

DEATH HAS TWO HANDS

Robert C. Blackmon

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The apartment lights struck gold in her hair. Her dark-blue eyes were wide, and there was fierce determination in the set of her chin and small red mouth. Her slim, blue-clad figure was quivering, but the little blue automatic gripped in her right hand was steady.

It was aimed at Detective Bill Moran's stomach.

A muscle twitched at the corner of her mouth. She backed away quickly, as Moran stepped into the apartment and pushed the door shut.

A tall, lean man in a shiny blue serge suit, black hat and scuffed black shoes, the detective was grinning; but there was a wariness beneath the grin. His rusty-brown eyes watched the gun, and he held both hands in sight. The knuckles of his hands were scarred.

"I'm Detective Bill Moran, Miss Trent, sent here in answer to your call for a policeman tonight."

He said that slowly, wanting her to understand every word. Her fingers relaxed about the gun butt and he lifted the left lapel of his jacket, exposing the gold badge pinned to his vest.

"I...I had to be careful." Wilma Trent made an aimless gesture with the little automatic. Her forefinger was on the trigger. "I've always heard that death had two hands. I didn't know what it meant. I do now. One hand of death is reaching for my brother Frank in the prison at midnight, tonight. The other hand is reaching for me, now!"

She gestured with the little gun again, and curly brown hair lifted under Moran's black hat, as the muzzle lined up with his eyes.

Moving quickly, he crossed the apartment and took the gun from Wilma Trent's unresisting fingers. The safety was off.

"We'd better put this away before it goes off and hurts somebody." Pushing the safety lever, he tucked the little automatic into his pocket. "Now, suppose you tell me about it."

Wilma Trent dropped into an overstuffed chair as though her slim silken legs wouldn't hold her up any longer. Moran sat on the edge of the nearby davenport.

"My brother Frank is to be electrocuted in the prison tonight at midnight for a murder he didn't do. I can prove he didn't do it. I Here, read this."

She extended her left hand, a crumpled envelope in it. Moran saw, after straightening the envelope, that it was addressed in pencil to Miss Wilma Trent, Fairview Apartments, There was no stamp. The letter read:

Dear Miss Trent:

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Your brother, Frank, didn't knock off that guy, and he didn't get the fifty thousand dollars that's missing. I know how it happened. I heard the guys that did it talking in a beer parlor. They would kill me if they knew I wrote this. You get the cops and bring them here, and I'll tell everything if the cops promise to see I won't get killed. I am doing this because I can't let a guy burn for something he didn't do.

Yours truly,
Charlie Ricker,
Room 231, Eagle Hotel.

"A little boy brought that about thirty minutes before you didn't knock off that guy, and he didn't get the fifty thousand dollars that's missing. I know how it happened. I heard the guys that did it talking in a beer parlor. They would kill me if they knew I wrote this. You get the cops and bring them here, and I'll tell everything if the cops promise to see I won't get killed. I am doing this because I can't let a guy burn for something he didn't do. Yours truly, Charlie Ricker, Room 231, Eagle Hotel.

"A little boy brought that about thirty minutes before you came." Wilma Trent talked rapidly, breathlessly. "He got away before I could read it. My first thought was to go to the Eagle Hotel. I was about to leave when someone tried the apartment door without knocking. The door was locked, so he didn't get in. After what the letter said, I was scared. I called the police. Whoever it was in the hall stopped trying the door. That's why I had the gun when you came. I was afraid you might be one of the men Charlie Ricker said would kill him and that you were after me. Frank gave me the gun years ago. I would use it on anyone, on you, if that would keep Frank from—tonight." Her voice broke. She started to her feet. "We've got to hurry to—"

"Wait!"

Moran thrust the letter into the side pocket of his coat, got to his feet and strode toward the telephone, which was on a small table near the apartment door.

"I'll have the police block off the Eagle Hotel," he called over his shoulder as he reached for the telephone. "That way, nothing can happen to Charlie Ricker before we—"

He stopped talking abruptly, the receiver at his ear. Thick brown brows met over his suddenly narrowed eyes. There was no sound at all in the telephone receiver. The phone was dead.

Hard lights started burning deep in Moran's eyes. His mouth set grimly. His mind was churning.

Frank Trent, Wilma's brother, had been one of two clerks in Donald Rayburn's brokerage office. Rayburn had returned to the office one afternoon about four months ago and had found one clerk dead with a crushed skull, Frank Trent gone and fifty thousand dollars in negotiable securities missing. He called the cops.

Frank Trent was picked up an hour later near the Central Railroad Terminal. He said Rayburn had telephoned him to go to an address near the terminal, but Rayburn had been lunching with two customers and couldn't have telephoned. Trent claimed to know nothing about the missing securities and they had never been found. He protested his innocence all through the trial. The prosecution brought out the fact that he had been gambling for several years, losing much more oftener than he won. Rayburn, on the stand, had expressed a belief that Trent was innocent. The jury decided otherwise. Trent was scheduled to burn at midnight tonight for murder. It was around nine o'clock now.

Moran's frown deepened.

The letter could be a bright stunt that Wilma Trent was pulling to delay her brother's execution. The someone trying to enter her apartment, presumably after the letter, and the dead telephone could be parts of that plan.

But if the letter was on the level and there was a Charlie Ricker, Ricker was in real danger. Wilma Trent herself was in danger. The person or persons who had tried to enter her apartment could be waiting for the girl to leave, waiting to kill her and get the letter. If Moran could get the girl out of the apartment without being seen, get her to the Eagle Hotel and talk to Charlie Ricker—

"Where's the fire escape?" Moran's eyes were glistening.

"At the end of the hall." Wilma Trent came to her feet, pointing with her left hand. Her eyes went to the telephone receiver, which Moran hadn't bothered to replace. The color drained from her small, oval face, leaving

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islands of rouge. Her eyes seemed to become larger. "You don't mean they cut—" The sharp whisper of a key being slid into the lock of the apartment door made Moran spin away from the telephone table! The realization that Wilma Trent was not playing a studied role drove him into rapid action.

Two long, quick strides took him to the girl. A thrust of his left hand pushed her, squealing in fright, in between the overstuffed chair and the davenport.

"Get down on the floor behind the chair and stay there!" he snapped, and at the same instant leaped away from the girl, toward the other side of the room. As he moved, his right hand flipped the heavy service gun from its holster under his left arm.

Even as he came around to face the apartment door, it flung wide open and he saw two men in the opening.

The two men were of about the same size, slightly built. Both wore smartly cut blue suits and gray snapbrims. Moran had never seen either of them before. They stood shoulder to shoulder in the doorway, both holding heavy blued automatics. Moran saw the two guns come up and swing toward him. Above the two weapons, the eyes of the two men were hard and bright and merciless—the eyes of killers!

Moran fired deliberately at the nearest man, and the gun roar blasted deafeningly in the apartment! Flame licked out from the doorway as the second man fired. The slug flicked Moran's black hat from his head. Through the haze, he saw the first man drop his gun and clutch at his chest with both hands. There was red on his thin fingers. His legs started folding beneath his slight body.

The second man drove another slug at Moran, but the shot went wild as the detective's second bullet caught the man squarely in the knot of his tie, even as he fired. He dropped his gun, folded at the middle as though to make a very deep bow, then went on over on his face and fell in the doorway, half in the apartment and half in the hall.

Moran became aware of the fact that Wilma Trent was screaming shrilly, a high, thin sound that made him squint his eyes. He didn't remember hearing her scream before, though she had been screaming since the first shot was fired. He crossed the apartment toward the two men on the floor, stepping lightly for all of his solid weight. His gun was up and poised warily.

The first man, in the outside hall, was entirely silent and motionless. He was dead. The second man was twitching oddly and making wet, choking sounds. He would be dead within a few seconds.

Moran heeled around and ran toward the chair behind which Wilma Trent was crouching. The girl was still screaming. She started fighting wildly, blindly, as Moran caught her arm and pulled her to her feet. He shook her, hard.

"Come on!" he all but yelled in her ear. "There might be others! We've got to get to Charlie Ricker before—"

He stopped yelling and, pulling Wilma Trent along, ran toward the apartment door. She stopped screaming as he forced her to step over the dying man in the doorway. Hurrying her out into the hallway, he urged her to the left, toward an open window at the end of the dimly lighted passage.

Two men and a woman were in the hallway, standing outside open doors, staring. Moran yelled loudly and waved the gun in his right fist. The men and the woman popped back through their respective doors, clearing the hallway almost instantly.

Moran grinned tightly and rushed Wilma Trent on along the hall to the window and helped her out onto the iron platform of the fire escape. Her heels clicked sharply on the iron as he hurried her down the structure. Then he was pulling her along the uneven pavement of the alley that ran along the rear of the Fairview Apartments building.

"My car's parked in front," he panted as they reached the street. "We'll get it and head for the Eagle Hotel before the homicide gang gets here. They'd hold us for hours before—"

"Miss Trent"

A short, dapper man in a gray suit and hat stepped out of a shiny blue sedan parked at the curb near the alley mouth and came across the sidewalk toward them. He looked about forty years old.

"Mr. Rayburn!" Wilma Trent broke away from Moran and ran across the sidewalk to the man. "Mr. Rayburn, I have a letter that proves Frank didn't do it! A man at the Eagle Hotel sent it! He said—"

Moran crossed the sidewalk, caught the girl's arm and thrust her toward Rayburn's sedan. A siren was wailing in the distance, coming toward the Fairview Apartments.

"Your car's handier than mine right now, Rayburn," Moran said rapidly as he opened the rear door and helped

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Wilma Trent into the car. "Take us to the Eagle Hotel over on Fourth Street, fast. Frank Trent's life might depend on it."

"Certainly. Certainly! I'll do anything I can to help Frank Trent."

As he talked, Rayburn had the sedan moving, pulled it out from the curb and fed gas with a heavy foot. Traffic was very light.

"I never did believe Frank Trent was guilty," Rayburn said sharply above the noise of the car. "I did everything I could to help him. I was on my way to see Miss Trent when you two came out of the alley. I was going to take her to talk personally with the governor tonight. Perhaps if she talked with him—"

Rayburn lifted thick, gray-clad shoulders and crouched lower over the sedan wheel. He sent the big car skidding around a corner and into Fourth Street. Wilma Trent gasped sharply and caught at the seat back to steady herself.

"What happened back there?" Rayburn all but shouted as the sedan roared along Fourth Street.

Moran told him, finishing brusquely:

"So Frank Trent is innocent. Charlie Ricker can clear him. We'll take Ricker to headquarters, get his story, then telephone the governor. The Eagle Hotel is along here somewhere."

Wilma Trent was crying, clinging to the seat back.

"It's just ahead."

Rayburn sent the big sedan swooping in to the curb before a painted wooden sign over a door—way. The sign read:

EAGLE HOTEL ROOMS \$1.00 UP

Moran led the way up the gritty, uncarpeted stairway. Rayburn and the girl followed. The girl was still crying. Moran strode along the dimly lighted second-floor hallway, found Room 231 and raked his hard knuckles across the dingy panels. Rayburn and the girl stopped beside him.

No one answered Moran's knock and he tried the door. The knob turned and the door opened. He stepped into the room. A low whisper pushed out through his suddenly clenched teeth and he felt sweat come out on his face.

Light from the street outside filtered into the room through the dirty panes of the single window. The light showed the tumbled covers of a chipped white iron bed in the far corner of the room. A man, fully clothed, was lying on the bed's rumpled covers. He lay on his back, his mouth wide open. The side of his face toward Moran was streaked with dark streamers of blood. There was no movement at all about the man.

Stiffly, Moran crossed the room and stood beside the bed. In the dim light coming in through the window, he could see that the side of the prone man's head had been crushed in. The man was dead. Moran knew that without an examination.

The words Wilma Trent had spoken in her apartment flashed through his mind: "Death has two hands!" The saying, he thought fleetingly, was wrong. Death has many hands. Those hands had already touched three men tonight. They might touch others before the night was gone.

Behind him, Wilma Trent made a gagging sound. Moran turned. "Good heavens, officer!" Rayburn had stopped in the doorway, between Wilma Trent and the room. "He...he's dead!"

Wilma Trent screamed once, chokingly, Then she started calling her brother's name over and over. There was hysteria in her voice.

Moran left the bed and went across the room toward Rayburn, in the doorway. White lines were pulled tautly about the detective's mouth.

"It's a cinch now," he said grimly, "that Frank Trent is innocent!"

"Look." Rayburn made a gesture with both plump hands as Moran reached him. "I've known all along that Frank Trent didn't do it. The governor is at his country place. It's only forty miles from here. My car's right outside. We could take Miss Trent there and show him the letter Ricker wrote. He couldn't help but issue a stay of execution after this." Rayburn's round head ducked toward the bed in the room beyond. "It would give us enough time for a thorough investigation. It's almost ten o'clock, now so if anything's going to be done before Frank Trent goes to— It happens at midnight, you know."

"All right. We'll try it. I've got a lot of explaining to do already, but it's worth it."

Moran pushed past Rayburn into the hall, caught Wilma Trent's arm and led her toward the stairway. The girl walked blindly. She was whispering her brother's name over and over as Moran helped her down the stairway and

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across the sidewalk to Rayburn's car at the curb.

"You drive, officer." Rayburn opened the right front door, motioned with a plump hand. "The governor's place is out on Highway 76, You probably know where it is. I'd feel a lot better if you'd—"

"Right." Moran slid across the front seat and under the wheel. He was frowning.

Rayburn helped Wilma Trent onto the front seat beside the detective and closed the door. The securities dealer got into the back of the sedan.

Moran pulled the sedan out from the curb, driving fast. Wilma Trent huddled on the front seat beside him and cried silently, her hands over her face. Her slender body was jerking. Rayburn, on the back seat, was silent.

They left the city limits behind and went out Highway 76. Moran's right foot pressed harder and harder on the gas pedal and the sedan's speedometer needle touched eighty on the dial. After a moment, it had passed eighty and crept around toward ninety, then ninety-five. Moran's knuckles showed whitely as he gripped the wheel rim. Muscles knotted at the angle of his jaws, as he stared at the light-struck ribbon of pavement streaming toward them. There were no other cars on the road. An occasional filling station shot past, a streaking blur of lights in the darkness.

Moran's lips set into a straight, grim line.

Death might have two hands, or many but, barring accidents, none of those hands would touch Wilma Trent's brother tonight. The governor couldn't do anything but order a stay of execution after reading the letter and learning of Charlie Ricker's death and the other two deaths tonight. And he, Bill Moran, was going to have to explain a lot of things—leaving the Fairview Apartments before the police came, not reporting Charlie Ricker's death, taking Rayburn and Wilma Trent to the governor. But the hell he was going to catch would be worth it, if Frank Trent's life were saved.

"Miss Trent," Donald Rayburn yelled above the roar of the sedan motor and the rush of wind about the car, "would you let me see that letter? Perhaps I might see something in it that you missed."

Wilma Trent gave no sign that she had heard Rayburn.

"I've got it."

Driving with one hand, Moran fished the letter from his coat pocket. He held it up and Rayburn took it. Moran kept his eyes on the road. The sedan's speedometer needle was quivering past the ninety-five mark. Moran put both hands on the quivering wheel and turned most of his attention to driving. A part of his mind still struggled with the questions of who had killed Charlie Ricker, who had sent the two killers to Wilma Trent's apartment.

The two killers he had shot wouldn't have had time to kill Ricker. There was a third man, possibly more. Wilma Trent had received Ricker's letter only thirty minutes before he, Moran, had arrived at the apartment. Ricker's name, apparently, hadn't figured in the thing until the arrival of the letter.

The killers could have got Ricker's name and address from the boy who brought the letter. They were, then, watching the apartment. The third man had gone to the Eagle Hotel to get Ricker. The two killers had cut the telephone wire to be sure Wilma Trent and Moran couldn't summon outside help. Then they'd got a key, opened the door, intending to blast both of them to—

A change in the whistling roar of the speed-born wind about the sedan broke into Moran's thoughts. For a moment, he thought little of it, then knew it had been caused by lowering a window somewhere in the sedan, Wilma Trent was still huddled on the seat beside him, her hands over her face, crying.

Glancing up at the broad rear-view mirror, he saw Donald Rayburn's figure leaning over toward the side of the car. He heard the dry rasp of tearing paper, but the sound made no impression on him for moments. Then realization struck with the force of a hard physical blow.

He knew, now, who had sent the two hard-eyed killers whom he had shot in Wilma Trent's apartment. He knew who had killed Charlie Ricker—and why.

Donald Rayburn had torn Charlie Ricker's letter into bits and was feeding the paper scraps out through the open window of the sedan! The pieces of the letter would be scattered over a mile of the highway. No one could ever fit the pieces together again. The letter that was to have saved Frank Trent was being destroyed entirely. It was as if Rayburn were actually throw-ing Frank Trent's life from the sedan window!

Instantly, the puzzling happenings of the past hour formed themselves into a grim and vicious pattern in Moran's mind. Death, he knew now, did have two hands. Those two hands were the two plump fists of Donald Rayburn!

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Cold sweat beaded on Moran's face. He could feel his stomach muscles mass into a cold, hard knot. Charlie Ricker's letter was gone. There was nothing he could do now to save it. Any move on his part, now, with the big sedan traveling at ninety-five miles an hour, would result in a quick and unpleasant death for all of them. A car couldn't be stopped at that speed for hundreds of feet. Clamping down suddenly on the brakes would mean a wreck.

He touched the brake pedal with his left foot, eased up with his right on the gas. The lights of another filling station blurred past and were gone. The sedan started losing speed slowly.

Donald Rayburn threw the last of the paper scraps through the window and yelled shrilly:

"Keep going! Don't stop!"

In the mirror, Moran saw him claw frantically at a side pocket of his gray coat, then saw a gun in Rayburn's hand. He could see the man's round white face in the mirror. His eyes held the hard, bright mercilessness that Moran had seen in the eyes of the two killers in Wilma Trent's apartment.

Rayburn leaned forward and pressed the cold muzzle of the gun against the back of Moran's neck.

"Keep going, or I'll shoot!" There was a shrill, frantic note in Rayburn's voice. Moran could feel the gun trembling against his neck.

"Go ahead and shoot!" Moran yelled. "We're making eighty. If I die, well go in the ditch!"

Rayburn swore, his voice as high and as thin as a woman's. The gun muzzle left Moran's neck. He saw Rayburn move in the mirror.

"I'll kill the girl!" Rayburn screamed. He pressed the muzzle of the gun against the back of Wilma Trent's blond head. Moran's mouth went dry and brassy.

"You've got me," he said grimly. He took his foot off the brake pedal, but did not press down on the gas. The speedometer needle clung at eighty. "Now what?"

"Go on until I tell you to slow down." Rayburn held the gun against Wilma Trent's head. Moran could see his face in the mirror, drawn and white. "There's a side road about two or three miles ahead. Turn the sedan into that side road and go until I tell you to stop, then—" Rayburn stopped talking. Moran saw him lick his lips in the mirror.

"You can't get away with killing Miss Trent and me, Rayburn," Moran said steadily. His right foot eased up on the gas pedal, and the speedometer needle dropped away from eighty, crept backward toward seventy. "I can!" Rayburn almost screamed the words. "No one saw you two come out of the alley and get in my car. No one saw us at the Eagle Hotel. The two gunmen were from out of town. They can't talk, now. They're dead. Just the three of us know, I—Slow down. The side road's just a short distance ahead, to the left. If you try anything, I'll shoot the girl, then you!"

Moran eased up on the gas pedal and the speedometer needle dropped to fifty. He was frowning, staring at the light-washed pavement. His mind was racing.

"Slower!" Rayburn commanded shrilly. "The side road's about a hundred yards ahead."

Moran glanced at Wilma Trent from the corner of his eye. The girl, apparently, was still oblivious of what was happening. She huddled slackly on the front seat, her hands over her face. Rayburn's gun muzzle was almost touching the top of her head. Moran's lips tightened.

Abruptly, he took his right foot off the gas pedal and jammed it down on the brake, with all of his solid weight behind it. The sedan's speed checked suddenly and the car went into a dry skid with a tortured howl of tires!

Jerked forward by the sudden braking, Wilma Trent tumbled off the front seat. Her head struck the dash a glancing blow and she fell to the front floor boards. She was screaming as she fell.

Even while she was falling, Rayburn fired. The slug went inches over her head and smashed a round, web-rimmed hole in the windshield. Momentum slammed Rayburn into the back of the front seat, hard. He yelled and fired again, wildly. The slug clanged into the metal top of the sedan.

Moran, shoving himself up out of the front seat with his right foot on the brake, twisted around as far as he could and tried to hit Rayburn in the face with his left fist. The position was awkward and he missed; but his knuckles drove into Rayburn's right shoulder, knocked him sprawling in the rear compartment. The violent movement jerked Moran's foot off the brake, and he slipped down in the front seat. His foot hit the gas pedal.

Bucking under the sudden braking, the sedan leaped forward as the motor started roaring. Driverless, the car headed for the ditch on the left side of the road. Its speed seemed to double for each foot it traveled.

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Wilma Trent, jammed down in the front compartment, was screaming shrilly. Rayburn, in the back compartment, was cursing frantically and trying to scramble to his knees for another shot at Moran. The detective twisted, got his knees up on the seat and started slugging at Rayburn's head with both fists. He felt the jolt of two blows; then the front of the car dropped suddenly as it went into the ditch. Moran gripped instinctively at the seat back.

There was a rending crash. and the car stopped suddenly! The horn started howling as Moran, flung forward, sat down on the steering wheel with a jar that made his teeth bang together. He heard Rayburn yell in pain, heard Wilma Trent screaming.

Driven by the fear of fire, Moran pawed for the left-door handle, found it and flung the door open.

The sedan was cocked up at a crazy angle, its front end in the ditch, its rear wheels up on the road embankment. Its lights, still burning, showed crushed weeds and the raw earth of the ditch bank.

The horn stopped blowing, and there was nothing but Wilma Trent's frightened whimpering and Rayburn's yells of pain as Moran scrambled out through the open doorway. There was an inch of mud and water in the ditch. Sloshing in it, Moran pulled Wilma Trent from the car and set her on her feet. The girl was crying, but she didn't seem to be injured.

Moran got the back door open. Rayburn was jammed up against the back of the front seat, one leg twisted under his short body. He was yelling and pawing at the seat back with both plump hands. Neither hand held a gun. His left cheek was gashed and blood streamed down the side of his face, staining his collar. Grasping Rayburn's left arm, Moran pulled him from the car. Rayburn screamed thinly in pain. His right leg trailed awkwardly. It was broken.

Moran carried the screaming securities dealer up to the road shoulder, laid him on the ground and went back to the car. Wilma Trent was standing beside the wreck, whimpering, dazed. Moran pawed around in the rear compartment and found Rayburn's gun. He dropped it into his coat pocket, caught Wilma Trent's arm and led her up the embankment to Rayburn. Rayburn was squirming on the ground and moaning in pain.

"All right, Rayburn." There was the bur of torn steel in Moran's voice as he bent over the man. "This is the end of the trail. You're badly injured. Perhaps you'll die. Miss Trent and I wouldn't shed any tears over that. If you had immediate medical attention—" He stopped, his eyes glistening.

"A doctor! An ambulance! Please!" There was stark terror in Rayburn's pleading. "I'll pay anything! I'll—"

"You'll sign a confession!" Moran said grimly.

He dug an old letter from his pocket, spread it on the broad rear deck of the ditched sedan and wrote rapidly, speaking each word aloud as he wrote it. "I, Donald Rayburn, confess that I hired two killers to murder the clerk who died in my office four months from this date. Frank Trent is entirely innocent of this murder and of stealing the fifty thousand dollars in securities. I stole the securities to cover market losses, then framed Frank Trent. Knowing Wilma Trent would do what she could today to save her brother from the chair tonight, I had the two hired killers watch her apartment. I was with them. When the boy delivered Charlie Ricker's letter to Miss Trent, the two killers and I made him tell where it came from. Leaving the two killers to dispose of Wilma Trent, I went to Charlie Ricker's room in the Eagle Hotel and murdered him to keep him from telling what he knew. Ricker had overheard the two killers and me talking in a beer parlor about our plans tonight. Those plans were to prevent Wilma Trent from doing anything to save Frank Trent from being executed at midnight for a crime he did not commit.

"I arranged the lunch with the two customers on the day the robbery occurred as an alibi for myself. One of the two killers I hired to help me in the plan impersonated me and telephoned Frank Trent, saying I wanted him to meet me near the Central Railroad Terminal. I appeared to assist Frank Trent during the trial, when, in reality, I was doing all I could to see that he was executed for the crime I had committed.

"The stolen securities are hidden in—"

Moran stopped writing, heeled around to Rayburn, who was lying on the ground nearby.

"Where are they?" he asked harshly.

"In a safe-deposit box in the Gate City Bank," Rayburn whimpered. "But a doctor—an ambulance! I can't die! I—"

Quickly, Moran wrote the location of the hidden securities.

"I had just returned from murdering Charlie Ricker when Detective Bill Moran and Wilma Trent came from

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the alley behind the Fairview. The two killers had obtained a key to Miss Trent's apartment and had tried to murder her. But both were shot by Detective Moran. I got Wilma Trent and Moran in my car and took them to the Eagle Hotel, knowing they would find Ricker dead. I then persuaded them to go with me toward the governor's residence, intending to murder them on the highway and dispose of their bodies and Ricker's letter.

"I make this confession of my own free will, without coercion, realizing that I must suffer the consequences of my actions."

Moran finished writing the confession and went over to Rayburn. In the reflected glow from the ditched sedan's headlights, the securities dealer's eyes were fever-bright. He was shaking with pain and terror.

"Sign this right here," Moran snapped, holding the paper and pencil where Rayburn could reach them. "I'll sign it as a witness. After that, we'll see about getting a doctor and an ambulance."

Plump hands jerking, Rayburn scrawled his signature at the bottom of the paper. Moran signed and tucked the paper into his coat pocket.

A little, choked cry from Wilma Trent, who was standing nearby, pulled him around. He saw two headlights some distance down the highway. As they came closer, he saw the red spotlight beneath the headlights. The car behind the lights, he knew, was a State highway patrol car. The time, he judged, was around eleven clock.

"My brother!" Wilma Trent said abruptly. She caught at Moran's arm, her fingers jerking. "Can't we stop that car, go to the governor and—"

"That car," Detective Bill Moran told her gently, "is going to stop anyway, when the men in it see this wreck. You can stop worrying about your brother. Death may have two hands, but neither of them will touch Frank tonight!"

THE END.