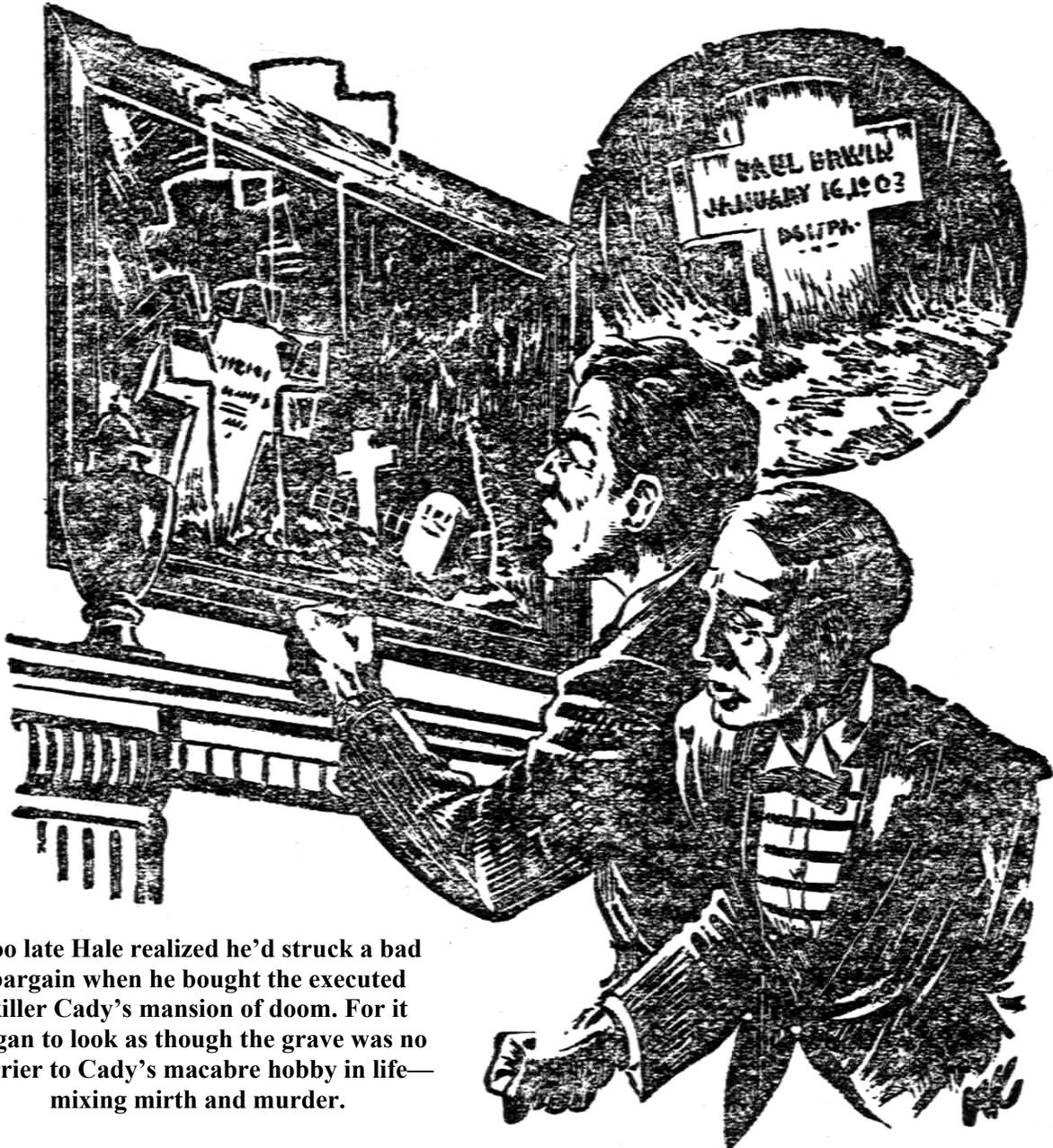


# People in Glass Tombstones

*By Norman A. Daniels*



Too late Hale realized he'd struck a bad bargain when he bought the executed killer Cady's mansion of doom. For it began to look as though the grave was no barrier to Cady's macabre hobby in life—mixing mirth and murder.

**E**VEN if there had been no vicious history about its former occupant, the sprawling house had a foreboding appearance. Walter Hale got out of the car and looked around. It was just growing dark, but here little sunlight

penetrated. Night seemed to have arrived prematurely. Thick clumps of well cared for shrubbery, great trees and a trellis loaded with vines hemmed in the place.

Attorney Field stayed in the car and

shivered. Walter Hale, slim successful architect, chuckled softly.

“Still afraid of Candy Cady, Mr. Field? He died six months ago. When the electric chair does the trick, you can bet he won’t be back.”

“I know,” Field said. “I’m being silly, I suppose, but you didn’t know Candy as I did. He was anything but sweet. I served as his attorney. He partially blamed me for letting him go to the chair, and frankly, I’m darned glad he went. The man had lived on borrowed time for ten years.”

Hale lit a cigarette, put one foot on the running board of the car and regarded Field quizzically.

“Candy was quite a character. He knew how to get money though. Really, I’m grateful to him because I’ve bought his house for practically a song. Grateful to you also, because you are the executor for Candy’s estate and you were very decent in dealing with me.”

Field slid over to the right-hand window of the car. “It remains to be seen whether or not I did you a favor, Mr. Hale. Candy was a clever vicious crook and murderer. Nobody is aware of how many men whose deaths he arranged or whom he killed himself. He was able to boast about the deaths because he knew the police could never pin anything on him.”

“Just the same,” Hale said, “I’m staying. Next week I’ll be married and I’ll bring my wife here. I don’t scare easily and—Candy is dead. Where’d he get that name anyhow?”

“The man had a propensity for eating hard mints. Listen, Mr. Hale, it’s only fair to warn you further. When they led Candy into the execution room, he sneered at everyone. He berated his former friends for not coming to his help as he believed they should have done. He said that if those so-called friends thought he couldn’t harass them from the grave, they were crazy.”

Hale grinned and hauled three heavy suitcases out of the car. The driving ban made such things as taking over a new house somewhat complicated.

“Candy made a mistake there,” Hale said. “He should have stated that he was crazy. Well, thanks for the ride out. I’ll find the caretaker inside—I hope.”

“His name is Tim Sibley—worked for Candy a lone time and I kept him on to maintain

the property. Sibley is all right, nothing like Candy. In fact, you’ll find him more than reticent. Good luck. If you need anything, let me how. I’ll have the phone connected tomorrow.”

Hale watched the car circle around the curving driveway and disappear onto the road several hundred feet away. Hale turned to pick up his bags and gasped. They were gone.

He swiveled quickly. A tall, somber-faced man stood there with one bag under his arm and holding the other two with his hands.

“You’re Sibley?” Hale asked.

“Yep.”

Hale nodded and walked into the house. It seemed even bigger than when he’d first looked over the place. He realized that he had secured a miraculous bargain. Sibley placed the three bags at the foot of the stairway and stood beside them, impassive and silent.

“Thanks, Sibley,” Hale said. “I’ll depend on you to show me about the place. Right now I just want to relax. Which is the best room to do that in.”

Sibley pointed. “Bedroom upstairs. Living room over there.”

**H**ALE walked into the big living room. There was no dust, no evidence that the house had not been occupied for a long time. Sibley, it seemed, was a wonder. Hale lit a cigarette, leaned back in a comfortable chair and let his eyes rove over the furniture and decorations.

Suddenly his cigarette sagged between his lips and he got up slowly. He pointed toward a weird picture-mirror across the room beside the fireplace. It was a scene not conducive to relaxing the nerves and it certainly had no place in a living room.

A clever artist had painted, upon the surface of a fine mirror, a cemetery. In the foreground was a fairly large tombstone and stretching behind it were many others. The mirror gave the whole thing a horrible depth.

“Sibley,” Hale yelled. “Come in here.”

Sibley walked in and stood beside Hale. “Nasty thing, ain’t it?” Sibley said.

“I didn’t notice this when I first looked at the house,” Hale grunted.

“Always been there. Ain’t never moved it. Candy figured it was about the best picture he

ever saw.”

“Then Candy’s tastes smelled as badly as his reputation. Get it out of here.”

Can’t do it—’less I take out part of the wall too. Built right into the wall.”

“Well then, rip the wall out,” Hale said. “Tomorrow will do, I can stand it for one night, I guess. What on earth was Candy thinking of to install a picture like that?”

“He liked tombstones,” Sibley grunted. “Real well. He used to chisel little ones out of stone and put the names of his friends on them, just like they were real.”

Hale shuddered. Sibley disappeared for a few moments and then returned with four miniature tombstones, almost perfect in detail. They were not inscribed.

“Candy used to send ‘em to people he hated,” Sibley explained. “Only then he’d put their name, when they were born and a day when they’d die on it. Usually died too—just as he said.”

Hale shook his head. “And that was what is known as getting away with murder.”

“Yep,” Sibley grunted. “But Candy was always home here with a lot of people when those fellows died. Didn’t do it himself. Paid somebody else.”

As if he’d spoken far too much, Sibley clamped his jaws shut and ambled out of the room. Hale heard him climbing the stairs with his bags.

Hale got up and stepped close to the picture, wondering why it had been painted on a mirrored surface. He flicked the electric light switch and fluorescent bulbs inside the wide, deep frame glowed a dull blue.

That made the picture all the more hideous. It acquired the appearance of fog creeping across the headstones and the larger monuments. Fog and ghosts. Hale reached for the switch to shut it off, debating whether or not to smash the thing right now.

His hand paused and he froze in place. Something was happening to that picture. The tombstone that was most prominent had carried no inscription, but now one seemed to be forming on it. Actual letters began to take shape:

REX CAVANAGH

JULY 9, 1898

The last line was still vague, but growing in shape. Then Hale gasped in horror. The second date—the date of death—was today!

A MINUTE later, the inscription faded slowly and finally vanished. Hale yelled for Sibley and cursed the man for his slow movements. Sibley came down the stairs no faster than if Hale had called him for a cup of tea.

Hale faced him in the hallway. “Did you ever hear of anyone named Rex Cavanagh?”

Sibley scratched the back of his neck. “Yep—friend of Candy.”

“Where does he live? I’ve got to reach him. Sibley—that picture—it showed a man’s name on the big painted tombstone. It was the name of Rex Cavanagh and the date of his death is today.”

“You don’t say?” Sibley gaped. “Well now, maybe there be ghosts and things. Yep—maybe.”

“What are you talking about?” Hale demanded. “Something may happen to Cavanagh. I want to warn him. There’s no phone here, no car, but I can reach the bus station down the road quickly enough.”

Sibley didn’t answer. He walked into the living room while Hale fidgeted near the front door. Sibley called him and Hale stood beside the man.

“You saw them words right there?” Sibley pointed to the big tombstone. “Yep, that’s where he used to put ‘em. Sometimes he liked to fool his friends and sometimes he meant it. Candy had a little projector opposite the picture. Couldn’t be seen. He’d turn it on and the name of somebody would show up in the stone, scare the daylight out of ‘em. Yes, sir.”

Hale hurried to the opposite wall. There was an elk’s head directly in line with the mirror picture. He seized it and ripped the thing from the wall. Sure enough, inside was a small projector, but there was no slide in it. The thing was stone cold and, he soon discovered, not even hooked up to the current. However the appearance of Cavanagh’s name had occurred, this projector had nothing to do with it.

Sibley turned the lights on again and watched the tombstone intently. No name appeared. Hale grabbed him by one shoulder and

swung the man around.

"Where does Cavanagh live? His life may be in danger."

"Nothin' in the elk's head?" Sibley asked.

"Yes, a projector, as you said, but it hasn't been used. Will you tell me where. . .?"

"991 Longacre Road. That's where Cavanagh lives. But mister, if Candy made that name come out on the stone, ain't no use going to Cavanagh because he'll be dead."

Hale didn't reply. He raced from the house, down the path and into the road. It was a quarter of a mile to the bus station and he had to wait ten agonizing minutes until a bus came along. He bribed the driver, to make him return without taking time to smoke a cigarette.

Further downtown, Hale hired a taxi and reached Cavanagh's home in fast time. He told the driver to wait, stepped onto the porch of the medium-sized house and rang the bell. Nobody came, although there were lights in the house. He reached for the bell again and noticed, for the first time, that the door wasn't tightly shut.

Hale opened it, called out Cavanagh's name and then boldly entered. He investigated a living room, the dining room and the kitchen without result. Upstairs, he glanced into various bedrooms. The one at the rear of the house contained what he'd been afraid of. A man lay across the bed. At first, Hale thought he was asleep until he noticed blood oozing out of the left ear. A closer examination showed that the man had been shot through the left ear.

Hale felt a prickle of horror. Candy almost always branded his murders by shooting the victim through the left ear. Nothing could be done for Cavanagh.

Hale suddenly realized what kind of position he was in. That fantastic tombstone wouldn't bring forth a name again. If he told police he knew Cavanagh was to be murdered, they'd arrest him and Hale couldn't sensibly blame them. He was on a spot and the best thing to do was leave as quickly as possible.

Yet it was only proper to at least notify the police. Hale decided to take a chance. He went downstairs, drew on a pair of gloves and used the phone. Then he hurried from the house, taking only time enough to wipe any trace of fingerprints from the doorknobs.

He piled into his cab and was driven downtown again. He dismissed the taxi, walked several blocks and then boarded a bus for the return trip home. Home! He winced at the word. Candy's house was a morgue, not a home. Hale was only grateful that he hadn't brought his bride-to-be along.

SIBLEY was sitting on the porch steps when he walked up the path. Beside Sibley was an ancient cardboard suitcase, almost bursting except for two ropes tied around it.

"Cavanagh is dead," Hale said. "He was shot through the left ear. Does that mean anything to you, Sibley?"

The caretaker looked up. "Yep, sure does. Everybody Candy ordered killed died by being shot through the left ear. He always said there'd be no chances of the corpse talking, if you know what I mean."

"What's the idea of the suitcase?" Hale asked.

"No idea. I'm just leaving. Got enough of this place. Yes sir, high time I got me another job."

"But you can't leave now," Hale protested. He knew his biggest reason for keeping Sibley on, was the fact that he was plain scared. "Not until tomorrow. Anyway, the police will want to talk with you. By running out, you might draw suspicion on yourself."

Sibley's lips pursed and he gave a low whistle. "Maybe you're right, mister. Yep, guess you are. I'll stay but only for tonight. When do the police come?"

"I don't know," Hale groaned. "I told them about Cavanagh, but I didn't stick around his house. They'd never believe I saw anything in that mirror. In fact, I can hardly believe I did either. Come on in and let's take another look at that projector."

Both of them studied the thing and knew it was impossible that it could have been used.

Hale said, very softly, "Candy made a statement before he died in the chair six months ago. He said death wouldn't stop him from harassing his enemies. I wonder if Cavanagh was an enemy."

"Not until after the trial," Sibley remarked. "Candy wanted him to arrange an alibi and pay

for it. You know, something to make the governor wonder if Candy really was guilty. Cavanagh said he wouldn't spend a dime on him. Sure, he was an enemy all right."

Hale walked over and faced the picture. He studied it from every angle, inspected the fluorescent lights around the frame, even tried to dislodge the thing.

"If the projector didn't create the inscription on that painted tombstone, what did?" he asked. "I saw the name and the dates. I don't imagine things, Sibley."

"Nobody said you did," Sibley answered in that monotone of his. "All I know is Candy promised to come back. Maybe he is back. Maybe he didn't die at all. Candy was a smart one."

"But not as smart as that," Hale derided. "Nobody fools the electric chair. It's something else. Some scheme on the part of a living person. I'm going to try it again."

Hale's hand trembled slightly as he reached for the switch, but he turned it on. The eerie scene jumped into all its ghastly clarity. The cemetery seemed to stretch for miles into the picture. The larger stone remained barren of an inscription however. Hale reached for the switch.

Then Sibley gave a yelp. Hale looked at the picture again and felt that same cold horror creep over him. Something was coming out; letters, figures:

PAUL IRWIN  
JANUARY 16, 1903

Again the last line took its good time to appear and again it was today's date. The whole thing began to fade. Hale whirled around.

"You saw it, Sibley."

"Sure did." Sibley picked up his feet and started toward the exit. "Saw too much, if you ask me. I'm getting out."

Hale ran after him. "Wait. Maybe there is a chance to save this Irwin, whoever he is. Tell me, you knew all of Candy's friends?"

"Yep, know Irwin too. Nice fellow. Candy hated him after the trial. He said Candy ought to die."

"Where does he live?" Hale demanded. "Where? Hurry up, man. We've got to try and save his life."

"Ain't no use," Sibley declared. "He's dead right now. Candy killed him. I'm getting out. Right away."

Hale doubled his right hand into a fist. He waved it in front of Sibley's nose.

"I'm asking for the last time. Where does Irwin live? Who is he?"

Sibley drew back under the menace of the fist. Then he reached up and took a firm grip on Hale's wrist to move his fist away. Sibley had strong, smooth hands.

"All I know is his name is Irwin and he lives on Mason Drive. Took things to him for Candy—when he was alive."

"Stay here," Hale ordered. "If you leave, so help me, every cop in the country will be looking for you. Understand? Anyway, how do I know the most valuable things in the house aren't going out in your suitcase?"

HALE left the house again and raced toward the bus station. Halfway there, he recalled that there was a house about half a mile beyond Candy's place—in the opposite direction. Chances were good that the house was provided with a telephone.

A car rolled past him as he turned back. Hale only glanced at it and then started running. He passed Candy's house—his own now. But recollection of ownership only brought chills to his heart. Hale was puffing badly and slowing up before he reached the other house. Work in an office wasn't very conducive to exercise of this kind.

He banged on the door and it was a couple of minutes before an irate man let him in.

"I'm sorry," Hale said. "I live next door, in Candy's house. The phone isn't connected and I have to reach a certain man. If I get him soon enough, I may save his life."

Hale was immediately led to a room where there was a desk and a phone. He checked through the phone book, found Irwin's number and dialed it. He gave a long sigh of relief when someone answered.

"Is this Paul Irwin?" Hale asked and received an affirmative answer. "Listen closely. I just bought Candy Cady's house. You've been there. You remember that horrible picture in his living room? How he used to make a name and a

date of death appear on the tombstone?"

"Who could forget?" Irwin said with a tinge of nervousness. "Plenty of names that appeared in his picture were carved into real tombstones a few days later. What's it got to do with me?"

"Not long ago the name of Rex Cavanagh appeared. I found him dead, shot through the left ear. Then your name appeared. The date of your death is today and it's almost midnight. I called to..."

"Through the left ear?" Irwin shrieked. "You're not kidding? Candy used to have his boys kill that way. The left ear. Call the cops. Candy is back. I don't know how or why, but he's back. I..."

An explosion that almost burst Hale's eardrums cut short Irwin's words. Hale's finger grew white where he gripped the phone. He heard a thump, as if the phone had dropped and a body fallen beside it. Still he held on, trying to hear something which might give away the identity of the killer.

Then someone spoke. The words were low, hollow and crammed with a satanic glee.

"Through the left ear—that's where he got it. The left ear."

Hale hung up and again considered calling the police. The owner of the house stood beside him, a puzzled expression on his face. Hale got up.

"Thanks very much," he said and bolted for the door.

Candy must be alive. Someone else had paid the penalty. Hale didn't believe in ghosts. It was Candy seeking revenge and getting it. Hale rushed back to the murderer's house. This time Sibley wasn't on the front porch and his suitcase was missing too. Hale cursed him roundly, went into the living room and only glanced at the weird picture.

He picked up a heavy fireplace poker, went upstairs and took a flashlight from one of his own bags. Then he hurried into the cellar and started a search that took him all the way into the spacious attic.

Several trunks were there, besides a lot of old furniture and the usual junk stored in attics. Hale ran the beam of his flash over the trunks. All but one carried a heavy coating of dust on top. Hale found the clean one locked, but the use of

the poker and some pressure broke the lock easily enough. He raised the lid and stepped back with a sharp cry.

There was a corpse jammed inside the trunk. A man of about fifty, clad only in underwear. His throat was discolored. He'd been strangled to death. Hale forced himself to look more closely at the gruesome thing. He even touched one hand and found it stone cold.

Flashing the beam of his light into all corners of the attic, Hale wondered what would happen next. With the flashlight still pointed away, he glanced once more into the trunk and gave another yelp of alarm. The dead man's hand seemed to be on fire. They gave off a bluish light.

Hale forgot his fear then. He picked up one of the limp hands. They were gnarled and rough. In the light of the torch they seemed quite normal, but when he shut it off, they gave off that bluish flame again.

Hale quietly closed the trunk, patched the lock as best he could and then went downstairs again. This time he searched the rooms scrupulously. A full hour passed by. Hale finally sank into one of the living room chairs, tired. His nerves were on edge and the presence of a corpse in the attic didn't help them.

**S**OMEONE stepped on the porch. Hale leaped to his feet, grabbed the poker and went to the door. He flung it wide, half raised the poker and then lowered it again. Sibley stood there, his bulging suitcase in hand.

"I came back," he said simply. "I got to thinking you were right. The cops would find me and—well, it don't make any difference anyhow. If Candy is after me, he'll know where to look."

"Irwin is dead," Hale said. "I got him on the phone. Before we could do anything, he was shot. Through the left ear. Candy told me so. He spoke over the phone, Sibley. I heard him speak. That's why I've been sitting here, waiting for him to come back. When he does, I'll brain him. So help me, ghost or mortal, I'll brain him."

Sibley blinked owlishly. "If the electric chair didn't kill him, how can you do it? Please, mister I don't want to stay here the rest of the night. I'm scared. You'd better leave too. If he comes back, we'll both be killed."

Hale kicked Sibley's suitcase. "What's in

it?" he asked.

"Just my clothes. I wouldn't steal anything, mister."

"Open it," Hale ordered. "Then, if you like, you may leave, but tell me where you are going. In a few minutes, I'll send for the police."

Sibley opened the suitcase and spilled out an array of clothing and personal effects. Hale grunted in satisfaction.

"All right. I'm sorry I made you do that, but I'm upset. That damned picture. Tomorrow, when the police get through examining it, I'll smash the thing into a million bits. I—Sibley do you think any more names would appear tonight?"

"I don't know," Sibley gulped. "I don't want to find out. Let me go, please."

"Wait a minute," Hale said. "I'm going to turn on the frame lights and see if anything happens. By the way, what do you know about Attorney Field? He was Candy's lawyer."

"Yep. Candy always said he didn't half try to save his neck. I—I better go now. I'll get a room at a hotel in town. Soon as I get there, I'll phone the police and let them know."

Hale took Sibley's arm. "Sure, after we take one last look at the picture. In fact, I think I'll go into town with you. This is no place for a man to stay all night."

They stepped up to the picture. Hale snapped the switch and those lights glowed again. Hale stood there watching. Then, something did form—more words and numbers:

FRANKIE DEVON  
MARCH 12, 1905

And once again the current date appeared. Sibley gave a howl of sheer horror and staggered back. He covered his eyes so as not to keep looking at the thing.

Hale said, "You can go any time now, Sibley. I know there's not the slightest use in trying to save this man Devon whoever he is. Alive or dead, Candy can still commit murder. Right now, I firmly believe he is back from the dead. There is no other solution."

"I—I'll go to my room," Sibley said. "I forgot something. Then I'll get out of here. I'm scared stiff. Wait here, I'll be right back."

Sibley returned in about three minutes and

he clutched a set of military silver-backed brushes.

"Candy gave 'em to me. I want to keep them," Sibley gasped. "Let's go. He might come back here and kill both of us."

"Just a minute." Hale reached down and pointed to one of the brushes. A couple of pieces of moist peppermint-stick candy clung to the bristles. "What in the world is that?"

Sibley looked, let go of the brush and screamed. Hale stepped close, brought up one fist and stopped the scream with a well-placed punch. Then he dragged Sibley into the living room and sat on him.

A POLICE CAR drove up to the door shortly after, and three detectives came in. One of them explained that the next door neighbor had heard a radio broadcast of Paul Irwin's murder, remembered that Hale had called him and, in turn, he'd notified the police.

Hale hoisted Sibley to his feet and turned him around. The detectives stared at the man.

"He claims his name is Sibley and he's been the caretaker here since before Candy died," Hale said. "Do you gentlemen know him?"

"Caretaker?" one detective grunted. "Since when did Frankie Devon soil his hands? That guy was a crook. He used to work for Candy Cady."

"Get me out of here," the pseudo-caretaker yelled. "Candy is back. He's going to kill me. He made my name appear in the picture."

"Put the cuffs on him," Hale said. "He killed Rex Cavanagh and Paul Irwin. I even know why. He tried to leave here before, but I stopped him. I suspected he had a hand in this so I questioned him about the suitcase he carried. I knew if there was anything important in it, he'd remove the stuff, and he did.

"I happened to see a full dossier that once belonged to Candy. It contained enough stuff to blackmail half the crooks in town. But Irwin and Cavanagh wouldn't play ball. They threatened to have Frankie here knocked off. So Frankie wanted to kill them, alibi himself and create such a diversion that he'd never be suspected."

"What about that picture?" one detective asked.

Hale grinned and turned on the frame lights. Once again, Frankie Devon's name appeared and

the dates. Frankie shivered and turned away.

“Frankie, posing as Sibley the caretaker, knew all about the way Candy used to scare the wits out of his friends by projecting their name and facts about their deaths on that tombstone. Frankie found another way to do it. He used a special kind of paint, invisible in ordinary light. When the frame lights are turned on, naturally the glass surface of the picture grows warm and the paint begins to gleam like fire. As the glass cools, it fades.

“Frankie—or Sibley—merely printed Cavanagh’s name on it, the date of his birth and today’s date as that of his death. He knew I’d try to reach Cavanagh and I’d have to do it by bus. I had no car, the phone isn’t connected. Frankie stalled me purposely until he knew the bus would be gone and I’d be delayed waiting for another. When I left, he did too and reached a car hidden somewhere behind the house. He beat me to Cavanagh’s and killed him.

“The same thing happened with Irwin, only that time I used a neighbor’s phone. I saw a car go by, but of course I didn’t know it was Frankie here. While I talked to Irwin, Frankie murdered him. He shot him through the left ear, as Candy always had his enemies executed. Then Frankie pulled his masterpiece. He pretended to be Candy’s ghost and talked to me.”

“Look,” one detective said. “My name is Sullivan. I’ve been a detective sergeant for eighteen years and I thought I knew everything. How’d you get wise to Frankie?”

“Upstairs,” Hale said, “you’ll find the body of the real Sibley jammed in a trunk. Perhaps Frankie bribed him to let him stay here and Sibley

caught him using that special paint. Anyway, Sibley’s fingers are covered with the stuff. Frankie worked it smoothly, you see. He’d get me away from the picture, wipe off the paint and nothing would happen when I turned on the lights again. But his hands queered him. For a caretaker who kept this place up, they were soft and well cared for. Not the hands of a worker.

“Naturally, after murdering Irwin he didn’t come right back. When he did, I was ready for him. I found a scrapbook of Candy’s containing pictures of Frankie. One item even gave his birthday so I painted that on the picture with the paint I also found. It shocked Frankie out of his wits and I added to it by sticking a couple of pieces of peppermint candy—the kind Candy always ate—to several articles in Frankie’s room. It so happened he went back to get the dossier and picked up those hair brushes as an excuse. When he saw the moist candy he almost passed out.”

“What a fool stunt,” Sullivan grunted. “We’d have got him.”

“I’m not so sure,” Hale said. “He had a neat trick arranged. He’d have left here as Sibley and I’d have sworn to his alibi for the time when those murders were committed. Later, he could have returned and removed the body of the real caretaker. Meantime, I’ll gamble that Frankie had an alibi all fixed, placing him miles from here.”

They dragged Frankie to the door. One detective went upstairs to the attic. Hale picked up the heavy poker.

“First,” he said, “I’m going to smash that picture and then open every window and air this place out. Boy—it certainly needs it!”