ALL'S FAIR

BY RICHARD WORMSER

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"*All's Fair . . .*" is more than a stirring love story. Its setting is a turbulent mining county where money and corrupt politicians rule with guns. Into this mare's nest comes a young labor leader, grimly determined to solve the murder of a fellow organizer and to break the feudal reign of Ware County bosses.

Disguised as a mine owner's son, young Mac is invited into the home of the Alastairs, Ware County's ruling family, and nearly forgets his mission when Sue Alastair's blue eyes speak in an age-old language. But the miners strike, Sue disappears, and Mac fights daringly. From the opening of the book to its surprising climax Richard Wormser carries his readers at a breathless pace.

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"All's Fair . . ."

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"ALL'S FAIR . . ."

1

They were five middle-aged hard men, and they looked at Mac with middle-aged, hard eyes. There were only five chairs around the splintery table, so he had to stand while he bore their scrutiny; he hoped his face was as noncommittal as theirs.

Finally the man with the scar down his cheek said: "You look like a silk-shirt dude to me." He had the remnants of a Southern accent: on his tongue, "like" became "lak."

Mac put his thumbs through his belt. "I wasn't too much of a dude for the deputies that tried to stop us organizing the sharecroppers."

"He's got to *look* like a dude," the thin bald man said. "How old are you, Mac?"

"Twenty-three," Mac said. He fished a package of cigarettes out of his pocket, offered them around without getting any takers, and then lit one for himself. The scarred man took out a plug of chewing tobacco and gnawed off a piece.

"By the way, Mac, what's your real name?"

"I've almost forgotten it myself."

"Yeah?" The man with the scar squinted at him. "You act like a college guy. How'd you get into labor organizing?"

"My old man was a college graduate, so was my mother," Mac said. "I was fifteen in 1929, a junior in high school. First my old man's savings went, in Wall Street; he'd never been on margin, but his boss advised him on the market and he took a chance. That market didn't have a bottom. Then the boss laid him off. Mother went out as a governess to some rich kids. She had to eat with the servants, and her boss made passes at her. She was only thirty-six . . . Finally, I ran away. I figured without me to worry about they'd do better."

"You've never been back?"

"Once. The old man was selling razor blades from door to door. He and my mother stopped nagging at each other long enough to say hello to me . . . I could remember when there was never a cross word in the house."

Suddenly the tension relaxed, and the thin man said: "Here, take my chair. I'll get one from the other room."

"I'll get it," Mac said. He opened the door, grinned

at the typist outside, and brought a chair back. He sat in it, tilted back, wrapping his long legs around the rung.

"You got any idea what we want you for?" the thin man asked.

"No," Mac said. "Just that you asked to borrow me because you needed a young organizer."

"This isn't organizing," the thin man said. "It's undercover work. Got any objections to being a fink and a louse for a while?"

Mac used a grin for an answer. "Let's hear it."

"O.K. You know Ware County, down in the baugnite country?"

"Sure," Mac said. "Supposed to be tough."

"It is tough," the other said. "Baugnite miners run tough, but that ain't nothing to what the deputies and foremen and company spies run down there. We lost a man down there a month ago."

"Organizer?" Mac asked.

"No," the thin bald man went on, his face gaunt. "Not an organizer. Listen," he said, quietly, "We sent an organizer down there. Those baugnite miners work their guts out in twenty years for wages that wouldn't feed a mouse. They got a right to know about unions. So we sent this man in. Told him to play it easy, avoid the rough stuff. Hell, it's fertile ground there! All you

have to do is tell your story, and the working stiffs would rush to join. Well, this guy was there a week, and things were going good. He did two things wrong then. He posted a notice of a meeting. And he wired his son — he had a nineteen-year-old son — to come and join him. For company. The day of the meeting, a bunch of deputy sheriffs came around in a car, and told this organizer to get out of town. Within an hour. He wired up here for instructions."

The bald man stopped, cleared his throat.

"Go on," Mac said. He was leaning forward in his chair.

"He got his instructions. They were to tell as many people as possible what had happened, call the meeting off, and leave town."

"We didn't want any bloodshed," the scarred man said.

"That's right," the thin man said, sadly. "No bloodshed — well, this fellow did all these things. First, though, he wired his son to stop off at the nearest city and wait for him. Then he went down to the station, and got out of town. The deputies saw him go."

"But —" Mac said.

"Sure. But. The son never got the telegram. It missed him. So he came into town, went up to the

shack his old man had rented, and waited there, wondering where his father was, I suppose . . . After a while it got dark, and he must have lit a lamp. About an hour after dark, some cars pulled up in front of the shack, and blew their horns. He went and opened the door and —" The thin man stopped, coughed. "They cut him in half with a submachine gun. That's all."

"The county's under quarantine now," the scarred man said. "They say it's full of measles or something. But the churches are still meeting, and schools are open. Quarantine, hell! Only we can't get a man in there. They stop him at the county line."

"That's a new twist," Mac said. "That quarantine gag." His eyes were hard. "Why would they want to kill the son? He hadn't done anything."

"They figured he was another organizer, or maybe they took him for his father, come back," the thin man said, then he turned away. "Lawrence, tell Mac here what you want him to do."

"We want you to go in there," the scarred man said, "and find out who killed young Gowan. Why, how, everything. But you'll have to work undercover. We have a plan. Out in California we have a friend, an old union man, a pal of mine, crippled now. He's working in a mine office. You're the son of the owner of that

mine. You are to write your 'father' often. Our friend in the office will pick up any mail from Ware County and answer it right. See?"

"I think so," Mac said. "I'm to tell these baugnite owners in Ware County that we expect labor trouble in California —" He put on a mincing, slightly lisping accent. "And in Ware County they are so wise, so clever in keeping the unions out that Daddy sent me East to find out how they do it."

"That's right," Lawrence said. "We'll buy you an outfit — good English tweeds, swell luggage and top hat, white tie, and tails, like the fella says. Think you can act a mine owner's son?"

"I'll take a stab at it. But there's one catch. I'm not backing out," Mac said, "but what if this man out West — your friend in the office — dies or gets sick, and somebody else gets the mail?"

"That's the chance you take," Lawrence said. "But if you want to go, you can start at once. Gowan here has the money for your clothes and spending money."

"Gowan?" Mac looked at the bald, thin man.

"Yes," the thin man said. "Gowan. It was my son they shot."

"All right, Gowan," Mac said. "Let's go buy me some clothes."

2

As the train slowed down, Mac caught his breath and shoved his shoulder back against the Pullman cushions. This was the beginning — of what?

The windows of the Pullman darkened as it entered a station, and Mac stood up, reaching for his bags. Then he remembered that he was out of the bag-toting class now, and walked, easily, to the vestibule, where the porter brushed him off and accepted a tip. Mac hoped to see scorn in the Negro's eyes, saw none and decided that porters were good at disguising the contempt they must feel for able-bodied men who had to pay other able-bodied men to carry a pair of grips.

The train stopped, and he went out on the stone platform and supervised the transfer of the suitcases to a redcap. Then he followed the redcap up the ramp to the iron barred gate.

Forrest Alastair — there was a name for you — was supposed to meet him here. That is, Old John Alastair had written to Mac's mythical father that "my son Alastair'll be at the train."

From Old John's reputation, Mac knew that people did what he told them to. Mac stood beside his redcap, and looked around. He tried to think like his fine clothes instead of like himself. The feeling of being about to plunge into the unknown excited him, and when he finally singled out a man who must be Forrest Alastair, Mac was deep in the role he had to play.

"Mr. Alastair?" he asked. He knew the answer, before he heard it; this young article with the butter-colored hair would have to be a rich man's son.

"Yes. You're Mr. MacBlair." Alastair gave him a warm smile and told the porter to take the bags out to "my car."

"This way, Mr. MacBlair. I imagine you're glad to stretch your legs after that long train trip."

Mac admitted it was a long way from California. "But I changed trains just two hours west of here. Had a chance to stretch there."

Forrest was making conversation while the porter stowed the bags into the rumble of a huge roadster. "You've been in the East before?" His eyes were polite as they took in Mac.

"No, never." Mac thought up an embellishment to that. "Oh, yes, once, Dad and Mother took me to Europe. But I was too young to remember."

"Never seen California," Forrest Alastair said. "Like to."

"We're very proud of our climate," Mac said, climbing in. Like strange dogs, he thought, smelling each other out, to see if it's to be friendship or fight.

Forrest Alastair started the car. "Beastly city, this," he said. "Not a decent building in it."

"I've always heard the country in your state was handsome," Mac said.

"Not our part," Alastair said. "Ware County doesn't care about scenery."

Mac decided that there was small hope of getting Forrest Alastair to like him. "This isn't Ware County?" he asked. City streets were flowing by them; but Alastair drove like a bat out of hell.

"No." Forrest swirled around a truck.

The conversation died.

They left the city, and Forrest Alastair let the big car out to seventy. He was, Mac had to admit, a competent driver, but after a while Mac's leg ached from pressing down imaginary brakes.

Then the big car slowed up.

"What now?" Mac asked.

"County line," young Alastair said. "We're quarantined."

Mac said: "Oh, was that why I had to get off the train at the city?"

"That's right," Alastair told him. He leaned out of the roadster's side, waved at the guard. "O.K.?"

"O.K., Mr. Alastair."

The car gathered speed again. Alastair glanced at Mac's face. "Don't worry," he chuckled, "I'm not taking you into a death trap."

Mac bit his lip. Alastair thought Mac was afraid and did not know it was hate he felt; but he had almost caught him off his guard. Watch it, Mac, watch it.

"Here are the mines," Alastair said. "By the way, what do your friends call you? Warren?"

Mac had given the name Warren MacBlair. It was not his own. "No, Mac," he said. "Those are your mines, old chap?"

"No," Alastair said. "That's the Rand Mining Company — old Harford Rand. You'll meet him — Dad's giving a party for you tonight. I suppose —" he made it "s'pose" — "they look quite different from your sort of mine."

There was more than casual question in his tone but Mac was on home grounds now. He had crammed up on engineering journals on the train.

"Not so different," he said. "Baugnite fetches about

twelve dollars the ton now, doesn't it?" He stared out at the blackened landscape. A bunch of men came into view as the car rounded a curve — white-faced men, with a black edge to them — going to work. They said if you worked a week in a baugnite mine, you didn't get all the way clean for a year. "Now we can barely make money on three and four dollar ore. But in Colorado, I hear, one company's getting fat on two-fifty stuff. That's because they know how to handle labor, I suppose."

"By jove, that is interesting," Forrest Alastair said, warming a bit. "Got much labor to handle in your town?"

"Our town — MacBlair — used to have a hundred families in it," Mac said easily. "Now we've got over a thousand. Father doesn't like it; says he used to know every man who worked for him. Swells up and bellows about having to let a lot of strangers into his mine."

Forrest chuckled. "Sounds an old timer, like my dad." He put the car around a curve that nearly made a horseshoe. The center of the horseshoe was an elm. "Well, times change and methods with them. *I* don't mind dealing with unions, but Dad and old Rand won't hear of it here." Something like cordiality was growing

up between the young men, hampered by old fashioned fathers.

Mac swallowed. "Unions? The way we feel, get a union and you get a strike."

Alastair slowed up for the beginning of the city limits. "That's one way of looking at it. Now, there's the county courthouse — our leading architectural monstrosity. Harford Rand found a deposit of limestone over one of his baugnite veins once. Instead of blowing it away with dynamite, he cut it out carefully and sold it to the county for a courthouse. He's still bragging, and the opposition is still cursing."

"That's how you get rich," Mac said. "Take your opportunities when you come to them."

Forrest Aalastair looked at him. "Well, I suppose so."

Take it easy, Mac. Don't lay the Tory stuff on with a shovel.

So this was Emilsville, county seat of Ware County. The sidewalks were gray like any other place; rains had washed away the blood that had stained them from time to time in seven years of turbulent labor history. Every wave of labor discontent had lapped against Ware County lines, and then ebbed away again, red stained.

But it looked just like any other county seat. Nothing in its mere looks to make Mac's heart beat faster; nothing yet to give him that old tingling feeling he always got when he reached the place in the field where he would have his hands full.

"There's the Rand office," Forrest Alastair said. "Ours is in the next block — if I can find parking space."

Under a bland face, Mac sneered. Those muscles of Alastair's hadn't come from working but from college athletics. Guys like Alastair didn't know what time it was in the world. Well, so much the better; the dumber they came, the easier it was going to be. "Quite a town you have here," Mac said.

"The dust from the sorters blows all day and all night," Alastair said. "It's a filthy place to live in." A farmer was taking his truck out and Alastair's car darted into the vacated space and parked. "Leave your bags here. No one will touch them. I'll tell the cop on the corner to keep an eye open." He slid out and called: "Oh, Perry, watch the car. There's luggage in it."

"Sure, Mr. Alastair." The cop made an eager salute.

Mac followed the other boy into the office of the Alastair Mining Company. A switchboard girl and

three typists looked up and smiled sympathetically; clothes, Mac thought, make a difference. Now that I got me some good clothes, I could make a date with that one in the blue dress, for instance, and — but he'd risen above that. Mine owners' sons couldn't date stenographers.

He and Forrest Alastair climbed a flight of stairs, went past another stenographer, middle-aged this time, and into a big, sparsely furnished room. On the wall was a geological map of Ware County.

John Alastair swung out from behind a desk to meet them. He was not very tall, but he was broad and bulging. "Muscle-bound," Mac said to himself. The untidy white hair, crooked arms, and deep-lined, tight mouth were those of a scrapper.

"You're young MacBlair?" he demanded.

"That's right," Mac said.

"Yeah, I got a letter from your father," John Alastair said. "You're here to see how we run a quantity mine, huh?"

"Sure," Mac said. It sounded flat, and he added; "Learn from the men who are doing it."

Alastair gave a snort that was evidently mirth. "You a college boy like my kid here?"

"Yes," Mac said. "I went to college." The palms

of his hands were a little damp; there was no way of faking a college register if they wanted to look it up.

"Well, did they teach you there how to dig dirt?" Alastair asked.

"Lay off, Dad," Forrest said. "Father has to have his joke," he told Mac.

"Sure, my joke. Hell of a joke when old timers like me have to leave our mines to be run by a bunch of kids who learned their mining out of books. Your old man start at the bottom?"

"With a pick and shovel," Mac said.

"So did I," John Alastair snapped. "Started out in old Guthrie's mine, the Scotch hellion. Before I got through, I bought the mine from his receivers. I was tough," Alastair said. "But there were guys tougher than me around. I was smart, but there were smarter guys than me, too. But I was tougher than the smart ones, and smarter than the tough ones. That's how you run a mine, but I'm not surprised one of you college punks had to come all the way from California to learn it."

Mac nodded and said quietly: "The old days are gone. Maybe they were better days, and maybe worse, but either way, they're gone. If you get too tough now,

the men plant dynamite in your hoist. If you get too smart, the blue sky laws nick you."

Alastair quieted down, and for the first time took a good look at Mac. "Them clothes fooled me, son," he said. "You're here to see why we don't get dynamite in *our* hoists, huh? Well, keep your eyes open, maybe you'll learn."

"We've heard about you, even out in California," Mac said. "Old John Alastair of Ware County."

"Not so damn old at that," Alastair bragged. "What I got I took with my two fists. Well, I keep it the same way. Let Forrest lose it back to 'em when I'm gone. I won't be here to see it." He dropped back in his chair, grabbed up a bunch of papers in his knotty fist. "Take the boy out to the club for lunch, Forrest," he said. "I'll see you this evening, MacBlair. Go on out to the country club, and catch a look at Ware County's real problem — our kids. We can handle the labor organizers and the bankers. But we got us a problem out at the country club old Carnegie himself couldn't cut. Our sissy sons — and too damn fresh daughters!"

He frowned down at his papers, and Mac was dismissed.

Outside, Forrest said, "Don't pay too much attention to the old man. The only thing I can do better

than he is play golf, and it makes him sore. We'll stop by the house and drop your bags."

Then Forrest looked up. "Ah. The family pride and joy. Here comes my sister."

A small coupe slid into the curb, its nose against the tail of Forrest's roadster, and a girl slid out. Except for her face, she was a little too thin; but under her unruly blonde hair that was cut almost like a boy's, she had an ingratiatingly round face. Mac couldn't help — despite the way he felt about the Alastairs — liking her rebellious blue eyes. She walked over, stuck out her hand, and shook Mac's hard. "This Lochinvar MacBlair?"

"Lochinvar?" Mac asked.

"Out of the West," she said. "The lonesome virgins here don't often get a crack at a young man whose father owns gold mines. You are a bachelor, aren't you?" she asked anxiously. "It'll be just too bad if you're married to a film star."

"Sue!" Forrest said. "Stop riding Mac!"

"I'm not embarrassing you, Mac?"

He laughed. "Oh, no. But I won't flutter any dovecotes. I'm here to learn."

"I know," she said. "Dad showed me your letter. Then learn something about these!"

Her look indicated two men on the other side of the street. They wore overalls and big black hats; they were stringy and worn out and every line in their faces was deeply etched with black baugnite dust.

"Pretty, aren't they?" Sue Alastair asked.

"Miners are tough," Mac said. "They can take it."

"I'd like to see *you* cut baugnite for a while."

"Don't mind her," Forrest said, "She likes to rib. Talks like a Communist. You fall for it — and the joke is on you!"

Sue gave him a long look. Then she smiled. "Well, go lunch with Forrest, Mac. *I'll* drive you around this afternoon."

3

"I've just had lunch in the country club," Mac wrote. "All the prominent families around here are interested in the mines, and the young men know a good deal more about the work than the fellows I went with in California. I'm sure I'll come back knowing a lot more than I did when I went away, Father.

"Sue Alastair — the daughter of the family I am staying with — is taking me driving this afternoon. She is charming, if a little wild, seems to have more brains than her brother, who met me up in the city this morning, and drove me down. When I say she is wild, I mean in her ideas; she told me that she was sorry for her father's employes, and that she had even considered joining the Communist party at one time. But there's more than an off chance she is only joking. More than likely.

"I told her I understood her father's viewpoint better than I did hers; he says that what he got he got by fighting and he holds it the same way. He is an outspoken old devil.

"Write me soon, Father, and tell me all the news.

Your loving son,

Warren."

He put the letter in an envelope, and addressed it to the mine office in California. If this goes astray, he thought, and gets into old MacBlair's hands, there will be fireworks; this whole business is rather silly. These people aren't likely to read my mail; they have taken me in on face value.

But he had been in the organizing game too long to question discipline; he followed orders. When Sue Alastair called up on the house phone to say she was downstairs, he went down carrying the letter with him. "Mind stopping at the post office?" he said to her. "I want to get this off to my father."

"A dutiful son," she mocked. "Father should have had you instead of Forrest."

"What's wrong with Forrest?"

Instantly she changed. "He's my brother, after all. Here's the post office."

"Maybe I should have said your father ought to count his blessings," Mac said. "After all, with a daughter like you, he got his share of the breaks."

"Your technique is none too subtle," Sue decided. "Go mail your letter."

He knew his grin was good. It had got him back-door handouts often enough on the road. He used it on her, and carried the letter into the post office. He shoved it into a box, thinking, this has to go to the Coast and then back east of here, and if they weren't so damned suspicious up at headquarters, they could have it tomorrow morning.

"Where to?" she asked when he came back.

"I'd like to see the mines. After all, that's what I'm here for."

"*Such* a serious minded boy," she said.

"But I have to get back west soon," he said. "Trouble's brewing up fast in our town. We want to avoid a strike if we can."

"And Sonny-boy is going to bring back the magic key that avoids strikes. I don't know, Mac. It takes a man to do that. A man like my father. They don't breed them like him any more."

"You're quoting him, Sue. Are we both in the good child class?" Talking this way was an effort. It kept making him want to use a few four letter Anglo-Saxon words.

"I just admit his capabilities. I don't say I admire them. But then I've never been without money, and he has. Maybe if I was broke enough I'd think any-

thing was justifiable if it guaranteed my never being poor again." She turned the wheel — her car was half the length of her brother's — and shot down a commercial street of gaudy signs and dingy windows. The next block was all frame houses, all alike, all dingy with the dust from the baugnite mills.

"Look at them," Sue said. "These people live that way so I can have this car and Forrest his, among other things. People live in those things, Mac. Do you have them in California? The travel folders don't say."

"What the heck? You can't keep miners in palaces. They'd just have them filthy again in a week."

"Oh — you —" The girl seemed bitterly angry, and what an actress! Intensity made her eyes bluer. But he, too, had to act well. He had to mark himself a heel in her eyes. "It's always been that way, Sue. You can't change human nature."

She made a vicious U-turn in the middle of the street, and swirled back again as though to fling him off.

He slumped in his corner of the car, miserable. She couldn't hate a smug-belly as much as he did, because, after all, she had never missed a meal. But nobody could love a smug-belly except another smug-belly. In her eyes he must be as bad as Forrest, as some of those guys at the country club. Well, it was too bad, but it

was one of the bumps that came with the work. Only this one hurt more than most.

She stopped the car at a group of buildings, gray dust over red paint. "This is Alastair Number 1," Sue Alastair said. "The superintendent is Reilly. I'll introduce you to him, and then I have to run. He'll be glad to drive you back to town." Her eyes were cold and withdrawn.

Reilly came out of the office, lanky in moleskin pants and a gray shirt, a slouch hat shoved back on his bald forehead. When he smiled, two gold teeth showed and an opening for another. "Hi, Miss Sue. Comin' to visit us?"

"This is Mr. MacBlair, Reilly. A friend of Dad's. In the mining business out West."

"So?" Reilly showed the white of one eye at Mac.

"I'm on here to learn something about your methods, Mr. Reilly," Mac said. He put out his hand and shook Reilly's.

The super was energetic in his grip; his arm pumped up and down so that his unbuttoned vest slid back and showed a deputy sheriff's badge pinned to his shirt.

"You'll drive him back to town?" Sue asked.

"Sure. Come on, Mister —"

"Mac'll do. Short for MacBlair. Well, Sue, thank —"

"I'll see you around, Mac."

Sue shoved the car into gear. As she went down the road, he realized she was not angry at him; she had simply lost interest. That hurt a little more.

Reilly said, "Well, what d'ya want to see first?"

"The mine, the sorter — the works," Mac said. "I'm more interested in labor relations than I am in mechanisms."

Reilly grunted. "I never went to college," he said, insolently. "Better try me again in shorter words." He sneered, almost openly, at Mac's good English tweeds.

Mac grinned. "I see you're a real miner, Reilly. I'll give it to you short enough. Ware County knows how to handle labor. I want to see it done."

Reilly snorted, but he looked flattered. "I dunno how you handle labor," he said. "All I ever had to deal with is men. Treat 'em square, work 'em hard, and kick 'em in the pants if they get fresh. What th' hell? We ain't got no bunch of lousy furriners here in Ware. All good Americans, as good as you or me if they had the opportunity."

Easy, Mac. There goes that old anger, rising up, choking you, making you want to crack this tough face. Ride it, Mac, ride it . . . He got some control

on himself, and hoped his voice was level. "Sounds easy when you say it. I guess it would be pretty hard for most men, but maybe that's why you're a super."

"Sure," Reilly said complacently. "Come on, Mac, I'll get you a set of jeans. You might spile your pretty clothes. Baugnite's dirty stuff to handle."

In the office, he tossed Mac a set of denims, washed to a faded blue. Mac pulled them on, accepted a miner's tin hat, and stole a look at a pack of rifles padlocked against the wall. He gestured towards them. "Payroll trouble?" he asked. "Or is that the kick in the pants you were talking about?"

Reilly grinned. "All you gotta do is have 'em here. I know they're there, and the men know they're there. But, hell, we never have no trouble. Ware County's gotten a bad name from a lot of them newspaper men comin' in here and writin' stuff that ain't so." He tapped the badge on his shirt. "Besides, I'm a deppity sheriff, and I gotta keep 'em on hand fer law 'n' order work. C'mon, I'll show you the mine."

The ground felt gritty under Mac's feet. A few hundred yards away a ridge made the skyline; but it was too straight to be natural; man had made that long sharp black ridge. Reilly saw Mac staring at it. "Tailing's dump," he said. "Show you that later. Here's the

mine." They stepped into a hut. There was nothing in the hut but the hoist machinery and a black-faced white man to run the hoist. Reilly made some cryptic gesture with his hands, and the hoistman pulled a lever. The drum started to wind up its cable.

"Now," Reilly said, "this'll give you some idea. We send the men down this way, but we take the ore out in cars. Y'see, we cut down here, and then cut over to meet the tracks under ground. The hoist-cars got tracks." He gestured as the hoist stopped on their level. "And we can move the cars, one at a time, from a higher or lower level to a grade level connectin' with the outside. It ain't always worth it, but sometimes we do it that way." He and Mac stepped onto the elevator, between the tracks, and Mac bent his knees. Knowing mines, and knowing the type Reilly was, he guessed what was coming next.

He was right. The car dropped a hundred feet without restraint, jerked up short as the hoistman tightened the cable, and continued to drop under control.

Reilly looked at Mac. "Thought she was broke there," he said gravely. "Sometimes they do."

"We pull that one out West," Mac said, "to scare tenderfeet. I expected it."

Reilly snorted. The car stopped at a level eerie with

unshaded electric bulbs, and colder than an icebox. Reilly led the way out, showing Mac the tracks, the way stopes were cut, the men drilling, explaining the way baugnite was cut out of the earth.

Mac hardly listened. He was looking at the men's faces. It was pretty hard to tell what they looked like under the black of their work, but it seemed to him that he could feel a sulkiness, a bitterness in their attitude towards Reilly, and towards him, because his face was clean and because he was with Reilly. That was what they'd want to know back at headquarters; was the time ripe for a strike, or not.

He pointed a thumb at a man holding an electric drill straight over his head to cut a dynamite hole in the ceiling. "We call that the widow-maker out home," he said. He had to shout it over the noise the drill made. "Don't you make the men take precautions against getting hurt?"

Reilly sneered, dragged Mac down the track. "What the hell's the idea?" he asked. "We got enough trouble gettin' the men to do overhead drilling now. Gotta pay 'em fifty cents an hour extra as it is. They don't like breathing the stuff that floats down."

"Why not give them masks?" Mac asked. "You can kill a man with that dust in his lungs."

"We tried masks," Reilly said, "but the men wouldn't wear 'em. Couldn't get production that way; the masks hold 'em up, get their necks tired. What the hell, they can have masks if they want 'em; I got a case up in my office."

Oh, yeah, Mac thought, only you'll dock a guy if he can't get as many holes drilled with one on as he can without one. Well, it was an item to write to "father" in his next letter. A little literature mailed into the county, telling the working stiffs that you didn't have to die of silicosis and it ought to stir up a little trouble for the good Mr. Reilly.

Reilly flagged a car, and they rode it out of the mine to daylight. "Here's the mill," Reilly said.

Mac made a show of interest as he was led by the ball-mill that ground up the ore to powder, the water tables that floated the matrix away from the good baugnite, the scrapers that sent the baugnite concentrate into freight cars to be hauled to the steel mills which used it for alloy. Then out of the mill.

Overhead ran a dozen chutes. Reilly pointed up. "Carrying away the matrix," he said. "It's tailings now. Look."

They climbed the ridge that Mac had seen from the distance. The chutes came together and poured all

their black sludge into a huge hose that was dumping it on one end of the ridge. It stayed there, the water trickling down through previous days' deposit to soak into the ground.

"What'll you do when your tailings dump gets too big?" Mac asked.

"Nature helps us there," Reilly said. "Look at that end. That's where we dumped last year. We're almost ready to start again."

The pile he pointed at was at the far end of the ridge. It was only a third as high as the center. "When she dries out good," Reilly said, "every little breeze that comes along carries some away, and by the time we reach one end, the other's ready for dumping again."

"Doesn't that stuff poison the ground?" Mac asked.

"Yeah," Reilly said. "But it's what the county lives on." He pointed with a little pride, like a man from Wyoming showing a geyser. "In that direction," he said, "there ain't a farm left. Back th' other way's some of the best farmin' country in the world. The wind's almost always from the West here."

"Always?" Mac asked.

"Well, yeah," Reilly said. "Sometimes it turns itself around for a day, and then we get a bunch of howls. You see, back there's where all the nice folks live. I

got a little house there myself, tucked right in between Alastair's place and old Harford Rand's," he said with pride.

"And in the other direction?" Mac asked.

"Aw, that's where the miners live," Reilly said. "Hell, they get so used to the dust in the mines they couldn't sleep at night if the tailings wasn't blowin' inta their windows. Anyway, they're a bunch of iggnerant bastards. They sleep with their windows closed."

Mac managed to get his stomach back down to its original level. "I guess I've seen everything," he said.

"Yeah, I guess so. Wait'll I tell my assistant, and I'll run you out to the country club, or wherever you're going."

4

Back at the office, Mac found that old John Alastair had had a desk dragged into the owner's office for him. The desk was his because old John growled: "Sit there," then went back to scowling over some reports. In the other corner Forrest Alastair dictated softly to the middle-aged stenographer.

Mac sat down, pulled over pen and paper and thoughtfully wrote: "Dear Father: — " Then he chewed the end of the pen.

Forrest stopped dictating, and called over: "How'd you like the mine, Mac?"

"O.K.," Mac said. That wasn't enough. He added: "It's efficiently run." His mind was on the letter.

Old John growled: "Get on with your work, Forrest, so we can get out of here."

Forrest went on dictating, and Mac wrote: "I have just come back from inspecting Alastair No. 1, one of the largest mines in the county. The foreman, Reilly, is a real old time working boss, reminds me of Panner, tough, unthinking, but a hard driver." That was

good. He wondered where the name Panner had come from.

"Of course, baugnite is different stuff to dig from gold, but not so different as we thought. The mill is much the same but not as tightly run, of course, — baugnite concentrate can be wasted without much loss. They call the tailings a dump instead of a pond, as we do, and baugnite tailings run black instead of our yellow.

"This place is beautifully run. It shows the effects of planning. For instance, they allow nature to take care of the tailings. They are dumped wet, then the nozzle moves on, and instead of removing the tailings, they let them dry out. They have placed the dump in such a way that a steady breeze blows against it; when the tailings get good and dry they just go with the wind. This makes a pretty sharp differentiation in living quarters: supervisors and foremen, and of course, the owners, live on one side of the dumps, the working men have their houses on the other.

"The working people here are so used to the tailings blowing in, that they do not seem to notice them. Can you imagine how the women in our town would scream if we allowed black dust to blow against them all the time?"

Mac liked that. It was a signal — if you can get any organizers in, send them among the women.

"Reilly, the super at No. 1, told me how they got around the widow-maker masks that have been such a burden to us. They give the men the masks, urge them to use them, and then dock them if they cannot get out as much production as they did before they wore the protectors. You might try this — I think it would speed up operations and cut down on the number of drillers.

"They tell me they have had no violence here for years.

"Let me know how things are going.

Affectionately, your son,

Warren."

He signed the letter, let it lie on the desk for a moment. "No violence here for years" should tell Gowan that he had made no headway in the investigation of Gowan's son's death. Yes, let it ride.

Old John Alastair banged over to Mac's desk with heavy strides. Mac's first instinct was to cover the letter; he pulled his hands back in mid-action. "Writing a report to my dad," he said. "I told him I'd report as I saw things. Maybe he can think of something to ask

that I missed. Then I'll have time to look further into it."

John Alastair reached out for the letter.

"Go ahead," Mac said. "Nothing personal in it."

He held his breath, trying to keep that casual look while the old man read. If he'd made one slip . . . He concentrated on something else. Think about your swell clothes, Mac, or about the girl in the office downstairs that keeps giving you the eye.

But his mind slid beyond his control to think of Sue Alastair and the scorn in her eyes, and he was glad when old Alastair said: "You're pretty smart for a youngster. That's a lot to pick up in one day. Next time, might as well dictate it; anything personal you got to say you can put on a separate sheet."

"Anything to correct?" Mac asked casually. "I maybe got the wrong slant on the mine."

"No, you've got it all right," Alastair growled. "Not much engineering in there, but then you ain't an engineer, are you?"

"No. Dad said he could always hire engineers. Wanted me to get some general knowledge."

The old man began to pound back to his desk. Midway he stopped. "One correction, son. Reilly maybe didn't trust you. Yeah, we've had a little trouble here.

One of them damn unions sent in a troublemaker." He grinned. "We never had to lift a finger. The men know which side their bread's buttered on. They handled him themselves. There won't be another in here soon."

"O.K.," Mac said. "I'll add that. Got any idea what makes the men take care of those things themselves?"

"No," Alastair drawled, cynically. "Not a damn idea."

Mac wrote: "Mr. Alastair just read this, and adds a postscript. There was violence here a little while ago, some outsider tried to stir up the men. They banded and took care of him themselves, Mr. Alastair says."

He finished the postscript, and then looked up. Forrest Alastair's face was red, and tense, and he looked at his father strangely.

Mac blotted the letter, fished an envelope out of the desk, addressed it, and shoved the sheet of paper inside. There was a wire basket on his desk, marked outgoing mail; he tossed the envelope in.

He wished he could be alone for a moment and let the mask of his face relax. Old John Alastair, across the room there, knew who had stirred up those carloads of men to go down and shoot Gowan's boy; knew, and had almost told Mac. Sooner or later, he would.

When it happened, Mac thought, he would get out

of town quick. The roundabout way his letters had to take was getting him down; too many chances of slipping.

"Come on, Forrest," old Alastair said, "let's get out to the club, and let those sales letters go. I want to show young Mac here what a boilermaker is."

Forrest stopped dictating and stood up. "Dad, the doctor told you to stop drinking boilermakers."

"Son, I'll die when I'm ready. I'd die now, if I had anybody to leave this joint to but you."

Mac dropped his eyes, embarrassed at being in the middle of this family row.

There was a pause that was like dynamite in the air.

Then Forrest said: "Dad will have his joke, Mac. All right, let's go."

The middle-aged stenographer scuttled out of the room as though she had been afraid of being hit. The three men got their hats and moved towards the stairs together. Mac dropped a little behind; at the bottom of the stairs, the brunette stenographer in the blue dress ran into him. She excused herself, and stood there, a little too close to him, a little too breathless. "Oh — I'm sorry," she said.

"My fault," Mac told her. "I charge downstairs like a buffalo."

"Oh — well, it's nice of you to say it." She smiled a little, obviously conscious that Mac was aware of her breasts close to his chest. "I mustn't hold you up, — Mr. MacBlair."

Mac took a quick look out the door, where John Alastair and his son were arguing over cars. "You know my name," he said. "You've got me there."

"Oh — I'm Kay Nannic. You'd better go, Mr. MacBlair. Mr. Alastair's waiting."

"All right, Kay. Be seeing you around." He felt he was a little flustered as he went to join the Alastairs at the car. I must report on her, he thought, she has access to the files . . . Then he was really embarrassed, at catching himself justifying an interest in a young, willing and shapely female by pretending that he wanted to use her professionally.

John Alastair growled, "Forrest wants to drive us out in that damned juggernaut of his. I'd as lief take an aeroplane."

"O.K., boss," Mac said, grinning. "I'll ride with you. Forrest can go ahead and get a boilermaker ready for us."

The old man grunted, and lumbered towards his big sedan. The chauffeur on the front seat made no effort to open the door; evidently old John objected to

aid. The muscle-bound old man clambered into the back seat and subsided with a grunt. Mac got in beside him, and the car started.

Old John shoved a red hand out at a big building they were passing. "Looka that thing."

"It's an armory, isn't it?"

"Yeah. All the kids in this county that have already inherited sink money into the National Guard. Old Harford Rand and I are the only ones with any sense. National Guard! Mail order soldier."

"You don't like the militia, eh?"

"Hell," John Alastair said, "they're all right to send to Mexico and Cuby and places like that. These punks that own mines around here now want to use 'em in labor troubles. Damn fools." He lapsed into profanity.

Mac looked at him. "What's foolish about using National Guards for labor trouble?"

"Listen," Old John said, "I never made any bones about what I was doing. I wanted to go out and get me a mine and be a rich man, and I did it. Not because I thought the miners would be any happier working for me than for the guy who had the mine first, but because *I* would be. You get it?"

"Sort of."

"So when I got my mine," Alastair went on, "I

meant to hang on to it. When I had labor trouble, hell, I didn't go running to the governor and yell for troops. Naw, I went up to Pittsburgh or Chicago or out to St. Louis, and I hired me one damned big bunch of the dirtiest fighters you ever saw. I busted the strike before anybody knew what was happening. Listen," John Alastair growled, "you go running to the law, and the first thing you know, the law's running you. What I did was against the law, and I knew it, and thataway I knew where I stood."

The driver turned his head a little. He had a red, shaved neck. "You was tough, Old John. Boy, was you tough! When someone else took the chances."

Old John snorted. "I paid you muggs to do my fighting. I wasn't going to get killed."

"Well," Mac said. "You're frank, anyway."

"State troops," the old man mumbled. "Who runs the militia? The Governor, the President, anybody. I can tell 'em who to elect in Ware County, but I can't always be sure who's going to be Governor. If you're gonna run 'em, run 'em."

He snorted belligerently, and then abruptly fell asleep.

"Tough old monkey," the driver said. "Too tough to die."

Mac nodded. "They don't make 'em like him any more."

"Well, you can't call him a whatchacallit — a hypocrite," the driver said. "I was a breaker boy when he was swingin' a pick and shovel. Only, I sunk my payday into beer and women and he saved his for a set of brass knuckles. So now I drive his bus."

"I see," Mac said.

"They call him democratic around here," the driver said, "but hell, he ain't democratic. He hung on to his old friends because once he started making money, he didn't have no time to go looking for new ones. Well, he'll croak soon, and then he'll fry in hell, won't you, John?"

Old John woke up as abruptly as he'd fallen asleep. "Stick to your driving, Nate. Here's the club."

Forrest was waiting for them on the steps. "You don't look well, father," he said. He had put up a hand to help his father out of the car.

John Alastair struck it down. "Stop trying to run me, boy!" He got out of the car stiffly, led the way to the club.

Mac followed. There was no doubt, now, in his mind as to what Old John would do if he found out that Mac was a labor man. He'd see to it that Mac's body was

tossed in a quarry. Forrest, on the other hand, would probably try to sue Mac for obtaining something under false pretenses. If they were all like Old John, he thought, maybe, we'd get further; at least the workers would know where they stand.

Well, Mac was here on a specific errand: find out who killed young Gowan.

Gowan's face was before his eyes when he went into the country club, and it was there — every patient, thin line of it, — when he was introduced to a young man in tweeds: "This is Sam Perrine," Forrest was saying. "He's Chief Deputy Sheriff of the County."

Mac shook hands, carefully, and said: "Glad to know you, Mr. Perrine. I figure I can get some help from you."

"Mac's here to study labor conditions," Forrest explained. "His father runs a mine out West."

"Well, the deputy's office isn't supposed to talk, but we'll sure be glad to help out any friend of the Alastairs'," Perrine said.

Mac looked up and saw Sue Alastair perched at the end of a bar in an inner room. She waved to him, and, as Perrine and Forrest started talking about golf, he walked over to her. "So you've met the Defender of the Faith, the Pride of the County," she mocked. "You

and he ought to get along fine together. Bloody Sam Perrine."

"He looks like a nice enough fellow," Mac feinted.

"Oh, yes, one of the house rules at the country club," Sue told him. "Sam Perrine always washes off the blood in the locker room before consorting with the lady members."

"What do you mean?" Mac asked.

"Oh, he hasn't committed a murder in months," Sue said. "Not since that boy that he shot with a machine gun — by mistake, he said. The coroner put it down as accidental death. Ask him."

"You mean —"

"Well, the boy was guilty," Sue said. "He was guilty of looking like his father who, in turn, was guilty of talking union in Ware County. Let me buy you a drink; members have to sign checks here."

5

Mac sat in his room at the Alastairs' big house, writing. He could write to his mythical father about the difference in viewpoint between Forrest and Old John. That was good stuff, and they could use it, and he could put it down in such a way that it looked all right. But the tip on Perrine was a little too much. He had to ask the committee whether they wanted him to come home now, or whether they wanted him to go on and make the evidence such that it could be used in a court of law.

After some effort, he hit on an angle; he could go on reporting Sue Alastair to his "father." That was O.K.; he had started that in a previous letter. He wrote: "I had a further talk with Alastair's daughter, Sue, this afternoon. She is bitter and rebellious against her father and against the existing order of things. For instance, sitting in the bar at the country club, surrounded by people, she made it pretty clear that Sam Perrine — he is chief deputy sheriff here — killed a boy a month or so ago. The boy, it seemed, was the son of a union organizer."

He read it over and blotted it, and thought it looked stark. Better add some more about Sue. But somehow or other, he didn't want to discuss Sue with the committee. She — well, his reaction to her was too personal. Maybe when he knew her better —

There was a rap on the door, and he looked hastily, at the clock. It was half past ten. Maybe this was Forrest back. He went and opened the door.

Sue Alastair stood there, dressed in a coat and a plain knitted hat. "I saw your light," she said. "I hoped you hadn't gone to bed. Want to go see how the other half lives?"

"You oughtn't to go rapping at men's doors in the night," he said. "Supposing your family —"

"How old-fashioned! Don't girls in California know about the war? It's over. In fact, it was over almost before I was born. Come on, you don't want to go to bed at this hour."

"O.K. Wait till I wash up. I've been writing a letter. To my father."

"That's the second today, isn't it?"

She came in and sat on the edge of his bed, while he went into the bathroom and washed his face and hands, slicked down his hair. It made him a little nervous for her to be there.

"The third," he said, rubbing the towel over his face. "They're reports on what I'm learning."

"You know," she drawled, "it's funny you've come a couple of thousand miles to find out how Ware County handles labor. I studied the history of labor in college; it seems to me that California has a reputation for knowing what to do about that sort of thing."

Involuntarily he dropped the towel. Slowly he picked it up again. "We don't want trouble in California," he said, "we want to prevent it. That's where Ware County shines."

"Oh, I see." Sue Alastair crossed her legs and swung one slipper, regarding the toe thoughtfully. "Well, I always knew Ware County would one day go too far."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She leaned forward intently, started to speak. Suddenly she jumped up, shut the door, went back to the bed. "You're a detective, of course," she said. "You came here to find out about the killing. Well, I can help you." The words poured out of her throat hotly. "The men in the car were supers and foremen from our mines and Harford Rand's. The old order's passing, see, Mac whatever your name is, and the old men are getting afraid. They met — my father and Rand — and they decided to make an example of Gowan.

He put a hand over her mouth, shutting off the turbulent stream. "Stop it," he said. "That's your own father you're calling a murderer. You've got me wrong, Sue. I'm really what I say I am."

She put her hands behind her on the bed, and leaned back on them. A pulse in her throat throbbed. "Weren't you exposed to any liberal ideas in college at all?"

"It's the fashion for rich girls to be Communists," he said. "You'll outgrow it."

"Yes? Well, come on with me. To the beer parlors and the little dance halls in town, where the miners take their girls. I want to get to know these people. The people my father came from. Don't you see, Mac, you're thirty years behind your times? If we're going to go on running our fathers' business, people like you and I, we have to learn to do it with co-operation. You can't beat men, and starve them, and kick them in the face when they protest, forever. They'll turn around some day and take our mines away from us."

He tried to repeat the things he thought a mine-owner's son should say. "The people who work in the mines would like to be mine owners themselves. Then they'd treat their help just as badly."

"You must be a detective. No one your age could really believe all that."

"O.K.," he said, "then I am one. So let's go see your other half." Because this was dangerous ground. Maybe she was sincere about wanting to help him — now; but she would turn and change. Rich liberals did that when it came down to push and shove, and if it was a question — as it might be — of indicting her father for murder, she would back out, and leave him holding the bag.

He got his topcoat and hat out of the closet and shrugged into them. The girl tucked her arm through his when they were in the hall, and slid her hand down till it grasped his. Her hand was warm. Watch your step, Mac!

She drove them past the mines, and though it was dark, they did not need the watchmen's lanterns to tell them when they had passed the workings; the air instantly tasted different, and Sue Alastair automatically turned her window shut. They cut off from the business section of the town, two blocks set on a hill that missed the air currents and were reserved for the bosses. Then they cut into the bottoms where the workers lived, and when Sue Alastair shut off the motor and they stepped out, the tailings instantly were in their noses and ears.

The girl had stopped in front of a double store,

through whose grimy windows light struggled. Music came through the weatherstripped door to the street. Sue took his arm, and they went over the pavement, dust grinding under their shoes. The girl didn't notice it.

When they opened the door, cigarette smoke and music, the smell of liquor and the smell of washed-up miners mingled to make him forget the dust. On their left was a bar, on their right a line of little tables at which men sat and drank and played poker, dice or cards. A good many pairs of eyes and one single eye, looked at Sue Alastair and her boy friend; then the eyes, filled with recognition, turned away.

But, as Sue led him between the tables and the bar, Mac recognized the man with one eye. He had seen that face before, and it had been in the South, on the share-cropper job. There had been various stories about that man — Harris, he had called himself — some of them that he was a left-wing organizer and some that he was a stool pigeon put in by the bosses.

Mac realized that he had been a sap; he should not have let Sue Alastair drag him out here. He should have stayed away from the workers as much as possible. Well, it was done now.

Sue led him into the back room, where the long nar-

row bar widened out into a square space with round tables. A couple of youths sat on a platform; one banged a piano, the other tooted a saxophone. There did not seem to be much money in art in Ware County; both musicians had the black edged white faces of miners.

The other men, too, were unmistakable miners, sallow and long faced and Scotch Irish from their features; good American stock. The girls were of the same breed but it was hard to tell whether they were pale or not under their rouge. But looking over the room, at the couples dancing and drinking, you got a pretty good notion that the women thinned as they got older, and dried up. Tailings dust could not help their complexions much.

Mac picked out a table that was empty; Sue took one of the six seats. Mac sat down by her, and ordered beer from the waiter.

Sue's eyes brooded. "Dad looks on them as unnecessary means to running his mines, and Forrest thinks they're an abstract sociological problem," she said in a low tone, half to herself.

"Golly, you're intense," he said lightly. He was thinking of that one-eyed man. "Drink your beer, child."

"I'm not a child. I'm twenty."

"And all kids are rebels at twenty. All good kids, all smart kids. Relax, Sue. We're out for a good time; let's dance."

She rose and they danced, in and out among her father's starveling employes. She was warm and alive in his arms, and there had been damned little that was warm and alive in his life.

They were feeling out the rhythm of the saxophone player, who seemed to be leading. He had a peculiar technique of playing; everything was on a rising inflection, so that no matter what piece he tackled, each bar came out with an undertone of the first line of "Chloe." Then abruptly it stopped, and Sue and Mac walked back to their table.

They were just sitting down when One-eyed Harris came wandering back from the bar, carrying a half empty glass of beer. His single eye lit on Mac, went away again; then Harris wandered over to Mac's table and as he got there, he slipped, and some of the beer sloshed out and splashed Mac's sleeve.

"Say, I'm sorry," One-eye said. He caught Mac's forearm. "Here, keep it like that, come on, I'll dry it off for you." He dragged Mac towards the washroom.

Inside he caught up a towel, tossed it to Mac, and

sat on the edge of the washbasin, watching Mac. "So you boys are trying to do something about Ware County, too. Or have you sold out? I seen you with the boss's daughter."

"I don't get you, mister," Mac said, mopping. "I'm from California."

"Yeah?" One-eye sneered. "And me, I'm from the moon. What the hell, have the conservative unions gone in for boring from within now? I thought they left that to us?"

"I still don't get you," Mac said. He tossed the towel at the hamper.

"You never saw the South, huh, you never was in the sharecropper thing with us, huh? Hell, they call you Mac, don't they? Well, Mac, I can figger it. You're loaned out to the American Alloy Miners now. Well, tell your union when they get ready to act, we got the field ploughed; the men here are plenty sore. I saw you today, goin' through the works with that Cossack Reilly; I got me a job diggin' in Alastair No. 1. What's your game, Mac? I can help you."

"Your mistake," Mac said. "My father owns a mine in California, and I'm here to study mining methods."

"O.K., O.K. You unions are too damned eager to get all the dues into your treasury instead of trying to

help the men. I ought to tell Reilly who you are; he's a first class stool pigeon for Sam Perrine, he'd run you over the line on a rail if he didn't kill you. But think it over, Mac, we ought to make a united front here, the middle unions and us and the conservative unions. I'll be around." He grinned, and took his face out of the washroom.

Mac stared after him. He was sure now about One-eyed Harris; he *was* an agent provocateur, who stirred up trouble, and then got paid for it by the vigilantes. A nice guy.

And Mac didn't think he had fooled Harris at all. Harris had recognized him, and Harris was a cat that was going to jump any way but the right one.

And cold-faced, sleek Sam Perrine, murderer and chief deputy sheriff for Ware County would be awfully pleased to meet Mac.

Mac shrugged, slicked his hair with his hands, and went out to the dance room again. Sue was no longer alone; a man was sitting at the table with her.

It was Sam Perrine.

6

Sue said: "You know Mr. MacBlair, Mr. Perrine? Sit down, Mac."

Considering the things she had said about Perrine that afternoon, she was cordial enough. And Mac made his own manner agreeable enough. "Yes, I met you out at the club, Mr. Perrine. I didn't think to see you here."

Perrine had a dry, rather unpleasant laugh. "Nothing doing any other place in town. After you've been around the country club awhile, you get so you know every flower on the wallpaper. Anyway —" he grinned — "some of these mine girls are pretty as sin."

"Don't their men resent your going with them?" Mac asked curiously. He added, quickly: "After what you told me this afternoon, I should think you wouldn't be popular in these quarters."

"They don't mind me," Sam said. "I'm their protection against losing their jobs through strikes. They know which side the butter's on."

"Oh, Sam Perrine's the hero of the county," Sue

said. "Everyone's smart enough to bow when he goes by."

Perrine said, "You parlor pink, Sue. Living on the fat of the land, and moaning about where the fat's sliced from. Me, I know where I stand. Every election the men vote for some fat glad-hander for sheriff, but I go right on being chief deputy. I tell you, people know me. Leave me alone, and I'll leave them alone."

"That boy left you alone," Sue said.

Sam Perrine's square jaw swung squarely around to face her. "What boy, Miss Alastair?"

"The organizer's son," Sue said steadily. "Young Gowan."

Perrine said: "I didn't think an Alastair would go around spreading that lie. I was driving by in my car, and I heard a shot. The boy had been cleaning a shotgun." His voice dropped. "It's on file at the county coroner's."

"Don't you ever get the screaming meamies in the night, Sam?" Sue taunted.

"No," he said. "A cop has got his job to do; I'm a cop and I do what I am elected to do."

"But you're not a cop, Sam," Sue said. "You're a sadist. You do it for pleasure."

Perrine grinned. "You've got a funny way of having

a good time, Sue. Mr. MacBlair, don't mind her. College filled her head with a lot of junk and she wants to be a martyr or something. Have a beer?"

"Don't mind if I do," Mac said.

Perrine gave the order, then said suddenly, "I gotta have a girl of my own. Be back." He walked over to one of the other tables, bent over a plumpish brunette, spoke smilingly into her ear. The men at the girl's table kept their faces impassive.

Sue's foot under the table touched Mac's. "Ever since that boy was killed," she said, "our County's been going some place. There's going to be trouble, Mac . . . I hate Sam Perrine."

"Why let him sit at our table, then?"

"This is a small town. You can't afford to have feuds. And I'm the boss's daughter."

Perrine came back, grinning, with the girl. "Folks, meet Mary. Sit down, Mary."

The girl sat down. She looked embarrassed.

"I'm Sue Alastair," Sue said, promptly. "This is Warren MacBlair, who's visiting us. I didn't catch your name, Miss ——"

Mary choked a little, blurted: "Mary Nannie."

Perrine grunted as though someone had kicked him. Sue said "Oh—" and her voice trailed away.

"Are you any relation to the girl who works in the Alastair office?" Mac asked naïvely. "Her name is Nannic, Kay Nannic."

Mary Nannic whispered, "Yes — she's my sister," and rose in a flurry of blushes. "I have to get back to my friends," she said. She nearly ran across the floor.

Mac was puzzled, faintly annoyed.

Sam Perrine said, "Well, I have to be at work early, good night, Sue, MacBlair," all in one breath, and took his hat out of there, tossing a coin on the table.

"Let's finish our beers and go home," Sue said. "I'm tired."

Mac gulped his beer, and added to the coin. He piloted Sue out, passed the stares of the men in the bar. One-eyed Harris was gone.

"You drive," Sue said. She let him help her into the car, and sat quietly till he was behind the wheel. "Straight ahead here," she said. "Then up the hill to the business block, and I'll show you."

He took the car out of the town, and abruptly, when the tailings dust stopped, Sue said, "Stop the car, Mac." After he had pulled up the brake and turned off the motor, she said, "No, just sit still."

He said, "You're a funny kid. Everything seems funny in this town, but you're the queerest."

"I suppose so. You arrived at a queer time, Mac. Like a man from Mars arriving on Earth just when everything was about to dissolve. Ware County's doomed, Mac, and they all know it, but I'm the only one who admits it. Some people say it's Sam Perrine's fault, and some say there are agitators among the men, but it isn't that. It's just that the strings that tie us to the rest of the world are pulling too hard."

"That's rather mystic," he said.

"I'm not very mystic. It was funny about Sam bringing that Nannic girl over, wasn't it?"

"I don't understand."

"Her sister is Forrest's — girl. Everybody in town knows it except Dad, but nobody says it. If Sam had known who the girl was he was picking up, he never —"

"Oh." Mac remembered the Nannic girl — Kay Nannic — in the office, trying hard to make him. "I don't think it's Forrest's fault."

"That isn't the point. Or is it? Oh, I want to go away, Mac. I want to get out of this place where everybody hates everybody."

He put his arm around her shoulders. I shouldn't do this, shouldn't do this, his conscience said, but his heart was strangely happy. He stared out over her head with a baffled, bitter expression twisting his young face.

"You look so old," she whispered.

He turned his eyes down to her uplifted face, and his features relaxed so suddenly that the muscles along his jaws ached. He bent his head and kissed her; a kiss at first brotherly, friendly, but swiftly growing into something more important. Finally: "Thanks, Sue," he said.

"No, thank you." She laughed confusedly. "Now drive me home. I only met you this morning."

He drove her home, let her out in front of the house, and took the car around to the garage. Forrest's big roadster was out.

When he got back to the house she had gone to bed, and when he came down to breakfast the next morning she had gone away to the city for a few days' visit, her father said. With an old school friend.

She had left Mac a note. It said: "I just want time to think."

7

She was not back when, two days later, he got his first letter from his "father." It was concise and to the point.

"Dear Son: —

"Have been much interested in your reports of methods and conditions in Mr. Alastair's mines. I am sure you are on the track of a fundamental truth that will help us considerable in future operations. Here we have heard much of the work in labor relations of Mr. Harford Rand. Be sure and look into his methods, too, while you are there.

"Don't you think you ought to move to a hotel? It is not right for you to impose on the Alastairs' hospitality any longer. But do convey to Mr. Alastair — to whom I am writing under separate cover — my profound thanks for his kindness to you.

Yours affectionately,

Father."

Now, who had written that? Mac read it with a grin

spreading across his face. Then the grin faded. Was their reason for wanting him to move his friendship with Sue Alastair, or was it simply that they wanted him in a place where they could get to him easily?

He gave the problem up, and carried the letter across the office to Old John's desk. The old man was out at one of his mines, inspecting. Mac went back to his own desk and picked up a report on personnel costs that Old John had given him to study. They were pouring out their hearts to him, here in Ware County. But so far, he had no definite proof on the murder of young Gowan.

He was alone in the office; Forrest was with his father, and the middle-aged secretary had gone to lunch. He was bent over the cost sheets, wishing he had some account — any experience, when a light step on the stairs broke his thoughts. It was Kay Nannic.

As always, the dark haired girl was a little breathless. She plumped some papers down on Forrest's desk, and stood there a moment. Her body had a trick of seeming to move inside her clothes while her feet and arms stayed still. "I — well, what do you think of Ware County, Mr. MacBlair?"

He tilted back in his chair, looked at her. "All right, I guess."

"It must be awfully dreary after all that sunshine in California."

"You mustn't believe the travel folders, Kay. Our mine isn't on Hollywood Boulevard."

"Oh, gee," she said. "I'd like to see Calif — I mean — oh, what am I saying?"

"I don't know, kid," he said. He swung out of his chair, moved towards her. The stairs outside were rickety, he'd be sure to hear anyone coming up them. "What were you saying?" He stood near her.

"Why, I made it sound as though — as though I — wanted to go with you."

He put a hand on her shoulder, grinning coolly. Was she working for Old John now, testing out a suspect? This was something he knew about. He didn't even move, just narrowed his eyes a little, and she swung into his arms. He held her tight, and kissed her with precision and technique. He didn't mean it to mean anything to him, but he was young and his blood was hot, and when she tried to struggle free, he held her.

Then he let her go, hating himself, hating her, and she backed against Forrest's desk — and said: "I — we shouldn't do that — Mac."

"And why not, Kay? We're only young once."

Her eyes were flicking from him to the door. "You don't love me."

He made his grin slow and cool. "You can't ask for everything, kid . . . We'll have champagne in our drawing room every night on the train." He kept on grinning, and then she smiled, too.

"We'll have a fine time, Mac," she said, and she meant it.

Heavy steps shook the stairs — Old John coming back from the mines. The Old Man slammed the door shut behind him, and flung one word — an obscene one — at the air. He saw Kay Nannic, and he didn't see her — at any rate she scuttled for the door and was gone. She must have passed Forrest on the stairs, because he came in right behind her.

His father turned on him, and bellowed: "Well?"

"O.K., Dad, O.K. I called him."

"He's on his way over here?"

"That would never do, Dad. I'm to meet him after dark."

A string of curses was born in Old John's throat and rumbled farther down, got no place; Mac watched curiously, avidly. Finally the old man made some sense. "You and your mail order troops. I warned you."

"What happened?" Mac asked.

Both the Alastairs looked at him as though they'd never seen him before. Finally Old John said: "A dozen pistols were stolen from the National Guard armory."

Forrest said: "I'll admit that agitators — Communists maybe — might have gotten into the Guard, but I don't see what Dad's all worked up about. The Government'll send detectives and get them all back before —"

"Government detectives!" Old John's face purpled. He sat down at his desk heavily, his hands clutching at the piled up mail. "I'll not have Federal men into this county. Rand and I have always run it, and we don't want any interference from the government."

"But Dad —"

"Mac understands," Old John said heavily. "He's the only one of you young punks that gets what's going on. You know what I'm talking about, don't you, Mac?"

The time had come to throw in his cards, to play hard and quick for the confidence of Ware County. "I think I do," Mac said. He took up a stand in the middle of the office. "Maybe I understand better than you do, Mr. Alastair. Once the Federals get a toe hold here, they'll stick, and they'll make you compromise with the men; and then they won't be your mines any more. You

won't like running them. You've got what they told us in college was a Napoleon complex; and that's you, Mr. Alastair. But you don't get your son, and it's killing you. He wants to apologize for his money, for the power that you're so eager to pass on to him. *He* won't get any fun out of the mines once he admits that you all are going against the law. He likes to see himself as Santa Claus, giving jobs to a lot of men."

Both the Alastairs looked at him, and he got no more love from the eyes of Old John than he did from Forrest's. Old John was quiet when he spoke. "You talk damn' funny, Mac, for one of us — Napoleons."

"I believe in knowing what I'm doing," Mac said. "I don't believe in kidding myself."

Forrest said harshly: "All right, Dad. Let Mac do it. He's so smart, so tough. Let him meet Sam Perrine tonight and go out raiding people's —"

"Shut up," Old John said. He was staring at Mac as though he had never seen him before. "Son," he said, "you talk awful big, awful smart. You wouldn't be a Government man, would you? I've heard they do some awful smart —"

"Stop kidding," Mac said. His shoulder blades were itching with sweat.

Old John pounded on the floor with one of his heavy

feet, and there was a scurry of noise downstairs. Then a girl's feet came up the stairs, and Kay Nannic burst in. "Yes, sir?"

"Take a wire," Old John said. "To Joseph MacBlair, MacBlair, California. Your son Warren, now with us, has —" he stopped.

"If you just want to send a wire," Mac said, "you could answer that letter I put on your desk."

Old John groped around among the crumpled papers, found the letterhead of the MacBlair Mines, Ltd. He read the letter from Mac's "father," ripped the envelope from the clip that held it to the letter, looked at the postmark. Then he seemed to think a while.

"Yes, sir," Kay Nannic prompted him.

"Get out of here," Old John roared. The girl ran down the stairs.

"I spoke out of time," Old John said. "If the government ever gets around to breaking up Ware County, they won't go meeching about it. They'll move in and take us. Sure, you're what you say you are. You wouldn't fake a postmark, a letterhead that way; there'd be something easier to do."

Mac thanked the Lord that the committee had forced him to use the roundabout mail system.

"But as for moving to a hotel, I won't think of it,"

Old John said. "Hell, we got nothing to do with that big house but have our friends live in it."

"I'm afraid it's out of the question," Mac said. "My father's as tough as you are, and I'm a lot more scared of him than I am of you — because he's my father. If he says move to a hotel, I move."

The old man chuckled. "O.K. You can still take your meals with us; your father forgot to specify that." He settled back to read his mail.

Forrest relaxed, and came over to sit on the edge of Mac's desk. "I'm afraid I'll have to leave you to amuse yourself tonight," he said. "I'll be busy. If that Sue hadn't gone off to the city —"

"Oh, I can take care of myself," Mac said, carelessly, and began reading the personnel report.

During the afternoon, he found an opportunity to speak to Kay Nannic. "I'm moving over to the Rand House this evening," he said. "If you're not doing anything, drop by around eight and show me the town."

She was typing; she went on typing. "Maybe," she said. But he knew she would be there.

8

Dinner at the Alastairs was early when Sue wasn't home; Old John had been a miner, and he still got hungry when six o'clock came around. These days, too, the old man was likely to want to go to bed when he had eaten. Forrest disappeared, and Mac had the servants load his bags into a car and take them over to the Rand House.

He said he would walk himself, but he took a roundabout way; he stopped at a half a dozen shops. At each one he changed a dollar bill, until silver loaded down one side of the fine flannel coat he wore.

The clerk at the Rand House expected him; Mac went up, looked at his room, and then came down again. He made a coin phone booth in the lobby without attracting too much attention, called long distance, gave them the telephone number of the room in which he had talked to the committee. Afterwards he shoveled coins into the slot while time and place fell away, and he was again a walking delegate in a gray flannel shirt, a kid without money or the desire for it.

A heavy voice said: "Yes?"

"Mac," the boy said. "This Lawrence?"

"That's right. You — what do you want, Mac?"

"I'm talking over a coin phone," Mac told the scar-faced man. "Don't worry, it's safe to talk this way. Listen. Ware County's on the loose. Some guns were stolen from the National Guard today, and the owners are doing something about it tonight."

"What?" Lawrence wanted to know.

"I don't know. I'm going to find out sometime after eight."

"Good work, son," Lawrence said. "It sounds to me like they're readying up the old vigilante, Black Legion stuff. We'll try and send someone in; are you at a hotel?"

"Yeah, I moved to the Rand House."

"All right. That damned quarantine has us stopped; but maybe somebody can get through over a field. Your reports are swell, keep them up. You're sure about this Sam Perrine?"

"There's no doubt about his killing young Gowan. Whether I could make it stick in court —"

"T'hell with courts. The committee's got a plan. Need money?"

"No, I'm O.K., Lawrence."

"If you do need dough, let us know. We got the hell of a break; Alastair's daughter is sending us most of her allowance to bust hell out of her papa with. Nice family. We reckon what she wants is a nice muscular labor boy; 's too bad you're already occupied. Anything else?"

"Just that One-eyed Harris is working here. You can have him called off, can't you? . . . Good. I'll call you, don't you call me. This county's tighter than a drum. S'long, Lawrence."

"S'long, Mac."

Mac hung up, and stood in the hot, smoky booth for a moment, his head down. There was no use getting mad. Sue Alastair was not for him, nor he for millionaires' daughters. The cause — or the Cause — was more than any girl. It would stay with you all your life, and you'd never get tired of it — But, damn them, they oughtn't to sic a fund-raising gigolo like himself on a girl like that!

Any means is justifiable if the end is right. That's what they'd taught him, and the committee had as much right to use any means they thought advisable on Sue as he had to do what he was doing to Kay —

He swung out of the booth, and into the hotel's bar. "A little whisky," he told the barkeep. "I've got a bad

taste in my mouth." The clock over the bar said seven-fifty.

At eight he was in his room, staring down at the grime of the town. The tailings couldn't go the right way all the time; there was the accumulation of years on the buildings in the business squares.

When the phone rang he looked at his watch, and it was just eight on the nose. He let the bell sound off twice while he lit a cigarette, and then scooped up the French instrument, cradled it against his ear and mouth while he let the smoke go up into his eyes. "Yes?"

"This is Kay Nannic, Mr. MacBlair," the phone said. "From the office. Mr. Alastair — Forrest Alastair — said that I might drop around and see what you were doing. He won't be able to see you tonight."

Mac grinned, squeezing the cigarette between his lips. "Fine, Miss Nannic. Come on up."

"I'd rather wait in the lobby," the girl said.

"I'll be down pretty soon," he said, and hung the phone up. His eyes felt small and hot in his head, and the pulse in his throat pounded. He washed his face in cold water, slicked his hair, slapped a hat on his head and went downstairs whistling.

Kay Nannic got up from a settee in the lobby and

shook hands with him politely under the gaze of the desk clerk and a couple of bellboys. With the county "quarantined" the hotel was nearly deserted. "You must be crazy," she said softly, "asking me up to your room in this town."

"Let's go," he said. "Mr. Alastair loaned me a car."

"I've got a flivver," she told him. "We'll take that." Outside in the car, she took him swiftly out of town, not talking at all. She drove through the "nice" end of town, and on out over farm country where green smells were a novelty; then into a back-road, and up it to a place where a somewhat battered electric sign said: "Chi-ken Dinne-s."

The girl parked the car and they walked into the roadhouse together. In the lobby she made her eyes warm and promising as she said: "We can't take — a private room. Everyone in this county —"

"I know how it is," Mac said. He took her arm above the elbow and squeezed it, and then they went into the main room, where three Negroes played instruments to prove that not all their race know rhythm, and where the management saved enough electricity so that all the booths looked unoccupied though half of them were filled.

A somewhat soiled headwaiter gave them a booth,

and accepted their order for two ryes and sodas. Under the table Kay's knee found Mac's and pressed against it, while she said: "Wasn't I smart? Forrest — I mean, Mr. Forrest — told me to entertain you tonight. So it'll be all right."

Mac chose a direct attack. "What difference does it make? We'll be out of Ware County in a month."

"Oh, a month? I thought —"

The waiter arrived with the liquor to stop her. Mac tasted his, and winced.

"I wonder what you have to order to get whisky?" he asked.

"There aren't any nice places in the county," she said. "Are you going to be here a month, Mac?"

"It seems so," he said carelessly. "At first I thought that I could get what I wanted to know in a week, but it's taking me longer. Well —" he added fatuously — "now that I've met you, we can go around together every night, and the time won't be so long."

He was glad, for the girl's sake, that the place was so dark. She must be having trouble keeping alarm out of her voice. "No, but we can't. I mean, my family lives here, and —"

O.K. If she wasn't going to come clean about her relationship with Forrest, he wouldn't let on that he

knew. He kept his knee where it was, and said: "Oh, I see. Well, that's too bad. I moved away from the Alastairs' so that — I mean, Kay, after today we meet in the office."

"Maybe you can leave sooner," she said. It was what she was supposed to say. "I mean, with me to help you study conditions here, you ought to get along faster. Just what is it you wanted to know?"

"Oh, I'm studying labor relations," Mac said carelessly. "Now you take today, tonight. Forrest was telling me about these guns that were stolen from the National Guard; he was sure that was a sign there was going to be labor trouble. Out West, if that happened, we'd have to call in the G-men, and the state police, but here they have some easier way. Well, Forrest was going to tell me all about it, but he was too busy."

"Oh," she said, happily draining her drink, "I can tell you all about that. That's why I could —" She stopped for a moment, and Mac ordered the waiter over by pounding on the table with his glass.

"Two doubles," he said. "This stuff is so weak," he explained to Kay.

She had her words marshalled now. "Forrest and Mr. Schmidt from Harford Rand's office are out with

Sam Perrine tonight," she explained. "You see, the Alastairs and the Rands own all the houses where the mill men work. Sam Perrine's the law. He serves a paper on them accusing them of violating some ordinance about sanitation — a building ordinance, you see."

"But that would be city," Mac said, "and Sam Perrine's county."

"He's city marshal, too," Kay told him. He had given her time to gulp her drink, and he ordered another one while she talked on. "Well, after they've been served, they have to take some action, so they go with him and look over the houses to prove to him that there hasn't been a violation."

"And thus," Mac said, "they happily search all the houses in town."

"Smart boy," she crowed. "You catch on quick."

"Old John never thought of that," Mac mused. "That's Forrest's idea."

"Forrest's a smart boy, too," she said. Mac had now put seven and a half ounces of bad whisky into her. "I like smart boys."

"Not wisely but too well," Mac said.

"What?" She goggled at him through the dusk.

"Let it go. Waiter!" He nodded at their glasses —

disregarding the pool of spilled liquor under his place — and dragged Kay Nannic to her feet to dance.

Ware County was going to be tough to crack. The net of stool pigeons, deputies and National Guardsmen that appeared on the surface was strong enough; but the laws and ordinances that underlay that was even stronger. Everything that happened would look so legal on the books that they could turn away with a smile any state or Federal investigator. The quarantine!

He whirled Kay through the last few measures of a dance, and put her back on her side of the booth. "How about this quarantine?" he asked. "How did they get that through?"

"I don't want to talk about Ware County," she said, petulantly, "wanta talk about California. Going to drink champagne in our drawing room every night! Going to — Mac, will you buy me an evening dress?"

"And a little mesh bag to go with it," he said, monotonously. "And gold heeled slippers."

"Nice Mac. We're going to have a wonderful time." She drooped over the table. "Shouldn't have given me so much to drink, Maccie. Take me home."

"O.K." There was no more to be gotten out of her

anyway. He called the waiter, paid a high check, helped Kay out. She was stumbling a little.

He put her into her car, took the wheel himself. She kept sliding, so he put an arm around her, held her to him while he drove. He shouldn't have forced the liquor on her so quickly; it was pretty bad liquor.

On the edge of the town, he stopped, said: "Kay. Where do you live?"

She opened her eyes a moment, and said, gravely: "I'm very, very sorry. I should hold my whisky like a lady, only I'm not a lady; I come from Pennsylvania, and my father dug in a mine and —"

"That's swell, but where do you live, Kay?"

"And you can't expect me to — Kiss me, Mac."

"O.K., O.K." He kissed her, said: "Kay, wake up. You've got to tell me where you live."

"Aglar Avenue. Nine houses from the end."

He started the car, drove around hopelessly for a while. Somehow a lot of time had gone by and the town had gone to bed; no one was on corners to help him, and he could not find Aglar Avenue. Eventually, he found a bar open, stopped the car, and went in. "Where's Aglar Avenue?" he asked the bartender.

"Other end of town, bud," the barman said. He

looked at Mac curiously. "Past Firehouse No. 2. Stranger here, ain't you?"

"Yes," Mac said, and went back to the car. As he was climbing in, a coupe came down the street, hesitated, stopped. Someone called: "Mac!" It was a girl's voice.

He walked stiffly — like a little boy called to the principal's office — over and leaned on the edge of Sue Alastair's car.

"I came back this evening and they said you had moved to the Rand House," she said. "But when I went over there, they said you had gone out. I — Mac, I looked all over for you. Are you . . . glad I'm back?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm glad you're back."

"Where did you get that car?" she said. "They said that you'd taken the other coupe, but it was parked outside the hotel and —"

Then she saw Kay Nannic. The stenographer had waked up and looked out the window. "Maccie," Kay Nannic called.

Sue Alastair said: "It's Miss Nannic, isn't it?" and all the excitement and joy had gone out of her voice.

"Yes. Forrest was going to be busy tonight, and he asked her —"

"She's not a mine or an automobile, you know," Sue

Alastair said. "I mean, Forrest oughtn't to loan her to his friends like — like —"

"Ah, Sue, she's drunk. She must have had — "

"Yes, I see." Sue Alastair looked down at the wheel of her car, and said: "You're not so different from Forrest . . . I came back because I knew it didn't make any difference — I —"

"Look, Sue," Mac said desperately. "We've got to talk. Help me get this girl home. It's Aglar Avenue, and I don't even know where it is."

"Follow my car," Sue Alastair said tonelessly. "Then I'll drive you back. Aglar's a long distance from the hotel." She started the car rolling, and he had to let go and walk to his own. Sue Alastair was perhaps ten feet away as he got in behind the wheel of the Ford; she must have heard Kay Nannic come to again and say: "Nice Maccie. Kiss me, Maccie."

He tooled the little car along behind Sue's until she turned up a street of small houses on the end of town. He counted nine houses from the corner, helped Kay up the wooden steps, and read the name tacked next to the bell: John Nannic. He found the girl's key in her bag, opened the door, and shook Kay until her eyes opened. "You're home," he said. "Can you make it upstairs?"

"Sure. Kiss me goo'-night."

He kissed her gingerly, watched her up the stairs. Then he put the key back in the bag and tossed the bag onto the bench beneath a hatrack, closed the door, and went down the steps. "I guess her car will be all right there."

"I guess so," Sue said. "If it isn't, Forrest will buy her another. Or maybe take up a collection among his friends to do it."

"Ah, Sue, it isn't like that. It isn't —"

"Maccie," the girl said. "There's a name for you."

"I just went out with her because Forrest —"

"I know how young men are," Sue said. "I read it in a book."

He said, stiffly: "If you won't try and understand —"

"All right, Mac, leave it at that. Here's your hotel." She sat quietly behind the wheel, not looking at him. "Good night. I'm going back to the city tomorrow. I may not be back before you leave."

"But, Sue —" He choked off his protests. It was better that way. He was in this county to get her father, and he didn't have any money, and his nice clothes belonged to the committee and not to him, and — well, it was better that she go away.

"All right," he said. "Goodbye, then." He walked into the hotel feeling a million years old, and not wanting to think, not wanting anything but to get into bed and stop this day. Maybe tomorrow would be better. Tomorrow may always be better; that's what keeps mankind going.

9

But some days don't end; they have a malign wish to live. Mac slammed the door of his hotel room behind him before he thought it curious that the light was on; in his dopey, tired condition, he almost switched it off. Then he raised his eyes from the floor and Lawrence was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Mac said: "My God!"

"Huh?" the scar-faced organizer grinned. "Aren't you glad to see me? How's it, Mac?"

"Oh, I'm dead out. Been trying to pump a gold-digging little slut all evening, and I'm pooped."

"Giving your all for the cause, huh?" Lawrence lay on the bed, his muddy shoes soiling the blue counterpane. "I guess you're surprised to see me, huh?"

"I'm astounded," Mac said crossly. "So what?" He slid out of his coat and vest, ripped off his necktie, and walked into the bathroom, where he started steaming water running into the tub.

"Hey," Lawrence said, "easy on them clothes. They belong to the committee, you know."

"If I had any sense," Mac said, "I'd back out now, let you send another boy in here. Only, of course, I know it won't work. I've got to see it through."

"When I talked to you on the phone you was full of hope. What's the matter now?"

"Ah, I'm not getting any place, Lawrence." Mac went into the bathroom in his shorts, stepped out of them, dropped into the tub and sighed: "Ahhhh. The more I dig into this town, the more I see — it's tighter than a drum. We can't break her open. They haven't left a chink wide enough for a louse."

"Yeah?" Lawrence came in, half sat, half leaned against the wash basin. "The committee thinks different. What's on your chest?"

Mac told him about the search for the guns.

"Vigilante stuff with a fine legal angle, huh?" Lawrence whistled. "You gotta hand it to 'em; they're slick in Ware County. Look, don't you want to know how I got here?"

"Sure. How did you get here, Mr. Bones?"

"You're a fresh punk," Lawrence said amicably. "Well, I got here in the automobile of Miss Susan Alastair. The boss's daughter, in person, took me over the quarantine line. All the guards know her, see; reg'lar rules don't hold for the Alastairs.

Say, she's kind of a smooth number, too. You met her?"

"Yeah. She was here when I first landed, when I was staying at their house."

"Say," Lawrence said, "she's kicking in, like I told you, good and strong. We got all the money we need. She brought in three other guys with me."

"Yeah?" Mac sat up in the tub. "She's on our side? Really?"

"Well, she thinks she is," Lawrence said. "She'll back down later, probably, but we got the dough now, and we're in Ware County, and we gotta work fast. Now, listen, this is what —"

But Mac had jumped out of the tub, was towelling himself furiously. He rushed into the other room, grabbed a bathrobe out of the closet, slipped into it. "Listen, Lawrence," he said. "If she's on our side — I mean, Sue Alastair — then I can tell her about myself, can't I? I mean —"

"So that's how it is?" Lawrence whistled. "The big boss's daughter. And the young ag-y-tator. You better keep your mouth shut, kid. She's gonna run out on us, sooner or later, and we can't have her putting the finger on you. We need you to work from the top. Let me tell you what the committee —"

"This is important," Mac said. He felt his own age again. "She won't run out. Not Sue. She —"

Lawrence dropped a heavy hand on Mac's shoulder. "Keep your shirt on, son. Look," he said, "it's only going to make trouble for you. What the hell, you can't marry her, can you? What are you going to use for money? And if it's just a question of making her, why —"

"Yeah." Mac dropped down on the bed. "Yeah, you're right, Lawrence. It isn't just a question of making her." Suddenly the reserve of years cracked. "There just doesn't seem to be any use going along without her. Did you ever feel that way, Lawrence?"

"Yes," Lawrence said quietly. He sat down on the bed next to Mac, put an arm over the kid's shoulder. "I felt that way once, boy. I was a steel puddler in those days. I made good money, eight bucks a day, so I married her. Only, the next year there was a depression or something, and I didn't work for three months. The doctor said it was living on dried beans and sowbelly that killed her."

"Sometimes I forget," Mac said, after a moment.

"There was a lot of women died that year," Lawrence told him. "A lot of babies, too."

Mac got up and walked over to the chair by the

window. He sat in it looking down at the grime, as he had before. Finally, he said over his shoulder: "What is it the committee wants me to do, Lawrence?"

"You got the confidence of the owners," Lawrence said. "Tomorrow we start distributing some pamphlets out of town. Among the women, like you said. They're going to make trouble. Women don't give in as easy as men. Well, when the trouble starts, and the owners yell for violence, it's not your job to stop them. See? Let them get over the line, if they want to. Then we'll get help from the rest of the country. For the first time in history, we got a governor in this state that's for the workers; he's just waiting for an excuse to break into Ware County. That's all you have to do; let the owners start the fight. Once the sheriff admits things are out of hand here, we win."

"It isn't the sheriff," Mac said. "It's his chief deputy, Sam Perrine. The man who killed young Gowan."

"We'll handle him when the time comes," Lawrence said. "So long."

"So long," Mac told him. He kept on looking out the window.

Lawrence went to the door, stood there a moment. "Some day," he said finally, "things'll be so there ain't so much difference between people."

"Some day," Mac said. "Yeah. But I'll be old or dead then."

"It's all we got to work for," Lawrence said, simply, and left.

Mac found he could sleep, and that was surprise enough. But he woke up the next morning with a dark brown mood and it was still there when he got up from breakfast in the hotel's sunless dining room, still there when he sat down at his desk in the Alastair office, still there when Sam Perrine burst up the stairs to throw something on Forrest's desk.

"There you have it," Perrine grated. "Treat those rats like human beings, and see what you get!"

Old John kicked his chair back against the wall in the same motion that brought him upright. "What is it?" He stamped over to Forrest's desk, ripped the paper out of his son's hands.

Mac went over too, and peered over the old man's shoulder. "It" was a neatly printed magazine, a four page job, rotogravure. There was hardly anything to it but pictures. Pictures of laughing women putting out snow-white wash in back yards; and the caption: "These are Miners' Wives in a Union Town." Next to that one was a Ware County yard; dirt and dust and

grime from the tailings dump told their own story.

"Tailings Don't Have to Blow Away," was another one. It showed the disposition made of dust in union mines. Someone on the committee had done some very good work picture gathering.

"You ain't seen nothing yet," Perrine said. He ripped the magazine over, showed the back page.

There were two strips of photographs, arranged like a comic cartoon. One was called: "Life of a Union Miner," the other was, of course: "What You Get In Ware County."

The first showed a man working with an overhead drill and a mask on; coming out of the mine, washing up, going home. Posed photographs, of course, because succeeding pictures showed the same man getting decently older, his hair getting whiter, surrounded by his children and his grandchildren, retiring, finally, in comfort.

But the Ware County man drilled without a mask; he went home, sat on his porch, coughed; later he was in a hospital; then there was a funeral, and then his wife was shown, old, worn-out, dragging home laundry in a little wagon. . . .

Forrest said: "I never even heard of anything like this before."

Old John answered: "The man who thought this up ought to be running a mine. If they'd thought of this thirty years ago, I'd be out of business now."

"You mean," Sam Perrine asked, "you're going to lie down? You're quitting?"

Old John faced him with his shoulders back, his heavy face red. "Hell, no!" he roared. "I'm not quitting. Call in your deputies; tell 'em to get the men out of the mines and lock 'em out now. They may not strike for a week, but I won't wait on 'em. I never have. Get them out of the mines before they sabotage the whole damn thing."

Perrine said: "Yes, sir!" leaped for a phone and barked into it: "Get Reilly at Alastair No. 1."

The stairs creaked again, and a lean, old man crashed in, barked: "Well, John, what's up? The whole town's crawling with women marching up and down."

"Strike," John grunted. "They'll be after you next, Harford. I got Sam here phoning the mines to get 'em out before they sabotage."

So this was old Harford Rand, the other boss of Ware County.

"Hello, Reilly?" the man at the phone said. "Perrine! Get the men out, lock 'em out, and get your unit by that rack of guns. Call Alastair No. 2, and give the

same orders." He slammed the hook up and down: "All right. Taylor at Rand No. 1."

"We'll give 'em hell, John," Old Rand said. "The ingrates!"

Old John grinned. "Once more before we go, eh, Harford?"

Mac looked from one to the other of the two millionaires, puzzled. They seemed to welcome the trouble.

Perrine got off the phone, said: "They're locking the men out now. There'll be no sabotage, anyway."

Old John said: "You boys get those guns back, last night?"

"All but three, sir," Forrest said.

"Huh." John looked at Rand; they seemed to be able to talk to each other without saying anything. Rand picked up the phone, said: "Long Distance. I want to talk to the Wales Detective Agency in Chicago. Call me when you get them." He put down the phone, looked at John. "I'll pay for a thousand men, John, if you'll pay for another thousand."

"Seven hundred," John said promptly. "You got ten bucks to every seven of mine."

"You must have been bribing my bookkeeper again," Rand said. His bony old hands got the phone

as it rang. "This is Harford Rand, let me talk to Jake Wales himself . . . Hello, Jake? Send seventeen hundred of your toughest babies down here, and send 'em fast."

Sam Perrine said: "Wait a minute, Mr. Rand . . . I have a suggestion."

"That's what we pay you for," Old John said. "Hold the wire, Harford. Sam's got something."

"It's like this," Sam Perrine said. "Leaving the men alone, it'll be a week before they get together to strike. Even locking them out, it'll take a day or so. But the minute the strike-breakers get in, trouble will start. And I'm not quite ready."

"Well, damn it," Harford Rand snapped, "you don't do anything else but get ready for this —"

"No, no," Perrine said. "There are spies in town, agitators. If we leave them here, they'll lead the men, make it that much harder. Tell Wales to send his men down tomorrow instead; I want tonight to look into a couple of things."

"That's fair," Old John nodded.

Harford Rand said into the phone: "Send them around noon tomorrow, Jake . . . That's fine!"

Sam Perrine's bony face was eager, his eyes bright. "I'm going to be busier than a cat at a fish fry. I'll call you back here."

When he was gone, Rand asked: "Perrine knows what to do, huh?" He fished a stogy out of his pocket, lighted it.

"He ought to know," Old John said. "He's got the mind of a rat." Old John picked up the pamphlet, waved it at Rand. "This wouldn't be a stunt of yours, would it?" he asked. "It looks too smart for union work."

"Mine?" Rand puffed the stogy. "Why should I start —?"

"I was just thinking," Old John said. "I'm old, and you know I don't trust Forrest here to run my mines. A little labor trouble might persuade me to sell out cheap, huh?"

"Why, John," Harford Rand said. "I never —"

"How about that time in '21 when I was tight for credit, and you sent stools into my workings to promote trouble?" Old John asked. "Yeah, I knew about it at the time. Hell, I paid two of your men to report to you that the trouble was spreading fast and was sure to go over into your mines, too."

"You —" Harford Rand began.

"Well, if you did start this," Old John said, "you're going to be sorry. Because I've been smelling it for weeks, ever since Perrine made that boner and shot that Gowan kid. So this time, you thin-nosed old louse,

I got the cash in the bank. And you're a little over-extended." He stood up. "This'll take a couple of weeks. I think we better not fight while it's going on. But if you want to fight, I'm ready . . . Mac, you better go out to the house, get Sue out. Tell her to go on up to the city till this is over. You can go with her, boy — this isn't your trouble."

"I'll stick," Mac said.

"All right, get going."

As he went down the stairs, he heard Old John booming, "See, I've got a dark horse, Harford . . ."

Then some racket started outside; but before Mac got down, it had settled into women singing "We'll hang Old John to a sour-apple tree . . ."

Outside, Mac's practiced eye saw that there was no mob yet, though there was a crowd. Almost all were women, with a few men looking sheepish and uneasy. But the women had not consolidated. They were in little knots, one group singing, another standing around a brawny woman who was explaining something, one group asking questions of an old man in faded denims, still another just standing. Unless some spark set them off, they would eventually drift home and cook dinners.

But there were too many people in the street for Mac to start his car. On foot he threaded his way through, and abruptly got to the end of the throng, past the Rand office. Then he walked away, towards the Alastair house. There were no cars rolling in Ware County that day.

10

Mac trudged down the long, dirty road. Behind him women were chanting: "Alastair! We want John Alastair!" but Mac wouldn't have known that was what they were shouting if he had to make it out with his own ears. The voices got fainter and fainter, and finally he could hear a bird sing to one side of the road.

Then, ahead of him, another noise started up. Men walking, but not in step. Once, as he topped a rise, he saw them. The men from Alastair No. 1, coming into town. When he got close he dropped off the road and stood behind some trees; he didn't want to answer questions. When the main body had passed he went out on the road again. The stragglers were talking and arguing among themselves. He walked on, and then finally the road was clear, though sounds on either side of him told him he was now between the men from Alastair No. 1 and Alastair No. 2. More men would be joining them nearer town, coming in on another road.

He slouched along in the dust, feeling alone and lost. He had been in on plenty of strikes before and always

the beginning was fine and joyful, the end of waiting, the beginning of action. This time he didn't know what he was supposed to do. Maybe the union would want him to go out with Sam Perrine's gang, and maybe not; he was being ordered around without being given a voice in anything.

A man popped up out of the ditch and fell into step with him. "Where you goin', Mac?"

"Out this way," Mac said. The use of his nickname didn't mean a thing; lots of stiffs called all strangers "Mac."

"There's trouble the other way, isn't there?" the man asked.

"There's been a lock-out at the mines," Mac answered.

"Yeah. Look's more like a strike to me. Lawrence phoned me and says it's a strike, and he oughta know. You know Lawrence?"

"Lawrence who?" Mac asked.

"That's his last name. Kinda scar-faced guy. He calls me and says a guy named Mac'll be comin' along this road. Stop him and ask him does he know anything. So I'm doin' it."

Mac kept on walking.

"He says, says Lawrence, Mac'll have on nice clothes, the committee bought for him. You tell him

that and he'll know you're O.K. How's about it, Mac?"

"O.K.," Mac said. "What does Lawrence want to know?"

"What's the bosses doin', I guess."

Mac said: "They've phoned for seventeen hundred finks from the Jake Wales office. They've got to fight it out without asking for State help; they didn't fall for Lawrence's plan. He'll know what that means. Sam Perrine is going to stage a red hunt tonight. The finks aren't to come in till noon tomorrow. Tell Lawrence."

"O.K., Mac."-The man turned and started walking towards town. Two minutes later the vanguard of the Alastair No. 2 gang came into sight. Again Mac left the road, but this time there was enough dust being scuffed up to let him keep on walking on the highway. He cut over, through the stragglers, to the road opposite the tailings piles that led to the country club district.

Two hours after he left the office he was on the porch of the Alastair house. He didn't bother to ring; he opened the front door and bawled: "Sue. Oh, Sue!" She answered, then came running down the stairs.

When she saw his dirty clothes, his grimy face, she cried: "It's started. Have the men struck?"

"The men were locked out before they got a chance to strike. How did you know?"

"Did you see those magazines we distributed in

town?" she asked. "They were my idea. I got them up."

"No, you didn't!" He sat down on the foot of the stairs and laughed and laughed.

She sat down next to him. "Whatever is the matter with you, Mac?"

"I was there when your father saw the magazine. He said —" Mac broke down in fresh laughter and finally went on. "He said the man who thought that up ought to be running a mine. He — he admired it tremendously."

Sue laughed with him. "I — I ought to tell him, he'd be so proud." Then she stopped laughing. "What are you doing out here, Mac?"

"Your father sent me to get you out of the county. He thinks it won't be safe here for you."

"Go back and tell him that if I leave there won't be any brain to run the strike."

"He'd like that," Mac said. "Say, I'm — where can I get a drink of water?"

"I'll get it for you." She went away and Mac got off the steps, brushing himself, and walked into the living room. He was no longer, as he had been when he first came here, conscious of the expensiveness, the luxury of the furniture. It was just a room to him.

Sue came back and found him in there. She carried a pitcher of lemonade and two glasses. Mac gulped

three glasses. "I feel better, a lot. So you aren't leaving?"

"No," she said. "I'm going into town and find Law — find the leader of the strike and go to work. We're going to break the Alastairs wide open and let a little light into Ware County." She turned, took his hand, "Mac, come with me. You can't go back on me now."

"I have to go back and help your father — and your brother — and Harford Rand."

"But why, Mac?" she asked. "You know you don't belong on the same side as a man like Sam Perrine. Is it love of money, or are you afraid that if they take your father's mine you'll have to work? Work isn't so bad, Mac. Anyway, it's as hard work hanging on to money as it is to —"

"Sue," he said, "I have to go back to your father and help him. I can't tell you why, but I do."

"You mean you can't tell me, or you won't?"

He didn't answer. She got up off the couch and started out. "You ought to be in looking after Kay Nannic," she said. "Or is it Forrest's turn today?"

"Sue!" he cried. She stopped and looked at him, but there was nothing more he could say.

And after a while she turned and went out, and he heard her slam the front door, heard her feet on the

gravel outside. He wanted to go and watch her from the window; but he couldn't. He just sat on the couch.

He poured himself another glass of lemonade, but it didn't taste right and he set it down. He walked up and down the room; once he went out into the hall and put his hand on the telephone, but he couldn't think of anyone to call. At last he went back to the garage and climbed into a station wagon, went towards town.

On the ridge road he turned off and ran up to Alastair No. 1. A hundred yards from the mine he was stopped by two men with rifles; but one of them said: "That's Mr. Alastair's car, isn't it?" and the other said: "Sure, that's the young feller's been stayin' with the boss," and they let him through. He parked the station wagon near the office and went in.

A big case of Mills bombs — hand grenades — had been opened and the little pineapples could be seen, neatly displayed in rows, each bomb wrapped in a sheath of tissue paper. Another box was open on Reilly's desk; deputy sheriff badges spilled out of it. The rack of rifles was nearly empty.

Reilly himself was standing in the middle of chaos, a long cigar tucked into the hole between his teeth. He said, around the cigar: "Yeah, young fella? What can I do for you?"

"Just driving in from the house, and I thought I'd stop and see do you need anything. I'll be seeing the boss."

"Naw, we're all set. Tell the boss I got a coupla my men out checking the tents; they seem to be O.K., and we'll have them all up and ready when the strike-breakers get here tomorrow."

"You were all set for it, eh?" Mac said.

Reilly said: "These things happen, son. Being ready is the same as winning. This one's a little different, though; the women started this one. You take a bunch of nagging wives and anything might happen. I oughta know — when we lived over in the bottoms them women used to be fighting with each other alla time. Mrs. Reilly could hardly stand it. She's a lady, not like these tubs the hands are married to."

"Well," Mac said, "you can hardly blame them. I guess it isn't a very nice life over there."

"Then they shoulda married men who could take 'em out of it. I was born over there, wasn't I? And Old John himself was a mucker. If they don't like it, they can work out of it. We done it."

"Everybody can't be a super," Mac said.

Reilly took the cigar out of his mouth to gesture

with. "Aw, you rich punks don't know nothin'. Hey, kid, where's your badge?"

"My —"

"Without a badge," Reilly explained, "you ain't safe in Ware County just now. It's O.K. so long as everybody knows you, only startin' tomorrow, there'll be a lot of help in from the city. Here, put up your hand."

Mac slowly raised his hand.

"Say you swear to uphold the laws of this county, state and government," Reilly said.

Mac muttered something and Reilly fished a badge out of the box, tested the pin, and pinned it on Mac's jacket. "Now you're a Deputy sheriff, son. Want a gun? We got some extra here."

"You better keep them," Mac said. "I can get one in town, and you might be cut off here."

"Naw," Reilly told him. "There ain't a half dozen fire-arms among that whole mob. We'll cut 'em like cheese." He stepped to a side window, threw it up and bawled: "Stretch that wire tight, you bums. Don't git it snarled."

Mac looked over his shoulder and saw two men — each wearing a badge — laying out barbed wire. The posts were already there and looked weather-beaten.

One of the rifle-bearing guards bummed a cigarette from Mac as he rolled the station wagon down the hill towards town again.

He had to leave the car at the edge of town; he found a garage there that would take it in. The garage hands were tacking up boards over the office windows, and they looked pale; nobody wanted to talk much, but Mac noticed them making covert glances at his deputy's badge.

Mac tried to draw them out. He said: "I guess the sooner this trouble's settled, the better for your business."

The manager said: "Sure. Only I was a sap to ever run up a garage in Ware County. It'll never be settled for good."

"Who do you think'll win?" Mac asked.

"Ah, you guys. You always do. You don't have to worry much. I'd sell this garage tomorrow if I could find a buyer, and get out of this forsaken country."

Then he seemed to be afraid of what he had said, and added: "Of course, you guys have to protect yourselves. I mean, these strikers ain't legal."

It was all Mac could get out of him. He walked on into the packed town.

Lawrence had gotten things organized quickly; the miners had joined their women and they were all

packed around the offices, yelling. "We want Alastair. Send out Old John. We want Rand. Let me talk to Harford."

Somebody struck up: "We'll hang Old Rand to a sour apple tree," and the mob took it up.

Mac started pushing his way through the crowd. He was smack in the middle of it when a woman saw his deputy sheriff's badge. She screamed: "Here's one of 'em. Here's one of the men came and got us out of our beds the other night."

Another woman screeched: "Here's one of the ones who lets us live in the dirt. Here's one of the men who kill our men."

Hands — mostly feminine hands, work-scarred — tore at his clothes. He ducked, dodged, but they were all around him. His coat ripped up the back, somebody twisted his necktie till his face went purple and tight. He struck out blindly and was kicked in the back; went down on his knees. Hands started beating on the top of his head.

Then they stopped, and he struggled to his feet, while they made a little circle around him. They had stopped suddenly.

Lawrence's voice was booming down. "No violence. Let him go. We're not fighting individuals, we're fighting a class."

Two men worked their way through from the speakers' stand and caught Mac. He recognized one of them as one of the middle aged men who had been on the committee that assigned him to Ware County. They seized Mac and dragged him roughly towards the office. The men Mac knew abused him loudly. "Go up and tell John Alastair what sort of people we are," he shouted. "Tell him we could have murdered you and didn't." The mob started shouting again, and under cover of that, the men muttered: "Lawrence says to tell Old John we got his daughter, and we're holding her till he settles the strike. Got it?"

Mac said: "Yea," softly, and then shouted: "You people'll suffer for this!" They threw him at the office door, which was opened a crack, hands pulled him in, and then the door was shut and locked again. One of the bookkeepers brushed him off and said: "They might have killed you, Mr. McBlair."

"Sure," Mac said. He looked into the downstairs office, where a little huddle of women stared at him, frightened; Kay Nannic's eyes were as scared as anyone's.

Then he went up the stairs, to hear Sam Perrine bark into the phone: "And hurry them up. This mob's tough; they tried to kill one of our people."

11

Old John said: "You took a beating, son. Did you find Sue?"

Mac said, gulping: "She's not at the house. One of the men that dragged me off down there said they had her and to tell you so. I don't know."

Forrest shouted, "Dad!"

"They wouldn't do it," Old John roared. "That's kidnapping, a Federal offense."

A brick crashed through the window, landed on Mac's desk and rolled to the floor. Others followed and everybody retreated to the far end of the office, away from the breaking glass and hurtling stones.

"Sam!" Harford Rand shouted, "You better tell that crowd they're flirting with death."

Sam Perrine nodded his lean head and hitched up the gun belt he wore outside his coat. He went forward, through the glass and rocks, till he was in the paneless window. A rock flew up and caught him on the shoulder, but he never moved.

The mob quieted down under the cold glare of his

eyes. He raised his hand. "We've got a lot of women in here," he said.

Somebody shrieked: "We got a lot more out here, mister." And there was laughter.

"We want them to have a way out," Sam Perrine said.

Lawrence — Mac would have known that voice any place — shouted: "Fair enough. Tell 'em to open the door and come out. We won't touch them."

Forrest ran downstairs. Sam Perrine continued to stand in the window. "There they go," he said over his shoulder. "This mob's not so tough." He took a deep breath and went on: "I've got a bunch of deputies coming to clear the street. I'm telling you, this destruction of property can't go on; we're going to protect ourselves. You'd better disperse and go home."

Somebody — surely an organizer — screamed: "Who killed young Gowan?"

A half dozen voices answered: "Sam Perrine. Bloody Sam Perrine!"

Perrine stood his ground. But a woman's voice said: "Who killed Joe Tittle last year?" and again there was that violent response.

Sam turned, tension making little pools of yellow at the corner of each nostril. "I can't take 'em," he said.

His voice had risen an octave or two above natural. "I'm going out the back way, over the roofs, and get the sheriff." His heels rapped the floor when he walked; his legs jerked; trouble was to Bloody Sam like opium to an addict.

He disappeared through the back window, his wolfish face turning to grin at them for a moment. Down below, Lawrence was making the old speech about orderly organization, about sticking together and avoiding violence. His deep voice rose and fell, and the crowd quieted.

Mac went to the side of the wrecked front window and watched Lawrence work. The scar-faced man was very smooth; one of the best crowd-handlers Mac had ever seen.

Old John said: "Did the servants know anything about Sue, Mac?"

"No, sir." Mac didn't turn. He was almost sorry for Old John — that is, if John Alastair believed the kidnapping story.

"Strikers don't kidnap," Old John said. "They work like they always done in the past. They — well, they haven't any originality."

"But, Dad," Forrest said, "Sue's in danger. Those people —"

"Just a bunch of working stiffs," Old John said. "What's happening, Mac?"

"The sheriff is opening a window over the hardware store," Mac said. "He's got —"

"As Sheriff of Ware County," they all heard, "I order you to disperse, and peaceably return to your dwellings. Any act of violence —" It was evidently the legal riot act he was reading, declaring a state of uprising.

The fat man who was sheriff of the county — Mac had never heard his name that he could remember — droned on, and the mob listened as though the empty sounds meant something.

Law and order were abruptly interrupted by a gun shot. Mac caught himself thinking that it sounded like a .45, while most of his mind saw disbelief and horror spread over the sheriff's face as he clutched a vest that was rapidly turning red.

The sheriff's knees buckled, then, and he started forward through the open window which he had been using for a rostrum. For a moment it looked as though he were going to fall into the street below, but he checked himself, and hung half out and half in.

Sam Perrine suddenly raised his voice from the crowd, and screamed: "Hold your guns on them, men!"

Rifle barrels appeared over the edge of every roof on the square, and Old John, next to Mac, dug his heavy fingers into Mac's arm. "He planted the shooting," Old John said. "That Sam Perrine —"

"I've got him here," Perrine shouted. "Hold a gun on anyone who comes near me, I'm going to —"

His voice was drowned out in the rising clamor of the mob. Because, Mac saw, it was a mob now; there was a unanimity about it that was imposing, and a little horrible.

But they made a clear circle around Sam Perrine, and Mac could see him, and the man that Sam was holding. It was a little man, with one shut eye; One-eyed Harris. Perrine was trying to thrust a gun into his hand, and at the same time make it look as though he were taking it away.

Things were happening faster than Mac's brain could take them in. He saw One-eye raise his right hand to the crowd, and scream something, but he couldn't hear what it was. And then the waving hand got close to Sam Perrine's face, and Perrine fired.

And as One-eye's little body jerked and writhed with the shock of the .45 slug, his hand continued to wave, and Mac understood what the little radical man had been trying to say: the index and middle fingers on his

right hand were missing, and he could not possibly have used the big army gun.

Then the three-fingered hand went down and Sam Perrine was dragging a corpse through a mob shocked enough to make room for him.

"Perrine killed the sheriff," Mac said. "That man had a crippled hand, he couldn't —"

"Now Sam is sheriff," Old John muttered. "He thinks so."

"I wonder if he lost his fingers the same time he lost his eye," Mac muttered.

"You got sharp eyes, son," Old John said. Mac could hear him lumbering away from the window. The heavy steps faltered, and Mac whirled in time to catch Old John and help him to his desk. The old man seemed broken and sick and nearly dead. Then he put his head back, and said: "Perrine'll be up here. Keep close to him, Mac."

"Yes, sir."

Harford Rand's eyes were curious as they played over Old John.

Perrine came in without Harris's body. He said: "Well, that does it. They killed the sheriff, and anything that happens from here out is their fault. My men have to protect themselves."

Rand said: "You expected this. You didn't tell us you'd posted deputies on the roofs."

"I didn't know how much time I needed," Sam Perrine said. "The guy I shot was the one I was going after tonight. But I got him first, down there."

"Which man?" Alastair asked.

Sam Perrine said: "If you don't like my methods, Old John, you're out of luck. Until we break the strike, I'm in charge of this county. You and Rand can have it back when I've whipped it down for you."

He curved his fingers around the gun butt and went to the window, as he had before.

The mob was very still when they saw him. He said, in an ordinary tone of voice: "I'm the sheriff here. I'm in charge now. You've killed the sheriff, and I'm going to keep law and order, or kill every damn one of you. My men are all around this square, and if you don't break up and go —"

"Bloody Sam Perrine!" someone shouted. It sounded like Lawrence. "Who'll work for Bloody Sam?"

The mob roared: "Nobody!"

"Call the Governor!" Lawrence boomed. "Call the Governor and tell him to send troops before Bloody Sam kills us all! Call the Governor!"

They took it up. "Call the Governor, call the Governor, call the Governor!"

"Shut up," Perrine roared. But they wouldn't listen, couldn't hear him. "Shut up! I'm taking charge of —" The back of his neck was an ivory yellow and the veins stood out like cords.

Mac couldn't make out all the things the crowd was shouting now, but he could tell that it was acting like a true mob; like one person, instead of a bunch of people. Whatever it was they were screaming, it was getting home to Sam Perrine.

Suddenly the sheriff's hands dropped and went for his guns. "Shut up, you rats, or I'll —"

Old John was the fastest of all. He skidded a desk chair into Sam's legs and the deputy went over backwards. Mac leaped on Sam Perrine and got the lean man's guns away before Sam knew what was happening.

Perrine whipped to his feet, yelled: "Let me at them. I'll teach them who runs Ware County —"

Old John barked: "If you'd fired, that mob would have killed us."

Sam Perrine ran his hands up over his face and through his yellow hair. "O.K. I got a grip on myself now."

"Too late," Old John said. "You're through. You lose your temper too easy."

Sam said: "Tell your little boy here to put the gun away. It might go off. I'm not through, Alastair. Ask Rand there. I've ridden your strikes for you in the past, and I'll go on riding them. You couldn't get along without me. I'm the only thing that keeps you Ware County owners from having to be white men." He laughed, reached into his pockets, brought out a package of smoking tobacco, and rolled himself a cigarette.

"John's right," Rand said. "You're through, Sam. You're too fond of gun work."

Perrine laughed, and lit the cigarette.

Old John said, abruptly, "S'funny about Sue. Wonder where she is."

"The men say they have her," Mac said.

"That's just a bluff," Harford Rand said.

John Alastair went to the phone, picked it up. Nothing happened. He jiggled the hook.

Forrest said: "The girls are gone. There's no one to run the switchboard." He ran downstairs.

"Nice errand boy you got there, John," Rand said. "I'm glad I'm a bachelor."

Old John didn't answer. He was staring down at the phone. When Forrest came back and yelped: "Dad,

the wires're cut," John just nodded. His face was still red when he looked at Harford Rand and said: "I didn't do so bad, Harford. I — the girl's O.K. anyway." He walked the floor, then, abruptly, went to the window and stood there, waiting for the mob to see him.

"Here come the deputies," he said. He leaned out and suddenly shouted: "Hold it, you men down there. Stay at the end of the street."

The mob was quiet now, turning to look at the cars of the deputies, and back to look up at Old John. They waited. He said to them, "My — the deputy sheriffs are there. They've got guns. You haven't. But I don't want bloodshed in Ware County. Pick a committee of five men and send them up. We'll talk this thing over."

He walked away from the window, sat down at his rock-scarred desk, and snapped, "Forrest, go down and tell those rabbits to let a committee of five in."

Harford Rand said, harshly, "Any deal you make about unionization, John, I'll fight. It's not my girl that's been —"

"They haven't got my daughter," Old John said flatly. "I'll — I have a plan. You never could think in a hurry, Rand." There were sounds on the stairs, and silence outside; the mob, startled by Old John's move,

had ceased to be a mob; they were individuals now.

"Take your desk, Forrest," John said. "You, Rand, sit at Mac's and Mac take the stenographer's." His face was impassive as he sat there, waiting for the committee.

When they came in there was no place for them to sit. They stood. Lawrence and the man who had hustled Mac to the door below were two of the committee. Old John pointed them out. "You two don't work in Ware County. Get out!"

"We're members of the Union," Lawrence said. "We'll stay."

"I'll deal only with my own miners," Old John said.

"You'll deal with us," Lawrence said, stridently. His scar glowed. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a bright scarf, wiped his face with it, put it back.

Forrest let out an agonized sort of gasp. Old John slowly lost color.

The scarf that Lawrence was using on his battered face had been around Sue Alastair's neck when Mac had spoken to her out at the house. Even Mac, who knew the truth, was a little awed, a little afraid; Lawrence looked sinister enough.

"So you're kidnappers," Old John grated.

"I don't know what you mean," Lawrence said

calmly. "Now, the men want these things: a twenty percent wage rise, straight pay for drillers instead of piece work, half day off Saturday, and the recognition of our Union as the sole bargaining agent. Furthermore, we demand the right to collect Union dues on company property during lunch hour. And, of course, a closed shop."

"What about the moon?" Harford Rand asked.

"We don't need the moon," Lawrence said.

"Wait a minute, Larry," one of the other committee men said. "We want that heel thrown out of the county." He pointed at Sam Perrine.

"He's not my man," John Alastair said. "Does he work for you, Rand?"

Harford Rand said, "No. You can have him."

Sam Perrine walked forward. "Throwing me to the wolves? Well, it don't go, Alastair. You —"

"Mac! Forrest!" the old man barked. It was curious, even then, the order of the names he used.

The two boys closed on Sam Perrine. Without his gun the deputy was not at home; they managed to hustle him down the stairs, and out of the door. Forrest locked and bolted the door, then shuddered at the howling outside. "What do you think they'll do to him, Mac?"

"I don't know," Mac said. "And I don't care!"

They went upstairs.

Old John was talking. "You see, you with the scarface there — if you'd let me handle my own work there wouldn't be any trouble. The only demand from a local man, I gave into it. Yours are ridiculous."

Lawrence said, "I know this, Alastair. If those seventeen hundred scabs and finks and nobles come in here tomorrow, we'll blood-bathe Ware County like she's never been bathed before. You don't move no ore —"

"You'll make production so expensive —"

"Sure we will, Alastair. We'll make you put in new machinery for that tailings dump of yours. And with a union scale, the men'll wear masks when they drill, or else. But you'll make plenty out of your diggings just the same."

"You want to run my mine, do you?" Old John said. He shoved back his chair and lumbered to his feet. There was tension in those thick, muscle-bound shoulders, extra wrinkles around Old John's eyes. The big man took a couple of turns around the office. There was a touch of the actor in Old John, — he had the stage now, he knew it and he was enjoying it.

Harford Rand said, "What's on your mind, John?"

"Well?" Lawrence demanded.

The old man paid no attention. He waited till the tension in the room was stifling. Then he turned slowly back to his desk and leaned on his gnarled knuckles. "O.K.," he said. "The strike's over." He sat down and smiled angelically. "As soon as I get to a phone, I'll call the city and cancel the strikebreakers."

"You mean," Lawrence asked incredulously, "you're recognizing the Union?"

"What Union?" Old John asked. "I ain't got no use for a union. I'm shutting Alastair operations down. Completely. So long, gentlemen."

Lawrence smiled a little. He nodded at Harford Rand. "Your mines closing, too?"

"Sure. You people talk about unity; now you see it. I'll stick with John."

"All right, gentlemen," Lawrence said. He took the scarf out of his pocket once more. "Mind putting that in writing?"

"Put the damned scarf away!" John Alastair barked.

"Why? It's mine."

John Alastair reached out and snatched the silk from him. He ran it through his stubby fingers, until he came to two little embroidered initials — S. A. He tossed it back into Lawrence's face, and growled: "It

won't do you any good. Harford Rand there don't give a damn about my personal problems. You make me put in shorter hours, and masks and expensive tailings machinery, and he'll undercut my price till I have to shut down." The old man's face was packed with blood till it seemed it would burst.

Lawrence put his hands flat on John Alastair's desk, and leaned on them. "O.K.," he said softly, "you deal with the union, and we'll cut baugnite for you till the moon melts. And we won't take out a chunk the size of a nut for Harford Rand till he deals too."

"I've always said I'd run my own mine or get out," Old John said. He almost whined. "I've always said when the unions started dictating to me I'd quit." It was the whine that tipped Mac off. They could take Old John's mines away, they could even kill his daughter, but they couldn't make him whine. It was an act.

"You know what the choice is," Lawrence said.

John Alastair lowered his look. "Give me twenty-four hours."

"You'll hold the finks off that long?" Lawrence asked.

"There'll be no strikebreakers come till I hold a talk with your committee at four tomorrow," Old John mumbled.

"How about that, Rand?" Lawrence asked the thin, cold man.

Old Rand nodded. "I'll give John twenty-four hours."

"Get us a phone and we'll cancel the strikebreakers."

Old Rand nodded again.

Lawrence went to the window, leaned out and yelled: "Hook her up again, Johnny!"

The other four members of the committee looked out too. Behind their backs, Old John raised his head, looked straight at Harford Rand and Mac, and his look was as good as a wink.

Two minutes later Lawrence turned back and said, "You can make your call."

Harford Rand picked up the phone, got the Wales agency in the city. "Hold those men, Jake. We'll let you know at 4:30 tomorrow if we want them." He slammed down the phone.

"We meet you here at four tomorrow," Lawrence said. "You and I better tell that mob out there, Alastair."

They had to help the old man up. Leaning on Mac's arm he went to the shattered window and looked out at the crowd. Lawrence raised his hand for silence.

Old John shouted. "We're taking twenty-four hours to consider your requests."

"Not requests," somebody shouted from below, "Demands!" There was a cheer.

Lawrence silenced them, and said, "Go to your homes, get some supper and a rest, and be back here at seven for a mass meeting. Meanwhile there's to be no trouble, and the owners are not to be molested."

They came back from the window, and Lawrence stuck out his hand, "Till tomorrow, then."

John Alastair disregarded the hand. "Tomorrow. Four o'clock."

When the committee had gone, John Alastair walked spryly to his desk and picked up the phone. "Get me the department of Justice, in Washington. I want to talk to this what's-his-name? You know, — the fella they call the G-man."

Waiting for his call, he said, calmly, to Rand and Mac: "This ends the union in Ware County. I'm going to send that scar-face to Alcatraz for kidnapping!"

Harford Rand said, "You get in the Federals and the newspapermen'll come in too."

"This is one time we can use them," Old John said. "Nobody likes a kidnapper."

"But Dad," Forrest protested, "They might hurt Sue while —"

Old John spat on the floor and answered the phone, which was ringing with his call.

12

Mac sat on the edge of his bed in the Rand House that night and smoked. From past strikes he tried to figure out what was going on in the town; he supposed that Lawrence and the rest were trying to get the men to go home and get some rest; while the men themselves wanted to trot around and drink and boast about what they were going to do to the bosses.

This was a crucial problem in any strike; to keep the men from spending cash on liquor and energy on hell raising.

Mac was twenty-three, and this was nearly his twenty-third strike. It was queer, to be sitting here on a bed while the others were running the strike. Always, in an operation, it seemed to you that you knew best, and no one else was doing the right thing. Now he was sure that everything would get jammed up, because he could not even go near headquarters.

He lit another cigarette, took two long drags, and pushed it out in a tray of long tangled stubs. He ut-

tered an exclamation of disgust and got up, emptied the tray in a waste paper basket. Almost as soon as he sat down again he lit another cigarette.

When he emptied the tray for a second time, there was a rap on the door. The ash receiver crashed to the floor, and he whirled, then grinned.

It was Lawrence. He came in, sat on the writing desk. "Well?"

"They sent for the G-men as soon as you left. What's up, Lawrence?"

Lawrence let a slow grin twist his scar. "Good!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"You oughtn't to come up here, Lawrence. Someone might —"

"Aw, I found a kitchen hand who used to be in the Seaman's Union. Blacklisted for labor leading. He sneaked me up the back. Come on down to headquarters and get a load of what's going on."

"Suppose Forrest or someone comes up?"

"They won't get wise till tomorrow. Come on."

"You're the boss." Mac pulled on his suit, coat and vest, dragged a hat over his eyes.

"You've got those clothes lookin' like they belonged to a bindle stiff," Lawrence said.

"Careful carelessness, m'lad," Mac drawled. "S'all the rage this season." They went out together.

In the kitchen a flunky in a soiled white uniform said: "If they bring in finks, the nobles'll eat here. I'll spit in their food for you."

Lawrence laughed perfunctorily, and took Mac out. "Now," he said, "he's seen you, Mac, you better not go back there. He never knew what I was comin' into the hotel for."

"Lawrence, how about Sue Alastair?" Mac asked.

"You're not as cool as I thought. I was wondering when you'd get around to that. Here we are."

Mac had been walking along, head down. Now he raised it, stepped back. "Hey, what street is this?"

"They call it Aglar Street, sonny. Why?"

"I think I've been here before."

"Yeah?" They stopped on the porch and Lawrence explained, "This house belongs to one of the foremen. He's got a personal grudge against the boss, came around and said we could use his place. It is out of that damn tailings dust."

"Guy named Nannic?"

"Yeah," Lawrence said, "A guy named Nannic . . . Say, I remember now. You was getting information out of some girl. Was that his daughter?"

"That's right."

"The old man never saw you, did he?" Lawrence asked, "because the reason he's working with us is he thinks the boss's son brought her home drunk a couple of nights ago, and that was the last straw . . . Was that you?"

"Yeah. But he never saw me."

"Well, you was workin' for the Union harder than you thought. Come on in."

Mac shook his head. "Is Sue —"

"She's in there. Come on in."

"But she saw me bring —"

"Yeah, she told old man Nannic her brother was beginning to shop Kay around . . ."

"You're quite right. Look, if I go in there, can I tell Sue —"

"Come on in, Mac."

So Mac went in. He saw a middle-class living room, ornate furniture, and a woman knitting and sternly rocking in a chair. Mrs. Nannic, from her face, didn't approve of her husband's activities.

Lawrence pulled open sliding doors and they went into the dining room. A dozen people were crowded in that small room, sitting at the round table; leaning against the walls and making a mess of neat Mrs. Nan-

nic's housekeeping. Sue Alastair was drinking coffee out of a huge, flowered cup. Her round eyes saw Mac over the cup. Down it came with a crash on the saucer, spilling coffee on the table.

"Mac!"

He said: "Hello, Sue. You're here of your own free will, aren't —"

"No. But —"

Lawrence said benevolently, "Sue, Mac was sent down to this county by the Union." The scar-faced man beamed like Santa Claus, then turned to the others. "You muggs gather up these dirty dishes and get out in the kitchen with Nannic. That poor slob's been washing up all day for us." They all beamed at Mac and Sue, left them and went into the kitchen.

Sue cried, "Oh, Mac, why didn't you tell me!"

He kept his hands at his sides, though she was coming towards him joyously. "I didn't have the right to trust anyone. When Lawrence came down — when you brought him down — I asked him if I could tell you. He said no."

She nodded, dropped her voice to a whisper. "Yes. Oh yes. I should have trusted you." She stepped back, staring at him. "Mac, what's the matter? Aren't you glad to see me?"

"You think this is a game, don't you? A fine exciting game of 'post office'? It isn't. Most of my work is going around and getting dirty, underpaid jobs. Helper on a tenant farm. Puddler helper in a steel mill. Working till the boss says quit, then going out and working all night on Union business. Not getting paid any more than the next exploited stiff. And it's always the underpaid jobs that I'm put in. And having to spend out of my own pocket for postage stamps and beers for converts." He laughed. "It's no game. And at the end there's not going back to a nice, comfortable house and being the hero of a lot of college pinks like you because you really worked in a strike."

She said: "Mac, you have no right to talk to me like that. What I'm doing here is important to me. And it's costing me, Mac. I love my father. Maybe you couldn't believe that."

"He's an old pirate."

"You — you snob," she cried. "You're no better than I am because you're poor. I'm going to be poor, too. My father'll never take me back. He loves the Alastair Mining Company more than he does —"

"I don't know. He sent for the Federals. You know his attitude towards outside interference in strikes."

She waved her hand. "He's smart. He thinks he'll

get the Union marked outlaws. He knows they wouldn't hurt me. I'm not Sam Perrine."

"What happened to Sam?"

"They tarred and feathered him, and ran him out of the country."

"You see," Mac said, "that's the sort of thing we cause. We didn't mean to. We never mean to. If we had our way, everything would be done legally. But you can't stir men up without having them act. They're always —"

"Oh, stop trying to convert me, Mac. I'm on your side."

"You're not converted," he shouted. "You're not on our side. Lawrence is kidding you, using you like I used Kay Nann —"

She put her hand over his mouth. "You ought to know better."

He stepped back, wearily, raised his voice. "Lawrence!"

Lawrence came in, still looking like Santa Claus. He took in the scene, and the smile faded.

"I want to get some sleep," Mac said. "What do I do tomorrow?"

"Oh, just hang around," Lawrence said. "You —" He broke off as a car stopped in front of the house and

voices drifted in to them. "Sit tight," he said, and went into the dining room.

He was back in a moment. "You'd better go, Mac. Kay Nannic just came home."

"All right," Mac said. "What'll I do tonight? I don't like any part of this," Mac said, "this not knowing what's going on. Do *you* know?" he asked Sue.

"No. I've just done what Lawrence told me to. After all, he knows about these things."

"So do I," Mac said. "And I've got a right to know too. If anything goes wrong, I'm the one who's going to be counted with your father's bunch of murderers."

"Stop picking on my father —!" Then she caught herself, blushed.

Lawrence said softly, "Get out of here, Mac. Go on, before Kay Nannic comes in and spills the beans."

God, Mac thought, you couldn't trust a girl with Sue's background not to revert to it if they started putting the screws on her father. And by the same token, Lawrence was right in not telling Mac too much; Mac had to act surprised tomorrow, and he was only an amateur actor.

But he forced a smile, drifted out over the back porch into the night and stood there, in the Nannic's back yard, and lit a cigarette. The back door opened

again, and Lawrence called softly: "Mac? You there?"

"Yeah?" He shielded the cigarette in the palm of his hand and went back to the porch railing. "What is it, Lawrence?"

"I'm sorry I can't trust you with the plans," Lawrence mumbled. "Only I'm scared you'll spill them by accident tomorrow . . . You're O.K., Mac. I wanted you to know; I wasn't for you so much when you first come up to see us, but you're O.K. You and the girl been fighting, haven't you?"

"Yeah." He wanted to get away now.

"S'too bad. But I don't know's she'd make an organizer's wife. She —"

"Ah, go to hell," Mac cried, and ran away. He tumbled over an ash can, picked himself up, and went on. After a while he got out of the maze of back porches, and to a street.

He didn't want to go back to the hotel, didn't know where to go, and finally walked out to the garage where he had left the station wagon. He got it out and drove fast for a while till he calmed down; then he found that curiosity was stronger than common sense, and went out to the Alastair house.

13

There were lights downstairs, and Mac went up on the porch and tried the door. A rifle muzzle poked his ribs, and a soft voice said, "Who are you?"

"MacBlair," Mac said. "Mr. Alastair'll want to see me."

"Yeah? Wait here till Reilly comes." The deputy poked at the doorbell, without moving the rifle.

Reilly opened the door after a couple of minutes and stood there, framed in the light. "Oh, yeah, it's the dude. O.K. to let him in, Perry."

Some of Sam Perrine's manner had passed on to Reilly with Perrine's shield. The new chief deputy stood in the hall, and said: "Kinda late for you to be out, aint it? You mighta started a riot in town, if them strikers had gotten you by yo'self."

"All right, Reilly," Mac snapped. "Where's Mr. Alastair?"

"Him and me's been planning tactics," Reilly said. "I'll let him know you're here."

"Don't get too big for your britches," Mac said.

"Remember what happened to Perrine." He went into the library.

Old John was pushing a pencil around on a map of the county. He looked up, and some of the weariness went out of his face. "Glad to see you, Mac. Set down. Reilly! Reilly! Get Mr. McBlair some whisky, will you?"

Reilly looked rebellious, but he went back towards the kitchen.

"Gonna keep this fellow in his place," Old John said. "I don't want another mess like that Perrine."

Reilly came back with bourbon and soda and ice. Mac mixed himself a drink, gulped it down, and felt better.

"Take one, Reilly, and then get out," Old John said grudgingly. "I'd like to join you, Mac, but I'm feeling my age."

Reilly poured half a tumbler of the brown whisky into a glass, said: "Well, here's to you," gulped it and got out, deflated.

Old John said, "Forrest came in before. I sent him to bed. When there aren't any books around, he's no use at all . . . Mac, you think they'd hurt Sue?"

"No, Old John, sure they wouldn't! Don't you worry." He was sorry for the old man.

"She's worth a dozen of my son . . . Mac, she kind of likes you, I think."

Mac said, "Well," noncommittally, mixed another drink that he didn't want, his back to Old John.

He was still stalling when a rifle cracked somewhere behind the house, and a man shouted. Mac heard Reilly running down the hall, and started after him; he was out of the room and Old John was alone when the window glass broke.

Mac heard and came running back.

A horrid, incredible figure was framed in the window, and it carried a rifle.

When it spoke, Mac identified it — Sam Perrine, come back with tar and feathers on. "You old softbelly," Perrine drawled. "Thought you could kick me out. Thought you could throw Sam Perrine to the wolves. I've done yo' dirty work a lot of years, Alastair; you used to talk big about what you'd do for me some day. Well, this is what it fetched me."

A breeze fluttered white feathers in the black tar on him.

"Got you a new boy, haven't you?" Sam asked. His voice was tight and jerky. "Kid, fetch me that whiskey . . . You heard me!"

"Take him the liquor, Mac," Old John said.

Perrine said: "Put that likker down on the floor where I can reach it, city boy, and then get back out of range."

He took a drink with one hand, holding the decanter to his battered mouth. The tar did not cover his face, but that face looked like hamburger. Perrine heaved the decanter back into the room, where it broke on the floor.

"You don't scare much, do you, Old John?" Perrine asked. "You're tough, like I was. Yeah, wait till a bunch of roughnecks take you out on the road and get the tar heatin' up. Bet you'll scare, too!"

"Reilly's got men all around the house," Old John said. "Good men. You ought to know; you trained them."

"I just took this gun away from one of them," Sam Perrine said. "And now —"

With no change of expression at all, he folded up and his face disappeared from the broken window. It seemed to Mac that the sound of the shot was later. But then Reilly stuck his head in, and said: "I got him. I guess he was out of his head."

"All right," Old John said. "Take him out and throw him some place. Help me to bed, Mac."

As soon as Mac had gotten the big body of John

Alastair into his bed, the old man went to sleep.

Mac thought he himself wouldn't be able to do that, but when he had gone to his old room and thrown himself, fully dressed, on the bed, he passed out without even having time to worry about Sue Alastair and about the fact that he never really had trusted Lawrence.

14

When he woke up, the house was deserted. He made himself some coffee in the kitchen, got out the station wagon, and drove it back to its garage. This time he didn't have any trouble going through the streets. They were packed with miners and their wives, but the workers let him through; the whole tone of the crowd was jubilant and strong, gay with assured success. It was queer how a strike crowd knew what was going on; yet the leaders could not possibly have taken them into their confidence.

The door of the office building was locked, but an armed foreman let him in. The clerks were no place in sight. Mac went on upstairs; the group was the same as yesterday's, except that Reilly had taken Sam Perrine's place.

Forrest Alastair was making a speech. "I still don't think it's safe," he said, "to let the strikers congregate out there before the Federal men get here. I think Reilly should —"

Old John cut him off. "The Government men'll be

here in a few minutes. They phoned from the city; they're driving down. The ore train caboose is too slow for those fellows." The old man crowed, bragging about the strength and virility and acumen of the Government men — his Government men — who were coming in to break these dirty baugnite muckers.

Harford Rand said, "Here they come." He had been looking out the back window. "There are six of them." He turned, faced John Alastair. "Now, John. You've got another hour — before the meeting — to decide what you're going to do. But mind this: I am not going to unionize my mines to get your daughter back."

Mac asked, "You don't mind kicking a man when he's down?"

"John Alastair would kick me to hell and back if I were down," Harford Rand said. "I'd have owned this county, lock, stock and barrel, if he hadn't foraged for his half of it all these years."

The back door opened and six men came in. The leader said: "I'm Nary, agent-in-charge. There's been a kidnapping here?"

"What the hell d'ya think we sent for you for?" Old John blared. "Those wobblies took my daughter to make me settle with them."

Nary looked at him suspiciously. "Have there been any ransom notes?"

"Nothing overt," Alastair said. "But yesterday when they sent their committee, a big, scar-faced brute kept using my daughter's scarf to wipe his face."

"They won't hurt her, Mr. Alastair," Nary said. "They're not professionals . . . And there, sir, is the rub. We haven't any *modus operandi* for these matters. I mean, we are accustomed to dealing with criminals."

"Ah, what do you think these wolves out there are?" Alastair snapped. "Amateurs?"

"Mr. Alastair, I'll have to ask you to remember that, while we're here to help you, we are not your employees," Nary said.

"Ah, Mac, you talk to them," Old John said.

Mac said, "You'll pardon Mr. Alastair. Naturally he's overwrought. Now, I'd suggest this. You gentlemen are armed and you have a certain prestige . . . The mob out there is not as large as it's going to be. Have your men stay on the edge of town, and towards four — when we are to meet the committee, and the mob will be largest, — have them start walking in. Bottle this crowd up in the square outside here and then you go out to that window and announce that if

their leaders don't give up Miss Alastair, there'll be trouble."

"That can't do any harm," Nary said, after a moment. "You understand, we shall not act till we're sure there has been an offense. Men, come here. This is a map of the town."

Mac took him over, showed him where the workers lived and watched Nary dispatch men to different spots. So far it had worked wonderfully.

Mac drifted to the window, looked down. He recognized a labor reporter from the Associated Press and two Federated Press men. The rest of the newspaper men were probably down there too; he just didn't know them.

Nary's agents left, and the head Federal took a chair in front of the map and mused over it.

Old John said, "I've written to your father, Mac. I'm asking for the loan of you. Ten thousand a year and complete charge of Alastair operations. As soon as we settle this mess outside, I'm going to retire."

Mac shrugged. "Well, thanks —" the game was running out; his role was over. Another half hour. His mind pictured the town; Nannic's dining room, and the strike committee there, tensed, ready to go; unnecessarily repeating urgent instructions to each other.

He pictured the G-men, walking in from the edges of town, looking like detectives, of course.

"Reilly," he said, "where are the deputies posted?"

"Every place we could get an upstairs window around the square here," Reilly said.

Alastair snapped: "Shut up!" The Federal men had been listening, curious.

Forrest went over and planted himself in front of his father. "If Mac takes charge of the plant, where do I fit in, Father?"

"You fit into a mighty small place," his father said deliberately. "Just like you always did. I got no use for weaklings, just because I sired one."

Old John was wound up. "Forrest, if you ran this operation, you'd give that scum outside all the things I'm about to refuse them forever. You're weak as water." He snarled. "After this the union'll be outlawed in Ware County till hell freezes over!"

Nary wheeled from the map, and said, "The Department isn't a strikebreaking organization, you know, Mr. Alastair."

"There's been a kidnapping, I tell you!" Old John blared.

"Nevertheless, we are not supposed to act unless the operation has crossed a state line" Nary was very smooth.

"State line, hell!" John Alastair said. "The nearest state line is fifty miles. They got my daughter here in town. What'd you come down here for if you're going to refuse to —"

"It's our policy to do everything possible in the case of a kidnapping. But we're not forced to aid the local authorities unless —"

"You another of these labor-lovers?" Old John asked. "That mob out there killed the sheriff and his chief deputy."

"If it seems advisable to act, we shall do so as Mr. Reilly's deputies, then."

"Only five minutes more," Rand said.

Nary got up and went to the window; so did Forrest Alastair.

Harford Rand went over and leaned on John Alastair's desk. A sign from Old John brought Mac up to the edge of the desk. "We've fought each other for a long time, Alastair," Harford Rand said, softly. "You've fought dirty as hell a few times."

"You were never any lily, Harford," Old John said.

Rand snorted. "Nevertheless, I got you where I want you. I never liked sharing authority in this county with a mucker like you; an axe-pick wielder. If this thing of yours goes wrong, and you have to close with the union to get your daughter back, count me

out. I gave you twenty-four hours to pull this stunt, and that's all." He closed his mouth like a trap.

"Mac," Old John said, "after this trouble, drop the price of baugnite two dollars. Mr. Rand is a little overextended in real estate. We'll see how he likes running at a loss for a while."

"Here comes the committee," Forrest said.

And here I go, Mac thought. Farewell to Warren MacBlair, the "millionaire's son." Farewell to Sue, and a lot of things. I wonder where they'll send me next!

The building shook to the thudding of work shoes on the stairs, and the committee came in. Lawrence had Sue Alastair's scarf — a little soiled now — knotted around his neck. He looked at Nary and said to Old John: "Who's that?"

"You run Sam Perrine out, didn't you? This fella's the law."

"Too bad about Perrine," Lawrence said. "The crowd got out of hand. I didn't want him tarred; I wanted to leave him presentable so he'd go to some paper in the city and tell about the murdering deals he's pulled for you . . . Let's get down to business. You accept our terms?"

Nary had turned away from the window. Mac went over and stood by the map.

"I accept nothing," John Alastair said, "until my daughter's returned. I won't be coerced."

"We haven't got your —" Lawrence began. Then he shook his head. "Might as well talk turkey. We have Miss Alastair, and unless you give in —" He snarled, suggestively.

Mac, by the map, moved his hand stealthily from the edge of Ware County out across the state line and back. He did it twice before Lawrence blinked to show he'd seen. "She's safe," he said. "She spent last night across the river, in the next state."

Nary jumped. "Ever hear of the Lindbergh Law, you fool?" he asked. "I'm from the Department of Justice."

Lawrence blustered, stammered, apologized, until Old John cut him short. "You've got your confession," he roared at Nary. "Now let's see some of this action the movies talk about."

Nary looked sad, but he went to the window, held his hands up. "I'm from the Federal Bureau of Investigation," he called down to the crowds. He had a lot of silence to go on in. "The committee handling this strike has held Miss Alastair prisoner, and has taken her across a State line . . . My men are on the edge of the crowd, and they're armed. No one will leave this square until we complete our investigation." He

turned back, his gun out. "You, with the scar on your face there. Phone someone to release this girl!"

Lawrence was grinning now. "O.K." He went to the window, pushed Reilly aside, bellowed: "Sue. Hey, Sue!"

They were all in the window now, pushing each other aside. And they saw Sue Alastair climbing out of a dirty, dusty car. She had an escort of two men; they pushed her up to the top of the car. "I was never kidnapped," she almost screamed. "This is just another one of my father's tricks to break the union. He tried to get the Department of Justice to pull his chestnuts out of the fire this time, but it didn't work. Because I'm as sick of the way my father and Harford Rand run this county as you are. I demand a Union!"

The crowd was slow to get it all but when they did they went wild.

Nary turned to John Alastair: "A man who'd use his own daughter —" He almost flung out of the office down the stairs.

Old John put his hand up and ripped the collar of his bull neck. Forrest hurried up with a glass of water.

Harford Rand said, bitterly, "I had no part in this. Alastair fooled me, too. You can't —"

"Yes, you did," Mac said. "I heard you and Mr. Alastair plotting this. I shall tell the papers so."

John Alastair knocked the water out of his son's hand and shouted: "*You*, Mac?"

"I was sent in here by the Union after Sam Perrine killed young Gowan. I'm an organizer."

Old John nodded. He was very quiet. After a while he said, "Tell Sue to come up."

Lawrence shouted down, "Sue. Come up here, please!"

The old man didn't even wince at the sound of Lawrence calling his daughter by her first name. When the girl came in, Old John got some of his bluster back. "They had to use my own daughter to break me, eh?" he growled. "I wanted you to hear this, Sue. I'm giving in."

"Not me," Harford Rand said.

"If you think you've heard the last from those G-men, you're crazy," Mac said. "You'd better sign, I'm telling you, Mr. Rand, or I'll testify that you all framed this, and that it went sour on you."

Rand said, "See me in my office later." And he got out. He looked sour.

"That's that," Lawrence said. "The Union wants to thank you, Mac."

"Why did you do it, Sue?" Old John asked. "Do you love this Mac whatever-his-name is? Or — is it — do you hate me?"

"We're going to get married, dad."

"We aren't," Mac said. "I'm sticking with the slums."

"You'll marry her," Old John said. "That's a girl that gets her way . . . So you think you've got me licked?" he asked suddenly.

He straightened his old shoulders, glared at them. "Well, you're wrong. I won in the end. When I was a kid the way to get ahead was to make a lot of money. I made it. I wanted power — I got it. But I'm passing it along. The new way to have power — the new men who run things, — are going to be the heads of unions." He chortled. "Times change, but it's still the same old whip hand. And if you men think you're going to run this union, you're crazy. An Alastair'll run it," he said. "Sue Alastair. What the hell else can a man ask for his children except a spot at the top of things?"

He stopped and his grin was evil as he looked at Mac. "She'll run you, too, Mac. You're a good boy, even if you are a dirty fighter . . . But you know," John Alastair said, "twenty, twenty-five years from now, when you're the President of a Union, and gettin' smug — you know, I wonder what your kids are going to revolt against?"

Nobody had an answer ready for that one.

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started writing the hard way: doing copy for newspaper advertisements and publicity. He wrote ten million words of copy before he started writing fiction. Among his early works are seventeen books written under the not-unknown pen name of Nick Carter. He wrote all seventeen in ten weeks.

Since then he has published innumerable short stories and novelettes in various magazines, and two murder-mystery novels, *The Man with the Wax Face,* and *The Communist's Corpse.*

Mr. Wormser now lives in California, on a ranch where he can indulge his passion for horses. With him are his wife, Ann Cockrell Wormser, who also writes, his two children, and his wife's father, Judge Ewing Cockrell, well-known writer and criminologist. From time to time others of the writing Cockrells, Marian, Francis, and Eustis, are there. The children write, but not for publication, so the only member of the family not a writer is the Siamese cat.