



# NEW DETECTIVE

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## FOUR BIG NOVELS

- FOR MURDER—OR WORSE**.....**John D. MacDonald** 12  
The timid little salesman of eternity gagged at killing—yet killed for a gag!
- CORPSE IN WAITING**.....**Larry Holden** 46  
His best girl thought Cantrell was out of this world—and did her best to send him there!
- DEATH LIES DREAMING**.....**Day Keene** 76  
McClarnen dreamed of making a killing—then chose himself as the corpse!
- THE BLOOD STONE**.....**Cornell Woolrich** 102  
She had to find a little white stone of death—the one thing that could save her from the chair!

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## SHORT CRIME-ACTION STORIES

- MIND OVER MAYHEM**.....**Mack Reynolds** 37  
If someone threatened you with a bottle of scotch—and all you had was a gun—what would you do?
- TERROR'S NIGHT**.....**I. R. Austin** 40  
The unseen killer of the mountain issued a challenge—who dies there?
- KILL ME ONCE AGAIN**.....**Bryce Walton** 66  
In the half world of mortal terror a man may perish—yet live to pay the price of murder!

## DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

- THE WITNESS CHAIR**.....The fearsome ladies.....**The Editors** 6
- THE THIRD DEGREE**.... Mitt glommers and P.K.'s ....**Hallack McCord** 45
- STRANGE TRAILS TO MURDER**..... Murder without trace .....**Lee** 90
- ASK A BODY**..... A corpse for Christmas .....**H. Hassell Gross** 92
- SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS**..... Code masters .....**M. E. Ohaver** 99

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# DEATH

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A NOVEL

By  
**Day Keene**

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*McClarnen took a quick step toward the stove plant and a machine gun slug slapped him around. . . .*

*McClarnen dreamed of making a killing—then chose himself as the corpse!*

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# LIES DREAMING

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Grave for Two

**J**OHNNY McCLARNEN laid the pencil on the kitchen table. Then he picked it up and chewed one end of it. He wasn't a certified accountant. He was an armored truck guard. His job was to carry money, not to count it. But figures didn't lie. The guy in the bar had been right. As closely as he could calculate, May was bleeding his paycheck

of a big, fat fifteen dollars every week.

A big, homely, freckled-faced youth, with a mop of unruly red hair, McClarnen returned May's itemized budget and special checking account book to their spot back of the flour container and got a bottle of cold beer from the ice box.

*Damn that wise guy in the bar!* He wished he hadn't dropped into Kelly's. He wished the guy hadn't popped off. What he hadn't known hadn't hurt him. Now, even if May could explain, there

would always be a small doubt in his mind.

Carrying the beer with him, he walked on into the bedroom and sat on the edge of their bed. He and May had been married for six months. He loved her. He couldn't imagine not being married to May. But it wasn't fair of May to do what she was doing. If May wanted money for some purpose, all she had to do was confide in him. He was, after all, her husband.

"Ha," the wise guy in Kelly's had jeered. "There's a little thief in every dame, and marriage seems to bring it out. Look at the dames in this bar. You don't think they're single, do you? Naw. You know better. They're spending some guy's hard-earned dough. Some drink it up. Some play the ponies. Most of them have another guy they like. A guy they're fattening up with their husband's paycheck. Then at twenty minutes of six they hurry home to put a gob of delicatessen potato salad and cold salami on the table so they can tell Johnny what a hard day they've had and isn't it awful now the prices they charge for meat."

McClarnen sipped at his beer. The wise guy had the name Johnny. But he hadn't singled him out. He was just talking generally. Or was he? The small veins in McClarnen's temples began to throb. Maybe the guy knew something he didn't. Maybe he was trying to tip him.

Fluffing a pillow, McClarnen leaned back against the headboard of the bed and itemized what he knew about May. It wasn't much. He knew she was twenty-three and it had been love at first sight for both of them. She'd been working as a billing clerk in the First National Bank. He'd insisted she quit her job when they married. May had protested, but she'd quit. He hadn't probed into her past. It hadn't mattered. He had a few secrets of his own he hadn't offered as a topic of conversation. What had happened before

they met didn't count. It was now and the future that were important.

McClarnen lighted a cigarette. Then, though, there was the matter of children. He wanted a family. May claimed she did. But every time he mentioned the subject May cried and suggested that perhaps they'd better wait a year or two before taking on the added responsibility of a child. And it wasn't that May didn't love him. There were ways a man could tell. She waited on him hand and foot. You'd think the sun wouldn't rise if he didn't enjoy his breakfast. His cigarette suddenly bitter, the big youth snuffed it out.

"That's the hell of it," the wise guy in Kelly's had scoffed. "Along with being thieves, most dames are born actresses."

McClarnen returned the empty beer bottle to the kitchen and sat down in a chair to wait. It was twenty minutes of six when he heard May's key in the front door.

The blonde girl, her arms laden with small packages, came in with a breathless rush and squealed in dismay when she saw him. "Oh, Johnny. You're home. You've been home all afternoon. They've changed your afternoon off." Spilling her packages on the table, she lifted her lips to be kissed.

McClarnen kissed her, ashamed of the thoughts he'd been thinking. May wasn't a dame. She was his wife. She loved him. Her breath was sweet. She hadn't come from any barroom. Still, there was the matter of the fifteen dollars. "From Thursdays to Tuesdays," he said. He made the question casual. "Where you been?"

May slipped out of his arms and took off her coat. Her back was to him when she spoke. "A movie. Why?"

McClarnen wished she hadn't hesitated. "I just wondered," he lied.

May busied herself about the kitchen, setting the table, opening packages. "You don't mind a pick-up supper, just for

once, do you, Johnny? I meant to have baked spareribs, but for some reason the time got away from me."

She was talking too fast, too brightly. She smiled too much. There was no doubt about it. May was hiding something. McClarnen lighted another cigarette. "No. Not for once. What's for supper?"

"Potato salad and cold cuts," May smiled. "With a nice big piece of cheesecake for desert."

McClarnen ate, but it was an effort to swallow. With every bite he took he could hear the wise guy in Kelly's sounding off.

**A**FTER supper he picked up his hat and it was May's turn to ask where he was going. "Just down to Kelly's," he told her. "I want to see a guy about a dog."

May reacted as if he had slapped her. "Oh," she said. "I see. Well, have a good time."

It was the closest to a quarrel that they had come. It wasn't until the downstairs door had clicked behind him that he remembered this was the night of the Policeman's Ball and they had tickets to it and May had spent the weekend making over an old evening dress. He turned to go back to the flat again, then thought, *The hell with it.*

He wanted to talk to the guy in Kelly's, learn if by any chance the wiseacre did know something about May and had been singling him out.

To reach Kelly's he had to pass the Bijou. Mason, the manager, was standing on the walk inspecting the marquee. Mason wanted to know how tricks were. McClarnen said they were fine and led the subject around to May.

"Why, no," Mason said. "We haven't been honored with Mrs. McClarnen's patronage for some time, Johnny. I see her go by here almost every afternoon, though."

McClarnen walked on, trying to tell himself it didn't mean a thing. The Bijou wasn't the only movie in town. May could have gone to any of a dozen others. But had she?

The man for whom he was looking was no longer supporting the wood in Kelly's. Kelly only vaguely remembered him. The saloon keeper was more loquacious on the subject of wives. "Yeah. We get a lot of 'em," he told Johnny. "Every afternoon a half dozen dames I know are married spend their afternoons in here. You're lucky you married a nice sweet kid like May."

"Yeah. Sure," Johnny agreed with him. "Let's have a double rye, Kelly."

He seldom drank to excess. It was one of the reasons why Fariday Armored Truck Service paid him eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents a week. Two beers were usually his limit. Tonight he drank nothing but rye. It was midnight when McClarnen left Kelly's, and there wasn't quite enough walk.

May was in bed but awake. She sat up as Johnny switched on the bed lamp but said nothing. Her eyes were red from crying. With her straw-colored hair in twin pigtails, she looked like a frightened little girl caught in a jam pot. *She should be frightened*, McClarnen thought. She was in a jam, a bad one. He wanted to slap her, hurt her, mark her, hurt her as he had been hurt. He sat on the edge of the bed and debated accusing her openly of two-timing him and decided with drunken gravity it would be much more satisfactory to catch her at it. The thought of another man kissing May's parted lips turned the whiskey sour in his stomach. McClarnen fought a desire to be sick.

*I'll kill them both*, he thought. *That's just what I'll do. I'll catch them together and shoot them dead.*

Meanwhile, though, May must have no reason to believe he knew that she

was two-timing him. Unknotting his tie, he asked with drunken subtlety, "About that movie this afternoon. What show didja go to?"

May clutched the covers. "The Bijou," she gasped. "Why, Johnny?"

His fingers trembling with anger, McClarnen bent and unlaced his shoes to keep from slapping her lying lips. "I—just wondered," he dismissed the subject. . . .

**T**HE MORNING matched McClarnen's mood. It was grey and looked like rain. His throbbing head echoed the occasional distance rumble in the sky. Flagle, the barn boss, was tacking a notice on the bulletin board in the squad room when he reported for duty. From force of habit McClarnen joined the group of uniformed guards and drivers around the board.

Hep Hooper, his driver said, "Not bad, eh? Two thousand bucks cold cash for every guy you kill trying to stick up a truck. That affair in Boston must have thrown the fear of the Lord into the big shots."

Jack Shane, the third man of their three man crew, said soberly, "I could use two thousand bucks."

"Who couldn't?" Hooper snorted. "That would mean college for my boy. Say. Did I tell you guys what the kid said yesterday morning?"

"Yeah," McClarnen said sourly.

Flagle held up his hand for silence. "You guys can read," he said. "You know as much about it as I do. Almost. I did hear one of the big shots say they had a tip some of the same heist mob who pulled the million dollar job in Boston had moved into town. That's why they've upped the ante. Instead of one grand you get two grand for any hood you kill during an attempt to heist your truck or any of the dough you're carrying. But get this. And get it straight. There's another side

to the story. If any of you crews let your trucks get knocked over, if you lose as much as a dime, don't bother to come back. You're fired."

Shrugging, McClarnen walked on into the machine-gun-guarded vault to check out his first load. He didn't give a damn about his job. He couldn't even use two thousand dollars. Yesterday it might have meant something. Yesterday two thousand dollars would have meant the down payment on the G.I. house May was always talking about. And an electric stove and a refrigerator and a hot water heater. Today it didn't mean a thing. May didn't love him any more. May was sneaking out afternoons and meeting some other guy.

What was it the wise guy in Kelly's had said, "Along with being thieves, most dames are born actresses."

And May had had the nerve to come into his arms last night and try to kiss his suspicions away. Johnny's cheeks burned at the thought. The nerve of the dirty, pretty little witch.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" Shane asked. "Why so sober this morning?"

McClarnen told him the truth. "I don't feel good. My head aches."

"Virus X, probably," Hooper offered.

"Yeah. Probably," McClarnen agreed.

For the first time since he'd held down the job the money sacks felt heavy. There were a lot of sacks. Beside the small stuff consigned to currency exchanges he checked in six payrolls and a transfer of one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars from the State Trust to the Pioneer National Bank. When he slammed the steel door on himself and Shane and gave Hooper the go-ahead the truck was carrying over two hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars.

Shane performed the morning ritual of checking his gun as the truck rolled out of the garage. "Two thousand bucks," he repeated. "Gee. That sounds good,

doesn't it? I could pay up Jen's hospital bill and maybe send her down to Warm Springs if I had that much dough." He peered through the slit in the steel. "Come on, you stickup guys."

McClarnen's mood continued sour. The close confinement in the armored truck and the heavy jolting over the holes in the pavement failed to help his aching head. "There's only one catch to that," he squelched Shane's enthusiasm. "With as much heat on as there is, any mob with guts enough to try to knock over an armored truck are going to be doing some shooting, too. And what in hell good would two thousand bucks do a dead man?"

Hep Hooper called through the heavily-barred window back of the driver's seat, "Don't be such a pig, Johnny. Think of all the fun your widow could have with two grand."

"Nuts to my widow," Johnny said shortly.

He stood on the walk with his hands on the butts of the guns on his thighs, looking up and down the walk and into all the overlooking windows and doorways, while Shane unloaded the Art-Craft payroll. Then, leaving Hooper inside the money compartment to guard the truck, he followed Shane into the plant and got a receipt for the money.

Out on the street again, the process was reversed. He and Shane guarded the truck while Hooper unbolted the door, climbed out of the money compartment, and resumed his place back of the wheel. Each move was timed and planned, and always the same. The danger point, of course, was when the door to the money compartment was still open, and he and Jack Shane were still on the walk. That, McClarnen thought, would be the time for a mob to strike. But preferably on a Friday. What with the payroll from the stove works and the pickups from the car barn and the cab garage, there was a half

hour during the Friday tour when McClarnen had seen the truck carrying close to three-quarters of a million dollars.

It was a few minutes after noon when they returned to the garage. After checking in his pickups, McClarnen went straight to Flagle. "I feel like hell," he told the barn boss. "How's for putting another man on Number One this afternoon?"

Flagle liked him and was sympathetic. "Sure. Sure thing, Johnny. You do look kinda peaked at that. I noticed it this morning." He repeated what Hooper had said. "Maybe you've picked up this Virus X that's floating around."

"Yeah," McClarnen agreed.

He changed from uniform to street clothes in the locker room but kept one of his guns. It bulged in his hip pocket. He had no shoulder holster. He compromised by thrusting it under his belt. It began to drizzle again. In the doorway of the barn, turning up the collar of his topcoat to meet the turned down snap brim of his hat, McClarnen thought, *This ought to be a good test. If May meets the guy this afternoon, she really loves him.*

Not that it made any difference. May could be in love. She could be merely amusing herself. McClarnen's hurt pride formed a lump in his throat. Either way he meant to kill them both. No dame ever lived who could do that to him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Lady, Be Dead

**O**NE O'CLOCK found him in the dingy hallway of the apartment building across the street from the one in which he and May lived. He stood looking up at their windows through the glass door. It wasn't much of a building. The neighborhood was old and so was the apartment. The rooms were small and dark. The plaster was patched and

cracked. Two garbage cans filled to overflowing stood on the walk beside the front stoop. The street was narrow and heavily traveled by truck traffic. Small wonder May was always talking about raising enough dough to pay down on a G.I. house. McClarnen made a mental correction. No wonder May *had* always talked about a little house in the suburbs with maybe a fenced-in green yard. May hadn't talked about a house for some time now. The corners of McClarnen's lips turned down. He felt the butt of the gun at his waist.

He'd just reached his lookout in time. The door of the building across the way opened and May came out on the stoop wearing her white transparent rain cape and hood. McClarnen's hands were hot. The large veins in his temples throbbed. If only May wasn't so pretty. If only she didn't look so sweet.

The blonde girl looked carefully up, then down the street. Then, certain she wasn't observed, she hurried north, the unheard tap of her high heels driving nails into McClarnen's heart. He allowed her to get a half block ahead of him, then followed on his own side of the street. Passing the Bijou, May looked up at the marquee. Even at the distance McClarnen could see her lips moving. She was probably memorizing the titles of the double feature in case she was late again tonight.

*The witch. The pretty little witch.*

She passed 2nd Avenue and then Grand Boulevard, still headed north. McClarnen was grateful for one thing. The neighbors didn't know his shame. They wouldn't know until they read it in the papers. May was smart as well as pretty, at least smart enough to do her running around out of her own neighborhood.

The cheaper saloons and bars and taverns lay behind her now. Up here in the Northeast Section they called them grills. McClarnen walked on doggedly, ignoring

the rain. Bars, saloons, or a grill, May was in a hell of a hurry to get to the guy she was meeting. In the forty-two hundred block she slowed her pace a trifle. There were two grills in the block, the Wedgewood on the east side of the street, the Plantation on the west. He and May had eaten and danced at the Wedgewood a few times. She was headed, McClarnen decided, for the Wedgewood. Her tastes were expensive. No wonder she had to bleed his pay check of fifteen bucks every week. He stopped under the lowered awning of the Plantation to give May time to get inside. Fighting an almost overpowering impulse to be sick, he watched May enter the Wedgewood. *May couldn't do this to him.* As he stood, wavering, undecided as to his next move, it was decided for him. May came out of the grill almost immediately, accompanied by a dark-complected, middle-aged, well-dressed man. A second man, his right hand in his coat pocket, walked out of the grill behind them and stood in the doorway of the Wedgewood, watching while the dark-complected man, smiling and obviously pleased to see May, unlocked and opened the smaller door that led to the spacious and reputedly beautifully furnished living quarters over the swank restaurant.

His hand on the butt of his gun, McClarnen had never felt so baffled. May wasn't fooling around with any punk. She had set her sights high. The dark-complected man was Bud Schaeffer, the owner of the Wedgewood and a minor power in local gambling. The second man was Joe Diamond, his bodyguard.

As McClarnen watched, Schaeffer bowed May into the hall and the heavy door closed solidly behind them. Joe Diamond walked back into the grill. There was nothing, no one on the walk, nothing but the pelt and patter of the rain. A moment later he caught a glimpse of May's white rain cape as it passed an



upper window. Then that too was gone.

McClarnen's ears burned as he felt the butt of his gun with a wet hand. So May was spending her afternoons at the Bijou, eh? He knew now where the fifteen dollars a week had gone. May hadn't spent it feeding drinks to any boyfriend. The owner of the Wedgewood had plenty of whiskey of his own. May had spent the money to make herself even more attractive. And the hell of it was that Schaeffer was relatively safe from him. He couldn't catch May and Schaeffer together. Either the restaurant owner and gambler or his bodyguard would blast him down before he could kick open the door to the upstairs living quarters.

"The dog," McClarnen said aloud.

"The dirty dog," a feminine voice echoed.

McClarnen turned to look at the speaker. A slightly older but even more beautiful girl than May was staring sullen-eyed at the window at the windows across the street. "The dog. The dirty dog," she repeated. Seeing McClarnen staring at her, she added, "Yon wouldn't happen to know the little blonde witch who just went upstairs with Bud Schaeffer, would you?"

"Yeah," Johnny said. "She's my wife."

The girl was red-haired and green-eyed, expensively dressed, with a lush figure that equaled or bettered May's. "Oh," she said. "I see. A brother chump, eh? We redheads don't seem to be doing so good, do we, fellow?"

"You know Schaeffer?" McClarnen asked.

"Know him?" the girl scoffed. "I used to be his girl until that damn blonde scab came along." She checked her vehemence. "I'm sorry. I forgot she was your wife."

McClarnen looked back at the windows. "I wish I could."

"You wish you could what?"

"Forget she was my wife."

The red-haired girl appraised him for a

long moment and, seemingly, liked what she saw. She moved a step closer on the rain swept walk. Her perfume was as expensive as her clothes, and subtle. "Well, why not?" she asked. "We aren't doing ourselves any good standing here in the rain glowering across the street." She laid a jeweled hand on his arm. Her green eyes narrowed. A husk came into her voice. "Why don't we go somewhere and buy ourselves a drink?"

McClarnen looked across the street, then back at the red-haired girl, and some of his feeling of futility left him. Keyed-up as he was, her presence and perfume were intoxicating. *To hell with May*, he thought. The red-haired girl was class with a capital C. What was sauce for the goose was just as much fun for the gander. "Sure. Why not?" he agreed. "I could use a drink about now. What's your name?"

Her fingers tightened on his arm. "Just call me Doris," she smiled.

**H**ER APARTMENT, a few blocks away, was as lush and as expensive as her clothes. Sipping at his fifth straight shot of fifteen-year-old bonded rye, McClarnen studied it with approval. It was the type of apartment in which he'd like to live. This was the type of whiskey he wished he could afford. And there was no doubt about it. In the short time he had known her, Doris had already become a pleasant fever in his blood. She was everything May was, and more. She was all knowing, all understanding. She knew how to treat a man. A man could have a hell of a good time, all the time if he was married to a girl like Doris. More, she would be true to a man she really loved. She'd said so in as many words.

Sitting on the overstuffed sofa beside him, changed into a pastel green sheer-silk hostess gown that clung to her, the red-haired girl muddled her fingers into

McClarnen's palm and wrinkled her pretty snub nose at the rain-smearred window. She, too, was a little drunk. "To hell with the rain. To hell with Bud Schaeffer. To hell with your wife. To hell with everything but us." She smuggled even closer to him. "Maybe the whole thing was a blessing in disguise. I can't begin to tell you how glad I am I met you, Johnny."

McClarnen squeezed her fingers. "I'm glad I met you, Doris." He wished he could rid himself of his guilt complex and really let himself go. He didn't owe May a thing. It was May who had started this. Still, there it was. He had promised to love, honor, and cherish May as long as they both should live.

"You're too sober," Doris complained, and poured them both another drink.

After that things became confused. Nothing much happened, except McClarnen remembered it was midnight when he got home and cursing May because she cried. It was like a woman to try and shift the blame. He even considered having the whole thing out with her, but fell asleep before he could give voice to his thoughts.

Thursday was a long grey nightmare. He wished his afternoon off hadn't been changed. He didn't dare take a drink during working hours but he could feel the need down to his toes. It rained again and his face was as grey as the day. Hep Hooper was certain he had flu. Even Flagle noticed his condition and suggested he take a week off, but McClarnen resisted the suggestion fiercely. In his new world of upset emotional and moral values, his job with Fariday Armored Trunks, Inc., was the only solid rock of fact that he had left. It seemed almost impossible that forty-eight short hours could so upset a man's life. He felt shamed and somehow empty, as if something fine and beautiful had gone out of his life forever. He blamed the

feeling on May. All of this was her fault.

After changing his clothes at the barn he went to see Doris. She took one look at his face and poured him two double drinks. The red-haired girl's cheeks were wet with tears.

She told him, "Bud knows you were here yesterday. And he stormed in like a madman this morning."

McClarnen hit the ceiling. "He should be sore?"

Doris sniffled. "Well, he is. And he knows who you are. And he threatened to shoot you, too. He's a dirty dog in the manger, that's what he is."

McClarnen repeated, "He should be sore."

Doris lowered her eyes. "Oh, if we could only go away somewhere together, Johnny. If we could only get out of this whole mess—"

She refilled their glasses.

McClarnen sipped his considering her statement. Bud Schaeffer was tough. Bud Shaeffer was bad. Bud Schaeffer had a lot of drag in town. He didn't want to be shot for something that May had started. There was no doubt that Doris was lovely. She probably would be good for him. They probably would be happy. At least for a while. But there was one unsurmountable problem. "Yeah, sure," he agreed. "Our going away together sounds very lovely."

He gulped his drink nervously. Doris told him. "I've been thinking about that, Johnny. If we had a lot of money we could go to Mexico, or even South America, couldn't we?"

"Yeah. Sure," McClarnen agreed. "Or China. Or South Africa." He made certain she understood. "But I wasn't kidding you yesterday, Doris. All I've got is my job."

Doris said, "Let's have just one more little drink first. You won't believe it, Johnny. But I have the most marvelous plan."

"What sort of a plan?"

"Well, I have a brother named Bill. And Bill has two good friends who aren't afraid of a damn thing, up to and including the law."

Her voice now petting him, now nagging, now accusing, now insistent, purred on until the poison in it numbed all his senses except the roaring in his ears. Then, thinking of all people, about May, McClarnen leaned his head forward and passed out.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Big Heist

THERE WAS no rain today, but the grass was greener for it. The trees in the park were budding. The sun was a brassy ball climbing in a blue sky tired of weeping. Hep Hooper was filled with the latest cute things his four-year-old had said. Even Jack Shane was more optimistic about his wife's eventual recovery from the attack of polio that had kept her bedridden for months.

"I figure," he told McClarnen, "if I cut out smoking and noon lunches that will save seventy cents a day. That's three dollars and fifty cents a week. In fifty weeks that's one hundred and seventy-five dollars. I can buy the braces that Jen needs for that and still send her to Warm Springs for three weeks or more. You see, it won't cost her anything there. It's just the transportation that I have to raise."

The heat in the money compartment of the truck was stifling. Every time Hep hit a bump, McClarnen thought the top of his head would come off. He almost wished it would. This thing was mad, fantastic. He'd dreamed the night just past. Or had he? Doris' voice rose over the hum of the motor.

*Mexico, even South America. I have*

*a brother named Bill. . . Bill has two good friends . . . and to, and including, the law. . . I could meet you in Acapulco. . . From there we'll take a steamer to Lima.*

McClarnen sighed. "And our cut of three-quarters of a million dollars."

"You say something, Johnny?" Shane asked.

McClarnen shook his head and wished he hadn't. It felt like his brains were rattling. The three nights of heavy drinking plus the emotional strain must have shriveled them in his skull. He looked at the back of Hep Hooper's head, then looked at Shane. Even if he was the type of man who could do what Doris had outlined, he couldn't endanger the lives of two men on whom so many other lives depended. And no matter what Doris had promised, there was bound to be some shooting.

The big youth buried his aching head in his hands. He'd been a fool, an awful fool. Leaving Doris out of the question entirely, May doing what she had done didn't give him the right to betray a trust for his own personal gain.

Shane sympathized, "Ya still feel bad, eh?"

"Yeah," McClarnen said shortly. Doris' voice, flat and cold now, beat at his aching head.

*We'll be waiting in front of the stove works. When you reach in to get the payroll, Bill will throw down on you with a sub-machine gun. Only a fool would argue with a machine gun. You put up your hands. The other two guards will take their cue from you. We'll load the money in the car that I'll be driving. The whole thing won't take two minutes. So you're suspected. So what? They can't prove a thing.*

McClarnen looked at Shane. "What do you know about Bud Schaeffer?"

Shane shook his head. "Not a damn thing." He beamed and was off on his favorite subject. "Yes. I do at that. Re-

member me telling you the other day that polio victims are often smarter than folks who never have it? Well, Bud Schaeffer's girl is proof of that."

"His girl?"

"Yeah," Shane enthused. "A kid about fifteen, I should say. You know, on account of her mother being dead, Schaeffer fixed up those living quarters over the Wedgewood. Well, anyway, Ann, that's her name, was going to graduate from high school next June in the same class with my Betty. But on account of she got polio, bad, last Fall she couldn't go to school no more so Schaeffer hires a private tutor for her. And what happens? Just last night at supper Betty tells me that their section teacher told them that on account of Ann had done so good at home they're going to give her a special diploma in June, a year ahead of the class she would have graduated with."

"Oh," McClarnen said softly. "I see."

He thought he did. He thought he was beginning to see a lot of things. If he was right, a clever bunch of sharpers had made a heel as well as a fool of him.

They dropped off the sack for the Acme Currency Exchange and picked up the cab and car barn money.

As Shane slammed and bolted the door at the car barn, he grinned, "Boy. Now we're really loaded. How much you figure we got aboard, Johnny?"

McClarnen told him, tight-lipped, "Pushing three quarters of a million dollars."

Sweat beaded his forehead and his cheeks and the palms of his hands. If what now seemed like a distorted nightmare was fact, he had four short city blocks in which to make up mind as to what he was going to do. If he kept his part of the bargain, if he put up his hands and allowed the truck to be looted, Doris would probably keep her bargain with him. Even if it had all been a part of the come-on, the red-haired vixen really liked him.

There were ways a man could tell. Her song and dance about having been Bud Schaeffer's girl was just that, a song and dance. In the light of what he now knew, McClarnen doubted if the restaurant owner even knew the girl. Her waiting in front of the Plantation had been timed and staged. Doris had fished for a sucker. She'd got one. But if everything went well, Doris would keep her word. She would meet him in Acapulco. On the other hand, if he didn't go through with his part of the agreement he was in no condition to attempt to stop the heist. All he would do would be to get Hep Hooper and Jack Shane killed. McClarnen looked at his big hands. They were shaking so badly he doubted if he could hit a man with a shotgun. He certainly couldn't with the brace of useless revolvers strapped to his thigh. His coordination and reflexes were shot. Either way Doris won. Delilah had done her work well.

A block passed, two blocks, three. Hep was slowing now to pull up in front of the stove works. He had to make up his mind, right now. McClarnen considered calling to Hep to keep on going, but that wouldn't solve a thing. The order would have to be explained.

**S**TANDING up, McClarnen wiped his sweaty palms on the seat of his trousers and looked out through the barred window back of the driver's seat. It hadn't been a nightmare. It was real. They were on a business street with cars parked bumper to bumper against the curbs except in the no parking zones. Sitting back of the wheel of a big car in the first parking space away from the no parking zone in front of the stove works, Doris was smoking a cigarette and eyeing the approaching armored truck over the top of a newspaper. McClarnen tried to spot her possible partners, and failed. Then he recognized the wise guy who had sounded off in Kelly's. The hood

was pushing a street-cleaning cart and wearing a white street department uniform.

McClarnen's ears burned. His own evil mind had done it all. So May was hiding out a few dollars. She probably had a good reason.

The wise guy's circular white-wing cart probably held the machine gun. He tried to spot the other two men, and couldn't. They could be any of the dozens of passersby. Wiping his sweaty palms again, McClarnen made his decision.

"Pull up so you block that Caddy, Hep. Mash it into the curb if you can and still leave our door free. Then you guys stay in the truck and do whatever seems best to you. I'm taking in the payroll alone."

Hep gasped, "For the Lord's sake, why?"

"Because we're going to be stuck up."

Shane got to his feet. "How the hell do you know, Johnny."

The words sour in his mouth, McClarnen told him the truth. "Because I vaguely remember helping plan it last night. But as of now, I'm backing out. Block the Caddy. Block it good, Hep."

There was a sound of crumpling steel as the heavy truck came to a stop. "You fool. You idiot!" Doris cursed. "Back that truck away from my car!"

The red-haired girl stopped cursing as Johnny McClarnen opened the door of the truck and stepped out on the walk with a money sack in hand. Then she cursed again, softly, as he turned and slammed the door.

Two of the pretended passersby stopped and cleared a space with their guns. The wise guy lifted a machine gun from his street-cleaner's cart. But their timing had been thrown off by the slammed door. Two more guards were supposed to be on the walk and the door of the money compartment left open. Then Doris broke the silence.

"Okay. Take them, boys," she said.

One of the men in the cleared space on the walk flipped a warning shot at the truck then attempted to tear the money sacks out of McClarnen's hands. Then Hep Hooper and Jack Shane and the wise guy opened up at the same time. McClarnen took a quick step toward the stove plant and a machine gun slug slapped him around and another pushed him face down on the pavement. As from a great distance he heard Doris scream, "Kill him! And then let's get out of here!"

A bucketing of shots drowned out her screams. Then everything was silence. McClarnen came to, still face down on the walk, still clinging to the sacks. Doris and the wise guy were gone but the other two would-be heist artists formed islands of solid flesh rising out of small seas of blood. The usual crowd of morbid curious had gathered. Squatted down on the walk beside him, a portly uniformed patrolman was trying to pull the money sacks out of his hands.

"It's okay, fellow," the patrolman pleaded. "Come on. Let me or one of your partners have the sacks."

His mouth dry and seemingly filled with bloody cotton, McClarnen continued to cling to the sacks until Jack Shane kneeled beside him.

"Okay?" McClarnen asked him.

"Okay," Shane replied. "You can let go, Johnny. We didn't lose a dime."

Hep, still excited, squatted on the other side of the big youth on the walk. "Not a dime, Johnny. Neither me nor Hep was even winged and we got two of them."

McClarnen released the money sacks to Shane. "Fine," he said. "Fine. That ought to send Jen to Warm Springs and Hep's kid to college." He looked up at Shane. "Now take the payroll inside and get a receipt."

By the time Shane had returned, an ambulance had arrived. "To hell with it," Johnny said. "I'm still responsible for the truck. I started out with it. I'm tak-

ing it back to the company garage now."

**T**HE TELLING took a long time. The police surgeon interefered for one thing. There were a lot of people to be told and descriptions to be given to numerous detectives.

The police decided, finally, they had no charge against him. The company big shots left the company decision up to Flagle. The barn boss waited until almost sunset. Then he walked into the small hospital room in the barn where McClarnen was attempting to dress and go home over the nurse's protest.

"Let him go," Flagle told the nurse. "You can't kill his kind." When she had gone, the barn boss leaned against a sterilizer and rendered his decision. "Sixty days suspension without pay, Johnny. And if you get mixed up with a redhead or a bottle again, so help me, I'll kill you. You think I want to hold down this job all my life? Now get on home to your wife. She's been burning up my wire every fifteen minutes."

McClarnen wet his lips. "You told her?"

The barn boss shook his head. "No. That's up to you. You're twenty-seven. You're old enough to know that anyone who dances has to pay the fiddler. Now go on. Get out of here." He added a trifle less gruffly. "And, take care of that shoulder, boy."

The street lamps were lit and pouring golden pools into the street for the neighborhood children to play in when the cab let Johnny off at his door.

May heard his step in the hall and opened the door. When she saw him she tried to smile. Then she saw his bandaged chest.

"Oh, Johnny. You've been hurt!"

The big youth nodded. "A little. But I'm going to be all right."

He walked on into the flat and into the kitchen and sat down at the table. It was

decorated as for a kid's party with pink and blue paper streamers. There was a big cake in the center with six candles on it. "What's the cake for?" he asked.

May took his hat and his coat. "Why, they're ours, Johnny. We've been married six months tonight."

May sat on the floor beside him. She was trying hard not to cry and failing. "And I'm sorry if I made you mad at me, Johnny. I did lie to you the night before last. I didn't go to the Bijou."

McClarnen ran the fingers of his good hand through her hair. "Yeah. I know. You've been tutoring Bud Schaeffer's kid so she could get through high school. And her flat on her back from polio."

May nodded, bright-eyed. "For almost four months. You didn't want me to work. And that wasn't work, really Johnny. Ann's a swell little kid. And Mr. Schaeffer's been just grand. He paid me a dollar an hour. And when he heard that Ann was going to graduate this June he insisted on giving me a fifty dollar bonus." Her eyes sparkled. "And that's my present to us, Johnny. The three hundred and twenty dollars I've made tutoring, plus the fifty dollar bonus, plus the fifteen dollars I've been sneaking out of your pay every week, gives us six hundred and ten dollars. Enough to pay down on a G.I. house."

McClarnen got up abruptly and walked through the small flat to the dark front windows. That was like May. He should have known. He still had to tell her about Doris and the holdup, and the sixty day suspension without pay. But May would understand.

May tagged along behind him, worried. "It's all right? You aren't mad, are you, Johnny?"

His eyes moist, McClarnen looked down at the yellow pools on the grimy street on which their children would never play. "No. I'm not mad," he said. "I think it's swell."