

DETECTIVE TALES

December Issue
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REPORT TO THE CAPTAIN

By CHARLES LARSON



The crack of the automatic coincided with the snap of his elbow as he threw the bottle. . . .

Detective Steve Nebraska was damned if he'd report the death of his prospective father-in-law as suicide. . . . And he was doubly damned if he didn't!

HE SAT down at his desk slowly, and one of his knees cracked as it always did when he bent it, but this time he didn't smile or wince or do it again just to feel the tiny imperfection in his body. He pulled a sheet of white paper toward him, and, after testing his pen on a blotter, began very deliberately to write.

TO: Captain of Detectives.

SUBJECT: Homicide.

His pen hesitated. Outside the police station, a street-car, one of the old ones with narrow, woven-straw seats, and a conductor who knew everybody, rattled and shook over a switch in the track. A newsboy shouted the earth's misery at women shoppers. Suddenly a memory flashed into his mind, held, evaporated. Nothing concrete. Just the recalling of

quiet things. Security. A bit of calmness. A laugh in the sunshine.

How long since he had laughed? Twenty years? Fifty? A thousand?

He shook his head, went on writing.

" . . . at eleven-thirty P.M., on the night of August 19, 1943 . . . "

At eleven-thirty P.M., on the night of August 19, 1943, he had gone up the steps of a brownstone apartment house just off Western Boulevard, in Hollywood, with a ring in his pocket, two fortifying drinks in his stomach, and a sense of well-being that verged on the idiotic.

He was a man in love. A blind beggar half way across the earth could have seen it.

He was very tall, and thin, and about him there was an air of awkwardness which added

a certain charm to the whole effect . . . when people weren't expecting him to fall down from sheer lack of balance.

The day had been good. It had started on a high note, and instead of dropping him around noon, had grown and grown, until he wondered how he could keep his reason.

At nine-thirty, he found he hadn't lost his number 18 shoe-ration ticket at all; at one-nineteen (he was sure of the time to the minute) he had been promoted from cop to plainclothes detective; and at ten-ten in the evening, just twenty minutes before his day ended, and with it his uniform, he'd succeeded in getting the prettiest girl he'd ever seen to say "yes" to marriage plans.

The few false notes in the whole crazy-happy scheme had been almost forgotten. It didn't seem to matter to him at all any more that the prettiest girl's well-to-do, society-conscious father would as soon have accepted Hitler as a policeman for a son-in-law. He was immune, strong, a detective, in love.

Carefully he pushed the buzzer over the name Edwin Grinnel, who was the father, and when the door clicked, he walked inside.

Prophetically enough, he was whistling a harmless little tune he had learned when he was six.

It went over and over in his mind, endlessly repeating, phrasing itself into weird rhythms, and interesting beats. . . .

"*Won't you come into my parlor?*" said the spider to the fly, "*Won't you come into my parlor . . .*"

He couldn't remember the rest. But it seemed to him that the last word was "die."

It rhymed so well. . . .

GRINNEL opened the apartment door himself when the young man knocked, and if there was a flicker of disgust in his eyes, the young man didn't see it.

Beyond the door, there was a sudden burst of laughter. A glass tinkled against another glass, and somebody began playing *Wonderful One* on the piano.

"I'd like to see Terry," the young man said.

Grinnel nodded. He didn't move, didn't stand aside for the other to enter.

"Who is it, darling?" someone called from the apartment.

Nervously, Grinnel turned his head.

He's like a great dog, the young man thought. Nobody could have startled him like that but her. I think he loves her almost as much as I do.

There was a girl at the door then, and the young man grew embarrassed and silly inside at the simple phenomena of noticing her eyes light up when she saw him.

"Steve!" she said. And then shyly, she

added, when Grinnel coughed. "Come in. Please."

"If there's something going on. . . ."

"Just Dad's friends. You know them all."

He hesitated, looking at Grinnel.

"For heaven's sake, Nebraska, come in," Grinnel said. "I won't kick you." He turned walked back into the room silently.

Nebraska said: "You told him about us?"

"Yes. Right after you called. He didn't like it, but . . ."

"But you do?"

"I do," she said quietly. "I do, very much."

Nebraska drew a deep breath. "Then that's that," he said.

Together they went inside.

There were four others in the apartment, besides Grinnel. Hanley Cronyn, the actor, played a chord at the piano when he saw them, and said: "A toast!" He picked up his glass obediently, and emptied it. He was already a little drunk.

In a corner, Liz and Callie Wilson looked up from a game of gin rummy.

"Stevie!" Liz said. "Our new detective."

"How are you, Nebraska?" Callie laid down his hand, whispered: "Gin," and beamed at his wife.

In a depressed voice Liz murmured: "That does it. You must cheat."

Terry took Nebraska to a sofa on the other side of the room, and they sat beside a morose looking gentleman named George who was staring at a small, flash-type camera in his hands as though daring the thing to snarl at him.

He glanced up briefly when Nebraska said something about the night being cold for that time of year, and nodded.

"Who's cold?" Liz Wilson asked over her shoulder. She raised herself on one hip to stare unbelieving at them. "With this damned heater cutting up like Hell gone mad. . . ."

"The night, darling," Terry explained patiently. "Outside. Do you want the gas turned down?"

"Touch that heater, and you take your life in your hands. I thought you were making disparaging remarks about Grinnel's power of host. Poor, sweet thing. I *asked* him to turn it on."

After that they all laughed, and went back to what they'd been doing before, and there was no sound in the room except the quiet slur of cards when Callie dealt.

Nebraska leaned forward, took Terry's hand. "Hi," he said softly.

"Hi."

He nodded at the rest of them. "I thought you'd be alone. There were one or two things . . ."

"We couldn't just . . . slip out," the girl said. "Might insult 'em."

"Yes."

"Of course. . . . I suppose if you *have* to have cigarettes. . . ."

"What?"

"Cigarettes."

"Cig—" And then he understood. "Oh, cigarettes," he said, "good Lord, yes." He got up, patting at his pockets. "I noticed a shop around the corner. Care to come along?"

"If you people don't mind. . . ." Terry said, standing.

"Gin," Callie Wilson said again. He looked up. "Mind what?"

"Mind us going out for some cigarettes. We'll be back. . . ."

Hurriedly Callie reached into his coat pocket. "Why didn't you say something? I've—"

THE kick that Liz gave him could be heard all over the apartment. She raised one hand to the back of her hair, and began humming in an abstracted manner.

"Oh," Callie said. "Yeah. Go on." He whistled a little through his clenched teeth.

"I think we'd better leave anyway," Liz said. She pretended to look at her watch. "I have to get this hulk up at six tomorrow. . . ."

At the piano, Hanley Cronyn yawned, got shakily to his feet, struck a pose, and waited for them to notice him. "It's been a wonderful party," he said, "but tomorrow I emote. I have an eight-thirty call at the studio. Could you drop me at a carline, Callie?"

"I could."

Cronyn nodded with great dignity, and ambled across the room to an ashtray.

"George?" Callie said.

The man with the camera stopped aiming it, looked up. "Ah?"

"Drop you somewhere?"

"Oh." He stood up. "Yes. Third house from the corner of Sunset, on Vine, if you're going that way."

"Where's Grinny?" Liz asked suddenly. She paused, bent over the chair holding her coat.

It was a simple statement, a quiet, curious question, but unexplainably Nebraska felt odd. It was as though he'd lost his flesh for a moment, and there were spider webs on his spine. He wanted to laugh at himself for his melodramatics, and yet the feeling was so real. . . . Disaster. Helplessness. One fractured second in time when things weren't right, or weren't going to be right. . . .

"I think I saw him going into the bedroom," Terry murmured uncertainly. "I ca—"

And then the bedroom door was opening, and Liz Wilson was saying in her high, nervous voice. "There you are, dear! We're leaving you. Do you mind?"

"So early?"

Grinell walked to them, smiling, and Nebraska felt even sillier than he had before.

The old man had been sulking. Heaven knew he had a right to. Terry was too lovely a thing to lose with good grace.

Relieved, Nebraska took the girl by the arm, and walked with her to the door.

"I'm just going to the corner, Dad," she said.

Grinell nodded, and made some remark about not staying out too late, and Nebraska thought comfortably: *He's over it. He's had his anger, and it's gone. Everything will be all right now.*

Everything would be fine.

. . . . as the spider assured the fly. . . .

When they were going down the stairs, George, the man with the camera, began to laugh softly.

Liz Wilson, who was two steps above him, looked startled. "Have I gone mad?" she asked. "I think that's the first time in five years I've heard you laugh, Georgie."

The other shook his head, and wiped silently at his eyes. "None of you noticed, did you?"

"Noticed what, dear?"

"The camera. I was taking your pictures. Infra-red attachment." He seemed immensely proud of himself.

"Isn't that sweet!" Liz said. She stared at her husband incredulously. "He took our pictures, Callie. Isn't that sweet?"

"Charming," Callie said.

"Which of my profiles was it?" Hanley Cronyn put in. Half-seriously he added: "Hope to God it was my right."

They reached the bottom, and stood in the hallway talking about the camera. Somehow an argument started between Hanley Cronyn and George about camera angles, and lighting, and when the woman upstairs screamed, almost a quarter of an hour later, none of them had left.

The second following the scream was one Nebraska remembered all his life. He had been shifting from one foot to the other, wishing they'd get on, when it came—a tight, mad, idiotic thing, bursting like a rocket over their heads, drenching them with bright terror.

HE remembered looking up, startled, and he remembered catching a glimpse of the faces around him. For an instant they were children's faces, filled with all the immature fear of unknown things in the dark.

Then Callie Wilson was saying, "Wha—" and running up the stairs, and in a moment the strain was gone. Swearing, Hanley Cronyn followed him.

"That's Mrs. Carnahan," Terry whispered. "The woman across from us, Steve. . . ."

"You stay here," Nebraska said. "Wait for me here. Don't come up."

He took the stairs two at a time, and the night wind from one of the open windows along the corridor swept across his face, and he trembled. . . .

Cronyn and Callie were standing before Grinnel's door, holding handkerchiefs over their faces. In the hallway, the odor of gas was cloying, overpowering, and Nebraska felt his stomach twist with its sweetness. Mrs. Carnahan, a dumpy, pear-shaped Irish woman in the graying fifties, was huddled against the wall.

"Nebraska?" Callie shouted over his shoulder.

"Yes, Callie! What's wrong with his door? Get his door open!"

"The damn thing's locked. He locked it when we left."

Hanley Cronyn drew back, kicked at the knob with one foot. Coughing, Nebraska shoved him aside, battered against the door with his shoulder until he heard it crack, and splinter, and finally give way.

The gas came at them, rolling, swirling, getting into their eyes, and their lungs, but it wasn't so bad that they couldn't see Grinnel. He was sitting in the easy chair by the heater, and even before they tore at his collar and dragged him into the hall, they could see that he was quite dead. . . .

Nebraska never knew for sure which one of them turned the gas heater off, but he imagined it was Callie. People and events moved in a strange haze around him. He got Mrs. Carnahan into her own apartment, and asked her the questions his text-book told him to ask her, but it was all so dream-like, so frantic. . . .

She'd come out into the hall, she said, for some reason (she'd forgotten in the excitement; maybe a breath of fresh air, or to stretch her legs) and she thought she smelled gas. Well, Carnahan had always made fun of her hearing burglars, and smelling gas, and what not, so she had tried to convince herself that everything was all right. But it wasn't. The gas smell had grown stronger. She'd knocked once or twice on Mr. Grinnel's door ("thinkin' he might be asleep, you know?") "Yes. I understand. Go on.") but he hadn't answered.

Then she'd screamed.

Was that all right. Had she done wrong not to scream sooner? She'd been so nervous, and Carnahan had always made fun. . . .

Nebraska assured her that angels couldn't have done more, and went back to take another look at the room.

The sick smell of gas hung like dust over everything. The curtains reeked of it, and when Nebraska stumbled against one of the chairs, he half expected it to rise in little clouds, like dust.

He'd posted Cronyn outside the door, and in the hall he could hear the subdued murmurs of all the inevitable curiosity-seekers. Callie had called the police from Mrs. Carnahan's apartment and then gone downstairs to be with Terry and Liz.

The windows of the room had been tightly closed. Obviously Grinnel had killed himself. Over and over Nebraska tried to believe that it had been suicide, that it couldn't possibly have been anything else, but still . . . in his mind. . . .

He made his way into the bedroom, searching vaguely for some tiny thing he could point to when the police asked for proof and there was nothing. Grinnel's robe, a wine colored affair with his initials embroidered in white on one sleeve, was laying neatly over the bed; a half mixed drink stood on the night table; bills were spread in orderly confusion over his desk. And the window behind the bed was open.

Hardly a suicide's preparations.

On an impulse, Nebraska went to the window, leaned out. Below him, the street took on the unearthly appearance of a miniature stage setting. There was no fire escape. To have entered the apartment by that window would have taxed the abilities of a comic strip character. With a start, Nebraska realized that he was assuming murder . . . and not suicide at all.

He shook his head, and returned to the main parlor. It *couldn't* have been murder. Aside from the absence of known motive, there was the crushing fact that Grinnel had locked his apartment door behind his guests when they had left, and it had still been locked when Mrs. Carnahan had discovered the gas. Further, no one had passed them while they stood in the hall talking. . . .

Accident was out of the question. At first he had believed that a strong wind might have extinguished the gas heater's flame without Grinnel noticing, but the tightly closed living room windows had kicked hell out of that theory.

He was turning to go again into the bedroom, when the police came.

They walked into the apartment slowly, three of them, with their note-books out, and their guns loose and ugly in their holsters.

One of them Nebraska knew. He was a big man, with the wide easy walk of assurance, and Ireland looked out of his eyes when he smiled.

He said: "What goes, Stevie?"

It was hard to answer. Nebraska felt strange and alien suddenly. He said: "You know as much as I do, Irish."

"We saw Grinnel's daughter downstairs. She told us you were up here. She said you'd been up here all evening."

"Yes."

The patrolman walked across the room, sniffing at the air, and his gun hit dully on his hip with every step. "Suicide?" he asked.

Nebraska hesitated. It had just occurred to him, in a kind of tired panic, that this was his first case. Since ten-thirty he had been a detective. Theoretically, he was superior to the three patrolmen beside him. Would it be so hard to tell them yes, it had been suicide? Who would know? With one word he could cut away all the routine, the rotten mystery, the endless questions. . . . And it *might* have been suicide. As a matter of fact, it was much more probable that it had been suicide than murder. A locked room. The impossibility of anyone entering after the six of them had left.

And yet . . . and yet. . . .

Slowly he raised one hand to his eyes, feeling the cool pressure of his fingers, and half-reveling in the child-like astonishment of the shooting, colored spears when he pressed.

Then he said, quietly: "No, Irish. It wasn't suicide." He dropped his hands, looked at them. "I think he was murdered." He drew a deep breath. "I'll draw up a list of the people who were here with me this evening," he went on. "One of us killed him. I don't imagine there's any doubt at all. . . .

AT his desk, he was dreaming. He'd dropped the pen on the blotter in front of him, and put his head in his hands, and miles away he could see the events he'd just written spiraling and turning in his consciousness as though they were appearing through a pair of cracked glasses.

He felt sick, and in a rush of nostalgia, he remembered how wonderful life and living had seemed only the day before. Where had all those things gone? Organically he hadn't changed. He was still twenty-six. He still had his arms, two eyes, his health.

He leaned over slowly, picked up the pen, and scrawled, *Stephen Nebraska* at the bottom of his report.

Then he pulled another piece of paper toward him, and still standing, he wrote,

Because of the unusual circumstances connected with the murder of Edwin Grinnel, I believe that my report should be considered in the nature of a resignation from this department.

He hesitated, his head down, his eyes closed. He hadn't believed it could hurt so much. Behind his eyelids the first sting of crying began, and he straightened suddenly, careful to think of other things.

He gathered the two sheets of paper together, marked *Captain—Personal* on the resignation, and walked quickly out the door. . . .

When he'd left the report and the resignation on the Captain's desk, and got into the noon sunshine, it was a little better. He moved along the stone-high parapet separating Pershing Square from the sidewalk, and when he came across a group of women waiting for the Sunset bus, he stopped because it was too much to go around them.

When or how or why he climbed into the bus when it came, he couldn't possibly have said. He found himself dropping a dime into the metal fare-box, and although he was surprised and a little indignant at the way his body moved without consulting his mind, he didn't go back.

They were already opposite City College when it occurred to him where they were going. He'd made the trip so many times. . . .

At Western Boulevard, he rang the bell and got off.

From the corner, he could see the brown-stone apartment house, and it seemed to him, too, that he could see past the walls, into a parlor on the third floor, where the prettiest girl always sat, and where Edwin Grinnel had been murdered. . . .

THE place was almost unattended. He was surprised until he remembered that his report couldn't yet have been seen and acted on. The patrolmen hadn't believed him. The preliminary report must have been suicide.

Upstairs, the manager, quiet usually, but upset and flustered at the death in her building, met him as he wandered into Grinnel's apartment. Suspiciously, she began: "No visitors. The policeman told me absolutely not a person was to come in here. He said. . . ."

Nebraska pulled out his wallet, showed her his detective's badge.

"Oh," the woman said. She looked at it carefully, her full lips pursed. "I see. Yes. Well, I suppose now. . . ."

"I'm sure it'll be all right."

"He said. . . ."

"Look, ma'am. . . ." Nebraska planted his feet solidly, aware that he had no legal right to do this thing, and mad because of that, and madder because the manager didn't trust him even so. "I haven't the time. . . ."

"All right." The woman raised her hands. "You fight it out with him. He told me to do something; you tell me I'm wrong. I don't know. . . ." Shaking her hands, she went down the hall. Behind her, a little wash of martyrdom eddied and died.

Stolidly Nebraska watched her go, and then he stepped into the apartment, and closed the door behind him.

The room had already taken on the hushed appearance of something not lived in. The blinds had been drawn, and the light that entered was golden and ghostly.

He heard the sound of his feet when he walked to the window, and the rumble of a bus starting outside, like the dignified Southern Senator clearing his throat. In the back of his mind, he'd half expected the girl to be here still, and he felt foolish and out of place in the room when he found that she had gone.

Still, what had happened in this room? Who could have moved through locked doors to kill? And *why*, above everything else, had there been any killing at all?

Some of them, Callie, Hanley Cronyn, Liz, or the photographer, George, had found the way to kill perfectly. They had discovered the magic that let them be downstairs talking to him, while they killed a man three stories above.

Softly, he prowled about the room, opening desk drawers, and examining papers wherever he found them.

And, in the bedroom, he discovered one of the answers.

At first, while he was reading the top letter of a pack laying unobtrusively among the unpaid bills, he didn't realize what he'd stumbled on. It was very unbusinesslike, very normal.

This one was hand-written, on ordinary gray paper, and it said:

Mr. Grinnel—

Leaving Alcatraz tomorrow. Thanks for what you've done, put it in his pocket, and for the future. Will arrive in L.A. Saturday.

George Maxl.

And it was dated February 19, 1938.

Blackmail. Grinnel had been holding blackmail over an ex-con's head.

Nebraska read through it again, his hands trembling over the signature.

He folded the note, put it in his pocket, and hurried again into the living room.

He felt light-headed, almost drunk. The photographer, of course. The one man who was out of place in the pattern of things last night.

But how? How on earth. . . .

He moved his foot irritably over a raise in the carpet. What had he said when they were going downstairs? Something about doing something that none of the rest of them had noticed?

Under his breath he swore at the bunched up carpet, kicked at it, trying to find the answer to a most unanswerable riddle.

Suddenly he stopped.

Beneath his inquiring foot, the carpet moved, rolled, had firmness. He bent down, staring at it. From the metal outlet in the wall near him, a short length of green rubber hose protruded, lost itself under the thin rug he was standing on, and emerged, fat and ugly, at the back of the heater. The gas line.

Suddenly too calm, Nebraska found a match, struck it, and kneeling, lit the heater. Then

he stood where he'd been standing, with one foot over the hidden gas pump, and pressed down abruptly with the edge of his heel.

The tiny flow and shoot of flame stopped. In the quiet Nebraska could hear the beat of his heart, and the pound of it in his head. He let his foot up. Once more the gas came, free this time of interfering fire at the heater's jets, and hissed gently into the room.

He felt like screaming with the happiness in his mind. Why on earth hadn't he seen before. George, standing where he was, putting out a cigarette perhaps, just as they were leaving. . . .

It was so clear. So perfect. So damned crystal-simple.

He shut off the gas, and anxiously tried to find some flaw. And there was none. All of them had left without long goodbyes, without waiting to talk over the party with Grinnel. They'd gone, and the old man had locked himself into the room, and if he'd noticed the gas over the worry in his mind, he'd been too tired and much too numb. . . .

A board creaked behind him, and he started to turn, thinking: This is the policeman. The one the manager was telling me about.

He had time for thinking only. There was no question of protecting himself. A thousand elastic bands seemed to snap in his mind, and his head opened, and he could feel the coolness of metal crush downward over his ear. He fell soundlessly, breathless with the pain of it. Then he remembered nothing. . . .

DRUMS grew, receded, played fantastic Sambas in his mind. Coming back to consciousness was fully as painful as losing it. He rolled onto his back, wincing at the slickness of blood along the side of his face, and waited until the moths in his belly had quieted before he opened his eyes.

Nothing had changed. There were a few more shadows on the floor, and a bit more traffic pulsed in the streets, but he couldn't have been out for any great length of time.

He got to his feet carefully, stumbled into the apartment's bathroom. Warm water stung his face, and soon the wash basin was tinged red with his blood.

He couldn't call the police. What there was to do, he would have to do himself. The note was no longer in his pocket, and the blackmail that Grinnel had been holding over George's head was gone.

He shut off the water, and wiped his face on a purple guest towel. Then he walked out of the room.

George first, he thought numbly, and then the hospital. . . .

He walked all the way to the small house third from the corner of Sunset, on Vine, and when he got there his legs were tight with the

ache of coiled muscles. He tripped a little going up the steps, and a boy passing in the street stopped to look at him.

There was no answer to his ring, and he had almost turned to leave, when it occurred to him to try the door.

It was not locked.

He should have suspected then and there that something was wrong, but his head was throbbing, and his mind was dull and not at all up to par.

The living room he entered was dim, but he found what he was after.

George, the murderer, sat quietly in a straight-backed chair opposite the door, waiting for him.

Nebraska said: "You should have hit me harder, George. I'm still alive."

"I see."

"Your trick with the heater was good. It fooled me."

"It wasn't bad, was it?"

Nebraska couldn't have said when he realized for the first time that the voice wasn't George's, and that the eyes of the man across from him were too wide to hold any intelligence.

He turned.

In the doorway leading to a small dark-room, incongruous in the affair of the house, stood Hanley Cronyn.

Nebraska said softly: "Oh."

"Come away from the door, Stevie," Cronyn said.

Nebraska glanced back at the figure sitting opposite him, and he couldn't understand why he hadn't seen before that George was dead.

He said: "So that's the way of it."

"That's it. Come here, please."

Slowly, Nebraska walked toward the dark-room, and Hanley Cronyn backed into it, his hand gentle and loving around a short, blunt automatic.

"Hanley Cronyn," Nebraska murmured. "Stage name?"

"I sign my checks 'George Maxl.'"

"Yes. It wouldn't look good for an actor's public to know that he'd been in Alcatraz."

"Not good at all."

"Grinnel knew you before you were sent away, and he helped you when you got out?"

"He thought I had picture possibilities. But the returns he asked for helping me were way too high."

"I see." Nebraska put his hand on a table to steady himself. It was a small table, cluttered with photographic equipment, the way a photographer's table should be. "Why didn't you kill me back there?" he asked. He watched the white finger of Cronyn against the automatic's trigger.

"I tried."

"You should have aimed for my stomach, not my head. I'm a cop, Hanley. You can't hurt cops by smacking their heads."

Cronyn grinned.

"One more question," Nebraska said, "and then we'll get this messy business over with."

"What is it?"

"Why did you kill George?"

"A good question, Stevie. Go to the head of the class." Cronyn shot his eyes toward the still form in the chair. "He took pictures, remember? When I saw that you'd discovered my clever little method of murder, I realized that others might, too. They might if—" he hesitated, and grinned again, "—if they had a picture showing who was standing by the heater in the parlor last night. Proof, you see. George had such a picture. I had quite a time getting it away from him."

"Well. . . ." Nebraska began, and got no farther. The crack of Cronyn's automatic coincided beautifully and harmonically with the snap of his own elbow when he threw the bottle of photographic developer he'd found on the table.

The bullet was fired too quickly to hit him, and the screams in the room weren't from his own throat.

THE bottle of developer had been open and the liquid had sprayed across Cronyn's face, and now the brave murderer was only a screaming man, hunched against himself, clawing at his eyes and his face with white hands.

Sighing, Nebraska scuttled across the room, picked up the pistol Cronyn had dropped, and waited for the people the murderer's screams were bound to bring.

He glanced over his shoulder when the door burst open, and he tried to grin when the boy who'd been staring at him outside, rushed to him.

"Hello," he said dryly.

"My golly—what—"

"I'm Nebraska. Detective. Call the police. Tell them the Grinnel murderer is out of circulation."

"Detective. Yes, sir."

"And then get an ambulance. And ask the doctor how long it takes for a busted head to heal."

He watched the kid scurry toward a telephone, and he hoped the doctor knew a way to heal wounds fast, because he had a lot of things to do. He had to marry the prettiest girl in the world, and he had to tear up a report and resignation, marked personal, on the Captain's desk. And, although the Captain had begun his vacation three days ago, there was the chance that he might return sooner than expected.