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Mr. Smith said, in a pleased way. "Funny business."

Bill and the trooper stepped into the debris and bent down and looked under the twisted wreckage of the stove. Pam and Jerry also came over and looked at it, but they were not sure why.

"A cut tube," Bill said, explaining to the Norths. "A thin metal tube, about—oh, three eighths of an inch in diameter. Sawed through." He paused. "It was a gas tube. It brought gas in from an outside tank to the stove. With it cut, and the gas turned on, gas would fill the room—and this kind of gas has practically no odor. If you walked in you wouldn't notice it—until you struck a match."

"But ——" Pam said.

Bill nodded. "Whoever struck the match would go up with the gas. Which makes it a nice booby trap."

"For Wilming!" Pam said. "In case—in case the other didn't work?"

"Anything would be surer than this trap, I should think," Jerry said. "Unless you were here to make it work. You're forgetting it's tank gas, Bill."

Bill thought a minute and looked more puzzled than before.

"A limited quantity of gas," Jerry pointed out. "Not inexhaustible mains. Gas from the tank fills the room—and leaks out. Perhaps this goes on happening for—oh, say a couple of hours. Then there's no more gas. What remains in the room leaks out. You strike a match—no booby trap. I doubt if you'd have three hours all told. But I should think the whole idea of a booby trap would be to kill while you were somewhere else—

for a good long time. So what's the good?"

Bill shook his head thoughtfully. "It would mean that you would have to fix the time of death pretty accurately," he said. "You'd have to trust that somebody would see the fire start, make a note of the time, and that

you would not only not be there, but not even near by."

Weigand and the Norths looked at the stove, now rather resentfully. It did not explain itself.

"Gas refrigerator, too," Smith said. "Tube on this was all right." He stepped over the tumbled masonry and was now outside the house. "Here's the tank," he said, moving some fallen timbers. "Stove and refrigerator both hooked to it. Well, there's your cause of fire. Incendiary."

"To kill a man," Weigand told him.

Smith looked at him. "Could be, I suppose. Haven't found any man."

"He was already dead," Bill told him.

"Think of that." Mr. Smith was obviously thinking of something else. "Of course, there could be a man around here, at that. Under things." He considered this. "Not if he was dead somewheres else, of course."

Pamela North looked at Mr. Smith with interest. The way he spoke reminded her of something, but she could not remember what.

"Take half a day to go through all this," the trooper said. "Do it tomorrow?"

"I suppose so," Bill Weigand said. He was looking abstractedly at the blackened debris. "I ——" He broke off. He moved suddenly, and bent and picked something up. Then he squatted and began to pull at burned wood. He picked up something else. He stood up and looked at the two things he held. One was—one had been—a silver compact. The other was the metal skeleton and clasp of a woman's purse. He held them toward the Norths.

He said, in a strange, dead voice, "Remember ——" Pam said. "It doesn't have to mean ——" Bill Weigand turned to the trooper. "Not tomorrow," he said, and his voice was harsh. "Now. We'll start. Get more men!"

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