



A Complete Crime Novelet

THE TRIANGULAR BLADE

By CARTER SPRAGUE

Major Jimmy Grey, just out of the army, is confronted with a puzzling mystery that defies solution when a lovely lady meets death in the luxurious home of an industrial tycoon!

CHAPTER I

SILVER KNIFE IN THE STARLIGHT

BOTH saw the single eye of the lighted cigarette staring at them as they stepped out onto the terrace. Despite the bright French windows in the big house at their backs, the cunning incidence of landscaped box cedar and the moonless autumn night caused it to glow at them with an orange, suspicious gaze. It lay twenty-five or thirty feet to their left, on the dining room portion of the elevation.

"You ought to police the place up," said Jimmy Grey to the girl whose soft white arm was linked with his. "I can't feel very secluded with that thing looking at us."

"The Army must have given you a complex, darling," Dawn Barton replied. "Somebody must have thrown it there and



Because of the hair that gleamed copper in the terrace light, the identity of the corpse was unmistakable.

walked off." She pulled him around to face her, slipped both arms under his, lifted a pair of softly inviting lips.

He kissed her—he had been waiting to kiss her for two long years, part of which had been spent with the occupation forces in Munich. But all the time he could feel that cigarette and perhaps its owner staring at them. The devil of a note, he thought. But after five years in a uniform he had just relinquished, he wanted privacy—privacy plus!

"Sorry, Dawn honey," he said, unwrapping himself gently. "I'll be right back."

"You'll have to hunt long and far for me," said the girl.

But she waited none the less, looking fondly after his dim long-legged figure as he strode toward the offending butt. She wondered why she loved this hunk of man.

He was tall, yes, tall and thin. But his

hair was neither dark nor curly to match her own ash-blond tresses. Instead it was a dirty brown and straight as a plumb-line. His face was craggily undistinguished save for a pair of level blue eyes. He had been doing well as a young Manhattan lawyer before enlisting, and had won a major's rank in the Army. But successful men were not new in the life of Dawn Barton. Her uncle, Olin Wade, was the tycoon of Laketown, a man of national importance.

Outside of a quiet and at times upsetting sense of humor, there was nothing remarkable about Jimmy—except that he was Jimmy. She sighed. She was lost, had been lost ever since she had first met him, on leave from the Army, while in New York two years before on a shopping and theater spree.

SHE heard him utter something between a gasp and a grunt. He knelt quickly, after grinding out the cigarette that had offended his sense of privacy. Dimly she saw him peering around the corner of a shrub at the outer edge of the terrace. She began to walk toward him.

The sound of her footsteps broke through the web of his concentration. He lifted his head from the horror before him, saw her coming.

“Go inside, Dawn,” he told her, and even to his own ears his voice sounded abrupt and unnatural. In emergency the habit of command was still too strong to be broken. “Tell your uncle and Rick Carden to come here—and have them bring a flashlight.”

But she was already at his shoulder. He could feel without touching her the coldness that crept over her skin. For face-down on the terrace steps that led to the swimming pool beyond lay a body—a body clad in white satin with a low-cut back, a back from which the silver handle of a knife gleamed dully in the starlight.

“It’s Anne!” the girl said in a choked voice. “Oh, my heavens above, it’s Anne!”

She turned and fled abruptly, a little unsteadily, toward the French windows behind which the party was still in full swing. As he rose, dusting his knees automatically, he wished she hadn’t seen it. Inured as he was to executions and violent death, he wished he hadn’t seen it. Then, almost as an afterthought, he moved swiftly, stooped to pick up the remnants of the crushed cigarette.

He was holding the bits of paper and charred tobacco in his hand when the terrace lights went on abruptly and the French windows opened to release a babel of sound. Quickly he pulled the silver cigarette case from the pocket of his dinner jacket, opened it, and put the cigarette’s corpse at one end.

His arrival at Olin Wade’s sprawling graystone mansion a few hours earlier had been his introduction to Laketown. It had promised to be a festive one. To see well-fed, well-dressed, amiable people living so luxuriously had been an immense reassurance after a year spent in the hungry rubble of Central Europe. He himself was hungry, had been hungry for two years, to be again with Dawn.

His arrival had coincided with a party given by Mr. Wade to celebrate the engagement of Rick Carden, tall, spare, darkly handsome right bower at the Wade factory, to Anne Lewis, the charming, red-headed ingénue whose lifeless body now lay on the steps at his side. Had Jimmy and Dawn not wished to be alone rather than with the noisy crowd within the house, they would not have discovered it.

Jimmy wondered if he were fated to be pursued by violent death—there had been plenty of that abroad—and felt a brief qualm of nausea. Then he braced himself as people came hurrying toward him.

Olin Wade himself was in the lead—

whether because of speed remarkable in so gross a body or because the others, from long habit, fell in behind him Jimmy could not tell.

An unusual man, thought Jimmy, who had seen many men in his thirty-three years. Perhaps unusual was too weak a word for Olin Wade. Bald, of barely average height and weighing at least an eighth of a ton, Jimmy's first impression of his host had been of a man made up of wisdom, strength and charm, with charm the dominant factor.

Now, as Wade strode up to him, the erstwhile major was conscious chiefly of strength that amounted to power. The single pearl stud of his shirt front was gleaming opaquely against its starched white background, and his mouth was set in a single curveless line amid the flabbiness of his face.

"What is it, Jim?" he asked, and his voice was low, in full control of its owner. "Dawn was a trifle inco—"

He broke off as Jimmy stepped aside so that he could see the corpse, its identity unmistakable because of the red hair that gleamed a copper reply to the terrace lights. The line of his mouth thinned almost to invisibility. For a moment the tycoon of Laketown simply stared. When he did speak, it was in a strained, harsh tone.

"This is rotten!" he said, paused again.

Habit of command took hold then, and he swung on his heel to address the dozen or more guests clustered behind him a few feet away.

"Harry"—this to one of them—"phone Chief Potter. Then bring Rick Carden here and inform my wife that Miss Lewis has met with an accident. The rest of you wait inside. Stone will bring you whatever drinks you want."

Jimmy, anxious to be with Dawn, took a step to follow them, but Olin Wade

gripped his elbow with a pressure unexpected in a man whose fingers looked soft and flabby.

"Not you—Jim," he said, briefly at a loss to remember his house guest's name. "From what Dawn has told us, you've had some experience with this sort of thing."

"Only in the Army," said Jimmy. He wanted no part of this. "Since I'm so new to Laketown, I hardly feel—"

"That's just my point," said Wade. "The rest of us know Laketown too well. A guest in my house has been—been . . . The devil with soft soap! She's been murdered. No one is going to get away with that. I need your help."

IT WAS quick thinking, Jimmy thought, quick thinking under extreme pressure by a man used to and qualified for command. His respect for Olin Wade rose another notch.

"Very well, sir," he said. "But I can't promise to deliver anything."

"Never mind your promises," snapped Wade. "I want your help! And I've never been knighted, so don't call me 'sir'."

"Okay then—Olin," said Jimmy. He nodded toward the French windows, one of which had opened to allow a couple passage. "We have company."

His host turned and glowered for a moment at the man and woman who walked toward them. The man was tall, and the sheen of his smoothly brushed black hair gleamed in the terrace lights. He wore beautifully tailored evening clothes, and an expression of concern was on his handsomely saturnine face. It was Rick Carden, the dead girl's fiancé.

The woman beside him, who came to his shoulder, was clad in green silk with cloth of silver belt and shoulder straps. She was red-headed, but not as the corpse was redheaded. Where Anne Lewis' locks had shown fiery copper undertones, this

woman's were red and silver, a shade Jimmy had never seen on any but a few Englishwomen. Her perfect face beneath its pancake powder mask was without expression, her lavender eyes were in shadow. She was Olin Wade's wife, Marian. Her accent, as she spoke, italicized the ex-major's belief in her overseas origin.

"My dear Olin," she said, "what is it? Rick and I were in the pantry seeing to the punch and heard a commotion."

"You'd better not come closer, Marian," said Olin Wade, his voice suddenly tender. "This concerns Rick rather than you."

"But, Olin, you know my curiosity," she protested.

"Yes, Olin, what gives?" This from Carden.

"Very well," said Olin Wade. "Anne is dead. Someone stuck a knife in her back. She's dead."

"Oh, *no!*" cried Marian Wade. Her eyes went wide and she stepped back a pace. For a moment she looked unsteady on her high-heeled silver slippers. Then she rallied to protest as Jimmy stepped toward her, "I'm all right, really. It—it's the shock. Poor Rick!"

Poor Rick looked as if he had been turned to stone. Then his face began to work. First it twitched slightly. He began to grimace more and more violently. Desperately his hands sought his pockets, emerged with a handkerchief barely in time. His sneezes shook the terrace.

"By Jove!" said Olin Wade, echoing Jimmy's shocked surprise. As if aware of the younger man's thoughts, the millionaire turned and explained, "Rick has hay fever like no one else this month—devil of a time for it too."

"Sorry," the afflicted man wheezed. "Can't help it."

Holding his handkerchief to his nose,

he came forward to peer at the corpse, turned quickly away. He uttered a sort of moan which was drowned by another sneezing attack.

"Better go inside, Rick," Wade said gently. "Take Marian with you to tend to the guests and Dawn. None of us can do anything until Chief Potter gets here."

"I'll tend to Dawn, Olin, if it's all right," said Jimmy. At the rich man's nod, he added, "Call me when you want me."

CHAPTER II

ASSISTANT TO THE CHIEF

JIMMY was comfortably ensconced in the cushioned window seat of the main staircase landing of the Wade mansion when one of Chief Potter's uniformed minions summoned him. His arm was about Dawn's shoulders as she leaned against him.

His feeling was not entirely of sympathy though. In fact, he was about to toss the conventions of the occasion overboard and kiss her anyway when the summons came. After all, two years is a long time, and her nearness for more than an hour while the other guests were questioned and sent home had been disturbing.

"Chief Potter will speak to Miss Barton too," said the policeman. "He's in Mr. Wade's study."

Dawn rose, shook the somewhat disordered folds of her simple black crepe gown over curves that denied indignantly the need of other ornament. Hand in hand they followed the policeman downstairs.

Chief Potter was alone in the study. He looked oddly out of place behind the magnificent gold-tooled, leather-topped Jacobean desk as he rose politely to greet them. His iron-gray hair was brushed scrupulously across a spreading bald spot. His gold badge shone brightly to match the

twin rows of brass buttons that adorned his blue uniform coat, and his sunburned face was stern but kindly.

First Dawn, then Jimmy, told him of the discovery of the slain girl's body. When both of them had finished, Chief Potter thanked them, then suggested that he would like to talk to Major Grey alone.

"Make it plain Mr. Grey," said Jimmy. "Major Grey sounds like a chutney."

The chief looked puzzled, but let it pass. He rose as Dawn departed with a roll of her blue eyes at Jimmy to warn him not to stay too long.

"Now," said the chief, "let's have it."

"Ok," said Jimmy.

He drew out his cigarette case, put the shaggy remnants of the butt on the blotter. Potter poked at them with his forefinger and frowned.

"Doesn't look as if we could get much from that," he said, with discouragement in his voice.

"Maybe not," said Jimmy. "But I tasted a bit of the tobacco. It's mentholated."

"So it's mentholated," said the chief casually. Then he sat upright. "So it's *mentholated!*"

"It may not mean a thing," said Jimmy. "But I took a look around the house. None of the boxes have this type. Still, one of the guests may have used such cigarettes."

"Exactly, Grey," said the chief. "And I'm thinking of just one of the guests. Now I want to ask you a favor."

"Whatever I can," said Jimmy. "I'm a stranger here."

"Sure, but you're in with the Wade crowd. And it's ten to one a member of that crowd did it. What you don't know, Miss Barton can tell you. You vouch for her?"

"Absolutely," said Jimmy. "You mean you want me to go along?"

"That's right," said Chief Potter. "I'm

all right in the mill section. I was born there. But up here I'm a stooge and I know it."

"You're not one in my book. No stooge ever admitted it. That's why a stooge is a stooge. But what can I do?"

"Stick around," said Potter. "First thing, you might pull up a chair and listen while I give Mr. Carden another going over."

"But isn't the tie between a mentholated butt and hay fever a pretty thin one?"

"Not when the party's alibi is backed by only one person. But before I bring him in, look at this."

He flipped back a napkin on the desk. A number of objects lay there, contents of the dead girl's evening bag, which at first glance seemed usual enough—money, powder, lipstick, handkerchief, cards and the like. But there was also a broad-based blood-stained triangular blade with a silver handle.

"Good glory!" said Jimmy. "She was stabbed with a pie knife!"

"That's right," said the chief. "She was stabbed with a pie knife. According to Stone, the butler, it came from the sideboard in the dining room here."

JIMMY looked at the blood-stained blade, already turned black, with a detachment he did not feel. Overseas he had seen plenty of Nazi instruments of murder and torture far more grisly. But even though he had barely met the Lewis girl, there was something personal about this. He tried to picture her as she had been earlier in the evening—a gay, beautiful girl, smiling and triumphant.

Smiling and triumphant. His eyes narrowed slightly. Rick Carden, for all of his slim and athletic appearance must be a man close to forty, if not older. The bride-to-be had been barely twenty-two

according to Dawn Barton.

Was it not possible that Carden had been involved with one or more other women? He was a handsome devil. Had Anne Lewis been triumphant because she had taken him from another woman's arms? Jimmy Grey wondered, then realized that Chief Potter was again addressing him.

The chief was offering a card for his inspection.

"We found this in the dead girl's bag," he said. "What do you make of it?"

The card was an orthodox unit for business identification. It read:

LAKETOWN MOTOR COURT
Cabins—Car Park—Swimming
\$2.00 for one—\$3.00 for two
Reuben Phelps, Proprietor
Call Laketown 200-J

Jimmy handed it back to the chief with lifted eyebrows.

"Well?" he inquired. "What does that prove?"

"I don't know," said the chief unhappily. "We keep an eye on the place." He paused, shook his head. "But this Lewis girl, from what I've heard, didn't go in for that sort of thing—you know what I mean. She taught English in the high school and her job depended on her reputation."

"I see," said Jimmy. "Still, you never can tell. Some women can play a part for years."

"You ain't kidding," said the chief. He sighed. "Okay, let's have Carden in. Maybe he can shed a little light on the subject."

"The cigarette first," said Jimmy.

Rick Carden came in a few moments later. He seemed outwardly as composed as ever, looked a trifle, though only a trifle, annoyed. He might have been the

busy executive at his office held overtime by some undersecretary's mistake. But Jimmy saw tight little lines of strain about the corners of his mouth and eyes that to him were unmistakable. This man was walking on hot coals.

Carden spoke to the chief politely, then looked at Jimmy with some surprise as he sat down.

"You know Major Grey, I believe," said Potter. At Carden's nod, the chief continued, "He's the man who found the body of your fiancée." (He pronounced it *fyancy*.) "He also found the remnants of a mentholated cigarette. Do you know anyone else here besides yourself who smokes them?"

"Sorry, I don't," said Carden.

He was perfectly cool, sat there awaiting the inevitable next question. Jimmy found his admiration for this man rising.

"It was still burning when the body was found," the chief went on. "Do you deny being on the scene of the crime before Major Grey reached it?"

"Certainly," said Carden. "I was in the pantry helping Marian—Mrs. Wade—make the punch. I have a special recipe she likes to use at her parties."

"Then for Pete's sake how do you account for the cigarette?" Potter asked. His face was growing redder.

"I believe you know," said Carden, turning to Jimmy, "that I am required to say nothing until I have seen my lawyer." Jimmy nodded, and Carden went on, "But I wish only to cooperate in bringing Anne's murderer to justice."

He paused and frowned as if to recall past details. Jimmy decided he was either in earnest or decidedly clever; perhaps both.

"Just before I went into the pantry," he explained, "someone asked for one of my cigarettes, said his own were beginning to

taste like hay in his throat. I gave him one. That's all."

"And you don't remember who this person was?"

"Sorry," said Carden. He smiled apologetically. "I fear I was a bit squiffed and there were a lot of people around. That's why Marian hauled me into the pantry. She was afraid I wouldn't be able much longer to mix the punch."

"You're sure it was a man?" Jimmy put in.

"Pretty sure," said Carden. "Wish I could do more."

"Perhaps you can," said Chief Potter. He tossed the tourist camp card across the desk to Carden. "We found this in your fiancée's handbag. Does it mean anything to you?"

CARDEN simply looked at him. He picked up the card and fingered it without seeing it. Then he laughed, a short brittle, unpleasant laugh.

"In all probability," he said, "I'll be pilloried for any admission against a dead girl's honor. But a man of my years and—well, experience—is hardly fool enough to walk into marriage blind. Need I say more?"

Chief Potter looked at Jimmy, who shook his head faintly. They let Carden go. The ex-major smiled faintly at the perplexity in the chief's eyes as he stared after the murdered girl's fiancé.

"Something fishy there," Potter muttered.

"I agree," said Jimmy. "But innocent or guilty, the guy's good. I'd hate to have to cross-examine him. So what is next on the list?"

"Mrs. Wade," said Chief Potter, rubbing his chin with thumb and forefinger. He sighed. "I don't suppose she would talk, even if she knew anything. But still I can make a stab at it."

When the silver red-head was ushered in a moment later, she moved with perfect composure. Behind the polished mask of her makeup it was impossible to determine whether emotion lurked or not.

"Suppose you give us an account of your whereabouts about the time the—Miss Lewis—was discovered," said Potter.

Marian Wade shuddered, accepted with a grateful flicker of long, unmistakably genuine eyelashes the cigarette Grey offered her.

"I was in the pantry for some time before we heard the—the news," she said. "With Rick Carden. I was helping him mix punch."

"He didn't leave you at any time?" Jimmy inquired.

"Sorry," said Marian Wade. Was there faint irony in the perfection of her accents? He wondered, gave it up.

"What about Miss Lewis?" Potter asked suddenly. "Was she—I mean, what sort of a girl would you say she was?"

"I hardly knew her," said the tycoon's wife, with a faint twist of her perfect shoulders. "She was Rick's friend, as you know. I'd hardly have taken her for the type to get murdered on other people's terraces."

"Thank you, Mrs. Wade," said Jimmy quickly, before a visibly shocked Chief Potter could say something foolish.

When she had gone, he asked the chief what came next.

"The servants," said Potter. "Maybe they can give us something. Say—why don't you run down this tourist camp business while I wind things up here?"

"Glad to," said Jimmy. "Are you going to put a man on Carden?"

"I've only got a dozen on the force," said Potter apologetically, "and Carden's a pretty big gun here in Laketown. He just about runs the plant for Old Man Wade."

"Okay, skip it," said Jimmy. "I'll see if

I can bum a car somewhere.”

“I’d loan you a police job if I had a spare,” said the chief. “I’m only asking you to do it because we’re so short-handed.”

“I understand,” said Jimmy. “Be seeing you.”

CHAPTER III

JUGGERNAUT

OLIN WADE and Dawn Barton were sitting alone in the vast living room of the mansion when Jimmy Grey entered it. Costly tapestries looked down with dramatic impassivity on the wreckage of the party which would now, at shortly after midnight, have been in full swing had the murder not occurred.

Spilled ash-trays, empty and half-empty glasses were everywhere. A sadly diluted punch in which the ice had melted threatened to overflow at any minute upon the mahogany table which supported it.

“All over, Jim?” the millionaire asked him.

Jim shook his head. “Afraid not,” he said. “Where’s Mrs. Wade?”

“She drove Rick home,” said Dawn, rising and coming over to him to slip an arm through his.

“Hasn’t Carden a car?” said Jimmy, honestly surprised.

“He’s still waiting,” said Wade with a chuckle. “He came here without one just after Pearl Harbor. Don’t know what I’d have done without him. But I couldn’t get him a car then for love or money. And reconversion takes time.”

“May I borrow yours?” Jimmy asked Dawn.

She leaned close against him.

“Sure, if you borrow me with it,” she said.

Her uncle chuckled again. “You’re hooked, son,” he said.

Jimmy was doubtful, not about being hooked, but about taking Dawn with him. Still, there could be little danger in visiting a tourist’s camp, not the type of danger he was thinking of.

“Let’s go,” he said. “Excuse us, Olin.”

“You’re excused,” said the rich man. “Plain shame this had to be your introduction to Laketown.”

Dawn and Jimmy Grey left the great house by a side entrance, walked to the garage. Dawn’s car, a smart little 1942 convertible, showed the gleaming perfection of constant care. The motor started with a hum of almost silent power.

“Where to, Sherlock?” she asked him.

“Phelps’ Motor Court,” replied Jimmy.

“I must say you have ideas,” the girl remarked. “But I can’t say you pick the most de luxe surroundings.”

“Quiet, wench, this is business,” said Jimmy. “Hey, how did you know I was working on this?”

“Element’ry my dear Watson. First, Chief Potter held you and let me go—and you simply aren’t a suspect. Secondly, Rick said you were in on his second questioning.”

“How things do get around!” said Jimmy. “Maybe you can give me a steer. You knew this Lewis girl well?”

“Pretty well,” said Dawn. “We weren’t intimate or anything—not until Rick got his crush on her. Why?”

“Would you say she was the type to spend much time at a place like this tourist camp?”

“Emphatically and definitely not,” the girl replied. “Much as I hate to speak ill of the dead, little Anne was out for big game, and her mind was set on getting her man roped, thrown, hogtied and led to the altar.”

“Okay,” said Jimmy. “But why would she be carrying a card to the joint in her handbag?”

"I don't believe it!" said the girl. "But still—"

"Exactly," said Jimmy. "Well, that's why we're on our way there. And while we're going, what gives with this Carden anyway? I mean general background and all."

"Oh, he's been Marian's devoted lapdog for years," Dawn told him. "That's why we were all so surprised when he began going around with Anne—poor Anne! I feel like a loathsome beast for speaking as I did about her."

"*Nil nisi malum de mortuis,*" said Jimmy. "Just because a person is dead doesn't qualify him for a coat of whitewash. But back to Rick—where did he come from?"

"New York," Dawn said promptly. "Back in Forty-one, when I finished at Miss Walker's, Uncle Olin met me in Grand Central. He gave a party for me at the Pierre. It was off-season for a coming out party, but what can an out-of-town girl expect? Anyway, someone brought Rick and Marian along. She was playing in an English play on Broadway then, and Uncle Olin fell like the well-known ton of bricks."

"She is English then?" he asked. "I thought so."

"And beautiful. Don't you think she's lovely?"

"Certainly. But a little too porcelain-perfect for me. I like my women a little on the warmer side."

"Darling!" said Dawn.

SHE took her eyes from the road to cast an adoring glance at him and nearly ran the car into the ditch.

"Steady," said Jimmy. "Later on we'll get around to us. But how did Carden land here? I should think your uncle would have been at pains to keep him away."

"Not Uncle Olin," said Dawn. "He isn't like that at all. He's pretty wonderful really. As it happened, he needed a man to handle the plant for him. He was too old to stand the war production pace and his best man had been drafted. Rick was over age and had the training, so Uncle Olin gave him the job. He's done wonderfully well at it."

"He looks able to handle himself," said Jimmy absently.

He was trying to get this situation straight. So Marian Olin and Rick Carden had known each other before her marriage to Olin Wade. That took some digesting.

Rich elderly husband—despite his charm; much younger wife with beauty; and devoted former swain. Here were all the ingredients of a first-class triangle. Jimmy tried to add it up angle by angle and found himself reaching too many conclusions.

They were skirting the shores of the lake which gave the town its name. The moon had finally risen above the pines that rimmed its further shore, tipping them with silver and reflected its image in more golden distortion upon the calm water. It was a night for fall romance, not murder.

Dawn steered the car through a white wooden gate with a big sign that was an enlarged reproduction of the card found in the dead girl's bag.

A hundred yards up a bumpy dirt road they reached another gate, from whose post an electric lantern hung.

To the right beyond it, a broad driveway passed between twin rows of a half-dozen demure, white-painted cabins each. Directly facing this gate was a larger building, obviously the office, with a pair of gasoline pumps alongside. Light streamed through the windows.

"Pull in on the wrong side here, honey," said Jimmy. "I may be inside a

few minutes, so if anything goes wrong just scream like the dickens.”

“What could go wrong here?” the girl asked, braking the car to a halt in a small shower of gravel.

“Wolves!” said Jimmy ominously. “It’s wooded country.”

”What’s wrong with wolves?” the girl countered.

He laughed and opened the door, turned back to blow a kiss at her as he stepped to the driveway. So while he had been subconsciously aware that another car had turned at the far end of the lane between the cabins and was coming back toward them, he missed its approach on the other side of the driveway.

The lights snapped on as he turned to walk around the front of the convertible, caught him full face. There was the sudden roar of a powerful motor racing, then the other car was swerving directly toward him. It was less than thirty feet away and picking up speed.

Jimmy gave vent to a yell. He could thank his wartime experience then for saving his life. Instinctively he dropped, as if under a dive bombing attack, and rolled under the convertible for cover.

One of the wheels of the other car tore his coat, so close did it come, and he could feel the wind of it and smell the aroma of gasoline. The convertible rocked on its springs as a bumper rasped against its right rear mudguard.

Then it was gone. Jimmy lay there on the dirt under Dawn’s car, and swore to himself softly.

After a while—it was probably a matter of seconds, although it seemed hours—he heard another voice swearing, almost in time to his own. He turned his head in his confined quarters and, made out the silhouette of Dawn’s ash-blond head down against the road peering at him.

“Hello,” he said. “So you do care!”

“Jimmy! Oh, I thought you were dead!”

“You were not alone,” said Jimmy. “Help me out of here. I’m weak as a puppy.”

WHEN he finally got to his feet, he was still trembling. Dawn put her arms around him as he sat on the running board and held him close.

“Do I have to go through this every time to get this?” he asked as her lips caressed his grimy face.

She laughed, and the sound brought him out of it.

“Did you get a glimpse of the low-down character who was driving that jalopy?” he asked.

“No,” was her reply. “How could I? All of a sudden the headlights came on, and then the bumper hit my rear mudguard. I didn’t even get a chance to read the license plate. Oh, Jimmy, I’m a rotten Watson!”

“A fit match to my Holmes,” he replied. He stood up then, after disengaging himself, took a tentative step. “No bones broken.”

He looked down the alley from which the car had come. It was quite broad for a street of that sort, possibly to allow plenty of room for parked cars.

“Okay, honey,” he said, after a moment. “Let’s get it over with. It may not be pretty, but after this I’m keeping you with me.”

“Try and shake me now,” said Dawn.

They walked around the car to the door of the main building. Without stopping to knock, Jimmy tried the door. It was unlocked, so he flung it open and walked in, the girl at his heels.

A seamed, skinny, sunburned man in a shiny black alpaca jacket was bent over an old roll-top desk. He started as he heard the new arrivals, quickly slammed the top

of the desk down and rose to meet them.

"Don't you believe in knocking?" he snapped, in a disagreeable nasal voice. He surveyed Jimmy's begrimed face and torn clothing, cast a bloodshot eye at Dawn. He was wearing gold-rimmed bifocal glasses. "Besides," he added, "I ain't got no room tonight. All full up."

"Don't you believe in keeping track of what happens in this camp of yours?" asked Jimmy, his voice ominously low in pitch. "There was enough noise out there just now to wake you out of an alcoholic stupor."

"Don't drink," said the man. He grinned and the grin was not pleasant. "Besides, it don't pay to pay too much heed to what goes on in a place like this. What's it to you, bub?"

"Listen to me, you eighth-rate racketeer," said Jimmy, stepping close to him. "I was almost run down out there. Suppose you tell me who was here last?"

"Suppose I don't?" said the man. "Besides, in a place like this, it's kinda hard to remember."

"I'll bet, Brother Phelps," said Jimmy. "Let's see what you have in that desk of yours."

"You lay a hand on that desk and I'll have the police on you," bleated Phelps. "Hey! You can't hit a man with his glasses on—it's a penal offense!"

"Very well, we'll take them off," said Jimmy.

Moving with deceptive gentleness, he hooked a finger under the gold-rimmed bifocals, drew them from the cowering man's nose, handed them gravely to Dawn.

"What you agoin' to do?" Phelps quivered.

"Nothing, if you play ball. As for the police, I'm doing a little job for Chief Potter right now. How would you like to have a squad go through those cabins of

yours tonight? I didn't think so. Well, talk. Who was here?"

"I can't tell you, mister, honest I can't."

"Sorry, baby," Jimmy said to Dawn. "I warned you it might be rough. Take a look in the desk and see what's under the blotter."

"She ain't got no right to—" the man cried, moving to intercept the girl.

Jimmy made a motion as if to hit him. The fellow cringed. Then, behind him, Dawn whistled.

"Look!" She cried. "Money, money, money!"

"That's mine!" cried Reuben Phelps, roused to a show of valor by the possibility of being robbed.

It was evident where his chief interest in life lay.

Jimmy gave him a glance of disgust, then deliberately turned his back.

CHAPTER IV

CAT OUT OF THE BAG

DAWN had fanned a mess of bills. Jimmy looked at them, saw they were all hundreds, all new, that there were fifteen of them. He looked at Dawn quizzically, then held out his hand. She obediently let him have them.

Facing the fearful, if irate Reuben Phelps, Jimmy smiled, took a cigarette lighter from his pocket, and ignited the flame with his thumb.

"Some of us," he said gently, "are not as avid for the root of all evil as you, Mr. Phelps. Some of us even care how we get it."

"You can't do that!" the tourist camp keeper cried, and there was anguish in his twang.

He made a pass at the bills, but Jimmy pulled the money back from him, held the lighter close enough so that a little curl of

smoke rose from the corner of one of the bills. Phelps bleated like an anguished sheep.

“Okay,” said Jimmy. “Who gave it to you?”

“I can’t tell you mister!” cried Phelps. “Honest I can’t!” He looked ready to go down on his knees and plead.

“Very well then,” said Jimmy. “Suppose we put it another way. Do you know Mr. Richard Carden?”

“Sure do. Who doesn’t in Laketown?”

“Has he ever come here?”

Phelps hesitated, and Jimmy singed another bill. The action drew a prompt affirmative.

“Has he ever come here with a redheaded lady?”

“I dunno. He doesn’t always bring the same one. . . No! Don’t burn ‘em! Sure he has.”

“Can you give me the lady’s name?”

“No, I can’t mister, honest I can’t. That’s the one thing I can’t tell you!”

Jimmy gave him a long stare. He had questioned too many desperate people abroad not to know when he had drawn from them all they were going to give. He threw the money carelessly on the floor, stepped to the wall telephone and called the Wade mansion.

“Chief Potter?” he asked, and Phelps who, his money recovered, had been about to launch a new protest, deflated like a pricked blimp. “This is Grey. Everything all right at your end?”

“Everything’s a mess,” said the chief. “You?”

“Wide open here,” said Jimmy. “Wait there and keep Mr. Wade with you, will you? I’m coming back and bust this thing wide open.”

He hung up, saw that Phelps was looking at him with an odd gleam in his eye. Again taking the receiver from the hook, he wrenched it from the box, cord

and all.

Phelps squawked in despair. “You can’t do that.”

“Pay for it,” said Jimmy coolly, “with some of that blood money you got tonight. You made plenty. Come, Dawn, let’s get out of this backwoods Plaza.”

“I didn’t tell you nothin’!” cried Phelps desperately after them. “Remember, I didn’t tell you nothin’!”

“You told me plenty,” said Jimmy, slamming the door after Dawn and walking around to his own seat on the right side. “Sorry, honey. Hope you don’t think I’m just an American Gestapo boy.”

“I wish you had hit him,” Dawn said sweetly. “Ugh! Talk about nasty men!”

“Let’s not, if you don’t mind,” said Jimmy. “Step on it now—back to the house.”

“Okay,” the girl replied. “Do you really know who did it?”

“Yup,” said Jimmy, lighting cigarettes for both of them and handing one to her. “But I have so little proof I couldn’t file charges of a misdemeanor. The job now is to force our baby into the open.”

“Tell me, darling,” Dawn pleaded. “I’m going crazy.”

“I could still be wrong,” said Jimmy. “For Pete’s sake, this isn’t the way you drove out here.”

“Well,” said Dawn, “you said to step on it, so I’m taking the short way home.”

“Then on the way out here—” His voice had a metallic ring that frightened the girl. She took a placating hand off the wheel and caressed his torn sleeve.

“You didn’t mind, did you, honey? I only wanted to have a few moments alone with you?”

“Mind!” he exclaimed, and his voice was almost choked. “Mind? No, of course not, Dawn. The only thing is, this is murder, and in your own home. And by taking those few minutes, we not only lost

a chance to nab our killer, but I nearly got killed.”

THE atmosphere was a trifle strained the rest of the way back to the Wade mansion.

Dawn drove the convertible expertly up the long winding driveway that led to the porte-cochere. Though it was after one o'clock, the big graystone pile was still alight downstairs and an orange glow in a number of the upstairs windows revealed that few of its inmates were early to bed that night.

Another car blocked the entrance of the entrance, and Dawn pulled up directly behind it. Jimmy got out, approached the other car, released the brake and wheeled it forward and out of the way.

The dashboard emergency moved easily, and to brace it, he jammed some pieces of cardboard he found on the floor in front of it, wedging them well in. Heat from the engine still flooded the driver's compartment. Then, dusting his hands, he returned to Dawn, who was regarding him somberly from the steps.

“Whose car is that?” he asked.

“One of ours,” said Dawn. “Why?”

“Oh, nothing,” said Jimmy. “Did you lock yours?”

“We never do here on the place,” she told him.

“Lock it,” said Jimmy.

It was an order. She obeyed him, looking puzzled and a little frightened. When she came back to him, she held the keys. She stood close in front of him and under the dim overhead light he saw that she was crying.

“For Pete's sake, honey!” he said, and then she was sobbing in his arms.

“I might have k-k-killed you!” she bawled. “Why don't you b-b-beat the devil out of me?”

“Well, you didn't,” said Jimmy. He put his arms around her, held her close. “But with your permission I intend to give you plenty of further chances.”

“Oh, Jimmy!” she said, and it was all right.

He held her until her sobbing was spent, then lifted her chin, kissed her lips and made passes at her eyes with his handkerchief.

“Come on, darling,” he said. “We've got work to do. And nasty work, I'm afraid. Maybe you'd better go upstairs and let me handle it alone.”

“You mean, you don't want me?” she asked. Her voice trembled, and she looked like a whipped puppy.

“I surrender,” he said. “But don't be surprised at anything. This isn't going to be nice.”

“Beat the devil out of whoever it is, and I'll help,” she said.

“It's not that kind of nastiness this time,” he told her. “Let's get it over with.”

Olin Wade and Chief Potter were awaiting them in the study. Both sets of eyes popped as they took in Jimmy's torn and disheveled condition.

“Great Scott, Jim!” said the millionaire, removing his cigar. “What on earth happened to you?”

“I had a little tangle with our killer,” he told them bluntly.

“Then you saw who it was?” the chief asked. “I knew I shouldn't have let you go on that assignment. Those tourist camps are tough places. Who was it?”

“Hold it,” said Jimmy.

He sank into a comfortable leather chair and eased aching bones. The dive under the car and his argument with Phelps had taken more out of him than he had realized at the time.

He smiled quickly at Dawn, who had perched herself on the arm of the chair.

"I didn't see our killer," he went on. "I've got a good idea who it is, though. But until I get proof, we're out of luck. Mr. Wade, do you mind if I ask you a few very frank and intimate questions?"

The millionaire sighed and settled himself in his chair as if to prepare himself for a blow.

He seemed to know what was coming.

"Fire away, son," he said in a weary voice. "When a murderer's loose, it's no time to spare feelings."

"Thank you, sir," said Jimmy.

He sat up straight and carefully marshaled his words. "Mr. Wade—Olin," he said, "to the best of my knowledge, and I know mighty little, mind you, your wife has been accepting the attentions of another man."

"You mean Carden, I suppose," said Wade.

JIMMY, who thought he had seen everything, was honestly shocked at this avowal. He could feel Dawn stiffen beside him, give a little cry.

"Sorry, youngster," said the millionaire to his niece. "But since it's out, you might as well hear it from me. This young man of yours would have to tell you about it later anyway. I know your curiosity."

"Uncle Olin!" was all the girl could say, but there was endless sympathy and distress in the two words.

But if the other two were shocked, the effect upon Chief Potter was almost ludicrous. He sat up as straight as if someone had poked a shish kebab skewer down his back. His eyes popped and his mouth fell open.

"Mr. Wade!" he said. "You knew about this and yet you gave this man a job?"

"Why not?" said Wade. "I was afraid if I sent him away Marian would leave

me."

The rest of them sat and stared.

"Then you mean," said Jimmy, groping for understanding of this amazing man, "that you knew about Carden all along?"

"Hardly," said Olin Wade. He looked suddenly like an old man. "I only made the discovery recently. And Rick's engagement seemed to clear things up so that no—er—drastic action was necessary."

"Poor Uncle Olin!" said Dawn. "I think you're the biggest man who ever lived."

"In one sense, perhaps," said the millionaire with a rueful glance at the expanse of his waistline. He sighed. "But I seem to have handled things badly. This murder tonight—"

He made another aimless gesture.

"But, Mr. Wade!" exploded Chief Potter. "Why if I found a guy on the force even looking at my Molly I'd take him apart!"

At that moment the sound of a motor starting on the driveway caused all of them to pause. Then came a clash of gears, the noise of a motor bucking savagely as it picked up speed on the driveway. Jimmy rose.

"The keys, Dawn," he said.

"Not without me," she said positively, sliding from the arm of the chair and moving swiftly toward the door.

"Hey!" bellowed the chief, overturning a chair as he started after her. "It's no job for a girl!"

"It's no time for an argument either," said Jimmy, racing after Dawn. "Where's your car, Chief?"

"Dolan's picking me up in half an hour," Potter muttered.

Both men reached the car in a dead heat as Dawn put her foot on the starter. Behind them they left a forlorn old man,

sitting sunk in his chair and holding a dead cigar in his hand.

CHAPTER V

ENGLISH DRIVER

BEFORE either of the men could object to Dawn's presence, she had the convertible in gear and was racing after their quarry, whose tail-light was no longer visible.

"Where to?" Dawn asked.

"Carden's house," said Jimmy quickly.

"I know a short cut," said the girl as they turned into the main road. "It's rough, but .it cuts the distance by a third."

"Don't break your lovely neck," said Jimmy, wedged in between Dawn and Potter.

There was pertinence in his remark, for the girl had skidded the car onto a rough, winding dirt road that seemed to be a rocky Jacob's ladder right into the sky.

"Are you crazy?" Potter asked. "We'll crack up this crate on this goat path. Why Carden's house anyway?"

He had taken his service revolver out and was busily rolling the cylinder close to the dashboard light to make sure the chambers were loaded properly.

"Sit tight, Chief," said Jimmy quietly. "We'll get there first if Dawn doesn't crack us up."

"Shut up!" she said, expertly picking an all but invisible pair of grass-grown ruts that seemed to run head-on into a cluster of trees.

"Two will get you ten that this little wench who got shivved blackmailed Carden into marrying her," said Potter. "What else could that card in her bag mean? He probably lost his head and stuck her with the first weapon handy and used Mrs. Wade for his alibi."

"I'll take that bet," said Jimmy quietly.

Chief Potter stared at him, grunted. "You'll lose," he said.

"Maybe, Potter. We'll see."

They went careening down the other side of the tree-and-rock-covered hill and for a while the convertible rocked dangerously on its springs. Once the dented rear mudguard scraped rasping warning on the tire beneath it. Then, suddenly, they were on a paved surface again.

In a surprisingly short time they pulled up in front of a pleasant-looking if small white house backing a small patch of lawn with low privet hedge in front of it. A driveway ran alongside it to a garage in back.

"Take the car down the street and park it," said Jimmy to Dawn. "On the other side. And for Pete's sake, keep your lights off, emergency brake light and all. Got it?"

"Got it," said Dawn. "And, honey, please be careful. After two years of worrying about you in the Army, I don't want anything to happen to you now."

"We made it at that," said Potter, who had jumped out and was peering around for evidence of the other car. "Nice going, Miss Barton"

Jimmy slipped out then with a farewell squeeze of Dawn's hand to join the chief. The girl drove on as ordered for a hundred yards or so, pulled in under a towering elm on the other side.

Chief Potter walked directly toward the front door, but Jimmy laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Over here," he whispered, nodding to a spot beside the door where a lighted window showed.

Potter hesitated briefly, then joined him. Both men melted into the shrubbery that rose close to the foundations.

Through the window they could see Rick Carden. He was no longer a suave article. His coat was off, his evening

waistcoat unbuttoned, his wing collar and tie removed. Deep in an armchair, with a glass in his hand, his face was a mask of enraged frustration. His well-cut nose was red from sneezing.

"He don't look happy," whispered the chief. "But then I never saw a killer who did."

"Shhhhh!" said Jimmy, as a car with lights on appeared down the street. It drew to a halt, still bucking.

"She's got trouble with her gears," muttered the chief.

"No," whispered Jimmy. "I jammed her emergency brake before I came into the house."

The look Potter threw him was eloquent. Then both men ceased to converse and concentrated utterly on the movements of the two they were watching.

MRS. WADE moved rapidly up the walk. She did not pause to ring the doorbell, but opened the door with her own key. A moment later they saw Carden jump to his feet as she came into the room where he sat.

"Marian!" he said. "Are you crazy?"

To their surprise, the listeners could hear. Looking up, Jimmy saw that the window under which they crouched was open at the top.

"You're jolly well right I'm crazy!" cried the millionaire's wife. "So you knew Olin wouldn't crack down on you because of me, and figured you'd run out on me!"

"For heaven's sake, Marian, I covered you up when you lost your head tonight—and stuck my own neck out with the police."

"You were planning to leave me married to that old bag of tired flesh!" cried the ex-actress.

Even in anger the beauty of her trained British enunciation did not fail her. She was lovely, standing there in the green and

silver evening dress, with a sable cloak tossed carelessly across her shoulders—lovely and utterly, dangerously mad.

"You didn't have to kill Anne," said Carden. "What harm had she done you?"

"Stop spoofing, Rick," said Marian. "I told the little tramp I'd have her run out of town if she didn't let you go. And then she tried to blackmail me on the tourist camp business. She knew all right."

"She and the rest of Laketown," said Carden coolly. "I was merely trying to spare your feelings."

"Rick!" The woman's cry was anguished. "And I thought you were merely waiting until I could get a divorce. That was our agreement, wasn't it?"

"It *was*," said Carden, lifting his glass to look at it against the light, "until I found I didn't need the money any more. I'm doing all right—or I was, until tonight."

"Rick, then you don't love me?" The voice was low and heavy with anguish.

"Are—you—kidding?" was the brutal response.

Marian Wade drew the pistol from the silver mesh bag in her hands, drew it and pointed it at Rick Carden's chest. He didn't see it for a moment. When he did, he dropped his glass. "Marian, for—"

The rest was drowned in the heavy bark of the service gun in Potter's hand. Jimmy struck at the chief's hand before he could fire again, but it was too late. Potter's aim had been too good.

Marian Wade lay dead on the carpet, her silver-red hair slowly turning a darker hue. . . .

* * * * *

"There's one thing you've got to tell me," said Dawn when, with the first streaks of morning with its earliest yellow-gray tints in the eastern sky, Jimmy climbed wearily into the car beside her in

front of the town's one police station.

"I don't have to tell you a thing," he replied, and stifled a yawn.

"None of that," said Dawn. "You *knew* it was Marian, right after we left the charming Mr. Phelps."

"I was pretty sure it had to be," said Jimmy.

"But how? I still can't believe it. I knew poor Marian was high-strung, but a killer!"

"Poor Marian was an actress," said Jimmy. "She was playing her biggest role right here—how to be lady of the manor until she could get away with a sizable chunk of the Wade exchequer. It takes a type of madness to conceive of such a role. And when she found her fellow player was not only laughing at her but was planning to ring in a new lead in her place, she blew up."

"But how did you know?"

"There were a number of indications. First, I doubt if a man present, even including the unestimable Rick Carden, would stab his worst enemy with a pie knife. And at a party. That was an act of hysterical, feminine passion if ever I saw one."

"Don't go superior male on me," warned Dawn.

"I'm not, honey, but a woman like Marian Wade is an inferior being—just as a man who is trained to win his way by conniving and trickery is. But you gave me the second clue."

DAWN'S eyes opened wide.

"I did?" she asked in astonishment.

"You did, honey, while we were driving to see our friend, Mr. Phelps. I've always been suspicious of this elderly-husband-beautiful-young-wife-devoted-swain setup."

"That's because you have a nasty mind, Jimmy."

"It was just as well that I did tonight," he replied. "I kept turning it over, and one of the possibilities I thought of was the one which turned out to be true. And then, when Marian tried to run me down, I was sure."

"Do you have to mention that?"

"I do if you want to know how I spotted her. In the first place, it was a stupid stunt—the same sort of stupid stunt the murder itself was. There were too many possibilities of being seen, too many of failure. It showed a hysterical person gone over the edge of sanity."

"But I don't at all see how that spelled Marian."

"If you'll remember," Jimmy went on, "that it is highly improbable she saw me until she switched her lights on, you should get it. You don't? Okay, Watson, remember which side of the alley it was that she was driving on?"

"Oh, Jimmy—it was the wrong side!"

"Yes, because we were parked on the wrong side the other way, and there was plenty of room for three cars to pass us. But it was the right side for an Englishwoman. And an English driver, under the stress of great emotion or fear is apt to revert, no matter how many years he has been over here. I've seen enough of our boys in England smashed up just that way."

"And I never thought of it," said Dawn.

"And that's why Brother Phelps was afraid to talk, even under duress. Marian had paid him to keep quiet and he was afraid of the Wade influence. He wanted to stay in business. Then when we got back to your house and the other car was still hot, I was sure. So I jammed the emergency brake with cardboard and had you lock your car."

“But, Jimmy,” said Dawn, looked at him with almost frightened eyes, “that means you were expecting her to listen in and do what she did.”

“She *had* to listen in. Her life was at stake. I couldn’t be sure whether she would crash in on us and try to frame Carden, or would go and try to kill him. So I arranged it for either break. And your uncle fixed that by his amazing frankness. It told her Carden had been playing her for a prize sap. She couldn’t take that. Not tonight.”

“Jimmy, that’s Machiavellian!” Dawn wailed. “I’ll never be able to get away with anything.”

“Anything but murder,” said Jimmy, gathering her into his arms.

They kissed, but not for long. It was broken as if by mutual consent.

“Jimmy,” said Dawn, “I feel like a heel. There’s Uncle Olin—he’s lost a lot tonight. His wife and the man whom he relied on most at the plant. He’s going to be an awfully lonely man.”

“It is probable,” said Jimmy, “that his amazing philosophy can stand even this double shock. But in case he finds it difficult, maybe you and I can help him out.”