



THESE SHOES ARE KILLING ME

By LEROY YERXA

Footprints all around the corpse; but they were all prints of the left foot!

INSPECTOR JAMES HALL was, like his office, a classical example of unadorned simplicity. Hall didn't like puzzles and he didn't like details. Puzzles troubled his solid head, and right now, as he slammed down the phone, the toughest problem he'd faced in months sent three thick fingers scratching over his bald head. He sat very still for a few minutes, shaking his head back and forth like an angry bull. Then his thick fist crashed down on the desk top in sudden decision. When he picked up the phone once more there was a suggestion of a twinkle in the dark, deep set eyes.

"Hello! Sergeant? Listen! Send in Robert Case. Yes, the little wonder boy of the detective squad."

He listened impatiently as the receiver chattered back at him. His jaw hardened into set lines.

"Yes! Well, I think we've got something

here that will keep little Robert Case busy for a while before he solves it. *Quite* a while!"

Inspector Hall dropped the phone and buzzed the main desk. Over the communication set he ordered a squad car to stand by. Tall and homely as a bald eagle, Hall unfolded himself from the chair and jerked on his overcoat. He was just pulling the battered felt down where it would conceal his lack of head shrubbery when a light knock sounded on the door.

"Come on in, Case," he shouted.

The door opened and a small, dapper individual entered. Robert Case had an innocent face that made him look like a choir boy who had just left church. He approached Hall with short steps and Hall was suddenly conscious of how carefully polished Case's shoes were in comparison to his own well worn boots.

"Bob," Hall began before Case could open

his mouth. "I got troubles."

Robert Case was slipping into the soft overcoat he had carried on his arm. He smiled.

"Man or woman? Knife, gun or poison? Your troubles are mine, Inspector. Let's share them."

Hall leaned on his desk, extracted a Havana from his pocket and started to chew the end of it.

"Murder," he said shortly. "Murder by strangulation."

Robert Case seemed to deflate. A pained expression crossed his face.

"Look Jim," he pleaded, "I'm not cut out for this rough stuff. Go get your man, convict him and burn him. I'll stay here and play bridge with myself."

He started to remove his coat.

"Wait a minute," Hall said. "I'm willing to get the murderer all right. There's just one point I thought might interest you."

Case said nothing. He was accustomed to Inspector Hall's build-ups.

"The man choked his victim and tossed her into the swamp just outside the city limits on Route 6. He left a raft of footprints all around the body. *Bob, every damned one of those prints were made with a shoe from the left foot.*"

Case watched him silently, but his wide, gray eyes narrowed.

"That would point to a one-legged murderer hopping around, fighting with the girl and finally killing her?"

Hall nodded hopelessly.

"For a while I was almost ready to believe *that*," he admitted. "But, by the saints, Case, it's impossible."

Robert Case grinned. He slapped a spotless hat over well combed hair, and turned abruptly toward the door.

"That's what I thought," he said. "What are we waiting for?"

Beyond the drainage canal, Inspector Hall saw the usual line of press cars, two squad cars and the death wagon. He pressed the brake pedal down gently and they rolled to a stop at the rear of the line. Down the steep bank a crowd had gathered at a respectable distance from the body. He opened the door, stepped out—and slipped on the clay bank. Robert Case, following at a more sedate speed, watched Inspector Hall take a complete turn on his back and land in the slime at the bottom. With no visible emotion on his face, Case went down the bank carefully. Hall was on his feet, face red and angry. Mud covered his overcoat.

"Jumping into this murder case with more gusto than usual, aren't you, Jim?"

Hall muttered darkly under his breath and the men who waited parted to form a straight line between him and the girl on the ground. Hall, head down, approached the body and walked around it in a wide circle. His eyes were on those footprints. The first phone report had been accurate. The girl was dressed in a white evening gown, low at the neck and covered by a short fur coat. Her dress was torn up one side, revealing a left leg. The throat was marked and bruised. Footprints were visible in the mud all about her. He went to his knees to study them, and felt rather than saw Case standing above him.

Robert Case's face was a study in dull anger. When he spoke, his words were low and choked with feeling.

"Yes! I see the prints. They're all from a left shoe. They're a damned clever start to what the murderer thinks is a perfect crime."

He paused, as though to catch his breath.

"Jim! I think the man must be a maniac to think he can get away with this. He's tried so hard that he'll trip himself into our arms by himself; and when he does . . ."

Hall stood up and tried to clean the mud from his clothing.

"That's all," he said quietly. "I knew when the boys called me that this wasn't the usual

ROUTE 6 crossed a section of muddy, reed grown swamp land just west of the city

murder.”

Case nodded.

“Tell your blood hounds to clean the place up. I want to know who the girl is. Make sure that strangulation was the real cause of her death.”

He turned away from the figure on the ground and climbed carefully back up the steep bank to the side of the car.

Away from the body, he seemed to relax. Hall followed him, and reached the small man as he painstakingly scraped the last bit of mud from the highly polished shoes. Case looked up at the disgruntled inspector and the old smile came back.

“Just one thing, Jim,” he suggested. “Don’t look for a one-legged man. If you couldn’t get down that bank with both pins under you, he could have never managed to force the girl to go down there.”

ROBERT CASE had a headache. For a man who made his living tracking down killers, his heart was much too tender. He sat across from Inspector James Hall’s desk, one knee crossed carefully over the other, his eyes glued to a two-page report. The details in black and white were even more horrible than the sight of the body itself. He read steadily for some minutes, then dropped the paper on the desk and stared steadily into Hall’s puzzled eyes. The Inspector returned the stare.

“So she was Helen Kane,” Case said slowly. “Helen Kane, age twenty-six, came from a decent family, worked in a down town office and lived for nights like last night when she could put on the only nice things she owned and go stepping out among the bright lights.”

Hall said nothing.

“That still leaves us without the right foot to stand on,” Case added. He stood up, brushed out the wrinkles on his trousers and folded the papers carefully into an envelope.

“If I’m not mistaken, Jim, we’ll get along quite nicely by waiting for a few hours. These

things never stop after the first round. Let me know if anything comes up that seems to link with Helen Kane.”

Hall seemed to awaken from his trance suddenly, switched the unlighted Havana to the far corner of his lips and grunted.

“Sounds good the way you put it,” he admitted. “Unfortunately the department can’t wait for murderers to hang themselves. We’ve got to go after this thing while it’s hot. Every hour we wait will make the trail that much harder to pick up.”

Case hesitated at the door, turned half around and slipped into his coat.

“I wouldn’t be too sure of that if I were you,” he said. “Being small the way I am, I’ve learned that sometimes pretty big things come to those who wait long enough for them.”

The door clicked softly and he was gone. Hall swore aloud and slapped an impatient hand on the call bell. In three minutes he was dictating orders at high speed. Inspector Hall believed in action, and stressed it in every move of his impatient hands. To wait was to worry and worry could make him a driving maniac inside of twenty-four hours.

“**I** THINK we’ve got something here,” Robert Case said, as the squad car lurched under them and slipped out into the foggy, rain spattered court. “You say the policeman found Helen Kane’s picture on the wall of his room?”

Inspector Hall nodded grimly. In the rush from the office he had forgotten his hat. Under the pale light of the car interior, his bald head shone.

“Yeah. Sergeant Graves reported ten minutes ago that a man had been found dead in his room at the LaGrove Hotel. He didn’t think much about it until he found this framed picture of Helen Kane on the wall. It was signed, ‘With love to Glenn.’ He called me at once, thinking I’d be interested.”

“Are you?” Case’s voice was innocent enough. “I mean, do you suppose there’s a

connection?"

"*Connection?*" Hall studied the smaller man at his side with eyes that questioned Case's sanity. "Good Lord, man, it's as plain as the nose on your face. This guy got rid of his sweetheart, and then committed suicide himself. I'll bet you . . ."

"I wouldn't!" Case held up a restraining hand. "Don't bet a cent, Jim. You've lost every bet we've ever made, remember?"

Hall stopped talking abruptly but the twinkle in his eyes grew more pronounced as they approached the downtown section. This time, he decided, Bob Case could pack up his bag of mysteries and jump in the lake. The case had been simple and to the point. He liked them that way. No headaches.

The LaGrove Hotel was a small, neat building sandwiched between two theatres. The night clerk took them up at once, beating a hasty retreat after he pointed out the door to the dead man's room.

Hall shouldered his way through the half dozen reporters and uniformed men who stood silently inside the door. Case, taking advantage of the Inspector's interference, followed in his wake.

They stood close to the edge of the bed, staring down at the figure sprawled across it. The coroner, young and impatient at his late visit, looked up from his job of emptying the dead man's pockets.

"Good evening, Inspector Hall. Suppose you want the details?" He held out a handful of trinkets, started to talk like a well-trained machine.

"Name's Glenn Halliday. Got that from his pocket book. Age about thirty-two. Was in good health. Died from a gunshot in the head. He held the gun close to his temple and fired it after stretching out on the bed and removing his shoes."

He stopped abruptly, and watched Robert Case go to one knee at the side of the bed. The little detective reached under the draped

blanket and drew a pair of shoes into the light. Hall's breath sucked in quickly.

"I'll be damned," he said.

Case stood up, drew a handkerchief from his pocket and carefully removed dried clay from his finger tips.

"From the looks of this," he admitted, "that's exactly what you'll be for some time—damned."

The shoes were of average material, low cut and sporty. The left shoe was covered with mud, dried and flaking from the instep. *The right shoe was clean and polished. It had not been worn enough to soil the bottom of the smooth sole.*

THE men in the room were silent. Hall's eyes glued themselves to the shoes on the floor, then swept up suspiciously to the still, wax-like body stretched across the bed. The lips were cold and sealed tightly. He would never learn from them the mystery of the clean right shoe. A low whistle escaped the coroner's lips. He stood up, passed the handful of trinkets from the dead man's pocket to Inspector Hall and put on his hat.

"He's been dead since last night," he said. "I'd set the time sometime between eight and ten o'clock."

Hall's head ducked mechanically, his eyes still staring at the body on the bed.

"Could it be possible . . .?"

An audible chuckle escaped Robert Case's lips.

"Jim," he begged, "don't say it. You're getting to the place where you actually *believe* the man hopped all over town on one leg."

Hall pivoted, facing the diminutive Case. His face was red with anger.

"Sure," he admitted shortly. "I'm crazy. The man has a muddy left shoe, there were left shoe prints all around Helen Kane's body, he has her picture on his wall, but he couldn't possibly have murdered her. If that's what you're trying to tell me, suppose I admit

you're right. Just one point, *Mister Case. How did he do it?*"

Case shrugged his shoulders.

"Damned if I know, Jim," he admitted coolly. "But if one of the boys will hold the door open for a quick escape, I'm going to suggest that one of his legs might be short enough so it never touched the ground. I was never meant for this all-night murder business, and I'm going home right now and get a decent night's rest."

Inspector Hall's answer fell on unappreciative ears. Robert Case was beating a hasty retreat down the long corridor toward the single elevator.

PERCY WALLACE was a sincere, earnest young man. Attired in a neat brown suit, plain silk tie, and juggling a nervous Adam's apple, he awaited Inspector James Hall's pleasure. Percy Wallace had announced his presence in a rather meek voice, asked to see Hall about the Kane killing and now sat on the edge of the hard bench in the waiting room.

Somewhere in the hollow halls of police headquarters, Percy Wallace heard a voice thunder:

"Well! What are you waiting for, you pin-head? Send him in! Call Case and get him in here. Start moving before your legs rust off!"

A very red-faced police sergeant appeared before Percy Wallace. Some of Inspector Hall's wrath carried itself with him.

"Come on," he growled. "The Inspector says you can come in."

Mr. Wallace arose, stroked his Adam's apple tenderly and cleared his throat.

"Th-thanks."

He followed the blue coat of the law down a short hall, and found himself facing an open door. The door was very large and the room behind it did not look inviting. Percy Wallace stepped inside and faced the huge, baldheaded man behind the desk.

Inspector Hall stood up slowly, feeling stiffness in his bones. He scratched his head

rather thoughtfully at the sight of his mild visitor and motioned him to a chair by the desk.

"Mr. Wallace?"

Percy Wallace nodded. Hall's great hand came across the desk top and folded over Wallace's hand. Percy Wallace winced and wriggled his freed fingers experimentally.

Robert Case came in silently, acknowledged an introduction and sat down. He picked up a law book from the desk, never bothering to take a second look at the slim young man with the bobbing Adam's apple.

Inspector Hall started chewing carefully on his cigar.

"Well, Mr. Wallace?" his voice was a little impatient. "I understand you have information concerning the murder of Helen Kane?"

At the mention of the girl, Robert Case's eyes darted up and over the newcomer, then returned to the open book.

At last Percy Wallace had something to grasp. Something he could talk about with interest and personal knowledge.

He nodded his head slightly and leaned forward in his chair.

"I'm a shoe salesman at the Regent Shoe House," he started. "Saturday I sold Mr. Glenn Halliday a pair of shoes."

"Halliday?" Hall shot forward, his hands outspread on the desk top. "You mean the man who committed suicide at the Hotel LaGrove?"

Wallace swallowed his Adam's apple, looked quickly at the little man still buried in the law book and turned back to Hall.

"Y-yes sir!" His voice was strong and determined. "I saw his picture in the morning paper and I read all about the shoes and I have a confession to make."

"Confession? You mean you're the murderer?"

PERCY WALLACE gulped in alarm, and Robert Case chuckled ever so slightly. He didn't look up. Hall's face turned red, and

Wallace hastened to explain.

“Oh, no sir!” He would have to explain everything now, and in a hurry. The big man behind the desk frightened him badly.

“You see, it was like this. This man, Glenn Halliday, came in Saturday afternoon to buy a pair of shoes. He tried on a number of them but Mr. Halliday didn’t seem easy to fit.”

Hall nodded impatiently.

“Never mind the shoe business,” he said. “Tell me only the things that have something to do with the murder.”

Wallace looked surprised.

“But *everything* has to do with it.”

Hall groaned aloud; and behind his book, Case suddenly turned red and started to read with renewed interest. Percy Wallace went on with his story.

“As I told you, Mr. Halliday had trouble with his feet. Well, at last I managed to find a perfect fit. The shoes were wrapped and he paid for them and left. As is customary, I took his name and address for my sales slip. It wasn’t until closing time that I discovered the ghastly error.”

Percy Wallace stopped talking, took a deep breath and swallowed his Adam’s apple once more. Hall’s face was livid.

“Discovered what?” he roared.

“Why, the two right shoes,” Wallace explained. “By mistake I had given Mr. Halliday two left shoes. As soon as we closed, I packed away the opened boxes and found two rights with no lefts to match. You can imagine how I felt?”

Hall shook his head.

“I can’t,” he admitted, “but go on.”

“Of course there was only one thing to do. I rushed straight to Mr. Halliday, and took the correct shoe to him. I *will* say he wasn’t a gentleman about it.”

Robert Case emerged from the book and listened quietly.

“Mr. Halliday was in a rage. He said he had had to go out on a special errand and had no choice but to wear the two left shoes. I told

him how sorry I was and although he had made both pairs useless, I insisted on leaving the other right shoe and taking the muddy one back to the store.”

A deep sigh escaped Inspector Hall’s lips.

“That’s the song I’ve been waiting to hear,” he said in deep satisfaction. “Well, Case, I guess that settles it.”

Case smiled pleasantly.

“Never mind, Mr. Wallace. Drop in anytime.” He went out swiftly, never looking back to where the slim shoe salesman stood shaking hands with a completely self-satisfied Inspector James Hall.

“**N**UTS!” Hall shouted. “That’s the trouble with you, Case. Every time I get a murder all sewed up, you go digging up the pavement and upsetting the apple cart.”

“Just the same,” Robert Case answered, “ninety per cent of the time you’re wrong.”

Hall walked around the edge of the desk deliberately, fists clenched. He strode across the room to where the unprotected Case had seated himself carefully, deep in the protecting seat of Hall’s only comfortable chair. For a split second Hall wanted to lift the little detective by the scruff of the neck and toss him out the window. Then he remembered how many times Case *had* been right.

“Okay! What have you got on that pint-sized mind of yours?”

Case stood up.

“Nothing,” he admitted. “It’s just that easy way out you took. The simple explanation usually turns out to be the wrong one. I want to take another look at Halliday’s apartment. There’s something . . .”

Hall’s fingers went unerringly to his smooth scalp. He shook his head.

“Let’s go,” he said. “The sooner you get this thing off your mind, the sooner I’ll get some rest. Why I ever let you in on the deal, I’ll never be able to figure out.”

Robert Case dropped his book gently on the desk top and looked up with mild surprise.

“You don’t?”

Hall chuckled.

“Come on, Sherlock,” he teased good naturedly, “give up the ghost. This settles the whole thing. Halliday went out with these two left shoes on because he had made a date with Helen Kane. He knew he’d have the perfect chance to kill her and get away with it. He came back to his room and was going to commit suicide when Wallace came up with his other shoe. That would explain his anger at being walked in on. After Wallace left, he took the gun and shot himself. Open and shut case.”

PERCY WALLACE was beaming.

“I-I hope I’ve been able to help you,” he said.

“Help us?” Hall was on his feet, pumping the shoe salesman’s hand. “All we’ve got to do is produce those other shoes and put your story on record. The whole thing is finished.”

Robert Case arose and crossed the room to Wallace’s side.

“What time did you leave Halliday’s room?” he asked.

Percy Wallace looked thoughtful for a moment.

“I reached the hotel at nine-fifteen. It must have taken about fifteen minutes to go up, leave the proper shoe and come down again. Yes! I’d say I left about nine-thirty or slightly later.”

Case nodded.

“It all adds up,” he admitted. “Well, Inspector, guess you won’t be needing me. Nice meeting you, Mr. Wallace. If you ever need a job . . .”

Percy Wallace shuddered and drew away.

“Oh! No thanks. The Regent people treat me very well. I’d never care to leave.”

Case smiled up at him in wide-eyed innocence.

“Because you needed my help, remember?”

THE clerk at the LaGrove Hotel did not welcome their return. The LaGrove couldn’t stand much publicity of the type the Kane killing had given it. They were ushered to the elevator and into Glenn Halliday’s room. Once inside, Case started a systematic search of the dead man’s belongings. The bed was as it had been left the night before. Halliday was fastidious and evidently had lived a comfortable life. Helen Kane’s picture was the usual portrait of a charming young girl, very much in love. Case took a quick look at it and turned away. The gleam in his eyes wasn’t pleasant.

The shoes had been removed for evidence. In Halliday’s closet Case found four more pairs hanging in a shoe bag, a half dozen neatly pressed suits, hats, and the usual attire of a man interested in life.

“Nothing here but clothes, a bed and a picture,” Hall grumbled from his post by the door.

Case went on, searching the carpet, behind the dresser and finally with great reluctance he lowered his body and crawled about under the bed. At last, apparently satisfied, he returned to the door.

“The great Robert Case admits he’s crazy, that the murderer wasn’t hiding under Halliday’s bed and that he’s ready to pay up or shut up,” Hall recited in a monotone.

Case went through the opened door and down to the lobby without answering. Outside, he turned and forced Hall to halt with him.

“Like to take a ride to the morgue?” he asked.

Inspector Hall maintained his usual uneven temper and a string of oaths escaped his heavy lips.

“What in the name of Saint Peter are we going to do at the morgue?”

Case started for the car.

“I’d like to take another look at Glenn Halliday,” he replied calmly. “If you don’t want to come . . .”

Hall hesitated, and then climbed in. He sat back silently as Case shifted the gears and pulled away from the curb. For a time they rode in silence. Finally Hall could contain himself no longer.

“Bob, for Heaven’s sake, let me in on it, will you? I’ll go crazy if you don’t stop this silence strike and talk.”

Case no longer smiled. His eyes were on the road ahead, and it wasn’t the sun’s glare that made them slitted and stone cold.

“Sorry, Jim,” he said. “I don’t know myself. It’s just a feeling I get about these things. That girl didn’t deserve to die. I just want to make sure we’ve got the right man.”

With no more than the necessary delay they entered the cold death chamber of the city morgue. With the attendant, a dried up man of fifty, they went down the line of ice boxes set into the wall.

Hesitating before one of them, the man compared tickets, loosened the handle and opened the door to the ice box. Cold, odorless air swept out into the room. The dull, hollow scraping of metal on wood, a white sheet drawn back and Case started quickly to examine the stiff body of Glenn Halliday. He worked swiftly. The job wasn’t a pleasant one for the mild little man. The head, neck, chest, the whole body was unmarked by any wound, except the bloodless hole in the side of the head. Hall stood by patiently until Case reached the up-turned feet.

“I told you you’d find nothing here,” he growled suddenly. “Stop looking at his feet. The man doesn’t even have a corn, not that it makes a hell of a lot of difference.”

Case turned away. He held his hands at his side as would a doctor who is anxious to reach hot water and soap.

“That’s just what I was afraid of,” he said bitterly. “Not a mark on his body other than the wound in his head.”

PERCY WALLACE, Regent Shoe House’s best salesman, expressed pleasant surprise

as Inspector James Hall and Robert Case opened the plate glass doors and strolled in. Hall saw Wallace standing beside the cash register and approached him, smiling pleasantly.

“Good afternoon.” Wallace held out his hand. “I don’t suppose I can sell you gentlemen any shoes?”

The question was meant to be humorous, but from the expressions on his visitors’ faces, he knew it had fallen flat.

“Mr. Case would like to talk with you,” Hall said. “Just a few details to be straightened out.”

Percy Wallace smiled pleasantly at the little man he had seen behind the law book at Inspector Hall’s office.

“I’m very glad to help all I can,” he said. “Shall we go into the back room? I’m not needed right now.”

Case nodded shortly and the three men passed through a narrow aisle and into what seemed to serve as combination office and stock room. There were two chairs against the wall, evidently removed from the front of the store. Wallace motioned to them and Hall sat down. Case remained on his feet, walking up and down along the wall of shoe boxes. He seemed interested in them.

Wallace remained standing, saw that Case didn’t intend to use the chair meant for him, and finally sank into it himself.

Case whipped around suddenly, looked straight into Wallace’s weak eyes.

“You knew Helen Kane, didn’t you?”

Wallace squirmed uncomfortably. This wasn’t the question he had expected but with a quick gulp he managed to stammer an answer.

“I knew Helen-er-Miss Kane several years ago,” he admitted. “That is, I knew *of* her.”

Case didn’t relax his steady stare.

“I think you knew her, not several years ago, but several weeks ago. In fact you knew her and were in love with her up to the time of her death.”

Wallace tried to control himself. His hands

on the arms of the chair were white and bloodless from the grip they had taken.

"You—you're wrong," he said. "It's true that Helen and I were friends. That's all it amounts to. I never met Halliday."

Case was relentless.

"What makes you mention Halliday?" Wallace sprang to his feet, his face pale.

"I don't know. That is—you're trying to make it look as though I was mixed up in this case. I told you all I know. You can't rightfully accuse me . . ."

Robert Case was sure of himself now.

He pushed his argument as a well-trained lawyer would fight for ground.

"Wallace, you've got something on your mind. Something that's going to haunt you straight to the electric chair. When I came down here I had a pretty good idea that you were the murderer. You've given enough away for me to prove it."

Wallace stood stiff and alert, eyes wide with terror.

Jim Hall was at his side, puzzled but ready to back up Robert Case when the little man needed him.

"Sit down, Wallace," Case said suddenly. "Sit down and let's see just how good a shoe salesman you really are."

His voice was silky, soothing as a snake charmer's.

LIKE a man in a dream, Wallace sank backward into the chair. He sat very still, his throat knotted and jumping.

"Take off your right shoe." Hypnotized, Wallace reached down, managed the knot and removed the shoe from his foot.

"And the stocking."

Hall stood by, a completely bewildered man. He forgot to rub his scalp and his fingers jerked nervously at his side. Case was close to the shoe salesman now. He reached down suddenly and jerked up Wallace's foot.

"Look, Inspector," he said. "The man who killed Helen Kane was wearing two left shoes.

Wallace claims Halliday did it. What happens to a man's foot if he wears an opposite shoe for an extended period of time?"

The room was dead silent. Wallace's breath was coming hard. Hall scratched his head and sudden understanding flashed into his eyes.

"Good God, man, you've got it! Halliday's feet were as smooth as glass."

Case nodded grimly, still keeping his hold on the shoe salesman's foot.

"And Wallace, who makes a *business* of perfect fitting, has a raw blister on his big toe and his whole foot is red and creased."

Wallace jerked away suddenly with all his weight.

"You're making a fool of me!" he screamed. "I had nothing to do with it. Nothing, you understand?"

His voice was high pitched and hysterical. Before Inspector Hall could reach him, Wallace dodged to one side and tried to dash for the door. There was satisfaction in Robert Case's eyes as he put out a quick right foot and caught Wallace. The shoe salesman went sprawling. Like lightning he was on his knees and trying to stand again. Case reached his side and with unholy delight planted a haymaker on his chin. Wallace's head jerked suddenly to one side as though hit by a truck. His Adam's apple bounced up and sank down again slowly and a groan of pain split his lips. He sank to the carpet with blood oozing from his mouth.

"Nice going," Hall said admiringly. "You may be a half pint, Bob, but what you can reach, you can kill."

Case rubbed his throbbing fist, flexing the fingers painfully.

"I wonder if it was worth it," he asked ruefully. "I won't be able to hold a book for a month."

PERCY WALLACE was safely in his cell before Hall and Robert Case retired to the warmth of Hall's office. The Inspector had

been rubbing his classic dome for several hours now and as no closer to an explanation than before. With the door safely locked, he brought out a tall bottle of rosy, transparent liquid, and two glasses, and placed them on the desk before him.

"Fifteen-year-old stuff," he said lovingly and fingered the cork of the bottle. "Never get it out for anything but special occasions."

Case flopped wearily opposite him, crossed his legs and straightened the crease in his trousers.

"This *is* special, isn't it?" he admitted. "In a way, I'm sorry it's over."

Hall grinned broadly.

"You won't get lonely," he answered. "People get murdered everyday."

He filled a tall glass and handed it to Case. The little man touched it to his lips and .said soberly:

"Yet, if I could drink a toast that could be reality, I'd say, 'a toast to murderers. May they always murder their own kind.' That's what gets me, Jim. The innocent ones have to take it."

Hall was thoughtful.

"How about it, Bob? Shoot the works, will you?"

"The works?"

"Yeah! How did you first find out that Wallace was involved in the crime? "

Case drank deeply and placed the partly emptied glass on the edge of the desk.

"I didn't have a thing to do with it," he admitted. "Wallace convicted himself."

Hall's eyes were steady.

"Go on."

Case smiled.

"Remember I told you that if you left a murderer alone long enough, things would start happening? I wasn't satisfied with the whole thing. When Wallace came here, he was finishing his plan for the perfect crime. He made it so perfect that he walked into his own net. Wallace was clever. He even figured out a new way to kill and he based it on a trade he

was accustomed to. He knew that Glenn Halliday had a date with Helen Kane. He picked up Helen and convinced her with some wild story that she should take a drive with him. He probably pretended that he was sorry for the trouble he'd caused her."

"Trouble?"

"Wallace loved Helen Kane. She turned him down for Halliday. Surely *that's* an old story?"

Hall nodded.

"Go on," he urged.

Case leaned back in his chair.

"Quite simple," he said. "Wallace met the girl and took her out Highway 6. He was wearing two left shoes. He murdered the girl, made a lot of confusing tracks around her body and returned to town. He already had two right shoes in his car. He went to Halliday's room, shot him in the head and made it look like a suicide. Then he planted a dirty left shoe and a clean right under the bed. Returning to the store, he turned in the shoes he had left and reported the transaction as he explained it to us."

For once, Hall forgot to bluster. "Case, I've got to hand it to you. All that on guess work, and because Halliday didn't have any bruises on his feet."

"Not quite," Case admitted. "To begin with, when we visited Halliday's room the second time, he had a whole shoe bag of practically new shoes hanging in his closet. That's the first definite clue I had. *A man doesn't rush around in the afternoon buying shoes, then go out to murder a girl wearing two lefts, when he has several perfect pairs in his closet.*"

INSPECTOR HALL poured a second glass, stoppered the bottle and placed it gently away in his desk.

"I guess we don't have to worry about smart shoe salesmen as long as our men are just a little smarter," he said softly.

"When did you find out that Wallace had

been in love with Helen Kane?"

"When Wallace told me," Case admitted. "After I figured out *who* killed Helen Kane and Glenn Halliday, it wasn't so hard to figure out *why*. Our friend Percy Wallace is going to spend a lot of sleepless nights wondering just how his perfect crime went astray."

Case stood up, tossed down a last drop and passed the empty glass to the man behind the desk.

"I've got to be running, Jim," he said, and glanced hurriedly at his pocket watch.

"Relax," Hall urged. "We both need a rest."

Robert Case slipped quickly into his coat.

"Sorry," he said, "my feet have been killing me for the past week. I'm going out and pick up a new pair of shoes!"