



*They'd put him in a crate, so his body wouldn't be found.*

It was clear enough that Gouldner had been murdered, but what could have been the motive for killing a man who had no enemies? And what was the meaning of some or the peculiar objects that were found among the dead man's effects? Could the motive for his death be explained by these pipes and various boxes with false bottoms?

## DEATH HAS NO DOUBLE

By Richard Cortez

**T**HE BATTERED old Ingersoll ticked merrily away as I sat at my desk and cursed myself over and over again. Why did I have to be in New Orleans and on a routine job, I mooned, just when this thing had broken? In the ten years that I had been in Hollywood, chasing everything from cranks to blackmailers, I would have offered my right arm for the opportunity to do anything for John Gouldner. He had given me my start in this racket. But now that I could repay the

guy, I wasn't Johnny-on-the-spot.

I reached over to the phone, dialed the familiar number of the Gazette, heard a click and a buzz, and then the equally familiar voice of the switchboard girl. I asked for Bill Kane, heard her say something—"just a moment pleazz"—and then Bill was on.

I said: "Hello, Bill. This is Mike Olsen."

"H'ya, Mike; when did you get back to town?"

"Just this afternoon—too late to get in on the

Gouldner case.”

He grunted sympathetically. “Yeah, that’s too bad. I told her that if anybody could crack the thing wide open, it would be you.”

“Who’s she?” I asked quickly.

“Why, Mrs. Gouldner, of course.” He hesitated a moment, then went on. “Look, I gather you haven’t gotten all the details yet, so maybe I’d better fill in the spaces. Move over to that moth-eaten thing you call an easy chair and make yourself comfortable.”

Kane was right about the chair and the rest of the office, I thought. I dragged the phone over to the easy chair. When I hit the seat, I heard a few loose springs hit the floor. If I ever got a few bucks ahead, I’d redecorate the joint. Lord knows, it needed it.

“You still there, Mike?”

“Just getting my carcass settled in the chair,” I muttered. “Okay, shoot.”

“Well, maybe there’s less to tell than I thought at first,” he said. “But here’s the picture of what I know. A few days ago, I got a call from Mrs. Gouldner, and she sounded plenty worried. She wanted to know if I knew where you were. I told her that you were finishing a case down South some where, and she nearly blew her top. When I wanted to know what all the fuss was about, she wouldn’t tell me; I guess she figured that, being a reporter, I couldn’t keep my mouth shut. After I convinced her that I could keep a secret—being dope enough to steal the bread right out of my own mouth—she asked me to meet her somewhere. I suggested the *Blue Grotto*, and she okayed it.

“She was there bright and early the next night, and she brought her best worried look along. It seems her husband had a habit of disappearing a few days at a time. He would return after his vanishing act and behave like a lion who had just been caught and put into a cage. I asked her if it could be another woman. She said she’d thought that might be, at first, but she followed him and he went to peculiar places, like waterfront dives and broken-down shacks. He would meet tough looking men, and they’d talk for hours. I asked her if business was bad at the LaSalle Studios, but she ruled out that angle, too; Gouldner’s business was having the best year of its career.

“By that time, I’d figured that it was going to be a job of hunting down clues, so I offered my services. She must have been pretty desperate,

because she snapped it up.”

I’d been listening to Kane’s story pretty closely, but that seemed to be all of it. “Did you find out anything about old man Gouldner’s actions?”

“Not a damn thing,” he answered. “That’s why I’m happy to see you back. And I’ve got a hunch that you really have yourself a case this time.”

“I’ve got the same hunch,” I agreed, slowly. “Well, thanks for what you could tell me, chum. I’ll see that you get first break on the story—that is, if there is any.”

Kane chuckled. “You’d better. Why else would I be spilling what I know to you? Anyhow, here’s luck, Mike; it’s going to take a good man to fit all the parts of this thing together.”

I got a picture of Kane tilting a bottle to point up his best wishes; I said “so long” and went home for some shuteye.

**T**HE NEXT morning, on my way out of the hotel, I saw that my work was really cut out for me. There on the newsstand, in big bold type were the headlines:

#### JOHN GOULDNER DEAD!

*Movie Magnate Found Floating in Bay.*

That was enough. I cursed Kane for not calling me when the body was found—though on second thought, what good would it have done? One body fished out of the bay looked like any other one, and the old man hadn’t been in the water too long to look any different. I’d run down to the Morgue later and take a look, but I didn’t figure it would tell much.

I got into the convertible and headed for Lisbeth. That’s the official title of the Gouldner estate. It was named by John for his wife, Elizabeth, and was a beautiful place—as pretty as the woman it had been named for.

I hadn’t seen Elizabeth Gouldner for several years, but when she came to the door to greet me, I saw that she hadn’t lost any of that loveliness. She was tall, with the kind of slim figure that you could put both arms all the way around. Her face, minus the bags under the eyes that the usual Hollywood resident goes around with, was in pretty good shape. She wore a tight-fitting, black gown that seemed to accent the right places. I was sure that even at her age, minus a sweater, she could hold her own against most of the stars in her husband’s

studio.

I started to offer condolences and regrets that I hadn't been here to do whatever I could, but she seemed to sense what was in my mind. "We're old enough friends to dispense with all the usual things, Mike."

I nodded, and she went on slowly:

"Fine. What I want to talk about is the plan for the future."

I could see that her old skill as an actress hadn't left her.

"Liz," I said, "I'll do all I can to help find John's murderer. But I'm going to need a free hand—and plenty of time. John's record was clean; outside of usual Hollywood grudges, I can't think of anyone who would kill him. Is there anything you can add to what you already told Kane?"

She tried to smile, shaking her head. "No, Mike. I told Kane everything I knew; I don't know of a single person who hated my husband."

We talked a little more, but I couldn't learn anything, and it was getting time to move along. But as I turned to leave, she pressed a couple of hunks of paper in my hand, I didn't have to look at them to know that the lettuce was enough to pay my hotel rent for quite a few rainy months.

**D**RIVING down the back road alongside Lisbeth, I tried to figure out an angle for the killing. I was sure that this was murder, because of the circumstances so far in the case, I tried to put myself in John's shoes and see if I could get some lead. Why should such a clean big-shot be put on the spot? Guys like the King of the Bookies, Mickey Troy, could get theirs and I wouldn't bat an eyelash. When they dumped the beautiful body of Helen Rayburn in the lake right in Hollywood Park, I had been expecting it for weeks. But, as far as I could figure it out, any motive for John Gouldner's death was lacking.

Coming down the hill road from John's estate to the main highway was always an experience for me. Those hairpin turns were rugged enough in dry weather, and now a shower was starting in. I reached for the button to lower the top on my convertible when I noticed a sleek-looking foreign job pretty close behind me. Cars are pretty scarce out there before the side road cuts into the highway to L.A.; this might be a tail. The road belonged to the Gouldner estate, privately built and maintained, and it was pretty narrow. I figured that the only

way to check on this guy was to step on the gas.

I pushed the pedal down and started to take the turns a little faster. The foreign job stayed with me like glue. I felt for my rod and breathed better when it was there; I couldn't believe that this bird was there to wish me happy birthday, and I liked to be ready for whatever might come.

It came. On the next turn, there was a light wooden railing stretched along the edge, and as I passed and started to round the turn, I got a look at the gully below. I saw enough of it to realize that I didn't want to go down there without a parachute. My friend in the foreign car had other ideas; he pulled in alongside me and swung his wheel toward me. I saw him coming and tried to brake down, but I was going too fast. His front end pushed the side of my car as if he didn't care what happened to my wagon. I felt my car being pushed gently but firmly toward the edge, and I swung my steering wheel as hard to the right as I could. But it didn't work; I started a spin, felt the crash—and then I wasn't hearing anything.

I awoke with the splash of rain on my face, picked myself up, and swore; my friend in the foreign car was miles away by this time. But except for the tears in my suit—one in the small of the back and another which had converted my trousers to shorts—I was in one piece. I couldn't say the same for the convertible; my new car looked like the job had been done by a couple of visiting firemen, who had been called to put out a fire in a wastepaper basket and then proceeded to tear down the entire building. Nothing was left of my bus but the Triple A sticker which read Drive Safely. My foreign friend should have read it. But my luck plus a slippery road had saved my life.

I hotfooted it down to the main highway and got picked up by a truck driver who was amused by my sad tale; I changed to a taxi in L.A. and sneaked up to my hotel room. A few hours later, via public conveyance better known in L.A. as jeep drivers, I was headed out to the LaSalle Studios.

**L**ASALLE had the usual big iron gates to keep out the curious and keep in the stars, so I flashed my buzzer to the guard and asked to be taken to Oleg Caspavi. The guard eyed me for a minute, then took me up to the office of John's right-hand man.

Oleg looked happy to see me, but I felt uneasy.

Ever since Caspavi had joined LaSalle, I'd had the same uneasy feeling. I don't know why I felt that way, because when I checked his record, I found it clean. Still, in my business, you learn to smell a phony a mile away—clean record or not.

I asked Caspavi to take me to John's office so I could go over his personal effects. I figured that the guy who had killed him would have gone over that room already, but I thought that it was worth the try.

The first thing that caught my eye up in John's plush office was his secretary; she was really a looker. I didn't remember her being there when I visited the old man a few months before. With a tight blue sweater made of angora, and tight-fitting skirt, she made a man's dream secretary. Plenty of sex, and yet not too hard. I wondered what Mrs. Gouldner would have said if she had seen her. Me, I wished that I had seen her first.

I said: "Blue-eyes, how long have you been around here?"

"Long enough to know a lot about you," she replied slowly.

"Well, it's nice to be famous," I decided. "Especially when it pays so little. What do you know about Mr. Gouldner's death?"

Her face fell, and she seemed to grow paler. "Nothing. I wish I did know something about who did it; he was such a wonderful guy, so considerate and all. I remember when my father. . . . But I mustn't bore you with my private affairs."

I smiled. "Baby, I don't think that you'd ever bore me."

And with that pleasant experience over, I turned to more serious business. If I were going to beat the cops on this case and earn my dough, I'd have to start moving.

The office looked freshly laundered, but I went over it carefully. All the time, Caspavi was watching me with his tiny, beadlike eyes. I reached over and started to fool around with the pipes on a rack. I knew that John was a nut about pipes and always had dozens around. They were all expensive ones, and they all looked well-worn—even the strange one. That one stood out like a sore thumb; it was an opium pipe.

In all the years I'd known John Gouldner, I thought I'd seen all his vices. I knew that, like most big-shots with red blood in their veins, he liked to throw a few bucks at the ponies; he liked to get high on good liquor and reach out to slap a cutie on

the buttocks as she passed by. But all were normal things any guy would do; he never went to extremes as far as I knew. And playing around with the dream stuff was going to extremes.

I turned to Caspavi. "Got any idea what the boss was doing with this pipe?"

"Oh, that." He grinned at me. "We made a picture with a Chinese setting, and he took that for a souvenir."

I wandered over to a small closet that looked as if it might contain some personal effects and glanced around. The usual stuff was in most of the drawers, but I found a few things in one that I didn't like. One of them was a paste necklace—a beautiful replica of a French period piece of Marie Antoinette days. Strange stuff for a movie producer's office—more suited for a prop man's room. To help things along, a little further on I found a beautiful leather jewel case. I knew that it had come from the Far East and I'd have bet dollars to doughnuts that it contained a false back.

I waited until Caspavi turned his back and pulled off the top page of the little appointment book and crammed it in my pocket. It was beginning to look as if whoever had done the cleaning was a bungler, too. It was like the maid who swept the room and pushed all the dirt under the carpet.

These things looked harmless in a producer's room to everybody but a Hollywood eye.

"Well, I guess I'd better shove," I muttered. "This place is as bare as a prison cell; I'll get in touch with you as soon as I find anything out."

"Be glad to help with anything to clear up this mess," Caspavi offered, but the smile on his face was still snakelike to me. "John was a good friend of mine, too."

On the way out, I paused to see what could be done about the blonde in the sweater. It wasn't too tough, nor too good; she had an idea I should call her up some time and ask further. I let it go and dropped around to a place where I could rent me a Buick. With that taken care of, I drove off a ways and read the message on the memo sheet. *Meet me at Mike's place at eight. Same scar. Same amount.* And the date on it was the fifteenth.

I pushed back my hat and pulled into a roadside stand for a coffee and cake, to think it over. It was too easy; no guy in his right mind would clean up a room and overlook something like this. But then, there was always a chance that it could happen.

No, damnit, the murderer or whoever was mixed up in this couldn't be that kind of a sap! I started swearing again.

The waiter bringing my coffee almost dropped it. He grabbed the change I gave him and trotted back in a hurry. I couldn't blame him. This was enough to make any man talk to himself without money in the bank. It was too damn easy. But I had to see for myself.

THAT EVENING, Mike's Place turned out to be a one-arm joint, as I'd expected. The grease on the walls and on the counter could be cut with a knife, and you were begging for ptomaine poisoning with every order. I walked in and planted myself in the corner so I could get a good look at everybody who walked in. A fat, sloppy-looking guy with a dirty apron came over and got my order of coffee and sinkers. I figured I'd wait for a while to see if anything developed, before I started talking.

I didn't have to wait too long before Scarface walked in. He was without a doubt one of the ugliest men I have ever seen, and I've seen plenty. I knew pugs with their ears smashed and nose bent and acres of scar tissue around, but they had nothing on this bozo. Outside of the movie-sets for horror pictures, this guy took the prize; he sat down in the booth and I looked back and knew I was in business.

I walked over to his table and sat down. "Nice weather we're having, mister," I said.

He scowled. "Got no time to be talking about the weather." As he talked, his face took on different hideous shapes.

"Waiting for someone?"

"Nosey, aincha?"

"Not if I'm the guy you're waiting to see," I told him.

"How can I tell?"

I knew he was waiting for the password, so I tried to do some bluffing. John Gouldner's death was no secret and this guy, whoever he was, knew it. I tried a long shot. "Before the old man kicked off, he asked me to continue the operation as before."

"What else did the old guy tell you?" he demanded. His hands were clenched and the knuckles were turning white.

"Nothing," I answered. "Except that he had put aside a batch of dough for this purpose, and I was

to carry on the job."

He looked me over, and finally decided. "Okay. Come on with me and I'll turn the stuff over; but I want the full fifty grand over; before tomorrow night, and no slipups."

I nodded my head, paid my bill, and followed him out of the cafe. His sedan was a big, powerful job, the kind that requires the use of a uniformed chauffeur. I felt for my rod and wondered why I was walking right into the lion's mouth.

The guy with the face seemed to know where he was going; he was putting on plenty of speed, down the highway going south. I figured that the hideaway was somewhere in a little town outside of L.A. but I was wrong. It took us half an hour to get where we were going, and when I stepped out of the car and smelled the dampness, I knew we were going on a boat.

We walked a few yards to the beach and I saw it, tied to a dock. I turned to my friend to ask where next—and ran into a gun. Ugly Face had a nice shiny new model popgun, and looked like he wanted to try it out. "All right, copper; this is the last stop."

"And just when we were getting to be such good friends," I said.

Things didn't look too good. Fifty miles from nowhere, a bullet in the back, and fish food. I wondered if he was headed for a ship out there or maybe an island in the bay. I knew I had to make a break first, but it didn't seem like the time. He relieved me of my gun and headed me up the little pier ahead.

"Okay to light a cigarette, mister?"

"And bring every Coast Guard Patrol down on us?" he wheezed.

He reached into his pocket and brought out a pint of whisky. I dunno whether it was himself or for me. I didn't ask; I slammed my fist into his puss and rocked his head back. He dropped to his knees. I kicked the gun out of his hand and jumped on his belly, pushing his chin back with my knee. He tried to lift his head up, and I socked it back with the knee. He settled down into dreamland.

I took his rod and hotfooted it to the car, heading the radiator cap toward L.A. It was getting late, now, but I wanted to check on one more thing before I could call it a night, I decided to go out to the Gouldner estate and see if my suspicions were true.

**M**OST OF the lights were out in the big mansion when I pulled the car into the driveway and shut off the ignition. I walked over to the door and rang the bell. I guess it must have been the maid's night off, because I was let in by Mrs. Gouldner, herself.

"Sorry if I got you out of bed," I began apologetically.

She was wearing a silken robe that was held tightly around her stomach by a braided belt. She must have noticed me looking at her, because she turned and walked into the living room, waving me to a scat. "Have you found out anything, Mike?"

"A few things here and there," I replied; "but nothing that would convict a man yet."

She looked up at that. "Why are you so sure it's a man?"

I said: "Maybe there's a dame mixed up in it somewhere, but I'm placing my money on a man—and a damned smart one. But, before I forgot what I came for, let me ask one question. Have you opened your husband's safe deposit box or his personal papers and effects?"

She nodded. "Yes. I'm going through his papers a little each day. I'll probably get them cleared up by the end of the week."

"Maybe you've stumbled across what I'm looking for already," I told her. "Have you seen any odd things that seem out of place? I mean things like jewel boxes, or maybe paste necklaces. Maybe something you'd think John brought home from the studio to study."

"I did find a few peculiar things among his personal effects."

"Like what?"

"Well, like the Chinese lantern he had in his wall safe." She stopped, hesitated, and went on. "It—well, when I put it on the table and it toppled onto the floor . . ."

"You found it had a false bottom and contained cocaine," I finished for her.

"How did you know?"

"That's what I meant when I said I know a little about a lot of things. I guess that actually covers what I wanted to know. And thanks for your help; I'll be around to see you when I crack the case."

She smiled, and I knew she wasn't going to sit around the rest of her life mourning. As soon as this blew over, she'd probably go to Europe, and then me back with a new lease on life. Then I was sure she'd remarry and make some man a fine wife.

"Damn," I muttered on my way out. "Getting sentimental already. I'd better stay away from those movie sets or I'll be believing in all that junk."

I was up early the next morning, shaved and showered, and feeling like new man. I'd ditched the big sedan, and I took the rented Buick downtown where I made a few phone calls. They brought results. I got the idea that a bird with a face like my pal couldn't be around town long without somebody knowing him. I was right; my pet stoolie told me about the mug, who'd spent time in all the best jugs on three continents. He was part of the old Wilber outfit, now trying a comeback. They used to specialize in hot goods, getting rid of anything. But it still didn't tie in with Gouldner. What was that kind of a man doing playing around with the Wilber crowd?

I pondered that for a few minutes and was stalemated, so I tried a new tack. I thought that business mixed with pleasure wouldn't be a bad idea. And there was only one pleasure I'd get on this job. I dialed her number and was surprised when she accepted without a protest. I was beginning to like that little secretary.

**W**E MET at a little restaurant outside of a small park I knew. It was a perfect place for good food and conversation.

I opened. "Tell me all about yourself, beautiful."

"I'm twenty something. I live in a pretty blue house with a slate roof. I weigh one hundred and something. I came to Los Angeles a short time ago. My parents were born, grew up, and are swell people." She liked watching my reactions, and smiled. "What else do you want to know, kind sir? After all, you're a detective, and all you need are a few clues. Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you—I don't want things to be too difficult. I'm Lois Lawrence."

"You've got a good act." I could go along with the kidding, to a point. "But we're not casting for comediennes right now. Sow about a little help from you? Did you ever hear anything unusual about Caspavi? I mean has he ever done anything out of the ordinary that you can remember?"

She hesitated a little. "Well . . . come to think of it, something peculiar did happen when I first began to work for LaSalle. I was driving south toward the LaPalma Hotel when a car passed me and almost pushed me off the road. I had noticed it

trying to pass, and I pulled over as far right as I could. The driver was an ugly man with a long scar on his face. The others were tough looking, too. But the thing that surprised me was Mr. Caspavi; he was in the car.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“Sure. I’d only seen him once on the lot when I was hired. But when I got to work the following day, I knew he was the man.”

“And he’s the man who’s getting closer to the hot seat, then, honey.”

“Do you really think he did it?” she asked, tilting her face to one side.

There’s only one thing to do when a girl looks like that, and I did it. She didn’t draw back—she seemed to like it. Then she was serious again. “Do you really think he did it?”

“I don’t know whether he did the actual killing—but I do know that he had a hand in putting Gouldner on the spot.” I found my arm still around her, and I squeezed just enough to feel right. But business had to come first. “Honey, you’ve been a big help. When this is over, I’d like to give you a job closer to my work—with your looks and brains, you could go a long ways. But for now . . .”

She was smiling when I left her, and I knew she’d read between the lines. But the case was splitting wide open, and I’d either have it in an hour or muff it for sure. I had hopes, but still wasn’t sure where Gouldner tied in.

Back at the lot, I walked into the prop department and started to pick up things and look at them. I knew that it would put the cheese on the trigger of the trap.

Then a little guy let out a shout:

“Hey, who let you in here?”

“Take it easy, shorty,” I told him. “I’m looking for a guy who’s handy with tools. You know, like making boxes with false bottoms.”

He turned pasty yellow but managed to stutter about not knowing what I was talking about. I grabbed him by the collar and lifted him off the floor. “Listen. You know damned well what I’m talking about.”

“Are you from Wilbers?” he asked nervously.

“Nope. I’m a private dick, and I know plenty about you—enough to send you up to the Federal pen for a nice long stretch.”

HE LOOKED sick, and the starch left him completely. His voice rose to a whine. “I dunno nothing about it. Caspavi wanted some things, I made ‘em. How’d I know what they were for? When you’re in the movie business, you never know what they’re going to ask for. Why they might want an elephant and crocodile with one eye and I’d have to make it. I get paid for work, not for asking questions.”

“Yeah,” I said. “You get paid for working. And maybe a bonus for helping kill a man.”

“I swear I didn’t know,” he pleaded. “I didn’t know till that night on the boat. Caspavi was there when his men brought me, and he was looking scared, but kinda like he enjoyed it.”

He would, I thought—the rat would get a kick out of seeing this shrimp dragged up on the carpet. The little guy was going on. “One of them said the last shipment was almost picked up by the customs, and they had to be more careful. And somebody said the old man had been snooping around, and he’d found some of the work and was taking it to the Feds. They didn’t like the containers I’d designed. Wanted some nobody could spot, even if they looked at the junk labeled for the LaSalle Studios—and they wanted it snowproof; I didn’t even know snow was cocaine till they told me. Then I knew—but I got a wife and three kids, mister. When they told me to keep quiet, I knew I was going to keep quiet.”

“Anything else?” I asked. “Nothing,” he said. “Except that just as they were sending me back to get started on the props, Mr. Gouldner came up in that little speed-boat of his, and he looked mad. He was yelling something about firing Caspavi. He had a bunch of paper flowers I’d made up with little pouches in his hand.”

I’d heard enough, so I headed toward the building where Caspavi hung his hat. I’d finally found how Gouldner tied in, and it wasn’t so hard to see. He was always a fool about standing on his own feet. When the Feds came snooping, or something slipped up—it didn’t matter how he learned about the business—he’d gone bulling off alone collecting evidence. And when he thought he had enough, the old man had gone charging out like a lion, instead of yelling for help. Damn his fool courage!

I went in the side entrance, so Lois wouldn’t see me and get caught in any fireworks. And I got there

just in time, because Oleg Caspavi was putting his things into the prettiest aluminum suitcases I'd seen. "Going somewhere?" I asked.

He wheeled around, with a gat jumping into his hand out of one case, and pointing straight at me. "Yes, copper," he told me. "Without company. When my boys found Angel knocked out by the pier, we knew too much word was getting around. I'd sort of hoped I could put your head in a tub and leave it there—the way John got his before we dumped his body. It's less messy that way. But since you're out for blood, that's what you're going to get."

I was figuring a way out, and not finding one—mostly I was trying to remember my prayers and remembering how nice Lois had looked. At first I thought it was only memory—until I realized that she actually had walked in. Only good training kept my face from tipping Caspavi off as she came in from behind him and cracked him neatly on the

skull with a solid statue.

Then I wiped the sweat off my forehead, and grabbed for her. "Dream girl! But how'd you know?"

"Just following orders," she said, when she could get her lips free. "Remember, you were going to make me your hired assistant? Well, I started work early by leaving the intercom open to Caspavi's office, so I heard the whole thing. Am I hired?"

"Honey," I told her, "you've got a contract for life. There's enough evidence here in his bags to send him up for life if the rat beats the gas chamber—which he won't. We'll have to see Mrs. Gouldner. And then . . ."

"Then?" she prompted.

I pulled her a little closer still. "Then, we'll give you a starring role as a witness, and top billing in my household for keeps."