

Dead Men  
Do Tell Tales

Day Keene

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# DEAD MEN DO TELL TALES

By DAY KEENE

Cooler weather indeed! *Santa mia Madonna!* The weather man was out of his head. He had been dropped as a *bambino*, and not on that portion of his anatomy that had been plumpest at the time. It stood to reason the heat wave would continue. Was this not New York? Was this not August? As for himself, as certainly as his name was Giovanni Lorenzo Garibaldi Fabriano Bianco, Papa Bianco hoped it would grow even hotter.

A big man given to flesh, he lay next to Mama in the early dawn thinking of his garden growing hourly more beautiful and fragrant in the small yard back of the restaurant. Where tin cans and ashes had been before he had made a thing of beauty. And now—with the beautiful birthday present from Mama. Papa Bianco's bulk quivered with emotion and he patted Mama's most convenient bulge tenderly before turning on his side to stare impatiently at the graying bedroom window.

The night noises of Greenwich Village had died away and the familiar sounds and smells of morning were beginning. There was a fragrance of freshly made coffee and frying onions. He could hear a faint tinkle of milk bottles and an occasional scuff of feet on the walk as some early rising laborer made his way to the subway. Dawn followed the swish of the water truck up Sullivan Street! A new day had begun.

The window fully grayed, Papa Bianco eased his bulk from the bed in a great creaking of springs. A devout man his first act of the day was to make his devotion before the image of the Virgin. Then he waddled barefooted to the open window, the long tails of cotton nightshirt dangling limp and damp around his ankles.

Truly the world was well conceived. After night had served its purpose God dropped a smile into the juke box of eternity and another day rose dripping from the ocean to revolve on the turntable of time. His roses, larkspur, hollyhocks, marigolds, snapdragons, and gaillardia, had never been more beautiful. He examined the thermometer nailed to the outside of the sill with interest. Even this early in the morning the mercury was well up in the nineties. It would be another growing day.

Dressed he tiptoed in elephantine silence down the inside stairs leading to the ground floor restaurant. The darkened restaurant was fairly cool and aromatic with the lingering odor of good food. Putting a pot of coffee to boil he drank his morning glass of brandy then caught up with his books

by thumbing through the signed food checks Mama kept on a spike on her desk.

Good. Young Vardell's tabs were gone. His one man show had been a success. He had sold at least one picture. *Tch, tch, tch.* But young Martin was still getting rejection slips instead of checks. And now he was into Mama for rent money.

The *Signora* Betty Carson, too, was still embarrassed. Papa Bianco thumbed through her tabs and breathed a fervent prayer the show she was currently rehearsing would be a huge success. *Cristo Madonna.* Where did a slim little thing like that put so much to eat? It was truly fortunate he and Mama served dinners only. With any more such variety of patronage he would have to close his doors.

Finished with his coffee he unbolted the kitchen door and walked out into the yard that was in reality little but an air well for the remodeled cold water tenement whose walls rose sheer on three sides of it. Mama's present was in the narrow shed he had built to house his garden tools. The sack was warranted to hold two and one cubic yards and squatting on his fat haunches Papa read the fine printing under the picture of a sad and frustrated looking bull:

This Steer Manure is Warranted to Be Free of  
Noxious Weed Seeds. Gathered From Cement Floors.  
Produced from Steers Fattened For Beef Market  
Which Have Been Fed On Cotton-Seed Meal and

Hulls and Especially Prepared for Lawns, Shrubs,  
Flowers, and Gardens.

Ah, Beautiful Mama. This would make things really grow. He started to open the sack then got to his feet with the effortless ease peculiar to some fat men as the first of Betty Carson's screams filled the well.

Locating the source of the screams, he gasped. *Mia Madonna*. It was the *Signora* Carson standing in the open window of her first floor apartment. And she was as innocent of clothes as she had been the day she had been born. Now Mrs. Levy in the flat across the way was leaning out her window. She looked first at the *Signora*, scandalized. Then she, too, saw the object at which the younger woman was looking and added her screams to those of the blonde girl.

Now other heads were thrusting out of windows.

Remembering her nudeness, tardily, the blonde girl wrapped the window drape sarong-wise around her middle and screamed at Papa Bianco. "There's a dead man in your garden."

The words failed to register it. It sounded to Papa Bianco as if the blonde signora had screamed there was a dead man in his garden. But such a thing obviously could not be. He tipped his garden hat politely. "*Perdonatemi?*"

"There is a dead man in your garden," she repeated.

His ruddy face paling, Papa Bianco strode through the tiny grape arbor under which he occasionally served meals to

avored customers and stared in horrified silence at the object to which the young *signora* was pointing.

It was as she had spoken. There was no doubt the man was dead. He lay face down on a rose bush. The back of his coat was sodden with clotted blood. Papa Bianco made no attempt to turn the body so he could see the face. Such an act he knew was against the law. Instead he appealed to the faces staring at him now from every window opening on the air well. "Would someone please be so kind as to inform the police a dead man is despoiling my garden?"

## II

There was the usual noon hour crowd on Broadway but few of the heat-ridden passersby, with the exception of a group of out-of-town housewives on a conducted tour, paused to watch the culinary experiment about to be performed on the public walk in front of Findy's.

It was worth watching. Two fried eggs with toast and atmosphere would have cost a dollar and a half on the air-conditioned side of the plate glass window. A roly-poly little man wearing a wilted chef's cap, Findy looked from the egg in each plump palm to the cameraman. "Come come. Make with the pictures, boys. So in this heat I am holding these eggs two minutes longer and they hatch."

One of the small group of men standing under the shade of the awning, a silver-haired little man with a twinkle in his eyes, suggested, "Now there is an idea for you, boys. Make him hold the eggs two minutes longer and you can caption the picture—Findy Becomes Mother During Heat Wave."

Findy gave him a dirty look. "Always to me such things are happening. It couldn't be I am being ribbed?"

"Who ever heard of a fried egg hot foot?" the other man asked him sober faced.

A camera man slipped his slide from his camera.

"Okay, Findy. Bust 'em."

Stooping with an effort Findy broke the eggs on the walk. The beat policeman stopped to watch. "I'm a son-of-a-gun. They're cooking."

There was no reason they shouldn't. Heat rose in shimmering eddies from the walk. It beat down from a cloudless, brassy, sky. It was reflected from heat-soaked tons of steel and concrete. The eggs on the walk begin to shrivel at the edges, then congeal.

A camera man suggested, "Now put the spatula down on the walk and make like you're turning them, Findy."

The restaurant owner attempted to comply but was balked by his waistline. "Better you should raise the sidewalk," he made a counter suggestion.

In the laughter that followed the guide conducting the out-of-town housewives made the most of his opportunity. "The man frying the eggs," he told them sotto voce, "is Findy the famous restaurateur. The big man behind him is Flip Anders the war correspondent currently producing a play he wrote out of his war experiences. The silver-haired little man with the big diamond in his tie is Silent Smith the gambler. He is reputed to be worth five million dollars, all of it made gambling."

Encouraged by their shocked clucking he pointed out Bill Morrow and Sam Eagan as Smith's seconds in command but few of the women heard him. They were still staring at Smith. He didn't *look* like a criminal type. A pleasant-faced little man whose washed-blue eyes were crinkled with laugh lines, he might have been a chain-store grocery clerk, if chain-store grocery clerks could afford to wear fifty-dollar panamas and four-carat square-cut diamonds in their ties.

The eggs on the walk turned brown. The camera men packed their cameras and talked pointedly of free beer. The patrolman, remembering his duty, ordered the sidewalk cleared. "All right. The show's over. Break it up, boys."

The guide and the housewives moved on. Most of the men under the awning adjourned to the cool of the bar. Smith continued to stand under the awning his eyes bright with interest. Broadway was his street. He knew her as few men ever had. He had moved uptown with her and both he and she had prospered. His casino had run through a dozen

administrations. His worst enemies admitted he was honest. His moral code was simple. A man was right or he was wrong. Boys were his hobby. He picked them off the streets and out of slums and gave them the education and the start in life that he had never had. To Smith a boy was a boy regardless of his color, race, or creed. There were no strings tied to his kindness. All he ever asked of his boys was that they keep their noses clean in whatever line of endeavor they might choose. It was a hobby that had payed big dividends. Sam Eagan was one of his boys. So was Bill Morrow.

A lean-faced man with predatory eyes, Morrow flipped the ashes from his cigarette. "You know," he said, "I think Flip is short of money and it might be possible to buy into his show."

Smith shook his head. "You can do as you like. I want no part of it." He disliked few men. He did dislike Flip Anders. In his opinion the former sports writer turned war correspondent and more recently a playwright was a heel.

"I'd give five to two," Morrow said, "that he has a hit on his hands."

Smith looked sideways at his second in command. "You wouldn't happen to feel that way about it, would you, because Betty Carson is playing the lead?"

Morrow grinned. "Could be. Betty is too young and pretty to stay a widow forever."

"Your torch is showing," Smith told him.

A police car with Sergeant Devers at the wheel swung in out of traffic and parked in front of Findy's. His heavy face florid in the heat, Captain Craig of Homicide sat on the front seat beside the driver his small eyes flicking over the faces of the men standing under Findy's awning.

A few of the loungers found sudden business elsewhere. Most of the group merely raised their noses from their *Racing Forms* and scratch-sheets and stared back incuriously.

"Craig's up to something," Morrow said. "I know that look in his eyes. You haven't killed anyone lately, have you, Silent?"

The gambler furrowed his brow in mock thought. "Now, let me think."

Getting out of the car Craig crossed the walk and tapped Morrow's chest with a thick finger. "I want to talk to you, Bill. Where were you between the hours of two o'clock and six o'clock this morning?"

Morrow lighted a fresh cigarette. "Why should I tell you?"

Craig said, "Because you'll either tell me of your own accord or I'm going to take you down to my office and try a rubber hose on you for size." He looked at Smith. "And you stay out of this, Silent. The Department is up to here with you attempting to play God."

"So," the gambler admitted quietly, "you have told me several times. But what's all this about?"

Craig turned back to Bill Morrow. "You wouldn't know?"

"No. I would not."

"But you do admit you are carrying a torch for Betty Carson."

Morrow clenched his fist and Smith caught at his arm. "Easy makes it, Bill."

"You don't have to admit it," Craig jeered. "It's common gossip on the Street. You took her home last night. And while she denies it, of course, another one of her boy friends found you there. You quarreled with him, put two shots in his back, then dumped him out her window."

The younger man shook off Smith's restraining hand. "It's okay, Silent. I'm not going to hit him. I don't know what he is talking about. And I don't think he does."

Craig said, "I'm talking about murder."

"How interesting," Smith said. "Just like in *The Naked City*, eh? You're making like Muldoon. Now suppose you tell us who was murdered."

"The body," Captain Craig admitted, "has not been identified."

Several of the camera men seeing the squad car had pushed themselves away from the bar. Sergeant Devers joined the group under the awning. "You guys should have been there," he told the camera men. "It was really something. Any of you know Bianco's garden on Sullivan Street?"

Solly Marks of the *Telegram* said, "I do."

"Well," Devers grinned, "when we got there this morning there was Giovanni standing knee deep in snapdragons blating his lungs out because this dead person has got himself murdered on top of one of the old man's favorite rose bushes. And in an open window just over his head was one of the cutest little blondes I ever saw wearing nothing but a frown and a diaphanous silk window drape. Boy. It was a picture in Kodachrome."

Marks set his camera case on the walk and kicked it. "And where was I? Me, I'm taking a picture of two fried eggs."

### III

Perched on the edge of her cot, Betty stared between the steel bars at the girl in the cell across the corridor. It had been a mistake on her part to tell Captain Craig that Bill Morrow had escorted her home from rehearsal. But how was she to know? She had never been involved in a murder before.

Maybe Bill had killed him. She knew he carried a gun. He wore it in a holster under his left arm.

She got up and paced the cell then sat back on the cot again and smoothed the skirt of the black and white checked outfit the police had allowed her to put on. It wasn't fair to do this to her. She hadn't done a thing except see a body and point it out to Papa Bianco. She still blushed when she thought of it. That was what a girl got for sleeping in the raw. From now on, heat or no heat, she would wear her pajamas.

A key grated in the cell door and she looked up to see a big-busted police matron. "Up on your feet, dearie," she ordered. "You're wanted down in the captain's office."

Betty went with her glumly, wondering how many years she would get for discovering a body in the nude. The office seemed filled with men. She knew Bill and Flip and Papa Bianco and Silent. The gambler got up as she entered and gave her his chair. "Stop worrying, child. Your being held at all was a mistake."

Flip Anders glowered at Craig. "A foul mistake."

"I had my reasons for holding her," Craig said. "And by the way *you* didn't happen to be in her apartment last night, did you?"

"No," Anders said. "I didn't happen to be. I went there deliberately."

"When was this?" Morrow asked sharply.

"Right after you left," Anders said. "I dropped in to give Betty the cuts I made in the second scene of the third act."

Betty shook her straw-colored braids emphatically. "And I don't like them, Flip. I tried to phone you and tell you so last night, but you hadn't gotten back to your hotel yet."

Captain Craig pounded on his desk. "Shut up. All of you. Is this a play rehearsal or a murder investigation?"

"I'll bite," Anders admitted.

Morrow walked over to stand beside Betty. "Instead of picking on a defenseless girl why not throw me and Flip in a cell? We both admit we were in the apartment."

"I may do that," Craig told him. "Someone killed the lad and despite the absence of bloodstains I have reason to believe he was killed in Mrs. Carson's apartment." He leveled a finger at the blonde actress. "You use the name of *Mrs. Carson*. Where's your husband?"

There was a slight husk in her voice. "He's dead. He was killed in the South Pacific."

Craig's tone softened slightly. "I'm sorry. But this other man." He hesitated briefly.

"What other man?"

"The man who was killed. When you discovered the body, you screamed. Why?"

Betty was indignant. "What was I supposed to do? Applaud? You'd scream, too, if you looked out your window and saw a dead man on a rose bush."

Smith wanted to know if the dead man had been identified as yet. "Not yet," Craig admitted. "But I have a hunch once we have identified him it will be easy sailing." He looked at Morrow. "Why not save the Department a little time and admit you killed him, Bill? The whole Street knows you're carrying a torch for the little blonde, here. You were in her apartment last night. This other admirer came in while you were there. You've killed other men for less. So—"

Morrow took up the story. "So I shot him with my trusty pisolver. Then I picked up the body and threw it out the window into a garden where it would be certain to be found the very first thing in the morning. You know, you ought to write your deductions for the Crook-of-the-Month Club. They could pass it out as a dividend—Craig's Grim Fairy Tales."

Craig's jowls colored but he made no reply.

Anders said, "I think you're all wet in suspecting Bill, Captain Craig. How about Giovanni there? After all the dead man was found in his garden. And if he wasn't dropped or thrown out of any of the windows on the air well he had to come through Papa Bianco's place. How do you know he didn't kill him?"

Papa Bianco was shocked. "Not on top of one of my rose bushes, *signore*." He raised his right palm. "No. This thing I

did not do. I swear by the *Madonna*."

"No one is charging you with anything," Craig said. "Not at the moment anyway. Just don't try to leave town." His scowl included Anders, Smith and Morrow. "All right. Get out, all of you. I know where to find you when I want you."

It had been fairly cool in the building but heat filled the street like an invisible molten river. Silent Smith immediately became the hub of a wheel of clamoring reporters. "Believe me, boys," he told them, "I don't know a thing about it."

Betty tried to thank him and he told her she had no cause for gratitude. "All I did was throw my weight around a little. Craig couldn't have held you much longer without a formal charge. He had to either book you or release you."

"Craig," Anders said succinctly, "is an Ass." He told the reporters. "And you may quote me."

Smith sighed as he relighted his cigar. Craig was no one's fool. He was holding something back. There was more to this than showed on the surface. He asked Betty, "You didn't recognize the dead lad, did you, Betty?"

She shook her head. "To the best of my knowledge I'd never seen him before."

Anders suggested, "Now that we're out of the mess I suggest that we stay out."

"I'm afraid we can't," Smith said. "We're all in something up to our necks. And it isn't rose petals." His smile was elfin. "Besides, I'm curious. I have heard a lot about a bed of roses, but this is the first time I've ever heard of a corpse being found in one." He motioned to Papa Bianco. "You, Bianco. I want to see where X marked the spot."

Anders' smile was wry. "Every man to his taste." He looked at his watch. "But we happen to have a rehearsal called for three o'clock. Think you can walk through it, Betty?"

"Of course I can," she smiled brightly.

Anders whistled down a cab and helped her into it. Bill Morrow looked after the cab like a lean greyhound deprived of a tasty bone. Smith said, "You have it bad, eh, Bill?"

"Bad," his second in command admitted.

Sam Eagan drove up with Smith's car. "Well, I saw the corpse," he reported. "He's not a bad-looking lad about twenty-six. Good clothes but four years out of style. Close-cropped black hair and either a prison or a hospital pallor. He could be either a recently released ex-con or an ex-service man who's fighting the war in a hospital since V. J. Day."

Smith turned to Papa Bianco. "You saw him, Giovanni. How about it? Did you ever see him around the Village?"

Papa Bianco raised his right hand. "This I swear to, *signore*. I never see this man before I find him making flat with his body the best rose bush I had in my garden...."

Mama Bianco was standing in the open doorway of the restaurant. She hurled a stream of liquid Italian at Papa who answered her in kind, then braced himself to receive her as she threw her two hundred and fifty pounds into his arms. "She is think I am arrest for murder," he beamed. "And Mama is pleased this is not so." He patted a plump arm tenderly. "My little dove."

"While you and Sam are looking at the garden," Morrow said, "I'll talk to some of the tenants whose windows open on the well."

It was the first time either Smith or Eagan had seen the garden. A high whitewashed board fence extending almost to the first floor windows of the remodeled tenement was banked with scarlet hollyhock and multi-colored sweet peas. In front of them a dozen other varieties of flowers bloomed in almost incredible profusion.

Smith removed his panama. "You're okay, Giovanni. You are also clear in my book. Any man who could plan and grow a garden like this couldn't kill anyone in it."

A uniformed patrolman sitting under the tiny grape arbor got to his feet and jerked his thumb toward the kitchen door. "Out back where you came from, chums. No one is allowed in here."

Smith was interested. "Is that so? Why? Did something happen here?"

The uniformed man stared at him suspiciously. "Oh, I make you now. You're Silent Smith the big-shot gambler."

"That's right," Smith admitted.

He studied the window Papa Bianco pointed out as the *Signora* Carson's window. It was at the far end of the well and in the opposite corner from the mashed canes of the ruined rose bush where the body had been found. There was no possible way the body could have fallen or been thrown from the window of the actress and landed where it did.

He turned to say something to Eagan and in the hot silence of the well the "spitt" of the silenced gun was plainly audible. The uniformed officer spun on his heel, tugging at his gun. Eagan was even faster. By the time the officer had fumbled his gun from its holster, Eagan had fired three shots through the open window from which the shot had come.

His eyes never leaving the window, Eagan asked how badly Smith was hurt. The gambler looked at the spreading stain on his upper arm. "Not too badly, I think." But it had been close, too close.

Excitedly chattering heads, most of them feminine, began to appear in the windows. Breathing heavily, Bill Morrow shouldered a woman aside and leaning out demanded to know where the shot had come from.

"Three apartments to your left," Eagan told him.

Morrow disappeared and was immediately replaced by Mrs. Levy. "Such a rudeness," she complained. "Without

even knocking on the door he is coming in and pushing me out of mine own window." Then looking across the air well she called triumphantly, "And what was I telling you this morning, Mrs. Gleason? Always in twos and threes are killings coming."

#### IV

This high up, in his penthouse on the floor above his forty-story high casino, there was a breeze. Smith stood in the big French windows opening onto the terrace drinking it in gratefully as Habeus his valet tucked a crisp handkerchief in the breast pocket of his white linen dinner jacket.

The day had been both long and hard. He wasn't as young as he once had been. His wound fortunately, however, had proven to be more painful than it was serious. The bullet intended for his heart had cut through his armpit instead, plowing a nasty furrow on the inside of his upper arm.

*But why shoot at him at all?*

Turning from the French windows he studied his reflection in a pier glass. His bandaged shoulder bulged slightly under the linen of his jacket. It made him look like he had taken to wearing a gun, something he had never done in all his years on Broadway. He had seen the gunmen come and go. Broadway was a lusty man's woman but she had to be wooed, not violated.

Cork Avers, operating the cage in the private elevator shaft that served only the casino and the penthouse, showed him the headlines in the evening papers as he descended to the heat of the street. One read—

MYSTERY MAN  
SLAIN IN LOVE NEST

There was a picture of Betty Carson and one of Bill Morrow on the front page. He read the caption under Morrow's picture:

Well Known Gambler and Bodyguard for Ulysses (Silent) Smith Admits Visiting Blonde Actress' Apartment Shortly Before Body was Found in Exotic Greenwich Village Garden.

The second paper headlined the fact—

SILENT SMITH SHOT IN  
SEQUEL TO VILLAGE  
LOVE NEST MURDER!

Smith returned the papers to Avers. "At my age."

Avers told him, "Sam just called in. And he says to tell you the F. B. I. has identified the lad found in the rose bush

as former Staff Sergeant Henry Merriman. He was released from a government mental hospital two weeks ago. Now they are looking up his service record for more data."

"Good. And the apartment the shot was fired from?"

"Was Merriman's apartment. He rented it four days ago, paying a fifty-dollar bonus for that particular apartment."

Smith shrugged and walked on out to the street. The sun, no longer visible, was tangling with the taller trees of the New Jersey Palisades, but it was still light and still hot on Broadway.

The shooting bothered Smith more than he cared to admit. The would-be killer had risked much and gained nothing. It was almost a feline gesture, a frightened cat reaching out of the dark to scratch. The apartment had, of course, been empty by the time Bill Morrow had reached it. The deeper into the affair they got the less sense it made.

Passing the foyer of the Empire Theatre he hesitated, then walked into the darkened interior. It was like entering another world. Except for the dim exit lights the only light in the auditorium was a harsh, unshielded, work light on the stage. Flip Anders in his shirt sleeves was sitting at a small table near it thumbing through a script. White-haired Lydia Hope, once a star in her own right, was knitting. His lips moving soundlessly, old Mac Shannon was trying to memorize lines a tired brain rebelled to absorbing. A boy and girl he didn't know were leaning against the proscenium. The

leading man's name, he believed, was Darcy. Betty was not on stage. At least Smith could not see her.

Halfway down the aisle he turned into a row and sat down as Flip, his fat face oily in the harsh glare of the work light, looked up from the script and called:

"All right, folks. Let's run through the last act again. Come on, Betty. We're waiting for you. And for God's sake, less tears and a few more lines this time."

Looking very frail and lovely, her young breasts straining against the thin white fabric of her blouse, Betty came out from behind a pile of stacked scenery blowing her nose vigorously on a wisp of handkerchief.

Smith didn't blame Bill for being in love with her. She was too young and too pretty to spend her life looking backward into a grave. He hoped she would marry Bill. Bill would be good to her.

"Places," Anders called. "Curtain. Take it away, Betty."

It was a love scene, exquisitely written and acted. The juvenile and ingenue came on. Then Shannon and Lydia made an entrance. Smith sat enthralled as the plot unfolded. There were few "clever" lines. There was none of Flip Anders' usual attempt at sophistication. It was as if the fat man in the work light had stripped his soul bare and examining it in the light of the horrors of war he had seen had written as a little child might have, a child gifted with adult mentality but without its weight of guilty knowledge.

There were no two ways about it. Bill had been right. Flip had a smash hit on his hands. The play couldn't help but be successful.

When the act was over he continued to sit quietly as Flip dismissed the cast with a curt, "That's all until tomorrow morning. Ten o'clock." Then leaving the theatre unseen he continued on up Broadway to Findy's....

It was the ghosts that bothered Lydia the most. A sharp tongue sufficed for the living. You could tell them it was none of their business or of course you were doing all right. But the ghosts knew better. They came in through closed and locked doors to find you cooking one pork chop on a gas ring. They opened your dresser drawers and examined your mended underthings. At night they made sleep difficult by sitting on the edge of your bed and reminding you of what had been.

But now she was working again, things would be better. The play was bound to be a success. It wouldn't hurt Flip at all to give her a small advance. She crossed to where he was standing by the work light. "I'll have to have some money, Flip. Say fifty dollars."

He opened his mouth as if to refuse the request, then taking a thin fold of bills from his pocket he counted a twenty and three ten dollar bills into her hand, saying, "If you really need the money I suppose I'll have to spare it. But

that's all I can possibly spare until we open. Do I make myself clear, Lydia?"

"Perfectly," the former star said cheerfully.

It was a long walk to her tiny room in the old brown stone front on West 51st Street but it was always pleasant to window shop and dream of the things one could buy if one had the money to buy them. And she intended to have the money. *Ghosts get away from my door. Lydia doesn't live here any more. She has moved back to her old suite at the Waldorf.*

It would be nice to have expensive clothes again. She missed them so. A strolling sailor passed her, turned his head to look at her face, then walked on, grinning.

"The rear elevation," the former star thought grimly, "must still be all right. But, grandmother, what white hair you have."

She turned in at the Automat and ate a hearty supper sitting at a white-topped table. It wasn't fair to be both old and poor. She didn't mean to be poor any longer. Finished with her meal she walked on up the street, breasting the theatre crowd. In a few more nights they would be coming to see her again. And the play was bound to be a huge success.

Findy's window was brightly lighted and Lydia knew a moment of regret. She should have eaten in Findy's. But when one had been poor for so long one forgot that such places existed. She paused and looked in through the glass.

The tables were all occupied by prosperous looking men and expensively dressed women. Silent Smith, immaculate in a white linen dinner jacket, was sitting at a table with two younger men she did not know. The former star sighed. This was her world. She loved it. She meant to return to it.

A few blocks farther up Broadway she turned and started down the first of the four long blocks she must walk before reaching her furnished light housekeeping room. This part of the walk she did not like. After she had passed Eighth Avenue there were few people on the street. There was nothing to look at.

The last block was worst of all. She was nearing the river now and warehouses and commercial buildings, their great doors closed for the night, were interspersed between the mouldering brown fronts. This was the last night she would walk it. In the morning she would move to a hotel.

Now there were no people on the street and halfway down the last block she started, frightened, as she thought she heard footsteps behind her, hollow, implacable, footsteps. She walked on even faster, a chill of apprehension tingling her spine. Perhaps she was being foolish. An old lady really didn't need much money. Perhaps she had best be content with the generous salary Flip was paying her.

It was completely dark now and she was grateful for the light that spilled out of the window of a small restaurant in the middle of the block. A taxi cab was parked at the curb. Its driver, a stocky man in his shirt sleeves, was sitting at the

counter spooning sugar into his coffee and flirting with a blowsy looking waitress.

Romance in the fifties. Young love in bloom among the ash cans. Thank God she hadn't much farther to go. Her feet were beginning to hurt. Starting tomorrow night she'd stop this walking.

Behind her a car motor raced and Lydia glanced back over her shoulder. The taxi cab was moving away from the curb. The girl's answer must have been "no."

She fished her small purse from her knitting bag and fumbled in it for her house key as she started to cross the street. It was her last conscious act. She had a brief glimpse of a pair of unlighted headlights. Then the roaring mass of noise and metal struck her, tossed her frail body to one side, and passed on without stopping.

This was death. She lay a limp, silent, figure in the gutter, attended by solicitous ghosts.

## V

Broadway called it the Judgment Seat. It was Smith's private table. No one ever used it but him except at his invitation. Fortunes had been made and lost across it.

Smith sat looking out the window. There was no abatement of the heat but night had brought an illusion of

coolness. Doctors, merchants, lawyers, chiefs, rich men, poor men, beggar men, thieves, and their feminine counterparts, jostled by on the walk outside. *There is no other street like it*, he thought. That was because it wasn't really a street. It was a small world of its own. A world in which he had lived all his life. A sudden throb of the wound in his arm made him wonder what it would be like to leave the street forever.

Findy continued to try to tempt his appetite. "The Lake Superior white fish I can personally guarantee."

"No. I don't feel like fish."

"Borsch with thick whipped cream. Cold cuts and potato salad."

"N-no," the gambler decided. "I tell you what, Findy. Bring me two fried eggs."

Inarticulate with anger, Findy drummed on the table with his fingers until he could speak. "Ha," he said finally. "A joker. Two fried eggs, he wants. And on the sidewalk should I fry them?"

Bill Morrow beamed at the suggestion. "Say. That would be nice."

"I'll take the same," Eagan said.

"Eggs." The word strangled in Findy's throat. "Almost half a barrel of beer those *schlemiels* drink up on me. And what do I get? Publicity? My picture in the paper? Nu. They

print a picture of a garden, a dead man, and a blonde *goy*. All Findy gets is everyone laughing and a fried egg hot foot."

He stalked away in stiff legged dignity.

Smith resumed his study of the passing crowd. Morrow added a chimney and a walk to the cottage he was sketching on the table cloth. Then he added a trellis for roses.

"Craig just came in," Eagan said.

"All this and Craig, too," Smith sighed.

The big homicide man came directly to the table. He was tired. Sitting down unasked he looked at Smith. "So you finally got burned."

"At least badly singed," Smith admitted. "What's on your mind?"

"It's still that affair down in the Village. Why should anyone shoot at you?"

"I mean to find out," Smith said. "Have you found out anything new?"

Craig ordered a glass of iced coffee. "Not a thing except this Merriman was a Denver newspaper man when he was inducted into the Army. He has no known relatives. And until two weeks ago he was confined in a government mental hospital with a service connected disability."

"We know that much," Eagan said. "We also know he offered the rental agent a fifty dollar bonus for an apartment overlooking Bianco's garden."

Smith said, "I suppose you've checked the tenants of the building?"

"Back to their babyhood," Craig told him. He scowled at Morrow. "And it may interest you to know your little blonde friend is completely in the clear. She seems to have a habit of stalking around her apartment a la Godiva, but only when she is alone. According to the other women in the building her morals are above reproach."

Morrow added a nursery to the cottage he was drawing.

Craig continued. "But that doesn't put you completely in the clear. The Medical Examiner says Merriman was killed shortly after three. And by your own admission both you and Flip Anders were in Betty Carson's apartment shortly before that hour."

Looking up from his sketching, Morrow said, "I didn't kill him. Believe me. I always hide my bodies far more cleverly. This hanging them on a rose bush is new to me. Besides I was back at my hotel by three o'clock."

Craig made an impatient gesture with his cigar. "The exact time of death is a guess. According to the M. E. there wasn't much in Merriman's stomach but whiskey and the best he could do was estimate the time. You sure you didn't kill him, Bill?"

"I'm positive."

"And you guys aren't holding out on me?"

"Why should we?"

"Why," Craig countered, "should anyone take a shot at Silent?"

"There," Smith admitted, "you have me."

Eagan suggested, "Maybe someone doesn't like him."

"Bah," Craig snorted. "How or why I don't know but you guys are in this up to your necks. And somewhere there is money involved. Merriman's buddy at the hospital says that Merriman told him as soon as he was released he had a hundred grand waiting for him on Broadway, all wrapped up in cellophane and tied with a big pink ribbon."

Morrow looked up to see Betty standing beside the table. Her eyes were swollen and red rimmed from crying. Standing up he took her in his arms. "Honey."

She tried to speak, and couldn't. Standing behind her, his fat face flabby with emotion, Flip Anders said, "It's Lydia. She's dead. Some damn fool cab driver ran her down. They found Betty's name in her purse and Betty phoned me at my hotel as soon as the police had phoned her."

"Lydia?" Captain Craig puzzled.

Anders told him, "My character woman," He looked at Smith for permission then sank into one of the chairs. "And there goes my show. The whole street knows I'm producing it on a shoe string. But now even the shoe string has snapped. I advanced Lydia fifty dollars tonight, half of what I have in the world. And we'll never be able to stick it out until we rehearse a new character woman. Well, that's show business, I guess. And me with a potential smash hit on my hands."

Morrow took the handkerchief from his breast pocket and gave it to the girl in his arms. "Here. Blow your nose. And stop crying, Betty. Crying won't do Lydia a bit of good."

Craig asked, "Did they get the driver?"

"I think so," Anders said. "I'm not sure." He cursed softly under his breath. "Of all the damn bad breaks."

"Forget the money angle," Smith said. "I saw the third act tonight. And I'll buy a piece of the show, enough to see you through."

Captain Craig got to his feet. "How nice it must be to have money. Well, I'll see you all later, I hope. One or more of you in jail."

Still sniffing, Betty, asked, "What did he mean?"

The silver-haired gambler studied the tip of his cigar a long moment before answering. "Craig means he doesn't like the way the game is going. Neither do I. An ex-service man is mysteriously murdered. An equally mysterious attempt was made on my life. And now a harmless old lady is run

down by a taxi cab. For one of the few times in my life I can't figure the house percentage. The whole game is out of balance."

Eagan said, "As in a game where someone is using a pair of switch-dice, eh?"

"Exactly."

Betty wiped at her eyes. "I knew that you knew Lydia, and that you would want to know."

"Thank you my dear," Smith said. There had been a time when he had known Lydia well, when both of them had been young.

The young actress's fingers closed on Bill Morrow's hand. "Besides, I don't know why, but I'm afraid."

"Stuff," Anders said. Catching a waiter's attention he ordered a double brandy.

Smith got to his feet and shaped his panama to his head. "You stay with Betty, Bill. And write Flip out a check for however much he needs to carry him. You come with me, Sam."

"That's him in there." The turnkey pointed to a cell. "He gave his name as Pepi Vieste when we booked him and his looks check with the picture on his hacker's license."

Smith looked between the bars. A stocky man in his shirt sleeves was lying perfectly relaxed on the steel cot suspended from the wall by chains. "So you're the lad who was driving the taxi, eh? Looks like you're in a bad jam, Pepi."

The stocky man turned his head on the clasped hands that were serving him as a pillow. "G'wan, fly cop. Blow. Scram. It's a bum rap, see? And you guys can't make it stick. I never run down no old lady. Check my record. I been hackin' fourteen years without no accident." He got to his feet in sudden recognition. "Hey. I make you now. You ain't no fly cop. You're Smith, the gambler. I seen you in front of Findy's lots of times. And once I drive you out to the Polo Grounds." His knuckles white on the bars, he asked, "Where do you come in on this?"

"The woman you killed was a friend of mine."

The driver beat on the bars with his fists. "I never killed no one." He caught at Smith's coat sleeve through the bars. "Look. Please, Mr. Smith. You've got the name of being a right guy. Maybe you can make the cops listen to you. Here's exactly what happened."

"Yes—?"

"I had the heap parked up on 49th Street, a couple of doors from where I am making a play for a waitress. A nice tasty little dish, see? There is no one in the joint so I'm passing it out hot and heavy and someone up and steals my heap. I hear the motor and I make a dive for the door. But

when I get there it is just rounding the next corner, the corner where they say I ran down the old lady. I don't even hear no screams, or nothing. All I know is that my heap is stolen."

"You went back and told the waitress?"

"Sure I did. I even called the station and reported the heap stolen on her phone. But on account of us being sweet on each other they say she is covering for me and we are acting in col—" He had trouble with the word.

"Collusion," Eagan suggested.

"That's the word."

Back in the lobby of the precinct station, Eagan asked, "Well?"

"I think I believe him," Smith said. "Let's go talk to Lydia's landlady. If the hacker's story stands up this isn't a hit and run affair. Lydia was deliberately murdered."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But I mean to find out."

The house on 51st Street was old. The river wasn't far away. The smell of mud and the docks mingled with the stale cooking odors in the hall and the gin reek of the landlady's breath. It was a hell of a place for a former star to have lived.

A slattern in her early thirties, the landlady said, "The police was already here."

Smith took a bill from his wallet. "I know. But I'd like to see her room if you don't mind. This isn't official. I'm merely an old friend of hers."

A door down the hall opened and a man thrust his head out and looked at Smith and Eagan. "You watch what you're doing," he told the woman. "The cops said not to let anybody in that room."

She looked at him with contempt as she stuffed the twenty dollar bill into the general location of where her brassiere would have been if she had been wearing one. "G'wan back to sleep, you drunk." She added in explanation to Smith, "My husband."

And this was where Lydia had lived. The room had been the front parlor when the crumbling old stone front with its patched plaster and peeling wall paper had been a mansion. There was a sagging bed, a curtained-off alcove for clothes, a two ring gas plate on a small table, and Lydia's sticker-plastered old-fashioned wardrobe trunk. It was difficult for him to imagine Lydia in the room. He preferred to remember her as she had been—one of the brightest stars in the Broadway galaxy. That had been forty, no forty-five years ago.

Her hair had been black as the ace of spades and worn in a profusion of curls that tumbled over one bare white shoulder when she was in evening dress. Diamonds had glittered in her ears and on her fingers. The young sports of the day, himself included, had fought for her slightest favors. Now she was a broken old lady lying on a slab in the

morgue, none of her former splendor left and all of her many talents fled. She had been run down by a taxi cab on the eve of a possible comeback.

The gambler removed his hat. *Good luck to her and a long run in the new cast she had joined.* Turning to the slattern, he asked, "Miss Hope lived here long?"

"Two years," the woman told him. "Most of the time she was on relief, I guess. Then she got a job in some show. And to hear her talk about it you'd think she was going to move down to the Waldorf Astoria tomorrow." She straightened a grimy cretonne window drape. "All of a sudden this place was a dump."

"How about callers?" the gambler asked.

"The police ast the same thing," she said. She turned suddenly coy. "I said she never had any. But for another twenty dollar bill I might possibly remember something I forgot to tell them."

Smith gave her another bill. Tucking it in the hollow between her ample breasts she shut the room door and confided:

"You know this guy who was killed down in some garden in the Village?"

"Yes."

"Well as soon as I seen his picture in this afternoon's paper I says to myself I've seen that face somewhere before.

Then I remembered. He's the same guy who walked Miss Hope home the other night and spent two hours in her room with the door closed."

"You're positive of this?"

The slattern said, "I am." She pursed her lips primly. "Because I don't run that kind of a rooming house. And if Miss Hope hadn't been such a good tenant and so old I would have banged on her door in a minute and told her to get him out of there."

"Well, thanks. Thanks a lot," Smith said.

Back out on the comparative cleanliness of the street, he sighed. It all just went to show a man. Police work was a good deal like gambling. A smart man kept putting in his ante and sooner or later he was dealt a possible winning hand.

The first rain fell at eleven-thirty. By midnight it had grown into a summer downpour that flooded the streets and gutters and gurgled merrily in the storm sewers.

Papa Bianco accepted it with reluctance. There was nothing one could do about God's rain. But at the risk of being sacrilegious, he preferred to make his own. God's rain played hell with a garden. From the dry vantage point of his kitchen door he watched the two men in the dead man's apartment. They were literally taking it to pieces under the little silver-haired *Padrone's* directions. The *Signore* Smith

was a stubborn man. The police had long since given up further search of the apartment as useless. Just what the *signore* thought he might find was difficult to determine.

The rain beating on the heat-soaked earth at the bottom of the air well made a Turkish bath house of the one-room apartment. A gray little terrier urging on two willing, if puzzled, hounds, Smith examined the floor, the walls, and even the ceiling of the dead service man's apartment. Somewhere there had to be a clue that would give him at least a starting point in his attempt to unravel the daisy chain of murder that had bloomed during the heat wave.

"If we knew what we were looking for," Morrow said, "it might be easier to find. What *are* we looking for?"

"I don't know," the gambler admitted. "But unless we find it I'll give you ten to one we'll have another murder on our hands."

"Whose?"

"I wouldn't know that either," Smith admitted. "All I know is that our killer is an amateur. He or she frightens easily and shoots when there's no reason to."

Sam Eagan sat on the wet window-sill and fanned himself with the brim of his straw hat. "Well, there may be something here to connect Merriman with Lydia. But I'll be damned if I know what it is. What theory are you working on, Silent? He certainly wasn't, well, shall we say, a pick-up."

Smith shook his head emphatically. "No. Even the thought is ridiculous. There comes a time in every woman's life, even women like Lydia, when men cease to be important physically—they tell me."

"How about," Morrow suggested, "him being a son by some, er, unconventional marriage?"

"I doubt it," Smith said. "Lydia was sixty-eight. Merriman was twenty-six. That would make her forty-two when he would have been born. No. He wasn't her son and he wasn't her lover. But there was some connection. There had to be. And both of them knew something—knowledge for which they were killed."

"It sounds logical," Eagan admitted.

Smith paced the small apartment. It had been recently redecorated and there were no phone numbers written on the paper by the phone. No scraps of messages had been left in any of the dresser drawers. The technical squad had even vacuumed the rug and swept the residue from the fireplace without finding anything of importance to the case. The only clear fingerprints found had been made by the dead man.

"It beats me," he admitted finally. Sitting on the sagging day bed he fingered idly through the newspapers and magazines in the newspaper rack beside it. Beside the newspapers there were two detective magazines, two western story magazines, one popular digest, two weekly news periodicals, a *Variety* magazine, a *Billboard*, and a *Saturday Review*.

Eagan mopped at his perspiring forehead. "There's nothing here. We might as well get back to the casino. This joint is like a steam bath."

"Wait a minute." Struck by a sudden thought that quickened his pulse, Smith fingered through the *Variety* without finding what he was looking for. He had better luck on the Drama page of the *Billboard*.

"Found something?" Morrow asked.

Smith said, "I think so." He looked at the cover of the theatrical magazine. It was an issue four weeks old and stamped—

This Magazine Is The Property Of  
The American Red Cross. Please  
Do Not Take From Day Room.

"What was that Captain Craig said Merriman told a lad in the hospital just before he was discharged?"

"That he had a hundred grand waiting for him on Broadway, wrapped in cellophane and tied up in a big pink ribbon. It sounded crazy to me."

"Like a fox. He was crazy like a fox," Smith said. "The kid knew what he was talking about. He had just broken the bank, gone for the house and made it, gotten rich overnight. Only he made a bad mistake in the way he tried to collect. Get me Denver on the phone."

"Denver?" Morrow puzzled.

"You heard me. I want to speak to the editor of whatever paper the kid was working for when he was inducted into the Army."

Shrugging, Morrow picked up the phone and when the operator answered he asked her for Long Distance.

## VI

This high up the faint noises of morning on the street below were a ghostly blur of subdued sound. It was the first time Papa Bianco had ever been in a penthouse. Refusing Smith's offer of a chair he prowled the thick pile of the carpet from the huge grand piano in the living room to the flagstoned terrace of the set-back from which all of Manhattan could be seen, murmuring, "Nice," as he touched this and that object.

It was three o'clock in the morning. Sam Eagan, bored, and emitting great yawns from time to time, stood in the huge French windows leading out onto the terrace. White-faced and puzzled, Betty Carson sat with Bill Morrow on an over-stuffed low divan back of a marble-topped coffee table on which he was drawing one of his endless chains of cottages. Morrow added a chimney and a walk to the cottage he was drawing then looked across the room at Smith. "Well,

you wanted all of us here. We're here. What's on your mind, Silent? What are we waiting for?"

"Captain Craig," Smith told him.

Papa Bianco stopped his padding. "The policeman?"

Smith nodded, "The Policeman. Craig said the Department was tired of me playing God so I thought I'd let them do a little work for a change."

Flip Anders set the glass of beer he was sipping on the floor beside his chair. "What's the idea, Silent? What do you mean, 'let them do a little work for a change'?"

"Pick up a killer, in so many words," Smith said. "You see I know who killed Merriman and Lydia, and why. And Captain Craig being the head of Homicide I thought he might be interested."

An uneasy silence followed the remark. Betty broke it by saying, "Oh. You know?"

"Yes," Smith nodded. "I know."

Morrow drew a few trees to shade the cottage he had drawn then began to sketch a post on which to hang a name plate.

Looking at Eagan, Smith inclined the back of his head toward the heavily draped window behind the chair on which he sat. "Make certain there is no one out on the small balcony, will you, Sam?" He explained to the others, "I'll

never forget the time a killer waited out there for me. It was close, too close, that time. I wouldn't want it to happen again."

Parting the drapes behind the chair, Eagan reported, "No one out there," then returned to stand in the big French windows.

"You say you know who killed Lydia and the man who was found in Papa Bianco's garden?" Betty said. "How?"

The gambler told her, "I read it in the showman's bible, in other words the *Billboard*. It was right on the drama page." Picking up the magazine he had found in the ex-service man's apartment he read aloud:

"This reporter has learned that 'Flip' Anders' new bid for literary fame, a short cast play called CONQUEST goes into rehearsal at the old Empire Theatre this morning with Betty Carson and Matt Darcy scheduled for the leads. Mac Shannon and Lydia Hope are also in the cast, as are Ginnie Ferrel and Albert Lee, slated for the juvenile roles. Although this reporter has not read the script the short cast and Flip's previous record of flops makes the new venture sound like a typical Flip Anders' one nighter—one night and it folds."

"I saw that," Anders said. "And I should sue the *Billboard*. I would if I wasn't so certain I had a smash hit this

time." He got to his feet heavily. "Well, it was nice of you to ask me to be present at your little denouement, Silent, and damn nice of you to lend me the money to carry on until I can replace Lydia. But I have a hard day ahead of me tomorrow. So if you don't mind I'll read about it in the papers."

"Sit down, Flip," Smith said. "I must be getting old. I've been mentally deficient not to have seen this whole thing from the start. I should have known the moment I saw the third act of the show tonight. *You never wrote lines like that in your life.* I said, sit down."

The former war correspondent continued to stand, both hands plunged into the capacious pockets of his coat. "I prefer to stand. Go on. What do you mean?"

"I mean you didn't write that show. I mean you stole it. I mean the dead lad, Merriman, wrote CONQUEST, and somewhere in France, because you were a big shot war correspondent, critic, and would-be-playwright, because he trusted you, he gave it to you to read, and when you heard he had been wounded and sent to a mental hospital, you stole it and claimed it as your own."

Anders voice was thick. "You can't prove a thing."

"No," Smith admitted. "I can't. But a few hours ago I had a long talk with the editor of the Denver paper for which Merriman was working when he was inducted into the Army. And what do you think he told me? That it was Merriman's ambition to be a playwright, that he had already written

several successful one act plays and that practically his only social activity in Denver was his connection with a little theatre group."

Anders' whole body sagged. He looked like a captive balloon about to be collapsed.

"And that proves I stole the show?" he asked.

Smith continued, "Perhaps not in a court of law. But there should be points of comparison with Merriman's earlier works. You made your big mistake when you shot at me, and missed, Flip. You should have killed me or not have tried it. I was only curious until you made it personal. But like all amateur killers you couldn't let well enough alone. You had to attempt to cover tracks already covered." Smith looked at Betty. "Think, Betty. When we parted on the steps of the station house, Bill and Sam and I to look at Papa Bianco's garden, and you and Flip to attend a rehearsal, did you and Flip go directly to the theatre?"

The actress shook her head. "No."

"Stay out of this, Betty," the fat man warned her. "Smith has no right to question you."

She looked down at the cottage that Morrow was drawing, then back at the silver-haired gambler. "No," she repeated. "We did not. A few blocks from the station Flip remembered he had forgotten the script so he sent me on to the theatre in the cab while he took another cab to his hotel."

Smith's smile was wry as he corrected her. "While he made a bee-line for Merriman's apartment afraid we might find something to connect him with the case. Then when he saw me in the garden he lost his head and flipped a shot at me."

"But why?" Betty asked, wide-eyed.

"He had already killed Merriman," Smith said. "He probably killed him a few minutes after he left your apartment that night. And his fat was a jumping bundle of nerves. He shot without even thinking of the possible consequences."

Papa Bianco spoke for the first time, his *mustachios* quivering with indignation. "*Per Bacco!* It was the fat peeg dog who keeled this man and despoiled my rose bush."

"Keep your shirt on," Eagan told him.

Anders took a quick step toward Smith and one hand coming out of his pocket held the snout of an ugly looking automatic to the little gambler's temple. "Tell Bill and Sam to shed their guns," he ordered.

Smith hesitated, said, "You heard him, boys."

"Toss them at my feet," Anders added.

"It would seem," Eagan said, "we have no choice." Slipping his gun from his shoulder holster he tossed it on the

carpet at Anders' feet. Bill Morrow did the same, then began to print—The Morrors—on the swinging sign he had sketched on the post by the gate on the walk leading up to the cottage.

For all the emotion his face showed, Smith might have been dealing a hand of poker. "You won't gain a thing by killing me, Flip. And you'll never get out of here. Remember you're forty floors above the street."

Anders picked the guns from the carpet and dropped them into his pocket. "Oh, yes, I will. For all your poker-face you don't want to die."

"No," Smith admitted. "That's right. What's more, as I said before, I doubt if I have a case against you that will stand up in a court of law. But possibly Craig's blood hounds can smell one out. As I see it, Merriman had been hounding you for days, but didn't want to crowd you too far for fear you would pull the show, *his* show, out of rehearsal. Maybe he wanted to be recognized as the author of the piece. Maybe he wanted money. He knew he had a valuable piece of property and when he read that article in the *Billboard* he told one of his buddies in the hospital that he had a hundred grand waiting for him on Broadway, all wrapped in cellophane. Betty was the star of the show. He knew you visited her almost nightly to discuss matters pertaining to it. That's why he was willing to pay a fifty dollar bonus for an apartment directly across the way from hers. He could see you whenever you came and when you left he could stop you in the hall without anyone growing suspicious. But he

stopped you once too often. He called for a show-down. And you killed him."

"Oh, Flip," Betty said. "How could you?" She began to weep softly on Bill Morrow's shoulder. He didn't seem displeased.

Smith continued, "Unfortunately for Lydia, Merriman also contacted her, undoubtedly because she looked like a nice old lady, a former star, who could advise him what to do about the situation in which he found himself. Maybe he couldn't prove he had written CONQUEST. He was fresh from a mental hospital. Maybe he was afraid if he came out openly and claimed to have written the show you would claim he was still crazy and have him locked up again. You were a war correspondent, a critic, a playwright, a Broadway big shot. He was just a G.I. with a Purple Heart, a mental hospital record, and a handful of battle stars." Smith puffed on his cigar. "Lydia brought what happened on herself. She was an old lady. She was tired of being poor. She wanted the pretty things she once had known. So instead of advising him to go to the authorities with his story she advised him to keep quiet for the time being. Then she told you that she knew and demanded a cut. That money I saw you give her tonight wasn't an advance. It was blackmail. She knew you had stolen the show. She knew you had killed Merriman. You knew you would never be safe as long as she was alive. So you followed her home from the theatre, stole that cab, and ran her down."

His voice thick, Anders said, "You can't prove it. No one can."

The little gambler was amused. "Then what are you sweating about? You're practically leaking at the seams." He started to get up from the chair as a fist rapped on the outer door. "Ah. That should be Captain Craig."

Anders jammed the gun against his temple. "No you don't. Sit down." Smith did as he was told. "I have to have time to think." His small eyes searched the apartment frantically, then settled on the drape behind the chair. "I'm going out on that little balcony," he said. "And if you had another similar experience that was close, it wasn't half as close as this one is going to be. My gun will be pointed at your head every minute until you get rid of Craig. Tell him anything you want, but get rid of him." He warned the others, "One peep out of any of you and I'll kill Smith. Is that clear?"

Eagan said it was. Papa Bianco made the sign of the cross. He wished he was back in his garden. Forty floors was a long ways above the street.

The fist knocked on the door again.

"Remember," Anders warned them. Then crossing in back of the chair, still keeping his gun pointed at the back of Smith's head, he parted the drapes with one hand and backed through them.

The scream was faint and seemed to come from a long distance away. Betty looked up, startled, but before she could speak the outer door of the penthouse opened and Habeus

came into the room carrying a large cloth-covered tray. "I knock but I guess you don't hear me," he told Smith. "I thought maybe you folks might be hungry. So I fixed up some sandwiches and such."

Smith's voice was barely audible. "Thank you. That was thoughtful of you, Habeus."

Betty continued to look at the drape. "That scream?"

Morrow tightened his arm around her shoulder. "The small balcony was merely in Flip's mind. That window opens into air."

She cried a little, then her head snuggled close to his chest, she sat looking at the sign plate he had drawn. It read—

*The Morrows*

Then taking the pencil from his fingers she erased it and wrote in the words—

*Two Morrows*

Still dissatisfied she erased it and printed the promise—

*Tomorrow*

Smith rose slowly from his chair. He was tired. He was old. It had been a long day. He still faced a tough session with Captain Craig but justice had been done and he had been instrumental in it. With a glance at the sofa where Betty and Bill were wrapped in each other's arms he suggested to Papa Bianco and Eagan, "Suppose we have our sandwiches and maybe a spot to drink out on the terrace before I phone Captain Craig." He glanced at the sofa again and the smile lines came back to his eyes. "I doubt if we will be missed."

He doubted very much if they would be missed. Her lips pressed to Bill Morrow's Betty had stopped looking backward into a grave. It was life. It was Broadway, Smith thought. The old died and the young were born. The Street was a jealous mistress. To her a man was right, or he was wrong. The wrong ones didn't last long. The right ones lived forever. He raised his glass to Papa Bianco. "To you, sir."

"*Saludi*," Papa toasted him soberly.

[The end of *Dead Men Do Tell Tales* by Gunard Hjertstedt (as Day Keene)]