

Case Of The **HONEST THIEVES**

By Thomas Thursday



Why should several people, all unconnected with each other, suddenly abscond with large sums of money—then have no recollection of what had happened?

IFOUND Det. Chief Gwynn Howard in his office, reading a book and laughing. “Cops,” I said, “ain’t supposed to have a sense of humor. We’re all sadists—or don’t you see the crime movies?”

The boss closed the book, cocked his tan sombrero to a forty-five degree angle, and retorted, “Listen, Bub, in this racket you either laugh or go nuts. Now this detective story I’ve been reading is very good, especially for giggles. The heroic private eye—and blind in the other—picks up guns with his hanky to preserve possible fingerprints,

and he can tell how long a corpse has been dead by merely looking at the deceased’s eyeballs. Both are neat tricks, worthy of Houdini, only he can’t do it. One of the most effective ways to gum up a print is to wrap it in a handkerchief. As to finding how long a person has been dead via the eyeballs—well, even a pathologist can’t tell the exact time life left a body.”

Captain Louis Allen, head of the Missing Persons Bureau, popped through the door. The Cap, a gray-haired veteran, is noted for very active popping.

“What’s the latest score on the Dr. John Stamm case?” asked Howard.

“Nothing-nothing, favor nobody,” said Allen. “He’s evaporated, like canned milk.”

“Listen,” I put in, “has anybody checked the private life of Mrs. Sarah Stamm, to see if she had an over-attentive boyfriend? They tell me that she is his third wife and almost 20 years younger. Youth will be served, and sex is here to stay.”

The Cap pointed a finger at me, and said to Howard, “Kindly tell junior that all wives are not unfaithful.” He then let go with a typical Allenese snort and walked out.

The Dr. Stamm affair was less than three days old. His wife had called Headquarters and had been piped to the Missing Persons Bureau. She said that the Doc had gone to his pet club at eight that night and never returned. It could be amnesia, another dame, foul play—or what have you on file, J. Edgar Hoover?

“What do you make of it, Boss?” I asked. “Or haven’t you seen Mrs. Sarah Stamm, in the full bloom of her figure?”

“I don’t know a thing about Mrs. Stamm, and I have never seen her,” said Howard. “And listen, Bub; never condemn anything or anybody until you can prove them positively guilty. The fact that Mrs. Stamm is much younger than the Doc does not mean a thing. Or perhaps it does; I don’t know. Besides, let Captain Allen boot the deal around for awhile. It’s his dish and I hope he enjoys it.”

Early next morning Howard called me to his office.

“Bub,” he said, “we just got a buzz that an honest bank cashier, named Martin Trotter, of the Tropical National, has departed, along with \$20,000 in real Truman currency.”

“I bet he played the greyhounds, the horses, or went to the Hi-Li games,” I said.

“There you go again,” sniffed the chief; “maybe you should have remained in the uniform division.”

“You mean to say,” I snapped, “that you never heard of guys stealing to play the races?”

“Certainly,” he grinned. “But you are trying this fellow Trotter before you actually know what happened; you, and the public in general, think with your emotions.”

“I would like to know if Mrs. Trotter goes in for fancy clothes and likes to keep up with the veddy social.” I replied. “Who knows—maybe she is a card fiend, for high stakes, and even goes in for

tossing the old crappers down the green cloth.”

“You’re only one hundred percent wrong, Bub. I happen to know Mrs. Abigail Trotter, and she is a very fine woman. She goes in for church work, social service, and spends a great deal of her time helping people who can’t help themselves.”

Here’s the dope on Martin Trotter: Age, 51; lived in Miami 27 years; been with Tropical Nation bank for 26 years. Record cleaner than a whistle, especially a traffic cop’s whistle. So, what do you do with a case like Martin Trotter?

HOWARD and I went to the bank and had a little chitchat with everybody from the watchmen to the president.

“He was a very fine, conscientious man,” said Joel Garner, the president. “Often he would work late at night, alone, and send out the watchman for a bite to eat. I can’t understand it; it’s most confusing and amazing.”

Howard sat in his private office all the next day, concentrating on his nail file and fingers. The more he thought, the less he knew; and the less he knew, the more jumpy he became. You can’t go out and grab a crook without any clues, or leads, or what the boys call “information.” In fiction, they call it “stoolies,” but never in official police circles.

Came the third day, and the case of Joseph Shadd. Mrs. Shadd phoned Headquarters and said to Sgt. Chester Eldredge, “My husband, Joseph Shadd, did not come home all night. What? No, sir; he never has stayed away all night before in our 26 years of married life. He’s a paymaster and chief accountant for the Thurman Department Store. What did you say? Oh, no; he’s not a drinking man and I just know there is no other woman in his life. I’m terribly worried.”

Later, I said to Howard, “I suppose Brother Shadd is also a fine and honest man.”

“That, Bub, seems to be the dope,” said Howard. “Shadd has been with the Thurman Department Store for more than 21 years, and they tell me that he has been a most honest and trustworthy employee. However, it seems that when he walked out, more than \$5,000 walked with him.”

“And that,” I said, “is a very profitable stroll. What ails these middle-age guys all of a sudden?”

“I don’t know what ailed Trotter and Shadd, but it might be credited to what the medical professors call the male menopause.”

“You mean the menopause that refreshes,” I said, which I consider a pretty good joke on a certain soft drink. “What is it, a brainstorm in reverse?”

“Listen,” replied the chef, “and I’ll tell you about the birdies and the beezies. For example, women, when they reach a certain age—anywhere from 35 to 50—pass through a physical change, and it is called the menopause. Some sail right through it with no pain or trouble at all; others go almost nuts, and have various kinds of both physical and mental trouble. Men pass through a similar period, but they react differently. For instance, whenever you see an old coot over-eyeing a dame—especially one young enough to be his granddaughter—they are more than likely in the menopause. Such men do all kinds of silly things, even to robbing and stealing.”

“Well,” I said, “that menopause gag ought to beat the old amnesia racket, when presented before a jury of twelve good men and true—and also soft-headed.”

The phone buzzed. “Howard speaking.” A slight pause. “*What,*” yapped the chief, “another?”

“Oh, no!” I said. “Two menopause cases is enough, even for Scotland Yard.”

Howard cradled the receiver. “Well, Bub,” he grinned, “it seems that a Miss Rose Bryant, cashier at the Miami theatre, is missing. The entire contents of the safe—a matter of \$4,236, the receipts for Saturday and Sunday—are likewise absent.”

“What was the name of the movie playing there, *The Willie Sutton Story*? And I bet the cashier never stole anything before in her life. Miami is lousy with honest thieves.”

“Miss Bryant worked for that company for more than 20 years,” explained Howard. “It’s a cinch she has no previous criminal record of any kind.”

“Could it be a publicity stunt to advertise their new feature, *Gone With Gold*?”

“I doubt it,” said the boss, tossing his nail file into the air, and missing it with his left hand, as usual. “Things are beginning to fall into a pattern. I don’t think we’ll have to work too hard on this affair. Er, let’s go out and have a glass of grape juice.”

IMAGINE a detective chief drinking grape juice in habit-forming doses. No beer, no hard booze, just grape juice. Can you imagine a mug like Howard getting anyplace in a detective novel? No

blondes, no brunettes, no redheads. Or on radio or TV? That’s where the boys drink a quart of Old Bellywrecker, or swig a gallon of Finnegan’s Foamy Brew, every hour, Daylight Saving Time. He has no hobbies, either—except baseball, football and a little golf. Just as a fan, never as a participant.

He never shot or slugged anyone in his life, but he has a fine record for second shots and second socks to the chin. He never swaggers around with a Homburg lid on his skull and cleans out a den of criminals single-handed. He’s as glamorous as a piece of tin cheese in front of a mouse.

“This business,” I said, “stinks in technicolor. No clues; no real crooks with or without former records; no fingerprints—no everything. Hell—let’s walk around and see if we can find a good, old-fashioned dogfight. Me, I’m bored.”

The boss sipped the last of his grape juice. Joe, the counterman, remarked, “Say, Chief, what’s all this robbery I been reading in the papers all about? It sure looks screwy to me. I bet they ain’t all honest like they say.”

“I have a hunch they are,” said Howard. “In real life it can happen, maybe not in fiction.” Turning to me, he said, “Come on, Bub; let’s see what we can find.”

We walked down Flagler Street to the Miami theatre and had a little chatter with the manager, Tim Tyler. “If this is a publicity stunt,” I said to Tyler, “you are headed for the can, minus any immediate opener.”

“Don’t kid me,” said the manager. “Do you think we can pay more than four grand for plugging a picture? That’s what she took out of that safe over there.”

“Did she have a boyfriend?” I asked. “Maybe a hood?”

“Gosh, no! I understand she is engaged to marry a Boy Scout leader. I’ve known Rose Bryant for years and she’s as straight as a new needle.”

Howard asked, “Who did Rose Bryant live with, and do you know if she ever gambled at the races or anything?”

“I know she never gambled,” said Tyler. “In fact, she once said they should close all the racetracks. I can’t understand it.”

“Make that two,” I put in.

As we left the office, we took a peek at the movie on the screen. It had the tasty title of *Amen For Murder*. A so-called private eye—or what real

detectives call a private cock-eye—was saying to the official inspector of police, “Okay, fatso; when you and your flatfeet get through gumming up the clues, I’ll get to work and see what I can salvage.”

I gazed at Howard, and asked, “If a private snoop-sniffer said that to you, what would *you* do?”

“According to where he was standing when he said it. For instance, if he was near either an open or closed window, I would throw him out to see if he would bounce.”

WE RETURNED to the chief’s office in Headquarters. Det. Tom Lipe passed the door and Howard called him in. “Bub, if you see Henry Reno around, tell ‘im I’d like to see ‘im, please.”

“Okay,” said Lipe. “I think he’s down in the ID Bureau right now.”

Reno was the veteran newsman and crime reporter for the *Herald*. He never missed anything, except sleep, meals, and the bus home. Tall, eye-glassed, and slightly gray at the temples, he came into Howard’s office a few minutes later.

“Who’s popping?” asked Hank.

“I thought I had this thing half-wrapped up,” said the chief, “but I think I need a little of your cooperation. Right now, I’m down a manhole, with the lid riveted on, so I have decided to try a hunch. I need your help.”

“Shoot,” said Henry, “you’re faded.”

Next morning the *Herald* printed a Story to the effect that Det. Chief Gwynn Howard believed that Dr. John Stamm had been kidnapped and was being held for ransom. The tale further stated that the chief also thought that the Doc was innocently mixed up in the Trotter, Shadd and Rose Bryant thefts. A fine picture of the chief ran with the story, and I bet same was taken when he was going to high school. I called his attention to the youthful mug.

“So what? The less people recognize police, the better off we are, Bub.”

I got back to the business at hand. “I don’t get this liverwurst,” I said. “If the Doc was actually kidnapped, he is out of circulation and won’t even see the write-up in the paper, or hear about it.”

“Listen, junior. In our racket more cases are cracked via luck than direct clues; we got to learn to play everything, including a piano.”

Next day brought zero in results. Howard spent most of his time in the office, diddling with his

habitual nail file. Near the end of the second day, he began to wish that hunches came in bunches. Bigger and better.

The morning of the third day paid off.

The phone buzzed. “Howard speaking.” There was a pause, then, “Fine! You just wait at your house; I’ll be there shortly.”

“Personal, or can I play?” I asked.

“You play. Let’s go.”

I followed him down the wooden stairs. We got into the chief’s car—minus siren or red light—and then headed for Northwest 1st avenue and 3rd street.

“I guess that’s the house over there,” he said.

“You mean where the little guy with the goatee is standing out front?”

“That, I imagine, would be Dr. John Stamm, who reads the *Herald*, thank the Lord.”

THE DOC looked tired and rather jumpy. In appearance, he resembled a miniature Buffalo Bill.

“Thank you for coming so quickly!” greeted Dr. Stature. “I’ve had a frightful time!”

He led the way into the nearly-new C.B.S. house and introduced us to Mrs. Stature. She was at least fifteen years younger than the Doc, and an authentic looker. If I told you she had beautiful fawn-brown eyes, a Betty Grable figure and shiny mouse-brown hair, what would you actually see? Nothing. Because you can’t make words into photos.

Let’s condense the Doc’s story:

He had started out for his evening walk, as was his custom. A car raced up to the curb near him with two men, both strangers. One jumped out, pointed a gun at his head, and ordered him into the car. Next, they put a blind over his eyes. Then they drove for at least one hour, but the Doc knew they were zigzagging all over town. Finally, they stopped and he was led into a house. Once inside, they removed the blind. He noticed that all of the windows had the shades down; no light seeping through. The room was small.

One of his captors was short, dark-complexioned, while the other was at least six feet and blond. The tall one said, “We need \$5,000 at once, and a note to your wife will get it.”

The Doc asked, “Is this ransom?” And the tall bum said, “What the hell did you think it was?”

Then Dr. Stamm told them that he did not have

that much dough nesting around the house. "I've just got about \$500, in cash." And the bum said, "We know you have some jewelry; we'll take that."

So the Doc wrote the note to his wife and then they bound and gagged him and left the place. But the Doc is double-jointed in the wrists and they were hardly out of sight when he was free and racing back home. When he arrived, no men had appeared, and the Doc was puzzled.

And that was the Doc's story.

"Can you take us to that house?" asked Howard.

"Of course I can; it is near the bay, at about 100th street."

We drove to the place—a small wooden shabby affair, setting back in some scrub palmettos, a few yards from the water's edge. The two rooms were almost bare. It was the type of joint that Bela Lugosi or Karloff could play their parts in. An old table, two wooden chairs, and a rusty oil stove made up all the furniture. Empty booze bottles dotted the floor; it looked like a jungle for winos and reefer-rats.

Howard radioed Bob Vollmer, of our ID Bureau, to haul his tail out and stir up some prints. Vollmer came and dusted everything in sight and came up with assorted prints.

"Okay, Doctor," said Howard, "we'll drive you home now."

At his house again, the Doc bowed to us with what they call Old World courtesy, and the chief said, "Better get some sleep. I'll keep you in touch if anything turns interesting."

BACK AT Headquarters Sgt. Eldredge informed us that Martin Trotter, the Tropical National Bank cashier, had been found by Squad Car Officers Ford and Logan. He'd been discovered walking along the left bank of the Tamiami Trail, eight miles west of Miami, in a semi-daze. The boys in the ID Bureau were nearly through mugging and printing him when Howard and I got there.

He was a mild-looking lad, half-bald, and I bet his fellow-workers called him 'Curly.' His clothes, although practically new and of good texture, were peppered with sandspurs and dirty.

"Well," began Howard, "what happened to you, Trotter?"

"And, where is the money?" I added. I am always interested in dough because you can do so many nice things with it.

"What money?" yipped Trotter. "I don't know anything about any money!"

Ah, another case of good old amnesia! A guy swipes a pile of heavy sugar, finds he can't get away with it, and promptly makes arrangements to contract assorted amnesia. But if a jury does not flop over on their collective bottoms from the gag, then the attorney gives them a large dose of what they coyly call "temporary insanity." In cases of homicide in the first degree, many a lucky gent—very sane—skips the one-way passage in the hot armchair when his lawyer claims that he went nuts suddenly and can't recall blowing the brains of his wife out into confetti sections.

"I tell you, gentlemen," went on Trotter, "this is all very strange to me. It's like a dream, really."

"Blonde or brunette?" I asked.

"Can't you remember what became of that money?" demanded Howard.

"What money?"

"The \$20,000 in cash that left the Tropical National the same time you did," said the chief.

"Why, I don't even remember leaving the bank!"

"Regardless," went on Howard, "you're under arrest for absconding with that money." Turning to Joe Musial, he added, "See that he's booked."

We returned to Howard's office. Outside, in the main detective bureau, the phone rang. Det. Johnny Holland yelled above the din, "Chief! Take No. 2."

Howard pressed down the lever, the green light flashed, and the chief said, "Howard speaking." A slight pause, then, "Hello, Charlie. Swell! What does she have to say? Okay; bring her over as soon as possible."

"Who's 'her'?" I asked.

"Rose Bryant, the theatre cashier. They found her sitting on a bench in Lummus park, near the ocean. She was dazed, dumbfounded, and altogether befuddled. It is her story, anyway. That was Charlie Pearce who called me." Pearce is the dick chief on Miami Beach.

The boys from the Beach got Rose into Howard's office in less than 35 minutes. She looked between 25 and a bad dream.

"What happened to the money?" asked the chief.

"What money?" There we go again. Her face was as innocent as a cooing babe. Which reminds me—the world's worst crooks often have the mug of a cooing babe.

"Another dose of amnesia," I said. "I think I'll get me a job in Fort Knox, walk out with the gold supply and, when caught, take a high dive into amnesia in six assorted flavors."

"I am really mystified," said Rose Bryant. "I simply *don't* know what happened to me."

"Take her down to the ID," ordered the chief. "And give her the whole works."

After she was mugged and printed, I took her back to Howard's office. A police matron was waiting and took her to the 17th floor of the Courthouse, the women's canola.

"Better get a new supply of hunches," I suggested to Howard.

"Right now I need them wholesale," he agreed; "let's get some grape juice."

AT THE drugstore, Joe, the counterman, asked, "What's new on them funny robberies, chief?"

Before he had a chance to reply, Claret Charlie, a veteran wino, soft-shoed up to Howard, and said, "Remember me, chief; huh? You once give me a buck for a flop and a bite and I ain't forgot it. Now I got some news for you."

"Hot stuff?" asked Howard.

"It'll bust things wide open!" said Claret Charlie.

"Step outside, where we can talk," said Howard. To me, he said, "You wait here and drink my grape juice."

Within ten minutes the chief returned, alone. "Let's hit the ball," he said, and practically yanked me off the seat.

"Easy on the rough stuff," I snorted; "don't forget—I got civil rights."

"Try and get 'em," he grinned. We drove to Northwest Fifth Street, near North Miami Avenue, and stopped about fifty feet west of the Skid Row Cafe. This was the home haven of most of the winos in the city, including some reefer-rats. A few of the clients are misdemeanor monkeys and felony flat-heads.

"You know Jake Walloon and Nick Chubble when you see them?" he asked.

"Hell, yes; I had this beat when I was working in uniform and I had to pluck 'em twice for assault and battery, against both booze and honest citizens."

"Take a look through the door and see if you can spot 'em."

I saw them sitting at the second table, both with heads resting in hands.

"They are resting from a hard night of reducing the corn supply," I said.

"Two men of distinction, eh?" laughed Howard.

"You mean *extinction*," I replied.

I followed the chief in. The assorted winos at the termite-eaten bar got one peek at the boss and beat the hundred-yard dash record going out the back door. Walloon and Chubble dreamed on. I grabbed Walloon by the neck and seat of the pants, while Howard did likewise with Chubble. Both were tossed into the back seat of the car before they stirred.

"Cuff 'em," said Howard. I used one set to bracelet the right arm of Walloon to the left of Chubble. As I did, Walloon opened his blood-shot right eye, and mumbled, "Gimme the same!"

We took them direct to the sergeant's desk in the city jail. Howard told Captain Collins, "Can 'em both till they sober. They're booked for investigation, minus any bonds."

WHEN WE returned to the office, Sgt. Tom Lipe said, "They got Joseph Shadd of the Thurman Department Store."

"How?" asked the chief.

"The manager of the Town theatre, Flynn Stubblefield, phoned and said a man had been sitting in the show since the theatre opened and must have sat through the feature at least five times. He's down in the ID now."

Mr. Shadd was a buxom gent, weighing around 220, and his pale blue eyes had a watery and puzzled look.

"Shadd," said the chief, "What did you do with the money?"

"*What* money?" It began to sound like a phono record that had jumped the track.

"The \$5,000 you assisted to leave the Thurman store," went on Howard.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I'm an honest man. . . . But I think there is something the matter with me; I feel like I have been in a dream."

I said, "It begins to look as if amnesia—like measles and smallpox—is catching. You know what I think? I think someone has invented a new amnesia ray and has sprayed it over the city."

"That," said Howard, "sounds like assorted nuts." Turning to Joe Musial, he went on, "When

you get through, send 'im across the street.”

Next morning we brought Walloon and Chubble into the ID for the regulation treatment. Both were about sober, considering that neither one had been absolutely normal for more than five years. From the ID we took them to the office, shut the door, with the idea of having a little social and informative chitchat.

The chief couldn't bat his questions far enough to get to first base. After a half hour of dumb looks from the boys, the chief tossed 'em back into the jugeroo.

“Well,” I said, “at least they didn't say, ‘*What money?*’”

“If they had,” grinned Howard, “I think I would have belted the bums through the window.”

The phone zizzed. “Thanks, Joe,” said Howard, and hung up.

“Joe says the prints just came back from Washington, complete with records.”

“Any good?”

“I'm glad they are not mine.”

The chief had ordered speed photo prints of Dr. Stamm, Walloon and Chubble sent to the FBI. The system is new and practically jet-propelled, when it comes to speed. You just shoot in the classifications of the ten fingers, along with just one print, enlarged six times; you can get a reply in less than an hour, if need be.

“Back in a minute,” said the chief, and went down to the ID Bureau. He returned shortly with the prints. “Look good?” I asked.

“Pretty and very interesting view,” he said. “Let's hit the ball.”

“Who's the ball?”

“Dr. John Stamm.” So we drove to the Doc's house.

MRS. SARAH STAMM, dressed in what they call a play suit—and I wouldn't mind helping her play in it—met us at the door.

“May we see the doctor?” asked Howard.

“Sorry,” she said, “but he's resting. May I offer you a drink?”

“Got any grape juice?” I asked.

She made a face that they call wry, and I must look that word up some time.

“No, thanks,” said the chief. “We must see Dr. Stamm.”

She let go with a pout and a haughty stare. “I just *told* you that Dr. Stamm is resting,” she said,

evenly. “I prefer not to disturb him.”

“In that case,” said the chief, “I will disturb him myself.”

We breezed passed her and into the house. The Doc was in the left bedroom, curled up in a nice snooze. Suddenly he must have thought he had a nightmare. Howard yanked his two wrists together while I clamped on the cuffs. His eyes popped open and for a moment he was so enraged that he was tongueless.

“This,” he squawked, “is an outrage.”

“Outrages,” said Howard, “happen in the best-regulated police departments; let's take a ride.”

Back at the station, Howard placed the Doc in a small room, which we call the think-and-wonder department. The walls are practically soundproof and a gent can scream in high soprano technicolor, without disturbing anyone but himself. If the Doc did any sound thinking, it may have occurred to him that Howard had his prints taken from the door handle of the car when he rode with us the first time.

The boss ordered Sergeants Lipe and Eldredge to go over to the can and bring back Jake Walloon and Nick Chubble. When they arrived, both their tongues were as dry as a Republican's speech in the middle of Alabama. They were parched from lack of corn—not from the cob, but the bottle.

“Sit down,” greeted Howard. “I regret to inform you that, so far, you have been far from cooperative. Here, my friends, we *like* cooperation; it is highly appreciated.”

“He means start talking before we knock you on the floor,” I explained.

“Now, then,” went on the chief, “Dr. Stamm, your little playmate has been gracious enough to inform us that you not only kidnapped him, but also Trotter, Shadd and Rose Bryant. I trust you gentlemen are aware that the crime of kidnapping is rewarded in the state of Florida with a fast trip to the electric chair, at Raiford prison.”

That did it. Walloon and Chubble tried to bellow at the same time.

“Why, that *louse!*” boomed Walloon.

“The dirty *heel!*” howled Chubble.

“Fine,” said the chief. “You're now beginning to sing the type of song I like. I take it that you are ready to talk for the official record, rather than play the parts of saps for the Doc.”

“Will we talk!” woofed Walloon.

“You're damned right we talk!” added Chubble.

I called in Ruth Saunders, the chief's sec, and for the next hour the song she recorded was the kind that Irving Berlin could never write. At the end, Walloon asked, "We get a break for this, don't we?"

"I can promise nothing," said Howard. "However, I will be glad to tell the judge that you boys have been highly cooperative."

EARLY NEXT morning we placed Dr. Stamm, Walloon and Chubble in the line-up with seven other prisoners. Then we called in Trotter, Shadd and Rose Bryant to lock them over. Each one had a number pinned to his shirt.

"If you folks recognize anyone in that line," said Howard in a soft voice, "just whisper the number in my ear."

Each studied the line for at least five minutes, then each one picked out Dr. Stature, Walloon and Chubble. All stated that they recalled the faces—rather hazily—but would swear in court that they were the right three.

"That," said Howard, "you can bet on. Meantime, I am releasing the three of you from official custody, on your own honor that you will remain in the city until we call you for further use. You understand, of course, that you must appear as the chief witnesses in this case. Good afternoon, and if you are dumb enough to steal any more money from your employers, please be awake and know what you are doing. Don't take it while hypnotized. It makes extra work for the police; and—as everybody suspects—police do not care to labor too hard."

After they left, we went into the room where Dr. Stamm was doing some thinking and wondering.

"Well, Doctor," began the chief, "if you care to talk in a cooperative and reasonable manner, we shall be glad to listen. Besides, it will save wear and tear on all of us, and personally I dislike wear and also tear. Perhaps I should tell you that Walloon and Chubble sang a pretty aria, starring you as the villain; in short, they said you were head man in the whole show."

The Doc took a long minute before replying.

"They are just a couple of winos!" he snorted. "No jury would accept their word against mine. I have told you what actually happened. They kidnapped me and then kidnapped the others and made me hypnotize them to steal the money. Why, I'll put my character and reputation against theirs

any time!"

"I doubt it," said Howard, removing the FBI record sheet from his pocket. "Now, it says here that, about six years ago, you were kicked out of the medical profession for performing various malpractices unbecoming a legitimate doctor. More, it says here, you also have a habit of writing and cashing checks on other people's bank accounts. It also says here—"

The Doc remained silent for a few moments, then sighed with a helpless gesture of his shoulders. "Well, gentlemen," he said finally, "I guess it's no use. No man ever made a bigger mess out of his life than I have!"

"Where's all the money?" I asked. Well, to make it brief and to the point, it was a case of hypnotism, all right—but there was a cute angle to it. You see, the victims were all thoroughly honest people, and it's well-established that you cannot make a person do anything, under hypnotism, which he considers immoral. The Doc didn't put them into a trance and order them to steal; what he did was to convince them that they were making a perfectly legitimate delivery. They were aware that they were taking money, but believed that it was a perfectly legitimate payment of bills for which they would get receipts to bring back to their bosses.

After they'd delivered the dough, Stamm simply gave them receipts, which they read, then hypnotized them again and made them forget the whole business. As a result, their consciences were clear, and they couldn't remember what had happened without further hypnotic probing.

We listened to the Doc's story, then I asked, "Where's all the money?"

"You'll find it in the closet, in the dining room, in a tan suitcase. My wife doesn't know a thing about this business. She is innocent. This will all be a terrible shock to her; she's such a good girl."

HOWARD dispatched me to the Stamm residence. The door was locked in both the front and the back. The garage door was open and the car was gone. I smacked in the back door and went in. There was no tan suit case in the closet or any place else. On the dining room table, I found a note. Scented violet, and written in a dainty hand, it read:

Doc:

I'm tired of living with a stupid crook. Thanks for the money.

Sarah.

I took the note back to Howard, and said, "You can tell the Doc that Mrs. Stamm wasn't too shocked, and how is he doing?"

"Good girls are sometimes no good," remarked the chief. "But she won't last long."

"By the way," I said, "what share will Walloon and Chubble get out of the deal?"

"Well," said Howard, "considering they did all the rough work, I would say they got gypped. They told me that all they got out of the racket was \$100 for the three jobs. The Doc explained to them that the total collections was less than \$600. All the victims brought the money direct to him."

"It looks like they might have been underpaid," I said. "Tell 'em to strike next time for higher wages."

The chief took out his file, placed feet on desk, and began to work on his nails. "Let's hit the ball," he said.

"Where?"

"Down to the store for a drink. I'm at least ten glasses short on my grape juice."

"Is this mess all bundled up?"

"And also delivered," he replied, flipping his nail file in the air.