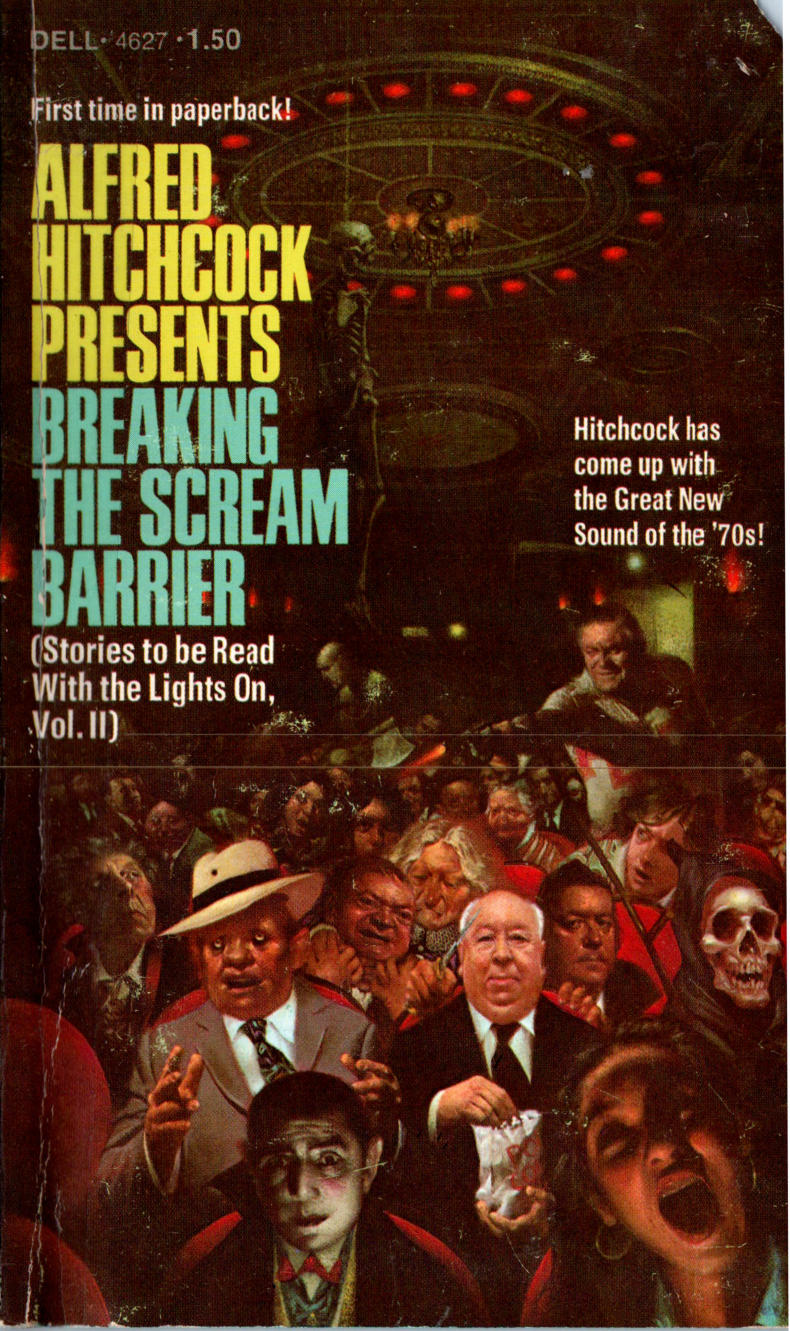
DELL · 4627 · 1.50

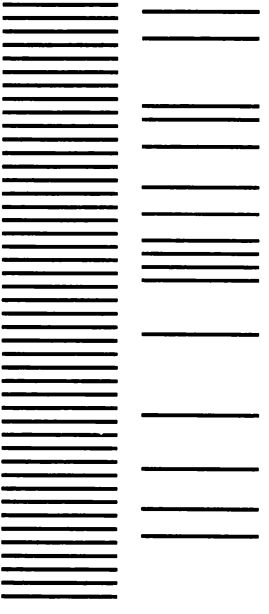
First time in paperback!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS BREAKING THE SCREAM BARRIER

(Stories to be Read With the Lights On, Vol. II)

Hitchcock has come up with the Great New Sound of the '70s!





FASTER

than a murderer's hand.

STRONGER

than a hangman's rope.

ABLE

to leap over society's petty conventions with a ghoulish grin.

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Is it Superman?

No. It's–

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

about to take you on the wildest ride you have ever lived through (if you're lucky)–

BREAKING THE SCREAM BARRIER

20 tales to play a tune of terror on your vocal chords

BREAKING THE SCREAM BARRIER

(STORIES TO BE READ WITH THE LIGHTS ON, VOLUME II)

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

A DELL BOOK

The editor gratefully acknowledges
the invaluable assistance of Harold Q. Masur
in the preparation of this volume.

Published by
DELL PUBLISHING CO., INC.
1 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza
New York, New York 10017

Dell ® TM 681510, Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
Reprinted by arrangement with Random House, Inc.
Printed in the United States of America
First Dell printing—April 1976

1958 by H.M.H. Publishing Co., Inc. First published in *Playboy*.

"Crawfish" by Ardath F. Mayhar: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1971 by Psychological Perspectives.

"The Strange Case of Mr. Pruyn" by William F. Nolan: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1956 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. First published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.*

"Ludmila" by David Montross: Reprinted by permission of the author, Jean L. Backus.

"The One Who Got Away" by Al Nussbaum: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. First published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.*

"It's A Lousy World" by Bill Pronzini: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1969 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. First published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.*

"Only So Much to Reveal" by Joan Richter: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1970 by Joan Richter. First published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*

"Who's Got the Lady?" by Jack Ritchie: Reprinted by permission of Larry Sternig Literary Agency. Copyright © 1964 by Renown Publications, Inc. First published in *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine.*

"Hey You Down There" by Harold Rolseth: Reprinted by permission of Larry Sternig Literary Agency. Copyright © 1971 by Yankee, Inc. First published in *Yankee Magazine.*

"Too Many Sharks" by William Sambrot: Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd. Copyright © 1956 by Dee Publishing Corp.

"Christopher Frame" by Nancy C. Swoboda: Reprinted by permission of the author.

"Obituary" by Paul Theridion: Reprinted by permission of the author.

"Ransom Demand" by Jeffrey M. Wallmann: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. First published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.*

"The Mother Goose Madman" by Betty Ren Wright: Reprinted by permission of Larry Sternig Literary Agency. Copyright © 1959 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. First published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.*

"The Green Fly and the Box" by Waldo Carlton Wright: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1969 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. First published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.*

"The Blue Rug" by Mitsu Yamamoto: Reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1967 by Mitsu Yamamoto. First published in *Cavalier.*

CONTENTS

BREAKING THE SCREAM BARRIER

PAYMENT RECEIVED

Robert L. McGrath

Chulie Ross was a strange one, and that was a fact. For a nine-year-old kid, he had more queer ways than a pup hound dog. Not dumb, just different. Tetched. A book-readin' kid. So nobody in Sunrise paid him much mind, and when he showed up luggin' this black kitten the mornin' they was fixin' for a necktie party with Tanner Higgins the honor guest, nobody bothered to shoo him off. They just paid him no mind a-tall.

"Let's get it over with!" someone hollered.

"Got to let 'im have his last say," came another voice. "String a man 'thout his last say, an' his spirit'll dog you seven times seventy years!"

They were all there, all the men from Sunrise: white-maned Rim Cutler—for lack of judge, preacher, marshal, and a few other assorted officials, he filled whatever shoes was most needed at the time; tattooed Seth Anders—he'd sailed the seas to India, where a lot of odd Hindu notions rubbed off on him; God-scared Tanner Higgins—sometime schoolmaster, a quiet, still-water-runs-deep man, convicted of the murder of his best friend; and a baker's dozen other citizens, all het with the fever of gettin' it done before sunrise, in the town tradition.

"All right, men!" old Rim Cutler bellowed. "Reckon any man's got a right to his last say. Start sayin', Tanner, but make it fast. We ain't got all day."

"What's the use?" Tanner Higgins said, sittin' sorry on the horse, hands tied behind his back. "We've been through it all before."

"That all you got to say?" Rim Cutler asked.

"I didn't kill him!" Tanner Higgins yelled. "I didn't have anything to do with it!"

Rim Cutler juiced the dust with amber. "Then who did?"

"I've told you—I don't know!" Tanner shook his head, hopeless.

"Your ax, warn't it?" Rim Cutler said.

"Yes, it was my ax—but I didn't do it!"

"Your girl he was chasin', warn't it?"

"Yes, she was my girl! But I wouldn't kill a man over a woman!"

"Maybe money, then," Rim Cutler suggested. "Some says Jack Bronson had money. Maybe that was it."

"Look, for the last time, I didn't kill Jack! He was a good man—my best friend! I couldn't have killed him! I couldn't kill anybody!"

"We're wastin' time, Rim," Seth Anders cut in. "Sun's comin' up. Let's get this thing over with!"

"All right, boys," Rim Cutler said. "Get that horse over here."

"Mr. Cutler, sir," a small high-pitched voice broke in, insistent.

"What—oh. Go on home, Chulie. This ain't no place fer kids."

"Mr. Cutler, you—fixin' to horsewhip Tanner Higgins?"

"Well"—Rim Cutler looked around, uncomfortable—"I reckon you might call it that. Now git on home, where you belong."

"He didn't do anything, Mr. Cutler. He didn't."

"Say, will somebody take this blabbin' kid out of here?"

"He didn't kill Jack Bronson, Mr. Cutler. He didn't."

"Go on, git! This ain't no place fer a kid!"

Seth Anders' arm swooped down to pull the boy up to the saddle, but the black kitten spooked and the tiny claws found home. "Ouch, you little son of a—"

"I know who did it," Chulie Ross said then,

smoothin' the black kitten's fur. "I know who killed Jack Bronson."

For a moment, no sound. "What was that again, son?" Rim Cutler could speak soft when he wanted.

"I—I said I know who killed Jack Bronson. And it wasn't Mister Higgins."

"Huh!" Seth Anders snorted. "I s'pose you did it."

Chulie looked at him, strokin' the kitten, sayin' not a word.

"All right, son," Rim Cutler said. "You know who did it. You tell us about it."

"Do I have to?" Chulie looked around at them.

"Reckon you do, Chulie," Rim Cutler said. "We got to see justice done this day."

"It was—it was—" Chulie looked from man to man, and there was some squirmin' done.

"Come on, son. Speak up!"

"It was—him!"

A small finger pointed. Seventeen pairs of eyes, includin' the black kitten's, went to one man.

"Like hell it was!" Seth Anders exploded, face clouded red. "You gonna take that dummy kid's word?"

"Ain't said we would," Rim Cutler drawled. "But we ain't stringin' nobody this day. Sun's up."

The red ball in the east had cleared the rim. The eyes left Seth Anders, checked the dawn of day, then settled uneasy on each other, on Tanner Higgins, on Rim Cutler, on Chulie Ross and the black kitten.

"What makes you think Seth Anders killed Jack Bronson, Chulie?" Rim Cutler asked, gentle.

"I—I saw him do it," the boy squeezed out the words. "I—I was hiding."

"He's a damn liar!" Seth Anders put in, louder than need be.

"Chulie," old Rim Cutler spoke low, "you sure you know what you're sayin'? You sure you didn't"—he looked around at the rest, sober—"didn't read all this in a book?"

"I saw him do it," Chulie insisted. "Me—and Jack."

"Jack? You mean Jack Bronson?"

"No, Jack—my little cat," Chulie said. "We saw him do it."

"Now, why," asked Rim Cutler, patient, "would Seth here want to hurt anybody? Why would Seth want to kill Jack Bronson?"

The boy looked at Seth Anders, but he held steady. "Money," he said then. "It was money."

Seth Anders got down from his horse fast, reachin' for the boy. The black kitten spooked again, spit, and barely missed hookin' the other hand.

"Jack—my cat—doesn't like—him."

Everybody eyed Seth Anders now, and no mistake—his once red face was white as the inside of a store-bought flour barrel.

"It—it's him!" A whisper rasped out of the throat of Seth Anders.

"What's the matter, man? You gone daft?"

"It—it's him—come back. Him! Him!" A cry, a sob, in the early mornin'.

"Chulie," Rim Cutler said, "you take that kitten of yours and mosey over yonder a piece."

Dust squirted as the boy dragged himself away.

"Now," Rim Cutler bellowed, "you got somethin' you want to say, Seth?"

"I—I did it," the voice broke. "I did it! I didn't know he'd come back. I didn't know! I didn't expect that!"

"You use Tanner's ax?" Rim Cutler asked.

"I—I borrowed it. Didn't intend to kill 'im. Wouldn't give me the money." Whinin' now. "I didn't know—he'd come back!"

"Boys, I reckon we almost made a mistake," Rim Cutler said. "I reckon we owe Tanner Higgins here quite a debt. Reckon it'll take a passel of time to pay it off."

The man with hands tied behind his back was limp,

his shirt dark with sweat. "I reckon I owe a debt to Chulie Ross," Tanner Higgins said, quiet. "And maybe someone else, too." He looked up at the sky; the others turned away and looked at the ground.

"Reckon you better come with us, Seth." Rim Cutler motioned to the rest. "Might as well head back." With a swipe of his knife, he cut the bonds on Tanner Higgins' hands. Then he slapped the man on the leg, hesitated a moment, and walked away.

Tanner Higgins waited, and when they were gone, got off the horse and walked slow toward the boy. "I want to thank you, Chulie," he said. "That was a brave thing you did." He held out his hand, and the boy grasped it, shy. "But you should have told them sooner, several days ago, when they had the trial. Why didn't you tell them sooner?"

"I—I didn't know what they were going to do," the boy said. "Mr. Higgins . . ."

"Yes, Chulie?"

"Mr. Higgins, what did Seth Anders mean when he said, 'It's him!' What was he talking about?"

"Well, Chulie, I think he figured that black kitten of yours was really Jack Bronson, come back to haunt him. It's a thing they call reincarnation—sort of a superstition."

"Like black cats bring bad luck?"

"That's right, Chulie. Since your kitten is named Jack, and all, Anders thought Jack Bronson's spirit was right there in the cat, and was after him."

"Mr. Higgins, I'd like to tell you something."

"Yes, Chulie?"

"Jack Bronson couldn't be in this here kitten of mine. It's a she—her real name is Jackie—only I was afraid they'd laugh at me, so I called her Jack."

Tanner Higgins wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, again looked reverent at the sky.

"Mr. Higgins . . ."

"Something else, Chulie?"

"Yes, sir. I—I didn't really see Seth Anders kill Jack Bronson. I—I just thought maybe he did it."

"You—what?"

"I thought maybe it was him. He always poked fun at me—for reading."

"Oh." Tanner Higgins shook his head.

"Way I figure, maybe now you and I are even, Mr. Higgins."

"Even, Chulie? How do you mean?"

"I did you a favor," Chulie Ross said. "I paid you back."

"For what, Chulie? You didn't owe me anything."

The boy stroked the black kitten nestled in his arms. "Sure I owed you, Mr. Higgins. Don't you remember? You're the one who taught me how to read!"

AGONY COLUMN

Barry N. Malzberg

Gentlemen:

I enclose my short story, THREE FOR THE UNIVERSE, and know you will find it right for your magazine, ASTOUNDING SPIRITS.

Yours very truly,
Martin Miller

Dear Contributor:

Thank you for your recent submission. Unfortunately, although we have read it with great interest, we are unable to use it in *Astounding Spirits*. Due to the great volume of submissions we receive, we cannot grant all contributors a personal letter, but you may be sure that the manuscript has been reviewed carefully and its rejection is no comment upon its literary merit but may be dependent upon one of many other factors.

Faithfully,
The Editors

Dear Editors:

The Vietnam disgrace must be brought to an end! We have lost on that stained soil not only our national honor but our very future. The troops must be brought home and we must remember that there is more honor in dissent than in unquestioningly silent agreement.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Editors. Due to the great volume of worthy submissions we are unable to print every good letter we receive and therefore regretfully inform you that while we will not be publishing it, this is no comment upon the value of your opinion.

Very truly yours,
The Editors

Dear Congressman Forthwaite:

I wish to bring your attention to a serious situation which is developing on the West Side. A resident of this neighborhood for five years now, I have recently observed that a large number of streetwalkers, dope addicts and criminal types are loitering at the intersection of Columbus Avenue and 124th Street at almost all hours of the day, offending passers-by with their appearance and creating a severe blight on the area. In addition, passers-by are often threateningly asked for "handouts" and even "solicited." I know that you with me share a concern for a Better West Side and look forward to your comments on this situation as well as some kind of concrete action.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Millow:

Thank you for your letter. Your concern for our West Side is appreciated and it is only through the efforts and diligence of constituents such as yourself that a better New York can be conceived. I have forwarded your letter to the appropriate precinct office in Manhattan and you may expect to hear from them soon.

Gratefully yours,
Alwyn D. Forthwaite

Dear Gentlemen:

In May of this year I wrote Congressman Alwyn D.

Forthwaite a letter of complaint, concerning conditions on the Columbus Avenue—West 124th Street intersection in Manhattan and was informed by him that this letter was passed on to your precinct office. Since four months have now elapsed and since I have neither heard from you nor observed any change in the conditions pointed out in my letter, I now write to ask whether or not that letter was forwarded to you and what you have to say about it.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Milner:

Our files hold no record of your letter.

N. B. Karsh
Captain, # 33462

Dear Sirs:

I have read Sheldon Novack's article in the current issue of CRY with great interest but feel that I must take issue with his basic point, which is that sex is the consuming biological drive from which all other activities stem and which said other activities become only metaphorical for. This strikes me as a bit more of a projection of Mr. Novack's own functioning than that reality which he so shrewdly contends he apperceives.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Milton:

Due to the great number of responses to Sheldon A. Novack's "Sex and Sexuality: Are We Missing Anything?" in the August issue of CRY, we will be unable to publish your own contribution in our Cry from the City column, but we do thank you for your interest.

Yours,
The Editors

Dear Mr. President:

I was shocked by the remarks apparently attributed

to you in today's newspaper on the public assistance situation. Surely, you must be aware of the fact that social welfare legislation emerged from the compassionate attempt of 1930 politics to deal with human torment in the systematized fashion and although many of the cruelties you note are inherent to the very system, they do not cast doubt upon its very legitimacy. Our whole national history has been one of coming to terms with collective consciousness as opposed to the law of the jungle, and I cannot understand how you could have such a position as yours.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Meller:

Thank you very much for your letter of October 18th to the President. We appreciate your interest and assure you that without the concern of citizens like yourself the country would not be what it has become. Thank you very much and we do look forward to hearing from you in the future on matters of national interest.

Mary L. McGinnity
Presidential Assistant

Gentlemen:

I enclose herewith my article, WELFARE: ARE WE MISSING ANYTHING? which I hope you may find suitable for publication in INSIGHT MAGAZINE.

Very truly yours,
Martin Miller

Dear Contributor:

The enclosed has been carefully reviewed and our reluctant decision is that it does not quite meet our needs at the present time. Thank you for your interest in *Insight*.

The Editors

Dear Senator Partch:

Your vote on the Armament Legislation was shameful.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Mallow:

Thank you for your recent letter to Senator O. Stuart Partch and for your approval of the Senator's vote.

L. T. Walters
Congressional Aide

Dear Susan Saltis:

I think your recent decision to pose nude in that "art-photography" series in MEN'S COMPANION was disgraceful, filled once again with those timeless, empty rationalizations of the licentious which have so little intrinsic capacity for damage except when they are subsumed, as they are in your case, with abstract and vague "connections" to platitudes so enormous as to risk the very demolition of the collective personality.

Yours very truly,
Martin Miller

Dear Sir:

With pleasure and in answer to your request, we are enclosing a photograph of Miss Susan Saltis as she appears in her new movie, "Chariots to the Holy Roman Empire."

Very truly yours,
Henry T. Wyatt
Publicity Director

Gentlemen:

I wonder if CRY would be interested in the enclosed article which is not so much an article as a true documentary of the results which have been obtained from my efforts over recent months to correspond with

various public figures, entertainment stars, etc., etc. It is frightening to contemplate the obliteration of self which the very devices of the 20th Century compel, and perhaps your readers might share my (not so retrospective) horror.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Sir:

As a potential contributor to *Cry* I am happy to offer you our "Writer's Subscription Discount" meaning that for only $5.50 you will receive not only a full year's subscription (28% below newsstand rates, 14% below customary subscriptions) but in addition our year-end special issue, *Cry in the Void* at no extra charge.

Subscription Dept.

Dear Contributor:

Thank you very much for your article, "Agony Column." It has been considered here with great interest and it is the consensus of the Editorial Board that while it has unusual merit it is not quite right for us. We thank you for your interest in *Cry* and look forward to seeing more of your work in the future.

Sincerely,
The Editors

Dear Congressman Forthwaite:

Nothing has been done about the conditions I mentioned in my letter of about a year ago. Not one single thing!

Bitterly,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Mills:

Please accept our apologies for the delay in answering your good letter. Congressman Forthwaite has been involved, as you know, through the winter in the Food

Panel and has of necessity allowed some of his important correspondence to await close attention.

Now that he has the time he thanks you for your kind words of support.

Yours truly,
Ann Ananauris

Dear Sir:

The Adams multiple-murders are indeed interesting not only for their violence but because of the confession of the accused that he "did it so that someone would finally notice me." Any citizen can understand this—the desperate need to be recognized as an individual, to break past bureaucracy into some clear apprehension of one's self-worth, is one of the most basic of human drives, but I am becoming increasingly frustrated today by a technocracy which allows less and less latitude for the individual to articulate his own identity and vision and be heard. Murder is easy: it is easy in the sense that the murderer does not need to embark upon an arduous course of training in order to accomplish his feat; his excess can come from the simple extension of sheer human drives . . . aided by basic weaponry. The murderer does not have to cultivate "contacts" or "fame" but can simply, by being *there,* vault past nihilism and into some clear, cold connection with the self. More and more the capacity for murder lurks within us; we are narrow and driven, we are almost obliterated from any sense of existence, we need to make that singing leap past accomplishment and into acknowledgement and *recognition.* Perhaps you would print this letter?

Hopefully,
Martin Miller

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your recent letter. We regret being unable to use it due to many letters of similar nature

being received, but we look forward to your expression of interest.

Sincerely,
John Smith, for the Editors

Dear Mr. President:

I intend to assassinate you. I swear that you will not live out the year. It will come by rifle or knife, horn or fire, dread or terror but it will come and there is no way that you can AVOID THAT JUDGEMENT TO BE RENDERED UPON YOU.

Fuck You,
Martin Miller

Dear Reverend Mellbow:

As you know, the President is abroad at the time of the writing but you may rest assured that upon his return your letter, along with thousands of other and similar expressions of hope, will be turned over to him and I am sure that he will appreciate your having written.

Very truly yours,
Mary L. McGinnity
Presidential Assistant

GUESSING GAME

Rose Million Healey

The little boy with the round, innocent face and fair hair sat swinging his legs and watching Martha work.

"Don't you want to know what I've got in here?" he asked her.

Martha didn't turn from her dusting, nor did she bother to answer him. It was the first time they'd been alone together, Martha and Mrs. B.'s grandson. Martha didn't care for him much. If she'd known about him, she thought, maybe she wouldn't have taken the job. Sighing, Martha bent her knees and applied her dust rag to the piano legs. It wasn't that she didn't like children; she'd had two of her own, hadn't she, and might be a grandmother herself if it hadn't been for the war taking John Joseph and the Lord not blessing Young Martha with the looks to get a husband. No, it wasn't a coldness toward children in general, she told herself, slowly rising and flicking the keyboard daintily with her duster. But there was something about little Jeffrey that upset her and made her ill at ease. He wasn't like other boys, and that was a fact. He was quiet, but that wasn't it. Boys don't necessarily have to be rowdy. It wasn't that he was impudent, either. I could handle a scamp easily, she thought. Something for which there was no name, or at least not one that Martha knew, was wrong with Jeffrey Belton III. He had a way of regarding you with a narrow-eyed stare when he thought you weren't noticing. There would be a faint smile on his lips that somehow wasn't the sweet thing a smile on a child's face should be.

Martha whirled around to see if she could surprise that look on his face now. He wasn't looking at her at all but at a small cardboard box he held in his lap.

Feeling her gaze, he glanced up. "Bet you'll never guess," he said, "what I've got in here."

He held the box up and shook it invitingly. Something rattled back and forth inside.

Martha tried to answer pleasantly. After all, he was only a baby.

"What do I win, if I guess right?" she asked.

The little boy regarded her solemnly.

"You never will. Never in a million, trillion years," he told her.

"But if I do?"

"I'll give you my allowance for next week," Jeffrey promised, after a moment's hesitation.

Martha flushed. "No, no, I don't want your money," she said. "I tell you what"—she pushed a vase aside on the mantelpiece and dusted carefully—"if I guess, you help me dry the dishes tomorrow morning. If I don't guess, I'll give you something nice."

"What?" the little boy asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Something nice."

"Will you give me what I ask for?"

"That depends," Martha told him, running her cloth over the gilt-framed mirror.

"On what? What does it depend on?"

"Whether I have what you ask for or not."

"Oh, you have it," Jeffrey assured her. "Is it a deal?"

Martha smiled. He was like other children, really, just harder to know. Playing the game, she hedged: "Well, hold on now. Not so fast. What is this something I have that you might win?"

"I can't tell you," the little boy said, as she had been sure he would.

"Is it something I won't mind giving up?"

"You shouldn't mind," he said. "You have plenty of others."

One of the toy automobiles her son had collected when he was young, Martha thought. She had shown them to Jeffrey during her first week in the house in an attempt to win his affection. They hadn't seemed to impress him at the time, but she should have realized he was shy. Well, one car out of so many wouldn't matter. And, besides, what had she kept them for but to make other little boys happy?

"Is it a deal?" Jeffrey demanded again.

"Yes, yes," Martha replied. "A deal."

"You promise?"

"Certainly."

"Say it."

"I promise," Martha said. She caught the little boy's reflection in the mirror. His eyes were slits of pale blue, and a suggestion of a smile played about his mouth.

With an effort, Martha forced herself to say heartily, "Now, then, what can it be? What *can* it be?" She faced the little boy and looked down at the box he clutched with both hands.

"Is it a—"

"Wait!" Jeffrey commanded. He scrambled off the chair. "How many guesses do you get?"

"That's right," Martha said. "There should be a limit. How many do you think I should have?"

"Three. Like in the storybooks."

Martha patted the blond head.

He drew away instantly, then came back. "You can pat my hair if you want to, Martha," he murmured in a purring tone.

Suddenly, Martha didn't want to. She pretended not to hear him. Looking around the room, she said, "Looks as if I'm finished in here. Better get busy on the bedrooms."

"Why don't you do the kitchen?" the little boy suggested. "I can drink my milk while you're guessing," he added slyly.

It wasn't easy to make him drink milk, she knew;

Martha obediently led the way to the kitchen.

He perched himself on the table in the middle of the room. From there he had a good view of Martha wherever she might go. Uneasy under his gaze, Martha poured the milk and handed it to him. As she turned from him, she stumbled slightly, and the boy laughed.

"Clumsy Martha. Clumsy Martha," he sang out in a clear, happy treble.

He liked to see people uncomfortable or hurt. She had noticed that before. It made her shudder.

At the sink she started the breakfast dishes. Hoping to end the game as quickly as possible, so Jeffrey would leave her to play in the living room with his jigsaw puzzle or outside on his swing, she said:

"Is it a toy?"

"No, no, no!" the boy yelled triumphantly.

"Am I warm?" she asked.

"You're not a bit warm. You're icy, icy cold. Brrr. I'm shivering, you're so cold! Guess again."

Martha shook the soap flakes into a pan.

"Is it—" She tried to think of any articles she'd seen him carrying around. For some reason, she really did want to win the game. It wasn't the car; she'd give him that anyway. But somehow she felt she should try hard to win. To refresh her mind on the size of the box, she glanced over her shoulder at the boy. He was staring at her again and with such an expression of cruel anticipation, she almost dropped the saucer she held.

"Go on. Guess," the boy urged.

The box was about two inches wide and four inches long. It was probably six inches deep. A number of things ran through Martha's mind and were rejected: a deck of cards, a scarf, stamps from his stamp collection? But it rattled. Whatever was inside rattled. Martha bit her lips.

"Well?" the boy said.

"I'm thinking," Martha snapped. She could sense his satisfaction at having upset her, and with difficulty she calmed herself.

"Let me hold the box," she suggested.

"Why?" the little boy asked. He scooted back on the table away from her.

"I want to see how heavy it is," Martha explained.

The boy seemed to weigh his decision carefully.

"No," he answered at last.

"Why not?"

"Your hands are all wet," he pointed out. "And besides, when we started to play, that wasn't in the rules."

Martha felt a keen pang of disappointment.

"It's not fair," she said, returning to her dishes. "How can I possibly guess if I haven't any hint?"

"Oh, I'll give you a hint."

"You will?" Martha knew her eagerness was silly. She knew she was being much too serious about a guessing game with a child, but she couldn't help it.

"I'll give you three questions," Jeffrey announced magnanimously, and Martha felt a surge of hope.

"How big is it?" she asked.

"As big as—" The boy lolled his head back and rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "As big as your finger," he said and grinned at some private joke.

Martha thought: A matchbox, a stick of candy, a pencil?

"What color is it?"

The boy considered the question, frowning. Then he smiled. "It *was* pink," he told Martha.

Absently Martha scrubbed the oatmeal pan. Beads, a lipstick, oh, why couldn't she get it?

Stalling for time, she asked, "You weren't fibbing, were you? It definitely isn't a toy?"

Jeffrey looked shocked. "I don't tell fibs," he said. Impatiently, he demanded, "Why don't you guess?"

"It's a—a penny," Martha blurted desperately, and the boy danced with joy.

"Wrong!" he screamed. "Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!"

He jumped to the floor and ran up and down wagging his head from side to side and saying, "Wrong,

wrong, wrong," until Martha told him sharply to stop it.

Obediently he stood still beside her at the sink. He leaned against the sideboard panting, and she could look down at the clean little scalp and the fine hair and the downy little neck. She almost regained her perspective. Almost.

Then he spoke in a breathy whisper: "You just have one guess left, Martha."

The warning sounded vaguely sinister.

The pit of Martha's stomach turned cold.

"It's a foolish game. I don't want to play anymore. Run along outside."

Instead of the protest Martha had expected, the little boy remained silent. He pulled a drying towel from the rack near the stove, and shifting his box under his arm, began drying the silverware.

Finally Martha couldn't stand the quiet any longer.

"Have I ever seen one?" Martha asked.

Without looking at her, his eyes riveted on the knife he held, Jeffrey commented, "That's your last question."

Martha had the sensation of seeing the final lifeboat lowered while she stood on a sinking ship.

"You've seen one," he said. "In fact, you have some. In fact, it's what I want from you, if I win."

"But you said it's *not* a toy!" Martha exclaimed.

"It isn't," the little boy said, still twisting and turning the knife in his hand. He had abandoned all pretense of drying it. The sunlight glinted on it, and Martha stood, mesmerized, staring at it as it glistened and grew dark, then gleamed again.

The little boy started talking in a low monotone: "It's got a nail, the thing that I have in the box, but the nail's not to keep it together. And it used to be pink, but now it's all gray and purplish. I got it from Lilian. She worked here before you."

Martha swallowed. "What is it?"

"You have to guess."

"I can't. I don't know."

"Don't you really know?" He looked directly at her. "Martha, you have such nice hands. You shouldn't get them all red with dishwashing. You ought to wear gloves."

The little boy moved as if to touch her hand, and Martha stepped away from him, hiding her wet hands in her apron.

"What's in the box?" she asked.

Jeffrey's gaze traveled to her hidden hands. "You know," he said.

"I don't believe you," Martha managed at last.

"Lilian didn't either. And she said I'd never do it. She said I couldn't. But one day, when she was asleep in her room, and Grandmother was away—"

"What do you have in that box?" Martha demanded.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," the little boy teased softly.

Martha lunged at the box. The knife in Jeffrey's hand slipped. There was blood on Martha's hand, and she screamed at the sight. Grasping the boy's shoulders, she said, "What's in there? What do you have in there?"

The knife clattered to the floor, and the box crumpled beneath the weight of the boy's arm as he clamped it tightly to his side.

"Show me what you have in there. Open that box. Open it!"

"Martha!"

Mrs. Belton stood in the doorway. She looked trim and smart in her tailored suit. Her silver hair was newly washed and set. She carried two small parcels. Her expression was changing from puzzlement to anger when Martha looked up at her.

"What *are* you doing, Martha?" Mrs. Belton asked.

Martha sat back on her heels and looked dazedly around. She found she was kneeling in front of the

little boy, clutching his shoulders and peering into his face like a crazy woman.

As if on cue, the little boy began to cry. Two huge tears crawled down his cheeks, and he shook free of Martha. Running to his grandmother, he wailed, "Oh, *Maman,* she's so mean. So scary. So mean."

Mrs. Belton stooped to the child who grabbed her skirt and whimpered pitifully.

"What is this all about, Martha?" Mrs. Belton asked in the tone of someone trying hard to be reasonable and fair-minded.

"I—he—oh, Mrs. Belton," Martha gasped.

"I come home and find you mistreating Jeffrey. Have you a reason? Was he naughty?"

"I wasn't naughty. I didn't do anything to her," the little boy protested, snuggling his nose close to his grandmother's thigh.

Mrs. Belton stroked his hair.

"Well, Martha?" she questioned with a lift of her arched eyebrows.

"Ask him what he has in that box," Martha said. "Make him show you."

"What earthly difference can it make—"

"Just make him show you, that's all," Martha said, rising laboriously. "Make him open it up."

Holding her grandson away from her slightly, Mrs. Belton asked, "Jeffrey?"

The little boy looked up innocently at his grandmother. "Yes, *Maman?"* he said.

"What have you in there?"

"Nothing, *Maman."*

"He's not telling the truth," Martha said. "Make him open it."

Her frown deepening, Mrs. Belton looked first at the child and then at Martha. She put out her hand, and Jeffrey slowly, oh, so very slowly, gave her his box.

As the older woman removed the crushed lid, Martha held her breath. She waited for the exclamation of disgust and horror. It didn't come. Surprised, Martha

looked at Mrs. Belton, whose eyes rose to meet her own.

"The box is empty," Mrs. Belton said.

"It can't be!" Martha rushed across the room and took the box into her own hands. A cardboard box. Empty. "But it rattled," she said. "It rattled."

She looked up to see Mrs. Belton regarding her strangely.

"I'm afraid I'll have to let you go, Martha."

Martha drew in her breath sharply at the injustice. "But I'm not to blame," she protested. "The box—"

"You can see for yourself, there is nothing in it."

"Then he—he emptied it while we weren't watching him. Look in his pockets," Martha said.

The little boy moved back involuntarily, and Martha saw the movement.

"Search him!" she demanded loudly. "Search him!"

Mrs. Belton stiffened. She placed herself between Martha and the little boy.

"Control yourself," she told Martha. "I must ask that you leave at once."

"I—"

"That's enough," Mrs. Belton said. Her voice was gentle but firm.

An hour later, Martha's bags were packed, and she was standing beside Mrs. Belton's desk receiving her final check.

"I'm sorry about this," Mrs. Belton said.

"So am I."

"I can't understand what could have possessed you. It's not as if Jeffrey's a worrisome boy. He's a model. Never gives me a moment's trouble."

"No, ma'am," Martha said. She had made up her mind to say no more about the matter. What was the use? Besides, there was the possibility that she had been wrong. Perhaps she was getting old and fanciful. Perhaps children did make her nervous.

"Such a dear, sweet boy," Mrs. Belton was saying.

"He's given me all the love he had for both his parents before they died in that terrible auto accident. Sometimes I'm afraid he loves me too much. He just wants to be alone with me all the time. He said to me only last night, '*Maman*,' he said, 'I wish I could be with you alone forever and ever. You're the only one in the whole world who loves me.' Does that sound like a bad boy?"

"I guess he's going to get his wish," Martha said, ignoring the question. She folded the check and put it into her purse.

Mrs. Belton's jaw tightened at the obvious rebuff. She had wanted Martha to admit her error. A vague uneasiness flickered in her eyes. She glanced out the window at her grandson as he swung back and forth in the garden swing. The sun shining on his yellow hair reassured her.

At the door, Martha paused. "Why did the woman before me leave?" she asked on impulse.

"Lilian?" Mrs. Belton mused. "She had an accident."

"What kind of accident?" Martha asked, knowing what the answer would be.

"The hara-kiri sword Mr. Belton brought home from Japan fell off the wall in her room and cut her finger. Severed it completely, in fact. It was a very regrettable accident. I was so sorry to lose her."

"Yes," Martha said and stepped out into the sunlight.

The little boy glided to and fro in the garden swing. To and fro.

THE $2,000,000 DEFENSE

Harold Q. Masur

The trial had gone well for the prosecution. Strand by strand, a web of guilt had been woven around the defendant, Lloyd Ashley. Now, late in the afternoon of the fifth day, District Attorney Herrick was tying up the last loose ends with his final witness.

Understandably, the case had made headlines. An avid public kept clamoring for more and more details, and the newspapers obligingly supplied whatever revelations they could find. For all the elements of a *cause célèbre* were present—a beautiful wife, allegedly unfaithful; a dashing Casanova, now dead; and a millionaire husband, charged with murder.

Beside Ashley at the counsel table sat his lawyer, Mark Robison, seemingly unconcerned by the drama unfolding before him. His lean face was relaxed, chin resting on the palm of his hand. To a casual observer he seemed preoccupied, almost uninterested; yet nothing would be further from the truth. Robison's mind was keenly attuned, ready to pounce on any error the district attorney might commit.

Defense counsel was a formidable opponent, as the district attorney well knew—they had both trained in the same school, Robison having served as an assistant prosecutor through two administrations. In this capacity he had been tough and relentless, doing more than his share to keep the state prison at Ossining well populated.

As a muskrat takes to water, so Robison found his

natural habitat in the courtroom. He had a commanding presence, the ego and voice of a born actor, and the quick, searching brain so essential to a skilled cross-examiner. He had, too, an instinct with jurors. Unerringly he would spot the most impressionable members of a panel, playing on their emotions and prejudices. And so, where his defenses were inadequate, he would often wind up with a hung jury.

But the Ashley case was more serious. Robison's defense was more than inadequate, it was virtually nonexistent.

Robison sat motionless, studying the prosecution's final witness. James Keller, police-department specialist in ballistics, was a pale, heavy-set man, stolid and slow-spoken. District Attorney Herrick had taken him through the preliminaries, qualifying him as an expert, and was now extracting the final bit of testimony that should send Lloyd Ashley to eternity, the whine of a high-voltage electric current pounding in his ears.

The district attorney picked up a squat black pistol whose ownership by the accused had already been established. "And now, Mr. Keller," Herrick said, "I show you State's Exhibit B. Can you tell us what kind of gun this is?"

"Yes, sir. That is a .32 caliber Colt automatic, commonly known as a pocket model."

"Have you ever seen this gun before?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Under what circumstances?"

"It was handed to me in the performance of my duties as a ballistics expert to determine whether or not it had fired the fatal bullet."

"And did you make the tests?"

"I did."

"Will you tell the jury what you found."

Keller faced the twelve talesmen, who were now leaning forward in their chairs. There were no women in the jury box—Robison had used every available

challenge to keep them from being empaneled. It was his theory that men would be more sympathetic to acts of violence by a betrayed husband.

Keller spoke in a dry, somewhat pedantic voice. "I fired a test bullet to compare with the one recovered from the deceased. Both bullets had overall dimensions of three-tenths of an inch and a weight of seventy-four grams, placing them in a .32 caliber class. They both bore the imprint of six spiral grooves with a leftward twist which is characteristic of Colt firearms. In addition, every gun develops with usage certain personality traits of its own, and all these are impressed on the shell casing as it passes through the barrel. By checking the two bullets with a comparison microscope—"

Robison broke into Keller's monologue with a casual gesture.

"Your Honor, I think we can dispense with a long technical dissertation on the subject of ballistics. The defense concedes that Mr. Ashley's gun fired the fatal bullet."

The judge glanced at Herrick. "Is the prosecution agreeable?"

Grudgingly, Herrick said, "The state has no desire to protract this trial longer than necessary."

Secretly, however, he was not pleased. Herrick preferred to build his case carefully and methodically, laying first the foundation, then each plank in turn, until the lid was finally clamped down, with no loophole for escape and no error that could be reversed on appeal. There were times, of course, when he might welcome a concession by the defense, but with Robison—well, you never knew; the man had to be watched.

When Robison resumed his seat, Lloyd Ashley turned to him, his eyes troubled. "Was that wise, Mark?" With his life at stake, Ashley felt that every point should be hotly contested.

"It was never in dispute," Robison said, managing a smile of assurance.

But the smile had no effect, and seeing Ashley's face now, Robison felt a twist of compassion. How radically changed the man was! Ashley's usual arrogance had crumbled, his sarcastic tongue was now humble and beseeching. Not even his money, those vast sums solidly invested, could give him any sense of security.

Robison could not deny a certain feeling of responsibility for Ashley's plight. He had known Ashley for years, in a business way and socially. He could recall that day only two months ago when Ashley had come to him for advice, grim with repressed anger, suspecting his wife of infidelity.

"Have you any proof?" Robison had asked.

"I don't need any proof. This is something a man knows. She's been cold and untouchable."

"Do you want a divorce?"

"Never." The word had been charged with feeling. "I love Eve."

"Just what do you want me to do, Lloyd?"

"I want you to give me the name of a private detective. I'm sure you know someone I can trust. I'd like him to follow Eve, keep track of her movements. If he can identify the man for me, I'll know what to do."

Yes, Robison knew a reliable private detective—a lawyer sometimes needs the services of a trained investigator, to check the background of hostile witnesses whose testimony he might later want to impeach.

So Ashley retained the man and within a week had his report. The detective had trailed Eve Ashley to a rendezvous with Tom Ward, an investment counselor in charge of Ashley's securities. He had watched them in obviously intimate conversations in an obscure cocktail lounge in the Village.

The one thing he had never anticipated, Robison told himself, was violence. Not that Ashley was a coward. But Ashley's principal weapon in the past had been words—sharp, barbed, insulting. When the call came through from Police Headquarters that Ashley

was being held for murder, Robison had been genuinely shocked, and he had felt a momentary pang of guilt. But Robison was not the kind of man who would long condemn himself for lack of omniscience. And Ashley, allowed one telephone call, demanded that Robison appear for him.

At the preliminary hearing in Felony Court, Robison had made a quick stab at getting the charge dismissed, presenting Ashley's version with shrewdness and skill. The whole affair had been an accident, Robison had maintained. No premeditation, no malice, no intent to kill. Ashley had gone to Ward's office and drawn his gun, brandishing it, trying to frighten the man, to extract a promise that Ward would stay away from Ashley's wife. He had been especially careful to check the safety catch, not to release it before entering Ward's office.

But instead of suffering paralysis or pleading for mercy, Ward had panicked, thrown himself at Ashley, and grappled for the gun. It had fallen to the desk, Ashley swore, and been accidentally discharged. He had been standing over the body when Ward's secretary found them.

Hearing this version, the district attorney had scoffed, promptly labeling it a bald fiction. The state, Herrick contended, could prove motive, means, and opportunity. So the magistrate had no choice. Lloyd Ashley was bound over for action by the grand jury which quickly returned an indictment for murder in the first degree.

And now, in General Sessions, Judge Felix Cobb presiding, on the fifth day of testimony, Herrick was engaged in destroying Ashley's last hope. He held up the gun so that Keller and the jury could see it—a small weapon which had erased a man's life in the twinkling of an eye.

He said, "You are acquainted with the operation of this gun, Mr. Keller, are you not?"

"I am."

"In your opinion as a ballistics expert, could a gun of this type be accidentally discharged—with the safety catch on?"

"No, sir."

"You're certain of that?"

"Absolutely."

"Could it be discharged—with the safety on—if it were dropped from a height of several feet?"

"It could not."

"If it were slammed down on a hard surface?"

"No, sir."

"In all your experience—twenty years of testing and handling firearms—have you ever heard of any such incident?"

"Not one, sir."

Herrick headed back to the prosecution table. "The defense may cross-examine."

"It is now five minutes to four," the judge said. "I think we can recess at this point." He turned to the jury. "You will remember my instructions, gentlemen. You are admonished not to discuss this case among yourselves, and not to permit anyone to discuss it in your presence. Do not form or express any opinions until all the evidence is before you. Court stands adjourned until ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

He straightened his black robes and strode off. Everyone else remained seated until a tipstaff had led the jurors through a side door. A court officer moved up and touched Ashley's shoulder.

Ashley turned to Robison, his face drawn and tired. He had lost considerable weight during these last few weeks and the flaccid skin hung loose under his chin. His sunken eyes were veined and red, and a vagrant muscle kept twitching at the corner of his right temple.

"Tomorrow's the last day, isn't it, Mark?"

"Almost." Robison doubted if the whole defense would require more than a single session. "Except for the summation and the judge's charge."

The guard said, "Let's go, Mr. Ashley."

"Listen, Mark." There was sudden intensity in Ashley's voice. "I've got to talk to you. It—it's absolutely vital."

Robison studied his client. "All right, Lloyd. I'll be up in about fifteen minutes."

Ashley left with the guard and disappeared through a door behind the judge's bench. A few spectators still lingered in the courtroom. Robison gathered his papers and notes, slid them into his brief case. He sat back, fingertips stroking his closed eyelids, still seeing Ashley's face. The man was terrified, and with considerable justification, Robison thought. Despite the judge's admonition to the jurors, advising them not to reach any decision, Robison's experience told him they had done just that.

He could read the signs. He could tell from the way they filed out, the way they averted their eyes, not looking at the defendant. Nobody really enjoys sending another human being to the electric chair. Ashley must have felt it too, this sense of doom.

When Robison reached the corridor, he saw Eve Ashley waiting at the south bank of elevators. She seemed small and lost, the very bones of her body cringing against themselves. Robison started forward, but she was swallowed up in the descending throng before he could reach her.

Eve's reaction had surprised him. She was taking it hard, ill with self-condemnation and remorse. He remembered her visit to his office directly after the murder. "I knew he was jealous," she said, her eyes full of pain, "but I never expected anything like this. Never." She kept clasping and unclasping her hands. "Oh, Mark, they'll send him to the chair! I know they will and it's all my fault."

He had spoken to her sharply. "Listen to me. You had no way of knowing. I want you to get hold of yourself. If you go to pieces, you won't be any good to yourself—or to Lloyd. It's not your fault."

"It *is* my fault." Her lips were trembling. "I should have known. Just look what I've done. Two men. Tom is already dead, and Lloyd soon will—"

"Now stop that!" He had gripped her shoulders.

"You must get him off," she cried fiercely. "Please, Mark. If you don't I'll never forgive myself."

"I'll do my best."

But he knew the odds. The state had a solid case. Motive, means, and opportunity . . .

The elevator took him down and he went around to the detention cells at the White Street entrance. After the usual routine he gained admittance to the counsel room, and a moment later Lloyd Ashley was brought in. They sat on opposite sides of the table, the board between them.

"All right, Mark." Ashley's clenched hands rested on the table. "I want the truth. How does it look?"

Robison shrugged. "The case isn't over. Nobody can tell what a jury will do."

"Stop kidding, Mark. I saw those men—I saw their faces."

Robison shrugged again.

"Look, Mark, you've been my lawyer for a long time. We've been through a lot of deals together. I've seen you operate. I know how your mind works. You're smart. You're resourceful. I have the utmost respect for your ability, but I—well, I . . ." He groped for words.

"Aren't you satisfied with the way I'm handling your defense?"

"I didn't say that, Mark."

"Don't you think I'm exploiting every possible angle?"

"Within legal limitations, yes. But I've seen you try cases before. I've watched you handle juries. And I've seen you pull some rabbits out of a hat. Now, all of a sudden, you're so damn scrupulous I hardly recognize the same man. Why, Mark? What's happened?"

"I can't find a single loophole, Lloyd, that's why. Not one crack in the state's case. My hands are tied."

"Untie them."

"How?" Robison asked quietly.

"Listen, Mark"—Ashley's fingers were gripping the edge of the table—"you know almost as much about my financial affairs as I do. You know how much money I inherited, how much I've made. As of now, I'm worth about four million dollars." He compressed his lips. "Maybe that's why Eve married me; I don't know. Anyway, it's a lot of loot and I'd like a chance to spend some of it. But I won't have that chance, not if they convict me."

Ashley moistened his lips, then went on: "Dead, the money will do me no good. Alive, I can do all I want to do on a lot less. If anybody can get me off the hook, even at this stage of the game, it's you. I don't know how, but I have a feeling—hunch, intuition, call it what you will. You can think of *something*. You've got the imagination. I know you can pull it off."

Robison felt a stir of excitement.

Ashley leaned forward. "Down the middle," he said, his voice hoarse. "An even split, Mark, of everything I own. Half for you, half for me. A two-million-dollar fee, Mark. You'll be financially independent for life. Just figure out an angle! I want an acquittal."

Robison said promptly, "Will you put that in writing, Lloyd?"

"Of course!"

Robison took a blank sheet of paper from his brief case. He wrote swiftly, in clear unmistakable language. He passed the paper to Ashley, who scanned it briefly, reached for the pen, and scratched his signature. Robison, his fingers a trifle unsteady, folded the document and put it away.

"Have you any ideas, Mark?"

The lawyer sat motionless, his flat-cheeked face devoid of expression. He did have an idea, one that was

not entirely new to him. He remembered, three nights ago, sitting bolt upright in bed when the brainstorm suddenly struck him. He had considered the idea for a moment, weighed its possibilities, then putting his head back he had laughed aloud in the darkness.

It was ingenious, even amusing in a macabre way, but nothing he would actually use. Now, abruptly, his thinking had changed, all scruples gone. There was considerable persuasive power in a fee of two million dollars. Men had committed serious crimes—including murder—for much less.

Now the possibilities of his idea stood out, sharp and clear and daring. There was no guarantee of success. He would have to cope with certain imponderables—most of them in the minds of twelve men, the twelve men in the jury box.

"Leave it to me," Robison said, standing abruptly. "Relax, Lloyd. Try to get some sleep tonight." He swung toward the door with a peremptory wave at the guard.

The declining sun had cooled the air, and Robison walked briskly, details of the plan churning in his mind. Ethical? He would hardly call it that. But then Robison was not often troubled by delicate moral considerations. As a trial lawyer he'd been consistently successful. His voice was a great asset: it could be gentle and sympathetic or blistering and contemptuous. Neophytes around the Criminal Courts Building still talked about Robison's last case as an assistant district attorney, remembering his savage cross-examination of the defendant, a man accused of armed robbery. He had won a conviction, and upon pronouncement of a maximum sentence, the enraged defendant had turned on him, swearing revenge. Later he had received venomous, threatening letters from the man's relatives.

So Mark Robison had acquired a pistol permit. And each year he had had it renewed. He always carried the permit in his wallet.

His first stop was on Centre Street, not far from Po-

lice Headquarters—at a small shop that specialized in firearms. He examined the stock, carefully selected a Colt automatic, pocket model, caliber .32, and a box of shells. The proprietor checked his permit and wrapped the package.

Robison then took a cab to his office. His secretary, Miss Graham, paused in her typing to hand him a list of calls. Seeing the abstracted look on his face, she did not bother to ask him about the trial. He went on through to the inner room.

It had recently been refurnished and Robison was pleased with the effect. Hanging on the far wall, facing the desk, was a picture of the nine Justices of the United States Supreme Court. The extraordinary occurrence that now took place before these venerable gentlemen was probably unparalleled in all their collective histories.

Mark Robison unwrapped his package and balanced the gun for a moment in his hand. Then, without further hesitation, he inserted three bullets into the clip and rammed the clip into the butt. His jaw was set as he lifted the gun, aimed it at his left arm, slightly above the elbow, and pulled the trigger.

The echoing explosion left his ears ringing. Robison was no stoic. He felt the stab of pain, like a branding iron, and cried out. The next instant he gritted his teeth while his thumb reached for the safety catch and locked it into position.

A moment later the door burst open and Miss Graham's apprehensive face poked through. With sudden dismay she saw Robison's pallor and the widening stain on his sleeve. She stifled a scream.

"All right," Robison told her harshly. "It was an accident. Don't stand there gaping. Call a doctor. There's one down the hall."

Miss Graham fled. Her urgent story stopped whatever the doctor was doing and brought him on the double with his rumpled black bag.

"Well," he said, sparing the gun a brief look of dis-

taste, "what have we here, another one of those didn't-know-it-was-loaded accidents?"

"Not quite," Robison said dryly.

"Here, let's get the coat off." The doctor helped him, then ripped the lawyer's shirt sleeve from cuff to shoulder, exposing the wound, and probed the inflamed area. The bullet had scooped out a shallow trench of flesh.

"Hmm," said the doctor. "Looks worse than it is. You're a lucky man, counselor. No muscles or arteries severed. Loss of tissue, yes, and some impairment of articulation—"

He reached into his bag and brought out some antiseptic. It burned Robison's arm like a flame. Then having dressed and bandaged the wound, the doctor stepped back to appraise his handiwork.

He looked faintly apologetic. "You know the law, counselor. Whenever a doctor is called in for the treatment of a gunshot wound, he is required to notify the police. I really have no choice."

Robison repressed a smile. Had the doctor been ignorant of the law, Robison would have immediately enlightened him. Most assuredly he *wanted* the police here. They were an essential part of his plan.

He could already picture the headlines: *Robison Accidentally Wounded. Defense Counsel Shot Making Test*—and the stories telling how he had tried to simulate the conditions that had existed in Tom Ward's office—by deliberately dropping a gun on his desk . . .

Promptly at ten o'clock the following morning a court officer arose in Part III and intoned the ritual. "All rise, the Honorable Judge of the Court of General Sessions in and for the County of New York."

A door behind the bench opened and Justice Cobb emerged briskly, his black robe billowing behind him.

"Be seated, please," the attendant said, tapping his gavel. "This court is now in session."

The judge looked curiously at Robison, eyeing the

wounded arm supported by a black-silk sling knotted around the lawyer's neck. "Call the witness," he said. James Keller was duly sworn and resumed his seat on the stand.

The twelve jurors bent forward, stirred by excitement and anticipation. District Attorney Herrick sat at the prosecution table, vigilant, wary. Robison smiled to himself, remembering the district attorney's tight-lipped greeting. Did Herrick suspect? Possibly.

"The defense may cross-examine," Judge Cobb said.

There was a murmur from the spectators as Robison pushed erect. He half turned, letting everyone have a look at his wounded arm in its silken cradle. He saw Eve Ashley in the first row, her eyes eloquent with appeal.

Robison walked to the clerk's table and picked up Ashley's gun. Holding it, he advanced toward Keller and addressed the witness. "Now, Mr. Keller, if I remember correctly, you testified yesterday that you fired a test bullet from this gun, did you not?"

"Yes, sir, I did." Keller's tone was guarded.

"You wanted to prove that this gun and no other fired the fatal bullet."

"That is correct."

"I assume that you released the safety catch before making the test?"

"Naturally. Otherwise I would still be standing there in my laboratory pulling the trigger."

Someone in the courtroom tittered, and one of Herrick's assistants grinned. Keller's self-confidence mounted visibly.

Robison regarded him sternly. "This is hardly a moment for humor, Mr. Keller. You realize that your testimony may send an innocent man to the chair?"

Herrick's hand shot up. "I move that last remark be stricken."

"Yes," said the judge. "It will be stricken and the jury will disregard it."

"Then you're absolutely sure," Robison said, "that

the safety catch must be released before the gun can be fired?"

"Positive."

"Are you equally positive that the safety catch on a gun of this type cannot be joggled loose under certain circumstances?"

Keller hesitated. "Well, yes, to the best of my knowledge."

"Have you ever made any such test?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you ever load this gun—State's Exhibit B—and try dropping it on a hard surface?"

"I—I'm afraid not, sir."

"Even though you knew what the basis of our defense would be?"

Keller shifted uncomfortably and glanced at Herrick, but he found no help in the district attorney's expressionless face.

"Please answer the question." Robison's voice was no longer friendly.

"No, sir. I did not."

"Why, Mr. Keller? Why didn't you make such a test? Wouldn't it seem the obvious thing to do? Were you afraid it might confirm the defendant's story?"

"No, sir, not at all."

"Then why?"

Keller said lamely, "It just never occurred to me."

"It never occurred to you. I see. A man is accused of first-degree murder; he is being tried for his life, facing the electric chair, and it never occurred to you to make that one simple test to find out if he might be telling the truth."

A flush rose from Keller's neck up to his cheeks. He sat silent, squirming in the witness chair.

"Let the record note that the witness did not answer," Robison said. "Now, sir, you testified yesterday that a gun of this type could never be discharged by dropping it on a hard surface, did you not?"

"With the safety catch on."

"Of course."

"I—yes, I believe I did."

"There is no doubt in your mind?"

Keller swallowed uncomfortably, glancing at Robison's arm. "Well . . . no."

"Let us see." Robison transferred the gun to his left hand, jutting out of the sling, its fingers slightly swollen. His right hand produced a .32 caliber shell from the pocket of his coat. His movements were awkward as he loaded the gun and jacked a shell into firing position. He stepped closer to the witness and started to offer the gun with his left hand, but he stopped short with a sudden grimace of pain. The expression was telling and dramatic. Then ruefully he shifted the gun to his right hand and extended it to the witness.

In distinct, deliberate tones he said, "Now, Mr. Keller, will you please look at the safety device on State's Exhibit B and tell us if it is in the proper position to prevent firing?"

"It is."

"Then will you kindly rise, sir? I would like you to prove to his Honor, and to these twelve jurors, and to the spectators in this courtroom, that the gun in question *cannot possibly be discharged by dropping it on the judge's dais.* Just lift it, if you please, or slap it down."

A murmur rustled through the courtroom as Herrick landed on both feet in front of the bench. The muscles around his jaw were contracted with anger. "I object, your Honor. This is highly irregular, a cheap grandstand play, inherently dangerous to every—" He caught himself, swallowing the rest of his sentence. His own words, uttered impulsively, had implied a possibility, however remote, that the gun might go off.

In contrast, Robison sounded calm and reasonable. "If it please the court, this witness made a statement under oath as a qualified expert. I am merely asking

him to prove his own expert statement."

Judge Cobb spoke without pleasure. "Objection overruled."

"Go ahead, if you please, Mr. Keller," Robison said. "Demonstrate to the court and to the jury that State's Exhibit B could not *possibly* have been fired in the manner claimed by the defendant."

A hush fell over the courtroom as Keller rose. He lifted the gun slowly, and held it suspended over the bench, his face a mixture of anxiety and misgiving.

Robison held his breath as Keller's arm twitched. The judge, trying to look inconspicuous, started to slide down his chair, as if to minimize himself as a target.

"We're waiting," Robison said softly, clearly.

Beads of moisture formed along Keller's temples. Had he flexed his muscles? Had he lifted the gun a little higher? No one in the courtroom could be sure.

"Please proceed, Mr. Keller," Robison said, sharply now. "The court hasn't got all day."

Their eyes met and locked. Deliberately Robison rearranged his sling. Keller took a long breath, then without warning he dropped back into his seat. The gun hung loose between his knees.

A sigh of relief swelled in the courtroom.

The verdict, everyone conceded, was a foregone conclusion. Robison's closing speech was a model of forensic law, and the judge, charging the jury to be satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt, left them little choice. They were out for less than an hour before returning a verdict of Not Guilty.

Lloyd Ashley showed no jubilation—the strain had left him on the edge of nervous exhaustion. Robison touched his shoulder.

"All right, Lloyd. It's over. You're free now. Let's go back to my office. I believe we have some business to transact."

Ashley roused himself. "Yes, of course," he said with a stiff smile.

They got through the crowd, and hailed a cab. The closing speeches and the judge's charge had taken all afternoon, so it was growing dark when they reached Robison's office. He ushered the way into his private room and snapped on the light.

By way of celebration the lawyer produced a bottle and poured two drinks. Both men emptied their glasses in single gulps. Robison passed the humidor and snapped a lighter for his client. Ashley settled back, inhaling the rich smoke of a long, thin cigar.

"Well, Mark," he said, "I knew you could do it. You performed your share of the bargain. I suppose now you'd like me to fulfill mine."

Robison made a deprecating gesture.

"Have you a blank check?"

There was a pad of blank checks somewhere in the outer office, Robison knew. He kept it handy for clients who needed legal representation but who came to him with insufficient funds. He went out to the reception room, rummaged through a storage cabinet, and finally located the pad.

Lloyd Ashley had shifted chairs and was now seated behind Robison's desk. He accepted the blank check and Robison's pen. Without flicking an eyelash, he wrote out a check for two million dollars.

"I said fifty-fifty, Mark. There may even be more coming to you. We'll know after my accountant goes over the books."

Robison held the check, his eyes transfixed by the string of figures. There was a faint throbbing in his wounded arm, but he didn't mind. Ashley's voice came back to him, sounding soft and strange.

"Oh, yes, Mark, there's more coming to you. Perhaps I can arrange to let you have it now."

Robison looked up and saw the .32 caliber automatic in Ashley's hand, his thumb on the safety catch.

"I found this in your desk," Ashley said. "It must be

the gun you used last night. Ironic, isn't it, Mark? You now have the one thing that means more to you than anything else in this world—money—and you'll never be able to spend a penny of it."

Robison did not like the look in Ashley's eyes. "What are you talking about?"

"Remember that private detective you recommended? Funny thing, after that trouble with Ward I never had a chance to take him off the case. So he kept watching Eve all the time I was in jail. As a matter of fact, he brought me a report only two days ago. I don't suppose I have to tell you about it—who she's been seeing, who the other man really is."

Robison had gone white.

The gun in Ashley's hand was very steady. "You know, Mark, I feel you're almost as responsible for Ward's death as I am. After all, who persuaded Eve to use him as a decoy, so that you and she could be safe? It must have been you. Eve never had that much imagination."

Perspiration now bathed Robison's face and his voice went down to a whisper. "Wait, Lloyd, listen to me—"

"No, I'd rather not. You're too good at winning people over. I saw a demonstration of your powers in court today, remember? I've been planning on this for two days. Finding your gun merely accelerated the timetable. There's a kind of justice in this, I think. You forced me into killing the wrong man. Now I see no reason why I shouldn't kill the right one."

Of the two shots that rang out, Mark Robison heard only the first.

THE MAN IN THE WELL

Berkely Mather

There were six of them in the waiting room when Sefton arrived, so he ran a cursory eye over them and went out again and hung about in the doorway of a haberdasher on the other side of the Strand.

He had not been frightened by what he saw, but let there be a dignity about all things—even applying for a job. There were two young men in duffel coats, one of them with a beard, a hard-bitten elderly character who might have been an ex-bosun from the Irrawaddy Flotilla, two one-time sahibs who looked absurdly alike in their yellowing bloodlessness and a woman who looked as if she had just crossed the Gobi on a camel. If this was the short list he was willing to bet on his chances.

He had lit his sixth cigarette by the time the last of them emerged, so he nipped it economically and crossed through the midmorning traffic and went up the narrow stairs again. A clerk took his name in and after a brief wait led him through to an inner office. A lanky, elderly man rose from behind a littered desk and held out his hand.

"Mr. Sefton?" he inquired. "Sorry if I've kept you waiting. Please sit down. You must excuse this mess—my agent has lent me his office for these interviews."

Sefton bowed, sat, balanced his hat on his knees and waited. The other man gazed at a spot on the wall over Sefton's head, screwed up his eyes and pursed his lips.

As phony as the papers say he is, Sefton thought, and added savagely, Silly old goat.

Minutes ticked by, traffic rumbled outside and from nearby Charing Cross an engine whistled shrilly. At last the old man broke the silence.

"There have been many other applicants, Mr. Sefton," he said softly.

"Which you short-listed down to seven—none of whom so far have suited," Sefton answered. "I hope I will. I am very keen on joining you."

The other looked slightly nettled.

"May I ask where you gathered that information?"

"Counted heads in the waiting room when I arrived and then timed their exits from across the street. None of them stayed long." His grin robbed the statement of offense. "I think I'm your man, Professor Neave."

"That remains to be seen," Neave answered stiffly. He shuffled through a file of letters in front of him and selected one that Sefton recognized as his own. "Would you care to elaborate on this a little?"

"Sure," answered Sefton promptly. "Eight years as assistant engineer with the Sontal Gem Mining Corporation in Mogok, Upper Burma. I speak good Burmese and can get along in most of the dialects—Shan, Chin and Karen. I know the country well and was an M.T. officer in the Royal Indian Army Service Corps during the war. I get along with people, can take and carry out orders"—he paused very slightly—"and I can keep my mouth shut."

"Why did you leave the Sontal Corporation, Mr. Sefton?" the professor asked.

"For the same reason as the rest of the staff," Sefton told him. "The Japs were ten miles up the track and traveling fast. We sent the married men and their families to Rangoon before the railroad from Mandalay was cut off, and we ourselves set fire to the whole shebang and got out in the last vehicle to leave. We only got to Yeu—that's just north of Bhame—when our petrol gave out. We walked the rest of the way to the Chindwin, right through the dry belt. I say 'we'—but

only I made it. Dysentery, malaria and starvation did for the rest. It was a bad year and the monsoon was late."

"How long did the journey take you?"

"Just over three months. Our speed was that of the sickest man."

"And then?"

Sefton shrugged. "Nothing much more to it. I crossed into Assam by the Tiddim Track and fell in with our forces in Imphal. I was a long time in the hospital and then I joined up. I fought my war with the Fourteenth Army and finished as a major."

"What have you been doing since?"

"I put my gratuity and savings into a small engineering shop in Lancashire in the first place—and lost the lot. Since then I've had a variety of jobs in my own line of country—deep drilling in Brazil, and I've been up the Gulf with an oil concern among other things—"

"Are you married?"

"No—and I haven't a soul in the world dependent upon me."

"What remuneration would you expect?"

"I don't want anything—except to go with you."

The professor brightened visibly for a moment and then covered up. "I don't understand, Mr. Sefton," he said.

Sefton leaned forward.

"I told you I'd had a series of jobs, Professor," he said earnestly. "All of them have been reasonably well paid and I left each one of them of my own accord—often in the face of strong persuasion to stay on. Restlessness—inability to find a niche in this postwar world—call it what you like, but I know I'll never be able to settle down until I get it out of my system."

"Get what out of your system?"

Sefton paused and gazed out of the window for a full minute before answering. "It's hard to say," he said at length. "Put it this way. I was a reasonably settled

young man with a career ahead of me with Sontal. The war finished all that. The corporation never started up again. I had seen my friends die on that trek and I'd been unable to help them. I'm not neurotic, but—but—" he spread his hands. "Oh, hell, I don't know—I've just got a yen to go out there again, to see the places we walked through—to feel the sun beating down on me and to get the stink of the jungle back into my nostrils. I want to face up to something I've been running away from all these years and to realize how little it all means in retrospect." He stopped suddenly. He had rehearsed this speech carefully but now he wondered if he had not overdramatized it. *Hell, that wouldn't have deceived a kid,* he thought ruefully, and added aloud, "This must all sound very silly, Professor."

But the professor smiled sympathetically, "Not at all. I think I understand. I was part of a lost generation myself in 1918. All right, Mr. Sefton—you've been very frank with me. Let me tell you something about myself and *my* reason for going out there." He pushed a box of cigarettes across the table and Sefton, noting the virgin ash tray, realized that he was the first who had been thus favored and felt his confidence rise accordingly. "I take it that you know a little about me—my one-man expeditions—my modest reputation as an author and popular lecturer—?"

Sefton looked suitably shocked. "Who doesn't, Professor?"

"None of the previous applicants, apparently," answered the professor with more than a touch of sourness. "One young man had heard, without particular interest, a fifteen-minute talk of mine on television. The woman confused me with Professor Lever, the ornithologist, while most of the others were far more interested in what I could pay them than in the journey and its objects. Still, be that as it may—I want a man who knows Upper Burma, who is prepared to rough it, who

can drive one jeep and maintain two and who, in short, is prepared to accompany me on a trip over the old Burma Road from Calcutta to as far as we can get toward the China border. A man who can relieve me of the chores of the trip while I collect material and take pictures for my next lecture tour, but who at the same time can be rather more—er—intellectually congenial than the average paid employee." He rose and held out his hand. "I think you might well be that man, Mr. Sefton."

In Sefton's heart was a paean of joy and relief.

He halted the jeep at the top of the last rise before Kohima. Down the winding road that led back toward Manipur he could see the second jeep snaking round the hairpin bends that multiplied the crow-flight distance tenfold. The road had all but gone back to the jungle since he had last seen it in the closing days of the war. Then it had been a tarmac miracle of engineering that had carried four lines of heavy military traffic round the clock. The teak-built culverts and Irish bridges had now for the most part rotted through, and Sefton, breaking trail, had had to stop many times since they had crossed the Brahmaputra at Gauhati to allow the professor to catch up.

He lit a cigarette and tried for the fiftieth time to fight down the feverish impatience that bedeviled him. Left to himself he could have pressed on through to the dry belt in a week, but with this old fool's insistence on stopping to take photographs, plus his maddening refusal to travel in the heat of the afternoon, it looked as if the time might well be quadrupled. And now it seemed more than probable that they would be held up in Imphal. The Indian government was engaged in sporadic jungle fighting with the Naga tribes who, promised their autonomy when the British left, were demanding it in terms that bordered on small-scale warfare. Politics! Politics had stopped his getting into Upper Burma

twice before. What the hell had it to do with him? All he wanted was a couple of hours in a pagoda near Yeu . . .

The professor had arrived now. He pulled up triumphantly in just the very spot he should have avoided, and Sefton bellowed wrathfully.

"For God's sake—how many times have I told you not to stop in mud?" He strode over and pushed the old man roughly out of the driver's seat and jabbed furiously at the starter. The engine roared but the wheels spun impotently. He cursed and got the towrope out of his own jeep and for the twentieth time yanked the professor onto firm ground.

"There are certain fundamental rules for good manners, too," answered the professor tartly. "Things are getting a little out of hand, Sefton. I would remind you that although you are not drawing a salary, *I* am in charge of this expedition."

"You want to get across Upper Burma to the Chinese border, don't you?" snarled Sefton. "OK then suppose you leave it to someone who knows, and do as you're damned well told."

"I'm not a child and this is not my first experience of the jungle." Neave was thoroughly angry now. "If things are to go on like this I would much prefer to take a paid driver on from Imphal and to pay your passage back to Calcutta by lorry."

Sefton recognized danger signs and temporized.

"I'm sorry, Professor," he said and drew his hand wearily over his brow. "All this rather brings things back—and I think I have a touch of fever coming on." He smiled bravely. "You were quite right to slap me down. I'll behave from now on."

The professor accepted his apology with a slight inclination of his head and turned stiffly back to his jeep.

Once over the Chindwin, you old bum, thought Sefton as they started off again, and you can go to blazes. I'll have to watch my step till then, though—I don't want to be left stranded when I'm this close.

The old man's Delhi-endorsed papers took them through the checkpoint at Imphal without question and even with an offer, which Sefton politely declined, of an escort as far as the border. They camped that night at the top of the Tiddim Track where rusting Japanese tanks made green hillocks under the creeping undergrowth which still, after twelve years, could not altogether cover the scars of that last fierce battle.

Sefton lay under his mosquito net and watched the pre-monsoon clouds gathering over the pass and blotting out the stars. They had been gathering that night he crossed. He stretched out on his camp bed and listened to the jungle night sounds and the professor's gentle snores the other side of the fire. His thoughts went back over the years.

There had been six of them at first in that crazy truck. Findlay, the Scotch manager—tall, grim, ascetic—who was a Sanskrit scholar and who some said was a secret convert to Buddhism; Muirson the Eurasian clerk; the two Karen coolies; and Ngu Pah, the pretty little Burmese nurse who had insisted on standing by her tiny hospital until the last moment; and himself. The Karens had deserted early and Muirson, opium-besotted and malarial, had died at the end of the third week. That left the three of them. Three oddly assorted people on foot in the middle of the freakish dry belt after the truck had finally petered out. There was a well in the pagoda to which they had struggled before Findlay collapsed, and Ngu Pah, the lightest of them, had climbed down the rotten rope to see if any dribble remained in the sand at the bottom. But it had been bone dry. The rope had broken as she struggled back and had left her clinging to the masonry a few feet from the top and they had been hard put to it to rescue her.

It was that night that he made his decision. Findlay could obviously go no farther and Ngu Pah was showing signs of failing too. Her tiny frame had borne the brunt of that hellish journey as she had carried her

full share of the water and rations and finally the heavy wash-leather bag that Findlay would entrust to nobody but her.

He knew what that bag contained because he had seen Findlay making his selection from the trays of pigeon-blood rubies before they had dynamited the strong room and set fire to the rest. They had been unable to send their usual shipments out to Rangoon for some months, so there had been a lot of stuff to choose from. That bag must have weighed seven pounds if it weighed an ounce. My God—seven pounds of uncut rubies. She had not let the bag out of her possession for an instant after Findlay had handed it to her. She had even slung it round her neck when she climbed into the well. Sefton wondered when she had first begun to suspect his intentions. He had tried for years to justify to himself that final act of treachery. He no longer bothered now. In Sefton's world it was every man for himself. He had stolen the bag that night while she slept and Findlay raved in his delirium—and with it he had also stolen their last half-gallon of water and the pitiful remains of their rations, and he had set out on the last desperate stage to the Chindwin and safety.

She had cheated him though—the little devil. He made the discovery the night before he crossed the border. He had opened the bag to make a careful selection of just what he could carry on his person with safety, meaning to cache the rest where, if the war went the right way, he could come back and collect it later. He remembered the feel of the rough sand and gravel that poured over his hands as he untied the thong. He had screamed and groveled in his rage out there in the jungle, and then, when sanity returned, he thought about going back—but the Japs were closing in fast and he could see the smoke from burning villages a scant five miles behind him. That's where the stuff had gone—down the bloody well—and that's where it was now. Obviously they couldn't have survived long. Find-

lay was almost a goner when he left them, and Ngu Pah couldn't have gone down the well again to recover the stones because the rope had snapped. He had often tortured himself with the possibility of the girl surviving the war and going back for them, but he had brushed that aside. Without food and water she could not have lasted another week. No—the rubies were still there, at the bottom of the well—of that he was convinced.

Twice he had raised the necessary money and gone out to Rangoon on the pretext of starting up in engineering, but try as he would he had been unable to get permission to go through to Upper Burma. There had been constant internecine warfare along the line of the Irrawaddy since the British had left, and both sides regarded visitors with suspicion. He had tried it without permission and had narrowly missed being shot for his pains. The third time he had attempted to go out they had refused him a visa, as had the India government when he applied for a mining license in the Shan hills. The professor's advertisement had been a heaven-sent final chance. He would *get* there this time—by God he would.

His plan of action was made. Their road lay through Yeu—there was no other way in. He would come down with a simulated attack of malaria there. The way to Mandalay was easy, so he would persuade the professor to go on alone, promising to catch up with him in a few days. They weren't on such friendly terms that the old man would boggle much at that. He *would* catch up too—but then he'd quit. He had enough cash to pay his way back to England—and more than enough wit to get the stones in with him.

He grunted, flicked his cigarette out into the damp undergrowth, swatted a mosquito and dropped quietly to sleep.

They reached Yeu four days later without incident except for a few further bog-downs on the professor's part. Sefton had suffered from malaria often enough to

be able to simulate the symptoms with a degree of realism that frightened the other man. He had even had the forethought to break the thermometer in the medicine chest so that his temperature would not give the lie to his agonized shaking each evening.

He had no difficulty in recognizing the turnoff to the pagoda as they drove past it that last afternoon. It was a few miles east of a tiny village that had been deserted in those panic-stricken days, but which was now repopulated. There was a well there which might have saved the other two had they known about it. A yellow-robed priest sat under a spreading peepul tree at the junction of road and track with a brass begging bowl before him for the offerings of the faithful. He was the first they had seen since crossing the Chindwin and the professor was delighted in spite of his preoccupation with Sefton's fever. He leaped out of his jeep, camera ready, but the priest dropped his eyes to the ground and covered his shaven head with a fold of his robe.

"The camera is a form of evil eye," Sefton explained. "These poonghies don't like 'em. Come on—plenty more of the idle devils where we are going. There's a whole monastery full of them in Yeu. By God, I'll be glad to get there—I'm feeling lousy."

They put up at the monastery rest house, and the professor wandered happily about with his camera for a couple of days while Sefton realistically recuperated. The old man was mildly indignant at Sefton's suggestion that he should go on alone but the latter worked on him skillfully. The Buddhist Feast of the Tooth would just about be starting in Meikhtila—the faithful came from all parts of Asia for this—opportunities for photography that it would be a crime to miss. Just catch the first rafts of teak coming down the Irrawaddy with the break of the monsoon. He'd be all right here—the monks were pretty decent to travelers. Catch him up in Mandalay in a week—as fit as a flea again. The old man at last capitulated, and with many a guilty backward glance, went on up the road.

Sefton gave him half a day for safety, and then set off back along the road they had come. He had no fear of the pagoda being occupied. They built these things on the top of practically every hill in Upper Burma, put a statue of the Buddha inside, a couple of dragons outside to guard him against evil spirits, dug a well for his refreshment and thereafter avoided the place like the plague.

It was just as he had last seen it. Perhaps the purple bougainvillaea over the archway that spanned the entrance to the small courtyard was a little more luxuriant, and the monsoon rains, short-lived but fierce in these parts, had washed some more of the white plaster from the pinnacled roof, but the Buddha was unaged, sitting, feet crossed beneath him, soles upward, forefinger and thumb of the right hand grasping the little finger of the other, jeweled lotus on his brow, as serenely as he had sat and watched fifteen years before.

He drove on a hundred yards or so and hid the jeep in a bamboo thicket. It was not necessary—nobody had seen him come this way, and anyhow no Burmese would dream of walking a mile or so uphill to investigate. It was the secretiveness of his nature that made him do it—just as the beasts of the jungle are at pains to conceal their tracks even when no danger threatens. He took a coil of rope and an electric torch from the toolbox and hurried back. He was sweating now in spite of the evening cool. His heart was hammering and his breath was coming in short, sharp gasps that almost choked him.

There was a carpet of dead leaves inside the pagoda that rustled and crackled under his feet as he skirted the image and hurried round to the well at the back. The shaft dropped sheer and black and the beam of his torch hardly reached the bottom of it. He dropped a stone over the edge and heard with satisfaction a slight thud as it landed on dry sand. There probably never had been water in the damned thing at all. There were some, Findlay among them, who said that these shafts

had never been intended as wells at all but were relics of some older and darker religion in which they had figured in other and more sinister roles—human sacrifices or something.

He knotted the rope round a projecting stone cornice and paid it out into the darkness until its slackness told him it had reached the bottom; then he swung his legs over and commenced his descent. It was easy at first, as the masonry was rough and offered some purchase to his feet. It had only been that which had saved Ngu Pah. Lower down, however, the sides became marble smooth and he was glad that he had the forethought to wear rope-soled *espadrilles.*

The ease with which he found the rubies came as an anticlimax that was almost a disappointment. He felt like a child who had been set too simple a task in a party game. He saw them in the first beam of his torch even as his feet touched the sand. They lay on a ledge in the masonry, wrapped in the rotting remains of a once-bright-blue silk scarf—a heap of dull pebbles which even in their uncut and unpolished state threw back the light of the torch in a reddish effulgence.

He wanted to shout and to sing—to throw them in fistfuls over his head like confetti. Instead, he sat down in the sand and lit a cigarette with trembling hands and then trained the beam of the torch on the rubies and just gazed.

It was a good ten minutes before he was steady enough to remove his sweat-soaked shirt and scoop the rubies into it—and a further agonizing ten before he was satisfied with the security of the bag he made of it. He finally fastened it under his belt; then, belaying the rope twice round his waist, he commenced the hard climb up.

He had gone a good fifteen feet before it happened—his body bowed stiffly outward from the side of the well—feet pressed firmly against the stones. He was not aware of falling. The first realization came to him

as he lay flat on his back in the sand with the rope coiled loosely about him and the chunk of masonry which had missed his head by inches beside him. He started to scream then—shrilly and horribly—and he was still screaming and tearing at the sides of the well when the moonlight at the top of the shaft was blotted out by the head and shoulders of a man—a man with a shaven poll and a swathe of yellow cotton across his chest. He could not make out his face but he knew it was the priest from the track junction and he stopped screaming and started to babble in Burmese.

The priest answered in English with a strong Edinburgh accent. "I knew you'd be back for them, Sefton, in the fullness of time."

Sefton tried to speak but his throat muscles refused to function. The voice went on. "Aye, vultures always return to their carrion—and that is what those stones are. I intended to steal them from my employers in the first place. I had already broken faith by intent. It was that knowledge that brought me to the samadhi of the Middle Way. These robes are not a disguise, Sefton—they are my atonement."

Mad, thought Sefton and fought down another wave of hysteria. "Findlay!" he called shakily. "Findlay—I came back to see if I could find any trace of you. I haven't rested, Findlay, in all these years—"

"That I can well believe," answered Findlay. "A man cannot escape his karma. Well, you have the chance to make your peace now—as I have."

"Findlay—you can't do this to me—you can't—don't murder me—" He was babbling now.

"I have done nothing. In your greed you tied your rope to an unsafe stone. Do you not see the symbolism of it?"

"Findlay—Findlay—listen to me—I know what you must have thought at the time, but I went off to find food, water, for all of us. I couldn't return, Findlay—before God I couldn't—I got lost and then I fell ill my-

self—I wandered for weeks before I was picked up and then I'd lost my memory. You've got to believe me, Findlay—you've *got* to—"

Findlay appeared not to hear him. His voice droned on dreamily, "Aye—the divine symbolism of it all—the sacrifice of little Ngu Pah—three times she made that five-mile journey for water and food for me after you had stolen our reserve. She died on her return from the last one and I made shift to bury her under the bougainvillaea at the gate. Did ye no sense something as you entered, or had your greed blinded you to everything except those scraps of crystallized alumina?"

"I don't want your damned rubies—"

"They're not mine—nor yours," Findlay answered. "They've returned to the earth that formed them. Down there they can do no more harm."

"All right then—let them stay here," Sefton sank to his knees in the sand, "but you've got to help me out, Findlay—"

"I can neither help you nor hinder you, Sefton. That is your karma—as *this* is mine." And Findlay held his hands over the opening to the shaft. Against the patch of light Sefton saw with a turning of his stomach that the fingers had degenerated into formless stubs. "Leprosy, Sefton—a curse turned blessing because it was only that which held me back from taking the jewels out myself—and thereby gave me my chance of atonement and peace."

"You can't leave me here—that's murder. You're a Buddhist, you say—Buddhists can't kill—not even animals. Get another rope, Findlay—get another rope!" His voice had dropped to a pleading whisper.

"I shall not kill you, Sefton," said Findlay, "not even by negation. You must make your own choice, though. If I get another rope I cannot tie it securely myself with these fingers. I must therefore get help from the village. You will have to come up empty-handed in that case—I should insist on that and ask the villagers' assistance if you broke faith."

"The—the other choice—?" Sefton croaked.

"I shall drop food and water to you for as long as you need it."

Sefton screamed again. "Listen, Findlay! There's money down here—millions! Be sensible. They've got cures for leprosy in Europe now—and you can get a pair of artificial hands that'll do everything your own could. There's enough here and to spare for both of us. Get a rope long enough to loop round the statue and drop both ends to me—you needn't try to tie it. Just let me come up so we can talk it over. If you don't agree to anything I say I'll go away peacefully and never come back—I swear it—"

"If you came up and I were alone, Sefton, you'd kill me," Findlay said. "You know that is in your heart already. I couldn't prevent you—nor would I try—but if that happened I would be robbing you of any chance you may still have of finding peace. That would be against the course of the Middle Way. We are all involved in the destiny of others and a man may not stand by and watch another destroy himself."

Sefton broke then. He fell forward on his face and pounded on the sand with his fists and howled like an animal in torment.

The villagers hauled him up at midnight and the monks at Yeu tended him carefully until the professor, worried at his non-arrival in Mandalay, came back to look for him. Then they shipped him home to a large house set behind high walls in the quietness of the English countryside, where he has found peace—except when the moon is full and he struggles in his canvas jacket and screams about rubies and ropes and a priest who is fed by the faithful at the roadside.

CRAWFISH

Ardath F. Mayhar

It's chill, down there in the river, I reckon. She don't know, though. Can't know. Them big innocent brown eyes are starin' away down there, unless the crawfish . . . God, I wish I didn't know nothin' about crawfish.

She's got this soft white skin, like to a baby rabbit or some baby animal, sort of. It shined, like, even through the muddy old river water. I could see her, shinin' and shinin', as she sank. Her hair moved all out loose on the water, dark and curling in the moonlight. It kept moving in the water, all the way down . . . them crawfish . . .

She was a tramp, I tell you. Everybody knowed it, I reckon. Smiling and smiling at everybody went by. I moved way down in the bottom-lands, 'count of that. No fancy traveling salesmen comes down here. No Avon women selling damnation. No men in cars and men in trucks that'd look at her when she worked out in the yard. Bending over, showing her legs! Tramp, just tramp!

Must of been born that way. She was just fourteen when I hitched up with her, and hadn't had time to learn nothing about men, then. Just naturally bad, flirting when we went into town, smiling at them tellers in the bank, in their white shirts and city suits. Looking with eyes of lust and fornication at them. First time, when I got her home, I beaten the living daylights outen her.

Way she cried and took on, you'd of reckoned she

was crazy. Her Pa never had no gumption with his womenfolks. Let 'em have their own way clear to ruination, seems like. His woman even had money to spend, when she felt like it. So I guess Mattie wasn't all the way to blame for her sinful ways.

Still, beating didn't do no good—not to last. She'd go round with her head down and her eyes on the ground, like is fitten, for a while, then she'd see something, maybe just a flower or a bird or some such sinful uselessness. All that decency would be gone in a minute, and she'd be laughin' to herself. And when she laughed, any man inside a mile would be starin' at her like they knowed her already.

I come home, one evenin' and she was full of talk. Met me at the door, jabbering fit to make me deaf. I slapped her a couple of times and quieted her down, like as my Pa used to my Ma, iffen she said more than is fitten for a woman. She didn't say nothin' else, just slapped the supper on the table and went off in the back to the garden and started pullin' weeds. I looked round to make sure she wasn't meetin' nobody, afore I set down to eat.

Next day, Miz Rogers, down the road, met me at the end of the row and asked me, real sly like, who'd been visitin' Mattie yesterday. Seemed like I got hot all over—it just seemed to rise up from my feet clean to my head, and I was so mad I could of busted. Miz Rogers, she looked at me kind of scared-liked and took off afore I could answer.

It was away before noon, but I took the mules in and unhitched. When I got to the house, she was gigglin' in the kitchen. I crept up, real sly like, and peeped in. They wasn't no one there. She was crazy. Clean crazy and a whore, too.

I slammed the screen open till the spring busted. My head was like to bust, too, with the blood poundin' and poundin'. She looked round and turned white and funny-lookin'. After she picked herself up from where I

knocked her, I started tellin' her what she was. The Whore of Babylon was nice to what I called her.

I slapped all her lies back into her teeth. She was gabblin' about flat tires and women with thirsty children, but she quit that, soon enough. She wasn't so all-fired pretty, after I got through with her. Her nose was all lop-sided and her eyes was so swole you couldn't see what color they was. I figgered, Hell, I might as well of married a homely woman, iffen I was goin' to have to keep mine all bunged up to keep the men away from her.

Next day, I went down to see Pa. Didn't let on what was goin' on, but Pa, he's read the Bible and helled around some, so he guessed pretty close. He told me he knowed of some land that was for rent, down close to the river. Said iffen I wanted, he could find somebody to take over my place and finish my crop. It was still early in the spring, so's I had time to make a crop down there in the wet land.

So we moved. There was a fair cabin on the place. Not fancy . . . she started sayin' something about havin' to carry water so fur, but I just had to look at her mean by then, and she shut right up. I broke a garden patch, and she put in a nice garden, but seemed like she didn't care iffen it growed or not. She didn't put no more flowers round the front, neither, so's I knowed she'd done it, t'other place, just to bend over and show her legs to the men on the road. She didn't fix up the cabin none, neither. Just went around like she was listenin' to somethin' inside her head. Her Maw come, a time or two, but I didn't care about havin' her come round givin' Mattie fancy notions, so I got rid of her quick as I could.

Got so I hated to come in, after finishin' work. I'd stay out till dark, near, or go night-fishin' with the niggers down the river. She kind of looked at me like I was somethin' scary. Give me funny feelings, the way she looked at me.

No sir, when I took her where she couldn't go smilin' at the men and flirtin' all over town on Saturday no more, she kind of dried up. Never even tried to talk to me no more. I might even of let her, so's to liven up the quiet some, but she kept her lips tight shut over her broke tooth and let the mosquitoes buzz.

Her eyes got queerer and queerer. They was big to start with, but it got so that they was deep as the pool down at the river, and just as full of strange things. I'd go in at night and she'd watch me, starin' and starin' like I was a bug or a snake. She was crazy, I tell you.

Anyways, one evening, I come in dead tired. Crop was laid by and I'd been fishin' all day, but it was so hot it like to of took your breath. They wasn't no air, down there, 'count of the woods just closed in all round like walls and kept it out.

While I was eatin' supper, she was standin' by the wash-pan, waitin' for the dishes. All of a sudden, she turned round with the meat knife in her hand and started for me. Iffen I hadn't of looked up, she'd of killed me where I set. Seems like, when she done that, everything just come together, like. I took her round the neck and shut my hands tight and when I opened 'em up, she was dead.

My folks has always been mighty proud and upstandin' people, round here. And Pa, why it'd kill Pa iffen they hung me over a woman. So I took her through the woods, down to the river.

I could hear the snakes slidin' off in front of me, while I carried her down the path. The 'gators was bellowin', and the moon was comin' up full. It was right hard, gettin' her down the bank to the deep water. She was right smart tall, if she was so slim. I got her down, though, and tied on some weights offen the nets we'd been settin' that day. They wasn't too heavy, but nobody never come there noway. So I put her down in the water. And she sunk, slow, and the moon made her go down shinin' and shinin', real soft, like a dream.

Wasn't till the next day I started thinkin' about them crawfish. Iffen you never seen a body that's been et by crawfish, you don't want to. It's a sight to turn a goat's stomach, let alone a man's. I kept thinkin' about her, down there, with them things eatin' out her eyes, nibblin' on that soft skin. Seems like I couldn't rightly stand it. For two days I held myself down. I took out and went with the niggers down the river and never come back till the morning of the third day. This morning. . . seems like forever.

Something drug me down there to the big pool. It's like I couldn't help myself at all. And when I got there, I couldn't see nothin'. I would of thought she'd of riz some by then. Seems like I had to see what they'd done to her, though. Thinkin' was a lot worse than knowin'. I took a sweet-gum sapling and started dredgin' around in the deep water, wadin' out fur as I could. I didn't want to, couldn't hardly stand it, but something made me keep pokin' and feelin' around with that pole, till it caught her.

Must've been caught on a snag or something, cause when the pole hooked her, up she come, slow and easy, just like she gone down. And I throwed up in the water until my insides like to of come out my mouth. Then I had to go and git rocks and rope and sink her good, so's I couldn't never see what they'd done to her, never no more.

I guess I must've went off my head, like. I come to wanderin' round in the woods, all black and blue from bumpin' into things. I went back to the house, but it stared at me outen its windows till I couldn't even go nigh it. Then I went up to Pa's. Course, I didn't tell him nothin' about what had happened, but I could see him wonderin'. He loaned me a clean pair of khakis and five dollars, and I come on into town. Seems like I had to see people, be away from the woods.

First thing you know, Will Pollard come up and winked. "Got a jug hid out in the back of the hardware store," he says.

So I went with him. Guess he didn't get much of that jug. I must've drunk most of it. Next thing I remember, Will was lookin' at me with his eyes bugged out and face fish-belly white.

And now you've got me locked up in here, and they're all down there, right now, fixin' to drag her out. And you're lookin' at me like I was the one that was crazy and sinful. And they're goin' to see what I seen when she come up.

Damn them crawfish!

THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. PRUYN

William F. Nolan

Before she could scream, his hand had closed over her mouth. Grinning, he drove a knee into her stomach and stepped quickly back, letting her spill writhing to the floor at his feet. He watched her gasp for breath.

Like a fish out of water, he thought, like a damn fish out of water.

He took off his blue service cap and wiped sweat from the leather band. Hot. Damned hot. He looked down at the girl. She was rolling, bumping the furniture, fighting to breathe. She wouldn't be able to scream until she got her breath back, and by then . . .

He moved across the small living room to a chair and opened a black leather toolbag he had placed there. He hesitated, looked back at her.

"For you," he said, smiling over his shoulder. "Just for you."

He slowly withdrew a long-bladed hunting knife from the bag and held it up for her to see.

She emitted small gasping sounds; her eyes bugged and her mouth opened and closed, chopping at air.

You're not beautiful anyway, he thought, moving toward her with the knife. Pretty, but not beautiful. Beautiful women shouldn't die. Too rare. Sad to see beauty die. But you . . .

He stood above her, looking down. Face all red and puffy. No lipstick. Not even pretty now. No prize package when she'd opened the door. If she'd been beautiful he would have gone on, told her he'd made a mistake, and gone on to the next apartment. But she was

nothing. Hair in pin curls. Apron. Nothing.

He knelt, caught her arm and pulled her to him. "Don't worry," he told her. "This will be quick."

He did not stop smiling.

"A Mr. Pruyn out front, sir. Says he's here about the Sloane case."

"Send him on in," said Lieutenant Norman Bendix. He sighed and leaned back wearily in his swivel chair.

Hell, he thought, another one. My four-year-old kid could come in here and give me better stories. Stabbed her to death with my fountain pen, Daddy. Nuts!

Fifteen years with the force and he'd talked to dozens of Dopey Joes who "confessed" to unsolved murders they'd read about in the papers with Ben Franklin's kisser on it. Oh, once he'd struck oil. Guy turned out to be telling the truth. All the facts checked out. Freak. Murderers are not likely to come in and tell the police all about how they did it. Usually it's a guy with a souped-up imagination and a few drinks too many under his belt. This Sloane case was a prime example. Five "confessions" already. Five duds.

Marcia Sloane. Twenty-seven. Housewife. Dead in her apartment. Broad daylight. Her throat cut. No motives. No clues. Husband at work. Nobody saw anybody. Score to date: 0.

Bendix swore. Damn the papers! Rags. Splash gore all over the front page. All the gory details. *Except,* thought Bendix, the little ones, the ones that count. At least they didn't get those. Like the fact that the Sloane girl had exactly twenty-one cuts on her body below the throat; like the fact that her stomach bore a large bruise. She'd been kicked, and kicked hard, before her death. Little details—that only the killer would know. So, what happens? So a half-dozen addled pinheads rush in to "confess" and I'm the boy that has to listen. Mr. Ears. Well, Norm kid, somebody's got to listen. Part of the daily grind.

Lieutenant Norman Bendix shook out a cigarette, lit

it, and watched the office door open.

"Here he is, Lieutenant."

Bendix leaned forward across the desk, folding his hands. The cigarette jerked with his words. "Come in, Mr. Pruyn, come in."

A small man stood uneasily before the desk, bald, smiling nervously, twisting a gray felt hat.

About thirty-one or so, guessed Bendix. Probably a recluse. Lives alone in a small apartment. No hobbies. Broods a lot. They don't have to say a word. I can spot one a mile away.

"Are you the gentleman I'm to see about my murder?" asked the small man. His voice was high and uncertain. He blinked rapidly behind thick-rimmed glasses.

"I'm your man, Mr. Pruyn. Bendix is the name. Lieutenant Bendix. Won't you sit down?"

Bendix indicated a leather chair.

"Pruyn. Like in sign," said the bald little man. "Everyone mispronounces it, you know. An easy name to get wrong. But it's Pruyn. Emery T. Pruyn." He sat down.

"Well, Mr. Pruyn." Bendix was careful to get the name right. "Want to go ahead?"

"Uh—I *do* hope you are the correct gentleman. I should hate to repeat it all to someone else. I abhor repetition, you know." He blinked at Bendix.

"Believe me, I'm your man. Now, go ahead with your story."

Sure, Bendix thought, rave away. This office lacks one damned important item: a leather couch. He offered the small man a cigarette.

"Oh, no. No thank you, Lieutenant. I don't smoke."

Or *murder,* either, Bendix added in his mind. All you do, Blinky, is read the papers.

"Is it true, Lieutenant, that the police have absolutely no clues to work on?"

"That's what it said in the papers. They get the facts, Mr. Pruyn."

"Yes. Well—I was naturally curious as to the job I had done." He paused to adjust his glasses. "May I assure you, from the outset, that I am indeed the guilty party. The crime of murder is on my hands."

Bendix nodded. Okay, Blinky, I'm impressed.

"I—uh—suppose you'll want to take my story down on tape or wire or however you—"

Bendix smiled. "Officer Barnhart will take down what you say. Learned shorthand in Junior High, didn't you, Pete?"

Barnhart grinned from the back of the room.

Emery Pruyn glanced nervously over his shoulder at the uniformed policeman seated near the door. "Oh," he said, "I didn't realize that the officer had remained. I thought that he—left."

"He's *very* quiet," said Bendix, exhaling a cloud of pale-blue cigarette smoke. "Go on with your story, Mr. Pruyn."

"Of course. Yes. Well—I know I don't *look* like a murderer, Lieutenant Bendix, but then"—he chuckled softly—"we seldom look like what we really are. Murderers, after all, can look like anybody."

Bendix fought back a yawn. Why do these jokers pick late afternoon to unload? God, he was hungry. If I let this character ramble on, I'll be here all night. Helen will blow her stack if I'm late for dinner again. Better pep things up. Ask him some leading questions.

"How did you get into Mrs. Sloane's apartment?"

"Disguise," said Mr. Pruyn with a shy smile. He sat forward in the leather chair. "I posed as a television man."

"You mean a television repairman?"

"Oh, no. Then I should never have gained entry, since I had no way of knowing whether Mrs. Sloane had *called* a repairman. No, I took the role of a television representative. I told Mrs. Sloane that her name had been chosen at random, along with four others in that vicinity, for a free converter."

"Converter?"

"To convert black-and-white television to color television. I read about them."

"I see. She let you in?"

"Oh, yes. She was utterly convinced, grateful that her name had been chosen, all excited and talking fast. You know, like women do."

Bendix nodded.

"Told me to come right in, that her husband would be delighted when he got home and found out what she'd won. Said it would be a wonderful surprise for him." Mr. Pruyn smiled. "I walked right in carrying my bag and wearing some blue coveralls and a cap I'd bought the day before. Oh—do you want the name and address of the clothing store in order to verify—"

"That won't be necessary at the moment," Bendix cut in. "Just tell us about the crime first. We'll have time to pick up the details later."

"Oh, well, fine. I just thought—well, I put down my bag and—"

"Bag?"

"Yes. I carry a wrench and things in the bag."

"What for?"

"To use as murder weapons," smiled Pruyn, blinking. "I like to take them all along each time and use the one that fits."

"How do you mean?"

"Fits the personality. I simply choose the weapon which is, in my opinion, best suited. Each person has a distinctive personality."

"Then"—Bendix watched the little man's eyes behind the heavy lenses—"you've killed before?"

"Of course, Lieutenant. Five times prior to Mrs. Sloane. Five ladies."

"And why have you waited to come to the police? Why haven't you confessed before now?"

"Because I chose not to. Because my goal has not been reached."

"Which was?"

"An even six. In the beginning I determined to kill exactly six women and then give myself up. Which I have done. Every man should have a goal in life. Mine was six murders."

"I see. Well—to get back to Mrs. Sloane. What happened after she let you in?"

"I put down my bag and walked back to her."

"Where was she?"

"In the middle of the room, watching me. Smiling. Very friendly. Asking me questions about how the converter worked. Not suspecting a thing. Not until . . ."

"Until what, Mr. Pruyn?"

"Until I wouldn't answer her. I just stood there, in front of her, smiling, not saying a word."

"What did she do?"

"Got nervous. Quit smiling. Asked me why I wasn't working on the set. But, I didn't say anything. I just watched the fear grow deep in her eyes." The little man paused; he was sweating, breathing hard now. "Fear is a really wonderful thing to watch in the eyes of a woman, Lieutenant, a *lovely* thing to watch."

"Go on."

"When she reached a certain point, I knew she'd scream. So, before she did, I clapped one hand over her mouth and kicked her."

Bendix drew in his breath sharply. "What did you say?"

"I said I kicked her—in the stomach—to knock the wind out of her. Then she couldn't scream."

Quickly Bendix stubbed out his cigarette. Maybe, he thought, maybe . . . "Then what, Mr. Pruyn?"

"Then I walked to the bag and selected the knife. Long blade. Good steel. Then I walked back to Mrs. Sloane and cut her throat. It was very satisfying. A goal reached and conquered."

"Is that all?" Bendix asked.

Because if he tells me about twenty-one cuts, then

he's our boy, thought Bendix. The kick in the stomach could be, just *could* be, something he'd figured out for himself. But, if he tells me about the cuts . . .

"Oh, there's more. I rolled her over and left my trademark."

"What kind of trademark?"

The small man grinned shyly behind the thick glasses. "Like the Sign of the Saint—or the Mark of Zorro," he said. "My initials. On her back. E.T.P. Emery T. Pruyn."

Bendix eased back in his chair, sighed, and lit a new cigarette.

"Then I removed the ears." He looked proud. "For my collection. I have six nice pairs now."

"Wouldn't have them *with* you, I don't suppose?"

"Oh, no, Lieutenant. I keep them at home—in a box, a metal box in my antique rosewood dresser."

"That's it, eh?"

"Yes, yes, it is. After I removed the ears, I left and went home. That was three days ago. I arranged my affairs, put things in order, and came here to you. I'm ready for my cell."

"No cell, Mr. Pruyn."

"What do you mean, Lieutenant?" Emery Pruyn's lower lip began to tremble. He stood up. "I—I don't understand."

"I mean you can go home now. Come back in the morning. Around eight. We'll get the details then—the name of the clothing store and all. Then, we'll see."

"But, I—I—"

"Goodnight, Mr. Pruyn. Officer Barnhart will show you out."

From the door of his office, Norman Bendix watched the two figures recede down the narrow hall.

An odd one, he thought, a *real* odd one.

He pulled the Ford out of the police parking lot and eased the car into the evening traffic.

So easy! So wonderfully satisfying and easy. Oh, the excitement of it—his sojourn into the Lion's Den. Almost like the excitement with the knife. That bit about the kick in the stomach. Dangerous, but wonderful! He remembered the lieutenant's look when he'd mentioned the kick. Delicious!

Emery Pruyn smiled as he drove on. Much more excitement was ahead. Much more . . .

LUDMILA

David Montross

Usually Grandmother screeched at her the minute the door opened, asking why Ludmila had loitered in the woods, or if she'd been bad in school and made to stay for punishment. Sometimes the old woman didn't even say that much before flinging her pillow at Ludmila, who was always ready to jump to one side or the other. But today was different. No pillow slung at her this late afternoon. No screeching either.

"Babushka?" Risking a glance at Grandmother, she saw the old woman's thin white braids spreading from under the pillow, and the blankets pulled up high as she'd arranged them hours ago. She wanted to say, "Forgive me for this morning, Babushka. I didn't mean to be a bad girl. Do please forgive me and say something. Please."

Because if Grandmother didn't speak now, then she wouldn't say anything for days and days. Not one word. Maybe not until after it was time for snow to fly, and the hut to be crowded with Ludmila's Papa and her brothers, after they returned from harvest.

Quietly so as not to awaken Grandmother, she set a string bag of beets and cabbage and a precious sliver of salt pork on the table, and hurried to throw faggots on the fire. Babushka complained of being cold even in the hottest weather, and now finding fallen wood was harder, and Ludmila had to wander in greater circles through the forest each day. Next spring she'd ask Papa and her brothers to leave a larger wood pile for

her before they went off for the summer to cut the grain. If Babushka wanted the hut kept hotter this summer than last, she'd want more heat than ever next year.

But then Ludmila would be thirteen, and surely she'd be able to cut her own wood. At least the lower branches of fir and birch which grew right up to the clearing. If she could do that, the men would be free to dig the well that someday would bring water right inside the hut, or build a shelter of some kind around the vegetables so rabbits and deer couldn't rob the garden as they had recently. Why, there was almost no food at all for this coming winter. The thought made her hungrier than usual. There were hardly any rubles left either, until Papa got home.

Careful not to look at Grandmother, who hated to be caught sleeping, Ludmila fried the pork and peeled the beets and chopped the cabbage and put them all to boil on the hearth, using the last water in the pail. Very quietly she put her shawl on again and went out across the clearing to the stream which chubbled over the rocks, sounding almost like Shura's balalaika.

If she stayed outside awhile, Babushka might sleep on, and there'd be less time for her to complain before they went to bed. Anyway, it was nicer out here alone, thinking and looking around at the shrubs and trees. It smelled better too; inside the hut it was awful.

She'd pretend when she did go in that she'd just come from school and the food store, and Grandmother could screech or throw her pillow as usual. Then they'd eat soup and go to bed, and in a day or two or a week Papa and the boys would be home. Babushka was quieter when they were around.

But as Papa said last spring, "If you were held in bed by useless legs, dear little Ludmila, you'd fret and whine and be mean too."

Since Papa said it, it must be so. Wasn't he the best father in the world? Helping with her lessons and al-

ways appearing at school on dark winter days just as she started the long lonely walk home through the woods. Comrade Varvara, the schoolteacher, said people must produce according to their ability, and reap according to their need. But Grandmother ate without producing any food. Papa said at her age that was natural; in her time she'd produced plenty.

This summer when birds and animals ate the vegetables and there was no grain or any feed for the cattle or sheep or pigs or chickens, old Nikolai at the food store said the coming winter would bring out the wolves for sure. Nobody in the village had seen one for at least three years, but everyone knew that when people died of hunger, the wolves always came.

Ludmila had never seen one either, but she'd heard them howling often enough. And Babushka was always saying that bad little girls were only good for feeding wild animals.

Ah, it would be nice when Papa and the seven brothers returned. This week probably, old Nikolai had said, shaking his bald head sadly, because early return meant bad harvest, and less food for everyone. Still Papa would keep the wolves away from the hut; he always had before.

Once they were all at home, there'd be no more dark and lonely mornings when Ludmila had to get up from beside Babushka, break ice on the pail of water left by the banked fire, and cook kasha after she pushed the pan under Grandmother.

Sometimes the old woman sat so long and fussed so about the way Ludmila fixed her blankets and fluffed her pillow afterward, she had to run all the way through the golden birches and green firs to the road and past the village houses to the collective hall where the schoolroom was. Then Comrade Varvara gave her extra homework to do by candlelight. If only Grandmother could produce candles even, or not be such a long time on the pan.

Oh, there was the first star. And others beyond it, getting brighter in spite of the rising moon, which tonight was as yellow as the birches by day. A lovely night filled with whisperings from the forest.

Last year Papa and the boys had been a month later than this, roaring with song as they tramped through the trees from where the lorries let them off in the village. Racing when they saw her waving, to see which of them reached her first. Whoever did would lift her off her feet and smother her squeals with kisses, taking his time before letting her go to the next in line. But none of them ever raced to kiss Grandmother.

How lovely to have them back early this year, if Nikolai was right. But sad about the people who'd starve this winter, maybe some from their own collective.

Which of the family might die?

Not Papa because he was healthy and strong. Nor the boys because they were young and strong. Not Babushka because if neither healthy nor young, she was the strongest of them all. Papa said so often. Every time Babushka asked him.

"Who's the strongest of us all?"

"You are, dearest little Mother."

Babushka would nod and grin, showing her shrunken gums, and the seven boys and Ludmila would laugh and cheer. Because Papa always stood where Grandmother couldn't see him, and winked as he answered to show what he truly thought.

But with all of them so strong that left only one who was weak. A bad little girl who couldn't cut her own wood, and begrudged the time Babushka spent on the pan each morning, and hated bringing her water to wash, and arranging the blankets and the pillow under the thin white braids.

Poor old woman. It was easy to hate her, hard to remember she was old and crippled. But who could love her when she smelled so and screeched so? This morning when Ludmila was already late for school, Ba-

bushka threw her pillow because it was hard and lumpy she said, and Ludmila began to cry. She'd thrown the pillow back at Grandmother, watching it fall on the old face. Minutes later she'd run as fast as she ever had to school, crying all the way.

More stars. And in the moonlight, shadows running short and long ahead of her as she left the stream and crossed the clearing to the door of the hut. She set the pail down, not wanting to go inside.

A screech or a pillow in her face? A complaint or a demand? What would happen if she screeched back? Or threw the pillow again? What if she didn't go inside, but stayed out here waiting for Papa and the boys?

When they came, she'd want to go inside. Then the hut would ring with talk and laughter, and Oleg's violin at night with Shura's balalaika and Papa's rhythmic clapping. Rodion and Vukuly and Kyril would dance a gopak, and afterward she'd waltz with all of them, counting to make sure they didn't fight over who was her next partner. They didn't have music and dancing every night because once a week the men would go to the village and drink beer and talk to their friends.

If she starved to death this winter who would they dance with? She snuffled and wiped her nose on a corner of the shawl. Dying might not be so bad. In heaven she'd know for herself what her mother looked like, although Comrade Varvara said there was no heaven. When she told Papa, he said, "That may be, but your mother was an angel." Only he couldn't remember if she'd been big or little, plain or pretty, only that she was just right for him, and he'd never find another like her.

Babushka said no woman, and certainly not her son's second wife, deserved such devotion. Anyway, he hadn't needed a second wife, not with seven fine sons already. What had the second wife ever done for anybody but produce a useless afterthought? A good thing Ludmila was the last baby, she was always so hungry.

Sometimes when Babushka talked about weak little girls, bad little girls, hungry little girls, Ludmila wanted to hurt her.

Two years ago when Babushka started to get up one morning, she fell out of the bed she shared with Ludmila. Papa came running around the curtain that divided the hut, and Ludmila was so frightened she put her thumb in her mouth, something she hadn't done for a long time. Babushka lay with her eyes closed and her breathing was as loud as her snoring. When Papa knelt beside her and began to cry, Ludmila cried too.

But Grandmother finally opened her eyes and rolled them around in her head. And still later she grunted and said, "Ludmila . . . Ludmila . . . she pushed me . . ."

A doctor who came to examine her for admission to a state hospital said she'd had a stroke and would never walk again. And he said there were few enough beds for the living let alone for the dying, so there was no reason to move her. She could go any time, from a sudden shock or just because her heart stopped, or she might linger for years. But that was their problem; his concern was for those who would recover and produce again.

Ludmila had wanted to ask, What about me? because the summers were bad enough as it was, and if Grandmother had to stay in bed, next summer would be longer and harder than ever with the men away.

Two years ago. An endless time, and never a "thank you" or "please" from Babushka. Only screeching and thrown pillows except when Papa was home last winter and got angry. "Enough, old woman. You're too harsh with Ludmila. She's doing more work than you'll ever do again."

Babushka had hardly spoken all winter, she was so offended. And she took to pinching in the night, her cruel fingers finding Ludmila's arm or leg or an ear. She'd pinch and pinch until Ludmila couldn't stand it,

and then she'd push Grandmother away. But the old woman never fell out of bed again.

Ludmila sighed and reached for the bucket at her feet. Opening the door, she hesitated, waiting for the pillow to come flying at her. But Grandmother lay exactly as she'd lain earlier. And the pillow was still pressed over her face from this morning.

Very carefully, Ludmila set the pail down, took the pot off the hearth, and ladled soup into her bowl. Then she took a spoon and enjoyed every mouthful. Without a glance at the bed, she got up and ladled out the rest of the soup and ate that as well.

THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY

Al Nussbaum

It was Saturday evening and I was standing beside the line of traffic coming from Tijuana. As each car stopped beside me, I asked the occupants the usual questions: "Where were you born?" and "Are you bringing anything back with you?"

Once in a while I'd check a truck or tell a driver to pull over for a closer examination, but I didn't do it often. I only did it when we'd had a tip from an informer, or the people seemed exceptionally gay and friendly, or I had one of my hunches. I didn't have many hunches, but they'd proven correct in almost every case, so I always paid attention to them.

When I saw Jack Wilner I had a hunch he was up to something. He was in one of the opposite lanes, heading into Mexico behind the wheel of a shiny yellow convertible. The top was down and the blaring radio was tuned to a San Diego rock station. The whole thing seemed too showy—like a magician's antics when misdirecting his audience.

It was the beginning of my shift—I was working the 8 P.M. to 4 A.M. tour—so I made a note of his license number with the intention of giving him a good going-over when he came back.

I watched carefully for the car, but it didn't return before I went off duty. I gave the other customs officers copies of the license number and a description of the car, and went home.

By the next night I had almost forgotten about the

yellow convertible, but the following Saturday evening I saw it again. The top was down, the radio was blasting, and it was on its way to Tijuana as before. I had the same feeling as I'd had the first time. I ran to the telephone and called the *aduana,* the Mexican customhouse, and asked them to check out the convertible.

When I got back to the traffic lane, I saw in the distance that the convertible had already been pulled over. Khaki-uniformed men swarmed around it, and a couple of them were busy removing door panels, while others checked the trunk and beneath the hood. Jack Wilner —of course, I didn't know his name then—stood to one side, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette. He was tall and thin, and even from far away I could see that he dressed with a youthful disregard for color.

I got busy with the cars coming into the country and didn't look over that way again for almost an hour. When I did, I was just in time to see the convertible as it pulled away from the *aduana.* Wilner turned to wave good-bye to the Mexican officers lined up watching him, then picked up speed.

So, they had found nothing. In that case, I reasoned, he must be smuggling something *into* the United States, so I watched for him to return. I stayed around a little after my shift was over and gave out the car's description and license number again. I asked everyone to be sure to pass the description and number to the next shift, if one of them didn't stop him.

Monday and Tuesday were my days off, but I called the customhouse both nights to see if the convertible had been checked out yet. It hadn't—and that's the way it went the rest of the week. The convertible didn't pass our border station.

But on Saturday evening I looked across into the far lanes, and there it was, heading into Mexico again.

I watched it with my mouth hanging open and then mentally kicked myself for being so stupid. Just because he'd left the country at this point didn't mean he had to return at this point. Mexico and California

shared over a hundred miles of border, and there were many places where he could cross back into the United States.

Up until now, my inquiry into the activities of the driver of the yellow convertible had been just that—*my* inquiry. That wasn't good enough anymore. I went to my supervisor and told him about my hunch, and he sent out notices to all the other checkpoints along the California-Mexico border. A customs officer has to rely on informers and instinct. Informers account for ninety percent of his arrests, but hunches like mine provide the other ten percent.

I went back to my post and waited. We were supposed to be notified once the convertible had been searched, but we received no word. None.

Then on Saturday evening, at the height of the traffic rush, I saw the yellow convertible heading into Mexico again.

At first we had thought it had checked out all right, and the people at its crossing point hadn't bothered to let us know. My supervisor decided to be sure, though, and sent out a call to find out where the car had crossed back into the States.

In half an hour he had the answer—nowhere. None of the official crossing points had seen the car.

Somewhere along the hundred-mile border, Wilner had found a way to slip across without stopping for a customs check. He was able to drive into Mexico, load the car with whatever contraband he cared to, and return to the United States without worrying about paying duty or fearing arrest. We had to find out where the hole was and plug it up.

A telephone call to the motor vehicles bureau gave us Jack Wilner's name and San Diego address. A twenty-four-hour watch was set up on his apartment, and we went back to waiting. Wilner was away until Wednesday, then he parked his yellow convertible in his carport and went inside.

Except for shopping and normal housekeeping trips,

he remained at home until Saturday evening. Then he drove across the border into Mexico while a car filled with customs agents followed fifty yards behind him. I watched the little parade from my post and felt pleased. I was confident we had him hooked and would soon reel him in.

But I was wrong. An hour later the agents returned. They had been trapped in the traffic on Avenida Revolución when he had made a sudden turn near the Jai Alai Frontón.

They had lost him.

I was disappointed, and they were angry. They were certain his maneuver had been deliberate, so they applied for a warrant to search his car when he returned. If they found so much as a marijuana seed, Wilner was in trouble.

I was given special permission to accompany the agents and was on the scene when Wilner returned to his apartment on Wednesday. It was obvious, from the way his jaw fell when they presented the warrant, that he hadn't lost his followers intentionally on Saturday. Until the warrant was thrust in front of him, he hadn't known he was suspected of anything.

We went over his car and found it spotless—literally spotless. It must have been cleaned recently, both inside and out, because even the ash trays were empty. Wilner watched us take the car apart and put it together again, but he wasn't as much at ease as he had been that day at the border. He kept licking his lips and shifting his weight from foot to foot. As far as he knew, the search at the border had been routine, but this certainly wasn't. We were on the scent of something, and he must have known we'd keep after him until we found it.

That's why I was amazed to see him drive into Mexico on Saturday evening. I was even more surprised to see him stop voluntarily at the *aduana* and go inside. We learned later from the agents following him that he'd applied for a residence permit and took care of all

the other paperwork necessary for an extended stay in Mexico. He wouldn't be coming back for a while; he was even more frightened than I'd figured.

I thought about Wilner a lot during the following months. In my mind he was the one who got away. In all the time I had been in the customs service, he was the first man who had eluded arrest when I was sure he was a smuggler.

I didn't see Jack Wilner again for over a year, and then I had to go to Mexico to do it. Every spring there's a yacht race from Newport Beach to Ensenada. There are always between three and four hundred boats in the race and they draw a huge crowd to witness the finish. I drove down to see it and found Jack Wilner standing alone not ten feet from me.

I walked over to him and touched him on the arm. "Hi!" I said. "Remember me?"

He gave me a hesitant smile, then it slipped away as he remembered. His eyeballs jerked as he searched the crowd for more so-called familiar faces.

"I just came down to see the race," I said. "Running into you wasn't planned."

That eased his nervousness and he relaxed visibly. We stood side by side and watched the boats. As the day wore on, he became more friendly and told me a little about himself. He was the owner of a small hotel and marina about twenty miles south of Tijuana, and he was in Ensenada to look at a few boats he was thinking of buying. He invited me to stop at his place sometime.

"Did you buy it with your profits from smuggling?" I asked boldly. I wanted to get him to talk about it, and I was sure he never would if I tried to be clever and circuitous.

He smiled with surprise at my directness. "I don't want to sign a statement," he said, imitating a TV villain. Then, after a few moments, he nodded. "Yes, that's how I got the money to buy it."

"You're not smuggling anymore?"

"No."

"That's hard to believe," I said. "You must've been pretty successful to afford a business, and few professional smugglers quit before being caught."

"I'd made up my mind to quit if anyone became curious about me. You people were too curious, so I quit."

We bought tacos from a street vendor and stood eating them.

"In that case, you won't mind telling me how you managed to return to California without being noticed when all the border stations were watching for you," I said.

"No, I don't mind. It was easy. I simply stuck my license plates under my jacket and walked back across the border," he said with a grin. "I was smuggling yellow convertibles, a new one every week."

IT'S A LOUSY WORLD

Bill Pronzini

Colly Babcock was shot to death on the night of September 9, in an alley between Twenty-ninth and Valley streets in the Glen Park District of San Francisco. Two police officers, cruising, spotted him coming out the rear door of Budget Liquors there, carrying a metal box. Colly ran when he saw them. The officers gave chase, calling out for him to halt, but he just kept running. One of the officers fired a warning shot, but when Colly didn't heed it, the officer pulled up and fired again. He was aiming low, trying for the legs, but in the half-light of the alley it was a blind shot. The bullet hit Colly in the small of the back and killed him instantly.

I read about it the following morning over coffee and undercooked eggs in a cafeteria on Taylor Street, a block and a half from my office. The story was on an inside page, concise and dispassionate; they teach you that kind of objective writing in the journalism classes. Just the cold facts. A man dies, but he's nothing more than a statistic, a name in black type, a faceless nonentity to be considered and then forgotten, along with your breakfast coffee.

Unless you knew him.

Unless he was your friend.

Very carefully I folded the newspaper and put it in my coat pocket. Then I stood from the table and made my way through the crowd of fine young men in dark business suits and neatly tacked ties, and the girls in tight, warm wool dresses and short, belted coats. I went out to the street.

The air smelled of pollution. The wind was up, blowing in off the Bay, and rubble swirled and eddied in the gutters. It would rain soon, but the cleansing would be short-lived, and ineffectual.

I walked into the face of the wind, toward my office.

"How's the job, Colly?"

"Oh, fine, just fine."

"No problems?"

"No, no, none at all."

"Stick with it, Colly."

"I'm a new man."

"Straight all the way?"

"Straight all the way."

Inside the lobby of my building, it was cold and dark and still. There was an Out of Order sign taped to the closed elevator doors. I went around to the stairs and up to the second floor and along the hallway to my office. The door was unlocked. I opened it and stepped inside.

Colly Babcock's widow sat in the chair before my desk.

Quietly I closed the door. Our eyes met and held for several seconds, and then I crossed the room and sat down, facing her.

She said, "The superintendent let me in."

"It's all right."

Her hands were clasped tightly in the lap of her plain black dress. "You heard?"

"Yes," I said. "What can I say, Lucille?"

"You were Colly's friend," she said. "You helped him."

"Maybe I didn't help him enough."

"He didn't do it," Lucille said. "He didn't steal that money. He didn't do all those robberies like they're saying."

"Lucille . . ."

"Colly and I were married thirty-one years," Lucille said. "Don't you think I would have known?"

I did not say anything.

"I always knew," she said.

I sat looking at her. She was a big woman, big and handsome—a strong woman. There was strength in the line of her mouth, and in her eyes, round and gray, tinged with red now from the crying. She had stuck by Colly Babcock through two prison terms, and twenty-odd years of running, and hiding, and of looking over her shoulder. Yes, I thought, she would always have known.

I said, "The papers said Colly was coming out the back door of the liquor store, carrying a metal box. They found a hundred and six dollars in the box, and the door jimmied open."

"I know what the papers said, and I know what the police are saying. But they're wrong. Wrong."

"He was there, Lucille."

"I know that," she said. "Colly liked to walk in the evenings. A long walk and a drink when he came home. It helped him to relax. That was how he came to be there."

I shifted position on my chair, not speaking.

Lucille said, "Colly was always nervous when he was doing jobs. That was one of the ways I could tell. He'd get irritable, and he couldn't sleep."

"He wasn't like that lately?"

"You saw him a few weeks ago," Lucille said. "Did he look that way to you?"

"No," I said, "he didn't."

"We were happy," Lucille said. "No more running. And no more waiting. We were truly happy."

My mouth felt dry. "What about his job?"

"They gave Colly a raise last week. A fifteen-dollar raise. We went to dinner to celebrate, a fine restaurant on the Wharf."

"You were getting along all right on the money," I said. "Nothing came up?"

"Nothing at all," Lucille said. "We even had a little

bank account started." She bit her lip. "We were going to the West Indies someday. Colly always wanted to retire to the West Indies."

I looked at my hands. They seemed big and awkward resting on the desk top. I took them away and put them in my lap. "These Glen Park robberies started a month and a half ago," I said. "The police estimate the total amount taken at between thirty-five hundred and four thousand dollars. You could get to the West Indies pretty well on that."

Lucille looked at me steadily from her round gray eyes. "Colly didn't do those robberies," she said.

What could I say? God knows, Colly had never been a saint. She knew that, all right. But this time he was innocent. All the evidence, and all the words, weren't going to change that in her eyes.

I got a cigarette from my pocket and made a thing of lighting it. The taste added more dryness to my mouth. Without looking at her, I said, "What do you want me to do, Lucille?"

"I want you to prove Colly was innocent. I want you to prove he didn't do what they're saying he did."

"I'd like nothing better. You know that. But how can I do it? The evidence . . ."

"Damn the evidence!" Her wide mouth trembled with the sudden emotion. "Colly was innocent, I tell you! I won't have him buried with this last mark against his name. I won't have it."

"Lucille, listen to me—"

"I won't listen," she said. "Colly was your friend. You stood up for him with the parole board. You helped him find his job. You talked to him, guided him. He was a different man, a new man, and you helped make him that way. Will you sit there and tell me you believe he threw it all away for four thousand dollars? Will you just sit there and let them brand him with these crimes, not knowing for certain if he was guilty? Or don't you care?"

I still could not meet her eyes. I stared down at the burning cigarette in my fingers, watching the smoke rise, curling, a gray spiral in the cold air of my office. And I said, "I care, Lucille."

"Then help me," she said. "For Colly. For your friend."

It was a long time before I said, "All right, Lucille. I'll see what I can do."

She stood then, head up, the way it had always been, and the anger was gone. There remained only the sadness. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to come on like that."

"Don't be sorry," I said, rising too. "He was your husband."

She nodded, her throat working, and there were no more words for either of us.

They told me at the Hall of Justice that Inspector Eberhardt was out somewhere but that he would be back within the hour. I went across Bryant Street and down a short alley to a coffee shop, and had three cups of coffee and smoked six cigarettes. Forty-five minutes passed.

When I went outside again, it had begun to drizzle. Some of the chill had gone out of the air, but the wind was stronger now. The clouds overhead were black and puffed, ready to burst.

I went inside the Hall of Justice again and rode the elevator upstairs and this time they told me Eberhardt was in. They asked him on the phone if he would see me, and he said he would, and they let me go in then.

Eberhardt was dressed in a brown suit that looked as if it had been hand-washed in lye soap. His tie was crooked, and there was a collar button missing from his shirt. He wore a reddish-blue bruise over his left eye.

"All right," he said, "make it quick, will you?"

"What happened to your eye?"

"I bumped into a doorknob."

"Sure you did."

"Yeah," he said. "You come here to pass the time of day, or was there something? I haven't been to bed in thirty-eight hours, and I'm in no mood for banter."

"I'd like a favor, Eb."

"Sure," Eberhardt said. "And I'd like three weeks' vacation."

"I want to look at an Officer's Report."

"Are you nuts?" Eberhardt said. "Get the hell out of here."

"There was a shooting last night," I said. "Two squad-car cops killed a man running away from the scene of a robbery out in Glen Park."

"So?"

"The man was a friend of mine."

Eberhardt gave me a look. "What friend?"

"Colly Babcock."

"Do I know him?"

"I don't think so. He did two stretches in San Quentin for burglary. I helped to send him up the first time, when I was on the cops."

"Glen Park," Eberhardt said. "That's where they've been having those robberies."

"Yeah," I said. "According to the papers, they've tabbed Colly as their man."

"Only you don't think so."

"Colly's wife doesn't think so," I said. "I guess maybe I don't either."

"I can't let you look at any reports," Eberhardt said. "And even if I could, it's not my department. Robbery'll be handling it."

"You could pull some strings."

"I could," he said, "but I won't. I'm up to my ears in something. I just don't have the time."

I got to my feet. "Well, thanks anyway, Eb." I had my hand on the doorknob before he called my name, stopping me. I turned to him.

"If things go all right," Eberhardt said, not looking

at me, "I'll be off duty in a couple of hours. If I happen to get down by Robbery, I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks, Eb," I said. "I appreciate it."

He didn't say anything. He was reaching for the telephone. But he heard me, all right.

I found Tommy Belknap in a bar called Luigi's, out in the Mission.

He was drinking whiskey at the long bar, leaning his head on his arms and staring at the wall. There were two men in work clothes drinking beer and eating sandwiches from lunch pails at the other end, and in the middle an old lady in a white shawl sipped dark-red wine, from a glass held with arthritic fingers. I sat on a stool next to Tommy, and said hello.

He turned slowly, his eyes moving upward. His face was an anemic white, and his bald head shone with beaded perspiration. He had trouble focusing his eyes, and he wiped at them with the back of one veined hand. He was packing one, all right—a big one. And I knew why.

"Hey," he said when he recognized me, "have a drink, will you?"

"Not just now."

Tommy got his glass to his lips, drinking tremulously. "Colly's dead," he said.

"Yes," I said, "I know."

"They killed him last night," Tommy said. "They shot him in the back."

"Take it easy," I said.

"He was my friend," Tommy said.

"He was my friend, too."

"Colly was a nice guy," Tommy said. "They had no right to shoot him like that."

"He was robbing a liquor store," I said quietly.

"The hell he was!" Tommy said. He swiveled on the stool and pushed a finger at my chest. "Colly was straight, you hear that? Straight ever since he got out."

"Was he, Tommy?"

"You're damned right he was."

"He didn't pull those robberies in Glen Park?"

"I told you, didn't I? He was straight."

"Who did pull them, Tommy?"

"I don't know."

"Come on," I said. "You get around. There must be something adrift."

"Nothing," Tommy said. "Don't know."

"Kids?" I said. "Street gang?"

"Don't know," Tommy said. "Don't know."

"But not Colly? You'd know if it was Colly?"

"Colly was straight," Tommy said. "And now he's dead."

He put his head down on his arms again. The bartender came over. He was a fat man with a reddish handlebar mustache. "You can't sleep in here, Tommy," he said.

"Colly's dead," Tommy said, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Let him alone," I said to the bartender.

"I can't have him sleeping in here," the bartender said.

I took out my wallet and put a dollar bill on the bar. "Then give him another drink."

The bartender looked at me, and then at the dollar, and then he shrugged and walked away.

I went out into the rain.

D. E. O'MIRA AND COMPANY, WHOLESALE PLUMBING SUPPLIES was a large two-storied building that took up three-quarters of a block on Berry Street, out near China Basin.

I parked on the street in front and went inside. In the center of the office was a glass-walled switchboard, with a little card glued to the front that said *Information.* A dark-haired girl wearing a print dress and a set of headphones sat inside the switchboard booth.

I went there and asked the girl if Mr. Templeton was in. She said he was at a meeting downtown, and wouldn't be back all day. Mr. Templeton was the office manager, and the man I had spoken to about giving Colly Babcock a job when he was paroled from San Quentin.

I thought about talking to one of the mélange of vice-presidents the company sported, and then decided that they wouldn't have had much contact with Colly. Since he'd worked in the warehouse, I thought it best if I talked to his immediate supervisor. I asked the girl where the shipping office was.

She pointed to a set of swing doors to the left, opposite the main entrance, and I thanked her and went over there and pushed the doors open. I followed a narrow, dark hallway, screened on both sides, and came out in the warehouse. On my left was a long counter. Behind it were display shelves, and behind them long rows of bins that stretched the width of the building. There were four or five men standing in front of the counter, and two more behind it, taking orders. Through an open doorway I could see the loading dock, and out to a cluttered yard where several pickup trucks were parked. On my right was a windowed office with two desks, neither occupied, and another room, jammed with an oblong workbench and dusty cartons of throw-away materials. I went to the office and stepped inside.

An old man in a pair of baggy brown slacks, a brown vest and a battered slouch hat that looked to be as old as he was stood before a narrow counter opposite the two unoccupied desks. A foul-smelling cigar danced in his thin mouth as he shuffled papers.

I waited for a time, but the old man did not look up. Finally I cleared my throat. "Excuse me," I said.

He looked up then grudgingly, eyed me up and down, and went back to his papers. "What is it?" he said, scribbling on one of the papers with a pencil.

"Are you Mr. Harlin?"

"That's right."

I told him my name and what I did, and then I said, "I wonder if I might talk to you for a moment."

"Go ahead and talk," he said.

"Privately, if you don't mind."

He looked at me again. "What about?"

"Colly Babcock," I said.

He made a grunting sound, shuffled his papers again, and then motioned me ahead of him, out onto the dock. We walked along there, past where a blond-haired boy in green coveralls was loading crated cast-iron sinks from a pallet into a pickup truck, and up to the wide double-door entrance to a second high-beamed warehouse.

The old man stopped and turned to me. "We can talk here."

"You were Colly's supervisor, is that right?"

"I was."

"Tell me about him."

"You won't hear anything bad, if that's what you're looking for."

"That's not what I'm looking for."

He thought about that for a moment, and then he shrugged. "Colly was a good worker," he said. "Did what you told him, no fuss. Quiet sort, kept to himself mostly."

"You knew about his prison record?"

"We knew, all of us. Nothing was ever said to Colly about it, though. I saw to that."

"Did he seem happy with the job?"

"Happy enough," the old man said. "Never grumbled or complained, if that's what you mean."

"No friction with any of the other men?"

"No. He got along fine with all of them."

A horn sounded from inside the second warehouse, and a yellow fork lift carrying a pallet of lavatories came out. We stepped out of the way, and the thing clanked and belched past, moving along the dock.

I said to the old man, "Mind telling me your reaction to what happened?"

"Didn't believe it," he answered. "None of us did. I ain't sure I believe it yet."

I nodded. "Did Colly have any particular friend here? Somebody he ate lunch with regularly, like that?"

"Kept to himself mostly, like I said. But he stopped with Sam Biehler for a beer a time or two after work."

"Would it be all right if I talked to this Biehler?"

"All right with me," the old man said. He paused, chewing on his cigar. "Listen, is there any chance Colly didn't do what they say? Oh, sure, I know all about what the papers put down, but a man'd have to be a fool to take half of that."

"There might be, Mr. Harlin," I said.

"Anything I can do," he said, "you let me know."

"I'll let you know."

We went back inside, and I spoke to Sam Biehler, a tall, slender man with a mane of silver hair that gave him, despite his work clothes, a rather distinguished appearance.

"I don't mind telling you," Biehler said to me, "I don't believe a damned word of it. I'd have had to be there to see it with my own eyes before I'd believe it, and maybe not even then."

"I understand you and Colly stopped for a beer occasionally?"

"Once a week maybe," Biehler said, "after work."

"What did you talk about?"

"The job, mostly. What was wrong with the company, what they could do to improve things. You know the way fellows talk."

"Anything else?"

"About Colly's past, is that what you're getting at?"

"I guess it is."

"Just once," Biehler said. "Colly told me a few things. But I never pressed him on it. I don't like to pry."

"What was it he told you, Mr. Biehler?"

"That he was never going back to prison," Biehler said. "That he was through with the kind of life he'd led before. That he was at peace with the world for the first time in his life." He looked at me, eyes sparkling, as if challenging me. "And you know something?"

"What's that, Mr. Biehler?"

"I been on this earth for fifty-nine years," he said. "I've known a lot of men in that time. You get so you can tell."

I waited.

"Colly wasn't lying," Biehler said.

I spent a half-hour in the Public Library, in Civic Center, reading back-dated issues of the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*. The Glen Park robberies had begun a month and a half ago, and I had paid only passing attention to them at the time.

When I had acquainted myself with the reported details, I went back to my office and called Lucille Babcock.

"The police were just here," she said. "They had a search warrant."

"Did they find anything?"

"There was nothing to find."

"What did they say?"

"They asked a lot of questions," she said. "They wanted to know about bank accounts and safety deposit boxes."

"Did you cooperate with them?"

"Yes."

"Good," I said. I told her what I had been doing all morning, and about what the people I had talked with said.

"You see?" she said when I had finished. "Nobody who knew Colly can believe he's guilty."

"Nobody but the police," I said softly.

"The police," she repeated, but there was no animosity in her voice.

I sat holding the phone. There were a lot of things I wanted to say, but they all seemed trite and meaningless. After a long moment I told her I would be in touch and then I hung up. The palms of my hands were moist.

I got a cigarette out of my pack. But I was out of matches. I went rummaging through my desk, but there were none there. I put the cigarette back in the pack.

I reached out and put my hand on the telephone. But before I could lift the receiver, the bell rang. I picked it up and it was Eberhardt.

"I was just going to call you," I said.

"I've been trying to call *you* for two hours," he said.

"Something you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Quit trying to hedge," he said. "You know what it is."

"Okay," I said. "Where are you now?"

"Home."

"Can I stop by?"

"If you can get up here within the half-hour," he said. "I'm going to bed then, and my wife has orders to bar all the doors and windows and take the telephone off the hook."

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," I said.

Eberhardt lived on Collingwood, at the foot of Twin Peaks. The house was small and white and comfortable, a stucco job with a trimmed lawn and flowers in neat rows. If you knew Eberhardt, the house was sort of symbolic; it typified everything the honest, hard-working cop was dedicated to protecting. I imagine he knew it, too; and if he did, got a perverse satisfaction from the knowledge. That was the way Eberhardt was.

I parked in his driveway and went up and knocked on the door. His wife, a tiny red-haired woman with astounding patience, let me in, asked how I was and showed me into the kitchen, closing the door behind her as she left.

Eberhardt was sitting at the table, having a pipe, a cup of coffee in front of him. There was a professional-looking bandage over the bruise on his eye.

"Have a seat," he said, and I had one. "You want some coffee?"

"Thanks."

He got me a cup, and then indicated a manila envelope lying to one side of the table. Sucking at his pipe he made an elaborate effort to ignore me then.

Inside the envelope was the report made by the two patrolmen, Avinisi and Carstairs, who had shot and killed Colly Babcock in the act of robbing the Budget Liquor Store. I read it over carefully, my eye catching on one part, a couple of sentences, under "Effects." When I was through, I put the report back in the envelope and returned it to the table.

Eberhardt looked at me then. "Well?"

"One item," I said, "that wasn't in the papers."

"What's that?"

"They found a pint of Kesslers in a paper bag in Colly's coat pocket."

Eberhardt shrugged. "It was a liquor store, wasn't it? Maybe he slipped it into his pocket on the way out."

"And put it into a paper bag first?"

"People do funny things," he said.

"Yeah," I said. I drank some of the coffee and then got on my feet.

"You leaving already?"

"Uh, huh," I said. "I've got some things to do."

"You owe me a favor," he said. "Remember that."

"I won't forget."

"You and the elephants," he said.

I wedged my car into a downhill parking slot on Chenery Street, a half-block from the three-room flat Lucille and Colly Babcock had called home for the past year. I walked through the rain, feeling the chill of it on my face, and mounted wooden steps to the door. Lucille answered on my first knock.

She wore the same black dress she had worn to my office that morning; I had the idea, looking at her, that she had been sitting in the silence of the empty flat, sitting in one chair, for most of the day.

We exchanged greetings and she let me in. I sat in the old stuffed leather chair by the window: Colly's chair. Lucille said, "Can I get you something?"

I shook my head. "What about you?" I said. "Have you eaten anything today?"

"No," she answered.

"You have to eat, Lucille."

"Maybe later."

"All right," I said. I rotated my hat in my hands, staring at it. I had some things I wanted to ask her, but I did not want to instill any false hopes. I had an idea, but it was only that, and too early.

I made conversation for a while, going over again my talk with Tommy Belknap and my visit to D. E. O'Mira. When I thought I could put it in without arousing her curiosity, I said, "You mentioned this morning that Colly liked to take walks in the evening. Was he in the habit of walking to any particular place, or in any particular direction?"

"No," Lucille said. "He just liked to walk. He was gone for an hour or two sometimes."

"He never mentioned where he'd been?"

"Just that he walked around the neighborhood."

Around the neighborhood, I thought. The alley where Colly Babcock had been shot to death was eleven blocks from this flat on Chenery Street. He could have walked in a straight line, or he could have gone roundabout in any direction.

I said, "Colly liked to have a nightcap when he came back from these walks, is that right?"

"He did, yes."

"He kept a bottle here, then?"

"Yes."

I continued to rotate my hat. "I wonder if I could have a small drink, Lucille."

She nodded slowly and went to a squat wooden cabinet near the kitchen door. She bent, swinging the panel open in the front, looking inside. Then she straightened. "I'm sorry," she said. "We—I seem to be out."

I stood. "It's all right," I said. "I should be going anyway."

"Where will you go now?"

"To see some people," I said.

"You'll let me know, won't you?"

"I will," I said. I paused. "I was wondering if you might have a picture of Colly, Lucille? A snapshot?"

"I think so," she said. She frowned. "Why would you want a picture?"

"It might be that I'll need it," I said vaguely. "I have to see a lot of people."

She seemed satisfied with that. "I'll see if I can find one for you."

I waited while she went into the bedroom. She returned a minute or two later with a black-and-white snap of Colly, head and shoulders, that had been taken in the living room there. He was smiling, one eyebrow raised in mock raffishness.

I put the snap into my pocket and thanked Lucille. Then I went to the door and let myself out.

The skies had parted like the Red Sea. Drops of rain as big as hail pellets lashed the sidewalk. Thunder rumbled in the distance, edging closer. I pulled the collar of my coat tighter around my neck, and made a run for my car.

I came inside Tay's Liquors on Whitney Street and stood dripping water on the floor. They had a heater on a shelf just inside the door, and I allowed myself the luxury of its warmth for a few moments. Then I went to the counter.

A young man wearing a white shirt with a green garter on one sleeve got up from a stool near the cash reg-

ister and walked down to me. He showed teeth. "Kind of wet out there," he said.

No, I thought, it's warm as toast. But I said, "Maybe you can help me."

"Sure," he said. "Name your poison."

He was brimming with originality. I took the snapshot of Colly Babcock from my pocket and extended it across the counter. "Have you ever seen this man before?"

He looked at me. "Cop?" he asked, but his voice was still amicable.

I sighed, and showed him my identification. He shrugged, and then squinted at the picture. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "You know," he said, "I might have seen this guy at that."

I did not feel quite as cold as I had when I came in. I had been walking the streets of Glen Park for two and a half hours now. I had been to eight liquor stores, two all-night markets, a delicatessen and six bars that sold off-sale. I had come up with nothing, except possibly a head cold.

The young man was still studying the picture. "Fellow looked like that stopped in here last night," he said. "Nice old bird, too."

"About what time?"

"Eleven-thirty or so."

Fifteen minutes before Colly Babcock had been shot to death in an alley three and a half blocks away. I said, "What did he buy, do you remember?"

"Let's see," the young man said. "Bourbon, I think. Medium price."

"Kesslers?"

"Yeah, I think it was. Kesslers."

"Thanks," I said. "What's your name?"

"Wait a minute," he said. "I don't want to get involved in anything."

"Don't worry," I said. "It's nothing like you're thinking."

A bit reluctantly he gave me his name and his address. I wrote it down in a notebook I carried, thanked him again, and got out of there.

I had something more than an idea now.

Eberhardt said, "I ought to lay one on your chin."

He had just come out of the bedroom, eyes foggy with sleep, hair standing straight up, wearing a wine-colored bathrobe and pajamas. His wife stood beside him.

I held up my hand. "I'm sorry to get you out of bed, Eb," I said. "But this couldn't wait."

He said something which I didn't hear, but which his wife heard. She cracked him lightly on the arm to show her disapproval, and then turned and left the room.

Eberhardt went over and sat on the couch. He finger-combed his hair, and then glared up at me. "What's so damned important?"

"Colly Babcock," I said.

"You don't give up, do you?"

"Sometimes I do," I said. "But not this time. Not now." I told him what I had learned at Tay's Liquors.

He thought about it. "Doesn't prove much," he said finally. "So he bought a bottle there."

"Eb," I said, "if he was planning to hit a liquor store, do you think he would have bothered to *buy* a bottle fifteen minutes before?"

"The job might have been spur-of-the-moment," Eberhardt said.

"Colly didn't work that way. When he was pulling them, they were all carefully planned, well in advance."

"He was getting old," Eberhardt said. "They change."

He was making argument. But he hadn't known Colly. I said, "There are a few other things."

"Such as?"

"The burglaries," I said. "I did some reading up on them. They run in a pattern, Eb. Back door jimmied, marks on the jamb and lock. Hand bar, or something."

I paused. "They didn't find any hand bar on Colly."

"Maybe he got rid of it."

"When did he have time? They caught him coming out the door."

Eberhardt wet his lips. I could tell I was getting his interest. "Go ahead," he said.

"The pattern," I said. "Doors jimmied, drawers rifled, papers strewn about. No fingerprints, but it smacks of amateurism, Eb."

He rubbed the beard stubble on his jaw. "And Colly was a professional."

"He could have done the book," I said. "He was neat and precise. He didn't ransack. He always knew exactly what he was after. He never deviated from that, Eb. Not once."

Eberhardt got to his feet and walked to the curtained bay window. He stood there with his back to me. "What do you think, then?"

"You figure it."

He was silent for a time. Then he said very slowly, "I can figure it, all right. But I don't like it. I don't like it at all."

"And Colly?" I said. "Did he like it any better?"

Eberhardt turned abruptly and went to the telephone. He made a call, spoke to someone, and then someone else. When he hung up, he was already unbuttoning his bathrobe.

But at the bedroom door he stopped. "You want to come along?"

"No," I said. "It's not my place."

He looked at me. "I hope you're wrong, you know that."

I met his eyes. "I hope I'm not," I said.

I was sitting in the darkness of my apartment, smoking, when the telephone rang three hours later.

I let it ring a few times, watching the shadows the way I had been, and then I picked up the receiver and said hello.

"You weren't wrong," Eberhardt said.

I let out my breath slowly, waiting.

"Avinisi and Carstairs," Eberhardt said. There was bitterness in his voice. "Each of them on the force a little more than a year. The old story: bills, long hours, not enough pay. They cooked up the idea one night while they were cruising, and tried it out. It worked pretty good; who'd figure the cops for it?"

"I'm sorry, Eb," I said.

"So am I," he answered.

"You have any trouble?"

"Not much."

"What about Colly?"

"It was the other way around," Eberhardt said. "He was cutting through the alley when he saw them coming out the rear door. He turned to run and they panicked. Avinisi got him in the back. When they went to check, Carstairs recognized him from the mug books; they have the rookies reading them through now."

"And they saw a way to get out from under," I said.

"Yeah," Eberhardt said.

"Look, Eb . . ."

"Forget it," he said. "I know what you're going to say."

"You can't help but get a couple of them that way."

"I said to forget it."

"All right. See you, Eb."

"Yeah," he said. "See you." The line went dead.

I listened to the empty buzzing for a time. It's a lousy world, I thought. But sometimes, at least, there is justice.

And then I called Lucille Babcock and told her why her husband had died.

They had a nice funeral for Colly.

They held the services in a small, white nondenominational church on Monterey Boulevard. There were a lot of flowers; roses, mostly, in yellow and red, the way Colly would have liked.

Quite a few people came. Tommy Belknap was there, and Sam Biehler and Old Man Harlin and the rest of them from D. E. O'Mira. There were faces I didn't know, too; the whole thing had gotten a big play in the papers.

Surprisingly, unless you knew him, Eberhardt was there as well. And, of course, Lucille. She sat very straight on the wooden pew in front of the coffin, next to me, and her eyes were dry. She was some fine woman.

We went to the cemetery afterward, quiet and green with wide-pillared gates in Colma, and listened to the words and watched them put Colly into the ground. When it was done, I offered to drive Lucille home, but she said no, there were some arrangements she wanted to make for gardening and for a headstone with the cemetery people, and that they would see to it that she got home all right.

I rode alone with the driver of the big, black hearse back to the church on Monterey Boulevard. Eberhardt was waiting there with his car. I walked over to him.

"I don't like funerals," he said.

"No," I said.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I hadn't thought about it."

"Come on up to my place. My wife's gone off to visit her sister, and I've got some brandy there. Maybe we'll get drunk."

I got in beside him. "Maybe we will at that," I said.

ONLY SO MUCH TO REVEAL

Joan Richter

When the police left—the two who had come from Nairobi by car and the two Africans who had walked over from the police station across the river—Matua locked up the main house and went to his quarters behind the line of pepper trees. He added a few more pieces of charcoal to the cook fire which had burned low during his absence, fanned it into a new flame, and put the pot of meat and beans back to cook again. Then he sat down on the stone steps to think.

Overhead the sky was a clear blue, with puffs of high white clouds. If he raised his eyes he might see the tops of the flame trees that grew down by the river, their scarlet blooms and broad green leaves obscuring the orange tile roof of the local police station just beyond.

Black or white, the police were the same, swollen by the authority their uniforms gave them into thinking they were bigger men than they really were. His friend Tano was no different. Since Tano had become a policeman there was no kindness in him, none of the old good-natured laughter. Only when his heavy boots were undone and set aside, and a freshly brewed bowlful of *pombe* began to gurgle in his stomach and flow in his veins, did Tano's face soften, his lips curl, and laughter fill his mouth. But still not in the old way.

Today Tano had not come as a friend. Like the other three with him, he had come as the police, with his boots on. One lunge of a boot and a man would fall to his knees. Matua had seen it happen many times.

And always it made the last meal he had eaten fight in his stomach.

The first time was in his village many years ago when he and Tano were boys. The police were all white men then and they came in their boots and uniforms, with their truncheons swinging at their sides. They were looking for a man. Matua could no longer remember of what crime the man had been accused, but he remembered how he and Tano had watched from the shadows of one of the huts as the man was found, kicked, beaten, and finally dragged away.

Matua shook off the recollection and leaned back against the stone of the step, sighing. Things had changed, but not in the way he had dreamed of. Independence had come and now Africans wore police uniforms side by side with Europeans. Tano was one of them. It bothered Matua more to see an African kick an African.

Yet today there had been a timidity about Tano that surprised him. It was the same with the other man who had come from the station house across the river, but Matua's quick mind found an explanation. The two black men were ill at ease in front of the big red-haired Englishman from Nairobi whose uniform was more elaborate than theirs and who had arrived by car with an Indian policeman as his driver. The Englishman's face was puffy and discolored, with streaks of purple in his cheeks. Rusty brows frowned over hard blue eyes and a bushy mustache twitched about his wet mouth like the tassels on a ripe ear of maize. The Indian wore a starched Sikh turban instead of the regulation hat and stared at Matua with bright hard eyes, but he too was silent as the questioning began.

"When was the last time you saw the Bwana alive?" the Englishman asked.

Matua opened his mouth but did not speak. Long ago he had learned it did not serve an African of his station to acknowledge how well he understood the

white man's language. Feigned ignorance allowed one to say less and learn more. His silence was rewarded. The question was repeated, as he had hoped, in Swahili.

"After dinner," he answered. "The Bwana said he did not want anything else, so I went to my room to sleep. It was no later than nine o'clock."

"What noises did you hear during the night?"

Had he heard something? Some small cry? Or perhaps even a scream. How could he be sure? It might have been a tree toad or an owl or the wild screech of a civet cat thwarted in its search of prey. Perhaps what he had heard had been only the sound of his own snoring. But his answer to the red-haired European showed none of his uncertainty. "I heard nothing," he said.

"Nothing!" The mustache twitched, the bloodshot cheeks reddened. "How could you not hear some sound? Look at this!" They were in the sitting room then where kapok lay in heaps on the floor and clung in clumps to the sisal rug that Matua had brushed and swept only yesterday. A white powder clouded the border of polished wood. Every seat had been slashed, every piece of furniture overturned and ripped apart. In the bedroom it was the same—the mattress in pieces, the pillows in shreds, feathers lying like fallen leaves around the room, as in a henhouse after a cockfight.

"My house is behind the trees." Matua pointed out the window. "It was very cold last night." It was true—he had even wished for another blanket. "My window was shut. I heard nothing."

The Indian turned to the Englishman, his head and turban moving as one plastered unit, his sallow face sly. "They sleep and it is as good as dead. But I think this one lies."

Matua gave no sign that he understood the English-spoken aside, but an old anger leaped in his stomach. It was eased a little when he saw the look that Tano gave the Indian. In it was his own hidden hatred, and once

again he felt united with his friend, because together they were seeing in that sallow face the countenance of all the Indians at whose shop counters they had been cheated and abused.

Long ago the British had brought Indian laborers to East Africa—hundreds of them, and their families—to work on the railway. A few returned to their homeland, but the others settled along the coast of East Africa and inland. They became shopkeepers and merchants and gained control of all the commerce and trade in East Africa. In small villages and towns the Indian *duka* was the only shop. In large communities *dukas* were side by side, connected like beads on a string by hidden passageways, where prices were set and word was passed when an African buyer appeared. If the price in one shop seemed too high it did no good to go to the one next door. The price was fixed and inflated, down the line, for everything—rice, tea, sugar, cloth, thread, a single needle. It is easy to learn to hate a man who will give you only half the amount of rice your money should buy, when half is not enough to feed your family, and the coin in your hand is all the money you have.

The British policeman scowled at the Indian's comment, but made no reply. Matua had learned early there was no love between them either. The policeman turned to Matua and continued his questioning.

"When did you return to the house?"

"At six-thirty this morning."

"Is that your usual time?"

"Yes."

"But you did not ring up the police station until fifteen minutes after seven. Is that correct?"

"It is correct."

"Why did you not call immediately? What were you doing from six-thirty to seven-fifteen?"

"I was making scones."

The mustache twitched and the words that came

from the moist lips were punctuated with spittle. "What are you talking about? Scones! Your master had been murdered!"

"I did not know the Bwana was dead. I did not go into the bedroom right away."

"Why not? Did not this mess tell you something was wrong?"

Matua shook his head.

The Indian took a step forward. "Do not shake your head! Speak!" The Swahili command was an explosion of garlic breath in Matua's face. "You are taking time to think up some lies!"

Matua swallowed but looked straight into the Indian's small black eyes. "I do not know what you mean by lies. It is I who called the police." Matua glanced at Tano to see if he would support his statement, but Tano was staring straight ahead. The Englishman spoke, angrily, "I want to know when you discovered the Bwana was dead!"

"It was six-thirty when I came into the house, by the kitchen door. Always I go to the sitting room to open the curtains, but this morning with the scones to make I did not go. I would do it later, while the scones were in the oven, after I had brought the Bwana his first cup of tea.

"It was seven o'clock when I took the tea tray down the hall to the bedroom. The door was closed. I knocked and went in. It was dark and I set the tray down on the small table inside the door and went to open the blinds. I stumbled over something lying on the floor. 'Bwana,' I called, but there was no answer. I backed away and turned on the light. The Bwana was lying on the floor dead."

"How did you know he was dead? Did you touch him?"

Matua frowned. "He did not need touching for me to know. There were many wounds and much blood. He was dead."

"When did you call the police?"

"Then." The answer was almost the truth. There was no need for him to say that he had run from the house first, to his own room, that he had sat on the edge of the bed shivering with terror and wondering what he should do, that he had even thought of running away.

But why should he run? He had done nothing. Where would he go? His village was far away and he did not have enough money for the bus fare. And what of the tea tray he had left in the Bwana's bedroom? And the scones still baking in the oven? He could not leave without cleaning the kitchen, or when the police came—and he knew they would come sometime—they would know he had been in the house and had run away. They would think he was the one who had killed the Bwana and they would come after him to his village. They would track him down as though he were nothing more than a wild pig.

Matua had covered his face with his hands, had tried to shut out the pictures forming in his mind of his children clinging to one another in the shadow of their hut, of his wife standing with the other women, watching as he was beaten and dragged away. It had not been the sight of the dead Bwana that had filled him with terror, but of the *panga,* lying next to him, its broad blade caked with dried earth and newly clotted with blood.

"I telephoned the police station where my friend Tano works. Tano was not there, but the others came. They took the body away and told me not to clean the room. Now you are here." He did not have to tell anyone about how he had almost run away. There is only so much that a man has to reveal of himself to other men.

"And the *panga?* Where is that?"

"They took the *panga* when they took the Bwana." He thought again of the knife as it had lain beside the dead body. Every African owned a *panga,* sometimes two. They were protection in the forest, a hoe in the

field, an ax for splitting bamboo or chopping firewood, a knife to cut a pawpaw in half and scrape out the seeds. All alike, with their solid wooden handles and broad blades, they could be bought at an Indian *duka* for fifteen shillings each. One was hardly recognizable from another. But a man knew his own *panga,* just as a man knew his own woman.

"The *panga* was mine," Matua said, and saw the Englishman lift his head and look at him. The Indian looked too, and so did Tano and the African policeman beside him. "I had worked in my *shamba* yesterday, hoeing beans. When I was done I left my *panga* standing outside the door to my room, with the earth still on it. It was there when I went to sleep last night, but it was gone this morning. I would like to have my *panga* back when the police are through with it."

"Of all the bloody nerve!" the Indian exclaimed. "He'd like to have his *panga* back!"

The African policeman beside Tano stepped forward and spoke for the first time. Matua did not know his name, but he had seen him with Tano once in a while in town. "A *panga* costs fifteen shillings. It is Matua's right to have it back."

"It's a murder weapon, you idiot!" the Indian shouted.

"What will be done with it when the investigation is over?" Tano asked quietly.

"How should I know," the Indian said.

"You know." Tano's voice was louder now. "You will take it! And then you will sell it to someone for *more* than fifteen shillings. The *panga* is Matua's. It will be returned to him."

The hate that gleamed in Tano's eyes warmed Matua. Once more they were boys together.

"Enough of that," the Englishman commanded and turned his attention to Matua. "You heard no one come to your house last night?"

"I heard nothing."

"What was the murderer looking for?"

Matua frowned, not certain that he understood. "I do not know what you mean."

"The murderer was looking for something. Why else would he have done all this?" The Englishman nodded at the ruined furniture.

"I do not know. Perhaps it was money."

"But didn't the Bwana keep his money in the bedroom safe?"

"Yes, but I do not think there was very much money there. It is the end of the month now and the Bwana always went to the bank on the first day."

"Whatever was there is gone," the Englishman said.

"The Bwana said it was not a very good safe. That is why he did not keep much money."

"What did he keep in the house?"

Again Matua frowned. "I do not understand."

"The murderer wanted more than what he found in the safe. He tore up this whole bloody place to find it. What was it? What was he looking for?"

Matua shook his head. "I do not know."

The questioning went on for a while longer and then suddenly it ended. Matua was glad, because there was no more to be said. The Englishman told him to clean up the house. The landlord had been informed of his tenant's death and already had someone interested in renting the house. They would be coming from Nairobi tomorrow.

Matua rose from the step and went to look at his cook fire. He had begun to smell the sweet odor of the beans and meat cooking together and he realized he was hungry. He was thinking how good it would be to have someone to share his meal with when he heard a footstep along the path on the other side of the pepper trees. He was not certain whether it was real or his imagination. And then all at once his breath froze in his chest. Not until that instant did he realize that if the murderer had not found what he was looking for, he might come back.

"Jambo," came a greeting through the trees.

"Jambo," Matua replied, his heart beating like a trapped bird in his chest.

"Habari gani, how are things?"

Matua felt his heart quiet. He recognized the voice. "Ah, Tano. You have smelled my meat and beans even from across the river."

They sat on the steps and ate with their fingers, dipping balls of cooked cornmeal into the stew. They spoke of unimportant things at first and then Matua asked, "What do the police think about the Bwana's murder? Do they know who did it?"

"A robber."

"A robber? But who?"

"How can they know who? He did not leave his name."

Matua frowned. He did not like Tano's joke. "But the police are clever. They have ways of finding things out."

"What things? What can be found out in the house? Have you discovered something?"

Matua shook his head. "I have discovered nothing. I only think it strange that the Bwana was killed with my *panga,* but that another knife was used to do the rest."

"And how do you know that?"

"The blood would have been gone from my *panga,* so would the earth left from my bean patch, if it had been used to open up the mattress and to rip the cushions."

Tano looked at him strangely, his eyes narrowing. "And what do you think is the meaning of that?"

Matua shook his head. "I do not know. Perhaps the murderer is someone not comfortable using a *panga* for very long. What was done to the furniture took a long time."

Tano frowned. "That is a good thought, Matua. I am sure the English policeman from Nairobi did not think of it. Tell me, though, why did you tell him the *panga* was yours? You do not need the fifteen shillings that much."

Matua looked up from the bowl. "Why should I let the Indian have it?"

Tano shrugged. "But that is not why you spoke of it."

"It is better I tell the police it is my *panga* than if they find out later. There would be trouble."

"How could they find out? One *panga* is like any other."

"There are differences. And the police are clever." Matua paused, realizing he had been talking about the police as if Tano were not one of them. "Besides, it is easier to tell the truth than it is to lie. A lie can be forgotten. But the truth never."

Tano laughed and sucked the juice of the meat off his fingers. "Why then did you not tell the truth about what the murderer was looking for?"

Matua raised his head, startled. "What do you mean?"

"You have said it is easier to speak the truth than it is to lie. So why lie to me, your old friend?"

"I do not know what you are talking about, Tano."

"A long time ago when you first came to work for the Bwana, when the Memsab was still alive, you told me they showed you diamonds—diamonds the Bwana had taken from the Congo which, if they were found, would put him in jail. That is why they had to be kept in the house, carefully hidden. But where, Matua? Where did the Bwana hide the diamonds?"

Diamonds. Matua heard Tano say the word again and thought to himself what a fool he had been to have forgotten. Too late he saw that Tano had caught the look of recollection in his face.

"Now you remember!"

"I have not thought of them for many years."

"Well, think of them now. Where are they?"

Matua frowned—only a fool or an old man could forget something he once knew. Why is it that I cannot remember? The Memsab once spoke of them to me, and so did the Bwana. They said that some day if the

coffee crop failed there would be the diamonds. But it is not the kind of thing for a European to tell a servant. Why was it I had to know? And why was I such a fool to boast about it to Tano? But that was long ago before Tano wore the uniform of a policeman.

"Come, Matua. We are old friends. Tell me where the diamonds are."

"I do not know where they are." Matua spoke with impatience, looking straight into Tano's eyes. Then he reached for the empty bowl and took it to the outside faucet to rinse it clean. "I must go back to the house now. There is much to do, with new people coming tomorrow."

Tano rose. "I will help you. Perhaps while you clean you will begin to remember. Perhaps together we can find them. Lend me one of your shirts, Matua. I cannot return to the police station looking like a houseboy."

Matua looked at the starched uniform and the polished black boots and at the new gold watch that gleamed on Tano's wrist. He did not think the job of a policeman paid so well. Without a word he went into his room to get Tano the shirt he had asked for. He wanted Tano to go, to leave him to his cleaning, but he would not say this because Tano would think he wanted to be left alone so he could find the diamonds. And in a way that was so, but not for the reason Tano would think. Just as clothes were in the closet, meat was in the refrigerator, and money was in the safe, the diamonds too were somewhere. But they were not his, so he had not thought of them. What would he do with a handful of diamonds? What good had they done the Bwana?

While Matua swept and dusted and carried the stuffings of furniture out to a rubbish pile in the garden, Tano examined the furniture, probing into corners with a shiny knife he had taken from his trouser pocket.

Once Matua called to him. "Help me with this rug, Tano. I cannot clean it in here. I must put it outside on the line and beat it."

With a flick of his wrist Tano sent the bright knife into the wooden arm of a chair where it landed upright and quivering. Matua pretended not to notice. Since he had become a policeman a *panga* was not good enough for Tano. But what good was a small knife like that? It could not hoe, nor could it chop down a bamboo tree. Matua bent over the rolled-up rug while Tano took his end.

"The safe in the bedroom—" Tano started to say as they heaved the large rug over the wire line outside the kitchen door. "Why did the Bwana not keep the diamonds there?"

"The safe was not strong." Matua squinted against the sun slanting through the curtain of pepper-tree leaves and looked over the rug barrier between them. How could Tano be so sure the murderer had not finally found what he had been looking for?

They went back into the house and with the rug out of the way it was easier to clean the sitting room. Tano helped him carry some of the broken furniture out onto the veranda and stack it in a corner. They took the mattress to the rubbish pile. Then Matua put on his sheepskin footpads and began skating over the wooden floors, rubbing in the coconut oil that made the wide boards gleam.

"I am thirsty after all this work," Tano said as he came upon the cupboard where the Bwana kept his whiskey. "Let us have a drink."

Matua shook his head. He liked *pombe,* the African beer of his village, but he had no taste for the white man's whiskey.

"What is this?" Tano held up a small green bottle. "I have not seen this kind of whiskey before."

Matua looked across the room at the bottle Tano was examining. "It is not whiskey. It is something called ginger ale, to be mixed with whiskey. When the Memsab was alive that is what she and the Bwana would drink, with a little ice. But afterwards the Bwana did not want anything but whiskey."

"Fix me a drink, Matua. A drink like the Bwana used to have. Pretend I am the Bwana of the house now and you are my servant."

Matua looked at him. "I will fix you one drink. And then you will go. You are keeping me from my work. There is more to clean if new people are coming tomorrow. Perhaps if I have the house to their liking they will ask me to stay and work for them." He took the bottle of ginger ale and the whiskey from Tano and started toward the kitchen.

Tano called after him. "I will have my drink and I will stay while you clean the rest of the house. I am not satisfied that you do not know where the diamonds are."

Matua turned around. "I have told you I do not know. The Memsab and the Bwana spoke of them once, a long time ago. And never again. What good would they do you anyhow?"

"Diamonds are worth a lot of money, Matua."

"Who would give you money for them?"

"Merchants in the bazaar."

"Indians."

Tano shrugged. "If I have diamonds and I want money for them, I must go to who has money and who wants diamonds. Yes, Indians."

Matua shook his head. "They would cheat you and then they would report you to the police."

Tano threw his head back and laughed. "You forget, Matua. I am the police."

Matua smiled sadly. "Yes, sometimes I do forget." He turned then and went into the kitchen and took two tall glasses from a side cupboard. It was automatic. Whiskey and ginger ale belonged in two tall glasses. One for the Memsab and one for the Bwana. But that was a long time ago. He put one glass back on the shelf and went into the pantry to the refrigerator for some ice.

He reached for the small tray on the right. That, too,

was automatic. Always the tray on the right. Why never the other? He stood for a moment staring into the open coldness and felt a small smile move on his lips. He reached for the tray on the left and carried both trays into the kitchen and put them on the counter near the sink. The refrigerator would need cleaning too.

Tano was leaning in the doorway, fingering the blade of his small knife, watching Matua thoughtfully. "What you have said about the Indian merchant is true. If *you* would go to him with the diamonds he would report *you* to the police, but he would not tell them you had brought him many diamonds—only one or two. But one or two would be enough to put you in jail for a long time. And the Indian would have all the rest."

"Why do you say this to me?"

"Because I want you to know that without me to help you with the diamonds they will do you no good."

"And what makes you think that with your help they would do me good? What good did they do the Bwana? I do not need your advice, Tano."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that if I knew where the diamonds were I would not touch them. And if they came into my hands I would get rid of them."

"You are either a fool or a liar!"

"Perhaps a fool, Tano, but I do not lie. Now here is your drink." Two ice cubes tinkled against the glass as he held it out.

Tano took it from him with his left hand, but his right hand shot forward, pointing the knife. "If I learn someday that you have lied to me, Matua, that the diamonds are already yours—"

Matua stared into the eyes of the man, who as a boy had been his friend, and then looked deliberately at the clean blade of the knife in his hand. He was not afraid. Tano would not hurt him. Two murders in the same house would cause the European policeman with the

mustache like the tassels on a ripe ear of maize to become suspicious. Perhaps he was suspicious already. Matua had admitted that the *panga* used to kill the Bwana belonged to him, but what of the other knife, the knife that had been used to slash up the furniture. To whom did it belong? The Englishman could not be the fool that Tano thought him to be.

Their glances met over the point of the knife and Matua found himself wondering if the uniform could be blamed for the man. He did not think the Bwana had minded dying. He was not young any more. He had grown old quickly after the Memsab's death. That Tano had killed him was a great misdeed, but that he had used an old friend's *panga* was the greater misdeed.

Tano raised the glass to his lips and took a long swallow. "It is good. Why do you not have one?"

Matua shook his head. "I have work to do," he said and turned to the sink. He emptied the two trays of ice cubes there and let water pour over the cubes. As they became small he got rid of them by sweeping them down the drain with his hands. He let the water run as he rinsed the trays and set them aside to dry. Later, after he had cleaned the refrigerator, he would fill the trays with fresh water and put them back in their place. For a while it would still be automatic for him to reach for the tray on the right, never to touch the one on the left. But now he realized that it did not matter any more.

Beside him Tano made a noise as he sucked up the last of his drink and then tossed the ice cubes into the sink.

Matua turned his head away as he reached for the faucet to flush down the last two cubes. He smiled to himself. It had been a good hiding place.

WHO'S GOT THE LADY?

Jack Ritchie

Bernice Lecour moved the enlarged color photograph of the "Patrician Lady" a bit closer to her easel. "That enigmatic smile. The eternal Mysterious Woman."

"Frankly," I said, "I think she's simpering."

Bernice shrugged. "Perhaps. I understand that they had awful teeth in those days and didn't dare grin from ear to ear like our modern beauty queens."

I glanced at my watch. "I have an appointment at Customs and after that I'll drop in at Zarchetti's and steal the rubber stamp."

"Wouldn't it be simpler just to go to some shop and have a duplicate made?"

"Simpler, yes. But I want the imprint to be absolutely authentic under a microscope. The police will undoubtedly visit Zarchetti looking for one particular stamp and I want them to find it."

Bernice picked up a magnifying glass, studied a corner of her almost completed copy of the "Patrician Lady," and then carefully applied another stroke of amber. "Have you ever stolen anything before?"

"Only the X-rays."

And that had occurred in Paris three weeks ago. I had been alone with Monsieur André Arnaud in his office completing arrangements for the American exhibition of the "Patrician Lady" when he had been called out of the room.

He had been absent a considerable time and I had found myself wandering idly about, examining this and

that, and eventually opening a filing cabinet. It was there that I found the X-rays of the "Patrician Lady."

I had been mildly startled that they were not under lock and key, but upon further reflection I realized that while the "Patrician Lady" herself might be worth a few million dollars, her X-rays were intrinsically of little value. They were probably not even referred to more than once every two or three years.

No one would possibly want to steal them.

But then I had pondered upon Bernice's enormous talent as a copyist and the fact that we would both be a great deal happier with a large sum of money, and it was at that moment that my plan was born and very rapidly outgrew its swaddling clothes.

I slipped the X-rays under my coat and when Arnaud reappeared I was all innocence and admiring a Rubens sketch upon the wall.

And now Bernice darkened a dab of sienna on her palette. "During his lifetime, the master painted eighty-seven portraits—one hundred and twelve of which are in the United States." She surveyed her work and sighed. "If I had lived in his time and been a man, I too would have become immortal."

"I prefer you mortal and in this form," I said. I looked at my watch again. "I'm afraid I'll have to go now, Bernice. My appointment with Amos Pulver is at three."

She lifted her eyes momentarily from the canvas. "About the Renoir?"

"Yes."

"What have you decided?"

"It's authentic."

She grinned. "What did you do? Flip a coin?"

I kissed her. "Goodbye, Bernice."

I arrived at the Amos Pulver townhouse a few minutes before three. The others were already there—Louis Kendall, of the Oaks Galleries, and Walter Jameson, who fancied himself an authority on Renoir.

Two months previously Pulver had purchased a

Renoir—or what purported to be a Renoir—at the annual Hollingwood auction. The price had been forty thousand and Pulver had been satisfied—until last week when he had read a magazine article concerning art forgeries while in his dentist's waiting room.

Pulver had immediately assembled the three of us to pass on the authenticity of the painting and we had each had the canvas for several days of study.

Now Pulver bit the tip off a cigar and surveyed us. "Well?"

Louis Kendall spoke first. "In my opinion your painting is a forgery."

Jameson regarded Kendall coldly. "You are mistaken. The painting is an original Renoir. There is no question about it."

Amos Pulver turned to me. "What's your verdict?"

I considered a moment and then said, "Your Renoir is absolutely authentic."

"Ridiculous," Kendall snapped. "Any fool can see that the canvas is simply a pathetic attempt to imitate the Renoir dry style."

Walter Jameson raised his favorite eyebrow. "What do *you* know about Renoir's dry style. I've written six articles on that alone."

Amos Pulver waved a hand. "The hell with his dry style. All I wanted was an official vote and I got that." He removed three checks from his wallet and passed them out. "But I still wish the vote would have been unanimous."

Pulver let Kendall and Jameson leave, but he detained me.

He mixed two bourbons and sodas. "I don't know a damn thing about paintings and couldn't care less. But everybody I know is collecting and I don't want to be left out in the cold with nothing to talk about."

He handed me my glass. "Tell me, do you experts really know what you're doing when you look over a painting?"

"Your bourbon is excellent," I said.

Pulver sipped from his glass. "I read that the 'Patrician Lady' is being shipped here for exhibition in the Vandersteen Memorial Wing of The National Art Center."

"A cultural exchange," I said. "France allows us to view her pictures and we are allowed to admire them."

"This one's worth a few million," he said with a touch of reverence. "The greatest painting in the world."

"Yes," I said. "It would appear so."

"I hear they're taking a lot of precautions? Since you're the Vandersteen Wing curator you must be well informed as to that."

I nodded. "The painting is being transferred by ship. It will be inside a specially constructed case—insulated, cushioned, and air-conditioned."

"I mean they're really guarding it. I hear that at least four armed guards are with it twenty-four hours a day. I understand that when it gets here there will even be a marine guard."

"With loaded rifles," I said. "Two of them will be stationed beside the painting at all times when it is on exhibition."

He admired the security of the operation. "I'll bet a thing like that is impossible to steal."

"Virtually impossible," I said. "And if things go well, the American public will next see 'Winkler's Brother.' "

Pulver thought about something else. "When the 'Patrician Lady' gets here, will there be a regular parade down the Avenue? I heard something about drum and bugle corps, baton twirlers, and maybe a couple of Shriner marching bands."

"I'm sorry," I said. "At the last moment some spoilsport canceled those arrangements."

He brightened a bit. "Well, anyway there will be quite a big ceremony at the Center, won't there? The governor's going to speak?"

"He will attempt to. But I'm afraid the acoustics are terrible."

When I left, I stopped at the first public phone booth and called Hollingwood. "You won't have to give Pulver his money back. The vote was two to one."

"Good," Hollingwood said. "But I was positive it was an original anyway. I'd stake my reputation on that."

"Nevertheless," I reminded him, "you did take precautions."

"I know," he said. "You'll get your check in the morning."

I took the subway to Zarchetti's Art Supply Shop. In the third floor storeroom I chatted idly with one of the clerks—as is often my habit—while he uncrated newly arrived supplies.

Zarchetti marks his goods in two ways—most of them with an ordinary paper label imprinted with his name, his address, and the inked price of the item. However, on certain other objects—raw canvases, for instance—he uses a common rubber stamp wetted with indelible ink.

He once explained to me that art students, being what they are, often remove labels from the cheaper canvases and paste them over the labels of the more expensive ones—thereby escaping past unlearned clerks with treasures worth five times their purchased price.

I watched the clerk consult his price list, adjust the wheels of a stamp, and affix the marking to a canvas—*Zarchetti's Art Supplies. 218 Lincoln Avenue. $10.98.*

There were at least half a dozen similar stamps lying about on the tables and I found the opportunity of slipping one of them into my pocket. I doubted if it would ever be missed.

That evening after dinner I read that Bernice had just received second prize of $1,000 for one of her paintings at the Raleigh Exhibition. It had been for a canvas entitled "Scylla Fourteen." According to the newspaper article, it consisted of a canvas painted a solid primary blue with just a hair's brush of orange in

one corner. It impressed one of the judges as "A bold venture into the fastness of the unknown—the firm vertical strokes exemplifying the inexorability of the exploding universe. And yet there remains the contradictory, the insistent, unrhymeable orange to contribute a human shriek against the inflexible mathematics of existence." I read that twice.

At eight-thirty, I took a taxi to the National Art Center, let myself in, and went to my office. I unlocked the large bottom drawer of my desk and removed the zipper bag with my tools and materials. At one of the janitor closets in the hall, I picked up a ladder and carried it with me to the Vandersteen Wing. Its large east gallery, like the rest of the building, was closed to the public at five.

It had been selected for the exhibition of the "Patrician Lady" and for the occasion all other paintings had been removed. The room had been thoroughly redecorated and painted, and during the process I had taken the pains to secure one of the buckets of wall paint the workmen had used.

The painting was to be hung in a small alcove at the far end—a recess approximately twelve feet wide and four feet deep. Attached to the ceiling at its entrance was a flexible metal lattice, now rolled up somewhat like a window shade. During the hours when the painting was not on exhibition, the device would be lowered and locked to the floor, thereby securely shutting off the "Patrician Lady" from the rest of the room. In addition to that, two armed marines and sundry French and American security agents would be stationed at all times just outside the alcove.

I examined my work of the previous evenings and again verified that all of it was undetectable to the eye.

Within the alcove itself, to one side, I had drilled a series of holes in a four-foot circle, installed powder charges, and primed them. I had further chiseled a groove from the circle to the ceiling. My wiring extend-

ed up this groove to the ornate molding and followed behind it to the rear of the room and down again to the dry cell batteries and to one of the three push-buttons I had installed behind a heavy, almost immovable, settee.

Using patching plaster to cover the grooves and holes and applying new paint to new paint had concealed my work entirely. I had followed a similar procedure with the installation of the smoke bombs and the charge placed at the metal shutter above the alcove.

So far I had installed two smoke bombs directly inside the alcove, two in the ventilator system, and one in the wall midway down the room. I thought that one more directly opposite the latter would be sufficient for my purposes.

There was little if any danger that Fred, the night guard, would hear me at work. I had ascertained that he made but one inspection trip every three hours and then retired to the couch in his cubbyhole in the basement. He there set his alarm for the next round and promptly relapsed into a deep and unshatterable sleep. It was a routine for which he should have been fired, but for the present I found his habits convenient.

I put on my rubber gloves, picked up my chisel and rubber mallet, and went to work. When I finished the opening it was approximately five inches deep and four in diameter. I inserted the last smoke bomb and the small explosive charge. When I pressed one of my push-buttons the charge would shatter the plaster immediately in front of the bomb, allowing the smoke to pour into the room.

I wired my contrivance, created the channel to the ceiling molding, and was in the process of splicing to one of my main circuits when I heard the soft voice behind me.

"How are you doing?"

I very nearly fell off the ladder.

However I recovered and turned. "Bernice, *must* you do that?"

She grinned. "I just came to see if you were done."

"How did you manage to get into the building?"

"Darling, you forget that our keys are common property."

I finished the splicing and descended the ladder. "By the way, Bernice, you've been keeping a little secret from me. I had to read that you took second prize at the Raleigh Exhibition. How did you manage to find the title 'Scylla Fourteen?' "

She flushed faintly. "I opened the dictionary twice at random. It's the only intellectual way to do things these days."

I began mixing my patching plaster. "Truly a fine painting, Bernice. A bold venture into the fastness of the unknown—the firm vertical strokes exemplifying the inexorability of the exploding universe. And yet there remains the contradictory, the insistent, unrhymeable orange to contribute a—"

"Oh, shut up," Bernice said.

I finished my plastering and cover painting and removed my gloves. "Everything is quite ready now, Bernice. While the governor is speaking, I shall wander casually through the crowd to that green settee and reach behind it.

"When I press the first button, there will be a small sharp explosion. This will destroy the mechanism holding up the metal gate and it will roll down, isolating the 'Patrician Lady' from everyone in the room, including the two marine guards.

"When I have seen that accomplished—perhaps a second or two later—I will press the second button. This will immediately activate my six smoke bombs. And when the room is sufficiently dense with smoke and confusion, I will press the third button. This will blast open a hole in the alcove—an opening large enough for a man or a woman to crawl through. While carrying a painting, of course."

Bernice nodded approvingly. "And the hole leads to

the storage room behind the alcove and the window to the alley will be open?"

"Exactly."

She became thoughtful. "Do you have to wait for the ceremony and all those people to be present? Wouldn't it be much easier if just a few of you were here? The French officials and the guards?"

"No, Bernice. In that event there exists the possibility that the entire incident might be hushed up. And for our purposes we want as much publicity as possible."

"Do you suppose they will suspect that you had anything to do with it?"

"I rather doubt it. If they *dare* to admit any suspicion, it will probably be directed toward the workmen who have been cluttering up the place the last few weeks."

I looked down the long room to the alcove and smiled. "Bernice, one of the advantages of being the curator of an art museum is knowing the collectors with money—and how much the unscrupulous ones will pay for what they want."

The "Patrician Lady" arrived by armored car the next afternoon. Her escort consisted of half a dozen automobiles containing uniformed police, plain-clothes men, French and American secret servicemen, and the delegation of French officials led by Monsieur Arnaud.

Two squads of United States marines followed closely in a two-and-a-half-ton truck.

After a brief exchange of introductions and handclasps, the entire entourage marched to the east gallery of the Vandersteen Wing.

The crate containing the "Patrician Lady" was there disassembled and she was presented to view.

A sheet of unbreakable glass protected her from crown to spleen. It was my opinion that once she was mounted in the alcove, the thousands who viewed her would see little more than the ornate frame and the glare of glass. However they would all probably depart

satisfied, having seen the emperor's clothes.

Arnaud and two of his assistants carried her carefully into the alcove and presently she was in place. Two of the marines immediately took parade rest positions just outside the recess.

I slipped the rubber stamp out of my pocket and concealed it in the palm of my hand. "Excuse me, gentlemen, I believe the 'Patrician Lady' is a fraction of an inch off horizontal."

When I grasped the painting, my fingertips pressed the stamp firmly on the backing of the portrait. I was certain no one had seen what I had done.

I stepped back. "There. Now everything is perfect."

Later that afternoon I managed to slip away to Zarchetti's for a moment and return the stamp. I did not think it had been missed.

At seven-thirty in the evening the Vandersteen Wing was filled to overflowing with selected first-nighters, all of whom gazed reverently in the direction of the alcove. They were not as yet allowed to approach closer than twenty feet.

The governor arrived at eight and mounted the small platform set up before the alcove. There were any number of introductions and credits—apparently anyone who had touched the "Patrician Lady's" crate demanded his moment of recognition. Even I, as curator of the gallery, was required to deliver a quota of words.

When I finished I left the crowded platform to make room for the mayor and his introduction of the governor.

I made my way slowly through the assemblage to the rear of the room. I put on my gloves, stood next to the green settee, and my fingertips hovered near the push-buttons.

At five minutes after nine, the governor finally rose and smiled at the audience.

The moment was appropriate. Everyone's attention focused upon him.

I pressed the first button.

The report from the top of the alcove—much like a rifle shot in close quarters—followed immediately. The heavy mesh roll clanged down its full length to the floor, instantly separating the "Patrician Lady" from every person in the room.

The marines were startled out of their parade rest and apparently the governor's initial thought was one of assassination. His hand instinctively explored his chest for hints of a cavity.

I pressed the second button.

The noise of the six explosions was minutely staggered by the echoes against the walls and my smoke bombs spewed forth their grayish-white vapor.

Within a matter of moments complete confusion and the lack of visibility reigned.

I pressed the third button.

The explosion this time was considerably louder as it created the hole in the alcove.

I felt my way blindly into the adjoining room—more or less flowing with the general exodus.

The air here was almost clear and I watched with interest as men in various uniforms dashed in for a breath of fresh air and then back into the east gallery. Most of them had drawn revolvers.

The governor was one of the last to leave the east gallery, possibly because he had the farthest to travel. But I did not see the marines. Apparently they remained true to their posts and I could not escape a sense of national pride at their indomitability and staying power.

Eventually I heard the tinkling of glass as windows in the east gallery were smashed and the smoke bombs tossed into the alley.

After half an hour the smoke in the big room had dispelled sufficiently so that I could reenter. Several dozen guards and officials were gathered at the iron grate, either peering through its lattice work or attempt-

ing by brute force to raise it. Evidently it had jammed.

I also noticed several uniformed policemen inside the alcove. Apparently they had entered via the storage room and the hole my explosion had created.

A Lieutenant Nelson of the Metropolitan Police organized the strong backs and after mighty groans of exertion the gate was finally raised approximately four feet.

We stooped and entered the alcove.

The "Patrician Lady" appeared unharmed, if a bit askew.

Arnaud's hands fluttered anxiously. "She is unharmed. I *think* she is unharmed."

Lieutenant Nelson pointed to the hole in the wall. "The way I figure it is that the one who was supposed to steal the painting crawled through there right after the last explosion. But either he lost his nerve, or the smoke got too much for him, so he just backed right out again and left by the open window in the next room."

Arnaud removed the painting carefully from the wall and examined it.

"Let me take a look at her," I said.

He clutched the "Patrician Lady" to his chest. "Monsieur, she is *mine.*"

"Sir," I said sternly. "*I* am the curator of this gallery and you are on American soil."

It was with great reluctance that he allowed me to remove the painting from his hands.

I examined the front of the painting and then turned it over. I stared at the backing and then closed my eyes. *Oh, no!*

Quickly I turned the painting back over and attempted to rehang the "Patrician Lady." "There is absolutely nothing wrong with her, gentlemen. *Absolutely* nothing."

But Arnaud snatched away the "Patrician Lady." He peered at the backing too—as did everyone else in the alcove.

They all saw the blue-inked stamping, but it was Lieutenant Nelson who had the nerve to read the words aloud. "Zarchetti's Art Supplies. Two-eighteen Lincoln Avenue. Fourteen dollars and ninety-eight cents."

He rubbed his jaw and stared at Arnaud. "Are you people *sure* you shipped the original to this country?"

Arnaud was pale. "Of course we shipped the original." He looked at the stamping again. "I do not understand," he said plaintively.

We all stood silent with thoughts that were probably exemplified when Lieutenant Nelson finally spoke. "Suppose they *switched* paintings while all the commotion was going on and nobody could see?"

None of us said anything and so he continued. "I heard that some of these art forgers are real masters. They can age the paint and the canvas so that *nobody* can tell the difference. Not even an expert." He cogitated further and then brightened. "But like all crooks, they slipped up on a little thing. They missed seeing that Zarchetti label on the backing when they put the whole thing together."

"Don't be ridiculous," I said coldly. "This is the *original* 'Patrician Lady.' Isn't that correct, Monsieur Arnaud?"

He was still pale and now he regarded the painting with a trace of suspicion. "I do not remember seeing this dent in the frame."

"The explosion," I said hastily.

But Arnaud was not listening. We all allowed him thoughtful and respectful silence until he came to a decision. "There is only one way to be positive. I will send for the X-rays in Paris. A clever forger may possibly delude even the best of experts, but he cannot fool the X-ray. He could not possibly duplicate every nuance of the paint—its thickness or thinness in strategic spots. And he certainly could not duplicate what is behind the paint—the microscopic individuality of every thread on the original canvas."

Arnaud turned to me. "Mr. Parnell, lead me to a telephone."

In my office we put through a call to Paris and waited on the open line. After a considerable interval, one of his subordinates evidently returned to the phone.

Arnaud listened and appeared about to faint. But he pulled himself together, issued further sharp orders in French, and then hung up. "Some idiot of a file clerk has misplaced the X-rays of the 'Patrician Lady.' However, never fear. I have given the command to ransack the files ruthlessly. The X-rays shall be found."

But, of course, they never were.

One week later a distinguished panel of twenty French and American art experts met in convocation to study and pass upon the authenticity of the "Patrician Lady."

After a month, the results of their examination were made public.

Twelve of them pronounced the work to be truly the original. Six declared that it was a clever forgery. And two maintained that it was a clumsy forgery.

The governor took it upon himself to publicly proclaim his faith in the majority opinion and he was backed by the State Senate, 64 to 56. The vote was strictly along party lines.

The "Patrician Lady" returned to France. However Paris announced that it had canceled plans to replace her with "Winkler's Brother."

My appearance was thoroughly muted by a false beard and dark glasses. Further, I wore a black wig and spoke with a slight French accent.

Though I had met Mr. Duncan a number of times, I felt positive that he did not have the slightest inkling of my real identity.

I began putting the money into my suitcase. Two hundred thousand dollars—none of it in bills larger

than one hundred—is quite bulky.

Duncan stared at the painting, his eyes awed, and yet triumphant. "So it really *was* stolen."

"Monsieur," I said. "I know nothing about the stealing. Absolutely nothing. The 'Patrician Lady' merely came—accidentally—into my hands."

He smiled knowingly. "Of course." His eyes went back to his new possession. "Millions of fools will look at that copy in Paris, and all the time *I've* got the original."

"You understand, of course, Monsieur," I said, "that you may show the painting to no one else. No one. It is for your private enjoyment. If it were discovered that you possess the original 'Patrician Lady,' the authorities would take it away from you and even put you into prison."

He nodded. "I'll keep it under lock and key. No one will see it. Not even my wife will see it!"

I could understand the last precaution. She was currently his fourth and might prove vindictive in any divorce action.

I closed the suitcase. "Goodbye, Monsieur Duncan. You are indeed fortunate to have a million-dollar painting for only one fifth of that sum."

In my taxi I sat back and relaxed. So far Bernice Lecour had made six copies of the "Patrician Lady" and I had had no difficulty in disposing of them as originals.

Perhaps Bernice and I could have stolen the authentic "Patrician Lady," but then the police of the entire world would have joined the search for the thieves.

It was much safer this way—merely to create the suspicion that she *might* have been stolen, and to capitalize upon it.

I thought that now Bernice and I deserved a vacation. Brazil should be interesting.

Perhaps we would not return.

HEY YOU DOWN THERE

Harold Rolseth

Calvin Spender drained his coffee cup and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He belched loudly and then proceeded to fill a corncob pipe with coarsely shredded tobacco. He scratched a match across the top of the table and holding it to his pipe, he sucked noisily until billows of acrid smoke poured from his mouth.

Dora Spender sat across the table from her husband, her breakfast scarcely touched. She coughed lightly, and then, as no frown appeared on Calvin's brow, she said, "Are you going to dig in the well this morning, Calvin?"

Calvin fixed his small red-rimmed eyes upon her, and as if she had not spoken, said, "Git going at the chores right away. You're going to be hauling up dirt."

"Yes, Calvin," Dora whispered. Calvin cleared his throat, and the action caused his Adam's apple to move convulsively under the loose red folds of skin on his neck. He rose from the table and went out the kitchen door, kicking viciously at the tawny cat which had been lying on the doorstep.

Dora gazed after him and wondered for the thousandth time what it was that Calvin reminded her of. It was not some other person. It was something else. Sometimes it seemed as though the answer was about to spring to her mind, as just now when Calvin had cleared his throat. But always it stopped just short of her consciousness. It was disturbing to know with such certainty that Calvin looked like something other than

himself and yet not know what that something was. Someday though, Dora knew, the answer would come to her. She rose hurriedly from the table and set about her chores.

Halfway between the house and the barn a doughnut-shaped mound of earth surrounded a hole. Calvin went to the edge of the hole and stared down into it distastefully. Only necessity could have forced him to undertake this task, but it was either this digging or the hauling of barrels and barrels of water each day from Nord Fisher's farm a half mile down the road.

Calvin's herd of scrub cattle was small, but the amount of water it consumed was astonishing. For two weeks now, ever since his well had gone dry, Calvin had been hauling water, and the disagreeable chore was becoming more unpleasant because of Nord's clumsy hints that some form of payment for the water would not be amiss.

Several feet back from the edge of the hole Calvin had driven a heavy iron stake into the ground, and to this was attached a crude rope ladder. The rope ladder had become necessary when the hole had reached a depth well beyond the length of any wooden ladder Calvin owned.

Calvin hoped desperately that he would not have to go much deeper. He estimated that he was now down fifty or sixty feet, a common depth for many wells in the area. His greatest fear was that he would hit a stratum of rock which would call for the services of a well-drilling outfit. For such a venture both his funds and his credit rating were far too low.

Calvin picked up a bucket to which was attached a long rope and lowered it into the hole. It was Dora's backbreaking task to haul the bucket up hand over hand after Calvin had filled it from the bottom of the hole.

With a mumbled curse Calvin emptied his pipe and started down the rope ladder. By the time he got to the

bottom of the hole and had filled the bucket, Dora should be there to haul it up. If she weren't, she would hear about it.

From the house Dora saw Calvin prepare to enter the well, and she worked with desperate haste to complete her chores. She reached the hole just as a muffled shout from below indicated that the bucket was full.

Summoning all her strength, Dora hauled the bucket up. She emptied it and then lowered it into the hole again. While she waited for the second bucketload, she examined the contents of the first. She was disappointed to find it had only the normal moistness of underground earth. No water seeped from it.

In her own fashion, Dora was deeply religious and at each tenth bucket she pulled up she murmured an urgent prayer that it would contain more water in it than earth. She had settled at praying at every tenth bucketload because she did not believe it in good taste to pester God with every bucket. Also, she varied the wording of each prayer, feeling that God must become bored with the same petition repeated over and over.

On this particular morning as she lowered the bucket for its tenth loading, she prayed, "Please God, let something happen this time . . . let something really and truly happen so I won't have to haul up any more dirt."

Something happened almost immediately. As the rope slackened in her hands indicating that the bucket had reached the bottom, a scream of sheer terror came up from the hole, and the rope ladder jerked violently. Whimpering sounds of mortal fear sounded faintly, and the ladder grew taut with heavy strain.

Dora fell to her knees and peered down into the darkness. "Calvin," she called, "are you all right? What is it?"

Then with startling suddenness Calvin appeared, literally shooting out of the hole. At first Dora was not sure it was Calvin. The peeled redness of his face was

gone; now it was a yellowish green. He was trembling violently and had trouble breathing.

It must be a heart attack Dora thought, and tried mightily to suppress the surge of joy that swept over her.

Calvin lay upon the ground panting. Finally he gained control of himself. Under ordinary circumstances Calvin did not converse with Dora, but now he seemed eager to talk. "You know what happened down there?" he said in a shaky voice. "You know what happened? The complete bottom dropped right out of that hole. All of a sudden it went, and there I was, standing on nothing but air. If I hadn't grabbed aholt of the last rung of the ladder . . . Why, that hole must be a thousand feet the way the bottom dropped out of it!"

Calvin babbled on, but Dora did not listen. She was filled with awe at the remarkable way in which her prayer had been answered. If the hole had no more bottom, there would be no more dirt to haul up.

When Calvin had regained his strength, he crept to the edge of the hole and peered down.

"What are you going to do, Calvin?" Dora asked timidly.

"Do? I'm going to find out how far down that hole goes. Get the flashlight from the kitchen."

Dora hurried off. When she returned, Calvin had a large ball of binder twine he had gotten from the tool shed.

He tied the flashlight securely to the end of the line, switched it on, and lowered it into the hole. He paid out the line for about a hundred feet and then stopped. The light was only a feeble glimmer down below and revealed nothing. Calvin lowered the light another hundred feet and this time it was only a twinkling speck as it swung at the end of the line. Calvin released another long length of twine and another and another and now the light was no longer visible, and the large ball of twine had shrunk to a small tangle.

"Almost a full thousand feet," he whispered in awe. "And no bottom yet. Might as well pull it up."

But the line did not come up with Calvin's pull. It stretched and grew taut, but it did not yield to his tugging.

"Must be caught on something," Calvin muttered, and gave the line a sharp jerk. In response there was a downward jerk that almost tore the line from his hands.

"Hey," yelled Calvin. "The line . . . it jerked!"

"But, Calvin," Dora protested.

"Don't Calvin me. I tell you there's something on the end of this line."

He gave another tug, and again the line was almost pulled from his hands. He tied the line to the stake and sat down to ponder the matter.

"It don't make sense," he said, more to himself than to Dora. "What could be down underground a good thousand feet?"

Tentatively he reached over and pulled lightly on the line. This time there was no response, and rapidly he began hauling it up. When the end of the line came into view, there was no flashlight attached to it. Instead, there was a small white pouch of a leatherlike substance.

Calvin opened the pouch with trembling fingers and shook into his palm a bar of yellow metal and a folded piece of parchment. The bar of metal was not large but seemed heavy for its size. Calvin got out his jackknife and scratched the point of the blade across the metal. The knife blade bit into it easily.

"Gold," said Calvin, his voice shaky. "Must be a whole pound of it . . . and just for a measly flashlight. They must be crazy down there."

He thrust the gold bar into his pocket and opened the small piece of parchment. One side was closely covered with a fine script. Calvin turned it this way and that and then tossed it on the ground.

"Foreigners," he said. "No wonder they ain't got any sense. But it's plain they need flashlights."

"But, Calvin," said Dora. "How could they get down there? There ain't any mines in this part of the country."

"Ain't you ever heard of them secret government projects?" asked Calvin scornfully. "This must be one of them. Now I'm going to town and get me a load of flashlights. They must need them bad. Now, mind you watch that hole good. Don't let no one go near it."

Calvin strode to the battered pickup which was standing near the barn, and a minute later was rattling down the highway toward Harmony Junction.

Dora picked up the bit of parchment which Calvin had thrown away. She could make nothing of the writing on it. It was all very strange. If it were some secret government undertaking, why would foreigners be engaged in it? And why would they need flashlights so urgently as to pay a fortune for one?

Suddenly it occurred to her that possibly the people down below didn't know there were English-speaking people up above. She hurried into the house and rummaged through Calvin's rickety desk for paper and pencil. In her search she found a small ragged dictionary, and she took this with her to the kitchen table. Spelling did not come easy to Dora.

Her note was a series of questions. Why were they down there? Who were they? Why did they pay so much for an old flashlight?

As she started for the well it occurred to her that possibly the people down there might be hungry. She went back to the kitchen and wrapped a loaf of bread and a fair-sized piece of ham in a clean dish towel. She added a postscript to her note apologizing for the fact that she had nothing better to offer them. Then the thought came to her that since the people down below were obviously foreigners and possibly not too well versed in English, the small dictionary might be of help

to them in answering her note. She wrapped the dictionary with the food in the towel.

It took Dora a long while to lower the bucket, but finally the twine grew slack in her hands, and she knew the bucket had reached the bottom. She waited a few moments and then tugged the line gently. The line held firm below, and Dora seated herself on the pile of soil to wait.

The warm sunlight felt good on her back, and it was pleasant to sit and do nothing. She had no fear that Calvin would return soon. She knew that nothing on earth—or under it—could keep Calvin from visiting a number of taverns once he was in town, and that with each tavern visited time would become more and more meaningless to him. She doubted that he would return before morning.

After a half hour Dora gave the line a questioning tug, but it did not yield. She did not mind. It was seldom that she had time to idle away. Usually when Calvin went to town, he burdened her with chores to be done during his absence, coupling each order with a threat of what awaited her should his instructions not be carried out.

Dora waited another half hour before giving the line another tug. This time there was a sharp answering jerk, and Dora began hauling the bucket upward. It seemed much heavier now, and twice she had to pause for a rest. When the bucket reached the surface, she saw why it was heavier.

"My goodness," she murmured as she viewed the dozen or so yellow metal bars in the bucket. "They must be real hungry down there."

A sheet of the strange parchment was also in the bucket, and Dora picked it out expecting to see the strange script of the first note.

"Well, I declare," she said when she saw that the note was in English. It was in the same print as the dictionary, and each letter had been made with meticulous care.

She read the note slowly, shaping each word with her lips as she read.

> Your language is barbaric, but the crude code book you sent down made it easy for our scholars to decipher it. We, too, wonder about you. How have you overcome the problem of living in the deadly light? Our legends tell of a race living on the surface, but intelligent reasoning has forced us to ridicule these old tales until now. We would still doubt that you are surface dwellers except for the fact that our instruments show without question that the opening above us leads to the deadly light.
>
> The clumsy death ray which you sent us indicates that your scientific development is very low. Other than an artifact of another race it has no value to us. We sent gold as a courtesy payment only.
>
> The food you call bread is not acceptable to our digestive systems, but the ham is beyond price. It is obviously the flesh of some creature, and we will exchange a double weight of gold for all that you can send us. Send more immediately. Also send a concise history of your race and arrange for your best scientists, such as they are, to communicate with us.
>
> Glar, the Master

"Land sakes," said Dora. "Real bossy they are. I've a good mind not to send them anything. I don't dast send them more ham. Calvin would notice if any more is gone."

Dora took the gold bars to her petunia bed beside the house and buried them in the loose black soil. She paid no heed to the sound of a car coming down the highway at high speed until it passed the house and wild squawking sounded above the roar of the motor.

She hurried around to the front of the house, knowing already what had happened. She stared in dismay at the four white leghorns which lay along the road. Now Calvin would charge her with negligence and beat her into unconsciousness.

Fear sharpened her wits. Perhaps if she could dispose of the bodies Calvin would think foxes had gotten them. Hastily she gathered up the dead chickens and the feathers which lay scattered about. When she was finished, there was no evidence of the disaster.

She carried the chickens to the back of the house wondering how she could best dispose of them. Suddenly, as she glanced toward the hole, the answer came to her.

An hour later the four chickens were dressed and neatly cut up. Ignoring the other instructions in the note, she sent the bulky parcel of chicken down into the hole.

She sat down again to enjoy the luxury of doing nothing. When she finally picked up the line, there was an immediate response from below. The bucket was exceedingly heavy this time, and she was fearful that the line might break. She was dizzy with fatigue when she finally hauled the bucket over to the edge of the hole. This time there were several dozen bars of gold in it and a brief note in the same precise lettering as before.

> Our scientists are of the opinion that the flesh you sent down is that of a creature you call chicken. This is the supreme food. Never have we eaten anything so delicious. To show our appreciation we are sending you a bonus payment. Your code book indicates that there is a larger creature similar to chicken called turkey. Send us turkey immediately. I repeat, send us turkey immediately.
>
> Glar, the Master

"Land sakes," gasped Dora. "They must have et that

chicken raw. Now where in tarnation would I get a turkey?"

She buried the gold bars in another part of her petunia bed.

Calvin returned about ten o'clock the next morning. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was a mottled red. The loose skin on his neck hung lower than usual and more than ever he reminded Dora of something which eluded her.

Calvin stepped down from the pickup, and Dora cringed, but he seemed too tired and preoccupied to bother with her. He surveyed the hole glumly, then got back into the truck and backed it to the edge of the mound of earth. On the back of the truck was a winch with a large drum of steel cable.

"Fix me something to eat," he ordered Dora.

Dora hurried into the house and began preparing ham and eggs. Each moment she expected Calvin to come in and demand to know, with a few blows, what was holding up his meal. But Calvin seemed very busy in the vicinity of the hole. When Dora went out to call him to eat, she found he had done a surprising amount of work. He had attached an oil drum to the steel cable. This hung over a heavy steel rod which rested across the hole. Stakes driven into the ground on each side of the hole held the rod in place.

"Your breakfast is ready, Calvin," said Dora.

"Shut up," Calvin answered.

The winch was driven by an electric motor, and Calvin ran a cable from the motor to an electric outlet on the yard lightpost.

From the cab he took a number of boxes and placed them in the oil drum.

"A whole hundred of them," he chuckled, more to himself than to Dora. "Fifty-nine cents apiece. Peanuts . . . one bar of gold will buy thousands."

Calvin threw the switch which controlled the winch, and with sickening force Dora suddenly realized the

terrible thing that would soon happen. The creatures down below had no use or regard for flashlights.

Down went the oil drum, the cable screeching shrilly as it passed over the rod above the hole. Calvin got an oil can from the truck and applied oil generously to the rod and the cable.

In a very short while the cable went slack and Calvin stopped the winch.

"I'll give them an hour to load up the gold," he said and went to the kitchen for his delayed breakfast.

Dora was practically in a state of shock. What would happen when the flashlights came back up with an insulting note in English was too horrible to contemplate. Calvin would learn about the gold she had received and very likely kill her.

Calvin ate his breakfast leisurely. Dora busied herself with household tasks, trying with all her might to cast out of her mind the terrible thing which was soon to happen.

Finally Calvin glanced at the wall clock, yawned widely, and tapped out his pipe. Ignoring Dora he went out to the hole. In spite of her terrible fear Dora could not resist following him. It was as if some power outside herself forced her to go.

The winch was already reeling in the cable when she got to the hole. It seemed only seconds before the oil drum was up. The grin on Calvin's face was broad as he reached out over the hole and dragged the oil drum to the edge. A look of utter disbelief replaced the grin as he looked into the drum. His Adam's apple seemed to vibrate, and once again part of Dora's mind tried to recall what it was that Calvin reminded her of.

Calvin was making flat, bawling sounds like a lost calf. He hauled the drum out of the hole and dumped its contents on the ground. The flashlights, many of them dented and with lenses broken, made a sizable pile.

With a tremendous kick Calvin sent flashlights flying

in all directions. One, with a note attached, landed at Dora's feet. Either Calvin was so blinded by rage that he didn't see it, or he assumed it was written in the same unreadable script as the first note.

"You down there," he screamed into the hole. "You filthy swine. I'll fix you. I'll make you sorry you ever double-crossed me. I'll . . . I'll . . ."

He dashed for the house, and Dora hastily snatched up the note.

> You are even more stupid than we thought [*she read*]. Your clumsy death rays are useless to us. We informed you of this. We want turkey. Send us turkey immediately.
>
> Glar, the Master

She crumbled the note swiftly as Calvin came from the house with his double-barreled shotgun. For a moment Dora thought that he knew everything and was about to kill her.

"Please, Calvin," she said.

"Shut up," Calvin said. "You saw me work the winch. Can you do it?"

"Why, yes, but what . . . ?"

"Listen, you stupid cow. I'm going down there and fix those dirty foreigners. You send me down and bring me up." He seized Dora by the shoulder. "And if you mess things, I'll fix you too. I'll really and truly fix you."

Dora nodded dumbly.

Calvin put his gun in the oil drum and pushed it to the center of the hole. Then, hanging on to the cable, he carefully lowered himself into the drum.

"Give me just one hour to run those dirty rats down, then bring me back up," he said.

Dora threw the switch and the oil drum went down. When the cable slackened, she stopped the winch. She spent most of the hour praying that Calvin would not

find the people down below and become a murderer.

Exactly an hour later Dora started the oil drum upward. The motor labored mightily as though under a tremendous strain, and the cable seemed stretched almost to the breaking point.

Dora gasped when the oil drum came into view. Calvin was not in it. She shut off the motor and hastened to the drum, half expecting to find Calvin crouching down inside. But Calvin was not there. Instead there were scores of gold bars and on top of them a sheet of the familiar white parchment.

"Land sakes," Dora said, as she took in a full view of the drum's contents. She had no idea of the value of the treasure upon which she gazed. She only knew it must be immense. Carefully, she reached down and picked out the note, which she read in her slow, precise manner: *Not even the exquisite flavor of the chicken compares to the incomparable goodness of the live turkey you sent down to us. We must confess that our concept of turkey was quite different, but this is of no consequence. So delectable was the turkey that we are again sending you a bonus payment. We implore you to send us more turkey immediately.*

Glar, the Master

Dora read the note a second time to make sure she understood it fully. "Well, I declare," she said in considerable wonder. "I declare."

TOO MANY SHARKS

William Sambrot

The sea was placid, glinting blue and lovely under the early morning sun. Allen Melton inhaled deeply, not looking at Marta, his wife, knowing her lazy gray-green eyes were taking in his smoothly tanned body, flicking boredly, uninterestedly over the bunched muscles, like oiled cables, rippling under his skin. His jaw tightened and with an effort he kept his narrowed eyes out toward the reef where the pelicans wheeled in slow graceful circles.

"It ought to be good hunting out there today," he finally said, directing his words to Jim Talbot, who sprawled, angular, graceless, on the already hot sand at Marta's feet. He swung quickly, catching Marta off guard long enough to see the swift glance that passed between her and Jim. For a split second her defenses were down and he saw the naked unashamed passion in her eyes.

His throat swelled with thick bitter rage. The urge to slam the deadly long-shafted barb he held into her body, between her firm rising breasts, was shockingly overwhelming. He fought himself, bending his close-cropped head down, to hide his face from her. She'd always been able to read his thoughts. Too bad he'd never been able to reciprocate. But at last he knew. So it was Jim Talbot. Good old life-long pal. Always at hand, ready to make it a threesome, or a fourth—and ready to make it two whenever Melton wasn't around.

He fiddled with the controls of his spear gun, seeing

Marta spitted on the long shaft, twisting and turning, the bubbles streaming from her lovely lying mouth, drowning under the warm green waters far out near the reef where the pelicans and gulls soared about, slipping down now and again to snatch up a silvery wriggling fish.

"We've been here two weeks, now," Marta was saying, not very convincingly. "And every day you've been out there, shooting fish underwater. Why not stay on the beach, for once?"

He looked at her, his hard eyes traveling slowly over the supple rounded length of her, knowing at last the passion she was capable of, wondering why she'd never responded to him. He was suddenly weak at the thought. *All these years . . . with Jim . . .*

"Yes," he said slowly, "I suppose I have been neglecting you—but then, Jim's been good company, hasn't he?" He bared strong white teeth in a savage grin at Jim.

Talbot had the good grace to flush. His glance slid over to Marta and he straightened, one sun-bleached brow cocked. "Someone had to fight off the wolves," he smiled faintly, "while you were out spitting half the fish in the ocean."

"Al never does things by halves," Marta said lazily. She crossed tanned legs and settled back in her canvas beach chair. "If it's skiing, he spends six days on a cross-country tour. If it's grizzly, he'll beat the brush for weeks—"

"I get what I'm after," Melton said softly.

"But do you, dear?" she answered coolly.

"I'll bet," Talbot said, smiling his intimate smile at Marta, "he's making love out there to a mermaid."

"Not if there's anything swimming around he can spear," Marta said casually. "Making love interferes with a man's sport, doesn't it, Allen?"

"It interferes with a lot of things," he said. He turned to Jim Talbot. "How about it, Jim, coming out

on the reef with me? You agreed to take a stab at it at least once before we leave."

"Well, I hadn't planned—" Jim hesitated, glancing again, covertly, at Marta.

"I imagine Marta can get along without you for at least an afternoon," he said pleasantly. Marta looked at him, and the alarm leaped into her face. Her eyes changed color. *She knows,* Melton thought, and again he grinned, tightly, thinking of Jim and Marta alone on the tiny deserted island a few hundred feet offshore, making love wildly—Marta with an abandonment she'd never shown him. It had been the merest chance that he'd decided to come in early, yesterday. And sliding along in the pirogue, he'd glimpsed the motion in the rank grass of the island and put his powerful glasses on them . . .

"What's the matter, Jim—not afraid of underwater spear-fishing, are you?" He punched Jim playfully in the shoulder, forcing himself to hold the punch, but even so, Jim's lean frame rocked backward. He draped an arm negligently over Talbot's shoulder and faced Marta, conscious of the contrast they made. Melton over six feet, narrow-hipped, big-chested, his eyes dark chips of ocean blue. Talbot lean and stringy, weak-jawed, ill at ease in a bathing suit—but not on a lonely island . . .

He had a sudden absurd impulse to swing Talbot off his feet, to hold him, easily, above his head, with all his muscles flowing and bunching, to throw him a great distance, or squeeze him in a bone-crushing grip, forcing him to cry out before Marta, proving he was the lesser man.

Instead, he said, "Nothing dangerous about spear-fishing, Jim. Even the kids hereabouts do it. Fifteen-year-old boy out there yesterday speared a sixty-pound jewfish."

"Why the sudden urge for company?" Marta said. She bit her lips and looked out toward the reef. "Looks

as if there's something big out there," she added. "All those birds. Won't a school of fish bring—sharks?"

"Probably," Melton said easily. "They don't bother you. Just sit still and they'll pass." He turned to Talbot. "What say, Jim? It's a lot of fun—good clean fun."

Again Talbot reddened. He swallowed and nodded lamely. "Yes, I did promise we'd go out before . . ."

"Good!" Melton waved an arm toward the boathouse. "Might as well get started now. I've got an extra set of gear in the pirogue—and lunch, too." He tightened a big hand around Jim's biceps. "I'll have you out over the reef in twenty-five minutes, and believe me, Talbot, it's something you'll never forget."

"Jim—Allen." Marta was on her feet as, reluctantly, Jim fell in beside Melton. They stopped. "Be . . . careful," she said, and as they nodded and turned to go, Melton knew she'd been speaking to Talbot. It was good advice. A lot of things could happen out there on the reef, with six or seven fathoms of emerald water overhead. A lot of things . . .

On the way out to the reef Melton explained how to use the expensive French portable aqualung. He pointed out the valves which controlled the flow of compressed air to the mask and, last—as the pirogue bobbed over the farthermost reef, away from the other underwater sportsmen—he showed him how to charge and cock the long-barreled speargun.

"Nothing to it, really," he said, his cold eyes traveling slowly over Talbot's bony body and riveting at a spot between his breastbone. "The gun works on compressed gas. It has killing power up to about ten feet." He slipped on his fins and hoisted the oxygen apparatus onto his shoulders. "Be careful in which direction you point that thing," he said. "You could kill a man with that spear—without half trying."

They went down together, sending a fine stream of bubbles up through the clear water, Melton moving powerfully, easily, like a sleek seal. Talbot kicked awk-

wardly, his skinny legs looking even thinner with the giant fins dangling on his feet. Melton's jaw tightened. What in hell attracted Marta to him? What did she see in this skinny nonentity to bring all her hidden fire aflame so that shamelessly, in broad daylight . . . ?

He swallowed and gripped the gun tightly. A gaudy parrotfish flashed past, and then another, and another. Soon a whole stream of fish, myriad flashing bits of colors, like a suddenly shattered rainbow, whirled past, faster and faster. The big schools of fish that had been feeding about the inward reef were coming toward them, as though driven before a strong wind. And then, shadowy in the distance, he saw the ominous bulk of a great blue shark, with lesser sharks tagging behind. He watched the sixteen-foot slab of muscle and killing power slide along, slashing and tearing at the big jacks, and hastily he flipped toward Jim. He touched his shoulder and smiled as he felt the flesh crawl. He put his face mask against Talbot's.

"Remain perfectly still," he shouted. He saw the whites of Talbot's eyes rolling about as he watched the shark dwindle into the soft green distance and vanish. He felt something bump and slide down his side and he pulled away, looking down. It was Talbot's gun, dropping from his nerveless fingers. He'd forgotten to attach the gun to his wrist with the cord provided for that purpose.

He leaned close again. "Talbot," he said, "can you hear me?" Talbot nodded and made violent gestures, up to where the bottom of the boat made a dark blob against the film of crystal that was the surface.

Melton shook his head, savoring the fierce exultation that came with the knowledge of what he was about to do. There would be no up for Talbot, not ever. Here, on the brilliant coral reef, he would pay for usurping the role that only he, Melton, in the sight of God and man, had the right to play. He would close those mocking eyes, stop the ears that had heard her whispered

lies, shut the mouth that alone could shout aloud his shame.

An accident, he would say. He'd spotted a big jewfish, pointed it out to Talbot, and somehow, as they'd both swum toward it his gun had discharged. A regrettable accident. One of those things that happen to even the most careful and experienced of hunters.

But Marta would know.

His teeth bared behind the mask. *Marta would know* and that was the sweetest revenge of all. Abruptly he put his mask against Talbot's, seeing the alarm in his eyes.

"There's going to be an accident," he said calmly. "Nothing pleasant—like making love to Marta on a lonely island—"

He choked, trembling, and Talbot grabbed him, his hands cold and slippery, his lips moving, speaking, wildly, hastily.

"Don't! Please—don't!" he shouted, his mask pressed close to Melton's, eyes fixed, wide with reflected horror at what he saw in Melton's eyes. "It's true—but why kill me? I'm not the only one." His clutching hands pawed at Melton's hard body, trying to fend off the coming death. *"What about the others?"*

Mechanically, without volition, Melton kicked him away, brought up the gun and pulled the trigger. He watched the slim needle-pointed dart smack into Talbot's body, just above and to the left of the breastbone. A perfect bulls-eye. He waited, watching the spurting line of red that trailed up, up to where the crystal surface film lay.

It wasn't true. He watched the thin line of bubbles break, flow, break, become scantier and finally cease. What Talbot had said wasn't true. It was only a desperate man's final attempt to escape the death he'd seen glaring out of Melton's faceplate.

He crouched over the still body, holding the shoulders, his brain cold, rigidly under control. There were

no others. Talbot was the only blot on his manhood, the only one who'd held her close. The only one . . .

He knew he should be going up, taking the body. To wait too long might look suspicious. But still he remained, fighting to reassert himself. All the mountains he'd climbed and conquered; the rivers swum; the animals, cunning and treacherous, he'd overcome. He'd proved he was a man, over and over again. Big, rugged Allen Melton, sportsman, he-man, married to a lovely passionate woman. Too passionate. He should never have taken so many trips. Should never have stayed away for so long a period at a time. He wasn't running from her, from her unquenchable thirst—not at all. It was just his nature to want to pit his strength against everything tough and brutal in the world and beat it. He was man enough for her or any woman. Man enough . . .

He stooped, cradled the cold slippery body in his arms, and kicking strongly, headed up. He stared into the white face so near his. *"I get what I go after." "But do you, dear?"*

Then suddenly the fish were streaming back, frightened hordes fluttering about, bumping into him, as they fled along through the green clear water, and abruptly he realized his terrible danger. He'd waited too long. The shark was returning, smelling the blood, Talbot's blood, which still streamed slowly up, a bright red ribbon of smoke curling toward the surface. He dropped the body, seeing in the dim distance the onrushing bulk, looming larger and larger.

For a wild immeasurable instant he tried to remain motionless, defying gravity, remaining suspended between heaven and hell. But slowly, slowly, he began to sink, following the gently twisting body, with the damnable red ribbon enveloping him, impregnating his hair, his swimsuit, with the lurid scent. Every instinct cried out to swim, to thrash his powerful legs and speed up, up to the crystal surface and safety. But his brain, cold

and logical, fought back. Don't move. To move is instant death. And still he sank, down, down.

The great shark, a narrow torpedo shape of sheer destruction, pivoted slowly and faced him, waiting for a movement to explode it into biting rending motion.

Melton's glance slid down, and there, glinting with metallic highlights, directly below the slowly settling body, lay Talbot's spear gun, undischarged, with the long needle-pointed spear still in it. In that instant, he made his decision. With a powerful kick he moved desperately for the gun. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the swift motion as the shark catapulted toward him.

Frantically he pumped toward the gun, a scant few feet from him. Just as he reached it, Talbot's body settled onto it, emitting a steady stream of red, rocking to and fro, and then, he heard the sudden *thuck!* and saw the quick stream of bubbles rise as the breathing tube on Talbot's body discharged the spear gun.

He crouched there in the eternity of a second, staring at the white dead face, hearing again the last words those stiff lips had spoken, realizing, at the end, their truth. He still had his knife, but he made no move for it. There were too many sharks. The ocean, the world, was full of them. Glittering-eyed, sharp-toothed creatures of insatiable appetite. Too many sharks.

He crouched there, all his defenses gone, waiting . . .

CHRISTOPHER FRAME

Nancy C. Swoboda

Christopher Frame looked out the window of his little shop at the rain. It was just after five in the evening and people with umbrellas and colorful raincoats hurried to get home from work. That's all they ever did anymore, he thought. They hurried through their jobs and they hurried through life, and there was no time for pride left in either one. He stirred up the gray lumps of coal in the tiny fireplace until they glowed orangy-red against the blackened grate and returned to his work at the big desk.

The building was incongruous on the modern downtown street. It was two stories high, not too wide, and was sandwiched in between two impersonal-looking steel-and-glass structures. Across the top of the door and big window on either side was an old-fashioned sign in raised brass letters. All it said was FRAMES. For over eighty-two years his father and then Christopher Frame had been in the business of photography—mostly restoration, tinting and oils, and framing. The coincidence of the name had made a descriptive trademark for their work.

Now Christopher was alone at both his job and his life. He lived in the back rooms of the old building and used the barny upstairs for storage and supplies. The ancient brownstone structure had been his home, his world for thirty years. At fifteen he had become his father's apprentice, the same year his mother died, and the two Frames had moved to their place of work to

live. When Christopher was thirty his father died, leaving him sole owner of an expensive piece of real estate upon which rested the sum total of his existence.

The rain had settled into a steady drizzle and the gray afternoon was fast darkening into evening. Christopher made himself some tea and toast and studied the picture before him on the desk. He had been looking at it, pondering over it ever since that Mr. Walters had brought it in four days ago. It was a very old photograph of a family outing—on a picnic, probably, but it was badly faded and dog-eared. Mr. Walters wanted it restored and done in oils as a present for his wife. It seemed the picture was of her side of the family and she was very sentimental about such things. Naturally, he entrusted Christopher Frame to do an excellent job. He had even selected a beautiful old gold-leaf frame to finish it off.

And finish it off, Christopher could not do. Briefly, Mr. Walters had mentioned his wife had blue eyes and that her hair was fair when she was a child. But the rest of the people—what of them? Eyes? Hair? What color were their clothes? How blue was the sky? In the background he could make out what looked like a lovely little town with a church spire spearing the clear day, but it was faded, and the family group in the foreground posing on the hillock blurred into various degrees of white outlined and accented in brown.

Pride and perfection went into each piece of his work, and now that picture restoration was so popular it bothered Christopher not to be able to reproduce the photographs faithfully. Most of them were in brown or sepia and the people who brought them in had no idea, of course, of any coloring, since they were either too young or not even born. He enjoyed creating oil tones for his subjects, but he felt he was misrepresenting the true past somehow. How few craftsmen were left. No one took time anymore—or cared. It was like the difference between some of the beautiful old gold-leaf and

hand-carved frames he had stored upstairs and the impersonal and uninteresting modern frames he shuddered to use on his work.

He stirred up the fire and added a bit of coal and then went to the big high-ceilinged room at the back of the shop. It was furnished as a bedroom in massive old mahogany pieces and a big fourposter with a patchwork quilt. It was a man's room, but it was warm and cheery—old-fashioned. He had the picture with him. He propped it up on the dresser opposite the foot of the bed and then settled himself on top of the quilt for a nap. The timer he used for developing was on the nightstand close by. He set it for one hour and then lay back to contemplate the troublesome photograph. If only he could be there . . . just long enough to see the true picture, the colors. What a wonderful thing it would be. He dozed off to the measured ticking of the timer.

The combination of something prickling in his ear and an awareness of a bright light brought him back from a heavy sleep to a groggy consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked straight into a stand of lush green grass and above it a horizon of china-blue sky. He was lying on his side under a tree, and it was a beautiful warm sunshiny day!

Cautiously, he rolled over and sat up. The air smelled of sweet clover and the sound of a steeple bell floated lazily in the soft summer breeze. He was on a hill overlooking a neat whitewashed village that nestled against a patchwork quilt of farm land and green slopes. He sat in sheer ecstasy sniffing the clear heady air, but laughter and voices startled him back to the realization that he was in a strange place and an even stranger situation.

Slowly Christopher Frame stood up and peered around the tree. His mouth fell open and a look of shocked disbelief washed over his face. In front of him, living, breathing and posing was the fleshly counterpart

of the picture on his dresser! The photographer, his back to Christopher, was placing his subjects and instructing them to stand very still for the camera. The colors were so vivid in the summer sunshine! Christopher stared at the group and memorized as much as he could and then made notes in the little book he always carried. Surely he was dreaming, but perhaps it was some sort of telepathy coming to him from the picture caused by his anxiety to know more about the faded print.

Just as the little girl in the group spied him a loud ticking started in his head and exploded into ringing bells. The picture before him blacked out, and when he could see again he was looking at the ceiling of his own room and the timer had gone off. He sat up on the edge of the bed and glanced at the picture. What a realistic dream, he thought, chuckled and patted the small notebook in his breast pocket. He decided to get to work on the reproduction while the scene was still clear in his mind. If not accurate in detail, at least this work would be inspired.

He stood, stretched, and then on an impulse, reached for the little book. It was warm from being so close to his body. He opened it and drew in his breath. On the page in his neat script was a detailed description of the photograph. In his excitement the book dropped from his trembling hands to the floor. As he stooped to pick it up he saw the green blades of grass caught in the heels of his shoes. Dizzy, with a feeling of strange elation, he sat down again on the bed. Gingerly, he picked up the timer and examined it. It was the same one he had used for years. There was nothing unusual about it now. He put it back on the nightstand and for a long moment stared at the single dial that stared back at him like a benign Cyclops.

The import of his experience left Christopher confused. He hovered between reality and whatever level of consciousness it was where he had been. Slowly he

moved from his bedroom to the outer regions of the old building. The coals were now gray ashes in the grate and the rain had stopped. Nothing was different about the familiar surroundings. He opened the front door and took a breath of the cool rain-washed air. Everything outside was the same, too. He liked his street best at night. The electric signs winked against the steel-and-glass buildings and made the cold impersonal structures appear cheery and friendly.

So often it seemed to him that this place was a fortress from within whose walls he could look out and see lovely old stone shops razed and new modern steel-and-concrete monsters thrown up, people hurrying faster each day to skim over their work and hurry home to start all over again. In a way Frames was a monument to the past and he intended that his work would continue in the fine tradition of his heritage.

Many nights as they warmed their feet by the small fireplace Christopher's father told of the days when it took weeks to turn out one piece of furniture and how most things you bought lasted a lifetime, how men were craftsmen and artisans instead of hurried workers. The pictures, the very old ones that people brought in, made those days seem even more real and desirable to Christopher. After his father died he gathered the walls around him even more closely and worked hard at his profession. He longed for the companionship of a wife, but he was too old-fashioned to be attractive to women, or so he thought. He made himself content in his work and the security of the old building.

The air helped clear his head and he felt free of the lingering cobwebs of his dream. But *was* it a dream? Blades of grass and a detailed description written in his notebook were tangible facts. Anxious to translate all he had "seen" into the photograph he put aside any further speculation and set to work.

The sun was casting a rosy glow on the pale-gray building across the street when he finished. It was like

looking through the gold-leaf frame into the real scene. The vividness with which he had reproduced the picture astounded him. He gazed at the distant church spire and the little village barely visible beyond the smiling group and he felt a faint nostalgic longing. Excitement overcame the melancholy and he lifted the receiver to call Mr. Walters to tell him the picture was finished. Then he realized it was only dawn—much too early. He decided to lie down for a short nap, and after affixing his trademark to the back of the picture he went to his bedroom. With a moment's hesitation he set the old brass alarm clock instead of the timer.

The day was uneventful. Mr. Walters was pleased with the restoration and framing of the photograph, but not overly impressed. Of course, he wasn't aware of Christopher's strange experience. There was a steady stream of customers, but he didn't handle them in his usual meticulous manner. His mind was preoccupied with other thoughts. He kept going over what had happened to him. It had to be real. There was no grass for miles around and one didn't write as clearly or as coherently in one's sleep as he had done in his little notebook. He knew he would try to make it happen again—now, after closing, and he knew just the picture he would use.

It seemed an eternity until five o'clock. He locked the front door and paused to watch the hurrying parade of people running for buses, rushing to parking lots, all fleeing from work after skimming through the day. Well, he had done the same thing today, too, but this was an exception. It threatened rain again. Christopher started a small fire in the grate, turned off all but the desk lamp and hurried to his bedroom.

Propped up on the dresser, just as he had done with the first one, was another old photograph. It was of a group of young men posing on a wooden sidewalk in front of a glass-fronted store. How many times Christopher's father had told him about all of those eager young fellows and the fine times they had. They, his fa-

ther included, were all apprentices at various shops, learning a trade for board and room, and sometimes a little extra if they worked especially hard.

Cautiously, he set the timer for one hour and lay down on the bed. Perhaps he would wake up in the town square opposite the store. How strange it would be to see his father as a very young man. In spite of his excitement he did fall asleep, but when the timer rang he was still in his own room and with no knowledge of having been anywhere at all. The picture remained inviolate on the dresser. Disappointment and doubt sapped the benefit of any rest he gained from the short nap.

He sat up most of the night brooding in front of the fire. Why hadn't it worked? The circumstances were almost the same. Maybe it had to be a past of which he had no cognizance. The desire to go back—even more, to prove or disprove the reality of so doing—overwhelmed him. He looked at his pocket watch. There was still time before dawn, and he was a bit sleepy. Carefully he sorted through the file of old photographs waiting to be restored and chose one brought in by a Mrs. Nellie Hampton. He knew nothing of or about her other than that she was a customer.

Again, he placed the picture on the dresser and set the timer at one hour. He studied the faded old print from his bed. It was evidently a party in someone's backyard. There were Japanese lanterns crisscrossed from the porch to the trees, long tables of food, and a smiling group in their best dress standing stiffly on the porch steps. But wait! He jumped up and examined the picture more carefully. There must be something that he could bring back with him—proof of his actually having been there. Ah! That was it. The porch railing had gingerbread spindles topped off by little round wooden balls. He could snap off one of those easily. Quickly he lay back on the bed and after a final look at the picture he closed his eyes.

It was the swaying motion that awakened him—

along with the discomfort of the wooden slats in the swing. He was on the porch facing the side yard away from the party in a big chair swing suspended from the ceiling by two stout chains. In front of him, plain as day, was a railing made of ornate spindles topped with little round wooden balls! He stood up and walked slowly to the corner of the porch and peered around the side of the house. As before, the group in the picture posed, waited for the photographer to dismiss them and then moved from the steps back to the festivities.

He was there! He looked at himself. In pants and shirt-sleeves he was not too conspicuous, for several of the men had taken off their coats and were pitching horseshoes. He walked nonchalantly down the steps and stayed close to the bushes where he could watch this wonderful old-time party. He was tempted to sample the food. The smells that wafted over to his nose in the balmy air made his mouth water. There was chicken and pie and home-baked rolls and a small crock of freshly churned butter. To the side was a tub full of ice surrounding a big gallon tin of fresh-strawberry ice cream.

"Hello. Would you like something to eat?" The soft voice startled him.

Christopher Frame whirled around and looked into the bluest eyes and sweetest face he had ever seen.

"Wha—? Oh, thank you. No, I've—I've already eaten."

"You're new, aren't you? My name is Sarah Phillips."

She looked at him with such genuine interest that on top of the headiness of being here he felt a strange new sort of dizzying elation.

"Er, yes. I've just arrived in time for the party."

"I'm glad you could come, Mr.—I'm sorry. I didn't catch your name."

"Christopher . . . Christopher Frame."

"What part of the country are you from?"

Although she still regarded him with interest, he could see that she was curious about his appearance.

"I—I'm a photographer. I travel a lot."

"Will you be here long?" Her golden curls shone in the sun.

"I don't think so. I'm not sure."

He looked at her hard and tried to fix a picture of her in his mind. Then the loud ticking started in his head.

"Mr. Frame? Are you all right?"

"Yes, but you must excuse me. I want very much to stay, but I must go now."

"I'm sorry you have to leave. I hope we'll meet again." A tiny frown crossed her brow.

"And so do I, Miss Phillips . . . Sarah. Goodbye."

The ticking was deafening now. He had to hurry. He walked rapidly out of sight around the side of the house. He barely managed to snap off a little wooden ball from the railing before the bell rang.

He was lying on his back when he awoke. The first rays of sun shone through the window to cast a pinkish hue on the ceiling. He was afraid to move, afraid to leave behind the last wisp of the world he had found but could not hold on to. Then he remembered the railing. Perhaps he did hang on. Slowly he closed both hands. Nothing. Despair engulfed him, not only for losing the past, but for losing Sarah Phillips.

He had been the victim of his own vivid dreams—dreams that had opened the flood gates to yearnings he had kept quietly within himself for so long.

He stood up and walked over to the picture. She was there, smiling out at him, but the faded print obscured her simple beauty. How foolish, he thought, to fall in love with the past and then with a girl who was part of it. Well, at least Mrs. Nellie Hampton would have an imaginative restoration when he finished. With a sigh he started for the front of the building. Getting to work

would help a little. He stopped and looked at the timer. Perhaps he should get a new one. Then he glanced at the bed, looked again and cried aloud. Hidden by the busy pattern of the patchwork quilt was a little round wooden ball!

Clutching the picture and the precious little piece of the past, a euphoric Christopher Frame staggered out to his desk and sat down heavily. It was all true. He had actually gone back into time prescribed by the old photos. Then a terrible thought crossed his mind. Just how long would he be able to go back? What if the timer broke? Tenderly he put the picture back on his desk and turned on the bright light. He studied Sarah's dear face through a magnifying glass, and suddenly he knew what he would do.

All day he worked hard to complete as much as he could. Pride and integrity still governed his actions despite the wild thoughts that whirled in his head. Anyway, he wanted to be good and tired by nightfall. As was his custom, he closed for an hour at lunchtime. He went to the second floor. Everything was neat, catalogued and in order. He browsed through the small storeroom, where all of the old family heirlooms were kept. Admiringly he ran his hands over the carving in the high-backed chair, held a cranberry glass goblet up to the light, studied the inlaid mother-of-pearl design in the graceful little secretary. Today any of these objects would be priced beyond the average person's reach. In the past such fine things were commonly available. It made him tingle to think of working among such artisans as those who considered doing no less than their best in every detail.

By closing time he was satisfied with his accomplishments and he was really very tired. He looked out the front window as if he hoped to see something other than the usual five o'clock rush, shrugged and turned away. Carefully he took the picture from his desk, glanced around once more and went to his bedroom. It

was almost like a ritual now. Again he placed the old photograph on the dresser—just as it had been the night before. Sarah was still there, smiling out from the past.

Beyond the picture he could see himself in the dresser mirror. His hair was rumpled and his shirt was flecked with oil paint and developing chemicals. Quickly, for he felt a great weariness overtaking him, he put on a fresh shirt and combed his hair. Then with trembling hands he set the timer for one hour. He was tempted to set it for a longer period, but he was afraid to upset the pattern. With a nervous little sigh he stretched out on the bed and shut his eyes tightly.

From far away he could hear her calling, and then closer—almost in his ear. He felt his head cradled in something soft and crinkly. Slowly, he opened his eyes and gazed into the face of a very worried-looking Sarah Phillips. She was holding his head in her lap.

"Christopher! Mr. Frame? Are you all right?"

"Sarah!" He started to get up.

"Now, just be still for a bit. You didn't look well when you rushed off around the side of the house. That's where I found you."

"Found me?"

"Yes."

"I—I guess I must have let the heat get to me."

"Do you feel able to get up now? I can get you a glass of cool lemonade."

"No, I'm fine." Regretfully, he left the haven of her lap and stood up. "I'd feel better if we could walk a little."

He had to know if the realm of the past extended beyond the house, the backyard party, the smiling group on the porch steps. He offered Sarah his arm and she took it with a shy, pleased smile.

They walked out to the front of the house. It was all there—the tree-lined street, the big whitewashed homes. They strolled slowly, deliciously, and he couldn't begin to absorb the richness of the surround-

ings. Two blocks over, they came to the town square, lushly green and manicured, surrounded by charming little shops in stone and wood buildings. This was where he wanted to be. Oh, if only . . . then he heard the ticking start.

"Sarah, I've decided to settle here. Would—would that please you? I mean, well . . ."

"Yes, Christopher, it would. I'm very glad . . . but you have that strange look again. Perhaps we've walked too much."

"Perhaps we have. Let's go back to the party. But Sarah? Just for a time, hold my hand—and don't let go for anything."

She looked frightened and the ticking in his head was deafening now. He could feel the firm pressure of her soft hand holding his. At last, they reached the house and went around to the back. Just before the bell went off he tightened his grip on Sarah's hand and shut his eyes.

It was three days before anyone called the authorities' attention to Christopher Frame's unannounced absence. Several of his customers with pictures promised them by the faithful Mr. Frame became concerned and two detectives were sent to check up on him. They found nothing amiss in the building, nor did they find any trace of Christopher Frame.

One of the officers discovered the picture on the dresser. "Hey, Charlie. Come in here. Want ya to see this."

"What's up?"

"See this picture? Just so's you'll know who we're looking for. Must be a relative of old Chris's from way back. Sure looks just like him."

"Which one?"

The detective pointed a big finger at the faded print. "Here. This one—holding hands with the girl on the porch."

OBITUARY

Paul Theridion

Reporter Bartholomew Schreiber and copyreader A. T. Ropos were fated for a bad end.

As city editor I knew them well: they were like chemicals, harmless apart but dangerous together.

Schreiber, who covered general assignments, was a big overgrown guy, mostly blubber, who had developed physically in all directions but not emotionally.

I could sometimes get great results from Schreiber by appealing to his pride. He was after all a Yale man and regarded his professional preparation as superb. But his performance was erratic, although it had once or twice come within a hairbreadth of a Pulitzer Prize.

We are a medium-sized newspaper with a copy desk of four—three scissors-wielding copyreaders directed by our news editor and charged with grooming our copy, locally written and off the wire, and devising headlines. All had gone reasonably well until copyreader Clem Lotho decided to turn in his eyeshade and pencil and retire under the publisher's penurious pension plan.

With newspapers folding so often these days, we had our pick of candidates and the managing editor chose Ropos, who had read copy for some prestigious dailies and was a Harvard man to boot. We called him familiarly A.T. because, as his personnel record indicated, the initials were mere ciphers bestowed upon him by whimsical parents who did not believe in name-calling.

He was a bony elf with a shock of fiery hair, bushy

eyebrows and a wild mustache that covered his mouth and most of his chin. He regarded language, for all its lacy texture, as tangible as wrought iron, and was determined to guard it to the death against the insidious corrosion of change and the drastic battering of abuse.

When Ropos joined the staff he brought his scissors with him. I had never seen their like in a newsroom. They were eighteen inches long, nickel-plated, and forged of Solingen steel. He kept a small honing stone in his drawer on the rim of the great horseshoe of the copy desk. Each morning before starting work he would stroke the stone expertly along the edges of his scissors as the light danced on the gleaming blades.

It was a hoary custom on our paper for all the takes on a story to be pasted into a long sheet by the reporter who wrote it. When I passed a story to the news editor, I could see the eagerness with which Ropos awaited the copy. With one hand he would brandish his shears, taking snippets out of the air, while with the other hand he waved his soft black copy pencil frenziedly like a maestro conducting Wagner in a blazing concert hall.

The first time Ropos operated on Schreiber's copy was the initial skirmish in what quickly became all-out war. The story, actually not up to Schreiber's usual standard, was a maudlin feature about a little blind girl who lived in a hamlet near the city. Her rustic neighbors had taken up a collection to dispatch her to the surgical wizards of the Mayo Clinic, where it was hoped a miraculous cure would be effected.

Schreiber was watching apprehensively over the platen of his old L.C. Smith as Ropos seized the copy from the news editor.

"Aha!" Ropos cried as his dark little eyes alighted on a blemish. "General consensus of opinion, eh?" His pencil slashed all but consensus from the redundant phrase. "Clutched her dolly to her left chest, eh?" His pencil made it the left side of her chest. Then he shook

his head and mumbled, "Drivel," as his sharp blades pierced the copy, causing Schreiber to clutch his abdomen. An irrelevant paragraph fell into the wastebasket like an excised appendix into a surgeon's slop bucket.

As Ropos bent over his work, the copy pencil twitched, darted, glided and stopped at last.

"Aha!" said Ropos as he patted the now subdued copy.

Then he scribbled an ironic headline which fit perfectly.

Later, as the presses rolled, our ancient building shook and so did Schreiber. When the copy boy handed Schreiber the paper with ink still moist, the reporter blanched as he read his truncated prose in 9 pt. Times Roman.

Schreiber strode to the copy desk, where Ropos was admiring his handiwork.

"Beastly butcher!" Schreiber cried.

"Scrofulous scrivener!" Ropos retorted, his scissors *en garde.*

"Harvard harpy!" Schreiber countered, his pudgy fists clenched.

"Yale yahoo!" the elf replied.

Had the news editor and I not restrained the two, the inevitable tragedy would not have been deferred. I judge that Schreiber's copy was the better for Ropos' surgery, but it was the little man's sadistic glee accompanying the operation which consistently infuriated the reporter.

For a while I hoped some benefit might result from the conflict. Schreiber was obviously trying harder. Before handing in a story, he would apprehensively scan it for errors in usage, grammar or punctuation.

As for Ropos, his obvious devotion to editorial excellence inspired the forgotten wretches on the copy desk who now felt they could hold their own in their eternal struggle with reporters.

But tragedy struck when both the news editor and I were in the paper's grubby lounge having our morning coffee after depositing a dime apiece in the publisher's collection box. As witnesses related the story to me later, Schreiber took from his desk drawer a short piece of copy he had been tinkering with for weeks and which he would hide whenever anyone approached.

The city room was a hushed arena when Schreiber stalked from his desk holding the story, and confronted Ropos at the copy desk.

"Let's see you cut this," Schreiber said belligerently as the smiling Ropos took the copy, his scissors snipping the air in anticipation.

But as Ropos read, his smile faded, and holding his shears at port he turned to face Schreiber, who had drawn a revolver and fired point-blank at the little man's chest.

Animated by a sense of outrage, Ropos sprang from his chair, his shears *en avant.* He plunged the scissors into the reporter's heart and the two adversaries sank in death to the city-room floor.

Who was the victor of this tragic battle? Perhaps the answer was in the faint smile that clung to Schreiber's lips as the reporter lay prone, his life claimed by the blades that had mutilated so many of his progeny.

For clutched in Ropos' hand was the story which said tersely:

> A. T. Ropos, 49, copyreader for the *Bugle,* was shot to death at 10:30 a.m. today in the newspaper's editorial office by reporter Bartholomew Schreiber, 42, who was in turn stabbed to death by the copyreader.

Schreiber's story, which required only a headline supplied by the news editor, was run without a word changed.

RANSOM DEMAND

Jeffrey M. Wallmann

Frances Bartlett sat in her husband's easy chair, her big hands clasped loosely in her lap, a plumpish auburn-haired woman in her late thirties, wearing a quilted robe over her pink nightgown. She was watching the *Today* show on television after having packed the children off to school, but this particular morning she wasn't relaxing as she usually did. She was worried.

She wanted to know what had happened to Paul.

Her husband was supposed to have been home sometime after 2 A.M. last night, after his flight from Chicago landed. Frances had awakened at three-thirty from the instinct bred of ten years' marriage to a sales manager, and had tossed and fretted in the dark for an hour before calling the airlines. A clerk at the check-in counter told her the plane had arrived on time, but that she'd have to wait until the business office opened to learn if her husband's name was on the passenger manifest or if he had transferred flights. Sorry. Touched slightly by hysteria, Frances had phoned long distance to the hotel at which Paul had been staying; he had checked out the previous evening without leaving any messages. Sorry . . .

She hadn't been able to sleep the rest of the night.

At least there hadn't been a crash, she told herself as she sat watching the television. She'd have heard about it if there had been, and surely she'd have been notified if there'd been an accident or Paul had gotten sick and was in a hospital. It was probably nothing, a mix-up of

some kind. But it wasn't like Paul not to let her know. Where was he? Oh God, where was Paul?

She glanced at her wrist-watch. Another hour and she'd phone the airlines office, and if they couldn't help her, she'd wait until the next flight from Chicago, and if he wasn't on that, she'd . . . Frances shivered, not wanting to think about what she would have to do then. The police, Paul's boss, the publicity and questions and embarrassment; the prospect seemed too dreadful for words.

A commercial began, and she went to the kitchen for another cup of coffee. She was stirring it absently when the phone rang. She set the cup down and hurriedly picked up the receiver of the extension phone near her.

"H-Hello?"

"Mrs. Bartlett? Mrs. Paul Bartlett?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"We have your husband, Mrs. Bartlett."

"What?" she said blankly. "What?"

"We have your husband," the voice repeated.

"What? You have Paul? How?"

"This is a ransom demand. Now do you understand?"

"Oh, my God . . . !" Frances sucked in her breath, trying to steady herself with her free hand. She knocked over the cup, coffee spilling across the counter; she never noticed it. "Paul, is he all right?"

"He's fine. He'll stay that way only if you do what I tell you."

"Let me speak to him. Please, let me—"

"No. Listen to me, Mrs. Bartlett, and listen closely." The man's voice was low and flat. "We want ten thousand dollars in unmarked bills, nothing over a twenty. Is that clear?"

"Yes, but I don't have—"

"Hock your jewels if you have to, but get ten thousand together by noon if you want to see your husband alive again. Take the money in a lunch pail—the old

kind with the round top—to McKinley Park. You know where that is?"

"Downtown," she answered quickly. "It's downtown."

"Right. There's a statue of McKinley in the middle of it. At exactly twelve-thirty, walk along the north path and put the pail beside the third bench from the statue. Got that? Third bench, north side."

"I—I'm afraid I don't know which is north."

"The side facing Woolworth's. Then keep on going and don't look back."

"I won't. Twelve-thirty, third bench, facing Woolworth's," she recited numbly. "When do I . . . I see Paul?"

"Tomorrow night."

"That long? Can't you . . . ?"

"Don't call the police, Mrs. Bartlett. We'll be watching you, and if you try to double-cross us, you'll never get another chance."

"I understand. But can't you let him go sooner? Please, can't you?" And then she realized that she was talking into a dead receiver; the man had hung up. She stood holding the phone for another moment, still stunned, and then slowly replaced it with mechanical deliberation.

"No," she cried out to her still, empty house. *"No!"*

Frances had been unable to sit still since she'd returned from McKinley Park. Now, with school over and her children playing in the yard, she paced aimlessly through the house, the phone serving as the base of her wanderings. She would walk to the living-room window and move the drapes aside to peer out; then let them drop to pace through the hall and up the stairs, gazing abstractedly into her bedroom, hers and Paul's; down to smoke a cigarette and drink a cup of coffee, only to leave it half finished; return once more to stare at the phone, occasionally touching its bright plastic.

She knew she would carry this day alive and painfully fresh in her mind for a long time. She wouldn't forget her initial panic, when she'd almost called the police, followed by her longer, cold dread of the chance she'd be taking if she did. She wouldn't forget how frantic she'd been at the bank, closing out the accounts and cashing most of their bonds, or how acutely she'd had to control herself when she'd left the pail and simply kept on walking. Or now, despairing, hoping she'd done right and praying Paul would be released unharmed. She kept asking herself why? They weren't rich or famous—only an average, middle-class family like millions of others. Why had they been picked?

The phone rang again. She ran to it, clutching it.

"Hello? Hello?"

"Honey?"

"Paul!" Tears of relief welled, blurring her vision. "Oh, Paul, are you all right?"

"A little tired, but otherwise I'm okay. What's the matter?"

"Where are you?"

"Philadelphia."

"Philadelphia?"

"Sure. The meeting just broke up; it lasted longer than I thought."

"Meeting?" Frances felt dazed and bewildered. "Paul, I-I don't understand. What meeting?"

"This new accounts thing that came up at the last minute. I tried calling you last night to tell you I had to go, but the line was always busy, as usual. Didn't you get my wire?"

"No, I didn't. You mean you're all right?"

"I told you, I'm okay. Just what's going on, anyway?"

"You mean you . . . you weren't kidnaped?"

"Kidnaped!" Her husband laughed. "What makes you think I was kidnaped, for God's sake?"

Frances thought about the phone call and the ran-

som demand—then she thought about the ten thousand dollars and she fainted.

Lew Sieberts lounged in his swivel chair, tapping his thick fingers on the battered oak desk, impatient for his shift to be over. He was still amazed how smoothly the job had gone, and every once in a while he'd have to look in the third drawer of his desk just to be sure the pailful of money he'd picked up on his lunch hour wasn't a figment of his imagination. Man, if he had to get fired, this was the kind of severance pay to leave with; the job was proving to be the best he'd ever had, even if the shortest. He'd stick around to pocket his regular severance tomorrow morning, but then he was getting out of town before that Bartlett guy returned. To New York City, maybe—it had the action, and he could get so lost there he'd never be caught. Yeah, New York sounded real good . . .

The teletype across the room began to chatter. When its bell rang, Sieberts went over to it and tore off the flimsy. It read:

BLTMR XLT1960 JS DL PD KANSAS CITY MO 6/21 340P XXX CAROLE WILSON 424 MAXWELL CT BLTMR MD 467 9073 XXXX MUST GO TO SPRINGFIELD FOR TWO DAYS STOP UNEXPECTED BUSINESS SORRY STOP DON'T WORRY LOVE PETER STOP END XXXX

Sieberts sat down again, studying the message. It was very similar to the wire Bartlett had sent yesterday. He leaned back until he could see out of the dusty window of the telegraph office and smiled faintly, wondering if he could pull the same trick twice in a row. Well, twenty grand was twice as much as he had now . . .

He swiveled around and picked up the phone, dialing the number printed on the telegram. The line buzzed and then a woman's voice answered.

"Mrs. Wilson? Mrs. Peter Wilson?" he said to her. "We have your husband . . ."

THE MOTHER GOOSE MADMAN

Betty Ren Wright

Only one thing distinguished the letter—that was the start of the terror—from the twenty she had already opened. The others were addressed to Juvenile Editor, Webster Publishing Company. This one said, Mrs. Julia Martell, Editor of Children's Books.

Julia noticed the distinction, but took no pleasure in it. She preferred anonymity in her job, which consisted chiefly of saying No to people. As a rule she barely glanced at the letters, but turned at once to the manuscripts which accompanied them. The letters were likely to tell too much, to paint too clearly the desperate beginner, the frustrated housewife, the poverty-stricken mother.

She slid a single sheet from the envelope. *Dear Miss Muffet,* the letter began, and she sighed, anticipating a cute approach. *Under separate cover please find my contribution to your line. It has been planned with you in mind and no one else. I hope it proves useful. If not, you will hear from me again. Sincerely, J. Smith.*

She glanced over the packages, looking for one addressed in the same hand as the letter. It was there, stamped *Fragile* and *Handle With Care* in a half-dozen places.

Fred Thompson stopped beside her, his arms full of art boards, and looked at the markings with amusement.

"Must be worth its weight in gold."

"Then it's not worth much," Julia said dryly. "Feels empty."

She slipped off the wrappings. There was thinly spread excelsior inside the box, with a feathery scrap of black showing through. She moved the excelsior aside.

Her first reaction was disbelief. But there it was: the spider's black hairy body drawn up over folded legs, the tremulous gathering of defenses as the excelsior was shifted. Then the legs moved.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh, *no!*"

She recoiled, because of her dread of all crawling things, while Fred slammed the heavy art boards down on the spider.

The brightly lit drugstore marked the beginnings of home. She stopped there every evening on her way from the bus to pick up a paper, to buy a pint of ice cream, or to reorder the eyewash that made her hours of reading possible. Possibly she liked the store because it reminded her of the one in which she had worked during her college days—the days before she had met, married, and been rejected by Ted Martell. Certainly her feeling about the place had nothing to do with the clerks and pharmacist who, big-city fashion, came and left with monotonous regularity.

Now she waved her prescription at the white-coated man in the back of the store, laid the slip on the counter, picked up a newspaper, and dropped a dime beside the prescription.

"Anything else?" the man called to her.

"No," Julia said, but with some reluctance. The cheerful store was especially soothing after the unpleasantness of the afternoon.

Partly, of course, it was the fuss everyone had made that disturbed her. There was Fred, his eyes showing more concern than his comments, which consisted mostly of consigning all practical jokers to damnation. Then the copyreaders and secretaries who had conjectured about Miss Muffet and her spider until it was time to go home. Even Mr. Webster had come in, curi-

ous about the excitement in the usually subdued editorial offices.

She hated their attention, which threatened to break through barriers she had built around herself. It wasn't easy to maintain those barriers. She knew that according to psychologists it was not only difficult, but wrong. Yet for her it was the only way. Having given herself, really given herself to the last, foolish degree, and having had the gift returned without thanks, she could not take a chance again. She would therefore depend on no one. It was part of the bargain she had made with herself in the months after her husband had left her.

But it was more than the attention of her fellow-workers that had upset her. She considered that as she left the store and hurried down the block to her own apartment building. And it was more than the fact of the spider—actually, harmless. She was disturbed because in her determination to avoid every possible entanglement she had failed. There was, somewhere, a person who called himself J. Smith who, she intuitively felt, hated her with a very real hate. She, who had tried so hard to remain aloof from all feeling, was caught in the entanglements of another's deep emotion.

She lifted the door of her mailbox and took out a handful of letters. Bills. Two invitations to spring book conferences. A letter from her aunt in Bangor, writing to thank her for a birthday present.

And an envelope addressed to Mrs. Julia Martell, Editor of Children's Books.

She put the other letters into her bag, opened the door of the automatic elevator, and stepped inside. She opened the envelope, almost eagerly. It was the same kind of paper, she saw that at once, the same thin hand. But she also saw that the salutation was different.

Dear Miss Humpty Dumpty, Did you enjoy my first submission? Expect another one soon.

The elevator lurched upward. Julia put out her hand

to the emergency Stop button, but hesitated, did not touch it. The elevator slowed, halted. The doors opened and she faced her familiar hallway with its muted light, gray carpeting, lilacs on the table. She stepped out and waited for her heart to stop its violent thumping.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—

It wouldn't be in the elevator, or here in the hallway, where one of the other tenants might be the victim. But it might be inside her apartment, or possibly—

She turned into the shadowed ell that led to her own door. If she had been stepping along at her usual brisk pace, it would have been a very bad fall, but caution had slowed her steps. As it was, she stopped at once when the wire barely brushed her left ankle. Then she sat down, hard and without dignity, because her knees suddenly failed her.

It was a thin, gray wire—the same shade as the carpeting—stapled to the paneling on either side of the corridor, about three inches above the floor. A foot away it could not be seen.

After a moment Julia stood up, took a white linen handkerchief from her bag, and draped it over the wire as a warning to anyone else who might be coming in. Inside her apartment, she looked carefully in the bedroom, the kitchenette, the bath, the closets. Then she came back into the living room and called the police.

The next morning, she took the manuscript rejection files into the small conference room and closed the door behind her. If, as the police believed, her correspondent was a disgruntled and fanatic amateur writer, she would determine his identity herself. The handwriting was distinctive—unfinished loops on the ascending letters, a slanted cross on the *t,* narrow *o*'s. She would recognize it.

There was only one letter in the file from a J. Smith —a barely legible scrawl which apparently accom-

panied some childhood reminiscences and was signed, *Jack Smith, age eighty-nine.* The letter was two years old.

Patiently, Julia moved back through the file to its starting point. The lieutenant had warned her that J. Smith was probably a pseudonym, and common sense told her that the writer, even though he had taken no pains to disguise his handwriting, would hardly sign his own name to what would be evidence against him.

She was halfway through the third drawer, when the door opened and Fred came in.

"Any luck?"

She shook her head, then looked up, startled, into his grin.

"Everybody's guessed what you're doing in here," he said. "And at least six people volunteered to help your secretary sort your mail this morning . . . Didn't find a thing."

Julia bit her lip. "I wish they'd just forget it," she said. "The whole thing is silly. I wish *everyone* would forget it."

Her tone was sharper than she had intended, and his reply matched it. "What's eating you?" he asked, and it was as if the question had been there for a long time, waiting to be asked. "Just why—why don't you want people to care about you? Is that a crime in your book?"

They stared at each other.

"End of conversation," Fred said, after a long moment of silence. "Full stop. Now—how about dinner at Charlie's tonight—all the spaghetti you can eat and extra meatballs on request?"

"No, thanks."

"We can discuss politics; who's going to win the pennant this year."

"Thanks anyway."

Afterward, staring at the closed door with a feeling close to shame, she thought how pleasant it would have

been to have said Yes. He was a nice fellow, fun to be with, gentle in a way her husband had never thought of being. If she were just the kind who could forget and start over . . . At once she was hurtled back to the months after Ted had asked for a divorce. This was the hell one invited by caring for someone—endless days punctuated with pain when sharp little slivers of the past forced their way into the present. Endless, unspeakable nights. She would never take a chance on going through such a period again.

It was late afternoon before she had completed checking the last file. Nowhere had she come across handwriting like the writing in the letters. The day had been wasted. And she should have been able to do the job, she scolded herself, much more quickly than she had. The trouble was that it had been impossible simply to glance at the letters and put them aside. J. Smith was there somewhere; she found herself searching out the emotions of the writers, smiling at the timid jokes, responding to every question and request for advice.

Her secretary looked in to say she was leaving, but Julia remained at the conference table. As she had gone through the files she had taken out every letter that held a reference to Mother Goose. These were stacked before her in a neat pile, ready to be checked again.

There were letters criticizing the rhythm of the old verses, and letters praising the Webster Company's two-volume edition. There were letters asking the meaning of a particular poem, or offering an explanation of another. One of them was written in an uphill hand on stationery headed Ravensfoot Sanitarium, Belden, Colorado, and was dated February eleventh. Julia found it quite moving.

> Dear Editor: I am sending you my original Modern Mother Goose Rhymes for Modern Children. During my illness I have passed many hours

making up these little poems which, I feel, would have appeal for today's child. I am allowed to sit up for a half-hour every day, and during that time I have copied the poems by hand. I don't mention this to gain sympathy, but to show you how deeply in earnest I am about the value of the verses. Thank you for your consideration.

The letter was signed, *Dorothy Kesselman.* A note indicated that the standard printed rejection letter had been sent on February sixteenth.

Julia picked up the phone. "Will you get me the Ravensfoot Sanitarium in Belden, Colorado, please?" she asked the late-duty operator. "I want to speak to the doctor who is caring for Dorothy Kesselman."

She waited, fingering the letter, until the operator called her back. Then she listened without comment. When the operator had finished speaking, she thanked her and asked her to call Detective Schwarz at the police station.

"This is Julia Martell," she said when the lieutenant answered. "I think I have something for you to look into. A Dorothy Kesselman sent us some original nursery rhymes two months ago, and we returned them with our regular rejection letter. She was ill with advanced tuberculosis, and she died the day she received the letter. The hospital, in Colorado where she was a patient, says her husband, Adolph, moved to this city after his wife's death."

It was spring without question when Julia got off the bus that night and walked up the block. Children skipped like wraiths in the twilight. And in front of the old brick houses near the corner, jonquils poked yellow heads above their green. Julia looked at the narrow windows of the houses and wondered about the people behind them. Were they happy? Were they lonely? Had any of them ever noticed her as she returned night after night?

At the drugstore, one of the girls who worked part time was behind the counter. Julia collected a paper, some magazines, and her medicine, which was wrapped and waiting for her.

"How are you tonight?" she said, and was aware that the girl stared in surprise at the greeting. "It's spring," she added, foolishly.

Outside again, she felt as if she were ill and the greeting to the clerk had been a symptom, ominous as a first sneeze. The air crackled with the pain, the yearnings, the disappointments and the delights of all who breathed it. She shook her head, but could not shake away the awareness. Yet she knew she had to. The whole city was storming her barriers now, and she had to keep it out.

She walked faster, trying not to hear the children's shouts, the mutterings of old people on their front stoops, the soft laughter of couples passing by. When she reached her foyer, she tried to pass the mailbox without looking into it. But she could not ignore the envelope's whiteness, seen through the little slot in the box.

> Dear Miss Peep-Peep, *the letter said.* I don't know if you are much of a swimmer or a mountain climber, but it doesn't matter. The name fits—or soon will. This is my last submission, one which you have earned by your sympathy, your compassion, and your understanding. Sincerely, J. Smith.

She read it again. Then, frowning, she crossed to the elevator and rode upstairs. She traversed the corridor with a slow, gliding step designed to reveal any invisible obstacles, and when she opened the door she stood back a moment before going inside.

It could be anything this time. She had never heard of Peep-Peep.

The living room appeared as she had left it. She

looked around the rest of the apartment, then with her coat still on, took her *History of Mother Goose* from the shelf and thumbed through the index. It was there—a short riddle-rhyme about a star:

> I have a little sister, they call her Peep-Peep;
> She wades the waters deep, deep, deep;
> She climbs the mountains high, high, high;
> Poor little creature, she has but one eye.

The telephone rang. Julia picked it up and heard the voice of Lieutenant Schwarz.

"You can relax, Mrs. Martell," he said. "We've got your joker. Picked him up right after you called us. The husband of the late Mrs. Kesselman who wrote you—he admitted it right away. Went off the deep end after his wife died. He says she worked for six months on the poems she sent you, and you didn't even—Well, he seems to think that if you'd sent a word of encouragement instead of a form letter, it would have made a difference. She was practically staying alive for your answer, according to him, and when it came—she just gave up."

Julia leaned back. "Yes," she said, "I understand you, Lieutenant. But it wasn't fair, was it? I mean, to put all that responsibility on me—"

The lieutenant sounded uncomfortable. "He says he wrote a letter that should have tipped you off," he said. "He knew he was going to be caught at this, but he didn't care . . . I'm sorry, Mrs. Martell. Anyway, you don't have to worry any more."

"Do I know him?"

"Could be." Lieutenant Schwarz seemed relieved to get off the delicate subject of motive. "At least, you've seen him. He's the pharmacist in the drugstore just down the block from your place."

Julia returned the receiver to its hook and sat for a moment without moving. Then she picked up the bottle of eyewash from the coffee table and unwrapped it.

Her handkerchief was lying on the table, and she poured a little of the solution on the cloth. The spot widened and then, as she watched, the dampened area shredded and dissolved. Through the small round hole, she saw the wood of the coffee table turn yellow.

Poor little creature, she had but one eye. Julia looked around the room that had been for a long time her cheerful, safe retreat. Then she picked up the telephone directory and began turning the pages.

"Fred," she said a moment later. "This is Julia. Are the spaghetti and meatballs still available? I think I'd like them very much."

THE GREEN FLY AND THE BOX

Waldo Carlton Wright

A fly buzzed under the edge of the blue blind. It sounded like a plane diving toward the woods, at once near and then far away down the valley. Hanford lay without breathing, knowing if he did it would hurt deep down in his ribs, the way the pain had flared up with the blast of the shotgun.

There had been an accident. Of that Hanford was sure. Just where or how was still back there, in the blackout; but now he felt fully awake and light enough to float.

Cautiously he tried to open one eye, to watch the fly, knowing it sat on the window sill preening its wings. It had come to lay nits in his insides, hasten the decomposition of the body he had dragged around the fields and barn. His body had served him well, making a living of a sort on the old farm, finding joy in being alive but never becoming a capable farmer.

The morning light carried the same urgency that disturbs a seed buried in the ground. He was too young to be lying idle in this box with the white satin lining. His son Shean needed a guiding hand; and Betty was still young enough to marry again. It hurt just to think of that.

Now over the edge of the box he could see the fly. It was a female, large and green. Her wings glistened in the wedge of sunshine under the blind, near enough to swat. He reached out swiftly.

The motion lifted him clear of the box and he found

himself floating. It was a bit awkward at first, moving like a cloud. It was smoother than using a crutch, the way he had hobbled around after he broke his leg when his first tractor turned over on the side hill.

He was drifting toward the wall and closed his eyes, expecting a bump. Instead he passed through it, just as if there were nothing there. Outdoors in the sunshine he circled the catalpa tree, riding a merry-go-round of nothingness.

The second time around he saw the couple drawing up in a large sedan, parking by the garden gate. Now he realized it was the purring of their car on the hill that had wakened him. He swung back under the fretwork of the porch to see who they were.

Then from the henhouse his son Shean appeared, carrying two buckets of eggs. Hanford must remember to caution his son to clear the nests at least twice a day in this heat.

By rolling on his side, still hearing the blowfly buzzing inside against the glass, Hanford recognized the visitors, his wife's sister, Elizabeth, and her husband, Matt Burr. Coming to the wake, no less.

"Mother's expecting you, Aunt Bess, in the living room," Shean said, setting down the buckets of eggs. Hanford noted the yellow seal on the back of Shean's blue sweat shirt: Future Farmers of America.

The woman spread her arms to embrace the boy. "What a horrible thing to happen," she said.

The lad pulled away, pushed back his stubborn mop of red hair, and motioned the woman toward the kitchen door.

Elizabeth's husband covered the embarrassment by reaching for one of the buckets of eggs. "Let me help you put these in the refrigerator," he said.

"I can do it, Uncle Matt." Hanford's son picked up both buckets and headed for the cellar.

"I'd like to see how the apple trees are coming along, the ones you set out the last year you were in

high school," Elizabeth's husband called after him.

As Elizabeth opened the side door and passed inside, a gust of air blew Hanford from under the porch so that he hung, light as the fluff of a milkweed pod, over the woodshed.

Elizabeth's husband, waiting for Shean to come out of the cellar, reminded Hanford of the centurion who had told Jesus he was accustomed to ordering men around. Born in a Brooklyn ghetto, he had learned to climb over other men's backs, until he was head of his own Somerset mills—master of all, except in his own home.

Shean came out of the entry carrying Hanford's shotgun in the crook of his arm. Shep, the collie, uncoiled from under the lilac bush, his tail wagging like the metronome Betty kept on the top of the parlor organ. Shean led the way, up the path by the blighted cherry tree, toward the leaning silo and the old red barn, and Hanford wondered why neither of them looked up to see him hanging in the air, right smack over the weather vane.

The sheep dog turned his nose skyward and sniffed. Then, to show his disdain of men who floated around instead of walking like normal critters, the dog raised his leg and watered a patch of dandelions.

At the barnyard, Shean's heifer moved out from under the straw stack to lean her muzzle over the rail for the boy's caress, and Shean said, "She's due to freshen any day now, Uncle Matt."

Matthew Burr reached out to pat the heifer's neck, but she drew back, shaking her head and watching them. Floating around the stack, Hanford chuckled to himself about the heifer drawing away instinctively from Elizabeth's husband.

"But why a Jersey?" Burr was asking.

"You sound like my old man," Shean said. "Don't you know it pays to raise the butterfat over four percent?"

"Well, now, that makes sense," Elizabeth's husband said. "What have you done to modernize the barn?"

"Come and I'll show you the surge milker and the stainless-steel storage tanks," Shean said.

They passed under the overhang, into the stalls. Hanford preferred not to try to wedge in, to hear what Burr would say about the new stanchions and the water cups. His son had bought these against his advice, going deeper and deeper in debt, and somehow Hanford no longer felt a part of all this.

He began to get the hang of floating in air. The trick was wishing to be someplace, hard enough, and resting in space, doing nothing, like floating on your back when swimming. Up here he could hear anything they said.

"My old man felt he could strip the cow's udders better by hand, more cream, the way his folks had done in Ireland all their lives." Shean's voice bounced out the entry and slithered soft-toned off the stone wall by the watering trough.

"But your mother—she was on your side, wasn't she?" Burr's voice was prodding, researching, firming up the facts, to lay them one-two-three on the intercom. You standardize this, you automate that. So, the Problem stands resolved.

They were outside again, walking right under him past the watering trough, heading for the orchard. There the old trees had died out, and Hanford had sawed them down singly with a one-man crosscut for firewood. His son had laid out the new orchard on the same west side of the ridge, as a 4-H project, with the help of the county agent.

Hanford had been against the project. Milk was a money crop, and cows returned strength to the soil. The new orchard would have to be sprayed with all those new poisons that killed the curculio and leafrollers and checked the powdery mildew. Poisons soaked into the soil and in time would seep into the well and

creep into the home vegetables. Science can go too far, his Scanlon grandfather had told him as a boy, when they went up Sunday afternoons to salt the sheep.

"My old man loved this place, just as it was; just as his father and grandfather had struggled here," Shean was saying. He walked in long high-stepping strides, the way a farm boy learns to clear the furrows left by the spring plowing, carrying this stride with him all his life.

"It's just as if he were out of step with life," Burr said, the way he would explain why it was necessary to let one of his accountants go now that the employee was over fifty and wages were handled by one machine, even the check writing.

Elizabeth had written to Betty about these time savers her husband had made at the Somerset mill, but his wife had never complained to Hanford or even hinted he was out of step with this thing called progress. That was why he had kept on believing in her, loving her, feeling her warmth smother some wildness in his heart, nights on the old farm.

Below him, the boy and man walked down the center row of the young trees. Every now and then his son would stop to examine the fruit, rubbing a green Rome Beauty with the sleeve of his blue shirt.

"They're beginning to show color," he told his uncle.

"How often do you have to spray them?" Burr asked.

Hanford couldn't catch the number of times Shean mentioned. Sliding along above the tops of the trees, brushing his stomach on the soft green leaves, he could feel the chalky coating rub off on him, the way powdered lime sifts right through your shirt, smarting your chest.

Up here, higher than the ridge, it looked like a toy farm, with its old log house, red barn, and the black and white specks of the Holstein herd grazing along the creek. The clover held back the soil from washing into

the valley. The cows enriched the land, giving back measure for measure to maintain the balance. It was a slicker accounting with time than any of Burr's data-processing machines could attain. Life here was simpler, mocking all the furor of pouring more steel, shaping it into pistons and gears, refrigerators and cars, speeding up the looms, sealing more packages, capping more bottles. The nonsense of it made Hanford laugh out loud.

At the rumble of Hanford's voice, Shean glanced up between the trees. For a moment he thought his son saw him floating there.

"The thunderheads are building," he told Burr. "We'd better take a shortcut to the house."

"I distinctly heard something," Burr said, frowning up at Hanford as if ordering him to come down from his perch and be a man again. Burr had often told him, "You'd make more in a year working for me than you will on this old farm the rest of your life."

No, no, you tried that before, dangled other offers through my wife's sister. Now you'll try to lure my son away—unless he's got some of my Irish rebel blood in his gizzard.

"I can get you a good job at the mill, you know." Burr was taking quick military strides down the field, half stumbling over the cross contour lines left by the plow, trying to keep up with the boy.

Shean walked ahead, the shotgun bobbing in the crook of his arm. From across the field came shrill barking. A rabbit jumped clear of the pine woods, headed toward them. The boy brought the gun to his shoulder. At the blast, dust spurted almost in the rabbit's nose. It swung down the field, leaping high to clear the clumps of clover, disappeared into the woods. The sheep dog came running from the woods toward the gun, his tongue lolling, expectant of picking up a limp rabbit.

"You missed," Burr was criticizing his son, just as he

would the first time Shean let a faulty gadget slide by him on the inspection line.

Hanford knew better. Shean had purposely missed the rabbit, merely wanted to scare it out of the clover. He gets that hate of killing wild things from his mother.

Hanford watched Shean break open the barrel, ejecting the red plastic shell. Then he blew through the breach, the way he had been taught. You don't have to explain twice to an Irishman to keep your gun at the ready.

They had come to the stake and rider fence that separated the clover from the corn field. Hanford banked lower on the current of hot air that flowed down the ridge, to hear what would be said. This was the spot where he last remembered carrying the gun. Was it yesterday or a week ago? Or beyond time? But it was here. He was almost sure.

"This is where I found him yesterday," Shean said, as if that were on his mind when he aimed in front of the rabbit.

"Right at this spot?" Burr asked, staring at the brown spot near the rails. He would have to know the facts exactly.

"It wasn't as if he didn't know how to crawl over a fence." Shean handed the gun to Elizabeth's husband. "Hold this while I take down a rail."

"Do you suppose the trigger caught?" Burr asked.

It seemed terribly important to Hanford to hear what his son would say, but just as Shean crawled over the rail lightning struck a tree in the woods. The blast pushed Hanford aside, sent him tumbling down the hill on a current of hot tangy air. When he recovered himself, floating over the Holsteins, Hanford bounced upward, fluttering the bulges that were his arms, like wings. By now the rain was falling through him, and Shean and the man were running past the vegetable garden, toward the fan doorway of the farmhouse.

Hanford floated after them, finding it breathless to

keep up, feeling something was being washed out of him, the way water leeches the salts out of the soil, eroding it, leaving it fallow.

They had gone in ahead of him and closed the door. He knew they were gathered in the parlor and that his wife Betty would have raised the blind only after she was sure the lid was on the coffin.

Hanford slid noiselessly through the plaster chinks, between the old logs that his grandfather had laid up when he first settled here a hundred and fifty years ago, retreating from the potato famine in Ireland.

Elizabeth sat in the rocker by the window, facing Betty, who stood by the door as if keeping watch over the coffin. Burr had slid into Hanford's captain's chair, an heirloom of a Scanlon. Burr's feet were stretched out to relax after the climb around the old place. Shean wasn't in the room. He must have gone up to the barn to see whether the Jersey heifer had dropped her calf.

Instead of sliding back into the coffin through the black lid, Hanford rested on a strand of cobweb along the ceiling above the mantel. The strand was soft and springy and from here he could watch them all, even hear their breathing. From the way Elizabeth's finger knocked the ashes from her long cigarette into the blue jardiniere, he knew his wife's sister had something that had to be said before the lad came in, now her husband was there to witness.

"Matthew will buy the place," she said, and then looked up quickly at the corner of the room, as if she had seen Hanford lying there on the cobweb. She shrugged as if she felt a chill, then brushed her hand over her eyes to fan away the puff of smoke coming from her nose.

Betty sat down quickly, the way the legs of a calf sag when the butcher hits it with a sledgehammer between the eyes. He had seen her collapse that way once before, when lightning struck the old barn just after haying. Grain and hay, even the herd, everything but the

house, had gone up in flames. It was the summer she had been carrying Shean.

Hanford eased his leg over the cobweb to relax. He suddenly felt tired to death, wanting to stretch out in the chair where Burr lolled. The man was waiting for Betty's reaction to his offer to buy the farm. Betty and the boy would move into the city. Shean could have a job on the inspection line, the way he had offered it back there at the fence, holding the gun that had somehow been part of this meeting, while the lad crawled over.

"The way of the world is change," Burr was saying. "The trick is to move ahead of the changes."

That must be how he thinks, that change is everything, always for the better. Hanford shook his head but knew they would not look up to him for guidance. He was just an old-fashioned farmer, proud of his acres. However lean, the land had still supported him, his wife and son. Until the accident, that was.

The female blowfly was again zooming around the room, dipping and buzzing, protesting at being shut out of the coffin. She sounded heavy with eggs, the nits that would assure Hanford's decomposition.

"You'll be better off living in a small house in Somerset." Elizabeth snuffed out her cigarette on the edge of the blue jar and dropped the butt among the dried pussy willows, to indicate it was all agreed, settled.

The door swung open and Shean stood outlined like a back-country Blue Boy in a frame. Raindrops trickled off the mop of red hair and his face was splotched with mud.

"Ma, Betsy's had her calf. Isn't that great?" Still grinning, he turned to Elizabeth's husband. "You must come up and see it."

"No, thanks. We've got to be going shortly," Burr said, sitting up straight, the way he brought a meeting of his board of directors around to a decision.

Elizabeth reacted to her husband's cue, first glancing at the coffin and then turning to face the lad. "Matthew will see that you get ahead at the mill. It might even be yours someday."

Hanford rolled over on his side on the cobweb, to watch his son's face. Shean seemed unable to grasp what was being spread out before him by his rich uncle.

The collie wedged by Shean, turned once, then stretched out at Betty's feet. The gesture seemed to ask, And what about me? Who'll feed me?

"I wouldn't like working in your mill," Shean said. "This is my farm. This is where I belong."

"For shame, Shean," Betty said. "Matthew only wants to help us, not take the farm."

"The farm is not for sale." His son's eyes seemed fixed on the black lid of the long box in the corner, as if he were making a vow.

"Well, think it over and if you change your mind . . ." Elizabeth's husband stood up. His head bobbed into Hanford's ribs. Then the visitor brushed a cobweb from his bald head and strode decisively through the door.

Good-bye, good-bye. Hanford almost fell off the cobweb laughing for joy. His son was every inch an independent Irishman.

Betty lingered behind for a moment. She stroked the lid of the box lightly, then drew the blue blind down to the window sill like a curtain falling on the last act.

When she had gone, Hanford listened for the revving of the car motor. Its departure rattled the windowpanes like the rumble of distant thunder. The green fly took up its frustrated hum, reminding him of its urgency.

Hanford could feel the open spaces, cleansed by the rain, like a cool draft when he opened the door of the egg refrigerator. He could still hear the priest kneeling beside him, mumbling the words of the last rites. Then

he remembered his own mumbling, his thick tongue, his smoldering fire. He had been drinking all day in the barn, not even bothering to milk the cows. He had spent the egg money for a little fun, to forget with a jug of Irish whiskey, the best.

Just as it was getting dark, Shean had driven in. The lad had wasted the whole day at a meeting of the county apple growers association down in Bedford. He had insisted Hanford go with him, right then, up the ridge where the new orchard would be. What angered Hanford most was the crazy fool buying a thousand more four-year-old red Delicious on bank credit, through the word of the county agent, putting him deeper in debt. It didn't make sense to Hanford.

As they walked they quarreled. At the stake and rider fence, his anger mixed with the whiskey. He clouted his son across the mouth, knocked him into the corn stubble. Flames of rebellion to a changed way of life, all he had worked for, roared through his mind, licked out at the cause of all his frustration. He remembered aiming the gun at Shean's chest. The lad grabbed the barrel and hung on, pleading. There had been this yellow blast and Hanford felt his ribs cave in, the way they had done when the tractor fell on him.

Somehow he had expected to wake up in hell. Or maybe, if he had been absolved, crowned and alone, sitting on the ridge of a cloud, wearing a white robe, sipping stale beer from a golden mug, his blunt fingers trying to pick out "Londonderry Air" on an Irish harp. Instead, this heaven was more like an extension of memory, linking him with the living, forever near those he loved on this old farm.

World weariness seeped through him into the open spaces left by the rain. He was falling into a bottomless sleep. Feet first, drawn out like a wisp of smoke, he slid slowly into the long black box, feeling the satin brush his cheek like Betty's hand in the night: *Now go to sleep, Hanford my love, my Irish prince.*

Just before oblivion, he remembered to push up the edge of the lid with one toe. That way the female blowfly could wedge in, lay her nits, assure the return of his body to the soil that had formed him.

THE BLUE RUG

Mitsu Yamamoto

"That guy there would be perfect."

I looked up from the equation I was checking at the two men standing in the doorway of my lab. One was Jamison, a vice president in charge of PR and advertising. The other I knew right off was some creative type—he was wearing a vicuna sweater, brown corduroy pants, and no tie. This turned out to be Reg, Reg of The Rug.

But the rug came later. Now Jamison was patting me on the arm and saying, "Don, here, is one of our think-men. Does most of his chemistry behind his desk."

Reg looked about thirty, a very trim thirty, with an eager manner and big smile. I felt myself warming toward him though I knew he was some Madison Avenue nuisance. "What's this experimenting by remote control?" he asked, motioning to my desk.

"Not completely remote," I said. "I figure it out, my assistants set it up, we run the experiment, it flops, they wash the glassware, and I'm back at my desk with a pencil."

Jamison frowned slightly. "Now, come, Don, the zinc purifier was all yours."

Reg ignored him, just shook his head at me, and said, "For the commercial, Don, you're going to have to get in there and lower the Bunsen burners yourself."

I noticed he was calling me Don already, but it just reminded me of a guy I knew in the Army. Same kind

of heartiness. He was the first in our outfit to buy it.
"Commercial?" I said.

Jamison interposed hastily. "Now, Don, you've heard we're planning some institutional advertising on TV, burnish up the image a bit. And Reg is in charge—writer, director, everything."

"And I want an actual Parkson chemist," Reg said. "But we'll use an actress for the housewife part."

"But I'm no actor," I objected.

Reg laughed. "You don't have to be. With that studious look, confident manner—you're type-cast."

So I was on TV, or almost. Reg planned four commercials, using a kitchen and a lab like mine. We packed tons of Erlanger jars and glass tubing off to a West Side studio. I tried to get the equipment set up in a way that would make some kind of sense, but Reg said it didn't matter, it was only background. But he spent an hour sighting the shots of the burners painted with Parkson's newest stove paint.

The man who really fussed around was the lighting director. He found too much glare from the glass everywhere. Then my hair was too dark, he claimed, and absorbing too much light, so up went another spot to counteract it. I stood under the hot lights, in a blue lab coat, feeling like an ass. But Reg loved it all and poured out energy, running, shouting, calling shots, moving us around, and interviewing girls for the housewife's role as they turned up.

At the end of the first day, I was completely beat from just standing around and moving on cue, so Reg took me back to his apartment for a drink. I expected to see the typical bachelor apartment of a bachelor who earned forty thousand dollars a year—the going price for top TV commercial writers, Reg told me to my annoyance. But Reg's apartment was all Reg.

In the living room were only three large dark-blue couches, end tables, a bar, a hi-fi and a pale-blue rug. The rug measured about 16′ by 16′, perfectly plain

except for the middle which had a dark-blue intertwined design that was hard to make out from the doorway. All the furniture bordered the rug, but some dark-blue cushions were thrown around on it.

"Now, laddie, life can begin," Reg said, throwing off his coat and going to the bar. "Two belts of Scotch for two needy men." He looked over at me in the doorway. "Well, come on in."

I pointed to the rug. "You mean it's for walking on? With shoes?"

Reg laughed. "With shoes—at first. I have a cleaning service that comes in regularly once a month."

I stepped on the rug and it was like walking with pillows strapped to your feet.

Reg watched me with a delighted grin. "It's got to you, hasn't it? You want to walk around in your socks or, even better, barefoot, don't you?"

I nodded sheepishly and took off my hat, my coat, and then my shoes. The rug felt even better. It was soft, it was sybaritic, it was damn near tranquilizing. "It's great, great," I murmured, feeling like all the feather beds in the world were underfoot.

Reg kicked off his shoes and handed me my drink. "Now you come to Phase Two. You want to sit down on the rug." He plopped himself down and leaned back against one of the couches. "You want to stretch out, maybe even lie down and feel good all over, the way your feet feel. Right?"

"Right, but I just had this suit pressed." But I found myself sitting down on the rug and leaning back against a couch, like Reg. I tasted my drink—it was very high-class Scotch and I knew this more as a chemist than a drinker, since my salary didn't run to it. I relaxed and watched Reg, now stretched toward the middle of the rug, tracing the dark-blue pattern there with a lazy finger. "Is there a Phase Three?" I asked.

Reg smiled again and said, "Phase Three is when she says"—here he reared back on his heels and stared at

the blue design in simulated surprise, saying in a girl's voice—" 'Why, it's a picture with people or something.' Then she looks closer at the people, the two people who seem to be entangled with one another."

I took another sip of Scotch. "*She* says?"

Reg sighed. "Don't be stupid, laddie. Do you think I poured five thousand dollars into a custom-made rug for guys like you to rub their socks into?"

"Five thousand dollars for this rug?"

Reg finished off his drink. "And as Mother Nature is my judge, it's been worth every cent."

"Mother Nature, huh?" I heaved myself forward and crawled two steps until I was looking down at the dark-blue design. I studied it very carefully, beginning with the woman's leg on the man's shoulder and ending with the splayed fingers of the man's right hand. Automatically my hand reached up to receive the second drink Reg was passing me. I crawled back to my position against the couch, the concern for the crease in my trousers a thing of the past.

"That," I pronounced, "is the most real, the most delicate, and the only piece of wool pornography I have been privileged to see." And I drank to it.

Reg nodded happily, his good-looking face aglow. "But that's only half of it. That stuff is Art. Right out of the *Kamasutra.* This husband and wife down in the Village made it to order for me. He was a designer and she was a weaver and they copied it right out of some scholarly Oriental art book." He sighed reminiscently. "And they went off to Mexico on the five thousand, and my rug and I went on to glory with countless, countless beautiful girls."

I interrupted this reverie. "But Kinsey says women are not particularly stimulated by pornography."

Reg sat up. "First, let us stop calling it 'pornography.' It's art. Famous Indian art. Second, yes, Kinsey said that, but no one can *actually* know that about *every* girl."

I crawled back to the design, to take it in again. "I admit I'd love to have this rug around the house, but I'd hate to spend all that money and find Kinsey right about most of the girls most of the time."

Reg had brought the Scotch bottle with him last time, and now he crawled over with it and refilled my glass. "No, laddie, you got it wrong. I don't expect the little girl to be all shook up by this." Here he stroked the woman's right buttock. "What I expect is just what's going on here. We are having a discussion about sex; nay, more, we are having a discussion about copulation. Did you ever bring a girl around to the topic this fast? And at the same time have her down on the floor with her shoes off and a sensuous desire to stretch out just because the rug is so soft?"

I shook my head admiringly. "I drink to two rug-makers in Mexico and to a great dirty mind beside me," I joked.

Because for me, it was just a big joke. I was in the market for marriage. I had a good job that I liked and I was getting tired of chasing around. I wanted my own girl and I wanted three sons. I was simply ready for *the* girl. But I could appreciate the Madison Avenue approach that Reg made with his rug, an approach that worked time after time, I heard later at the TV studio. The girls knew it was a big blatant joke and try-on, but they loved it—it was so fantastic—and besides the rug was soft and Reg had a lot of charm.

The first commercial was set to roll on Tuesday. At ten Reg was still turning down girls for the housewife part. The same agent always cast for him and usually there were no problems, but this time the girl had to match up with me. I'm dark, so they wanted a blonde. I'm six feet, so they didn't want a girl under five feet three. I have rather sharp features, so they wanted a kitten-type girl. And to balance my voice, which tends to be fast and a little bossy, they wanted a smooth, olive-oil-sounding girl.

Sarah "Sally" Larsen turned out to be that blond olive-oil kitten. Reg hired her after one look and her first sentence to him, "I'm trying out for the Parkson commercial." The casting agent had matched us perfectly from a physical viewpoint, and Sally turned out to be sweet and intelligent. By the time we had wrapped up the third commercial, I was in love with her. By the end of the fourth, I had told her, just to get her used to the idea.

Of course, everybody liked her. As soon as she came on the set, each man started doing his job like a pro—from the sound mixer to the kid keeping the camera cables from getting tangled. We all wanted to look good in front of her. All of us, including Reg.

During the week we made the commercials Sally, Reg, and I were like the Three Musketeers. But we never went to Reg's apartment. He had to save his rug as a surprise for any new girl, so we all went to a new bar and a different restaurant each night. And the question loomed early: I wanted Sally, Reg wanted Sally, who did Sally want?

We kicked this question around for the next two months. I went back to my lab at Parkson's, but the three of us were in constant touch by phone and dates in the city. I watched the commercials every chance I got, just to see Sally's eyes light up when she looked at her stove burners painted with Parkson's paint. I knew Reg had been pressing Sally to come to his apartment for dinner, but she had been in New York only six months and was a little afraid of his smoothness. I told her about Reg's rug—just as a warning without having to say it was a warning against Reg—which was probably a mistake, for the idea of the rug intrigued her. But I kept telling myself I had something intriguing too, an offer of marriage. I didn't realize how much I was in love with her until one morning at eleven I found myself leaving the lab and rushing home to look at a Parkson commercial that I had seen twenty times over.

Then I knew I *had* to marry her.

The Christmas holidays were terrible. Sally spent them in Ohio with her family and Reg was invited to the Bahamas. I spent a lot of time at the lab, including evenings, but I determined that next Christmas I would spend double that time at home with my own wife, planning the house we would build on some beautiful wooded land I had bought near Parkson's.

I made so many plans for Sally and me that I could scarcely take it in when she told me. At home she had given us a lot of thought and decided it wasn't fair to keep me dangling. She wanted to be married and possibly to me, but not yet. So one of her New Year's resolutions was to enjoy herself in this New York period while she was still the girl every man in the room turned to look at when she entered. She would begin by accepting Reg's invitation to dinner at his apartment that Sunday.

I went home and got drunk by myself. The last thing I remember is explaining to the umbrella stand, "I want to marry her, so I don't get the girl. Reg doesn't want to marry her, so he does." It took me two days to really sober up and by then it was Friday. Friday before Sunday. Sunday, which would be the end of my dream of a wonderful life with Sally.

I always think best at a desk, with a pencil in my hand. So now I made myself a hearty breakfast, took the phone off the hook, and went into the study. I sat down at my desk and took up a pencil. I put a scratch pad in front of me and then I began to think about my problem. A scientist starts out by absorbing the facts about his field and training himself in its technics. This makes him a technician in his field. When he learns to direct his mind, to *think,* to solve problems in his field, then he becomes a scientist. And I was a scientist with a problem. I sat at my desk and thought throughout most of Friday. At midnight I went to bed, only to wake up at four in the morning. I had some milk and

went back to my desk. By nine o'clock Saturday morning I had solved my problem, and I went back to bed for a nap until it was time to call Reg.

I finally got hold of Reg at his apartment about six that evening after calling regularly all afternoon. I made my voice a little unsteady and said, "I want to talk to you about Sally. She . . . she tells me you two have a date tomorrow."

Reg was embarrassed by the emotion he could detect in my voice, but said heartily, "Well, sure, laddie, but I'm going out this evening. And tomorrow is out. How about lunch next week?"

But I insisted it had to be this evening, letting my voice rise somewhat. So Reg finally agreed to my coming to his apartment around midnight, promising to cut his date short. I hung up with satisfaction.

I got into the city about eight and bought the pink, sweet liqueur that Sally was fond of. I had dinner alone and went to a French film. I was pleased to notice I was detached enough to enjoy the movie, though every now and then I became conscious of the weight of the liqueur in my lap. From eleven to midnight I drank. Reg was an expert in estimating how drunk a man was—it was part of his job entertaining clients for his agency, getting them happy without making them unmanageable. So I had to draw a fine line between being alert and being sloppy enough to convince Reg.

Reg answered the door quickly when I rang and I caught the shadow of annoyance that passed over his face when he saw me steadying myself against the door frame. He didn't want to talk about Sally, he didn't want to see me, and, most of all, he didn't want to contend with a drunken, aggrieved friend.

I held out the liqueur. "It's for Sally. She likes it." I sat down abruptly on the floor, still holding the bottle.

"Okay, Don, take it easy," Reg said. "I'll put some coffee on."

"No, wait," I commanded loftily. "I was going to

knock the bejesus out of you. But that . . . that too degrading for Sally. Jus' want you to know you ruined my life."

Reg sighed. "Oh, come on, Don. Sally and I'll see one another for a while and that'll be it. She's not *really* interested in me. It's just the New York bit. You'll see."

He left me sitting on the floor and went to make the coffee. I didn't bother taking off my coat, but opened the liqueur and carefully dribbled it over the blue rug. I emptied the last of the bottle over the entwined figures and rubbed the sticky pink liquid into the wool with my foot.

I looked up when I heard Reg gasp. I saw him fight for control of his feelings and gain it. He was tight-lipped as he set the coffeepot down on a table. "Okay, Don. You're drunk and unhappy and think you have a right to be. Maybe you have. I don't see it that way."

I stood looking down at the pink mess I had made of the two dark-blue figures. "She was my girl," I said. I tried to slur it drunkenly.

"Go home. We have nothing to discuss. You think this"—he waved his hand at his stained rug—"will prevent Sally from coming. But you're wrong. It's not even a delaying action."

I looked up at Reg and smiled inwardly. I hadn't been mistaken in him: the value I had assigned to him in my equation was correct. He was coldly furious but determined.

"I intend," said Reg, spacing his words, "to clean this rug and have Sally to dinner tomorrow as planned. Or today, I should say. There's an all-night drugstore at Times Square and they must have something I can use. So, take off, back to your test tubes."

I sagged and started toward the door. Reg watched me. At the door I turned and passed my hand over my forehead. "Reg, I . . . I . . . you've got to understand how this has hit me. I can't believe I've done this

childish thing." But my eyes glinted with pleasure as I saw how the thick fibers of the rug had absorbed the liquid, leaving small beads of stickiness to catch the light and glisten.

"Well, you sure did," said Reg, with a little less hardness in his voice. "I only hope they don't have some kid on duty at the drugstore who won't know anything." He went to the closet for his coat.

I turned the knob of the door. "Oh, just ask him to give you carbon tet."

Reg's expression softened slightly. "Carbon tet?"

"That's right," I said. "Carbon tetrachloride." Then I let myself out and walked for about an hour in the cold dark. After a while it began to snow.

On Sunday evening at eight o'clock Sally called me from a hospital. She was almost hysterical, so I drove as fast as I dared into New York. When she saw me hurrying through the hospital lobby, she flew into my arms and started to cry. I knew she was in my arms to stay.

"Oh, Don, it was awful, awful. I was supposed to come for dinner, but he didn't answer the door. I got the super because we could hear the hi-fi going."

"And Reg was . . . ?" I prompted.

Sally lifted a tear-streaked face to mine. "He was lying on the floor unconscious. And in the ambulance, he died!" Her voice began to rise. "Reg died!"

I gave her a little shake. "Get hold of yourself, Sally. Tell me what happened."

"The doctor said he poisoned himself. Besides he was drinking beer and the alcohol made him absorb it faster. Oh, Don, he was all blue." She shuddered.

"Reg poisoned himself?"

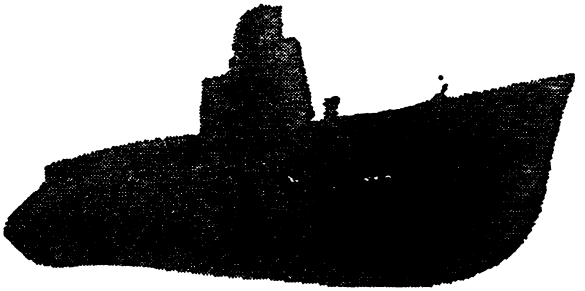
Sally gave a big sigh. "This is all so ugly I'll never forget it. He was cleaning his rug, that loathsome rug you told me about. Cleaning it for my benefit. There was a bucket and brush beside him. The doctor said it was carbon tet poisoning."

She began to tremble and I held her close. My Sally. "Never mind. I'll take you home now. It was just an accident. An ordinary mistake. Could happen to anyone."

She let me lead her out of the hospital, but stopped on the sidewalk and looked up at me through the snow. "Just an ordinary mistake—that's what's so terrible. If he wanted a cleaning fluid, why didn't he ask you what to get? You're a chemist, you could have told him."

"That's right," I agreed. "I'm a chemist, I could have told him."

Then I drove her home.



DECEMBER 11, 1944 . . . U.S.S. *Candlefish,* submarine on wartime patrol, mysteriously lost. at Latitude 30 in the Pacific. All hands perish, except for one survivor.

OCTOBER 5, 1974 . . . Six hundred miles northwest of Pearl Harbor, a submarine surfaces in front of a Japanese freighter. It is the *Candlefish,* in perfect working order fully outfitted down to steaks in the freezer yet without a trace of life aboard.

In Washington, D.C., a naval intelligence officer is convinced that the *Candlefish* was the victim of another Devil's Triangle, and convinces his superiors to send it on a voyage retracing her route of thirty years before in the hope of uncovering whatever fearful force lies in wait at Latitude 30.

Only when the sub is well out to sea, with no turning back, do he and the rest of the crew begin to suspect why the *Candlefish* has come back from a watery grave, and what that means to every living soul aboard.

GHOSTBOAT

by George E. Simpson and Neal R. Burger

At your local bookstore or use this handy coupon for ordering:

Dell

DELL BOOKS A DELL BOOK $1.95 (5421-00)
P.O. BOX 1000, PINEBROOK, N.J. 07058

Please send me the above title. I am enclosing $_____
(please add 35¢ per copy to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order—no cash or C.O.D.'s. Please allow three weeks for delivery.

Mr/Mrs/Miss_____

Address_____

City_____ State/Zip_____

Offer Expires: 2/77

TEST YOUR TERROR THRESHOLD

Do you twitch at the sight of a corpse? Does a bit of another's blood make your own run cold? Does a menacing shadow beneath a streetlight late at night make you walk a little faster? Does the rattling of a window at three in the morning find an echo in the chattering of your teeth? No? Well, then let Alfred Hitchcock give you his ultimate test as he puts you in the hands of masters of mystery and the macabre whose business and pleasure are to carry you beyond the boundaries of safety and into the heart of the terror that waits for us all. Here are 20 great nerve-twisters by such star spellbinders as:

Robert L. McGrath • Rose Million Healey • Ardath F. Mayhar
Al Nussbaum • Jack Ritchie • Nancy C. Swoboda
Betty Ren Wright • Barry Malzberg • Harold Q. Masur
William F. Nolan • Bill Pronzini • Harold Rolseth
Paul Theridion • Waldo Carlton Wright • Berkely Mather
David Montross • Joan Richter • William Sambrot
Jeffrey M. Wallmann • Mitsu Yamamoto

PRINTED IN USA