

# NEVER COME MOURNING

By STEWART STERLING



**“Every arsonist has a twisted mind,” said Chief Fire Marshal Pedley. But the tangled web of greed and lust that fashioned a monstrous funeral pyre in the Hotel Grolier was more than he could fathom . . .**

**I**T seemed futile to hunt through that steaming jungle of twisted metal and charred wood. A screen of blackish water dripped from the warped girders above. A veil of smoke hung sluggishly over the smoldering wreckage. Searchlights, shooting up from the street, cast grotesque shadows through the gutted hotel.

As he followed the fat python of canvas which coiled up the staircase around the steel bones of the elevator shaft, he appeared to be methodically following another, more

obscure, trail through the clutter. His eyes, reddened from too much exposure to acrid fumes, held the bleak bitterness of a boy helpless to prevent the agonies of a pet dog.

He moved, cautiously, focusing the cone of light here on a lump of fused glass, there on the drooping angle of a buckled pipe. The melted metal of electric fixtures held peculiar interest for him.

On the landing between the third and fourth floors, he flattened against wet brick to permit gangway for a helmeted pair clumping

streetward with a limp burden. It didn't seem to disturb them when the head of the sagging figure they were lugging banged against a beam.

The man with the flashlight asked: "Many more up there?"

"Plenty on nine and ten, Marshal." One of the ladder-men recognized him. "Ain't any hurry about getting 'em out, now, though."

His partner cursed in corroboration; they clumped on down. Chief Fire Marshal Pedley went up.

He left the stairs, moved slowly down the corridor of the fourth floor. The boards became suddenly springy beneath his feet. He went down on hands and knees, distributing his weight.

It was slow work, crisscrossing the corridors from door to door, creeping over jagged shards of glass, slivers of metal. The drenched woodwork was still blistering. The planking grew spongier underneath him. He kept on, hacking lightly at the inside and outside of each door with his emergency axe. All the chips showed a greater depth of char on the corridor side than on the room side, until he reached room 441.

The blackened fragments from that door showed the roomside burned much more deeply than the exterior. He started in the room. There was a sound like a ripping canvas; the floor sagged, tilted away from him.

He spreadeagled—as he would have on ice too thin to support him—inched on.

His fingers touched fibrous jelly interlaced with coiled wire; what was left of the mattress. Two-thirds of the way across the bed, the drenched pulpiness became greasy residue, where the mattress-filling had burned away. This was where the blaze had started . . .

With infinite caution, he worked his way around the room. The front legs of the bureau had burned first, tipping the glass top and what had been on it, forward onto the floor. Woman's things. Hairpins. A long nail file.

The fused back of what had been a silver hairbrush. A compact.

The beam of his flashlight glinted on a thin, round neck of glass. The remnants of a liquor bottle. Beside it, flat pieces. An ash-tray that had cracked in two, folded over on itself as if made of cardboard. Between the two segments was the sopping stub of a cigarette—unburnt—the paper-stained tobacco yellow. He fished it out of its place of protection with a pair of tweezers as if he were extracting the fangs of a cobra.

Below in the street, gongs clanged as pumpers and combinations rolled back to their stations. Pedley remained for long minutes in room 441, wriggling across the insecure floor, putting shoe-eyelets into envelopes, scooping up ashes with a spatula, scowling. . .

By the time he had descended to the lobby, only the big quad and the hook-and-ladders remained in the street; their long fingers pointed accusingly up at glassless windows. Hosemen were uncoupling. Police were forcing the fire lines back toward the avenue. The bloodshot eyes of ambulances glared at shiny black rubber and crisp white jackets moving among the rows of tarpaulin-covers stretched along the curbs . . .

Inside the lobby, firemen, policemen and a few individuals in civilian clothes milled about wearily. One of the latter, a blocky man with a raw hamburg complexion, signaled to the Marshal across the wreckage of the room clerk's desk:

"Those babies're raising hell, Ben. They want out of here, bad. That manager's ready to blow his fuse. Says he's going straight to the Commish . . ."

"Tell him to go to hell. This fire was set. He's partly responsible. Before we get through with him, he'll wish he was lying out there on the sidewalk with the others." Pedley's voice was a gritty file on rough metal. "I'll take 'em in the manager's office. One at a time. That floor patrol, first."

THE Deputy Marshal pushed a heavysset, white-haired man into the manager's office. The man's puffy face was shiny with sweat; his eyes dull with shock. The absence of his left eyebrow and part of his hair on the left side gave him a lopsided appearance. The port sleeve of his light blue uniform had been slashed off at the elbow; his wrist and hand were encased in a bandage.

"Doc says this gent has to hustle to Polyclinic for treatment," the deputy explained. "He hung out one them seventh floor windows twenty minutes before they got the big ladder up to him. That's a second-degree burn on his duke. He got a bellyful of fumes, too."

"Don't fret about him, Ed." Pedley wasn't impressed. "Plenty of others aren't getting to the hospital, either."

"Yeah. Name's Lester Harris. Here four years. Okay record." The deputy went out, closed the door behind him.

"You phoned the alarm, Harris?"

The patrolman nodded glumly. "I'm up on the ninth, see? I smell this smoke. So I beat it for the hand extinguisher down the end of the hall. When I get down there I see smoke's comin' from the stair door. Comin' up from eight. So I run down there an'—"

"What time was this?" Pedley cut in.

"Only a couple minutes before I phone in. Don't know exactly. I just punch my clock on nine when I get that whiff of smoke. When I get down to eight I still can't tell where it's coming from. I figure it ain't safe to delay any longer. So I push in 802—that's a vacant they're repapering—and grab the phone."

"Been making your regular tour up to that time?"

"Yes sir."

"Where'd you start?"

"From the mezz."

"When?"

"Midnight. Maybe a little after. Clock'll show."

"The alarm hit the Telegraph Bureau at

1:07. How long's it take you to cover a floor?"

"Suppose to be around five minutes. They allow an hour for me to cover ten floors."

"Why'd it take you sixty-seven minutes to inspect eight, then?"

"Crysave!" Harris coughed. "I don't generally gallop up them stairs. An' I took out for a personal. On six, that was."

"Didn't notice anything out of the way on any of the lower floors when you came through?"

The floor patrol's glance flickered for a split second.

"No sir."

"Know the party in 441?"

Harris repeated the number with a rising inflection.

Pedley consulted a card. "Register says it was occupied by a Mrs. Doris Munson, Danbury, Connecticut."

"She's a permanent." Harris fumbled at his bandage, showed his teeth in a grimace. "Works here. On the switchboard. Day side."

"Know anything about her?"

"A blonde. A nifty. Thirty or so." He rubbed his bald eyebrow. "Why? What's she got to do with it?"

"Fire started in her room."

The floor patrol's eyes grew round. "Holy cats!"

"Smoking in bed, looked like." Pedley's face told nothing. "Was she much of a boozer?"

"Not that I hear of. But—" Harris didn't finish whatever it was he had been going to say.

"But what?"

"Nothing."

THE Marshal took two quick steps, wound his fingers in the cloth of Harris's uniform coat at the second button, jerked the shorter man up on tiptoe. "This blaze put twenty people in the morgue! Twice that many in the hospital!" He put his face close to the other's, growling: "If you know one damn

thing about how it started, spit it out! Fast! Or you'll have a long time to wish you had!!"

"I don't know," Harris looked as if he was about to sneeze, "if I do know anything . . ."

"Let me decide." Pedley released him.

"This Mrs. Munson. She's kind of . . . uh . . . friendly . . . with Check Wayner . . ."

"Who's Wayner?"

"Bell captain. Night side."

"Keep pouring."

"He goes up to her room once in a while. He ain't suppose to; it's strictly against house rules. I don't know if anybody else knows it. But I seen him coming out of 441 a couple times when he didn't know I was around. He was in there tonight."

"You see him go in?"

"No, sir. I hear him. When I'm comin' along the corridor on four. They're havin' some kind of argument."

Pedley eyed him stonily. "So you listened at the door."

"I'm suppose to see nobody roams around in rooms where they don't belong," the patrolman protested. "Mrs. Munson was a single."

"What were they battling about?"

"You couldn't prove it by me. I only horn in on it a minute. I figure it's one of them things and none of my business. Except I wonder how Check gets away with bein' off his desk so long."

"What were they talking about?!" Pedley stepped in close again.

Harris retreated a step. "Near's I can make out from the little I hear," he muttered defensively, "Check is bawlin' her out for fiddling around with some other joe. An' she's tellin' him to peddle his papers, she'll do like she pleases."

"That all?"

"Well, Check gets pretty sore, from the way he sounds. I figure he's about due to come bustin' out of the room. So I mosey along. Last thing I hear him say is—"*I'd rather see you dead than living this way,*

*Doris!*"

PEDLEY waved brusquely at the short, dapper youth in the snappy bellman's uniform.

"Sit down, Wayner."

Check Wayner didn't make any move toward the straight-backed chair beside the manager's desk. "You got no right to hold me."

"Get the idea out of your mind, fella. I've the right to hold you, arrest you, try you and convict you—right here and now. At the scene of a fire I'm cop, prosecutor, judge and jury, all in one. You better take my word for it but it won't make a damn bit of difference whether you do or not. What you know about this blaze?"

"Nothing."

"Still alarm came in at one-seven ayem. Fire had a ten, maybe a fifteen minute start by then. Where were you, around ten minutes to one?"

"Taking a bucket of ice up to somebody, chances are."

"Your call sheet doesn't show any entries after 12:25."

"Then I was in the lobby."

"Weren't up on the fourth?"

"No." Wayner's eyes became wary.

"Not in 441, maybe?"

"No."

"When was the last time you were up in that room?"

"Don't the call sheet tell you that, too?" the bell captain inquired sullenly.

"You were up in Mrs. Munson's room about quarter past twelve. How long'd you stay?"

"I don't remember . . ."

Pedley looked unhappy. He got up from the chair behind the desk, shucked his coat. "I'll lay it on the line, kid. This hotel was torched. The fire started in Mrs. Munson's room. It was set so it would look as if she'd been smoking in bed and fell asleep . . ." He

rolled up his sleeves; Wayner watched him.

"A lot of people got killed," the Marshal went on. "A lot more got hurt, some of 'em so bad they'll die. Most of 'em were guests in this hotel but some of them were firemen. Friends of mine." He stared down at his big hands, flexing the fingers slowly. "I'm going to find out who touched off this blaze. I don't know whether it was you, or not. But you know something. I'm going to get it out of you, one way or another. Up to you, how I do it . . ."

Wayner spoke through set teeth. "You think I'd start a fire that put my sister in the hospital?"

"Mrs. Munson your sister?"

"Yes. I got her the job on the switchboard here."

"What were you quarreling about, tonight?"

"We weren't."

"Les Harris says he heard you when he came past 441 on his twelve o'clock tour."

The bell captain snarled: "He's a liar."

"He says he heard you tell Mrs. Munson you'd rather see her dead than living the way she was. What was that all about?"

"Why don't you ask her?"

Pedley turned, tapped the telephone. "The doctors just told me she wouldn't be answering any questions, Wayner."

"She's dead?" He breathed it, as if it hurt him to speak.

"Not yet. She's going to die."

The youth whirled for the door. Pedley caught him:

"If you want to see her before she goes, you better loosen up, kid. I can't let you go until you do."

Wayner's lips trembled, he stared blankly at the carpet, his head rocking from side to side in misery. "All right. She was fooling around with the manager here and—"

"Broodman?"

"Arnie Broodman, yuh. Doris—" tears began to stream down his face—"she was in

love with the crumb. He tells her he's going to marry her—all the time he's got a wife an' a couple of kids out on Long Island. He keeps sayin' he's going to get a divorce so he can marry Doris but I know better. He don't intend to do nothing of the kind. I been trying to get her to break it up, quit her job, move out of the hotel. She tells me to keep out of it, she's old enough to know her own mind. Maybe she is, but she don't know Arnie's . . . and now—" he closed his eyes and lifted his face toward the ceiling.

"Was your sister drinking heavily tonight?" Pedley didn't ease the pressure.

"Some. Arnie'd been up to see her around eleven an' he brought her up a fifth of brandy. To celebrate the good news, he says. He was feeding her a lot of yatadada about the hotel closing down for six months—repairs or something—an' him going down to Miami to run another place so that's when he'll split up from Mrs. Broodman an' marry Doris. I tell her she's feeble-minded if she falls for an old line like that but she laughs me off. Finally I ask her how long she's going to stand for the runaround an' she says if Arnie doesn't file suit or whatever as soon as the hotel closes here an' he goes to Florida, then she'll know he isn't on the level and she'll raise plenty of hell with him." He opened his eyes, staring fiercely at Pedley. "Y'know what I think? I think she told Arnie that, too—an' he hadn't any idea of bustin' up his home, so he was afraid of what Doris might do and he beat her to it, tonight. *That's what I think!*"

"You didn't see him go up to the fourth again—after you left?"

"I didn't see the crumb at all!"

"Not after the alarm went in?"

"No. Soon's I heard those sirens I grab one of the service elevators and run it up to take people off the eighth—that's where Harris says the fire is . . ."

"You don't know where Broodman was, from the time you left your sister's room until the apparatus began to come in?"

“No.” Wayner’s mouth hardened. “But I know where he’ll be when I get my mitts on him! I’m going to—”

“—go out in the lobby and sit down and keep your mouth shut. Understand me?”

“You said you’d let me go to see my sister.”

“I’ll tell you when you can go.” Pedley rolled down his sleeves, put on his coat, opened the door.

“Ed . . . ?”

“Yeah, Ben?”

“Keep an eye on this kid. Send Broodman in.”

**A**RNOLD BROODMAN was a tall, gaunt, sandy-haired individual with deep frown-creases slashing the bridge of his nose; he had a golf-course tan and a slightly disheveled look about him, as if he had dressed hurriedly.

Pedley didn’t ask him to sit down. “A week ago,” the Marshal read from a tissue carbon, “the Bureau of Fire Prevention wrote you as follows:

ARNOLD J. BROODMAN

RESIDENT MANAGER, HOTEL GROLIER—

*You were directed by the Fire Commissioner on . . . March 7, 1947 . . . to:*

1. *Equip with steel doors all exits from all floors*
2. *Install acceptable fire breaks on floors 2 to 10, inclusive*
3. *Satisfactorily enclose two elevator shafts*
4. *Erect an additional fire escape on the Forty-fifth Street side of the building*
5. *Provide for an automatic smoke alarm system*

*within . . . 60 days . . . at the premises occupied by . . . the Grolier Operating Corporation (leased) by you, said premises being considered dangerous to life and property and in its present condition a violation of law.*

*Having failed to cause the ordered re-equipping to be done within the . . . 60 day . . . period, I am required by law to notify you that*

*the said premises are hereby ordered to be . . . vacated.*

“That notice was signed by John M. Bresnahan, Deputy Fire Commissioner, City of New York.”

Broodman laced and unlaced his fingers wretchedly but said nothing.

“Three days after you received that notice, your lawyers obtained a two-week stay of ejection from Judge Potter. In your application for this deferral, you promised to cease operating this building as a hotel within ten days; you pleaded inability to get labor and materials with which to make the required alterations to date.”

The manager sweat it out in silence.

“A couple of days ago you attempted to obtain an additional policy of fire insurance to the tune of forty thousand dollars—”

“To cover the improvements on the property,” the hotel man interrupted.

“The companies turned you down. After checking with us. Anyhow, failing to get your additional coverage, today you began to give your employees their week’s notice. And tonight you have a fire.”

“Nobody can feel worse about this than I do.” Broodman combed his hair nervously with his fingers.

“A hell of a lot of people feel a hell of a lot worse!”

“The corporation won’t attempt to deny its responsibility.”

“You won’t, either.”

“You’re not suggesting—?”

“I’m making a flat statement, Broodman. This blaze was incendiary. You . . . and your other stockholders . . . are the only persons who could profit from it.”

The manager’s tan became a muddy gray. “As far as profit is concerned, every cent I have was in this hotel. The insurance won’t cover sixty percent of the loss. I’m wiped out . . . even if the corporation wasn’t liable for damage suits. Don’t talk to me about profiting from a ghastly business like arson. I’ll sue you

for defamation of . . .”

“After I get through with you, you won’t have any character that could be defamed, mister. The fire started in Mrs. Munson’s room. You were up in her room tonight. She was liquored up. You supplied the liquor. You were in a jam with her. Now she’s going to die; you think you’re out of that jam. Well, you’re in another and it’s a lot worse. They electrocute people for first degree arson in this state, in case you didn’t know.”

Broodman scowled. “You sure the fire started in Doris’ room?”

“I can make it stand up in court.”

The manager sat down suddenly in the straight-backed chair, buried his face in his hands. After a minute he groaned:

“I guess you’re right, saying I’m responsible. But not for arson. Only because of Doris.”

“Trying to say the girl deliberately burned herself.”

“That’s what she would do, Marshal—what she must have done. She threatened as much, though she didn’t say anything about . . . setting a fire.”

“When was this?”

“Tonight. Half-past eleven or so. We’d been threshing the thing out—apparently you know about it . . .?”

“Only what I got out of Harris and Wayner.”

“Well . . . I told her I had to shut the place up . . . was going south to run a hotel there. It would take a while for me to get a divorce and so on. She wanted to know how she was going to live in the meantime. Couldn’t she go with me and so on. Finally I got sore. Told her if she wasn’t satisfied to play it my way, we’d call the whole thing off.”

“And then . . . ?”

“She bawled and got hysterical, the whole damn rigamarole women put on. But I’d had enough of it by then—I suppose worrying about the shutdown made me kind of jumpy—and I told her we were all washed up. Finally

she said she’d kill herself; she’d make me sorry for treating her that way if it was the last thing she ever did.” Broodman chewed at his lower lip. “That’s the kind of break I get—for her to be so badly burned she can’t tell you the truth of it. You could ask her . . .”

“I will,” Pedley said. “She might come to and talk a little before she signs off.”

Broodman shivered.

THERE were more reporters than firemen in the lobby when the Marshal left the office; more photographers than internes, in the street. The crowd had thinned; the fire lines were permitting traffic on the opposite sidewalk. Pedley spoke to a haggard man in a white helmet:

“How about Maxie?”

“Died on the way over, Ben.” The Battalion Chief spat. “Rest his soul. He was a good man.”

“He was.” Pedley nodded, walked to the red sedan. Maxie Rhine had been in the old Engine Eleven Company with him when they were probationers. They had rolled to many a bad blaze together; once Maxie had waded through the acid-loaded water of a drug warehouse cellar to drag Pedley out from under the I-beam that had pinned him. Now Maxie had taken a gust of flame from a back draft up on the tenth floor of this firetrap and they’d be sounding the four 5’s for him in the morning. And there were three other wearers of the Maltese Cross who’d never answer the gong again, though Pedley hadn’t known them as well as he had Maxie. There’d be those who’d miss every one of them . . .

At the hospital the doctor confirmed what Pedley had learned on the phone. Doris Munson had been seriously burned about the breast and throat; was suffering from shock and smoke inhalation; barring pneumonia setting in, she’d recover. The matron said it was all right for the Marshal to talk to her, long’s he didn’t excite her. He said he’d try not to.

The girl on the cot in Ward C couldn't have been identified as a blonde; there wasn't enough of her hair left. She looked up at Pedley out of bandages swathing her like a mummy.

"First thing I remember," she mumbled, "was someone at the window yelling 'Water!'"

"Had you been smoking in bed?"

A negative shake of the head.

"Were you feeling pretty good—you know—hit the cork quite a bit—before you turned in?"

Another negative. "I only had three little drinks," she added with an effort. "I was feeling terrible. I'd just found out something that would have sobered me, if I'd drunk a gallon."

He told her what Broodman had said. "Is that true?"

Doris nodded, her eyes widening with horror. "Oh! Arnie thinks I . . . started the fire!"

"You could have."

She struggled to sit up. He put a hand on her forehead, forced her back on the pillow.

"*Maybe I did!*" she whispered. "If I did, I hope I don't live. I couldn't bear to know I'd . . . caused all *that!*"

"Take a sleeping pill to get you to sleep?"

He knew there must have been something to make her doubt her own actions.

"I took . . . six."

"Yeah." Not enough to kill her. Enough to scare Broodman if he'd learned about it. "You wash your face before you went to bed?"

"What?"

"Wash your face? Or use cleansing cream?"

"No." she was puzzled. "Why. . . ?"

The nurse came in. "Phone for you, Marshal."

He took it out in the corridor.

"Ed, Skipper. I been keeping an eye on Wayner, like you suggested."

"So . . ."

"He didn't head for the hospital at all."

"Know he didn't. Where is he?"

"Seven fifty West Twenty-eighth. Rooming house. No savvy if he lives here or not. Name isn't on the mail box. That don't necessarily mean anything at a fleabag like this."

"Where you calling from?"

"Candy store. Across the street."

"Stay there till I get down."

He didn't bother to go back to the ward. The red sedan made it in four minutes, with the blinkers but without the siren.

Shaner stopped devouring a chocolate bar long enough to say: "Must be in one of the back rooms, Ben. None of the fronts have lighted up since he went in."

"He could be rooming with somebody," Pedley said.

"Or he could be calling on somebody. Better let me go in with you."

"You go back, sit on Broodman's neck. I want him handy when the grand jury meets, in the morning." Pedley went across the street, into a hall that smelled of cabbage and pork and carbolic. In the front of a black tin mailbox was a cardboard with a dozen names printed on it; a couple of them had been crossed out. *Harry Lester, C-6*, hadn't been crossed out; the Marshal thought it was close enough to Les Harris to be worth casing.

He went up a staircase, where the paint flaked off the walls like skin off sunburned shoulders; he made no particular effort to be silent about it.

On the third floor, lights showed under two of the doors—none under 6. He walked on up to the top floor, opened the door of the common bathroom, closed it. Then he took off his shoes, went down one flight in his stocking feet.

He listened at 6-C long enough to make sure somebody was opening a window inside, quietly, in the dark. Pedley set his shoes down carefully, took out his flashlight. He tried the knob, turned it noiselessly. The door wasn't

locked.

He pushed it open suddenly—swung his flashlight in an arc covering as large a segment of the room as possible.

A washstand. A bed, rumped up. The toe of a shoe just behind and beyond the open edge of the door. Pedley reached around the jamb for the switch. The movement took his head and shoulders into the doorway for an instant.

Long enough for a gun butt to smash down across the crease of his hat . . .

**T**HE room was still dark, but dull red flashes pulsated before the Marshal's eyes. It was some seconds before he realized they came from a neon sign high on a building on the next block. The ruddy reflection from a polished shoe-tip was the thing that made him recognize it.

He reached out, touched the shoe. There was a foot in it; the foot didn't move when he felt it. Pedley pulled himself up by the bedpost, found the light switch, snapped it.

The foot in the shoe belonged to Les Harris, who lay on his back with a small scarlet worm wriggling down from a dark spot in his right temple. There was a purplish lump an inch above his right eye. The body was still warm. An automatic lay on the grass matting of the floor about eight inches away from the dead man's head.

The Marshal looked at his watch. 4:52. He hadn't been out more than ten minutes or so.

He felt in the pockets of the floor patrol's uniform. Nothing but a fistful of silver coins and a couple of keys. No bills of any denomination. But on the chair beside the bed was a strange collection.

Six wristwatches; two men's, the others the tiny diamond doodads women go for. Four rings; one wedding, two solitaires, a pinky set with what looked like real rubies. A black opal brooch. A gold comb. A platinum cigarette case with the initials K. T. M.

Pedley stripped a pillow-slip off the bed,

tilted the chair so the jewelry slid gently into the white sack. He lifted the gun by sticking a pencil in the muzzle, deposited it on the loose end of the pillow-slip, wrapped the surplus fabric around the weapon.

He retrieved his shoes, put them on. When he left 6-C, he took the key from the inside of the door, locked the room.

**“E**VERY arsonist has a twisted mind.” The Marshal stared coldly across the manager's desk at Broodman. “I don't mean pyros, either; they're psycho cases, anyhow. But every firebug is so snarled up in his mental processes that he figures a fire has to be set by some tricky method . . . and it always backfires on him.” He opened a flat metal case, like a child's paint box. “This one used a cigarette, hoping it would look as if Mrs. Munson had fallen asleep smoking and set the bed on fire. But he forgot the lipstick.”

Broodman leaned forward to peer at the brown-stained stub. “I don't see—”

“There isn't any. Would have been if Mrs. Munson had been smoking it—no matter how water-soaked it had gotten. She used lipstick, of course; she hadn't wiped it off.”

The hotel man sighed. “She didn't start it, then.”

“No. She was hurt enough to do it, maybe. But her mind didn't run to endangering other people's lives—only her own. She took an overdose of luminol. Not enough to kill her. But enough to keep her from waking up until the blaze had a better start than the firebug ever intended it should have.”

“Who—?”

“He opened the door with a master key, after Mrs. Munson had gone to sleep—say twenty minutes to one. After he made sure she wasn't awake—he probably assumed she was drunk—he tiptoed in, took the lighted cigarette out of his mouth, laid it on the edge of the ash-tray that was on her bed-table, put the ash-tray and cigarette on the bed so the burning stub would fall off and ignite the

mattress. He thought Mrs. Munson would wake up after the mattress started to smolder and filled the room with smoke. She didn't; the sleeping pills prevented her from waking up until the flames from the burning blankets began to sear her."

"What was the idea. . . if he didn't mean to burn down the building?"

"To cause a panic. Get people running around the corridors in their nightgowns and pajamas, half scared to death. With the corridors filled with smoke, the apparatus rolling in with bells clanging and everybody screaming "Fire!!"—it was easy for the bug to go through the guests' rooms on the pretext of routing them out and starting them for the elevators and the stairs."

"Why!"

Pedley slid the contents of the pillowcase out on the desktop. "So he could loot their rooms; their clothing. Most people don't lock up their money or jewels when they go to bed. They leave their money in their purses and wallets—their rings and watches on the bureau. With a hotel employee yelling at them to get out of their rooms in a hurry—with those sirens and the smoke stampeding them—not many would take time to go for their valuables before they rushed out into the hall."

"Wayner!"

"There's another screwy thing about firebugs," the Marshal shook his head. "They always have an alibi. In twenty years I haven't run across one who hasn't claimed he was somewhere else when the fire was set—who didn't try to prove he couldn't possibly have been around when the fuse was lit. Now your bell-captain didn't have any alibi at all—any more than you did."

"That damned Harris!"

"Sure. He kept impressing me that his patrol clock would show by the times he punched it, on each floor, that he couldn't have been down on the fourth at the time the place was torched."

"But why—?"

"Your fault, partly. You gave him his notice today. He didn't know where to get another job, probably. By the room he was living in, I'd say he didn't have much money saved up. He saw a way to get even with you for firing him and to get his hands on a lot of valuables, at the same time. Only the thing got out of hand; he didn't know it until it was so late he got cut off, up on the eighth—and nearly lost his own life before the boys brought him down."

"They should have left him up there," Broodman said grimly. "Did you get him?"

"Somebody did." Pedley stirred the heap of jewelry with his finger. "He's dead. It was supposed to look like suicide. He was shot with his own gun. But he'd been slugged before he was lit up."

"Ah . . .!" Broodman waited.

"One of my deputies trailed Wayner over to Harris's rooming house, called me and I went down there. When I went in the room, somebody was hiding there. I didn't see him; he crowned me with a gun-butt and got away while I was out cold. My deputy trailed your bell-captain back here to the hotel, collared him and found a big roll of bills on him. Nearly a thousand bucks. Wayner'd slugged Harris, taken the money which couldn't be traced and left the jewelry because it would be risky to pawn it."

"Check Wayner shot Harris?"

"No. You did that."

The manager didn't deny it. He appeared to be too dazed by the accusation to attempt an answer.

Pedley felt of the bump on the top of his skull. "Wayner wasn't the person who crowned me. He isn't tall enough to swing a gun down on the crease of my hat. Harris wasn't, either. But you are. And you sneaked out of the lobby right after I left for the hospital."

"For coffee," Broodman admitted. "I had to have some coffee. I was dead on my feet."

“Harris was, anyway. You doped it out just the way Wayner had. Only your bell-captain wanted the money he guessed Harris had stolen; *you* wanted to get even with Harris for ruining you. If you hadn’t been afraid the whole business about your entanglement with Mrs. Munson would come out, if Harris had been forced to defend himself in court—you might have had him arrested and tried for arson. But you didn’t want your own dirty linen hung up for everyone to see—so you took his punishment into your own hands . . .

“You followed Wayner to the boardinghouse, waited in the hall until the bell-captain had slugged Harris and taken over the dough. When he came out, you went in.

You were still in there when I arrived. Wayner was down in the hall somewhere—anyhow, he left the rooming house before you did. My man trailed him, didn’t see you!” The Marshal walked around the desk.

“I’m not booking you for murder,” the Marshal said harshly. “I’m taking you in for criminal negligence in connection with the deaths in this fire. You’ll have the better part of the next ten years to wish you’d spent the dough to make those changes the Commissioner ordered. At that,” he gripped the manager’s arm roughly, “it won’t be as long as a lot of other people will have, to regret what happened tonight. Come on....”