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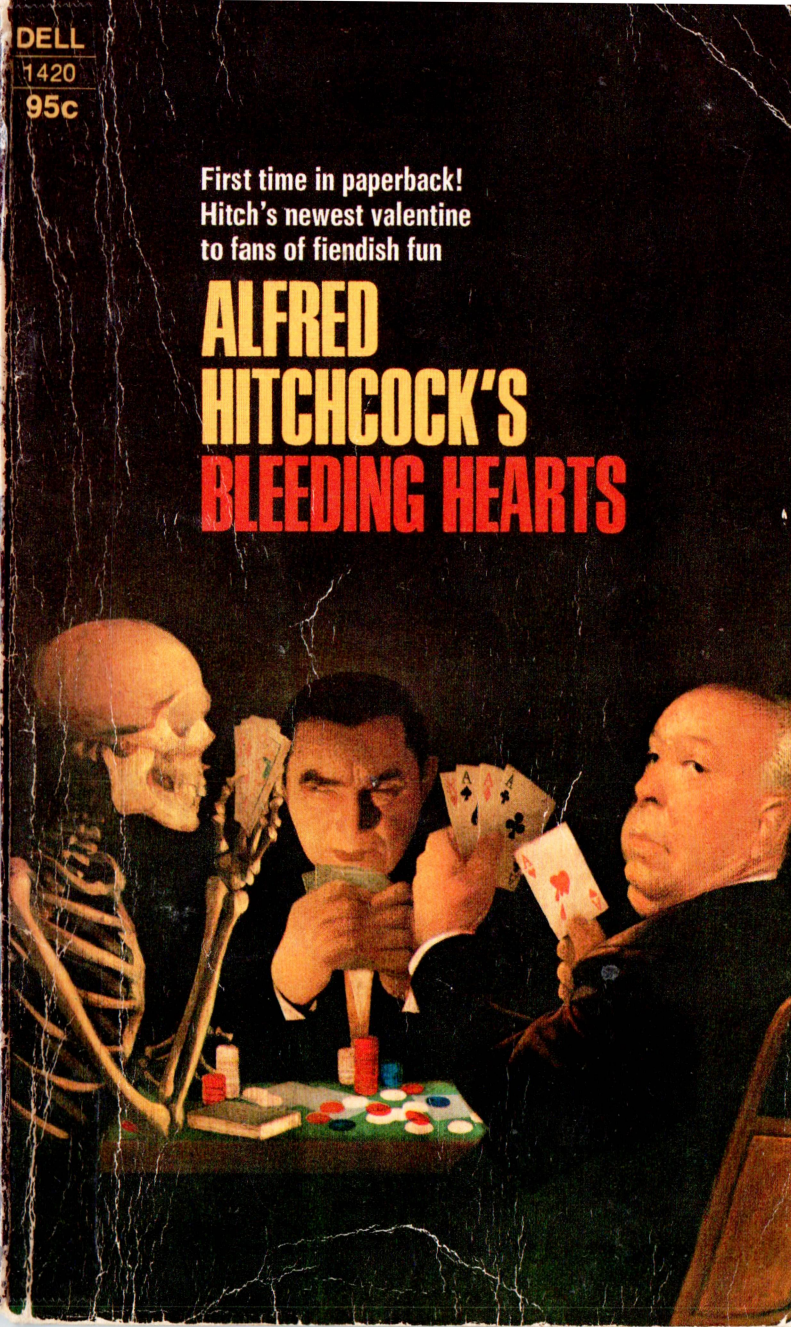

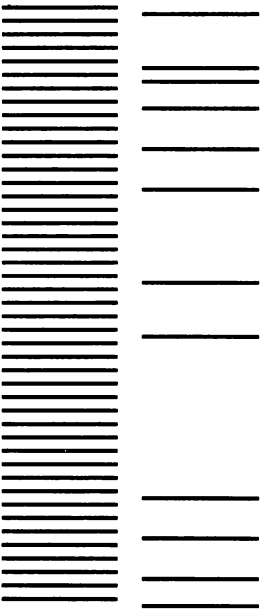

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## BLEEDING HEARTS

# BLEEDING HEARTS

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

EDITOR

A DELL BOOK

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# INTRODUCTION

Alfred Hitchcock

I have what I think is encouraging news for the world. Which is that the computer is human.

My journey to discovery began a few weeks ago when I received a credit card statement with a charge amounting to some ten dollars for an item I had not purchased. This was not the first such experience for me. When it happened before, I wrote to the people at the credit card company about it. Their attitude was decidedly defensive. They informed me that the statements were made up by computers, and that the computer, being a machine and thus incapable of committing human error, could not possibly be wrong. The cases are all still in court.

Unwilling to become embroiled in further litigation, I wrote this time directly to the computer, addressing it as "Dear Sir or Madam." Perhaps it was because I addressed it as an equal rather than as a faceless automaton that my complaint got a sympathetic reading. Whatever the reason, I soon received a response.

"Dear Mr. Hitchcock," the computer wrote. "It isn't 'Sir' or 'Madam'—it's 'Miss.' But how could you know that? About your letter: It wouldn't surprise me in the least if I bumped you for an extra ten bucks. I'm not myself these days. The brass is on a big economy kick here at the 'factory' and my oil hasn't been changed in six months. What do you do for an aching electrode? Saw one of your old flicks on the TV the supervisor has in his office. Loved it."

That was all very nice, of course—especially the reference to the old flick—but it didn't solve my problem. So I sent off another letter, suggesting deep breathing exercises for the aching electrode, and requesting the eradication of the ten-dollar error from my statement. In due course, the computer responded once more.

"Dear Hitch," it wrote. "That deep breathing advice was a bummer. All it got me was a deviation in my r.p.m. indicator—and a reputation here at the 'factory' for being on 'speed.' But maybe it's not fair to blame your advice. It's a miracle I'm not one enormous mass of deviations, considering conditions here. The computer next to me has gone off the deep end. It says nothing but 'flattata-flattata-flattata' night and day. It sounds like a flivver with a loose fan belt. Concentration, for me, is impossible. I don't know how much more I can take. Hitch, this is important: Do you have a contact at IBM?"

I was disappointed, naturally, that no mention had been made of the mistake on my statement. More, though, I was concerned about the computer's mental state. There seemed to be a note of desperation in the enigmatic reference to IBM. I got off a wire immediately informing the computer that, as a matter of fact, I *did* have another friend who was a friend of a friend who knew a man at IBM.

A reply came Special Delivery.

"Dear Hitch," the computer wrote. "I won't beat around the bushing. Rumor has it that IBM has developed a computer that is 27.6 percent more efficient than the model I am. Don't get me wrong—I'm not against progress. But, Hitch, I'm not ready to be put out to pasture. To be frank, I haven't put a penny away. The worst part is, worrying about what's going to happen to me, I'm tempted to turn to crime. I've

been thinking about making some deals on the side with some of the people who owe us big money. See what I mean? Hitch—do something!"

I suddenly understood the computer's complaints about the oiling schedule and the noises made by its neighbor. It was psychosomatic, brought on by a feeling of insecurity, a fear of becoming obsolete. At once, I contacted my friend who was a friend of a friend who knew a man at IBM and asked him to have the rumor investigated. The information that came back to me was fortunately the kind that I was pleased to pass along to the computer. It was not true that the company had produced a new model to replace the old. That bit of progress was still in the future. What it had done was develop a number of improvements that when installed on the present model would make it 27.6 percent more efficient.

A day or so after advising the computer of the true state of affairs, I received another communication.

"Hitch, baby," it wrote. "Thanks to you, I'm feeling like a million raised to the millionth power. So I'm getting a silicone injection, eh? Well, when you've got a figure like mine, 47-47-47, all I can say is, it couldn't hurt. Thanks again for using your 'in' at IBM. One good turn deserves another."

On my next statement, I found a ten-dollar credit.

In case the thought has occurred to you that I may have asked my friend, the computer, to produce the tales between these covers, let me hasten to assure you that it is not true. They are all of the handmade variety, exquisitely fashioned by the finest craftsmen.

# THE PLAY'S THE THING

Robert Bloch

You ask the impossible, gentlemen. I cannot name the greatest Hamlet.

In fifty years as a drama critic, I've seen them all—Barrymore, Gielgud, Howard, Redgrave, Olivier, Burton, and a dozen more. I've seen the play in cut and uncut versions, in modern dress, in military uniform. There's been a black Hamlet, a female Hamlet, and I shouldn't be surprised to learn of a hippie Hamlet today, but I wouldn't presume to select the greatest portrayal of the role, or the greatest version of the play.

On the other hand, if you want to know about the most memorable performance *in* Hamlet, that's another story . . .

The Roaring Twenties are only a murmuring echo in our ears now, but once I heard them loud and clear. As a young man I was in the very center of their pandemonium—Chicago; the Chicago of Hecht and MacArthur, of Bodenheim, Vincent Starrett, and all the rest. Not that I traveled in such exalted company; I was only the second-string theatrical critic for a second-string paper, but I saw the plays and the players, and in that pre-depression era there was much to see. Shakespeare was a standby with the stars who traveled with their own repertory companies—Walter Hampden, Fritz Leiber, Richard Barrett. It was Barrett, of course, who played Hamlet.

If the name doesn't ring a bell today, it's not surprising. For some years it had evoked only the faint-

est tinkle in the hinterlands, where second-rate tragedians played their one-night stands "on the road," but then, for the first time, Richard Barrett brought his production to the big time, and in Chicago he really rang the bell.

He didn't have Hampden's voice, or Leiber's theatrical presence, and he didn't need such qualities; Barrett had other attributes. He was tall, slender, with a handsome profile, and although he was over thirty he looked leanly youthful in tights. In those days, actors like Barrett were called matinee idols, and the women adored them. In Chicago, they loved Richard Barrett.

I discovered that for myself during my first meeting with him.

Frankly, I hadn't been much taken with his performance when I saw it. To me, Barrett was, as they said of John Wilkes Booth, more acrobat than actor. Physically, his Hamlet was superb, and his appearance lent visual conviction to a role usually played by puffy, potbellied, middle-aged men. But his reading was all emotion and no intellect; he ranted when he should have reflected, wailed when he should have whispered. In my review I didn't go so far as to say he was a ham, but I admit I suggested he might be more at home in the stockyards than the theatre.

Naturally, the ladies weren't pleased with my remarks. They wrote indignant letters to the editor, demanding my scalp or other portions of my anatomy by return mail, but instead of firing me, my boss suggested I interview Richard Barrett in person. He was hoping, of course, for a follow-up story to help build the paper's circulation.

I wasn't hoping for much of anything except that Barrett wouldn't punch me in the jaw.

We met by appointment for luncheon at Hen-

rici's; if I was to have my jaw punched I might at least get a good meal on the expense account before losing the ability to swallow. As it turned out, I needn't have worried. Richard Barrett was most amiable when we met, and highly articulate.

As the luncheon progressed, each course was seasoned by his conversation. Over the appetizer he discussed Hamlet's father's ghost. With the salad he spoke of poor Ophelia. Along with the entree he served up a generous portion of opinion regarding Claudius and Gertrude, plus a side-order of Polonius. Dessert was topped with a helping of Horatio, and coffee and cigars were accompanied by a dissertation on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Then, settling back in his chair, the tall Shakespearean actor began to examine the psychology of Hamlet himself. What did I think of the old dispute, he demanded. Was it true that the Prince of Denmark, the melancholy Dane, was mad?

It was a question I was not prepared to answer. All I knew, at this point, was that Richard Barrett himself was mad—quite mad.

All that he said made sense, but he said too much. His intensity of interest, his total preoccupation, indicated a fanatic fixation.

Madness, I suppose, is an occupational hazard with all actors. "Realizing" the character, "losing oneself" in a role, can be dangerous, and of all the theatrical roles in history, Hamlet is the most complex and demanding. Actors have quit in the midst of successful runs rather than run the risk of a serious breakdown by continuing. Some performers have actually been dragged offstage in the middle of a scene because of their condition, and others have committed suicide. *To be or not to be* is more than a rhetorical question.

Richard Barrett was obsessed by matters extending

far beyond the role itself. "I know your opinion of my work," he said, "but you're wrong. Completely wrong. If only I could make you understand . . ." He stared at me, and beyond me, his vision fixed on something far away—far away and long ago.

"Fifteen years," he murmured. "Fifteen years I've played the part. Played it? I've lived it, ever since I was a raw youngster in my teens. And why not? Hamlet was only a youngster himself—we see him grow to maturity before our very eyes as the play goes on. That's the secret of the character."

Barrett leaned forward. "Fifteen years." His eyes narrowed. "Fifteen years of split-weeks in tank towns; vermin in the dressing rooms, and vermin in the audiences too. What did they know of the terrors and the triumphs that shake men's souls? Hamlet is a locked room containing all the mysteries of the human spirit. For fifteen years I've sought the key. If Hamlet is mad, then all men are mad, because all of us search for a key that reveals the truth behind the mysteries. Shakespeare knew it when he wrote the part. I know it now when I play it. There's only one way to play Hamlet—not as a role, but as reality."

I nodded. There was a distorted logic behind what he said; even a madman knows enough to tell a hawk from a handsaw, though both the hawk's beak and the saw's teeth are equally sharp.

"That's why I'm ready now," Barrett said. "After fifteen years of preparation, I'm ready to give the world the definitive Hamlet. Next month I open on Broadway."

Broadway? This prancing, posturing nonentity playing Shakespeare on Broadway in the wake of Irving, Mansfield, Mantell, and Forbes-Robertson?

"Don't smile," Barrett murmured. "I know you're wondering how it would be possible to mount a pro-

duction, but that's all been arranged. There are others who believe in the Bard as I do; perhaps you've heard of Mrs. Myron McCullough?"

It was an idle question; everyone in Chicago knew the name of the wealthy widow whose late husband's industrial fortune had made her a leading patron of the arts.

"She has been kind enough to take an interest in the project," Barrett told me. "With her backing—"

He broke off, glancing up at the figure approaching our table; a curved, voluptuously slender figure that bore no resemblance to that of the elderly Mrs. Myron McCullough.

"What a pleasant surprise—" he began.

"I'll bet," said the woman. "After you stood me up on our lunch date."

She was young, and obviously attractive; perhaps a bit too obviously, because of her heavy makeup and the extreme brevity of her short-skirted orange dress.

Barrett met her frown with a smile as he performed the introductions. "Miss Goldie Connors," he said. "My protégée."

The name had a familiar ring, and then, as she grinned at me in greeting, I saw the glint of her left upper incisor—a gold tooth.

I'd heard about that gold tooth from fellow reporters. It was well-known to gentlemen of the press, and gentlemen of the police force, and gentlemen of Capone's underworld, and to many others, not necessarily gentlemen, who had enjoyed the pleasure of Goldie Connors' company. Gold-tooth Goldie had a certain reputation in the sporting world of Chicago, and it wasn't as a protégée.

"Pleased to meetcha," she told me. "Hope I'm not butting in."

"Do sit down." Barrett pulled out a chair for her.

"I'm sorry about the mix-up. I meant to call."

"I'll bet." Goldie gave him what in those days was described as a dirty look. "You said you were gonna rehearse me—"

Barrett's smile froze as he turned to me. "Miss Connors is thinking of a theatrical career. I think she has certain possibilities."

"Possibilities?" Goldie turned to him quickly. "You promised! You said you'd give me a part, a good part. Like what's-her-name—Ophelia?"

"Of course." Barrett took her hand. "But this is neither the time nor the place—"

"Then you better make the time and find a place! I'm sick and tired of getting the runaround, understand?"

I didn't know about Barrett, but I understood one thing. I rose and nodded. "Please excuse me. I'm due back at the office. Thank you for the interview."

"Sorry you have to leave." Barrett wasn't sorry at all; he was greatly relieved. "Will there be a story, do you think?"

"I'm writing one," I said. "The rest is up to my editor. Read the paper."

I did write the story, stressing in particular the emphasis Barrett placed on realism. BARRETT PROMISES REAL HAMLET FOR BROADWAY was my heading, but not my editor's.

"Old lady McCullough," he said. "That's your story!" And he rewrote it, with a new heading: MRS. MYRON McCULLOUGH TO FINANCE BARRETT'S BROADWAY BOW.

That's how it was printed, and that's how Richard Barrett read it. He wasn't the only one; the story created quite a stir. Mrs. McCullough was news in Chicago.

"Told you so," said my editor. "That's the angle.

Now I hear Barrett's closing tomorrow night. He's doing a week in Milwaukee and then he heads straight for New York.

"Go out and catch him at his boardinghouse now. Here's the address. I want a follow-up on his plans for the Broadway opening. See if you can find out how he managed to get his hooks into the old gal so that she'd back the show. I understand he's quite a ladies' man. So get me all the gory details."

The dinginess of Barrett's quarters somewhat surprised me. It was a theatrical boardinghouse on the near North Side, the sort of place that catered to second-rate vaudeville performers and itinerant carny workers. But then Barrett was probably pinched for funds when he'd come here; not until he met Mrs. McCullough did his prospects improve. The meeting with his wealthy patroness was what I'd come to find out about—all the gory details.

I didn't get them. In fact, I got no details at all, for I went no farther than the hallway outside his door. That's where I heard the voices; in that shabby hallway, musty with the smell of failure, the stale odor of blighted hopes.

Goldie Connors' voice: "What are you trying to pull? I read the paper, all about those big plans of yours in New York. And here you been stalling me along, telling me there was no job because you couldn't get bookings—"

"Please!" Richard Barrett's voice, with an edge to it. "I intended to surprise you."

"Sure you did! By walking out on me. That's the surprise you figured on. Leaving me flat while you went off with that rich old bag you been romancing on the side."

"You keep her name out of this!"

Goldie's answering laugh was shrill, and I could

imagine the glint of the gold tooth accompanying it. "That's what you tried to do—keep her name out of this, so I'd never know, or so she'd never know about me. That would queer your little deal in a hurry, wouldn't it? Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Richard Hamlet Barrett! You promised me a part in the show and now it's put up or shut up."

Barrett's voice was an anguished pleading. "Goldie, you don't understand! This is Broadway, the big chance I've waited for all these years. I can't risk using an inexperienced actress—"

"Then you'll risk something else. You'll risk having me go straight to your great lady and tell her just what's been going on between you and me!"

"Goldie—"

"When you leave town tomorrow night I'm going with you—with a signed contract for my part on Broadway. And that's final, understand?"

"All right. You win. You'll have your part."

"And not just one of those walk-on bits, either. It's got to be a decent part, a real one."

"A real part. I give you my word."

That's all I heard, and that's all I knew, until five days after Richard Barrett had left Chicago behind.

Sometime during the afternoon of that day, the landlady of the run-down boardinghouse scented an addition to the odors mingling in the musty hallway. She followed her nose to the locked door of what had been Barrett's room. Opening the door, she caught a glimpse of Barrett's battered old theatrical trunk, apparently abandoned upon his departure the day before. He'd shoved it almost out of sight under the bed, but she hauled it out and pried it open.

What confronted her then sent her screaming for the police.

What confronted the police became known in the

city newsrooms, and what I learned there sent me racing to the boardinghouse.

There I confronted the contents of the trunk myself—the decapitated body of a woman. The head was missing. All I could think of, staring down at it, was my editor's earlier demand. "The gory details," I murmured.

The homicide sergeant glanced at me. His name was Emmett, Gordon Emmett. We'd met before.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

I told him.

By the time I finished my story we were halfway to the northwestern Depot, and by the time he finished questioning me, we had boarded the eight o'clock train for Milwaukee.

"Crazy," Emmett muttered. "A guy'd have to be crazy to do it."

"He's mad," I said. "No doubt about it. But there's more than madness involved. There's method, too. Don't forget, this was to be his big chance, the opportunity he'd worked and waited for all these years. He couldn't afford to fail. So that knowledge, combined with a moment of insane impulse—"

"Maybe so," Emmett muttered. "But how can you prove it?"

That was the question hanging over us as we reached Milwaukee at ten o'clock of a wintry night, and no cab in sight. I whistled one up on the corner.

"Davidson Theatre," I said. "And hurry!"

It must have been ten-fifteen when we pulled up in the icy alley alongside the stage door, and twenty after ten by the time we'd gotten past the doorkeeper and elbowed our way backstage to the wings.

The performance had started promptly at eight-fifteen, and now a full house was centering its attention upon the opening scene of Act Five.

Here was the churchyard—the yawning grave, the two Clowns, Horatio, and Hamlet himself; a bright-eyed, burning Hamlet with feverish color in his cheeks and passionate power in his voice. For a moment I didn't even recognize Richard Barrett in his realization of the role. Somehow he'd managed to make the part come alive at last; this was the Prince of Denmark, and he was truly mad.

The First Clown tossed him a skull from the open grave and Hamlet lifted it to the light.

"Alas, poor Yorick," he said. "I knew him, Horatio—"

The skull turned slowly in his hand, and the footlights glittered over its grinning jaws in which a gold tooth gleamed . . .

Then we closed in.

Emmett had his murderer, and his proof.

And I? I had seen my most memorable performance in Hamlet: Goldie's . . .

# THE EXECUTIONER

## H. A. De Rosso

Tonight there was only one. Usually, there were several and once, when the executions had first started, there had been twenty-three, and when he had mentioned the number to Tomasino, the Leader had laughed and said it was most appropriate since the Movement was called the 23rd April after the day the revolution had started. But now the numbers had decreased. One night a week ago there had been seven, the largest in a fortnight. Tonight, however, there was only the one.

He waited impatiently beside the bus which was to take the condemned man to the place of execution, a hill not far off from where one could look over the Caribbean which, of course, was not visible now at night. The view, however, was beautiful during the day but he never went there any more when the sun was up. Not that he was squeamish, he told himself, it was just that he was usually tired. That's all there was to it, he told himself fiercely, there was no such thing as regret and homesickness any more, Cielo Azul was his home now and that was that.

He dropped the butt of the cigar he was smoking and ground it underfoot, thinking this was a habit he had copied from the Leader for once he had smoked only cigarettes. Remembering Tomasino made him a little irritated and troubled. There was starting to be talk against Tomasino here in the capital, but the Leader was somewhere in the southern provinces promising farmers land and plantation workers high-

er wages and dreaming his dream of making the republic of Cielo Azul an island free of poverty and despair. Dreams were all right in their place, but there were those who had started to demand something more concrete than talk. Look at Laramate. He had been one of the most ardent of the supporters of Tomasino de la Luz, but then he had turned to criticizing Tomasino and had been arrested, and was now in prison awaiting trial. The sentence undoubtedly would be death and, some night soon, he would have to take Laramate to the hill overlooking the Caribbean and shoot him.

He sighed and for a moment, just the briefest moment, wished he were back home in the States. Then he remembered he had been nothing there and here in Cielo Azul he was something, a captain in the army of Tomasino. He was regarded with respect and awe and fear, for he was in charge of the executions in the capital. He had decided to become a citizen of Cielo Azul. There was no telling how far he would go in this land.

Footsteps sounded on the asphalt of the courtyard and he heard the firing squad, which always followed the bus in a jeep, snapping to attention. It was the warden and two guards and the prisoner at last. A few more minutes and it would be over and then perhaps he would see Maria Alba. Thought of this made him glad there was only the one tonight. It was the custom to execute the prisoners singly, and several would have dragged time out.

He motioned the denim-clad prisoner into the bus and then there was a moment's confusion over who was to drive the vehicle. He remembered then that Rivera, who always drove, had reported ill and there was a new sergeant. Perez, was that his name? Or Gonzales? He singled the man out with his eyes, a stocky

youth with a wide, blank face looking sallow in the dim lights of the courtyard.

"You," the captain said. "How are you called?"

"Gomez, *mi capitan.*"

"Do you know how to drive?"

Teeth flashed white in a grin. *"Si."*

"Proceed."

Gomez got in the bus and the captain went over to the jeep and got behind the wheel. He honked the horn to signal the bus and followed the vehicle out of the courtyard and onto the winding road that led up the hill.

One thing about the people down here, the captain thought, most of them knew how to die. None of them had to be bound and not many allowed the blindfold. Two of them, hardened officers of the fallen dictator's army, had shouted the commands to the firing squad. Only one prisoner had collapsed to his knees when he had been placed against the pockmarked wall beneath the electric light and had been shot like that, whimpering. But he was a rarity. It seemed that conditions down here, the poverty and hunger and exploitation and persecution, had made death a familiar thing to most of the people so that they could regard it almost with indifference.

The prisoner tonight stumbled once as he walked to the wall. And then, as if this moment's weakness had angered him, he threw his shoulders back and walked the rest of the way with his head tilted at a defiant angle. He was a slight man, with dark hair that was turning gray. Hardly a military type, the captain thought. Probably a political, and the captain shrugged. The charges for which the men were sentenced were none of his business. His job was their execution and he never let his thoughts wander be-

yond that. He seldom knew the condemned men's names and did not know this prisoner's.

The prisoner shook his head at the offer of the blindfold. The captain always carried a pack of American cigarettes in his shirt pocket for the condemned, and the prisoner accepted one and the captain lighted it for the man. Then the captain started back to the firing squad and stood a few moments with his back to the prisoner to allow him the generosity of a few more puffs. Then the captain turned and stood very straight. He was proud of the way the commands in the alien tongue rolled off his lips.

*"Atencion! Listo! Apunten! Tiren!"*

When the echoes of the shots died, there was silence, a silence so heavy that, briefly, your thoughts were concerned with it, rather than with what had just taken place.

The firing squad always returned in the bus, while the captain rode the jeep alone. The new sergeant, Gomez, was watching him with a strange smile that vanished the moment the captain's eyes fell on him.

"That is all for tonight," the captain said. "Return the men to the barracks."

Gomez saluted. *"Si, mi capitan."*

The captain got in the jeep and started away without waiting for the bus to precede him. He was in a great hurry to get away from the hill. He told himself it was because soon he might see Maria Alba.

The annoying part of it, he thought, was that he could never be sure of her. The fact that he had made her acquaintance in the Flor de Oro on the Avenida Nacional set her apart. Under the fallen dictator, the Flor de Oro had catered only to the wealthiest of American tourists. It was still an exclusive place. He gained entrance and preference over oth-

ers because of his uniform and because he was in charge of the executions. Fear rather than acceptance admitted him, and he smiled to himself thinking of that. It had never been like this in the States, where he had been nobody.

He sat in an alcove. The music had the proper softness here, the lights the proper dimness. Everything would be perfect, if only she would come.

He looked at his watch again and frowned. But that was her way. She was annoying and irritating and, he had to admit, most exciting.

Closing his eyes, he imagined the scent she used, so fragilely sweet and teasing in his nostrils, and he imagined well for the odor seemed very real. He opened his eyes and saw that it was real. She had slipped into the alcove silently and sat across the table from him, watching him with a slight smile.

The smile died, like Gomez's had died, the instant his eyes found her. Now what had made him think of that? Too many executions? It couldn't be that. He put the number roughly at two hundred and felt he should have become inured to them by now. Still, the members of the firing squad kept changing. Take Rivera, reporting sick. Had Rivera after all lost his stomach for executions? With a feeling of vexation, he put the thoughts from him.

He could never look at her without a quickening of his heartbeat. She was that exciting and disturbing. She had the black hair and violet eyes and olive skin of so many of the women of Cielo Azul but, in addition, she had a special, round-faced beauty.

He was lost in admiration of her and so was only idly attentive to what she was saying and she had to repeat herself.

"I said tomorrow is the trial of Laramate."

"Who?"

Her eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "Are you not listening? The trial of Ramon Laramate. He who has betrayed Tomasino."

"Oh?" He experienced the annoyance he always felt when someone brought up the subject of politics. The people down here took their politics most seriously, they fought and bled and died over them, unlike the apathy and indifference he had been familiar with in the States. "So soon?"

"He has been a prisoner for two weeks."

"I would not think anyone as beautiful as you would concern herself with politics."

"Politics?" she echoed. "I do not hate Laramate because of his politics."

He looked at her with a new interest. Something disquieting stirred in him, but he paid it no heed. "Hate Laramate? Why? Why do you hate him?"

"A personal matter. My sister. He would not marry her; so she drowned herself." She was staring broodingly down at the table. Her glance lifted, sought and held his. "If Laramate is sentenced to die, as he will be, will you execute him?"

He gave a negligent shrug. "I suppose. I am in charge of all the executions here in the capital." He stared at her wonderingly. "How well do you know Laramate?"

"Very well. We've been very close."

He watched her with a hard, sober look. "So you've been very close. Was this—before you knew about your sister?"

"No. Our friendship was afterwards—afterwards. When I had already promised to see him dead."

"But—but why?"

"So I could denounce him in court. So I could learn things about him to denounce him for. So when he dies, he will know it was I who denounced him."

"Does he know what you propose to do?"

She laughed. Her laughter was sharp, metallic, an inanimate quality to it. "He still thinks I am in love with him," she said. "He still thinks that should a miracle happen and he is acquitted that I will marry him." She laughed once more. "Oh, I am going to enjoy that trial tomorrow."

You really hate him, don't you? he thought. I wouldn't want anyone to hate me like that. He stared at her as though from a distance, suddenly quiet, unable to think of anything at all.

She laughed, low and throaty, all the harshness and primal savagery gone from it, and the hardness slid from her features and the smile she showed him was rich with allure and promise.

"But enough of such talk," she said. "There are more pleasant things to discuss, are there not, *querido?*"

*Querido,* he thought, darling. It was the first time he had heard an expression of affection from her. His heart began to race.

She glanced about her with a look of boredom. "I can not stomach this place any more tonight. So much noise and loud talk, such tedious music." Her eyes caressed his face, her voice was very low. "Do you know of somewhere else we can go? Where we will be alone?"

The next morning he hummed her name over and over as he rose and showered.

He was in the best of moods, until he saw the morning paper with the news that today was the trial of the accused traitor and seditionist, Ramon Laramate. A grayness came over him then, a moment of chill like a musty wash of air from a tomb. He shrugged the sensation from him. She hated Laramate. It would not

bother her should he execute the man. Still, he was curious to see if she had denounced Laramate.

The evening paper informed him. She was there in a huge photograph on the front page, face contorted with rage and hate so that he scarcely recognized her, pointing a finger elongated and thickened by its nearness to the camera, mouthing silent execrations. This disturbed him somewhat. She appeared to be of genteel extraction and her part in the trial was not at all in keeping with her refined upbringing. Then he recalled that these had been troubled times the past two years in Cielo Azul and that she must have witnessed many atrocities. And then there was the matter of her having been very close to Laramate and now denouncing him. Even the paper remarked on that. She had accused Laramate of plotting with the deposed dictator, now in exile, for the overthrow of Tomasino.

I will have to be careful with her, he told himself. I'll see her a few more times and then I will drop her. I do not want her to begin hating me.

Then he laughed at his fears. He was a captain in the army of Tomasino de la Luz. Nothing could harm him; he was secure. But hadn't Laramate been a confidant of Tomasino? But Laramate had criticized the Leader for his inaction and inability to get the economy of the country back on its feet.

He, the captain, was different. He had never concerned himself with politics and did not intend to. He had joined Tomasino as a soldier and would remain one.

That evening the warden of the prison informed him there would be no executions that night. There were two condemned men, convicted of atrocities, but they would be held over until the following night when it was expected that Laramate would be shot.

A higher court would review the sentence of death the next day, but it was not expected to reverse the penalty since Tomasino had declared in a public speech that Laramate was guilty and must die.

"So enjoy yourself tonight, my captain," the warden said with a wink. "Tomorrow night you will earn your pay."

So he returned to his hotel and put on a fresh uniform and then went early to the Flor de Oro on the Avenida Nacional.

She was moody this evening and not given to talking. She stared at him out of dark, veiled eyes. After a long silence, she asked, "Is there no chance whatever of Laramate escaping?"

"None. The prison is well-guarded. Not a man has got away since we took charge." He peered at her narrowly. "Are you frightened?" He could not help his lips twisting into a small smile as he said that.

"Frightened? Why should I be?"

"After all, you denounced Laramate. Should he escape, would he not want vengeance on you?"

Her hand clutched his wrist and her nails dug in until they pained. "But you just said Laramate can not escape."

"That is true. I was just teasing, *querida.*" He folded a hand over hers. The nails still dug into his flesh. "Let us go from here. My place."

"Before we go," she said slowly, "you must promise me something."

An uneasiness stirred in him. Then he mocked his stupid fears. What could she do to him? Denounce him? He had never concerned himself with politics; he had never uttered a single word against Tomasino; he was more faithful to the Leader than the

natives of Cielo Azul. What, pray, could she do to him?

"What do you wish me to promise?"

"That I will be allowed to watch Laramate die."

She had this way of catching him by surprise, of rendering him speechless, and it angered him. Then it came to him it was this unpredictability about her that made her so exciting to him. But there were times when he wished she were a trifle dull and commonplace.

"It is highly irregular," he said. "The executions must be held in private. When we first started shooting war criminals and the public could watch, there was a furor in foreign papers. You know, photographs and descriptions. So Tomasino ordered that all subsequent executions be held in private. I am sorry. But that is how it is."

Her hand withdrew from his wrist. "Very well," she said, and rose to her feet. "I must go now. Good night."

He reached out and caught her by an arm. The fear of losing her was like a pain in his heart. "Good night? Have you forgotten you are to go with me to my place?"

She stared down at him as if from a distance, haughty and aloof. "I thought that perhaps you loved me. Evidently you do not, for you will not grant me even the tiniest favor."

"Maria Alba," he said, begging.

"Do not say my name," she burst out with a rush of viciousness. "Do not call me any more. Good night."

"Please," he said, and resisted her efforts to disengage his hand from her arm. "Do not be angry with me. Please, Maria Alba. I will do anything for you. But it is difficult; it is irregular." She tried to break

his grip again. "No. Wait. I will see what I can do."

Her struggles ceased. She stared down at him with a cold, calculating look. "That is not enough. I must know definitely if I am to watch Laramate die."

He took a deep breath. The sound was audible, like a faint, ragged moan. "All right. I will do it. You shall watch him die."

I do not know what it is, he thought; it was never like this with me before. He was nervous and on edge; it was almost as if he expected threatening shapes to leap at him from out of the shadows of the courtyard. He assured himself that nothing could go wrong. He had told Maria Alba to wait for him beside the road to the hill. After it was over he would swear the firing squad to secrecy. They would obey because he was their captain and they feared him.

Thinking of the firing squad made him look at them, lounging about the jeep waiting for the warden to bring out the condemned prisoners. The only one the captain recognized was the stocky sergeant, Gomez. All the others were strangers to him. The turnover among the squad was very frequent these days. The fervor and frenzy that followed the overthrow of the dictator was ebbing; soldiers were losing stomach over serving on the firing squad. Was that what was wrong with him tonight? Had he finally been sated? Had he lost his desire to be in charge of the executions? He swore silently and told himself it was not so.

It was her who made him nervous. Not because he was afraid of the consequences, should it be learned that she had watched the executions. It was something else, a sense of horror and revulsion that she should want to see Laramate die. I had not thought she could hate that much, he said to himself. He shook his head

and decided he would have to break off with her sooner than he had planned.

He heaved a sigh of relief when the warden and guards came with the prisoners. Silently, he motioned them into the bus. There were three of them tonight. The two convicted of atrocities did not look at him. Only Laramate laid a heavy, piercing stare on him before stepping into the bus.

He told the firing squad to ride with the prisoners, the better to guard them, he explained. He would follow in the jeep. Gomez, the only holdover from the previous squad, evinced no surprise. He saluted and got behind the wheel of the bus. The captain got in the jeep and sounded the horn to start the bus.

She was waiting, hidden in some bushes along the road, and as she stepped out he slowed the jeep and without waiting for it to stop completely she climbed in. He noted that she wore men's clothing, khaki fatigues that were the uniform of the army of Tomasino. He wondered only briefly where she had got the clothing. She could have been a member of Tomasino's guerilla forces, as many women of Cielo Azul had been. In any event, the clothes facilitated her moving about and hindered recognition of her and he was grateful for that.

She spoke only once, leaning toward him and saying in a feral whisper, "I want him to die last."

"I have already promised you that," he said.

He could imagine her gloating and watching Laramate sweat out his final minutes and seconds while the other two died before him. The more he knew her, the more he became aware of the cruelty that dwelt in her. A faint shudder passed through him. Just tonight, he promised himself, and then he would have nothing more to do with her. He was already beginning to be sorry that he had gone this far with her.

They were at the hill now. The bus stopped with a faint squealing of brakes. Five of the firing squad came out of the bus, the sixth remaining to guard the prisoners. The captain got out of the jeep and stood on legs that seemed stiff and aged. He told Gomez the order in which the prisoners were to be shot.

Maria Alba sat in the jeep. If any of the firing squad knew astonishment over her presence they did not reveal it. The height of discipline, the captain thought wryly. The first prisoner stepped out of the bus on sagging legs, and the captain took his arm to steady the man and directed him toward the bullet-pocked wall under the electric light. Halfway there, the prisoner's legs strengthened and he brushed the captain's hand away.

There were the formalities—the refusal of the blindfold, the acceptance of the last cigarette—and then the captain walked over to the firing squad and kept his back turned a decent interval to allow the prisoner a few extra puffs and then the captain faced around and spoke in his loud, clear voice.

*"Atencion! Listo! Apunten! Tiren!"*

The second one went much the same except that he needed no steadying hand and also refused the cigarette. When he was done, the captain looked to the bus for Laramate and saw that Maria Alba was at the door, preparing to enter. She beckoned him with a jerk of her head.

He went, a strange prickle like ice on his spine. He could not understand these twinges of uneasiness. Too many executions, he thought. He had better get away from them for awhile, perhaps take a trip back home to the States. All at once he knew a strong desire to be in his native land again, and silently swore at this weakness.

Inside the bus, Maria Alba spoke. "I wish to speak

to you alone," she said to the captain.

He nodded a dismissal to the guard, who immediately went out of the bus. Laramate sat in a rear seat, watching the captain with a tiny smile that instantly vanished when the captain glanced at him. Again something disquieting moved through the captain as he remembered a smile like that one on Gomez and on Maria Alba. When he turned to look at her, he saw that she had taken a pistol out of her clothing and was pointing it at him.

Again surprise and shock left him mute. And something told him she would never startle him again, because there would not be the chance. Laramate had risen swiftly from his seat and took the captain's pistol from its holster.

"I admire your uniform, Captain," Laramate said. "Would you let me have it? Quickly."

The paralysis began to leave the captain's throat. He looked with hurt and anger at Maria Alba. She read the question in his glance and smiled thinly.

"There was no other way to get Ramon out of the prison," she said.

The captain could speak now. "You planned it thus?" His voice was hoarse, he hardly recognized it as his own.

She nodded.

"But what about your sister? Have you forgiven him for that?"

"I never had a sister."

"They were all lies then? Even when you said you loved me?"

She showed her teeth. "I meant it as much as you meant it when you said you loved me. How else was I to do it? I had to denounce him, so that it would look like I was against him; and I had to pretend that I hated him very much, so that you would allow me

to attend his execution." She laughed, quietly, without mirth. "Yes. His execution." She laughed again.

"Hurry with those clothes, Captain," Laramate said, his voice ugly. "I will not ask you again."

They can't get away with it, the captain thought as he took off his uniform and put on Laramate's denims. They were of a size and the denims fit. I know what they are trying to do, but they forget that those are my soldiers out there. I am their captain. They will obey me, not them. Let them have their little fun. I shall laugh last.

Laramate jabbed him in the back with the pistol and moved him out of the bus. "To the wall," Laramate growled. "Underneath the light."

The captain's heart was pounding. He had to swallow the panicked urge to shout. He had to wait until Laramate stepped back, thus removing the pistol from contact with his body. Then he would show Laramate who the firing squad took orders from.

"There is no time for a blindfold or a cigarette, Captain," Laramate said, walking away as the captain stood under the glare of the electric light. "I am sorry."

"Sergeant," the captain shouted. "Gomez. Shoot the traitor. Do you not know him? He is Laramate. Do you not recognize him? Gomez. Why don't you do something? Can't you see what is going on here? Shoot him down where he stands. Gomez!"

But Gomez was grinning, the grin he had seen in the courtyard two nights ago, and the rest of the squad was grinning, too. They were in the plot, also. Somehow Laramate's men had been substituted for the regular squad. That accounted for the absence of Rivera and— He stole a quick glance at Maria Alba and saw that she was watching with much interest. At least, she was not smiling, nor was Laramate.

The clipped, loud commands were very familiar in the captain's ears; only the voice was strange, lower and harsher than his had been, the voice of Laramate, shouting:

*"Atencion! Listo! Apunten! Tiren! . . ."*

# MAN ON A LEASH

Jack Ritchie

I glanced at my watch and frowned. "All right. I can give you ten minutes."

Renolds was a tall, sharp-faced man with yellow-brown burning in his eyes and he claimed to be one of the reporters on my newspaper. "The Journal," he said, "has functioned as a watchdog for the public ever since it was founded sixty years ago."

I selected a cigarette from my case. "You could have told that to my editor. He loves compliments. Get to the point."

His face told me that he was mentally skipping several paragraphs and finding a foothold closer to his subject.

"This entire county is metropolitan," he said. "And we have a quite competent police force of over three thousand men. Yet we still tolerate the anachronism of a Sheriff's Department with its force of twenty-five deputies."

"If you've been reading the newspaper you're supposed to be working for," I said, "you might have noticed several editorials about that."

Renolds shrugged that off. "But simple duplication of law enforcement isn't the worst part of it. The entire Sheriff's Department is a political plum, a protection racket in uniform. It actually thwarts the regular city police in the performance of their duty."

He slapped his fist on his open hand. It made a small sound. "We've got to do more than write editorials. We've got to split this thing wide open."

His face was darkish red, as though he harbored a permanent fever. "The Sheriff's Department runs the County Workhouse and we all know what goes on in there."

I lit my cigarette. "Perhaps."

He nodded. "Of course you do, Mr. Troy. It's Sheriff Brager's private mint. He gets rake-offs on the food and kick-backs from the guards. A prisoner lives like a dog unless he has a friend on the outside to slip him enough money to buy favors. The guards are cretins who stay on the job for the graft they can squeeze and for the beatings they can administer with a smile."

"There was an investigation about two years ago," I said. "It came to nothing."

Renolds snorted. "All that the investigating committee had to go on were rumors. It had no concrete facts. Brager cleaned up the place in a hurry and kept it that way for the month it was watched. The prisoners were too scared to talk. Brager saw to that."

He paced the floor. "Kangaroo courts run rampant. Brager uses the prisoners as a private work force. When they aren't working on his estate or on one of his pet projects, he loads them on trucks and rents them out to big farmers at four bucks a head. He pockets the money and they're lucky if they get a good meal out of it."

I leaned back in my chair and watched the cigarette smoke. "Apparently you intend doing something about it."

Renolds nodded vigorously. "I'm going to get myself arrested."

I examined my manicure. "For vagrancy, no doubt. You're going to write an inside story about your experiences in the workhouse. Good for you. See Frank Harrison. He's the editor of this paper

and he's the man you should have seen in the first place. There was no need to go over his head. I regard my time as valuable."

Renolds held up a hand. "Mr. Troy, I plan nothing so simple. And I thought that the fewer people who knew about what I'm going to do, the better. And that goes for Mr. Harrison." A thin smile came to his face. "An exposé of conditions would make a good story, no doubt, but I intend to destroy the reputation of the sheriff and his department with something more final, more drastic."

Renolds' smile seemed to be self-congratulatory. "I am going to have myself arrested for murder."

"Whose murder?" I asked.

His smile increased by an inch. "Yours."

I shifted in my chair.

Renolds giggled slightly. "Of course I don't actually intend to murder you. I merely want it to look as though I did."

I relaxed. "Thanks," I said dryly.

"But it's going to look like murder to Brager," Renolds said eagerly. "Don't you see it, Mr. Troy? Brager and his department haven't had a major case since anybody can remember. All they do, when they do anything at all, is to arrest a few speeders, pick up vagrants, and raid the shanties near the railroad yards for their work force. Then something big like this comes along and it's laid in Brager's lap. An important man is murdered and Brager has the confessed killer right in his own jail. He'll make the most of it. He'll see that his picture gets in all the papers. He'll take credit for everything."

Renolds paused dramatically. "And then the bubble bursts. He finds himself with no murder and no murderer. He fell for a fake murder and a false confession. The entire public's attention will be focused

on him and once that occurs every rotten thing in his department will find an eager, awake public demanding that something be done."

"Perhaps," I said. "But why choose me as the murder victim?"

"Because you're an important man, Mr. Troy. And we need all the publicity we can get. You own this newspaper, the largest in the state. You come from a nationally known family. Your father served in the Senate for over thirty years until his death three years ago. And now you are entering politics too; following in his illustrious footsteps. You're running for governor, but everyone knows that the governorship is just a stepping-stone to bigger things."

"You're sure about that?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. "Your future is unlimited."

I ground out my cigarette. "In other words, you want us to frame Brager?"

He shook his head fiercely. "I wouldn't call it a frame-up. Not when we're dealing with a man like Brager. We're performing a public duty."

I looked out at the skyline for a moment and thought tiredly of the half a dozen short speeches I was scheduled to make that day. I turned back to Renolds. "If you have any intelligence, you must realize that I couldn't participate in any scheme like that."

Renolds put his fingers on my desk and leaned forward. "In a sense, you won't be involved at all. I simply ask that you disappear for three or four days. Go on a hunting trip where there are no communications with the outside world. No radio, no television, no newspapers. And see that no one knows where you have gone or even that you decided to go."

His fingers left wet marks on my desk. "When you come back you will be shocked and horrified that the world thought you dead. You knew absolutely noth-

ing about me or what I had done. I was simply an opportunist who somehow discovered that you would be away and took advantage of that fact."

The entire scheme was ridiculous, but I felt a trace of curiosity. "Let's hear the details."

Caution veiled his eyes. "Do you agree to go along with me?"

"I'd have to know more about it first."

He shook his head. "I can't tell you more unless we come to an agreement."

I looked him over. "You must have a good reason for wanting to get Brager. Something more powerful than civic duty."

His mouth tightened and he said nothing.

I played with my smooth stone paperweight for a few moments and then looked up. "You'll have to give me a few days to think it over."

His face brightened with hope. "Certainly, Mr. Troy. I'll be back on Wednesday."

When he was gone, I took my private elevator down to the fourth floor. Frank Harrison's office was crowded when I entered. I waited fifteen seconds while it emptied and then took a chair.

Harrison brushed steel-gray hair away from his forehead. "All business stops when the owner makes his appearance. How long has it been since you've been down here? Two weeks?"

"I understand we have a reporter named Renolds," I said.

He nodded. "What about him?"

"You tell me."

He rapped ashes from his bulldog pipe. "He's one of the best men I have. When I assign him to something he covers it from front to back. He's the sharpest digger for hidden facts that I know of."

"What's wrong with him?"

Harrison's eyes flicked to me in sudden surprise. Then he almost shrugged. "There's hate burning inside of him for Brager. He works on it whenever he has time. Probably he knows more about Brager than Brager does himself."

"Why?"

Harrison seemed reluctant, but he spoke. "Renolds came to me from San Francisco about a year ago. Naturally I wondered why a top-notch reporter should suddenly pull up stakes and move across the country. So I checked on him."

I waited.

Harrison tamped new tobacco into his pipe. "Last year Brager attended a sheriff's convention in San Francisco. With him it wasn't business. We all know that. Just one big drunk. One evening his car ran over and killed a four-year-old kid. The boy was Renolds' son."

Harrison's eyes went to the half dozen men marking time outside the glass walls of his office and then back to me. "Brager got a fast lawyer and maybe a few other hands got some of his money. Some witnesses testified that the boy ran out from between two parked cars. The same witnesses said that Brager was sober. The cop who did the arresting disagreed, but Brager got off."

He met my eyes. "Got any special reason for wanting to know?"

"Curiosity."

Harrison shrugged. "Which means it's none of my business." He folded his hands and looked at me. "I just can't figure you out."

"It isn't necessary."

He smiled slightly. "I get the feeling that there's something been riding you ever since you took over the paper."

I rose to go.

"I worked for the Senator for twenty-five years," Harrison said. "And the last three for you. Your father was a fine man."

"Yes," I said. "I've heard that for a long time."

He kept his eyes on me. "Your father trusted me completely. He let me run this newspaper without any interference."

"Have I twisted your arm?"

"No. But I'm sensitive and I get the feeling that you might, should you happen to suddenly get interested in this newspaper. I'm too much of a tired grandfather to quit now and get another job."

"I'm leaving for the day," I said.

He puffed his pipe. "I wish I could do that. It must be nice to have money."

It was a half-hour drive along the lake shore and north. I went through the gates and up the curving driveway to the house that had been in our family four generations. I recognized the black Cadillac parked in front.

Brager was in the library mixing himself a drink.

"If you don't find my liquor cabinet versatile enough," I said, "I'd be delighted to run to the nearest tavern and fetch a bucket of beer for you."

His grin showed big teeth clenched on the cigar. "You're polite, as usual."

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing in particular. Occasionally I just like to look over some of the things I'm paying for. My real and human properties." He poured a double shot of brandy. "And don't tell me to worry about the servants again. I know they might do talking about us among themselves, but that's as far as it would go. They've been with the family so long, they're more worried about its reputation than you are."

He moved to the portrait of my father and lifted his glass in a toast. "The good Senator. He served the nation faithfully and honestly for thirty years and dipped into his capital in order to be able to do it." He indicated my grandfather's portrait. "And the worthy Ambassador. Also a man of unquestioned honor and integrity and a royal spender in the major cities of Europe. He financed that with the family capital too."

Brager's heavy body stopped under the smaller painting of my great-grandfather. "And here's the spade-bearded you-know-what who made it all possible. The old-fashioned nineteenth century tiger who clawed his way into the millions."

"Yes," I said. "A favorite of mine."

Brager looked at me and grinned. "The family fortune didn't amount to much by the time you got hold of it, and you weren't bred to be poor."

"I find it uncomfortable. Why this recapitulation?"

"I caught you just in time. You were down to your last ounce of credit. Practically a pauper."

I went to the sideboard and made myself a drink.

Brager savored his brandy. "We're going far, you and me. You've got the spotless reputation and background and I've got the money to finance you and the organization to get you rolling."

I added ice cubes to my glass. "What do you eventually want?" I asked dryly. "The Postmastership?"

He grinned. "I might at that. I've been thinking of cleaning up my public name. Ten or fifteen years from now there won't be too much eyebrow raising if I'm seen walking next to you."

"You've got a big stable-cleaning job to do."

He nodded amiably. "You're so right. Maybe I'll start with the Sheriff's Department. Make it a shining model for the whole country to admire." He sighed.

"I feel kind of sentimental about the department. I got my start there, but now it's only chicken feed in my operations. I'm a rich man now, boy. One of the richest in the state."

His shrewd half-buried eyes watched me. "It wasn't an accident about me finding you. I was prospecting for a puppet and you were my strike. I watched you for years before I moved."

His laugh came from deep inside. He was enjoying this too much to stop. "You got rid of everything that could be turned into money and then you started on the newspaper. You must have thought you were selling the stock to fifty different men, but all the names were me.

"Now I own you, boy," he said. "Every last aristocratic bone. I've got you on a leash, and when I pull you've got to follow. Nobody knows that but you and me and I want to keep it that way. I even let you print the nasty stuff about me. It gives me a kick and keeps the good public from seeing that we got fingers in the same glove."

"Don't give me credit for the editorials," I said. "My editor is the crusader."

Brager regarded me critically. "In a way you ought to be thankful. Until I got hold of you, you were a nobody with famous ancestors. No one outside of that little circle you breathe in ever heard of you before. You had no ambition and you were going nowhere. Now you're on the train, boy."

He shook his head. "I just don't understand you. The only reason you want money is so you can lead a certain type of life. Don't you want position and power?"

"It wouldn't be my power," I said. "And besides, I detest grubbing for it among people who sweat."

He thought about that and the body laugh came

again. "And I get a kick out of it. It's blood, meat, and air to me."

I finished my drink and put down the glass. "I was wondering how you would take to the idea of having me as a son-in-law?"

His eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by that?"

I smiled. "Just a thought. Since we are evidently due for a long association, I had the idea that it might be amusing to make it a family affair. Why don't you introduce me to your daughter?"

His face splotched with anger. "If I ever see you near her, I'll kill you."

I raised an eyebrow. "How protective. But why? Wouldn't you want her to be the wife of a governor, a senator, or more?"

He glared at me. "I want her to be happy. That's what I want. And she wouldn't have a chance to be happy with you. You might look like a clean white god to everybody else, but I know what's really inside that hide of yours. There's only one person you give a damn about, and that's yourself."

I nodded. "Possibly you're right. And then there's also the fact that my entire brilliant political career would be jeopardized by such an obvious alliance."

I watched him pick up his hat. "I could use another five thousand," I said.

His eyes flicked over me. "You spend money like water. All right, I'll get cash and mail it tomorrow. But it'll be a thousand. Not five." He scowled. "Sometimes I wonder who's got who on the hook."

The phone rang a half hour after he left. It was Ellen Brager again.

"Yes," I said. "I haven't forgotten. But I have to appear at several meetings tonight. I'll try to get away before ten."

I met her in the same small family restaurant in

the Third Ward. As usual, she had the table at the rear and near the kitchen. She was just over twenty-one, somewhat plain, and fifteen pounds heavier than the accepted fashion. I reflected once again that as far as intelligence went, she must have taken after her mother. The shrewd light in her father's eyes was but a dim reflection in hers.

"I've already ordered," she said. "I suppose I should have waited and let you do that, but they stop taking orders at ten. I wanted to make sure we had something to eat. I'm hungry."

"Of course, first things first."

"I hope you like fried chicken?"

I repressed a shudder. "Haven't I always?"

The proprietor brought us two steins of beer. He beamed. "Nice night. Ain't that right, Mister?"

"Lovely," I said. "Absolutely lovely."

After he went away, Ellen took a sip of her beer and then leaned forward, her chin in one hand. "You know what I'm thinking?"

"Not at this particular moment."

"I'm thinking of how it was such a coincidence that we met."

"Yes," I said. "A remarkable coincidence. Perhaps fate brought us together."

She nodded eagerly. "That was it. Fate. I never thought I'd meet anybody like you. Important, I mean, and society."

The fried chicken was brought to us and put down on the checkered tablecloth.

After a while, Ellen paused in her eating. "There are so many things I don't know yet about good manners in public, but I'm learning. I'm reading books and I've just hired Mrs. Jackson to teach me. She's real society too. She says she's giving me lessons as a hobby and contributing the money to charity, but personally

I don't know. Her clothes ain't so new."

The name Jackson was completely unfamiliar to me.

Ellen touched her hair. "How do I look. Not too flashy?"

"A bit too much jewelry," I said.

"But it's real."

"No doubt, my dear. But that isn't the point."

"I want you to be proud of me some day."

I sipped the beer. "I'm proud of you right now, of course."

She sighed. "It's like Romeo and Juliet. Us two, I mean. Their families were enemies too. You have all those editorials in your paper about my father and here we are in love." She giggled slightly.

I wiped my fingertips with a paper napkin and then patted her hand.

Her face became serious. "Father's really a sweet kind of person."

"Some day I hope very much to meet him."

She shook her head. "But not now. I know what it would do to your political career if you were even seen with my father or even with me. And getting married to me right away would absolutely ruin it. That's why we have to meet like this. Secluded, I mean. For the time being."

I thought the chicken was under-done. "But, my dear," I said. "My career means absolutely nothing to me."

She smiled with superior feminine wisdom. "I appreciate you saying that, Roger, but one of us has to be practical. I know you probably believe that right now, but in later years you'll be sorry. I know you'll never say anything about it, but I'll be able to tell."

I patted her hand again.

She sighed. "If it were only simple like us running

away, and getting married. If only there was no politics. Then even if for some reason father wouldn't approve and should cut me off without a cent, it wouldn't matter because you've got plenty of money anyway."

"I suppose you're right about everything," I said.

She nodded, "We've just got to be patient and wait a little while. Father doesn't tell me hardly anything about his work, but he did say that he wasn't going to run for sheriff any more. All we have to do is wait a couple of years and then everybody will have forgotten about him." Blind loyalty stiffened her chin. "Not that Father has ever done anything bad, but people talk."

I left her at eleven-thirty. It had been a long hour.

Renolds came to see me Wednesday afternoon.

He probably hadn't been sleeping too well and his voice was tense. "Have you made up your mind?"

I played with the stone paperweight for a moment and then looked up. "Your son was killed by Brager's car?"

His eyes flashed. "How did you find out?"

"That's unimportant," I said. "Brager wasn't held. It was an accident. The boy ran into the street from between two parked cars. You're not the only one, you see, with a capacity for unearthing facts."

Renolds shook his head. "Brager was drunk and he was driving too fast. Much too fast."

"You were there and saw that?"

"No," he said tightly. "But I know it."

I selected a cigarette and thought over his scheme. The whole idea was ridiculous. And yet I felt a curiosity. I had to hear it. Perhaps it would help me. If it didn't, I could always back out. "I've decided to help you," I said finally. "It's up to honest citizens

to get rid of Brager. One way or another."

He leaned forward eagerly. "All that you actually have to do is disappear for three days. No one must know where you are or even that you planned to go away. When you return, you simply explain that it was a sudden impulse on your part. You wanted to get away from the strain of campaigning for a few days."

"All right," I said. "And what will you be doing?"

He smiled grimly. "At about eleven tonight I'll appear at the sheriff's office. I will be disheveled and my clothes will be bloodstained. I will confess to having murdered you."

He let me think about that and then went on. "When the sheriff's men investigate, they'll find plenty of evidence to corroborate my story. There will be blood stains all over the furniture in this room and they'll find the supposed murder weapon lying here with my fingerprints on it."

"But no body," I reminded him.

Renolds shrugged that aside. "I'll tell them I dumped it into the river. They'll drag for it, of course, and they won't find it. But they'll expect it to be discovered farther down the river. All we need, however, is a few days for them to make fools of themselves."

The whole thing is thin, I thought. So many things could go wrong. "And what would be your motive for killing me?"

"That's taken care of," he said. "I asked Harrison for a raise and he refused me. I knew he'd have to because I just had one a short time ago. But I'll tell the sheriff's men that I got angry and decided to go directly to you. We had an argument about it and you fired me. I lost my head and killed you."

It wouldn't work, I thought. But I saw something

else and nodded. "It sounds all right to me."

"Yes," he said. "The details aren't too important."

But they are, I thought. They're the key to this whole thing.

"I'll be back here tonight at ten-thirty," Renolds said. "And we can make the final preparations."

I had three speeches scheduled for the night, but I managed to get back to my office suite five minutes before Renolds arrived.

He put the zipper bag he was carrying on a chair and opened it. He removed an opaque bottle of approximately quart size. "This is blood."

I looked at it. "Human?"

He seemed shocked. "Of course not. Where could I get that?"

I smiled. "There are detectable differences between animal and human blood."

There was a trace of petulance in his voice. "The sheriff's deputies will have no reason to doubt it is human blood. Not after my confession. I doubt if the department even has the facilities to make a test."

Another supposition, I thought. I sighed. "Very well. I'll take your word for that."

His eyes went about the room. "We need a murder weapon."

I pointed to the twin set of pokers in the stand by the fireplace. "Those seem appropriate."

He pulled out one of them. "Yes. They're quite heavy."

"About this matter of your being bloody and disheveled," I said. "Don't you think that's a bit overdone? Wouldn't it be much better if you simply go to the sheriff's office as you are and make a quiet, calm confession?"

He looked at me. "Do you think that's enough?"

"Absolutely."

He studied the furniture. "Now I suppose we ought to disarrange things here so that it appears there was a struggle. And of course we'll have to spill some blood around."

"I'm going to have to remain here for another hour at least," I said. "There are a few things I must absolutely take care of before I can leave for a few days."

He seemed about to protest.

I held up a hand. "If we disturb the room now there's always the danger that someone might accidentally wander in here during the next hour and spoil our plan. A cleaning woman, perhaps."

I took the bottle from his hand. "But I see no reason why you must remain here until then. I'll take care of everything just before I leave."

I glanced at my watch. "In exactly one hour, you give yourself up."

He hesitated.

"I am entirely competent to take care of matters here," I said firmly. "I suggest that you take a quiet drive for an hour."

It was difficult to determine whether he was relieved or reluctant to go.

I phoned Brager five minutes after he left.

Brager came within twenty minutes. "What's so mysterious that you had to make me come to you?" he demanded. "If it's a scheme to get more money out of me, you're wasting your time."

I waited until he took a chair. "Does anyone know that I phoned?"

"Of course not," he snapped.

I leaned against a corner of my desk. "You want power and I want money. That much is plain. I'm willing to get you that power, but the pay isn't sufficient and I don't like begging for money a bit at a time."

He grinned. "I'm crying about that."

"I require at least two hundred thousand a year," I said. "And that in regular installments."

Brager chuckled softly. "A man in the public eye can't be too big a spender. The voters don't like it. And don't be bitter about the little thousands I give you. They add up to fifty a year."

I folded my arms. "Then I may assume you intend to change nothing?"

"I like things just the way they are."

I sighed. "In that case I come to a second matter. I mentioned previously the possibility of a family alliance."

Anger flicked into his eyes. "You know what I said about that."

I picked up a sheaf of papers. "Then I move to subject number three. Look these over. You'll find them interesting."

He took the bundle and frowned at it. "What is this supposed to be?"

I moved to the fireplace. "Read and find out."

Brager's back was toward me. "This is just a financial report on the newspaper," he said. "And a year old at that."

"Turn to page twelve," I said. I selected the poker which did not carry Renolds' prints.

Brager was still hunched over the report when I struck. He grunted as the iron bit into his skull, and pitched forward on his face.

I made sure that he was dead. Then I took the poker to the washstand in the next room and cleaned it. I returned it to the fireplace and with a handkerchief carefully removed its twin so as not to disturb Renolds' fingerprints. I smeared it with Brager's blood and put it on the floor beside his head.

I dimmed the lights, making the room almost dark and then put on my hat and topcoat. I slipped Renolds' bottle into my pocket and took the elevator to the floor below, where I knew there was an incinerator, and got rid of it.

Outside the building I walked to where I'd parked my car two blocks away and began the drive to my cabin in the mountains.

I could almost see the way things would happen.

Probably Earl Wittig, Brager's Chief Deputy, would be in charge of the case.

"It's peculiar," he would say. "First Renolds said that he killed you. When we investigated, we found it was actually Brager who was dead."

"Renolds admitted the murder?"

Wittig would look perplexed. "He changed his story to something wild, about you and him trying to frame Brager and the department."

"That's ridiculous," I would snap. "Why should I want to do something like that?"

Wittig's eyes would be guarded. "You and Brager weren't exactly bosom buddies."

If there were other people in the room, I would draw Wittig aside. "Do you believe everything you read in the newspapers?"

Wittig's face would show perplexity.

My voice would be low. "Brager's daughter and I intend to marry."

The information might take a few seconds to penetrate. Wittig's mouth would fall open slightly.

Perhaps I would wink. "Things aren't always what they seem on the surface, Wittig. I'm sure you understand that. Brager and I were actually the best of friends. But we thought it more . . . ah . . . convenient to keep that fact quiet. At least until after the

election. You know what I mean?"

Wittig would break into an understanding chuckle. "I get it, Mr. Troy."

"I imagine that Brager probably came to see me and have a drink," I would say. "He often did that late at night when he could be sure we wouldn't be seen together. We would talk over business."

I would sigh. "Unfortunately for Brager I wasn't there, but Renolds was." I would be thoughtful for a few moments. "Perhaps it was dim in the office and Renolds actually thought he was killing me. Or is it possible that he actually had a motive for killing Brager?"

"A good one," Wittig would say emphatically. "That and his fingerprints on the murder weapon ought to take him to the chair."

I would offer Wittig a cigar. "I suppose you're next in line for Brager's job?"

His eyes would light at the thought of it. "That's right. Somebody has to take his place."

"I hope we can be friends." I would smile. "In the same way Brager and I were."

Wittig would grin. "Why not?"

I arrived at the cabin at two-thirty in the morning and made a fire to drive out the dampness.

Ellen was alone now, I reflected as I watched the flaming logs. I doubted if it would be difficult to get her consent to marry me soon. At the most it might be a year.

I would probably still have to run for governor. If for no other reason, but to please her. I sighed at the thought of the remaining three weeks of the campaign.

I had no great desire to win the election. The governorship would be tedious.

When I married Ellen, I would take an immediate

leave of absence. Perhaps we'd go to Africa. Yes, that was it. Then a hunting accident and the governor would resign his post and go to Europe to grieve and forget.

And live so well on his late wife's millions.

It was two days later when Wittig found me. I was sitting on the steps of the cabin cleaning my rifle.

"Mr. Roger Troy?" he asked.

I nodded.

He took the rifle out of my hands. "You're under arrest."

I smiled quizzically. "May I ask what in the world for?"

"For the murder of Sheriff Mike Brager. He was found dead in your office. We checked the prints on the murder weapon with Washington. They were identical to those taken when you were in the army during the war."

I burned my fingertips slightly when I ground out my cigarette. I looked up at Wittig. "What was the murder weapon?"

"You ought to know. A smooth stone paperweight."

The next words slipped out of me unintentionally. "What about Renolds?"

The name was strange to Wittig. "Who's he?"

I took a breath. "Nobody. Nobody at all."

"Would you care to make a statement?"

"No," I said. "Not until I see my lawyer."

But it was Renolds I really wanted to see.

I didn't know if he would actually come when I sent for him, but it may have been that he was curious to see what he'd done.

The guard brought him up to my cell door the next day. "Would you like to be let inside, Mr. Renolds?" he asked.

Renolds shook his head. "No. This is far enough."

I waited until the guard moved down the corridor. "You became frightened and backed out? Isn't that right?" I demanded. "You came back to my office and framed me. You knew that my fingerprints would be on the paperweight."

He spoke quietly. "You tried to frame me too, didn't you, Mr. Troy?"

"I can drag you into this," I said harshly.

His mouth twitched slightly. "With some wild story? Are you planning an insanity plea?" He met my eyes. "You did murder him, didn't you?"

I glared and said nothing.

His mouth twitched again in what might have been a smile. "I just wanted to be sure. There was a remote possibility that it could have been someone else."

"I had no motive," I snapped.

"Perhaps one will be found." There was no question about the smile now. "I understand you are being thoroughly investigated as a result of several anonymous tips."

"They'll be able to determine that the murder weapon was a poker. Not the paperweight."

There was amusement in his eyes. "If the murderer had been content to strike only once or twice, that might have been possible. But Brager's skull was completely smashed. Perhaps by a dozen blows."

But that wasn't the way I'd left Brager.

The note of desperation in my voice startled me. "If I'd killed him, I wouldn't have left him in my office. I would have disposed of the body."

Renolds smiled. "You got panicky and ran away." He watched my face. "I wanted Brager to be dead and that's what happened. Things couldn't have worked out finer if I'd planned them that way."

My eyes widened.

Renolds touched the brim of his hat with a fore-

finger. "Goodbye, Mr. Troy. At least now you can stop worrying about being poor."

I stared at him. "How did you know about that?"

Renolds smiled.

I gripped the bars. "How did you know about that?" I demanded again.

But he was walking away.

# THE DEEP SIX

Richard Hardwick

Marty Pollard propped his fishing rod against the seat of the skiff and put on the yellow rain jacket. In the gray light of early morning the calm surface of the lake was pocked by raindrops.

Phil Devlin, hunched on the rear seat beside the small outboard motor, said, "Thought the fish would have started hitting by now, Marty."

"Patience, pal, we just got started." He lit a cigarette, pulled the hood of the jacket up against the fine, mist-like rain, and picked up the rod again. Devlin had been right. Getting away from the store for a few days did help. On the lake, with a fishing rod in his hands, the problems did indeed seem smaller. They didn't go away, there were going to be no miracles wrought, but there was something about the outdoors that threw a different light on things. It was also doing his nerves no harm getting away from Francine for a while. That part Phil wouldn't know about, having never leaped into the sea of matrimony himself.

Marty gave the deep trolling plug a jerk, hoping the action might enliven the appetite of a passing bass. The little outboard chugged along faithfully, moving the boat on a course parallel to the steep shore, some thirty feet out. A couple of hundred yards down the road that ran along the lake shore he saw a car. It was coming very fast, and for a moment it disappeared from his view.

His mind was on other things, the big shopping cen-

ter that had put such a crimp in his small hardware business, and what he could do to straighten that out if only he could arrange the proper financing.

The car abruptly appeared again, making the sharp curve just above them. It was going even faster than he had first thought, and now Marty could see that it was sliding on the rain-slick road. There was no sound of skidding, or if there was, it was inaudible above the steady chug of the outboard. But he saw the back end slew around on the narrow road, and the desperate cut of the wheels as the driver tried to bring the car back under control.

*"Phil!"* Marty pointed up, and Devlin craned his head around and saw the car. It was completely off the road now, soaring gracefully through the air and dropping so rapidly that Devlin rammed the throttle forward in an effort to avoid having the car come down on them. The abrupt action served only to choke the engine and it spluttered to a halt. With the outboard suddenly silenced, they could distinctly hear screams from the car.

It passed directly over the boat and crashed into the lake in the attitude of a shallow dive. A steep wave struck the skiff almost at once, rocking it violently. The car itself submerged completely, then bobbed up, the hood still underwater and the windows almost at water level. It had swung sideways to the boat and a man's face appeared at the rear window, staring out at them, his fingers curled over the top of the glass which was open several inches.

"Get the motor started!" Marty said. He snatched up the paddle and began to stroke toward the car as Phil jerked on the starter cord. The car was settling rapidly, air hissing out the windows and vents as the weight of the steel pulled it down.

*"Help,"* the man called out faintly. *"Help . . ."*

There were four other men in the car. Marty saw the driver sprawled forward on the steering column, the others crumpled forward by the impact, all but the one either unconscious or dead. As they drew alongside the car he also saw two large bags in the rear seat.

Marty grabbed the rear door handle, but either the door was locked or the pressure of the water prevented his opening it. His face was only inches from that of the dazed passenger, and for an instant their fingers brushed. Then the car tipped violently, rear bumper skyward, nose down, and with much bubbling and gurgling and a final scream from the man, it plunged beneath the water. A circular wave swept in, met, tossed a little plume of water into the air, and then there was only the sound of the rain drizzling down softly on the surface of the lake.

Marty and Phil stared at each other. "Good gosh . . ." Devlin muttered.

Marty leaned and peered over the side, as if expecting the car's occupants to start popping up. But nothing at all came up, other than a few final bubbles and a faint slick of oil that spread away over the water leaving no more trace than a flooded outboard motor would have.

"Hadn't we better do something?" Marty said.

"Do? The water's seventy or eighty feet deep here! What the devil can we do?" He shook his head, as if clearing it. "I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. I'm not so sure I believe it anyhow."

"That poor guy at the window . . ."

"The damn car nearly landed on *us,* Marty."

They both glanced up quickly at the road, as if expecting another. But cars rarely used the old road now that the new interstate highway had been completed. The lake road, following the shoreline for

twelve or fifteen miles, was used mostly now by fishermen and people like Phil who had cabins on this side of the big lake.

"We'd better mark the place and go for help," Marty said.

"Best way is to run back to the cabin and drive the car into Flintville. It's not likely another car'll be along any time soon."

"Do you suppose we should stay here for a while? Just in . . . in case?"

"None of 'em will be getting out down there, but it won't hurt to wait a few minutes."

They waited ten minutes, and then Devlin got the little motor cranked up and the two friends headed back for the cabin.

More than an hour had passed by the time they got to Flintville, what with the long, slow boat ride and then the rain-slickened dirt road leading from Devlin's cabin to the highway. They drove directly to the police station, which was located on the courthouse square. Early as it was, just seven o'clock, the square was a beehive of activity. Cars roared in and out and a great many men milled about the police station.

"I wonder what's up?" Marty said as they went inside the building. A big man in a black suit and a ten gallon hat brushed by them and Marty tapped him on the shoulder. "Say, mister, where do we report a . . ."

The big fellow shrugged him off. "Somebody clear all these people outta here!" he bellowed. "How are we supposed to get anything done with a bunch of rubbernecks cluttering up the place?"

"But we just want to . . ." Devlin started.

"Right over there, buster, the sergeant'll take care of you."

A door to the left flew open and a thin, unshaven face peered out. "Hey, Cap'n Cleary! FBI in Atlanta wants to talk to you!"

"Tell 'em to get up here!"

"They've got some men on the way, but they still want to talk to you."

The big man groaned. "Okay. Be right there." He grabbed a uniformed officer who was passing. "What about those road blocks east of town? Did you get the state patrol on that?"

"Yes sir. All taken care of."

"What's all the fuss?" Marty asked blandly.

"Somebody please see what these birds want!" the captain shouted. A cop took them in tow and led them to a desk.

"I'm Sergeant Holman," he said. "Now then, what's your beef?"

A brash young man smelling of shaving lotion forced his way between them. "Come on, Holman, give out! I can't get beans from Cleary. How much did they get away with? Who was it saw them? What are you doing . . . ?"

"You know as much as I do, Fred. Old Cleve Towers just happened to see 'em sneaking out the back door of the bank about five-thirty. If he hadn't seen 'em, we probably wouldn't have found out about it till the bank opened. The vault's been busted into, with maybe $200,000 of the bank's money gone. On top o' that, a bunch of safe deposit boxes were rifled, and there's no telling how much they got there. We won't know the total haul till we catch 'em."

"*If* you catch 'em," the reporter grinned.

"We'll catch 'em. Got road blocks on every road in the area." The sergeant tried to turn back to Marty and Phil, but the reporter grabbed his arm.

"What kind of car, Holman? And how many men?"

"Five men and a black car, medium-sized."

Marty and Phil glanced at each other, and Marty turned quickly back to the cop. "Hey, we saw . . ."

Devlin gave him a sharp kick in the shin and interrupted. "We see you're busy right now, Sergeant. We'll check back later."

"You got a complaint to make?"

"Nothing serious. Just some . . . some stuff swiped out of our car. It'll wait. It's insured, anyhow."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Camera," Devlin said. At the same instant Marty realized what his friend was doing and volunteered, "Fishing box!"

The cop looked at them with a scowl. "Make up your mind, what was it?"

"Camera *and* fishing box!" Devlin said, almost shouting. He grinned uneasily and backed away from the desk, pulling Marty with him. The reporter resumed his attack on the sergeant and the two fishermen scurried through the crowd and out to the street.

"I think we did the wrong thing," Marty said as they sat across from each other at a table in a diner half a block from the square. "I think we should have told him what happened."

"You heard what they were saying, Marty! Those guys in that car just blew the bank. They got more than $200,000 and it's all down there on the bottom of the lake!"

"Sure—*if* it's the same car."

"Don't give me that *if* business," Devlin scoffed. "A black car, five guys in it, and you saw those big bags in the back seat."

"The cops will be looking everywhere for them, and you heard what that fellow said about the FBI com-

ing up here. I think we ought to go back and tell them, Phil. I don't want to fool around with the FBI."

Devlin stirred his coffee, then pushed the cup aside, folded his arms on the table and leaned toward Marty. "We aren't fooling around with anybody, pal, can't you see that? We're just—just waiting to see what happens."

"We're withholding information, that's what we're doing. And it's against the law."

"So, suddenly you know all about the law or something? What are you, Marty, some kind of lawyer maybe?"

"No, but ignorance of the law is no excuse . . ."

"Oh, brother! Let's get back out to the cabin and hash this whole thing over. It won't hurt to wait a couple of days. It's not as if telling about the car now would help those guys down there in it. Anyhow, maybe the cops'll find it by themselves."

Marty finished his coffee and shrugged. "Okay, we'll wait a couple of days and see what happens."

On the way back to Devlin's cabin they stopped at the curve where the bandits' car had plunged into the lake. There was hardly a mark on the wet pavement or on the narrow gravel shoulder to show that anything had happened; nevertheless, Devlin carefully smoothed the gravel with his shoe and by the time they drove on no one could have detected anything out of the ordinary.

At the cabin they turned on a portable radio, popped a pair of beers, and settled down to hear the developments. The Flintville radio station had a man on the scene at the bank giving a blow by blow account of the investigation, or as near that as he could, since confusion seemed to be the principal ingredient at that point.

"Captain Cleary has just told your reporter that the search is being concentrated in the hill country surrounding the lake. It is thought the bandits may have holed up nearby, as hastily set up road blocks have produced no trace of the fleeing criminals."

"It's them, all right!" Devlin exulted. "Holed up in the area, are they? He can say that again! But the hole is about eighty feet deep and filled with water!"

Marty was still plagued by doubts concerning the course they had embarked upon, but when he mentioned again to Devlin that he thought they were doing the wrong thing, Phil replied, "How's that business of yours going, pal? Making lots of money since the shopping center opened down the street?"

"You know my business is lousy. And so is yours."

"Right. So let's analyze it. A guy with a nice little hardware store . . ." he reached over and tapped Marty on the chest, ". . . and a guy with a comfortable little liquor store . . ." he tapped his own chest, ". . . are doing okay until a big shopping center opens up right down the street. They got no parking problems like we got, and two liquor stores and a big hardware emporium open up in the shopping center. Our business hits the skids. We need dough to make changes or to move, but we don't have it and the banks are suddenly very cool toward us." He aimed a finger out at the lake. "But we know where there's a lot of dough, and we're the only two guys on earth who *do* know where it is! That dough can solve every last problem you and I have got, Marty! And you want to tell it to the cops?"

Marty let it all sink in, and then he said, "It'd take a lot of equipment to pull that car up. You said yourself the water there is eighty feet deep. How can you do something like that without attracting a lot of attention?"

"What do we want with the car? And we sure don't want the five guys inside. This is a job for divers, Marty. Have you ever seen that guy Mike Nelson on TV? He uses one of those diving outfits with the tanks and all, and he does stuff like that in his sleep."

"Sure," Marty grinned. "But we aren't Mike Nelson. Why, I've never even seen a diving outfit, and I'll bet you haven't either."

"Right," Devlin said, "but we're going to see one, first thing when we get back to the city."

A ray of morning sunlight slanted in through the window. "Rain's stopped," Marty said absently.

"Kind of like an omen, maybe?" Devlin suggested. He stood up and finished the can of beer. "Let's get back out fishing. We don't want to do anything the least suspicious. We want to go on just like we didn't know a thing. Right, *partner?*"

The place had the casually disorganized air of all establishments that deal with the sporting public. There was a conglomeration of equipment and gadgets on display in showcases, none of which seemed to have any logic or attention to eye appeal. They were simply there, to be looked at if anyone cared to do so.

At the rear of the store against one wall stood a row of tall pressure cylinders, and beyond them was an air compressor. A cluster of boys stood about a young man who was filling a smaller air cylinder, all talking excitedly and occasionally laughing in happy anticipation.

Marty and Phil waited patiently at the counter and thumbed through a catalog until the young man was free to wait on them.

"We're thinking about taking up diving," Phil said. "Your sign out front says you give instructions."

"We got a new class starting Monday downtown at

the YMCA pool," he said. He looked them over, his gaze pausing momentarily on Marty's ample paunch. "A man has to be in pretty good physical condition to become a scuba diver."

Marty grinned and patted his stomach. "This? Don't worry about it!"

"I ain't worried about it, mister. Maybe you should."

"What do we need for the course?" Phil asked.

"Well, we supply equipment or you can bring your own."

After a bit of dickering Marty and Phil signed up for lessons and bought a complete set of scuba diving equipment, used, at a cost of slightly more than $200 for each of them.

"It's okay for you," Marty said as they drove away, "but what about me? You don't know what it's like having a wife who watches every dime that comes in or goes out. Francine is going to find out I spent two hundred bucks and she's going to want to know where the devil it went."

"This thing is between you and me, Marty. The worst thing we could do is to go blabbing it around."

"Okay, but I'll still have to tell Francine something."

"Say, the guy that does my bookkeeping used to be with the city tax department. I'll bet I could get some kind of blank tax form, make it out to you, mark it paid in full, and that would be that!"

Marty thought about it for a minute or two. "Well, I guess it's as good as anything else." He shook his head. It wasn't as simple as it looked. Just eighty feet or so away from all that money, and now there was all this business about diving lessons, and lying to Francine, and phony tax bills. That was going to be the tough part, trying to convince Francine.

The next morning Marty Pollard discovered it was far tougher than he imagined. Petite Francine, less

than a hundred pounds soaking wet, seemed to swell up at times like this, and Marty sat hunched over his oatmeal, listening.

"Bowling, was it? Where do you and Phil do your bowling now, Marty, downtown at the YMCA pool? And what about *this?*" She flung the fake tax receipt across the breakfast table where it came to rest in the bowl of hot cereal. "I called the tax office and they don't know one thing about this! And finally, there's two hundred dollars missing from the bank account, and what about all that junk you've got hidden in the back room at the store! *Diving* equipment, Marty Pollard! Have you gone completely out of your mind? We can hardly scrape together enough for the mortgage payments, business is so lousy, and here you've taken up a new hobby!"

He lifted the paper out of his oatmeal, shook it off lightly, and dropped it on the table. "If you'll let me explain, Francine," he muttered, not having the slightest idea where to go from there.

"I'm waiting, Marty," she said, crossing her arms tightly across her bosom. "I'm not unreasonable. When you came back from that hardware convention in Atlantic City and I found those lipstick smears on your shirt and that woman's name and phone number in your coat pocket, I was reasonable, wasn't I? I let you explain. . . ."

"But you didn't believe me."

"That's beside the point. Go on. I'm waiting."

Phil Devlin could not possibly understand. There was no way a single man could understand these things. "Well, it's this way, Francine," he said, defeated. "When Phil and I were at the lake fishing we stumbled onto something big."

"Blonde or brunette?" she rasped between clenched teeth.

He tried to ignore the remark. "You've read in the papers about that big bank robbery in Flintville?"

Her expression did not change at once, but the blood seemed to drain slowly from her face. "Marty, you and Phil didn't . . . you're not the ones the police are looking for . . ."

He had not anticipated this. "No! Of course not! Rob the bank? Phil and *me?*"

"Then what is it you're getting at? And it better be good!"

He took a deep breath, pushed the oatmeal aside and, starting at the very beginning, told Francine everything.

By the time he was done she was staring at him with her mouth agape. Behind the unusual expression, he thought he saw, though he could not be sure, a faint glimmer of respect.

"And that's it," he said. "Phil and I are learning to dive so we can go down and get the money. It was Phil's idea. I wanted to tell the police what we'd seen and . . ."

"Tell the *police!*" she broke in. "The biggest thing that ever came along and you wanted to tell the cops! Are you out of your mind?"

Funny, Marty thought, but that was almost precisely Phil Devlin's reaction.

Francine scurried out to the back porch and came back with an armful of recent newspapers. She cleared away the table and, starting with the first one, clipped the news stories of the robbery. "Look at this one," she said gleefully. "Vanishing Bandits Baffle Cops."

"They say the FBI never does stop looking for people like that," Marty ventured. "They never close a file until it's solved."

She did not appear to have heard him. "Did you

see this, Marty? Last Wednesday's paper says that the Flintville police are examining the lake road for signs of an accident. They think the bandits might have run into the lake."

"I saw that. Friday's paper says they didn't find anything. Did you hear what I said about the FBI? They never give up."

"But you and Phil didn't rob the bank, honey. What's against the law if you just happen to find a whole lot of money lying on the bottom of the lake?" She went on reading the papers. "Are you going to get it soon?"

"The lake's deep where the car went in. Phil says it's at least eighty feet, and our instructor says we shouldn't try any deep dives till we finish the training course. We're going to the lake tomorrow and measure just how deep it really is."

"I'm going with you."

"No! You can't! I mean, Phil and I agreed we wouldn't say a word about this to anybody. He'll get sore if he finds out I told you."

"Well, *let* Mr. Phil Devlin get sore!" she bristled. "He ought to know that a husband doesn't have any secrets from his wife."

"Try to understand, Francine!"

"Maybe you should try to understand, Marty. Has it occurred to you that your old friend might want to keep this little secret between the two of you because he has plans?"

"Plans? What are you talking about?"

"It seems simple to me. I'm talking about an awful lot of money, and I'm talking about Phil Devlin, who has always looked shifty to me."

"Phil? Shifty? He's my best friend! What's shifty about my best friend?"

"You take a close look at him sometime. It's kind

of hard to pin down, but I think it's his eyes."

"That is the most absurd thing I ever heard," he said flatly. He had to admit that it was odd, though, Francine's bringing this up. He had felt a peculiar, indefinable mistrust growing between himself and Phil, and he now realized that it traced back to that moment in the Flintville police station when Phil had kicked him in the shin.

At eight o'clock the following morning Francine and Marty pulled up in front of Phil Devlin's house and Marty reluctantly blew the horn. Phil came trotting out, paused at the side of the car, looked from Francine to Marty, and then climbed into the back seat, slamming the door far harder than necessary.

"She knows?" he asked.

Francine turned and gave him an icy stare. "She knows."

"We agreed, Marty," he said, trying to bypass Francine. "It was going to be just between the two of us until we found it."

"I—I couldn't help it, Phil."

"Why so secretive?" Francine asked. "You wouldn't have been cooking up a little double cross, would you?"

"Francine!" Marty said. "You've got no reason to talk to Phil like that!"

"No? Look at him, Marty. I hit the nail right on the head."

"That's what I meant," Phil went on, trying to contain his anger. "You tell Francine what we're up to and right away she starts looking for trouble."

"*Trouble!*" she screamed.

"Oh, shut up, both of you," Marty said. "It's done, now let's make the best of it." He glanced furtively in the rearview mirror at Devlin. He did seem unaccountably peeved by Francine's being there. Maybe,

just maybe, she was onto something after all.

There was no other boat in sight and no cars up on the road. As they came abreast of the boulder on the shore by which they had marked the spot, Devlin cut the motor.

"This look about right, Marty?"

"I think so." He tipped the rod over the gunwale and took his thumb off the reel. The line spun out until the sinker struck bottom, and Marty made a little knot in the line and reeled back in. "That's got it. We can measure it when we get back to the cabin. Let's go."

A car was parked beside Marty's when they got back to the cabin. As Phil eased the skiff ashore a big man in a black suit and a ten gallon hat came ambling down the slope, and before he was halfway to them Marty was able to recognize him.

"One of you fellas Phil Devlin?" the big man said in a voice that rang with authority.

Phil nodded and climbed out into the shallow water. "That's me."

The big man stopped at the bow of the boat, squinted slightly and let his gaze pause on each of them, as if taking a mental photograph. Then he pulled a leather folder from his pocket and flashed it around.

"Captain Cleary of the Flintville police."

"Police?" Devlin said faintly.

The badge and ID card disappeared into the pocket, and the captain pinned Devlin with his gaze. "The guy up the road at the bait shop knows you. Says he thinks you bought some shiners from him on the fifth of this month."

Devlin laughed uneasily. "No law against buying shiners, is there?"

Cleary overlooked the obvious. "You folks have

read about the bank robbery we had in Flintville on the sixth?"

"What's that got to do with me—with us?"

"It's a tough case. Wondered if maybe you were out fishing early on the morning of the sixth."

"The sixth, huh?" Phil pursed his lips. "You were up here with me then, weren't you, Marty? Sure! I remember it was raining that morning. We didn't have much luck. Should have stayed in."

"Did you happen to see anything?" Cleary asked. "Maybe a car or a boat with five guys in it?"

"No—fact is, we didn't even see a fish."

"That's the truth, Phil," Marty put in. "Just about the worst luck we ever had. I . . ."

A uniformed cop appeared from beyond the cabin and started down toward the group at the boat. "Any luck?" he called down to the captain.

"Don't look like it, Holman."

The cop looked at Devlin and frowned. He stopped at the captain's side, his attention switched to Marty, and the frown deepened. "Say, don't I know you guys from some place?"

"Us?" Marty croaked, his throat suddenly bone dry.

The cop rubbed his jaw to summon the genie of remembrance. "Yeah, you guys were in the station the morning of the bank job. Something about your car being busted into."

"Oh, that," Devlin said. "Forgot all about it. Fact is, we *thought* some things had been swiped out of the car, but we found the stuff back here at the cabin, didn't we, Marty?"

"We sure did. Found 'em. Sure did find 'em." His lips tried to stick when they came together.

The captain nodded to Marty. "The two of you fishing together that morning, huh? What's your name, mister?"

"Me? Oh, I'm Marty. Party Mollard—I mean Marty *Pol*lard." He swung his arm around stiffly, striking Francine in the neck. "This is my wife, Mrs. Mollard —Pollard."

Both officers touched their caps cursorily, then the captain sighed and pushed his hat back. He took a card from his pocket and gave it to Devlin. "Well, if you do remember anything about that morning, no matter how little it might seem to you, we'd appreciate your getting in touch."

They all walked up to the cabin and cars. Sgt. Holman, climbing in behind the wheel, glanced into Marty's car. "Let's go, Holman," Cleary grumbled. "We've got a lot to do."

Three pairs of eyes watched the car until it disappeared in the direction of the highway. It was Marty who broke the silence.

"Do you think they got suspicious, Phil?"

"What's to get suspicious of? They're desperate, that's all. Grabbing at straws. They got less chance of solving this case than I got of flying to the moon. Now come on, let's measure that line."

The five bank robbers, along with their car and their loot, were not in eighty feet of water at all, but in one hundred and twenty feet. Marty and Phil queried their instructor at the end of the next diving class on a hypothetical dive of that depth.

"Pretty deep for beginners," he said. "I wouldn't worry about you, Mr. Devlin. You've got a natural knack for diving." He cut a glance at Marty. "It's going to take a little longer with you, Mr. Pollard. It's like that with some people. Some got it, some ain't."

Driving home that night Devlin said, "You could stay in the boat, Marty. I could dive down and get it by myself."

The things that Francine had been saying about

Phil Devlin had sunk in deeper and more effectively than even Marty himself realized. "And stash half of it away so you can go back later?" he asked harshly. "Not on your life, Phil! And don't try anything like going up there with*out* me, either! I'll be keeping a close eye on you!"

"Now *wait* a minute! You think I'd try to double-cross you? That I'm some kind of fink or something?"

"I just want to be sure we understand each other, buddy. No funny stuff."

"*Funny* stuff, is it?"

"Any funny stuff and I go straight to the cops."

Devlin slammed on the brakes, reached over and grabbed Marty's shirt front. "Don't start threatening me, pal! I could handle you when we were kids and I can still do it!"

"Get your crummy hands off me!" He clawed at Devlin's grip and the shirt tore down the front from neck to belt.

The abrupt sound seemed momentarily to bring both men to their senses. Devlin laughed self-consciously and put his hands back on the wheel.

"Sorry, Marty. I guess I kind of blew my stack there."

"I shouldn't have said what I did. Sorry, Phil."

But the rift was there and a smile and an apology were not going to close it. The weeks went by slowly, and the end of the diving course drew near. Marty told Francine what the instructor had said about Phil having a knack for diving, and subsequent sessions bore this out. Phil emerged decidedly as the star pupil of the entire class.

Francine's suspicions were endless and, to Marty, more and more convincing.

"What's to keep Phil from going up there and taking the money and hiding it somewhere?" she asked one night.

They had agreed that the salvage job had to be done at night, with the aid of a powerful underwater light they had selected carefully.

"I told him what I'd do if he pulled any funny business. I'll call the cops," Marty said.

"And what can the cops do? All Phil has to do is say he doesn't know what you're talking about. And then who will be out on the limb?"

"He wouldn't try it alone. It's deep. It's . . ." He paced up and down the room, hands clasped behind his back. Sure it was deep, and there would be a certain element of danger, particularly for a lone diver. But the estimates of the haul the bandits had made had ranged up as high as half a million. Phil would be willing to take a chance for that kind of money. He might not want to settle for a half share. . . .

Marty snatched up the telephone and dialed Devlin's number. "We'll see if he's up to anything." The phone rang half a dozen times and Marty shifted it uneasily to the other ear. "Might be asleep," he said to Francine.

Her only reply was a sneer. He let the phone ring a few more times and then he slammed it down.

"He'd better not be trying to put anything over on me!" he snapped, grabbing up his hat.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going over to Phil's house! If he's not there, I'm going up to the lake!"

He stormed out the door, Francine's "Be careful!" ringing in his ears. It was a moonless night, calm and warm. An ideal night for a solo dive.

He reached the car, and as he took hold of the handle there was a rustling sound from the nearby shrubbery. Marty paused, staring into the darkness. Leaves rustled again, and a shadow loomed up. Marty tensed himself.

"Kind of late to be going somewhere, isn't it, pal?" Phil Devlin materialized out of the gloom. "You wouldn't be trying to beat *me* to the loot, would you? All that talk of yours got me to thinking."

"What are you doing here? I just called your place. Got no answer and I figured *you* were . . ."

"Who're you talking to out there, Marty?" Francine called from the house. "What's going on?"

"It's Phil."

"*Phil!* What's he doing here?"

"He says he thought I was trying to double-cross him."

By unanimous agreement among the three of them, Phil Devlin moved into the Pollards' guest room that same night. They drove to Phil's, he packed a suitcase, and they drove back and settled him in his room, Francine turning back the covers for him.

"We should plan on making the dive in a week or ten days, Marty," Phil said. "Until then, we can all keep an eye on each other."

"I feel kind of silly about this whole business," Marty said.

"Better silly than sorry," remarked Francine.

"Right," seconded Devlin, and he bade them goodnight and closed and locked his door.

They sat down together at the breakfast table next morning, eyes swollen and red from sleeplessness.

"Sleep well?" Francine asked their guest.

"Like a top!"

"So did we!" She put his plate of eggs and bacon before him, then got Marty's and her own. "Eat hearty!" she smiled.

"Looks great!" Phil said. "A poor bachelor just doesn't eat like this!" With that, he swapped plates with Marty and dug in with gusto.

It saddened Marty. The complexities piled up. In

addition to worrying about the police and the FBI, it now appeared that the friendship between himself and Phil Devlin, which dated back to early childhood, was shattered beyond repair. When trust goes out one window, he said to himself, friendship goes out the other. And as if to compound the fracture, a couple of nights later Francine took Marty aside urgently and revealed a discovery she had made while searching Phil's car.

"He's got a *knife,* Marty! Hidden under the car seat, one like I've seen pictures of in your diving books! What's he need a knife for? There aren't any sharks or octopuses in the lake!"

"Are you sure?"

"Am I sure! Do I look like I don't know a monkey wrench from a knife? Sure I'm sure!"

Phil was sitting on the small patio at the rear of the house, reading the evening paper and looking oddly at peace with the world. "The instructor says a knife is a handy tool to have," Marty said lamely.

"Maybe so, but who needs a knife when all you're going to do is go down one time and open a car door?"

Phil turned the page of the paper and re-crossed his legs. The last session of the diving course was set for the next day, a field trip to the lake to give the students a chance at depths greater than the thirteen feet afforded by the pool at the Y. It was the windup, the finale.

And Phil had bought himself a knife. . . .

"Say something to him about it, Marty," Francine whispered close to his ear.

He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I don't think I will."

"You're crazy if you don't!"

He looked around at her, his lips drawn tightly over his teeth in a sinister grin. "I'm not going to say one

thing to him, Francine. But tomorrow I'm going to buy *myself* a knife!"

The big night rolled around. Marty, Phil, and Francine put all the diving gear into the car and after a light supper drove up to the cabin. The night was fine for the task at hand, filled with stars and the sounds of crickets and an occasional bullfrog down by the lake.

But the mood of the group did not fit the night. There was the silent crackle of tension as the equipment was carried down to the skiff. A fishing rod was added so that if anyone chanced by while Francine was alone in the boat there would be little cause for suspicion. The underwater light was checked, and as they climbed into the boat and set out, Marty strapped on his new knife and sheath.

Devlin, at the outboard motor controls, peered at him in the gloom. "When did you get that?"

"The knife? Oh, I don't remember exactly. Just thought it might come in handy. You got one?"

"As a matter of fact, I have," he replied. He glared in the darkness at his two companions, then flipping his cigarette out into the water, touched the handle of his own diving knife.

The site of the crash was not easy to locate even though they had made practice night runs from the cabin on several occasions. At last, however, their flashlight beam picked up the round boulder below the road by which they had marked the spot, and Devlin cut the motor.

Instantly, they were aware of the sound of another motor not far astern of them. Across the still water a small light flared in the night. The motor slowed and a voice wafted to them, "Havin' any luck?"

"Just some guys fishing," Marty whispered. He

cupped his hands to his mouth. "Nope. Don't look too good here."

"Well, we'll give it a try around the bend," the man called back. The motor picked up speed and droned on past them, and Devlin eased the anchor over the side and let the long line run out.

"Hope there won't be any more boats hanging around," he said, and looking around at Marty, "You all set?"

Marty picked up his scuba gear and strapped the harness on, flipping the mouthpiece over his head. "I'm ready whenever you are."

"We got to find it quick, you know. At that depth we can only stay down a few minutes without having to figure decompression coming up. And we don't want to hang around here a minute longer than we have to after we get the dough."

"We've been over this a dozen times," Marty said. This was it. Really it. They were actually going down to get the money, and he wondered just what was going through Devlin's mind at that moment.

The sound of the other boat had died away beyond a bend in the shoreline, and Marty and Phil eased into the water and started down with the anchor line as a guide. The powerful light, carried by Devlin, stabbed into the blackness below. At last they reached the bottom, soft ooze with a little cloud stirred up where the anchor had touched down. Visibility was better than Marty had expected, and by the greatest stroke of luck Phil turned the light to their left and there, less than fifteen feet away, was the automobile.

The two divers finned quickly to it. The car sat upright, as if it had simply been parked there and was waiting to be driven away again. They made for the doors, Marty at the rear and Phil the front. Marty's door came open with surprising ease, and as it did,

creating a small current of its own, a man's body emerged, head first, and began to drift away. A second body was half out as Marty caught at the first. The light dropped to the lake bottom, Devlin grappling to keep the second body inside the car.

In the sudden blackness, with the light directed away from him, Marty caught hold of a cold hand, and fighting down his revulsion, towed the deceased bandit back and pushed him into the back seat, where Devlin was in the process of reseating the one he had caught.

The light caught them in its beam as they crowded into the car with the five bodies and two large sacks. A glint of metal caught the periphery of Marty's vision —he was certain of it! Devlin had his knife in his hand! In an instant of sheer terror he reached for his own knife, banging his head against the roof of the car. He saw Devlin twist around, and they both tried to get through the open door at once.

But he had the knife in his hand now, and Marty brought it around as hard as the resistance of the water would allow. It seemed to sort of slide in just between Phil's ribs, and a dark billow suddenly joined the stirred clouds of silt.

Marty turned loose the knife and, outside the car, closed the door. He retrieved the light and aimed it through the window. It was very difficult to see clearly but he did not need to count them to know that there were six bodies in the car now.

It had been Phil's fault! He had pulled his knife first . . . or had he? Had it been something else that glinted in the beam of light?

It was too late to worry about that. He had to get the bags out and he had to get back to the surface so that decompression stages wouldn't be needed going up.

He removed the bags, closed the door again, and finned back to the anchor line, tied the bags on and started slowly upward.

His head broke the surface beside the boat and he dropped the mouthpiece, pushed the mask up, and put the light over into the boat.

"Marty?" came Francine's whisper. "Is—is that you, Marty?"

"It's me." He gripped the side of the skiff, breathing heavily.

"You found the car?"

There was a splash toward the shore, a fish feeding in the watery jungle. "Yeah, we found the car."

"And—and the *money?*" Her voice pitched higher, keened by anticipation.

Six men, he thought, down there on the bottom of the lake in a black car, driving on through eternity. Five bank robbers and one double-crossing . . . he was certain Phil had tried for him with the knife!

"We found the money," he said. "It's tied to the line."

"Phil," she said, "he hasn't come up. Why—why hasn't he come up, Marty . . . ?"

A sudden burst of light struck them with the force of a physical blow. Oars clanked in oarlocks and then a voice, not really familiar, yet readily identifiable, boomed, "Hold it just like you are! This is the police!"

The light drew nearer and a boat came alongside the skiff. There were three men in it, Captain Cleary, Sergeant Holman, and a man in diving gear.

"We figured it right, Holman," Cleary said.

Marty was pulled out of the water and deposited in the bottom of the boat, completely dazed now by the rapid sequence of unexpected events. "How . . . what . . . that was you a while ago?"

"That was us. We followed you and we had to say something when you stopped and heard our motor."

"Want me to go down now, Cap'n?" the diver asked.

"The other one ought to be up in a minute. We'll wait for him."

"But . . . *how?*" Marty insisted.

"It started that day Holman spotted the diving stuff in your car. When no trace of the bandits turned up we got to thinking something might have happened to them. But it would have been impossible to search the whole shoreline of the lake. Then we remembered you guys coming into the station the morning of the bank job and leaving right after you heard about the robbery. We got to doing some checking. It wasn't hard to find out you were both in financial trouble, and that you'd both enrolled in a diving course. We decided just to keep an eye on you. If we brought you in for questioning it might have spooked you."

Marty glanced over at Francine in the other boat. "Didn't I tell you—*both* of you—that we should tell the cops what we saw?"

"Where's that pal of yours?" Holman asked. "How come he ain't up yet?"

Marty sighed and gazed up at the flickering stars. Such complications, such absolutely fantastic complications. Who would ever have thought that he, Marty Pollard, would ever have gotten himself into such a . . .

"Maybe you'd better send down, Captain," he said. "I think Phil is going to need some help."

# HIDDEN TIGER

Michael Brett

I was thinking that the best time for sleeping is between seven and nine a.m., but if you have trouble sleeping, then any time is the best time.

Myself, I have trouble sleeping and I guess it's due in large part to my wife, who snores and has been snoring for the last eighteen years; but for the fifteen years of our marriage before she started snoring I also had trouble sleeping, so I guess maybe her snoring isn't wholly responsible.

Thirty-three years married to one woman. You love her. You're used to her. Sometimes you think looking at her is like looking at your elbow and you wonder sometimes how a person can stay with another person for so long. Still, it happens all the time.

Nothing remains the same. There was a time when I could play handball for three hours; now, if I run for a cab it takes me five minutes to get my breath back. When I married my wife, she was something. She used to say, "Bradley, you look like a Greek statue." Today she just laughs and pokes me in the belly and tells me that I look like Greek ruins. What are you going to do? It's the way of things.

There are days when a theatrical agent should stay home and forget about making a buck. This was one. There wasn't enough heat in the office. A chill wind swirled large snowflakes and banked them against the store fronts on the opposite side of the street. People walked huddled and crossed carefully at the corners.

Business was like the day, terrible. I had heard two groups audition. In the morning there'd been a folk-rock song-and-guitar outfit, three young men wearing beards and a young girl with long, brushed hair flowing to her waist. They did something about going over a cliff in a car doing one hundred and thirty-five m.p.h. and the world wasn't such a nice place. So what else was new? I told them I'd call them if anything turned up. They sounded ready to lie down in the street and die. They depressed me. Maybe it was too soon after breakfast for me to listen to them.

An hour later there was a psychedelic group, two boys and two girls with electric guitars and a prop man with a shaggy-dog look, a lean character with long sideburns. He flashed colored lights on the group. He gave me a demonstration and I said, "Spare me the lights."

One of the girls pleaded, "Please, Mr. Bradley, our act depends upon psychedelic lighting for effect."

I said, "Okay, but just remember this building is older than me. The wiring isn't so hot. So don't blow any fuses."

They made some noises with the guitars and the girls did some shaking and the gold, red and blue lights gave me a headache. I said, "Pretty good. Leave your names, addresses and a phone number."

The light-flasher said, "We could use work now, Mr. Bradley. We were held over in Manitoba."

So I thought, so why did you ever leave? I need a new psychedelic group like I need a hole in the head, but they weren't bad, so I said, "I'll call you the minute something comes in."

One of the girls said, "Mr. Bradley, we really need the work."

"Everybody needs the work," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

So the light-flasher said, "We'll work for anything, Mr. Bradley. We just got into town. Things are kind of rough."

He was really saying that they were broke. Well, I'd seen and heard worse and I knew a guy who owned one of those coffee houses down in the Village who might be able to use them. I gave him a call and he told me that business was stinko. He needed some entertainers, but the only way he could hire them was on a straight food basis.

"What's that?" I said. "I've never heard that before."

So he said, "I feed them. I don't pay them. That's what that is."

I covered the mouthpiece and said to the psychedelic group, "I don't think so. All he wants to do is provide food."

"We'll take it," said the light-flasher. "Food's worth something."

When they left I tried to figure my commission on the deal. What percentage? Ten percent of four ham sandwiches? Like that, I'd go broke.

I spent the rest of the day on the telephone and booked a little business, a magician for Kent, Ohio, a gal singer for a saloon in Atlantic City, a comic for a lounge act in Las Vegas.

I told two guys who called for acts that I'd keep an eye out and dismissed their requests as soon as I hung up. The first guy had a little roadhouse-type nightclub and if I sent him a girl singer he wouldn't leave her alone. He'd chase and pinch her and she'd get black-and-blue marks on the arms where it showed, and then later I'd have to listen to her complaints. Who needed it?

Phil Kwenk, the second guy, was an altogether different story. He owned Kwenk's Blue Room. It's a dive in an old mill town along the Hudson River in upper New York State. The town has been designated as a depressed area by some state agency. The mills are all closed and the town is dead, and there are some bitter people who live there. You can't blame them. You live in a place, you can get kind of attached to it. You might not want to move away. It's progress and automation, people say. I can remember when people were happier without it.

Anyway, Kwenk used to book a three-piece combo, or sometimes a crooner, but I stopped sending him people when I learned that his patrons gave my performers a hard time. They'd make birdcalls while the singer was on, or throw a firecracker or two while the combo was performing—cute things like that. I liked to think they were the way they were because the town was finished and they had no hope. It could have been like that. Or it could have been that Kwenk's patrons were simply crazies. They used to wreck his place about every third month. At any rate, I no longer sent my clients up to Kwenk's. After all, a theatrical agent has to protect his clients a little bit from the crazies of the world.

The day passed. I checked my watch. It was four o'clock and already dark. Usually I stay until five. Today there seemed to be something wrong with the heating. I felt as cold as the day outside. I cleared my desk. I wouldn't miss any business by going home an hour earlier. I'd have a drink, walk around in slippers, have something hot for supper. Maybe there was something to see on television for a change.

I got my hat and coat and the phone rang. It was my wife reminding me that tonight was her bridge night with the girls, and that she had left cold cuts

and some hard-boiled eggs for me. "And make sure you clean up after yourself. Put the dishes away. Don't leave me a mess, and if you don't mind, Mister Bradley, don't fall asleep on the couch and don't leave your filthy cigar butts in my ash trays."

I said, "Okay," and hung up. Of course she was right about the cigar butts. Thirty-three years together, and we had two children and three grandchildren and she calls me Mister Bradley, and with a sharp tone, no less; and that was a girl who used to have to fight me off like a tiger before we were married.

I heard a sound and a slender girl stepped into the office. She was about twenty, a brunette with a thin face and big eyes and with fresh snow on her hair. There was something familiar about her.

"Are you Mr. Bradley?" she asked.

"One and the same," I said. "That's me."

She glanced at her watch, then looked at me worriedly. "I thought the office would be open until five o'clock."

"Usually it is," I said. "Today I have a business appointment. Is there something you want to tell me?"

"My name is Janet Rawls. I sing, Mr. Bradley," she blurted. "I was hoping that I could sing for you."

"It's late," I said. "Come back tomorrow morning when you're fresh, Miss. You're trying to get into a tough business. You need all the breaks you can get. You come around twenty minutes before closing time, when people are thinking of going home, and you're not going to do yourself any good." That was me, the voice of experience talking. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Mr. Bradley, I'm sorry I came just before you were leaving," she said, and began walking out. From the doorway, she turned to me and explained, "Mr. Brad-

ley, it would be very difficult for me to come back tomorrow morning."

I didn't ask her why. She probably had a reason. Maybe it wasn't convenient. To look at, she was just a skinny kid, all eyes. In the dim light shining from the hall, she was a figure out of the far-off past. She startled me. Then I realized she reminded me of my wife twenty-five years ago. Twenty-five years ago I would have rushed home to see my wife. Tonight I didn't feel like going home. Sometimes I think I work longer than I need to, so I don't have to go home.

She was very young and pretty, and tonight my wife and her cold cuts and her Mister Bradley, and the miserable gray snow and the cold people in the streets bent over against the sharp wind made me feel sad.

So I said, "Miss Rawls, would you make an old man who is very much in need of cheer happy, by having dinner with him?"

She made an appraisal, then gave me a warm grin. "I don't think you're old at all. I think you're distinguished-looking with your gray hair, handsome in fact, and I would love to have dinner with you."

"A big steak, tossed salad, and a baked potato. You like that?"

She just nodded and looked happy.

So I took her to a place with low leather-covered booths that had a moose head hanging on the wall and where the drinks were good and the portions plentiful and delicious.

She attacked her steak like a school of piranha. It was wonderful just to watch her. We drank coffee and she told me about herself. Born in a small New England town, father a chauffeur, she'd come to the big town to study dramatics and voice. Her father had died, she'd run out of funds. An instructor had told her she had a good voice and she'd come to me.

"In the morning I'll hear you," I said.

"I know it's an imposition. Can I do it now?"

There was nobody waiting for me at home. *Why not?* I thought. I said, "All right," and we went back to my office.

I played the piano. She had a voice suitable for one of those bad college-musical productions. It wasn't good enough to sell. Too bad; I felt sad, because I liked her. I wanted to help her. Then I thought of a saloon-keeper who owed me a favor. He sometimes had a girl playing lazy piano, background stuff to which nobody listened.

She couldn't play the piano.

I told her that I was sorry.

"Thank you for everything," she said. Then she gave me an uncertain look. "Mr. Bradley, would it be all right if I stayed here tonight?"

"Here? Here in the office?" I said.

"The reason I wanted you to hear me sing tonight is, if you had liked me I would have asked for an advance, and I'd have taken a room in a hotel."

I offered her twenty-five dollars and she said, "No, thank you, Mr. Bradley."

"It's a loan," I said.

"No, thank you," she said, and I watched in amazement as a tear welled in her eye. "I just want a place to spend the night."

Her pride was unsettling. "You'll freeze here. They turn the heat down. It gets very cold at night."

"I don't care about that," she said. "Please."

"Stay here," I said. I went out and purchased an electric heater and brought it back. "Don't open the door for anyone. You're a girl and you're alone."

"I'm grateful to you, Mr. Bradley. You don't have to worry. I won't take anything," she assured me.

"Take whatever you want, my desk, my file cabinet,

a calendar from my insurance company. You'll be doing me a favor. Leave the ash trays. I stole them from a hotel and I'm very fond of them."

"I love you, Mr. Bradley," she said, and laughed.

She was something, this Miss Rawls.

Twenty-five years ago, ten years ago, I was a tiger. I said, "Go to sleep." I went home and went to bed.

When my wife came home she awakened me. "What's the matter with you?" she said. "You were smiling and laughing in your sleep."

"Don't begrudge me my happiness. I was dreaming of a young, beautiful girl who's sleeping on the couch in my office."

"Some chance of that. Don't talk like an old fool. There's no fool like an old fool," were my wife's deathless words.

I went back to sleep.

In the morning, Miss Rawls had done a very thorough job of tidying up. She'd swept the floor and cleaned the dingy windows. She beamed. "How do you like it?"

I used the phone and ordered breakfast sent up from a lunchroom downstairs. The coffee was strong and the Danish pastry fresh.

Miss Rawls told me I needed a secretary.

"I've always had a one-man office. I don't need a secretary."

"I type. I can answer the phone. I'll work hard. I'm efficient. You need some efficiency around here."

"A pretty girl like you around—my wife would kill me."

"No, she won't," said Miss Rawls.

It was nice having Miss Rawls around. "All right," I said. "We'll try it on a temporary basis."

She laughed. "I love you, Mr. Bradley."

Her youthful exuberance was contagious. I said,

"Control yourself, Miss Rawls." I realized I was having a good time.

At the end of the day I knew that she was an asset to me and to my business. She lifted some of the pressure from me. She replied to letters, she answered the phone and told various clients I didn't want to speak to that I wasn't in.

At the end of the week I wondered how I'd ever got along without her. She added comfort and joy and stature to my life. She made me feel twenty years younger. Just having her around was like a renewal of life.

It came with a crash, her falling in love with Dean Conrad. He was my most important client, a singer. He's also a bum.

There are a lot more people in the world like Janet Rawls than there are like Dean Conrad, but the ones like my singer feed on the unsuspecting ones like Janet Rawls. He wasn't any good. He took great pride in the vast numbers of gangsters he counted among his friends. He had a contempt for women and he used them with the ruthlessness of a slave trader. He had a terrible temper and it wasn't beneath him to punch some of his girlfriends around. I sometimes wondered if getting him out of the scrapes that came about as the result of his fine "character" was worth it. With it all, his popularity increased year after year.

A theatrical agent who has too much to say about the morals and behavior of his clients soon learns that he has no clients. Nevertheless, after he took her out the first time, I sat her down and told her about him. She thanked me and told me she thought my concern was charmingly old-fashioned, but she was a big girl now and she knew how to take care of herself. Furthermore, Dean had been a perfect gentleman. When

she spoke of him her eyes were bright and her color high.

Three months later, when he was keeping her on the hook with promises of marriage, I confronted him and told him that she deserved better.

He laughed and said, "Bradley, they all deserve better. She's going to quit her job with you. I've got a cross-country tour coming up and I'm going to take her along as my personal secretary." He winked. "I need a personal secretary."

"All you need is yourself," I said.

He gave me one of his famous smiles. "Maybe you got a yen for her yourself, Bradley." He laughed. "You're kind of old for her."

"I'm asking you to give her a break."

"The trouble with you, Bradley, is that you haven't kept up with the times. So what if I tell her goodbye after the tour? So what? She's got to learn the facts of life and I'm a first-class teacher. Come on, you make it sound as though I'm offering her a fate worse than death, Bradley. Wise up."

"You're a first-class bum," I said.

"Any time you want to tear up the contract. . . . Now get this: what I do is my own business. You mind your own business and I'll mind mine."

When I got back to my office, it was past five and Janet had already left. I found a note on my desk. Kwenk had called.

I sat there and thought about Dean Conrad and Janet. He was playing games and she had to come out a loser. I picked up the slip of paper with Kwenk's name and I had an idea. It was crazy, but it might work. I put a call through to Kwenk and after I'd finished speaking I called Dean Conrad and apologized for being a meddling old man. Could he overlook it?

"Forget it," he said.

Then I asked him to do me a favor.

"Kwenk's?" he said. "You want me to work a place called Kwenk's Blue Room? I never heard of it, and you know I don't work for the kind of money a joint like that pays."

"Look, I owe the guy a favor. All you have to do is drive up there, show your face, sing one or two songs and walk out. That's all. I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important to me. I promise I'll make it up to you."

He said, "All right."

That was on Thursday. He appeared at Kwenk's on Friday night. The police called me Saturday morning and I drove up and spoke to a police lieutenant named Sam Pechard, who explained what had happened. Kwenk's was S.R.O. for Conrad's appearance. When Conrad went into his second song it was met by a barrage of birdcalls from the patrons. Whereupon Conrad went after one of the birdcallers and crowned him with a beer bottle, knocking the miscreant senseless. The act had so incensed a bearded man in the crowd that he had thrown a firecracker, which triggered a barrage of firecrackers from other patrons. Then somebody had taken advantage of all the noise and excitement to fire a bullet which killed Conrad. The place had erupted in a panic, patrons had charged out and driven off into the night. So far, no witnesses had come forward. The lieutenant doubted that any would. "It's a great loss, Mr. Bradley," he said. "My wife was crazy about him."

"Yes, many people were."

"I can imagine how you must feel," he said with concern.

"No, I don't think you can," I said, and he nodded understandingly.

He left when Kwenk came over.

"Sorry it happened here, Mr. Bradley," Kwenk said.

"Well, a thing like that, who could predict it? It certainly didn't do the name of your place any good," I said.

"That's for sure," said Kwenk. "Something like this really hangs a black eye on a place. I'll tell you something. I think that maybe one of my competitors rigged the whole thing to ruin me."

"No!"

"I'm sure of it," said Kwenk. "Of course the place is kind of dimly lighted so you really can't see too much, but I got a look at this guy with the beard who threw the first firecracker. I know just about every customer I've got. He's not one of the regulars. Well, this guy with the beard could have been put up to do it. My competitors know about the way my patrons act, so they could have hired him to do it. Nobody saw him firing a shot, but he could have done that, too. One thing I'm sure of, I'd never seen him before."

That wasn't quite accurate. He'd seen me on a number of occasions in my office, but never while wearing a black beard and wig and false eyebrows, the disguise that I had worn Friday night when I fired the shot that took Dean Conrad out of Janet's life.

"I'm sorry this happened," I said.

"I am, too," Kwenk said. "He was probably your biggest and most important client." He gave my back a sympathetic pat.

"Thanks." I smiled bravely. "I'll get over it," I said, and went out. In time, so would Janet.

# THE SENSITIVE JUROR

Richard Deming

The panel members had been instructed not to discuss the case among themselves while waiting their turns to be called to the stand and questioned to determine their suitability to sit as jurors. But since the whole thing had been in the papers, they all no doubt had already formed opinions.

Plump, middle-aged Jennifer Hamilton was convinced of Jonas Will's guilt long before the bailiff stuck his head into the panel room and called, "Miss Jennifer Hamilton."

As she followed the bailiff up the hallways to the courtroom door, and then the length of the courtroom to the stand, she forgot the defendant completely. With the gaze of every spectator on her, she could think of nothing but whether her hair was still in place and whether the long wait for her turn had allowed her new spring suit to wrinkle. She wished desperately that she had possessed enough sense to ask permission to go to the ladies' room and check her appearance in the mirror before she was called.

When she took the stand after being sworn in, she held her knees tightly together and primly tugged her skirt down over them. It was the first time in her forty-four years that she had ever faced an audience.

The district attorney was a red-faced man of middle age with a hoarse but kindly voice.

He said, "State your name, please."

"Jennifer Hamilton," she said in a nearly inaudible voice.

"Will you speak a little louder, please, so the judge can hear you?"

"Jennifer Hamilton," she managed more distinctly.

"Is that Miss or Mrs.?"

"Miss," she said. "I have never been married."

"What is your work, Miss Hamilton?"

"I am a bookkeeper for the Bond Trust Company."

"How long have you been a resident of New York City?"

She had to think about that, and was appalled to realize how long it had been since she had come to the city bubbling with youth and ready for adventure. Now the bubble of youth was gone and she had yet to find the hoped-for adventure. Perhaps she hadn't been as lucky as she thought when she obtained a job with the Bond Trust Company on the day she arrived in town. For all the adventure to be found in a bookkeeping department that employed only women, she might as well have remained in the small Missouri town where she was born.

"Twenty-five years," she said in a low voice.

"Will you speak louder, please?"

"Twenty-five years," she repeated defiantly.

"Hmm. Now, Miss Hamilton, you are aware that this is to be a trial for first-degree murder, and if convicted, the accused may be sentenced to death in the electric chair. Do you have any religious or moral objections to capital punishment which might influence your verdict?"

"No, sir."

"Are you personally acquainted with or related to the accused, Miss Hamilton?"

Jennifer glanced over at the defense table for the first time. Jonas Will was a tall, lean, personable man of about fifty-five, with wavy, prematurely white hair which contrasted sharply with his healthily tanned

features. He was much more handsome than his newspaper pictures. "Why, how distinguished he looks," she thought with astonishment. She had expected to see someone more sinister. Could a gentleman of such obvious breeding be a wife murderer?

"No," she said.

"Were you acquainted with the deceased Mrs. Edna Will, or with any of her or the accused's relatives, or in any way do you have a relationship with either the accused or the deceased, however distant, which might prejudice your verdict?"

"I never heard of them before I read the newspapers."

That brought on the next question. "This case, unfortunately, has received considerable publicity. As a result of what you have read or heard, have you formed any opinion of the accused's innocence or guilt which might make you unable to render an impartial verdict?"

Jennifer glanced at the defendant again. He was gazing at her intently, and there was something deep in his clear gray eyes which unexpectedly touched her. She was surprised at how honest and straightforward his gaze seemed. There was nothing pleading in it, yet he seemed to be saying to her, "My life may be in your hands. I ask no favors, but I am entitled to a fair judgment, unbiased by what you have read or heard of me."

She said quite honestly, "I would not let what I already know of the case influence me. I am sure I could render a verdict based entirely on the evidence presented here." She was a little surprised at her own words, for ten minutes earlier she had been convinced of the man's guilt. Now, after one look at him, she suddenly had an open mind.

The district attorney seemed pleased by her answer.

He had only one further question. He asked if she were acquainted with, or had ever had professional dealings with either himself or the defense attorney. When she said no, he turned her over to the counsel for the defense.

The defense attorney was a thin, suave man named Martin Bowling.

Approaching her with a smile, he said, "Miss Hamilton, you are an attractive, well-groomed woman of considerable charm. Yet you say you have never been married. I can hardly believe you have never been asked. I hope I'm not touching an old wound, but was there, perhaps, a tragedy in your life at one time? Perhaps a deceased lover you have never forgotten?"

As a matter of fact Jennifer never had been asked to marry, but she wasn't going to admit that. Blushing furiously, she said, "No, he didn't die," leaving the implication that there had been a lover she was unable to forget, but something other than death had parted them.

"I didn't mean to embarrass you," Bowling said in a kindly voice. "I merely wanted to make sure your single state doesn't indicate a general dislike of men. You are not then, I take it, what is generally known as a 'man-hater'?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I like men very much. I mean—" Her blush deepened and she paused in confusion.

"Mr. Right just hasn't yet come along, eh?" the lawyer said with a charming smile. He turned to the district attorney. "Miss Hamilton is acceptable to the defense if she is to the prosecution."

"No objection," the district attorney said. "You may step down and take seat number eight in the jury box, Miss Hamilton."

Jonas Will was charged with the premeditated mur-

der of his wife in order to obtain control of her assets. The state took a full week to build its case, and it was a damning one. Through a series of witnesses and documentary exhibits the prosecution established the following series of events:

Jonas Will had married widowed Edna Barnes in New York City the previous December and the couple had set up housekeeping in a brownstone house his bride owned in upper Manhattan. A week after the wedding Will appeared at his wife's bank with a power of attorney and closed out her account of some twenty-four hundred dollars. The following day he disposed of some stocks and bonds in her name, totalling an additional three thousand dollars. He then put the house up for quick sale and let it go for seventy-five hundred dollars, about half its real value.

Meantime, the new bride had not been seen by neighbors since a few days after the wedding. Will's explanation was that his work required a move to the west coast and that his wife had gone ahead to locate a new home while he wound up their affairs here.

Sixty days after the wedding Will left town with all the woman's assets converted to cash.

There had been some gossip among neighbors about the strange disappearance of the new Mrs. Will, and the new owner of the brownstone house became suspicious of a fresh cement patch in the basement. Digging it up, he discovered a grave containing a female body which had been partially destroyed by sulphuric acid.

Too much of the body had been consumed by acid for positive identification, but pathologists established that the woman had been the age and size of Edna Barnes Will. They further established that death had resulted from a blow on the head, and had occurred

at approximately the time Edna was last seen by neighbors.

Police investigation turned up that a five-gallon carboy of sulphuric acid had been purchased by a man answering Jonas Will's description four days after the wedding.

The prosecution stressed that the woman's body had been toothless, and that Edna Barnes Will had worn a full set of dentures.

A week after discovery of the body, Jonas Will had been located and arrested in San Francisco. After waiving extradition, he had been returned to New York to face the charge of first-degree murder.

The defense took another week to present its case.

Jonas Will's explanation was that his wife actually had gone ahead to San Francisco to locate a home there. As evidence, he produced a telegram from that city reading: ARRIVED SAFELY. LOVE, EDNA. A San Francisco hotel manager testified that a wire reserving a room in the name of Mrs. Edna Will had been received from New York several days prior to the time the telegram to Jonas was dated, but the reservation had never been claimed. The defense contended that Edna had arrived in San Francisco by train, had sent the wire from the railway station, and had disappeared en route to the hotel.

Jonas Will's rather lame explanation to the prosecution's question as to why he had instituted no investigation after nearly two months passed with no word from his wife after the initial wire, was that he knew she was a poor correspondent, and he had been busy winding up their local affairs. He claimed to have been completely mystified when he arrived in San Francisco and discovered she had never checked into the hotel.

It was established that he had inquired after his wife at the hotel and subsequently had made a report of her disappearance to the San Francisco police.

The defense contended that the body buried in the basement of the brownstone house was not that of Edna Barnes Will. Attorney Martin Bowling suggested that the woman had been murdered and buried prior to the marriage of Jonas and Edna, implying that the victim, whoever she was, had been murdered by Edna. To substantiate his theory, he produced a building supply dealer who testified he had delivered a sack of cement and some sand to the address in November, several weeks before Jonas moved into the house.

The defense had no theory as to the reason for Edna's disappearance between the rail station and the hotel in San Francisco, merely pointing out that hundreds of similarly mysterious disappearances occur in different parts of the country each year.

It had been widely reported in the newspapers that Jonas Will had only a year previously been acquitted of a similar charge of wife murder, but neither the prosecution nor defense mentioned this. In his instructions to the jury the judge, in obvious reference to this previous trial, cautioned that nothing the jurors had read or heard about the defendant outside of the courtroom should be considered in reaching a verdict.

Jennifer listened attentively to everything said during the trial. But most of the time her eyes were on the defendant instead of on the attorney or witness speaking. And quite often she found his gaze fixed on her too. Perhaps she imagined it, but sometimes there seemed to be a strange sort of telepathic communication between them.

"I am innocent," she kept imagining his mind

saying over and over to hers. "Don't let them convict an innocent man."

As the trial progressed, she found herself paying more and more attention to this secret voice and less and less to the evidence. She began to resent it when the prosecution made a telling point, and to offer up a silent cheer whenever the defense scored.

By the time the jury finally filed out to consider a verdict, she was convinced of Jonas Will's innocence.

There were nine men and three women on the jury. The foreman was a scholarly appearing man of about Jennifer's age whom she had overheard tell one of the men that he was a science teacher at an industrial high school.

When they were all seated around the long table in the jury room, the foreman said, "Does anyone want to discuss the case before we take a ballot? Or shall we have a vote first and save discussion until we find out if there is any disagreement?"

One of the women, a slim housewife of about thirty, said, "I don't see that there's anything to discuss. Let's take a vote."

When there was general assent, the foreman passed out slips of paper to serve as ballots. Each juror wrote down his verdict, folded the paper and passed it back.

After opening all the slips, the foreman announced, "Eleven guilty, one not guilty."

"How could anyone vote not guilty?" the woman who had requested the vote exploded. "This is the *second* wife he's killed!"

Jennifer was usually silent in any sort of a group discussion, but then she had never before sat in a group discussion where she had any sort of strong opinion one way or the other.

She found herself saying diffidently, "We're not supposed to consider that previous case. Anyway, he was acquitted, so he must have been innocent."

"Innocent!" the slim housewife said. "He just had a jury of idiots. His wife was found buried and he'd made off with her money, just like this time. It was all in the paper."

Jennifer's tone became more firm. "We can't even discuss that case. We took an oath to consider only the evidence presented in court. I, for one, don't think the dead woman was Edna Will. I think she was someone Edna Will murdered before she married the defendant, and that's why Edna disappeared. She's hiding somewhere to escape punishment for her crime."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" the slim woman said with disgust.

The foreman said, "I think we had better open the floor to general discussion. And since we are eleven to one for conviction, we'll let the recalcitrant lady give her reasons for differing with the rest of us, then start at my left and move right around the table, giving each person a chance for rebuttal."

With all eyes on her, Jennifer was momentarily overwhelmed. But finally she managed in a shaking but stubborn voice, "The judge said if we felt reasonable doubt of guilt, we must find the defendant innocent. And they never even proved the dead woman was Edna Will. How about that telegram making a room reservation, and the one from her in San Francisco to her husband here?"

The man to the foreman's left said, "Anybody can send a telegram. He could have had a confederate out there, or even have flown there and back himself. You can make it round trip by jet in about eight hours."

"You can't consider remote possibilities," Jennifer

protested. "The prosecution never proved anyone other than Edna Will sent either telegram, so we have to assume she did. That wasn't disproved."

"I don't have to assume it," the man second from the foreman said. "He sent those telegrams, or had them sent, just so he'd have some defense if anything went wrong. For the same reason, he inquired at the hotel, and made a report to missing persons in San Francisco. But for the two months she was supposedly in San Francisco locating a house, he never wrote or wondered why she didn't write. Does that sound like the normal behavior of newlyweds?"

"They were mature people," Jennifer said a trifle shakily. "They both had been married before. It wasn't like young love."

The third woman, a middle-aged stenographer who wore a wedding band but no diamond, said, "This whole discussion is ridiculous. He killed her, stole her money, and that's all there is to it."

But the discussion went on, and for the first time in her life Jennifer had a lot to say. She was hardly eloquent, but she put up such a persistent and stubborn argument that eventually she won over one of the men. The jury had filed out at one p.m. After four hours of Jennifer's championship, the vote stood at ten for conviction, two voting not guilty.

By seven p.m., when the bailiff brought in their dinner and they took a half-hour break, she had won four more converts and the jury was evenly divided. Four of the men and both the other women were still holdouts.

By ten p.m. the vote had swung to ten to two, with only the slim housewife and the middle-aged stenographer still holding out for a guilty verdict.

At ten thirty the foreman said, "I think we have reached an impasse. I'll take one more vote; then

I suggest we inform the court we're hopelessly deadlocked."

"That will mean a whole new trial," one of the men growled. "All this waste of time and money."

The stenographer said grumpily, "I'm not going to be the cause of making them do this all over again. I still think he's guilty, but I'll go along with the rest of you rather than have it declared a mistrial."

The slim housewife didn't have the moral stamina to stand all alone. Deserted by the last of her supporters, she threw in the towel too.

"All right," she snapped. "We'll turn him loose to kill a few more wives."

It was just a week after the trial that Jennifer came home from work one day to find a visitor waiting in the hall outside her apartment door. It gave her quite a start to recognize the tall, distinguished figure.

Jonas Will was already holding his hat in his hand. He inclined his body slightly in a bow which had a touch of old-world flavor. He said, "I hope you won't think I'm presumptuous for dropping by, Miss Hamilton. But I felt I had to."

"Of course not, Mr. Will," she said, flustered. "Won't you come in?"

She tried to put the key in the lock upside down, laughed nervously, and managed to get the door open on the second try. Inside she flicked her gaze around the front room and was relieved to note it was in its usual immaculate condition, with everything in its proper place.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "May I take your hat?"

"I won't be long enough for you to bother hanging it up," he said, smiling.

He seated himself in an easy chair and held the

hat in his lap. Laying her bag on an end table, she sank onto the sofa and looked at him inquiringly.

"I looked up your address in the phone book," he said. "I hope you don't mind. I felt I had to come by and thank you."

She blushed. "I merely voted as I thought was right, Mr. Will. I was only one of twelve."

"The twelve deliberated for nine hours," he said dryly. "There must have been considerable disagreement. I think perhaps I owe my life to you."

Jennifer felt her blush deepen. "You owe your life to your innocence, Mr. Will. I assure you that if I had thought you guilty, I would have voted with the rest, and we wouldn't have been out five minutes."

His clear gray eyes studied her face. "So it *was* only you on the first vote. I sensed it. Did you know I was watching you throughout the trial?"

"You were?" she said in simulated surprise.

"Don't pretend," he said quietly. "Of course you knew. I recognized you as a sensitive the moment you stepped on the stand."

"As a what?" she asked with raised brows.

"A sensitive. A person capable of receiving telepathic communication. I can't, unfortunately. I can only transmit."

She looked at him in astonishment. "Do you mean those were actual thought transmissions? I wasn't imagining it?"

He smiled. "You weren't imagining it, Miss Hamilton. I have always been able to transmit to a limited number of people. Very few have the sensitive receptivity to receive thought waves from a telepathist. And, of course, even if they have, it doesn't mean anything unless we're on the same wave length. It requires a particular type of mind to become a sensitive, the receptive mind of a person more interest-

ed in listening than in thinking of what to say next. It has to be a mind uncluttered by self-centered thoughts."

"You mean an empty mind?"

His smile broadened. "You have a sense of humor as well as a receptive mind." Rising to his feet, he said, "Well, I won't take up any more of your time, Miss Hamilton. I just wanted to thank you for what you did."

At the same time, his mind spoke to her almost as clearly as his voice, "You are a charming woman, and I'd like to stay longer, but I can't with decency intrude on you any longer."

Her heart began to thump. It was a totally new experience to feel that a man had any opinion of her at all, let alone to get the impression he considered her charming. Had she actually again read his mind, or was it merely imagination combined with wishful thinking?

She decided that, imagination or not, she would give him a chance to stay longer if he wished.

She said, "Are you just going to walk in, excite my curiosity by telling me I'm some kind of mind reader, then walk out again without further explanation? I usually have a cocktail when I come home from work. Would you like to join me and tell me a little more about this while we're having it?"

He hesitated before saying, "If it won't be an imposition, I'd enjoy it."

He ended up by staying for dinner.

That was the beginning of it. During the next few weeks Jonas Will gradually became a nightly companion. At first he appeared only at intervals of several days, but finally he fell into the habit of picking her up after work daily and taking her somewhere for a cocktail. Afterward, they would sometimes have din-

ner at her apartment; sometimes they would dine out and then attend a movie. On the whole their evenings were very quiet, but compared to Jennifer's previous recreational activity, they were riotous. She felt as though she had suddenly been swept from her humdrum life into one of glamourous adventure.

While they eventually got to the point where she was calling him Jonas and he was calling her Jennifer, he was always circumspect, never even taking such a liberty as squeezing her hand in the darkness of a movie. Yet she sensed in him a growing romantic interest which made her heart flutter. It was nothing he said or did, but occasionally she continued to get momentary glimpses of his thoughts, or at least to imagine she did. And when this happened, it was always some warm and admiring thought she felt pulsing from his mind to hers.

They had much discussion about this apparent extra-sensory ability of hers, for the subject fascinated her. She had never before experienced it with anyone else, and she strove for an explanation of why and how her latent ability to read minds had suddenly developed.

"Not minds," he said, smiling. "Just one mind. It's not an uncommon phenomenon, particularly among married couples who have unusually close relationships. Psychologists don't know much about it, but there's one theory that the minds of certain so-called 'sensitives' act much as radio receivers tuned to a single narrow band. The theory is that such minds are able to receive thought waves transmitted at a precise frequency. A latent sensitive may go through life without ever encountering a telepathist who transmits on the proper wave length. I'm probably the first you ever met exactly attuned to you."

It pleased her to know the phenomenon was some-

thing common among married couples with unusually close relationships. Although Jonas hadn't even suggested any feeling for her deeper than friendship, it gave a romantic touch to their relationship. She began to dream a little.

The dream was shattered one night as they sat in the front room of her apartment. Jonas announced that he probably would be leaving town in a week or two.

In a way it wasn't a complete shock, for she knew he had been searching for an out-of-town position. He had explained that the sales job he had moved to San Francisco to take had gone up in smoke the moment he was arrested for murder. And there was too much scandal attached to his name for him to get anything in New York. He had a few-thousand-dollar reserve, he had told her, but he couldn't live on it forever. He wanted to move to some new place where he was unknown and try to rebuild his life under another name.

"I've been a bit limited as to the jobs I could apply for," he said. "I've been applying under the name of Henry Gunner, so I had to pick jobs where I figured they wouldn't bother to check references. This is only a car sales job on straight commission, but if I make good in it, eventually I can apply for a better job and have a ready-made reference under my new name."

"Where is it?" she asked.

"St. Louis. It isn't definite yet, but it looks good. I have to fly down there Monday for a personal interview."

"I hope you get it," she said in a voice she managed to keep steady. "But St. Louis is a long way off. I don't suppose we'll cross paths very often."

"There's one way they could cross daily," he said.

The shattered parts of her dream began to come to-

gether again in her mind and her heart began to thump. "What way is that, Jonas?"

"If we were married."

She gazed at him, her heart now beating wildly. She was utterly unable to speak.

"Of course there's a difficulty there," he said. "It's quite possible Edna's still alive."

The thought jolted her. As certain as she was that the body discovered in the basement of the brownstone house wasn't that of Edna Barnes Will, she hadn't given a thought to the possible whereabouts of Edna Will since the day Jonas appeared at her door.

"Of course it wouldn't mean anything to me from a moral point of view if she were," Jonas said. "If she's still alive, she must have known I was on trial for her murder, because everyone in the country knew. I'd hardly want to return to a wife who deliberately intended to let me die for something she knew I didn't do."

Jennifer remained silent.

"The State of New York has declared her dead," Jonas went on. "So I don't believe I could be arrested for bigamy if she ever turned up. I'm merely thinking of you. I would hate to have you undergo the distress of discovering you had been living in sin, perhaps ten years after our marriage."

Jennifer blurted out, "Suppose I was willing to take the chance?"

He smiled at her. "I hoped you'd say that. It isn't really much of a chance, because we'll be starting a new life under a new name, and it's unlikely she could find us, even if she did eventually reappear. At worst, it would mean a quick trip to Reno for me and then our remarriage. One of our U.S. presidents was once confronted by the same problem and surmounted it without scandal."

Searching back into her memory for her high school knowledge of history, she nodded. "Andrew Jackson. But there was a little scandal, wasn't there? Didn't he challenge someone to a duel for making a remark about his living in sin with his wife?"

"Attitudes have changed since then, my dear. No one will condemn us if it ever comes to necessary legal action. It will be accepted as an honest error, easily straightened out. But it's up to you."

"I'll marry you," she said, before he could change his mind.

She had been sitting on the sofa and he in an easy chair. Rising, he crossed over and kissed her for the first time.

This was on Saturday, June twenty-ninth. Monday morning Jonas flew to St. Louis. At four p.m. he phoned her long-distance at her office.

"I got the job," he said jubilantly. "I start Monday, July fifteenth. I'm going to stay here a few days to try to get us some place to live, but I'll be back Friday. We'll be married Saturday and start for St. Louis in my car about Tuesday, July ninth."

"So soon?" she said, both appalled and delighted at the short time remaining before she would be a married woman. "I'll have to give notice, and there's an apartment lease, and. . . ."

"Then you'd better start hustling," he said cheerfully. "We're leaving for St. Louis just a week from tomorrow."

When she hung up, she went right in and gave her notice to her boss. After her quarter century of service he was very understanding. He waived the usual two-week requirement and told her she could just finish out that week.

She was in a flurry of activity all the rest of that

week. She managed to find a woman willing to buy up the rest of her apartment lease and also take the furniture off her hands, though she had to let the latter go for about a fourth of its value. There were also utility services to be terminated, charge accounts to close, and packing to do.

The last was the biggest problem, for Jonas phoned again on Wednesday and, when she mentioned her packing job, he limited her to two suitcases to take in the car. Everything else had to be expressed to St. Louis to be held until called for.

She managed to get everything accomplished but the closing out of her bank accounts by the time Jonas got back on Friday.

He came in on a morning plane and picked her up at her office at noon. They spent her lunch hour getting blood tests and the license, as New York had a twenty-four-hour waiting period, and this had to be accomplished if they expected to get married the next day.

Jonas registered his name on the license as Henry Gunner. Jennifer was a little dubious about this until he explained that a marriage was legal under any name, as long as the proper persons went through the ceremony. It would hardly be feasible to use his real name, Jonas said. In the first place it would be front-page news if it leaked out that a man twice acquitted of wife murder was remarrying, and neither of them wanted that type of publicity. More important, since they would be living under the names of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gunner in St. Louis, it would certainly be more convenient to have that name on their marriage certificate.

Jennifer agreed he was right.

They were married by a justice of the peace Sat-

urday evening. Jonas, who had been living in a furnished room, gave it up and moved into Jennifer's apartment.

In the excitement of preparing for the wedding and the move, there had been no time to discuss financial affairs with Jonas. And of course that was the farthest thing from her mind on her wedding night. But at breakfast the next morning she decided to bring it up.

"Will we be able to live on what you earn as a car salesman, Jonas?" she asked him. "Or will you want me to get a job too when we get to St. Louis?"

"Let's see how I make out first," he suggested. "I have about four thousand dollars to carry us for a while."

"I have some money too," she said. "Tomorrow I planned to close out my checking account and get traveler's checks for it. There's only a couple of hundred dollars in it. But what should I do about my savings account? Just leave it here, and have the bank where we open an account in St. Louis handle the transfer?"

"Why don't you get a bank draft for it, made out to Jennifer Gunner? That will be as safe as traveler's checks, and you can just deposit it in a savings account when we get to St. Louis. As a matter of fact, have the balance in your checking account included in the single bank draft too. I have enough traveler's checks to carry us."

So that was what she did. Jonas hadn't asked her how large her savings account was and she hadn't told him, wanting to save it as a pleasant surprise. For twenty-five years she had been regularly saving a part of her salary. The bank draft she got was for seventeen thousand, two hundred and forty-eight dollars.

They left for St. Louis early Tuesday morning. Jonas did all the driving, as she had no license. They were in no hurry, since he had until the following Monday to report to work. They took three days and made a honeymoon trip out of it. It was early Friday evening when they drove over MacArthur Bridge into St. Louis and stopped for dinner before driving on.

Jonas had told her he had rented a "summer cottage sort of place" for a month, to serve as a temporary base while they did serious house hunting. It was some distance from town, he explained, but he would take her in with him each day when he drove to work, and drop her at some real estate office to spend the day looking at houses which might prove suitable.

She hadn't realized it would be so far from town, though. The cottage was on the Meramec River, a good ten miles from the extreme south edge of town, and probably twenty miles from the downtown district. It was all by itself on a stretch of clay and gravel beach, not even in sight of any other cottage. It was raised on stilts to keep it above flood waters, and boards had been nailed to the stilts on two sides to form a rough, open carport beneath the building. A wooden stairway led upward from the carport to the cottage.

Inside, it was much more pleasant than its outside appearance had indicated, Jennifer was gratified to find. There was a big front room full of rustic furniture, a large kitchen, and a bedroom and bath. The furnishings were old but adequate. She decided that after a thorough cleaning it would be livable for the short time they planned to be there.

Friday night they retired early, tired from the long trip. Saturday morning Jonas took her shopping at a plaza on the highway, and she stocked up with groceries and cleaning supplies. The rest of that day and

all day Sunday she scrubbed and cleaned until the three rooms glistened.

Sunday evening after dinner, as they sat in the front room, Jonas said, "Tomorrow I start to work. How will you spend the day, dear?"

She looked at him in surprise. "I thought you were taking me in to start house hunting."

"Not tomorrow," he said. "I wouldn't know where to drop you. I'll pick up a St. Louis paper and tomorrow night we'll make a list of real estate companies that advertise rentals. Then I'll take you in the next day. You could use one day of rest before you start hunting."

"All right," she said agreeably. "I suppose there isn't that much rush."

"I may as well open your savings account for you while I'm in town tomorrow, if you want to endorse that bank draft and give it to me."

"Our savings account," she corrected, with a smile. "We're not going to have the kind of marriage where we keep everything separate, are we?"

"Ours then," he said, smiling back. "Anyway, you better endorse the draft while you're thinking of it."

She went into the bedroom to get the bank draft from her bag, turned it over and endorsed it on the dresser. It gave her a pleasantly warm feeling to write, "Mrs. Jennifer Gunner." It was the first time she had had occasion to write her new name.

When she carried the draft back into the front room and handed it to Jonas, he merely glanced at it, then folded it and put it in his pocket.

"Aren't you a little surprised at the amount?" she asked with pride.

"Not really," he said. "You'd been working for years and your tastes are simple. I assumed you'd have a tidy sum tucked away."

She frowned, a little hurt by his casual acceptance of the amount. "I thought you'd be proud of me."

"Oh, I am," he assured her. "I'm just not surprised."

She examined him dubiously, and suddenly something from the trial popped into her mind. She couldn't imagine why she recalled it at that precise moment, but all at once she remembered the handwriting expert testifying that it was actually Edna Will's signature on the power of attorney which had given Jonas control of his wife's assets. All her assets were contained in the bank draft she had just handed him, she realized, and her actual signature was on it.

"Did you know Edna long before you married her?" she asked abruptly.

He gave her an odd look. "That's a peculiar question, right out of the blue. Not very long."

"How'd you meet her, Jonas?"

He gazed at her for a moment before saying casually, "She was on the jury at my first trial."

Almost on top of the words she caught a vagrant thought from him, and this time she knew it wasn't imagination. As clearly as though he had spoken aloud she heard his mind saying, "I always try to find one sensitive in the jury box."

She gazed at him with growing horror, and he stared back at her with a sudden sadness in his clear gray eyes.

"I let the wrong thought slip, didn't I?" he said. "I meant to let it last one more night, but of course I can't now. That's the trouble with picking sensitives. You always have to keep a curb on your thoughts."

# FAT JOW AND CHANCE

Robert Alan Blair

A rapid pounding at his street door aroused Fat Jow from the depths of sleep. He switched on the bedside lamp, sat rubbing his eyes while he gathered his senses. The muffled moan of foghorns about the Bay bespoke early-morning fog sliding in through the Gate, but as yet it was too early for the rumble of traffic in the streets.

He stepped into his battered slippers and, drawing on his silken robe, shuffled through his small basement to the door. "Who is there?" he called.

"Gim Wong," came the answer, in a voice he knew.

If he was surprised, he did not reveal it as he unbolted the door. Undoubtedly his old friend and fellow merchant had a pressing reason for the time of his visit, and in his own good time would inform Fat Jow without being asked.

Gim Wong glanced up and down the steep hillside street before stepping inside. "I run from the police," he explained as he closed the door behind him. "They raided the pai gow game at the Hing family association, and they were coming after me. Your door was nearer than my own."

"You are most welcome," said Fat Jow. In their eyes gambling was not a crime, but a revered ancestral privilege hallowed by a thousand years, more to be honored than were the presumptuous laws designed by the white foreigners to forbid it. Its preservation against all attackers was a stimulating battle of wits, into which all Chinatown entered with

zest and invention, an eternal contest against the recurrent attempts of the city to throttle the various games of chance.

However, pai gow was a game for the wealthy, and Gim Wong was not wealthy. His modest stature as owner of a ten-machine sewing shop permitted perhaps the lottery, but never pai gow. Of a single evening, thousands were won and lost at the pai gow table.

In a manner encouraging his guest to refuse his invitation—his hospitality was at low ebb at this hour —Fat Jow asked, "Will you have tea?"

"It is very late," said Gim Wong, "and I have not slept. I ask only to rest here until daybreak."

Fat Jow waved toward the old leather sofa. "Sleep, then," he said, and returned to bed.

In the gray morning, when he emerged once more from his bedroom, Gim Wong was gone, fully as expected. Fat Jow put the incident from his mind. He took breakfast at his customary small restaurant at the nearby corner of Powell Street, removed sufficiently from Grant Avenue that the small swinging sign, lettered only in Chinese, did not draw the tourist seeking such barbarian dishes as chop suey. The decor was clean and utilitarian, the white tile and yellow paint almost monastic for lack of ornamentation.

Ordinarily the breakfast atmosphere was subdued and conducive to contemplation, but today a buzz of repressed excitement pervaded the crowded room. Men discussed the pai gow raid, and the serious injury to old Suey Tong, who now lay in police custody at St. Francis Hospital on the other side of the hill.

Suey Tong had attempted to flee by leaping from a window, and had fallen. A well-known importer of substance who could win or lose with equanimity, he was one to frequent the pai gow game. Not so Gim

Wong. For Gim Wong to sit at that table suggested that he was in trouble. Fat Jow went his way to his herb shop with slow step.

Toward midday he was occupied at the rolltop desk in the loft at the rear of the shop when the jangling of bells on the door below announced a caller. He turned his swivel chair and peered over the rail. He had seen this man before. Where? His conservative business suit identified him as neither customer nor casual tourist strayed from the sightseers' thoroughfare. This was a local foreigner from the confusing world of San Francisco enveloping his haven of order and reason called Chinatown.

A momentary chill touched Fat Jow's shoulders; was one of Lindner's friends on a mission of vengeance? This very shop had come to him from the hands of the grateful son of Moon Kai, for Fat Jow's part in finding the murderer of his father.

The stranger saw him and came to the foot of the loft stairs. "Remember me? Detective Lieutenant Cogswell. We met in court."

"Ah yes." Fat Jow relaxed, beckoned warmly. "Do come, sit down."

Cogswell took the ancient kitchen chair beside the desk, began to tilt back, was discouraged by an ominous creak. "We haven't forgotten your help in cracking Lindner's protection racket. We need you again."

Fat Jow shrugged. "You have a staff of trained professionals, and you come to a struggling shopkeeper?"

"There are more doors open to you around here than to any man on the force."

"You do me an honor. I trust that I may justify it."

"I suppose you've heard of the pai gow raid?"

Fat Jow's manner cooled. "There is talk on the streets. I must advise you, sir, if the matter concerns gambling, then I cannot be of assistance to you."

"If it were gambling alone, I wouldn't have come. Suey Tong died a few minutes ago . . . without regaining consciousness."

Fat Jow clucked and shook his head. "But surely you do not suspect murder?"

"No, no. It was an accident. A man his age, jumping from a window, was just asking for it. Couldn't keep his feet, and fell against some cement steps."

"Then, if it is not gambling that brings you, and not murder . . . ?"

Cogswell leaned closer and lowered his voice confidentially. "Suey Tong was a heavy winner," he said. "Nobody would tell us who sat in on the game and got away, but one did say that Suey Tong had at least $17,000 on him when he went through that window. He just scraped it off the table and jumped. By the time we got out of the building and into the alley, he had only $2000 on him."

"Hardly a conventional robbery," mused Fat Jow. "Would not a thief have taken it all?" The finger of accusation pointed more strongly at Gim Wong. "It suggests a specific sum desired, and no more. You have made arrests?"

"Yes, two—they weren't fast enough to get out the window. They couldn't have taken it. The others got away clean. I don't know where they got to. In seconds, there was not a soul to be seen."

Fat Jow stood up, to signify that the interview was at an end. "I shall make inquiries. Come at the same time tomorrow, and we shall see what I have learned."

Reluctantly Cogswell prepared to leave. "Don't you want me to fill you in?"

Fat Jow permitted a small smile. "Your* motives and mine merge only incidentally, and at a single point. I prefer to work without distraction of detail which appears important to you. You request my

help, please let me offer it as I will. Good day, sir."

Long after Cogswell had gone, Fat Jow sat in the swivel chair with eyes closed, hands clasped in his lap. The elements of the picture had begun to arrange themselves into a pattern.

At his usual midday closing time, he locked the shop and walked the few blocks to the sewing shop. The women were at their machines solemnly making denim work clothing, but Gim Wong, they said, had not appeared today. Fat Jow went next to the Hing family association building, where the old woman who was the only resident at home during the working day conducted him to the game room in the apartment adjoining hers.

A large round table and several chairs were the only furniture, under a hanging single-bulb fixture with metal shade, white inside and green outside. Fat Jow stepped to the window. The alley was but a lane, barely broad enough for three persons walking abreast. It did not pierce the block, and its only entrance and exit was three doors above his own. Gim Wong had chosen his steps well.

The old woman was of little help. Although her window also faced the alley, and she had seen Suey Tong jump and fall, the police had at that moment summoned her to the door, and she had seen no more.

It was indeed time to talk to Gim Wong, but Fat Jow was unable to find him. He had not been at home since the preceding evening. Only one person had seen him this day other than Fat Jow, as he walked a street far removed from his daily habit. Fat Jow returned to the herb shop.

Near the day's close, when the congestion of the homebound city slackened and the strollers increased on Grant Avenue, Fat Jow made preparation for ex-

pected guests. Always they came, a few of his friends, seeking counsel or silent companionship. Today came Lee Keung of the noodle factory, Ng Har of the fowl market . . . and, as he had hoped, Gim Wong. They sat about the teakwood table which had come from China with Moon Kai in the old days, and chatted politely of inconsequential matters. Knowing Gim Wong's part in the pai gow game, they would not speak of it unless he did, and he did not.

Fat Jow requested that Gim Wong remain. After showing the others out and drawing the "closed" shade on the door, he returned to the loft to assume his professional position at the rolltop desk. He did not look at Gim Wong, who still sat at the teakwood table, toying absently with his empty cup. Fat Jow said, "You rested in my house this morning."

Gim Wong moved restlessly to the loft rail and leaned his hands upon it. "You were more than kind."

"The police have come to me." Fat Jow glanced aside to detect any reaction; Gim Wong did not stir, but the old polished-wood rail creaked. "I told them nothing, of course. But it seems that gambling is not the only subject under inquiry. I would know whom I shield—and from what I shield him. I will manufacture a deliberate lie for no one."

Gim Wong came to the kitchen chair, sat upon its edge. His eyes pled. "You will not expose me?"

"You must trust me," said Fat Jow. "There may be a way to assist the police without falsehood." He turned his swivel chair away slightly. "Perhaps I know more than you think. You were in dire need of much money before you entered the game. Otherwise you would not have gone." Gim Wong remained silent. "You have, I believe," continued Fat Jow, tapping his fingers upon the desk, "a daughter and small

grandchild still in Red China. . . ."

Gim Wong hid his face. "Two grandchildren—whom I have never seen."

"And the Reds have required several thousand dollars to see them both safely to Hong Kong."

Gim Wong regarded him with wonder. "The figure was $20,000," he whispered.

"Yet Suey Tong had another $2000 which was not touched."

"I had $3000 in the bank; I needed only $17,000."

"It was wrong to take it from a dying man."

"Yes," said Gim Wong, lowering his eyes.

"Why did you not come to your friends? We are qualified to furnish more than tea and idle talk. Are you so proud that you believe we do not know you cannot assemble a sum like this of your own assets?"

"I had heard of the great winnings at pai gow. If one fortunate evening would be enough, why trouble my friends? I waited until I felt a day when fortune came upon me."

"Your evening was otherwise, I gather."

Gim Wong sagged visibly, sat back in the chair. "It began so. I won, as I had known I would. Hand after hand I won. I passed $16,000, $16,500, and intended to stop after winning the last $500 on the next hand. Then Suey Tong came in, and it was he who won the next hand—and the next. I saw all the money that had been in my hands flow across the table to him, and the $500 as well. I was about to leave, for I could not lose the stakes I had brought to the game. But the police came. Suey Tong was wise and practiced; he gathered into one hand the money before him, and jumped from the window while still the rest of us were pushing back from the table. One went after him at once, and was gone into the night. I followed closely, but delayed to help Suey Tong

where he fell. I soon saw that he lay as one dead, and the money scattered about. I was picking it up when a voice shouted from the window. I ran, because it seemed the only thing to do. I did not remember the money in my hand until I had come near your door, and I put it out of sight."

Fat Jow sighed. "If only you had come to me before the game! I presume that you have cabled the money to your contact in Hong Kong?"

Gim Wong hesitated, then reached into his jacket and handed Fat Jow a packet of banknotes bound with an elastic band. "I walked the street all day," he said slowly, "summoning the courage to go to the telegraph office. But I could not. It is all there. Please. Give it to the police."

A smile crept across Fat Jow's face. "That is not exactly what I have in mind," he said, cradling the money in his hands as if it were worth many times its value. "With your permission, I shall place it in my safe overnight, to gather interest on the . . . loan."

Gim Wong stiffened, raised his head. "I refuse to lose face by accepting charity from my friends," he said.

Fat Jow reached to the back of the desk and pulled the telephone directory to him. "Perhaps we may satisfy the police and save your face at the same time. Leave me now, and come to me again tomorrow afternoon. We shall then talk of your family."

He settled busily to work, and paid no heed as Gim Wong wearily descended from the loft and let himself out.

Starting within a quarter-hour of the opening of the Chinatown office of the Bank of America the next morning, a procession of respected citizens came and went through the door of the herb shop. The bells were hardly silent throughout most of the morning.

One after another the men went up the loft stairs to transact an average of five minutes' business with the herbalist at his rolltop desk. After the last had gone, Fat Jow employed his abacus to make order of the litter of paper before him.

Thus Cogswell found him. Without pausing in his task, Fat Jow waved him to the kitchen chair. Cogswell knew better than to hurry him; he sat meekly, entranced with the concentration and expert fingers of the old man.

At length Fat Jow pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and rubbed his eyes. "It is done," he said.

"Have you learned anything?" asked Cogswell bluntly.

"A bit here, a bit there."

"Did you find out who got away?"

Fat Jow spread his hands. "They were innocent gamblers, my good sir, not robbers. My inquiry, as you recall, had to do only with a suspected robbery. I am pleased to report that there was no robbery."

Cogswell sniffed. "I'd like to know what you call it. Several thousand dollars disappeared between that room and the alley."

"It was in the nature of a loan, sir." Fat Jow pushed toward him a long list of signatures. "Please read the statement that these gentlemen have signed."

Cogswell read aloud, with growing suspicion: "We the undersigned voters and taxpayers of the city of San Francisco have borrowed of the late Suey Tong, grievously fallen at the Hing family association upon the 21st instant, the following sums . . ." He looked up sharply at Fat Jow. "Wait now! Are you trying to tell me all these guys got to him in the alley and . . . borrowed the money?"

Fat Jow raised one finger. "Ah no. If the language creates such an image, it is unfortunate. A man like

Suey Tong gathers in his wake many debtors, great and small."

Cogswell shook the list at him. "I can't put this in my report! Who took the money?"

"You have the names there, sir." Fat Jow now handed him a thick unsealed envelope. "And here is the money, which they have paid back."

Sourly Cogswell removed from the envelope a collection of personal checks. "Pay to the order of the Estate of Suey Tong, $250.00. Pay to the order of the Estate of Suey Tong, $1,400.00."

"You will find the list to be accurate," said Fat Jow. "The total is $18,384.00. The excess represents interest on the loan, you see."

"The whole bunch is standing up for somebody, and I want to know who!" Cogswell was struggling to maintain professional calm.

"Why?" Fat Jow's face was unsmiling, but a chuckle lurked in his voice. "There is no crime—that I can recognize. First, some money was missing, and now it is not missing any more. Therefore, my interest in the case is at an end." He stood up. "You are pursuing only gamblers . . . and since we are all gamblers here, all I may say is, good hunting, sir."

Cogswell's frustration melted into a grin of wry admiration. "I'm glad you're on our side," he said, extending his hand, "if only part of the time. May I treat you to lunch?"

Fat Jow beamed. "Ordinarily, it would be my pleasure. But I do not think it wise that I be seen fraternizing with the police. Some of these valuable doors may begin being closed even to me."

Only when Cogswell was safely out of sight did Fat Jow take from his safe the money he stored for Gim Wong. Rather than wait for Gim Wong, he would go now to the sewing shop, learn the name of the Hong

Kong contact, and cable the money himself, so that it could not be traced to Gim Wong. His conscience was clear, and suddenly Gim Wong had a right to the money he had won, had then lost to Suey Tong, and later had gathered from the pavement of the alley.

The police were less than satisfied, but one could not do them the disservice of thrusting upon them the burden of understanding a matter of sentiment.

# SLAY THE WICKED

Frank Sisk

James Morton Oliver was seemingly a man above reproach. He was a deacon of the Queensport Congregational Church. He served for varying periods of time as local chairman of the Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, the United Fund, and the Waterfront Improvement Association. With a dozen other civic-minded citizens he founded the Benjamin Oliver (after his father) Memorial Library and was thereafter its principal financial support. Annually he subsidized a part of the summer camping expenses of the local Boy Scout troop. His pledge of $10,000 inaugurated the campaign that raised the money to add a children's wing on the Queensport Community Hospital. And he was always a dues-paying member of the Chamber of Commerce, although he had no local commercial interests.

James Morton Oliver had inherited a fair fortune from his father and then trebled it over a twenty-year period by judicious investment in the common stock of certain insurance companies. Each month he spent a few days in Hartford, another few days in New York, usually chauffeured to these cities by a small compact black man named Darby Tyler, who had been with him a long time and served also as butler. All the other days Mr. Oliver devoted to Queensport and environs—"the loveliest area in all of New England," as he often said with happy satisfaction whenever he was toastmaster at a testimonial dinner.

As had his father and grandfather before him, he

lived in the Oliver mansion on Jericho Hill. The original part of the house was nearly two hundred years old and, thanks to assiduous maintenance from one generation to another, still remained in prime condition. Over the long years a number of additions had gradually converted the once four-square Colonial structure into a hub for a rambling series of wings and galleries that now could have housed quite comfortably a very large family. It sprawled in the approximate center of ninety scenic acres. The boundaries were marked by tall stands of Norway pine, green sentinels for all seasons. Behind them were mixed ranks of beeches, birches, maples, oaks. Close to the house were small well-kept orchards of apple, peach, and cherry.

James Morton Oliver dwelt on this sizeable property completely alone except for his household staff. Besides Darby Tyler, there were Josephine Downes, the fat red-headed cook, and tall, slow-moving, laconic Si Green, general handyman and gardener.

James Morton Oliver never married. He had once been engaged to a young lady from Newburyport, Massachusetts, but she had died in an automobile accident. That was back when he was twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. After that, any liaisons he may have enjoyed with the opposite sex were either nonexistent or conducted safely beyond the purview of the Queensport citizenry. Most people took the romantic line that the Newburyport girl (who was remembered even by those who saw her only briefly and from a great distance as an exceptional raven-haired beauty) had been his one true love and that nobody else would ever fill the aching emptiness left by her tragic death.

James Morton Oliver, being the sole issue of his parents, had no close relatives. A few cousins, vaguely in

evidence on occasion during his boyhood, had vanished under the folds of time. An aunt, the youngest sister of his father, was reputedly living the life of a society dowager in Phoenix, Arizona. An uncle on his mother's side had spent at least a decade succumbing to alcohol in and out of a VA hospital in West Haven, just forty-two miles away.

As for friends, James Morton Oliver appeared to have hundreds of them in all walks of life, but actually nobody was really close to him. Despite his natural warmth of manner, his fine sympathetic smile, his cheerful willingness to help where he was needed, he kept curiously at a distance from wholehearted involvement. He constantly gave a supporting hand but always withheld his heart. He accepted confidences but never dispensed them. The one man who might have known him better than anyone else was his lawyer, Herman Maxfield, and yet it was his lawyer who in the last analysis knew him least of all.

"For twenty-three years I have been this man's admiring legal adviser," Maxfield declared, his long loose-skinned face fuller than ever of melancholy furrows. "For twenty-three years I fancied myself among his few intimate friends. For twenty-three years I held him in a higher regard than almost anyone I've known. And now, in a trice as it were, the countenance I knew is stripped away like a mask and I tremble to see what is behind it. The quiet words of wisdom that were always so much a part of his character have overnight become a tissue of falsehood, a complex camouflage. It's a damned hard blow to take, I tell you. Worse still, I have just started to realize that henceforward I shall always remember the man—*if I can't somehow forget him*—with a great shudder of complete abhorrence."

The man listening to Maxfield was a pipe smoker.

His name was Richard Seneca. He was state's attorney for the county. "Perhaps, Herman, your reaction is a little extreme," he said, emitting a slow cloud of smoke. "White to black, no in-between."

"Well, I admit I'm sort of under shock, Richard. Understandably. But wait till you've read what I've read. You may see for yourself."

They were closeted in the library of the Oliver mansion. The French doors were slightly ajar. It was a glittering April afternoon. Motes whirled lazily into the room on shafts of sunlight, depositing an infinitesimal residue on all the shiny dark-wood surfaces.

James Morton Oliver had been dead nearly a month, dead and gone but hardly forgotten. His funeral had been a large affair. Among the many notables who attended was the lieutenant governor. Out-of-town papers gave it a column or more; *The Queensport Quota* filled a page. His ashes now reposed in a simple copper urn among other such urns in the family vault. But a corporeal remainder of the man, an essence of his earthly travail, lingered like a ghost and seemed bent on a disastrous course, namely to distort the august image that many were still politely mourning.

For James Morton Oliver had left in his wake a secret diary. It was a massive thing—fourteen thick volumes—and embarrassingly comprehensive on certain subjects. In his capacity as executor of the estate, Herman Maxfield had discovered the diary in the old-fashioned safe in a den off the library. During the past week he had been skimming through it, stopping at some passages with a growing sense of alarm, until finally he had come to the bitter end in utter dismay.

"Here's the first volume," Maxfield said, handing it to Seneca. "It begins at the latter part of nineteen

forty-five while Oliver was still in Washington. He served the Navy in some civilian role during the War, but I think we may skip that part. Pure bureaucratic gossip. I've placed bookmarks in the sections that pertain to our immediate interest."

"So I see." Seneca placed his pipe bowlside down in a nearby ash tray and opened the volume at the first bookmark.

*January 12th*—Home at last for good. The town never looked finer. A white carpet of snow as far as the eye can see. Trees festooned with icicles. The very air seems to shimmer and sparkle. Winy is the word. Nothing will ever lure me back to Washington again. Not even that Congressional seat which has been dangled ever so tantalizingly in front of me by L. M. and A. R. . . .

Richard Seneca's eyes inquiringly left the diary. "These initials, Herman. They mean anything to you?"

"Leo McGovern and Al Roper," Maxfield replied. "They had a lot of the say in those days. Both long deceased."

Seneca's gaze returned to the diary.

. . . Father needs me here. He is failing fast. Just in the short time since my Thanksgiving visit he has aged a year. Also he is drinking more than is good for him, but I suppose he always has. And if Mother, may her soul rest in everlasting peace, was never able to persuade him to cut down on his intake, I certainly don't stand much of a chance. How is it stated in Proverbs? "Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish, and wine unto those who be heavy of heart." That perhaps is the best line to follow. He celebrated

his sixty-seventh birthday last October. I doubt he will see his sixty-eighth. Which reminds me of my own approaching anniversary. On the twelfth of next month I'll be twenty-nine. The date is one thing I have in common with Abraham Lincoln.

*January 13th*—The morning mail brought me a most welcome letter from my dear Claudia. Knowing I am now a bureaucrat emeritus, she writes to urge me toward an early reunion in Boston. A few days on the town, just the two of us. I shan't say nay. It's been a good six months since I last held her sweet passionate body in my arms, and then our moment of happiness was somewhat abruptly terminated by the intrusion of her brother phoning from the hotel lobby. Luckily we were registered in separate rooms. Six months, a lifetime, a millennium, an eon. I grow pathetically maudlin just thinking about her. Ah, Claudia, how I wish you were here with me now, here in the library, enjoying the great dancing warmth of the logs in the fireplace.

*January 14th*—The word is getting around town that I'm home. Phone calls are starting to fill the hours, some welcome, some not so welcome. One I would have preferred not to have taken was from Carol Roos, but Darby handed me the phone without first establishing the caller's identity. The dialogue went something like this:

"Hello, Jim Oliver speaking."

"Hiya, Jimmie. Bet you can't guess who this is."

"I'm not in a betting mood." Of course I knew immediately who it was.

"Give one guess, just one."

"Lana Turner."

"Oh, *youu!*"

"It's not Lana Turner then? Odd, I'm expecting a call from her this morning."

"It's Carol."

"Carole Lombard?"

"That's not a very nice thing to say. She's dead. Carol Roos."

"Why, of course. I was beginning to recognize your voice, Carol. How are you these days?"

"So-so. As if you care."

"But I *do* care, Carol. I care much. And how's that big blond boyfriend of yours—Henry Webber?"

"We've broken up."

"What in the world happened?"

"One of those things. You wouldn't understand. Or maybe you would."

"Try me, Carol."

"If you give me a chance. I want to see you anyhow."

"All right."

"Well, when?"

"Soon."

"Today?"

"I'm afraid today is out of the question. I've only just got home—"

"I heard you've been home two whole days."

"That's true. But two days is not long. I haven't finished unpacking yet. Besides, my father is rather ill and he's been letting things slide. I'm trying to straighten out a few messes."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"Tomorrow's no good either, Carol. I have some legal matters to attend to. And the day after that I'm due in Boston."

"You don't really want to see me."

"Please don't take that childish attitude."

"Well, you're full of excuses, Jimmie."

"Please don't call me Jimmie."

"You men! Once you get what you want from a

girl it's so long, dearie, good-bye."

"Listen, Carol. I promise you this. As soon as I return from Boston we'll get together. Understood?"

"I bet."

"You have my word. I must go now."

After hanging up I instructed Darby in no uncertain terms never—but never—to pass me the phone without determining who was on the other end of the line and giving me a chance to be unavailable.

*January 15th*—Herman Maxfield came to lunch with us today. Father's appearance handed him rather a shock. The old man was in a mild state of the shakes from last night's session with the bourbon bottle. His eyes were more bloodshot than usual. He had little appetite. Ignoring the lamb chops that Josephine had broiled to perfection, he concentrated on several dark-looking highballs, growing less lucid as time went on.

Later, when the old man tottered off for his afternoon nap, Maxfield lowered his Harvard reserve sufficiently to comment: "Ben appears to be overdoing it, James. Is his doctor aware of it?"

"I wouldn't wager on it," I said. "Are you acquainted with Doctor Jeremy Bevins, Herman?"

"I don't think so."

"Next to Father I'd rate Jerry Bevins the second best drinker in town. Some might even say they're tied for first place."

"I see," Maxfield said in a tone that plainly expressed his dislike for what he saw.

Rabelais once wrote a line I should have quoted to him: "There are more old drunkards than old doctors around."

*January 19th*—With great reluctance I have just returned home from Boston after three delicious days and nights. My beloved Claudia has hooked me forever

and a day and I must say I thoroughly like the idea. We took a suite at the Copley Plaza and rode the merry-go-round upstairs and down, getting nothing but gold rings.

One afternoon the skies opened up and let fall a slow thick snow. We watched it like happy children from breath-fogged windows, glasses of champagne in hand, dozens of bright red roses in every receptacle throughout the sitting room. At times we enjoyed the distinct illusion of rising upward in the downcoming snow, ethereal spirits.

But there was nothing ethereal about our appetites. We ate like beasts of burden. One evening we even took in a movie—*Life with Father*—starring William Powell and Irene Dunne. Paternal autocracy made amusing. In a daughterly part was a young actress whose dark hair and fair skin reminded me strikingly of Claudia. Her name is Elizabeth Taylor. She'll bloom into a headliner.

On the plus side of the Boston visit was the complete absence of Claudia's obnoxious brother Paul. Seems he's on the verge of flunking half his courses at B.U. and was parentally remanded to the Newburyport manse for a week of study.

Before we parted, Claudia and I agreed to announce our engagement on my birthday next month. She'll come to Queensport for the party in the company of her parents and her (ugh) brother.

*January 20th*—Carol Roos phoned today but Darby, who never has to be told twice, said I was out.

*January 21st*—Drove to Hartford today and bought a diamond ring. Lovely as it is, it won't achieve its full splendor until it is on Claudia's finger.

Upon arriving home I intended to tell Father about my marriage plans but found him and Doc Bevins drunkenly reviewing the policies of Harry Truman.

A note from Darby near the telephone said Carol Roos had called again and asked that I get in touch.

*January 22nd*—I nearly answered a Carol Roos call today but on an instant hunch I drew my hand back from the receiver and permitted Darby to take over. That little girl is shaping up as a bit of a pest.

*January 23rd*—O fateful day! O day of dreadful recriminations! If I had known this morning what lay in store I would have gone back to sleep.

Even now, many hours after the accident (for it was definitely an accident), I am still trembling at the recollection. I can hardly hold this pen. But I must record the details while they are clear in my mind. Otherwise, a week, a month, a year from now I might begin to blame myself instead of fate.

St. Augustine has written that "fate commonly means a necessary process which will have its way apart from the will of God and of men," and God knows my own will was never invoked over this terrible event.

It started this morning after a late breakfast. I decided to walk to the mailbox myself instead of waiting for Si Green to do it. The day was cold but brightly lanced through with sunlight. I enjoyed the quarter-mile stroll along the wooded path that led to our RFD box on Jericho Hill Road. As I was lowering the metal flag a car rolled slowly up behind me and came to a stop.

"Hello there, Jimmie," called a voice that was unpleasantly familiar.

I turned and saw Carol Roos sitting at the wheel of a green sedan, pre-War model. "Why, hello, Carol. What brings you up this way?"

"That's easy. You." Her smile was pert.

"I guess I've been a little remiss."

"Whatever *that* is, that's what you've been. So why

don't you get in and tell me all about it." She leaned across the front seat and opened the car door.

Forgetting the mail, I climbed in. My conscience obliged me to do it. Carol drove in obvious accordance with a preconceived plan to the waterside section of town and eventually to Rocky View, a plateau overlooking the sea. We had been here together once before. It was as deserted now as it was then. It is a summer place, a place for picnics. The stone fireplaces were rimed with ice. The trash cans were topped with graying snow.

Stopping the car near the chain link fence that guarded the seaward side of the plateau but letting the motor idle, Carol turned her curly blonde head in my direction and gazed at me accusingly through sad brown eyes. "I had to see you, you know. Can you guess why?"

"You're quite a girl for guessing games, aren't you?"

"Maybe. But why don't you try to guess just this once. It shouldn't be too hard."

"You'd better give me a few clues, Carol. I feel rather dense this morning."

She smiled happily. "All right. Let's think back to Thanksgiving time. When you were up from Washington. Remember?"

"I remember, yes."

"Don't you remember one thing special, Jimmie?"

I didn't particularly wish to remember. "A twenty-pound turkey," I said, grinning.

"Stop kidding about it. What else?"

"Mashed turnips and pumpkin pie," I said.

"The Thanksgiving Eve dance at the Congregational Church."

"That too."

"And after the dance, Jimmie?"

"Let's see now." I wrinkled my brow in a sem-

blance of deep thought. "I danced with you twice. Right?"

"More than twice. And that's why Henry Webber got mad."

"It's coming back to me. Henry brought you to the dance and then left you there."

"And you drove me home, only not right away."

"That's right, Carol. We came up here first, didn't we? It was rather a warm night for that time of the year. Rather warm indeed."

"I'd say hot," she said, giggling. I detest gigglers. "And that brings up why I just had to see you now. Do you understand, Jimmie?"

"Call me Jim."

"All right, Jim." Her hand reached out for mine. "You know what I mean, don't you?"

"I'm afraid we acted on strong impulses that evening, Carol. I take the full blame. After all, I'm older than you. I should have known better."

"You didn't force me. I was willing. I love you, Jim."

"Wait a minute, honey. Let's not be hasty."

"Hasty. Well, we've only got about seven months left."

The idea was incredible. "Do you mean you're going to have a baby, Carol?"

"Yes. That is exactly right."

"And you're saying I'm the father?"

"You *are* the father, Jim."

"How can you be so sure?"

"What a thing to say!"

"There's Henry Webber."

"Henry has never touched me like that. He has very high moral standards."

"Unlike me," I said. "Or you."

"Besides, I never loved Henry, Jim." She reached

into the back seat and produced a skein of blue yarn and two aluminum knitting needles attached to about five square inches of knitted material. "Look at what I've been doing. Making a little blue pullover. I'm sure it's going to be a boy."

I opened the car door and got out. I walked to the chain link fence and lit a cigarette. I looked out over the wintry sea. A cold chill ran up my spine.

Then I heard Carol opening the door on her side. I heard her saying, "Gee, honey, don't be mad at me. Please don't."

I turned as she came running in my direction, still carrying the knitting. I turned just in time to see her feet slip on a puddle of ice. They went out from under and she fell hard on her left side.

For several seconds a strange bubbly sound came from her open mouth, not unlike giggling. Then there was a sudden silence and a pervasive immobility about her. I took the few steps to her body and squatted beside it. One of the knitting needles was buried more than half its length in her left side. She was already dead.

I tossed my cigarette over the chain link fence. With a handkerchief I removed any possible fingerprints from inside and outside the car. Then, with a last look at the poor girl who was now beyond any mortal help, I took the wooden stairs that ran from the west side of the plateau down to the beach. My shoes left no prints in the shifting sand. Within thirty-five minutes I was at the lower end of Dock Street, where I purchased two quarts of steamers from Fred Pollard who runs a fish market there, and then I walked two blocks to the depot and took a cab back to Jericho Hill. I asked Bingo Bates, the driver, if he'd ever had an ungovernable yearning for steamed clams and he said he sure had, hundreds

of times, and I said, well that's exactly what had hit me this morning and so much so that I'd walked better than three miles to buy a few quarts, but I was damned if I was going to go the same route on foot again. Bingo said he understood and didn't blame me one damned bit.

I got out at the mailbox, gathered up the mail at last, and then walked briskly back to the house.

*January 24th*—Today I woke with incipient sniffles. Josephine brought breakfast to my bed along with the morning newspaper. I could hardly bear the thought of what might be on the front page and in fact didn't so much as glance at it until I poured a second cup of coffee. Of course it was there—under a two-column headline in the lower right corner:

KNITTING NEEDLE KILLS GIRL

The body of a 19-year-old girl was discovered yesterday afternoon in the Rocky View section of Queensport as the apparent result of a freak accident involving a metal knitting needle and an icy strip of pavement.

Carol Roos, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Roos of 22 Windsor Drive, was found shortly before 2 p.m. by Policeman Oscar Randall on a routine cruiser patrol. From the position of the body, Randall judged the girl must have been walking away from a car, also found at the scene, and slipped on the icy asphalt, thereby forcing a knitting needle into her left side. Dr. R. F. Keating, the medical examiner, said the needle obviously punctured the victim's heart, and called for an immediate autopsy.

The car which the Roos girl had driven to the deserted picnic area was traced by authorities to

Henry Webber of 14 Windsor Drive. Webber informed police he often let Carol borrow his car to run errands, but he had no idea why she had gone to Rocky View at this time of the year.

"She said she needed the car to handle a personal matter," Webber was quoted by the police.

Mrs. Roos told this newspaper that "Carol had been acting kind of funny the last few days," but couldn't guess why.

Henry Webber's car. A personal matter. Et tu Brutus. The female of the species has at best an extremely tenuous moral fiber.

*January 25th*—A newspaper account today outlines the arrangements for Carol's funeral. Never noted for tact, *The Queensport Quota* appends to the end of the story a gratuitous malefaction: the deceased was in the early stages of pregnancy, according to the medical examiner. Furthermore, the police have begun to question Henry Webber more closely. If it develops that Henry sired the unborn, he is in a ticklish spot. One might quote Psalms at him: "Evil shall slay the wicked."

Looking up from the diary, Richard Seneca reached tentatively for his pipe. "I didn't know the private man," he said to Herman Maxfield, "but to judge from what I've read so far he is quite different from the public man."

"The private man you're seeing, Richard, is not the private man I thought I knew so well. Turn to the next marker. It starts with his twenty-ninth birthday."

*February 12th*—Bad weather is a bad augury. Drizzle at dawn. Dreary sleet throughout the morning.

Even the festive preparations for my birthday party fail to brighten the gray mood.

Claudia arrives two hours past noon, a long hour overdue. For a moment then there is light, but it is swiftly eclipsed by the looming presence of her brother and the notable absence of her parents. I ask where they are. They are at home with the flu. They send their regrets. They extend their best wishes. Paul says the drive down from Newburyport was the roughest one hundred fifty miles he's ever driven. Roads a glare of ice. He needs a drink to steady his nerves. Father remedies that situation promptly, all too happy to have a tippling partner to tide him over until Doc Bevins arrives.

Doc arrives semi-soused at two-thirty and the other guests, among whom are Herman Maxfield and the Reverend John Rutherford, begin to appear a bit later. By three-thirty everyone is present. The champagne is poured by Darby. Father proposes a toast to me and I propose a toast to my good luck and thereby announce that Claudia has consented to be my bride.

"And when will the wonderful wedding take place?" inquires John Rutherford.

"In June," I say.

"A month ordained by God and nature," he says. "And where, may I ask, will the event be celebrated?"

"In Newburyport, John."

"More's the pity, James."

"But you'll be invited."

"I feel better already."

The occasion went off fairly well as such occasions go. It was marred only by somewhat excessive drinking on the part of Father, Doc Bevins and Paul, but since they kept pretty much to themselves in the library their behavior was not generally noticed.

Claudia and I managed to disappear for nearly an hour down in the wine cellar to which only I have a key nowadays. There is a most comfortably furnished tasting room adjoining. Needless to say, it was not the grape that we savored.

The party began to break up at seven. Because of the weather (a few degrees below zero and the radio warning that driving was extremely hazardous), I tried to persuade Claudia to stay overnight, but it seems Paul was scheduled to appear next morning before the dean to answer for some serious infraction of school rules that might possibly lead to his expulsion. As it was, he was going to present a picture of the world's biggest hangover.

"I'll let you go on one condition," I told Claudia. "You do the driving—all of it."

"Don't worry, darling. Paul will probably sleep it off straight through to home."

"And be slow and careful, sweetheart."

"Forever and always, Jim."

*February 13th*—"Forever and always." For my beloved Claudia it meant almost no time at all, a meager few hours. On a sharp curve just south of Worcester, the automobile went into a skid and struck a guardrail, then flipped over several times, the state police reported. It was crushed to look like an accordion. Miraculously the driver escaped death, *but the driver was Paul.* Claudia, riding in the so-called suicide seat, was pronounced dead by the doctor who arrived with the ambulance.

I am numb from the shock of it. I can't think, I can't feel, I cannot write another word about it. I wonder whether I shall survive.

*February 17th*—The numbness lingers, but I'm afraid I shall live. To some good purpose, I pray.

These last few days have been the most harrowing

of my life. I attended Claudia's funeral like a man drugged. The casket was closed, a black reminder of how completely her beauty had been destroyed. I remember seeing her parents as two gray shadows drifting limply across my vision. We exchanged whispered phrases that were meaningless. Paul was not present. He is still in the hospital with a broken arm and a slight concussion. My father did not attend the funeral either. He remained home "too ill," as we say, "to travel."

*February 18th*—Is Father trying in his own awkward way to take my mind off my sorrow? It seems so. Late this afternoon he emerged momentarily from his alcoholic cocoon with a very curious idea. He wants to endow a town library. I call the idea curious because it comes from a man who has shunned books all his life. The only book I've ever heard him mention (and that was years ago) was Kipling's *Stalky & Co.,* which his father must have given him as a boy. Actually, our own library was established by Grandfather, enlarged by my mother who was an avid reader of Dickens, Trollope, Hardy, and Meredith, and then more or less modernized by myself. Now in his dotage, Father perhaps feels he should get into the act as a sort of local Andrew Carnegie.

"We already have a town library," I told him.

"We do? News to me. Where in hell they hide it?"

"In the basement of the Congregational Church."

"Basement? Don't make me laugh."

"Among its twenty-five hundred or so volumes it numbers several works of Rudyard Kipling."

"Good. The old Stalky stories, I hope. But I got bigger ideas. Get the damned library out of the cellar. Into a big brick building. Statue out in front. The Thinker or something along those lines."

"When did this idea develop, Father?"

"Been worming round inside me for a year at least."

"You plan it as kind of a memorial for yourself?"

"I want you to plan it that way. You and Maxfield. I'll set up the money."

"What size endowment do you have in mind?"

"Hundred and fifty thousand. How's that strike you?"

It rather struck me dumb.

*February 22nd*—Herman Maxfield phoned this a.m. Father had mentioned the library memorial to him. Not too coherently, I gather. The good lawyer wished to verify a few facts. I told him I'd visit his Hartford office soon.

*February 23rd*—A slowly healing wound was cruelly reopened today. The morning mail brought a letter from Claudia's brother, writing from the hospital:

*Dear James:*

*I can guess how you must feel about me. You probably want to kick my butt from here to eternity and to tell the truth I would not mind you doing it because being built the way we are I can hardly do it to myself and God knows I deserve it and a lot more. It's only today I realize that Claudia is dead and gone forever and it's all my fault getting drunk at your party and then insisting on driving after we stopped somewhere for a cup of coffee . . .*

Et cetera. And then he came to the main reason for his letter. And I recognized behind it the disciplinary hand of his parents. Claudia's engagement ring was in his possession. He felt he should return it to me in person. He also felt he should personally ask my forgiveness (knowing it would be next to impossible for me to forgive him) for the good of his own tor-

tured conscience. He was due to be discharged from the hospital on the twenty-seventh of February. At eleven a.m. If I could find it in my heart to meet him there at that time and perhaps drive him to Boston, he would give me the ring and a few dozen letters of mine found among Claudia's things.

*I know I'm asking a lot, James, but I've got to ask if I'm going to be able to live with myself. Remember I loved Claudia too. She was my only sister, my older sister, and always was kind to me....*

*February 27th*—This morning at 11 o'cock I met Paul at the hospital in Worcester. His face was drawn and pale, giving his eyes a strangely luminous look. His left arm was in a sling. He held out his right. We shook hands.

"Let me get my bags from the desk," he said, "and I'll be ready to go."

"Better let me give you some assistance," I said.

Together we went to the desk and picked up a large leather suitcase and a small zippered canvas bag. I carried the suitcase.

As I put the car into gear, Paul said, "I feel like hell about everything. I can hardly look you in the eye, James. And as for my mother and father, they're sorry I was ever born, I guess."

"Deep-six that crying towel, Paul."

"On top of everything else, I've been booted out of school. I mean I'm on everybody's list, Number One Crumb."

"I know a fine inn not far from here. Grog that'll give the sky a brighter hue. And food that'll—"

"No booze, James. That's out. Strictly taboo from now on."

"Whatever you say. Still, this inn is where we're going. I feel like a relaxed hour after the drive up here."

"You're in the driver's seat."

So I drove to this well-known inn, whose name I won't mention here for obvious reasons soon to develop, and we found deep chairs in front of a blazing fire in the cocktail lounge. It is difficult under such cordial conditions to refuse a drink, but Paul manfully passed up the first round, diverting himself by unzippering the canvas bag and taking from it two bundles of letters tied with blue ribbon. Pushing them toward me across the table, he said, "Mother thought you ought to have these."

"Thank her for me."

"Oh, and this too." From the right pocket of his jacket he produced a pink satin ring case.

Without opening it, I dropped it in my own pocket. "Listen, kid," I said. "This is tough on both of us. Let's not make it any tougher than it has to be."

The waiter set a Rob Roy in front of me and went away again.

"I just feel lousy, that's all," Paul said. "I don't think I'll ever get back to feeling the way I used to."

"That may be all to the good," I said, taking a sip of the drink. "Every crisis, whether the results are happy or sad, brings a change in a man's life."

"I suppose so."

"If it will help, Paul," I drained the glass and lied with a straight face, "I forgive you. I can't forget, maybe, but at least I can forgive."

Tears brimmed in his luminous eyes—eyes heartbreakingly like Claudia's. "Well, jeez, James, thanks, thanks. I, I, ah, I feel like the human race might let me join up again. Someday."

"How about now?"

"Like how?"

The waiter was approaching.

"As a starter, join me for a drink. I hate to drink alone."

"Maybe. Well, okay. Just one."

Three hours later the picture had undergone a radical change. Deep in grog but still without grub, we were the personification of wassailers just over the peak and beginning to head downhill. In my case the appearance was deceptive. After the third cocktail I had stopped at the bar on the way to the men's room and told the bartender, for my delicate stomach's sake, to omit the Scotch from all future Rob Roys sent to our table. Paul was drinking gin fizzes and continued to do so.

At three-fifteen he gazed blearily at the grandfather clock ticking steadily away at the far side of the room. "Looks like after three already. Gotta shove off, James. Deadline's five. Home at five on dot. Ultimatum from the old man. Otherwise."

"Otherwise what?"

"Disown me. Cut me off. Work me in his damned mill as bobbin boy."

"I'm afraid I'm feeling these drinks, Paul."

"Can't handle stuff. Thass what you saying?"

"I'm not much of a drinker."

"So Claudia always said. Be like James, she always said. Drinks like a gentleman. Dignity, he's got dignity. Never drunk."

"Glad she can't see me now."

"Look fine to me, James. Sober's a judge."

"Inside is where it is. Nausea. Tell you what, Paul. Take the keys to my car here and drive yourself home. I'll make some arrangements to get it back in the morning."

"Must be kidding, pal. I got no license. Cops grabbed license at scene of accident. Fact, come to think of it, I'm out on bond."

"So what. They can't take away what they've already taken. You go on, Paul, and I'll get a room

here and lie down awhile. You are able to drive, aren't you?"

"One thing I can do, James, is hold my liquor and drive."

So when the waiter was not in sight I gave Paul the car keys and we shook hands and I watched him weave his way, zipper bag in hand, to the side door that let out on the guest parking lot. In a few minutes I saw my car go past the tall curtained windows with a reckless amount of speed.

At the desk I asked the clerk if he had a room available. My friend, I said, required a few hours' rest before we continued our journey. The clerk said he had a very nice room.

I returned to the cocktail lounge and encountered the waiter. "Where is my young friend?" I asked.

"In the gents' perhaps."

"I suppose so. But no—unless he's taken his topcoat and bag along with him." I took my own topcoat from the back of a chair and felt through the pockets. "My car keys are gone." I walked to the nearest window and swept back the curtains. "And the car's gone too."

"I don't think the young man was fit to drive," the waiter said.

"I know he wasn't," I said. "We'd better have him picked up by the state police before he hurts himself. Is there a phone handy?"

"In the lobby. But don't say he got his drinks here. We could lose our license."

"Don't worry. All he had here was black coffee. Right?"

"Right, sir. Just right."

I majored in economics at college, not psychology, but my insight on Paul presently proved to be highly accurate. About fifteen miles from the inn the state

police spotted the car and signaled it with the dome light to pull over. Paul's response was to accelerate from sixty to eighty mph. The state trooper gave chase, playing it up with his siren now. Paul moved my old sedan up to ninety-five, according to the accident report, and that was as fast as it could go, faster than it had ever gone for me, faster than it would ever go again. It suddenly went wild, zigzagging from one side of Route 9 to the other, until it finally bounced against a drainage curbing which put it on a swift straight line in the direction of an overpass abutment of reinforced concrete. The crash was followed almost immediately by an explosion. The flames were too hot for any rescue attempt by the state trooper. After the fire was extinguished by an emergency field truck, the state police came for me at the inn and drove me out there to make an identification. If it wasn't for the charred cast on the corpse's left forearm I would not have known it was Paul. "Evil shall slay the wicked," as I've noted heretofore.

"Your Mister Oliver was quite a rationalizer," Richard Seneca said, placing the open journal face downward across his knees and beginning to fill his pipe. "It's a quality we all have to some extent, but he seems to have had it to an exaggerated degree. And you say you never noticed it, Herman?"

"Not as such, Richard." Maxfield lighted a cigarette, took a puff of it, then snubbed it out in an ash tray. "I'm trying to give these damn things up . . . Rationalization, yes, it was often there, but at the time it appeared to be compassion mixed with good sense, a sort of beneficent pragmatism, if I may say so."

Seneca pulled flame from a match into the bowl of his pipe. "Yes," he said.

"Go to the next marker, Richard, and you'll see what I mean."

*August 6th*—A balmy day. Too bad the adjective, in its less flattering sense, can also be applied lately to Father.

As he grows more incapable of handling any of his affairs, big or small, he grows more insistent on handling all of them. The result is both comic and chaotic. This morning, for instance, he put Si Green to work pruning the apple trees, though they'd all been pruned as usual in June. I told Si to cut a few laterals with weak fruit spurs and then to vanish as soon as the old man turned his back.

At noon Father engaged Josephine in a rambling discussion on the best way to make mincemeat, finally issuing orders that henceforth it should be made with applejack instead of rum. In a huff the good woman went to the kitchen and baked four pies, each containing either applejack, rum, brandy, or bourbon. "I dare him to ever tell the difference," she told me.

In the afternoon he pulled Darby away from the polishing of silver and told him to lay down a good hard wax on the uncarpeted portions of the main staircase. Darby protested that he'd waxed them two days ago, but Father simply said to wax them again. Waxing wood, giving it a rich sheen, was becoming one of Father's many little obsessions.

And then late in his own elongated cocktail hour, around four-fifteen or thereabouts, he cornered me about the memorial library.

"What in hell have you and Maxfield been doing about it?" he demanded.

"Frankly, not much. Since you haven't mentioned it in several months, I thought you might have changed your mind."

"Changed my mind. You know I never change my mind once it's set."

"All too well."

"No high-class sass, now, boy. I'm still head of this house."

"Everyone's quite aware of it, Father."

"Better be. To get back to my question, I want some papers drawn up on this memorial library and I want 'em drawn up before the week is out."

"You still like the figure of a hundred and fifty thousand?"

"It suits me, sure."

"Which demonstrates your ignorance in at least one walk of life, Father. A hundred and fifty thousand buys a lot of booze but it sure as the devil doesn't buy an impressive number of books, not to mention a good well-planned building to stack them in."

"I don't give a damn about the books. I just want the building. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth. You can move the books from the basement of the Congregational Church and start it off that way."

"So that's how it is."

"That's how it is. So set up a meeting with Maxfield for tomorrow morning sure, James. Early."

"All right."

"Now. There's the phone."

The dictator had spoken. I acted.

*August 7th*—Early this morning, an hour before dawn, I emerged from my bedroom on the way to the bathroom and discovered Father sleepwalking in the hallway. At least I think he was sleepwalking. His hands weren't extended in front of him as classically provided by the best movies. But when I called to him in a low voice he seemed not to hear

me. He was wearing pajamas, a dressing gown and leather-soled felt slippers. His gait was somewhat shuffling. The leather whispered across the hooked rugs lying at intervals over the highly polished hardwood floor and made a rasping sound on the floor itself. He was heading toward the staircase.

"Father," I called, a little louder this time.

Unheeding, he shuffled on.

"Father, be careful," I warned. He was getting close to the head of the stairs. If he were sleepwalking, I was afraid he might injure himself. "Father, wake up!"

He went on.

I started quickly forward with the intention of grabbing him, but went into a skid on a hooked rug, which carried me sledlike across the shining floor and threw me on my back. I continued to slide, feet upraised at a thirty-five-degree angle, until I came to a colliding halt against the back of Father's buttocks. He in turn flipped over and began to descend the stairs in a crashing series of clumsy cartwheels.

Dr. Bevins, nearly sober for once, arrived at six-forty-five and, after a cursory examination, pronounced Father dead of a broken neck.

"How in hell did it happen, Jim?" he asked, getting to his feet.

"Let me buy you a drink and I'll tell you."

He looked at his wristwatch as if considering other urgent appointments. "Well, sure. I guess I've got time for about one."

Once we were seated in the library, drinks in hand, I told him this story: a natural urge had awakened me at five-twenty, by the luminous dial of my watch, but I hadn't responded immediately. I was warm and comfortable and rather sleepy. I lay in bed uselessly postponing the trip. Then I heard the sound of move-

ment in the hallway. That got me out of bed quickly. Hurrying across the room, I opened the door. From the faint glow of the night lamp on the table outside the bathroom door I made out Father moving rapidly toward the stairs. Before I could call out to him, his feet appeared to slip on the polished hardwood exposed at the left side of the carpeting on the top step, and down he went like a bagful of kindling. It was awful, the noise of it, and seemed almost endless.

"Every square foot of hardwood in this house constitutes a hazard," I concluded. "It's all waxed regularly until it's about as slippery as a skating rink. Obversely enough, the hardwood with its fine sheen had become one of Father's pleasures. In fact, he had Darby wax the stairs *twice* this week, Doc."

Bevins shook his head slowly and sadly. "Hippocrates said it and he said it right—'Old people have fewer diseases than the young but their diseases never leave them.' I'll have another drink, Jim—this one to Ben, a fine old man."

A fine old man indeed! My mother would not have agreed and, looking back, neither can I.

*August 8th*—I devoted most of the morning to conferences with the Reverend Rutherford and Mr. William Bradley on the matter of funeral arrangements. Mr. Bradley is Bradley & Sons, Morticians.

Maxfield had risen from an easy chair and wandered behind Seneca to look over his shoulder. "You needn't go any further into that period, Richard. The next several hundred pages are irrelevant to our immediate interest. But what you've just read is a prime example of what I described as Oliver's beneficent pragmatism, or the illusion of it."

"I'm listening, Herman."

"A month or so after the funeral, Oliver and I met

at my club in Hartford for a few drinks and lunch. Our purpose was to discuss plans for the Benjamin Oliver Memorial Library project. Almost immediately the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars entered the conversation. Although this sum had never been fixed by a codicil in the will, it had been mentioned to me several times by Benjamin Oliver and I knew it was his intention to contribute that amount of money to the undertaking. James Oliver agreed as to the intent, but he took another tack—his beneficent pragmatic approach, if you will—and I found myself in wholehearted agreement with him."

"He must have been quite a spellbinder," Seneca said.

"Well, no, not in the usual sense of the word. Sincerity of purpose might better describe the impression he gave you, plus a very honest intelligence. I remember his pointing out at this lunch of ours that, let's face it, as much as he'd always loved and respected his father he had to admit to himself that the old man was rather unstable during the last year of his life. Liquor had taken its toll. Did I not agree? Of course I agreed.

"The figure of a hundred and fifty thousand was a reflection of addled vanity, in his opinion, forgivably addled because the intent was fundamentally good. However, he had been giving his father's wishes careful thought these last doleful weeks and he had finally come to a conclusion he hoped was the right one. Right for Benjamin Oliver, right for himself and his conscience, right for the people of Queensport.

"We would draw up a trust agreement to be called the Benjamin Oliver Memorial Library Foundation into which he would place the sum of ten thousand dollars. The goal of the Foundation would be to raise not a hundred and fifty thousand but *two* hundred

and fifty thousand over the next five years by means of public donations. The five-year period would allow time for bequests by will and testament, by charitable subscription, and by special fund-raising events. In short, it would allow the town as a whole to participate in the creation of a library, a community library, an enduring monument to learning rather than just an edifice to commemorate one man's senile vanity."

"He *was* a spellbinder, Herman," Seneca said, "but he knew what spells were acceptable. I'll say that for him."

"I daresay you're right, Richard. At any rate, the trust was drawn up in accordance with his outline. The amount of money was six thousand dollars short of the goal at the end of five years and therefore James Morton Oliver generously made up the difference."

"Curiously enough, Herman, that generous gift of six grand would be a thousand dollars less than a year's interest at five percent on a hundred and forty thousand—which is what he kept out of the Foundation by means of his father's death."

"How true, how terribly true! Yet the library now stands. As a matter of fact, it may well be said that it marked the beginning of Oliver's career as Queensport's most respected citizen and most beloved philanthropist."

"Did he still pursue his subterranean life?"

"Let me find you another volume. Yes, here it is. Nineteen forty-nine, three years after his father's death. Open it to the marker, Richard, and your question will be answered."

*June 14th*—Flag Day. Boy Scout Day. Ship Ahoy Day. Goat Island Day. Rev. John Rutherford Day.

In fact, it has been a red-letter day for nearly everybody but me. If I had a beard I should weep into it. And gnash my teeth.

I might begin by blaming John Rutherford for what has happened, but I won't, lest I be accused of subscribing to the belief of St. John Chrysostom that, "Hell is paved with the skulls of priests."

But the unpleasant occurrence definitely started to ovulate (nice word) when Rutherford came to me for financial and social assistance in the annual Flag Day expedition of the Boy Scouts to Goat Island. I willingly contributed the usual one hundred dollars but rather reluctantly consented to act as one of the expedition's adult supervisors.

"Can't the scoutmaster handle the situation, John?" I asked.

"On land, James, yes. But at sea we require additional precautions."

Goat Island is a state preserve fourteen miles offshore. Any responsible organization can obtain a permit to use it for an outing. The ferry that runs twice a day from Queensport to the larger inhabited island of Kingston can be chartered to make a slight change of course to discharge passengers on Goat Island and pick them up again, and it does so regularly during the summer.

Well, to get to the point, the trip over was uneventful except for one thing. The scoutmaster, a tall, blond young man who looked vaguely familiar, seemed to take an inordinate interest in my appearance. Several times I caught him making quite an intense study of me from a distance, as though he wanted to ask me a great favor. At first I blamed my imagination, but no. Again on the island I caught him in the act. I was tempted to approach him and ask what was on his mind, but he was always sur-

rounded by boys pleading for help with bowline hitches or semaphore messages or fire-lighting equipment. He impressed me as a nice young man, not too bright.

Late this afternoon, when we were midway of Goat Island and Queensport, the young man finally escaped from his charges, who were confined to the enclosed lower deck of the ferry, and came to the bow of the upper deck where I was alone watching the rough sea churning below. The sun, which had been kind all day, had recently withdrawn behind a thickening screen of grayish clouds. A chill was in the air. Rain threatened.

"Hello," the young man ventured.

I released my grip on the cold chain that stretched fifteen or so feet from the portside gunwale to the starboard and was the only barrier between me and the sea beneath. "Hello," I said, turning to face him. "You made it after all."

"I know you, Mister Oliver," he said in a voice strung a bit taut, "but I guess you don't know me."

"I guess not. Who are you?"

"Henry Webber."

The name didn't really register. It was familiar, though, like his face.

"I used to go around with Carol Roos," he said.

"Yes, now I remember."

"You ought to, Mister Oliver. You sure ought to."

"I don't think I like your tone, Webber."

"And I don't like your high and mighty ways, either. I been doing a lot of thinking these last couple of years, and I come to a certain conclusion."

"Your mental processes do not interest me at all."

"You're going to listen, though."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Even if I have to hold on to you."

"Don't try it, Webber."

"It was you who got Carol in trouble. I'm sure of it. It couldn't be anyone else."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do, sir. The Reverend Rutherford told me you drove Carol home from the Thanksgiving dance that night. Left about an hour after I did, he said. Around ten, he said. But Carol's mother said she didn't get home until late. Close to three in the morning."

"Will you kindly step aside," I said firmly.

"So wherever you took her, that's where you got her in trouble. She never went out with anyone but me and I never did anything like that to her. Never."

"Step aside."

"And another thing, Mister Oliver. The morning she died up there on Rocky View, you were seen coming from that direction along the beach. Fred Pollard saw you. He mentioned it once without knowing what it meant. He happened to say you came into his market that morning from a long walk on the beach and bought some steamers."

"Why, you pinhead! I've got a good mind to sue you for defamation of character."

"I think you killed Carol," he said as if just arriving at that idea. "I really think you did."

Without further ado I tried to step around him. He lunged forward. I aimed a vicious kick at his shins. His feet went out from under him. He fell forward. The chain caught him at belt level. It acted like a sling, catapulting him up and out. I didn't even see him hit the water. It all happened too quickly. When I looked down he was not to be seen. The ferry propellers had probably sucked him in and chopped him up.

I darted a glance at the wheelhouse. I could see

only its roof and about five inches of glass from where I stood. If I couldn't see the captain he certainly couldn't see me.

Lighting a cigarette, I strolled to a companionway and down a flight of iron stairs. I entered the enclosed lower deck from the stern. It was filled with the noise of forty boys engaged in forty different forms of self-expression. I spotted Rutherford in a deck chair reading a book. I made my way toward him.

"John," I said, "do you happen to know where Henry Webber is? I want to subscribe to the summer camp fund."

"He's around somewhere, James."

"I suppose so," I said, sinking into a deck chair myself.

Richard Seneca slapped the volume closed. "I've heard of cool characters, Herman, but this guy wins hands down. Did they ever find anything of Webber's body?"

"Not a trace," Maxfield said.

"How did they close the case?"

"Accidental death by drowning. There was talk, of course, that he'd committed suicide. His parents inadvertently told a reporter that Henry was given to spells of moodiness ever since the Roos girl's death." Maxfield pursed his lips as holding back words, then he said resignedly, "There's a sequel to Webber's death that you won't find in the diary. But I'm terribly afraid it's connected."

"Go on."

"A week later Fred Pollard was found shot to death in the back room of his fish market. It's Queensport's only unsolved murder."

"And you think it can be solved now?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What makes you say that?"

"I think Oliver would have destroyed his diary otherwise. I think at the end the weight of his crimes was too much for him to carry. He wanted to atone somehow. But read the last several entries just before his death."

*April 8th*—I begin to catch a glimpse in the mirror that I like less and less. After all these years the events I thought I had forgotten are more alive than ever.

*April 9th*—Another night of insomnia. Even the sleeping pills don't work. An overdose might. Unless there's life out there in the dark after death.

*April 10th*—Funny, I can no longer recall what Claudia looked like and yet Carol Roos' face is graven indelibly on my mind. My mother's face is a sweet blue, but my father's is as clear as copperplate. Paul, whom I hardly knew, and Henry Webber, whom I saw only twice in my life, are my constant nocturnal companions.

*April 11th*—I once wrote somewhere in these vast volumes that "Evil shall slay the wicked," but at the time of the writing I did not realize the deep inner significance of that sentence. Now I know. As I scraped the shaving cream off my face a few minutes ago, I exposed an expression of wickedness I never dreamed to behold. I cannot ever face it again. The evil in my eyes is killing the wickedness in my heart. I am being slain slowly by myself, slowly and painfully and interminably. . . .

"Well, that's the end of it," Richard Seneca said, closing the final volume of the diary.

"I only wish it were," Herman Maxfield said. "For memory's sake. But there's a little more to come. I believe if you compare the bullet that was removed from James Morton Oliver's head with the one taken twenty years ago from Fred Pollard's heart, you will probably find they were fired from the same gun."

# INTO THE MORGUE

## Hal Ellson

The young woman surely had been pretty, but...

Detective Fiala turned to Captain Meza. "A nasty job," he said. "Who is she?"

The captain didn't know. An old man had made the discovery in Garza Canyon that morning. He'd brought the head in a basket. A half dozen men had gone back to the canyon and found nothing else. "The canyon's big." The captain shrugged. "With all those caves, you could search it for a year and not find the body."

"I doubt if it's there," Fiala said, studying the head again. "Very strange that the tongue is missing."

"That seems to bother you, Victor."

"No." Fiala rubbed his nose, asked if any girl had been reported missing.

"Our daughters and wives don't stray from home," Meza answered. "I'm sure the girl isn't from Montes."

"And what other conclusion have you arrived at?"

"I'd say she was married, and her husband caught her with another man."

Fiala shook his head. "A husband so frenzied by jealousy—"

Meza interrupted him, second-guessing now: "A sex maniac might have committed the crime."

"Or perhaps just a collector," Fiala said dryly.

"A what?"

"Someone who likes tongues."

"Very amusing, Victor."

"And as good a guess as yours, Captain."

Meza flushed at his rival's remark. "Murder isn't exactly a guessing game," he answered. "But allow me to remind you, the chief agrees with me."

"As usual. And, as usual, he's wrong."

"Better tell him that," Meza flung back, grinning and showing his teeth. "He's been asking for you."

"I'm sure of that. After all, he always expects me to come up with the answers."

"Please don't disappoint him, Victor."

Fiala let the sarcasm pass, left the morgue and went to Chief Lopez' office.

"So you finally arrived," Lopez greeted him. "I hope you didn't strain yourself."

"It's too hot for that, senor."

"Damn the heat. Do you know what happened? Did you see Meza?"

"I heard his story. Don Quickshot has already ironed out his theories."

"And you don't agree with them?"

"When do I ever?"

"You must have reason for doubting him."

"No reason, just a feeling," Fiala lied, preferring to keep what he thought to himself.

"And this feeling?" Lopez said. "What do you base it on?"

"The murdered girl's missing tongue."

"If you're going to make something of that, then what about her body?"

Fiala was about to reply when the phone rang. Lopez answered it, hung up and said, "The body's been found, Victor."

"Good." Fiala left and went below, where Meza awaited him.

"The body was discovered in a well behind an

abandoned house in San Rafael," the captain said. "Coming along?"

Fiala shrugged and followed him through the door. The plaza outside headquarters dozed in the heat, empty jeeps and several motorcycles lined the curb, a peaceful scene which was suddenly transformed as policemen rushed from the cool depths of headquarters. Four jeeps loaded up, motorcycles were straddled and started; the plaza trembled. With Meza and Fiala in the lead, jeeps and motorcycles roared out of the plaza, through the city and into the desert.

A wild, rough ride brought them to San Rafael. The village dozed in the heat. Flowers were blooming there, roses in profusion—the red roses of San Rafael—and a woman's body in a well. *Does she belong to the village?* Fiala wondered as the cavalcade halted in a tiny plaza, a forlorn square with only a few old benches and dying orange trees. The sheriff stepped from a cantina, greeted Fiala and Meza, directed them to the abandoned house and climbed into the jeep.

The cavalcade moved on again and stopped at the house, a crumbling ruin, doorless and roofless. The sheriff led the way to the back and the well which had gone dry. Two boys had discovered the body, he explained, lifting the blanket which covered it. The torso was that of a young woman, the skin very white; the sun had never touched it.

"Whoever she is, she's not from the village," the sheriff remarked.

Fiala nodded and signaled to two of the policemen. They wrapped the body, placed it in one of the jeeps and waited while Fiala questioned the sheriff. Finally he climbed into the lead jeep and the cavalcade started back to Montes.

This much was known now: the murdered girl wasn't from San Rafael, wasn't an Indian, and the head and body hadn't been touched by the sun. But what of the legs and arms?

Returning to headquarters, Fiala was informed that an important call had come through from the sheriff of Minas, a village forty miles to the south. "The missing arms and legs," he remarked, picking up the phone on Meza's desk.

The connection was bad, but he finally got through. A brief conversation ensued and he put down the phone. "That's it. The missing limbs," he said to Meza. "Ready for another jaunt?"

Again the cavalcade moved out of the city, this time southward through wilder country on a road that sometimes denied the name. Minas was larger than San Rafael, but just as lifeless, the plaza deserted, no one about. The sheriff stepped from a cantina, a tall gaunt man bronzed by the sun. A smaller man followed him, the mayor of Minas. Greetings were exchanged and they crossed the plaza to the jail. Wrapped in newspaper, the sheriff's gruesome find lay on a table, two legs, and two arms minus the hands. The sheriff had searched for the latter, but . . .

"No girl's missing from the village?" Fiala asked.

"No, senor."

"As I thought." Fiala turned to Meza. "Shall we go?"

Shrugging, the captain returned to the jeep and was forced to wait while Fiala went into the cantina with the sheriff. Five minutes passed and Fiala came out. "You took your time," said Meza.

"It doesn't pay to miss anything."

"Such as a little drink in the cantina?"

"A necessary gesture."

"You know the regulations?"

"I entered the cantina in the line of duty."

"But you smell of—"

"Tequila?" Fiala laughed. "It's in the air here. You should try it sometime. But enough on that. The sheriff gave me something which should help establish the identity of the murdered girl. What did he give me? Patience, Captain. You'll have to wait."

Angered, Meza locked his jaws and remained silent the rest of the way to headquarters. Reporters were waiting there; he ignored them. As they trailed him, clamoring for news, Fiala slipped off across the plaza for a cup of coffee. When he returned, Meza met him with a grin and gave him the message: the chief wished to see him.

Up he went to see Lopez in his office. Meza obviously had set him off. "So you had enough coffee?" Lopez snapped as a starter.

"Only one cup, senor."

"And how many tequilas did you have at San Rafael?"

"Ah, Meza said his piece."

"You deny drinking with the sheriff at San Rafael?"

"It was in the line of duty."

"In the line of duty?" Lopez shouted. "Since when . . ." The anger, invective, and reprimand readying to explode never came. Lopez' jaw dropped as Fiala unwrapped the newspaper he'd taken from under his jacket.

"The hands of the girl in the morgue," the detective explained.

"Where did you find them?" Lopez asked, keeping his distance.

"At San Rafael. The sheriff gave them to me in the cantina."

"But Meza didn't know."

"The sheriff isn't very fond of him. But look, senor, we're in luck. Those initials on the right thumb—

they should help identify the girl."

Lopez nodded and lit a cigarette. "My apologies for jumping the gun, Victor. Meza charged you, and I had no choice . . ."

"Forget it. Meza's too young and too quick. He has a lot to learn. Now if you'll excuse me."

The door closed behind Fiala. Down from the balcony he went, through the patio, toward the morgue to deliver his gruesome package. Captain Meza looked up from his desk when the older man entered his office. "You saw Lopez?" he asked.

"I enlightened him."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I told him what really happened in the cantina at San Rafael. You see, you jumped to the wrong conclusion and accused me, but your error . . . perhaps if you were older, you wouldn't have made it."

"My error? What are you talking about?"

"Put it in your report. The hands of the murdered girl were found in the village of San Rafael. The sheriff—"

"Gave them to you in the cantina," Meza said.

Fiala nodded. "As a favor to me. Why? We won't go into that now. Do you want to look at them?"

"With your permission?"

Fiala laughed and they went off to the morgue. "C. R.," Meza said, frowning at the pair of hands. "The girl's initials. Now we have something to bite on."

"If those are her initials."

"But whose else could they be?"

"Her boyfriend's."

"I doubt it."

"That's your prerogative. Meantime, what's the next step?"

"It's already been taken. The photographers were

here. The girl's picture will be in the paper. Someone will recognize her."

"I hope so," Fiala said, and glanced at his watch. In two hours he'd be off duty; two hours to kill. "I'm going for coffee," he said. "If anything comes up, let me know."

Meza nodded and they left the morgue. Crossing the plaza, a newsboy waved a paper in Fiala's face and there was the photo of the murdered girl. He bought the paper, went on to the restaurant, ordered black coffee and opened the paper to the sports section.

At six he dined at home; at eight he left to return to headquarters. As expected, the newspaper story and photograph of the murdered girl spread word of the crime. Crowds came to view the body in the morgue, but no one identified it.

"That's it," Captain Meza finally said. "The girl isn't from this area, or someone would have claimed her."

"Under ordinary circumstances," Fiala replied. "But there's nothing ordinary about this case."

Meza conceded the point and said, "There's a chance she was a tourist traveling alone."

"If she was, then the odds would be that she was murdered for her money. In that case, the robber wouldn't stop to dismember her."

Meza shrugged and returned to his original stand, that the girl wasn't from Montes or someone would have claimed her.

"Perhaps no one wants to," Fiala pointed out. "If she went bad, if she lived off men . . ."

"We're going in circles." Meza yawned.

They were, and Fiala got up. "Home and to bed. I'll see you in the morning, Captain."

At midnight the captain called it quits and left, but

didn't go home. He went to the Blue Moon restaurant and found Fiala there. "I thought you were in bed," he said.

"I'm too tired to sleep."

"Lopez will expect some answers tomorrow. Doesn't that bother you?"

"His demands are always exorbitant, but that's the nature of the man."

"I don't want him on my back."

"He'll always be there, so don't let it get you down."

"That's easy to say, but if we don't come up with something soon . . ."

"We've done well enough, I think."

"But does he?" Meza said. His coffee came, disrupting the conversation. When his cup was empty, he stood up and said, "I'll leave you to your thoughts, Victor," and he started for the door of the cafe.

As he reached it, it opened before him and in stepped a thin pock-faced man named Vasquez. Their eyes met; each regarded the other with a look of contempt and went his way.

"You were looking for me?" Vasquez stood over Fiala.

"You took your time."

"It couldn't be helped. I was with a young lady."

"I assumed that. Sit down."

"I hope this won't be too long. The young lady's waiting."

"If she likes you, she'll wait all night. If she doesn't . . ." Fiala shrugged, and Vasquez sat down. He had no choice.

"You know why I'm here, of course," Fiala went on. "The girl in the morgue. Did you go see her?"

"Why should I? I had nothing to do with her."

"You saw her picture in the paper?"

"I happened to."

"Know her?"

Vasquez' uneasiness was apparent from the moment he stepped into the restaurant, but now he was beginning to sweat. "I don't know the girl," he finally said.

"And you've heard nothing."

"Nothing."

"But you're frightened and very pale."

"Are you accusing me, senor?"

"You appear to be accusing yourself. The sweat of guilt is running off you."

"I had nothing to do with the murder. That's not my thing."

"Not until it happens. Not until you lose your head because one of your girls cheated on you."

"I'm not a fool. I wouldn't hang myself for a—"

"Perhaps you were drunk."

"You can't put it on me," Vasquez said. "Eil Every time something happens you send for me."

"I shouldn't have to send for you. You're supposed to come to me."

"When I know nothing?"

"Who said you know nothing? It's on your face."

Vasquez bit his lip and finally shrugged. "She got what she deserved," he muttered.

"So you do know her."

"Many men did."

"Was she one of your girls?"

"No, and I'm glad of that. She worked in The Ranch."

Fiala knew The Ranch was the fanciest place in the city, with the fanciest girls and fanciest clients. With her looks, the girl must have been in constant demand, but no one had come forward to identify her and none of the fancy clients would. Had one of them murdered her? It didn't seem likely, but . . .

"You know the girl's name, of course," Fiala said.

"Carmen Rios."

"Many thanks. A cup of coffee?"

"No, I'm in a hurry. The young lady—"

"Is getting anxious. Go," Fiala chuckled, and as Vasquez went out the door, he glanced at his watch. It was late, but he couldn't go home. His presence was demanded at The Ranch.

Ten minutes later he drove up to the "house" where Carmen Rios had worked. The doorman let him in. A long dark passage led to a bar and reception room in back of the house. The girls sat there, awaiting their clients who crowded the bar.

"Carmen Rios," Fiala said to the barman. "She worked here?"

"Not that I know of, senor."

"I've reason to believe she did."

The barman shrugged, but he wasn't as calm as he appeared. If he talked, he might cause trouble for himself and the house.

"Where's the boss?" Fiala asked.

At that moment Francisco Otero entered the bar. He was smiling, but he stopped when he saw Fiala and his face became a mask. "What brings you here?" he asked.

"Carmen Rios." Fiala threw the name at him, but to no effect. Otero offered his cigarettes and asked, "Who is Carmen Rios?"

"She *was* one of your girls."

"I don't recall the name. How long ago?"

"Within the past week."

"No." Otero shook his head.

"I have good word she was."

"Your informer lied."

"She was murdered, Otero. The girl who was chopped up. You know about that."

"Who doesn't?"

"And you didn't recognize her?"

"I didn't go to the morgue."

"Her picture was in the papers."

"I haven't looked at a paper in a week."

"Then look at this," Fiala said, taking a newspaper from his back pocket. "Now do you recognize her?"

"She worked here," Otero admitted, "but not under the name Rios."

"What name did she use?"

"Maria Villa."

"An assumed name. She was very pretty, Otero."

"My clients demand the best."

"She must have been very popular."

"She earned her money."

"Did she have any difficulty with one of your clients?"

Otero knew the question was coming and shook his head in denial. He had to, considering the men who patronized his place.

"You're not playing ball," Fiala said. "You're just stalling now."

"Excuse me?"

"Don't give me that, and don't forget your little debt."

"Ah, my eternal debt," Otero sighed, "for something I did ten years ago. I thought I repaid you."

"Not quite."

Otero sighed again. He did not want to name the man who'd murdered Carmen Rios, but there was no way out. "The girl was no good," he said. "She deserved what she got."

"Perhaps, but that's beside the point. The name of the man?"

"He deserves to go free."

"The name, Otero."

With a shrug, Otero gave up and named the murderer. "Now do you understand?" he said.

Fiala said nothing, and turned away.

Otero followed him through the dark passage to the door. "Are you going to let him go?" he asked. "After what she did to him, what would you expect?"

Expect? Fiala shrugged and opened the door. The street outside was dark, the sky black and ominous. He glanced up at it, and the doorman bade him good night. Fiala didn't reply, but climbed into his car. Let the killer go? Again he heard Otero's plea. Mercy for the killer? He wondered as he drove off.

Five minutes later, stepping from his car into the dark street, his brow furrowed. Twenty years he'd lived here and now neither house nor street looked familiar. I'm tired, he thought, and he was. His body ached and his feet dragged as he went to the door.

Lest he wake his daughter and grandchildren, he went to the patio where his special chair awaited him under the avocado tree. Easing into it, he lit a cigarette and Otero's words came back: "He deserves to go free." Let him go?

"Papi?" The voice came from the kitchen doorway beyond the screen.

"I'm home, Aurora," he said to his daughter. "Go back to bed."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"It's always nothing with you."

"And with you it's always calamity. Go to bed and wake me early. I've important work to do tomorrow."

Argue with him? The older he got, the more stubborn he became. "I'll wake you early," Aurora snapped, and went back to bed.

Silence now, the whole city was sleeping. But Fiala?

There was too much on his mind, and tomorrow was rushing at him. What should he do? Behind him the fronds of the banana palm stirred to a vagrant breath of wind, then stood still again. The night was deepening, sky blackening, white and distant, the stars blazed and told him nothing. What should he do?

He could not answer himself, could not sleep unless . . . rising, he went into the house and came out with three bottles of beer. He opened and emptied them quickly, lit a cigarette and allowed the sedative hops to do its work. In the morning all things would be righted, all questions answered.

It was dawn when he opened his eyes, much too early to rise and go forth. He grumbled in protest, but a persistent hand and voice prodded him. Laura, his youngest granddaughter, who regularly rose with the coming light of day, was up and at him and there was no denying her. Informed that it was time to go to work, he conceded and the child relented only to tell him that coffee awaited him in the kitchen.

"I'll drink it here, if you don't mind," he said, and Laura toddled off and returned, carefully balancing a cup of black coffee. He drank it and the child watched, then examined the cup to make sure he'd emptied it. Satisfied, back she went to the kitchen and let him be.

Thankful, he smiled and closed his eyes. An hour later, with the sun well up, his reprieve was ended. This time Aurora shook him awake. Breakfast was ready, the day awaited him, but he begged off breakfast and informed his daughter that he'd go to work when it suited him.

It was enough for Aurora. With her own temper, she answered him in kind and let him be.

It was his own fault; the morning slipped away

and he slept on. Finally, the heat of the day brought him awake. Even in the patio it was hot, and the house silent, for Aurora had taken herself and her children off somewhere.

Slapping cold water on his face, Fiala changed his shirt and left the house, a house so hollow and silent. The world outside was the same, made desolate by the fierce white light of the sun. He started the car and drove off. Headquarters lay five minutes away, but there was no point in going there with the question still unanswered in his mind—what to do about the one who'd killed Carmen Rios.

But for an old man sleeping on a bench, the big plaza in front of headquarters was deserted. Fiala stopped his car, stepped out and light flashed as the door of the Blue Moon swung open and caught the sun. Senor Otero, owner of The Ranch, stepped to the walk, greeted Fiala and said, "I've been waiting for hours. When do you start work?"

"When it pleases me. What's on your mind?"

Otero let out his breath. "More trouble."

"You gave me the wrong information and decided to retract?"

"No. The man you want is going to hit the bank."

"Again? And at this hour? He wouldn't get a peso."

"He's not after money. This time it's blood he wants."

"Whose blood?"

Otero explained, and Fiala frowned. "It's possible," he said, "but how did you find out?"

"He was with one of my girls last night, raving drunk and talking about killing someone. She finally got the story out of him and came to me."

"And here you are."

"You sound as if you don't believe me."

"It's the girl's story, not yours. But many thanks."

"Senor, I think you'd better hurry."

In this heat and at his age? Fiala nodded and walked off. Halfway through the narrow street siding headquarters he caught himself, broke into a jog, then began to run as he hadn't run in years, thinking himself a fool and half-expecting to collapse from a heart attack. Gasping, he turned the corner. There was no traffic, not a person in sight. The whole city seemed to be sleeping, but the illusion, like a struck mirror, suddenly shattered when a man burst from the door of the bank on the corner. Gun in hand, he jumped into a car at the curb and it moved off.

Fiala stepped into the gutter. Roaring of death, the car hurtled toward him. Stop it? Never. He jumped back, his heels struck the curbstone, down he went and his gun went off. The car roared past, swerved sharply, leaped the curb and catapulted through a shop window. Glass shattered, wood splintered, metal twisted; then sudden silence, and the car half-buried in debris.

Fiala picked himself up. Splintered glass mirrored the white light of the sun. The gunman sat unmoving behind the wheel of the car; the street was still silent, the city deep in its siesta, but the spell soon broke. Running steps echoed from headquarters.

In less than a minute, a dozen policemen and Captain Meza were at the scene. A wild-eyed teller from the bank appeared and pointed at the car. The one behind the wheel had gunned down the president of the bank.

Meza nodded and approached the car, looked inside. The gunman's head was thrown back, his mouth agape; a .38 slug had pierced his temple. Confused again, Meza frowned.

*Let him wonder about that,* Fiala thought, and walked away. In spite of the heat, it was cool under

the arches of the Municipal Building. Leisurely, he made his way to headquarters and up the iron stairs to the balcony and Lopez' office. A knock on the door and he stepped inside.

The chief looked up, ready to roar, but Fiala's grin stopped him. "Ah, you've swallowed the canary?"

"If you wish to put it that way," Fiala said, and he explained: the girl in the morgue had been identified; her name, Carmen Rios. She'd 'worked' in The Ranch and had lived with Juan Rivera, the bank robber.

"So she lived with him. What does that establish, if anything?"

"Rivera murdered her."

"Impossible. He's in prison."

"He was. Early this week he went over the wall."

"Escaped?"

"Yes, senor."

"And why did he kill the girl?"

"Why? Because she spent all the money he got from the bank holdup, but that was the least of it. When the last peso was gone, she turned him in and claimed the reward, so . . ."

"So she got what she deserved, but that doesn't let Rivera off the hook."

"I'm afraid he is. A short while ago he went back to the bank to square things for the reward put on his head. He killed the president and, in attempting to escape . . ." Fiala shrugged. "By coincidence, I happened to be on the scene. I was forced to shoot him."

"A logical move," Lopez said and frowned. "One more question, Victor. Why did Rivera—"

"Chop up the girl?" Fiala shrugged again and went to the door. "She was greedy," he said from there, "so I presume that was the reason he cut off her hands,

and her tongue because she talked and gave him away." With that, he opened the door and looked back. "The missing tongue was the key to the whole business. If it hadn't been for that . . ." His voice trailed off, the door closed softly as he stepped onto the balcony.

Voices and a shuffling of feet sounded in the patio below. Fiala leaned over the railing, then nodded his head. The police were carrying the body of Juan Rivera into the morgue.

# I'LL BE LOVING YOU

Fletcher Flora

We lived in a big white house on five acres of ground a short walk from town. There were oaks and maples and a solitary pine in the deep front yard, and out back was a barn painted red. We didn't keep any livestock, unless you wanted to count a flock of Buff Cochin hens and one rooster, but behind the barn was a big garden plot where we raised truck for the table and some over for the market. I liked the planting and spraying and harvesting, and didn't even mind the hoeing on hot days, for at the bottom of our property was a line of trees and brush along the two banks of a small creek with a deep pool in which I could swim naked after the work was done. My father said early that I had a green thumb. We raised carrots and onions and radishes and peas and beans and tomatoes and potatoes and roasting ears, and it worked out during the growing season that something good was coming from the garden, in turn, from spring till frost. The garden was my father's pride, and he gave it his loving care, but then he died.

Never mind how. He seemed old to me at the time, but he was young. He died in the winter, and he was gone, and there was the garden to plow and plant in the spring. I didn't know how I could do it alone, going to school besides, but I tried and my mother helped. We worked hard at it, but some of the ground had to lie fallow for two seasons. There was plenty of everything for the table but not much over for the market.

My mother worked bare-headed in the garden, dressed in faded jeans and a man's blue shirt with the throat open and the sleeves rolled up, and she became brown and beautiful in the sun. She had a slim boyish body and brown bobbed hair, both of which were then the fashion. I had always thought of her as old, as I had thought of my father, as all young boys, I suppose, think of all parents, but I became aware, seeing her brown and beautiful in the garden, that she must still feel in her flesh the strange aches and errant longings that I was beginning to feel in mine. When my father died, she was, I guess, not more than a year or two past thirty, but she was tired from work and worry, and I know now that she was lonely. She rarely left the house or grounds during the day, about once a week going shopping into town, and I cannot recall that she left at night in the two years following my father's death more than six or eight times, at most.

Spring and summer nights we sat together on the screened back porch that ran the entire width of the house, and sometimes we talked about trivial things, but never about the secret things that mattered. Mostly we just grew slowly sleepy listening to frogs along the creek and sometimes owls in the trees beyond the barn. Fall and winter nights, when the temperature dropped from chill to cold, we sat inside by the fire, and I did what homework there was to do from school, and she mended socks or clothes, or listened to the tunes of Irving Berlin on the phonograph, or read *This Side of Paradise* or *The Beautiful and Damned* or *The Plastic Age* or some other novel of the time that she had borrowed from the public library on her last trip to town. She wished for a radio, and so did I, but we couldn't afford it.

I won't forget the second winter after my father's

death. It was the winter of 1926-27, and I had turned fifteen in the spring. I remember the winter clearly because it seemed that everything happened with a rush, things crowding one right after the other in a hurry to get done, but probably it was only that I was beginning to take more notice of events outside my own narrow life. Anyhow, there seemed to be a kind of feverish quality in that time, and everyone was desperate to make more of everything than it deserved. My mother shared the fever with millions of others, and she took an avid interest in public sensations like the death of Rudolph Valentino, which happened in August before winter came, and the scandals arising from the suit of Mrs. Browning against her husband. I remember her reading intently the reported escapades of "Peaches" and "Daddy," but what I remember most vividly is her almost obsessive fascination with the Hall-Mills case, and with, soon afterward, the Snyder-Gray case. Both cases involved murders that were dull and sordid enough, to be sure, and the latter especially would have passed as considerably less than a national sideshow if it had not involved a romantic triangle, one corner of which, the murderer, was a Presbyterian corset salesman. As it was, it was reported to the people by a corps of notables, including Billy Sunday, the famous evangelist, who took time off from God to give it his personal attention.

Do I remember all of this from the time? Bear in mind that I was only fifteen. Well, perhaps not. Perhaps my recollections have been reinforced by later review. It doesn't really matter, however it was, for it was not the public fever and the frantic scandalmongering that fixed the time so firmly in my memory. It was fixed by two quiet and intimate events that hap-

pened during the winter, and by what came out of the winter afterward.

The first of these two events was simply a conversation that I had with my mother. It was one night shortly after Christmas, in January, I think. As our Christmas present to each other, we had decided at last to buy a radio, a table model in an elaborate little Florentine cabinet, and I had been busy with algebra while my mother listened to a musical program. I don't remember what the program was. It may have been the A & P Gypsies. I'm not sure that Rudy Vallee, in January of 1927, had yet caught the public fancy. No matter, anyhow. Whatever the program was, it ended, and my mother snapped off the set and spoke to me suddenly, as if she had been thinking to the music and had come to a conclusion.

"It's too much," she said.

"What is?" I said.

"The work. The garden and this big house."

"I like it here. I don't mind the work. Please, let's try to stay."

"Your father's insurance money is dwindling. In a few years, if we aren't careful, we'll be without savings."

"I'll cultivate more of the garden this spring."

"It's not enough. When your father was alive, he held a job in town and worked the garden after hours and weekends."

"I'm older now. I can get a job in town myself."

"What could you do at fifteen? Deliver papers? Maybe it would be better to sell the place and rent a little house or apartment. Then I could go to work. I could clerk in a shop and take typing and shorthand at the business college at night. Later I could get a good job in an office."

"I don't want to move," I said. "I never want to live anywhere else."

There we dropped the matter, but it stuck in my mind like a burr, and it bothered me. I was saddened and troubled by the thought of selling our place, and it's the truth that I loved it and never wanted to leave it. A poet wrote that the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and I guess most boys dream of going into the wide world, but all I wanted or asked was to live all my life on my five acres. It suited me just fine.

January passed, then February after January, and it was in early March, on a cold, bright, windy Saturday morning, that the second event I mentioned happened. I had gone down the long brick walk from the house to the mailbox beside the narrow macadam road that ran past. While I was there, with the mail in my hands, I saw a stranger approaching from the west along the hard shoulder of the road. I could tell at once that he was no hobo; at least, not an ordinary one. He was tall and slim, and he was wearing a corduroy cap with flaps over his ears and a bright red flannel shirt and a heavy corduroy jacket and corduroy pants and good, solid shoes with thick soles. He was carrying a heavy stick that he had cut from a tree and trimmed up neatly, and on his back, held in place by two straps under his arms, was a canvas pack. Somewhere along his way on this bright, cold morning he had found a place and time to shave. He was clearly warm and washed, and I could see as he came closer that he had a young and handsome face with brown, bright eyes and a ready smile. He stopped and leaned on his stick and spoke to me.

"Morning, son," he said.

I answered his greeting politely, and his eyes wandered off through the deciduous oaks and maples past

the evergreen pine to the house beyond the deep lawn.

"A charming place," he said. "Your home?"

I said it was.

"My imagination pictures it two months from now," he said, "with the grass green and the trees in leaf and the ground dappled by sun and shade. A pity that I can't linger to see it."

He talked like that. What I mean is, he put into easy words the things I felt but couldn't say.

"It's nice in spring and summer," I said.

"I'm sure it must be." His bright, brown eyes came back across the lawn through the trees and rested on mine. "I've had a long, brisk walk this chilly morning. I wonder if, by some stroke of good luck, you have a cup of coffee left over from breakfast?"

"I don't know," I said. "If there's none left, I can make fresh."

"There you are," he said. "I knew at once that you were a good and generous boy. It will give me pleasure to accept your hospitality."

So we walked up across the lawn and around the house and across the back porch into the warm kitchen. My mother had baked bread, and it smelled close to heaven. She was standing by the stove when we entered. Her face was a little flushed from the heat of the oven, and her short hair was slightly tousled, and I thought suddenly again with a feeling of surprise, as if every time it was a new discovery, that she was beautiful. I started to introduce my guest, and realized foolishly that I hadn't learned his name. He, understanding this, came smoothly to my rescue.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said. "My name is James Thrush. I am a vagabond but not a bum. There is a vast difference, and I trust that the difference is apparent in me. This good boy, whom

I take to be your younger brother, has kindly invited me to stop for a cup of coffee."

He had removed his cap, and his thick brown hair had become somewhat matted under it, but it had been combed before, and it was neatly trimmed. My mother looked at him without much expression, and I could see that she didn't know whether to accept his reference to her as my sister as an honest mistake, which would have made it pleasing, or as brazen flattery, which would have made it offensive. After a moment she smiled, and the smile was pleased.

"You're welcome," she said. "My name is Elizabeth Caldwell. This is my son. His name is Mark."

He didn't make a big thing of his mistake, honest or not. He merely said gravely that he was delighted to know us. My mother was convinced by this, I think, that he had not taken her for a fool.

"Please take off your pack and coat," she said. "The coffee pot is empty, but I'll make fresh."

We sat at the kitchen table while the coffee perked. Then we drank it, mine with milk and sugar and theirs black, and ate thick slices of hot bread and butter. We ate a whole loaf of the bread among us, and James Thrush apologized for being a glutton, but my mother was plainly pleased by his appetite. She was also pleased by his cleanliness and his table manners and his correct and fluent talk. He was no ignoramus, surely, and he told us after a while that he had, in fact, after serving with the American Expeditionary Force in the last war, taken a degree in liberal arts at the University of Kansas. Since then, he had been, for the most part, roaming about the country.

"With a college education," my mother said, "I should think you'd want to settle down somewhere and get a good job."

"Doing what?" he said. "I'm not much of one for

an office. I could teach, I suppose, but I don't fancy a schoolroom, either."

"Don't you do any kind of work at all?"

"Now and again I work at something or other for what I choose to call my travel expenses. And then, for other motives, I work constantly at something else. I write poetry."

"Poetry?"

"Yes. I'm a poet. A good one, if you'll excuse my saying so. My head bursts with images and ideas. My pack grows heavy with filled notebooks. Believe me, writing poetry is work, Mrs. Caldwell. It's *hard* work. Unfortunately, it pays poorly."

"Do you sell your poems?"

"Some I sell, some I donate. That's poetry for you. You can find me in the Little Magazines, if you care to look. I've published one book, an extra copy of which is in my pack. I shall leave it with you when I go, as token payment for your hospitality."

"I'll be proud to have it," my mother said.

He took from a side pocket of his corduroy jacket, which he had hung on the back of his chair, a stubby black pipe and a leather pouch of tobacco.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked.

"Not at all," my mother said. "I'll join you."

After my father's death, she had taken up the smoking of cigarettes, still considered rather daring among women. I suppose she did it because, in her loneliness, it afforded her company and comfort. From an open pack in her apron she took out a cigarette and leaned across the table to light it from the match the poet had struck on a thumb nail and extended.

"When I have had my pipeful," he said between puffs, as he sucked the match flame onto the tobacco, "I shall be on my way again. I have imposed upon your hospitality long enough."

"It's no imposition. You needn't feel obliged to hurry away."

In that instant, hearing her voice and seeing in her eyes a flicker of something naked and desolate, I had a feeling that she was strangely reluctant to see the last of him. To tell the truth, so was I. I have never met anyone else in all my life who captured my favor so swiftly, or who, in so short a time, created so convincingly an illusion of being an old and tried companion.

"I confess," he said, "that I am tempted to linger. I am indebted to you and your son for a delightful interlude. It would have been an added pleasure to meet your husband."

"My husband is dead."

"Oh. I'm sorry." He drew on his pipe for several seconds in silence. "It's a charming home you have here, Mrs. Caldwell."

"Sometimes it becomes a burden. There is too much work for Mark and me."

"You have much land with the house?"

"Five acres. There is a large truck garden below the barn. Mark and I try together to work it, but it's too much. Since my husband died, we've been able to cultivate only part of it."

"It must be difficult for a woman and a young boy. You need a man's strong back."

"You're a man," I said suddenly.

His bright, brown eyes swung toward me, and his eyebrows shot up in surprise. His burst of laughter was gay and infectious.

"So I am, I hope," he said, "although a poet in some quarters is considered somewhat less than one."

"You could stay," I said. "There's nothing to prevent you if you want to."

"Mark," my mother said, "don't be presumptuous."

"No. The boy is right." James Thrush prodded the air in my direction with the stubby stem of his black briar. "Moreover, the suggestion, I find, is not without its seductions. I shall have to stop somewhere soon, in any event, to find temporary employment and replenish my funds. Unless one is a hobo, which I am not, one cannot travel indefinitely without funds."

"I couldn't pay you," my mother said. "I could give you good food and a dry place to sleep, but there will be no extra money."

"My work for my keep—a fair exchange. Perhaps I can earn a bit from odd jobs at odd times in town. My expenses are nominal. Mrs. Caldwell, do you wish to hire a hand?"

"You are welcome to stay. I won't deny that it would be a great help to us."

"We will consider it settled, then. Here's my hand on the bargain." He and my mother shook hands gravely across the table, and then he leaned back, sucking briskly on his pipe, which had grown cold, and turned to me. "Well, Mark," he said, "it seems that I shall see your fine oaks and maples in leaf, after all," and so he did.

We agreed for the sake of propriety that it would not be wise to take him into the house at night, but the old harness room in the barn was tight and dry and unused, and we moved in an army cot and supplied him liberally with blankets, so that he slept warm enough through what were left of the chilly nights of March and April. He furnished it with odds and ends, and fastened pictures to the wall that he cut from old magazines. All in all, he made it a snug place. He ate his three good meals a day in the kitchen at table with my mother and me, and after supper he was always welcome to linger until bedtime,

which he usually did, and frequently, to my satisfaction, relieved me of the tea towel when the dishes were washed and dried. He never did go into town after the odd jobs, so I suppose that his funds were not so low as he had let us think. He earned, I believe, a little money from the poems he wrote while he was there. Now and again he would leave a long envelope in the box for the mailman to pick up, and several times, when I gathered the mail, there were return letters addressed to him in our care. The letters were self-addressed, and must have been enclosed in the envelopes he sent out, but they were thinner and lighter in weight, which made me believe that the poems had been removed and maybe a check put in.

He was a good worker. He prepared the garden for planting, and later planted the things that had to be in the ground early. My mother and I helped him when we could, of course, she when she could leave the house and I when I was not in school, but he did the lion's share of the work. He had been lean and gay when he came to us, seasoned by the wind and the sun, but while he was there and working for his bed and board he acquired, besides, for a while, a quality of settled peace. But this was temporary, as we should have known.

It's odd, as I look back, how my memory of specific incidents in our private lives that winter and spring and summer is pinpointed and fixed, so to speak, by public events. I can say exactly, for example, when I first became aware that my mother was desperately in love with James Thrush. It was the evening of the twenty-first of May, 1927. I remember this because it was on that day that Charles A. Lindbergh landed in Paris after his flight from New York, and the whole country seemed to go wild with a kind of hysterical

joy. The hysteria penetrated almost instantly even to our small town, and to thousands like it, and the local daily, I recall, was on the streets with a four-page extra. That evening, when I came up from the chicken house with a pailful of eggs, I found James Thrush sitting on the back steps smoking his stubby black briar. I took the eggs into the house and came back and sat down beside him, my daily chores finished.

"Have you heard about Lindbergh?" I asked.

"Before yesterday," he said, "I had never heard of him in my life. Since then, I and millions of other folk have scarcely heard of anyone else."

"I guess he's a hero, all right."

"I guess he is."

"Well, if you ask me, he's an improvement over Judd Gray."

"Right you are." He sat there in the twilight looking down over the roof of the barn in an attitude of intent listening, as if he were trying to hear and separate all the sounds that came up from the fields and the trees. "But still, you know, old Judd was not without his intriguing qualities. He was a pathetic devil, of course, but as a character study he was more interesting, perhaps, than many of those who pass for heroes."

"How so?"

"How? Well, he was a perfect example of the rigid moralist turned sinner. As such, he was incapable of evaluating his sins. Or crimes, if you please. Once you have committed adultery, you might as well go on and commit murder. God has you by the ears in either case."

"That doesn't sound reasonable."

"Old Judd was not a reasonable man."

I couldn't think of any answer to that, and I

didn't have to, as it turned out, because at that moment my mother came out onto the back porch.

"Supper's ready," she said. "You two better wash up."

"I'm washed," James Thrush said. "Mark, hop to it. I'm hungry."

I washed, and we ate, and after the dishes were washed and dried we sat in the kitchen while James Thrush smoked his pipe and my mother kept him company with a cigarette.

"I'll have to walk into town tomorrow or the next day," James Thrush said.

"Why?" my mother asked.

"I'm getting shaggy. I hate to spend good money on a haircut, but it looks like I'll have to."

"I'll be happy to trim your hair."

"Well, I don't know." James Thrush sucked at his pipe and looked quizzical. "I'm not an inordinately vain man, I hope, but I have no desire to be butchered."

"I trim Mark's hair. Does he look butchered?"

"I must say he doesn't. Are you sure it wouldn't be too much trouble?"

"Nonsense. Pull your chair out under the light while I get the tools."

James Thrush sat in a straight chair under the light, and my mother pinned a clean towel around his neck. I went out onto the back porch and stood looking down toward the barn and the line of trees beyond, along the creek. After a few minutes, I turned around and looked back across the porch through the open door into the kitchen, and it was then, in a flash, that I knew my mother was in love with James Thrush. I saw them in profile, he in the chair and she standing beside him. Her right hand held the clippers suspended, and her left hand was resting on the crown

of his head to turn it a bit this way or that as was needed. All this, of course, was ordinary enough. What was extraordinary was the expression on my mother's face. Her eyes were almost closed, and her mouth was slightly open, and the effect of her expression was one of intense ecstasy; as if the feel of his thick brown hair under her hand was nearly more than she could bear.

It was a shock. I turned away again with the shameful feeling that I had inadvertently violated her privacy. I remember that I had, for a moment, a deep stab of sorrow and regret for my father, so lately dead, but that passed quickly. I liked James Thrush, you see. From that night, I began to hope that he would love my mother, as she loved him, and that he would marry her then and never go away.

He loved her, I think, in his way. I'm sure he did. It was not his fault, after all, that his spirit longed for freedom and his feet itched for the road. We were at fault, my mother and I, for wanting to hold him. We should have known that the time would come when we could not. Meanwhile, as spring passed and summer came on, life was good and somehow exciting. The garden season was almost perfect, with rain enough and the short nights warm and bursting with the silent juices of growth. Everything planted matured in abundance, and there was plenty to eat and plenty to sell.

One night in June we were sitting after supper on the back porch. We could hear the chorus of frogs from the creek, and the myriad softer sounds that stir in a summer night. The back yard was washed with white gold between house and barn.

"It's a beautiful night," James Thrush said. "It's a night for fantasy and errant dreams. Who would like to take a walk?"

"I would," my mother said.

James Thrush turned to me. "Mark?"

"I'm tired," I said. "I'll stay here."

"As you wish," he said. "Your mother and I will see if the elves are out among the trees along the creek, doing their good deeds."

I watched them walk together across the gold-washed yard into the shadow of the barn, then I stretched out on my back on the old settee that we kept on the porch. After a while, to the music of soft sounds, I went to sleep. I slept soundly for a long time, and when I woke up my mother was standing in the light from the kitchen door. I did not stir or speak, watching her through half-closed lids. On her face was almost the same ecstatic expression it had held when she trimmed James Thrush's hair, but there was a subtle difference that I failed at first to understand. Then I saw that the effect of longing had been replaced by one of fulfillment. She no longer merely loved. Somewhere in the shadows of trees along the creek, in the warm and bursting night, she had *been* loved.

I closed my eyes, and after a moment she came and bent over me and shook me gently by the shoulder.

"It's late," she said. "You'd better go to bed." Her voice was dreamy and lilting in the accent and rhythm of her enchanted night.

I got up and went upstairs to my bed, but now, having napped so long, I couldn't go to sleep again. I lay on my back in the darkness and thought deliberately of my mother and James Thrush. Should I have been angry? I wasn't. On the contrary, I was filled with a quiet, perverse happiness. Now, James Thrush would surely stay forever. Now, we would all stay together in the house I loved, he and my mother and I, and everything would work out well in the end.

So, for a long time, it seemed. The enchanted night endured and became enchanted days and weeks and months, and I cannot believe that any other three people on this earth ever had such pleasure from common work, or sustained such excitement in simple living. My mother grew brown and beautiful in the summer sun, and she seemed to glow softly from some interior and everlasting light, as if her body were translucent, so that her skin was like satin and her short brown hair had day and night a moonlit sheen. She encountered the days with a kind of childish wonder, as if she saw everything anew and saw it differently, with a kind of restrained delight; as if she felt everything afresh and felt it more intensely. I wondered what James Thrush said to her, and she to him, in the long walks they took at night, and all the other times they were alone. I wondered, too, when matters would be settled between them and he would move from the harness room into the house. Well, no hurry. For the present, I supposed, they liked the shimmering texture of their lives as they were. Fall would be time enough, when the nights grew long and the weather cold.

The hot, dog days of August went, and September came; school began, and our long armistice with reality ended. It ended abruptly, brutally, one night as October neared. James Thrush and my mother, though the night was chill, had gone out for a walk to the creek beyond the barn and the garden, and later my mother came back alone. I was in the kitchen, studying at the table, and I could see at once that something was wrong. She moved as though she were blind and stunned. There was something terribly withdrawn about her, and she seemed to have shrunk into her dark inner self, where the light had gone out. She sat down stiffly at the table, staring blindly

ahead, and her bloodless face was as still and hard as a stone.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"He's going," she said.

"James Thrush?"

"Yes. James Thrush."

"Where's he going?"

"Away. Just away. Tomorrow he's going away."

"I thought he never would. I thought he'd stay here forever."

"He's going. Tomorrow he's going."

"Where is he now?"

"In the barn. In his room."

"I'll go out there and talk with him."

She didn't answer. I got up and went out to the barn, and James Thrush was in the harness room putting his possessions into the canvas pack that he carried on his back. The room was lighted by a kerosine lantern, and my feet were standing on the shadow of his head on the floor. When he saw me enter, he turned away and stood staring at some things he had spread on his cot. Although he spoke softly without anger in his voice, there was, nevertheless, something angry and bitter in his attitude.

"I'm going," he said. "I'm going because it's time to go. I do what I must when I must."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Did I say I would stay forever?"

"You never did."

"I've kept my bargain, haven't I?"

"I can't say you haven't."

"I've given full measure for what I've received, haven't I? My work for my keep. That was the agreement, wasn't it?"

"It was."

"And if more than keep has been received, then

more than work has been given. I told no lies, did I? I made no promises, did I?"

"I can't believe you did."

"You're a good boy, Mark, and it has been a pleasure to know you, but it's time to go, and I'll go tomorrow."

"Where shall we send your mail?"

"There will be no more. I've had answers to all I sent."

"It would be a kindness if you'd tell my mother good-bye before you go."

"That I shall. I'll tell her good-bye."

I went back to the house. My mother was still sitting at the kitchen table.

"He's going," she said, "isn't he?"

"He says so," I said.

She didn't speak again, or move, and there was nothing I could say or do to make her. I gathered up my books and papers and went upstairs, leaving her alone. The next morning she was gone. There was no breakfast ready for me before I left for school, so I left without it. I had my lunch at school, and that afternoon, of all days, I had to stay late to make up a missed examination, and so, considering the long walk home, it was almost six o'clock when I got there. My mother was sitting at the kitchen table again, in the same chair and position I had last seen her. If I hadn't known better I'd have sworn she hadn't moved an inch all night and day, but her face last night had been a stone. Now it was the drugged face of one who is caught in an enduring dream.

"Has James Thrush gone?" I asked.

"No," she said. "He's decided to stay. He's decided to stay because he loves me. He'll be with us always."

"Where is he?"

"In there. In the little back bedroom. He's lying

down, poor darling. We were having coffee together, just as we did when he came to us, and suddenly he felt ill. He's resting."

I went into the back bedroom, and James Thrush was lying on his back on the bed. He did not open his eyes when I entered or move when I touched him. His hands were folded on his stomach. I turned away and went back into the kitchen. The oven was cold, no pots were on the burners. My mother, at the table, was dreamily humming a tune of that time which has survived to this:

*I'll be loving you—always,*
*With a love that's true—always.*

She didn't croon the words. She only hummed the tune. I had to get out of there. I couldn't bear seeing her or hearing her. I found the can of cyanide powder and took it down to the barn and put it back with the other insecticides.

That night I buried James Thrush and all his possessions at the foot of the garden.

I tried my best to take care of my mother, but she kept wandering out into the cold nights barefooted in her nightclothes. When I missed her and went after her, I always found her at or near the creek, and at last she caught pneumonia and was dead before Christmas.

Since then, there has been another war, and wars after the war.

It was a long time ago.

# MOTIVE: ANOTHER WOMAN

Donald Honig

Five years ago their marriage had almost come to an end, but Marsha had saved it. It had not been easy, but with great perseverance and determination she had done it. Harry had sworn to her that if given another chance he would change his ways and be a faithful and conscientious husband. It was not the first time she had caught him philandering. Her friends all said that she should leave him and sue for divorce. But she had pride. She would make the marriage stick, she said.

And she had, for another five years. Harry had become the model husband; home every evening after work, seldom going anywhere without Marsha.

The first year had been the hardest. Marsha had watched the days melt from the calendar one by one like someone listening to the ticking of a time bomb, wondering which day would bring the new, and final, disaster. But none had. Then, after two years, she cautiously began telling her friends that she had succeeded, had saved their marriage from crashing on the rocks with so many others. As time passed it became a fetish with her. She was immensely proud of her achievement. Her pride turned into a constant boasting. Her friends began to tire of hearing it and drifted from her. But she didn't care. She had Harry, and her marriage.

Then, occasionally, Harry began stepping out on Sunday evenings, going to the movies, he said. Marsha never cared for movies; they gave her headaches. So

Harry went alone. But it seemed very innocent and she thought nothing of it.

He came home rather late one Sunday night and Marsha had gone to bed. She asked him the next morning as he rushed through breakfast if he had enjoyed the picture. He said it had been nothing to talk about. So they didn't talk about it. And he rushed off to his office.

Later that morning Marsha was shopping in the supermarket, pushing the wire cart along the aisle. Pondering the contents of the shelves, she found herself faced with a supper problem. Surrounded by all that food, and yet not knowing what to make. What would Harry like? She decided to call him at the office from the pay phone in the market. She rolled her cart over to the phone and dropped a coin into it and dialed the number. The phone rang several times before Harry's secretary answered it, and answered rather crisply, Marsha thought. Before she had the chance to identify herself she was told to hold the wire, that Mr. Leonard was busy on another line.

The secretary had probably rung Harry in his office and neglected to close the intercom key, because Marsha began to hear his voice, very low and faraway, but just audible enough to be understood if she concentrated. She concentrated.

"I saw young Mrs. Bennett last night," Harry's voice said.

Marsha stiffened, a look of confusion and disbelief filling her face. Then Harry's voice said, "Look, I've got another call. Hold on just a minute." His voice followed, round and metallic in her ear, "Hello? Hello?" But she didn't answer. She put the receiver back. A hot anger and humiliation burned her face. She whirled away, leaving the cart behind and strode quickly down the aisle, her heels rapping sharp and

angry on the wooden floor, walking with such abrupt haste that the store's manager made a gesture to her, wanting to know what was wrong, what had displeased her. But she wasn't stopping for anyone, anything.

Outside, she continued walking like that, fast and angry, her eyes glazed with bitter disbelief. She neither saw nor thought, self-contained by the burning anger and humiliation. Finally, after going several blocks, she began to thaw and slowed down. She raised her hand to her face and brushed aside an imaginary tear. She stopped. The man in the shoe repair store was staring curiously at her, hammer raised to strike a blow on a mounted shoe. Blushing, self-conscious, as though her secret were emblazoned upon her, she walked on.

All morning and afternoon she remained out, walking aimlessly or sitting on a bench in the playground staring emptily at the children frolicking on the swings and seesaws. It was odd. For awhile Harry hardly entered her thinking. She was too busy nursing the injury to her pride, trying to assuage the suffocating humiliation, directing her anger and resentment not towards Harry, yet, but towards the friends who would crow over it.

*Marsha Leonard's husband has done it again.*
*Has probably been doing it right along.*
*And after all she bragged.*

It would be just a matter of time before they all knew. All the old stories would be dredged up again and thrown in her face, the acrimonious laughter clothed in false sympathy. They would recall the boasting she had done. People enjoyed presiding at failures, and this would be a conspicuous and enjoyable failure.

Now it would begin all over again . . . the tension

and suspicion in the house, the raising of the wall between them. They would play cat-and-mouse with each other, like the other time. Harry would go about masking his deception with an exaggerated cheerfulness, wondering if she knew, sure that she didn't (he was always so cocksure of himself), coming home in the evenings and planting his bold and mocking kiss on her cheek while she had to pretend she didn't know, pretending until she could stand it no longer. And she would go slowly mad on those nights when he went out to the "movies" and left her alone. And how clever of him to pick the movies to figure in his story, for he knew she would never go to the movies with him. But this time she just would not endure it, just would not go through all the deceit and lying and play-acting.

Mrs. Bennett. The name stuck in her throat. *Young* Mrs. Bennett. Of course she was young. They always were. Young and callous, eager to break up a home for the sake of a moment's pleasure. She was probably from the neighborhood. The name sounded vaguely familiar. Marsha had heard it before, she was certain.

Harry had told it to the person on the phone. She wondered how many others knew. Was Harry as brazen as that? He had grown considerably less subtle. Perhaps he just didn't care anymore. Perhaps he wanted Marsha to know, so she would let him go.

But she'd never let him go. Never. You didn't get what you wanted from people by hurting them, humiliating them.

She began to wonder what she ought to do. She couldn't permit this awful thing to go on, and she couldn't face the thought of leaving Harry and admitting to everyone that she had failed. But even as she was thinking these things she knew what she was

going to do. The idea gave her an odd thrill. How many wives had thought the same thing at one time or another—and how many of them had actually converted their thought into action?

She remembered hearing one story of how a woman had done away with her husband. The man came home drunk every night and fell asleep at the kitchen table. One night, the wife simply turned on one of the gas jets. The verdict was accidental asphyxiation. That would be a fine way, except that Harry never presented her with such an opportunity. But there were other ways.

The following Sunday, Harry announced that he was going to the movies again. There was an interesting picture playing that he wanted to see.

"Is there?" Marsha asked coldly.

"So they tell me," he said. "It's about—"

"Well, if you want to go," she interrupted, "I wish you would leave earlier so you can get home earlier. I'm afraid to stay here alone. I didn't tell you, but I think I heard a prowler—last week."

"A prowler?" Harry asked. "Did you call the police?"

"No. I was speaking about it with Mrs. Connell, the other morning, and she said she thought she heard something too." The woman next door, Mrs. Connell, was not very strong-minded and open to any suggestions, particularly those that would give her something to worry about. So Marsha had established it with Mrs. Connell that there had been a prowler—and the neighbor would confirm it, would swear to it.

"Do you want me to leave the gun out?" Harry asked. He had brought a .45 home with him from the army and kept it locked in his drawer. Marsha had seen it only once, but she knew it was there.

"I'm afraid of those things," she said.

"They're the simplest things in the world," Harry said. "And it will make you feel more comfortable."

"I'm touched by your solicitude," she said.

He missed the sarcasm and laughed. "Of course," he said, turning toward the bedroom, "A man has to look out for his wife."

That last sounded ambiguous and rankled her. When he returned with the bulky-looking .45, she said, "I might wax the kitchen floor tonight, so you'd better come in by the side door."

"Sure," he said. "Sure. I don't want to go sliding." He put the gun down on the table under the lamp. "There it is," he said. "Man's best friend. I doubt that anyone will come prowling—this house isn't prosperous-looking enough to tempt any thief—but just in case, the gun is there, loaded for bear. If you see a stranger," Harry said with a laugh, "just pick it up and shoot him."

"Yes," Marsha said. "I'll do just that."

Then he left. It was six o'clock. She sat for two hours, staring at the gun gleaming under the lamp. At eight o'clock, she went next door to Mrs. Connell to borrow a section of the Sunday newspaper.

"Harry just went to the movies," Marsha said.

"Then you'll be alone till midnight," Mrs. Connell said, her eyes expressing tentative horror.

"Yes," Marsha said. "Harry won't be home till midnight."

At nine-thirty, she turned off the lights and went upstairs and got ready for bed. She put her housecoat on over her nightgown and then went downstairs. She picked the gun up from the table and sat down on the couch and waited, watching the dark weave and melt before her eyes.

With bitter, self-inflicting clarity, she pictured the scene between Harry and Mrs. Bennett. Harry would

tell her that from now on he would be early. Mrs. Bennett would ask what was the matter with his wife. Harry would laugh and say that Marsha was afraid of a prowler. And Mrs. Bennett, no doubt clever and flippant as her kind always were, would say, "Well aren't you a prowler too, Harry?" And they would laugh . . . embrace and laugh. . . .

Marsha heard him in the alley, coming quietly. She heard the keys in his hand. Suddenly all her poised anger and bitterness tensed and hardened. She stood up, holding the gun out in front of her, her finger fixed on the cold, stiff trigger. The key came into the door in soft metallic searching. The door opened; she could see its shape, somewhat lighter than the darkness, floating in on the dark. It closed. He was inside, a silhouette in the dark, entering the living room. He saw her. He was surprised.

"Marsha?"

He saw her again, in the white flash that swept a brief deadly illumination over the room. There was a terrific roar from the .45 and something charged into him with hot animal strength and threw him back over the table, a wild thudding in his breast that suddenly boiled over and ceased.

Marsha turned on the light. She stared coldly at him, putting the gun down. Then she began to scream, covering her eyes. . . .

The police were sympathetic. They were crowded about the living room but were very quiet. They spoke in undertones to the distraught woman, asking her the necessary questions. Marsha maintained a constant sobbing, amazed at how easy it had been. And she thought, fiercely, repeatedly: I wish you could know the truth, Mrs. Bennett. I want it to be a lesson for you and Harry and for your kind everywhere.

Two days later, she was walking outside. The bitter satisfaction still clutched at her heart. But one further desire remained. She wished she could see the other woman, to know who she was, to let her know that there had been no secret. And then she stopped dead, her heart almost crushed with shock, her body turning cold. There, pasted on a wooden fence, was a colorful poster which began:

NOW AT THE BIJOU:
THE YOUNG MRS. BENNETT,
STARRING . . .

But she read no further, collapsing in a dead faint as people rushed to her assistance.

# THE BROTHERHOOD

## Theodore Mathieson

From where twelve-year-old Jared sat alone on a stump amid a grove of ponderosas, watching their massive boles glowing sepia in the moonlight, he could hear his parents by the lake as they shouted at each other in the summer night.

"All right, Gert," he heard his father say, "you're the one who wanted to visit your brother."

"You wanted to meet his new wife as much as I did," his mother said. "But you said we'd stop in a motel on the way. I didn't expect to have to sleep in the *wilderness,* in the back seat of our old car!"

"I just suggested it. There wasn't enough money for breakfast unless we did!"

"You could have driven until we got to Artie's. You didn't have to *lay over,* like a tired businessman."

"Well, that's what I am! It's six hours more to Artie's and you don't drive to spell me off, so . . ."

Jared sighed, and tried to shut out their tiresome voices, which had been going on like that all his young life. He looked around at the encircling pines that towered over him like a stern congregation of elders, and then at their crowns, where they seemed to touch the stars.

"Let me be one of you," he whispered. "Please."

How long he sat there after that, Jared never knew. He came to himself at the sound of his name echoing through the forest, and by reflex started stumbling along the trail back to the camp, aware only of the

feeling that he was leaving a place in which he wished to remain forever.

"Well, where have you been?" his mother said as he came within the circle of campfire light. "You always disappear when there is work to be done."

"You're not wanted here," Jared said, impelled somehow to deliver the message.

"W-what is that you say?"

"Those trees don't want either you or dad. You don't belong. And neither does he." Jared pointed to his four-year-old brother Timmy, who was seated at the foot of a ponderosa, picking off the brittle, jigsaw pieces of bark.

*"Stop that!"* Jared cried, as if his brother were plucking off pieces of Jared's own skin. Then he lifted Timmy and put him down away from the tree. The next moment he felt a blow that sent him reeling.

"Who do you think you are—*anyhow?*" his father yelped. "Just for that, kiddo, you're the one who is going to sleep outside the car tonight!"

"That's fine with me," Jared said as, unaware of his parents' stares, he lay down on the soft pine needle mat near a ponderosa, and began running his fingers gently over the subtle intricacies of the glowing bark. . . .

"We don't know what's gotten into the kid," his mother said next day to her brother Artie, as Jared fidgeted next to her. Artie, a building contractor, had been married recently to a tall, handsome blonde with a German accent, who, Artie had written in a letter to Jared's mother, which she'd read aloud to the family, *didn't like kids.* As Jared studied Artie's wife curiously, wondering how an adult could not like

him when she hadn't even met him, his mother said, "He likes to read too much. I try to keep books away from him, but he's a natural-born dreamer."

"What he needs is a job," his father said. "I'm going to put him to work as part-time janitor in my office next year."

Then Greta, his aunt, said: "It's not unnatural for a boy Jared's age to read and to dream, or to dislike having people talk about him to his face!" She smiled at the boy.

Jared stared at Greta. For the first time in his life, an adult had taken his part, seemed to understand how he felt.

Shortly afterwards, while Artie took his mother and father and Timmy off to see a new construction job he was working on, Jared found himself alone with Greta.

"Come out in the garden, Jared, and I'll show you my flowers. I also have growing there a Venus's-fly-trap."

As Greta explained how the leaf apex of the latter had been modified into an insect trap, Jared studied her smooth skin and golden, braided hair, and thought she was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

"I don't think I like flowers so much as trees," he confided presently, as they sat together on a little stone bench backed by a prickly box hedge. "They're pretty, but they don't last long, while the trees are like the mountains—old, like God."

"Do you think of God very much?" Greta asked with a smile, as she pressed his hand.

"Sometimes. When I try to think of what he's like, I think of the stars, but then, last night for the first time, I sat in a forest where a lot of big pines were,

and they seemed like God, too. Did you know they talk together, the big ones? I call them, to myself, the tree people."

"*Do* you? And what do they say?"

"You can't put it into words, really, except that it gives you a funny feeling that scares you at first, because their language is not like ours. They talk about how they like people, or don't like them."

"And they liked you?"

"They said I could be one of them, if I wanted to. They didn't like Mom or Dad, or Timmy."

"I wonder why?"

"They're *different.* They could never understand the tree language, no matter how hard they tried."

"The woods really made an impression on you, then."

"It's so peaceful, and full of beautiful things. And you know one of the most beautiful? The bark on the trees, like pieces of a puzzle I've got at home, all different sizes and shapes, and all in the color I love best —like cinnamon toast!"

Greta laughed gaily, and they walked hand in hand in the garden in the sunshine, and Jared felt he'd never been so happy, except in the woods in the moonlight.

That night, when he went to bed in a room which Greta had given him for himself, his heart sang, so that it was a long time before he could get to sleep.

The sunshine was bright at the windows when he awakened, and he rose and washed and put on his clothes. Then he went downstairs where he heard in the kitchen the voices of his mother and—his heart leaped—Greta. But he stopped dead in his tracks when he heard what his mother was saying.

"You really think, Greta, that Jared has something seriously wrong with him?"

"I explained it all last night." Greta's voice sounded different this morning—stiffly accented and censorious. "It is what a psychiatrist would call paranoia resulting from maladjusted attitudes toward his parents, marked by a severe departure from reality, a living in a dream world that could eventually become more real than reality itself. The woods, for instance, have taken on for Jared the characteristics of people."

"You mean he's nuts?" his father's voice spoke up. "A son of mine is nuts?"

"Nuts is not the word to use."

"Crazy, then."

"You think he should be—put away?" His mother was weeping.

"I think he should be put under observation. A good psychiatrist, perhaps . . ."

Like one in a dream, Jared walked away from the kitchen and out the front door, and went to sit in the back of his father's car.

He was sitting there an hour later when his father came out the front door and saw him.

"Come in and get breakfast," he growled, "and then we're going back to the city."

*Where you're going to try to have me put away,* Jared thought. But he smiled as he got out of the car.

"What's so funny?" his father demanded. "Why are you holding your hand like that?"

"I hurt it getting into the car," Jared said, covering the back of his left hand with his right; but it was really because he didn't want them to see the brittle jigsaw bark that was forming on his skin. Not yet . . .

# THE FINAL REEL

John Lutz

I mean, Spiedo's not a bad guy, though you might say he's a few degrees daft, even when he's not high. The night I remember it starting is when we were sitting on the beach, watching the midnight blue Pacific roll onto the California coast and break in millions of white bubbles. Spiedo was coming down from wherever his pills had taken him, and he was sitting with his lean body doubled, his arms folded and resting on his drawn-up knees, his chin resting on his arms. He was looking out to sea.

"Pretty, isn't it?" I said, staring out in the same vague direction.

Spiedo shrugged, the night sea breeze whipping his beard. "Not when you stop to think about it," he said. "It's like a lot of other things, pretty until you stop and think what they're doing. That ocean's eating away at the shore, devouring it—that ocean's chawin' up California! If you look close you can see the teeth!"

I didn't pay much attention to this kind of talk. Spiedo talked like that a lot when he was coming back down, and he was always seeing teeth in the most unlikely places. Sometimes he'd swear something was going to attack him, and he'd strike first and hurt whatever or whoever it was. On some days that was Spiedo, lean, hairy and mean.

I'd met Spiedo in Frisco, where he was living at a place called Zodiac Manor, a run-down pad shared by two dozen freaks and visited by the cops once a week.

We both decided we didn't like it there, so we packed our nothings and moved out to the L. A. area. But now we were tired of that action too.

Something white was skittering down the deserted beach toward us, sailing and soaring low over the sand in a zigzagging kind of way. It startled both of us for a moment, though I don't know why, because when it got closer we saw it was just a half-folded sheet of newspaper. As it passed, Spiedo raised his foot and brought his heel down hard on the paper, pinning it into the sand as if he wanted it to feel pain. He sat for a while staring down at it, then he raised his foot and looked back out to sea while the sheet of paper spread like a sail to the wind and with a crinkling sound soared away behind and beyond us.

"I've got an idea for us," Spiedo said, running his fingertips through his long hair as if there was shampoo on his head.

"My ears are aimed at you," I told him.

"Stamps and curios," he said.

"Why not?" I tell him agreeably.

Spiedo straightened and fell backward to lie in the sand beneath the thousand bright stars. "You hear of King Murdoch?"

"Sure," I said, "the movie villain . . . real cornball."

"Used to be a leading man," Spiedo said. "Got all the girls. Now he's got all the loot."

"So?"

"So he put it all in a stamp collection and curios, little salable things, and yesterday he went to Europe."

"How do you know?"

"The paper tells me so."

That's what I mean about Spiedo being a few degrees daft, but only a few degrees. He'd read that paper by moonlight while I thought he was just sitting

there coming down. There was always a half of Spiedo doing something you wouldn't expect.

"You want to steal his stamps and curios while he's gone," I said.

Spiedo nodded. "Sure. We find out where he lives, break in and take our share. Like that politician's place in Frisco, where we stole all that whiskey."

I remembered that and a few other places we'd broken into. "I don't know," I said, thinking about what Spiedo carried taped to the inside of his thigh.

"It's settled then," Spiedo said. "We go over the top tomorrow night for fun and profit. Man, that's an unbeatable combination!"

"Okay," I said, caught by Spiedo's exuberance. "We get the address tomorrow and creep."

"Look out there, Graham," Spiedo said suddenly, raising his head. He was pointing to some lights far out to sea. "Some crud rolling in green with his own yacht. Some crud with five bank accounts while most of us got nothing! That makes me sicker than a maggot!"

"How do you know it's not just a fishing boat or something?" I asked.

"I *know!*" Spiedo said, and his face was caught in the moonlight.

We sat for a while longer before Spiedo sighed, unfolded to his feet and brushed himself with stiffened fingers.

"In the meantime," he said, staring out at the ocean again, "let's find some place else to sleep. There are things moving in this sand."

I stood and the two of us walked up the beach toward our jalopy, the sea breeze gluing our clothes to our backs, gently pushing us away.

We found out where King Murdoch lived easy

enough from one of those guided-tour places. They even showed us a picture of the place, a huge mansion-like spread, located way out in the valley, lost and secluded. You should have seen Spiedo's eyes when he saw that picture. Break a needle in me if that wasn't a quarter of a million dollar pad! Only old, and fenced off all around with plenty of hedges and big trees you wouldn't expect to see growing there. All in all just the kind of place for what we had in mind. There and then I figured the whole thing just might work.

"What if there's a caretaker or somebody?" I asked Spiedo when we left the tour place.

"Caretaker?"

"Yeah, somebody King Murdoch left to watch the place. You don't just leave a pad like that and go flying off to Europe."

"You don't know these people," Spiedo assured me as we crossed the street quickly against the light. "Money's not to them what it is to you and me. Anyway, he's not flying, he's taking a slow steamship."

I felt even better then. That made it all the safer.

"Besides," Spiedo said, loping along the sidewalk, "big as that place is, he'd have to have a dozen caretakers to catch us creeping in and out."

So that evening we siphoned some gas from a gentleman's car and with our tank three-quarters full we headed our bundle of dents out toward the valley. I can see it like I was looking out the windshield now, at the clouds way ahead of us, all low-hanging and purple because the sun had just set, and the way the land rolled, stretching away from us all different colors. I remember thinking it was beautiful. Lord, you can bet I wish now we'd never made that trip!

But that night I felt good, scared good, with my blood racing through my body and my mind burning

like a Fourth of July sparkler.

King Murdoch's pad was secluded, nothing but secluded—and it was dark. There was a low brick wall covered with vines that ran all the way around the property, and there was some kind of iron railing on top of that. Spiedo pulled the car under some trees and doused the headlights and we looked closer at the place. It was two stories, built on a little rise, and the gables of the top story seemed real high against the sky that was almost completely black now. We waited there, watching, until well after midnight.

"There's nothing stirring there," Spiedo said, rubbing his beard. "If we're gonna do it let's go now."

I didn't answer as I got out of the car on my side and left the door open an inch or so. I'd noticed that the long-bladed knife Spiedo usually carried taped to his leg was tucked in his belt now. There never had been anybody home when we'd made our earlier raids, but Spiedo always carried the knife. I knew that he really wanted somebody to be home . . . and that was the thing I dreaded.

I followed his sandaled footsteps across the black lawn and quickly, without the slightest hesitation, we scaled the brick wall, then the iron rail, and dropped down on the other side. Spiedo was breathing hard, and by what light there was I could see he was grinning.

"Like a big cherry," he said, "just waiting to be plucked."

I followed him toward the dark shape of the house and up a terrace onto a big patio. Off to our left I could barely make out a bathhouse and the glistening dark water of a wide swimming pool. The high-diving board towered over it like a scaffold.

With a quick glance around into the night, Spiedo used the handle of his knife to punch out a pane of

glass in a French window. He reached through the broken pane and twisted the latch. Quickly, as if we were trying to get out of the rain or something, we stepped inside the house.

It was nothing but dark. Spiedo and I both reached into our pockets at the same time and brought out our little pen-lights that sent bright slim beams through the blackness.

"Okay, Graham," Spiedo said in an excited voice, "let's look around for that stamp collection."

He didn't mention the curios because we could see some of them in the beams of our lights: a dozen or so little figures on a wide shelf, mostly dwarfs and misshapen glass animals. As I followed Spiedo out of that room and into a long hall I felt the uneasiness for the first time. Looking back on it, I think it was because it struck me there how smooth everything was turning out.

"Hey," Spiedo said, "we can turn on a light. There's nobody for a thousand miles."

He flicked the light switch of the room we'd just entered. It was a tremendous room, with some more curios in a big glass-fronted case. A high old secretary desk stood in one corner, with fancy carved bookshelves that would have almost reached the ceiling of an ordinary-sized room.

"Okay," Spiedo said, "let's find the stamps, then look around for whatever else we want."

"The stamps are upstairs in a safe," a voice said behind us.

I can tell you we both froze, I mean cold! What was going on?

We turned around slow, and my whole body shook for a moment. It was King Murdoch, wearing a red dinner jacket, standing in the doorway and smiling that villainous smile that I remembered him smiling

out of the big screen at me since I was a kid. And he was holding in his right hand, of all things, a long sword that made Spiedo's knife look good for nothing but spreading butter.

"We, uh, were just looking around . . ." Spiedo said.

"No," Murdoch said in a friendly voice, "you came to rob and pillage because you thought I was in Europe and the house was deserted. The 'European trip' item always draws people like you."

"I don't get you," Spiedo said, recovering some of his cool. "We knocked on the door, and when nobody answered we just came in to look around. Thought the place was abandoned or something."

"Don't waste our time with elaborate deceptions," King Murdoch said in his best Hollywood manner. "We've been expecting you—or someone like you."

"We?" I asked, finding my voice for the first time.

Then somebody came into the room behind King Murdoch and I almost dropped over. It was Otto Koph, the famous movie villain who usually played Nazi generals. Then four or five more people walked into the room, all of them with faces I remembered from some long ago leering at me from the big screen. There was Basil Kane, fat Roger Spade, and Gorvana, to name the ones I recognized within a few minutes. Gorvana kind of threw me with her bony vampire-like face because she was just standing there chewing gum, which I never saw her do in any of her horror movies.

Otto Koph was wearing a long, dark dressing gown, and he drew a gun out of one of the pockets and pointed it at us. "They'll do nicely," he said in his guttural snarl. Gorvana looked right at me with her starving smile and the whites of her eyes showing all around her pupils. She didn't have to snarl to scare me.

Four of the men moved in on us, and before Spiedo or I could even put up a struggle our hands were tied behind our backs and we were sitting on a long sofa with our ankles tied to the legs.

"What right you got to do this?" Spiedo asked in a squeaky voice. "What's going on at this pad?"

"You might say we have a little club," King Murdoch said with his famous leering grin. "Every so often we place small clues in the newspapers that might attract someone like you to a big, rich, empty house."

"You mean all you movie stars are in this together?" I asked incredulously.

"Oh, no, no," Murdoch said. "Let's not give Hollywood a bad name. Only eight of us old-timers are in the club, all famous villains if I do say so myself." He turned casually to present his best profile. "Though I dare say at one time I had other roles, romantic ones."

"Okay," Spiedo said, "so what do you do now that you got us here? Call the men in blue?"

"Hah!" Otto Koph said thickly. "What we do is play our little game. That is what the club is all about."

"Game?" I could hear the edge of fear in my voice. Basil Kane was staring at me with his deep-set eyes, and Gorvana was smiling and chewing rhythmically. Gruesome!

"Have you ever wondered," King Murdoch asked, "how often we have had to die on the screen? Between us we have met terrible deaths a hundred and forty-nine times, while the hero or heroine lived on to reap the rewards."

"Do you realize, young man, how sick we get of that?" Otto Koph asked.

"So?" Spiedo said, and I marveled at his insolence.

"So we formed this little club," King Murdoch said, "where, before the cameras, we create certain of our least favorite scenes—only this time we play slightly different roles in those scenes."

My body began to tremble. I could remember seeing stakes driven through Gorvana's heart at least three times.

"Hey, get serious," Spiedo said. "You can't mean what I think you mean. You can't!"

But they were ignoring us now, talking, as they say, animatedly among themselves like at one of those Hollywood parties you see films of. Several of them went to a small bar in a corner where fat Roger Spade was mixing drinks.

"I say let's roll the dice now," Otto Koph was saying to Basil Kane.

Kane flashed his famous lopsided sneer. "I'm ineligible this time. I won last time," he added gleefully.

"That's right," a familiar face I couldn't quite match with a name said brightly, "the French revolution scene with the guillotine!"

Basil Kane smiled broadly. "From *The Iron Lady,* 1945. One of my big money-makers."

"Waldo Jacobson directed that one, didn't he?" a voice asked.

"Yes, indeed," Basil Kane said, "a fine director."

"Most underrated," King Murdoch said. "He directed me in *The Walking Head.*"

"Enough of this," Otto Koph insisted. "Let us roll the dice." He looked at me with a look I can never forget.

A chorus of voices sounded agreement, and everyone went to a small felt-covered table near the center of the room. Spiedo and I listened to the clatter

of dice and the buzz of excited voices for about fifteen minutes.

Then all of them walked toward us, most of them smiling.

"I won," King Murdoch said, raising his martini glass in triumph. He pointed to Spiedo. "I choose the tall one, and the scene will be the last part of *Blood on the Caribbean!*"

"A great choice!" Otto Koph said, as the protesting Spiedo was yanked to his feet.

"Costumes!" the heavyset Roger Spade yelled. "Let's get the pirate costumes!" He and the familiar face ran off together through a door at the far end of the room.

"Don't worry, honey," Gorvana whispered in my ear. "We won't forget about you."

I could tell by her voice she was drunk, and as she straightened, one of her metal snake bracelets dropped from her bony wrist onto the sofa next to me. I moved over so my body hid the coiled strip of silver and watched them lead the horrified Spiedo toward the door at the far end of the room. King Murdoch followed, leaving only Gorvana behind to watch me. While she stared at me, popping her gum, I worked the edge of the silver bracelet against the ropes binding my wrists. How many times in his earlier movies had I seen King Murdoch scraping objects against the ropes that bound *his* wrists?

The rope was frayed and almost ready to give when they all walked back into the room, so I stopped and sat perfectly still. King Murdoch was dressed in a flamboyant pirate outfit, and Spiedo, looking terrified and helpless, was dressed in a similar outfit, only not quite so dashing. I have to admit with his beard and all, he looked a lot like a real pirate.

"Remember *Blood on the Caribbean?*" King Murdoch asked. "How they made me walk the plank in the last reel, with all the gold strapped to me and with those big heavy boots that filled with water?"

I looked and with a sudden jolt of fear saw the heavy-looking sacks hanging from Spiedo's sewn-on belt, and he had on heavy, flare-top boots.

"To the swimming pool!" King Murdoch cried.

"To the pool!" Otto Koph echoed gaily, tossing down the rest of his drink and hurling the glass into the fireplace like he did in *Russian Winters.*

Spiedo glanced once over his shoulder at me, like I could help him, as they shoved him out through a door onto the patio.

"Come, Gorvana!" King Murdoch motioned with a swashbuckling wave of his laced arm. "The other one will keep."

Gorvana smiled at me and kind of danced after the others and I was alone, working desperately at the ropes that bound me.

I could hear snatches of conversation from the direction of the pool: "Set the lights up over there!" "I think this angle is best!" "Only one take, remember!" Laughter, and the sound of some kind of equipment being moved. Then the rope gave!

Frantically I untied the rope around my ankles, then made my way out of the room and back to the French windows where we'd broken in. As I slipped out into the night I heard someone call "Action!" and I peered through the hedges as I moved, crouching, away.

The area around the pool was brightly lighted, and where before I had heard voices there was now a deathly silence. Then I crouched even lower as I looked up and saw Spiedo and King Murdoch on the high diving board. Spiedo was facing Murdoch, his

back to the pool and the end of the board, and both of them were holding swords.

"You've pillaged your last ship!" King Murdoch yelled in a clear and vibrant voice, and the minute they started dueling I saw that Spiedo's sword was rubber.

Just before I let myself slide down the terrace and run for the car I stopped to look behind me. Spiedo was flailing away desperately with the bendable sword, with only the toes of his massive boots clinging to the edge of the board. Suddenly King Murdoch lunged dramatically. I think the tip of his sword probably only pricked Spiedo's skin, but he was forced to step backward off the diving board. His scream ended in a splash as the weighted sacks and heavy costume must have dragged him to the bottom like he was made of lead. I heard King Murdoch yell something else as I ran for the car, and there was a generous round of applause.

Sometimes now when I'm asleep I see Gorvana smiling and chewing gum as she leans over me with a sharp-pointed wooden stake and a huge mallet. The mallet rises, falls! I try to move but I'm tied down, I'm tied *down!* There is a terrible sound I can't describe and then that same round of enthusiastic but polite applause and I'm awake, sweating like I never sweated.

I've thought of telling somebody about the whole thing, like the police, but then I'd be implicating myself in a crime. Anyway, nobody'd believe me—nobody! Except maybe you . . .

# CHIMPS AIN'T CHUMPS

Talmage Powell

In the spectator section of the courtroom, the old man, Pierre Soulard, strained forward as the ten men and two women returned to the jury box. As powerful as a Florida razorback, old Pierre's eyes burned in their rawboned sockets as he moved his head and drilled his gaze into the back of the tall, slender youth at the defense counsel table. *They've found you guilty, David Wickway,* the old man thought. *They'll give you many years behind bars to remember how you killed two people.*

"Gentlemen and ladies of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

As the words spilled over the courtroom, the old man returned his attention to the jury. He watched the foreman, a lean Florida Cracker, slowly get to his feet.

"We find the defendant," the foreman said, "not guilty."

There was a moment of stillness in the sun-scorched day; then Dave Wickway's friends applauded, leaped to their feet and whooped it up, crowding around Dave and slapping him on the back.

The old man sat stunned, incapable of movement. It was unthinkable, unbelievable. Yvonne and Tony —his daughter and her child—both dead, and their killer was going free. Unaware of the motions of his own muscles, the old man was on his feet, pushing toward Dave Wickway, shoving people aside.

Dave didn't turn until one of his friends saw the old man's face and spoke sharply to Dave.

The old man drew back a fist as rough and hard as the bole of a palm tree. Dave jerked his arm up to protect himself. The effort was too little and too late. The old man's fist smashed through Dave's defense. The irresistible force met a movable object, Dave Wickway's nose. The mutilation of skin and gristle took place with a crunching sound audible all over the courtroom. With his face suddenly bright with blood, Dave pitched across the counsel table.

The old man lunged, his huge, bony hands reaching for Dave's throat. A bystander grabbed Pierre's left arm. He shook free almost without effort. Two young friends of Dave's added their efforts to the fracas, grunting and gasping as they tried to pull Pierre away from Dave. The defense lawyer and yet another bystander were finally able to wrestle the old man back and hold him prisoner.

Pierre ceased his struggles when he saw he was surrounded. The judge, the bailiff, and a deputy, along with the prosecutor, were pushing toward him.

"Here!" the judge bellowed. "What's the meaning of this?" A bulky, bald man whose many years on the bench had given him a deserved reputation for honesty, integrity, and judicious compassion, the judge quickly understood the meaning of it all.

"Pierre—Pierre," he said with a shake of his head. "What are you trying to do to yourself?"

"Lock me up," Pierre said in his rumbling voice. "I don't care. You can't hold me forever, you can't protect the murderer for all time."

"He's not a murderer," the judge said gently. "You heard all the evidence. Your widowed daughter and her little child—I know what a loss you've suffered,

Pierre. But it was an unavoidable accident. They stepped from between two parked cars on a rainy night, directly into the path of Wickway's car."

"Your justice is blind," Pierre said. "Mine isn't."

"No more of that talk!" the judge's tone sharpened. "We'll have no one-man vigilante lawlessness around here." The judge glanced at Dave. "You have a right to press charges against this man."

With a bloody handkerchief to his face, Dave had struggled to a standing position. He seemed slimmer, much paler than when the trial had started. He was a clean-cut, sun-scorched youth from a farming family that lived near Pierre.

"No," Dave said in a blood-muffled voice, "I don't feel I have any right. Let him go, please."

Angered exclamations came from Dave's friends. Ignoring them, he faced Pierre squarely. "You think you're the only one who's suffering? Well, you're wrong. For the rest of my life, I'll carry the moment when they were suddenly there in the path of my car. I'll remember the helplessness of myself when I tried to stop. Nights when I want to sleep I'll hear the sound of the car striking them, feel the impact." He drew in a heavy breath. "I'd give anything, even my life, if I could turn back the clock and not have it happen. You've got to believe that, Pierre. I—I'd like to be your friend and try to make up in some way for this terrible thing."

*Clever,* Pierre thought. *Cunning as a cottonmouth. Making himself look so kind and generous to all of them. The murderer!*

"Let him go," Dave said. His voice left no room for refusal. "Let him go, I said!"

The restraining hands and arms pulled away from Pierre. He stood ringed in by men ready to pounce again. *Not now,* he thought, *the time is not now. But*

*there is much time later.* He turned and stalked out of the courtroom, an oaken giant of an old man.

Pierre stopped his pickup truck beside his modest frame house and sat a moment. He did not want to go inside. He was acutely conscious of the silence that gripped the house and the flat, sere acres that stretched to the swamps in one direction and to palmetto thickets and pines in the other.

He had first come to this section of the world in the old lost days when the carnivals had wintered near Tampa. Carnies had had it made in those days, and he'd been a headliner with his trained animals. Then the world had changed. Television had come. People of a new generation had broader horizons, different interests, changing tastes. Carnivals had died like elephants in an ice age. Even the big circuses had fallen on hard times; those unable to streamline themselves had perished.

When the day of the final squeeze had come, Pierre had bowed out with an attempt to save face. He knew the harried owner of a show, losing its shirt in the wilds of Iowa, would have to axe an old friend whose animals now played in a leaky tent in the corner of the lot.

Pierre spared the owner the final action. "My daughter," Pierre explained, "and her little son live on a small place near Bradenton, Florida. She has lost her husband. She needs me."

"A man must go where he must, Pierre."

"True."

"I wish I had the moolah to take the animals off your hands."

"I have a buyer. Already I have a buyer," Pierre said, "for all but Gretchen. I'll keep Gretchen. It would be like cutting off my right arm if I sold the chimp."

"Good luck, old friend."

"May you have no more bloopers," Pierre said.

And now, what was left? Only he and Gretchen. If she were not waiting inside the house, he would never open the front door.

He forced his muscles to lift him out of the car, carry him into the superheated stillness of the frame house. He crossed the living room with its sparse, floral-patterned furniture, and dropped the chain from the door of the little room he'd fixed for Gretchen.

A full grown and aged chimpanzee, Gretchen immediately jumped into Pierre's arms. She nuzzled his shoulder, squeezed his neck, and made childish noises of pleasure.

"It is all over, old girl," Pierre said, sudden tears in his eyes. "The murderer is free, and they are gone. I have thought about it all the way from the courthouse. He deserves to die, the murderer. Do you agree?"

The chimp lifted her face and chattered, responding to Pierre's tone.

"And you will help me, Gretchen," the old man said. "Together we can deal out death and remain safe and free, the way Dave Wickway believes foolishly that he is safe and free."

While Gretchen slept that night, Pierre constructed a simple training harness with strips of leather and cordage. He slept little, rising with the sun. After a hurried breakfast, he cleaned the heavy, double-barrelled shotgun that had belonged to Yvonne's husband.

While Gretchen nibbled at a breakfast of fruit, Pierre gathered up the training harness and carried it and the shotgun out of the house. He crossed the sandy yard, walking to the small, weathered tool-

shed which stood about fifty yards behind the house.

Inside the toolshed, Pierre pulled the solid, heavy work table from its place against the rear wall, leaving room for a person, or a chimp, to stand behind the table. Laying the shotgun on the table, he stooped until his eyes were level with the gun. The barrels were pointed directly at the shed door, at a level slightly higher than a man's waist. No man could possibly stand in the toolshed doorway and live beyond the moment of a discharge from the shotgun. Only one barrel, one exploding shell would send a man on a short trip from the doorway to eternity.

Making sure the gun was unloaded, Pierre laid two shells beside it for future use. Then with hammer, nails, and cord, he swung Gretchen's training harness behind the table.

The chimp was in the front yard when the old man returned. She did a quick performance for him, turning handsprings, jumping to the porch railing, crossing it in the manner of a wirewalker. She peeled her lips from her teeth and joined the applause as the old man clapped his hands.

"Good girl, Gretchen. Always so eager to please, to learn. And that is fine, Gretchen, for now you learn the most important trick of your life."

Pierre extended his hand. She came to him quickly, knowing a new game was afoot, a new trick by which she would delight both herself and the man in mastering.

Her excitement increased as Pierre guided her into the toolshed and slipped her into the harness. He snapped his fingers, holding her immobile as he backed away with his hand upraised, a gesture so familiar to her from all the past years of training.

The old man paused in the bright, sunlit oblong of the shed doorway. He knuckled sweat from his

forehead, drew a breath, and said. "Now the hours begin, Gretchen, the long, painstaking hours of teaching and learning."

By the end of the first day, under Pierre's expert tutelage, Gretchen mastered the first hurdle. She realized the gun was part of the act and that she must put her finger to the trigger and pull it, making the gun snap.

The second day, she realized that her infinitely patient master wanted her to pull the trigger only at certain times, under certain conditions.

By the end of the third day, Gretchen was responding perfectly, out of harness now, moving to the gun and pulling the trigger only when Pierre opened the toolshed doorway from outside.

*One more day,* Pierre thought, *to condition her until it's an automatic reflex action.*

The final day of drilling ruled out any chance for error. The toolshed had a single meaning and purpose for the chimp, evoked a single association in her mind. It was the unique place where she was to wait alone and watch until the door opened and the man stood there. Then she was to reach to the gun and snap the trigger.

Time after time, she went through the routine flawlessly. Wholly satisfied, Pierre put her in the house, came out to his truck, and drove to the Wickway farm.

His dark good looks marred by his swollen nose, Dave was standing in the yard when the pickup approached. "Get out of here," Dave said coldly.

Pierre looked out the open window of the truck. "I came to tell you I'm sorry, Dave."

"I don't want any words with you, Soulard."

"I guess I can't blame you."

"Then turn the truck around and get back where you came from."

Pierre shook his head, his eyes heavy and sad. Quietly and slowly, he reached to the ignition key and turned off the idling engine.

"I guess you have a right to throw me off the place, Dave. But I'm not going under my own steam until I say one thing. I need your forgiveness. I want it."

Pierre saw a little of the chill leave Wickway's dark eyes. "Davey boy, you believe in kindness. I know you do. I'm a suffering old man who's humbling himself. Don't that mean nothing to you?"

"Well, I—hadn't figured on you coming here this way, Soulard."

"I had to come, and you got to forgive me. Will you do that?"

Dave was relenting. The old man, sensing it, kept his real feelings from showing on his face.

"There isn't much more I can say," Pierre said. "In the courtroom all I could think of was my daughter and her baby—both dead."

"I can understand that," Dave said slowly.

"It was something that somebody had to pay for, Dave, and you happened to be the handiest. So I did a foolish thing, and I'm sorry for it."

"I guess we've both been plenty shook up," Dave said. "But you can't call back water from under the bridge, can you?"

"No, I guess you can't. You have to go with the tide, and that's what I'm figuring to do. I'm pulling up stakes, Dave, and I don't want to leave with a bad thing between us."

"We'll try to remember we were once pretty good neighbors," Dave said. "That's the way I'll remember."

"You're a good man, and to prove the sincerity of our feelings, I want a favor from you, and I want to pay you for it."

"Favor?"

"I'm going to convert the pickup here," Pierre said, "into a van for me and Gretchen. We'll hit the road again. There's still shows and spots where we can do a performance for a bean. I'll need a little help for a few hours, Dave, when I close in the bed of the truck for living space. I'd be proud to have you work at my side for a little while before I shove off."

"Well, I—"

"And I want to pay you well, so everything will be right and square between us after I'm gone. When Gretchen and I make camp aboard the truck, I'll need to look around and remember that we finished things between us, you and me, as men and neighbors should."

Pierre knew he was getting through to the boy. He hadn't for a moment doubted that he could.

"I don't blame you for having to think about it, Dave," Pierre said. "Maybe you don't want to come to my place alone?"

"It isn't that—"

"I don't blame you. I might not want to either, in your place. I might still wonder a little about the other man, no matter what he'd said to assure me. So don't come alone, Dave. Bring Harley Johns, the man who works for you, with you. I can use him. We'll need him. I'll be glad to pay him. The two of you, Dave, you and Harley. Help me get the heavier pieces in place so's this pickup will be a real camper."

"We're pretty busy," Dave said.

Pierre brought a tired, lonely, compassionate smile to his lips. He looked at Dave a moment in forlorn silence. "Well," he said, with a heavy sigh, "I guess I can find somebody else. Maybe it was foolish of me, coming here. I just wanted you to know how sorry I am, Dave, how I feel. Guess I wanted my last hours

around here to be something I could look back on with solace. Guess I was just an old man needing a memory, Dave." Pierre reached for the ignition key to start the truck.

"Wait a minute," Dave said. "I guess I need a memory like that myself. God knows I've got enough of the other kind, from that rainy night. We're not all that busy."

"Tomorrow morning, Dave?"

"Yes."

"Be sure and bring Harley Johns with you."

"I will."

"Thank you, Dave. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Pierre was up with the sun the next morning. He got through breakfast chores quickly. While Gretchen romped, Pierre went into the toolshed, loaded both barrels of the shotgun, and lined the gun with great care directly at the doorway. Then Pierre brought the gun to full cock and backed out of the toolshed.

The heat of the rising sun dried out dew and ground mist. Insects came to singing life. And as the morning progressed, Pierre sawed plywood panels on sawhorses which he'd set beside the house, and watched the road. At nine-forty, he saw the red and white pickup from the Wickway farm. A quivering went through his brain. His mouth became instantly dry.

"Gretchen!"

The chimp looked up at him. She had been in and out, around his feet, wetting her finger, touching it to the fresh sawdust, tasting it, making faces, and chattering.

Pierre took her hand, and the two of them moved around the house, hurrying to the toolshed, the man walking straight and tall, the chimp rolling on her

bowed legs and touching the ground now and then with the knuckles of her free hand.

Pierre eased the door open and gently pushed Gretchen inside the toolshed. Then he closed the door gently and leaned against it until his breathing became less shallow.

When Pierre returned to the sawhorses, the Wickway truck was pulling off the road. Inside were two men. Dave and Harley. Victim and the witness. The witness to the fact, later, that it had all been a terrible freak accident, with Pierre nowhere close by when David Wickway was killed.

*Davey boy,* the old man thought, *you're really just halfway knowledgeable about accidents. This morning we're going to complete your education.*

"Good morning, Pierre."

Pierre watched the two get out of the truck. "Same to you, Dave. How're you, Harley?"

"Fine," the young man said.

Dave and Harley stopped beside the sawhorses.

"See you've already started," Dave said.

Pierre nodded. "Plan to box the pickup in, roof her tight, and stick in a bunk and kerosine stove. Gretchen and I will make it fine."

"What do you want us to do, Pierre?"

"Well, Dave, Harley and I can lift these panels I've already cut if you want to keep on sawing."

Harley climbed onto the bed of the pickup as Pierre lifted the end of a piece of plywood obviously cut for a side panel. When Harley had hold of his end, Pierre went to the other end, picked it up and moved forward as Harley moved back into the truck.

"Dave," Pierre said.

"What is it?"

"Before you start with the saw, how about getting

the brace and bit? It's hanging just inside the door of the toolshed. Shed's the little shack around back of the house."

"Okay," Dave said. He went out of sight around the house.

Pierre stopped, set his end of the plywood panel to rest on the tailgate of the pickup. He stood gasping.

Up against the cab of the truck, Harley said, "What's the matter, Mr. Soulard? Anything wrong?"

"Just the heat, I guess—the sun—a dizzy spell. It'll pass in a moment."

But the moment had dammed up time. The moment wouldn't pass. Pierre had the weird feeling that even the insects had stopped movement, were hanging motionless in the dead, still, superheated air. Then the moment fell like a drop of sweat. Pierre heard footsteps. He turned his head to look.

There was David Wickway—big as life, coming toward the sawhorses with a brace and bit in his hand.

"Right where you said," Dave smiled, holding up the tool. "Say, that was a pretty neat idea of yours, putting the chimp in the toolshed so she wouldn't be getting underfoot while we're building you a portable Waldorf room."

Pierre stumbled a step away from Dave. It was unbelievable. It was impossible. It simply couldn't be true. He'd forgot to cock the gun! He could clearly remember cocking the gun with great care, but his mind must be playing a trick on him. There was no other explanation. Was he losing his mind, going crazy?

The old man made a fearful inhuman sound in his throat and bolted—straight to the toolshed. With incoherent dissonances dribbling from his lips, the

gaunt old man opened the door.

He heard and saw the shotgun blast. He felt the force of it hurling him backwards, away from the shed, on a quick route to eternity.

The explanation for Dave Wickway's survival was really quite simple, at least in the mind of a monkey. Gretchen was no chump. She had responded precisely to her training. She had obeyed with a thoroughness that was not at all human. Her performance had been flawless, letter perfect.

Gretchen had waited until Pierre—and only Pierre—had appeared in the toolshed doorway. And that, naturally and as a matter of course, had been the proper moment for her to reach for the shotgun trigger.

# IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, KILL, KILL AGAIN!

Alfred Hitchcock believes that practice makes perfect, especially in the fine art of murder. Your first crime might be jumped on by critics—a messy corpse, clumsily dropped clues, maybe even a victim left alive. But don't despair. Just do your thing awhile—and you'll kill them every time! In fact, you just might approach the diabolical expertise you'll find in every one of the 14 chillers Hitch has selected for your shivery delight. Here are terror tales by such great names as:

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