

I slid off the stool quickly and went into the back room. I stood in front of the closet door and called out, "Are you all right, Mike?"

The thumping quit. It was so quiet in that closet that I could hear the scrape of his clothes against the wall as he hugged one side of the closet and crouched down, hoping I'd miss if I fired shots through the wood.

I stood there a second as though listening to an answer and then went back into the tavern. I strolled back toward the stool I'd been sitting on.

I said casually, "Mike drank a bit too much; I think he's being sick. If you're friends of his why don't you help yourselves and leave the money on the ledge of the register?"

I didn't think they'd take the suggestion seriously and they didn't. The woman said, "Let's go to the place in the next block, Harvey."

The man nodded and said, "All right, dear."

He turned and looked at me a moment as though he wanted to ask a question. He wanted, I could guess, to ask what Mike was being sick at his stomach had to do with that thumping on a door back there, but decided not to ask. He was a mild-looking little man; he didn't want, I could see, to ask a question that just might lead to an answer he didn't like.

I met his eyes and his dropped first. He took the woman's elbow and helped her down off the bar stool and they went out.

I took a deep breath and went back to the closet door again. I called out, "Do that again, Mike, and it'll be the last time. Get me?"

There wasn't any answer, and I went back to the bar. I held my hand out in front of me and it was shaking badly. I put it down flat on the bar to steady it and looked at my wrist watch. Twelve forty-five. Adrian had been gone for forty minutes.

I thought, I'll count to a hundred slowly, and if he isn't here I'll phone his place. I turned around to face the door and started counting, as slowly as my patience would let me, probably about one count a second.

I got to seventy-nine before the door opened and someone came in. But it wasn't Adrian Carr. It was a policeman in uniform. This is the payoff, I thought, here and now. I'm not going to shoot it out with him. If he says, "Are you Wayne Dixon?" it means he came here for me because Adrian sent him. And if he does, I'll go along quietly. It was a thousand to one shot anyway, what I had in mind doing.

And if he says, "Where's Mike?" it'll probably mean that he met the two people who went out of here a few minutes ago and that they'd told him about that suspicious thumping on the door and the story I'd told about Mike being sick.

He asked, "Where's Mike?"

I jerked my thumb casually toward the back room. "Back there," I said.

He stopped halfway between the door and the bar. "Oh," he said. "Well, tell him his brother looked in, will you, fellow? I got to make the next call-box. Tell him I'll drop in again later."

He went out, and I started to breathe normally again. When I felt able to get

down off the stool without falling, I did. And I quit worrying about taking further chances. I went around behind the bar and poured myself a stiff drink of bourbon. I drank it neat and felt the warmth of it trickle from my throat downward.

Then I went back to the phone and called Adrian Carr's number.

The phone rang twice and Adrian's voice answered.

"This is Wayne," I said. "What happened to you?"

"Oh, hello, darling," he said. "Where are you?" The "darling" was enough of a tipoff; Adrian didn't talk that way. If it hadn't been, the "Where are you?" was enough too. He knew where I was.

I asked softly into the transmitter, "Cops?"

"Well, I'm afraid I'm going to be late, dear," he said. "Do you want to wait for me there?"

"No," I said, urgently, "not here, Adrian. There's trouble at this end, too. But look, what the hell are you standing up for me for? Why don't you tell them the truth?"

"A couple of hundred reasons, which I can't explain now. I'll give them to you later. You want to go on to the party, then?"

"How long will you be tied up?" I asked him.

"Another hour, possibly. But it's an all-night party. It'll keep. Shall I pick you up somewhere?"

I said, "You're mad, Adrian. But there's a little all-night restaurant on Seventy-second, south side, west of the park. I'll be there. If you change your mind, send the cops for me instead."

"Fine. 'Bye, darling."

I put the receiver back and went over to the bar for one more stiff drink. I made plenty of noise getting it so that Mike would know I was still around and wait a while before he tried hammer-ing again. Then I left, quietly, so he wouldn't know I was gone. I didn't want him loose yet.

I walked over to Central Park West and north to Seventy-second Street. I took a seat on one of the benches along the edge of the park, from which I could watch the door of the restaurant I'd told Adrian about. I lighted a cigarette and tried to look as though I'd just sat down to rest a minute.

It must have been an off night; they weren't doing much busi-ness. After I'd been watching ten minutes I saw a policeman stroll in and out again, but I knew he wouldn't have been looking for me. If there'd been a tip-off from Adrian, there'd have been more than one of them. Three or four, probably; Adrian would have told them I was armed.

I was on my third cigarette when I saw Adrian's car drive up and park in front of the restaurant. He seemed to be alone in the car and he got out of it alone and walked to the door. I saw him look in through the glass and hesitate when he didn't see me, but he didn't look around or make any signals. He went inside.

No other car had driven up. I crossed the street and went in. Adrian had taken one of the little tables for two along the side, facing the door. He'd hung up his hat and cape, and--in full dress--he looked as out of place in that little greasy spoon of a restaurant as a peacock in a chicken yard.

He looked up as I came in and called out, "Hi, Harry."

I sat down across from him. I asked, "What's the Harry stuff?"

"Well, I didn't want to call you by your right name. Suppose it's been on a broadcast or--"

"Adrian, the guy behind the counter there knows me by my right name. He's going to wonder."

Adrian stared at me wonderingly. "You mean you actually *eat* in a place like this?"

"Occasionally. At least as often as I eat at Lindy's. But forget the gastronomics. What's with the cops?"

"Dropped in just after I got home to pick up the sketches." He leaned forward across the table and dropped his voice. "Lola's body was found in the park at a little after midnight. She had identification on her. They went to your place and--"

"Wait," I said. "Here comes Jerry."

The waiter had finished serving his customers at the counter and was going to our table. He said, "Hi, Mr. Dixon. How are things?"

"Swell, Jerry. Two orders of ham and eggs and coffee."

I saw Adrian open his mouth to say something and I glared him into silence until Jerry, whistling, had gone to the grill back of the counter. Then he said petulantly, "Why did you order ham and eggs, Wayne? I can't eat--"

"I'll eat both orders," I told him. "I'm hungry. What about the cops? You said they'd gone to my place and that was as far as you got."

"They went to your place and you weren't there, so they're trying to locate you. They found an address book of yours and they've been checking among your friends."

"Mine?" I asked, "or Lola's?"

He looked at me blankly. "Why do you ask that? Yours, I presume. They had a little brown leather notebook about four by six--"

"Good," I interrupted him. That was my notebook; it had been lying on my desk near the telephone. I knew which names were in it and which weren't.

Adrian went on: "Mostly they were looking for you, through your friends. They asked me first if I'd seen you tonight and I said I hadn't. And then--"

"That's the bad part, Adrian," I told him. "After you left Mike's, Mike got onto me. I had to lock him up in a closet in his back room. He's out by now, and he'll tell the cops fast that I was in his place and that you were with me. They'll know you were lying when they were at your place. I should have told you that over the phone so you could have changed your story. I'm sorry, but you're going to have to do some fast talking the next time they call on you."

He waved that aside. He said, "I can talk fast. And I've got connections. I can't get away with murder, but I can get away with lying to the cops for a couple of hours--if I think up a good story why I lied to them. Can you give me one?"

I shook my head slowly. "Why *did* you lie to them, Adrian? I don't even know that."

"I'm not too sure myself," he said. "All right, then, don't worry about that. I'll figure an out for myself. What about you?"

I said, "I've got a hundred to one chance. It was a thousand to one when I figured it out--just before I met you. If I've got you on my side --for another hour or

so anyway--that cuts it down to a hundred to one."

"Not very good odds."

"No," I admitted. "Not very good. I don't like them at all. But the alternative gives me less of a chance--no chance at all."

"You haven't an alibi?"

"Not a ghost of one. Damn it, Adrian, three people know we left home to take a walk in the park half an hour before I killed her. And a paraffin test will show I fired the gun. Adrian, barring a miracle, I'm strapped into that chair now."

"And what's the miracle?"

"I can't tell you, Adrian. It sounds silly, but--if you want to help, and God knows why you should--you'll just have to string along with me for the next hour or two. If you don't, that's okay. I don't blame you. I don't think I would, if I were in your shoes. If you don't, my chance goes back from one in a hundred to one in a thousand, but I'll carry on."

"What do you want me to do?"

"That's the sad part; I won't even tell you. Because if we're separating now, you'd better go right to the cops and tell 'em how you lied to them the first time. They'll know by now anyway, from Mike. And you're in deep enough; I don't want you to have to do any more lying for me by saying you don't know where I am."

Adrian sighed. "And what makes you think I wouldn't string along a little longer? Want me to write it out and sign it? You're not going to commit another murder, are you?"

"I don't think so."

"All right, then. What are we waiting for? Oh, the ham and eggs." He made a face.

I got up and said, "Forget the ham and eggs. I can eat ham and eggs in jail, maybe. Come on."

I dropped two dollar bills on the counter as I went past Jerry and said, "Forget the grub, Jerry. We just remembered something important." And I got out before he could say anything.

We got in Adrian's car and he started the engine and asked, "Where to?"

I said, "Carry on as though those cops hadn't dropped in on you. Just what we were planning to do before."

"You mean go to Dane Taggert's? What for?"

"What we were talking about in Mike's. You're looking for a Bluebeard for your play. You said I'd have to have Taggert's okay for the part, didn't you?"

Adrian killed the engine. He said, "Don't try to kid me you're interested in a part and a murder rap at the same time, Wayne. It doesn't make sense and the gag is wearing thin."

I said, "That's exactly what you told me a little over an hour ago--only about a different matter. You said then that the gag about my having killed Lola was wearing thin. It's got a little thicker since then. Hasn't it?"

"Yes, but--"

"But you want to know what I really have in mind. Just take my word for it that this gag might get thicker, too. I hope it will. But maybe it won't. If you don't want to play--and I've said already I won't blame you --I'll get out and trot along."

I opened the door of the car. Adrian sighed and said, "All right, all right. But look--how much of a hurry are you in to get there?"

"Only my life depends on it." Then I relented a little. "You didn't ask that; you asked how much of a hurry I'm in. None, as long as we get the role business settled before the cops get me. I can spare half an hour, if that's what you mean."

He started the car again. He drove across Central Park West and took the southeast fork inside the park; he cut east and then north to where there's a wide parking place near the lake. He parked the car and turned to me.

"Let's get one thing straight, Wayne," he said. "There's no gag left about that first gag? You *did* kill Lola?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then--are you sure you know what you're doing, boy? Let me give you some money, and get away from here before they catch you. I had another three hundred cash at home; I've got five hundred you can take now. Are your fingerprints on file?"

"No," I told him. "But what am I going to do? Get another chance at acting somewhere? I'm no good at anything else. No, Adrian. Thanks for your offer of the money, but I'm going to take my chances here."

"All right, then. I'll help with a lawyer. And it looks like I'm going to have to do some awfully fast talking--or I'll need one for myself too."

"Adrian," I said, "you're a good guy; that much I know. But why are you doing all this? Being a good guy or even a good friend--and we haven't seen an awful lot of each other recently at that --doesn't include taking chances like you're taking."

"Because--because Lola needed killing if any woman ever did. Because I don't blame you, boy. I--Sometimes I think I knew her better than you did, because you were blinded by being in love with her. I wasn't. I almost hated her, and yet--you don't mind my talking about this now, do you?--there was an attrac-tion, a purely physical attrac--"

I said, "Stop. I'm afraid I do mind you talking about it. Let's skip anything that was, or ever was, between you and Lola. It doesn't matter now."

"All right, we'll speak of her abstractly. Wayne, you don't *know*, being blinded by loving her and being too close to her, what that woman was capable of, what she *was* under that beautiful exterior of hers. Or maybe you do at that. Maybe you found out tonight for the first time. Is that right?"

I said, "You're righter than you know, Adrian."

"Then--let's do this. Let's go to the best lawyer I know. Right now. We'll wake him up in the middle of the night. We'll talk it over with him and then you give yourself up, taking his advice on what to say and what not to say. If you're guilty, I doubt if he's going to be able to get you a habeas corpus, but he can--"

"No, Adrian," I said. "Listen, can you make a car backfire?"

"Can I-- Are you crazy?"

"*Can* you?"

"You'd have to disconnect the muffler or something, wouldn't you?"

"I don't think so, Adrian. Your engine's still running, isn't it? Try turning the ignition off and on and goosing the gas pedal at the same time. I mean it. Go ahead and try it. I want to know, for sure."

He turned and stared at me a moment in the dimness of the car, and then he

leaned forward and turned the ignition key. There was a loud backfire.

"Couple more times," I said. "I want to see how close together you can space them, doing it on purpose that way."

"You want to draw the cops here?"

"I'll take a chance on that. You want me to give myself up anyway."

He tried it; the explosions were only about a second apart.

I said, "All right, let's go."

"To Taggert's? You're really going to follow through with that silly business of wanting the role in the Bluebeard play?"

"Yes."

## Backfire

Adrian shrugged, and backed out of the parking place. He drove on across the park and over East Seventy-second past Third Avenue. He parked in front of a remodeled brownstone front halfway down the block.

"This it?" I asked.

"Sure. Haven't you been to Taggert's place before?"

"I've seen him around," I said. "I've never been in his home up till now."

Adrian started to get out of the car. Then he said, "Wait a minute, Wayne. I've been thinking while I drove. I think I've got your angle, now. It threw me for a while. You're going to try an insanity plea, aren't you? That's the reason for this build-up of keeping after a Bluebeard role just after you've killed your wife. That's why you locked Mike in his closet. That's why you tried the backfires, or had me do it. That's why you've been telling everyone you killed Lola, but not going to the cops. You--you aren't really crazy, are you?"

I said, "I sometimes think that maybe I am, Adrian."

He clapped me on the shoulder. "That's the boy. If that's your story, stick to it. I'll ride along for a little while yet. Not too much longer, or I'm going to have to cop an insanity plea myself."

I didn't say anything, and we got out of the car. He led the way to the door and pushed a button in the hallway. The latch of the lock clicked almost right away, and we went in and walked up two flights.

Dane Taggert was standing in the doorway of his apartment. He said, "Took you fellows long enough to get here."

Adrian said, "I went home to get those scene sketches to show you, Taggert. How goes the rewrite on the third-act curtain?"

We were inside by then. Taggert said, "Finished, but don't know whether you'll like it or not. Let's have a drink first. Rye and sparkling okay? Sit down; I'll get it."

Adrian sank into a chair, and I wandered over to the radio. It was a big Zenith console, the kind with four wave bands. It wasn't playing but I looked at the setting. It was on short-wave and the dial was turned for police calls. I moved it out from the wall a little and reached in behind. The tubes were warm; it had just been shut off.

Taggert must have heard me move the set; he stepped to the doorway of the kitchen, an open bottle in one hand.

"Nice set you've got," I told him, moving it back. "Is it good on police calls?"

His eyes missed mine and went to the dial. He said, "Very good. I sometimes get story ideas from them. I still do an occasional detective short."

"Tubes are warm," I said. "You must have been listening in before we came."

"For a few minutes. How do you want your highball, Dixon? Strong? Medium?"

"Medium will do, thanks."

I sat down across from Adrian and felt his eyes on me curious-ly, but I paid no attention until Taggert came in with the drinks on a tray. I took one and sipped it.

Taggert said, "About that third-act curtain, Adrian. What do you think of the idea of--"

"It stinks," I said.

They both turned to stare at me. Their eyes took in the gun--the nickel-plated, .32 revolver--that was in my hand, resting on the arm of my chair with the muzzle pointed between Carr and Taggert. Then their eyes came back to my face. I wouldn't know, being behind it instead of in front, but I think my face was pretty deadpan, and I kept my voice that way too.

I said, "I've got one idea for a third-act curtain. It's corny as hell. Why don't you have your wife-killer shoot the rest of the cast and then himself?"

Adrian cleared his throat. He said, "It's been done, Wayne. *Othello*. Roderigo, Iago, Othello."

"Not quite the same," I said. "Othello himself doesn't kill either Roderigo or Iago. My plot is different." I saw Taggert start to get up and I said, "*Sit down*, Taggert. I'm not kidding." I cocked the revolver.

Taggert had sunk back in the chair. He looked sideways at Adrian. He asked, "Is this a bad joke, Adrian, or is he ... crazy?" There was a little sweat, not much, on Taggert's forehead.

Adrian was staring at me intently. He said, "I'm not sure."

I said, "You had the police short-wave on, Taggert. You know there's a pick-up order out for me. Let's take the gloves off. Even this one."

With my free left hand I took a man's right leather glove from my coat pocket and tossed it to the floor in front of me. I asked Taggert, "Ever see it before?"

He shook his head slowly.

I explained, to Adrian rather than to Taggert, "Lola had it in her purse, along with the gun. This gun."

Adrian stared at me, bewildered. I said "You're on the outside of this, Adrian. Taggert knows what I'm talking about, but you don't. I'll straighten you out. Don't move, Taggert."

"Tonight Lola suggested we take a walk in the park. It puzzled me a little, because it's a cool night, not the kind that makes you want to take a walk at eleven in the evening. But Lola wanted to--and she was sober tonight and very nice to me, so we went for the walk."

"There was hardly anyone else in the park at that hour. We were near the lake and suddenly Lola wanted to walk over to the bridle path--through a dark spot. She didn't give a reason; maybe she had one ready if I'd argued but I didn't argue. We were behind a big clump of bushes, concealed from the drive--if there'd been anyone

on the drive. Out on Central Park West, a little past the bridle path, a car began to backfire."

I had them both now. They were staring at me and Adrian's eyes were wide.

I said, "It was nice timing. I remembered afterward that Lola had been glancing at her watch fairly often. Lola must have dropped a couple of steps behind me without my knowing it. After the first time the car backfired, she said 'Wayne' and I turned and there--it was just light enough to see her--was Lola with a pistol in her hand aimed right at me. She had a glove--that glove--on the hand that held the pistol. Shall I let that be the second-act curtain, Adrian, while we have another drink?"

Adrian was leaning forward. He said, "Go on. And don't corn it up."

I said, "I did corn it up, then and there. I guess Lola wasn't used to murdering people; she didn't move fast enough. And, for some reason, I did move fast enough. I had my hand on the gun, over hers, before she pulled the trigger.

"And then we were fighting for the gun, and Lola was plenty strong. And she must have been scared and thought she was fight-ing for her life, because she fought like a demon for that gun. She almost got it aimed at me again once, short as that struggle was. But it was turned back, pointing at her, when it went off.

"And the car, out on the street fifty feet away, backfired once more after the shot. I just stood there, too stunned to move or to know what had really happened. It didn't make sense; Lola couldn't have gone suddenly insane, because the fact that she'd had the glove along--a man's glove, by the way--and the gun proved she'd *planned* it.

"But first I was mostly worried about having killed her. I sup-pose I did silly things. I pulled off the glove and rubbed her hands I started to run for help and ran back because I didn't want to leave her there alone. And I touched her again and knew for sure that she was dead."

I looked at Taggert. I said, "One thing I remember out of that frantic first few minutes after I killed her. I heard the sound of footsteps on the cinders of the bridle path and I turned around and said, 'Hurry! Someone's hurt!' But no one came. Whoever had been on the bridle path turned around and went back to the street--*when he heard my voice instead of Lola's*. He got in the car--the car he'd made backfire a few times--and drove off. But that part of it I figured out afterwards, while I was walking around wondering what to do.

"And I finally figured it, Taggert, and I waylaid Adrian and had him bring me here. I hadn't meant him to know that Lola was really dead; I knew he'd think I was acting. But that didn't matter, since he played along anyway."

Taggert wet his lips. He didn't wear his voice quite straight when he asked, "What makes you think I was the man in the car or that he was an . . . accomplice of Lola's, if she really tried to kill you?"

"It makes sense that way," I told him. "She was in love with you. She couldn't divorce me because she had no grounds--in New York State--and anyway I still have some insurance I took out a few years ago during a prosperous period. A big chunk of insurance, Taggert, enough for you and Lola to take a chance to get."

I said, "And the plan was worthy of a detective story writer, Taggert, because it was so simple. You'd know how easily compli-cated plots and plans go astray.

This one was so simple as to be foolproof once Lola had pulled the trigger. But even this went haywire--because she didn't pull the trigger soon enough. Am I right?"

Taggart said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Adrian said, "Maybe I'm being stupid, but--I'm not sure I do, either. *How* was Lola to get away with shooting you?"

I said, "The story was so simple that even the cops would believe it: We were held up in the park. I tried to jump the hold-up man and was shot. And Lola had fainted. If no one had found her in half an hour or so, she'd have come to and screamed.

"They couldn't have disproved that story with a sledgehammer; it was so simple. There'd be no gun anywhere around that Lola could have used; there'd be no nitrate marks on her hand; my wallet and probably her purse would be gone. Taggart's back-fires would have covered the sound of the shot; nobody would have thought anything of it. If there'd been people around, in the park, Lola wouldn't have done it tonight; there would have been other nights. The sound of the car backfiring had another purpose too, probably; it could have let Lola know that there was no one going by on the sidewalk immediately outside the park at that point.

"When he heard the shot in the park, Taggart would have come in--as he started to do, until he heard my voice--got the gun and the glove and my wallet and Lola's purse, and ditched all of them on the way home. Maybe he even had an alibi rigged, just in the remote chance that the cops would doubt Lola's straightforward story and go nosing around."

I shrugged my shoulders. "As simple as that, except that Lola didn't pull the trigger quickly enough."

Adrian said, "I'll be damned. When I told you Lola was vicious, I didn't guess she'd--"

"I told you you didn't know the half of it, Adrian."

"But, Wayne," he asked, "how can you prove it?"

I stood up and backed around the chair I'd been sitting on until I was behind it, with a little more distance between me and them. I rested the gun on the back of the chair, still pointing between them.

I said, "I can't, Adrian. I can't prove it in a thousand years, so I told you what the third-act curtain was going to be. I shoot both of you. And myself."

Adrian's face started to turn the color of the white window curtain just behind him. He said, "Me? But why? Surely, on account of ten years ago--"

"It's been more recent than that, Adrian. Taggart is the most recent, but you weren't ancient history. Maybe she even tried to blackmail you a bit, Adrian, and that's why you were so glad to learn I'd killed her that you were willing to help me beat the rap or make a getaway. Anyway--"

I turned my eyes back to Taggart. His face didn't look much better than Adrian's.

I said, "Adrian's right, Taggart. I can't prove a thing. I'm not too sure I want to bother. But you might talk me out of this, with a pen and a paper and full details--including things like where you and Lola bought the gun, and little details you'd have a lot of trouble changing your mind about if you decided to claim the confession was under duress."

Taggart said, "You're crazy, Wayne. I didn't have anything to do with whatever Lola did or tried to do tonight. Even if you're telling the truth about that."

"Okay," I told him, "that's fine with me. I didn't think you would, so--"

"Taggart!" Adrian Carr was leaning forward in his chair. "Taggart, you fool! He *means* this. And what are you confessing to if you write it? Accessory before the fact to a murder that never came off! With a good lawyer--"

I said, "Don't argue with him, Adrian. I'd just as soon he didn't. Taggart, get up and turn that radio on. Loud. A regular program, not the short-wave band."

I had to swing the muzzle of the gun dead center on his chest and let him see my finger pretend to tighten slowly on the trigger, before he got shakily to his feet. He backed over to the radio and turned the switch; I thought he was going to try to do it without looking away from my face, but he didn't. He turned to face the console to push the button for a broadcast station, and I looked quickly at Adrian and winked.

A little of the color came back into Adrian's face after that wink and I saw him let out his breath slowly. The radio started to blare as the tubes warmed. Taggart turned back and began to edge toward his chair, and Adrian started to look scared again, though not quite so convincingly this time. But he didn't really ham it up; there was enough of the real stuff left to carry over.

I waited till Taggart was back standing in front of his chair, and I didn't bother telling him to sit down; that was up to him. I asked, "Any last words, either of you?"

"You can't get away with this," Taggart said, but he didn't sound as though he was convincing even himself. His voice slid upward almost to a question mark.

I said, "I'm not expecting to. All three of us are going out the same door, remember?"

Adrian started to say something, but I was afraid he might say the wrong thing. I said, "You're first, Adrian, because you came first with Lola, and besides I want to save Taggart for the last. Are you ready?"

I lifted the gun and sighted it. The radio came to the end of a number and the announcer's voice cut in with a commercial. I said, "As soon as the music starts again." I lowered the gun a few inches.

The announcer's voice shouted on--it *was* a shout, with the radio that loud. The commercial went on almost interminably, but it finally ended.

I lifted the gun again, but this time Taggart yelled, "Wait! Don't. I'll--I'll write it."

I said, "Don't bother. To hell with you. I'd rather--" but Adrian came in, begging me to let Taggart write and sign. Weak and shaky inside, I let myself be talked into it. Taggart was sold by now; he was almost pathetically eager in wanting to get to the desk and write out that confession. I let him, finally.

He signed it and I said, "Hand it to Adrian," and I kept the gun on him while Adrian read it rapidly. Adrian said, "It's fine, Wayne. It's all here. The only sad part is they can't send him up for long. A little while in jail--and if this play goes over he'll have money when he comes out. They can't do much to him."

I said, "There's one thing *I* can do." I put the gun back in my pocket and took the four steps that took me to Taggart, who was still standing by the desk. He made only a half-hearted effort to get his hands up and went down and out cold with the

first punch I threw. There wasn't much satisfaction in that, but there wasn't anything more I could do about it.

I picked up his phone and called the police.

While we waited, Adrian said, "Damn you, Wayne, did you *have* to scare me to death after we got here? Couldn't you have tipped me off in advance? How'd I know, for a while there, that you really weren't going to shoot both of us?"

I said, "You might have hammed it up, Adrian. You can't act, you know."

He grinned weakly. He said, "I guess *you* can. Well, with him in jail or out, Taggart's play goes on. Only I won't consult him about who gets the lead. You still--I mean, did and do you really want it?"

I said, "I guess I do. I don't really know right now. I'll let you know after the police get through with me and I get over the hangover I'll have from what I'm going to do after that. I'll let you know. I feel like--"

I remembered the radio was still blaring; we'd both forgotten it. I went over and shut it off and then turned to Adrian. I asked him, "What will the job pay?"

He laughed out loud. He said, "You'll be all right, boy. You're coming out of it already."

## THE SPHERICAL GHOUL

### Murder Makes the Morgue Go

I had no premonition of horror to come. When I reported to work that evening I had not the faintest inkling that I faced anything more startling than another quiet night on a snap job.

It was seven o'clock, just getting dark outside, when I went into the coroner's office. I stood looking out the window into the gray dusk for a few minutes.

Out there, I could see all the tall buildings of the college, and right across the way was Kane Dormitory, where Jerry Grant was supposed to sleep. The same Grant being myself.

Yes, "supposed to" is right. I was working my way through the last year of an ethnology course by holding down a night job for the city, and I hadn't slept more than a five-hour stretch for weeks.

But that night shift in the coroner's department *was* a snap, all right. A few hours' easy work, and the rest of the time left over for study and work on my thesis. I owed my chance to finish out that final year and get my doctor's degree despite the fact that Dad had died, to the fact that I'd been able to get that job.

Behind me, I could hear Dr. Dwight Skibbine, the coroner, opening and closing drawers of his desk, getting ready to leave. I heard his swivel chair squeak as he shoved it back to stand up.

"Don't forget you're going to straighten out that card file tonight, Jerry," he

said. "It's in a mess."

I turned away from the window and nodded. "Any customers around tonight?" I asked.

"Just one. In the display case, but I don't think you'll have anybody coming in to look at him. Keep an eye on that refrigerator unit, though. It's been acting up a bit."

"Thirty-two?" I asked just to make conversation, I guess, because we always keep the case at thirty-two degrees.

He nodded. "I'm going to be back later, for a little while. If Paton gets here before I get back tell him to wait."

He went out, and I went over to the card file and started to straighten it out. It was a simple enough file--just a record of possessions found on bodies that were brought into the morgue, and their disposal after the body was either identified and claimed, or buried in Potter's field--but the clerks on the day shift managed to get the file tangled up periodically.

It took me a little while to dope out what had gummed it up this time. Before I finished it, I decided to go downstairs to the basement--the morgue proper--and be sure the refrigerating unit was still holding down Old Man Fahrenheit.

It was. The thermometer in the showcase read thirty-two degrees on the head. The body in the case was that of a man of about forty, a heavy-set, ugly-looking customer. Even as dead as a doornail and under glass, he looked mean.

Maybe you don't know exactly how morgues are run. It's simple, if they are all handled the way the Springdale one was. We had accommodations for seven customers, and six of them were compartments built back into the walls, for all the world like the sliding drawers of a file cabinet. Those compartments were arranged for refrigeration.

But the showcase was where we put unidentified bodies, so they could be shown easily and quickly to anybody who came in to look at them for identification purposes. It was like a big coffin mounted on a bier, except that it was made of glass on all sides except the bottom.

That made it easy to show the body to prospective identifiers, especially as we could click a switch that threw on lights right inside the display case itself, focused on the face of the corpse.

Everything was okay, so I went back upstairs. I decided I would study a while before I resumed work on the file. The night went more quickly and I got more studying done if I alternated the two. I could have had all my routine work over with in three hours and had the rest of the night to study, but it had never worked as well that way.

I used the coroner's secretary's desk for studying and had just got some books and papers spread out when Mr. Paton came in. Harold Paton is superintendent of the zoological gardens, although you would never guess it to look at him. He looked like a man who would be unemployed eleven months of the year because department store Santa Clauses were hired for only one month out of twelve. True, he would need a little padding and a beard, but not a spot of make-up otherwise.

"Hello, Jerry," he said. "Dwight say when he was coming back?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Paton. Just said for you to wait."

The zoo director sighed and sat down.

"We're playing off the tie tonight," he said, "and I'm going to take him."

He was talking about chess, of course. Dr. Skibbine and Mr. Paton were both chess addicts of the first water, and about twice a week the coroner phoned his wife that he was going to be held up at the office and the two men would play a game that some-times lasted until well after midnight.

I picked up a volume of *The Golden Bough* and started to open it to my bookmark. I was interested in it, because *The Golden Bough* is the most complete account of the superstitions and early customs of mankind that has ever been compiled.

Mr. Paton's eyes twinkled a little as they took in the title of the volume in my hand.

"That part of the course you're taking?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I'm picking up data for my thesis from it. But I do think it ought to be in a course on ethnology."

"Jerry, Jerry," he said, "you take that thesis too seriously. Ghosts, ghouls, vampires, werewolves. If you ever find any, bring them around, and I'll have special cages built for them at the zoo. Or could you keep a werewolf in a cage?"

You couldn't get mad at Mr. Paton, no matter how he kidded you. That thesis was a bit of a sore point with me. I had taken considerable kidding because I had chosen as my subject, "The Origin and Partial Justification of Superstitions." When some people razzed me about it, I wanted to take a poke at them. But I grinned at Mr. Paton.

"You shouldn't have mentioned vampires in that category," I told him.

"You've got them already. I saw a cageful the last time I was there."

"What? Oh, you mean the vampire bats."

"Sure, and you've got a unicorn too, or didn't you know that a rhinoceros is really a unicorn? Except that the medieval artists who drew pictures of it had never seen one and were guessing what it looked like."

"Of course, but --"

There were footsteps in the hallway, and he stopped talking as Dr. Skibbine came in.

"Hullo, Harold," he said to Mr. Paton, and to me: "Heard part of what you were saying, Jerry, and you're right. Don't let Paton kid you out of that thesis of yours."

He went over to his desk and got the chessmen out of the bottom drawer.

"I can't outtalk the two of you," Mr. Paton said. "But say, Jerry, how about ghouls? This ought to be a good place to catch them if there are any running loose around Springdale. Or is that one superstition you're not justifying?"

"Superstition?" I said. "What makes you think that's--"

Then the phone rang, and I went to answer it without finishing what I was going to say.

When I came away from the phone, the two men had the chess pieces set up. Dr. Skibbine had the whites and moved the pawn to king's fourth opening.

"Who was it, Jerry?" he asked.

"Just a man who wanted to know if he could come in to look at the body that was brought in this afternoon. His brother's late getting home."

Dr. Skibbine nodded and moved his king's knight in answer to Mr. Paton's opening move. Already both of them were completely lost in the game. Obviously, Mr. Paton had forgotten what he had asked me about ghouls, so I didn't butt in to finish what I had started to say.

I let *The Golden Bough* go, too, and went to look up the file folder on the unidentified body downstairs. If somebody was coming in to look at it, I wanted to have all the facts about it in mind.

There wasn't much in the folder. The man had been a tramp, judging from his clothes and the lack of money in his pockets and from the nature of the things he did have with him. There wasn't anything at all to indicate identification.

He had been killed on the Mill Road, presumably by a hit-run driver. A Mr. George Considine had found the body and he had also seen another car driving away. The other car had been too distant for him to get the license number or any description worth mentioning.

Of course, I thought, that car might or might not have been the car that had hit the man. Possibly the driver had seen and deliberately passed up the body, thinking it was a drunk.

But the former theory seemed more likely, because there was little traffic on the Mill Road. One end of it was blocked off for repairs, so the only people who used it were the few who lived along there, and there were not many of them. Probably only a few cars a day came along that particular stretch of the road.

Mr. Considine had got out of his car and found that the man was dead. He had driven on to the next house, half a mile beyond, and phoned the police from there, at four o'clock.

That's all there was in the files.

I had just finished reading it when Bill Drager came in. Bill is a lieutenant on the police force, and he and I had become pretty friendly during the time I had worked for the coroner. He was a pretty good friend of Dr. Skibbine too.

"Sorry to interrupt your game, Doc," he said, "but I just wanted to ask something."

"What, Bill?"

"Look--the stiff you got in today. You've examined it already?"

"Of course, why?"

"Just wondering. I don't know what makes me think so, but--well, I'm not satisfied all the way. *Was* it just an auto accident?"

### Why the Dead Man Crossed the Road

Dr. Skibbine had a bishop in his hand, ready to move it, but he put it down on the side of the board instead.

"Just a minute, Harold," he said to Mr. Paton, then turned his chair around to stare at Bill Drager. "Not an auto accident?" he inquired. "The car wheels ran across the man's neck, Bill. What more do you want?"

"I don't know. Was that the sole cause of death, or were there some other

marks?"

Dr. Skibbine leaned back in the swivel chair.

"I don't think being hit was the cause of death, exactly. His forehead struck the road when he fell, and he was probably dead when the wheels ran over him. It could have been, for that matter, that he fell when there wasn't even a car around and the car ran over him later."

"In broad daylight?"

"Um--yes, that does sound unlikely. But he could have fallen into the path of the car. He had been drinking plenty. He reeked of liquor."

"Suppose he was hit by a car," Bill said. "How would you reconstruct it? How he fell, I mean, and stuff like that."

"Let's see. I'd say he fell first and was down when the car first touched him. Say he started across the road in front of the car. Horn honked and he tried to turn around and fell flat instead, and the motorist couldn't stop in time and ran over him."

I had not said anything yet, but I put in a protest at that.

"If the man was as obviously drunk as that," I said, "why would the motorist have kept on going? He couldn't have thought he would be blamed if a drunk staggered in front of his car and fell, even before he was hit."

Drager shrugged. "That could happen, Jerry," he said. "For one thing, he may not have any witnesses to prove that it happened that way. And some guys get panicky when they hit a pedestrian, even if the pedestrian is to blame. And then again, the driver of the car might have had a drink or two himself and been afraid to stop because of that."

Dr. Skibbine's swivel chair creaked.

"Sure," he said, "or he might have been afraid because he had a reckless driving count against him already. But, Bill, the cause of death was the blow he got on the forehead when he hit the road. Not that the tires going over his neck wouldn't have finished him if the fall hadn't."

"We had a case like that here five years ago. Remember?"

Dr. Skibbine grunted. "I wasn't here five years ago. Remember?"

"Yes, I forgot that," said Bill Drager.

I had forgotten it, too. Dr. Skibbine was a Springdale man, but he had spent several years in South American countries doing research work on tropical diseases. Then he had come back and had been elected coroner. Coroner was an easy job in Springdale and gave a man more time for things like research and chess than a private practice would.

"Go on down and look at him, if you want," Dr. Skibbine told Bill. "Jerry'll take you down. It will get his mind off ghouls and goblins."

I took Bill Drager downstairs and flicked on the lights in the display case.

"I can take off the end and slide him out of there if you want me to," I said.

"I guess not," Drager said and leaned on the glass top to look closer at the body. The face was all you could see, of course, because a sheet covered the body up to the neck, and this time the sheet had been pulled a little higher than usual, probably to hide the unpleasant damage to the neck.

The face was bad enough. There was a big, ugly bruise on the forehead, and the lower part of the face was cut up a bit.

"The car ran over the back of his neck after he fell on his face, apparently," Bill Drager said. "Ground his face into the road a bit and took off skin. But--"

"But what?" I prompted when he lapsed into silence.

"I don't know," he said. "I was mostly wondering why he would have tried to cross the road at all out there. Right at that place there's nothing on one side of the road that isn't on the other."

He straightened up, and I switched off the showcase lights.

"Maybe you're just imagining things, Bill," I said. "How do you know he tried to cross at all? Doc said he'd been drinking, and maybe he just staggered from the edge of the road out toward the middle without any idea of crossing over."

"Yeah, there's that, of course. Come to think of it, you're prob-ably right. When I got to wondering, I didn't know about the drinking part. Well, let's go back up."

We did, and I shut and locked the door at the head of the stairs. It is the only entrance to the morgue, and I don't know why it has to be kept locked, because it opens right into the coroner's office where I sit all night, and the key stays in the lock. Anybody who could get past me could unlock it himself. But it's just one of those rules. Those stairs, incidentally, are absolutely the only way you can get down into the morgue which is walled off from the rest of the basement of the Municipal Building.

"Satisfied?" Dr. Skibbine asked Bill Drager, as we walked into the office.

"Guess so," said Drager. "Say, the guy looks vaguely familiar. I can't place him, but I think I've seen him somewhere. Nobody identified him yet?"

"Nope," said Doc. "But if he's a local resident, somebody will. We'll have a lot of curiosity seekers in here tomorrow. Always get them after a violent death."

Bill Drager said he was going home and went out. His shift was over. He had just dropped in on his own time.

I stood around and watched the chess game for a few minutes. Mr. Paton was getting licked this time. He was two pieces down and on the defensive. Only a miracle could save him.

Then Doc moved a knight and said, "Check," and it was all over but the shouting. Mr. Paton could move out of check all right, but the knight had forked his king and queen, and with the queen gone, as it would be after the next move, the situation was hopeless.

"You got me, Dwight," he said. "I'll resign. My mind must be fuzzy tonight. Didn't see that knight coming."

"Shall we start another game? It's early."

"You'd beat me. Let's bowl a quick game, instead, and get home early."

After they left, I finished up my work on the card file and then did my trigonometry. It was almost midnight then. I remembered the man who had phoned that he was coming in and decided he had changed his mind. Probably his brother had arrived home safely, after all.

I went downstairs to be sure the refrigerating unit was okay. Finding that it was, I came back up and locked the door again. Then I went out into the hall and locked the outer door. It's supposed to be kept locked, too, and I really should have locked it earlier.

After that, I read *The Golden Bough*, with a note-book in front of me so I could jot down anything I found that would fit into my thesis.

I must have become deeply engrossed in my reading because when the night bell rang, I jumped inches out of my chair. I looked at the clock and saw it was two in the morning.

Ordinarily, I don't mind the place where I work at all. Being near dead bodies gives some people the willies, but not me. There isn't any nicer, quieter place for studying and reading than a morgue at night.

But I had a touch of the creeps then. I do get them once in a while. This time it was the result of being startled by the sudden ringing of that bell when I was so interested in something that I had forgotten where I was and why I was there.

I put down the book and went out into the long dark hallway. When I had put on the hall light, I felt a little better. I could see somebody standing outside the glass-paned door at the end of the hall. A tall thin man whom I didn't know. He wore glasses and was carrying a gold-headed cane.

"My name is Burke, Roger Burke," he said when I opened the door. "I phoned early this evening about my brother being missing. Uh--may I--"

"Of course," I told him. "Come this way. When you didn't come for so long, I thought you had located your brother."

"I thought I had," he said hesitantly. "A friend said he had seen him this evening, and I quit worrying for a while. But when it got after one o'clock and he wasn't home, I--"

We had reached the coroner's office by then, but I stopped and turned.

"There's only one unidentified body here," I told him, "and that was brought in this afternoon. If your brother was seen this evening, it couldn't be him."

The tall man said, "Oh," rather blankly and looked at me a moment. Then he said, "I hope that's right. But this friend said he saw him at a distance, on a crowded street. He could have been mistaken. So as long as I'm here--"

"I guess you might as well," I said, "now that you're here. Then you'll be sure."

I led the way through the office and unlocked the door.

I was glad, as we started down the stairs, that there seemed little likelihood of identification. I hate to be around when one is made. You always seem to share, vicariously, the emotion, of the person who recognizes a friend or relative.

At the top of the stairs I pushed the button that put on the overhead lights downstairs in the morgue. The switch for the showcase was down below. I stopped to flick it as I reached the bottom of the stairs, and the tall man went on past me toward the case. Apparently he had been a visitor here before.

I had taken only a step or two after him when I heard him gasp. He stopped suddenly and took a step backward so quickly that I bumped into him and grabbed his arm to steady myself.

He turned around, and his face was a dull pasty gray that one seldom sees on the face of a living person.

"My God!" he said. "Why didn't you warn me that--"

It didn't make sense for him to say a thing like that. I've been with people before when they have identified relatives, but none of them had ever reacted just

that way. Or had it been merely identification? He certainly looked as though he had seen some-thing horrible.

I stepped a little to one side so that I could see past him. When I saw, it was as though a wave of cold started at the base of my spine and ran up along my body. I had never seen anything like it--and you get toughened when you work in a morgue.

The glass top of the display case had been broken in at the upper, the head, end, and the body inside the case was--well, I'll try to be as objective about it as I can. The best way to be objective is to put it bluntly. The flesh of the face had been eaten away, eaten away as though acid had been poured on it, or as though --

I got hold of myself and stepped up to the edge of the display case and looked down.

It had not been acid. Acid does not leave the marks of teeth.

Nauseated, I closed my eyes for an instant until I got over it. Behind me, I heard sounds as though the tall man, who had been the first to see it, was being sick. I didn't blame him.

"I don't--" I said, and stepped back. "Something's happened here."

Silly remark, but you can't think of the right thing to say in a spot like that.

"Come on," I told him. "I'll have to get the police."

The thought of the police steadied me. When the police got here, it would be all right. They would find out what had happened.

### Facing Horror

As I reached the bottom of the stairs my mind started to work logically again. I could picture Bill Drager up in the office firing questions at me, asking me, "When did it happen? You can judge by the temperature, can't you?"

The tall man stumbled up the stairs past me as I paused. Most decidedly I didn't want to be down there alone, but I yelled to him:

"Wait up there. I'll be with you in a minute."

He would have to wait, of course, because I would have to unlock the outer door to let him out.

I turned back and looked at the thermometer in the broken case, trying not to look at anything else. It read sixty-three degrees, and that was only about ten degrees under the tempera-ture of the rest of the room.

The glass had been broken, then, for some time. An hour, I'd say offhand, or maybe a little less. Upstairs, with the heavy door closed, I wouldn't have heard it break. Anyway, I hadn't heard it break.

I left the lights on in the morgue, all of them, when I ran up the stairs.

The tall man was standing in the middle of the office, looking around as though he were in a daze. His face still had that grayish tinge, and I was just as glad that I didn't have to look in a mirror just then, because my own face was likely as bad.

I picked up the telephone and found myself giving Bill Drager's home telephone number instead of asking for the police. I don't know why my thoughts ran so strongly to Bill Drager, except that he had been the one who had suspected that something more than met the eye had been behind the hit-run case from the Mill

Road.

"Can--will you let me out of here?" the tall man said. "I--I--that wasn't my--"

"I'm afraid not," I told him. "Until the police get here. You--uh--witnessed--"

It sounded screwy, even to me. Certainly he could not have had anything to do with whatever had happened down there. He had preceded me into the morgue only by a second and hadn't even reached the case when I was beside him. But I knew what the police would say if I let him go before they had a chance to get his story.

Then Drager's voice was saying a sleepy, "Hullo," into my ear.

"Bill," I said, "you got to come down here. That corpse down-stairs--it's--I--"

The sleepiness went out of Drager's voice.

"Calm down, Jerry," he said. "It can't be that bad. Now, what happened?"

I finally got it across.

"You phoned the department first, of course?" Drager asked.

"N-no. I thought of you first because--"

"Sit tight," he said. "I'll phone them and then come down. I'll have to dress first, so they'll get there ahead of me. Don't go down to the morgue again and don't touch anything."

He put the receiver on the hook, and I felt a little better. Somehow the worst seemed to be over, now that it was off my chest. Drager's offering to phone the police saved me from having to tell it again, over the phone.

The tall man--I remembered now that he had given the name Roger Burke--was leaning against the wall, weakly.

"Did--did I get from what you said on the phone that the body wasn't that way when--when they brought it in?" he asked.

I nodded. "It must have happened within the last hour," I said. "I was down there at midnight, and everything was all right then."

"But what--what happened?"

I opened my mouth and closed it again. Something had hap-pened down there, but what? There wasn't any entrance to the morgue other than the ventilator and the door that opened at the top of the stairs. And nobody--nothing--had gone through that door since my trip of inspection.

I thought back and thought hard. No, I hadn't left this office for even a minute between midnight and the time the night bell had rung at two o'clock. I had left the office then, of course, to answer the door. But whatever had happened had not happened then. The thermometer downstairs proved that.

Burke was fumbling cigarettes out of his pocket. He held out the package with a shaky hand, and I took one and managed to strike a match and light both cigarettes.

The first drag made me feel nearly human. Apparently he felt better too, because he said:

"I--I'm afraid I didn't make identification one way or the other. You couldn't--with--" He shuddered. "Say, my brother had a small anchor tattooed on his left forearm. I forgot it or I could have asked you over the phone. Was there--"

I thought back to the file and shook my head.

"No," I said definitely. "It would have been on the record, and there wasn't

anything about it. They make a special point of noting down things like that."

"That's swell," Burke said. "I mean--Say, if I'm going to have to wait, I'm going to sit down. I still feel awful."

Then I remembered that I had better phone Dr. Skibbine, too, and give him the story first-hand before the police got here and called him. I went over to the phone.

The police got there first--Captain Quenlin and Sergeant Wilson and two other men I knew by sight but not by name. Bill Drager was only a few minutes later getting there, and around three o'clock Dr. Skibbine came.

By that time the police had questioned Burke and let him go, although one of them left to go home with him. They told him it was because they wanted to check on whether his brother had shown up yet, so the Missing Persons Bureau could handle it if he hadn't. But I guessed the real reason was that they wanted to check on his identity and place of residence.

Not that there seemed to be any way Burke could be involved in whatever had happened to the body, but when you don't know what has happened, you can't overlook any angle. After all, he was a material witness.

Bill Drager had spent most of the time since he had been there downstairs, but he came up now.

"The place is tighter than a drum down there, except for that ventilator," he said. "And I noticed something about it. One of the vanes in it is a little bent."

"How about rats?" Captain Quenlin asked. Drager snorted. "Ever see rats break a sheet of glass?" "The glass might have been broken some other way." Quenlin looked at me. "You're around here nights, Jerry Grant. Ever see any signs of rats or mice?"

I shook my head, and Bill Drager backed me up. "I went over the whole place down there," he said. "There isn't a hole anywhere. Floor's tile set in cement. The walls are tile, in big close-set slabs, without a break. I went over them."

Dr. Skibbine was starting down the steps.

"Come on, Jerry," he said to me. "Show me where you and this Burke fellow were standing when he let out a yip."

I didn't much want to, but I followed him down. I showed him where I had been and where Burke had been and told him that Burke had not gone closer to the case than about five feet at any time. Also, I told him what I had already told the police about my looking at the thermometer in the case.

Dr. Skibbine went over and looked at it.

"Seventy-one now," he said. "I imagine that's as high as it's going. You say it was sixty-three when you saw it at two? Yes, I'd say the glass was broken between twelve-thirty and one-thirty."

Quenlin had followed us down the stairs. "When did you get home tonight, Dr. Skibbine?" he asked.

The coroner looked at him in surprise. "Around midnight. Good Lord, you don't think *I* had anything to do with this, do you, Quenlin?"

The captain shook his head. "Routine question. Look, Doc, why would anybody or anything do that?"

"I wouldn't know," Skibbine said slowly, "unless it was to pre-vent

identification of the corpse. That's possible. The body will never be identified now unless the man has a criminal record and his prints are on file. But making that 'anything' instead of 'anybody' makes it easier, Cap. I'd say 'anything' was hungry, plenty hungry."

I leaned back against the wall at the bottom of the stairs, again fighting nausea that was almost worse than before.

Rats? Besides the fact that there weren't any rats, it would have taken a lot of them to do what had been done.

"Jerry," said Bill Drager, "you're sure you weren't out of the office up there for even a minute between midnight and two o'clock? Think hard. Didn't you maybe go to the washroom or something?"

"I'm positive," I told him.

Drager turned to the captain and pointed up to the ventilator.

"There are only two ways into this morgue, Cap," he said. "One's through the door Jerry says he sat in front of, and the other's up there."

My eyes followed his pointing finger, and I studied the venti-lator and its position. It was a round opening in the wall, twelve or maybe thirteen inches across, and there was a wheel-like arrangement of vanes that revolved in it. It was turning slowly. It was set in the wall just under the high ceiling, maybe sixteen feet above the floor, and it was directly over the display case.

"Where's that open into?" Quenlin asked.

"Goes right through the wall," Dr. Skibbine told him. "Opens on the alley, just a foot or two above the ground. There's another wheel just like that one on the outside. A little electric motor turns them."

"Could the thing be dismantled from the outside?"

Dr. Skibbine shrugged. "Easiest way to find that out is to go out in the alley and try it. But nobody could get through there, even if you got the thing off. It's too narrow."

"A thin man might--"

"No, even a thin man is wider than twelve inches across the shoulders, and that's my guess on the width of that hole."

Quenlin shrugged.

"Got a flashlight, Drager?" he asked. "Go on out in the alley and take a look. Although if somebody did get that thing off, I don't see how the devil they could have--"

Then he looked down at the case and winced. "If everybody's through looking at this for the moment," he said, "for crying out loud put a sheet over it. It's giving me the willies. I'll dream about ghouls tonight."

The word hit me like a ton of bricks. Because it was then I remembered that we had talked about ghouls early that very evening. About--how had Mr. Paton put it?--"ghosts, ghouls, vampires, werewolves," and about a morgue being a good place for ghouls to hang around; and about--

Some of the others were looking at me, and I knew that Dr. Skibbine, at least, was remembering that conversation. Had he mentioned it to any of the others?

Sergeant Wilson was standing behind the other men and prob-ably didn't know I could see him from where I stood, for he surreptitiously crossed himself.

"Ghouls, nuts!" he said in a voice a bit louder than necessary. "There ain't any such thing. Or is there?"

It was a weak but dramatic ending. Nobody answered him.

Me, I had had enough of that morgue for the moment. Nobody had put a sheet over the case because there was not one available downstairs.

"I'll get a sheet," I said and started up for the office. I stumbled on the bottom step.

"What's eating--" I heard Quenlin say, and then as though he regretted his choice of words, he started over again. "Some-thing's wrong with the kid. Maybe you better send him home, Doc."

He probably didn't realize I could hear him. But by that time I was most of the way up, so I didn't hear the coroner's answer.

### Wildest Talent

From the cabinet I got a sheet, and the others were coming up the steps when I got back with it. Quenlin handed it to Wilson.

"You put it on, Sarge," he said.

Wilson took it, and hesitated. I had seen his gesture downstairs and I knew he was scared stiff to go back down there alone. I was scared, too, but I did my Boy Scout act for the day and said:

"I'll go down with you, Sergeant. I want to take a look at that ventilator."

While he put the sheet over the broken case, I stared up at the ventilator and saw the bent vane. As I watched, a hand reached through the slit between that vane and the next and bent it some more.

Then the hand, Bill Drager's hand, reached through the widened slit and groped for the nut on the center of the shaft on which the ventilator wheel revolved. Yes, the ventilator could be removed and replaced from the outside. The bent vane made it look as though that had been done.

But why? After the ventilator had been taken off, what then? The opening was too small for a man to get through and besides it was twelve feet above the glass display case.

Sergeant Wilson went past me up the stairs, and I followed him up. The conversation died abruptly as I went through the door, and I suspected that I had been the subject of the talk.

Dr. Skibbine was looking at me.

"The cap's right, Jerry," he said. "You don't look so well. We're going to be around here from now on, so you take the rest of the night off. Get some sleep."

Sleep, I thought. What's that? How could I sleep now? I felt dopy, I'll admit, from lack of it. But the mere thought of turning out a light and lying down alone in a dark room--huh-uh! I must have been a little lightheaded just then, for a goofy parody was running through my brain:

A ghoulish murdered sleep, the innocent sleep, sleep that knits . . .

"Thanks, Dr. Skibbine," I said. "I--I guess it will do me good, at that."

It would get me out of here, somewhere where I could think without a lot of people talking. If I could get the unicorns and rhinoceros out of my mind, maybe I had the key. Maybe, but it didn't make sense yet.

I put on my hat and went outside and walked around the building into the dark alley.

Bill Drager's face was a dim patch in the light that came through the circular hole in the wall where the ventilator had been.

He saw me coming and called out sharply, "Who's that?" and stood up. When he stood, he seemed to vanish, because it put him back in the darkness.

"It's me--Jerry Grant," I said. "Find out anything, Bill?"

"Just what you see. The ventilator comes out, from the outside. But it isn't a big enough hole for a man." He laughed a little off-key. "A ghoul, I don't know. How big is a ghoul, Jerry?"

"Can it, Bill," I said. "Did you do that in the dark? Didn't you bring a flashlight?"

"No. Look, whoever did it earlier in the night, if somebody did, wouldn't have dared use a light. They'd be too easy to see from either end of the alley. I wanted to see if it could be done in the dark."

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "But the light from the inside shows."

"Was it on between midnight and two?"

"Um--no. I hadn't thought of that."

I stared at the hole in the wall. It was just about a foot in diameter. Large enough for a man to stick his head into, but not to crawl through.

Bill Drager was still standing back in the dark, but now that my eyes were used to the alley, I could make out the shadowy outline of his body.

"Jerry," he said, "you've been studying this superstition stuff. Just what is a ghoul?"

"Something in Eastern mythology, Bill. An imaginary creature that robs graves and feeds on corpses. The modern use of the word is confined to someone who robs graves, usually for jewelry that is sometimes interred with the bodies. Back in the early days of medicine, bodies were stolen and sold to the anatomists for purposes of dissection, too."

"The modern ones don't--uh--"

"There have been psychopathic cases, a few of them. One happened in Paris, in modern times. A man named Bertrand. Charles Fort tells about him in his book *Wild Talents*."

"*Wild Talents*, huh?" said Bill. "What happened?"

"Graves in a Paris cemetery were being dug up by something or someone who--" there in the dark alley, I couldn't say it plainly--"who--uh--acted like a ghoul. They couldn't catch him but they set a blunderbuss trap. It got this man Bertrand, and he confessed."

Bill Drager didn't say anything, just stood there. Then, just as though I could read his mind, I got scared because I knew what he was thinking. If anything like that had happened here tonight, there was only one person it could possibly have been.

Me.

Bill Drager was standing there silently, staring at me, and wondering whether

I--

Then I knew why the others had stopped talking when I had come up the stairs just a few minutes before, back at the morgue. No, there was not a shred of proof, unless you can call process of elimination proof. But there had been a faint unspoken suspi-cion that somehow seemed a thousand times worse than an accu-sation I could deny.

I knew, then, that unless this case was solved suspicion would follow me the rest of my life. Something too absurd for open accu-sation. But people would look at me and wonder, and the mere possibility would make them shudder. Every word I spoke would be weighed to see whether it might indicate an unbalanced mind.

Even Bill Drager, one of my best friends, was wondering about me now.

"Bill," I said, "for God's sake, you don't think--"

"Of course not, Jerry."

But the fact that he knew what I meant before I had finished the sentence, proved I had been right about what he had been thinking.

There was something else in his voice, too, although he had tried to keep it out. Fear. He was alone with me in a dark alley, and I realized now why he had stepped back out of the light so quickly. Bill Drager was a little afraid of me.

But this was no time or place to talk about it. The atmosphere was wrong. Anything I could say would make things worse.

So I merely said, "Well, so long, Bill," as I turned and walked toward the street.

Half a block up the street on the other side was an all-night restaurant, and I headed for it. Not to eat, for I felt as though I would never want to eat again. The very thought of food was sickening. But a cup of coffee might take away some of the numb-ness in my mind.

Hank Perry was on duty behind the counter, and he was alone.

"Hi, Jerry," he said, as I sat down on a stool at the counter. "Off early tonight?"

I nodded and let it go at that.

"Just a cup of black coffee, Hank," I told him, and forestalled any salestalk by adding, "I'm not hungry. Just ate."

Silly thing to say, I realized the minute I had said it. Suppose someone asked Hank later what I had said when I came in. They all knew, back there, that I had not brought a lunch to work and hadn't eaten. Would I, from now on, have to watch every word I said to avoid slips like that?

But whatever significance Hank or others might read into my words later, there was nothing odd about them now, as long as Hank didn't know what had happened at the morgue.

He brought my coffee. I stirred in sugar and waited for it to cool enough to drink.

"Nice night out," Hank said.

I hadn't noticed, but I said, "Yeah."

To me it was one terrible night out, but I couldn't tell him that without spilling the rest of the story.

"How was business tonight, Hank?" I asked.

"Pretty slow."

"How many customers," I asked, "did you have between mid-night and two o'clock?"

"Hardly any. Why?"

"Hank," I said, "something happened then. Look, I can't tell you about it now, honestly. I don't know whether or not it's going to be given out to the newspapers. If it isn't, it would lose me my job even to mention it. But will you think hard if you saw anybody or anything out of the ordinary between twelve and two?"

"Um," said Hank, leaning against the counter thoughtfully. "That's a couple of hours ago. Must have had several customers in here during that time. But all I can remember are regulars. People on night shifts that come in regularly."

"When you're standing at that grill in the window frying something, you can see out across the street," I said. "You ought to be able to see down as far as the alley, because this is a pretty wide street."

"Yeah, I can."

"Did you see anyone walk or drive in there?"

"Golly," said Hank. "Yeah, I did. I think it was around one o'clock. I happened to notice the guy on account of what he was carrying."

I felt my heart hammering with sudden excitement.

"What was he carrying? And what did he look like?"

"I didn't notice what he looked like," said Hank. "He was in shadow most of the time. But he was carrying a bowling ball."

"A bowling ball?"

Hank nodded. "That's what made me notice him. There aren't any alleys --I mean bowling alleys--right around here. I bowl myself so I wondered where this guy had been rolling."

"You mean he was carrying a bowling ball under his arm?"

I was still incredulous, even though Hank's voice showed me he was not kidding.

He looked at me contemptuously.

"No. Bowlers never carry 'em like that on the street. There's a sort of bag that's made for the purpose. A little bigger than the ball, some of them, so a guy can put in his bowling shoes and stuff."

I closed my eyes a moment to try to make sense out of it. Of all the things on this mad night; it seemed the maddest that a bowling ball had been carried into the alley by the morgue--or something the shape of a bowling ball. At just the right time, too. One o'clock.

It would be a devil of a coincidence if the man Hank had seen hadn't been the one.

"You're sure it was a bowling ball case?"

"Positive. I got one like it myself. And the way he carried it, it was just heavy enough to have the ball in it." He looked at me curiously. "Say, Jerry, I never thought of it before, but a case like that would be a handy thing to carry a bomb in. Did someone try to plant a bomb at the morgue?"

"No."

"Then if it wasn't a bowling ball --and you act like you think it wasn't--what

would it have been?"

"I wish I knew," I told him. "I wish to high heaven I knew."

I downed the rest of my coffee and stood up.

"Thanks a lot, Hank," I said. "Listen, you think it over and see if you can remember anything else about that case or the man who carried it. I'll see you later."

### Horror in a Bowling Ball

What I needed was some fresh air, so I started walking. I didn't pay any attention to where I was going; I just walked.

My feet didn't take me in circles, but my mind did. A bowling ball! Why would a bowling ball, or something shaped like it, be carried into the alley back of the morgue? A bowling ball would fit into that ventilator hole, all right, and a dropped bowling ball would have broken the glass of the case.

But a bowling ball wouldn't have done--the rest of it.

I vaguely remembered some mention of bowling earlier in the evening and thought back to what it was. Oh yes. Dr. Skibbine and Mr. Paton had been going to bowl a game instead of playing a second game of chess. But neither of them had bowling balls along. Anyway, if Dr. Skibbine had told the truth, they had both been home by midnight.

If not a bowling ball, then what? A ghoul? A spherical ghoul?

The thought was so incongruously horrible that I wanted to stop, right there in the middle of the sidewalk and laugh like a maniac. Maybe I was near hysteria.

I thought of going back to the morgue and telling them about it, and laughing. Watching Quenlin's face and Wilson's when I told them that our guest had been a man-eating bowling ball. A spherical--

Then I stopped walking, because all of a sudden I knew what the bowling ball had been, and I had the most important part of the answer.

Somewhere a clock was striking half-past three, and I looked around to see where I was. Oak Street, only a few doors from Grant Parkway. That meant I had come fifteen or sixteen blocks from the morgue and that I was only a block and a half from the zoo. At the zoo, I could find out if I was right.

So I started walking again. A block and a half later I was across the street from the zoo right in front of Mr. Paton's house. Strangely, there was a light in one of the downstairs rooms.

I went up onto the porch and rang the bell. Mr. Paton came to answer it. He was wearing a dressing gown, but I could see shoes and the bottoms of his trouser legs under it.

He didn't look surprised at all when he opened the door.

"Yes, Jerry?" he said, almost as though he had been expecting me.

"I'm glad you're still up, Mr. Paton," I said. "Could you walk across with me and get me past the guard at the gate? I'd like to look at one of the cages and verify--something."

"You guessed then, Jerry?"

"Yes, Mr. Paton," I told him. Then I had a sudden thought that scared me a little. "You were seen going into the alley," I added quickly, "and the man who saw

you knows I came here. He saw you carrying--"

He held up his hand and smiled.

"You needn't worry, Jerry," he said. "I know it's over--the minute anybody is smart enough to guess. And--well, I murdered a man all right, but I'm not the type to murder another to try to cover up, because I can see where that would lead. The man I did kill deserved it, and I gambled on--Well never mind all that."

"Who was he?" I asked.

"His name was Mark Leedom. He was my assistant four years ago. I was foolish at that time--I'd lost money speculating and I stole some zoo funds. They were supposed to be used for the purchase of--Never mind the details. Mark Leedom found out and got proof.

"He made me turn over most of the money to him, and he--retired, and moved out of town. But he's been coming back peri-odically to keep shaking me down. He was a rat, Jerry, a worse crook than I ever thought of being. This time I couldn't pay so I killed him."

"You were going to make it look like an accident on the Mill Road?" I said. "You killed him here and took him--"

"Yes, I was going to have the car run over his head, so he wouldn't be identified. I missed by inches, but I couldn't try again because another car was coming, and I had to keep on driving away.

"Luckily, Doc Skibbine didn't know him. It was while Doc was in South America that Leedom worked for me. But there are lots of people around who did know him. Some curiosity seeker would have identified him in the week they hold an uniden-tified body and--well, once they knew who he was and traced things back, they'd have got to me eventually for the old business four years ago if not the fact that I killed him."

"So that's why you had to make him unidentifiable," I said. "I see. He looked familiar to Bill Drager, but Bill couldn't place him."

He nodded. "Bill was just a patrolman then. He probably had seen Leedom only a few times, but someone else--Well, Jerry, you go back and tell them about it. Tell them I'll be here."

"Gee, Mr. Paton, I'm sorry I got to," I said. "Isn't there anything--"

"No. Go and get them. I won't run away, I promise you. And tell Doc he wouldn't have beat me that chess game tonight if I hadn't let him. With what I had to do, I wanted to get out of there early. Good night, Jerry."

He eased me out onto the porch again before I quite realized why he had never had a chance to tell Dr. Skibbine himself. Yes, he meant for them to find him here when they came, but not alive.

I almost turned to the door again, to break my way in and stop him. Then I realized that everything would be easier for him if he did it his way.

Yes, he was dead by the time they sent men out to bring him in. Even though I had expected it, I guess I had a case of the jitters when they phoned in the news, and I must have showed it, because Bill Drager threw an arm across my shoulders.

"Jerry," he said, "this has been the devil of a night for you. You need a drink. Come on."

The drink made me feel better and so did the frank admiration in Drager's

eyes. It was so completely different from what I had seen there back in the alley.

"Jerry," he told me, "you ought to get on the Force. Figuring out that--of all things--he had used an armadillo."

"But what else was possible? Look! All those ghoul legends trace back to beasts that are eaters of carrion. Like hyenas. A hyena could have done what was done back there in the morgue. But no one could have handled a hyena--pushed it through that ventilator hole with a rope on it to pull it up again.

"But an armadillo is an eater of corpses, too. It gets frightened when handled and curls up into a ball, like a bowling ball. It doesn't make any noise, and you could carry it in a bag like the one Hank described. It has an armored shell that would break the glass of the display case if Paton lowered it to within a few feet and let it drop the rest of the way. And of course he looked down with a flashlight to see--"

Bill Drager shuddered a little.

"Learning is a great thing if you like it," he said. "Studying origins of superstitions, I mean. But me, I want another drink. How about you?"

## HOMICIDE SANITARIUM

### Killer at Large

I put down the newspaper.

"It's about time," Kit said.

I stood up. "Right, honey. It is."

Her big brown eyes got bigger and browner.

"What do you mean, Eddie? I just meant you've been reading that blasted newspaper for hours and hours."

I glanced at the clock. "For eleven minutes."

I sat down again and motioned, and she came over and sat down on my lap. I almost weakened.

"It's been a nice honeymoon," I said. "But I *am* a working man. I thought you knew."

"You mean you're taking on another case?"

"Nope," I told her. "One of the same ones. Paul Verne."

"Who's Paul Verne?"

"The gentleman I came to Springfield to find."

She looked really shocked. "You came here to . . . Why, Eddie, we came here for our honeymoon! You don't mean you had an ulterior motive in choosing Springfield."

"Now, now," I now-nowed.

"But Eddie--"

"Shhh," I shhhd.

She cuddled down in my arms. "All right, Eddie. But tell me what you're going to do. Is it dangerous?"

"Get 'em young," I said, "treat 'em rough, tell 'em nothing."

"Eddie, is it dangerous?"

"The world," I told her, "is a dangerous place. One's lucky to get out of it alive."

"Oh darn it, I suppose you *are* going to do something danger-ous. I won't let you!"

I stood up, and she had to get off my lap or fall on the floor. I walked over to the bureau and picked a necktie off the mirror.

"What *are* you going to do, Eddie?"

"Answer an ad I just read in the paper."

"You mean an ad to go to work?"

I nodded, and started to put on the necktie.

In the mirror, I could see Kit studying me.

"The idea of a pint-size like you being a detective," she said.

"Napoleon wasn't so big," I said, over my shoulder.

"Napoleon wasn't a detective."

"Well how about Peter Lorre? He's no bigger than I am."

"Peter Lorre was shot in the last two pictures I saw him in," Kit said.

She picked up the newspaper I'd put down and started scanning the want ads, while I was putting on my coat.

"Is this the ad?" she said. "Wanted: Man with some knowledge of psychiatry, for confidential work?"

"What makes you think that's it?" I countered.

"I know that's it, Eddie. All the other ads are routine sensible ones for salesmen or dishwashers or something. But why get dressed up to answer it? It just gives a phone number, and there's a phone right on the table there."

"That reminds me," I said. "Use that phone to call Informa-tion, will you, and get the listing on that phone number. You'll find it's the Stanley Sanitarium, I think. But I might as well make sure."

She made the call.

"You're right, Eddie. Stanley Sanitarium." She looked at me with respect. "How did you know?"

"Hunch. There's an article on Page Three telling about a new sanitarium for mental cases being started here. A doc by the name of Philemon Stanley runs it."

"But why can't you phone from here about the job?"

"From a hotel? Nix. I've got to give myself a local background and a local address. I go rent myself a room, and then use the landlady's phone. That way, if he's going to phone me back or write me a letter, I can give him an address that won't sound phony."

"What's phony about the New World Hotel?"

I grinned at her. "Ten bucks a day is what's phony. People who stay at a hotel like this don't apply for jobs that probably pay less than their hotel bills would be."

I kissed her, thoroughly, for it just might be the last time for a while if I had to follow up on the job right away, and left.

Half an hour later, from a rooming house, I called the number given in the want ad.

"Ever had any experience working in an institution for the mentally ill?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "Two years at Wales Sanitarium in Chicago. They didn't handle really bad cases, you know, just mild psy-choses, phobiacs, chronic alcoholics, that sort of thing."

"Yes," said Dr. Stanley, "I'm familiar with the work at Wales Sanitarium. What were your duties there?"

"Attendant, male ward."

"I believe you would fit in very nicely. Not--uh--as an atten-dant, however. I have something in mind of a different and--uh --more confidential nature."

"So I figured from the ad, Doctor," I said. "But whatever it is, I'll be glad to try it."

"Fine, Mr. Anderson. I'd like to talk to you personally, of course, but if our interview is satisfactory to both of us, you can start right away. Would you rather have that interview this eve-ning or tomorrow morning? Either will be quite satisfactory." I thought it over, and weakened. After all I had been married only two weeks and I would undoubtedly have to live at the sani-tarium while I was on the job. I told him tomorrow morning. I went back to the hotel and Kit and I went down for dinner to the New World dining room. Over a couple of cocktails, I told her about the phone call.

"But suppose he should phone the Wales Sanitarium to check up on you?"

"They never do."

"What kind of confidential work would there be around a booby hatch, Eddie?"

"I don't know," I told her. "But as long as it puts me in contact with the patients, I don't care. Anyway, it isn't a booby hatch, honey. It's a sanitarium for the idle rich. People who go slightly screwy wondering how to spend their money. That's why I used Wales as a reference. It's the same type of joint."

"It didn't say that in the article in the paper."

"Sure it did. Between the lines."

"But Eddie, aren't you going to tell me *why* you're doing this?"

I thought out how I'd best tell it without worrying Kit too much. She'd have to get used to things like that, but not all at once. Not--right from our honeymoon--to know I was looking for a homicidal maniac who had killed over a dozen people. Maybe more.

"I'm looking for a man named Paul Verne," I said. "He's crazy, but he's crazy like a fox. He escaped three years ago from an insti-tution in California. It's been in the papers, but you may not have noticed it, because his family had enough money and influ-ence to keep it from being played up too much."

Kit's eyes widened.

"You mean they don't want him caught?"

"They very much want him caught. They offered a reward of twenty-five thousand bucks to have him caught and returned to the institution from which he escaped."

"But wouldn't publicity help?"

"It would, and there has been some publicity. If the name doesn't click with you, you just haven't read the right papers at the right time. But they held that down, and they've spent thou-sands circularizing police offices and detective agencies to be on the lookout for him. That's more effective, and reflects less on the family name. Every copper in the country knows who Paul Verne is, and is trying for that twenty-five grand. And every private detective, too."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars! Why Eddie, think what we could do with that!"

"Yeah," I said, "we could use it. But don't get your hopes up, because I'm just playing a long shot. A tip and a hunch."

Our dinner came and I made her wait until we'd eaten before I told her any more. When I eat, I like to eat.

"The tip," I told her, after we had finished dessert, "was Springfield. Never mind exactly how, because it's complicated, but I got a tip Paul Verne was in Springfield. That's why I sug-gested we come here for our honeymoon."

"Well," she said, "I suppose we had to go somewhere, and after all--"

"Twenty-five grand isn't hay," I finished for her. "As for the hunch--it's a poor thing, but my own. Where's the last place you'd look for an escaped loony?"

"I don't . . . You mean in a loony-bin?"

"Brilliant. What could possibly be a better hide-out? A private sanitarium, of course, where everything is the best and a patient can enter voluntarily and leave when he likes. I've made a study of Paul Verne, and I think it's just the kind of idea that would appeal to him."

"Would he have money? Could he afford a hide-out like that?"

"Money is no object. He's got scads."

"But why this particular sanitarium?"

I shrugged. "Just a better chance than most. First, I think he's in Springfield, and he isn't at any of the others."

"How do you know that?"

"There are only two others here. One is for the criminally insane. He certainly wouldn't commit himself *there* voluntarily--too hard to get out again, and too much investigation involved. The other's for women only. But Stanley's place is ideal. Brand new, takes wealthy patients with minor warps, comfortable--everything."

Kit sighed. "Well, I don't suppose it'll take you more than a day to look over the patients and find out."

"Longer than that," I said. "I haven't too much idea what he looks like."

She stared at me. "Mean you're working on this and haven't even gone to the trouble to get a photograph?"

"There aren't any. Paul Verne did a real job of escaping from the sanitarium out West. He robbed the office of all the papers in his own case--fingerprints, photographs, everything. Took along all their money, too."

I thought it best not to mention to Kit that he'd burned the place down as well.

"Then he went to his parents' home. They were away on vaca-tion or something, and he destroyed all the photographs of him-self, even those of himself as a kid. He also took along all the money and jewelry loose, enough to last him ten years."

"But you have a description, haven't you?"

"I have a description as he was three years ago," I said. "A guy can change quite a bit in three years, and if you haven't got a photograph you're not in much luck. But I know he's got brown hair, unless he dyed or bleached it. I know he weighed a hundred sixty then. Of course he might have taken on a paunch since then, or got thin from worry. I know he's got brown eyes--unless he went to the trouble of getting tinted contact lenses to change their apparent color."

I grinned at her. "But I do know he's within a couple of inches of five feet nine. He might make himself seem a couple inches under by acquiring a stoop, or a couple inches over by wearing these special shoes with built-up inner heels."

Kit grimaced. "So you'll know that any man you see between five feet seven and five eleven might be him. That's a big help. How *will* you know?"

I told her I didn't know.

"If it were just a matter of spotting him from a photograph or a good description," I said, "he'd have been picked up long ago. I can probably eliminate some of the patients right away. The others I'll have to study, and use my brains on. It might take longer than a few days."

"Well, then I'm glad you didn't go out this evening."

"This evening," I told her, "I'm going to study. There's a book-store on Grand Avenue that's open evenings. I've got to pick up a few books on psychology and psychiatry and bone up a bit to make good my story to Dr. Stanley that I know something about it. I don't want to get bounced the first day because I don't know pyromania from pyorrhoea."

We got the books, and Kit helped me study them. Fortunately or otherwise, there was a Kraft-Ebbing in the lot and we spent most of the time reading that. But I did manage to read a little in some of the others, enough to pick up a bit of the patter.

## A New Job

The Stanley Sanitarium was out at the edge of town, as all respectable sanitariums should be. There was a high brick wall around it, and barbed wire on top of the wall.

That rather surprised me. So did the size and impregnability of the iron-work gate in the wall. I couldn't get in it, and had to ring a bell in one of the gate posts.

A surly looking guy with thick black eyebrows and rumpled hair came to answer it. He glared at me as though I had leprosy. "Eddie Anderson," I said. "I got an appointment with Dr. Stanley."

"Just a minute." He called the sanitarium on a telephone that was in a sentry box by the gate, and then said, "Okay," and unlocked the gate.

He walked with me up to the house, slightly more friendly.

"I reckon you're the new patient," he said. "My name's Garvey. The other patients'll tell you you can trust me, Mr. Anderson. So if there's any little errands you want done or anything you want brought in, why just see me, that's all."

"That's fine," I said, "and if I ever go crazy, I'll remember it."

"Huh?" he said. "You mean you ain't crazy?"

"If I am," I said, "I haven't found it out yet. But don't worry. That doesn't

prove anything."

I left him looking doubtful and wondering whether he'd talked too much.

Dr. Philemon Stanley had a white walrus mustache and the kind of glasses that dangle at the end of a black silk ribbon. He twirled them in a tight little circle while he talked. I had to look away from that shiny circle to keep from getting dizzy. I wondered vaguely if he used them on patients for hypnotic effect.

"Uh--Mr. Anderson," he said, "have you had any experience at all in--uh--confidential investigations? That is, in making confidential reports?"

"Can't say I have," I told him. Not quite truthfully, of course. I couldn't say that was my real occupation. "But I'd be glad to try my hand at it."

"Fine, Mr. Anderson. I intend to try out a new theory of mine in the study of mental aberration. A method, not of treatment, but of more accurate diagnosis and study of the patient. It is my belief that a person suffering from a mental ailment is never completely frank or completely at ease in the presence of a doctor, or even of an attendant. There is a tendency, almost invariably, either to exaggerate symptoms or to minimize and conceal them."

"Sounds quite logical," I admitted.

"Whereas," said Dr. Stanley, twirling his glass a bit harder in mild excitement, "they undoubtedly act entirely natural before the other patients. You see what I'm driving at?"

"Not exactly."

"I would like an attendant--someone experienced, as you are, with pathological cases--to pose as a patient, to mix among the other patients, become friendly with them, play cards with them, win their confidence as fellow-sufferer, and to report confidentially on their progress. The job, I fear, would be a bit confining."

He broke off, watching me for my reaction.

It wasn't good, at first. Then I began to see the advantages of it. Certainly I'd be in a better position to find out what I wanted to know, in the status of a fellow patient.

But it wouldn't do to appear eager. I asked about salary and when he named a figure higher than an attendant's wages would be, I let it convince me.

"My clothes," I said. "Will it appear suspicious to anyone who saw me come here if I leave, and then return with them?"

"Not at all. You are, as far as anyone knows, committing yourself to me voluntarily. All my patients, incidentally, are here of their own free will, although they are under restraint to stay within the grounds for the period of their cure. There will be nothing unusual about your having had a preliminary interview."

"Fine," I said. "I'll get my stuff and be back. Right after lunch, say. Oh, by the way, just how insane am I to act, and in what direction?"

"I would suggest a mild psychosis. Something you're more than usually familiar with. Nothing that would force me to keep you under restraint or limit your freedom in circulating about with the other patients. Alcoholism. . . . No, you look too healthy for that."

"How about kleptomania?" I suggested. "I'd have to swipe a few things from time to time, but I'll put them under my bed, and if your fountain pen disappears, you'll know where to look for it."

"Excellent. Any time this afternoon will be satisfactory, if you have affairs of your own to wind up. Uh--you sign nothing, of course, but if any patient asks, tell him you committed yourself here for say, sixty days. At the end of that time, we'll know how satisfactory our arrangement is."

We shook hands and he sat down again at his desk while I went to the door and opened it. I took one step to go into the outer hallway, and then I stopped short as though I'd run into a brick wall.

I stood staring, and then I wrenched my eyes away and looked back at my employer.

I had to clear my throat before I could say:

"Dr. Stanley?"

"Yes, Anderson."

"You have any homicidal patients here?"

"Homicidal? Of course not. That is. . . . Of course not."

"There is a corpse in the middle of the hallway, with the hilt of a dagger sticking out of his chest," I said. "Right over the heart."

"Eh? Oh, I should have warned you. That would be Harvey Toler."

It didn't faze him in the least. He didn't even get up from his desk or reach for the telephone. Was he crazy, or I?

"I don't care if it's J. Edgar Hoover," I said. "The fact remains that there's a knife in his chest."

I heard a sound in the hall and looked through the door. The corpse had got up and was walking away. He was a slender, dark young man with thick shell-rimmed glasses. He put something in his pocket that looked like the hilt of a dagger without any blade.

I looked back at Dr. Stanley.

"Harvey Toler," he repeated. "Uncontrollable exhibitionism. He must have heard I had a caller in my office. A strange case--arrested development in one respect only. A brilliant mind, but he cannot control impulses to shock people. I want particularly careful reports on his conduct among the other patients. I think you'll like him when you get to know him."

"I'm sure I will," I said. "Is that a favorite stunt of his, with the dagger?"

"He's used it before, but he seldom repeats himself. He may . . . Well, I'd rather not tell you too much about him. I'd rather have your impressions without prejudice."

Without prejudice, my grandmother, I thought as I walked to the bus line. If Harvey Toler pulled another one like that one, I'd take advantage of being a fellow-patient to pop him on the nose, exhibitionism or not. And maybe that would be the best cure, at that.

I went to my rooming house, told my landlady I'd landed a job and she could keep the rest of the week's rent I'd paid her.

Then I went to the hotel and woke up Kit. She'd had early breakfast with me and then gone back to sleep.

"Got the job," I told her. "And I'll have to live there. Hope it won't take me more than a few days to decide one way or the other about whether I'm on the right track or not."

"What is the job, Eddie?"

"I'm in charge of the hypochondriac ward, honey. It's con-fidential. I'd better not tell you about my duties."

"Eddie! Be serious. What *is* the job?"

I told her and she wouldn't believe me. But by dint of repeating it four or five times, I finally convinced her.

I packed a few things in a suitcase, rather regretfully leaving my automatic out of it. Hardly the sort of thing I'd be carrying, if I was what I pretended to be. But if I really found Paul Verne, it might not be any picnic to handle him. I took a chance on including brass knuckles, rolling them up carefully inside a pair of thick woolen socks.

Kit and I had lunch and then she walked with me to the bus. I told her I might or might not be able to phone her. I couldn't be sure till I knew the set-up at the sanitarium. And not to worry if she didn't hear from me for a week.

"Eddie, why didn't you tell me the truth?" she said.

"Huh? What didn't I tell you?"

"That Paul Verne is a homicidal maniac. That what you're going to do is dangerous, really dangerous. After breakfast this morning, I went to a newspaper office and I read their file of clippings on him. I wouldn't have tried to stop you, Eddie. But--but I want you to be honest with me."

From her face, I could tell she was being brave.

"Okay, honey," I said. "I just didn't want you to worry."

The bus pulled up.

"I won't, Eddie," she said.

I kissed her good-by and got on. She turned away, crying quietly, and I felt like a heel.

I was still feeling punk when I rang the bell that brought Garvey to the gate.

"You again?" he said, and opened it.

I grinned at him. "Well, I found it out," I said.

"Found what out?"

"I'm crazy."

"Huh?"

"That's it. I told you this morning that if I was, I hadn't found it out yet. I found it out."

He digested that as we went up the walk.

"Oh, well, what I told you goes, then," he finally said. "If you want anything just let me know."

We had reached the door, and he turned to leave.

I said, "Ssst," and when he turned back, I leaned over and whispered:

"Can you get me a machine-gun?"

He backed off.

Dr. Stanley turned me over to an attendant who took me to Room Twenty and told me it was to be mine. The attendant said if I wanted he would show me around the place, so I left my suit-case on the bed and went with him.

My room was at the end of the corridor and was the highest number on the second floor. My guide--fortunately he was over six feet tall, so I didn't have to

study him as a possible suspect--told me that these twenty rooms, with five others on the first floor, were all the rooms assigned to patients, and that attendants and other employees had quarters on the third floor. He said that, counting me, there were now twelve male patients and seven female. The remaining rooms were empty.

He took me first to the main recreation room on the first floor. There was a bridge game going on in one corner. My friend Harvey Toler was one of the players. The others were a nondescript little woman with gray hair and mousy eyes, a gaunt, dissipated-looking man of about forty, and an anemic youth. They were introduced to me as Miss Zaner, Frank Betterman and Billy Kendall.

Betterman and Kendall went down on my list as possibles. As we walked on, I elicited from my guide the fact that Betterman was an alcoholic--a dipsomaniac--and Kendall the anemic, was suffering from recurrent amnesia. Periodically, he would forget who he was and where he was and what he was doing there.

We saw another recreation room in the basement, with ping-pong tables and a shuffleboard set-up as well as one billiard table with warped cues and a few rips in the cloth. We encountered several other patients in our walk around the outside grounds, and I was introduced to each.

Five men, out of eight I met, could have been Paul Verne.

### White in Blackness

My guide excused himself on the ground of other duties, and I went to my room to unpack. There was a lock on the door of my room, I noticed, but the only keyhole was on the outside. From the inside, one just didn't lock the door.

I stood looking out the window for a moment at a man who, standing in the middle of the driveway, was turning in slow steady circles for no reason that I could discover.

Then I turned back into the room and reached for the handle of my suitcase to move it down to the end of the bed.

The pull nearly jerked my arm out of its socket. It felt as though someone had taken my clothes out of that suitcase and filled it up with paving blocks.

I stared at the suitcase. It was mine, all right.

So I opened it. My clothes were still in it, but packed much more tightly than I'd packed them, to make room for the object that had been added.

It was a tommy gun.

I lifted it out and looked at the drum. It was loaded to capacity, and the bullets were real.

I put it down on the bed alongside the suitcase and stood staring at it unbelievably.

So Garvey did little errands for patients, huh?

But he had backed off when I'd asked him for a machine-gun.

It just didn't make sense. Granting that he had taken me seriously, granting that he was screwy enough to be willing, where in thunder could he have got a tommy gun?

And why, thinking me crazy, would he have given me one? He was supposed to be sane.

The more I thought about it, the crazier it got.

Finally it occurred to me to look through the rest of my stuff to be sure it was all there.

It all seemed to be. Five shirts, one suit besides the one I was wearing, handkerchiefs, socks. I hadn't counted the smaller items of laundry, but there seemed to be about as many of them as I'd put into the suitcase.

I had just thrown them in, though, and now they were tightly packed to make room for the machine-gun. To give my hands something to do, and my brain a rest, I moved them over to the empty drawers of the bureau. Shirts in the big drawer, handkerchiefs and socks in the upper smaller.

And then I remembered something. None of the rolled-up pairs of socks had been heavier than it should be.

I found the pair of thick, woolen socks into which I had rolled the brass knuckles. I didn't have to unroll it. I could tell merely by feeling. The knucks were gone.

I unrolled the socks to be sure.

And then the humor of the thing hit me square, and I sat down on the edge of the bed and began laughing as though I belonged there, laughing like a blasted loony.

Whoever had given me that loaded tommy gun had gone to the trouble of stealing my set of brass knuckles!

"Lovely," I thought, "perfectly lovely."

Stanley Sanitarium, Paul Verne or no Paul Verne, was going to be an interesting place.

After a while sanity came back to me, and with it the realization that I had to do something about that tommy gun. What?

Take it to Dr. Stanley and tell him the truth about it? If he believed me, okay.

But suppose he didn't--and I wouldn't blame him a bit. Suppose he thought, or even suspected, that I had brought it in myself? Out on my ear I would go, before I got another look at the sanitarium. Or I would have Hobson's choice of paying my fare and signing on as a bona-fide loony and committing myself.

On second thought, I doubted he would give me that alternative. He took "mild psychoses" only. Would he figure a man who pulled a stunt like that with a loaded tommy gun was suffering from a mild psychosis? Hardly. He would turn me over to the police for investigation.

And anyway how could I do an about-face from being a man in need of a job to a man able to pay the plenty high tariff a place like this would charge?

Nope, Dr. Stanley might believe me, or he might not. If I took that chance, I was seriously jeopardizing my "in" here before I even began to accomplish my purpose.

But what then?

Well, there was a tiny penknife on my watch chain. Using it as a screwdriver, I took the breech of the tommy gun apart and took out the firing-pin and the tiny block of metal that held it. I took the bullets out of the drum, too.

Then, leaving the tommy gun, with its teeth pulled, behind me, I went down the corridor a few doors and knocked on a door at random. Number Twelve. As I hoped, there wasn't any answer, and when I tried the door, it opened.

I went back for the tommy gun and put it in a drawer of the bureau in Room Twelve. The room was occupied, because there were shirts in the drawer. I didn't take time to try to find out whose room it was. Undoubtedly the whole place would know, when the occupant of that room found what was in his bureau.

Then I went downstairs, avoiding the recreation room, and went outside. I wandered about the grounds until I found a secluded spot behind a small storage shed, and there I buried the bullets. The firing-pin block I threw over the wall, as far as I could throw it. Somebody might find it some day, but they wouldn't know what it was.

I got back to the building just in time for dinner. A bell was ringing.

Dinner was unexciting, although the food was good. It was served in a dining room with half a dozen tables for four, at which the guests seemed to group themselves at will. I found myself with two table companions. Frank Betterman, the dipsomaniac, sat across from me, and at my left sat a man whose only obvious claim for presence there was that he wore a folded newspaper hat, the kind children make.

Betterman ate without talking or taking his eyes off his plate. The man with the paper hat talked only of the weather at first but with the meat course he warmed up on human destiny and some complex theory of his that seemed similar to astrology except that the affairs of men were run, not by the stars and planets, but by volcanic activity within the seething core of earth.

I followed him, more or less, as far as dessert, and then was hopelessly lost.

On the way out, Betterman came up alongside me.

"Did you bring in any liquor, Anderson?" he said quietly. "I've got to have a drink or . . . Well, I've just got to."

"No," I admitted, "I didn't. Have you tried Garvey?"

"Garvey!" There was the ultimate of scorn in his voice. "That man's on the wrong side of the fence here. He's mad."

"In what way?"

Betterman shrugged. "Cadges you to run errands for you, and then doesn't. Laughs about it behind your back, to the other patients."

"Oh," I said.

Then anyone here might know the joking request for a machine-gun I had made to Garvey. Not that it helped me any to know that.

I played ping-pong in the basement with Betterman for a while, which gave me a chance to study him. Aside from being nervous and jittery, he seemed normal enough.

Lights out at eleven was the rule, but by ten-thirty I was ready to go to my room and sort out my confused impressions. Already all but a few of the patients had disappeared from the recreation room and those few were ones who interested me least.

I walked up the stairs and along the dimly lighted corridor. The door of Room Eleven, just across the hall from the room into which I had put the tommy gun, was open. There was a light on somewhere in the room, out of my range of vision.

I started past the open doorway, glanced in--and stopped abruptly.

On the blank white wall opposite the open door was a shadow, the shadow of

a man hanging by his neck from a rope. Obviously dead, for there was not the slightest movement.

I stepped through the doorway and turned to the corner in which the man must be hanging.

"Hullo," said Harvey Toler.

He wasn't hanging by his neck. He was sitting comfortably in a well-padded chair, reading a book.

"Your name's Anderson, isn't it?" he said. "Come in and sit down."

I looked back at the wall, and the shadow of the hanging man was still there. It looked like a real shadow, not painted. I looked back toward the opposite corner and this time I saw the gimmick. Nothing more complicated than a bit of work with a black crayon on the white, translucent shade of the reading lamp. The six-inch figure there cast a six-foot shadow yonder.

"Clever," I said.

Toler smiled and looked pleased.

"Sit down," he repeated. "Care for a drink, perhaps?"

Without waiting for my answer, he put down his book and opened a door in the front of the little stand upon which the lamp stood. He took out two glasses and a quart bottle of whiskey, already opened and with only about a fifth of its contents left.

"You'll find the whiskey Garvey brings in is pretty smooth stuff," he said. "He robs you for it, but it's good."

I took the glass he handed me.

"Here's to crime," I said, and we drank.

It *was* smooth; didn't bite a bit. The only thing wrong was that it wasn't whiskey at all. It was cold tea.

"Another?" Toler asked.

I declined enthusiastically. For just a moment I felt a deep brotherly sympathy with Frank Betterman. It was part of my job, maybe, to stay and pump Harvey Toler so I could report on him. But after that business with the tea, the devil with it.

Excusing myself on the ground of being sleepy, I went on down the corridor to my own room.

I looked into the drawers and the closet but my stuff still seemed to be as I had left it, and nothing new had been added. I chucked under the bed the several items of silverware which I'd stolen from the dinner table, to carry out my role of klepto-maniac, and then undressed. I was just reaching for my pajamas when the lights went out.

I lay in bed in utter, perfect darkness, trying to think. But the only thought that came was the thought that if I stayed here long enough, I'd go crazy myself.

After a while I could see a thin crescent of moon and there was enough light in my room that I could make out the dark outline of the dresser and the doors.

Why, I wondered, in the name of sanity or insanity, had someone put that loaded tommy gun in my room? No sane person would have put it there. And how would an insane person have got it?

Was Frank Betterman right in thinking the gateman, Garvey, was on the wrong side of the fence in regard to insanity? If so, was Dr. Stanley crazy to hire a crazy

attendant? Frank Betterman had seemed sane except for his craving for liquor, and while a dipsomaniac may get DT's, he doesn't usually suffer from fixed delusions.

I wondered what would happen if Toler offered Betterman a drink of that zero-proof whiskey of his. If I knew anything about dipsomania, there would be a bloody murder on the spot.

"Nuts to it," I told myself. "I haven't been here long enough to get any answers. I'd better go to sleep."

I had just shut my eyes when I heard the sound of the door opening.

I didn't move, but my eyes jerked open and strained into the darkness.

Yes, the door was open all right and someone--or some-thing--in white was standing there in the doorway looking at me. I couldn't make out any details, for if there was a light in the hallway, it had been turned off.

Just something white. An attendant's white uniform? Or the white pajamas of a patient?

Still without moving, I braced myself for quick action. As soon as he stepped inside the room, I would jump him. Luckily, my only cover was a thin sheet that wouldn't hamper me much.

Then suddenly the figure wasn't there any more. Blackness instead of gray-white, and the sound of the door closing. The hallway light flashed back on. I could see the crack of it under the edge of the door.

That meant I could see who my visitor had been. Quietly I got out of bed, tiptoed to the door, and turned the knob.

The knob turned silently enough, but the door wouldn't open. It was locked.

## Mystery Patients

Calmly I went back to bed.

And lay there, getting less and less calm by the moment. It was silly for me to want to make any move tonight. I needed more time to study the people with whom I had come in contact.

But just the same, I couldn't sleep, and the longer I lay there, the less sleepy I got. My mind went in circles.

Finally I gave up, and got up. I got the little pencil flashlight from the pocket of my suit coat, and started to work on the lock. I got it open within ten minutes.

The hallway was empty, and all the doors along it were closed.

My bare feet made no sound in the hallway and on the stairs. The recreation room was dark, but there was a dim light in the corridor that led to the office.

The door of the office was locked, too, and that cost me another ten minutes or so. But time didn't matter. It couldn't be later than about one o'clock and I had the whole night ahead of me.

I took a look around the office, shading my tiny flashlight so its beam would not show outside. I don't know just what I was looking for. I opened a closet door and jumped back when a skeleton confronted me. But it was a conventional wired medical skeleton and entirely harmless. An odd thing, it occurred to me, for a psychiatrist to have, but possibly it was a relic of his medical student days, with which he hated to part.

There was a safe, a big one. It looked to be well beyond my lock-picking abilities. And it probably wouldn't contain anything of sufficient interest to justify the attempt.

The desk would probably have what I wanted. And I found it in the first drawer I opened.

A small card file of names and addresses. It was divided into two sections, one for patients and the other for employees. Into a notebook I quickly copied the names and addresses of all the male patients and male employees.

Oh, yes, it was remotely possible that Verne might be mas-querading as a woman. But the more likely prospects came first.

I found myself with a list of eleven male patients and four male employees. Then I began marking off those who couldn't possibly fit the description of Verne. First the attendant who was over six feet tall, and another who was barrel-chested and had arms like a gorilla. A man can change his weight by taking on fat, but he couldn't take on that sort of a muscular development.

Three of the patients were definitely too tall-- including the man with the paper hat and the inverted astrological theories. One was too short--only about five-feet five.

Seven patients left, two employees. I didn't mark off any more names, but I ticked off with check marks four which seemed the most unlikely of the nine. All four had physical characteristics so different from Verne's as to put them at the bottom of my list, if not to eliminate them entirely.

That left only five names as my best bets. They were not the only possibilities, but they were the ones who rated attention ahead of the others.

I picked up the telephone and, speaking so softly I couldn't have been heard outside the office, I gave the number of the New World Hotel and then gave my own room number.

Kit's sleepy voice answered.

"Take a pencil, honey," I said, "and copy down these names and addresses. Ready?"

When she was, I gave her the names and addresses of Garvey, Frank Betterman, Harvey Toler, Bill Kendall and Perry Evans. The latter was a paranoiac whom I'd seen in the recreation room and at dinner, but with whom I had not yet talked.

"Got 'em, Kit? Attagirl. Now here's one more name, only you get it for a different reason. Joe Unger. He has an office on the third floor of the Sprague Building here in town. Joe's a private detective and we've worked together. I mean, when he has any work in Chicago he throws it my way and when anything I'm working on, when I'm home, has a Springfield angle, Joe handles it for me.

"Now bright and early tomorrow morning--I think he gets to his office at eight--you look up Joe Unger and give him those names. Don't tell him where I am or what I'm working on, but have him get all the dope he can on each of those names."

Kit sounded wide awake now.

"How about the out-of-town ones?" she asked. "One's in Chicago and one in Indianapolis?"

"Joe can handle them by phone, somehow. Main thing I want to know is

whether they're on the up and up. One address might turn out to be a phony, and then I can concentrate my attention on that name. And any general information Unger can pick up will help. Tell him to get all he can in one full day's work."

"How shall I tell him to report to you, Eddie?"

"You can get the dope from him tomorrow evening. I'll phone you tomorrow night about this time. Oh, yes, one other thing I want him to check. What kind of a reputation Dr. Stanley has. Whether he rates as being ethical and honest."

"All right, Eddie. But why?"

"The bare possibility that Paul Verne might be here-- if he's here at all--with Stanley's knowledge. Verne would have plenty of money, and he might bribe his way in and make it worth anyone's while."

"All right, I'll have him check on that. What's happened since you got there?"

"Here? Not a thing. Life is dull and dreary."

"Eddie, are you lying to me?"

"I wouldn't think of it, honey. 'By now. I'll call you tomorrow night."

I got back up to my room without being seen.

After I fixed the lock back the way it had been, I wedged the blade of my penknife between the door and the jamb, near the top. I sleep lightly, and if the door opened again during the night the fall of the knife onto the floor would wake me.

But the knife was still in place when I awakened in the morning.

Just after lunch I was summoned to Dr. Stanley's office.

"Close the door, Anderson," he said, "and then sit down."

I took the chair across the desk from him.

I spoke quietly. "You want a report on what I've seen?"

"You needn't lower your voice. This room is quite sound-proof--naturally, as I interview my patients here. No, I didn't have a report in mind. You haven't been here long enough. It will take you several days to get to know the patients well enough to--uh--recognize changes in their mental attitudes.

"What I had in mind was to ask you to concentrate for the moment on Billy Kendall. Try to win his confidence and get him to talk to you freely. I am quite disturbed about him."

"That's the fellow with recurrent amnesia, isn't it?" I said.

Dr. Stanley nodded. "At least up to now, that is all that's been wrong with him. But--" He hesitated, twirling the gold-rimmed glasses faster on their silk ribbon, and then apparently made up his mind to tell me the rest of it. "But this morning the maid who cleaned his room found something strange under the bed. An--uh--extremely lethal weapon. A submachine-gun, to be frank."

I looked suitably surprised. "Loaded?" I asked.

"Fortunately, no. But the mystery is no less deep for that. Two mysteries, in fact. First, why he would want one. He has shown, thus far, no symptoms of--uh--that nature. Second, where and how he could have obtained it. The second question is the more puzzling, but the first is, in a way, more important. I mean, it involves the question of whether or not he is still a fit inmate for this particular institution. In short, whether it may be necessary to suggest his transfer to a place where they are prepared to cope with that sort of insanity. You see what I mean?"

"Perfectly, Doctor," I said. "I'll look him up at once." I stood up. "What

room is Kendall in?"

It wasn't until I was out in the hall that I realized he had said Room Six. I had put that tommy gun in Room Twelve. Had the occupant of Room Twelve found it and passed the buck? Or what?

Billy Kendall could wait. I went to Room Twelve and knocked on the door. Frank Betterman opened it and I pretended I had known it was his room and suggested a game of ping-pong.

So we played ping-pong and I couldn't think of any way of asking him if he had found a tommy gun under his bed without admitting I had put it there. Which hardly seemed diplomatic.

I managed to sit at the same table with Billy Kendall at supper. But he wouldn't talk at all, except to answer my questions with monosyllables.

I swiped another pocketful of silverware.

A bridge game constituted the excitement of the evening and I began to think I had been telling Kit the truth in saying events were dull and dismal.

After turning in, I waited until well after midnight before my second foray into the office to phone Kit. She didn't sound sleepy this time. She had been waiting for the call.

"Get anything exciting?"

"Yes, Eddie. That Indianapolis address was a phony. There isn't any such street there."

The Indianapolis address had been that of Harvey Toler. I whistled softly. Was Harvey Toler the man I wanted?

"Thanks a million, angel," I said. "Now I can go ahead."

"Wait, Eddie. There was something funny about one or two of the others. Frank Betterman--his address was okay, a cheap rooming house, but he'd lived there. Used to be a reporter on the Springfield *Argus*. He got fired for drinking too much."

"But that makes sense," I said. "He's a dipso--"

Then I saw what she meant. Where would a fired newspaper reporter get the kind of dough to stay at a fancy sanitarium? Particularly a lush, who would hardly have saved his money while he was working.

"And Kendall, William Kendall," Kit said. "He used to work for a bank and left there under a cloud. There was a shortage, and he was suspected of embezzlement. But they couldn't prove anything and he was never arrested."

"Um," I said. "Maybe that's where he got the dough to stay here. And since he's got amnesia, maybe he forgot where it came from. What about my friend Garvey?"

"That one was okay. He's got a sister, married and with six kids, living at that address. The other patient, Perry Evans, we couldn't get much on."

"That was the Chicago address, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and it's a hotel. A little one, Joe Unger said. All we could find out was that Perry Evans had stayed there for three months up to a month ago. They didn't know anything about his business, or wouldn't tell."

Nuts, I thought. That didn't eliminate Evans, by any means. For all anyone knew, Paul Verne could have stayed three months in a Chicago hotel under that

name. But the heck with it, Harvey Toler had given a nonexistent out-of-town address.

"Okay, honey," I said. "I'll keep him in mind as second choice. What'd you find out about Doc Stanley?"

"He came here only a little over a month ago, rented the prop-erty out there. It had been built ten years ago as a small, select girls' school.

"And failed three years ago," I said, "and has been vacant since. Yes, toots, that was all in the newspapers. Also that Stanley came here from Louisville, Kentucky. What I want to know is about his reputation."

"Good, as far as we can find out. Joe Unger called a Louisville detective agency and they made inquiries there. He practiced as a psychiatrist for ten years there, then got sick and gave up his practice a year ago. His reputation was good, but presumably he didn't want to start at the bottom again to build up a new practice when he recovered, and got the idea of starting a sanitar-ium instead."

"I suppose somebody told him he could get this place here for a song," I said. "So he came to Springfield. Okay, honey. Anything else?"

"No, Eddie. How soon will you be through there?"

"Not over a few days, I hope. I'll concentrate on my friend Toler with one eye and Perry Evans with the other, and I ought to know pretty soon. 'By now.'"

### Death in the Dark

After I hung up the phone, I sat there in the dark thinking. For some reason, I can think better sitting in an office, even in the dark, than in bed.

The only trouble was that the more I thought, the less I knew. Harvey Toler, the exhibitionist, had given a false address when signing on here. That might mean he was Paul Verne--if Paul Verne was really here at all. But it might mean nothing at all. There are plenty of reasons why people give false addresses. I had given one myself, and I wasn't Paul Verne. Maybe he was ashamed of being here and didn't want his friends to find out where he was. Maybe giving himself a false identity--if his name as well as the address was phony--was a facet of his exhibitionism. And wasn't Perry Evans' case even more suspicious, on second thought? Paul Verne wasn't a dope. Would he give an address which a single phone call would prove to be false? Wouldn't he be more likely to have established an identity somewhere?

Say, he had been hiding out at a little Chicago hotel. Coming here, he would use the identity he had used there, so if some-one--like me--got curious, he could be checked back that far and no farther.

And if Perry Evans were genuine, and had enough money to afford this sanitarium, why had he been staying at a place like that? And where had a broken-down newspaper hack got the money to stay here?

And Billy Kendall, ex-bank clerk. Had he or had he not been guilty of embezzlement? And if so, where did he fit into the picture?

Nuts, I thought.

Only Garvey's case had been completely on the up and up. And Garvey had interested me most of the bunch. It had been Garvey I had asked for a machine-gun. And got one.

Again, nuts.

I went back upstairs. Maybe some sleep would do me good. I hadn't slept much last night and it was already two o'clock tonight.

The light was still out in the upstairs hallway. I groped my way along the wall to my door at the end of the corridor.

I opened it, part way. It hit against some yielding but solid obstacle. Six inches, perhaps, it opened. Then a few more as I shoved harder. There it stuck.

I had the pencil flashlight in my hand, although I hadn't been using it along the hallway. I reached inside the door and turned it on, aimed downward. I could barely get my head inside the door far enough to see what lay there.

It was a body, lying on its back. A man, in pajamas, with blood matted in his black hair. It looked like--

And then something hard and heavy swished through the air and grazed the top of my head. Just grazed it, luckily, for the blow was meant to kill.

Pain blinded me, but I didn't have to be able to see to jerk my head back out of that door. And my hand, still on the knob, pulled the door shut after me.

Whoever was in there could probably open it from the inside, as I had, but not for several minutes.

Then, as a shot roared out inside the room and a little black hole appeared in the panel of the door, I dropped flat. And, as four more shots came through the door, at different angles, I rolled to a corner of the hallway and hugged the floor. None of them hit me.

Five shots was all that came through the door. That meant that the killer hadn't emptied his gun. A revolver holds six shots, and an automatic may hold more.

Then silence. I listened carefully but the man inside didn't seem to be working on the lock to let himself out.

I stood up cautiously, and used my handkerchief to wipe off blood that was running down my forehead and into my eyes.

There wasn't silence any more now; there was bedlam. From most of the rooms along that corridor came voices yelling questions as to what was happening, wanting to be let out. Several doors were being hammered by impatient fists.

I heard footsteps running along the corridor overhead on the third floor, which meant that attendants were coming. If I waited for them it would be too late to find out what I most wanted to know--which of the patients were still in their rooms and which were not.

I ran along that corridor, jerking doors open. In most cases, the occupant of the room was right behind the door. If he wasn't I stuck my head inside and played my flashlight on the bed. I didn't take time to answer questions or make explanations, and I finished the corridor by the time the tall attendant, in white uniform, and Garvey, pulling trousers up over a nightshirt, came pounding down the stairs.

Two rooms had been empty. Harvey Toler's room where, just the night before I had been given a toast in cold tea. And Room Four, Perry Evans' room.

Two gone, and both of them were in my room. One was dead and the other was a homicidal maniac. But why *two* of them? Paul Verne must have learned, in some way, that I was a detective and had gone to my room to kill me. But had he

taken some-one along for company, and then killed him?

And which was which? Both Harvey Toler and Perry Evans had black hair. Either one could have been lying there just inside the door. And Joe Unger's investigation outside had not eliminated either one. Toler's address had been a fake, and Perry Evans' address had been the little hotel in Chicago, an easy-to-get address that made him almost more suspect than a phony one.

Betterman had me by one arm and the attendant by the other, and both were asking questions so fast and getting in each other's way. I couldn't find an opening to answer them. Frank Betterman's face, I noticed, looked more haggard than usual.

Then Dr. Stanley, fastening the cord of a bathrobe, was coming down the stairs, and his first question shut up Betterman and the attendant and gave me a chance to answer.

He took a quick glance down the hall at the bullet-holes in the door of my room, as though to verify what I was saying, and then interrupted me long enough to send the attendant to phone the police.

"You don't know which shot which?" he demanded. "And you think the other one is Paul Verne?"

His face was white and strained. The name of Paul Verne meant something to him. Every psychiatrist in the country, as well as every copper, knew of Paul Verne.

I nodded. "I doubt if he's in there now, though. He can't hope to get out this way any more, but there's the window. There's soft ground under it and he could drop. He's probably over the fence by now."

The words were bitter in my mouth as I spoke them, because I had failed. The police would have to take up the chase from here, and even if they caught their quarry, I wouldn't get a smell of that twenty-five grand.

If only I'd had a gun, it might have been different. But it would have been nothing but suicide for me to have gone through that door, or to have run around outside to try heading him off. I would do a lot for twenty-five thousand dollars, but suicide wasn't one of them. . . .

Police.

The place was run over with policemen, inside and out.

The body in my room had been that of Harvey Toler. And he hadn't been playing dead this time. The back of his head had been bashed in by something that could have been, and probably was, the butt end of a pistol or automatic.

Perry Evans was gone and there was a little triangle of check-ered cloth stuck on a barb of the barbed wire on top of the wall. Evans had a checkered suit and it was gone from his room; his other suits hung in a neat row in his closet.

Squad cars, every one available, were searching the neighborhood. Railroad and bus terminals were being watched. So were freight trains and highways. You know the sort of thing.

Apparently the shock of discovering he'd had Paul Verne among his inmates had slowed down Dr. Stanley's thinking a bit. Although I had told him the whole story, it still hadn't dawned on him that I had taken the job there solely for that purpose and that I would not be staying.

"We'll tell that to the police privately, of course, Anderson," he said. "Or the patients will find out you aren't really one of them and then your usefulness will be

ended."

I shrugged and let it go at that. I was too annoyed at losing a chance at twenty-five grand to care whether the boss thought I was staying or not.

I talked to Captain Cross, who was in charge, and to some of the other detectives, privately, and showed my credentials. And I avoided talking to the other patients so I wouldn't have to explain to them why I had not been in my room when the fireworks started.

Most of the patients were downstairs. Few were willing to return to their rooms. The whole building was lighted up like a Christmas tree.

I wandered outside and walked around the grounds. Looking for something; I didn't know what.

The whole place, inside and out, had been searched. The police had recognized the possibility that the bit of cloth on the barbed wire might have been a ruse and that Perry Evans might have doubled back and hidden somewhere here. They looked everywhere a man could hide and some places he couldn't.

I leaned back against a tree and stared at the building, particularly at my own window. The photographers were up there now. What had happened in that room, in my room, tonight? Verne must have discovered who I was and what I was doing there and come to kill me. But how had Harvey Toler got in the way, and got his best chance to play the rôle of corpse?

Harvey Toler worried me. More dead than when he had been alive. Why had he used a phony address?

There are plenty of reasons, aside from being a homicidal maniac, why a man might give a wrong address. Not all of them criminal reasons. But it was a coincidence, the devil of a coincidence, that in this particular case a wrong address had been given. And Billy Kendall, the lad who couldn't remember who he was part of the time. Who had maybe had something to do with money being gone from a bank, although they couldn't prove it. And maybe he didn't have anything to do with it. It started to go round and round inside my head and it didn't make any sense.

Perry Evans was gone, so Perry Evans had been Paul Verne all right, but where had a broken-down newspaperman like Frank Betterman got the dough to take his booze cure at a place like this?

It was nuttier than a fruit cake, and the more I thought about the whole thing the screwier it got.

Screwier and screwier and finally, there in the dark, it got so bad it began to make sense.

There was *one* way of looking at it that added it up to some-thing so monstrously crazy that it almost had to be true.

I grinned up at the lighted window of my room and then I went inside for a moment and borrowed a big flashlight from Captain Cross.

"Sure," he said. "But what do you want it for?"

"Maybe I can find Perry Evans for you."

"In the grounds here? We looked high and low."

"But maybe not low enough," I said, and before I had to explain what I meant by that, I made my escape.

There was one really likely place, and if what I wanted wasn't there, I would

have to start a systematic search.

But I went to the likely place, and it was there.

## No Nuts

When I went back in, I gave Cross his flashlight.

"Find him already?" he wanted to know. "Where's he hiding?"

"Back of the garage," I said. "He dug a hole and pulled it in after him. He's buried there, or somebody is."

He stared at me.

"That's the one place where the ground's soft and easy to dig," I said, "and you wouldn't have to pull up and replace turf. It's been smoothed over pretty carefully, but you can see where it is. It'll probably be pretty shallow."

He still just stared at me.

"Don't blame your men for not finding it," I said. "They were looking for a live man hiding, and live men don't hide under-ground."

There was still disbelief in his eyes, but he went to the door and gave some orders, and then he came back.

"You mean he wasn't Paul Verne?" he said.

"I got to make a phone call," I told him. "Long distance. Come on in the office if you want to listen."

There was quite a congregation of patients in the office, talking it over. Dr. Stanley, still looking worried stiff, was trying to calm them. A plainclothesman, looking bored, was leaning in one corner of the room. Except for the pitch of the voices, it sounded like a ladies' tea.

But I picked up the phone anyway, and said, "Long distance," and when the operator came on I said, "Get me the home of Roger Wheeler Verne in San Andria, California. Yeah, I'll hold the line."

It was quite a while to hang on to a telephone, but it kept me out of local conversations.

After a while the operator said, "Here's your party," and a male voice said, "Roger Verne speaking."

This time when I started to talk, all the other voices stopped and everybody listened.

"This is Eddie Anderson, Mr. Verne," I said. "Private detective. I've located your son alive, and I'm about to turn him over to the authorities. I wanted to tell you first so there could be no dispute about the reward."

"Excellent, Mr. Anderson. I assure you there will be no difficulty about that."

"Thanks," I said. "You'll probably have another phone call shortly, as soon as the police have him."

As I put the phone down, Captain Cross growled:

"What kind of chisellers do you think we are?"

I grinned at him. "I don't know. What kind are you? All I know is I've had difficulty with rewards before, so you can't blame me for playing safe."

There was tension in the room, plenty of it, as I turned around.

"Frank Betterman," I said.

He was standing behind Dr. Stanley's chair at the desk, and he looked startled and backed to the wall. I went on around the desk after him.

Dr. Stanley turned in his chair and gave Betterman a startled, frightened look, and then pulled open a drawer of his desk that had been partly open before, and his hand jerked out of the drawer with an automatic in it.

"Attaboy, Doc," I said, as I rounded the end of the desk. "Aim it at him. He's a killer. He might get you."

As Dr. Stanley's automatic swung around to cover Betterman, I was right beside Stanley, and I dived for the automatic. I caught his gun wrist in both my hands and bore it down to the floor as I pulled him out of the chair.

The gun fired once as his knuckles hit the floor, but the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the molding. Then I had the gun twisted out of his hand and had his arm turned behind his back, and it was all over. Even the strength of a homicidal maniac can't break an arm-twist like that.

"Sorry, Frank," I said, to Betterman. "But if I hadn't played it that way, he'd have shot several of us before we got him. I saw his hand keeping near that partly open drawer and I knew there'd be a gun in it. Had to stall till I got near enough to jump him."

Frank Betterman wiped sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand.

"You mean Stanley is this Paul Verne?" he said.

I nodded. "I might have known he wouldn't be without an identity that would stand checking. He probably killed the real Dr. Philemon Stanley in Louisville, took over his identity and came here. He couldn't have impersonated him where he was known, of course, but it was easy enough here."

"You better be right, Anderson," Captain Cross said. "I don't get all of it. Why'd he kill those other two guys? I know a nut doesn't need a reason, but he had a good hideout here and was not suspected."

"And he wanted to keep it," I said. "Those weren't motiveless murders, either of them. He wanted to kill me, because he found out why I was here and he knew I'd catch wise sooner or later once I suspected Paul Verne was here. Probably he heard me talking on the phone, via an extension, last night, and decided to kill me. So earlier in the night he killed Perry Evans and hid the body and--"

"Why?" Cross demanded. "What's killing Perry Evans got to do with killing you?"

I grinned at him loftily.

"So there wouldn't be an unsolved murder. I'd be dead and Evans gone, with a piece of cloth from his suit on the barbed wire. Two and two make four, and if the Verne angle pops up, why Evans was Verne and he killed me and scrambled."

"Umm," said Cross. "But what about Toler?"

"Toler burgled my room while I was downstairs tonight. I'll tell you why later. Skip it for the moment. And Verne--Dr. Stanley--was waiting here to kill me when I came back, and in the dark he got Toler by mistake. But he found out he'd got the wrong man and waited for me. It wouldn't have put any crimp in his plans. Perry Evans, missing, would have taken the blame for two murders instead of one. But he missed killing me, even after firing a gun through the door. And I got a crowd in the hall outside so he couldn't come out after me that way, so he went back upstairs to

his own room."

"You mean he dropped out the window, ran around the outside and went upstairs?"

"I doubt it," I interrupted. "His room is right over mine. I imagine he came in my window by a rope or something let down from his window. And all he had to do was climb back up and then come down the stairs, fastening his bathrobe."

"You were telling me some screwy yarn about a tommy gun," Cross said. "Where does that fit in?"

"Garvey was under orders to report to Stanley on the patients and any requests they might make. As a gag, I asked Garvey for a machine-gun and, of course, he told Stanley. And that's the one nutty thing that Paul Verne did. His macabre sense of humor made him put one in my room. That was before he knew I was a detective, of course. Maybe the first thing that made him suspect me was the fact that I ducked the gun in another room and didn't report it to him. If I'd been what I was supposed to be, I'd have come to him about it."

Cross and the plainclothesman had relieved me of my captive by now and he was handcuffed and helpless. His sullen silence was enough of a confession for me, and apparently for Cross, too.

But there was a plenty worried look on the captain's face as his subordinates took Verne away.

"This is a new one on me," he said. "I mean, the sanitarium here. What the devil am I going to do about all the patients? Can the attendants take over, or did he have an assistant who can handle things long enough to find other places for these people to go?"

I grinned at him. "You didn't ask me yet, Captain, why Harvey Toler came to my room tonight."

He frowned. "All right, why did he? Not that that can have anything to do with winding up the affairs of a sanitarium."

"It can have everything to do with it," I said. "Toler came there to spy on me, after he heard me pass his door to go downstairs. He wanted to look over my stuff, so he could report to Dr. Stanley, or to the man he thought was Dr. Stanley."

"Huh? Why? Wait a minute! You mean Toler wasn't really crazy, that he was faking exhibitionism like you faked klepto-mania, and that Stanley hired him like he hired you, to watch the other patients?"

"Exactly, Cap. Now double that, in spades. . . ."

\* \* \* \*

"You're crazy," Kit said.

"No, angel," I explained patiently. "That is the whole point. Much as I deplore two murders --three if you count the original Dr. Stanley--that is what makes this case utterly and screamingly a howl. I am *not* crazy.

"And neither was anybody else in that nut house, except the man who ran it! I should have known it when we investigated a few patients at random, and not one of them seemed to have had enough money to pay his way, but every one of them was the type of person who would be looking for a job and reading want ads. Want ads

like the one I answered, but worded different-ly"

"You mean there wasn't a single nut in that place?"

"Not a one," I told her. "It seems likely Verne would have had at least one genuine application during the month or so he had been operating there, but if he did have, I have a hunch he'd have turned it down. One or two legitimate ones would have spoiled the record, see? Lord, what a kick he must have got out of running that place, knowing that eighteen or nineteen people there were spying on each other at his orders and each of 'em acting crazy to fool all the others! And the whole shebang run by--"

I couldn't go on with it.

Besides, we'd have to stop laughing long enough to figure out where we were going to spend--with the aid of twenty-five thousand dollars--the rest of our honeymoon.

## THE MOON FOR A NICKEL

It was almost midnight. The lake front sweltered in the after-math of a blazing mid-summer day.

The little man with the straggly gray hair stood dejectedly beside his big black skyward-aimed telescope, upon which hung a hand-lettered sign, "The Moon for a Nickel."

It was too hot. Business was poor.

Over the rippling waters of Lake Michigan the moon hung like a golden ball--but no one seemed interested in it. On the other side, beyond the park, the tall buildings rose: black gaunt shapes against a black background. Here and there shone the white rectangle of a lighted window.

A hand touched his shoulder, and the little man jumped. He had not heard any one approach.

A man with a black slouch hat pulled down over his forehead stood beside him. The telescope man recognized him as a man he had noticed hanging around almost an hour the previous night, watching the telescope, the buildings, and the people.

He was holding out a dollar bill. "Take a walk around a tree, dad," he said. "I want to look at the Big Dipper."

The little man stuck the dollar into his pocket. A buck was a buck--particularly right now. He didn't see many of them. He meandered off and sat down on a bench, just near enough to see that the fellow didn't try to walk off with the 'scope.

Not that he could do much about it-- the guy looked smooth but tough. Thinking about it, the little man became quite uneasy. It wasn't usual to be handed a dollar and told to take a walk. In fact, it had never happened before. But a buck was a buck, and if only he had forty-nine more of them--

Out of the corner of his eye he managed to watch the mysterious stranger without appearing to do so. He had a hunch it would not be advisable to act interested.

The stranger swiveled the telescope around so that it seemed to be pointing up at the nearest building, across the street from the park.

He kept turning the focusing screw. At last he seemed satisfied with the adjustment and moved the telescope slowly from side to side as though he were peering intently into every window. Then he raised it a trifle and seemed to look into the windows of the floor above. Then the floor below.

Then he took out his handkerchief to mop his forehead. But before putting it back into his pocket, he waved it once. He turned the telescope around again so that it pointed out over the lake. Then, without a word, he walked away rapidly.

The little man with the straggly gray hair strolled back to the telescope. He knew that it was none of his business and that he should keep out of it, but his eyes followed the stranger, who became a dark shadow as he crossed the two blocks of park.

Then, as he came out under the street lights of the boulevard, he could be seen clearly again. He climbed into the front seat of a big car parked at the curb.

But the car didn't drive away. It stayed there, waiting.

The little man realized he was out of his element--that sudden death sat in the front seat of that car, and in its vacant back seat as well.

And he didn't want to get killed just then, not when his wife was so ill, when she needed an operation and was counting on him, somehow, to find the money. But fifty bucks was as far away as the moon.

The moon--he should re-aim his 'scope at the moon, so that in case anybody with a nickel came along-- He looked through the telescope and saw a blurred golden disk. He reached up to turn the focusing screw, and then lowered his hand. What was the use?

He might as well go home. No more tonight. The dollar bill had been a windfall, but just enough to be tantalizing. How, where, when, to find forty-nine more of them to pay for his wife's operation? Her wan face seemed to swim before his eyes, superimposed upon the blurred disk of the moon.

He turned back and looked up at the building front across the park. There were a few lights here and there. One on the fourth floor, two in adjacent windows on the eighth. He tried to remember the exact slant of the telescope. It would have pointed, he guessed, at the fifth or sixth floor.

Suddenly, on the sixth floor, he saw a light that glowed and disappeared, showed once more, dimly. A flashlight, he thought. He didn't see it again. Several minutes passed.

Then out of the entrance of the building, two men walked rapidly to the parked car. One carried a small bag.

Curiosity overcame caution in the little man beside the telescope. It was partly a dim hope that if he could get the license number of that car, a description of all three of the men, there might be a reward. But mostly it was curiosity.

He swung the telescope around as quickly as he could, gave the focusing screw a slight twist with a practiced hand, aimed.

As the distant scene leaped suddenly into view as though it were only a few yards away, the men were climbing into the car.

They looked tough. One had a long jagged white scar just above his collar. He had a long thin nose and little ratty eyes. The other man, who was getting in beside the driver, had a fat pudgy face. Through the telescope the little man could make out the baggy wrinkles under his eyes, could almost count the hairs in his toothbrush mustache.

He got ready to swing the telescope to follow the car. He wouldn't be able to catch the license plates until it had moved almost a block. But anyway he could identify all three of the men, anywhere, any time. They seemed almost close enough to reach out and touch.

He saw the man who used the telescope start the car. It seemed so close that he was surprised for an instant not to be able to hear the sound of the motor.

Then the driver turned, looked out over the park toward the lake, toward the telescope. The little man could see his lips moving in what seemed to be silent curses. The driver pointed toward the telescope and said something to the two other men.

Obviously, plans were changed. The car made a U-turn on the boulevard and headed toward the drive leading into the park.

It had to go a few blocks out of its way to get at him, but it was coming toward the man with the telescope.

For a moment he stood petrified. The car was roaring down the straight stretch toward him before he moved. Then he began to run blindly out across the grass, away from the drive.

Brakes screeched. A gun barked and a bullet buzzed past his left ear like an angry hornet.

Two automatics were barking now--they did not dare take time to get out of the car and run after him, so they were firing from the drive. But the light was uncertain, and he had presence of mind enough to zigzag a bit.

And then another sound, a welcome sound, came to his ears--the shrill sirens of squad cars. They seemed to come from three directions, converging upon the park. Two of the cars came into sight on the boulevard and swung into two different driveways into the park.

As suddenly as they had started, the automatics ceased to bark. The big black car roared into motion again--but a squad car blocked its way, swinging around to block the drive, a revolver firing at the robbers' car.

The windshield shattered, and the car came to a stop with squealing brakes. A second squad car pulled up behind it. Two detectives from the third car were running toward it across the grass, one of them carrying a submachine gun.

A salvo from the big car made the man with the gun go flat on his belly, and he started firing from that position. The staccato of the gun drowned out the short sharp barks of the pistols. A row of holes six inches apart appeared in the side of the big car.

Only one automatic continued to bark. Then that one was thrown out to the drive, and its owner, trying to surrender, opened the door to climb out. But he fell out instead and sprawled gracelessly in a pool of blood on the asphalt.

In the silence that followed, the little man with the straggly gray hair walked over to the detective who had fired the sub-machine gun.

"I can identify them," he said.

Then he realized how silly it sounded when the detective looked at him in bewilderment and from him to the body on the drive and the car with its two silent occupants.

"So can I," said the detective, with a grin.

"I mean," said the little man, "that I saw the robbery happen." And he went on and told how his telescope had been used, and the whole story. "Is there," he asked, although he knew very well that there wasn't, "any chance of my getting a reward?"

"What for?" asked the detective, and then grinned. "You're lucky we don't run you in as an accessory, allowing your spyglass to be used by a lookout in a jewelry-house burglary."

The little man winced, and the detective reassured him.

"Naw," he added. "They set off an alarm as they were leaving. We'd have got 'em anyway, a little bit down the boulevard, even if they hadn't stopped to take a pot shot at you."

The police ambulance had driven up, and the three bodies were loaded into it. A cop got into the riddled car and found that it could be driven in under its own power.

The little man walked dispiritedly back to his telescope. A crowd had gathered--the shooting had drawn one of those tremendous mobs of the curious who always gather at the scene of an accident or crime in a city, whether it be noon or midnight. There were hundreds milling about. Excitement can always draw a throng.

The little man perked up. Crowds might mean business.

"The moon for a nickel," called the little man, standing beside his telescope. "See the moon for a nickel."

But nobody much wanted to see the moon. He took in one nickel in five minutes.

He happened to look back toward the building across the boulevard. He saw the looted shop brightly lighted up. He focused the telescope on the windows. As though looking through from the very window sill, he could see the policemen, the detectives, going over the place. Back at one wall he could see a damaged safe. A man came in who looked liked a jeweler, probably the proprietor.

The little man had a big idea.

"See the scene of the crime!" he called. "Half a dollar to see the scene of the crime through a telescope!"

Some one shoved a half dollar into his hand and looked through the telescope. Another. A knot gathered about the tele-scope. The little man beamed, and began to get heavy about the pockets. He hadn't known that there *were* that many half dollars. It was hours later before he finally went home, and sixty-one dollars jingled in his pockets.

## SUITE FOR FLUTE & TOMMY-GUN

I waited till the train had pulled out, and still nobody had got off it. Nobody, that is, except the funny-looking little guy with the shell-rimmed glasses and the hat that looked like a country preacher's.

But the great McGuire wasn't on it. I was glad, in a way, because I--well, I might as well admit that I resented Old Man Remmel having thought I wasn't good enough for the job and having sent for the biggest-shot private detective in the country. Just on a matter of some threatening letters, too. Didn't even want me to call in a postal inspector; said he'd have the best detective in the country or none.

Well, I decided, he'd been stood up. I grinned and turned to head back home, figuring maybe this guy McGuire had phoned Remmel he'd be delayed and Remmel had phoned me and I wasn't there. But this funny-looking little guy I mentioned steps up to me and sticks out his hand. "Sheriff Clark?" he asked. And when I admitted it, he said, "My name is--"

Yeah, you guessed it.

I gawped at him. "Not *the--*"

He grinned at me. "Thanks for the compliment, sheriff, if it was meant for one. If I disappoint you, I'm sorry, but--"

I'd recovered enough by then to take his hand and to stammer out something that was probably worse than if I'd kept my big mouth shut and let it go at that. But honesty, not subtlety, has always been my long suit, and the people here have elected me ten terms running, in spite of it. I don't mean in spite of the honesty; I mean in spite of my being not much of a diplomat.

"Well," I said, "I'm glad you're here anyway." I saw too late that the "anyway" was putting my foot in it farther, but a word's like a bullet in that once you've shot it you can't get it back into the gun and pretend you didn't. A guy really ought to be as careful about shooting off his yap as about shooting off his gun, come to think of it. There'd be fewer murders either way.

"I'm sorry, Mr. McGuire," I told him sheepishly. "But, gosh, you sure don't look like--"

He laughed. "Never mind the mister, sheriff. Just call me Mac. And I'm not sensitive about my looks; they're an asset. Now about those letters. Got them with you?"

I took his arm. "Sure," I said. "I'll show 'em to you over a drink before we drive out to see Remmel. I'll give you the picture first, since we'll be working together. Anyway, I can say some things better if it isn't in front of him."

"You mean he isn't on the level?"

"Nix," I said. "I don't mean that at all. If anything, he's too much on the level. He's not only interested in his own morals, but in everybody else's, see? He's a reformer, and he's a damn teetotaler. You know these smug teetotalers. Pains in the neck, all of them."

I jerked my thumb toward the building we were passing on the other side of

our main street. "That's his bank," I said, "and if he'd stick to banking, he wouldn't have got those letters. But he had to stick his nose into politics and get himself elected to the county board. And with his ideas--" I shook my head.

"Such as--" McGuire prompted.

I steered him into Sam Frey's place that we'd just come to, before I answered. If I was going out with him to see Rimmel--and I had an appointment with Rimmel to do just that--we'd be in for a long, dry conversation. A bit of prelubrication would come in handy.

I answered his question as we headed for the bar. "Such as tavern keepers and roadhouses, mostly. I know we're not too tight on the roadhouses down this way, but that's mostly because the people want it that way, and it brings a lot of business and money into the county. We keep 'em closely enough supervised that there's no rough stuff, you know, or anything really much wrong, but--"

"But what?"

"But this Rimmel has a bill up before the county board--the gosh-awfulest bill you ever heard of. It would shut up all taverns and roadhouses at ten o'clock in the evening. Not midnight or one o'clock, mind you, but *ten*, when their trade is just starting. Naturally, the boys are sore. It's just the same thing, practically, as closing them up entirely."

I crooked a finger at Sam, and he came ambling down toward us behind the bar.

"And the worst of it is," I went on, "that there's a chance of it going through, with Rimmel swinging all his influence back of it. Now, reform's a darn good thing where it's needed, but it isn't needed here, and it's going to play hell with things. That's the trouble with these damn intemperate teetotalers--"

--Derryaire for mine, Sam, short beer for a wash. Yours, Mr. McG--I mean, Mac?"

His eyes twinkled at me from behind those shell-rimmed cheaters. He said, "I'll have coffee, if Sam has some hot. Sorry, sheriff, but I'm a damn teetotaler."

That was my third boner since the train had pulled in at seven p.m., which was ten minutes ago. There wasn't anything to do but to laugh it off or else get down on my hands and knees and crawl for the back door. But the corners of McGuire's mouth showed me I could laugh it off all right, and I did.

"Make mine coffee, too, Sam," I said. "But be sure it's got whiskers on it. Let's get back to Banker Rimmel, Mac. Now, I don't mean that he is a complete louse, even if he is a--I don't mean he is a complete louse at all. He's got a soft side, too. He loves music, for one thing; plays piano at the Sunday school. And once a week regular, for thirty years, he and Dave Peters get together and jam it up."

"Jam what up?"

"I got a daughter in high school," I explained. "That's the kind of English they teach them there. It means they play together. Dave plays a squeak-pipe."

"A what?"

"I didn't learn that from my daughter," I told him. "It came natural, because I hate flutes. They smell to high heaven, and especially when Dave wheezes a high note on his. Golly!"

"Who is Dave?"

"Dave Peters, the clerk at the bank. He and Old Man Rimmel are friends from kidhood. Guess Dave couldn't hold a job any-where else; he's a little light in the head. Guess anybody has to be to take up playing the flute for a hobb--Say, Mac, you don't by any chance play the flute, do you?"

He put back his head and laughed heartily. He said, "Sheriff, you're a wow. May I see those letters?"

I nodded and handed them over. There were three of them, and they were the perfectly ordinary type of threatening note. One of them read:

Rimmel: Get out of politics or get out of Crogan County.

Another one:

Rimmel: Resign from the county board or be mea-sured for a wooden kimono.

The third one was about like the other two; I forget the exact wording.

"You checked them for prints, I suppose?" McGuire asked.

"Sure. Even us hicks know that much these days. Nope, no prints, Mac. But did you notice anything about the spelling?"

"Hm-m-m. Not especially. What do you mean?"

I nodded wisely, glad of a chance to show him that even out in Springdale we are able to give a whirl or two to the old deduc-tive angles. "It's the spelling of a fairly well-educated person," I pointed out. "Makes no attempt to sound illiterate, you see. He spells words like 'resign' and 'politics' all right. But he misses an easy one, and that little slip wouldn't have been faked. When we find a guy who spells 'kimona' with an 'o' on the end, we really got a suspect. See?"

He looked surprised. "You sure, sheriff? I've always thought it *was* spelled with an 'o.' " He opened his brief case, which he's put on the stool beside him, and pulls out a little pocket dictionary and--well, when we'd looked it up, he had to admit that my deduction would have been a good one if I'd only not known how to misspell kimono myself.

Sam brought our coffee and I put three spoonfuls of sugar in mine before I realized what I was doing, being kind of con-fused. And then, rather than make a worse fool of myself by admitting it, I had to pretend I'd done it on purpose and drink the sickly stuff. There's a bottom limit to what a sheriff wants a famous detective to think of him, and I felt two degrees below that already, even if Mac was too nice to show that he thought it.

He drank his coffee black and unsweetened, and he asked. "Do you think these threats are from some roadhouse owner who'll be ruined if that bill of Rimmel's goes through?"

I shrugged. "Could be. There's plenty of owners that will be ruined, and some of those boys might play for keeps if they saw their livings being yanked out from under them. There are a few that--well, they stay within the law now because under the law they can still make a fair profit, but--"

He said, "Put yourself in the place of one of these roadhouse proprietors,

sheriff, and try to imagine you don't give a hang about the law. Now, if the situation were what it was, would you figure it would be best to try to *scare* Remmel with notes like these, or would you figure it safer in the long run just to eliminate him quietly, without threats?"

"Hm-m-m,' I said. "I see your point." Well, I did see it, even if I couldn't see where it would get us. "If I *really* intended to go so far as killing him, I don't think I'd send notes first that would give away my motive and make me one of a limited number of suspects."

"Fine," Mac said, "but you wouldn't send the notes, either, unless you thought there was a chance of them working. Would you?"

I downed the last of my super-sugared coffee while I thought that one over. "Guess I wouldn't," I said. "But they might work, at that. Remmel doesn't show it, but I think he's really scared. Oh, he says he's going ahead with his campaign with redoubled energy, but I think he's weakening. He'd like some sort of an excuse, I think, to back out without looking like he was yellow."

"And since you'd rather not commit murder unless you had to, for purely selfish reasons, if no others, how would you go about giving him that excuse to back out?"

"Darned if I know," I admitted, after I'd scratched where my hair used to be. "How would you?"

"I don't know either, sheriff. I'd like to meet one of these road-house owners of yours, though, just for a sample."

"Under your right name?" I asked him. "Or undercoverlike, with me introducing you as a textile man from Texas, or something?"

He smiled. "Since I'm being introduced by the law, I may as well go under my true colors. I'll be freer to ask questions without making excuses."

"O.K., Mac," I told him. I turned around and yelled, "Hey, Sam." Sam Frey came waddling over to us again, and I said, "Sam, meet Mr. McGuire. *The McGuire*, the guy you've read about."

Sam said, "Glad to meet you." I told Mac: "Sam, here, owns a roadhouse, besides this tavern. It's out on the Kerry pike, near where we're going. He works there nights and here days and evenings, like now. He never sleeps."

Sam grinned. "Oh, I catch a few hours now and then. Few more years and I'll retire, and then I'll sleep twenty hours a day for a while and catch up. I'll be able to afford it then."

"Unless this new law goes through," said McGuire.

Sam's face sobered. "Yeah," he said.

I looked at the clock on the wall over the bar. "It's eight o'clock, Sam. Want to turn your place here over to Johnny for the rest of the evening and go over to Remmel's with us?"

I caught the surprised look on McGuire's face. "Sam's a deputy of mine," I explained. "He knows all about the notes. And he's a good guy to have along."

"Here I thought you were introducing me to a suspect," pro-tested McGuire. "Or are all the suspects deputies of yours?"

Sam chuckled. "Nope," he answered for me. "I'm the only one fits both ways. Sure it ain't too early to go there, sheriff? This is his evening for Dave Peters to be

there. And you've told me how Remmel won't let anything at all interrupt those doo-ets of his."

"Remmel's expecting us," I told him. "Said he'd have Dave come early tonight so they'd be through by the time we got there. Go get your coat, Sam, if you're coming."

Sam went to the back, and McGuire wanted to know, "Why are you taking him? Not that I mind, but I'm curious."

"Two reasons. First, Sam knows every roadhouse proprietor who'll be affected by that law. After you've talked to Remmel, Sam can give you enough leads to keep us going all night. Sec-ond, Sam's been wanting to get a chance to see Remmel, to have a talk with him about that law. He says he thinks maybe he can make him see how unfair it is."

"Oh," said McGuire. Suddenly I saw what he was thinking. He'd just asked me how the sender of the notes could go about giving the banker a chance to back down without looking yellow.

"Sam never sent those notes," I said suddenly. "Sam's an honest guy, a swell guy. He wouldn't kill a fly."

McGuire said quietly, "I agree with you. But the sender of those notes hasn't harmed a fly yet, has he? And maybe he has no intentions of harming Remmel."

"You mean the whole thing is just a bluff? Is that what you think?"

He smiled. "Sheriff, are you asking me to give a considered opinion on the case before I've even seen Mr. Remmel? Lord, man, I just got here, and all I've got is an open mind. I'm discuss-ing possibilities, not opinions."

Well, he was right as usual, and I'd asked a silly question. But before I could try to back-track on it, Sam came with his coat and hat on and we got into my car and went to the Remmel place.

It's a big, rambling house with three wings to it, and the minute I turned in the gateway I had a feeling that something was wrong. I get feelings like that sometimes, and every once in a while they're right, even if they mostly aren't.

And the minute I stopped the motor of my car in the driveway, I knew I was wrong again, and breathed a sigh of relief. They were still playing.

A flute isn't exactly loud, but it carries well, and Dave's wheezy tones were unmistakable. I grinned at McGuire as we walked along the path from the driveway to the porch, past what Remmel called his "music room." The shades were up and the curtains drawn back, and we got a glimpse of them hard at it as we walked by, Remmel at the piano bench pounding away at the keys and Dave standing behind him and to his left, tooting.

"We got here too soon, all right," I said as I rang the doorbell. "But it isn't our fault. They were expecting us at eight, and it's a quarter after."

The door opened and Craig, the Remmel butler, bowed and stood aside for us to come in. I said, "Hi, Bob," and clapped him on the shoulder as we went past.

Ethelda Remmel, regal in white, was sweeping down toward us along the corridor. "Sheriff Clark," she said, holding out her fingertips and looking like she was trying to pretend to look glad to see us.

I performed the introductions.

"Henry is expecting you," she informed us. "If you'll step into the drawing

room a moment until he and Mr. Peters are through their--" She didn't name it; just gave a deprecating little laugh that made me understand why Henry Remmel--teetotaler that he was--sought release in pounding ivory. Another man might have set up a blonde, but Henry Remmel wasn't another man.

We went in; it was across the hall from the music room. There was a lull in the noise and then it started in again, right away. I'd recognized the music before; I didn't know the name, but it was something we had on the phonograph at home; but this one I didn't know, had never heard before. It sounded like a show-off piece for the flute, with high, short little runs and trills and octave jumps all over the place. Not bad, but not good, either.

Then it happened, so suddenly that for an instant that seemed a lot longer none of us moved. Once you've heard that sound you never mistake it again. I've heard it, and I know Sam has, and I have no doubt that McGuire had heard it more often than we.

I mean the staccato yammer of a sub-machine gun. One burst of about half a dozen shots, so quick together that it sounded almost like one. The flute, in the middle of a high note, seeming to give an almost humanly discordant gasp before it went silent. And at the same moment the dreadful discord that a piano makes only when a couple of dozen keys in a row are pushed down all at once and hard--like if you fall across them.

It seemed, as I said, like a long time that we just looked at each other, but it couldn't have been long, because the strings of the piano, with the keys obviously still held down, were still vibrating audibly when we reached the hall.

Mrs. Remmel had been nearest the door of the drawing room, and she was the first to reach that closed door across the hall. She wrenched at the knob, forgetting that her husband always turned the catch on the inside of the door to make sure no one would disturb him while he was in the one room he held sacred. Then she put up frantic fists to pound on the wooden panel, but before she could connect, the latch was turned from within and the door swung open.

Dave Peters stood there in the doorway, his face pale and his eyes so wide they seemed ready to fall out of their sockets. Over his shoulder I could see, at the piano, just what I had expected to see there. Somehow, merely from the way he lay slumped for-ward across the keyboard, I was certain that Henry Remmel was dead. I knew at a glance that there wasn't any use wasting time crossing over to feel for a pulse that wouldn't be there.

I saw Dave's flute on the floor where he had dropped it, and the curtain blowing slightly inward from an opened window on the side of the wing toward the back of the house. Dave was pointing to that open window. "Fired in there," he shouted, although there was no need for shouting. "Hurry, maybe you can--"

Cursing myself for not having thought of it before someone told me to, I jerked around and ran for the outside door. Sam had been quicker than I, and hadn't waited for a flute-playing bank clerk to tell us what to do. He was already outside and pounding around the house to the left.

I pounded out the door after him and started around the house the other way, yanking out my Police Positive as I ran.

Sam had nerve, all right, because I knew he didn't have a gun. Or maybe his

running out had been more reaction than courage, because when we came in sight of each other at the back of the house and he didn't recognize me in the almost darkness, he gave a yawp and started to go back.

I called out to him and he stopped. I was beginning to think again, and I said, "Be quiet, Sam. Listen." It was too dark to see whoever might be making a getaway, but there was just a chance that they wouldn't be so far but what we could hear them.

We stood there a moment, and there wasn't any sound but the hysterical sobbing of Ethelda Remmel in the house. None that we could hear, anyway. I said, "Sam, there's a flashlight in my car. Will you get it?"

He said, "Sure, Les," and went after it. I stepped up toward the open window that the killer had fired through, and three feet away, too close to the window to be visible in the square of light that fell from the window onto the lawn, I stumbled over something. Something hard and heavy.

I bent over to look, and I could make out that it was a Tommy-gun all right. I didn't touch it until Sam got back with the flash-light. Then I picked it up carefully by hooking my finger through the trigger guard so as not to smear any prints. As I raised up with it, I shot a resentful glance in the window.

This McGuire was sure disappointing me. He was in there comforting Mrs. Remmel and trying to calm down Dave Peters so he could answer questions without shouting. That kind of stuff is what you'd expect from an ordinary private dick, but not from one with a reputation like McGuire's. Staying in there to jabber and leaving the man hunt and the dirty work to me and Sam.

I went around in the door again, and put the Tommy-gun down in a corner of the murder room. A housekeeper had appeared on the scene from somewhere and was taking Mrs. Remmel away toward the upstairs of the house.

"He got away," I said. "And the ground is too hard for prints. He left the typewriter, though. Maybe there'll be fingerprints on it."

"And maybe not," said Sam. Privately, I agreed with him. The only killers nowadays who leave prints are spur-of-the-moment boys, and they don't carry Tommy-guns around on the chance that they may decide to go hunting.

I glared at McGuire. I couldn't blame him out loud for not having gone chasing out with us, because it had turned out he was right and there hadn't been any use of trying. But I was mad at him anyway, and my tongue gave way at its loosest hinge.

"So you thought the boys were bluffing about killing Remmel, huh?" I said. I realized, even as I said it, that I was being unfair, because he hadn't made any such statement at all, and had refused to even guess until he had all the facts. Then I thought of another angle.

"So you thought Sam here was a suspect, huh?" I said accusing-ly. "That maybe he was coming here to give Remmel an out. Well, Remmel don't need an out now; he's got one. And Sam was with us when it happened, and he couldn't have done it any more'n me or Mrs. Remmel or Dave or you yourself, or--"

He said, "Be quiet, sheriff." He said it so softly and so calmly and authoritatively that I shut up so sudden I near sprained a tonsil, and felt my face getting red. In spite of my general resemblance to a spavined elephant, I have a

blush--so I'm told--that is like a schoolgirl's.

McGuire wasn't even looking at me, though. He was talking conversationally to Dave, just like there wasn't a stiff in the room at all. "That piece you were playing after the 'IL Trovatore' number," he said. "Is this the score for it?" He strolled to the piano and looked at the music opened on it. It was written out by hand in ink, on ruled music paper.

Dave nodded. "My own composition," he said. "A suite for flute and piano. I brought it over tonight for us to try out."

"Interesting," said McGuire casually. He was leaning over to study the manuscript, and he'd taken a pencil from his pocket. He pointed to a place about halfway down the second page. "This would be about the point where the machine gun made a trio of it, wouldn't it? About so."

Lightly, with his pencil, he sketched in six slurred thirty-second notes below the staff. "About six notes right here."

I thought he'd gone nuts. I didn't change my mind at all when he turned and went on talking. "The history of music is very inter-esting, Mr. Peters," he said. I gawked at him.

A guy who'd talk about the history of music over a dead body was a new one on me. He went on: "Have you ever read about a Colonel Rebsomen who lived in France early in the last centur--"

Then I knew he'd gone genuinely and completely insane, because he tensed suddenly and his right hand darted inside his coat and came out holding an automatic. But this time I wasn't so slow; I dived before he could aim at whoever he was going to aim at, and the bullet went wild and snipped a stem from a potted plant on my left. My right to his jaw made him drop the gun and claw the air, and I grabbed for the gun and got it. McGuire didn't go down from my punch. He kept his feet and looked at me a little sadly. "You damned fool!" he said. "I was going to shoot it out of his hand."

I said blankly, "Shoot what out of whose hand?"

Then I turned around and saw Dave, and saw that he was slumped back in a chair, and that his face wasn't pretty to look at. There was a little bottle in his hand. Even as I watched, his relaxing fingers let it slide to the floor.

Sam said, "Prussic acid. It's all over; no use rushing for any antidote for that stuff."

I didn't understand it, but I did get that I'd made a fool of myself again. This time, though, I can't say I was really sorry. I'd known Dave pretty well, and if he'd killed Hank Rimmel it was better for him to have had a sudden out than to go through what a murderer goes through before he climbs the steps. A guy like Dave.

I turned back to McGuire, and I didn't call him Mac this time. I handed him his gun respectfully, and I said, "I sure owe you an apology, Mr. McGuire. I thought--but damn it all, I still don't see how Dave could have killed him. We heard 'em, all the time."

He slid his gun back into its holster. "Here's the score for it, sheriff," he said. "Suite for Flute and Tommy-gun. I don't like this case, sheriff, but just the same, I'd like to take along this piece of music as a souvenir of it. It's unique. May I?"

He took it out into the hall and put it into the brief case he'd left there. I

followed him. "Listen," I said, "I'm still as dumb as I was. How did Dave--"

We were out of sight of the two dead bodies now, and he grinned. "The case is closed, sheriff," he told me, "and I can catch the ten-o'clock train out. If you can have your deputy stay here and call in the coroner and so on, why on the way back to town I'll tell you."

I fixed it with Sam, and as I started to drive McGuire in, I said: "I figure it this far. It's easy to see how Dave could have had motive, as teller of the bank. An audit'll show it. I'd guess offhand that he must have forged Remmel's name to cover up, too, and figured that with Remmel dead the forgery would never be found out. Maybe he even had it fixed to get control of the bank himself. If he was short, and had a choice between that and jail--well, you can see the motive, all right.

"And sending those notes was a natural to throw suspicion in another direction, and that, too, would show the murder was planned. But how on earth--Say, you mentioned a Colonel Reb-something. That was when Dave pulled out the bottle and--you know. What the hell would a colonel who lived last century have to do with it?"

"Colonel Rebsomen," said McGuire, "was quite famous. He was a one-armed flute player. Anyone much interested in the flute would have heard of him. He had a special flute he could play anything on and play it well. When I wrote in that part for the Tommy-gun into Peters' flute score and then mentioned Colonel Rebsomen, Peters knew I saw through it."

"A one-armed flute player! Holy cow! But . . . but that was a special flute, you say. Dave's is an ordinary one, isn't it?"

McGuire nodded. "But on an ordinary flute there are certain notes that can be played with the left hand alone. Quite a few of them, in fact. From G to C in the first and second octaves, and most of the notes in the top octave.

"You see, sheriff, he not only planned this murder, but he had written the music for it. Almost the whole of that suite he wrote is so pitched that it can be played with one hand.

"We were to be his alibi. He waited until he heard us come, and then persuaded Remmel to run through that number once before he went out to join us. As soon as they started he backed to the window, still playing. He'd planted the gun on the window sill when he came, and he'd probably opened the window earlier to be ready to get at it.

"He got the gun and, still playing, pulled the trigger. You can't do much with a Tommy-gun one-handed, but you can fire one burst that can't miss a man two yards away. Then he dropped his flute, probably wiped his prints off the gun and threw it out the window and came to unlatch the door. Perfect--except for Colonel Rebsomen's ghost."

I'd just swung my car in to the curb at the station, and we walked in. It was well before train time and, except for us, the station was empty.

I said, "My God, Mac, what a scheme for murder that was! Only an unbalanced mind would have planned it. I guess flute players really are a bit nuts."

McGuire nodded absently. He put his brief case down and took the score of Dave's suite from it. I looked over his shoulder and shuddered when I saw those penciled staccato notes that showed where the Tommy-gun had joined in.

And suddenly I realized how near Dave had come to getting away with it. He would have, for all of me or Sam. Offhand, you'd say only another flute player could have--

"Gawd, Mac," I said, "I just remembered that you didn't answer me before when I asked if you played the flute. *Do* you?"

"I was just considering," he said, "showing you how this would sound if it were well played. It's not bad music, really." He reached deeper in his brief case and came up with a black leather case that proved to be plush lining and the sections of a dismembered flute. And darned if it didn't sound not so bad at that, the way he played it.

I've had mine a month now, and I can play "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and a few other easy ones. Only, as my wife acrimo-niously points out, if another fancy murder is ever pulled off in Crogan County, it'll probably be planned by a chess player instead of a flute player, and I'll make a fool of myself again because I don't know a pawn from a bishop, except that the knights look like horses.

But a guy can't be an expert in everything, and what's good enough for a guy like McGuire, who can solve a case practically while it's happening, is good enough for a guy like me.

## THE CAT FROM SIAM

### The Locked Door

We were in the middle of our third game of chess when it happened.

It was late in the evening--eleven thirty-five, to be exact. Jack Sebastian and I were in the living room of my two-room bachelor apartment. We had the chess game set up on the card table in front of the fireplace, in which the gas grate burned cheerfully.

Jack looked cheerful too. He was wreathed in smoke from his smelliest pipe and he had me a pawn down and held a positional edge. I'd taken the first two games, but this one looked like his. It didn't look any less so when he moved his knight and said, "Check." My rook was forked along with the king. There didn't seem to be anything I could do about it except give up the rook for the knight.

I looked up at the Siamese cat who was sleepily watching us from her place of vantage on the mantel.

"Looks like he's got us, Beautiful," I said. "One should never play with a policeman."

"I wish you wouldn't do that, dammit," Jack said. "You give me the willies."

"Anything's fair in love and chess," I told him. "If it gives you the willies to have me talk to a cat, that's fine. Besides, Beautiful doesn't kibitz. If you see her give me any signals, I'll concede."

"Go ahead and move," he said, irritably. "You've got only one move that takes you out of check, so make it. I take your rook, and then--"

There was a noise, then, that I didn't identify for a second because it was made up of a *crack* and a *ping* and a *thud*. It wasn't until I turned to where part of the sound came from that I realized what it had been. There was a little round hole in the glass of the window.

The *crack* had been a shot, the *ping* had been the bullet coming through the glass--and the *thud* had been the bullet going into the wall behind me!

But by the time I had that figured out, the chessmen were spilling into my lap.

"Down, quick!" Jack Sebastian was saying sharply.

Whether I got there myself, or Jack pushed me there, I was on the floor. And by that time I was thinking.

Grabbing the cord of the lamp, I jerked the plug out of the wall and we were in darkness except for the reddish-yellow glow of the gas grate in the fireplace. The handle of that was on Jack's side, and I saw him, on his knees, reach out and turn it.

Then there was complete darkness. I looked toward where the window should be, but it was a moonless night and I couldn't see even the faintest outline of the window. I slid sideways until I bumped against the sofa. Jack Sebastian's voice came to me out of the darkness.

"Have you got a gun, Brian?" he asked.

I shook my head and then realized he couldn't see me. "No," I said. "What would I be doing with a gun?"

My voice, even to me, sounded hoarse and strained. I heard Jack moving.

"The question is," he said, "what's the guy outside doing with one? Anybody after you, pal?"

"N-no," I said. "At least, not--"

I heard a click that told me Jack had found the telephone. He gave a number and added, "Urgent, sister. This is the police." Then his voice changed tone and he said, "Brian, what's the score? Don't you know anything about who or why--"

He got his connection before he could finish the question and his voice changed pitch again.

"Jack Sebastian, Cap," he said. "Forty-five University Lane. Forty-five University Lane. Somebody just took a pot-shot in the window here. Head the squad cars this way from all directions they can come from. Especially the campus--that's the logical way for him to lose himself if he's on foot. Start 'em. I'll hold the line."

Then he was asking me again, "Brian, what can I add? Quick."

"Tell 'em to watch for a tall, slender, young man," I said. "Twenty-one years old, thin face, blond hair."

"The hell," he said. "*Alister Cole?*"

"Could be," I told him. "It's the only guess I can make. I can be wrong, but--"

"Hold it." Whoever he'd been talking to at the police station was back on the line. Without mentioning the name, Jack gave the description I'd just given to him.

He said, "Put that on the radio and come back in."

Again to me, "Anything else?"

"Yes," I said. "Tell 'em to converge those squad cars on Doc Roth's place, Two-ten University Lane. Forget sending them here. Get them *there*. Quick!"

"Why? You think if it's Alister Cole, he's going for Doc Roth, too?"

"Don't argue. Tell 'em. Hurry!"

I was on my feet by now, trying to grope my way across the pitch black room to the telephone to join him. I stepped on a chessman and it rolled and nearly threw me. I swore and got my lighter out of my pocket and flicked the wheel.

The tiny flame lighted part of the room dimly. The faint waver-ing light threw long dancing shadows. On the mantel, the Siamese was standing, her back arched and her tail thick. Her blue eyes caught and held the light like blue jewels.

"Put that out, you fool," Jack snapped.

"He isn't standing there at the window," I said impatiently. "He wouldn't stay there after we doused the light. Tell them what I said about Roth's, quick."

"Hello, Cap. Listen, get some of the cars to Two-ten University Lane instead. Two-one-oh. Fast. No, I don't know what this is about either. Just do it. We can find out later. The guy who took a shot here might go there. That's all I know. So long."

He put the receiver back on the hook to end argument. I was there by that time, and had the receiver in my hand.

"Sorry, Jack," I said, and shoved him out of the way. I gave Dr. Roth's number and added, "Keep ringing till they answer."

I held the receiver tight against my ear and waited. I realized I was still holding up the tiny torch of the cigarette lighter and I snapped it shut. The room snapped again into utter darkness.

"You stay in here," Jack said. "I'm going out."

"Don't be a fool. He's got a gun."

There was a sharp knock on the door, and we neither of us moved until the knock came again, louder. Then we heard Profes-sor Winton's high, nervous voice.

"Brian, was that a shot a minute ago? Are you all right?"

Jack muttered something under his breath and groped for the door handle. In the receiver against my ear I could hear Dr. Roth's phone still ringing. He hadn't answered yet. I put my hand over the mouthpiece.

"I'm all right, Dr. Winton," I called out.

By that time, Jack had found the knob and opened the door. Light streamed into the room from the hallway outside, and he stepped through the door quickly and closed it behind him.

"Someone shot through the window, Doctor," I heard him say, "but everything's under control. We've called the police. Better get back inside your room, though, till they get here."

Dr. Winton's voice said something, excitedly, but I didn't hear what, because Jeanette Roth's voice, husky and beautiful, but definitely sleepy, was saying "Hello," in my ear. I forgot Jack and Winton and concentrated my attention on the phone.

I talked fast. "This is Brian Carter, Jeanette," I said. "Listen, this is important. It's maybe life and death. Just do what I say and don't argue. First, be sure all the lights in your house are out, all doors and windows locked tight--bolted, if they've got bolts. Then don't answer the door, unless you're sure it's the police--or me. I'm coming over, too, but the police may get there first."

"Brian, what on earth-- ?"

"Don't argue, darling," I said. "Do those things, fast. Lights out. Everything locked. And don't answer the door unless it's me or the police!"

I hung up on her. I knew she'd do it faster that way than if I stayed on the line.

I groped my way through the dark room and out into the lighted hallway. The door to Dr. Winton's room, just across from my apartment, was closed, and there was nobody in the hallway. I ran to the front door and out onto the porch.

Out front on the sidewalk, Jack Sebastian was turning around, looking. He had something in his hand. When he turned so light from the street lamp down on the corner shone on it, I could see that it was a long-barreled pistol. I ran out to join him.

"From Winton. It's a target pistol, a twenty-two. But it's better than throwing stones. Look, you sap, get back in there. You got no business out in the open."

I told him I was going to Roth's place, and started down the sidewalk at a trot.

"What's the score?" he called after me. "What makes you think it was that Cole kid and why the excitement about Roth?"

I saved my breath by not answering him. There'd be plenty of time for all that later. I could hear him running behind me. We pounded up the steps onto the porch of Dr. Roth's place.

"It's Brian Carter--and the police!" I called out while I rang the bell.

Maybe Jack Sebastian wasn't exactly the police, in the collective sense, but he was a detective, the youngest full-fledged detective on the force. Anyway, it wasn't the time for nice distinctions. I quit leaning on the bell and hammered on the door, and then yelled again.

The key turned in the lock and I stepped back. The door opened on the chain and Jeanette's white face appeared in the crack. She wasn't taking any chances. Then, when she saw us, she slid back the chain and opened the door.

"Brian, what--" she began.

"Your father, Jeanette. Is he all right?"

"I--I knocked on his door after you phoned, Brian, and he didn't answer! The door's locked. Brian, what's *wrong*?"

### Murder for a Million!

Out front a car swung into the curb with a squealing of brakes and two big men got out of it. They came running up the walk toward us and Jack stepped to the edge of the porch, where light from a street lamp would fall on his face and identify him to the two men. It also gleamed on the gun dangling from his hand.

Jeanette swayed against me and I put my arm around her shoulders. She was trembling.

"Maybe everything's okay, Jeanette," I said. "Maybe your father's just sleeping soundly. Anyway, these are the police coming now, so *you're* safe."

I heard Jack talking to the two detectives who'd come in the squad car, and then one of them started around the house, on the outside, using a flashlight. Jack and the other one joined us in the doorway.

"Let's go," Jack said. "Where's your father's room, Miss Roth?"

"Just a second, Jack," I said. I snapped on the hall lights and then went into the library and turned on the lights there and looked around to be sure nobody was

there.

"You wait in here, Jeanette," I said then. "We'll go up and try your father's door again, and if he still doesn't answer, we'll have to break--"

Footsteps pounded across the porch again and the other detective, the one who'd started around the house, stood in the doorway.

"There's a ladder up the side of the house to a window on the second floor--northwest corner room," he said. "Nobody around unless he's upstairs, in there. Shall I go up the ladder, Sebastian?"

Jack looked at me, and I knew that he and I were thinking the same thing. The killer had come here first, and there wasn't any hurry now.

"I'll go up the ladder," he said. "We won't have to break the door now. Will you two guys search the house from attic to cellar and turn all the lights on and leave them on? And, Brian, you stay here with Miss Roth. Can I borrow your flashlight, Wheeler?"

I noticed that, by tacit consent, Jack was taking charge of the case and of the older detectives. Because, I presumed, he was the first one on the scene and had a better idea what it was all about.

One of the men handed over a flashlight and Jack went outside. I led Jeanette into the library.

"Brian," she asked, "do you think Dad is--that something has happened to Dad?"

"We'll know for sure in a minute, darling. Why make guesses meanwhile? I don't know."

But--what happened that made you call me up?"

"Jack and I were playing chess at my place," I told her. "Some-one took a shot through the window. At me, not at Jack. The bullet went into the wall behind me and just over my head. I-- well, I had a sudden hunch who might have shot at me, and if my hunch was right, I thought he'd consider your father his enemy, too. I'm afraid he may be--mad."

"Alister Cole?"

"Have you noticed anything strange about him?" I asked her.

"Yes. He's always scared me, Brian, the way he's acted. And just last night, Dad remarked that--"

She broke off, standing there rigidly. Footsteps were coming down the stairs. That would be Jack, of course. And the fact that he walked so slowly gave us the news in advance of his coming.

Anyway, when he stood in the doorway, Jeanette asked quietly, "Is he dead?" and Jack nodded.

Jeanette sat down on the sofa behind her and dropped her head into her hands, but she didn't cry.

"I'll phone headquarters," Jack said. "But first--you and he were alone in the house tonight, weren't you, Miss Roth?"

She looked up and her eyes were still dry. "Yes" she said. "Mother's staying overnight with my aunt--her sister--in town. This is going to hit her hard. Will you need me here? I--I think it would be best if I were the one to break it to her. I can dress and be there in half an hour. I can be back in an hour and a half. Will it be all

right?"

Jack looked at me. "What do you think, Brian? You know this guy Cole and you know what this is all about. Would Miss Roth be in any danger if she left?"

"You could figure that yourself, Jack," I said. "Cole was here, alone in the house with her after he killed Dr. Roth, and he had all the time in the world because there hadn't been an alarm yet. But let me go with her, though, just to be sure."

He snorted. "Just to be sure--of *what*? He *is* after you, my fine friend. Until we get Cole under lock and key--and throw away the key--you're not getting out from under my eye."

"All right," I said, "so I'm indispensable. But everybody isn't, and this place will be full of police in a few minutes. If I'm not mistaken, that sounds like another squad car coming now. Why not have one of the boys in it use it to drive Miss Roth over to her aunt's?"

He nodded. "Okay, Miss Roth. I'll stick my neck out--even though Headquarters may cut it off. And Wheeler and Brach have finished looking around upstairs, so it'll be okay for you to go to your room if you want to change that housecoat for a dress."

He went to the front door to let the new arrivals in.

"I'm awfully sorry, Jeanette," I said then. "I know that sounds meaningless, but-- it's all I can think of to say."

She managed a faint smile. "You're a good egg, Brian. I'll be seeing you."

She held out her hand, and I took it. Then she ran up the stairs. Jack looked in at the doorway.

"I told the new arrivals to search the grounds," he said. "Not that they'll find anything, but it'll give 'em something to do. I got to phone Headquarters. You stay right here."

"Just a second, Jack," I said. "How was he killed?"

"A knife. Messy job. It was a psycho, all right."

"You say messy? Is there any chance Jeanette might go into--?"

He shook his head. "Wheeler's watching that door. He wouldn't let her go in. Well, I got to phone--"

"Listen, Jack. Tell me one thing. How long, about, has he been dead? I mean, is there any chance Cole could have come here after he shot at me? I might have thought of phoning here, or getting here a minute or two sooner. I'd feel responsible if my slowness in reacting, my dumbness--"

Jack was shaking his head. "I'm no M.E.," he said, "but Roth had been dead more than a few minutes when I found him. I'd say at least half an hour, maybe an hour."

He went to the phone and gave the Headquarters number. I heard his voice droning on, giving them the details of the murder and the attempted murder.

I sat there listening, with my eyes closed, taking in every word of it, but carefully keeping the elation off my face. It had gone perfectly. Everything had worked out. Whether or not they caught Alister Cole--and they *would* catch him--nothing could go wrong now. It had come off perfectly.

I would never be suspected, and I stood to gain a million dollars--and Jeanette. . . .

She came down the stairs slowly, as one approaching a reluctant errand. I waited for her at the foot of the staircase, my eyes on her beautiful face. There was shock there, but--as I had expected and was glad to see--not too much grief. Roth had been a cold, austere man. Not a man to be grieved for deeply, or long. She stopped on the second step, her eyes level with mine and only inches away. I wanted to kiss her, but this was not the time. A little while and I would, I thought.

But I could look now, and I could dream. I could imagine my hand stroking that soft blonde hair. I could imagine those soft, misty blue eyes closed and my lips kissing the lids of them, kissing that soft white throat, her yielding lips. Then--

My hand was on the newel post and she put hers over it. It almost seemed to burn.

"I wish I could go with you, darling," I said. "I wish there was something I could do to help you."

"I wish you could come with me too, Brian. But--your friend's right. And didn't you take an awful chance coming over here anyway--out in the open, with a madman out to kill you?"

"Jack was with me," I said.

Jack was calling to me from the library. "Coming," I said, and then I told Jeanette, "It's cool out, darling. Put a coat on over that thin dress."

She nodded absently. "I wish you could come with me, Brian. Mother likes you--"

I knew what she meant, what she was thinking. That things were going to be all right between us now. Her mother did like me. It was her stuffy, snobbish father who had stood in the way. Jack called again impatiently.

"Take care of yourself, Brian," Jeanette whispered quickly. "Don't take any chances, please."

She pressed my hand, then ran past me toward the coat closet. I saw that one of the detectives was waiting for her at the door. I went into the library. Jack was still sitting at the telephone table, jotting things into a notebook. He looked very intent and businesslike.

"Captain Murdock--he's head of Homicide--is on his way here," Jack said. "He'll be in charge of the case. That's why I wanted you to let the girl get out of here first. He might insist on her staying."

"What about you?" I asked him. "Aren't you staying on the case?"

He grinned a little. "I've got my orders. They're to keep you alive until Cole is caught. The Chief told me if anything happens to you, he'll take my badge away and shove it up my ear. From now on, pal, we're Siamese twins."

"Then how about finishing that chess game?" I said. "I think I can set up the men again."

He shook his head. "Life isn't that simple. Not for a while yet, anyway. We'll have to stick here until Cap Murdock gets here, and then I'm to take you into the Chiefs office. Yeah, the Chiefs going down there at this time of night."

It was after one when Jack took me into Chief Randall's office. Randall, a big, slow-moving man, yawned and shook hands with me across his desk.

"Sit down, Carter," he said, and yawned again.

I took the seat across from him. Jack Sebastian sat down in a chair at the end

of the desk and started doodling with the little gold knife he wears on the end of a chain.

"This Roth is a big man," Chief Randall said. "The papers are going to give us plenty if we don't settle this quick."

"Right now, Chief," Jack said, "Alister Cole is a bigger man. He's a homicidal maniac on the loose."

The Chief frowned. "We'll get him," he said. "We've got to. We've got him on the air. We've got his description to every rail-road station and airport and bus depot. We're getting out fliers with his picture--as soon as we get one. The state patrolmen are watching for him. We'll have him in hours. We're doing every-thing."

"That's good," I told him. "But I don't think you'll find him on his way out of town. I think he'll stay here until he gets me--or until you get him."

"He'll know that you're under protection, Brian," Jack said. "Mightn't that make a difference? Wouldn't he figure the smartest thing to do would be to blow town and hide out for a few months, then come back for another try?"

I thought it over. "He might," I said, doubtfully. "But I don't think so. You see, he isn't thinking normally. He's under paranoiac compulsion, and the risks he takes aren't going to weight the balance too strongly on the safety side. He was out to kill Dr. Roth and then me. Now I'm no expert in abnormal psychology, but I think that if he'd missed on his *first* killing he might do as you suggested--go away and come back later when things had blown over. But he made his first kill. He stepped over the line. He's going to be under terrifically strong compulsion to finish the job right away--at any risk!"

### Double Bodyguard

Jack said, "One thing I don't get. Cole was probably standing right outside that window. We reacted quickly when that shot came, but not instantaneously. He should have had time for a second shot before we got the light out. Why didn't he take that second shot?"

"I can suggest a possibility," I told them. "I was in Alister's room about a week ago. I've been there several times. He opened a drawer to take out his chess set for our game, and I happened to notice a pistol in the drawer. He slammed the drawer quickly when he saw me glancing that way, but I asked him about the pistol.

"He said it had been his brother's, and that he'd had it since his brother had died three years ago. He said it was a single-shot twenty-two caliber target pistol, the kind really fancy marksmen use in tournaments. I asked him if he went in for target shooting and he said no, he'd never shot it."

"Probably telling the truth about that," Chief Randall said, "since he missed your head a good six inches at--how far would it have been, Jack?"

"About twelve feet, if he'd been standing just outside the win-dow. Farther, of course, if he'd been farther back." Jack turned to me. "Brian, how good a look did you get at the pistol? Was it a single-shot, the kind he described?"

"I think so," I said. "It wasn't either a revolver nor an automatic. It had a big fancy walnut handle, silver trimmings, and a long, slender barrel. Yes, I'd say I'm reasonably sure it was a single-shot marksman's gun. And that would be why he

didn't shoot a second time before we got the light and the gas-grate turned out. I think he could have shot by the light of that gas flame even after I pulled out the plug of the floor lamp."

"It would have been maybe ten seconds, not over fifteen," Jack said, "before we got both of them out. A pistol expert, used to that type of gun, could have reloaded and shot again, but an amateur probably couldn't have. Anyway, maybe he didn't even carry extra cartridges, although I wouldn't bet on that."

"Just a second," Randall said. He picked up the phone on his desk and said, "Laboratory." A few seconds later he said, "That bullet Wheeler gave you, the one out of the wall at Brian Carter's room. Got anything on it?" He listened a minute and then said, "Okay," and hung up.

He said, "It was a twenty-two all right, a long rifle, but it was too flattened out to get any rifling marks. Say, Jack, do you know if they use long rifle cartridges in those target guns?"

"A single-shot will take any length--short, standard, or long rifle. But, Brian, why would he carry as--as inefficient a gun as that? Do you figure he planned this on the spur of the moment, and didn't have time to get himself a gun with bigger bullets and more of them?"

"I don't think it was on the spur of the moment," I said. "I think he must have been planning it. But he may have stuck the target gun in his pocket on the spur of the moment. I figure it this way: The knife was his weapon. He intended to kill us both with the knife. But he brought along the gun as a spare. And when he got to my place after killing Dr. Roth and found you there, Jack, instead of finding me asleep in bed, it spoiled his original idea of coming in my window and doing to me what he did to Roth. He didn't want to wait around until you left because he'd already made one kill, and maybe he remembered he'd left the ladder at the side of the house. There might be an alarm at any time."

Randall nodded. "That makes sense, Carter. Once he'd killed Roth, he was in a hurry to get you."

Jack quit doodling with his penknife and put it in his vest pocket. "Anything from the M.E.?" he asked.

Randall nodded. "Says the stroke across the jugular was prob-ably the first one, and was definitely fatal. The rest of the--uh--carving was just trimming. The ladder, by the way, belonged to a painting contractor who was going to start on the house the next day. He painted the garage first--finished that today. The ladder was lying on its side against a tree in the yard, not far from where Cole used it. Cole could have seen it there from the front walk, if he'd gone by during the day or during the early evening while it was still light."

"Did the medical examiner say about when he was killed?" I asked.

"Roughly half an hour to an hour before he was found," Randall said. He sighed. "Carter, have you told us everything about Cole that you think of?"

"Everything."

"Wish I could talk you into sleeping here, under protective custody. What are your plans for the next few days?"

"Nothing very startling," I told him. "This is Friday night--Saturday morning, now. I have to teach a class Monday afternoon at two. Nothing special to do until

then, except some work of my own which I can do at home. As for the work I was doing with Dr. Roth, that's off for the time being. I'll have to see what the Board of Regents has to say about that."

"Then we'll worry about Monday when Monday comes," Randall said. "If, as you think, Cole is going to stay around town, we'll probably have him before then. Do you mind Sebastian staying with you?"

"Not at all."

"And I'm going to assign two men to watch the outside of your place--at least for the next forty-eight hours. We won't plan beyond that until we see what happens. Right now, every policeman in town is looking for Cole, and every state policeman is getting his description. Tomorrow's newspapers and the Sunday papers will carry his photograph, and then the whole city will be on the lookout for him. You have your gun, Sebastian?"

Jack shook his head. "Just this twenty-two I borrowed from Winton."

"You better run home and get it, and whatever clothes and stuff you'll need for a couple of days."

"I'll go with him," I said.

"You'll wait here," Jack told me. "It's only a few blocks. I'll be right back." He went out.

"While he's gone, Carter," Randall said, "I want to ask a few things he already knows, but I don't. About the set-up at the university, the exact relationship between you and Roth and between Roth and Alister Cole, what kind of work you do--things like that."

"Dr. Roth was head of the Department of Psychology," I said. "It's not a big department, here at Hudson U. He had only two full professors under him. Winton, who stays where I do, is one of them. Dr. Winton specializes in social psychology."

"Then there are two instructors. I'm one of them. An instructor is somewhere between a student and a professor. He's taking post-graduate courses leading to further degrees which will qualify him to be a professor. In my own case, I'm within weeks of getting my master's. After that, I start working for a doctorate. Meanwhile, I work my way by teaching and by helping in the research lab, grading papers, monitoring exams--well, you get the idea."

"Alister Cole was--I suppose we can consider him fired now--a lab assistant. That isn't a job that leads to anything. It's just a job doing physical work. I don't think Cole had even completed high school."

"What sort of work did he do?"

"Any physical work around the laboratory. Feeding the menagerie--we work with rats and white mice mostly, but there are also Rhesus monkeys and guinea pigs--cleaning cages, sweeping--"

"Doesn't the university have regular cleaning women?"

"Yes, but not in the lab. With experiments going on there, we don't want people who don't know the apparatus working around it, possibly moving things that shouldn't be moved. The lab assistants know what can be touched and what can't."

"Then, in a way, Dr. Roth was over both of you?"

"More than in a way. He didn't exactly hire us--the Board of Regents does all the hiring--but we both worked under him. In different capacities, of course."

"I understand that," Randall said. "Then you could say Dr. Roth's job was something like mine, head of a department. Your relationship to him would be about that of your friend, Sebastian, to me, and Alister Cole would be--umm--a mess attendant over on the jail side, or maybe a turnkey."

"That's a reasonably good comparison," I agreed. "Of course I was the only instructor who worked directly under Dr. Roth, so I was a lot closer to him than Jack would be to you. You have quite a few detectives under you, I'd guess."

He sighed. "Never quite enough, when anything important happens."

There was a knock on the door and he called out, "Yeah?" The detective named Wheeler stuck his head in. "Miss Roth's here," he announced. "You said you wanted to talk to her. Shall I send her in?"

Chief Randall nodded, and I stood up. "You might as well stay, Carter," he told me.

Jeanette came in. I held the chair I'd been sitting in for her, and moved around to the one Jack had vacated. Wheeler had stayed outside, so I introduced Jeanette and Randall.

"I won't want to keep you long, Miss Roth," Randall said, "so I'll get right down to the few questions I want to ask. When did you see Alister Cole last?"

"This afternoon, around three o'clock."

"At your house?"

"Yes. He came then and asked if Dad was home. I told him Dad was downtown, but that I expected him any minute. I asked him to come in and wait."

"Did he and you talk about anything?"

"Nothing much. As it happened, I'd been drinking some coffee, and I gave him a cup of it. But we talked only a few minutes--not over ten--before Dad came home."

"Do you know what he wanted to see your father about?"

"No. Dad took him into the library and I went out to the kitchen. Mr. Cole stayed only a few minutes, and then I heard him leaving."

"Did it sound as though he and your father were quarreling? Did you hear their voices?"

"No, I didn't hear. And Dad didn't say, afterwards, what Mr. Cole had wanted to see him about. But he did say something about Mr. Cole. He said he wondered if the boy was--how did he put it?--if he was all right. Said he wondered if maybe there wasn't a tendency toward schizophrenia, and that he was going to keep an eye on him for a while."

"Had you noticed anything strange about Cole's actions or manner when you talked to him before he saw your father?"

"He seemed a little excited about something and--well, trying to hide his excitement. And then there's one thing I'd always noticed about him--that he was unusually reticent and secretive about himself. He never volunteered any information about his--about anything concerning himself. He could talk all right about other things."

"Do you know if Cole knew your mother would not be there tonight?"

"I don't believe--Wait. Yes, he did. I forget just how it came into the conversation when I was talking with Mr. Cole, but I did mention my aunt's being

sick. He'd met her. And I think I said Mother was staying with her a few nights."

"Was anything said about the ladder in your yard?"

"He asked if we were having the house painted, so I imagine he saw it lying there. It wasn't mentioned specifically."

"And tonight--what time did you last see your father?"

"When he said good-night at about ten o'clock and went up to bed. I finished a book I was reading and went upstairs about an hour later. I must have gone right to sleep because it seemed as though I'd been asleep a long time when I heard the phone ringing and went to answer it."

"You heard nothing until--I mean, you heard nothing from the time your father went to sleep at ten until you were wakened by the phone--which would have been at a quarter to eleven?"

"Not a sound."

"Did your father usually lock the door of his room?"

"Never. There was a bolt on the door, but he'd never used it that I know of."

Chief Randall nodded. "Then Cole must have bolted the door before he went back down the ladder," he said. "Is there anything you can add, Miss Roth?"

Jeanette hesitated. "No," she said. "Nothing that I can think of." She turned and smiled, faintly, at me. "Except that I want you to take good care of Brian."

"We'll do that," Randall told her. He raised his voice, "Wheel-er!" The big detective opened the door and Randall said, "Take Miss Roth home now. Then take up duty at Forty-five University Lane--that's where Carter here lives. Outside. Jack Sebastian'll be inside with him. If the two of you let anything happen to him--God help you!"

### A Window Is Opened

Pulling the car to the curb half a block from my place, Jack said, "That looks like Wheeler in a car up ahead, but I'm not taking any chances. Wait here."

He got out and walked briskly to the car ahead. I noticed that he walked with his hand in his right coat pocket. He leaned into the car and talked a moment, then came back.

"It's Wheeler," he said, "and he's got a good spot there. He can watch both windows of your room, and he has a good view of the whole front of the place besides."

"How about the back?" I asked him.

"There's a bolt on the back door. Cole would have trouble getting in that way. Besides, we'll both be in your place and your door will be locked. If he could get into the house, he's got two more hurdles to take--your door and me."

"And don't forget me."

"That's the hurdle he wants to take. Come on. I'll leave you with Wheeler while I case the joint inside before I take you in."

We walked up to Wheeler's car and I got in beside him. "Besides looking around in my place," I told Jack, "you might take a look in the basement. If he got in while we were gone, and is hiding out anywhere but in my place, it would be there. Probably up at the front end."

"I'll check it. But why would he be there?"

"He knows that part of the place. Mr. Chandler, the owner, turned over the front section of the basement to me for some experiments that Dr. Roth and I were doing on our own time. We were working with rats down there--an extension of some experiments we started at the university lab, but wanted to keep separate. So Alister Cole's been down there."

"And if he wanted to lay for you someplace, that might be it?"

"It's possible. He'd figure I'd be coming down there sooner or later."

"Okay, but I'll get you into your apartment first, then go down there."

He went inside and I saw the lights in my place go on. Five minutes later he came out to the car. "Clean as a whistle," he said.

"Wait till I get my stuff from my own car and we'll go in."

He went to his own car half a block back and returned with a suitcase. We went into the house and into my place.

"You're safe here," he said. "Lock me out now, and when I come back, don't let me in until you hear and recognize my voice."

"How about a complicated knock? Three shorts and a long."

He looked at me and saw I was grinning. He shook his finger at me. "Listen, pal," he said, "this is dead serious. There's a mad-man out to kill you, and he might be cleverer than you think. You can't take anything for granted until he's caught."

"I'll be good," I told him.

"I've got more at stake on this than you have," he said, "because if he kills you, you're only dead. But me, I'll be out of a job. Now let's hear that door lock when I go out in the hall."

I locked it after him, and started to pick up the chessmen from the floor. The Siamese blinked at me from her perch on the mantel. I tickled her under the chin.

"Hi, Beautiful," I said. "How'd you like all the excitement?"

She closed her eyes, as all cats do when they're having their chins chucked, and didn't answer me.

I leaned closer and whispered, "Cheer up, Beautiful. We're in the money, almost. You can have a silken cushion and only the best grades of calves' liver."

I finished picking up the chessmen and went over to the win-dow. Looking out diagonally to the front, I could see the car that Wheeler was sitting in. I made a motion with my hand, and got an answering motion from the car.

I pulled down the shades in both rooms and was examining them to make sure that one couldn't see in from the outside when there was a tap at the door. I walked over and let Jack back in after he'd spoken to me.

"Nothing down there but some guinea pig cages and what look like mazes. The cages are all empty."

"They're rat cages," I told him. "And the things that look like mazes, strangely enough, are mazes. That's a sizable suitcase you brought. Planning to move in on me?"

He sat down in my most comfortable chair. "Only suitcase I had. It isn't very full. I brought an extra suit, by the way, but it's not for me. It's for Alister Cole."

"Huh? A suit for--"

"Strait jacket. Picked it up at Headquarters, just in case. Listen, pal, you got

any idea what it means to take a maniac? We'll take him alive, if we can, but we'll have to crease him or sap him, and I'll want some way of holding him down after he comes to." He shuddered a little. "I handled one of them once. Rather, I helped handle one. It took four of us, and the other three guys were huskier than I am. And it wasn't any picnic."

"You're making me very happy," I told him. "Did you by any chance pick up an extra gun for me?"

"Can you shoot one? Ever handled one?"

I said, "You pull the trigger, don't you?"

"That's what I mean. That's why I didn't get you one. Look, if this loonie isn't caught, and he makes a clean getaway, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get you a permit for a gun, help you pick one out, and take you down to the police range and teach you how to use it. Because I won't be able to stay with you forever."

"Fine," I said. "I'd feel happier with one right away, though."

"Brian, people who don't know guns, who aren't expert with them, are better off without them. Safer. I'll bet if Alister Cole hadn't had a gun tonight, he'd have got you."

"How do you figure that?"

"Simple. He looked in the window and saw me playing chess with you. If he'd had only the shiv, he'd have hidden somewhere until after I'd left and given you time to get to sleep. Then he'd have come in your window--and that would have been that. But since he had a gun, he took a chance with it. Not knowing how to squeeze a trigger without moving his sights, he overshoots. And, I hope, ends his chances of getting you."

I nodded, slowly. "You've got a point," I admitted. "All right, I'll wait and learn it right, if you don't get Alister. Want to finish that game of chess?" I glanced toward Beautiful, now sound asleep, but still perched where she could overlook the game. "I promise you that Beautiful won't kibitz."

"Too late," Jack said. "It's after three. How long have you had that cat, Brian?"

"You should remember. You were with me when I bought her. Four years ago, wasn't it? Funny how a pet gets to mean so much to you. I wouldn't sell her for anything on earth."

Jack wrinkled his nose. "A dog, now, I could understand. They're some company to a guy."

Moving my hand in a deprecating gesture, I laughed at him. "That's because you're not used to such intelligent and aesthetic company. Next to women, cats are the most beautiful things on earth, and we rate women higher only because we're prejudiced. Besides, women talk back and cats don't. I'd have gone nuts the last few months if I hadn't had Beautiful to talk to. I've been working twelve to fourteen hours a day, and--that reminds me. I'd better get some sleep. How about you?"

"Not sleepy yet, but don't let me stop you. I'll go in the other room and read. What have you got that might give me some dope on Alister Cole. Got any good books on abnormal psychology?"

"Not a lot. That's out of our line here. We don't have courses in the abnormal brand. We work with fundamentals, mostly. Oh, I've got a couple of general books.

Try that *Outline of Abnormal Psychology* on the top shelf, the blue jacket. It's pretty elementary, I guess, but it's as far as you'll cover in a few hours reading anyway."

I started undressing while Jack got the book and skimmed the table of contents. "This looks okay," he said. "Chapters on dementia praecox, paranoia, waking hypnosis--Never heard of that. Is it common?"

"Certainly," I told him. "We've tried it. It's not really part of abnormal psychology at all, although it can be used in treatment of mental troubles. We've subjected whole classes--with their consent, of course--to experiments in automatic writing while under suggestion in waking state amnesia. That's what I used for my senior thesis for my B.A. If you want to read up on what's probably wrong with Alister Cole, read the chapter on paranoia and paranoid conditions, and maybe the chapter on schizophre-nia--that's dementia praecox. I'd bet on straight paranoia in Cole's case, but it could be schiz."

I hung my clothes over the chair and started to pull on my pajamas.

"According to Jeanette," Jack said, "Dr. Roth thought Cole might have a touch of schizophrenia. But you bet on paranoia. What's the difference?"

I sighed. "All right, I'll tell you. Paranoia is the more uncom-mon of the two disorders, and it's harder to spot. Especially if a subject is tied up in knots and won't talk about himself. A man suffering from paranoia builds up an air-tight system of reasoning about some false belief or peculiar set of ideas. He sticks to these delusions, and you can't convince him he's wrong in what he thinks. But if his particular delusion doesn't show, you can't spot him, because otherwise he seems normal.

"A schizophrenic, on the other hand, may have paranoid ideas, but they're poorly systematized, and he's likely to show other symptoms that he's off-balance. He may have ideas that other people are always talking about him, or trying to do him harm, and he's subjected to incoherence, rambling, untidiness, apathy--all sorts of symptoms. Cole didn't show any of them."

"A paranoiac, then, could pretty well hide what was wrong with him," Jack said, "as long as no one spotted the particular subject he was hipped on?"

"Some of them do. Though if we'd been specialists, I think we'd have spotted Cole quickly. But listen. Hadn't you better get some sleep too?"

"Go ahead and pound your ear. I'll take a nap if I get tired. Here goes the light."

He turned it out and went into the next room. He left the door ajar, but I found that if I turned over and faced the wall, the little light that came in didn't bother me.

Beautiful, the cat, jumped down from the mantel and came over to sleep on my feet, as she always does. I reached down and petted her soft warm fur a moment, then I lay back on the pillow and quit thinking. I slept.

A sound woke me--the sound of a window opening slowly.

### Death--to Rats

With me, as with most people, dreams are forgotten within the first few seconds after waking. I remember the one I was just having, though, because of the tie-up it had with the sound that wakened me.

My dream had changed that slow upward scrape of the window into the scrape of claws on cement, the cement of the basement. There in the little front room of the basement, Dr. Roth was standing with his hand on the latch of a rat cage, and a monstrous cat with the markings of a Siamese was scraping her claws on the floor, gathering her feet under her to spring. It was Beautiful, my cat, and yet it wasn't. She was almost as large as a lion. Her eyes glowed like the headlights of a car.

Dr. Roth cowered back against the tier of rat cages, holding a hand in front of him to ward off the attack. I watched from the doorway, and I tried to open my mouth to scream at her to stop, not to jump. But I seemed paralyzed. I couldn't move a muscle or make a sound.

I saw the cat's tail grow larger. Her eyes seemed to shoot blue sparks. And then she leaped.

Dr. Roth's arm was knocked aside as though it had been a toothpick. Her claws sank into his shoulders and her white, sharp teeth found his throat. He screamed once, and then the scream became a gurgle and he lay on the cement floor, dead, in a puddle of his blood. And the cat, backing away from him, was shrinking to her real size, getting smaller, her claws still scraping the cement as she backed away. . . .

And then, still frozen with the horror of that dream, I began to know that I was dreaming, that the sound I heard was the opening of a window.

I sat up in bed, fast. I opened my mouth to yell for Jack. Some-one stood there, just inside the window!

And then, before I had yelled, I saw that it was Jack who stood there. Enough light came in from the other room that I could be sure of that. He'd raised the shade. He was crouched down now, and his eyes, level with the middle of the lower pane, stared through it into the night outside.

He must have heard the springs creak as I sat up. He turned. "Shhh," he said. "It's all right--I think."

He put the window back down again then, and threw over the lock. He pulled down the shade and came over to the bed and sat down in a chair beside it.

"Sorry I woke you," he said, very quietly. "Can you go back to sleep, or do you want to talk a while?"

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Three-forty. You were asleep only half an hour. I'm sorry, but--"

"But what? What's been happening? Did you think you heard a sound outside?"

"Not outside the window, no. But a few minutes ago I thought I heard someone try the knob of the hall door. But when I got there and listened, I couldn't hear anything."

"It could have been Alister Cole," I said, "if he got in the back way. Wheeler isn't watching the back door."

"That's what I thought, even though I didn't hear anything back there. So I went to the window. I thought if I could attract Wheeler's attention, he'd come in the front way. Then I'd take a chance opening the hall door--with my gun ready, of course. If Cole was there, we'd have him between us."

"Did you get Wheeler's attention?"

He shook his head slowly. "His car isn't where it was. You can't even see it from the window. Maybe he moved it to a different spot where he thought he'd be less conspicuous, or could watch better."

"That's probably it. Well, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. Sit tight. If I stick my neck out into that hall, or go outside through the window, the edge is going to be with Cole. If I sit here and make him come to me, it's the other way round. Only I'm through reading for tonight. I'm sitting right here by the bed. If you can sleep, go ahead. I'll shut up and let you."

"Sure," I said. "I can sleep swell. Just like a lamb staked out in the jungle to draw a tiger for the hunters. That's how I can sleep."

He chuckled. "The lamb doesn't know what it's there for."

"Until it smells tiger. I smell tiger." That reminded me of my dream, and I told him about it.

"You're a psychologist," he said. "What does it mean?"

"Probably that I had a subconscious dislike for Dr. Roth," I told him. "Only I know that already. I don't need to interpret a dream to tell me that."

"What did you have against Roth, Brian? I've known there was something from the way you've talked about him."

"He was a prig, for one thing," I said. "You know me well enough, Jack, to know I'm not too bad a guy, but he thought I was miles away from being good enough for Jeanette. Well--maybe I am, but then again, so's everybody else who might fall in love with her."

"Does she love you?"

"I think so." I thought it over. "Sure, I practically know she does, from things she said tonight."

"Anything else? I mean, about Roth. Is that the only reason you didn't like him?"

I didn't say anything for a while. I was thinking. I thought, why not tell Jack now? Sooner or later, he'll know it. The whole world will know it. Why not get it off my chest right now, while there was a good chance to get my side of it straight?

Something made me stop and listen first. There wasn't a sound from outside nor from the hallway.

"Jack," I said, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm awfully glad that you were here tonight."

"Thanks, pal." He chuckled a little.

"I don't mean what you think I mean, Jack. Sure, maybe you saved my life from Alister Cole. But more than that, you gave me an alibi."

"An alibi? For killing Roth? Sure, I was with you when he was killed."

"Exactly. Listen, Jack, I had a reason for killing Roth. That reason's coming out later anyway. I might as well tell you now."

He turned and stared at me. There was enough light in the room so that I could see the movement of his head, but, not enough so that he could watch my face. I don't know why he bothered turning.

"If you need an alibi," he said, "you've sure got one. We started playing chess at somewhere around eight. You haven't been out of my sight since then, except

while you were in Chief Randall's office."

"Don't think I don't know that," I told him. "And don't think I'm not happy about it. Listen, Jack. Because Roth is dead, I'm going to be a millionaire. If he was alive, I still might be, but there'd have been a legal fight about it. I would have been right, but I could have lost just the same."

"You mean it would have been a case of your word against his?"

"Exactly. And he's--he was--department head, and I'm only a flunky, a little better on his social scale than Alister Cole. And it's something big, Jack. Really big."

"What?"

"What kind of rat cages did you find in the basement when you looked down there?" I asked him.

"What kind? I don't get you. I don't know makes of rat cages."

"Don't worry about the make," I said. "You found only one kind. Empty ones. The rats were dead. And disposed of."

He turned to look at me again. "Go on," he said.

Now that I'd started to tell him, I knew I wouldn't even try to go back to sleep. I was too excited. I propped the pillow up against the head of the bed.

"Make a guess, Jack," I said. "How much food do rats eat a year in the United States alone?"

"I wouldn't know. A million dollars' worth?"

"A hundred million dollars' worth," I said, "at a conservative estimate. Probably more than a million dollars is spent fighting them, each year. In the world, their cost is probably a billion dollars a year. Not altogether--just for one year! How much do you think something would be worth that would actually completely eliminate rats--both *Mus Rattus* and *Mus Norvegicus*--completely and once and for all? Something that would put them with the hairy mammoth and the roc and the dinosaurs?"

"If your mathematics are okay," Jack said, "it'd be worth ten billion bucks in the first ten years?"

"Ten billion, on paper. A guy who could do it ought to be able to get one ten-thousandth that much, shouldn't he? A million?"

"Seems reasonable. And somebody ought to throw in a Nobel prize along with it. But can you do it?"

"I can do it," I said. "Right here in my basement I stumbled across it, accidentally, Jack, in the course of another experiment. But it works. It works! It kills rats!"

"So does Red Squill. So does strychnine. What's your stuff got that they haven't?"

"Communicability. Give it to *one* rat--and the whole colony dies! Like all the rats--thirty of them, to be exact--died when I injected one rat. Sure, you've got to catch one rat alive--but that's easy. Then just inject it and let it go, and all the rats in the neighborhood die."

"A bacillus?"

"No. Look, I'll be honest with you. I don't know exactly how it works, but it's not a germ. I have a hunch that it destroys a rat's immunity to some germ he carries around with him normal-ly--just as you and I carry around a few million germs which

don't harm us ordinarily because we also carry around the anti-bodies that keep them in check. But this injection probably destroys certain antibodies in the rat and the germs become--unchecked. The germs also become strong enough to overcome the antibodies in other rats, and they must be carried by the air because they spread from cage to cage with no direct contact. Thirty rats died within twenty-four hours after I inoculated the first one--some in cages as far away as six feet."

Jack Sebastian whistled. "Maybe you have got something," he said softly. "Where did Roth come in on it, though? Did he claim half, or what?"

"Half I wouldn't have minded giving him," I said. "But he insisted the whole thing belonged to the university, just because I was working on an experiment for the university--even though it was in my own place, on my own time. And the thing I hit upon was entirely outside the field of the experiment. I don't see that at all. Fortunately, he didn't bring it to an issue. He said we should experiment further before we announced it."

"Do you agree with that?"

"Of course. Naturally, I'm not going off half-cocked. I'm going to be sure, plenty sure, before I announce it. But when I do, it's going to be after the thing has been patented in my name. I'm going to have that million bucks, Jack!"

"I hope you're right," he said. "And I can't say I blame you, if you made the discovery here at your own place on your own time. Anyone else know about it?"

"No."

"Did Alister Cole?"

"No, he didn't. I think, Jack, that this thing is bigger even than you realize. Do you know how many human lives it's going to save? We don't have any bubonic here in this country--or much of any other rat-and-flea borne disease, but take the world as a whole."

"I see what you mean. Well, more power to you, keed. And if everything goes well, take me for a ride on your yacht sometime."

"You think I'm kidding?"

"Not at all. And I pretty well see what you mean by being glad you've got an alibi. Well, it's a solid one, if my word goes for anything. To have killed Dr. Roth--no matter how much motive you may have had--you'd have had to have had a knife on a pole a block and a half long. Besides--"

"What?"

"Nothing. Listen, I'm worried about Wheeler. Probably he moved that car to another spot, but I wish I knew for sure."

"It's a squad car, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes."

"With two-way radio?"

"Yes, but I haven't got a radio in here."

"We got a telephone. If you're worried about Wheeler--and you're getting me that way too--why don't you phone Headquarters and have them call Wheeler and phone you back?"

"Either you're a genius or I'm a dope," he said. "Don't tell me which."

He got up out of the chair and I could see he was still holding the gun in his hand. He went first to the door and listened carefully, then he went to the window.

He listened carefully there. Final-ly, he pulled back the shade a crack to look out.

"Now you're giving me the willies, and I might as well get up," I said. "For some reason, I'd rather get killed with my pants on--if I'm going to get killed." I looked at my cat. "Sorry, Beautiful," I said as I pulled my feet out from under the Siamese.

I took off my pajamas and started putting on my shirt and trousers.

"Wheeler's car still isn't anywhere I can see," Jack said.

He went over to the telephone and lifted the receiver off the hook. I slipped my feet into a pair of loafers and looked over. He was still holding the receiver and hadn't spoken. He put it back gently. "Someone's cut the wires," he said. "The line is dead."

### The Cat

I said, "I don't believe this. It's out of a horror program on the radio. It's a gag."

Jack snorted. He was turning around, looking from the win-dow to the door. "Got a flashlight?"

"Yes. In the drawer over there."

"Get it," he said. "Then sit back in that corner where you're not in direct range from the window or the door. If either opens, bracket it with your flash. I've got my flash but I'm using it left-handed. Anyway, two spots are better than one, and I want to see to shoot straight."

While I was getting the flashlight, he closed the door to the other room, leaving us in pitch darkness except for our flashes. I lighted my own way to the chair he'd pointed out.

"There's a window in that other room," I said. "Is it locked?"

"Yes," he answered. "He can't get in there without breaking that window. Okay, turn out that light and sit tight."

I heard him move across the room to another corner. His flash-light played briefly first on the door to the hallway, then swept across to the window. Then it went out.

"Wouldn't the advantage be with us if we kept the light on?" I asked.

"No. Listen, if he busts in the window, when you aim your flash at it, hold it out from your body, out over the arm of your chair. So if he shoots at the flash, he won't hit you. Our two lights should blind him. We should be able to see him, but he shouldn't be able to see us."

"Okay," I said.

I don't know how many minutes went by. Then there was a soft tapping at the window. I tensed in my chair and aimed the flashlight at the window without turning it on.

The tapping came again. An irregular series: *tap-- tap--tap--tap*.

"That's Wheeler," Jack whispered. "It's the code tap. Cole couldn't possibly know it. Sit tight."

I could hear him moving across the room in the darkness. I could see the streak of grayness as he cautiously lifted one side of the shade, then peered through

the crack between shade and window. As quietly as he could, he raised up the shade and unlocked and raised the window.

It was turning slightly gray outside, and a little light came from the street lamp a quarter of a block away. I could recognize the big body of Wheeler coming through the window. Wheeler, and not Alister Cole.

I began breathing again. I got up out of the chair and went over to them. Wheeler was whispering.

". . . So don't put down the windows," he was saying. "I'll come in that way again."

"I'll leave it up to Brian," Jack whispered back. "If he wants to take that chance. Meanwhile, you watch that window."

He pulled me to one side then, away from the open window. "Listen," he said. "Wheeler saw somebody moving in back. He'd moved his car where he could watch part of the back yard. He got there in time to see a window going down. Alister Cole's inside the building. Wheeler's got an idea now, only it's got a risk to it. I'll leave it up to you. If you don't like it, he'll go out again and get help, and we'll sit tight here, as we were until help comes."

"What's the idea?" I asked. If it wasn't too risky, I'd like it better than another vigil while Wheeler went for help.

"Wheeler," Jack said, "thinks he should walk right out of the door into the hall and out the front door. He thinks Cole will hear that, and will think I'm leaving you. Wheeler will circle around the house and come in the window again. Cole should figure you're here alone and come in that hallway door--and both Wheeler and I will be here to take him. You won't be taking any risk unless by some chance he gets both of us. That isn't likely. We're two to one, and we'll be ready for him"

I whispered back that it sounded good to me. He gripped my arm.

"Go back to your chair then. That's as good a place as any."

Groping my way back to the chair, I heard Jack and Wheeler whispering as they went toward the hallway door. They were leaving the window open and, since it was momentarily unguarded, I kept my eyes on it, ready to yell a warning if a figure appeared there. But none did.

The hallway door opened and closed quickly, letting a momentary shaft of light into the room. I heard Jack back away from the door and Wheeler's footsteps going along the hallway. I heard the front door open and close, Wheeler's steps cross the porch.

A moment later, there was the soft *tap--tap-tap--tap* on the upper pane of the open window, and then Wheeler's bulk came through it.

Very, very quietly, he closed the window and locked it. He pulled down the shade. Then I heard the shuffle of his footsteps as he moved into position to the right of the door.

I haven't any idea how long we waited after that. Probably five or ten minutes--but it seemed like hours. Then I heard, or thought I heard, the very faintest imaginable sound. It might have been the scrape of shoes on the carpet of the hall outside the door. But there wasn't any doubt about the next sound. It was the soft turning of the knob of the door. It turned and held. The door pushed open a crack, then a few inches. Light streamed over a slowly widening area.

Then one thing Jack hadn't counted on happened. A hand reached in, between the door and the jamb, and flicked on the light switch. Dazzling light from the bulks in the ceiling almost blinded me. And it was in that blinding second that the door swung back wide and Alister Cole, knife in one hand and single-shot target pistol in the other, stood in the doorway. His eyes flashed around the room, taking in all three of us. But then his eyes centered on me and the target pistol lifted.

Jack stepped in from the side and a blackjack was in his up-raised hand. It swung down and there was a sound like someone makes thumping a melon. He and Wheeler caught Alister Cole, one from each side, and eased his way down to the carpet.

Wheeler bent over him and got the gun and the knife first, then held his hand over Cole's heart.

"He'll be all right," he said.

He took a pair of handcuffs from his hip pocket, rolled Cole over and cuffed his hands together behind him. Then he straight-ened, picking up the gun he'd put down on the carpet while he worked on Cole.

I'd stood up, my knees still shaking a little. My forehead felt as though it was beaded with cold sweat. The flashlight was gripped so tightly in my right hand that my fingers ached.

I caught sight of Beautiful, again on the mantel, and she was standing up, her tail bushy and straight up, her fur back of the ears and along the back standing up in a ridge, her blue eyes blazing. "It's all right, Beautiful," I said to her soothingly. "All the excitement's over, and everything's--"

I was walking toward the mantel, raising my hand to pet her, when Wheeler's excited voice stopped me.

"Watch out," he yelled. "That cat's going to jump --"

And I saw the muzzle of his gun raising and pointing at the Siamese cat.

My right hand swung up with the flashlight and I leaped at Wheeler. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jack stepping in as Wheeler ducked back. The corner of my eye caught the swing of his blackjack. . . .

The overhead light was bright in my eyes when I opened them. I was lying flat on the bed and the first thing I saw was Beautiful, curled up on my chest looking at me. She was all right now, her fur sleek and her curled tail back to normal. Whatever else had happened, she was all right.

I turned my head, and it hurt to turn it, but I saw that Jack was sitting beside the bed. The door was closed and Wheeler and Cole were gone.

"What happened?" I asked.

"You tried to kill Wheeler," Jack said. There was something peculiar about his voice, but his eyes met mine levelly.

"Don't be silly," I said. "I was going to knock his arm down before he could shoot. He was crazy. He must have a phobia against cats."

Jack shook his head. "You were going to kill him," he said. "You were going to kill him whether he shot or not."

"Don't be silly." I tried to move my hands and found they were fastened behind me. I looked at Jack angrily. "What's wrong with you?"

"Not with me, Brian," he said. "With you. I know--now--that it was really you

who killed Dr. Roth tonight. Yes, I know you've got an alibi. But you did it just the same. You used Alister Cole as your instrument. My guess would be waking hypnosis."

"I suppose I got him to try to kill me, too!" I said.

"You told him he'd shoot *over your head*, and then run away. It was a compulsion so strong he tried it again tonight, even after he saw Wheeler and me ready to slug him if he tried. And he was aiming high again. How long have you been working on him?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You do, Brian. You don't know it all, but you know this part of it. You found out that Cole had schizophrenic tendencies. You found out, probably while playing chess with him, that you could put him under waking hypnosis without his knowing it. And you worked on him. What kind of a fantasy did you build in him? What kind of a conspiracy, did you plant in his mind, Dr. Roth was leading against him?"

"You're crazy."

"No, *you* are, Brian. Crazy, but clever. And you know that what I've just told you just now is right. You also know I'll never be able to prove it. I admit that. But there's something else you don't know. I don't have to prove it."

For the first time I felt a touch of fear. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"You gave Cole his fantasies, but you don't know your own. You don't know that--under the pressure, possibly, of working too hard and studying too hard--your own mind cracked. You don't know that your million-dollar rat-killer is *your* fantasy. You don't believe me, now that I'm telling you that it is a fantasy. You'll never believe it. The paranoiac builds up an air-tight system of excuses and rationalization to support his insane delusions. You'll never believe me."

I tried to sit up and couldn't. I realized then that it wasn't a matter of my arms being tied. Jack had put the strait jacket on me. "You're part of it, then," I said. "You're one of those in the plot against me."

"Sure, sure. You know, Brian. I can guess what started it. Or rather what set it off, probably only a few days ago. It was when Dr. Roth killed your cat. That dream you told me about tonight-- the cat killing Dr. Roth. Your mind wouldn't accept the truth. Even your subconscious mind reversed the facts for the dream. I wonder what really happened. Possibly your cat killed a rat that was an important part of an experiment and, in anger, Dr. Roth--"

"You're crazy," I shouted. "Crazy!"

"And ever since, Brian, you've been talking to a cat that wasn't there. I thought you were kidding, at first. When I figured out the truth, I told Wheeler what I figured. When you gave us a clue where the cat was supposed to be, on the mantel, he raised his gun and pretended--"

"Jack!" I begged him, to break off the silly things he was saying. "If you're going to help them railroad me, even if you're in on the plot--please get them to let me take Beautiful with me. Don't take her away too. Please!"

Cars were driving up outside. I could feel the comforting weight and warmth of the cat sleeping on my chest.

"Don't worry, Brian," Jack said quietly. "That cat'll go wherever you go."

Nobody can take it away from you. Nobody."

## LISTEN TO THE MOCKING BIRD

When the phone rang, Tim McCracken grabbed for it. Then he pulled back his hand and made himself count up to ten, slowly, before he lifted the receiver. Just because it was the first time the darned thing had let out a peep in a week, he didn't want whoever was calling to think he'd been sitting there waiting for the call.

Sure, business was bad, but a guy had to bluff. Or did he? While he was counting to ten, McCracken let his eyes run around the well-furnished office that constituted his bluff. He wondered again if he hadn't been foolish to sink the profits from his first three cases into that layout.

But those cases had come so easily and so quickly after he'd quit his job with the police department, and gone out on his own. They'd all come, though, when his office was a secondhand desk in a ramshackle building. And since then--

Eight, nine, ten. He picked up the phone, and said:

"Timothy McCracken Detective Agency. McCracken speaking."

"About that rent, McCracken," came a gruff voice. "When you going to pay up?"

"I explained about that yesterday, Mr.--Say, who is this? You're not Mr. Rogers."

There was a baritone chuckle at the other end of the line.

"Mack, you ought to be a detective, the way you catch on to things. This is Cap Zehnder. How're tricks? Never mind, you just told me."

McCracken grunted disgustedly. "Cap, if I didn't used to work for you, I'd come over and slap your big ears down for that gag."

"Keep your scanties on, Mack," said Zehnder. "That ain't why I called you. If you still think you're a private detective, I got a client for you. He asked for you by name, even. I didn't have to recommend you. Now what do you say?"

"My God!" said McCracken. "Give quick! Where is he?"

"In the jug, right here. Suspicion of murder. It says it heard of you and wants you to help it beat the rap."

"It? What do you mean, it? You started out with a 'he.' "

"Did I?" The captain chuckled. "My error. It's a mocking bird. And it crochets."

"It what?"

"I said crochets. For a hobby. But it's a mocking bird for a vocation. But, I'm not going to explain everything over the phone. If you want to make twelve bucks, come on over."

McCracken gasped. "Twelve bucks? Listen, Cap, they didn't transfer you to

the narcotic squad and put you testing samples, did they? What do you mean, twelve bucks?"

"Okay, don't come then," Zehnder said stiffly. "That's all the money, in cash, he's got. But maybe you can blackmail him for more if you get him off. He'll have a salary check coming from the theatre, if they don't fire him."

"But holy cow, Cap, I can't handle a murder investigation for a twelve buck advance. What's it about? Who'd he kill?"

"Don't you read the papers? Story's in the *Morning Blade*. Of course, if you haven't got three cents--"

"Okay, okay! Save your breath to cool your soup. I'll drop around and see what the guy looks like."

"Fine, Mack. Listen, Jerold Bell's coming over to see him, too. I told him to stop by and pick you up. Thought I'd save you cab-fare or a walk."

"Bell?" echoed McCracken. "Oh, the insurance guy. I remember him. Where's he figure in?"

"He insured the ring," Zehnder explained. "It's in the papers. Buy one, and I'll refund your three cents." There was a click in the receiver.

McCracken took his hat from the bottom drawer of his desk, and put it on his head. He'd wait for Bell in the lobby and read the newspaper meanwhile.

He looked at his reflection in the mirror of the elevator and wondered if he'd been a triple-dyed sap to quit a paying job for a gamble on being his own boss. Six months ago, he'd been drawing down a paycheck every week, and no overhead to worry about. And this morning, he'd had a cup of coffee for breakfast, instead of the ham and eggs he usually ate.

Twelve bucks would buy a lot of ham and eggs. He hoped Zehnder hadn't guessed how badly he needed that twelve bucks.

The elderly walrus at the cigar counter was waiting on another customer, and McCracken fished up the contents of his pockets and looked at them. There was a folder of matches, three keys, and two pennies in cash, one of which was Canadian.

He shoved his hand back into his pocket, as the walrus turned.

"*Morning Blade*, George," said McCracken. He grinned engag-ingly. "Got a case today, George! So don't let the credit worry you. I'll be back in the money soon. Give me a pack of cigarettes, too."

"That's fine, Mr. McCracken," said George. "But if you're working, how come you can't pay--"

"Don't quibble, George. I'm going over now to pick up my retainer. I'll pay you this afternoon."

The walrus looked at him darkly, and then passed the ciga-rettes across the counter. McCracken had meanwhile picked up the top newspaper from the pile alongside the cash register.

The banner line read: "Italians Suffer New Reverses." That wouldn't be it. "President Vetoes --" No. But there was two-column head at one side halfway down the page. It read:

SLIMJIM LEE MURDERED, ROBBED

The walrus had followed the direction of his gaze. "Say, is that the case you're gonna work on, Mr. McCracken?" he asked, and there was respect in his tone of voice.

McCracken's eyes caught the words "Mocking Bird" in the second paragraph. He nodded absently, continuing to read.

"Golly," said the walrus. "Reckon whoever's hiring you has all kinds of dough, then. Slimjim used to be the biggest bookie in town. And the way he sometimes threw money around . . . You stick 'em for plenty, young feller."

"Mmmm," said McCracken, and started to add that you couldn't throw money around the way Slimjim Lee had thrown it, and still have much left, and that the big-shot gambler was reputed to be broke. Anyway, he wasn't working for Slimjim's heirs, if any.

Then he closed his mouth again. The way the walrus was looking at him awakened new possibilities.

"Say, George," he said, "I'm short of cash until I get that retain-er. Let me have a buck and put it on my account, will you?"

"Sure, Mr. McCracken." The walrus rang up "No Sale" on the register and passed over a bill from the drawer. He made a notation on a slip of paper on the ledge.

"Makes it eleven dollars and--no, twelve dollars even." McCracken winced slightly. "Thanks, George," he said, and moved a few steps away to lean against the wall, while he studied the article in the *Blade*. It was quite brief--understandable as the murder had been discovered only half an hour before deadline of the *Blade's* final edition.

Slimjim Lee, whose real name was James Rogers Lee, had met his death probably between midnight and three A.M., although the body had not been discovered until four-thirty. Autopsy might determine the time of death more closely.

His body had been found in the visiting parlor of a theatrical rooming house on Vermont Street. He had been killed, presumably, by a long slender needle called a crocheting needle in one part of the story and a knitting needle in another paragraph. It had been thrust into his heart.

He was known to have been wearing, shortly prior to the murder, his famous ring with the huge solitaire diamond for which he was reputed to have paid six thousand dollars. His bill-fold was found empty. Undoubtedly, according to the police, robbery had been the motive, and the solitaire diamond the principal objective of the murderer.

Mr. Lee, according to the newspaper article, had been a close friend of Perley Essington, who roomed at the house in question, and was a frequent visitor at the Vermont street address. Perley Essington was a vaudeville performer specializing in whistling and bird imitations, and he was billed as "The Mocking Bird" on the Bijou's current bill.

Harry Lake, another vaudevillian and inmate of the rooming house, had seen Slimjim Lee enter the house at around midnight, and had assumed he was calling on Perley Essington.

Another vaudevillian and roomer, one LaVarre LaRoque, a dancer, had discovered the body when she came in at four-thirty in the morning. She had opened

the parlor door when she had noticed a crack of light under it.

McCracken read the story for the third time, and was putting the paper in his pocket, when he saw Jerold Bell coming through the revolving door into the lobby.

"Hi, Mack," Jerry greeted him. "Haven't seen you since you left the force. Have a quick one before we go see our fine feathered friend?"

Over a Scotch-and-soda, McCracken asked:

"You're in this because Continental insured the ring? How much was it really worth, Jerry?"

"He paid four thousand for it," Bell said. "I doubt if it could be sold now for over two and a half. Openly, I mean. As stolen property, whoever has it will be lucky to get a thousand. It's insured, incidentally, for two thousand."

McCracken nodded. "Cap Zehnder said you sold the policy. How come? I thought you handled only investigations for Continental."

"Ordinarily, yes. But in cases where unusual factors influence the amount of the premiums, I generally get called in. The regular salesman gets a cut, too, but turns the closing over to me and I help advise the amount of the premium."

"And what was unusual about this policy?"

Bell grimaced. "Just that Lee insisted on wearing that rock twenty-four hours a day, which made the risk much greater than is ordinarily the case with jewelry that valuable. Most people keep their stuff in safes or vaults, and wear it on special occasions. And then there was his occupation to consider, of course. A gambler, who goes to all the places a gambler goes to, and associates with the kind of people--well, I had to talk the company into issuing the policy at all."

"Leaving you out on a limb, now that the ring is gone?" McCracken grinned. "Any chance that Slimjim might have sold the ring himself?"

"Not an earthly one," Bell said. "That ring was his luck, he thought. He'd have sold his shirt and shoes first. I've sat in on games with him, and knew him well enough to be positive of that."

"Ever met this Perley Essington?"

Jerry Bell nodded. "Wait until you see him, Mack. A crackpot of the first water. I never thought he'd pull anything like this--if he really did. Cap Zehnder says he has him cold, but I don't know what the evidence is."

"How well you know him?" McCracken asked.

The insurance man laughed. "A month ago, he wanted to take out an insurance policy on--believe it or not, Mack--on his whistle! How could you insure a whistle? That was when he first got his engagement at the Bijou. He'd been 'at liberty' for a long time before that. I think Slimjim loaned him money to live on."

"You didn't issue the policy?"

"Heck, no. I saw him a few times and pretended to give it consideration only because he was a friend of Lee's. I wanted to keep Slimjim's good will, and that meant I had to go easy with Perley."

At Headquarters, they found Zehnder alone in his office. He barked an order into his desk phone.

"I'm having your Mocking Bird sent up here," he said. "If you want to talk to him in private before you go, Mack, you can do that in his cell when we send him back. Okay?"

McCracken nodded. "Sure. It won't matter, if he's innocent. And if he's guilty, I don't want it."

Zehnder chuckled. "Then I'm afraid you're out twelve bucks."

"Any news on the ring?" Bell asked.

The captain shook his head, but before he could add to the negation, the door opened.

A fat little man, whose head was as devoid of hair as a banister knob, came in. A uniformed turnkey was behind him, but stepped back into the hall and closed the door from the outside when the captain signalled to him.

"Mack," said Zehnder, "this is Perley Essington. Your client, maybe. You said you already know him, Bell?"

McCracken put out his hand and shook the pudgy, moist one of the little bird imitator.

"Tell me about it, Mr. Essington," he said. "All I know now is what I read in the paper."

The little man beamed at him. "I saw the paper," he said. "It's right as far as it goes. I wasn't home when Jim Lee came there at midnight."

"How do you know he came at midnight, then?" asked Zehnder.

Tim McCracken frowned at the captain. "Tut, tut, Cap. It says so in the paper. Don't you read the *Blade*? Or haven't you got three cents?" He turned back to the vaudevillian. "Where were you at midnight, Mr. Essington?"

"Call me Perley, Mr. McCracken," the actor said. "Why, at midnight, I was just walking. After the show I went for a walk in the park. It was a warm night, and I didn't get home until about two o'clock. I didn't know Jim was coming around last night."

"See anyone you knew while you were out?" McCracken asked.

"Nope." Essington shook his head. "And you'll ask next if I stopped in anywhere. I didn't. I sat on a park bench for awhile and listened to a nightingale. I had a sort of conversation with him. Like this."

He pursed his lips, and suddenly the little room was filled with a sweet, lilting melody. The clear notes throbbed to silence. McCracken saw that Jerold Bell, who was standing behind Perley's chair, was grinning at him.

McCracken cleared his throat. "Say, that's good, Perley. You that good on other birds?"

"Better," said the little man complacently. "On some, even the birds can't tell the difference. On the stage, I'm a wow. And I have a line of patter with the whistling that knocks them out of their seats and rolls them in the aisles. Just last week, the manager was telling me that I was the greatest--"

"That's fine," interrupted McCracken. "But let's get back to Slimjim Lee. How well did you know him?"

The look that had been in Perley's eyes while he talked of the stage faded to awareness of the present.

"Very well," he told them. "I guess he was just about my best friend, and vice versa. Yes, I know most people think--thought--it was funny, because Jim and I are--were--so completely different. But I guess that was why we liked each other."

"You saw him often?"

"He came to see me two-three times a week. Generally after the evening show. We'd play chess or whistle until nearly morning."

"Whistle? Late at night?"

"Sure. He liked whistling. But he couldn't very well, and I was teaching him how. He just couldn't get the knack of it."

"But didn't the other roomers--"

"Not in a place like that, Mack," Jerry Bell cut in. "They're all slightly nuts. It's liberty hall. Last time I was there, there were acrobats jumping off the banister at four o'clock in the morn-ing. Slimjim took me there after a game."

Zehnder nodded. "Yeah, I've been there," he said, "and I'd believe anything. We picked up a guy there a month ago."

"Cap," McCracken asked, "could that have any connection with this case, maybe?"

"No. Simple theft case, and the guy's up now, doing three years. He was a stranger to the rest of the mob there, anyway."

McCracken glanced at Perley for confirmation, and got it.

"None of us knew him well," the whistler said. "He wasn't an artist like the rest of us. He painted pictures."

McCracken closed his eyes for a second, then opened them and asked the bird imitator:

"What do you know about Jim Lee's affairs? I've heard he was broke, or nearly so. If you're *a* friend of his, you ought to know about that."

"I do, Mr. McCracken. He was hard up, that is, for him. He ran a lot of bookie places, you know, or rather he backed them. Then the syndicate--the Garvey-Cantoni group that runs the numbers game--moved in and took them over. He didn't fight them about it. He wasn't a gangster and he didn't want to start a war. And that's what it would have been if he'd tried to buck them."

Zehnder cut in.

"Perley's right about that. We're working on that syndicate, and we close a place now and then, but we haven't got much on them yet. They're bad boys, though."

"Then why," McCracken wanted to know, "suspect Perley when you've got some really tough mugs that might have a motive?"

"But they haven't," said Perley. "Jim Lee wasn't fighting them. Of course, they could have killed him for his ring, but--" He shrugged.

"What about that crochet needle Lee was killed with, Perley?" McCracken asked. "Was it one of yours? The captain says crochet-ing is your hobby."

For the first time, the little man seemed on the defensive as he answered.

"The police seem to think it's funny that I should like to crochet," he complained. "That's silly. Why, lots of men do. And it's good for the nerves, and it gave me something to do when Jim and I played chess. He took so long between moves."

"*Was* it one of your needles?" McCracken demanded.

"It could have been." Perley shrugged again. "I have lots of them."

"It was exactly like others in his room," said Zehnder.

Jerold Bell was getting restless.

"The devil with crocheting needles," he said. "I just dropped in here to see if there was any news on the ring. I think I'll go on around to Vermont Street and help the boys there look for it. Coming, McCracken?"

"In a minute, Jerry." He turned to Zehnder. "Listen, Cap, the main thing I want to know, is why you're holding Mr. Essington? Thus far there isn't any evidence against him, except that he hasn't an alibi he can prove."

Zehnder grinned. "It ain't that he can't prove he wasn't there. It's that we can prove he was, see? He says he didn't get home before two. But two people there heard him in his room, between half past eleven and half past twelve."

"You mean they heard someone in his room?"

"Nope. Him. Like always when he's in his room alone, they said, he was whistling to himself. Bird calls and stuff. Even a dog imitation."

Perley Essington whirled indignantly. "*Dog imitations!*" His voice was shrill with indignation. "Why, I--"

"How do you know it wasn't Slimjim Lee they heard, waiting for Perley?" McCracken asked Zehnder. "If he was learning how to whistle -- ?"

Again Perley, still indignant, interrupted.

"Mr. McCracken, that isn't possible," he said. "Nobody would mistake Jim Lee's whistling for mine. They couldn't. He was just learning, and he just whistled straight, *whistled*, not bird calls."

His voice rose now:

"No, nor anybody else whistling, either. Nor a phonograph record, or anything like that. One young whippersnapper of a policeman suggested that. There isn't another artist in the coun-try who could possibly have been mistaken for me by the people who room there and who know my work."

"Fine," said Captain Zehnder. "Then it must have been you they heard?"

"I don't know," said Perley. "But they couldn't have mistaken anybody else for me. Listen, have you ever heard anybody else who can do this?"

He pursed his lips and began to run a gamut of bird calls that sounded like feeding time in an aviary. The calls tumbled upon one another's heels so rapidly, that McCracken could almost have sworn that two or three birds were singing simultaneously.

The insurance man, standing behind the little bird imitator, looked at McCracken over Perley's head and winked. He circled his forefinger at his temple, than reached forward at Perley's bald head, and--with the exaggerated gesture of a stage magician--pretended to pluck something from Perley's scalp. He held it up so McCracken could see that it was a tiny feather.

It *was* funny, but Perley was looking, and whistling, directly at McCracken and the private detective couldn't laugh without hurting Perley's feelings.

He wondered if Bell was right, and if Perley had really passed the borderline between eccentricity and outright screwiness. If he hadn't, he was putting himself in a bad spot by refusing to admit that his fellow-roomers could have been mistaken about whom they had heard.

Zehnder tapped Perley on the shoulder to stop him.

"Anything else you want to tell McCracken?" he said.

Perley stopped whistling and shook his head. He looked at Tim McCracken.

"You'll take the case?" he said. "I'm sorry I can't pay you more than--"

"Sure," said McCracken, "I'll take it." He looked at Zehnder. "You going around with us, Cap?"

Zehnder crossed and opened the door before he answered, and nodded to the turnkey who had been waiting outside. After shaking hands with McCracken, Perley was led down the hallway toward his cell. Mingling with his footsteps, there floated back the trilling notes of a thrush.

Zehnder grinned at McCracken. "That's the answer," he said. "The crackpot doesn't even know he's doing that. It's a habit, a reflex. Last night, in his room, he probably didn't even know he was whistling." He opened the bottom drawer of his desk and took out an envelope, and handed it to McCracken. "Well, here's your retainer, Mack. You can't get him in any deeper than he is, so I wish you luck."

McCracken put it in his pocket, grateful to Zehnder for not having embarrassed him by mentioning the amount.

"You didn't answer me, Cap," he said. "Coming with us?"

"Part way. Just for routine I want to see the Bijou's doorman, to check on that call Perley says he got."

"What call? He didn't say anything about a. call."

Zehnder snorted. "He did last night, but he probably decided it sounded too thin and to forget about it. Come on, I'll tell you on the way. You follow us in your car, Jerry. We'll just stop there a minute."

As he drove north on 24th Street, the captain explained about the call:

"It was from a fan, Perley told us. Wanted him to listen to something he thought was a pink-crested tootwhistle, or some-thing."

"A what?"

"I dunno what, but it doesn't matter. Perley says the guy said he was a fan of his and a member of some Audubon society, and he'd heard a night-singing bird in Winslow Park he thought was something or other that's rare. He wanted Perley to meet him there and help identify it."

"So that's why he went to the park instead of home? And the guy didn't show up?"

"Not unless it was that nightingale that called Perley up . . . Here's where the doorman lives."

Zehnder swung the car into the curb and climbed out. McCracken followed him into a rooming house where a brief conversation with a half-awake old man in a nightshirt brought out nothing of interest. As far as the doorman knew, Perley Essington might have got a call just after the show, or might not have. Lots of the performers got calls. He didn't remember.

Zehnder drove on to the Vermont Street address. It was a brownstone front just like its neighbors, except that there was a cop in front. Jerold Bell parked just behind Zehnder's car and joined them.

"I'm going back," the captain told them, "but I'll get you past Regan here. Are the Homicide boys still here, Regan?"

"Just left, fifteen minutes ago, Captain," answered Regan. "Don't think they got anything new. I heard one of them say some-thing about grilling Essington again."

"Okay, Regan. Let these fellows mosey around inside. You know Mack. This other guy's from the insurance company."

Zehnder got back into his car. McCracken, following Bell, turned back a moment.

"Who all's here, Regan?" he asked.

"This LaVarre dame, for one. She's asleep. Want me to go wake her up for you?" There was a faint note of hopefulness in the voice of the policeman.

McCracken shook his head. "Who else?"

"The landlady. And this Carson guy, the comic. He's one of the two that heard Essington in his room. He's in Number Two. Essington's is Number Six, right across the hall from the parlor where they found the stiff. It's unlocked."

"How's the LaVarre woman fixed for alibis?" McCracken asked.

Regan grinned. "Triple-barreled. She was out with three guys all at once. I heard the Homicide gang questioning her. Sure you don't want me to wake her up for you?"

"Keep your mind on your work, Regan. I suppose somebody's in back, on guard there?"

"Sure. Kaplan. You know him, don't you?"

McCracken went down along the dark hallway to the parlor. Bell was looking around painstakingly. McCracken's gaze went about the room quickly, noted the position of the body that had been marked in chalk on the floor before the sofa that stood diagonally across one corner of the room. There were half a dozen flash bulbs in the wastepaper basket in the corner.

"He must have been sitting there," said Bell, pointing to the sofa. "If he was stabbed and fell off, that'd put him in about the position those chalk marks show. The killer could have been hid-den right behind that sofa when he came in and sat down. Then he stood up, reached over his shoulder and stabbed him."

McCracken nodded. "That's about it. And if it is, that means he was killed early, almost as soon as he got here. Say, a crocheting needle isn't so long, is it? Must have been fitted into some sort of a handle, like an ice pick. Well, we can find about that later. You don't think you'll find the ring in here, do you?"

Bell shrugged. "Probably not. Probably never find it, but I've got to turn in a report to the company. I want to be able to tell 'em I went over things with a fine-tooth comb."

McCracken crossed over and looked out the window.

"Whoever hid behind that sofa could have come and gone this way," he mused. "And come and gone by the alley. There's a cellar door right outside. You can come in this way easy."

Bell nodded. "There's fingerprint powder on the sill there. The Homicide boys thought of that, too. But what about Perley? He's too screwy on his story to figure out of it. Why'd he lie about not having been here until two o'clock?"

McCracken grunted. "That's the only thing against him, really. I want to talk to one of the persons who heard him, or say they did."

He walked out into the hall, down two doors, and knocked. After a minute, a tall man in a worn bathrobe came to the door and said, "Yeah?" He had the sad, bored air most comedians have when they aren't working at the trade.

"Carson?" McCracken asked.

"That's me, yeah."

"You like this Perley Essington? Was he a friend of yours?"

"Huh? Sure, he's a swell little guy. A bit nuts, maybe. But he's good on the boards."

"As good as he thinks he is?"

"Well, maybe not *that* good," Carson said. "Maybe none of us are. It's an occupational disease. What do you want?"

"I want to hear your side of what happened last night." The tall man put a hand to his head. "Oh, Lord! Again?" He started to close the door. "Four cops, and three reporters, and --"

McCracken caught the door and held it. "Then once more won't hurt you," he said. "Besides, I'm on Perley's side. I'm working for him, trying to punch some holes in the case against him."

"Why didn't you say so? Come on in." He walked back to the dresser to get the bottle standing on it. "Have a drink?"

"Two fingers. The main thing is are you sure it was Perley you heard?"

"Yes and no. I wouldn't swear it was him, but if it wasn't, it was somebody pretty good. There aren't many that can come close to him on that warble stuff. I've heard lots of imitators. Straight whistling, yes, but not on the imitations."

"What time did you hear it first, and what time last?"

Carson lifted a glass and clinked it against the one he'd handed McCracken. When he'd downed the glass' contents, he said:

"I got home about ten-thirty, maybe eleven. I had a good mys-tery story I wanted to finish, and I was reading." He rubbed his chin. "It was sometime between then and midnight that it started. And kept up maybe half an hour, off and on. And it *was* in Perley's room. I went past the door when I went to the bathroom once about twelve, so I'm sure of that."

"Did you look in the parlor then?" McCracken asked.

"No. I think the door was closed. But I didn't have any reason to look in, so I didn't."

"You're not sure about the time. Couldn't it have been two o'clock, maybe, if you'd lost track of time while you were reading?"

"No. I went to bed at twelve-thirty, see? I did look at my clock then, and my watch too, to set it. I could be wrong by it being earlier, but not later."

"And the other fellow who heard it?"

"Name's Bill Johnson. Yes, he's sure, too, that it was somewhere around midnight."

McCracken sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed. He tried another tack.

"Birds outside, maybe?" he asked.

"No, too loud," Carson said. "And I never heard birds sing that much or that loud around here before. Anyway, it'd have to be a flock of different kinds of them. And--let's see--robins don't sing at night, do they? Robin's about the only bird call I'm sure of, and I heard that."

"How good was Slimjim Lee? Perley was teaching him, he says."

Carson shook his head firmly. "No, but definitely. I've heard him, and he could carry a tune, but that's about all. And he wasn't sure where he'd carry it. No, pal, this stuff was good. If it wasn't Perley, then he's got a rival."

"How about the radio?"

"I thought of that, afterwards," Carson said. "But it couldn't have been. The place was as quiet as a morgue, around then, and I'd have heard the announcer shooting his mouth off between imitations. Anyway, no bird imitator could stay on the air that long. It was at least half an hour, off and on, like I said."

McCracken sighed again. "Was it you said something about a dog imitation?"

"Not me. That was Bill Johnson. I might have heard a dog, but if I did, I don't remember. I'd have figured that came from outside. Like the cats. I did hear some cats yowling, but that wouldn't have been Perley either. He doesn't imitate animals, just birds."

McCracken got up and went to the door.

"Well, thanks," he said. He declined another drink, and went down the hall. He opened the door of Perley Essington's room and went in.

Jerry Bell came out of the room across the hall and stood in the doorway.

"Find out anything new?" he asked.

"Carson's telling the truth, I think," McCracken said. "If he was lying, he'd be more definite about time and things. He rings true."

"Then how can you figure an out for Perley? Or can you?"

"I don't know," McCracken said. "But I got an idea. It's almost as screwy as Perley is."

He got down on his hands and knees in the middle of the car-pet, and started working around the floor in circles, examining the carpet carefully. A white spot he found on the floor behind a chair interested him considerably.

He was starting to crawl behind the bed, when Jerry Bell said:

"You got it wrong, Mack. No corpses in here. That was the other room, remember?"

McCracken got up slowly and dusted off the knees of his trousers with his left hand. A tiny object he'd found behind the bed was gripped carefully between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He held it so Bell could see that it was a light blue feather.

Jerry Bell grunted. "Is that what you were looking for, Mack? Jeepers, I'll open the pillow and get you a handful of "em."

McCracken shook his head slowly.

"I doubt it," he said. "Very few pillows are stuffed with mocking bird feathers. Jerry."

"What makes you think that's off a mocking bird? You sure?"

"No," McCracken answered frankly. "But it's the right color. An ornithologist can tell. Anyway, mocking bird or not, there was a bird in this room. There's proof of that back of the chair. And a mocking bird fits the picture."

"Look," he explained. "The killer brought the bird here, prob-ably in a box. He came in the window there and hid in the parlor until Jim Lee came in, and he killed him. Then--to pin the thing on Perley Essington--he came in here and let the bird out in this room for awhile. The bird would be Perley's best imitator, wouldn't

it? And it'd sing, being free--comparatively--after being shut up."

"But--a mocking bird!" Bell protested. "Where'd anyone get one?"

"Pet shops have 'em occasionally. They're not common, but they can be got. Probably the killer stole it, though. He wouldn't want the trail traceable if there'd be a slip-up. It was that dog-and-cat business made me think of one. My aunt used to have a mocking bird, and it'd imitate dogs and cats when it heard them.

And it'd have picked that up around the pet shop."

"Then maybe Perley wasn't lying about that call that sent him on a wild-goose chase."

McCracken nodded. "Of course. This was carefully planned. The guy who did it made sure Jim Lee would be here and that Perley wouldn't, and that he'd be a place where he couldn't prove he'd been."

"If an expert backs you up on your guess what that feather is," Bell said, "looks like you did figure Perley an out, Mack. Got any idea who did kill Lee?"

McCracken took a deep breath, then said flatly: "You did, Jerry. I was sure as soon as I found this feather. It's just like the one you pretended to pull off Perley Essington's head when you were clowning back at Headquarters. You had the bird in your pocket when you left. Maybe you'd killed it after you used it. And when you pulled that feather gag in Zehnder's office you'd just had your hand in your pocket. You were so confident you had Perley framed, you didn't hesitate to use it for making fun of Perley."

The expression on Jerry Bell's face didn't change. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, an unlighted cigar was tilted in a corner of his mouth.

"Not bad, Mack," he said. "How about motive?"

"It wasn't the ring," McCracken went on, "although in your kind of work you ought to know the outlets and where to cash in on it easy. But you wouldn't have done it for that. I figure you must have gambled over your head and gone in debt to Lee. Which did he have in his billfold, I.O.U.'s or checks of yours?"

Jerry Bell sighed deeply, took a gun out of his pocket.

"You're covered, Mack," he said. "I think you could make that stick. I'm in plenty deep, including some company funds, and that'd come out if the police nosed around. And -well, I did buy that bird instead of stealing it." He paused, then:

"But listen, Mack, Slimjim was blackmailing me on those debts. You can't blame a man for killing a blackmailer. You aren't --"

"How about Perley?" McCracken interrupted. "You tried to frame it on him, just so you wouldn't be suspected, just to give the cops an easy victim."

"He was in with Slimjim on the whole--"

"Nuts! If he had been, he'd have known who killed Jim, and why. That don't hold water, Jerry."

"Then let's try it this way, Mack. I can get two thousand for that ring. I know you're broke. How about half of that?"

McCracken's eyes were cold. "Jerry," he asked, "know what that spot on the floor back of the chair is?"

"I can guess. Why?"

"Then you can guess my answer to that proposition. I'm going to call your bluff, Jerry. You won't shoot me. You'd have done it already, if you figured you

could get away with it. As readily as you killed Lee."

He turned and walked slowly toward the door, his hands relaxed at his sides.

"Regan out there knows we're in here alone, Jerry," he said. "If there's a bullet hole in my back, there's no story you could tell that would stand up under investigation. I'm not even armed, so you couldn't use self-defense. There'd be no out for you at all, Jerry."

He took a step toward the door, another.

"Stop, Mack!" ordered Bell. "I'll--"

McCracken kept on walking. It didn't seem to him that he was breathing at all. He made the hallway, and was half way to the front door before he heard the shot. It had not been aimed at him.

\* \* \*

The contents of the desk and the filing cabinet had been taken from the drawers and were stacked in a cardboard carton with a rope around it.

The carpet was rolled up at one side of the room, and the phone had been disconnected, although it still stood on the desk.

McCracken sat on the desk beside the phone, with his elbows on his knees and his chin cupped in his hands.

He was whistling softly and mournfully.

He didn't hear the door open, but he almost fell off the desk when a voice said:

"Excellent whistling, Mr. McCracken. Excellent!"

The shiny pate of the little bird imitator was bobbing across the office toward him.

"Hello, Perley," McCracken said. He couldn't muster a smile to go with it.

"I'm leaving vaudeville, Mr. McCracken," Perley explained. "Or maybe one could say that vaudeville is leaving me, because the Bijou is closing. Anyway, I'm opening a school for whistling and bird imitating. You whistle well. I could make you my star pupil."

"Thanks," said McCracken listlessly. "Maybe sometime. But what with moving and all--"

"To better quarters, I hope. And that reminds me. You never sent me a bill. I came to settle up for what you did for me."

He beamed at McCracken, and for a moment the private detective felt a ray of hope. Then it faded. A few dollars can seem like a lot sometimes, but it doesn't make much difference when you owe a few hundred and are about to be put on the street. "In fact, Mr. McCracken," Perley went on, "I have a check already written, which I hope you'll think adequate. It's for three thousand dollars. You may have heard that Jim Lee's will said that I was his only real friend and that he left me all his money, and that it turned out to be more than anybody thought he had. Some bonds, you know, that he thought weren't worth much."

Mechanically, McCracken took the little slip of yellow paper that was being held out toward him. His eyes focused on the figures, then blurred, then came into focus again.

"There was thirty thousand net, Mr. McCracken," Perley Essington was saying, "and if it hadn't been for you--well, I'd never have been free to spend any of it. So I think a tenth is fair, isn't it?"

McCracken found his own voice at last.

"More than fair, Perley. I--well you can put me down as your star pupil, all right. And give me that nightingale business first. It's just how I feel. But not on an empty stomach." He took the little man's arm firmly. "First, we're going down to the Crillon and order a plate apiece of their very best birdseed."

\* \* \*

Scan notes for Brown, Fredric - Homicide Sanitarium (ssc, rtf) [v2.0].

I took a little more liberties than usual with editing spelling and the occasional layout question. I believe it is important to preserve the author's spellings to help preserve the sense and atmosphere of the time period works were written but I ran across some spellings inconsistent with Brown's usual spellings and some that were both distracting and very questionable as to whether they were the author's spellings or misspellings/errors of some proofreader at a magazine of original publication overlooked.

A single font in only one size and a very "plain vanilla" layout were used to facilitate ease of global changes with minimal layout changes by those with poor eyesight or other reasons for wishing to make such changes. I believe this also facilitates the ability of those who've made such changes to read a work and find errors while reading to correct them, reversion and repost the improved work without introducing any unintentional changes to the file in the process.