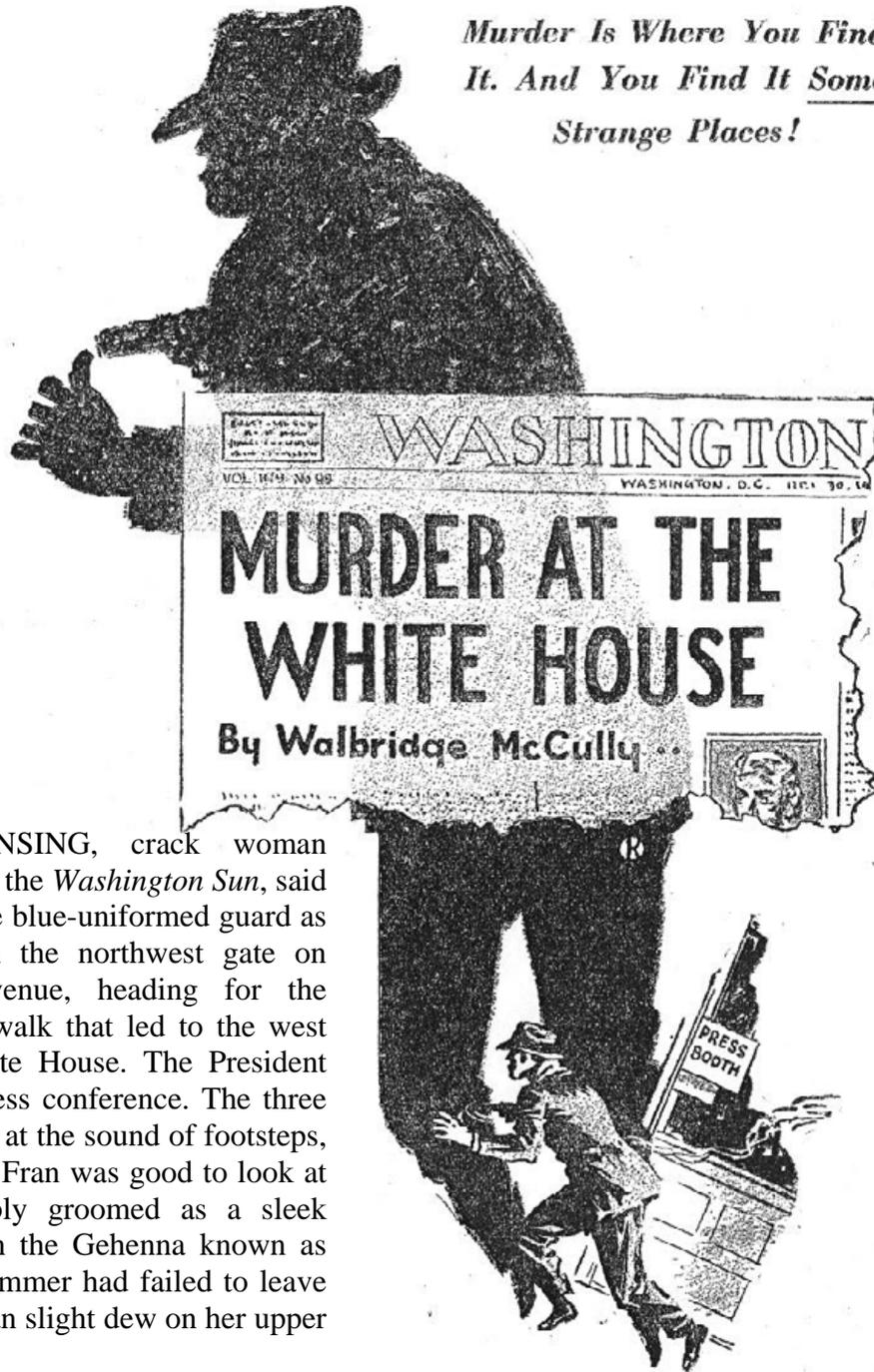


*Murder Is Where You Find  
It. And You Find It Some  
Strange Places!*



**F**RAN LANSING, crack woman reporter for the *Washington Sun*, said “Hi!” to the blue-uniformed guard as she shot through the northwest gate on Pennsylvania Avenue, heading for the winding cement walk that led to the west wing of the White House. The President was holding a press conference. The three men ahead turned at the sound of footsteps, faces lighting up. Fran was good to look at and as impeccably groomed as a sleek blonde seal. Even the Gehenna known as Washington in summer had failed to leave its mark, other than slight dew on her upper lip.

“Fran! Lord, but it’s good to see you again!” Jim Brewster exclaimed. “This is the moment I’ve been waiting for.” Jim was with *United Press*, a lean Texan with a drawl and a homespun-face that Fran considered better than handsome. He was showing, however, the effects of months in a Jap prison.

Fran stole a surreptitious glance at her fiancé, Andy Anderton of the *Washington Home-Herald*. Damn and blast! Why did he have to be on hand when she first met Jim? It was distinctly a break, however, that she’d had some warning of Jim’s return. Unfortunate, though, that Andy knew exactly how she’d felt about Jim—

how she felt now—which made the meeting harder. And Andy was jealous! No doubt, he was already wondering how soon the blow would fall, how soon she'd be saying, "Sorry, Andy, but with Jack back, naturally I'll be marrying *him*." Fran's heart turned a complete flip-flop at the thought. She wished her mind wasn't so chaotic—hoped her eyes didn't reflect her thoughts. Andy was frowning, jaw squared pugnaciously, and his somber black eyes on her were inquiring, enigmatic.

Fran pulled herself together. "It's swell seeing you back at the old stand, Jim. Out of khaki and into. . ." Fran looked him over, trying to be casual, "into seersucker. It was reported, you know, that your parachute failed to open. It's going to be like old times now we four are together again." Looking at Andy's veiled eyes, however, she knew it was merely a hope. "We've missed you at the White House."

Fran was the only one of the gang who had sweated out the war in Washington. Andy had recently been in ETO and Charlie Rinehart of *Weekly*, the other member of the old crowd, a rubber-faced bilikin in a wrinkled, loose-fitting palm beach suit, had been in Okinawa with Jim Brewster.

"'Ace war correspondent dies over Tokyo' was the way they put it," Charlie Rinehart commented. "I was just leaving Okinawa for Washington when word came back."

Jim winced. "That was poor Bellows. I had all the luck, though Shinagawa wasn't exactly a bed of roses. However, remember the old adage, lucky in games—and war is a game, though grim—unlucky in love." He was looking directly at Fran so she knew he'd heard of her engagement. But, of course, Jim must realize, as Andy must, that everything would be just the same—that he came first.

"Oh, you do all right," Charlie said, and

at his tone was bitter, brooding. Fran glanced at him, frowning. So that was Charlie's trouble—girls and frustration! She was remembering back through the years she'd known Charlie. He'd fallen hard for a girl or two and they'd laughed at him, cruelly, and after that he'd crossed girls off his list, had taken to drinking spasmodically. Of course, Charlie did have the kind of face only a mother could fancy, impossible to associate with romance—messy, with loose lips. Still, old Charlie was a good scout, but, though doing his best work while slightly teed up, the Charlie that emerged from a bottle like a fattish genie was an ugly customer, looking for a fight—hating the world. Fran was wondering which was the real Charlie—the amiable good egg or the surly, bad-tempered genie of the bottle. She was also wondering whether he'd been s at it that early in the morning.

"Let's go," Andy suggested shortly. They had stopped to talk. "We'll be late for the conference," He took Fran firmly by the arm in a show of possessiveness, starting up the path.

**G**ENIAL Ben Bowles of the White House police inspected their passes at the door, his gold badge of office flashing from a spotless white shirt that, with black tie and blue trousers, was a concession to Washington's summer climate. Across the vast entrance hall, Bill Simmons, white-haired, well-fed and impressive, waved a special greeting to Jim from behind the little American flag that decorated the front of the reception desk. Already, Treasury Secret Service men were checking milling newspapermen in line at the left, while at the right, visitors were being questioned separately.

Fran, being hatless, stepped into line, while the men flung their hats on the massive carved Philippine mahogany table

standing in the center of the room, to join the litter of assorted hats and late press releases already there.

"Washington is exactly the same," Jim stated, following Fran into line, "and hotter than hell." The room was a blast furnace that sapped all vitality in its sullen, depressing heat.

"Nothing is changed at all," Charlie agreed, mopping his brow, "And I even arrived for the usual Washington murder—still unsolved."

"And that, too, is exactly according to Hoyle," Jim said.

"Nothing changed, but plenty has happened," Andy protested. "You've heard about Charlie, of course."

Jim shook his head, frowning and turning to Charlie. There were so many loose ends to catch up on. "No. What about him?"

Andy, fresh from ETO, didn't show Jim's fatigue, his look of strain. His black eyes were alert and bright. Too bright, Fran thought, worrying feverishly. *When shall I tell him?*

"Good old Charlie's hit the jackpot!" Andy said.

Fran, gesticulating with the long, slender amber cigarette holder that matched her eyes, said, "Damned if he hasn't written a novel—war and things, he says. It's out next week and already an amazing success. Hollywood and all the trimmings. Book-of-the-Month Club, too. Isn't that a helluva note!" Fran punctuated her conversation with salty words that brought a faint sense of shock, coming from so sensuously feminine a mouth.

"Stout fella," Jim said, "and don't forget you knew us when, Charlie. I've a book on the way myself. . . ." Jim grinned, turning to Fran, "as what correspondent hasn't—but not likely to make much of a splash. I expect it with my things from

Okinawa which haven't turned up yet. My mother has them in Texas."

FRAN smiled proudly. "And you never said a word in your letters! It's sure to be a knockout, Jim. I hope you'll let me have a look. Charlie never would. He wanted his book to burst on the world all at once."

Charlie murmured something deprecating, then added, "But Fran's a knockout herself, isn't she, boys? And the best damned woman reporter in Washington," He threw her an approving glance from small piglike eyes in a layer of fat.

"Check," Jim agreed, hoping nobody would notice his trembling hands as he lit a cigarette. "But what about the murder. Anybody we knew?"

"Sure," Charlie said. "Remember Stephen Haverford, the lawyer, the one who threw the parties? Somebody drilled a neat little hole through the back of his head. Got him in his library. It looks the perfect crime—no clues."

"I have a theory," Fran murmured, breaking in, "that the well-planned murders are pulled off by people who are mature. Hotheaded youth murders on impulse—and gets caught—but it's the carefully thought-out murders by the middle-aged babies that get by—more often than we suspect, I believe. Take some of the famous unsolved cases—the Hall-Mills murders, the Elwood murder, and the shooting of that headmaster of a school in Massachusetts. I'd be willing to wager they were all the products of minds over forty."

"The dangerous forties," Andy suggested lightly.

A SECRET SERVICE man moved them along in the line and then the conversation was resumed.

“Rot,” Charlie said belligerently. “Easy enough to say, but impossible to prove. And what have you to say, Fran, about that Nassau case? Is that another example of your thoughtful and elderly murderer?”

“Not by a damn sight,” Fran retorted with spirit, “and that, I think, exactly proves my point. Sir Harry Oakes was murdered on impulse probably—in the heat of red-hot anger—and a devilish poor job.”

Andy, amused, said, “And yet the murderer got by.”

“And why not! There never yet has been a conviction for murder in Nassau—that is, of a white person. And what a wretched farce of a trial!” Scorn rang in Fran’s voice. “A fantastic parody of justice, shunting the chief witness for the prosecution out of the country so he couldn’t testify.”

“Of course, all murderers are mentally unbalanced, whether twenty-four or forty,” Jim Brewster said categorically. “Emotionally unbalanced, with murder as the result of overweening hate, love, or some other equally strong emotion unleashed—out of whack.”

“I presume we’re not discussing the professional criminal, then,” Andy inquired.

“Certainly not,” Jim agreed, “only incidental murder.”

“And how in hell did we get started on this subject, anyway?” Fran said, flipping open the leather case of her pass for a Secret Service man, “You’d think we were crime reporters.”

Once more the line started moving toward their objective—the President’s conference room, and this time they made it, with two hundred-odd press and visitors finally squeezed into the formally appointed circular room.

“Good God, I’d forgotten the jam!” Jim said to Andy—Fran had been swept outside their ken and they were fitted in like fish in

a tin near the back of the room. Jim’s hands were wedged shoulder-high, with barely room to scribble momentous news items.

Andy moaned as an elbow caught him. He was remembering vividly the room. The same gold velvet draperies with tassels were at the windows, the same dull red rug on the floor. There was the large mahogany desk in front of the windows, with the American flag and the President’s flag on standards on either side. At the right a small statue of Andrew Jackson was close to a table made from the old *Constitution*, and there was plenty of gold braid, as usual, on the brass hats attending the President. Everything was just the same with one exception. Behind the mahogany desk sat President Truman, forthright and sincere, instead of the suavely smiling Roosevelt who had once fenced urbanely with the press.

The conference was short, but packing a punch, and there was the usual stampede to the press room and telephones. The moth-eaten deer, caged by the press from the hotel where they’d hung out in Poughkeepsie during the Roosevelt reign, leered cynically over the press room doorway as frenzied newspapermen below buttonholed each other for fill-ins or to check on questions asked the President. The din was terrific.

Fran, parted from the others during the conference, was swept along with the mad rush, two hundred people making for the press room, with fifty or so scrambling for twenty-five telephones. She efficiently speared her own desk telephone, however, sending in her story. As she perched on the desk, slim legs swinging, Fran caught a glimpse of Jim Brewster talking to Charlie Rinehart across the room—Charlie appearing excited and worried—then Jim turned into the UP booth.

After struggling for bits of information in the press room, a hell-hole of heat, Fran

drifted out to the entrance hall to get the latest press release from the table. She found Charlie on the same errand, looking for the messenger. Fran noted the press release in his hand and the scrawled "lead" in the margin, pointing to the underlined words in the script. *Charlie must be slipping*, she thought. There was a better lead.

Andy interrupted her train of thought. "Seen Jim?" he inquired, "I thought we all might lunch together."

"Sorry. I have a date but meet Jim tonight for dinner," Charlie said, frowning.

"Jim was telephoning from the UP booth five minutes ago," Fran volunteered, "and perhaps he's still there."

"I'll go see," Andy said.

Fran watched him go with no premonition of trouble. The look on Andy's face, however, as he reappeared in the press room a doorway a few minutes later, frightened her. His eyebrows were a straight black line across a ghastly mask, handsome but meaningless. She knew at once something was wrong, even before Andy shot across the room toward big Ben Bowles, entirely ignoring her.

Spurred by fear, plus her instinctive nose for news, Fran quietly started for the press room, pointedly casual. Charlie, fortunately had become involved in an argument with the *Tass* correspondent—didn't notice. She was a homing pigeon, making for the place she'd last seen Jim, anxiety clutching at her throat, peering into the booth first, her nose pressed against the glass and seeing nothing. Her next move was to open the door cautiously. Around her jostling, sweaty newspapermen clamored vociferously. Fran took a long look inside the booth, gasped and closed the door abruptly. She moved—a dazed, frozen figure—silently across the room to take over the telephone on her desk. There was just time to make the evening edition.

JIM had been shot through the back of the head and was slumped on the floor of the telephone booth, quite dead. Fran had hardly told the bare bones of the story over the phone—all she knew—when Ben Bowles and Andy came into the press room. Ben was shouting, trying to make himself heard above the noise and confusion but it took actual physical force to get people to listen. He shouldered his way through the crowd, spreading the news of the murder. Finally, there was an ominous quiet.

"Nobody has left the west wing," Ben informed the appalled newspapermen, speaking in more subdued tones now that he had their attention, "which means the murderer is still in the White House. Any member of the press, or the two visitors to the President's news conference, therefore, had ample opportunity to commit this crime. One of you has murder on his soul and nobody will be allowed to leave until Lieutenant Wingo of the homicide squad arrives and takes over. After that, it's up to him."

"Where was Jim killed?" somebody shouted from the back of the room.

Ben told them, adding grimly, "A bullet from a government issue gun with a silencer through the back of the head."

"Of course it's all right to use the phones, Ben," Charlie Rinehart said anxiously.

Ben hesitated. "Well, I don't see why not, but not the UP booth. The body mustn't be disturbed." He glanced across the room. A Secret Service man had already taken over, was guarding the booth.

Charlie recoiled visibly. "Hell, no!"

"I'll notify the UP," Andy said, carefully avoiding Fran's eye. "It's what Jim would want. They'll have to have coverage for the story—send another man."

Fran having done her duty as a newspaperman, was feeling hollow and

gone inside. Her emotion broke through. "Poor Mrs. Brewster," she murmured, distress puckering her brow.

Ben glanced at her sharply. "So you know his mother. It wouldn't hurt, then, if you broke the news to her—better than reading of the murder in the papers or being notified by the police."

"I'd already thought of that," Fran admitted. "Perhaps a telegram. No, it would be better to phone." She glanced across at the row of booths. "Well, here goes." She'd spotted Cliff Foster of the *Associated Press* and knew she could get permission to use the AP booth for the call. A booth would be preferable.

"I'll take you to lunch when you get back," Andy called after her. A good stiff drink would do them both good. "And tell Mrs. Brewster I'll handle Jim's book for her."

Fran looked back and nodded. Andy was a darling, even if he did have that nasty black streak of jealousy in his make-up. She thought grimly, *There's no need for jealousy now!*

Lieutenant Wingo arrived while Fran was telephoning Mrs. Brewster. She could see him through the glass of the door, a graying, baldish harassed man in plainclothes, taken in tow by a deferential Sergeant Bowles. Fran sickened, knowing Lieutenant Wingo was looking over Jim's body in the UP booth on the other side of the partition. She wiped a tear away defiantly, wanting to scream "damn, damn, damn," to do something violent.

Instead, Fran said steadily, "Mrs. Brewster? This is Fran Lansing, I'm afraid I've very bad news for you. Jim is dead—murdered!"

THE long silence on the other end of the phone frightened Fran. Finally, Mrs. Brewster said in a controlled voice, "Thank you, my dear, for calling. Will—will you

make all arrangements—send Jim's body back to me in Texas?" Her voice faltered at the end—broke.

Fran agreed quickly, mentioning Andy's offer about the book; was amazed at the result.

Mrs. Brewster was saying, "It's awfully nice of Mr. Anderton, my dear, but there isn't any manuscript. Nothing came with Jim's things from Okinawa but clothes."

"But Jim's letters, Mrs. Brewster! Surely, he mentioned his book!"

She hesitated. "Perhaps he did. I'll have a look again."

Fran said feverishly, "I wish you could send the letters on—all you can find. Would you mind? It's really rather important."

Already an idea—horrible, monstrous—had shot into Fran's mind, arriving from the subconscious with the speed of a diver coming to the surface of the water and just as smoothly. *Charlie! Charlie could have stolen Jim's book—could have murdered him!* She was listening through a haze, as Mrs. Brewster promised to send on the letters. Feeling battered in body and soul, Fran said "good-bye" and hung up.

Outside the booth a photographer's flash went off as the police took shots of the body. Fran stayed in the comparative peace of the booth, trying to pull herself together, make plans. Actually, there was nothing to prove she was right about Charlie. Suppose she told the police what she thought. What did she have to back it up? Charlie was publishing a book—a howling success—and Jim's manuscript was missing. Well, what of it? Just a coincidence, of course. The police would laugh at her. She bit her lip, considering. But, even if they didn't believe her, they might question Charlie and he'd be forewarned. No, she'd stay on her own.

*But, Charlie could have done it, she*

told herself defiantly, *and I'm following through*. There was a week's leave coming to her and she made the decision. She'd take the leave and follow her hunch. One Washington murder wouldn't go unsolved—not if she had anything to say about it! Fran's eyes gleamed, amber icicles.

SHE opened the door of the booth, head buzzing with plans, and, joined the group around Lieutenant Wingo. Any routine information the police gathered would help and she intended keeping in touch with them.

Already, she had ideas for a quick plane trip to New York—to Charlie's publisher's for a look at the manuscript of *Red Flames and Embers*. Fran caught a glimpse of Charlie at a telephone—an amiable, rolypoly little man—or was he? Her heart contracted painfully.

"And the gun that killed Brewster," Lieutenant Wingo was saying, "the murderer conveniently left on the floor of the telephone booth, and much good that will do us. All fingertips had been removed—an army gun and no chance of tracing it." Lieutenant Wingo was still smarting from his razzing by the press over the Haverford murder. He glared around the room defiantly, his feeling being that he'd drawn another murder that would be tough, a conspiracy against him for which the press was directly responsible. However, if he could hang a murder rap on a newspaperman—Lieutenant Wingo's eye glistened hopefully.

Fran edged closer. "I guess I was the last person to see Jim Brewster alive, Lieutenant," she said fishing. Her words got Lieutenant Wingo's attention.

"Hmmm," he said, "You were? And who are you?" He was slightly mollified by Fran's slim curves. *Nice honey-bunny blonde*, he thought.

"Fran Lansing, *Washington Sun*."

Lieutenant Wingo became alert. "Ah," he said, "Engaged to Jim Brewster, weren't you?"

Fran was in the maw of a giant crane, was about to be dropped a quivering mass, into a bottomless pit from which there was no return. She looked quickly at Andy. "I—I was before he was reported dead."

"Ah, and now?" Lieutenant Wingo pressed.

"I'm engaged to Andy Anderton," Fran said faintly.

She could see suspicion welling in Lieutenant Wingo's eyes. He turned towards Andy. "Of course," he said, "the man who found Brewster's body." He might as well have yelled his suspicions to the housetops and the seed found sudden root in Fran's mind, an icy chill running up and down her spine, *Andy, too, could have murdered Jim!*

She was remembering with growing horror the smell of smoke in the air as she opened the door of the telephone booth, smoke, perhaps, from a gun recently fired. Fran took another look at Andy—seeing him with the eyes of a stranger. Andy had a dark, secretive face that told her nothing. *But Andy is kind*, Fran told herself in a panic. *He loves me far too much to hurt me so. Impossible for Andy to be a murderer!* She was so disturbed, however, that it increased her determination to solve the murder, come hell or high water.

From a long way off, Lieutenant Wingo was saying, "Well, Miss Lansing, tell us all about it. How long have you known Brewster? When did you last see him and had he any known enemies?"

"I've known Jim about four or five years. Saw him today for the first time since his return. Four of us, Charlie Rinehart, Andy Anderton, Jim Brewster and I met just inside the gate, walked up to the White House together. Later, I was

telephoning in my story when I noticed Jim going into the UP booth. That, of course, must have been the last anyone saw of him." *But Charlie had seen him go, too*, she remembered, heart beating faster.

"Except the murderer," Lieutenant Wingo agreed. "And what about enemies? Know of any?"

Fran felt her face grow rigid. She moistened stiff lips with the top of her tongue. "No," she said.

"People liked Jim," Andy explained grimly, "which makes the murder all the more unbelievable."

"Well, we'll check on everybody in the building for a tie-in with Brewster. Bowles is getting me a list. I know about the two visitors to the news conference already. They were Frank Moore, executive of Lane and Jones, New York publishers, and an Iranian journalist, Sultan Sadegh."

"Doesn't look as though you had anything there," Fran said.

"You never can tell." Lieutenant Wingo consulted a small notebook. "I see Brewster's address is given as 2222 I Street, N.W. Might pick up something there and not a bad idea to run around while my men are covering the usual routine. Ah, here comes Bowles with the list." Lieutenant Wingo put the typewritten pages in an inside pocket, then turned to Fran.

"Care to come along to I Street, Miss Lansing? Since you knew Brewster so well, you might help."

**F**RAN concealed her satisfaction. "I'll be glad to, Lieutenant," she said conservatively.

"Good," Lieutenant Wingo said.

"But what about our lunch date, Fran?" Andy insisted, not to be brushed off.

"The Lieutenant, no doubt, will be glad to have you along. We can go to lunch from there." Fran had resolutely tied any

doubts of Andy in a weighted sack and thrown them overboard. She was only hoping now he hadn't been a mind reader.

"Of course, Anderton," Lieutenant Wingo conceded reluctantly.

"But what about all these people?" Sergeant Bowles asked, brow furrowed. "We can't hold them indefinitely." He looked around the crowded room. There were others, too, outside in the entrance hall.

"Let 'em go," Lieutenant Wingo said brusquely. "Good God!" Two hundred and five people who had an opportunity to kill Brewster! We can't interview them all here. I'll detail men to cover the list quickly—get everything we can. Coming, Miss Lansing?"

Fran suddenly became conscious she was still clutching the press release she'd picked up in the hall. "I have to find the messenger first," she said, "send this to my paper."

"That's easily done," Andy assured her. "He's outside now. Charlie and I just handed him ours. Come on."

Jim's one-room apartment in I Street was 411. They took the self-service elevator to the fourth floor and got out. Lieutenant Wingo had Jim's key and opened the door. Fran was shivering as she followed him in, with Andy close behind. Her reaction was purely involuntary as there was nothing in the room of Jim. It was a room without soul and as characterless as the ordinary hotel room. Recent purchases were on a table, some of them open but still in their wrappings. On the floor by the table was a leather bag, also new.

Lieutenant Wingo grunted as he stood in the middle of the room and looked the place over. "Not much here, I'm afraid."

"Shinagawa is a damned poor place to pick up possessions," Fran reminded him wryly.

“Oh, that’s where Brewster was. I’d forgotten.” Lieutenant Wingo was bending over the bag, stirring the contents with practiced hands. “Ah, this looks better,” he said, bringing to light a moldy-looking envelope. Lieutenant Wingo inspected the contents of the envelope, with Andy brazenly looking over his shoulder. There was a prolonged whistle from Andy.

“Some houri!” he announced, raptly.

Lieutenant Wingo was holding a small faded snapshot of a dark-eyed beauty in native costume. He turned the snap over. On the back was written in faded ink, Jamela Sadegh—Iran.

“You don’t happen to know anything about this, do you, Miss Lansing?” he asked.

Fran narrowed her eyes, thinking. “Only that Jim was in Iran early in the war, went from the European theater to the Pacific. I’ve never heard of the girl.”

LIEUTENANT WINGO held on to the small photograph, studying it. “Jamela Sadegh—Jamela Sadegh,” he muttered, savoring the words on his tongue as though the taste was familiar. “I have it—the Iranian journalist! Sadegh was his name, too.”

“We—ll, this may prove interesting,” Andy exclaimed.

Fran looked at her wrist-watch. Her plans included a hasty lunch with Andy and the hope she could pick up a plane to get her to New York in time to visit Charlie’s publisher.

“It must be more than coincidence that an Iranian journalist turns up in that crowd in the press room and a picture of an Iranian girl, having the same name, also turns up in Brewster’s apartment,” Lieutenant Wingo said firmly. “I’ll get right after this Sadegh, have him brought in for questioning.” He put the girl’s picture carefully away in his pocket.

Lieutenant Wingo was as transparent as a glass fish bowl—ideas like fish swimming through his mind and their travels followed as easily. Fran could trace his hackneyed thought from its inception—predatory correspondent meets journalist’s wife, irate husband follows seducer across the sea, to murder correspondent in the White House press room. Very glib, and in true movie form, only Fran didn’t believe a word of it. She knew Jim.

“What about lunch?” Fran inquired, stirring Andy up. She was anxious to be on her way.

“Er—why not hang around, Fran? See Sadegh.”

“I’m hot, hungry, and have things to do. Besides, even the police must eat some time. Isn’t that right, Lieutenant?” Fran knew lunch would choke her but if she were to follow her hunch, she’d have to keep up her strength.

Lieutenant Wingo agreed. “And it may take an hour or so to round up Sadegh. I’ll have him brought to headquarters about two.”

Fran and Andy parted from Lieutenant Wingo in front of the apartment house, ending up at the Statler in air-conditioned luxury. Fran took time out to powder her nose and make telephone calls to the airport and her paper, then joined Andy at the secluded table acquired by some miraculous sleight-of-hand. But Andy was like that. He got what he wanted. Fran felt a lessening of her tension as she looked over the menu. She liked her men to know their way about, what they wanted, and how to get it even against overwhelming odds. She was almost in the mood to give Andy the tip about Charlie but decided against it. It wouldn’t hurt, she decided, to let him tag along with Lieutenant Wingo on the Sadegh lead.

Fran left the airport at two o’clock, arrived in New York promptly and made

her way to the publisher's by taxi. She sent in her name to the head—always flying high—and was pleasantly surprised to be received at once. In her handbag was a sample of typing from Charlie Rinehart's typewriter, picked up at her apartment on the way to the airport. One of the letters—an e—was out of alignment and very distinctive.

Mr. Fowler had great respect for the press, besides Fran wasn't hard to take, but he hesitated. "I'm sorry, Miss Lansing," he said, "but I don't see how I can let you see the manuscript of *Red Flames and Embers* without, at least, a request from Mr. Rinehart."

Fran did some quick thinking and acting. She was scrabbling through her handbag. "But, of course, Mr. Fowler, I did have a note but must have left it at my hotel. I'll run right over and get it."

SHE taxied to the office of *Weekly*, picked up some paper, borrowed a typewriter from a man she knew there, and wrote out a request to give Fran Lansing a look at the manuscript of *Red Flames and Embers*, signing it with Charlie's name in the taxi on the way back to the publisher's office. She committed the forgery calmly and without a qualm. This time she was successful.

Mr. Fowler pushed a buzzer on his desk, gave instructions to the secretary who answered.

"Er—er—would you mind answering a question?" he asked, curious. "Just why are you interested in *Red Flames and Embers*?"

Fran's mind fluttered, squirming. She could hardly tell Mr. Fowler her suspicions of his pet author—that she suspected him of being a thief and a murderer. "Oh, it's for an article I'm writing," she said lightly, hoping it wouldn't sound as silly to him as it did to her.

Mr. Fowler let it go. "Ah, here comes the manuscript now," he said, as the secretary arrived with it under her arm.

Fran wanted to snatch at *Red Flames and Embers*, riffle hurriedly through the pages. She forced herself to take it more easily, left the package on the desk while she lit a cigarette. Then she opened the envelope and took out the manuscript. Even a cursory inspection showed the pages had undoubtedly been typed by Charlie. There was the same distinctive "e" and other eccentricities of his typing with which she was familiar. It was a disappointment because, while it didn't mean Charlie might not have re-typed Jim's manuscript, it was a purely negative finding. Her trip to New York had drawn a blank.

There was still Jim's letters to Mrs. Brewster however, which she should receive by airmail in the morning. They might tell her something. With this faint hope still remaining, Fran took her leave of Mr. Fowler, after being presented with a copy of *Red Flames and Embers*. She took a bus to the airport, had dinner while waiting for a plane, and returned to Washington in time to get a good night's sleep.

The morning's mail brought Jim's letters. Fran opened the thick manila envelope eagerly.

Mr. Brewster had sent six letters; the first two had nothing to say about the book, but the third did. In that letter Jim mentioned working hard on a novel and, though still untitled, it was practically finished. Fran looked at the date. It was written about a month before the flight on which Jim had been shot down. She attacked the three remaining letters with renewed zeal, only to throw them disconsolately on the breakfast table at the end.

Fran lit a cigarette and got up, to pace

restlessly up and down the small modernistic amber and green living room that mirrored so perfectly her personality; decorative and pleasing to the eye, yet still practical and cozy. The surroundings were charming but still Fran frowned. She was getting nowhere fast.

She finished her cigarette and picked *Red Flames and Embers* from the table where she'd tossed it the night before on her arrival from New York. Fran sat down and commenced reading. Skimming through the book on the plane hadn't given her its full flavor. Now that she was reading more carefully, however, no doubt remained in her mind. Jim had written the book. She could see him in the turn of a phrase, in the selection of words, in its philosophy. Besides, *Red Flames and Embers* was tops and it would take a better man than Charlie to have written it. Charles didn't have the caliber. The ratio of possibility of his having written *Red Flames and Embers* was about comparable to the possibility of killing an elephant with BB shot. She flung the book aside.

But I can't prove it, Fran told herself disconsolately. *I'll have to go at this thing differently; first prove Charlie murdered Jim and take up motive later.* Her crooked smile as she thought of herself in the role of detective was mocking but determined.

THAT line of reasoning brought Lieutenant Wingo and Sultan Sadegh to her mind. Fran took to the davenport. Her lounging pajamas were maize and she lay on her back with knees comfortably crossed and balancing a mule on the tip of toes with carmined toenails. Fran reached for the telephone on a nearby table, called Lieutenant Wingo at police headquarters.

"Hello, Lieutenant," she said. "This is Fran Lansing. What's happening in the Brewster murder? Did anything come of your questioning Sadegh?"

Lieutenant Wingo was smug and jubilant over the phone. "I'll admit I had doubts of Anderton, Miss Lansing," he said, "but now I think we have our man. Sultan Sadegh turns out to be a brother of Jamela and admits having known Brewster in Iran. Of course, he denies any part in the murder but I've cabled for more information both on Sultan and Jamela, particularly on her relations with Brewster. Too bad we couldn't have brought Sultan in before he had a chance to wash his hands."

"Before he washed his hands?" Fran said, perplexed. "What good would that have done?"

Lieutenant Wingo snorted. "We might have caught him red-handed. You see, we have means of proving whether a man has used a gun or not. With a hot day like yesterday, it would probably have showed up even more than usual if he had—sweaty, you know."

"Oh," Fran said, preoccupied, "now I call that interesting."

Her thoughts were far away—back in the entrance hall of the west wing of the White House. She could see Charlie holding the press release, the underlined words in the script giving his lead. Jim had already been murdered. Suppose—just suppose, Charlie *had* murdered Jim. Was there a chance he might have had traces of gunpowder on his hands? Was there also a chance it might have been transferred on that hot, sticky day to the press release? In other words, would Charlie have been a careful murderer—one that would take into account every eventuality. Would Charlie have had the sense to wash his hands?

Fran said "good-bye" absently, cutting Lieutenant Wingo's pleasantries short. Her one idea, now, was to hurry down to the office of *Weekly* and find yesterday's press release from the White House. Fran dressed hurriedly, found a taxi outside and drove to

the *Weekly* office. She paid the taxi driver and rushed inside, finding, providentially, Charlie had gone to lunch. The stenographer in charge burrowed in a pile of papers on her desk to turn up the desired press release.

"You're sure you won't need this any more, Miss White?" Fran asked, putting the paper carefully in an envelope and speciously making her eagerness to get away.

"Sure. Mr. Rinehart would want you to have it, I know."

*And I'm not so sure!* Fran said to herself. Aloud, she continued, "Thanks a lot, Miss White."

Fran had luck in finding a taxi waiting at the curb outside. She climbed in hurriedly.

"Police headquarters, driver," Fran said briskly, sitting back in the seat, relaxed. She'd done her part and the answer was now on the laps of the gods.

Lieutenant Wingo looked up, surprised, as she opened the door of his office on the second floor of police headquarters some ten minutes later.

"We-ll," he said, getting up. "Come in, Miss Lansing. I wasn't expecting a visit." Something in Fran's face must have stirred his curiosity as he added, keenly, "What's up? Anything new?"

Fran didn't know exactly how to begin—how much to tell. "You see," she started slowly. "I can't see Sultan Sadagh as Jim Brewster's murderer—can't imagine he'd actually have a motive."

"Is that so!" Lieutenant Wingo said, piqued and on his dignity, "and why not?"

"Oh, because . . ." Fran hesitated.

"Perhaps you have another murderer in mind," His sarcastic emphasis was on the "you."

"You're damned right, Lieutenant," Fran said crisply. "I have, and it's up to you to prove whether I'm right or wrong."

"And just who is your suspected murderer?" Lieutenant Wingo asked dryly.

"Charlie Rinehart of *Weekly*."

"What!" Lieutenant Wingo said in a strangled voice.

**F**RAN had the queerest feeling now that she'd at last voiced her suspicions of Charlie. Also, she wasn't much surprised at Lieutenant Wingo's reaction.

"I have a press release here," she said, holding it out, "and I want you to put it through whatever process it is you use to detect gunpowder on hands. This press release was handled by Charlie Rinehart just before the murder of Jim Brewster was discovered. If you find traces of gunpowder, it should prove something."

"Well, I'll be damned! You're really serious!"

"Damn-it-to-hell, why else should I come running down to headquarters!"

"Have you any objection to telling what reason Rinehart would have for murdering Brewster?"

"I'll tell you what I think was the reason," Fran said slowly, "but I can't prove it."

"I see, and I suppose the police are to do that," Lieutenant Wingo was tart. "Well, let's have it."

"Charlie is just publishing a book. I think he stole it from Jim Brewster in Okinawa and when Jim turned up from the dead. . . ." Fran shrugged, "Charlie *had* to do something."

"Hmmm, motive enough," Lieutenant Wingo admitted, "if true."

"It would have ruined Charlie—absolutely ruined him. Besides, the book's a big success. Charlie could, no doubt, use the money."

"A lot of money, you say?"

"At least a couple of hundred thousand before the government got its cut," Fran said.

Lieutenant Wingo was impressed. "I'll have the press release processed—see what turns up." He pressed the buzzer on his desk.

"Swell, and if you do find traces of gunpowder, Lieutenant, let me know. I have an idea Charlie will crack if he thinks you have the goods on him about *Red Flames and Embers*. He's a steady drinker and jittery."

"Thanks for the tip. However, Sadegh is the man for my money, though I have an open mind. Call me later in the afternoon. That will be better than my calling you." Lieutenant Wingo handed the envelope Fran had given him to the man who answered the buzzer, gave him instructions, then turned to Fran when the detective left the room. "About three would be a good time to call. I'll have the answer then."

"Okay, three it is," Fran said, and breezed out of the room.

She was so confident over the result of the test that she went straight back to her apartment to execute another spot of forgery—just in case. It was intended for Charlie Rinehart and, again, the question of ethics didn't bother her. The forgery consisted of carefully copying Jim's signature on a new letter Fran typed out, following exactly that sent Mrs. Brewster by Jim and in which he mentioned his book, but inserting a paragraph or two giving a resume of *Red Flames and Embers* as the plot of his story. When she had finished, the result was good; flowed in easily with the rest of Jim's letter, and the signature was a nice copying job. Fran put the letter in the original envelope that had been posted in Okinawa. The whole thing had an authentic air and Fran regarded her work with satisfaction.

*All's fair in love, war and murder*, Fran murmured, glancing at the French ormolu clock on the desk. It struck the half-hour cheerily and she decided to raid the

refrigerator. The time was half-past two and still a half-hour to go before she could get returns from Lieutenant Wingo. While she ate lunch she had the eerie sensation that Jim was with her in the room, that he was actually directing her efforts. She was tense and quivering as the clock chimed three. It had hardly ceased when she was dialing Lieutenant Wingo.

"Fran Lansing," she said, trying to keep her voice from sounding as hectic as she felt. "Any news?"

"Well, —er," Lieutenant Wingo said, nearly driving her frantic with his deliberation, "your hunch seems to have been good. There were definite traces of gunpowder on that press release."

"Damn and blast! That's wonderful!"

"Rinehart will be here shortly," Lieutenant Wingo continued. "Want to be in on it?"

"Do I! And, Lieutenant, I've a letter I'll bring along that might help—might get a confession. It sort of confirms my theory that Charlie stole Jim Brewster's manuscript—his book."

"Hm, but I thought you said you had nothing to prove that."

"Something new turned up," Fran announced glibly. *Damned new!* she said to herself, smiling wryly.

"Okay, lady, bring it along. Better step on it."

Fran took time to call the *Washington Home-Herald*, finding Andy at his desk. "Better hurry down to police headquarters, Andy," she said breathlessly, "Something doing on Jim's murder. I'll meet you there." Fran slammed up the receiver, feeling virtuous. She might have left Andy in the lurch. She didn't bother with lunch dishes but flew out of the apartment like a bat-out-of-hell.

CHARLIE was ascending the steps as Fran drove up to police headquarters.

For the first time, she felt a twinge of compunction, seeing the familiar plump figure climbing the long ascent—old Charlie who'd palled around with her and the other newspapermen for years. Good old Charlie whose salt she'd eaten many a time.

*Don't be a damned fool!* she told herself savagely. *Don't go soft because you know the man. Good old Charlie's a murderer!*

Lieutenant Wingo had the press release in his hand when Fran opened the door of his office and went in. The envelope was lying on the desk and Charlie's face was puckered into a puzzled expression.

"Why, yes," he said, "that's mine all right. It's yesterday's press release from the White House. The messenger took it over to my office."

"That's all I want to know," Lieutenant Wingo said smoothly, looking bland. "Now, Rinehart . . ."

Fran interrupted. "You may be interested in seeing this, Lieutenant." She handed over the letter with the forged signature, with its added paragraphs. "You see what Jim Brewster says about his book. I've read the book supposedly written by Charlie and it's exactly the same plot."

Charlie's face seemed to disintegrate—go soft and sag. His lips were pale and dry and he moistened them with his tongue. "I—I . . . Well, there's just nothing to say. I planned to explain to Jim, make restitution, of course—had a date for dinner and expected to throw myself on his mercy. Then, he was murdered," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, yeah," Lieutenant Wingo said, and his tone was cynical. "You bet he was murdered and by you. We'll use this letter as exhibit B, a beautiful motive."

Charlie was eying him wildly. "Good God!" he exclaimed, his voice rising hysterically, "You can't think I murdered Jim!"

Lieutenant Wingo looked grim. "You signed your death warrant when you admitted that was yours," he said, pointing to the press release on his desk. "There are definite indications that the hands that handled the release had been messing around with a gun. Since there was only one gun used in the White House yesterday, you must be the man who murdered Jim Brewster."

"A thief, yes, but not that—not a murderer," Charlie cried shrilly. "There's another answer." He gulped, stricken, then looked wildly around as though seeking help. "There may have been only one gun used in the White House yesterday but that doesn't mean only one pair of hands handled my press release. Look at my first lead at—the one crossed out." Charlie grabbed for the paper, pointed dramatically. "Can't you see it was changed? For God's sake, get Andy Anderton!"

"Get Andy Anderton for what, Charlie," Andy asked easily, coming in the door.

There was a crying silence. Lieutenant Wingo coughed uneasily. He wasn't quite sure what it was all about but his eyes were on Charlie's anguished, pleading eyes. It couldn't be—anyway, he'd proceed with caution.

"Charlie was trying to explain how come he changed his lead on yesterday's press release from the White House," Lieutenant Wingo said casually. "You were with him at the time, weren't you, Anderton?"

"I don't see. . ." Andy said. Fran could see his mind working, wondering what the hell it was all about—a bit contemptuous of all the fuss. "Where's Sadegh? I thought you had something on him in the Brewster murder."

"First, let's get this straightened out," Lieutenant Wingo said. "What about it,

Anderton? What about Rinehart changing his lead?"

Andy laughed. "It was Charlie's off day, I guess. He had a bum lead and I fixed it up, crossed it out and underlined the right one. Why?"

"Because there were traces of gunpowder on it—on that White House release, meaning either you or Charlie murdered Jim Brewster," Lieutenant Wingo explained phlegmatically. "Now we'll check on the release you sent *your* paper. Don't worry, we'll find out which one is the murderer."

But Fran already knew. She could see it in Andy's too bright eyes, his quickly indrawn gasp, from a new knowledge of what made Andy tick, and Andy who couldn't bear being frustrated, who had to win and who had wanted her too much. She put her hand over her eyes to blot out his face. "Oh, my God!" she moaned, "Andy!"

FRAN was having a late breakfast at Allies Inn the next morning, haggard of face. The morning paper was propped up in front of her and screaming headlines told of the arrest of Andrew Anderton for the murder of Jim Brewster. The White House press release found in Andy's office at the *Home-Herald* carried more traces of gunpowder than Charlie's release and it had been handled only by Andy, himself. Charlie Rinehart joined Fran, eyes red-rimmed and not quite sure of his welcome.

"Sit down," Fran said gently.

"You can see how it was," Charlie said. "I was always an also-ran—wanted success

and the things that go with it." Fran thought of the girls who had laughed. "The temptation was too much for me when Jim's manuscript practically fell into my pocket. But I'd never have killed Jim, never. I haven't the guts," he admitted candidly. "Of course, Jim will get public credit for *Red Flames and Embers*, and his mother all the profits and that's that—a belated gesture."

"But it doesn't bring Jim back," Fran said bitterly, "and the thing that bothers me now is, what is my own responsibility for his death. You remember, of course, our conversation in the White House that morning—my remarks about the possibility of murdering safely after forty. Perhaps it spurred Andy on."

"Rubbish! Andy must have planned the thing in advance, knew the routine and that one could murder with impunity in the bedlam of the press room. You couldn't help being you and that he would go to the length of murder to get you. Besides, you haven't read the paper carefully." Charlie reached for it, pointing halfway down the page: " 'Andrew Anderton, age thirty-nine,' " he quoted. "You see, Fran, you actually warned Andy not to take murder on."

Fran grimaced forlornly. "Damn and blast! Then I was right, after all. One more year and Andy would have got away with it, would have known enough to wash his hands of powder traces after committing murder!"