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**LESTER LEITH**  
*and the*  
**SEVEN SINISTER  
SOMBREROS**

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# THE SEVEN SINISTER SOMBREROS

A Lester Leith Novel



By  
ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

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## CHAPTER I. THE DRUGGED GUARD.

Lester Leith lifted the lid from the humidor of carved ivory which held his cigarettes. Gently tapping the tip of a cigarette on his thumbnail, he snapped a match into flame, sucked in a deep inhalation of fragrant smoke, and started blowing smoke rings.

Men who have lived together in months of intimate association learn to know each other's habits with an almost clairvoyant perception; and Edward Beaver, the police undercover man, who had so long been masquerading as Lester Leith's valet, watched him with glittering eyes. Experience had taught him that if Lester Leith should start tracing the perimeters of those smoke rings with the tip of his extended forefinger, the time would be ripe to trap the man upon whom he spied. That trap had already been set. It remained only for the spy to bait it by interesting Leith in a crime problem which had been carefully selected by Police Sergeant Ackley as the pitfall which would lead the unsuspecting victim to his undoing.

Twice, three times, Lester Leith blew smoke rings, and contented himself with watching their upward progress as they twisted and writhed on themselves, finally to disperse in a blue haze.

"Scuttle," he said.

The undercover man had a particular aversion to this nickname which Leith had given him because of a fancied resemblance to an ancient pirate. Swift irritation showed on his face, then vanished as Lester Leith's right hand claimed his beady-eyed fascination.

The well-manicured tip of Leith's extended forefinger meditatively traced the perimeter of one of the writhing smoke rings, unmistakable indication that his chain-lightning mind, bored with matters of everyday routine, was groping for some exciting new stimulus.

"Scuttle," Lester Leith said the second time.

"Yes, sir," the spy answered quickly, stepping from the table he had been dusting to be where he could face the slender, well-knit figure that was seated in the big, over-stuffed leather chair.

"Scuttle," Lester Leith said, "I've never fully interrogated you concerning your last escapade with Sergeant Ackley. Tell me, Scuttle. Did he really suspect me of hijacking those gems?"

The spy grasped the opportunity. "I'm afraid he did, sir. If I might be pardoned for making the suggestion, sir, Sergeant Ackley is altogether too petty a person to interfere with your plan of life."

"Interfere with *my* plan of life, Scuttle!" Lester Leith exclaimed, half turning in his chair. "What the devil are you talking about? Sergeant Ackley is like an irritating housefly in drowsy weather—an annoyance, to be sure; an obstacle never."

"Yes, sir. But since you have such an extraordinary ability to read the newspaper accounts of crime and spot the criminals from the facts reported, it seems such a shame to give up your hobby just because— Well, pardon me, sir. Perhaps I shouldn't mention it."

Leith nodded slow affirmation. "You're right, Scuttle," he said.

"You mean about letting Sergeant Ackley interfere with your plan of life?" the spy asked eagerly.

“No,” Lester Leith said, blowing another smoke ring. “About the fact that you shouldn’t mention it.”

The spy’s face darkened, but since he had been particularly commissioned by Sergeant Ackley to direct Lester Leith’s attention to the strange case of the drugged guard, he dared not let any distraction divert Lester Leith’s mind from the channel on which the spy knew it was about to embark.



“Yes, sir,” he said. “I beg your pardon. It was presumptuous of me, a resentment against Sergeant Ackley, because there are *so* many interesting crimes in the papers these days.”

Leith glanced up quickly. “Scuttle, you tempt me.”

“Pardon me, sir. I had no intention of doing so.”

“Damn it,” Lester Leith said irritably. “Why can’t Sergeant Ackley quit his confounded suspicions? I have repeatedly explained to him that my interest in crime is only academic. Yet he thinks my charitable donations are sustained by funds adroitly hijacked from criminals. I presume Ackley feels criminals should be allowed to retain their ill-gotten loot. I don’t.

Personally I think this mysterious hijacker is a public benefactor, regardless of whether the hijacked funds eventually find their way into charitable causes or not. I suppose it's illegal, but, damn it, it's poetic justice."

"Yes, sir. I quite agree with you, sir."

"Hang it, Scuttle," Lester Leith said. "You're catching me at a most inopportune moment. Perhaps it's my mood. Perhaps it's the weather. Damn it, Scuttle! To *what* specific crimes are you referring?"

For a moment, the undercover man regarded Lester Leith with the expression of an angler surveying a choice pool of water in which he knows there lurks a very large and wary trout. Experience had taught him that Lester Leith seldom rose to the first lure which he offered. But, now, there was something in Leith's mood which made the spy feel it might be possible to launch at once into the affair of the drugged guard.

"There have been *several* crimes," he hedged.

"Well, pick the most interesting, Scuttle. I'm not going to permit my mind to dwell on it, but I can at least *hear* about it."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, and his big hand, pushing down into the inside pocket of his coat, dragged out a sheaf of newspaper clippings.

Leith said irritably: "Scuttle, you're still clipping crime news and carrying the clippings around with you. I told you not to do that any more."

"Yes, sir. If you'll pardon me, sir, these were not clipped for *your* consideration. You've got *me* started, if you don't mind my saying so, sir."

"Got *you* started, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. Of course, I realize I can never attain even a fraction of your efficiency, but the crime news has come to exercise a fatal fascination for me. I can't help thinking of how easy it is for you to study the facts in a newspaper, spot the real criminal, and then outline a scheme by which that criminal might be apprehended: a scheme by which unusual objects betray the criminal to his own destruction."

Lester Leith stared at the huge figure of the police spy with thought-slitted eyes. "Scuttle," he said, "you're almost stealing my thunder."

"Oh, no, sir! Not at all, sir! My own efforts are most clumsy and utterly inadequate. I was merely explaining how I happened to have these crime clippings so readily available."

"But you're duplicating my methods, Scuttle."

"Oh, no, sir, not duplicating! It's a feeble imitation, sir."

"Oh, well, let it pass," Lester Leith said. "What crime did you have in mind as being so interesting, Scuttle?"

"The affair of the missing heiress, sir."

"Who's the heiress, Scuttle?"

"Miss Blodson-Hess."

"And what about Miss Blodson-Hess, Scuttle?"

"She vanished. No one seems to know what has happened to her, but it's generally known that shortly before her disappearance she drew out large sums of cash."

"A man in the case, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. She was engaged to be married next week, and the man is naturally all broken up over it."

Lester Leith yawned. "Naturally, Scuttle," he agreed, "one would expect him to be, but his interest robs the case of its fascination for a student of crime. There's altogether too much

emotion in it, Scuttle. Your perfect crime is one of cold-blooded deliberation, of cool, calm reasoning—speaking, of course, from the standpoint of a connoisseur of crime, Scuttle. What else do you have?”

“There’s the matter of the Blossom robbery, sir. Mrs. Blossom had—well, sir, to put it mildly, she had deceived her husband. She had told him she was going to visit her sister in Pittsburgh for a week. In place of that, she had gone somewhere else. She had quite a bit of cash, and some diamonds—”

“How old, Scuttle?” Lester Leith interrupted.

“You mean the diamonds, sir?”

“No, no, Scuttle. Damn it, the woman, Mrs. Blossom.”

“Thirty-three, sir, according to the newspaper account.”

“That means forty-two,” Lester Leith said with conviction. “When a woman enters the roaring forties, Scuttle, she becomes somewhat unpredictable. She certainly should be entitled to have her little fling. Why the devil couldn’t her husband have taken her word for it that she was at her sister’s in Pittsburgh?”

“Because she was robbed, sir.”

“And so what, Scuttle?”

“So she was forced to call the police.”

Lester Leith yawned. “Uninteresting, Scuttle,” he said. “Had the woman any real character, she would have either recovered her gems herself, have tricked the man who victimized her into some compromising position by which she could have regained her property, or else have kept entirely quiet about the matter. Doubtless she was vain enough to think that only her beauty was responsible for the interest of the dashing young blade who undoubtedly acted as a professional lure for a criminal organization. No, no, Scuttle, gems partake of the characteristics of the owner. I’m hardly interested in considering the gems of a fatuous woman who couldn’t stand up on her two feet and take it when the going got rough. Well, Scuttle, I’m afraid that you’ve overestimated the interest-compelling quality of the crime news.”

“Yes, sir,” the spy said eagerly. “I can understand that now you’ve pointed it out. It was because I lacked your quick ability to analyze that I blundered into the trap. Perhaps that’s why I wasn’t able to do more with the solution of the cases myself. But there’s just one more thing I’d like to call to your attention, the affair of the drugged guard.”

“Drugged, Scuttle?”

“Yes, sir, and while he was drugged, some one hundred thousand dollars in cash mysteriously disappeared.”

“What was he guarding,” Lester Leith asked, “the mint?”

“No, sir. It was a private safe.”

Lester Leith smiled and shook his head. “Just another newspaper story, Scuttle. Give it no thought. Newspapers are inclined to magnify the amount of loot in order to make the case sound more spectacular. People don’t keep one hundred thousand dollars in ordinary safes, Scuttle. It simply isn’t done. Banking institutions, yes; but private individuals, no.”

“Yes, sir,” the spy said, “and I wouldn’t, of course, presume to contradict you, sir, but the circumstances in this case are different.”

Lester Leith raised his eyebrows in silent interrogation.

“You see, sir, Karl Bonneguard was rather expecting—”

“Bonneguard, Bonneguard,” Leith interrupted. “I’ve heard the name before. Isn’t he interested in some way in a camp or something?”

“Not exactly,” the spy said. “Bonneguard is trying to interest people in the formation of a political party—a sort of cult, to change our form of government.”

“Oh, yes,” Leith said. “I remember now. There was some sort of investigation, wasn’t there, Scuttle?”

“The grand jury were about to act, and apparently Bonneguard had been tipped off.”

“What were they going to act on, Scuttle?”

“I don’t know exactly. Ostensibly, Bonneguard was simply trying to promote a sort of new political party. It was all done open and aboveboard in accordance with our principles of freedom of speech and the press.”

“Oh, yes,” Leith said. “I remember now. He insisted upon the right of freedom of speech so he could organize his party and deny freedom of speech to others. It was claimed he’d taken an oath of allegiance to some foreign organization. There was something of a stir about it, as I remember.”

“Yes, sir. So, you see, Karl Bonneguard, not knowing just what was going to happen, hardly dared to keep his funds in a bank.”

“One hundred thousand dollars, Scuttle?” Lester Leith asked.

“That’s the best information the police have been able to obtain, sir.”

Leith said: “Dammit, Scuttle. You’ve got me interested now. Tell me more about this drugged guard.”

“Yes, sir. Karl Bonneguard maintained headquarters at 924 Wilmeier Avenue. It’s a huge rambling house. Bonneguard’s private offices occupied the south wing. The windows are heavily barred. There are vicious police dogs roaming the grounds, and an armed guard was kept on constant duty in the corridor just outside the door of the room in which the safe was located. And the guard didn’t even have a key to that door.”

“The guard was there on account of the money, Scuttle?”

“Yes, sir, and because some cranks had threatened Bonneguard with personal violence.”

“Yes, yes. Go ahead, Scuttle.”

“The organization was nationwide. All funds were collected and forwarded secretly to a Job Wolganheimer. Ostensibly he was the national treasurer for the organization. Wolganheimer, however, was just a figurehead for Bonneguard. As soon as funds were received, he turned them over to Bonneguard.”

“And Bonneguard put them in the safe, Scuttle?”

“No, sir. Bonneguard kept them in various banking institutions under various names: the Bonneguard Cleaning & Dyeing Works, the Bonneguard Real Estate Investment Association, and accounts of that sort.”

“Why did he take them out of the bank, on account of this grand jury investigation?”

“Yes, sir. He was afraid that something might happen, and the funds of the organization would be impounded.”

“Proceed, Scuttle.”

“The money was reduced to one-thousand-dollar bills. There were quite a few of them. Some witnesses say a hundred. Some say more than that.”

“The organization must have been profitable, Scuttle.”

“It was quite mercenary. Regardless of what principles it espoused, it was strict in the matter of dues.”



“And the guard, Scuttle?”

“A man named Bettler, a Hanz Bettler, a man with a fine record. He had been employed by one of the large banking institutions as a messenger for many years and had given perfect satisfaction.”

“He was drugged, Scuttle?”

“Yes, sir.”

“When did this happen?”

“Three nights ago. Bonneguard and Wolganheimer had been to the place and deposited another package of currency. No one except Wolganheimer and Bonneguard knows how much was in it, and neither of them will say anything. At any rate, they deposited the money. Wolganheimer drove Bonneguard to the office of the attorney who was handling Bonneguard’s affairs. Then Wolganheimer went to call on his flame of the moment, a young hula dancer who—”

“A what, Scuttle?”

“A hula dancer, a Hawaiian hula dancer.”

“Do you by any chance mean a *professional* hula dancer, Scuttle?”

“Yes, sir. Her name is Io Wahine. She’s a member of a troupe performing at night clubs and on the radio. She plays the ukulele, sings, chants, and dances.”

“One would say she was a very accomplished young woman, Scuttle.”



“Yes, sir. Yes, *indeed*, sir. I’ve seen her dance.”

“So Bonneguard went to see his lawyer, did he?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, let’s get to the drug business, Scuttle. That’s what interests me.”

“Yes, sir. I was just giving you the picture, sir. You see, Wolganheimer was driving the car. He ran out for a visit with Io Wahine. He left her apartment about five minutes to nine. He was to pick Bonneguard up at the lawyer’s at nine. He was there on the dot. He picked Bonneguard up, and the two of them went to the home of Emil Bradercrust, a mutual friend. They were talking over matters of business when the phone rang. It was Hanz Bettler on the phone. He happened to know that Bonneguard was going to spend the evening with Bradercrust. Bettler said that he thought something was wrong, said he was feeling so sleepy he couldn’t hold his head up, that he thought perhaps he’d been drugged, although he had been there alone all evening. He could hardly talk, he was so stupefied with the drug. Bonneguard said they’d come right over and to try and keep awake until they arrived.

“He, Wolganheimer, and Bradercrust climbed in the car and started at once for the Wilmeier Avenue headquarters. When they arrived, they found Hanz Bettler fighting off sleep. He stayed awake long enough to let them in, then dropped to the floor and was asleep before they could even ask him any questions. So Bradercrust volunteered to stand guard while Wolganheimer and Bonneguard took Bettler home.

“Naturally they didn’t want to have any notoriety or do anything which would attract the newspaper reporters. So they drove Bettler out to the house of a friend, an outlying house some distance out in the country. And when they got *there*, there was a telephone from Bradercrust telling them to come at once. His voice sounded very thick and dopey. They left Bettler to sleep it off and started at once to the Wilmeier Avenue headquarters. But they were delayed nearly half an hour in getting there. When they did, Bradercrust was lying on the floor sound asleep. Near him, in a drugged stupor, was one of the police dogs. But apparently the door to the inner office hadn’t so much as been touched.

“While Bonneguard was trying to arouse Bradercrust, Wolganheimer unlocked the door, and then discovered that the safe had been entered, probably within the last twenty minutes. The combination knob had been wrenched off and the spindle driven back. The inner door of the safe had been forced open and the contents were missing.”

“And did they find out how the drug was administered, Scuttle?” Lester Leith asked, his voice showing his interest.

“No, sir. That’s the mysterious part of it. They didn’t. When Bettler regained consciousness, he swore that he hadn’t talked with a single person, and Bradercrust had the same story.”

Leith said thoughtfully: “Well, let’s consider that the thief had some ingenious method of administering the drug, Scuttle. It’s quite apparent that he hadn’t had an opportunity to complete the job of safe cracking when Bettler took the drug. Therefore, it became necessary for him to drug Bradercrust, and in doing that, he drugged the police dog. Now tell me, Scuttle: was that the only police dog or were there more?”

“No, sir. There were half a dozen of them prowling around the grounds.”

“Then why did the criminal consider it necessary to drug *one* of these dogs and not the others?”

“I’m sure I couldn’t say, sir.”

“Give me the clippings,” Leith said. “This is, indeed, interesting.”

The spy, striving to hide the triumphant expression on his face, passed over the newspaper clippings. Leith read them thoughtfully, studied the illustrations.

“This photograph of Bettler shows him as a very thin individual, Scuttle. One would hardly associate him with being a guard.”



The spy laughed. “He may be small, but he’s dynamite,” he said. “And if you think he’s small, take a look at that picture of Job Wolganheimer, and then contrast it with the picture of Bonneguard.”

Leith regarded the two photographs and burst into laughter.

“What the devil, Scuttle!” he exclaimed. “This is like a Hollywood comedy: Karl Bonneguard, broad-shouldered, husky, well nourished, Hanz Bettler so slender you’d think he was a professional dancer, and then Job Wolganheimer so thin he looks like a lead pencil dressed up in a double-breasted suit. Dammit, Scuttle, perhaps the man *gets* thin carrying that long-winded name around with him.”

“Yes, sir,” the spy said with a broad smile.

“You said they were delayed a half hour in getting there when Bradercrust called.”

“Yes, sir. That’s right. It seems that there was a slow leak in one of Wolganheimer’s tires, and when he went to change the tire, he found that the nut which holds the spare tire in place had been put on against the threads and was screwed on so tight they simply couldn’t loosen it. So Wolganheimer had to repair the flat by taking off the casing, pulling out the tube, patching, and then inflating the tire by hand.”

“Couldn’t they have done something better than that?” Leith asked. “Surely they could have got a taxi, or one of them could have stopped a passing motorist and ridden in. If I had a hundred thousand dollars in a safe and the guard was drugged, I’d *get* there.”

“Yes, sir, but you forgot they took Bettler to a very lonely isolated spot in order to keep the newspapers from finding out what had happened. Coming back, they were on a road where there was no traffic.”

“I see,” Leith said moodily. “Look here, Scuttle. In this photograph it shows a water cooler standing there in the corridor. As I remember it, it was very warm three nights ago. Isn’t it possible that both Bettler and Bradercrust drank water from the cooler: also the dog—”

“You’ll pardon me, sir,” the spy interrupted diffidently, “but that’s already been gone over.”

“What has?”

“The water cooler.”

“What about it?”

“Bonneguard thought, of course, that was how the drug had been administered, because Bradercrust remembered taking a drink of water from the cooler. But Bonneguard turned the cooler over to the police who made a detailed examination and found not the slightest trace of any drug whatever in the water.”

“Was there anything different about that one police dog which was drugged?” Leith asked. “Was his history exactly the same as the others?”

“Yes, sir, absolutely the same. The dogs were all purchased from an agency which makes it its business to supply watchdogs. They are trained to recognize only certain people, and as watchdogs, they’re very superior.”

“And those dogs were all furnished at the same time?”

“Yes, sir.”

Lester Leith frowned at the tips of his bedroom slippers. “Let me take a look at that picture of the Wilmeier Avenue house, Scuttle.”

The spy silently passed over the clippings. Leith studied them for several minutes: then, whistling a little tune, placed his thumbnail over one of the barred windows, completely blotting it from sight.

“Pardon me, sir. May I ask what you’re doing?” the valet asked.

“Yes, Scuttle,” he said, still absent-mindedly. “I was wondering when the house was remodeled as a fortress, those bars and so forth. Was that part of the house changed after Bonneguard purchased it?”

“Yes, sir. When Bonneguard purchased the house, he fixed it up the way he wanted it. The steel doors and iron bars were installed by Wolganheimer and Bonneguard. They’re both carpenters and contractors and did the work themselves.”

“Had these bars been tampered with, Scuttle?”

“No, sir, the bars were firmly in place, and the windows were closed and locked on the inside. Wolganheimer had locked them the last thing before he and Bonneguard had left, and they both inspected them again as soon as they realized the money had been taken from the safe.”

“And Wolganheimer’s young lady friend is the hula dancer, Scuttle?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Of course, Scuttle, spies from time immemorial have been recruited from the ranks of dancers and glamour girls.”

“Yes, sir, but this young woman is hardly a professional spy. She has a record back of her of several consecutive years in the theatrical world.”

Leith nodded absent-mindedly, sat in silent concentration for a matter of some fifteen minutes. Once or twice his head moved thoughtfully in an almost imperceptible nod. His pet parakeet, venturing through the open door of its cage, fluttered around the room and then settled to rest on Leith’s shoulder where it began preening the hair around the base of his neck.

Leith said: “Scuttle, it occurs to me that one *might* reach an academic solution of this crime if he had certain things.”



“Yes, sir,” the spy said eagerly.

“One of the first things he would want,” Leith declared, “would be a hula dancer, one of those girls whose form is as quiveringly tremulous as jelly on a plate. One would want a large-sized monkey wrench, a secondhand automobile, a ukulele, seven cowboy hats, and a ‘human-skeleton’ broncobuster. In addition, Scuttle, he’d want a small replica of a surfboard stamped from solid gold. The border would be embellished with several small diamonds. You know what I mean, Scuttle, a small replica of a surfboard such as is used on the beach at Waikiki. And I think that would about cover the situation. Oh, yes, one thing more. It would be necessary to organize the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association. It would be necessary for the association to have offices in a downtown office building, and the association would, of course, need a president. I would say offhand, Scuttle, that you’d make a very excellent president.”

The spy stared at Lester Leith with eyes in which there was a sudden hostility. “You’re making a joke of it,” he said with dignity. “You’re trying to ridicule the whole matter, make me feel like a fool for having tried to help you find an interesting crime.”

Lester Leith shook his head. “No, I’m not, Scuttle,” he said. “Given those things, I see no reason why the case shouldn’t be carried to a satisfactory conclusion—by a private investigator, of course. The police could never do it. The trouble with the police, Scuttle, as I have pointed out to you on so many occasions, is that they are completely lacking in imagination.”

“Yes, sir,” the spy said, regaining his assumed servility with an effort. “Of course, sir, I realize that you don’t expect to be taken seriously.”

Leith said: “The devil I don’t, Scuttle! Here, take a couple of ads for the newspaper, something like this: ‘Wanted—educated, talented, beautiful hula dancer of Hawaiian extraction. Must be slender, active, graceful and supple. Wanted—thin broncobuster who can ride them when they buck, should be between five foot seven and five foot eight and weigh under a hundred pounds, wear a seven-and-a-quarter hat and be experienced in riding broncos. Excellent pay for the right party.’

“And now, Scuttle, if you’ll see about getting me a very large monkey wrench, and seven cowboy hats, I’ll attend to the rest of it myself.”

“Seven cowboy hats, sir?”

“Yes, Scuttle. Now, there are several varieties of cowboy hat. There is what is known as the two-gallon hat, the five-gallon hat, and the ten-gallon hat. I want the ten-gallon hat, Scuttle, and it should be lined with silk.”

“Any particular size, sir?”

“Seven and a quarter.”

“Do I understand, sir,” the spy asked, his enthusiasm dampened by his incredulity, “that you’re planning to solve this case of the drugged watchman by any such a collection as this?”

“Good heavens, no, Scuttle! I’m merely getting these things together so I can convince you that by using them to advantage, a person *could* solve the crime, that’s all.”

The spy sighed patiently. “You really wish me to put these ads in the paper, sir?”

“Yes, Scuttle. Phone them in right away. No, never mind. I’ll attend to the ads myself. And now I’m going to have a fast set of tennis with an estimable young lady. You may get out my tennis things, and I’ll hop into them and get started.”

## CHAPTER II. BEAVER'S THEORY.

Sergeant Ackley sat in police headquarters, his feet elevated to the edge of a somewhat scarred and battered desk. Careless cigarettes had left charred, black marks until it looked as if the edges of the desk were festooned with caterpillars. Sergeant Ackley was reading the morning paper. As he read, his lips moved soundlessly, forming the words.

He turned to the classified ads and read them mechanically. Not that he expected to find anything startling, but since Lester Leith's surreptitious activities so frequently found a manifestation in the classified ad columns, Sergeant Ackley made it a point to glance through the "Help Wanted," on the off-chance that he might stumble onto something.

Suddenly his eye lighted on an ad which read:

Skinny broncobuster wanted. Employment for Western cowboy broncobuster, five feet seven or five feet eight, weighing under a hundred pounds, and wearing a seven-and-a-quarter-size hat. Must be able to ride them when they buck. If you dig post holes with your head, don't apply. Only first-class, top-notch rider wanted.



Sergeant Ackley spread the newspaper down on the table, marked the place of the ad with a heavy spade-like thumbnail. While he took a knife from his pocket and cut around the edges

of the ad, he jabbed a call bell; and when an officer opened the door in response to his signal, he said:

“As soon as Beaver reports, I want to talk with him.”

The officer said, “Yes, sergeant; I’m expecting him any minute now,” and withdrew.

Sergeant Ackley, fishing a black cigar from his waistcoat pocket, clamped the end between his teeth, closed down his powerful jaw muscles, wrenched the cigar free, spat out the conical end tip of tobacco, wrapped his lips around the cigar, and groped for a match. While he was looking for the match, he read through the “Help Wanted Female” column.

Suddenly he stiffened to attention, pushed his extended forefinger against the paper, and moved it slowly back and forth along the lines of the ad which read:

Opening for hula dancer who can wiggle. Squirm your way to success. Wanted, a hula dancer of Hawaiian strain, beautiful figure and dusky eyes, who can go “around the island” like nobody’s business. Girls with stiff backbones and contortional inhibitions need not apply. This position is open for a professional, native, genuine, amiable Hawaiian hula dancer. First-class pay. No references other than those you carry with you.

Sergeant Ackley once more placed the paper flat on the table, imprisoned the ad with the spatulate end of his stubby thumb, and cut around it with the blade of his knife.

He had just finished pinning the two ads together, when the officer advised him that Beaver was in the outer office, and a moment later, the huge figure of the police undercover man insinuated itself through the doorway.

“Beaver,” Sergeant Ackley said, “he’s at it again.”

“At what, sergeant?” Beaver asked.

Sergeant Ackley handed him the two ads clipped together.

“Oh, I know all about these,” Beaver said.

“Oh, you do, do you?” Sergeant Ackley observed with ponderous sarcasm. “Oh, well, then, *that’s* all that’s necessary. Never mind making reports, Beaver. After all, our work up here at headquarters isn’t particularly important, just so *you* keep fully posted on what’s happening. There’s no necessity for letting *me* know.”

Beaver flushed, stiffened, and said: “I’m sorry, sergeant. I didn’t think there was any use reporting these two ads.”

“And why not?”

“Because they’re just a run-around.”

“Tell me about it,” Sergeant Ackley said. “And tell me *all* about it. Dammit, Beaver, when you’re planted on a job, you’re supposed to keep your superiors posted about what’s going on. These ads must have been sent in to the paper yesterday afternoon.”

“That’s right. They were.”

“And why the devil didn’t I know about it? I could have arranged to plant a couple of applicants. I suppose it’s too late now.”

“The other things that he wants,” the spy said wearily, “are seven ten-gallon cowboy hats, a huge monkey wrench, and a secondhand automobile which he prefers to buy himself. There are several other minor matters such as a gold surfboard incrusting with small diamonds, the organization of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association, the renting of office room for same, and the selection of a president. At last reports, I was to be that president.”



“Then he *is* nuts,” Sergeant Ackley said.

“Not that,” the undercover man said quietly, “but I’m afraid he’s wise to us.”

“What do you mean? You didn’t tip your hand, did you?”

“Well, no—not exactly, no, I’m quite sure I didn’t, but I did try to get him interested in that matter of the drugged guard, just as you suggested.”

“That damn thing’s an impossible case,” Sergeant Ackley grumbled. “I don’t think there ever was any robbery. I think the whole thing is a frame-up.”

“Why’s it impossible?” Beaver asked, his voice showing his interest.

“It’s impossible because it couldn’t have happened the way it did happen,” Sergeant Ackley said. “We’ve checked that case with a fine-tooth comb, and the facts just don’t fit together. Not only is somebody lying, but I think everybody is lying.”

“I’d like to know,” Beaver said, “because I’ve been trying to get him interested in that case. I thought I really had him sold on it. He was sitting right up on the edge of his chair, listening to details, and then he pulled this stuff about the skinny broncobuster and the hula dancer and—”

“Whatever gave him the idea of the hula dancer?” Sergeant Ackley asked.

“Because Bonneguard’s right-hand man, Wolganheimer, is going with a hula dancer. You’ll remember that he has Io Wahine on the string. In fact, he was with her—”

“That’s right,” Sergeant Ackley said. “I remember now.”

“I’d like to know as much as you’ve found out about the case, sergeant,” the undercover man said. “It may make quite a difference in getting him *really* interested in it.”

Sergeant Ackley raised his hand to his face, scraped the edge of his thumbnail along the stubble at the angle of his jaw. “Well,” he said, “there *was* a bunch of money in that safe all right. We’ve been in touch with various police officers, and the government secret service gave us a tip-off. There’s no question that money has been pouring into headquarters, and from all we can find out, that money has gone. Someone made a good haul. But it never on earth could have been made the way they claim it was made.”

“Why not?”

“Well, let’s start in with Bettler. Now, Hanz Bettler has a pretty good record. Of course, that may or may not mean anything. He calls up Bonneguard, tells him he’s been drugged and to get some relief down to him right away, because he can’t stay awake. Bonneguard, Wolganheimer, and Bradercrust start for the place. When they get there, Bettler has managed to keep awake, and has been awake all the time. Drugged as he was, if he’d ever dropped off to sleep, he’d have slept straight through. It would have been impossible for anyone to have opened that door without his knowing it. And there’s no evidence the lock had been tampered with.”

“Leith got that all figured out,” Beaver said. “The thief didn’t have an opportunity to pull the job while Bettler was drugged. That’s why he had to drug Bradercrust.”

“Drug Bradercrust, my eye,” Sergeant Ackley said. “How the hell did he have a chance to drug Bradercrust?”

“Well, he did it, didn’t he?”

“Get this,” Sergeant Ackley said. “It was a hot night. Hanz Bettler took a drink out of the water cooler. Bradercrust took a drink out of the water cooler, and gave the dog a drink out of the water cooler. Now, that means the water in the cooler was doped, doesn’t it?”



The undercover man nodded.

“Well,” Sergeant Ackley said, “we grabbed that water cooler just as soon as our men got on the job, and it wasn’t doped. There’s absolutely no trace of any drug in that water or in the cooler.”

“They must have got it from *somewhere*,” Beaver persisted.

“Sez you,” Sergeant Ackley said. “Now, get this straight, Beaver. The guard watches the inside of the house, but in order to get to the inside of the house, you have to cross a strip of lawn. Widths of that strip vary from thirty-two feet at its narrowest point to seventy feet at its widest. Those grounds are patrolled by savage police dogs. Our detectives made a series of tests. Even conceding they could get over the fence or pick the lock in the gate, they were never able to get so much as a foot on the ground before the police dogs had nailed them.

“Now, there were just four people whom those dogs obeyed: Bonneguard, Bettler, Wolganheimer, and Bradercrust. The time of all those men is accounted for; therefore, none of them could have pulled the robbery. And yet no one else *could* have done it. Now, you figure that out and—”

The undercover man suddenly sat bolt upright.

“What is it, Beaver?” Sergeant Ackley asked, as he saw the expression on the man’s face.

“Bradercrust,” Beaver said, in a low tone.

“What about him?”

“The dogs knew Bradercrust,” Beaver said.

“Well, what if they did? Bradercrust was drugged. There’s no question about that. He was taken to the hospital, and his stomach was pumped out. There was enough dope in his system to—”

“Don’t you see?” Beaver exclaimed. “It was a cinch. That burglary wasn’t committed while *anyone* was drugged. Bradercrust managed to dope Bettler, knowing that Bettler would telephone Bonneguard at his house. Well, then Bradercrust went up and volunteered to take over. What happened? He picked the lock and burglarized the safe as soon as the other two had left. Since the dogs knew him, he had no difficulty whatever in going to the fence and

slipping the package through the iron bars to a confederate. Then Bradercrust went back and took a drink of water from the cooler, dropped some drug into it, drank it, and gave a dose of the same drug to one of the police dogs, just to make the whole thing look convincing. Because Bettler had been drugged earlier in the evening, the whole thing made a perfect background so that no one would suspect Bradercrust.”

Sergeant Ackley’s eyes narrowed. For a matter of more than two minutes, he was silent. Then he said: “I hadn’t meant to tell you about that, Beaver.”

“Hadn’t meant to tell *me* about *what*?” the undercover man asked.

“About that theory of the case.”

“You weren’t telling *me* about anything,” the undercover man said. “*I* was telling *you*.”

“Yes, it’s true,” Sergeant Ackley said, “that you hit upon the only theory which explains what actually happened. It’s rather a peculiar coincidence, because it’s something I’d figured out about an hour ago and had just written it in my report to Captain Carmichael. Naturally, I hadn’t intended to mention it to anyone until after the captain had passed on it.”

The undercover man slumped down in his chair, regarded his superior with sullen hostility.

“Oh, I see,” he said. “You thought of it first.”

Sergeant Ackley met his gaze without so much as the quiver of an eyelash. “Yes,” he said. “I had written my report about an hour ago.”

“I see,” Beaver said, scraping back his chair. “Well, I should have known better— Do I outline any of this to Lester Leith?”

“You do not,” Sergeant Ackley said positively. “Let him pull his own chestnuts out of the fire.”

“I thought I had him interested in that case,” the spy said. “Gosh, I don’t know why he *wouldn’t* be interested in it! There’s a cold hundred thousand dollars to be picked up for the asking. The numbers on the bills aren’t listed, public sympathy is against the whole movement. Bonneguard is on the defensive, and will probably be brought before the grand jury, and I understand the government is figuring on deporting him. It’s an ironclad cinch for a hijacker; and then Leith goes ahead and gives me the run-around with this gold surfboard and all that stuff.”

“You never can tell,” Sergeant Ackley said thoughtfully. “He may not intend to use the skinny broncobuster with the cowboy hat; in other words, he may have padded out his order to keep you from figuring what he really has in mind.”

There was new hope on the spy’s face. “There *may* be something to that,” he conceded. “I would have sworn he was interested.”

“You should have reported those ads to me at once.”

“They sounded so foolish that I figured he was just giving me a run-around,” the spy said, “and thought it was better to pay no attention to them.”

Sergeant Ackley motioned toward the door with his thumb. “*You* get back on the job, Beaver,” he said. “*I’ll* do the thinking, and you’d better start now because I’ve got a lot of important work to do.”

Beaver scraped back his chair, lumbered toward the door. His face was a mask of sullen rage. In the doorway, he turned and said savagely:

“All right, I’ll get out, and let you write your report to Captain Carmichael.”

Sergeant Ackley pushed back the chair, and got to his feet.

“What was that, Beaver?” he demanded.

For a long moment, the two men locked eyes. Then the big spy shifted his.

“Nothing,” he said.

“It sounded like insubordination, Beaver. I’d hate to report you.”

“It was nothing. Forget it,” the spy said, and oozed through the door.

As soon as the door had closed, Sergeant Ackley whipped a piece of paper from the drawer of his desk, and started scribbling feverishly:

Report to Captain Carmichael on the Bonneguard Safe Job. I, Sergeant Ackley, have been thinking all night, for two nights, walking the floor, working out a theory which accounts for all the facts.

He paused to read the paragraph he had written and nodded with approval as he squared away and started writing the rest of the report, scratching his pen feverishly over the paper.

### CHAPTER III. AROUND THE ISLAND.

There were eight tawny-skinned Hawaiian girls, and fully half a dozen thin cowpunchers at Lester Leith's apartment when the spy returned from his session with Sergeant Ackley.

Lester Leith frowned his disapproval, and said: "Dammit, Scuttle, you've been more than an hour getting the car from the garage. What the devil's the idea? Did you think you were on a vacation?"

"I'm sorry, sir," the spy lied glibly with the facility born of long practice. "The car had a flat tire and I had the devil of a time getting it off. The rim was frozen solid to the wheel and —"

"Well, never mind," Leith said. "Here are these people who have gathered in response to the ad. Get the name and address of each, and send the applicants into my private sitting room, one at a time. Give me a list of the names and addresses, and I'll check them off as I interview the applicants."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, making a surreptitious appraisal of the Hawaiian girls whose dark, smoky eyes, hinting at the romantic possibilities of a friendly race, drew his attention as a magnet.

Lester Leith, ensconced in his private sitting room, set the stage for the interviews. After five minutes, the spy opened the door and oozed into the room.

"Here they are," he said, "the names and addresses of all the applicants."

"Very well, Scuttle. I'll see the dancers first, the cowpunchers next."

The first young woman through the door smiled at him with the frank friendliness of the Polynesian.

"What's your name?" Lester Leith asked.

"Nano Kapiolani."

Leith checked off her name and address on the list. "What do you know about the hula?" he asked.

"Everything," she said, and for a moment her lips lost their smile. Her eyes were pleading and wistful. "If you people of the Mainland could only understand the spirit of our hula," she said, "it would make for so much more enjoyment of our dances. The genuine hula isn't a vulgar 'grind' such as you see at so many of the cheap exhibits. It's a portrayal of nature. With our bodies, we imitate the swaying of trees in tropical winds. With our hands, we signify the action of our songs, the tiny wavelets hissing up the sand, the drifting of clouds across the sky, the— Here, let me show you."

She kicked off her shoes, loosened the belt of her skirt, and, singing with the effortless ease of the native Hawaiian, began to sway in rhythm to the music.

When she had finished, Leith said: "You get the job. It may interest you to know that your activities will be in connection with the organization of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association with offices in the Moronia Building. The purpose and scope of the organization will be to advance a greater appreciation of the artistic significance of the Hawaiian dances. Here's a one-hundred-dollar advance on salary. That will cover your work for a week. The job may not last longer than that, but you'll get another week's salary in lieu of notice."

“Shall I tell the other applicants that the position’s filled?” she asked, her eyes glistening with gratitude as she took the hundred-dollar bill.

“No,” Leith said. “I want to talk with each of them, but remember to hold yourself in readiness for a telephone call from me.”

She thanked him and went out. The spy promptly introduced the next applicant.

“Maui Huanemo,” the spy said.

“How did you get that first name?” Lester Leith asked her.

“I was born on Maui,” she said. “Most of the girls on the Hawaiian teams come from Oahu. They started calling me Maui as sort of a nickname, until now it’s the way I’m known in all of the booking agencies.”

“And what do you know of the hula?” Leith asked.

“I know too much,” she told him sadly.

“What do you mean?”



“WATCH MAMMA,” SHE SAID.

“I have learned that on the Mainland the Hawaiian hula has been turned from something beautiful and symbolic into something vulgar. In Hawaii, when we dance the hula, it is an attempt to interpret songs and legends with the rhythmic motion of our bodies. Whenever we portray ‘going around the island,’ it brings forth wild applause. That’s all *you* want of a hula. Even your ad emphasized that part of the hula dance. We—”



Lester Leith interrupted to say: "I'm sorry if you misunderstood the ad. As a matter of fact, I am a representative of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association with offices in the Moronia Building. It is the purpose of the organization to advance an artistic appreciation of the true aesthetic value of the Hawaiian hula dances. If you are employed, you will be doing field work for the association, and may rest assured that everything you do will advance an appreciation of the Hawaiian dances. Are you acquainted with Nano Kapiolani, the young woman who was just in here?"

"No, I have never seen her before."

Leith gravely took from his pocket a hundred-dollar bill.

"You get the job," he said, "but I don't want you to tell the others."

"But don't you want to see me dance?" she asked. "Don't you want—"

"It's quite unnecessary. I can tell from the manner in which you carry yourself that you are quite proficient. This hundred dollars will cover your first week's salary. The job may not last longer than that, but you will receive another hundred dollars in lieu of notice. And remember that you start working for me tonight, that you are to hold yourself in readiness to follow my instructions regardless of how peculiar and eccentric those instructions may seem."

"Oh, thank you so much," she said.

Leith nodded crisp dismissal, ushered her to the door, and nodded to the undercover man.

The next young woman was Mildred Wemomano.

“And what,” Lester Leith asked, “do you know about the hula?”

“Watch mamma,” she said.

She took off her shoes, stepped from the chair to the desk, fastened big, brown, laughing eyes on Lester Leith and began swaying in the rhythmic tempo of a South Sea Island dance.

Gradually the tempo grew more rapid.

“Here we go,” she said, “around the island. Watch.”

Folding her arms, she characterized the journey around the island in the age-old Hawaiian manner.

Lester Leith gravely took a hundred-dollar bill from his pocket.

“You’re hired,” he said. “But don’t tell the others.”

Within the next fifteen minutes, Leith had hired all the Hawaiian dancing girls, and had started interviewing cowpunchers.

Harry Lanten was the first applicant, a drawling, soft-spoken individual who walked into the room with shoes that would clump despite anything he could do, with legs that were bowed like a pair of calipers.

“What,” Leith asked, “do you know about riding mean bucking broncos?”

“I’ve ridden a few.”

“And you wear a seven-and-a-quarter size hat?”

“That’s right.”

“I see,” Lester Leith said, “that you’re exactly what I’ve been looking for. You’re hired. Here’s one hundred dollars to cover a week’s salary in advance.”

The blue, deep-set eyes, seemingly trying to crowd together past the barrier of a nose which was as protruding and businesslike as the beak of a mosquito, lighted with gratitude. “Say, buddy,” he said, “you don’t know what this means—”

“Could you,” Lester Leith interrupted his thanks, “teach me how to ride a bucking bronco?”

The thin cowpuncher surveyed him with appraising eyes. “Yes,” he said. “I know where there are a couple of horses, not downright mean uns, you know, but horses that’ll start to buck if you crowd ’em a bit.”

Leith said: “Tomorrow afternoon at three o’clock I want to take my first lesson. Have a bronco all ready for me.”

“O. K. Swell,” the man said.

Leith opened the door of his closet.

“Here,” he said, “is a little present for you. Take your pick.”

The man stared at the array of ten-gallon sombreros, grabbed one of them, felt the texture of the rim, looked in the band to be certain of the name of the maker, and then whistled.

“You mean you’re *giving* this to me?” he asked.

Leith nodded. “And remember,” he said, “to be on the job waiting for me to telephone. Don’t get drunk, and you hadn’t better wear cowboy togs. Just keep on your regular clothes, but you can wear this hat.”

Lanten thanked him and left, renewing his assurances of gratitude. Five minutes later, Lester Leith had hired Philip Wolsack of Arizona. Six minutes after that, Tex Sherwin of San Antonio had collected the job. Then Arthur Grebe was hired.

However, it wasn’t until shortly after noon that Beaver was able to call Sergeant Ackley.



“Hello, sergeant,” he said cautiously. “I just wanted to give you the lowdown. Apparently those ads *are* just run-arounds. He tried to keep anyone from knowing which one of the applicants he’d hired, but I was too smart for him. Whenever they would come out, I would take them to one side and ask them confidentially: ‘What time did Mr. Leith say you were to start work?’ ”

“Good work,” Sergeant Ackley said. “Whom did he hire?”

A slow grin twisted the spy’s thick lips. “He hired every damn one of them,” he said. “Remember, sergeant, you boys do the thinking. That puts it in your department. Now figure *that* out, and put it in your report to Captain Carmichael.” And the spy eased the receiver back on its hook.

## CHAPTER IV. RANGE REGALIA.

Lester Leith, attired in leather jacket, vivid blue silk shirt with a wide, flaring collar open at the neck, leather gauntlets elaborately ornamented with hammered silver, black chaps, cowboy high-heeled boots, and ornamental belt with hammered silver conchs, came down the corridor which led to his apartment, his boot heels sounding with a rhythmic *clump-clump-clump*. He unlocked the door, entered the reception hallway, and started calling almost before he was through the door:

“Scuttle. Oh, Scuttle. Where the devil are you, Scuttle?”

The undercover man came running from the kitchenette.

“Yes, sir. What was it, sir? Oh, my heavens!”

“What’s the matter?” Leith asked.

The spy stared at him with wide, round eyes. “Nothing, sir, only— Pardon me, sir. A bit of a shock, sir. I’d hardly expected—”

“Tut, tut, Scuttle,” Lester Leith said. “You shouldn’t ever be surprised at anything I do. Tomorrow I’m taking lessons in riding a bucking bronco. I want to become proficient in the art, and I’ve noticed that one of the most difficult bits of cowboy technique is wearing the clothes. Tell me, Scuttle, how am I doing?”

“Yes, sir,” the spy said, gulping down his surprise. “You’re doing very well, sir. Very well, indeed, if I may say so, sir.”

“You may say so, Scuttle,” Lester Leith said. “But look at the hat.”

The valet studied the broad-brimmed sombrero.

“Yes, sir,” he said. “It’s a very becoming hat.”

“Becoming, my eye!” Lester Leith stormed. “It’s a puny, half-size, five-gallon hat. Scuttle, where the devil are those ten-gallon hats?”

“In the closet, sir.”

“Well, bring me one immediately, Scuttle. I started down to the garage to get my car before I realized that the Western outfitters who sold me this cowboy outfit had short-changed me on the hat.”

“Yes, sir,” the undercover man said, and moved toward the closet, walking with cat-footed swiftness, despite his large frame.

When the undercover man had brought him the ten-gallon hat, Leith took off the sombrero he was wearing and put on the huge cowboy hat.

“That,” he said, surveying himself in the mirror, “is better, much better.”

The undercover man’s doubts showed in his eyes. The huge hat, with its high crown and wide brim, seemed to throw Leith off balance. It was as though the hat were wearing the man rather than the man wearing the hat.

The spy coughed deprecatingly.

Leith glanced at him sharply. “What’s the matter, Scuttle?”

“Begging your pardon, sir,” the spy said, “but if you don’t mind my saying so, sir, I thought that hat you were wearing was very becoming, very becoming indeed.”

“Meaning that you don’t like this one as well, Scuttle?”

“Oh, I’d hardly say that, sir. After all, this cowboy regalia is a bit strange to me. That first hat, sir, was very becoming, very becoming indeed.”

Leith said dubiously: “I can see that you’re being tactful, Scuttle. Don’t do it. *I* like this big hat. When I want a cowboy hat, I want a real one. I shall wear this.”

“Yes, sir. Very good, sir.”

“And, Scuttle, how many more of those sombreros do we have?”

“Two, sir.”

“Put them all in the car,” Leith said. “If I decide that this hat is too large, I’ll change all those others for smaller hats.”

A cunning glint came into the eyes of the spy. “Begging your pardon, sir,” he said, “but you can only wear one hat at a time.”

Lester Leith surveyed his valet thoughtfully. “Scuttle,” he said, “never make positive statements to me in that tone of voice. It irritates me. It acts as a challenge, and it’s not correct. After all, Scuttle, hats are made to telescope. Dealers carry them that way on their shelves. There’s no reason why a man couldn’t wear four or five hats, one on top of the other.”

“Yes, sir,” the spy said. “Very good, sir. It is, of course, quite readily conceivable.”

“That’s better, Scuttle,” Leith said. “Now bring those hats down to the car.”

Leith walked back to the elevators, descended to the lobby, and *clumped-clumped-clumped* out to the street where his car was parked. A few persons who happened to be in the lobby eyed him curiously, and then turned to exchange amused glances with each other. But Leith, seemingly oblivious of their stares, marched across to the automobile.

As Lester Leith pulled away from the curb, an inconspicuous car, neither old nor new, neither shiny nor shabby, slid out from the mouth of an alley and started following Leith’s car. The man at the wheel was broad-shouldered, thick-necked, and his eyes had that peculiarly insistent, boring belligerency which comes to men who have been long on the police force.

Two men occupied the rear seat of the automobile, sitting well back with the brims of their hats pulled low on their foreheads so as to shade their eyes as well as conceal their faces. The man on the left was Sergeant Ackley. The one on the right was Captain Andrew Carmichael.

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Captain Carmichael was staring thoughtfully at the car ahead as they speeded down the boulevard. “Look here, Ackley,” he said. “This thing doesn’t make sense.”

“It never does,” Sergeant Ackley said. “He fixes it so it don’t.”

“Don’t be impertinent!”

“I’m not being impertinent, captain. That’s the thing about Leith which makes him so dangerous. He reasons along entirely unconventional lines. I’ve worked on him enough now so I’m commencing to know something of his methods.”

Captain Carmichael said angrily: “Well, this time he’s just taking you on a wild-goose chase. He could no more hijack money in an outfit like that than he could fly to the moon. Look at the way everyone stares at him. He’s a walking side show. He might just as well be carrying a brass band with him.”

Sergeant Ackley said with feeling: “And don’t think that man couldn’t walk in right under your nose and hijack a bunch of loot with a brass band. That’s just his style.”

Captain Carmichael puckered his forehead. “I certainly hope,” he said, “that you know what you’re doing.”

“I do,” Ackley said. “I’ve got him this time. He’s hot on the trail of this hundred thousand dollars. What’s more, he’s going to get it, and when he does, we’re going to get him. This is

one time we're properly prepared. You see, captain, on the other occasions we've known what Leith was doing, but we didn't know what he expected to accomplish by doing it because we didn't know who was guilty. This time we've got the whole thing doped out, because we know Bradercrust is the one he's after. Always before, Leith has been one jump ahead of us. This time he ain't."

Captain Carmichael said: "That was an interesting bit of reasoning, that report of yours, sergeant. I sent it on to the chief. He seemed very much pleased with it."

Sergeant Ackley beamed. "I surely worked hard enough on it," he said.

"How did you figure it out?" Captain Carmichael asked.

"Just concentration and persistence," Sergeant Ackley replied modestly.

"Simple as that?" the captain asked.

"Hardly simple," the sergeant protested. "I walked the floor for two nights. I didn't sleep a wink for forty-eight hours."

"Well," Captain Carmichael announced, "some officers could have walked the floor for a month and still couldn't have got it. I have an idea this training you've been getting with Leith has developed your deductive powers. I don't mind telling you that the chief was *very* much impressed. You're going to hear more of it, sergeant."

Sergeant Ackley ripped the end off a cigar. His eyes were glowing.

"Thanks," he said.

In the car ahead, Lester Leith found driving, with the broad brim of his sombrero cutting off his view on either side, sufficiently difficult to force him to concentrate his entire attention on the road ahead. Not once did he turn to look behind. He, perforce, paid no attention to the other traffic on the boulevard.

## CHAPTER V. THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

Io Wahine was sprawled in velvety-skinned comfort on the chaise longue. Her features were relaxed in the effortless smile which is the natural heritage of the Hawaiian. Pearly teeth showed between red lips. The clear olive skin of her face served as a fitting background for the smoky hue of her limpid eyes. There was something completely at rest about her, a relaxation which spoke of perfect muscular co-ordination, reminiscent of a cat sprawled on a hearth.

Job Wolganheimer, on the other hand, was the exact antithesis. So thin that he seemed to be nothing but skin and bones, bowlegged, restless-eyed, he paced the floor, walked over to the window, looked down into the alley, walked over to the wall, stared moodily at a picture, went to the kitchen, had a drink of water, and called raspingly over his shoulder:

“How about it, Io? Want a drink?”

“No, thanks,” she said, in lazy tones of perfect contentment.

Wolganheimer walked back into the living rooms, snapping his fingers nervously. For the tenth time within the last twenty minutes, he looked at his watch.

“Bonneguard was to be here,” he said, “ten minutes ago. I wonder what’s keeping him.”

Io Wahine saw no reason for trying to answer the question.

Wolganheimer again walked over to the window, looked down into the alley.

“When I tell Bonneguard what I’ve got on Bradercrust, there’s going to be a big blowoff,” he said. “You and I probably will have to lie low for a while. It’s going to make a stink.”

“What *do* you have on Bradercrust?” she asked, with a curiosity which was so indolent that, when he didn’t answer the question, she merely yawned, stretched her superb figure, raised her arms and clasped her hands behind her head.

The doorbell rang.

Wolganheimer jumped as though a shot had been fired, whirled and raced toward the door.

Io Wahine unclasped her hands, made the gesture of pulling her skirt down over her smooth limbs. Then deciding that it was too much effort, dropped her arms so that the backs of her fingers rested lightly on the carpet.

Wolganheimer flung open the door.

“Well,” he said, “it took you long enough to get—” He broke off to stare in surprise at a messenger in the conventional uniform of the Western Union Telegraph Co.

“Telegram for Io Wahine at this address,” the messenger said. “She here?”

The Hawaiian dancer swung from the couch with the smooth, easy rhythm of a trout gliding through the depths of a cool mountain pool. She took the telegram as well as the pencil which the messenger held out, signed for the telegram, tore it open, and then laughed with the sheer enjoyment of life.

“What is it?” Wolganheimer asked, instantly jealous.

She smiled her thanks at the messenger, closed the door, and handed Wolganheimer the oblong of yellow paper.

Wolganheimer read:

“HAWAIIAN-AMERICAN AESTHETIC ART COMMITTEE AFTER MAKING UNANNOUNCED COMPARATIVE TESTS OF ALL THE CURRENT HULA DANCERS HAVE AWARDED YOU FIRST PRIZE FOR MOST INTERPRETATIVE PERFORMANCE OF ISLAND DANCING STOP NOTIFIED YOU BY MAIL TWO DAYS AGO THAT PRIZE WOULD BE DISTRIBUTED FIVE O’CLOCK THIS AFTERNOON STOP HAVE RECEIVED NO ANSWER STOP PRIZE WILL BE AWARDED ROOM SIX-THIRTEEN MORONIA BUILDING STOP UNLESS YOU ARE PRESENT AT FIVE O’CLOCK AWARD WILL BE CANCELED AND FIRST PRIZE DISTRIBUTED NANO KAPIOLANI WHO STANDS SECOND ON LIST”

Job Wolganheimer, his narrow-set, nervous eyes peering greedily down his bony nose at the telegram, reacted commercially. “Why the hell don’t they say what the first prize is?” he asked.

Io Wahine, slipping down the zipper of her short house dress as she walked toward the closet, said:

“I don’t care if it’s nothing but a box of matches. It’s a recognition of merit. And think of the publicity value.”

“But look here. We can’t walk out on Bonneguard. We have to wait for him.”

“You wait,” Io Wahine called from the closet where she was dressing. “I’ve waited twenty minutes already, and that’s enough to wait for any man.”

“Well, you’re not going up there alone,” Wolganheimer protested. “How the devil do I know this isn’t another trick to ditch me so you can have a date with that Hawaiian boy friend?”

Io Wahine was always short-tempered when she tried to imprison her legs in stockings, her feet in shoes. She said: “Come if you want to, or stay if you want to. I’m going, and you’ve got five minutes to make up your mind. Leave a note for your friend and let him follow us.”

The telephone rang.

With an exclamation, Wolganheimer jerked the receiver from its cradle to hear a masculine voice say:

“Don’t forget, sweetheart, five o’clock.”

“Hello, hello!” Wolganheimer shouted into the telephone. “What the devil—”

He heard the soft click at the other end of the line as the party who had burst into such extemporaneous conversation gently, almost surreptitiously, hung up his telephone.

His face twisted with rage, Wolganheimer slammed the receiver back on the hook so violently that it almost pulled the telephone loose from the wall.

“You’re damn right, I’m going!” he shouted at Io Wahine.

## CHAPTER VI. THE PECULIAR TIRE.

Between four o'clock and five thirty, there was a "No Parking" ordinance covering the entire district near the Moronia Building. Immediately adjacent to the Moronia Building, however, was a parking lot at the end of which a sign announced: "15 cents for one hour, 25 cents for three hours." By five o'clock, a large percentage of the cars had left this parking lot. It was too late for shoppers, and the professional men in the Moronia Building usually managed to get away between four thirty and quarter to five so as to beat the rush of traffic.

Job Wolganheimer, driving a 1936 Ford, drove into the parking space. The attendant took his car, gave him a numbered pasteboard, slipped a square containing the corresponding number in under the windshield wiper, and backed the car into a stall.

Across the street, Harry Lanten, driving a 1936 Ford, with Nano Kapiolani at his side, glided in close to the curb and stopped. Directly behind him, Lester Leith, driving a 1938 Buick, came to a stop and slid from behind the wheel.

"O. K., Harry," he said. "You two take this car, and park it in the next block as I told you."

Lester Leith walked forward to the Ford, eased in the clutch, and turned into the parking place. The attendant was still busy with Wolganheimer's car, and Lester Leith obligingly parked the car himself, selecting the stall next to that occupied by the Wolganheimer car.

The attendant glanced curiously at Lester Leith's cowboy regalia, gave Leith a ticket, inserted a numbered pasteboard beneath the windshield wiper, then hurried toward the front of the lot as a third 1936 Ford, driven by Edward H. Beaver, came nosing up over the sidewalk.

Lester Leith slid out from behind the wheel, started toward the front of the lot, then turned back.

On the far side of the street, Captain Carmichael said to the driver of the police car: "He'll spot us if we wait here. We can drive down the block and make a U turn. How did it happen Beaver met him here?"

"I don't know," Sergeant Ackley said. "He hasn't had a chance to make a report."

"Where did he get those 1936 Fords?"

"Bought them," Sergeant Ackley said shortly. "Remember I told you he was buying secondhand cars?"

"What does he want with them?"

"Heaven knows," Ackley said. "He's building up a smoke screen of some sort. Don't let it fool you. While you're watching the smoke, he'll suddenly reach in, grab the piece he wants, and leave the rest of it in a grand snarl. You can go crazy trying to unscramble that snarl."

"I feel like I'm going crazy now," Captain Carmichael said. "This is the damndest thing I ever heard."

"You haven't seen anything yet," Sergeant Ackley said. "Wait until the blowoff. Then things start moving so fast, it dazes you."

"How about it, sergeant? Think we'd better have a couple more of the boys come out?"

Sergeant Ackley snorted. "They'd laugh me off the force," he said. "I've been giving the boys the devil because two of them can't keep track of Lester Leith's activities. That's the reason I took this job over myself. If the two of us aren't sufficient to outsmart that crook with an undercover man on the job and a police chauffeur driving the car, we'd better quit."

Captain Carmichael said musingly: “I don’t know, sergeant. After all, in our work, the thing to do is to get the criminal, not try to show off.”

“I’m not trying to show off,” Sergeant Ackley said sullenly. “I just yanked the detectives off the job because they hadn’t been giving results.”

“Well, we’ll see,” Captain Carmichael said thoughtfully, “but I don’t like the looks of this. You know, sergeant, most crooks play the police game. We know what they’re doing; it’s only a question of catching up with them. But as I see this chap Leith, he manipulates things so that we’re always playing his game, and I don’t like it.”

“Don’t worry,” Sergeant Ackley said grimly. “You watch. Before this case gets really hot, Emil Bradercrust will enter the picture, and when he does, then you’re going to see some action; and we’re going to get Leith.”

“What’s he doing over there?” Captain Carmichael asked, turning to get a last glimpse of Leith through the rear window in the car.

As the driver went to the block and made a U turn, a traffic officer at the corner, raising his whistle in indignant protest at the flagrant violation of the traffic rules, delayed matters somewhat while Sergeant Ackley identified himself.

Sergeant Ackley answered Captain Carmichael’s question as the traffic officer turned back toward his station. “Oh, Leith just forgot something and went back to his car to get it.”

“I couldn’t see what he was doing on account of that broad-brimmed hat,” Captain Carmichael said. “There’s Beaver coming down the street. Let’s flag him and see what he has to say. We’ll have a minute before Leith can get back to the front of that lot. Pull into the curb, driver. Oh, Beaver!”

The undercover man stiffened to attention, looked furtively back over his shoulder, then came to the curb.

“What is it?” Ackley asked.

“I’m to go up to 613 Moronia Building and have Io Wahine put on a hula. When she’s finished, I’m to present her with the brooch made in the form of a gold surfboard with a border of small diamonds.”

“What’s the idea?” Captain Carmichael asked.

“You can search me. He telephoned me I’d find a 1936 Ford waiting out in front of the place, registered in his name. I was to get in it, drive to a certain place, wait until he came past, then follow his car, and drive into the same parking place. Watch out, boys. Here he comes.”

Beaver, with elaborate unconcern, walked down to the entrance of the Moronia Building. The police car dashed ahead. Lester Leith, attired in cowboy regalia, the high-heeled leather boots making him walk awkwardly, came clumping down the sidewalk.

Harry Lanten and Nano Kapiolani, who had parked Lester Leith’s Buick in a garage, a block down the street, returned in time to give Leith the parking ticket and receive some low-voiced instructions from Leith as they stood for a moment at the entrance to the Moronia Building. Leith walked to the elevators, was whisked to the sixth floor, and heard the sounds of voices and laughter in 613.

Leith opened the door.





Joe Wolganheimer, his face dark with jealousy, was standing near the window. Out in the center of the floor, Io Wahine was talking with Beaver. She was standing very close to the undercover man, looking up into his appreciative eyes, her face upturned, her lips parted in a friendly smile.

Leith said, "Pardon me a moment," and motioned to Beaver.

The undercover man reluctantly left the dancer's presence to follow Leith into the hall.

"Everything going all right, Scuttle?" Leith asked.

"Yes, sir," the spy said, with complacent self-satisfaction.

Leith said: "Give me the parking ticket on your car, Scuttle. Here's the ticket on my Buick. You take it, and I'll take your car. I'll meet you at my apartment. No need to hurry back. Incidentally, Scuttle," Leith said, lowering his voice, "I think this man who's with her is going

to be busy with some friends in a few minutes, and if you want to take the little girl to dinner, there's no objection; it'll be on the expense account."

"Dinner!"

"That's right, Scuttle. Of course, when I say dinner, that includes cocktails, champagne, and a liqueur."

The spy pushed the pasteboard parking ticket into Leith's hand, took the one which Leith gave him, and almost stumbled over his own feet in his anxiety to get back into the office of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association.

Leith took the elevator, left the Moronia Building, and walked over toward the parking station. Harry Lanten and Nano Kapiolani were waiting for him.

"Ready?" Harry Lanten asked.

"Ready," Lester Leith said. "Now, I'm going to drive out the car I took in. You folks will be driving another car, same make and model, but a different car. It's the one my valet drove in a few moments ago. You meet me at the corner of Seventh and Center streets. I'll drive out first, but you pass me in the middle of the next block, and I'll follow you."

"Very good," Harry Lanten said.

Nano Kapiolani inquired archly: "When am I going to be called on to do my dancing? I don't want to get out of practice, you know."

Leith, taking her arm, escorted her into the parking station. "You might hula your way down to the car," he said.

Laughing, she started to comply.

Leith said: "Whoa, back up. I didn't *really* mean it."

The service station attendant said, "You folks are back early."

"We come and go," Lester Leith observed, casually giving the attendant the parking ticket which he took from his pocket. "How much?" he inquired.

"Fifteen cents."

Leith handed him the fifteen cents. The service station attendant got out the car.

Harry Lanten said: "I presume it's the same on this car?"

"Sure," the service station attendant told him, and went back to get out the other Ford.

Leith was just leaving the entrance to the parking station when a car containing Karl Bonneguard and Emil Bradercrust swung into a lurching turn, narrowly avoiding him, and skidded on into the parking station.

Leith frowned his annoyance at such careless driving, swung his car to the right, and proceeded slowly down the street. Midway in the block, Harry Lanten passed him. The right rear tire on Leith's car was so soft it was almost flat.

Lagging behind, Sergeant Ackley and Captain Carmichael had a choice to make. Sergeant Ackley made it.

"Tag that car with Bradercrust in it," he ordered. "Leith has been setting the stage. The stuff which doesn't affect Bradercrust is all hooey. We tag Bradercrust now."

Captain Carmichael said: "I'm trusting your judgment in this, sergeant."

Sergeant Ackley tilted his cigar upward, said confidently: "And you ain't making no mistake either, captain."

After four blocks, Leith tooted his horn several times, speeded up and signaled for Lanten to pull into the curb.

"I'm getting a flat tire over on my right rear wheel," Leith said.

As Leith put on his brakes, the added strain on the tire finished the casing. Lanten parked his car. The two men got out and walked around to stare at the puncture with that hesitant appraisal which is the universal first reaction of motorists everywhere to a flat casing.

“Well,” Leith said, “we might as well change it. You get the tools out, and I’ll get the spare off.”

Leith took off his leather jacket, displaying the resplendent silk shirt.

“Here we go,” he said.

Leith had some trouble with the bolt on the spare tire. It had been put on so that the threads were crossed. The ordinary lug wrench had no effect on it, but from the car Lanten was driving, Leith took a huge monkey wrench which he brought into play, and which made short work of the cross-threaded nut.

Lanten started getting out the tools. Lester Leith peeled the tire cover from the spare tire, then leaned forward as though to inspect the tire closely. For several moments, the broad brim of his ten-gallon hat hid exactly what he was doing.

A short time later, when Lanten was getting the jack under the car, Leith said:

“Take a look at this spare tire, Harry. What do you make of it?”

Harry Lanten got up from his knees, and said:

“Why, it looks all right. It—”

“Touch it,” Leith said.

Lanten tapped the spare with his knuckles.

Leith said: “Not there, down here on the side.”

Lanten tapped the edge of the spare tire.

“What the devil!” he said. “It’s metal, with rubber on top.”

Leith said: “Looks like a section of metal had been vulcanized right in the tire. That’s the part that was the bottom. I turned it up when I was taking it off.”

“What the devil’s the idea?” Lanten asked.

“I don’t know,” Leith said. “Let’s see if we can get it open.”

It was Lanten who found the little catch concealed in the side of the casing which released the lock and enabled a section to be swung downward, disclosing a lacquered interior.

“Seems to be empty,” Leith said.

“I’ll bet this car belonged to a smuggler,” Lanten said excitedly. “This was where he carried dope back and forth across the border.”

Lester Leith whistled. “By George, you’re right! Tell you what, Lanten. I have a friend on the police force. He’s not exactly a personal friend. I don’t get along with him very well, but nevertheless, he’s an officer of the law, and I think this should be reported.”

Lanten nodded.

“Tell you what you do,” Leith went on. “It’s a cinch we’ll have to do something about that tire. You go over there to that drugstore, ring up police headquarters, and ask for Sergeant Ackley. If he’s in, tell him where we are and what we’ve discovered. If he isn’t in, leave word that Lester Leith has just discovered a most peculiar compartment in the spare tire of a secondhand car which he’d purchased, and that he thinks it must have been used for smuggling.”

## CHAPTER VII. THE CURVED ANGLE.

Edward Beaver, his beady eyes glistening with enthusiasm, said: "I think the committee has done itself proud in picking you as the winner, Miss Wahine. That's one of the best hulas I've ever seen in my life."

Job Wolganheimer said: "Oh, hell! If you're going to give her the prize, go ahead and give it to her and nix on this malarkey."

Io Wahine turned from the undercover man, walked over to Wolganheimer, and said:

"I am from a friendly race. I love well, but I do not hate well. Instinctively I know how to love. I have never learned how to hate. I would not like to have you make me begin."

"Now listen, baby," Wolganheimer said. "If you—"

Beaver moved aggressively forward. "You," he said, "can—" He stopped as imperative knuckles sounded on the door.

Wolganheimer stiffened to apprehensive attention. Beaver, without taking his eyes from Wolganheimer, said:

"That's probably Mr. Leith coming back to see me. Open the door, will you, Miss Wahine?"

She flung open the door.

Karl Bonneguard and Emil Bradercrust pushed their way into the room.

Wolganheimer said to Bonneguard: "Well, it's about time you showed up. I've been expecting you for an hour. Did you get my message?"

"Yes, I got your message," Bonneguard said.

Wolganheimer pushed forward. "Well, what the hell's the idea of searching my room and having your men grab me and go through me with a fine-tooth comb? Who the hell do you think you're kidding?"

"I'm making sure, that's all," Bonneguard said.

"Well, that's a great way to do it."

"It's my way."

"I don't like it."

"I don't care whether you do or not."

"Well, you're sure now," Wolganheimer said, with something of a swagger, "and I know who put the ideas into your head. Now it's my turn. I've got something to say about him!"

"I'm not so certain he's sure now," Bradercrust remarked.

Wolganheimer whirled on him, but Bonneguard said:

"That'll be enough of that, Bradercrust. We want to talk with you, Wolganheimer."

"Go ahead and talk," Wolganheimer said irritably, "and talk fast."

"Not here," Bonneguard said.

"Where?"

"Out at our headquarters."

Wolganheimer considered the invitation with knitted brows. "I don't know just what I'm getting into," he said thoughtfully.

"You're in it now," Bonneguard said.

"I've got a dame here," Wolganheimer protested.

“She’ll keep,” Bonneguard told him.

Wolganheimer looked at the police undercover man, and said bitterly: “That shows all you know about it.”

“Get your hat,” Bonneguard said. “Where’s your car?”

“Down in the parking lot.”

“Get it,” Bonneguard said.

“That’s O. K. I’ll ride out with you,” Wolganheimer told him.

Bonneguard’s voice was ominous. “I said *get your car.*”

“Oh, all right,” Wolganheimer surrendered, with a shrug of his shoulders. “If you’re going to be like that, let’s go ahead and get it over with.”

He turned to Io Wahine. “Well, baby, I guess this is the end. I’ve given you about all the presents you can reasonably expect. I know what that means.”

The Hawaiian girl said proudly, “One does not buy *my* friendship.”

“So I’ve noticed,” Wolganheimer remarked. “That don’t keep one from paying for it.”

He marched out of the door, with Bradercrust and Bonneguard falling into position, one on each side.

The door closed.

Io Wahine raised dark, limpid eyes to Beaver. “Thin men,” she said, “are inclined to be nasty. Don’t you think so?”

Beaver, with the assurance of his two hundred odd pounds of brawn, placed a friendly but not particularly platonic hand on her shoulder, and said patronizingly: “Thin guys are the bunk, baby. Now this first prize is a solid gold surfboard studded with diamonds.”

“Don’t you think it would be a good idea to have a representative of the press here when you present it?” she asked. “A photograph would make excellent publicity.”

Beaver nodded. “Sure,” he said. “We aren’t in any hurry, are we?”

She smiled up at him.

Suddenly a look of worried preoccupation clouded the spy’s eyes. He said: “You wait here just a minute. I’ve got to run downstairs and see about my car. I’ll be back in just a minute.”

“You’re pinched if you’ve left it parked near the curb,” she warned. “There’s no parking —”

“It’s all right. I can square it,” Beaver said hurriedly. “You wait right here.”

He dashed out of the door, caught an elevator flashing past the floor, yelled, “Down, six,” and saw the cage come back to a stop as the door slid open. Beaver jumped in the car.

“Get to the lobby just as quick as you can, operator. Pass up all stops. It’s a matter of life and death.”

The cage shot downward. Beaver, running out through the door, ran to the sidewalk and almost collided with Sergeant Ackley and Captain Carmichael.

“What is it, Beaver?” Sergeant Ackley asked, his eyes fixed on the entrance to the parking lot.

“I’ve got something, sergeant,” the spy blurted.

“Well, go ahead and spill it fast,” Ackley told him. “We’re waiting for Bradercrust to drive out of that parking lot. When he does, we’re going to follow him. We’re just about ready to spring our trap. He’s got the dough and—”

“He hasn’t got it at all,” Beaver said hastily. “It’s Wolganheimer.”

“Bunk,” Sergeant Ackley retorted easily. “You’re always going off half-cocked with goofy theories, Beaver.”

The spy said, “Very well, sergeant. I just thought I’d report,” and turned back toward the office building. It was Captain Carmichael who stopped him.

“Let’s hear about it, Beaver,” he invited.

The undercover man turned back.

“It stands to reason it was Wolganheimer,” he said. “I see the whole thing now. When Leith first became interested in the case, he looked at a photograph of the house on Wilmeier Avenue. I noticed that he put his thumbnail over the picture of the window. It didn’t occur to me at the time what he was doing. I’ve been thinking it over, and now I realize he was measuring the bars on that window.”

“What’s that got to do with it?” Captain Carmichael asked.

“Everything,” the spy said. “I remember noticing it at the time, and yet I *didn’t* notice it. It’s one of those things that you see, and it sticks in your memory, but you just don’t understand or appreciate why it sticks until later on when it flashes through your mind all at once and then—”

“Never mind that,” Carmichael said. “We’re going to have to tag Bradercrust in a minute. Give me the dope fast.”

“Well, Wolganheimer is a thin man. He’s the only one in the crowd who could get through a real narrow opening. You notice the bars on that window on this side of the door of that house, and you’ll see they aren’t spaced exactly uniformly. The lower left-hand corner is oblong, and the space is just a bit larger than any other space in between the bars in any of the windows. It’s a cinch that space was left purposely. Bonneguard wouldn’t have done it, because he’s so big it wouldn’t have done him any good, but Wolganheimer could have done it.”

“But Wolganheimer was with Bonneguard all the time that job was being pulled off,” Sergeant Ackley said, his voice showing contemptuous disgust.

“No, he wasn’t either,” Beaver said, “because the job wasn’t pulled when everyone thinks it was. Just because the guards went to sleep on the job, it’s a natural assumption that the safe must have been cracked while a guard was sleeping. You naturally figure that that’s why the guards were doped. That isn’t so. The guards were doped just as a cover-up.”



“Wolganheimer and Bonneguard went in the room to lock up. Bonneguard put the dough in the safe. Wolganheimer went around locking the windows. He could have left that one window unlocked. He went out, took Bonneguard to the lawyer, doubled back in the car, slipped over the fence, spoke to the dogs, reached through the bars, raised the window, squirmed in through that opening, opened the safe by using the combination, took out the cash, then knocked out the dial, and punched back the spindle.

“Bettler was keeping guard in the outer corridor all the time, but Wolganheimer didn’t care because there was a locked door between him and Bettler, and Bettler didn’t even have a key. Wolganheimer slipped back out and went and picked up Bonneguard. He told Bonneguard he’d been out with his Hawaiian girl. Nobody cared enough about it to check him on it because no one figured it made any difference *where* he’d been.”

“But how did Bettler get drugged, and afterwards how did Bradercrust get drugged?” Captain Carmichael asked. “As Sergeant Ackley has pointed out, those facts indicate that Bradercrust *must* have been the one who administered the drug.”

“No, it was a cinch,” Beaver said. “When Wolganheimer left the first time, he coated the glass tumbler below the spigot of the water cooler with some tasteless opiate. Bettler took a drink. Half an hour afterward, he became groggy. He telephoned Bonneguard. Bonneguard, Wolganheimer, and Bradercrust dashed up there. They took Bettler and left Bradercrust. While they were there that time, Wolganheimer coated the inside of the glass with more dope. This time he made a better job of it, because he knew he hadn’t given Bettler quite enough. This time he almost got too much. Bradercrust took a glass of water, drank some, saw the dog was

thirsty, poured the rest out for the dog, then added more water to it by refilling the tumbler from the spigot. The dish the dog drank the water from was too big to go under the spigot. It had to be filled by using the tumbler.”

Sergeant Ackley said. “You’re all wet, Beaver.”

“I’m not so certain he is,” Captain Carmichael said thoughtfully. “And what do you suppose is holding them up in the parking station? Let’s go take a look.”

“That will be tipping our hand,” Sergeant Ackley warned.

“Well, maybe it’s time to tip it,” Carmichael remarked. “Come on, Beaver.”

“If it’s all the same to you,” the spy said. “I’m working on another angle of this case. I’m working on Io Wahine. I think I’m going to be able to worm it out of her that Wolganheimer didn’t come to see her at all the night of the burglary.”

“Good work, Beaver,” Captain Carmichael complimented.

“But in order to do that,” Beaver went on desperately. “I’ve got to get in strong with her. I’m giving her a prize on behalf of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association which Lester Leith organized for some purpose or other. I don’t know exactly what was back of it, but I figured that it was because he wanted to get on the good side of her and find out about Wolganheimer himself. Now, let’s beat him to it.”

Captain Carmichael nodded. Sergeant Ackley let his eyes narrow. The cigar in his mouth assumed a less rakish angle, but the jaw muscles below his ears were taut as he bit into the soggy tobacco.

“Here’s what I want,” Beaver went on hurriedly. “I want some newspaper we can count on to send a man down to 613 Moronia Building to cover the presentation of this prize I’m awarding. That will make me the fair-haired child, and give me a chance to make her come across with the information I want.”

Captain Carmichael said: “Ring up the *Planet*. Ask for Joe Ashe, the managing editor. Tell him that I told you to ring him up. Tell him what you want. Tell him it’s for me, and in connection with some work we’re doing. He’ll co-operate with you to the limit. Come on, sergeant; let’s go around and see what’s holding up the procession.”

Beaver turned to dash for the nearest public telephone. Sergeant Ackley and Captain Carmichael, marching shoulder to shoulder, with the air of two tough cops who are ready for anything that may break, rounded the corner and entered the parking lot.

A little knot of figures was engaged in hectic argument.

“I tell you that *ain’t* his car,” Bonneguard said. “I know the license numbers.”

“I don’t care a hoot about the license numbers,” the exasperated service station attendant said. “This is the number that’s on his ticket. This is the number that’s on his car, and this is his car. A skinny, bowlegged fellow with a Hawaiian girl came in here and parked that other car. A skinny, bowlegged fellow with a Hawaiian dancer came in and got that other car. It was a ’36 Ford when they brought it in, and it was a ’36 Ford when they took it out. This is this guy’s car. I don’t know what kind of a flimflam you’re trying to work, but so far as I’m concerned, it’s no soap. See?”

Bonneguard said ominously: “Now listen, brother. We don’t want any of your lip. This car is important. We’ve searched this guy, and we’ve searched his room. We’re looking for something. We want to search his car. Now then, it ain’t going to do us no good to search the wrong car.”

Wolganheimer took a deep breath. “You guys are nuts,” he said quietly. “This *is* my car. It’s the car I brought in, and it’s the car I’ve been driving. I didn’t recognize it at first.”



The service station attendant nodded. "Sure, it's his car," he said.

Bonneguard and Bradercrust exchanged puzzled glances.

Captain Carmichael said in a low voice to Sergeant Ackley: "Looks as though you've had us barking up the wrong tree, sergeant. Now, where do you suppose Leith is? We've let him slip through our fingers, and it begins to look as though *he* was the one we wanted."

"Not until he gets in touch with Bradercrust," Sergeant Ackley said doggedly.

Captain Carmichael stepped forward, and said to the parking attendant:

"A man came in here a few minutes ago, all dressed up in cowpuncher togs, and—"

"Yeah, I know, driving a '36 Ford, same model as this one," the attendant said. "He went out a minute ago. What do you want?"

"Which way did he go?"

The attendant jerked his thumb, and said: "I don't think he went far either. I noticed his right rear tire was going flat as he pulled out. I yelled at him two or three times, but he didn't hear."

Captain Andrew Carmichael said. "Thanks," and nodded significantly to Sergeant Ackley.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CARS, COWBOYS, AND CUTIES.

Lester Leith heard the sound of the siren, looked up from the automobile, took off his big ten-gallon hat, and wiped his perspiring forehead.

"Quite a drag on your head," he said to Harry Lanten with a grin.

The thin cowpuncher said: "Oh, you get used to 'em after a while. They seem heavy at first, but they protect your head and neck. After you once get accustomed to them, you wouldn't ever wear anything else."

"I think mine's bigger than yours," Leith said. "Let's see those brims for a minute."

Lanten removed his big cowboy hat, passed it over to Leith who held the hats together, turned them over, and said:

"Nope. They're as like as peas in a pod. Tell you what you do, Harry. Jump in that car, go down the street until you find a garage. Send a man back here to repair this car, then you and Miss Kapiolani go down to the Crestview Hotel at Lakewood. Put your car in a garage, and you two wait until I get in touch with you. Don't try to communicate with me under any circumstances. Here's three hundred dollars for expense money. Get started right away."

"Gee," Lanten said, "this is a funny kind of a job—"

"*Get started right away,*" Leith said.

"O. K." Lanten grinned. He walked to the car ahead, said to Nano Kapiolani, "Wait until *you* hear the news."

They drove away just as the big police car came rocketing down the street.

Lester Leith looked up as tires protested the sudden application of brakes. For a moment, he seemed puzzled, then his eyes flashed into smiling recognition.

"Well, well, well," he said. "You certainly made a quick run of it, sergeant! Where were you when you got my message? The man said you were out on an important case."

Sergeant Ackley pushed open the door of the car and stepped to the pavement. He was followed by Captain Carmichael.

"What are you up to now?" he asked.

Lester Leith frowned. "Sergeant," he said, "I really wish you wouldn't cultivate such a constant attitude of belligerent suspicion. As a private citizen, I have uncovered information which, I think, should be of interest to the police. I immediately telephoned police headquarters, and asked that the information be relayed to you. I see no reason for you to adopt—"

"What's this about telephoning headquarters?" Captain Carmichael asked.

Lester Leith indicated the drugstore. "The call went in from there," he said, "not over three minutes ago. Step in and verify it if you don't believe it. However, sergeant, unless you received the call, I don't know how the devil you could possibly have known where to find me."

Captain Carmichael and Sergeant Ackley exchanged glances.

Sergeant Ackley said to the driver of the police car, "Step in that drugstore, Bill, and check up on it." He turned back to Lester Leith. "Any time *you* voluntarily report anything to the police!" he said sneeringly.

Captain Carmichael interposed. "Just a moment, sergeant," he said. "After all, Leith is a citizen and a taxpayer. Moreover, he's a prominent citizen. Let's hear *his* side of the story before we start any browbeating."

Sergeant Ackley grunted.

Leith said: "I don't think I've had the pleasure of meeting you, sir."

"I'm Captain Carmichael," Carmichael said.

Leith stepped forward and shook hands. Sergeant Ackley, standing on the side lines, snorted, took the cigar from his mouth, spat contemptuously into the gutter.

Leith said: "Quite recently, captain, I became interested in the interpretation of nature through the Polynesian dances, and in particular through the Hawaiian hula dance. My interest was aroused when I advertised for hula dancers who—"

"*Why* did you advertise for them?" Captain Carmichael asked.

Lester Leith grinned and said: "Because I had an idea it might be possible to work out a purely academic solution of the Bonneguard safe robbery by the use of hula dancers."

Sergeant Ackley snapped to swift attention. "What's that?" he asked.

Lester Leith ignored him. "You see, captain," he explained, "I understood that a man by the name of Wolganheimer had been keeping company with a Hawaiian dancer named Io Wahine. I had never met Miss Wahine myself, but I thought perhaps that by taking an interest in Hawaiian dances, I would find some other dancers who could gain her confidence and who would in turn find out certain things for me."

"Did it work?" Captain Carmichael asked ominously.

"I don't know," Lester Leith said, "whether it would work or not. To be perfectly frank with you, captain. I'm not doing it for myself, but merely to win an absurd argument with my valet, a most unusual chap by the name of Beaver. I developed the situation until, as a natural result, he was brought into contact with Miss Wahine, the young woman, who I am satisfied holds the key clue to the case. I'm now leaving Beaver with her and waiting for developments. I think it won't be long until Beaver comes to me and admits I was right. It's all rather petty, perhaps, but Beaver's taking an interest in criminal matters, and I want to encourage him as much as possible."

The driver of the police car came out of the drugstore and nodded.

"That's right," he said. "A thin guy with a cowpuncher's hat came in and telephoned, said he was telephoning on behalf of Lester Leith, and wanted to get in touch with Sergeant Ackley and report something Leith had discovered."

Sergeant Ackley frowned. Captain Carmichael inquired:

"What was it you found, Leith?"

"I purchased this car as an investment," Leith said. "I came to the conclusion that this particular model offered a very remarkable actual value, far in excess of its so-called 'blue book' listing. So I bought several of these cars. On this one, I happened to have a flat. I started to change the tire, as you will notice, and then tried to put on the spare tire. What do you think I found?"

"What *did* you find?" Carmichael asked.

Lester Leith led them around to the back of the car and indicated the spare tire and the section which had so cunningly been built into it.

"Evidently, captain," he said naively, "this car must have been used by a smuggler. Now it occurs to me that you may want to check back on the registration and find out just who had it."

Captain Carmichael exchanged glances with Sergeant Ackley.

“Let’s take a look,” the captain said. “And you, Bill, skip in and call the motor vehicle department. Tell them we want some fast action. How long have you had this car, Leith?”

“Not over twenty-four hours.”

“You have a bill of sale and assignment of—”

“Oh, yes,” Lester Leith said, producing several documents from his pocket.

“How many of these cars did you buy?” Captain Carmichael asked.

“I don’t know. Five or six, I think.”

Sergeant Ackley came storming forward.

“Oh, what the hell’s the use of stalling around?” he said. “Leith has some scheme to get the dough. He wants to give us a run-around and is trying to make suckers of us.”

“Just a minute, sergeant,” Captain Carmichael interrupted sternly. “There’s only one way to prove a case, and that’s by getting proof. When you can furnish proof that a man’s a criminal, arrest him. Until you can, he’s a citizen and a taxpayer and entitled to courteous consideration. Shut up!”

Lester Leith smiled gratefully.

Captain Carmichael, checking through the documents, said: “But you don’t seem to have anything covering *this* car, Mr. Leith.”

“What?” Lester Leith exclaimed incredulously. “I must have. I bought it.”

“Well, it isn’t here.”

Sergeant Ackley said: “Don’t listen to him, captain. He’s just trying to mix things all up and—”

Captain Carmichael said sternly: “Use your head, sergeant. There’s been a mixup in cars at the parking lot. *This is Wolganheimer’s car.*”

Sergeant Ackley stared at the secret compartment in the spare tire, looked at Lester Leith in startled dismay as slow comprehension sagged his jaw muscles, sent his cigar drooping downward at a dejected angle. Suddenly his eyes sparkled. The cigar snapped upward.

“Holy smoke!” he shouted. “We’ve *got* him! We’ve got him with the goods on. He read about Wolganheimer having a puncture the night of the burglary and not being able to put on the spare tire because the threads were crossed on the bolt. He figured out Wolganheimer had deliberately crossed those threads so the tire couldn’t be taken off. That’s why he got that big monkey wrench. Wolganheimer knew his own associates would eventually search him and every place he’d been— We’ve got him, captain! We’ve got him! He switched tickets there at the parking space, copped this car, started away with it, and the tire went flat. We came storming on his heels, and he hasn’t had a chance to ditch the swag. He’s trying to stall around so he can hide it. Search him!”

Captain Carmichael nodded, said grimly, “I’m sorry, Leith, but I think there’s enough evidence to warrant our taking you to headquarters.”

“For what?” Lester Leith asked.

“To search you.”

“Search me here,” Leith said. “Come on in the drugstore. Search me in there.”

“Come on,” Sergeant Ackley said; “in the drugstore, captain. Seconds are precious. We want to clean this thing up.”

They rushed Lester Leith into the drugstore, searched him from head to foot, went through every inch of his clothes—and found absolutely nothing, other than the usual assortment of

articles which might have been expected, including some two thousand dollars in fifty and hundred-dollar bills.

Sergeant Ackley wiped perspiration from his forehead, scowled at Captain Carmichael.

"He *couldn't* have ditched it," said the sergeant. "He— Wait a minute. How about that skinny cowpuncher. What became of *him*?"

"He drove away," Lester Leith said.

"He's got the swag," Sergeant Ackley yelled, and pounced upon the telephone.

He called the radio department at police headquarters, ordered a broadcast to all cars to pick up a thin man wearing a sombrero, and accompanied by a Hawaiian girl. The pair were probably in a 1936 Ford sedan.

Lester Leith yawned, and lighted a cigarette.

At the end of ten minutes, headquarters called back that a detective reported a thin cowpuncher, wearing a big sombrero, accompanied by a Hawaiian girl, was sitting in a 1936 Ford in front of Lester Leith's apartment, apparently awaiting instructions.

"Get them under arrest," Sergeant Ackley bellowed into the telephone. "Rush them to headquarters. Don't give them a chance to ditch anything. We'll meet you up there and search them."

Sergeant Ackley slammed up the telephone and said to Lester Leith:

"Come on, buddy; you're going to headquarters."

"This," Leith suggested, "is a damnable outrage."

Captain Carmichael tilted back his hat to scratch the side of his head.

"I'm not so certain but what it is," he admitted.

"I am warning you, gentlemen," Lester Leith said, "that if I am dragged to police headquarters, I shall cease to co-operate with you. I shall make absolutely no statement of any sort, nature, or description."

"Who wants *you* to make any statement?" Sergeant Ackley yelled. "Every time you talk, you mix things all up. We've got you this time, dead to rights. We've caught you in the act, and we're going to run down your back trail until we nail you to the cross. All we ask of you is to keep your mouth shut. Come on, captain; let's go."

Lester Leith sat in the police car, and, during the journey, made no comment. At headquarters, he nodded to the thin, bowlegged cowpuncher in the Western hat, and the Hawaiian girl who accompanied him.

Sergeant Ackley said: "This gives you the whole sketch. Leith was advertising for a cowpuncher. *Why* did he want a broncobuster? Not that he cared a hang about whether the man could actually bust broncos or not, but broncobusters are riders. Riders are bowlegged. Now, Wolganheimer is thin and bowlegged. Wolganheimer took a 1936 Ford into the parking station. He had Io Wahine with him. The guy in the parking station was all eyes for the Hawaiian girl. Lester Leith drove in and started shuffling '36 Fords around like cards in a deck. He had every opportunity to switch parking tickets. Then when this pair came to the parking station, all the attendant could see was a thin man with bowlegs accompanied by a Hawaiian girl. He never smelled a rat. He gave them the car without any questions. Handling the number of cars that he does, he has only a hazy recollection of cars and people."

Captain Carmichael nodded. "Very logical, sergeant," he said ominously. "Very well worked out and very concisely stated. Now, just how do you expect to get your proof?"

Sergeant Ackley said belligerently: "I'll get it. Leith won't talk, but I can turn the heat on these two and—"

The thin broncobuster said, with a quiet calm which was packed with deadly anger: “I don’t know what the devil you’re talking about. I have been running some errands for Lester Leith. This Hawaiian girl has been with me. We haven’t been near *any* parking lot.”

“That’s right,” Maui Huanemo said. “I know because I was with him every minute.”

“That’s what *you* say,” Sergeant Ackley stormed. “Wait until that service station man identifies you.”

The thin broncobuster reached in his pocket and said to Captain Carmichael: “Here’s something that may help. About forty minutes ago, I parked the car in front of a fire plug, and the officer insisted on giving me a ticket. Perhaps he can identify me. In any event, the ticket will.” He took from his pocket a traffic tag on which the name, “Phil Wolsack,” had been signed as the operator of the car.

“Your name Wolsack?” Captain Carmichael asked.

“Yes.”

“Go ahead and sign your name. Let’s see you sign it,” Sergeant Ackley said.

They looked over his shoulder while he signed his name.

Captain Carmichael said: “That tag was issued at ten minutes past five by Hal Whiteside over in No. 5 precinct. This car *couldn’t* have been parked out there by the Moronia Building, sergeant.”

Sergeant Ackley stared from one to the other with apprehensive eyes.

An orderly stepped into the room.

“Beg pardon, sergeant,” he said. “Do you want another report on that radio broadcast?”

“What radio broadcast?”

“You called all cars and asked them to be on the lookout for a ’36 Ford, driven by a thin chap wearing a cowboy hat, and accompanied by a Hawaiian girl.”

“What have you learned?” Sergeant Ackley asked.

“Radio Car No. 13 has picked up a pair answering the description. They were speeding out of town. The guy says he’s working for Lester Leith and was delivering some packages. The girl says she’s a professional hula dancer, hired by Lester Leith as a member of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic—”

“Skip all that,” Sergeant Ackley said. “I know all about it.”

“Do you want them?”

“You bet I want them!”

The orderly seemed fighting to suppress a smile. “Just a minute, sergeant,” he said. “Here’s another one.”

“Another what?”

“Another report.”

“I don’t want any more reports!” Sergeant Ackley yelled. “I want action! I want that car brought in. I want those two dragged into headquarters and searched.”

“But this other report,” the orderly said, “has some bearing on—”

Sergeant Ackley’s face darkened. “Tell that radio car to bring that cowpuncher and the Hawaiian girl in here. I don’t give a damn about any more reports. Beat it.”

“Very good, sergeant,” the orderly said.

Captain Carmichael stopped him as he was in the act of closing the door.

“Just a minute,” said the captain. “I think *I’m* interested in that other report. What is it?”

“Radio Car 3,” the orderly said, “also reports that it picked up a Ford ’36 driven by a thin man who admits he’s a broncobuster and who’s wearing a cowboy ten-gallon hat. There’s a

Hawaiian dancer with him. They say they're working for a man named Lester Leith, and he hired them to drive around the city, stopping in at the night clubs and—”

Sergeant Ackley abruptly sat down in a chair, as though his knees had suddenly refused to support his weight.

Captain Carmichael's lips twisted in the ghost of a smile. He glanced furtively at Lester Leith's calmly tranquil countenance.

“I suppose you know, Wolsack,” Lester Leith said to the broncobuster, “that you have the right to sue Sergeant Ackley for false arrest, for defamation of character, and malicious prosecution. I'll be very glad to put you in touch with competent counsel if you desire to go ahead.”

“You bet I want to go ahead,” the thin man said, his voice vibrant with rage.

“And I do too,” the Hawaiian girl chimed in.

Sergeant Ackley yelled: “You can't get away with that! This is a wholesale conspiracy. You've deliberately shuffled this thing all up, figuring that when a person sees a thin man in a sombrero accompanied by a Hawaiian dancer, he isn't going to look for any better description.”

Lester Leith yawned, and patted his lips with four polite fingers in a cursory attempt to disguise the yawn. “So sorry, sergeant,” he said, “but apparently you've forgotten the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association, organized for the purpose of promoting a closer appreciation of the true nature of Hawaiian art. In case you're interested, sergeant, I have quite a number of cars canvassing the city, performing errands, calling on night clubs, and leaving literature. Unless you cancel that order asking all radio patrol cars to pick up these people, I'm afraid you're going to have *quite* a few cases filed against you for defamation of character, for false arrest, for—”

Captain Carmichael said tersely: “He's got you, sergeant. Cancel that order.”

## CHAPTER IX. THE BENEFACTOR.

Captain Carmichael, Sergeant Ackley, and Edward Beaver sat in a huddled conference at police headquarters. On the table in front of them was the morning newspaper. A photograph appeared prominently on the second page, with the caption:

Edward H. Beaver, representative of local Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association, presenting diamond-studded gold surfboard to Io Wahine, Hawaiian dancer. Miss Wahine was awarded first honors by the committee appointed to canvass night clubs.



In the upper right-hand corner of the same page was an article:

### HOSPITAL GETS GIFT

Lester Leith, eccentric young millionaire and sportsman, unostentatiously donated ninety thousand dollars to the Orthopedic Hospital last night. The wealthy clubman made the donation in the form of ninety bills, each of the denomination of one thousand dollars. The windfall was entirely unexpected by the board of directors. A grateful representative of the hospital said today the institution will now be enabled to install new and much-needed equipment.

Beaver said, "I found out how he did it."

"How?" asked Captain Andrew Carmichael.

"When he heard your siren, he knew you were following him. While this man Lanten was getting out the tools and jacking up the car, Leith had found this concealed hiding place, opened it, taken out one hundred, thousand-dollar bills. He'd cut a slit in the lining of his big cowboy hat and pushed the bills down inside the lining. It was one of those big ten-gallon affairs and would hold plenty of money. He'd insisted on the hats having a silk lining. Then when he knew you were coming, he managed to switch hats with Lanten.



“Remember, they were all identical hats. They were all the same size. They were all the same shape and appearance. He’d figured far enough ahead to know he might need an innocent man to carry the bills away, yet have them where they could be recovered at any time. So Lanten quite innocently took the loot away with him. Leith sent him to the Crestview Hotel at Lakewood. That’s a road which, after the first two miles, is entirely outside the limit of the radio patrol cars. The other Leith cars were all running around town on errands. He’d spaced them so *they’d* be right in the path of the radio patrol.”

Captain Carmichael nodded. “Clever,” he said slowly. “Damned clever!”

“Then when Leith left here,” Beaver went on, “he made certain he wasn’t followed, and drove directly to the Crestview Hotel. It was a cinch to switch hats there without Lanten knowing anything about it.”

“But how do you know?” Sergeant Ackley asked.

“Because I happened to notice Leith’s sombrero when he returned to the apartment last night. Of course, the money had already been removed, and after he’d taken out ten thousand to compensate himself for his expenses and trouble, he’d dropped in at the Orthopedic Hospital with the other ninety bills. Well, as I say, I looked his hat over pretty carefully, and found a slit in the lining up at the top of the crown.”

For a moment, there was silence, then Captain Carmichael asked:

“How did you happen to look there, Beaver?”

The spy coughed deprecatingly. “I don’t know,” he said, “except that being around Lester Leith the way I am, I’m studying his methods of reasoning. Frankly I think the man is a genius, despite the fact that I hate his guts. I couldn’t imagine why he’d insisted on getting such a large number of ten-gallon hats, silk-lined and which were absolutely identical in size and appearance, unless he’d intended to switch hats back and forth so that *he* wouldn’t actually have stolen property in *his* possession in case he was arrested and searched: and yet have it so he could put his hands on the money whenever he wanted it.”

Captain Carmichael nodded. “Do you know, Beaver,” he said, “we may or may not be able to catch Lester Leith red-handed, but whether we do or don’t, I think the training you’re getting out there is invaluable. I’ve been watching your progress with a great deal of interest, and I’m going to make it a point to keep my eye on you. When you finally are free to return to your detective work, I feel quite certain you’ll make a name for yourself.”

The undercover man flushed. “Thank you, captain,” he said.

Sergeant Ackley could stand no more. He blurted: “All very nice, Beaver. You’re making quite a grandstand of it, but how do you account for the fact that you threw me off on the wrong track by advancing this theory that Bradercrust was the guilty party? If you hadn’t confused me with that theory, I’d have put the finger on Wolganheimer.”

Beaver raised his eyebrows. “Why, no, sergeant,” he said. “That Bradercrust angle was *your* theory.”

“Why, you double-crossing—”

Captain Carmichael placed a stern hand on Sergeant Ackley’s shoulder.

“Sergeant,” he said, “you forget yourself.”

“But that was *his* idea! It was—”

Captain Carmichael interrupted: “Sergeant, you’re quite beside yourself. Apparently you have forgotten that you worked out that idea after pacing the floor for two sleepless nights. In fact, sergeant, I believe I have a statement to that effect in your own handwriting.”

Sergeant Ackley subsided. After a moment, he made one more attempt to assert himself.

“Well,” he blustered, “we’ll drag Lester Leith in here. We’ll take him before the grand jury. We’ll ask him where he got those ninety, one-thousand-dollar bills which he presented to the Orthopedic Hospital. We’ll make him show—”

Captain Carmichael’s laugh was scornful. “I presume, sergeant,” he said, “that you’d go so far as to endeavor to show that those identical one-thousand-dollar bills must have been hijacked from a thief who in turn stole them from a political organization which was planning to undermine our government.”

“Why not?” Ackley asked.

“And then you’d expect the chief to go before the people and ask support for the police program by pointing with pride to the fact that we had deprived the Orthopedic Hospital of ninety thousand dollars which was to be used for much-needed equipment, and turned the money over to a foreign-controlled organization which was planning to undermine our government! I think, sergeant, that you have quite overlooked the fact that, in the long run, the support the police department gets from the public depends upon the service the police department renders to the public.

“Of course, if you *want* to try and get a conviction in a hopeless case, predicated upon the theory that a lone individual thought faster than the police department, utilized the clues which should have been available to the department, and that all the police could do was to follow along behind and snatch the ninety-thousand-dollar donation from an institution so worthy of help as the Orthopedic Hospital, you’re quite welcome to the job; but *I* don’t want any part of it. And when you’re back pounding pavements, you may realize why.”

Sergeant Ackley’s lip quivered with emotion.

“Damn him,” he said. “I’ll get him yet.”

Captain Carmichael scraped back his chair, signaling that the interview was over.

“Well, sergeant,” he said, “please don’t disturb me again until you have something more definite to work on. In the meantime, I’m free to confess that I don’t think Leith is the worst criminal at large in the city by a long way. He’s given a stimulus to the used-car market, furnished employment to several very engaging and amiable Hawaiian hula dancers, been a godsend to half a dozen broncobusters who were on their uppers, furnished a great deal of free publicity to Io Wahine, deprived an unpatriotic anti-American organization of its sinews of war, donated ninety thousand dollars to a very worthy charity, and charged only ten per cent for his time and expense.

“For my part I’d like to have a city pretty well sprinkled with just such ‘criminals.’ I think we’d get along better with the underworld, and incidentally, sergeant, don’t overlook the fact that he’s giving Beaver a most valuable training, a training in deductive reasoning that couldn’t be purchased for any amount of money. And as for you, sergeant, I want once more to caution you against jumping at conclusions from insufficient data. Your theory about Bradercrust sounded logical upon a hasty, superficial examination of the facts. It proved to be most confusing to the department. I would suggest that, in the future, you be more careful about making accusations. Don’t pace the floor nights thinking up theories to throw yourself off the track. Think your way cautiously, a step at a time. Don’t try to be brilliant, because it isn’t natural for you to be brilliant.”

Sergeant Ackley glowered at the undercover man who returned his stare with the meek humility of conscious virtue on parade.

The telephone rang.

Captain Carmichael picked up the receiver, said, “Carmichael talking,” listened a minute, then said: “All right. We’re not interested—officially.”

He dropped the receiver back into place and grinned at the discomfited Sergeant Ackley. “One more good deed,” he said, “that you can add to Lester Leith’s account. Hollywood scouts, attracted by the publicity given Io Wahine in connection with the award of the Hawaiian-American Aesthetic Art Association, have just signed her for a lead in a Hawaiian picture.”

Sergeant Ackley jumped to his feet, ripped the cigar from his mouth, threw it as hard as he could throw it in the general direction of the cuspidor, and stormed from the room.

[End of *The Seven Sinister Sombros* by Erle Stanley Gardner]