

There Are Only Three Things People Kill for—Love, Money, Revenge. A Good Newspaper Man Ought to Be Able to Dope Out Which It Was in This Case



MURDER ISN'T EVERYTHING

By KINGSLEY SMITH

SHE came out of the door of the big apartment house in a rush, half running to the curb where I had parked my convertible. As she climbed in beside me, I had a whiff of a delicate but very definite scent. While I was getting the car under way, I turned for a deliberate look at her flushed, excited face. I was a little excited myself. A male who can gaze on Janet Gordon without some such feeling is either senile or queer; thank heaven, I am neither.

"You're the most beautiful accomplice I've ever had on a murder story," I said.

"Thank you for noticing it, Mr. Dawson," she replied, immodestly.

"Thank you for calling me George from now on—Janet. Two reporters working together can't afford all that formality. Are you nervous, or is that just natural vivacity busting out all over?"

"I'm scared," she confessed. "This is the first important story I've ever been sent on—and working with you, too. Of course, that's a thrill in itself."

"It's nice of you to cut me in," I said, "even though I did get secondary billing. But relax; this job isn't going to be so tough."

I took my right hand off the wheel long enough to pat her, ever so gently, on the shoulder. She didn't seem to mind.

"There are cigarettes in the glove

compartment,” I said. “Why don’t you light one for each of us?”

As she handed me mine, we came to the last arterial stop in West Lakeville and I turned the car onto Highway 13, the main paved road between Lakeville and Littleton, about 100 miles away. It was a brilliant May morning, and the countryside glistened with spring greenery.

Janet exhaled smoke, and then drew a large breath of unadulterated country air.

“What a day!” she said. “I certainly do admire your choice of weather.”

“How old are you?” I asked.

She laughed, and it was a good, throaty, gusty laugh.

“That’s the quickest switch from the weather I’ve ever seen a conversation take,” she said. “I am twenty-two years old, five feet, six inches tall, weigh 118 pounds, and have never been turned down for insurance.”

“And the way those inches and pounds are distributed,” I said, “I don’t believe you’d be turned down by John Robert Powers, either.”

She took the compliment without comment.

“There’s no future in modeling,” she said. “I was going to try to be an actress, but after—after Daddy died, I had to earn some money and Mother wanted me to stay in Lakeville, so I got a job on the *Journal*.”

“Do you think there’s a future in that?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said defensively, “I do. Mr. Mason says I show promise, and I like to work hard.”

I KNEW what Mason meant, but I didn’t say so. It was no part of my job to suppress the youthful enthusiasm in this pert, pretty blonde creature with baby-blue eyes and upswept curls. I had heard Mason grumbling the day the Old Man called him in and told him to put Janet on the staff,

and I knew that everybody in the place felt she owed her job solely to the fact that she had been Tad Gordon’s daughter.

It might have been a mistake to give her the job, but it was certainly no more than Tad Gordon deserved. He was the closest we ever came to a great reporter on the *Journal*—a powerful hulk of a man who had covered two wars with distinction, who had added luster to our Washington bureau, and had come home to die after doing a brilliant undercover series on conditions in postwar Europe. His widow had been left with Janet and a few insurance policies overburdened with loans.

In spite of her fresh, vibrant youthfulness, I felt sorry for the kid. To make any headway, she’d have to accomplish twice as much as anybody else on the same job, and from what I’d heard, I was not at all sure that she could do it.

“Do you know anything about this murder?” I asked her.

“Only what Mr. Mason told me on the phone this morning. Do you?”

“About the same, I guess. A guy named Frank Turner was found shot to death in his house in Littleton this morning. He was a real estate dealer, 45 to 50 years old. He had lived in the town only about two years and never had any trouble that the police knew of. Nobody arrested yet, but I understood Harrity has a couple of suspects.”

“Who’s Harrity?” she asked.

“Harrity,” I said, “is the first guy we go to see. He’s the chief of police in Littleton. Rugged old character. Not too old at that, I guess—55 or so. Loves to talk. He can drink a gallon of whiskey in a day without showing it. He used to be head dick on the force, and never took a nickel. When the reform crowd got in, they made Jess chief because he was about the only honest cop they could find around. Now they’re all

honest, because if the boys start to play, Jess knocks their heads together. There hasn't been much crime in Littleton since Jess took over. He really hates crooks."

I looked around and saw that Janet was eating it up.

"Harrity sounds wonderful," she said. "So do you. I am beginning to see what it takes to be a reporter."

"What do you mean?"

"Well—I can see you have to be interested in people like Harrity, and know a lot about them, and understand what makes them tick, in order to find out what they know. Just as you must have to know a lot about politicians and lobbyists, and their motives, to handle that investigation of the highway bill you've been working on."

"Let's not talk about that," I said. "I'm on a vacation from that—and mighty glad of it."

I had been trying to dig up a scandal for the Old Man—Arthur Cranston, publisher of the *Journal*—in connection with the Legislature's passage of a \$27,000,000 highway improvement bill. We were pretty sure some palms had been crossed because the bill went through just about the way the cement companies and the road machinery manufacturers wanted it, but I hadn't been able to prove anything yet, although I had some leads that I was going nuts trying to follow. Mason gave me the murder assignment because he knew I was going stale on the political investigation.

"You need a change of pace," he said, "and so does the *Journal*. We aren't going to sell any papers with this political stuff until we get the lowdown on somebody."

It was all right with me. I hadn't been on a crime story for years, but at the moment solving a murder case seemed simple by comparison with the problem of getting through the labyrinth laid down around the highway improvement bill.

Besides, here I was out in the open air, rolling along through beautiful country with a mighty attractive girl who seemed to like me. It was too good to be true, of course. About the time I was feeling most set up about the whole thing, Janet called my attention to a big sedan pulled up beside the road about 200 feet ahead of us. As I slowed down, I saw that it carried license plate No.2. This meant it was an official state car. When we drew alongside it, a plump, dapper little man arose from the running board and came toward us. We recognized each other at the same instant.

"Hello, Dooley," I said. "Are you out studying the fauna of our great state, or trying to figure out how much cement can be used to double the width of this road?"

THE guy was Dooley Williams, confidential secretary to Governor Anderson and generally credited with having log-rolled the highway bill through the Legislature. He was one of the key figures in my investigation, but I hadn't been able to pin anything definite on him yet. Jovial, as he invariably was with reporters, he ignored my crack about cement and smiled his big, golden smile.

"Well, Dawson," he said, "this is my lucky day after all." He turned his smile on Janet. "Of course, if this is an elopement, I'll wait for another car to come along."

I introduced him to Janet, and said: "You know reporters don't have time to elope. Get in. We're on our way to Littleton, to cover a murder."

"That's where I'm going, too," he said.

He pushed in beside Janet, moving her into very close physical contact with me. It occurred to me that that fat bottom of his had finally served a useful purpose.

"What happened to your car?" I asked him.

"Don't know," he said. "I just gave up. I am helpless on anything mechanical, so I

just had to sit there.”

His voice, as I had noticed before, had a funny way of rising to a high pitch, almost shrill, as he came to the end of a sentence.

“Did you check the gas tank?”

“Yes,” he said, “there’s plenty of gas.”

We drove on, after I had checked an impulse to look under the hood of the sedan. I am mechanically illiterate, too, but I was almost willing to bet that there was a purposely disconnected wire somewhere in the entrails of Mr. Williams’ car. However, after a little meditation, I quietly laughed off my own suspicion. What could the guy gain by stopping me on an open highway to bum a ride?

Nothing, I finally decided.

Janet obviously fascinated him, and he turned on the charm with which he had so successfully persuaded so many legislators to vote his way.

“Tad Gordon’s daughter!” he exclaimed. “Well! I knew Tad very well indeed. Best reporter that ever lived, begging Dawson’s pardon. Helped me get elected state senator from the old Fourth ward in Millersburg, Tad did.”

This, strangely enough, was true. But Gordon had lived to regret it, as Williams became transformed from his original role of rebel against political machines into a powerful, behind-the-scenes dispenser of machine patronage. His hold over the current Governor was notorious, and I had discovered among other things that he was the principal owner of a dummy corporation which seemed to exist primarily as a repository for undercover political slush funds.

“Dooley,” I said, breaking in on him, “tell Miss Gordon about the time you saved Governor Anderson’s life.”

“Oh, that,” he said. “Everybody knows about that.”

“I don’t,” said Janet. “I’ve been away at school most of the last four years.”

“It wasn’t much,” Williams said, modestly. “One night, when I was conferring with the Governor at his house, a man, obviously a fanatic of some kind, pushed his way in and came at the Governor with a pistol. I tackled him just as he was firing, and the bullet went into the ceiling. He kicked me in the chin and ran away. He was never found.”

“Didn’t he have a thick beard?” I asked.

“Yes,” Williams said, “probably a disguise.”

“It always seemed a little fishy to me,” I said, brutally.

“To you, it would,” he retorted. “You’re even trying to find something fishy in a bill designed to give this state of ours the fine, improved highway system which it needs and deserves. You are the kind of reporter who would suspect the motives of a mother trying to help her only child.”

“I might, at that,” I admitted. “Especially if the only child happened to be in the pen and the mother had money to spend to get him out.”

This was an oblique reference to a pardon-selling scandal that had developed in the closing days of another administration with which Williams had been connected. He let it pass, and staved off further argument by asking us about the murder. We told him what we knew, and discovered in return that he was booked for a very busy day in Littleton, himself. Morning conference with the county chairman and his wardheelers. Speech to the Kiwanis Club at noon. Visit to the state home for the indigent in the afternoon, and an address before the Civic Betterment League in the evening.

“Why does a guy go into politics,” I asked, “if it means that he has to go through days like that? Does power or money make up for all that clap-trap?”

“The cynical Mr. Dawson forgets that

there is such a thing as public service," Williams replied, pompously.

"The cynical Mr. Dawson," I said, "hasn't seen enough evidence of it to be over-impressed."

Again he declined to fight back, and turned his attention to Janet, who had dug into my ribs in disapproval at a couple of my nastier cracks. I detected a few tentative attempts on his part to get in some fatherly knee-pats with his chubby left hand. When Janet frustrated him by crossing her knees and leaning in my direction, I smiled my appreciation.

WE MADE the last 50 miles, which is a fairly straight stretch, in a little less than 50 minutes, and were parked in front of the Hotel Littleton before 11 o'clock. We all registered, and Williams was effusive in his thanks for the ride. He insisted that he wanted us to be his guests at the dinner that night.

"They're going to put on a real feast," he said. "Steaks that thick—and all the liquor you want."

I knew he thought free liquor was open sesame to the confidence of a reporter, and I regretted that some reporters had given him cause for thinking so. But I didn't want him putting us in that category.

"We can buy our own liquor," I said brusquely. "We'll be in the cocktail lounge between 5:30 and 6, and if we can get to the dinner, we will."

Janet wanted to go to her room and primp, but I kiboshed that.

"We have two deadlines to meet between now and three o'clock," I said. "I'll give you three minutes in the little girls' room on the mezzanine." I watched her walk up the stairs, and saw that she was drawing glances from several other males in the lobby. She was very trim in her well-fitted blue suit and white blouse with a collar open at the throat. Her legs didn't

exactly discourage attention, either.

"Now I know what they mean by wolf bait," I thought; and somehow, the thought was quite saddening. She was so young and fresh and eager, and I didn't like to contemplate what five years in the newspaper business might do to her.

She was back fast, and we took a cab to the police station. I could see that she was excited again, and I took her hand and told her to relax. She let it linger in mine for a second.

"You don't like Mr. Williams much, do you?" she asked.

"Not much," I admitted. "Do you?"

"No," she said, "but he's rather fascinating—in a disgusting sort of way, if you know what I mean."

"Yes, I guess I do." There wasn't much time just then for figuring out the vagaries of a female mind. We were in front of the Littleton police station, a dirty, red-brick monstrosity bearing the date "1883" above the doorway. I led Janet inside, past the desk sergeant, who must have known me vaguely because he made no move to keep us from going right on into the chief's office.

JESS HARRITY looked bigger than ever, sitting there in a cushioned swivel chair behind the old-fashioned roll-top desk. He smiled and waved, but made no effort to lift his bulk off the chair.

"Well," he said, "what's this—newlyweds?" I had forgotten how incredibly soft his voice was.

I felt my ears turning red, and looked at Janet. She was blushing, too. My laugh was a little feeble.

"That's the second time we've heard that crack today," I said to Harrity. "We're getting a little tired of it."

"Then you shouldn't look the part so thoroughly," he retorted. "Why don't you introduce me to the young lady?"

"Jess," I said, "this is Janet Gordon, the Lakeville *Journal's* newest reporter. Tad Gordon's daughter. Miss Gordon, Chief Harrity."

Janet looked at me a little reproachfully, and I could see that she was biting her lip.

"I know," I said. "I'm supposed to quit introducing you as Tad Gordon's daughter. You're a reporter, yourself."

Harrity didn't get it. "I'm very pleased to meet you," he said. "I knew your father years back. A fine man he was, too." The remnant of a brogue came through an occasional word in his speech. "Is there a shortage of news in Lakeville, that you two come traipsin' down to our poor little city?"

"There's a shortage of murders," I replied. "We've got lots of news about politicians and lobbyists and university budgets, but you've got all the murders."

"One murder," he corrected me. "One little murder in two years, and you come down on me like vultures. A simple thing it is, too, not worth the time of busy reporters from the great capital city."

"So?" I said. "If it's so simple that you have got a signed confession and the murderer is locked up in your crummy jail, we'll just take a few notes and be out of your way. If it's any less simple than that, it's going to cost you a drink—unless, by some miracle, you've gone on the wagon."

A grin spread over his round, red, honest face.

"My boy," he said, "you know better than that. Father Cleary always told me—and he was right—that if a man doesn't drink or smoke, you have to be on guard against him, because everybody does something. And me, I can't stand the taste of tobacco."

He swung around in his chair, opened a large bottom drawer in the old desk, and pulled out a quart bottle of Bourbon, half

empty.

"For the young lady," he said, "there's a glass."

He lifted himself out of the chair, and walked to a wash basin in a corner. I had seen Jess Harrity often, but I always marveled anew at his size and the way he carried it. He was well over six feet, broad and thick, and must have been toting at least 230 pounds. Yet he moved across the floor with the agility of a basketball player.

I saw Janet try to repress a shudder when he handed her a tumbler half filled with whiskey. I didn't know much about the child, and nothing about her drinking habits, but it seemed obvious that she was unaccustomed to large alcoholic jolts on an empty stomach, before midday. I smiled at her.

"You don't have to drink it," I said, as Harrity handed me the bottle.

She smiled back, and tossed off most of the whiskey, as if to say, I won't be outdone and I won't be patronized. While I tipped the bottle, I watched her move, in a fair hurry, to the wash basin, where she drew herself a chaser and downed it. By the time she got back to the desk, Harrity was absorbing a final snort that didn't leave much in the bottle.

"George," she said, "may I have a cigarette, please?"

I caught the exaggerated attempt at nonchalance, and I knew she was wondering whether Harrity's low-grade Bourbon would ever stop burning her insides. I was having a little difficulty with it, too. While I lighted cigarettes for both of us, Harrity put the bottle back in the desk and locked the drawer.

"Want to see the body?" he asked. "It's right around the corner."

I nodded, and we all walked to the undertaking parlor. As we reached the door of the shabby, somber little place, Janet tossed her cigarette away and threw back

her shoulders.

I grasped her arm firmly, but she pulled away in resentment.

"I'm perfectly all right," she insisted, too vehemently.

I had a few interior butterflies myself, although death was a fairly common story to me. However, it wasn't bad, and Janet took it standing up.

THE object of our curiosity was very peaceful. We knew there was a bullet hole in the back of his head, but I didn't ask to see it and nobody insisted on showing it. The guy was medium-sized, middle-aged and thin-faced, and his thin, grayish hair was neatly combed. We didn't take a very long look. Janet stood there until I touched her elbow, and we walked out into the fresh air together.

"Ever see him any place?" Harrity asked. "Know anything about him?" We shook our heads.

"All I know is what we got in the early story this morning," I said. "His name is Frank Turner, and he was in the real estate business."

Harrity nodded, and led the way back to his office, where he reclined again in his big swivel-chair.

"He was a partner in the Ideal Real Estate Company," he said. "Only been here a couple of years, and caused us no trouble. Came from Chicago, far as I can find out, but the cops there got no line on him."

"You said this was a simple case," I reminded him.

"That it is," he replied. "Only two people coulda done it. I got evidence they was both at his house last night, and his maid I found him dead this morning. One's a widow named Lucy Marston, the other's his partner. French guy named Francois Lemay."

"What makes you think he might have killed Turner?" I asked.

"Only three things people kill for," said Harrity, "unless they're drunk or crazy—love, money and revenge. The widow was in love with Turner, or maybe she was just getting money out of him. Anyway, I got witnesses who saw her at his house often, including last night. And I got witnesses who saw this Lemay leave the house last night after the widow was there."

"Must have been a mass meeting right in front of the house," I said.

"Neckers," the chief explained. "Coupla carloads of kids and their girl friends. Turner's house is up in a kind of half-developed suburb, and the road is off by itself. I guess a lot of neckin' goes on up there. It's a thing you can't stop even if you try. You can preach against it and legislate against it, but you can't make it unpopular."

"You're quite a philosopher, Jess," I said, "but how did you find out about these kids?"

"They came in after they heard what happened. Good kids—they were kinda scared, but they knew they should tell the police what they saw."

"And even at night, they recognized Lemay and Mrs. Marston?" I asked.

"Sure," he said, "everybody in town knows Lemay. He's a kind of half-breed. Says he's one-eighth Indian, but he looks a hell of a lot more. Some of the kids knew the widow. She used to be married to old man Marston, the banker, and there's been a lot of gossip about her goin' here and there with men, but there's nothin' really against her, I guess. Besides, I don't really need witnesses. Both of 'em admit being at Turner's house last night. Naturally, they both say Turner was O.K. when they left, but the kids say they both lit out of there pretty fast.

"I kinda favor the widow as the killer, at that. She was there first, and the other guy might've just been running away from

the corpse. She's a mean dame, too; you can tell that by talking to her. Exactly the kind of woman who'd plug a man that was trying to give her the toss."

"Have you pulled her in yet?"

"Naw, I'm just lettin' her sit for a while, until the dicks turn up some stuff on her. She's not going any place. Got a guy watching her house."

I pulled a wad of copy paper out of my pocket and made a few notes. Then I turned to Janet, who had been sitting in silent awe as the chief unwrapped his theories.

"Your story," I said, "is the woman's angle. Go talk to the dame and see what you can get out of her. Call the desk by three o'clock with whatever you get. I'll call now with the start for the early afternoon edition, and later with whatever develops. And after you get through with Mrs. Marston, go over to the *Littleton Times* and pick up all the pictures they've got on the case. Mason made a dicker for us to buy 'em. Since the economy wave struck, he won't send one of our own photographers more than six blocks from the office. I'll see you at the Littleton Hotel cocktail lounge by five-thirty."

Janet jumped up, grabbed her handbag, and inquired sweetly:

"Shall I ask for a new picture of Chief Harrity, too?"

My reaction must have been about that of an established movie star who has just had a scene stolen from him by a brat of a child, but I gave back with the same sweetness.

"By all means," I said. "We certainly ought to have a nice new picture of Mr. Harrity."

At this point, Mr. Harrity reached for one of the two telephones on his desk.

"Wait a minute, Miss Gordon," he said. "I'll send you in a squad car."

"Well, I'll be damned," I exploded. "Harrity is going to send you in a squad

car, even if the taxpayers are screaming about how much the police department costs. I am beginning to see the value of a college education on a murder story, especially when it's accompanied by a pair of big, baby-blue eyes."

Janet gave me a baby-blue glare, and stuck out her tongue; then turned to Harrity and thanked him prettily.

In response to the chief's call, a red-faced, broad-shouldered individual introduced as Detective-sergeant Herrick came into the room for orders. When Harrity told him to drive Miss Gordon to the Marston house and anywhere else she wanted to go, his relish for his assignment broke out all over him. He took Janet's ridiculously tiny bag as though it were a great burden that he was proud to assume for her, and ushered her out the door with much play of his big left hand on her charming right arm. Moreover, she acted as if she liked it.

"I hope," I said to Harrity, "that that guy is not under the impression that he has just started out on a blind date with a pony from the chorus."

"What the hell!" Harrity sputtered. "Sure he's all right. He's got a wife and three kids."

"They're not getting much of his attention, at the moment," I said.

The chief grinned at me.

"Not jealous, are you, son?" he asked.

"Of a flatfooted dick?" I sneered. "Hell, no. I just want to be sure Janet keeps her mind on her work."

FRANKLY, the violence of my own reaction to such a harmless little scene startled me when I thought about it. Fortunately, I couldn't think about it long, because it was past time to call the office with my little nuggets of information.

I gave what I had to Hawley, our best rewrite man, and he took it without comment.

"I suppose," I concluded, "that you are going to add the usual corn about an arrest being imminent. Just remember, please, that the Old Man doesn't like libel suits and nobody has been charged with a damned thing in this case yet."

"Take it easy, Dawson," he said. "We'll just hint at mysterious developments until you really turn up some news."

I told him that I would call back at three o'clock, news or no news, and that Janet would give him her interview with the widow in time for the final home edition.

About that, I was quite wrong. Five minutes after Hawley hung up, Janet was on the line to me at the station with tears in her voice.

"Mrs. Marston won't talk," she said in a mournful, little girl voice.

"Then you have to persuade her," I said. "Get her started on a female discussion of her garden, or the Ladies' Aid Society, or something."

"She won't let me in," Janet replied.

I exploded. "What the hell! Can't your big, burly boy friend, the sergeant, even get you past the door?"

"He tried," said Janet, "but Mrs. Marston is standing on her constitutional rights."

I groaned. "All right," I said curtly, "get over to the *Times* and see if you can get those pictures. Better ask a man; you don't seem to do so well with women."

It was a nasty crack, and I knew Janet was crying when she hung up, but I was disgusted. More disgusted than the situation warranted, I can see now. We could get along without an interview with the widow. I guess I was just galled because the kid had fallen down on her first assignment.

I went back to the chief's office, and found Harrity on the telephone. When he finished the call, he swung around toward me with a big smile on his moon-like face.

"First break, Dawson," he said. "Turner had a bank account in Chicago with \$14,000 in it."

"Where does that get you?" I asked.

"I don't know yet, but I gotta hunch it will get me some place. People have been killed for a lot less dough than that. I'm checking now to see if he's got any heirs. Meantime, I want to talk to Lemay and the widow again."

I looked at my watch. It was nearly two.

"Do me a favor," I said. "Call the widow in first."

He did, but it took a threat of arrest as a material witness to get her to budge.

She was a dark, chunky woman, carefully corseted and neatly dressed. Her deep-set, brown eyes were filled with fear and suspicion.

"This is outrageous," she said to Harrity. "I have told the police all I know."

"Sit down, Mrs. Marston," the chief said. "There's been a new development. Do you know whether Mr. Turner had relatives in Chicago?"

"No." The reply came in a flat, dead voice.

"Business connections?"

"No."

"Did he ever go to Chicago?"

"Yes—I think so, once in awhile."

"Did you ever go with him?"

MR. MARSTON rose in dignified indignation.

"I don't have to submit to insults," she said.

Harrity was suddenly very firm.

"Sit down, Mrs. Marston," he said, emphatically. "We can find out these things without your help, but if you're really

cooperating with the police, you'll tell us. Now, did you ever go to Chicago with Mr. Turner?"

Mrs. Marston wilted.

"Yes," she admitted, "a few times."

But she wouldn't admit anything else. She had gone to Chicago to visit her sister, and had merely accepted Turner's offer to ride with him in his car. She didn't know what he did there. She had never seen him go near a bank. He had never mentioned relatives or business connections, although he always went "on business."

"And, of course," Harrity said, "it was on business that you went to see him last night."

"I told you," she replied, "that my house is up for sale and Frank—Mr. Turner—was handling the deal."

"So you did," the chief said, thoughtfully. "We'll keep in touch with you, Mrs. Marston."

With the heat off, she seemed to deflate and her shoulders sagged, but she made a real try at keeping her head up as she walked out.

"A born liar," Harrity said. "But I really haven't got a damned thing on her. You haven't got any idea where I can find the gun that killed Turner, have you?"

"You're a born comedian," I said, and walked out to the desk to use a telephone. I called the office and got Hawley again.

"Here's Janet's interview with the widow," I told him. "I'm calling it in because she had to go after pictures."

When I hung up, the chief was standing behind me. He placed his big mitt on my shoulder, and chuckled.

"Got it bad, haven't you, boy?" he said. "Well—can't say I blame you. She's mighty handsome."

I could feel my ears turning purple.

"Nuts!" I said. "What shall we do or have a drink while we wait for Lemay?"

We returned to Harrity's office and

finished off his Bourbon. It hit me a little. I hadn't had any lunch, and did not seem to want any, especially after the whiskey began to glow.

Lemay was even less helpful than Mrs. Marston had been, although he seemed to be trying harder. He was a roly-poly little keg of a man, with almost no hair and an obsequious manner. He knew Turner had driven to Chicago for an occasional weekend, but professed not to know why.

"None of my business," he said, virtuously.

"You were his partner, weren't you?" Harrity asked.

"We let each other alone." The tone of voice was almost a whimper.

"You didn't let him alone last night."

"That was just a—discussion over a deal."

"And it turned into a fight, maybe?"

"Oh, no, sir. A fight, no. A little argument, maybe. But we never fight."

The chief had been doodling with a pencil. He whirled away from the desk suddenly and faced Lemay.

"Did you ever own a .38 pistol?" he asked.

The little guy cringed, but he didn't give.

"Not me, no, SIR!" he said. "I never had a gun in my life."

There were more questions, but they developed no more information. Lemay waddled out of the station, resisting an obvious inclination to run like hell, and the chief leaned back in his swivel chair.

"Well," he said, "I can wait. Eventually, one of them is going to get tied up with that Chicago bank account. That dough was deposited by Mr. Turner in person, and in cash, usually in \$1,000 chunks—and there have been very few withdrawals. The dicks are checking all the angles on that. Have you got a story?"

"Not much of a one," I said. Such as it

was, I gave it to Hawley, and told him not to be too optimistic about any sensational breaks right away.

"The Old Man is crying for blood," Hawley reported.

"Let him cry," I said. "I can't conjure up killers out of the atmosphere."

"However, that's what he expects of the great Dawson."

"Go pound your typewriter," I said, and hung up. A great dissatisfaction with the whole damned affair was creeping over me. I went back to see Harrity.

"Chief," I said, "if you will lead me to your favorite taproom, I'll gladly buy you a drink."

"No, my boy," he replied. "The chief of police cannot drink in saloons. However—" He reached back into the bottom drawer of his desk and found another bottle.

Harrity seemed as bright as a button when I left him at five o'clock, but I was both woozy and depressed when I got to the hotel. The cocktail lounge was well filled, smoky and noisy, but there was no sign of Janet. I sat down at a little table for two, and ordered a Scotch and soda.

"I've often wondered how that would mix with straight Bourbon," I said to myself. The waiter brought some popcorn and potato chips with the drink, and I devoured the plateful before I knew I was eating.

After that, the Scotch seemed to go all right; so I ordered another one. This was about half gone when I saw Janet come into the lobby. She had a large package under one arm, and a brisk young man in a checked suit was hanging onto the other. They stopped before they reached the lounge entrance, and their conversation was punctuated with smiles. The young man finally left, after patting Janet's hand, arm and shoulder enthusiastically about a dozen times, and she came on into the lounge.

I made only a token effort to rise as she

reached my table and sat down, placing the package on the floor beside her chair.

"The pictures are in there," she said. "I had quite a time rounding them all up."

"I'm glad you got something."

"Do you have to be so nasty?" she asked. Her eyes were moist, but she was being as defiant as possible. I took a drink, and switched the subject.

"Did you have any lunch?"

"Yes—Art bought me a sandwich and a beer."

"And who in hell is Art?" I shouted.

I had not intended to raise my voice, but I could hear it booming around the place, and several people looked over at us. Janet flushed, but she answered the question.

"Arthur Russell, city editor of the *Times*. He brought me over here. He—he was very helpful about the pictures."

"I'll bet he was," I said. "So that's the jerk I saw giving you the feel treatment in the lobby! You really get a going-over from the boys, don't you? You walk out of the station with Sergeant Herrick and come into the hotel with this kid city editor pawing you. Even Dooley Williams was playing knees-y with you in the car. You're the kind of dame who invites passes; if you didn't, you wouldn't get so many."

MY VOICE had risen again, and the whole lounge seemed to be giving us the eye. Janet grabbed her package and stood up, her face white with fury and embarrassment. She leaned over the table and talked right down my throat.

"You're a second-class brute, George Dawson," she said in an impassioned whisper. "I'm sorry I ever had anything to do with you. I'm sorry I ever saw you. I—I'm sorry. I called Hawley this afternoon and gave him a new angle for your story."

It was my turn to be nonplussed.

"You—what?" I asked.

“Art Russell called the police station and found out Turner had a big bank account in Chicago. It was too late to waste time calling you, so I called the office direct. Hawley seemed very pleased.” She was quite triumphant.

“I’ll bet he did!” I said grimly. “Why you—you fake sob sister, you imitation campus reporter, I was in on that angle the second it developed. Hawley had it from me long before you heard about it. For God’s sake, why don’t you stick to necking and leave reporting to those that know a something about it? No wonder the staff thinks you’re trading on Tad Gordon’s name, you—”

I was half out of my chair, with the highball glass in my hand, and Janet was scurrying out of the lounge as fast as her pretty legs could carry her. As she disappeared, I brought the glass down hard and it smashed against the table, flying into countless pieces. I pulled my hand away from a jagged fragment, and noticed blood on my index finger. I was staring at it stupidly when a waiter rushed up with a towel and started mopping up the mess. He was followed by Dooley Williams, red of face and more jovial than usual.

“Well,” he said, “what goes on? First, I find the little lady running through the lobby with tears in her eyes, and now I come across the great reporter with a broken glass in his hand. Is there anything I can do?”

“Sit down, Dooley,” I said, “and have a drink.” For the first time in my life, I was glad to see the fat crook.

“Don’t mind if I do,” said Dooley, “although I’ve already had a couple with the boys upstairs. I just can’t get through one of these civic uplift things without a little libation.”

The waiter eyed me dubiously, but he brought a couple of Scotches at Dooley’s request. The rest of the customers finally

quit looking at me, and went back to their drinking.

“Dooley,” I said, “I like women. I can even stand ‘em in a newspaper office. But a dame on a murder story is—murder. Especially a dame—oh, hell, let’s have a drink.”

“Here’s to male reporters,” said Dooley, lifting his glass.

We were in fairly mellow shape by the time we went upstairs, but the dinner was good and the pheasant plentiful and by the time it was over I was more sleepy than anything else. To my surprise, Janet showed up. She was wearing a dark-blue dress which set off her blondness very effectively, and she had obliterated all traces of tears. She spoke quite charmingly to Dooley, but looked right through me without a word.

During dinner I noticed that she was placed down the table, between a baldish gent with gold teeth and a spruce young man in an oxford gray pin stripe. She appeared to be giving both earnest and affable attention. The president of the Civic Betterment League, seated at my right, called my attention to a hawk-faced woman across the table from Jane.

“If looks could kill, the girl would be dead now,” he said.

“Why?”

“That’s her husband on the other side of Miss Gordon. She’s very jealous.”

“I should think,” I said, “that the wife of the guy on the other side would have more cause.”

“He has no wife. He’s the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and one of our most eligible young men.”

FOR a moment, I had a lot of sympathy for Mrs. Hawk-Face. Harrity had accused me of being jealous, and I was beginning to see how right he was. And I was jealous of the damnedest people, too.

With fewer fumes in my head, I realized what an ass I had made of myself in the cocktail lounge. Then I began to argue with myself. As a reporter, she stinks. She had no right to call the office without consulting me. But I had no right to lose my temper. But she—and so on, until the remains of the baked Alaska had been taken away. I never knew how it tasted.

The program began with the usual address of welcome from the president, a report on progress; etc., and a plea for money “to carry on our great work.” Dooley Williams was the piece de resistance, and he was never more eloquent.

“Our administration,” he said, “your administration is being attacked by the vested interests because it is trying to do something for you, the people of this great state. Because we have taxed the swollen profits of greedy corporations to provide for your safety and your well-being, we are vilified by the kept press, the press that bows down before its masters, the corporations.”

He paused to take a drink of water, and looked right at me with a big smile on his face.

“Our plan for highway improvement,” he said, “is essential to the growth of our great state, to the development of your commerce and industry—to the safety of your children, whom you love so well. More than seven hundred persons were killed on our inadequate highways last year, and thousands more injured. We must build better highways, and safer highways.

“In your own great city of Littleton, you have an outstanding example of human sacrifice to the greed of Mammon. Four people killed at the intersection of the Littleton-Wabena highways before your city council saw fit to provide money for a warning blinker. And that blinker—what a beautiful beacon of safety and civic

progress it is, as it lights up the word STOP in red and gold at night. How heart-warming it is to me to see it blazing there as a symbol of the progressiveness of you good citizens of Littleton.

“You have recognized your responsibility to your children and your fellow man. The state must do likewise. All over this great state, we must make our intersections safe, our highways broad and modern, etc., etc.”

I had heard most of it before, and the words buzzed in and out of my ears as I tried to shake off the drowsiness induced by too many drinks and too much food. I remember thinking:

“Even if we could print a picture of Dooley taking money from a lobbyist, these people wouldn’t believe it. He’s so plausible and sounds so righteous that he’s got them sewed up in his pants pocket.”

They confirmed the thought with the applause they gave him. It woke me up completely.

After the meeting adjourned, all kinds of people crowded around Dooley to shake his hand and tell him what a fine speech he’d made. I even told him so, myself.

THEN I tried to find Janet. Much as I dislike crow, I had decided that she had an apology coming. But Janet was gone, and no amount of searching turned up any trace of her. The baldish gent she had been sitting with, who turned out to be Mr. Gerond, a hardware merchant, said she had excused herself at the conclusion of Dooley’s speech and he hadn’t seen her since.

“Quite a dish, isn’t she?” he tittered.

I thought for a minute she had gone out with the Chamber of Commerce glamour boy, but I ran him down in a corner, surrounded by women, and he likewise reported no knowledge of her whereabouts. Dooley Williams didn’t know, either.

"I hope she comes back," he said. "I wanted to dance with her."

"You go leer at your beloved citizenry," I said. "I'll try to find Janet."

When I found she wasn't in her own room, or any of the hotel's public rooms, I gave up and went back to the ballroom. Janet had not returned, but the dance was on and Dooley was whirling with an ironclad matron. What I saw there held no interest. I went to the lobby for my key, bought the local paper and a couple of magazines, and took the elevator to my floor. I half expected—or hoped—to find Janet hiding behind the door of my room, but she wasn't there—or under the bed, either. I called Harrity and asked him if there was anything new.

"Not yet," he said. "I'll call you when there is."

I was asleep almost before I could get into my pajamas. In my dreams, Janet, clad only in a pale blue nightgown, ran down a broad, paved highway pursued by a great crowd of men, all reaching out their hands for her. I was chasing them, but the men seemed to be getting farther and farther away from me, and closer and closer to Janet. When the telephone awakened me, I said "Janet!" out loud before I lifted the receiver.

Harrity, not Janet, was on the other end.

"Better get over here to the station, Dawson," he said. "Things are cracking on this case."

"What things?" I asked sleepily.

"I can't tell you on the telephone. Wake up, and get over here."

I got, with the aid of a chilly shower and a glass of cold water. It was shortly after midnight.

There was no sign of taxicab life, or much of any other kind, on Littleton's deserted streets, so I walked around to the hotel garage and took my car out. The chill morning air made me shiver, and brought

me out of my torpor. In spite of a rigid personal rule against smoking before breakfast, I lighted a cigarette, in a confused hope that the smoke might clear some of the fuzz out of my mouth. It seemed only to accentuate the odor of stale whiskey that I couldn't shake off.

Operating the automobile brought me back to almost complete consciousness, and with it came a heart-stopping fear. Where was Janet? What had happened to her? Why had I gone to sleep instead of continuing to search for her?

I burst into the police station, and into Harrity's office, at a fast trot. Before he could say a word, I grabbed his telephone, called the hotel and asked for Janet's room.

"Miss Gordon left word that she is not to be disturbed," the operator reported. After a little futile sparring, I hung up, somewhat relieved but still mystified.

"The young lady is all right," said Harrity softly.

"How do you know?" I asked.

He smiled, and told me to sit down.

"Just take it from me, she's all right," he said. "Now, if you can regain your manners and your interest in your job, tell me—did you hear Dooley Williams' speech at the hotel last night?"

"Yes," I said, "as much of it as I could stomach."

"What did he talk about?"

"The usual clap-trap. Our great state must be made safe for you and your children, and that sort of hogwash. Meaning, of course, that Dooley Williams must be allowed to go on taking dough from lobbyists."

"Now, think a little bit," the chief said. "Do you remember anything he said about the warning beacon at the Wabena-Littleton intersection?"

"Yes—I recall that he mentioned it. Something about its being a bright, shining symbol of civic righteousness, or words to

that effect.”

Harrity leaned back in his chair, and began tapping his pudgy fingers together.

“Do you know,” he asked, “when that beacon was put into operation?” I didn’t.

“Last night,” he said.

My wits were still slightly scrambled, and I did not catch it right away.

“Last night?” I repeated. But he sounded as if he were describing an old friend. “If it just started to operate last night, why—”

“Why, Dooley Williams was in Littleton last night,” the chief added, “and he doesn’t seem able to prove otherwise. The boys have been working on him for quite a while, in the back room.”

I must have jumped pretty high, because Harrity restrained me.

“They’ve just been asking him questions,” he said. “We don’t use rubber hose in this police station.”

I had not recovered from my incredulity.

“Do you mean you think Williams committed this murder?” I asked. “Why?”

“If he was here last night, he could have,” Harrity said. “As for his motive, I thought you might be able to give me that. You been investigating the guy, haven’t you?”

The telephone rang, and the chief listened for a minute with no more comment than a couple of “uh-huhs.” When he turned back to me, I was hammering my forehead.

“The bank account!” I said. “The bank account in Chicago. I found out in the lobby investigation that Williams had a dummy corporation with a bank account at the Second National in Milwaukee. I wasn’t able to get authorization to see its statements—the state banking department blocked that—but I have a hell of a suspicion that a lot of cash went in and out of that account. Could some of it have gone

into Turner’s?”

Harrity picked up the telephone again, and told the desk sergeant to place calls to the Milwaukee and Chicago detective bureaus.

“We’ll know by the time the banks open,” he said. “That other call was from Wabena. That’s a small place, as you know, and the cops have found a guy who swears he saw Williams driving through there last night.”

“What does Dooley say?” I inquired.

“He don’t know about the Wabena witness yet. But he’s got absolutely no alibi. He says he had dinner at the Park Hotel in Lakeville last night—which is true enough—and retired to his apartment, and didn’t budge out of it till morning. Since he lives alone in a ground floor apartment in a big building, there’s no way of proving that either true or false, unless we find a witness who saw him come home in the wee, small hours—and I doubt we’re gonna be that lucky.”

I was shaking my head, and trying to dope it out.

“It may add up,” I said, “but it’s all damned circumstantial. What the hell would he kill Turner for?”

“Looks to me like it was for money,” the chief replied. “He’s mixed up in a lotta crooked dough, as you found out. Maybe this guy Turner was bleeding him.”

“But—” I said, “Turner wasn’t involved in any of the lobbying, or in politics. I know the roster on all those deals, backward and forward, and Turner just wasn’t on it.”

“Maybe not,” Harrity conceded, “but he was mixed up with that bird some way—and we’ll find out how, now that you remembered that dummy corporation. I’m much obliged to you, Dawson. With your help, I’m gonna be able to prove in a few hours that Dooley Williams put that bullet into Frank Turner’s head.”

Bullet. I kicked the word around, silently, for a moment.

"Bullet," I said. "Chief, that word is going to save you those hours. You aren't going to have to wait until the banks open."

"Whatta you mean?"

"If you'll take me to see Williams," I said, "I think we can wind this case up right here."

STIFLING further questions, Harrity led me through to the station to the bullpen, where Dooley was seated on a bench, more or less surrounded by three towering detectives. He was a far cry from the dapper secretary to the governor, the eloquent after-dinner speaker, the smartly tailored politician who cracked the whip over legislators and ward-heelers.

His coat was off, his shirt collar open, and his tie awry. He looked unutterably tired. But he was smoking a cigarette, and there was a spark of jauntiness left in him.

"Ha, Dawson!" he greeted me. "Maybe you can convince these—gentlemen that they are making a big mistake. They won't listen to me. There is going to be hell to pay when the governor learns about this. Do you know they have not even allowed me to call him?"

"You won't need him—for a while," I said. "After you've been sentenced, you might be able to persuade him to pardon you—if he really thinks more of you than he does of his political future. Aren't you glad we don't execute murderers in this state?"

He threw down his cigarette, ground it into the cement floor, and stood up in a gesture of defiance.

"You're crazy," he said. "The whole thing is absolutely ridiculous." He was too scared to make it sound as if he meant it.

"No, it isn't," I said. "You might as well tell all now, Dooley, because you haven't got a chance. We found the fake

beard in Turner's house."

He turned on me, and screamed in a frightened tenor.

"It wasn't a fake beard!" he exclaimed. "It was real."



"Yah," I said, "but it was Turner's, wasn't it? He staged a phony attack on the governor and let you stop him, so you could be a hero and stay solid with the governor forever after.

"You let him get away because you had to. And you've been paying him off ever since, through that dummy company of yours, with the filthy dough you extort from lobbyists.

"And when he started to demand more and more money, you couldn't take it any longer and killed him. We found a letter in his house—"

I was virtually pushing the words down his throat. When I came to "letter" Dooley started to disintegrate, after the manner of an ice cream cone in a summer sun. He slumped back onto the bench with such a pitiable expression in his eyes that I actually felt sorry for him.

"You couldn't have found a letter," he whined. "You couldn't have found a letter."

"You thought you'd got 'em all, didn't you?" I sneered. "But there was one you didn't find."

He was licked, and he gave up. He always had been the kind who would give up if you pushed him into a corner. His

giving up made me a little sick. .

He turned away from me, and toward Harrity.

“All right,” he said, limply, “I’ll give you a statement. I—I had to do it. The man was bleeding me white.”

HARRITY nodded, and one of the detectives took Williams by the arm and half-carried him into the chief’s office. He was on the verge of hysteria, but he had one more taunt left for me.

“There’s no credit in this for you, Dawson,” he said. “You weren’t smart enough—it was that girl. That damned dame trapped me some way. I saw her here when they brought me in. She did it—the dame did it.”

“Shut up!” Harrity said. “When we want you to talk, we’ll tell you.”

I grabbed the chief’s arm and held him back as the detective went on into the office with Williams. He tapped me on the shoulder, approvingly.

“You did it, my boy,” he said. “But you certainly are an awful liar. We got no letter, and I never heard of this beard business before.”

“You didn’t think the truth would do any good, did you?” I asked. “Now, what’s this stuff about a dame? Is he talking about Janet?”

Harrity adorned his moon face with its most benign expression.

“Yes,” he said. “I promised her I wouldn’t tell you, but you know anyway, now. She came here last night after the dinner, and gave me the tip on the road beacon. She knew it had been put up last night. Art Russell gave her quite a speech about it while he was driving past it on the way over to the hotel.”

“And—and she didn’t say anything to me?” I asked, sounding very hurt indeed.

“From what I hear,” the chief said, “you weren’t giving her much chance to

talk. I musta given you a few too many drinks. But you might be glad to know she wouldn’t tell me a thing until I agreed to give the whole story to you first, if and when it broke.”

I started for the door, fast.

“Jess,” I said, “I’ll be back soon. I have to—”

“I know you have to,” he said, “but I think you’d better go to the railroad station instead of the hotel. She was planning to catch the Chicago sleeper to Lakeville, so you wouldn’t be burdened by her company on the trip back.”

He looked at his watch. “Nearly two,” he said. “The sleeper’s due through here at 2:18.”

I drove into the station parking lot at 2:14. Janet was seated inside, beside her ridiculously tiny overnight bag, and staring straight ahead of her, at nothing. She started when she saw me, but didn’t get up. So I sat down. I was almost, but not quite, tongue-tied.

“Hello,” I said, stupidly.

“What are you doing here?” she questioned.

“Looking for you,” I said. “I want you to—hell, I just want you, that’s all.”

“Well, that’s a quick change of pace. The last time you saw me, you didn’t want any part of me.”

“Baby,” I whispered, “I’m sorry—I—” I was fumbling for her hand. She pulled it away, but I could feel the ice melting slightly.

“Did Harrity call you?” she asked.

“Yes, that’s all settled. The case is solved. Williams confessed.”

She was wide-eyed and excited.

“He did? What did the office say?”

Much to my amazement, I hadn’t even thought of the office.

“I haven’t called the office yet,” I said. “I was sort of hoping that when I did I’d

have a society page item to go along with the murder story.”

“Such as what?”

“Such as an announcement of the Gordon-Dawson engagement. That would be kind of an exciting story in Lakeville, too.”

IN THE distance, bells started to ring and the noise of wheels on rails penetrated the waiting room. Janet reached for her bag and started to rise, but I held her arm firmly.

“You’re not going,” I said. “You can’t go.”

“Janet—Janet darling, I’m in love with you. I want you to marry me.”

She stood up, in spite of me, and I bobbed up, too, still clutching her arm.

“What makes you think I’d marry a drunken reporter?” she asked.

“The same thing,” I said, “that makes me know I’ll never take another drink.”

For the first time, she smiled, and to me it was the most beautiful smile in the history of the world.

“No, you don’t,” she said. “Don’t give me that going-on-the-wagon speech. From now on, you just drink at a more lady-like pace, as I do.” She stood very close. “My God, George, how I want to be married to you!”

She put both hands on my neck and pulled my face down for a kiss that was both wild and tender. Then she pushed away and stared at me.

“I guess I never would have been any good as a reporter, anyway,” she said, resignedly.

“The trouble is,” I replied, “you’d have been too good. I couldn’t afford to let my wife beat me to the punch on stories, the way you did on this one.”

The few other persons who had been in the station had gone out to catch their train. We had the place all to ourselves, and we just stood there in the dim half-light, locked in the tightest embrace that the fusty old barn had ever witnessed.