

The infernal web

By Hugh B. Cave

CHAPTER ONE

It was dark tonight, and quiet, and the ticking of the big mahogany clock on the fireplace mantel seemed abnormally loud. Ed Dreyer tried hard to concentrate on the columns of newsprint that blurred before his eyes, but the room's silence had worked on his nerves and he kept peering into shadows, kept squirming in the big chair under the lamp.

Two o'clock. Bee should be getting home from that confounded party.

He wondered if she felt as nervous and jumpy as this when Headquarters kept him out late on assignments. Bee had complained often about being the wife of a city dick. Maybe he should not blame her for good-timing with pals of his when he himself had so often been forced to disappoint her.

Still, when a girl was only two months married she should be wanting to spend some time with the man who married her.

He scowled again at the paper. This stuff on page one didn't help the nerves any—this business of a guy's being arrested and jailed for wife-slaying. The paper said:

The evidence, while largely circumstantial, is overwhelming. The State maintains that Haskell's repeated denials of guilt are merely desperate attempts to escape the consequences.

The phone was ringing. Dreyer answered it.

"That you, Ed, honey?" His wife sounded plastered, he thought glumly.

"Listen, dear. The whole crowd is leaving the apartment here and going out to Matt Crandall's cottage at Echo Lake. It'll be a grand party. You'll hurry out there, won't you?"

"Maybe you don't remember you've got a home," Dreyer said.

"Of course I do, darling. But I can't bring the crowd over; there isn't a decent thing to drink in the house. You *will* come out to Matt's place, won't you, dear?"

Dreyer put the phone down and went upstairs to change his clothes. His wife smiled at

him from a photograph on the cluttered top of her dressing-table, and he glared back at her, bitterness twisting his mouth.

She was a good-looking girl and a swell sport, but in two months of married life she had warped him all out of shape, killed all his big ideas.

He pulled a patched blue sweater over his shirt and went downstairs again. Sure, he'd go to Echo Lake. Why not? And this time he'd drag her back with him, drunk or sober.

It was three a.m. when he turned off the main road and drove over lumpy ruts to the clump of pines on the lakeshore. The place had been a sucker development some years back; Matt Crandall had bought land, put up a cottage, then found himself looking out over a swamp. No neighbors.

There ought to be cars parked in the pines now, and a radio turned full blast. The girls should be doing a lot of drunken giggling. But the place was dark, quiet.

Dreyer leaned over the wheel, stared at the darkened house, and wondered what was wrong.

He took a flashlight from the door pocket before sliding out of the machine. Chances were, Matt Crandall's crowd had stopped at some roadhouse on the way here. They'd be along soon, most of them roaring drunk.

The house door opened when he turned the knob. He stepped inside, and the roving beam of the flashlight showed him the usual junk of a cheap summer camp: ugly, second-hand furniture, a fireplace filled with refuse, knotty pine walls plastered with pictures from magazines.

He picked up an oil lamp, shook it, held a match to the wick and looked around, scowling. It was a good place for an all-night brawl; wasn't fit for much else. He lit a cigarette, walked to a battered portable phonograph and pawed through a pile of dusty records, then cranked the machine and put a Duke Ellington disc on the turntable. The muted strains of Ellington's *Mood Indigo* trailed him into the bedroom.

He stood quite still and stared at the bed. Somewhere in a shadowed corner of the room a cricket was chirping.

The flashlight's beam clung to a shape that lay there on the patchwork quilt. It swept across a tangled mop of blond hair, a pain-twisted face gray and stiff as dirty plaster, a slender, twisted body clad in a metal-cloth evening gown which had cost thirty bucks a month ago.

Blood had gurgled from a gaping hole in the girl's chest, had coursed down a deep crease in the crumpled quilt and puddled the floor. Out in the other room the record had played itself out and the needle was grinding monotonously in the last groove.

Dreyer paced forward slowly, his own face twitching. He peered down at the woman and worked his lips a moment and said thickly, "I—I guess I won't have to drag you home, kid. I guess there'd be no sense to it now." Then he sat down and tried to figure it out, and when he stopped staring at his wife he saw a gun lying at the edge of the pool of light thrown by the flashlight in his hand.

The weapon was lying on a small rag rug in front of a bureau and it should not be there. It should be in the drawer of a desk-table in his den at home. It was his own gun.

Hell, Dreyer, you're crazy, he thought. But when he got out of his chair and picked the weapon up and looked at the serial number on it, he shook his head, frowning, and said, "Nope. It's mine, all right. But what the hell . . ."

It was an S&W forty-five, and one slug was gone. He walked back to the bed and peered down at his wife. *She didn't do it herself, that's certain*, his mind told him. But there were other things he was not so sure about.

There was, for instance, a bottle of gin on the dressing-table. It was a brand not popular with the gin-consuming public, but it was the kind he always ordered. There were two small glasses beside it, and both had come from the kitchen closet at home. One of them he had used last night. His fingerprints were probably all over it.

There were cigarettes blocked in an ashtray—ten-centers, of the brand he himself smoked. And there were other things.

He got the idea after a while that the set-up had been carefully arranged to point a bloody murder finger in Ed Dreyer's face. One or two of these things might just have happened; not so many all at once.

Well, it wasn't too late to straighten things out.

He dropped the gun into his pocket, dumped the cigarette butts into a glass, picked up both glasses and the gin bottle, and headed for the door. Then he realized it couldn't be done so easily.

That phone call. There'd been a cunning motive behind that. The call had been made for the purpose of luring him out here, and now the place was full of Ed Dreyer's fingerprints. Sure. Fingerprints on the furniture, the phonograph, the death-bed, the dressing-table in the murder room. Everywhere.

In the soft ground outside there'd be footprints and tireprints. It was too late now to undo all that damage. He'd be sure to overlook something. Chances were, the killer was watching the place right now; therefore it was senseless to entertain even for a moment the fantastic thought of hiding the corpse.

"Framed," Dreyer muttered.

The newspaper tonight had said something about a fellow named Haskell being arrested for wife-murder. *The evidence, while largely circumstantial, is overwhelming*, it had read. The evidence here was the same, and the police would be out for Ed Dreyer the same as they'd gone after Haskell.

Maybe Haskell had been framed, too. Maybe there was some connection. But it was too late, anyway, to claim innocence and expect the cops to believe the truth. Haskell had claimed innocence; no one had believed him.

Dreyer flung the gin bottle and glasses into the fireplace, growled maledictions under his breath, and slammed the shack door behind him. He got into his car and turned it around. Hands stiff on the wheel, mouth twisted into a thin-lipped snarl, he stepped savagely on the gas-pedal.

He did a lot of hard, slow thinking during the next hour, and when he was through thinking he turned onto the Parkway and drove out to Somerville, where he put the car in cold storage in a garage run by a dark-haired Italian named DiAngelo. For a while he'd be better off without it.

He walked from Somerville to Lechmere and caught a street car. When he got off at North Station the streets of the city were gray with dawn, the air was damp, cold, and Ed Dreyer had an ache in his stomach.

He filled up in a one-arm lunch, then prowled through the grimy streets of the North End until he found a tenement house that suited

him. It was six a.m. then. He took a suite of rooms on the top floor, paid the landlady five dollars in advance, and at eight o'clock went out for a paper.

The headlines screamed:

SECOND WIFE-MURDER STUNS POLICE!
*City Detective Hunted for Killing Mate in Lonely
Echo Lake Cottage*

He was not surprised. He'd expected it.

He read the details while sprawled on a couch in the smallest and dirtiest of the three rooms he had rented. The door was locked. For a while, unless the cops were almighty keen, he would be safe here in these three squalid rooms, would be quite alone with the crawling things that undoubtedly lurked in the cracked wallpaper, the grimy floors, the assortment of patched-up furniture.

Even sunlight, if there were any, would have trouble getting through the grimy windows of this dump.

That was bad, because Ed Dreyer's soul sorely needed some sunlight right now. The words in the newspaper chilled his blood. With wide eyes he read that the police, tipped off through an untraced phone call, had gone to Matt Crandall's place at Echo Lake, found the body, and come up with fingerprints, footprints and tireprints to prove that Edward Dreyer had been there during the night.

They had also established a motive: Dreyer's knowledge of the fact that his wife frequently held amorous meetings with other men. Now they were looking for Dreyer himself, to pin a charge of first-degree murder on him.

He went out to find a phone. Careful where he found one, he slid unobtrusively at last into a cigar-store booth and was particular about facing the wall while he talked.

He called Hagen Sturm, who was both an attorney and a friend, and was young enough, maybe, to be willing to play a dangerous game for the sake of friendship.

"Thanks, Sturm," he said a moment later. "Now listen. Udell is a close friend of yours. Edmund Udell, who owns the *Tribune*. Get close to him, will you, and find out what's going on? I can't wait for the papers to tell me what's happening. And listen, Sturm. The name is

Wilson—mine, I mean—though the landlady was so sleepy she maybe didn't get it. Third floor tenement, one-eighteen Cramer Street. Bring whatever you get. And be careful."

He walked back to Cramer Street. The morning's mist had become a chill drizzle. Passing cars, trucks, were gray ghosts in a distorted world that seemed sinister. It had just occurred to him in full blast that the police were out to get him; that the word GET had capital letters and there would be no stalling for talk before the fireworks. The chill under his damp clothes was not entirely due to the rain. Cops around these parts were generally pretty competent.

He closed the downstairs door of one-eighteen behind him and climbed the stairs. A girl was leaning against the railing-post on the top-floor landing. She looked straight at him and said, "Hello." Dreyer glared at her. She was young, well-dressed, rather attractive.

"My name is Ann Corey," she said quietly, "and I'd like to talk to you."

He didn't answer. The dampness of his clothes was bothering him, and his disposition was none too good after last night. He suspected she was a welfare worker, and accused her of it. Welfare workers were like flies down here in the slums.

"I'm a reporter," she countered calmly. "For the *Tribune*."

Dreyer said, "How'd you find me?"

"By accident. I was down here asking questions at the welfare agency, because Haskell's wife used to work there. I saw you walk out of the building, tried to follow you but lost you, then came back and waited in hope you'd return."

Dreyer shrugged his shoulders. The girl didn't look hostile, and she certainly wasn't afraid of him. He unlocked the door, said "Come in, then," and after trailing her over the threshold relocked the door behind him. Then he said grimly, "So you're a reporter."

"I asked Mr. Udell to let me work on the Haskell case," Ann Corey said, "because I knew Mrs. Haskell personally. I've found out a lot of things in the past few days. You seem to be in the same fix that Haskell is in, except that they haven't caught you yet. The cases are amazingly similar."

He talked to her for a while. She seemed sensible, and she apparently had no intention of rushing to the police with information concerning his whereabouts. She stated her position clearly by saying, "If I could crack this case I'd be getting you out of a frightful mess and boosting myself at the same time. Why not let me help you?"

"Why not?" Dreyer said.

Ten minutes later he heard footsteps on the stairs. When he tiptoed to the door and opened it he had a gun in his hand—the same gun that had killed Bee.

"Get in the other room, will you?" he said to Ann Corey.

She obeyed without comment, and he heard the bedroom door close softly as he waited out on the landing. He said, "Hello, Hagen," before the man reached him, and the fellow stopped with a jerk as if startled out of some deep thinking.

Paradoxically, attorney Hagen Sturm didn't look like an easy man to scare. He was tall, had a pale face and a high, pale forehead, thin lips and cold, clear eyes. He looked competent.

"I've been to see Udell," Sturm said when the door was locked. "I had to confide in him to a certain extent to gain his confidence, but I've convinced him the police are wrong about you. He wants very much to help."

Dreyer put his hands on his knees, leaned forward on his chair, and said pointedly, "Far as the police are concerned, they're positive I did it?"

"I'm afraid so, Ed. But Udell has a strong hand, too, owning the city's biggest paper and being high up in politics. He's put some of his best men on the case, and they've already found an angle to work on."

"What angle?"

"I got this straight from the city desk, not from Udell. Ever hear of a place called Paul's Beauty Salon?"

Dreyer nodded. "My wife went there."

"So did Haskell's wife. The place is run by a foreign-looking fellow about thirty, name of Isidore Paul, who's been acting in a mighty suspicious manner."

"Anything else?"

"I'm afraid not, Ed. But I'll keep you informed, and I'll move heaven and earth. I'll have to be careful coming here, though." On his

feet, Sturm had his hand out. "Take care of yourself, Ed."

When the lower door clicked shut, Dreyer called to Ann Corey and she came out of the bedroom. "What he said about Paul's Beauty Salon may mean something," she said.

"What do you know about it?"

"I've been there. Matter of fact I've been there often. It's handy to the *Tribune* Building, where I work. Isidore Paul doesn't own the place. It's owned by a woman who calls herself Madame Yvonne, who gives special facials to special customers at higher than the usual prices." She looked straight into Dreyer's narrowed eyes and was scowling. "I think I'll pay Paul a visit."

"You'll be back?"

"If you change your address," she said, "put the new one in the want-ad column of my illustrious paper."

Dreyer watched her as she went down the stairs. Then with the door relocked he sprawled out in a chair, stared at the scarred top of the table, and cursed himself fluently for being a fool.

CHAPTER TWO

Ann Corey came again next morning. She had a paper bag in one hand, put it on the table, and took out a can of coffee, some eggs, other supplies. For the next ten minutes she was busy in the kitchen, and he heard her swearing softly over the gas stove. Then she brought him a breakfast, put it on the table, and placed a chair in front of it.

"You eat," she said. "I'll talk. When you're through eating, there's a razor and some shaving stuff in the bag there."

While eating, Dreyer said with his mouth full, "You went to Paul's place?"

"I made an appointment to have my face beautified by Madame Yvonne this afternoon at three-thirty." She put her elbows on the table and frowned at him. "I learned something else, too. Can you take it?"

Dreyer put his fork down. "What?"

"The lawyer who came here to see you yesterday—Hagen Sturm—isn't the pal you think he is. Behind your back, he and your wife were

such good friends that all your wife's friends know about it."

A red flush crept into Dreyer's face, flamed there for a moment, and left a pallor disturbed by twitching muscles. "I've known Sturm for years," he said finally.

"And for years I've known Matt Crandall, who owns the camp where your wife was murdered." Her voice was low and came with an effort. "He was my escort last night at a party attended by many of the crowd your wife traveled with. I did a lot of listening."

Dreyer pulled a harsh, noisy breath into his lungs and stood up. "I'll go have a talk with Sturm," he said quietly.

"No. Don't."

"Why not?"

"If you put your cards on the table, he'll go straight to the police," Ann Corey said sensibly. "What if he did know your wife rather well? He'll even admit it if they question him. The evidence is stacked so high against you that Sturm's name won't even get into the papers."

"I still want to talk to him," Dreyer muttered.

He walked uptown to Tremont Street and across the Common to Park Square. Sturm had an office in the big Park Square Building. At this hour, nine a.m., he should be in it.

So Hagen Sturm was less a friend than he pretended to be? Maybe Ann Corey was wrong about that. As a city dick, Dreyer had gone out of his way many times to help the fellow. Sturm should be grateful.

The fact that he'd secretly been chummy with Bee didn't seem all that important. A lot of men had been chummy with Bee.

Dreyer went up eleven floors in the elevator and found the door of Sturm's office locked. He walked on down the hall and stood at a window, gazing down on traffic. It was odd, he thought, that he'd been able to get here from the North End without being jumped on. Cab drivers, cops, detectives all knew him by sight.

Maybe they hadn't recognized him with a stubble and wearing old clothes.

After ten minutes at the window he tried the door of Sturm's office again and was able to walk in. An attractive blonde at a desk said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Dreyer. Mr. Sturm hasn't come in yet."

Nodding, Dreyer walked past her into the inner office.

Sturm arrived half an hour later. Stopping short, he opened his mouth wide and stood gawking. "Good Lord, Ed!" he gasped then. "Why did you come here? Don't you realize—"

"Tell your girl to go for a ten-minute walk," Dreyer said, nodding toward the outer office.

"But—"

"All right, don't. Let her sit there and listen. She'll have a great time spilling your personal affairs all over town later."

Sturm went out and spoke to the girl, returned and sat down, staring. "She's gone. Now what on earth—"

"I'm told that you and my wife were close friends behind my back."

Hagen Sturm stiffened, paled a bit, then regained control and for a moment sat very straight in his chair, quite the competent lawyer, able to handle situations as they were thrust upon him. He seemed at that moment to be thinking that this was just another situation in which he, as an attorney, was merely an observer.

Then he wilted. Perspiration stood out on his forehead and he said dully, "I'm sorry, Ed."

"Sorry for what?"

"For not telling you. I did—I did know your wife better than I had a right to. You obviously didn't love her. For a while I thought I did."

Dreyer hadn't expected that. Prepared for a scarlet-faced denial, he had come with his fists clenched and a head full of words. This was different.

"Why bring this up now?" Sturm groaned. "I—my God, Ed, I've tried to make amends, haven't I? You called me, needing help, and I'm trying to help. If I were found out"—he waved his hands in a gesture of finality—"it would be the end."

Dreyer stared at him. "How do I know you didn't kill her yourself?"

"I didn't."

"You say you didn't."

"Listen, Ed." His back to the door, the attorney was suddenly hunched forward with both arms on the desk, angular chin outthrust, unblinking eyes drilling holes in Dreyer's face. "I didn't kill Bee, Ed, but I think I'm very close to

finding out who did. I already told you about Paul's Beauty Salon. Now—"

There was no report. There was only a hollow click, much like the click of a phone-receiver. The words stuck in Sturm's mouth and his teeth ground down on them; then the mouth twitched open and emitted a gurgling sound that chilled Dreyer's blood. The gurgling continued until Sturm's head thudded on the desk.

Lurching erect, Dreyer whirled to the door but was too late. The doorway was empty again, and the outer door to Sturm's office banged shut as he skidded across the inner threshold.

He slammed past the desk where the blonde had been sitting. The corner of the desk caught his thigh, dug deep and threw him sideways. When he got the door open and lurched into the hall, the hall was empty. Empty and quiet. No sound of receding footfalls. No sign of the man who had put a bullet in Hagen Sturm's back.

Wiping sweat from his face, Dreyer closed the door and went back into the inner office. No need to look more closely at the man sprawled there. Fired from a gun equipped with a silencer, the bullet had bored through Sturm's back, torn an ugly hole in his chest, and sprayed a bloody mess over the desk.

Ed Dreyer was desperate.

He stared around him, started for the door, stopped. There was no way out of this. The girl had seen him walk into Sturm's office, had heard harsh words between the two of them. When she returned and found what was here, she'd call the police and describe Sturm's murderer, and the description would fit that of Ed Dreyer.

Motive? "Sure!" He could hear the cops saying it. "Sure! Sturm was friendly with the guy's wife. He found out about it, killed his wife out there at Echo Lake, then handed Sturm the same dose."

No way out. Hagen Sturm knew the truth but couldn't talk. In a few minutes the girl would be opening that door . . .

Dreyer strode down the hall. Time was precious now—he would need a lot of it to prove his innocence—and the police would be trying to cut it short. He heard the click of the stenographer's heels as she came along the corridor, even caught a glimpse of her as he turned a corner and made for the elevators.

He caught an elevator and lurched into it, but when the car reached the street floor he had enough grip on himself to walk through the lobby without attracting attention.

It wouldn't be long now. The police would broadcast it to every scout car in the city. Radio news flashes would spill it into attentive ears. Newspaper headlines . . .

There was no out. If they caught him it meant the chair, unless he could stall them off long enough to work out his own salvation.

CHAPTER THREE

In a five-and-ten four blocks north he bought a pair of metal-rimmed spectacles, put them on when he reached the sidewalk again. In a clothing store on Washington Street he spent six dollars for a brown suit and got rid of the patched and faded sweater he had worn since the heat of the law first blasted him.

Keeping away from side streets and alleys, he walked straight up Washington to the *Tribune* Building. Cops were human. Looking for him, they might stare holes through him in a public place without actually seeing him. It was a chance he had to take.

Dodging the elevator, he walked up five flights of stairs and straight into Edmund Udell's office. A man less desperate might have blundered, doing that. Might have faltered, looked around him, caught the eye of any one of the score of people working at typewriters and dictating machines. But the *Tribune* Building was one of Dreyer's stamping grounds.

It was his first time, though, in the presence of Edmund Udell, who owned and managed the city's largest newspaper and controlled most of the city's politics.

When he closed the door of Udell's private sanctum and stepped forward, Udell was staring at him. The man had eyes for staring.

They were large, dark eyes under thick brows, and above them, reddish and ridged, the man's forehead humped into a wave of thin gray hair. He was a small man, sloppily dressed, and had a long, thin mouth that looked ugly.

"I guess you know me," Dreyer said.

Udell nodded, kept on nodding slowly while leaning back in his chair and thumbing his suspenders. "You're Ed Dreyer."

"And in a jam."

"Yes. I can understand that."

"Not the way I mean, you can't." Dreyer crowded over the desk and was mildly surprised at his own grim coolness. "I've got maybe a couple of hours of freedom left, with luck. No matter how deep a hole I crawl into, they'll find me. So listen, Udell. I want every angle you've got on this case. I need something to work on. It means—" Dreyer leaned back, scowling. "I guess you know what it means."

Udell rocked back in his chair, evidently weighing his answer. His reply was a long time coming. Dreyer stared at pictures on the walls, pictures of attractive women. Stared at Udell's thick, gnarled hands.

"I'm sorry, Dreyer. I can't help you."

"You mean—"

"I can't expose myself and my paper to scandal of any sort. When you leave here I shall be duty bound to call the police."

Dreyer rose to his feet, hands tightly clenched, face deathly pale. "Listen. Hagen Sturm said he told you about me. He said—"

"I know nothing about Hagen Sturm."

"Oh, you know nothing about Sturm." Dreyer's head moved slowly up and down. "I think I understand, Udell. If I ever get out of this mess, I'll see you again."

He wanted to slam the door behind him but didn't because he knew it would make people stare. Scowling, he strode across the newsroom and down the stairs, out to the street. Then he walked back to the North End, to one-eighteen Cramer Street.

CHAPTER FOUR

They let him get in. The street was deserted when he hiked along it, and no one crowded him while he climbed the stairs and unlocked the door on the third-floor landing. He got his first inkling of trouble when he stood behind the closed door a

few minutes later and listened to stealthy footfalls on the stairs.

He stepped to a window, peered through the dirty glass and saw things moving in the street below. His face paled. He dragged the gun from his pocket, stared at it, and put it back.

He couldn't shoot cops.

The footfalls on the stairs were in no hurry. Evidently the men making them thought they had their victim securely bottled up. Those others in the street were just waiting in case the rat evaded capture and came scurrying out of the trap.

Dreyer backed away from the door and looked wildly around him. He was trapped. A building as old as this would have no fire-escape. There were no rear stairs, and even if there were, the alley they led into would be filled with coppers.

No way out. Just windows, opening into space. Grimy windows here and in the bedroom and kitchen. He caught up a chair, wedged it against the door, turned with terror numbing his lungs and ran to the filthy little kitchen.

Someone had tipped the police off. Sturm, probably. Sturm had done it before that bullet ground its way into his back. The cops had been watching this place, just waiting for Ed Dreyer to come back to it.

He flung himself at the kitchen window, slammed it up and leaned out, looking up and down. Houses were jammed close together in this district, with no breathing spaces between. But the house next to this one, on this side, had a black roof that lay two stories down and was humped like a ramp in a beach-resort fun house.

He looked up and shuddered. Out on the stairway the cops had reached the upper landing and were banging on the door, commanding him to open up in the name of the law. That was a laugh. The law had gone crazy now. The law was driving an innocent man to his death. But you couldn't tell the cops that. They had their orders.

Sweat ran off Dreyer's face. A cop's shoulder crashed against the door and jarred it. He swung onto the window sill and got his knees under him, not looking down. If he looked down, the height would make him dizzy.

When he rose to his feet on the sill, the edge of the roof was a foot above his groping hand. He swayed there. If he fell, the cops would get him but there'd be no long-faced lawyers mumbling to

him through bars, no death-house parade to the big chair. Only a stone slab in a graveyard with his name on it.

The door out there was about to let go.

Dreyer grabbed something hard and rough with his left hand and reached up with the other. The next three seconds lasted a long time. His groping right hand caught the edge of the roof, slapped down on loose gravel and clawed for a hold. He hung by one arm, feet dangling, and couldn't for a moment swing his other hand up because the movement would have spun him off balance.

Then somehow he was up, over, and on his feet, running across the roof. Hoarse yells followed him as his pursuers swarmed through the tenement and discovered the open window. But they couldn't shoot at him from there without periscopes. He had a running start and the house on the other side had a roof only a couple of feet lower than this one. Beyond that he didn't know.

He ran across two roofs, heard shouts, shots, heard the whang of a bullet as it ricocheted from an iron pipe to his left. Looking wildly around him as he ran, he traveled over three more roofs before sliding down a pipe to a filthy courtyard. The pipe tore skin off his hands, and when he put his hands in his pockets to ease them, the pockets filled with warm, sticky blood.

But they'd lost him. He reached a side street and stumbled across it. Prowled through a network of alleys. Half an hour later, on the West Side, he scribbled the name "Arthur French" in the Hotel Apollo register and got himself a room.

For a long time he just lay there on the room's dirty bed and stared wide-eyed at the cracked plaster on the ceiling and waited for his nerves to stop jumping. His sweat-drenched clothes, hot enough during the past twenty minutes, were cold now and damp. His heart hammered. He felt sick.

When he felt better he cleaned up, went downstairs to the lobby and doped out an ad for the *Tribune*. He wrote: "Expert Beautician Desires Position in Reputable Establishment. Formerly in charge Ann Corey Beauty Shoppes, California. Apply Arthur French, Hotel Apollo."

They'd get a laugh out of that in the *Tribune* ad department. But hell, maybe there really was a chain of Ann Corey Beauty Shoppes in California. Ann would get the hint, anyway.

Maybe they'd even show it to her before publication, for a laugh.

He took the paper to the desk, put a five-dollar bill on it, and said to the clerk, "Have that inserted in the *Tribune* six times, will you? Starting right away." Then, as the clerk nodded and reached for a phone book, Dreyer added, "Would you have a morning paper I can look at?"

He took the paper to his room, locked the door, and sprawled on the bed again. It must be after twelve now. Ann Corey had an appointment at Paul's Beauty Salon at three-thirty. He hoped she wouldn't forget to look in the want-ads first.

The paper in his hands was a *Tribune* and its headlines gave him a jolt, even though he had expected the worst. Udell, sore now, had made the most of the discovery of Hagen Sturm's body in the Park Square Building. The headlines read:

MANIAC STRIKES AGAIN!

*Dreyer, Wife-Slayer, Murders Prominent Attorney
in Cold Blood!*

Page one was full of it, and there was an editorial wail in a box on page two, condemning the department and demanding action "for the safety of men, women and children everywhere." The girl in Sturm's front office had done nobly in furnishing a description of Sturm's slayer.

Dreyer put the paper aside and gazed at the ceiling. It was so pathetically funny, in a way. Every cop in the department, every city dick and state dick and state trooper was out looking for Ed Dreyer while the real killer could easily be planning further horrors.

When he scooped the paper up again and looked for a continuation of the gory details, he ran into a full-page advertisement that stiffened him. It was an ad for Paul's Beauty Salon, featuring portraits of half a dozen beautiful women.

Dreyer studied it. The women seemed familiar. He'd seen them before somewhere. He wondered where.

Later on he looked at the ad again. When he got through staring at it his face was pale, stiff, and his hands were shaking. He remembered now. He grabbed the ten-cent spectacles off the bureau and headed for the door. But his phone was ringing.

He stopped to answer it, and the voice of the clerk downstairs said, "Mr. French? Call for you."

The caller was Ann Corey.

"Ed, listen. I'm in the back room at Paul's place. You know—the appointment I made?" The words came in quick gasps of excitement. "I've met the woman who calls herself Madame Yvonne. I think I know who she really is—"

The voice suddenly changed. Now the urgency was gone and it was loose and easy. "But listen, dearie, I don't *want* to see Tony. He's such a dreadful bore, you know. If you could just persuade Eddie to come . . ."

Dreyer heard another voice say quietly, "Ready, Miss Corey."

"Yes, of course." Then into the phone Ann said, "See you later, Helen. Don't let me down."

The phone clicked. Words rang in Dreyer's brain. "*Now if you could persuade Eddie to come . . .*"

He yanked the door open. "Eddie was on his way anyhow," he growled. "For reasons of his own!"

CHAPTER FIVE

There was no time for walking, though he could have made it in fifteen minutes. He caught a cab, got there in five minutes, and took the stairs rather than plow through a mob of women in the building's only elevator. It was a small, old-fashioned building, a beehive filled with beauty shops, millinery and hosiery and corset establishments. Paul's was on the second floor.

He strode into the place with his fists clenched and lower jaw pushed forward, and got a look for the first time at Mr. Isidore Paul, who was small, black-haired and foreign-looking and with his hands full of mud was doing things to a woman's face. Other women were camped under dryers, reading movie magazines.

"I'm looking for Madame Yvonne," Dreyer snapped.

Isidore Paul didn't answer right away. Evidently he was less effeminate than he looked. He scowled, seemingly unimpressed by Dreyer's dirty clothes and unshaven, twisted face. Then he weakened, took a step backward to get beyond range of Dreyer's hands, and said falteringly, "What do you want?"

"Told you. Madame Yvonne."

"But she is busy just now. She—"

Shouldering him aside, Dreyer sent him sprawling across one of the unoccupied chairs. A woman screamed, and the scream trailed Dreyer across the room, becoming a babble of hysterical voices as he jerked open the door of a rear chamber. The sounds ended abruptly when he slammed the door shut after him.

He had a gun in his fist then, and it was aimed straight at the face of a short, stout woman who gaped at him in amazement. The woman wore a white, short-sleeved uniform and her bare arms looked husky. She took a slow step backward and collided with a chair that was tipped back on a swivel.

Ann Corey was in the chair. Dreyer couldn't see her face because the other woman's stocky body concealed it. But Ann Corey hadn't moved, wasn't moving now.

"So I'm too late," Dreyer muttered. "I got here too late . . ."

The woman wagged her head sideways. She was trying to say no, did say it after a while, and then kept on saying it. She looked scared. Her gaze never left the gun.

"One side," Dreyer snarled, and strode toward the girl in the chair.

The realization that Ann Corey might be dead, that he'd been too late getting here, put cold sweat on his face and a knot in his gut.

He pushed the woman aside, kept the gun aimed at her, and looked down into Ann's face. She was wearing the same neat gray suit she had worn while getting his breakfast at one-eighteen Cramer Street. She looked asleep, and a reek of chloroform assailed Dreyer's nostrils as he leaned closer.

"She's not dead," he muttered. "Not dead."

He advanced slowly toward the woman, and the woman backed away from him. The room was small, with no windows. Its only furnishings were a wash-basin, a table cluttered with cosmetic junk, and the chair in which Ann Corey was sleeping. The woman backed up until the opposite wall stopped her.

She stared goggle-eyed as Dreyer strode forward, but now she wasn't staring at Dreyer. He suddenly realized that. Spinning around, he saw a door swing open and flung himself sideways as

the room was suddenly honored with another occupant.

Dreyer saw the gun in the man's hand. Saw, too, that the hand was shaking. His own gun was in his own hand, and he could have blown the intruder's head off, but instead he slammed back against the wall and snapped, "Drop it, Udell! Drop it, you fool!"

The gun in Udell's fist exploded, and the slug tore into Dreyer's arm. Udell's face was white, twisted all out of shape. He was snarling, and he was quick enough on his short legs to lurch from the doorway and get behind the big chair where Ann Corey slept in a reek of chloroform. Again he fired, this time missing, but then was unable to squeeze the trigger a third time because Dreyer was on him.

Udell was a man threatened by a landslide. Uttering a wild shriek, he tried to squirm out of its way.

Dreyer swarmed over him, slamming him to the floor. Dreyer tore the gun out of his fist and clipped him with it, hard, down across the face, and then straddled the man's squirming body. He glared into Udell's bloody face and said, "Now we'll wait for the cops, mister, and while we wait, you'll talk."

He did most of the talking himself, however. "Denials won't get you anywhere, Udell," he said. "You killed Hagen Sturm because he was hot on the trail of who killed my wife and Mrs. Haskell. Why you killed the two women in the first place I don't know, except they were clients of Madame Yvonne here and for some reason you had to get rid of them." He swung around, glaring at the woman who was inching her plump body along the wall toward the door. "Get back there, you!" he snarled. And to Udell, "Who is she? Your wife?"

Udell nodded. "Yes. My wife."

"Owns this place, does she?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. Why did you kill *my* wife?"

Udell stared up at him with terrified eyes. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

Dreyer pressed his gun against the man's belly. "Answer my question, Udell. Now."

"I tell you I don't know—"

The gun roared. The bullet went into the floor, but took all the color from Udell's face with it. The man's shriek died away to a slobbering

mumble. "I had to do it. The two women would have died anyway." He sounded like a drunk talking to himself.

"Why would they have died?"

"My—my wife was using a beauty preparation she made herself," Udell groaned. "Some kind of facial mud. She used it for months on those two women; then Mrs. Haskell complained of feeling ill. I suspected the worst and had the mud analyzed. It was deadly."

"And the truth, if it got out, would have sent your wife to prison and ruined you," Dreyer said, nodding. "Would have wrecked your newspaper business and blackened your name in politics, and smashed everything else you're tied up with." He rocked back on his knees and struggled to his feet, favoring his left arm where Udell's bullet had gouged out a chunk of flesh. "How did you get my wife to phone me that night?"

Udell was silent.

"All right, I'll answer it myself. You met her after she left Crandall's party and took her to Echo Lake, then forced her to call me. Later, you discovered from Sturm where I was hiding out. You watched the place, trailed me to Sturm's office, and killed him before he could tell me that your wife—*your* wife—was the woman behind this beauty salon. And if I hadn't barged in here just now, you and your wife would also have murdered Ann Corey!"

"No! No!" Udell was up on one elbow, spitting the words out. "She is only chloroformed!"

"But you'd have paid someone to lug her out of here tonight and see that she never came back. All right, Udell. Maybe you think you'll deny the whole business when the cops come here. Maybe you'll change your story and hire the best lawyer in the city and—"

The door had opened. "I guess he won't change anything, Dreyer," a voice said. "I guess you don't need to worry about that."

Dreyer turned slowly, narrowed his eyes at a uniform, at several uniforms, and let the gun slide out of his hand. "Hello, Kennedy," he said. "Hello, Finch. I've been waiting."

"We've been listening."

"You heard it all?"

"We heard enough, Dreyer. Isidore called everything but the fire department when you busted n here. Funny thing"—Kennedy pushed

his big bulk forward and scowled down at Udell—"your getting the dope on this guy. This was a tough case."

Walking over to the chair in which Ann Corey was sleeping, Dreyer said, "Get a doctor, will you?" The odor of chloroform was strong, but he stood there looking down into Ann's face. "This girl had courage, Kennedy. All kinds of it, coming in here." He swung around. "Funny thing. It was just luck. There was an ad in the paper, a full-page ad in Udell's own paper, with some pictures of good-looking women . . ."

The room was full of cops now but Kennedy scowled at Dreyer and said, "Yeah?"

"I'd seen those pictures before," Dreyer said, "on the wall of Udell's office. Seemed funny to see the same pictures in that ad. I got to thinking maybe Udell drew up the ad himself. Seemed queer, too, that a place like this could *afford* a full-page ad in the city's biggest paper. I thought about that name, Madame Yvonne, and guessed maybe the ad wasn't paid for; maybe Udell owned this place or it was one of his wife's hobbies."

"It turned out to be a dangerous hobby," Kennedy said, shrugging. "As for you being lucky—hey, now, a lot of guys see ads in the papers and never read 'em. You better come along, Dreyer, and make all this official. I'll leave a couple of men to take care of this girl."

Dreyer was smiling for the first time in days. "Tell them to take mighty good care of her," he said quietly. "She's become pretty special to me."

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THE END

