

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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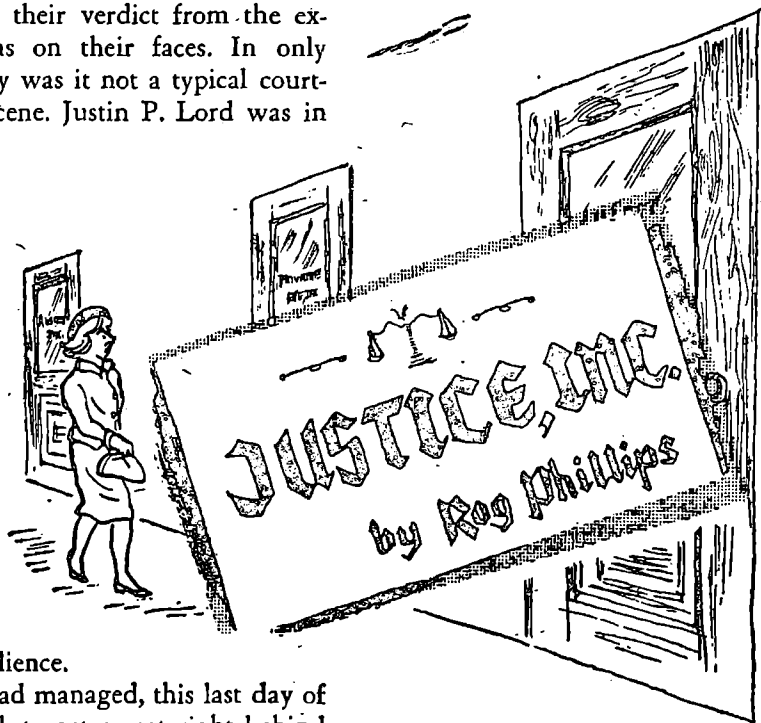
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Dissatisfaction with the slow, majestic march of courtroom procedures, and the results, is not uncommon among citizens. Most register their protests by writing letters to the editors. Mr. Justin P. Lord was made of sterner stuff.

IT WAS a typical courtroom scene, with jurors filing in, everyone standing when the judge came from his chambers, the defendant staring at the jurors in an attempt to read their verdict from the expressions on their faces. In only one way was it not a typical courtroom scene. Justin P. Lord was in

eyes, owlishly magnified behind thick lensed glasses, darted in quick relish from the tense face of the defendant to the tense shoulders of the murder victim's wid-



the audience.

He had managed, this last day of the trial, to get a seat right behind the widow. A connoisseur in many fields, far from least of which was the criminal trial, his pale brown

ow, from the slightly worried expression of the defense lawyer to the confident expression of the prosecutor.

Already dismissed in Justin's thoughts was the outcome. He had known what it would be from the second day of the trial—and he had not been wrong in a hundred trials! He barely listened as the judge asked, "Has the jury reached a verdict?", and the jury foreman stood up and said, "We have, your honor."

"What is your verdict?" the judge asked, and Justin's finger hovered above the shoulder of the widow of the liquor store owner.

"We find the defendant not guilty," the jury foreman said, and Justin tapped the suddenly stiffened shoulder of the woman.

He had to tap her shoulder quite firmly, and several times, to get her attention. "Mrs. Clark!" he whispered in urgent tones.

She glanced around at him in annoyance, then turned her hate-filled eyes again toward the defendant who had just been freed.

"Mrs. Clark!" Justin wheedled. "This is most important. For both of us. Please take my card."

She turned, looked down at the small rectangle of white he held out, took it, and read it. She looked up at his magnified eyes with sudden interest.

"What does this mean, *Justice, Incorporated?*?" she asked.

"Please! Not so loud!" Justin said. "You *are* interested in justice, aren't you?"

Fire flashed from the widow's eyes. "I certainly am!"

"Then should we go somewhere—and talk . . . ?" Justin murmured. He took out a spotless linen handkerchief and mopped his brow free of nervous perspiration.

"Let's," Mrs. Clark said grimly.

The cocktail lounge was nearly empty at three in the afternoon, so there was no difficulty in finding a table well away from anyone else. Mrs. Clark ordered an old-fashioned. Justin P. Lord ordered a *creme de menthe*. They studied each other while waiting for the drinks.

She was tall, large-boned, approaching forty, a typical wife of a typical successful liquor store owner who spent much of her time helping out in the store. Justin was short, small-boned but rather fleshy, with an expressive mouth. His hands were delicately formed.

Mrs. Clark shook her head. "You just don't look like a professional killer to me!" she said.

"Please!" Justin said—and the drinks came. After the waitress had gone he sipped his thimble of *creme de menthe* and added, "I have never killed anyone in my

life!" He shuddered and blinked.

Mrs. Clark drained half her old-fashioned in one gulp, then as it took effect she began to relax.

She chuckled.

"You know, Mr. Lord," she said, "I'm inclined to believe you. I think you would faint at the sight of blood!"

"Please!" Justin said. "Not at the table!"

"Why not?" Mrs. Clark said bitterly. "Blood-blood-blood! Does it make you sick? I saw my husband's blood soak out over his shirt onto my skirt while he was dying. I saw the man who did it—and back in that courtroom his lawyer tricked me into seeming stupid."

"Please," Justin said. "That is a lawyer's business. That is what he gets paid for."

"And what do you get paid for, Mr. Justin P. Lord?" Mrs. Clark asked, finishing her old-fashioned.

Justin twirled his stemmed liqueur glass with thoughtfulness.

"For many things, and in many ways," he said, "but never for murder. Never! He forced a smile. "Would you like another?"

"As long as you're buying, Justin," Mrs. Clark said.

Justin caught the waitress' eye and held up one finger, then pointed to Mrs. Clark's glass.

"But he will get murdered?"

Mrs. Clark said. "Well, won't he?"

"Oh yes," Justin said. "That's what you want, isn't it?"

"You're damned tootin'!" Mrs. Clark said. Her forehead wrinkled in perplexity. "But how . . . ?"

"There are many situations in which a man is bound to be murdered," Justin said. He smiled apologetically. "Perfectly legal situations. The person who creates the situation is violating no law."

"And you?" Mrs. Clark said.

Justin shrugged. "I am a specialist in creating situations. Like this present one, here in this cocktail lounge. Isn't it strange that twenty minutes ago you were in a courtroom waiting for a jury to return a verdict of 'Guilty' against the man who killed your husband—and now you are sitting here across the table from me, wondering how much money I will ask?"

The waitress came with the second drink for Mrs. Clark, who watched Justin pay for it and tip the girl a dollar. When the girl had gone, Mrs. Clark picked up the glass, looked into its depths of ice cubes and liquor and spices, and said, "All right, how much?"

"Ten thousand dollars," Justin said.

Mrs. Clark put her drink down and laughed. "Now I get it," she said. "I suppose you want five thousand now and the other five

later—only there won't be any later. You just take my five thousand and forget it."

"I was going to *try* for five thousand in advance," Justin said, unperturbed. "It isn't really necessary though. Just give me your word that when it's done you will pay me ten thousand."

Mrs. Clark gulped at her drink, watching Justin over the rim of the glass.

"What if I give my word—then don't pay you when it's done?" she asked.

"Oh, you'll pay," Justin said comfortably.

"What if I don't give my word?"

Justin shrugged. "My dear woman," he said, "I may be president of Justice, Incorporated, but I am not altruistic. In that case Michael Evan Birch, the murderer of your husband, is free to do what he pleases so far as I am concerned."

"All right, Justin," Mrs. Clark said, capitulating. "I'm convinced about you. I'll give you a five thousand advance and another five thousand when the job is done. How do you want the money. In small bills?"

"Your check will be fine," Justin said. "After all, we will have nothing to hide. I give you my word on that."

Mrs. Clark hesitated just a brief instant. "Okay," she said, fishing

her checkbook from her purse. "Do I make it out to Justice, Incorporated?"

"To me personally," Justin said. "In a sense I *AM* Justice, Incorporated."

His eyes blinked owlishly, watching her make out the check. And, sometime later, he blinked with equal owliness at the suspicious features of the recent defendant half exposed by the narrow gap permitted by the night chain on the door of a cheap tenement apartment.

"Please, Mr. Birch, may I come in?" Justin wheedled. "I assure you it will be to our mutual advantage." He extended a small rectangle of white cardboard.

Mike Birch took the card and read it slowly, aloud. "Auditors, Incorporated," he read. "Tax refunds our specialty." Then his eyebrows shot up almost to his hair line. "*Michael Evan Birch, Field Representative?*"

"I took the liberty of having them printed up ahead of time," Justin apologized. "You see, I felt you would not refuse my offer."

"What offer?" Mike said.

Justin glanced down at the door chain.

"Oh. Sure, sure," Mike said, closing the door long enough to free the chain, then opening it wide. He glanced again at the busi-

ness card with his name on it as Field Representative.

Justin P. Lord glanced over the cheap furnishings of the apartment with distaste, selected a varnished kitchen chair, and sat on its edge.

"Haven't I seen you before?" Mike asked.

"At your trial," Justin said.

"Then why are you offering me a job?" Mike said. "Is this some kind of a trap?"

"A trap?" Justin said. He chuckled. "Even if you were guilty they could not try you again for the same crime. Everyone knows that. No, this is an opportunity. Pleasant work, two hundred and fifty dollars a week with substantial bonuses every month."

"What's the catch?" Mike asked.

"No 'catch' whatever," Justin said. "Let me explain. I employ a large staff of bookkeepers, auditors, and accountants. At times it is quite a problem to find enough work for them, so I hit on a plan. Many small businessmen don't know how to take advantage of all the loopholes in the tax laws. Half of them pay thousand of dollars too much in taxes every year. This is especially true in small communities unable to support a full fledged staff of qualified auditors."

"But I don't know anything about—" Mike said.

"You don't need to," Justin interrupted him. "As field man you simply make them an offer, which they can't resist. The client only has to turn his books of the past five years over to you, you send them to us, we go through the books, and if we can't save the client money it doesn't cost him a cent. If we can save him money, we get fifty percent. How can an honest businessman refuse an offer like that?"

"It sounds great," Mike said doubtfully.

"Also," Justin said, "we have another angle that will pay you substantial bonuses. Businessmen in small communities who bluntly turn down our generous offer usually do so because they have been cheating on their taxes. Part of your job will be to give us their names so that we can have the Internal Revenue Department investigate their books. We get five percent of what the Government can stick them for."

"And I get two fifty a week?" Mike said.

"Plus expenses," Justin said, taking his slim billfold from his inside breast pocket. "We will expect you to dress conservatively. Go to my tailor. He has instructions to dress you properly. I am advancing you two hundred dollars for living expenses for the time being,

until your suits are ready. This is Wednesday. You should be ready to go to work by Monday. Meanwhile, you are on the payroll." He stood up and went to the door.

"But *why*?" Mike blurted.

"Business," Justin said. "Purely business. I think you're the man for the job." He went out, closing the door gently.

Michael Evan Birch stood looking at the four crisp fifty dollar bills, the card of a very exclusive tailor, and the card with his own name imprinted.

The bedroom door, to one side of the room, opened, and the reason for the chain on the door entered. She came over and stared wonderingly at the fifty dollar bills.

"What a creep, Mike!" she said. "He made me shudder! I mean really! You aren't taking him up on it, are you, Baby?"

"And why not?" Mike said, stuffing the money and cards into his pocket. "It's a break. I never got a break before in my life. A good job, honest money—"

"But he's sick!" she said. "Couldn't you see it, Mike? Don't touch it. He's some kind of psycho, I swear it." She clutched at Mike's arm. "Let's go on as we were, Mike, with me casing the joints for you. Only one slipup in two years, and that was a plain fluke."

Mike shook his head. "Next time they could pin me," he said grimly. "Anyway, Leona, I'm going to check this out. You know why? It could be a sweet legitimate racket. I could learn the ropes, hire myself some bookkeepers, and go into business for myself." He grinned and snapped his fingers. "Why don't you go down to this Auditors Incorporated and get a job? That way you can learn it from the inside—and maybe keep track."

"Well," Leona hesitated. "All right. First thing in the morning."

"Good girl," Mike said, taking her in his arms. And in the hallway outside the door Justin P. Lord took his ear from the panel and departed with a smug smile of satisfaction.

Thursday morning, much to her surprise, Leona was hired at once, as a file clerk. She saw the door labeled, *PRIVATE, Justin P. Lord*; but the man who interviewed her was in his twenties and every inch a bookkeeper type.

"Who is Justin Lord?" Leona dared to ask.

"He's the owner of the company," her new boss said. "He's seldom in."

"Oh," Leona said.

Meanwhile Mike was submitting to the measurements of a balding pot bellied tailor with a Harvard

accent and his young assistant in a shop he would never have dared to enter otherwise, even to rob. He was consulted and outvoted on everything from sox to satchels.

He was told to come back Saturday, which he did. So he had a weekend to get used to his new wardrobe before Monday.

"Yes, sir!" Leona breathed in admiration. "Clothes *DO* make a man." She meant it—and for the first time began to think in terms of a home in the suburbs.

Mike took her places—and began thinking in terms of a mansion and a nice brunette for a wife. A girl from the society set.

On Monday morning at ten o'clock when Justin knocked on the door of Mike's apartment the door was opened immediately by a well groomed young man whom Justin found difficult to recognize.

"I could have come to your office, sir," Mike said.

"No, no," Justin said. "I much prefer that my field men don't." He put the brief case he was carrying on the table and opened it. Taking things out, he explained, "These are the contracts for clients to sign, these are the receipts you give them for their books for us to audit, these are the report sheets and envelopes you drop in the mail every day—and don't forget what I told you about reporting to us peo-

ple who violently refuse to do business with us. We actually make more money on tax evaders . . . And this is the map of your territory. As you see, it is the southwest quarter of the State. I've numbered the towns in the sequence in which I want you to take them."

Mike studied the map.

"Oh, by the way," Justin said, "you will use a company car. It's parked down in front. Here are the keys." He handed Mike a key ring.

"Thanks," Mike said, his eyes lighting up. "What kind of car is it?"

"A convertible, this year's," Justin said. "And I may as well confess to something right at the start."

"What's that?" Mike said.

"It isn't exactly a company car," Justin said. "It's owned by another of my companies. I find it more convenient to have one company own all my cars. It simplifies book-keeping."

"That sounds reasonable," Mike said with a wink. "What's the name of the company?"

Justin frowned. "I feel I'd better caution you on a point," he said. "Some of my field men have run into trouble. I'm really thinking of changing the ownership of the cars to another of my companies, but that—" Justin sighed. "—would re-

quire a lot of inter-corporation bookkeeping. The owner of the car is Private Eye, Incorporated—but if anyone asks you about that you must make it very plain you do not work for that company.”

“Why would anyone ask?” Mike said.

“The ownership card on the steering wheel shaft,” Justin said. “People—especially in small towns—are always very curious. Anyway, here are your credentials from Auditors, Incorporated, so you can prove what company you work for. Are you ready to leave? Is there anything else you would like to know?”

“I think I can handle it, sir,” Mike said. “The first stop is—” He consulted the map. “Left Fork, population eight fifty.”

“Good hunting, Michael,” Justin said, holding out his soft, cold hand for a firm handclasp. “I’ll walk down to the car with you. As a matter of fact, I’d be grateful if you’d drop me off at the office on your way out of town.”

Mrs. Clark waited patiently for five weeks, reading every page of each day’s papers in search of some notice of the death of her husband’s killer. Then she called the number on the business card of Justice, Inc. A female voice an-

swered, giving the firm names.

“I want to speak to Mr. Lord,” Mrs. Clark said.

“Who’s calling, please?” the girl asked.

“Mrs. Clark,” Mrs. Clark said.

There were several seconds of silence, then the girl said, “Oh yes. In relation to the case of Michael Evan Birch. Mr. Lord will be in touch with you when the matter is closed. Please be patient.”

“I want to talk to Justin,” Mrs. Clark said doggedly.

“I’m sorry, he isn’t in,” the girl said.

“Who are you?” Mrs. Clark asked bluntly.

“I’m his secretary, Miss Higgins,” the girl said. “I know how impatient you must be, but these things take time.” She sounded most sympathetic.

Frustrated, Mrs. Clark hung up. Also she was somewhat amazed. The little man with the owlish eyes had a secretary who kept a card index on his “cases”! A Miss Higgins! How macabre!

Mrs. Clark waited another two weeks, reading the papers all the way through, every day. Then she could wait no longer. “Miss Higgins,” she said on the phone. “Mr. Lord had better see me. I’m coming right to his office now, and he’d better be there.”

“I will try to get your message to

him, Mrs. Clark," Miss Higgins replied. "He's in court and will be until noon."

"In court?" Mrs. Clark said in surprise.

"Yes," Miss Higgins said. "The State versus Frederic Jones."

"Oh yes," Mrs. Clark said. "He's the one arrested for the killing of those three women. I could catch Mr. Lord at the courtroom."

"No, I'm sure he would prefer to see you here in the office," Miss Higgins replied. "If you could be here by one?"

"Certainly," Mrs. Clark said. And she could hardly wait! She was very curious about this Miss Higgins, and about an office of Justice, Inc. In the back of her mind she had never believed there was an office for that sort of thing. A professional killer with an office! But of course, Justin had explained he didn't kill, he merely set up a situation where someone else would do the dirty work. And right now Justin was in court, listening to another trial, with his eye on a new client!

Then the memory of seven weeks of waiting for results came back, and she compressed her lips with determination. Her lips were still compressed with determination when she got off the elevator at two minutes to one and strode past several doors with AUDI-

TORS, Inc., on them, turned the corner and went past the door with PRIVATE EYE, Inc., on it, and came to the door with JUSTICE, Inc., on it. So there really was an office! She pushed open the door and went inside.

Immediately she wished she hadn't. It wasn't the secretary sitting behind the desk in the corner. Miss Higgins was a surprise, yes. She was a very healthy-looking young lady, strikingly beautiful, and nothing at all like the image Mrs. Clark had built up in her mind of a hunchbacked old spinster in faded clothes.

No, it was the other people in the room, sitting in attitudes of waiting, reading outdated copies of magazines. One was a young mother with a four-year-old girl on her lap. One was an old man in his seventies. It might have been a doctor's waiting room—except that on the door against the far wall was printed, JUSTIN P. LORD, PRIVATE.

Miss Higgins had fixed her eyes on her questioningly, so Mrs. Clark took a firmer grasp on her purse and went up to the desk. "I'm Mrs. Clark," she said belligerently. "I called you."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Clark," Miss Higgins said. "Mr. Lord will see you in just a few moments. Will you please be seated?"

Mrs. Clark sat, and covertly studied those around her. A professional killer with a beautiful secretary and a clientele that waited their turns in a waiting room equipped with old magazines? Mrs. Clark wondered if perhaps she might be going mad.

She did not have long to wait. A quiet buzzer sounded and Miss Higgins said, "Mrs. Clark?" Mrs. Clark stood up, feeling the eyes of everyone watching her, and went to the door to the inner office. (At least she had not had to wait her turn!) (But why would that woman with a small daughter be hiring a professional killer?)

Inside, Justin P. Lord stood up, a cigarette holder with a long, freshly lit cigarette in his mouth.

"Ah," he said. "Mrs. Clark. Miss Higgins tells me you have been growing impatient. Please sit down."

"You're darn right I'm impatient," Mrs. Clark said. "I paid you five thousand dollars. Almost two months have gone by. I want some results."

Justin resumed his place behind the desk. His expression became unhappy.

"All we can do is wait," he said.

"Look," Mrs. Clark said curtly. "I paid you five thousand bucks to have the murderer of my husband killed. Are you going to have it

done or not? I want an answer."

"I have set up the situation," Justin said unhappily. "It's inevitable. All we can do is wait."

"What situation?" Mrs. Clark sneered.

Justin puffed on his cigarette delicately, frowning.

"I suppose it would do no harm to explain," he said, opening a file folder in front of him and taking out a small map, and extending it across the desk to her. It was a map of the southwest quarter of the State. "Michael Evan Birch is now employed as a field man by Auditors, Incorporated, in this map area. He goes from businessman to businessman with an offer to audit their books for nothing. The apple he holds out is that if his company finds a way to get a substantial refund, Auditors, Incorporated gets fifty percent. He also reports those who refuse, and within a week the Internal Revenue Bureau starts investigating those who turned down the offer. That situation alone has possibilities of murder, but there is more to it."

"Yes?" Mrs. Clark said, staring at the map.

"He is driving a car whose ownership, on the white card on the steering post, is a detective agency. In every town he visits he is forced to explain he does not work for the

detective agency. Naturally the rumor spreads that he IS a detective, and that his tax business is only a front. That adds another element that might make someone murder him, don't you think?"

"I don't know . . ." Mrs. Clark said.

"In addition," Justin went on eagerly, "I have an operative who follows him from town to town and starts the rumor that he is a famous detective who is on the track of a killer that has hidden out and established himself as a respected citizen." Justin jabbed at the map with his finger. "Surely there must be at least ONE murderer who has hidden out in this area, and who will murder Michael to keep his identity safe!" He leaned back in his chair and pouted, his magnified eyes blinking.

Mrs. Clark studied the map. "Where is Birch now?" she asked.

"In Maple Corners," Justin said. "As you can see on the map, I have the towns numbered in the sequence he will visit them. Maple Corners is fifty-seven, Eden Valley is fifty-eight. He will go there next. Don't you see?" Justin spread his pudgy hand over the map. "*Some-where* in this area he will be murdered!"

Mrs. Clark hesitated, then nodded. "It does sound reasonable," she said. She stood up.

"Then you'll be patient?" Justin said. "I am so glad! Please, the exit is this way." He opened another door than the one she had come in through.

"I'll pay you the other five thousand when he's dead," Mrs. Clark said. There was a quiet smile on her lips as she departed. The quiet smile was still there an hour later as she headed out of town on the highway that would take her to Maple Corners, two hundred and fifty miles distant. She had stopped at home only long enough to put a small but deadly automatic pistol in her purse.

On the way back from Maple Corners Mrs. Clark marveled at how easy it was to murder someone. She had arrived shortly after six, and had dinner in the hotel restaurant. Birch—though she had hardly recognized him in his tailored clothes and air of confident respectability—had come into the restaurant shortly after her.

He hadn't even noticed her. Maybe he wouldn't have remembered her if he had looked at her. When it seemed he was ready to leave she had left a moment before him, and powdered her nose in the hotel lobby to give him time to start up the stairs. She had followed him boldly, as though she

were a resident of the hotel. She had followed him down the hall, and when he unlocked the door to his room she had simply followed him in, taking the gun from her purse.

One bullet had done it. Oh, he had known who she was and why he was dying, those seconds before she fired. The sound of the shot had been deafening inside the room, but in the hall there was no milling crowd wondering about the shot, and downstairs the desk clerk did not bother to look up from the newspaper he was reading as she crossed the lobby and left the hotel. Contrary to popular belief, people had NOT instantly identified the sharp report as a shot, and made note of her movements so they could identify her later in court. There had not even been sirens as police rushed to the scene of the crime. Maple Corners was a sleepy town. It was doubtful that even the waitress in the hotel restaurant had *really* looked at her.

A hundred miles from Maple Corners there was a small lake Mrs. Clark had made a mental note of, on her way downstate. She stopped there on her way back and tossed the gun as far as she could throw it, out into the deep water. It was a dirty lake, filled with algae and cat tails, with undoubtedly several feet of loose silt

on the bottom. Even if she confessed to her crime and told the police where the gun was, they probably would be unable to find it.

She arrived home shortly after midnight, half expecting the police to be waiting for her. There was no one. It was almost disappointing.

She took barbiturates and slept until noon the next day. She was awakened by the ringing of the telephone.

The memory of last night flooded into her waking mind. Filled with dread, she listened to the phone ring, then finally answered it. The voice at the other end was that of Justin.

"What?" she said, putting shocked surprise into her voice.

"Yes!" Justin said, chuckling. "It's true. He was shot last night! The hotel maid found his body this morning! It's in all the papers. On one of the back pages, of course—but it's there!"

"I'll check," she said. "If it's true, I owe you another five thousand dollars." She was fully awake now, and her expression softened. She felt sorry for this pitiable and ineffective little man. "I could mail you the check," she said, "but—why don't we celebrate? Suppose I meet you where we had cocktails? Say, three o'clock?"

A brisk shower and three cups of strong coffee restored her to life. She forged out into the daytime world and bought a newspaper and had a two o'clock breakfast at a small cafe while reading it.

On the front page was the news that Frederic Jones had been found guilty of murdering the three women and sentenced to death. Well, that lost Justin a possible client. On page three was the report of the murder of Michael Evan Birch, in downstate Maple Corners. No clues to the murder had been found so far.

Promptly at three o'clock Mrs. Clark went into the cocktail lounge. Justin was already there, sitting at a table well removed from other customers. She went over and sat down opposite him, and without fuss handed him the check for five thousand dollars she had already made out.

Justin glanced at it with his magnified eyes and smiled in gratitude. "Thank you," he said, his voice purring. "I have already taken the liberty of ordering you an oldfashioned."

"And you a creme de menthe?" Mrs. Clark said.

"No," Justin said. "Today is special. I have ordered a martini."

"Special?" Mrs. Clark said. "Why? Frederic Jones was found guilty—so you lose a client there.

"On the contrary," Justin said.

He was silent while the waitress came with the drinks.

"You see," he went on when they were alone, "Fred is innocent. Unfortunately, the only way to prove his innocence now is to find the guilty party. The police have closed the case, so . . ."

"How do you know he's innocent?" Mrs. Clark asked, gulping half her drink.

"I watched the entire trial and formed my own judgment," Justin said with some dignity. "So I have persuaded Fred to engage my detective agency to find the real killer."

"Your detective agency?" Mrs. Clark said.

"Private Eye, Incorporated," Justin said smugly.

Mrs. Clark finished her drink in a deep gulp. Justin caught the eyes of the waitress and held up one finger, then pointed to his companion's glass.

"I've been meaning to ask you, Justin," Mrs. Clark said, "who were those people waiting in your office? That old man, for example, and that young mother with a four year old girl?"

"Oh yes," Justin said, nodding. "The old man is Joe Travelini, an old character actor. He often does odd jobs for me. I keep him in living expenses. The woman with

the daughter? She's Mrs. Hathaway. Her husband is in the big house. Guilty? Yes, but she wasn't. So I help her out. In fact—" He pointed to Mrs. Clark's check on the tablecloth. "This will go a long way toward that. You see, I pretend to give her assignments, such as sitting in the lobby of a hotel with her little daughter watching for a suspect; but they are always idle assignments. I pay her ten dollars an hour when she works, and see that she gets at least six hours a week in. When she really needs it and I can afford it, I give her ten hours a week."

Mrs. Clark's second drink came. She gulped half of it, gripping the glass with both hands, so they wouldn't tremble.

"Justin," she said, setting the glass down slowly.

"Yes, Mrs. Clark?" Justin said, sipping his martini, his owl eyes blinking at her.

"Will you marry me, Justin?" Mrs. Clark said.

She gripped her old-fashioned until her knuckles whitened, with

her soul in her eyes, while Justin's enlarged eyes blinked back at her mildly, in surprise.

"Mrs. Clark," Justin said gently, with a tone of deep regret in his voice, "I'm flattered, naturally, but I am already married."

Mrs. Clark studied him shrewdly for a moment.

"I think you're lying," she said, "but an expert at creating situations would also be an expert at getting out of them." She smiled—too brightly—hiding her sudden loneliness. Then, in a gesture of bravado, she held up her glass and said, "Cheers!"

She drained the glass, put it down, picked up her purse, hesitated as though she were about to say something, then stood up and headed toward the front doors of the cocktail lounge.

Justin watched her, making no move to call her back. When the doors had closed on her, an expression of distaste appeared on his face. His eyes were fixed.

In tones of shocked horror he said, "Me? Marry a murderess?"