



# NITROGLYCERIN NEWS

BY J.-J. des ORMEAUX

Author of "Letters Of Mystery," etc.

**I**T all happened very quickly, very smoothly, very innocently, those few moments in the quiet dusk at the corner of Cobalt Street that were to Detective Jim Fairwell the most critical of his life. It was that time of day when everything was slate-gray: the houses, the sidewalks, the roofs, the ornamental posts and iron gates that marked the esplanade down the middle of Cobalt Street. The sky was dropping lazy gobs of snow that fell like wads of cotton batting through the air. The squad car, left at the corner while Fairwell and his partner, "Brick" Eames, had dinner, would not start. Fairwell said it was the starter. Brick Eames said it was not, and ornamenting his opinion with a couple of blistering epithets, had said it was no use fooling with the old crate and had gone around the

corner to fetch a mechanic. Fairwell, resolved to have it fixed before Eames got back, shoved it in reverse and began to rock it, big shoulders swinging, lean jaw squared.

A gob of wet snow had attached itself to his upper lip, and he was thinking what a ludicrous sight he must make, embracing the car as if it were his mother and balancing a wad of snow like a popcorn ball on his upper lip, when Billy Rand, his best girl's little brother, had passed by on his paper route.

Billy had passed by, with his papers ranked like cartridges on the carrier of his bicycle. Fairwell would always remember that.

Billy had given him a flash of his merry dark eyes, thrown a crack at him, and pedaled on. It

made Fairwell smile. It always made him smile to see the kid, chipper, as pert as sunlight, in spite of the left leg that hung loose down the bicycle and would always be short of the other by three inches. The detective put his head under the hood. It must be the starter switch. He got out a screwdriver and began to short around the starter switch, the snow falling lazily on his neck and trickling down his back.

It was a few minutes later, when after a couple of blue sparks the length of his hand the engine coughed and started, that it happened.

It sounded as if the whole neighborhood took a deep breath and blew itself apart like a paper bag.

There was no locating the sound. It simply bloomed like a geyser in the air, making the eardrums rattle in Fairwell's head. He stood with the screwdriver in his hand, mouth half-open, turning his head with short jerks from side to side. He jumped into the car, shoved it into gear, and it died. Cursing, and deciding by this time that the sound had come around the hook in Cobalt Street, he jumped out, lifted the hood, and made contact again.

This time the engine kept going. He was just shoving the hand brake loose when Brick Eames came running around the corner, holding his hand against one leg to keep his holster from flapping. Brick Eames had a face as red and moon-round as Fairwell's was dark and rugged.

"Didya hear that?"

"Yeah—sounded like it came from Cobalt Street."

They were away from the curb, Eames cutting in the siren. Over the noise Eames shouted:

"You know who lives down there?"

"Who?"

"Bergereau."

They were both silent, thinking of John H. Bergereau, the big printer and calendar engraver, who had lately hurled the challenge to the extortion rackets that he would pay not one cent to them if he had to throw a guard around his plant night and day. He *had* put a night shift of special policemen around his plant—but not around his house.

They took the hook in Cobalt Street and saw a mushroom of grayish-blue smoke settling over the south side and part of the esplanade.

"Yeah," said Brick Eames, as if confirming a conjecture of his own mind to himself.

Under the mushroom were the remains of a

dignified yellow brick house. The front of it gaped now like a mouthful of broken teeth. Joists stood up naked and splintered; the sidewalk was a shambles of glass and broken brick. In back a woman was screaming.

"You take the back," cried Fairwell, and vaulted through the debris over what had been the front porch.

To the left a mound of broken plaster and beams was quivering. It stopped as Fairwell scrambled over to it. He lifted up a four-by-four and looked into a woman's face. She had been an ample blond woman, handsome in a foreign way, with a gold ornament like an oyster shell hanging at her neck. Now half her head was blown away, and the oyster shell was full of plaster dust.

Eames came around the front of the house with a trembling Swedish maid. She had stopped screaming; there was a streak of blood on her cheek from a cut under one eye.

"Anyone else in here?" cried Fairwell.

"No! No! We were all alone when—"

"How'd it happen?"

"I don't know—I was in the back!" She caught sight of the pinned body. "Oh—Mrs. Bergereau!"

It was only then Fairwell saw Billy. He was lying by a telephone pole, trying to lift one hand to signal. His crumpled body was lying half across the parkway into the street. Fairwell got to him in two steps. Billy recognized him, tried to grin, and passed out. Fairwell started to pick the boy up, stopped, his arms out rigid, a groan bursting from him. He turned to Eames.

"It's Billy Rand—Mary's brother—you know, Mary, my girl."

The ambulance screamed up. Fairwell's jaw muscles were still working.

"I can't tell her—I can't tell her. Will you?"

"Sure."

In the ambulance Fairwell sat by Billy's broken body, holding one of the boy's hands. The big detective was breathing deeply, his nostrils distended. He never took his gaze from the boy's eyes. He didn't expect them to open, but they did.

"Hello, Jim," breathed the kid.

There was a semblance of the same merry sparkle in his eyes, now overshadowed by something else, tragic and near.

"Billy"—Fairwell leaned closer—"who did you see?"

"Nobody."

"What? Nobody!"

"Nobody. There was nobody in the street. It just—happened."

"You must have seen somebody."

Billy shook his head. The smile still stayed in his eyes, but his face went blank. He gripped Fairwell's hand with convulsive strength.

Fairwell looked down at the grimy little paw. The fingers relaxed suddenly, leaving four red marks on the back of the big hand.

"I'll get 'em, Billy," said Fairwell in a low, shaken voice, "if it's the last thing I do."

The boy was dead before they got to the hospital.

Then came what knocked the legs out from under Jim Fairwell as if he had been hit by a mowing machine.

It was in the commissioner's office. The commissioner was a man with a frame like a halfback and a head as bald as an arc light. A mustache made a tangled black brush beneath sharp and bilious eyes. He wore a wing collar that rubbed against his chin with a rasping sound when he moved his head. He had been elected on a reform platform to smash the extortion rackets that were sucking the city's blood. He had been in office two months and had just got his program launched. He stopped walking up and down in the room when Fairwell was shown in to him.

Beside him was a man Fairwell recognized as Bergereau. Two wings of gray hair swept back above a face that was florid, handsome, and wattled with flesh. He was bigger even than the commissioner, and in his handsome face was an expression of ruthlessness and driving power. He was lighting a cigar as Fairwell entered and through the smoke his eyes flashed hard.

"You're Detective James Fairwell?" asked the commissioner.

"Yes, sir."

"You were at the corner of Cobalt and Polk streets when the bombing of Mr. Bergereau's house occurred?"

"I was."

"What were you doing?"

"We'd had trouble with our car, sir. My partner Eames had gone around the corner for a garage mechanic."

"How long were you on the corner of Cobalt and Polk after the sound of the explosion?"

Fairwell calculated. "I should say two minutes, sir, before I could start the car."

"Anyone near you?"

"No, sir."

"No cars? No vehicles? No passers-by?"

"No, sir." Fairwell was vaguely worried, and his rugged face expressed it by a slight knitting of his black brows. "You see, it's a dead corner—there's only Fathergood's drugstore a block and a half down Polk."

"Did any automobile pass you coming out of Cobalt Street?"

The commissioner shot the question like a bullet. Bergereau, shoving his head forward like a bull, was blazing at him with black eyes.

Fairwell stared from the commissioner to Bergereau, not so much at the question, as at the implication in their attitudes.

"No, sir."

The commissioner picked up a brass paperweight and set it down hard.

"Fairwell," he said, "Cobalt Street is blind at the east end. The blind end is two blocks down from where you were. In those two blocks there is no intersection. The Swedish maid swept the Bergereau front porch at five o'clock. That was five minutes before the explosion. Therefore there was no package, or bundle, containing the time bomb left at the entrance. Moreover, it could not have been a time bomb. We've had a demolitions expert at the scene verify the fact that the bomb exploded on impact. On impact—and the inclination of the wreckage shows it was thrown from outside. On *impact*," he repeated, his tired voice breaking into a rasping edge of sarcasm, "and I hardly suppose somebody walked by wearing a suit of armor and tossed that bomb up there."

Fairwell said nothing, passing his tongue between his lips.

The commissioner went on: "That bomb was tossed from an automobile traveling at high speed. That automobile must have passed six feet in front of you."

Fairwell swallowed. He felt the sweat start in his armpit. "But there was none, sir—no automobile passed me!"

The commissioner's collar rasped as he indicated Bergereau with his head. "Mr. Bergereau stepped in at Fathergood's drugstore for cigars on his way home. When he heard the explosion, he started running down Polk Street. As he did so, a

sedan shot by him, rocking from a skid. From the marks of the skid in the snow, it must have come out of Cobalt Street!"

"What!" exclaimed Fairwell.

He stared at Bergereau. In the man's hot black eyes there was no more of grief or suffering, rather a kind of triumph.

"You must have seen it," snapped the commissioner.

"He's mistaken!" exclaimed Fairwell. "He must have been mistaken—no car came out of there!"

Bergereau opened his mouth for the first time. His heavy bass voice snarled across the room like a black snake whip.

"How much were you paid to keep your mouth shut?"

Anger blazed through Fairwell. He took one step toward Bergereau, his big fist clenched; then the thought of the man's tragedy flashed on him and checked him. He turned toward the commissioner, breathing hard, the muscles of his jaw clenching and unclenching in his lean cheeks.

"I tell you there was no car came out of Cobalt Street! The boy—Billy Rand—confirmed it in the ambulance; he said there was no one in the street!"

"Confirmed by the boy—the dead!" Bergereau sneered.

The commissioner planted both fists on his desk. His bilious eyes seemed to throw a harsh and lambent fire.

"Fairwell," he said, "you've had a good record. There's nothing to prove you took a bribe. I'd rather put it down as intimidation. But I'm not running this force with men who can be intimidated. I give you one more chance. Whose was that car?"

Fairwell's breathing made his voice vibrate. "I swear there was no car passed me!"

The commissioner's jaws came together like a bear trap.

"You may go," he said.

Ten minutes later Fairwell was walking through the outer office of police headquarters with his discharge in his hand. He did not seem to see the chairs, the desks, the green-shaded lamps or the furniture; he bumped into the office railing at the end. His dark rugged face looked numb and rigid; if anyone spoke to him, he did not answer because he did not hear.

He walked down the wide scuffed stairs to the

street with the discharge wadded in one clamped fist.

At the door he almost collided with Eames.

"Brick—"

Eames's red face flushed to a deep mahogany as he looked stiffly by him. "I don't like anybody smelling of grease," he said harshly. "I'm moving my stuff out of our rooms."

Still it did not seem to get to Fairwell. It only stunned him more deeply. He heard the door slam after Eames and went on down the stairs in the way an ox who has been hit between the eyes with a mallet continues of its own momentum. A yelling newsboy bumped into him. Automatically he bought a paper. In a box on the front page was a blistering scarification of the police in the Bergereau bombing, claiming that a detective had seen the death car and was withholding evidence. It was all Fairwell read. He crumpled the paper in his big fist and threw it into the gutter, where it swirled like a sail for a moment on the river of running thaw.

Him! Him! The backs of his legs began to quiver. Him, Jim Fairwell, who had never taken a dime from a racketeer in his life! Discharged! Canned! Kicked out!

He was to meet Mary for dinner in the lobby of the Sherburn Building where she worked.

As he turned the corner, he saw her coming out of the building, her crisp hair flying brightly from under the rim of her small hat. He reached her in three strides.

"Mary—"

She turned on him, her blue eyes enormous, her winsome face drawn into a white mask of anguish.

"You! You! *You* took hush money to conceal the identity of the killers!" She struck her knuckles without knowing it on the front of the paper she carried. "Oh, no, Jim—no—no!"

It was all she could get out; her voice broke. He stood staring at her. They were in a little inset of the building; drops of thaw fell on a litter of papers between them. He felt his heart contracting as if a red-hot needle had been shoved into it.

"Mary—"

"Talk, Jim," she burst out; "talk—tell about it—tell who was in the car!"

"Mary, there was no—"

"Oh, go!" she cried. "That you—*you* should hide the murderers of Billy! That you *helped murder* Billy! Oh, go, I never want to see you

again—I can't stand it—go—go—get away from me!"

She turned and darted blindly into the eddying knots of passers-by.

Fairwell went into a downtown bar and began to drink. After three or four whiskies the whirling chaos in his mind began to settle into burning, hammering outlines. He sat hunched forward, staring at the bottom of the glass he was rotating in his fist. Like that it seemed in his mind—a spinning circle; only a red circle, red with rage and impotent anguish.

Out—booted out—shunned by everybody—a pariah—for what? For not seeing something that had not been! For not seeing the death car when there was no death car! No—no—it was not as though there were some corner of his mind he could run to and hide and say: I might have been wrong. It was simple *fact*—there was no position he could have been in that could have made him miss it. Even if he had had his head under the hood, Cobalt Street was so narrow the car must have whipped his coattails.

No car had come out of Cobalt Street.

He thought of Billy. The boy's brave racked face flashed into his mind, the whispered words: "Nobody. It just—happened."

No—no—no—nothing had come out of Cobalt Street.

He opened his hand and found he had broken the glass. He took the two segments from his palm and set them down without seeing them.

One thought stood up like a blazing brand in the whirling waste of his mind.

*He had to get the killers.*

How? In God's name how? When there was not even a lead—when he was no longer even a detective?

He put his hands over his eyes and tried to think.

Snatches of music, the sound of Bergereau's bass voice, sights of Mary, of Eames, interrupted and jostled his thoughts. Cobalt Street was blind. Yes. There was no intersection between Polk and Bergereau's house. No. It could not have been an inside job because the bomb exploded on impact and the maid had swept the porch five minutes before.

The thing was impossible.

That was Bergereau's voice. He took his hands

from his face and looked around. He realized for the first time he was in an expensive place, luminous with mahogany, soft lights, rich drapes, and shining glass; behind a casemented partition soft-footed waiters were circulating among diners.

Then he spotted Bergereau, his massive body bulking up among the other diners, the tones of his bass voice penetrating through the glass.

Fairwell moved over to a table by the partition and watched him.

He was dining with a woman in red. Shimmering, satiny red; the lines of her supple body were displayed in blond perfection as she flung back her head to laugh at something he had said. Bergereau, chuckling till his wattles shook, was leaning over with his eyes fastened on hers. The ruthlessness and driving power were gone out of that big handsome face now. It was flushed with liquor, and with something else—something that Fairwell could not fix. The man was enjoying himself. He was enjoying himself a little too much; the blonde was trying to hold him down. They were not eating much; at least Bergereau wasn't—but the highballs disappeared like magic beside him as fast as the waiter put them down.

Carousing—with his wife scarcely in her grave. Fairwell remembered that look that had been in Bergereau's eyes at the commissioner's.

A little wizened man with a withered arm came in and sat down at a table across from Fairwell.

Bergereau kept hunching closer to the blonde, as if to compress the barrier of the table between them. Every once in a while his bass voice rumbled through the partition in a roll of laughter, and once he leaned over and smacked a long kiss on the blonde's soft palm.

That kiss did it. As the big man's eyes came up, Fairwell fathomed the look in them. It was something special between him and the blonde. It might have been printed on his shirt front. That blonde could wind Bergereau like a piece of lingerie ribbon around her finger.

It slapped Fairwell with a jolt of all his instincts that Bergereau had done it.

Bergereau had murdered his wife, and the reason was sitting before him in shimmering red satin.

But how? How? Instincts could leap across the gap, but proof, evidence—that was another thing. How could he have done it when he was in Fathergood's drugstore at the time and both Billy

and he knew no one drove down the street?

The blonde and Bergereau got up to come out. Bergereau was in some difficulty with his muffler, and as they reached the door, he was still laughing and winding it in circles around his neck. The wizened man with the withered arm bobbed up before him.

"Hello, Mr. Bergereau."

A savage look wiped the merriment from Bergereau's face.

"What are you doing here?" he snarled.

"Why, I just—"

Bergereau swung a hard fist that caught the wizened man between the nose and the chin. The wizened man hit a rack of brandy glasses and went headlong with a splattering crash. Fairwell was on his feet. He got Bergereau by the shoulder and spun him around.

"Lay off the cripples."

The wizened man screamed: "You know no one was trying to milk you! No extortion racket, no—"

"You!" bellowed Bergereau, his inflamed eyes close to Fairwell's. "The copper filthy with hush money! I'll knock you—"

The blonde threw herself in a red catapult between them.

"John! John! No! Come on!"

She dragged Bergereau, muscling him like a she-leopard, out the door.

Fairwell darted his eyes around for the wizened man. The side door beyond the brandy rack was quivering. He dived that way, darted out an alley entrance to the street, looked two ways, saw no one, turned and plunged down the alley splashing through puddles and muck.

At the end of the alley was a fenced-off space hung with red lights from a building excavation. It was empty.

Two hours later Fairwell came back to his rooms and let himself in with his key. The first thing he saw was Brick Eames standing in the living room.

Brick's red face was set in rigid lines. He looked as if he were going to brain Fairwell with a chair.

"You!" he burst out. "I don't care whether you did it or not—I mean I know you didn't—I don't know what I mean, but I wish you'd bust me in the face for what I said to you!"

Fairwell didn't say anything, but he swallowed

as he took Brick's hand. They sat down at the living room table. Brick's eyes fell on a splintered mass Fairwell had under his arm.

"What's that you got?"

Fairwell set a length of broken timber on the table.

"It's a piece of beam from the Bergereau house. I've been digging around in the wreckage."

He put the beam on end and indicated some bright-colored irregularities on the side. "It's the edges of the leaded glass still sticking to it. It's from the entrance. It's one of the beams that supported the entrance."

He turned it crosswise and showed Brick the broken end. In the cross-section, one half was clean yellow wood, the other half jagged splinter. He ran his fingers over the clean wood.

"It's been sawed," he said.

"Sawed!"

"Sawed part way through."

Brick gave an exclamation and ran his hand over the wood. He shot his shoe-button blue eyes up to Fairwell.

"You're all wrong if you think the maid was an inside plant," he said. "We've checked up on her and she's clean—only been over from Stockholm six months."

"I'm not thinking the maid did it," said Fairwell. "I'm thinking Bergereau did it."

Brick's eyes bulged. "You're crazy!"

"Listen." Fairwell leaned over the table, his mouth and eyes like three lines. "The guy did it. I know it. I know it in my soul. I've been watching him all evening slobbering over a blonde. She's got him roped. He did it to get rid of his wife."

Brick stared at him as one does at a delirious child. "How could he have done it when he was in Fathergood's drugstore at the time? That's flat. That's established. Six people were with him when the bomb went off."

"I know, I know," said Fairwell. "What's the angle on this extortion business?"

"Why," said Brick, leaning back and still looking at him as if he doubted his sanity, "no more than you know yourself—that Bergereau called in the reporters a month back and made the statement that they wouldn't dig a cent from him if he had to throw a guard around his plant."

"Any proof he was threatened?"

"No. Why?"

"There was a little wizened man bumped into

Bergereau tonight that Bergereau didn't want to see. Bergereau was high and slapped him down in the bar of the Carlton. The little man yelled out: 'You know no extortion racket was trying to milk you!'"

Brick stared at him. "What!"

"Rake around among the stoolies and find out who that wizened man is," said Fairwell. "He's got a withered arm, the left one, dark complexion, stands about five-four, tips a hundred and a quarter, fifty to fifty-five, wears a brown overcoat and tan spats with one buckle off."

Brick's wide-stretched eyes had not altered. "You think Bergereau sawed away the front of his house? What do you think the little guy did? Pushed the house over?"



"No. But I long-distanced Scapiatti tonight, who was Tony Capri's secretary when Tony was trying to consolidate the extortion rackets and ran into a .45 slug. Scapiatti ran for Miami when the commissioner put the heat on. He laid me ten-to-one Bergereau was never approached."

"That don't mean anything," said Brick. "Scapiatti'd say that anyway. You're not piling up evidence. You're piling up imagination. There's one thing you don't even know: that Bergereau is collecting two hundred grand on seven insurance policies for his wife. But because a guy takes two hundred grand out on his wife is no sign he's going to murder her. A freak of the blast could cut that timber clean like that."

Fairwell did not seem to be listening to him.

"Know anything about his wife? Were they on good terms?"

"I don't know."

"Know the address of the Swedish maid?"

"Yes. She's staying at the Bellevue."

"I'll find out," said Fairwell.

Brick shook his head. "You can load up what you think is evidence. But it don't mean a damned thing. It's only evidence to you. You're haywire on the subject. You got Bergereau on the brain. The only way Bergereau could have left the bomb was to have planted it. But it was thrown. It exploded on impact. Do you think Bergereau heaved it over the roofs from Fathergood's drugstore? Do you think the little guy dropped it from an airplane?"

Fairwell's eyes almost closed. "Bergereau is all I think about," he said. "He did it. I'm going to get him." His voice quivered. "I've got to get him."

The city congealed with cold and with it the case congealed into impossibility. By noon the next day Fairwell had only this: that the blonde was named Anita Hapgood, that she was living at the Shoreview Hotel and Bergereau was staying there, too. Fairwell even barged in on the blonde, but she recognized him and threatened to have him thrown out. Of the wizened man he could find no trace, no lead.

He had no better luck with the Swedish maid. He bluffed her into talking, but the same simplicity that allowed her to be bluffed, opposed him with wandering generalities. The Bergereaus had had no children. Mrs. Bergereau and the maid came from the same part of Sweden. The Bergereaus had not been happy, but Mrs. Bergereau had religious scruples against divorce.

These things meant nothing. They only skirted the surface. The question was: How had it been done? Fairwell kept his mind locked on this question—even when it revolved, through repetition, as senselessly as a blind squirrel in his head. He had to. He had nothing else. The thought of Mary was a black hole in his mind he had to avoid. Sometimes he found himself reaching up, as his habit was, to free his badge from the inside edge of his pocket; and when he felt the empty place, he plunged on, his big hands numb in his pockets, his set lips blue.

At half past four he was in Fathergood's drugstore. Fathergood was a man with a long head like a cob of corn, and a drooping russet mustache

that turned to violet at the ends as if from dipping in his own prescriptions. It was not hard to draw him into conversation.

"So you all ran out when you heard the sound of the explosion?" asked Fairwell.

"No," said Fathergood, who had been dramatizing it graphically, "Mr. Bergereau cried, 'My house!' and ran out—but the other customers and myself just kind of gaped around for a minute kind of senseless."

"Then you didn't see any sedan pass by?"

"No, mister, but the windows were all steamed up with frost."

"I see." Fairwell pocketed the cigarettes he had bought. "Was Mr. Bergereau in here long, before it happened?"

"Let's see." Fathergood put a violet end of mustache between his teeth. "He must have come in here about five minutes to five; yes, I remember, because it was only about ten minutes after Billy left."

"Billy!" exclaimed Jim Fairwell. "Billy who?"

"Billy Rand, the boy who was killed."

"Billy Rand was in this drugstore?"

"Yes, he came in for three cigars."

"Cigars!"

"Yes, for Mr. Bergereau. He said he'd met Mr. Bergereau down the block and Mr. Bergereau had asked him to get them for him. I guess it was just a stall," said the druggist with an apologetic laugh, "because Mr. Bergereau himself came in and got three cigars about ten minutes after."

The druggist could supply nothing more. Billy had come in for three cigars about twenty minutes before the explosion, saying they were for Mr. Bergereau. Some ten minutes later Mr. Bergereau himself came in and bought three cigars.

This set Fairwell's mind racing off at new and incomprehensible tangents. Why on earth would a man send a boy for cigars and then come in and get them himself? Was it to get Billy out of the way? Was Bergereau afraid Billy, being in the block, might see something—some preparation?

Fairwell turned at the corner and walked rapidly down Cobalt Street. The scene was now sharp black and white; the ornamental railing of the esplanade held a rim of snow like toothpaste on a brush. A white downy mantle softened the wrecked silhouette of the Bergereau house; already the debris was cleared away. A bicycle leaning against a tree gave Fairwell a shock; he thought for an

instant it was Billy's. A boy blowing blasts of steaming breath ran across the street with a full sack thumping behind him.

"Paper, mister?"

"No."

"Thought you might want one. I got some extras."

Fairwell bought one. He looked at the boy's round, lobster-red cheeks.

"Did you know Billy Rand?" Fairwell asked.

"Sure," said the boy. "We go to the Lloyd School together. I mean, we went. That was sure tough. I was the one broke him in on this route. I used to have it."

"Did you know Mrs. Bergereau?"

"Sure. She got the *Svornost*—Swedish paper. Only one on my route. I always used to see her watching for me down the block. Not no more. Thanks, mister."

He pedaled down the street.

Fairwell stood staring after him, the wind souging in his ears, probing him with cold fingers. The black and white of Cobalt Street merged to a silvery gray; feathers of snow dusted down his neck.

"Can it be?" he said half aloud. His body twitched forward at the waist. "Can it be? *I've got it!*"

Bergereau had breakfast in the azure room of the Shoreview Hotel at nine o'clock, usually with the blonde. At ten minutes to nine Fairwell went into the Shoreview pharmacy and bought a toothbrush.

"I want a special kind," he said to the clerk, his eyes searching the showcase. "Let me see that rack up there."

"Yes, sir."

The clerk took down the rack and Fairwell examined several.

"I'll take half a dozen of these," he said.

After several minutes in the lobby washroom he passed through the azure room where he had already learned from a waiter the location of Bergereau's and the blonde's table. He stopped a second at the table, picked up the *Herald* in the rack, and substituted another *Herald* for it.

At nine o'clock Bergereau came into the azure room, rested, shaved, radiating self-satisfaction and his handsome face glowing from a massage. He looked around for the blonde. She was not down



yet. Bergereau walked to his table, spread his napkin, took a leisurely sip of orange juice, smacked his lips, and opened his morning paper.

An outcry burst from him. It vibrated in the room, a blast of uncontrollable agony. He came to his feet; the chair went over behind him.

At that moment the blonde came into the azure room. Bergereau, his face quivering, made a tremendous effort to control himself, coughing and burying his face in his napkin. The paper he thrust behind him on the seat of his chair.

The blonde came rapidly across the room and pressed him with solicitous questions. Bergereau sat down, shaking his head and gesturing as if it were nothing. He spread his napkin and forced a smile. His glowing wattles had turned as gray as putty.

Fairwell was watching from the lobby, his eyes narrowed.

Bergereau ate very little breakfast. He excused himself and had a conference with the waiter. Then he went quickly through the lobby to the car waiting to drive him to work.

Fairwell prowled around the Bergereau printing plant all morning. Bergereau took lunch inside the plant; but at six o'clock the blonde called for him in a club sedan. Fairwell was waiting for him, his coat collar turned up, his eyelashes glued together with frost under his pulled-down hat. He got his stiff legs into motion and ran around the corner and flagged a cab. The sedan snaked leisurely through downtown traffic and pulled up at the Carlton.

Fairwell took a chance and darted through the side door into the dining room while Bergereau and the blonde were getting out.

"Single?" The head waiter bobbed up before him with one finger raised. "This way, sir."

"I'm looking for somebody," said Fairwell, and pushed by the head waiter toward the table Bergereau and the blonde had occupied the other night. The table had a "Reserved" card on it. Fairwell put an *Evening Tribune* on the table and walked around the glass partition into the bar.

Bergereau and the blonde walked in toward the reserved table, the head waiter bobbing before them, Bergereau smiling, the blonde gurgling. Bergereau did not notice the *Tribune*, but in leaning over to seat the blonde, he knocked it to the floor with his elbow. His eye automatically followed it as it opened.

He shrieked. It was an unleashed, wild sound; it

penetrated the room like a knife. Everybody came up on their chairs like ramrods. Bergereau's face went fish-belly white; he snatched up the paper, tore it in shreds with obviously no notion what he was doing. He was like a drunken man. His wattles were shaking like a brained turkey cock's.

"Who did this? Who did this?" he screamed.

The head waiter clutched him. "Here, sir—"

Bergereau turned on him absolutely berserk. His quivering face was a purplish black. "You! You! You let him do this! Who was it?" He grabbed the head waiter by the throat.

The blonde stood like a block of marble. Two waiters tackled Bergereau. Bergereau, not even bothering with the head waiter, hardly knowing what he was doing, put his head down and plunged for the door.

"Let me go! Let me go! I'll—"

"Hold him! Hold him!" shrieked the blonde.

Bergereau, tearing the waiters from him, dived for the door, absolutely oblivious of her. His face was like an insane man's. The words were a hoarse scream: "I'll get him! I'll get him!"

Fairwell stepped into a phone booth and dialed Brick Eames.

"I'm here at the Carlton," he said. "Bergereau just rushed out like a wild man. He's ripe."

"Listen," said Brick. "I've just turned up that Bergereau was underbid two months back on the telephone directory contract that furnishes most of his business. He's facing foreclosure."

"Check," said Fairwell.

"I've located that wizened fellow for you. He's Johnny Lipps, an old safecracker; worked for Bergereau up till January 1st. He lives at 1707 Burchett Street, in back of a store."

"I'll see you there in ten minutes," said Fairwell.

Burchett Street was a dead byway that ran like a narrow canyon beneath the dark girders of the elevated structure. A few neon lights blinked feebly down its black throat. Brick Eames was waiting for Fairwell behind a stanchion of the elevated structure. He pointed to a shabby storefront, as empty as a dead eye.

"That's 1707," he said. "There's lights in back. The boy's at home."

They made a circuit from the corner through an alley and approached the store from the rear. Foot tracks, heavily indented and widespread, went

ahead of them in the snow.

"He's got company," said Eames. "Somebody in a hurry."

Between two mounds of tin cans covered with snow they emerged into the backyard. Deep bass tones reached them from within.

"Bergereau!" said Fairwell. "So this is where he went!"

Blinds were drawn in the building behind barred windows.

"Look. There's a transom," said Eames.

Fairwell put one foot on the barred sill, got hold of the door frame, and looked through the transom.

The wizened Johnny Lipps was sitting on a cot piled with blankets opposite Fairwell. His withered arm was turned as if he were resting it against the wall. A solitaire deck was spread out on a deal table before him. The room was small, papered with colored pictures from Sunday magazine supplements; a couple of discolored vats and some laundry tubs poked up.

Bergereau's back was to Fairwell. He could see the ripple of fat and muscle in the man's bull neck.

"Don't take that line with me," he was saying in a deep snarl. "Who else could it be but you?"

"I tell you I haven't been out of the house!" shrilled Lipps in a piercing nasal. "You're screwy as—"

"You're the only one that knew about it!" Bergereau burst in. "Didn't I buy the nitroglycerin from you? Who else but you knows I did it?"

"Get the hell out of here!" screeched Lipps. "I don't know what you did with the soup I gave you! I don't care!"

"Playing me for a sucker, eh?" rasped Bergereau. "Popping up in front of me so I'll know you did it! Planting me with newspapers, eh? You'll bleed me, eh?" His voice rose to a mad roar. "Well, I'll pay you to keep still! I'll pay you to keep still—with this!"

His hand snapped up and an automatic kicked fire across the room. It happened so suddenly the bullets might have been part of his roar. Lipps's wizened face jerked into the expression of a Halloween mask, his eyeballs rolled up like white grapes. He got up, grabbed at the solitaire deck as if trying to shovel the cards into his lap, and pitched head down on the table.

Fairwell dropped lightly to the ground, then swung with all the weight of his body against the door. It was unlatched; it slammed back. Both he

and Brick went in together. Bergereau whirled, firing blindly; a bullet splintered the glass. Fairwell, with no gun, tackled him by the legs as a shot from Brick knocked his forearm around like a windmill. The cot went over as Fairwell dived for his gun.

Bergereau crouched in the corner like a bull in a corner of a corral.

"Dead," said Brick, flipping Lipps's head up with his hand. "You'll burn for this murder, Bergereau. Better spill the other."

Bergereau laughed. It was an impossible sound, coming from that contorted face.

"This is my wife's murderer!" he cried. "I killed him, see? He was the only one who knew how it was done!"

"No," said Fairwell. "I know how it was done." He stepped to Bergereau and handed him an open *Tribune*.

Bergereau's eyes came up to Fairwell's. He did not move. His eyes were fascinated, paralyzed, dazed, like a rabbit's before a snake. Something seemed to break in him, but without sound, without movement.

"All right, copper," he said. He did not talk, he whispered. "I did it. I might have known. But it was impossible. But I don't see her. I never see her. I see the boy. I always see the boy."

He stopped whispering and began to scream.

The sound of Bergereau's screams had long since subsided down the cell block. The assistant chief of detectives kept scratching the blue dent in his chin and staring at Fairwell, sitting beside him. He said, shoving his hat back:

"I still can't believe it. He murdered his own wife—behind an extortion screen. If I hadn't heard it from his own mouth, I'd think I was dreaming."

His eyes kept returning wonderingly to Fairwell. "This'll knock the commissioner high as a volcano," he said. "He was nearly nuts about the case, with the pressure from the newspapers about the extortion angle. When I told him over the phone, I could hear the upper plate drop out of his mouth."

A uniformed policeman ran in. "Here's the commissioner now."

Both men got off the precinct sergeant's desk. A door slammed and the commissioner rushed in, his bald head wrapped in a muffler under his hard hat, his bilious eyes still puffy with sleep.

"He's down in Cell 18, sir," said the assistant chief. "Do you want to see him?"

"No, no—I want to see Fairwell," said the commissioner, still unwinding the muffler from his face. "I thought you said he was here."

"Here I am, sir," said Fairwell, coming around in front of him.

The commissioner finished taking off his muffler. "It isn't often you get an apology in this town," he said. "Much less from a public official. But if I ever made one in my life, I make one now." He extended his hand to Fairwell, his bilious eyes frank, direct, and glowing. "You won't get your badge back, but you'll get another, Detective-Lieutenant Fairwell."

Fairwell flushed. He couldn't get a word out. He stood gripping the commissioner's hand.

"You say he did it with a bottle?" asked the commissioner.

"Yes, sir," said Fairwell, "with a long narrow vial like an elongated chemist's test tube. You see, it was very simple. Billy Rand threw the bomb. It was inserted in his newspaper.

"Bergereau's wife read the *Svornost*, the only Swedish paper on Billy's route, as Bergereau easily ascertained. He knew his wife always went to the door when she saw the newsboy coming. He figured the nitroglycerin thrown to the door would kill her and the boy, too.

"He wasn't very sure of the extent of damage the nitroglycerin would do, so he partially sawed

some of the entrance beams. He stopped Billy on Polk Street, and asked him to go to Fathergood's and get him three cigars. While Billy was gone, Bergereau opened the *Svornost* in his carrier and inserted the tube of nitroglycerin with a bit of adhesive tape. He retwisted the paper in the tight knot newsboys use to throw their papers to the door.

"He made a mistake when, in going into Fathergood's drugstore to establish his alibi, he got rattled and asked for three more cigars. He overstepped himself too when he claimed he saw a sedan, but he figured by that he made it airtight. He knew his business was going on the rocks, knew of his wife's insurance, and had the thing planned from the time he called in the reporters and bulled them about the extortion racket.

"I broke him by simply taping a glass toothbrush holder inside a paper and laying it by his plate. What I didn't figure was that he would think Johnny Lipps was doing it and go for him. If we hadn't caught him red-handed murdering Lipps, we never would have got him, for there wasn't a shred of evidence."

Brick Eames came in.

"I've got somebody here to see you," he said, and stepped out of the doorway. Mary Rand, her white face haloed by her bright hair, stood in the open door.

"Jim—Jim—my Jim!" she cried in a breaking voice, and rushed across the room into his arms.