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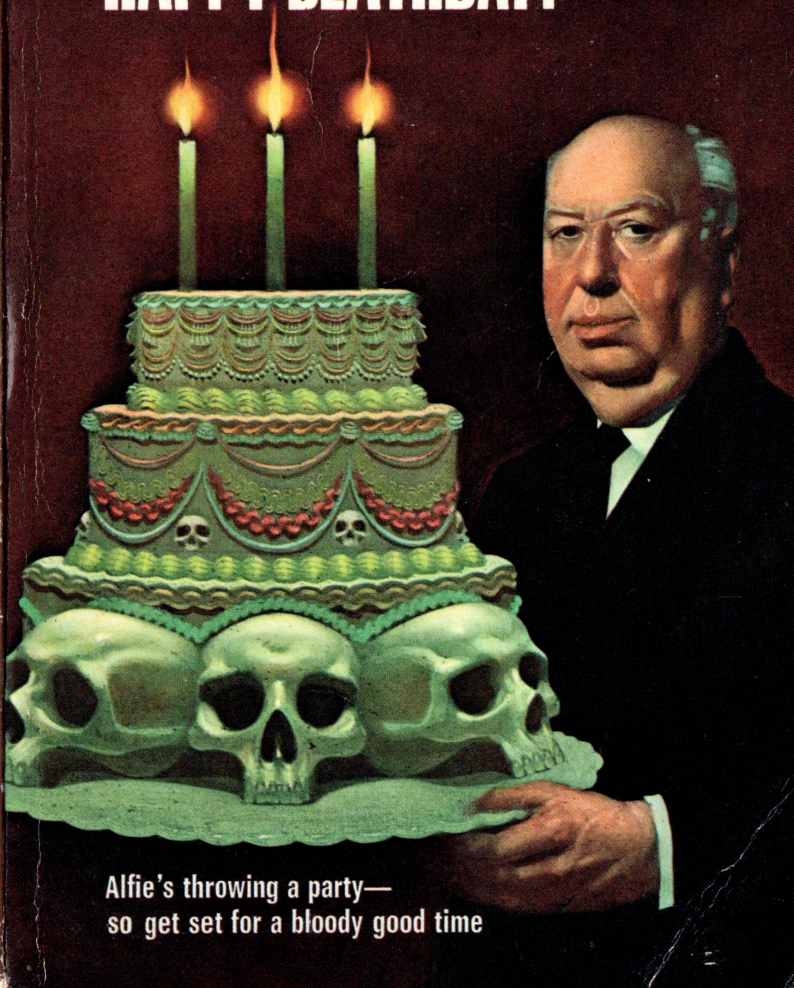
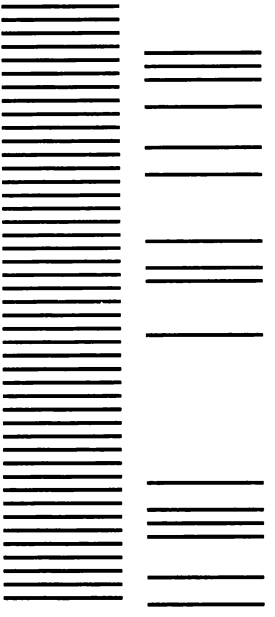
First book publication

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S HAPPY DEATHDAY!



Alfie's throwing a party—
so get set for a bloody good time



Enjoy, Enjoy!

You may be surprised to learn that Alfred Hitchcock, famed all over the world for his ghoulish gallivantings, is really a total sentimentalist. Yes, it's true, Alfie readily admits that he has a great big marshmallow for a heart, and gets misty-eyed at the slightest excuse.

Birthdays, christenings, marriages, anniversaries, all turn the master into a blob of quivering jelly. But there's one joyful occasion that tops the rest for Alfie . . .

. . . a nice, well-run funeral with the solemn music of an organ mingling with the diabolical laughter of a murderer. . . .

HAPPY DEATHDAY!

Fourteen great novelettes and stories of spine-chilling mystery and horror.

HAPPY DEATHDAY

Alfred Hitchcock,
EDITOR

A DELL BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

I met Dr. Louis Aarr by sheer chance, and whenever he comes to mind I think of him as that eminent psychiatrist. The event that marked it sounds so farfetched as to defy all the laws of probability. Before I say anything further I think it only fair to inform you that the name Dr. Louis Aarr is completely fictitious and solely a product of my imagination. I've chosen it to avoid any possibility of a defamation of character lawsuit.

I had gone to Switzerland for a winter vacation and was staying at the Hotel Pablo. It's a rather small picturesque hotel set atop an Alp and architecturally designed so that a good portion of its wooden observation terrace overhangs the mountain peak. Beneath it there's a breathtaking drop of perhaps four thousand feet.

There, in the same hotel, was Dr. Louis Aarr in the middle of a young spirited skiing party. He was a handsome, lithe, athletic fellow. I used to watch him on the curving snowtrails and on the giant slalom courses. He literally leap-frogged down those courses, swatting gate poles, swaying madly and springing back from awkward positions to regain his balance. What drew attention to him was his joyful exuberance while he made those runs. His contagious laughter could be heard at the bar

and also in the oak-beamed lounge where he led a form of yoga for some of the vacationers. Aarr rested on his elbows and the back of his neck, feet straight up in the air for eight minutes. He was friendly and anxious to please. This was one of the roots of his charm. I formed the opinion that he was a likable, charming fellow.

What changed my opinion took place soon afterward. I was awakened one morning by an uproar outside my bedroom window and recognized a small wizened man in pajamas balanced precariously on the guard rail of the observation terrace. He was Hector La Farge, the bellhop. Dr. Louis Aarr stood nearby.

I threw on a bathrobe. My bedroom opened out onto the observation terrace, and I joined a throng of gawking spectators. La Farge was threatening to jump. Someone remarked that La Farge's girl friend, a chambermaid, had run off with the hotel's baker, leaving La Farge distraught.

I was dumbfounded to hear Aarr's words when he spoke to him. He said nothing to dissuade or discourage the bellhop. To my amazement he seemed to be encouraging La Farge to jump. "Hold it," Aarr said. "I'll get up on the rail and we'll jump together."

"Don't come near me," La Farge cried. "All you want to do is get close enough so you can pull me off the rail."

It was also what I thought Aarr was trying to do. Nevertheless it troubled me. In my efforts to authenticate various crime patterns over the years I have sought out and questioned many psychiatrists. I couldn't recall one who would have used Aarr's approach to the problem.

La Farge swayed unsteadily on the rail and it appeared that he was really getting ready to leap.

What stopped him was Aarr climbing up on the rail about twenty feet away. "We'll jump together on the count of five," Aarr said.

"You're crazy," La Farge shouted. "If you think I'm

going to jump because of a nut like you, you're crazy." He waved an arm to emphasize the point and almost went over, and flailing his arms wildly barely managed to recover his balance.

That was that, he got down off the rail in short order and slunk furtively away, mumbling to himself. "You think I'm going to jump because some guy wants to jump with me? When it's my turn to jump, I'll jump alone." He pointed to Aarr. "And the same goes for him. Everyone goes alone." Sometime later the police arrived and carted him off to a hospital in Zurich for mental observation and that was the last I heard of La Farge.

I was both fascinated and unsettled by Aarr's daredevil technique of what had appeared to be a life-and-death situation. I was compelled to ask him how he had been so certain that La Farge wouldn't jump.

He replied unhesitatingly. "Did you see the way he was prancing about on the rail completely without fear?"

"Yes, of course," I said.

"You would have to understand the upside-down world of the subconscious, specifically as it pertains to the fear of heights. For instance, the person who draws away from a high window or the edge of a mountain is protecting himself from his wish to jump. What he fears is not the height itself, but his own destructive suicidal impulses, and he moves away to remove the temptation. La Farge merely appeared ready to jump. Actually, all he wanted was somebody to convince him not to make the jump in the first place."

I agreed with his diagnosis of La Farge. I'd heard of similar cases, but Aarr's handling of the apparent suicide attempt, his climbing up on the rail and flippantly offering to jump with him struck a discordant note.

I said, "Suppose you were wrong and La Farge had actually jumped?"

He smiled. "I wasn't wrong. In any case, psychiatry

isn't an altogether exact science. One has to gamble occasionally."

I found the statement unpalatable. Psychiatrists have their share of idiosyncrasies but I had never heard of one gambling on the life of a mentally disturbed man when a mistake could only have tragic results. I was convinced that Aarr was an imposter, nevertheless I had nothing other than this strange behavior with which to confront him. It wasn't enough.

In the morning I said good-bye to everyone and caught a flight for home. Some time afterward I saw Aarr's photograph on the third page of a newspaper and the account which appeared beneath it merely confirmed what I already knew. Aarr wasn't a doctor. Instead, he was a bank teller who had embezzled three hundred thousand dollars. Aarr had been industrious, quiet, and methodical with no known bad habits. He had been with the bank for ten years and was considered completely trustworthy.

Aarr—the respected bank employee, secretly yearning to be somebody glamorous, playing the role of the suave psychiatrist with a casual attitude toward death and a zestful view of life—gave proof that a swinging exterior does not always house a swinging interior.

I can assure you, however, that the stories that follow are consistently what they appear to be, excellent crime stories of the highest quality.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

SETTLEMENT OUT OF COURT

Fletcher Flora

Francis Etheridge was sitting on the floor of a small closet at the foot of the stairs that ascended from the front hall into the shadows of the second floor of the rented house in which he lived with his mother and father. Francis had always lived with his mother and father in rented houses. The house was always old and shabby, furnished with odds and ends that always gave the impression of being strangers to each other, and it was always just a temporary expedient, something to afford shelter until Mr. Etheridge could find something suitable to buy. The funny thing about these houses, as Francis knew them, was that they were all alike. Although they were in different locations and varied somewhat in age and the number of rooms and stories they had, they possessed, nevertheless, a kind of strange and pervasive common denominator that made all these variations unimportant, so that Francis, thinking back, could not remember a single significant difference.

Francis had not been happy in these houses, and that was why, when you came right down to it, he was sitting now on the floor of the small closet in this one. He had learned that any house, no matter how shabby and depressing in general, always had a particular place, a

corner or a closet or an attic or someplace where one could withdraw in secret to security and peace. You could sit there, as Francis was now sitting, and do nothing whatever except listen to the silence that formed a soft protective perimeter around a golden core of fantasy. If someone came near, you remained silent. If someone called, you did not answer.

It was dark in the closet. The only light was a dull diagonal swath that fell across the floor from the narrow crack Francis had left in the door. He liked darkness, which was comforting, but he did not like *total* darkness, which was terrifying. From where he sat, he could look through the crack and up the narrow, steep stairs to the landing above. The upper hall was full of shadows, but an odd layer of light, about eighteen inches thick, lay along the floor like a blanket of fog just at the head of the stairs. Francis was watching this layer of light, because it was odd and interesting and something to watch, and that was how he happened to see the legs move suddenly into the light and stop. The dim scene took on instantly a quality of eerie farce, as if it had been arranged by an intelligence with a sense of insane humor, for the legs appeared to be detached at the knees, the body above them obscured by shadows.

The legs were thin and ugly, a woman's legs, and they seemed for that reason, their ugliness, to heighten the farcical quality of the scene. Francis felt compelled to laugh, and he covered his mouth with a hand to smother any inadvertent sound, but he did not laugh after all, for there was suddenly a subtle change, an added ingredient of irrational terror. Behind, and a little to one side of the first pair of legs, there was all at once a second pair, simply not there one instant and soundlessly there the next; and it was perfectly clear to Francis, with all the surety of revelation, that the first legs were not aware of the second, and were not meant to be aware.

All was static in utter silence, the four detached legs

in a layer of light and Francis watching from the dark closet below, and then the first legs spoke in a high, querulous voice.

"Francis!" the legs said. "Where are you, Francis?"

Francis did not answer. He never answered unless there was a practical certainty that he would be discovered anyhow. The legs, which had remained static, became silent again for an interval of several seconds before speaking again in the same high querulous voice. They did not speak, this time, to Francis, or to anyone else, unless it could be considered that they spoke to themselves.

"Where is the boy?" the legs said. "Why is he never around when I need him? Now I suppose I must go down myself for the aspirin."

The first legs were his mother, of course, and the second legs were his father. His mother was always taking aspirin, and it seemed that she was always leaving them in a place where she surely wouldn't be when she needed them next. She was thin and sickly and afflicted with migraine headaches.

His mother's legs did not begin immediately to descend the stairs. They did not move, the legs of Mr. Etheridge did not move, everything was still and fixed in absolute absence of sound and motion. Then, with startling and almost comic abruptness, like an explosion, the legs of Francis' mother seemed to fly straight upward into shadows, and an instant later her entire body came flying down across the narrow range of Francis' vision. It looked for all the world as if she had deliberately dived head foremost down the stairs, and all this odd and comic action was punctuated by a sodden sound that was like the sound made in the imagination by a big, splashy period in an exclamation point.

Francis, who had stopped breathing, took a deep breath and released it slowly with the softest sigh. He continued to sit motionless, Indian fashion, his eyes fixed in the path of his narrow vision. The legs of his fa-

ther began to descend, steps on the treads exactly cadenced, as if measured slowly by count, the body of his father emerging step by step from the shadows, until it was precisely in view, bounded by door and jamb. His father's face was like a stone. In his hand, hanging at his side, was a short, heavy piece of wood or dark metal. He passed from sight, slowly descending, and Francis listened to the cadenced steps until they stopped. At almost that instant, the instant of the steps' stopping, there was a low moan, a whimper of pain, and after that, quickly, a second sudden sound.

Francis waited, his eyes now removed from their vision of the stairs, his head cocked a little in a posture of intent listening. He heard his father in the hall, his steps receding briefly toward the rear of the house. Then he heard a familiar sound and knew that his father was dialing a number on the telephone. A few moments later his father's voice spoke urgently a doctor's name. The telephone was behind the stairs, out of view, and Francis, self-schooled in the preservation of silence and solitude, arose in the closet without the slightest sound and slipped into the hall and from the hall into the living room, and so through the dining room and kitchen to the back yard.

At the rear of the yard, its branches spreading over the alley, was a big mulberry tree. No care was taken of it, but the berries, which were large and sweet and dark purple when ripe, somehow escaped the ravishment of worms. Francis often climbed the tree and sat there for long periods eating the berries and thinking about all sorts of things real and unreal, and he went there and climbed it now and sat on a sturdy limb with his back at rest against the trunk.

Sitting so, now and then eating a berry, he began to wonder why his father had killed his mother.

The days before his mother's funeral were desolate days. The shabby rented house was full of relatives who had to be fed and bedded down, and Francis was even

forced to give up his room to a maternal uncle and two cousins. There was simply no place to go to be alone, no place in all the house, not even the small closet in the front hall, to spin securely the golden gossamer web of fantasy. The mulberry tree was invaded daily by the two cousins, both of them too young, in the tolerant opinion of the adults, to behave with the decorum of grief for a woman they had hardly known.

Francis himself felt no grief. He merely felt confused and lonely and violated. He spent most of the time alone in corners, and he kept wondering all this time why his father had killed his mother. He had pushed her down the narrow stairs, and then he had certainly given her a definitive blow with the heavy piece of wood or metal, and Francis wondered why. His mother had been a submissive and oppressive woman, oppressive to the spirit, but she had been kind in her own way, within her limited capacity to sense the need for kindness, and if she had not created love, neither had she incited hatred.

There were reasons, of course, why men killed women. One of the reasons was other women, or another woman, but Francis could not believe that this was true of his father, for he had long ago perceived dimly, although he was very young, that his father had no interest in women, not even in his wife, whom he had killed. He was, in fact, a rigid and moralistic man who abstained from tobacco and alcohol and insisted upon clean speech. He said grace at table and spoke up for old-fashioned modesty as opposed to contemporary wantonness. It seemed strange to Francis, when he thought about it, that his father and mother had ever married, or that they had, having married, continued to live so long together. It was impossible to believe that either was in the least interested in the other, and that they had, sometime in these years, by deliberate design or in eruption of distorted passion, given birth to him, their son, was entirely beyond credence, an intolerable obscenity. He did not think of this so specifically or so

precisely, of course. He merely sustained, because it was essential to what he was and had to be, the illusion that his relationship with them did not antedate the deepest probing of his memory.

Another reason why men sometimes killed women, he thought in his corner, was to gain money or something valuable that the women had, but this was even more untenable than love or hate as a motive for his mother's murder by his father. His mother had been as poor in goods as in spirit and body, and she had left nothing to his father except the expense of burying her and feeding for two or three days all the relatives who came to help him do it. There seemed to be, in fact, no rational reason for killing her at all, nothing to be gained that could not have been gained with less trouble and danger by simply going away. Francis, pondering the mystery, was filled with wonder, if not with grief.

It was a great relief when the funeral was finally over. Services were held in the chapel of the mortuary that had received the body, and Francis sat beside his father in a cool, shadowy alcove lined with gray drapes. He could look across the chapel to the casket in which his mother lay under a spray of fern and red and white carnations, and by lifting his eyes he could see, high in the far wall, a leaded window of stained glass that transmitted the sunlight in glittering fragments of color. Most of the time he watched the window, but once in a while he would glance sidewise from the corners of his eyes at his father's face. He was curious to see if the secret his father thought he shared with no one would reveal itself, here in this dim alcove, in some naked expression, however fleeting. But if there was such an expression, Francis could not detect it, was not looking, perhaps, in the instant that it came and passed. His father sat as still as stone and stared at nothing with empty eyes.

After the chapel, there was the ordeal of the cemetery. Francis rode out there with his father in the back

seat of a big black limousine furnished by the mortician. Beyond the edge of the cemetery where the earth had been opened for his mother's entry, a meadow of green grass, growing brown in the sun, sloped down to the bank of a stream lined with poplars and oaks and elms. Overhead, while the service was read, a crow flew lazily and constantly cawed. Francis watched the trees and listened to the crow.

Happily, the graveside service was brief, and after it was completed everyone went away, and Francis went home with his father in the limousine. All the relatives began to leave then, to go back to wherever they had come from, and that was the best of a bad time, as the shabby old house approached emptiness and silence. After a while, before dark, no one was left but Francis and his father and Uncle Ted. Uncle Ted, who had to wait until morning to catch a train, was the oldest brother of Francis' mother, and he and Mr. Etheridge, when all the others had gone, sat in the living room and talked. Francis, hardly noticed, sat behind them in a high-backed chair and looked out a window into the side-yard and listened to what was said.

"Luther," Uncle Ted said to Mr. Etheridge, "I haven't wanted to discuss this with you previously, but if you don't take action in this business, you're a fool, and that's all I've got to say."

"I intend to take action," Mr. Etheridge said.

"If I were you, now that the funeral is over, I'd see a lawyer immediately."

"I've made an appointment for tomorrow, Ted."

"Good. In my opinion, you have a perfect case. Surely your landlord carries liability insurance."

"Oh, yes. Certainly. He has numerous rentals, and could hardly afford to be without it."

"It's always easier if there's insurance. If it comes to a jury, they have much less compunction about soaking a big company."

"I have a notion it will be settled out of court."

"Quite likely. You mustn't accept too little, however. After all, your wife is dead and buried."

"So she is, and I'll not forget it for a moment. Any settlement will have to be most liberal."

"Well, the liability is perfectly apparent, I should say. It's amost criminal. That broken board at the head of the stairs should have been replaced long ago. It's a landlord's obligation to take care of such matters."

Then, of course, Francis knew why his father had pushed his mother down the stairs. There was no longer the least need to wonder about it.

He was in his room upstairs when the investigator from the insurance company came. Francis knew that the visitor was an investigator because Mr. Etheridge brought him right upstairs and showed him the loose board, and then they stood there in the shadowy hall at the head of the stairs and talked about what had happened. Francis had his door closed, and in the beginning could hear only the voices, not the words, and so he walked over silently from his bed, where he had been sitting, and opened the door a crack. Then he could hear clearly what was being said, and could see, by applying an eye to the crack, the investigator and his father standing face to face there in the shadows.

"It happened very suddenly," Mr. Etheridge was saying. "My wife and I were in our room. She had a severe headache and wanted some aspirin, but she had left the bottle downstairs. I offered to get it for her, but she said no, she couldn't remember just where she had put it and would have to look for it. She went out of the room, and I followed her, a few steps behind, thinking that I might be of help. When she reached the head of the stairs, she simply seemed to pitch down headfirst, almost as if she had dived. It happened so suddenly, as I said, that I couldn't reach her, although I tried. She struck her head on the edge of one of the lower steps. Her collarbone was broken also, as you know, but the

death was caused by the head injury. The doctor has certified that."

"I know." The investigator was a squat man with arms and torso far out of proportion to his legs, which were remarkably short. His voice had a harsh, rasping sound, as if he had a sore throat that was painful to talk through. "Are you positive she tripped? She didn't merely faint and fall? You said she wasn't feeling well. She had a severe headache."

"No, no. She tripped. She didn't merely collapse, as she would have done in fainting. She pitched forward with considerable momentum. That's surely obvious from the distance she fell before striking the stairs. You can see the board here. It had rotted away from its nails and came loose. It projects above the others perhaps a quarter of an inch."

"I see. It's quite dangerous, being right at the head of the stairs. I'm surprised that you didn't fix it yourself, Mr. Etheridge."

"I should have. I reproach myself for not having done so. But I'm not handy at such things. It's the landlord's duty to keep the house in repair, and I reported the board to him. He assured me that he would have it replaced."

"I assume that you were the only one who witnessed the accident?"

"Yes."

"That's too bad. It would simplify matters if there were someone to corroborate your testimony."

"Well, there isn't. My wife and I were alone in the house. The boy was outside playing."

It was then that Francis opened the door of his room and walked out into the hall and over to his father and the investigator. The door made a thin, squeaking noise in opening, and both men turned their heads in the direction of the sound and watched Francis approach.

"I've been in my room," Francis said, unnecessarily. "I heard you talking."

"Did you?" Mr. Etheridge's voice had an edge. "You shouldn't listen to conversations that don't concern you, Francis. It's bad manners."

"I'm sorry. I just thought I could help."

"There is nothing you can do. You had better go back to your room."

"Help in what way?" the investigator said.

"Well," Francis said, "I heard you say that it would simplify things if there were someone else who saw what happened, and I saw."

"What's that? You saw the accident? You saw your mother fall down the stairs?"

"Yes. I was sitting in the closet down there in the hall. I often sit in there, because it's quiet and no one knows where I am and it's a good place to be. The door was open a little bit, though, and I could see right up the stairs, *and I saw just exactly what happened.*"

Francis looked from the investigator to the face of his father, and his father's face was just like it had been in the alcove in the chapel, as gray as the drapes, as hard as stone. He did not move, watching Francis.

"All right, son," the investigator said. "Just tell me what you saw."

Francis turned his eyes back to the investigator. The eyes were pale blue, complementing his pale hair, the wide remote eyes of a dreamer.

"It was just as Father said. Mother tripped and fell. She just came flying down."

There was a long, sighing sound that was the sound of Mr. Etheridge's breath being released in the shadows.

"If you saw your mother fall," he said, "why didn't you come out to help her?"

"I don't know. I was afraid, I guess. It was so sudden and so terrible that it frightened me. I don't know why. Then you came down, and I heard you calling the doctor, and so I just went out the back way and sat in the mulberry tree."

"Well, I'll be damned!" The investigator shrugged at Mr. Etheridge. "Kids are odd little animals."

"Yes," Mr. Etheridge said, "they are, indeed. Now you will please return to your room, Francis. Thank you for speaking up."

"You're welcome," Francis said.

He went back into his room and closed the door and sat on the floor in a swath of sunlight. There was a large book there that he had been looking at earlier, and he began now to look at it again. It contained thousands of colored pictures of almost every imaginable thing, and Francis was still looking at the pictures about a quarter of an hour later when his father opened the door and came into the room and stood staring down at him.

"What are you looking at, Francis?" Mr. Etheridge said.

Francis looked up from the bright pictures to his father's gray stone face. His pale blue eyes had a kind of soft sheen on them. The sunlight gathered and caught fire in his pale hair.

"It's a catalog," he said. "There are so many beautiful things in the catalog that I've always wanted. Are we going to get a lot of money from the insurance company? If we are, maybe we could get some of the things. Maybe even a piano that I could take lessons on."

The soft sheen gave to his eyes a look of blindness. He did not seem to see his father at all.

"Yes," Mr. Etheridge said. "Maybe even a piano."

DRAWER 14

Talmage Powell

No cracks about my job, please. I've already taken more than enough ribbing from campus cutups. I don't relish being night attendant at the city morgue, but there are compensations.

For one thing, the job gave me a chance to complete my college work in daytime and do considerable studying at night between catnaps and the light, routine duties.

In their tagged and numbered drawers, the occupants weren't going to disturb me while I was cracking a brain cell on a problem in calculus. Or so I thought.

This particular night I relieved Olaf Daly, like always. Olaf was a man stuck with a job because of his age and a game leg. He lived each day only for the moment when he could flee his profession, as it were. Like always, he grunted a hello and a goodbye in the same breath, the game leg assisting him out of the morgue with surprising alacrity.

Alone in the deep silence of the anteroom, I dropped my thermos, transistor radio, and a couple of textbooks on the desk. I pulled the heavy record book toward me to give it a rundown.

Olaf had made his daily entries in his neat, spidery

handwriting. Male victim of drowning. Man and woman dead in auto crash. Wino who didn't wake up when his bed caught fire. Male loser of a knife fight. Woman found dead in river.

Olaf's day had been routine. Nothing had come in like the dilly of last week.

She had been a pitiful, dirty, lonely old woman who had lived in a hovel. Crazy as a scorched moth, she had slipped into a dream world where she wasn't dirty, or old, or forsaken at all. Instead, she had believed she was the Fourth Witch of Endor, with power over the forces of darkness.

The slum section being a breeding ground for ignorance and superstition, some of her neighbors had taken the Fourth Witch of Endor seriously. She had looked the part, with a skull-like face, a beaked nose with a wart on the end, a toothless mouth accenting a long and pointed chin, and strings of dirty hair hanging lank about her sunken cheeks. She had eked out a half-starved living by telling fortunes, performing incantations, predicting winning numbers, and selling love potions and spells. To her credit, she never had gone in for the evil eye, her neighbors reported. If she couldn't put a good hex on a person, she had refused to hex him at all.

On a very hot and humid night, the Fourth Witch of Endor had mounted the roof of her tenement. Nobody knew for sure whether she had slipped or maybe taken a crack at flying to the full moon. Anyhow, she had been scraped off the asphalt six stories below, brought here, and deposited in drawer 14. She had lain in the refrigerated cubicle for four days before an immaculate son had flown in from a distant state to claim the body.

She hadn't departed a moment too soon for Olaf Daly. "I swear," the old man had said, "there's a hint of a smell at drawer 14, like you'd figure sulphur and brimstone to smell."

I hadn't noticed. The only smells assailing my nostrils

were those in a chem lab where I was trying hard to keep up with the class.

I turned from the record book for a routine tour of the building.

Lighted brightly, the adjoining room was large, chill, and barren. The floor was spotless gray tile with a faint, antiseptic aroma. Across the room was the double doorway to the outside ramp where the customers were brought in. Near the door was the long, narrow, marble-topped table mounted on casters. Happily, it was empty at the moment, scrubbed clean, waiting for inevitable use. The refrigeration equipment made a low, whispering sound, more felt than heard.

To my right, like an outsized honeycomb, was the bank of drawers where the dead were kept for the claiming, or eventual burial at city expense.

Each occupied drawer was tagged, like with a shipping ticket or baggage check, the tag being attached with thin wire to the proper drawer handle when the body was checked in.

I whistled softly between my teeth, just for the sake of having some sound, as I started checking the tags against my mental tally from the record book.

As I neared drawer 14, I caught myself on the point of sniffing. Instead of sniffing, I snorted. "That Olaf Daly." I muttered. "He and his smell of sulphur and brimstone!"

A couple steps past drawer 14 I rocked up on my toes, turned my head, then my whole body around.

Olaf had not listed an occupant for drawer 14, but the handle was tagged. I bent forward slightly, reached. The whistle sort of dripped to nothing off my lips.

I turned the tag over casually the first time; then a second and third time, considerably faster.

I straightened and gave my scalp a scratch. Both sides of the tag were blank. Olaf was old, but far from senile. This wasn't like him at all, forgetting to fill in a drawer tag.

Then I half grinned to myself. The old coot was playing a joke on me. I didn't know he had it in him.

The whistle returned to my lips with a wise note, but not exactly appreciative. I took hold of the handle and gave it a yank. The drawer slid open on its rollers. The whistle keened to a thin wail and broke.

The girl in the drawer was young. She was blonde. She was beautiful, even in death.

I stood looking at her with my toes curling away from the soles of my shoes. The features of her face were lovely, the skin like pale tan satin. Her eyes were closed as if she were merely sleeping, her long lashes like dark shadows. She was clothed in a white nylon uniform with a nurse's pin on the collar. The only personal adornment was an I.D. bracelet of delicate golden chain and plaque. The plaque was engraved with initials: Z. L.

I broke my gaze away from the blonde girl and hurried back to the anteroom. At the desk, I jerked the record book toward me. I didn't want to misjudge old man Daly.

I moved my finger down the day's entries. Hesitated. Repeated the process. Went to the previous day by turning a page. Then to the day before that. Nobody, definitely, had been registered in drawer 14.

I puckered, but couldn't find a whistle as I turned again to the door of the morgue room. There was a glass section in the upper portion of the door. I looked through the glass. I didn't have to open the door. I'd left drawer 14 extended, and blonde Z. L. was still there, bigger than life, as big as death.

Carefully, I sat down at the desk, took out my handkerchief, wiped my forehead.

I took a long, deliberate breath, picked up the phone and dialed Olaf Daly's number. While his phone rang, I sneaked a glance in the direction of the morgue room.

Olaf's wife answered sleepily, along about the sixth

or seventh ring. No, I couldn't speak to Olaf because he hadn't come home yet.

Then she added suddenly, in a kindlier tone, "Just a minute. I think I hear him coming now."

Olaf got on the line with a clearing of his throat. "Yeah, what is it?"

"This is Tully Branson, Mr. Daly."

"I ain't available for stand-in duty if some of your college pals have cracked a keg someplace."

"No, sir," I said. "I understand, Mr. Daly. It's just that I need the information on the girl in drawer 14."

"Ain't nobody in drawer 14, Tully."

"Yes, sir. There's a girl in drawer 14. A blonde girl, Mr. Daly, far too young and nice looking to have to die. I'm sure you remember. Only you forgot the record book when she was brought in."

I heard Mrs. Daly asking Olaf what was it. The timber of his voice changed as he spoke in the direction of his wife. "I think young Branson brought straight whisky in his thermos tonight."

"No, sir," I barked at Olaf. "I need it, but I haven't got any whisky. All I've got is a dead blonde girl in drawer 14 that you forgot to make a record of."

"How could I do a thing like that?" Olaf demanded.

"I don't know," I said, "but you did. She's right here. If you don't believe me, come down and have a look."

"I think I'll do just that, son! You're accusing me of a mighty serious thing!"

He slammed the phone down so hard it stabbed me in the eardrum. I hung up with a studied gentleness, lighted a cigarette, poured some coffee from the thermos, lighted a cigarette, took a sip of coffee, and lighted a cigarette.

I had another swallow of coffee, reached for the package, and discovered I already had three cigarettes spiraling smoke from the ashtray. I gave myself a sickly grin and butted out two of the cigarettes to save for later.

With his game leg, Olaf arrived with the motion of a schooner mast on a stormy sea. I returned his glare with a smile that held what smug assurance I was able to muster. Then I bowed him into the morgue room.

He went through the swinging door, with me following closely. Drawer 14 was still extended. He didn't bother to cross all the way to it. Instead, after one look, he whirled on me.

"Branson," he snarled in rage, "if I was twenty years younger I'd bust your nose! You got a nerve, dragging a tired old man back to this stinking place. And just when I'd decided you was one of the nicer members of the younger generation too!"

"But Mr. Daly . . ."

"Don't 'but' me, you young pup! I'll put you on report for this!"

I took another frantic look at drawer 14. She was there, plain as anything. Blonde, and beautiful, and dead.

Olaf started past me, shoving me aside. I caught hold of his arm. I was chicken—and just about ready to molt. "Old man," I yelled, "you see her. I know you do!"

"Get your mitts offa me," he yelled back. "I see exactly what's there. I see an empty drawer. About as empty as your head."

I clutched his arm, not wanting to let go. "I don't know what kind of joke this is . . ."

"And neither do I," he said, shouting me down. "But it's a mighty poor one!"

"Then look at that drawer, old man, and quit horsing around."

"I've looked all I need to. Nothing but an overgrown juvenile delinquent would think up such a shoddy trick to oust a poor old man out of his house!"

He jerked his arm free of my grip, stormed through the door, past the anteroom. At the front door of the

building, which was down a short corridor, he stopped, turned, and shook his finger at me.

"You cruel young crumb," he said, "you better start looking for another job tomorrow, if I have anything to do with it!" With that, he was gone.

I'd followed him as far as the anteroom. I turned slowly, looked through the glass pane into the morgue room. A dismal groan came from me. Z. L. still occupied drawer 14.

"Be a good girl," I heard myself mumbling, "and go away. I'll close my eyes, and you just go away.

I closed my eyes, opened them. But she hadn't gone away.

I groped to the desk chair and collapsed. I didn't sit long, on account of a sudden flurry of business which was announced by the buzzer at the service door.

The skirling sound, coming suddenly, lifted me a couple feet off the desk chair. When I came down, I was legging it across the morgue room.

Smith and Macklin both looked at the open, extended meat wagon, were sliding an old guy in tattered clothing from a stretcher to the marble-topped table.

"He walked in front of a truck," Smith said.

"No I.D.," Macklin said. "Ice him as a John Doe."

"Kinda messy, ain't he, Branson?" Smith grinned at me as he pulled the sheet over the John Doe. Smith was always egging me because he knew my stomach wasn't the strongest.

"Yeah," I said. "Kinda." I blew some sweat off my upper lip. "Not like the girl. No marks on her."

"Girl?"

"Sure," a note of eagerness slipped into my voice. "The beautiful blonde. The one in drawer 14."

Smith and Macklin both looked at the open, extended drawer. Then they looked at each other.

"Tully, old boy," Macklin said, "how you feeling these days?"

"Fine," I said, a strip of ice forming where my forehead was wrinkling.

"No trouble sleeping? No recurrent nightmares?"

"Nope," I said. "But the blonde in 14 . . . if you didn't bring her in, then maybe Collins and Snavely can give me the rundown on her."

Smith and Macklin sort of edged from me. Then Smith's guffaw broke the morgue stillness. "Beautiful blonde, drawer 14, where the poor old demented woman was . . . Sure, Branson, I get it."

Macklin looked at his partner uncertainly. "You do?"

"Simple," Smith said, sounding relieved. "Old Tully here gets bored. Just thought up a little gag to rib us, huh, Tully?"

It was obvious they didn't see the girl and weren't going to see her. If I insisted, I knew suddenly, I was just asking for trouble. So I let out a laugh about as strong as skimmed milk. "Sure," I said. "Got to while away the tedium, you know."

Smith punched me in the ribs with his elbow. "Don't let your corpses get warm, Tully old pal." He departed with another belly laugh. But Macklin was still throwing worried looks over his shoulder at me as he followed Smith out.

I hated to see the outside door close behind them. I sure needed some company. For the first time, being the only living thing in the morgue caused my stomach to shrink to the size of a cold, wrinkled prune.

I skirted drawer 14 like I was crossing a deep gorge on a bridge made of brittle glass.

"Go away," I muttered to Z. L. "You're not real. Not even a dead body. Just a—an *image* that nobody can see but me. So go away!"

My words had no effect whatever on the image. They merely frightened me a little when I caught the tone in which I was conversing with a nonexistent dead body.

Back at the anteroom desk, I sat and shivered for several seconds. Then an idea glimmered encouragingly in my mind. Maybe Olaf Daly, Smith, and Macklin were all in on the gag. Maybe Z. L. had been brought in by Collins and Snavely, who tooled the meat wagon on the dayshift, and everybody had thought it would be a good joke to scare the pants off the bright young college man.

Feeling slightly better, I reached for the phone and called Judd Lawrence. A golfing pal of my father's, Judd was a plainclothes detective attached to homicide. He'd always seemed to think well of me; had, in fact, recommended me for the job here.

Judd wasn't home. He was pulling a three-to-eleven P.M. tour of duty. I placed a second call to police headquarters. Judd had signed out, but they caught him in the locker room.

"Tully Branson, Mr. Lawrence."

"How goes it, Tully?"

"I got a problem."

"Shoot." There was no hesitation in his big, hearty voice.

"Well, uh . . . seems like the record is messed up on one of our transients. A girl. Blonde girl. A nurse. Her initials are Z. L."

"You ought to call Olaf Daly, Tully."

"Yes, sir. But you know how Olaf is when he gets away from here. Anyhow, he's in dreamland by this time and I sure hate to get him riled up. He gets real nasty."

Judd boomed a laugh. "Can't say that I blame him. That all you've got on the girl?"

"Just what I've given you. She's certainly no derelict, furthest thing in the world from that. Girl like her, dead from natural causes, would be in a private funeral home, not here."

"So the fact that she's in the morgue means she died violently," Judd said.

"I guess it has to mean that."

"Murder?"

"Can't think of anything else," I said. "It has to be a death under suspicious circumstances."

"Okay, Tully. I'll see what I can turn up for you."

"Sure hate to put you to the trouble."

"Trouble?" he said. "No trouble. Couple phone calls is all it should take."

"I sure appreciate it, Mr. Lawrence."

I hung up. While I was waiting for Judd Lawrence to call me back, I sneaked to the door of the morgue room and let my gaze creep to the glass pane to make sure the image was still in drawer 14.

It was. I shuffled back to the desk, feeling like I was a tired old man.

When the phone rang finally, I snatched it up. "City morgue. Tully Branson speaking."

"Judd here, Tully."

"Did you . . ."

"Negative from homicide, Tully. No blondes with initials Z. L., female, have been murdered in the last twenty-four hour period."

"Oh," I said, gagging, giving vent to a moan of real anguish.

"Checked with nurse's registry," Judd was saying. "There is a nurse answering your description. Young, blonde, just finished training. Her name is Zella Langtry. Lives at 711 Eastland Avenue. She recently went to work at City Hospital. But if any violence occurred to her, it's been in the past half-hour. She just checked off duty when the graveyard shift reported on."

His words, coupled with the image in drawer 14, left one crazy, wild possibility. The inspiration was so weird it turned the hair on my scalp to needles.

"Mr. Lawrence, I have the most terrible feeling Zella Langtry will never reach home alive."

"What is that? What are you saying, Tully?"

"The Fourth Witch of Endor . . ." I gabbled. "She

was a kindly soul at heart. Never put a bad hex on anybody. Just good ones."

"What in the blathering world are you carrying on about?" Judd asked sharply. "Tully, you been drinking?"

"No, sir."

"Feel all right?"

"I—uh . . . Yes, sir, and thanks a lot, Mr. Lawrence."

Twenty minutes later, my jalopy rolled to a stop on Eastland Avenue. I got out, started walking along looking for numbers. I knew I was in the right block, and I located number 711 easily enough. It was a small, white cottage with a skimpy yard that attempted to look more wholesome than its lower-class surroundings.

The place was dark, quiet, peaceful.

I was standing there feeling like seventy kinds of fool when the whir of a diesel engine at the street intersection caught my attention. I looked toward the sound, saw a municipal bus lumbering away.

From the shadows of a straggly maple tree, I watched the shadowy figure of a girl coming along Eastland in my direction. But she wasn't the only passenger who had got off the bus. Behind her was a taller, heavier shadow, that of a man. My breathing thinned as I took in the scene.

She realized he was behind her. She started walking faster. So did the man. She looked over her shoulder. She stepped up the pace even more, almost running now.

The man's shoes slapped quick and hard against the sidewalk. The girl's scream was choked off as the man slammed against her.

They were struggling on the sidewalk, the man locking her throat in the crook of his elbow, the girl writhing and kicking.

I went from under the maple tree like invisible trumpets were urging me on with a blood-rousing fanfare.

The man heard me coming, released the girl. I piled into him with a shoulder in his midsection.

He brought a knee up hard. It caught me on the point of the chin. I sat down on the sidewalk, and the man turned and ran away.

Firm but gentle hands helped me to my feet. I looked into the eyes of Zella Langtry for the first time. They were very nice, smoky and grateful in the shadowy night.

"You all right?" I asked, getting my breath back.

"I am now, thanks to you. And you?"

"Fine," I said. "Just fine now."

She was regaining her composure. "Lucky thing for me you were around at the right moment!"

"I—uh—just happened to be passing," I said. "Maybe I'd better walk you to your destination. Won't do any good to report that guy now. Didn't get a look at him. Never would catch him."

"I was going home," she said. "I live just down the street."

We walked along, and she told me her name was Zella, and I told her mine was Tully. When we got to her front door, we looked at each other, and I asked if I could call her some time, and she said any time a phone was handy.

I watched her go inside. I was whistling as I returned to the jalopy.

Inside the morgue, I headed straight for drawer 14. If my theory was correct, the image of Zella Langtry wouldn't be in the drawer, now that she had been rescued from the jaws of death, as it were.

I stood at drawer 14, taking a good, long look. My theory was right as far as it went.

The image of Zella Langtry was no longer in the drawer. The new one was quite a lovely redhead.

AN ECHO OF EVIL

Mary E. Nutt

Kendrick Warren died as he had lived so many years—alone. The paper boy, noticing the accumulation of dailies on the porch, notified the town marshal. They found him sprawled across the bed, half-dressed, one hand clutching an untidy pillow. He was eighty-one.

Now we turned from the grave, old people, all of us, moving hesitantly over the uneven grassy surface of the cemetery. I watched the others—the men shrunken within their good dark suits, the shapeless women with gallant hats perched atop white permanents—as they paused to offer conventional condolences, tinged with curiosity, to the solitary mourner.

They had found his name and address among Kendrick's things, but to me it seemed almost indecent that Nolan Warren, spare and grav and successful, should receive that sympathy—he who had dealt his brother the most irrevocable blow one man can give another.

Words from the brief obituary the minister had read came to my mind, "Kendrick Warren is survived by a brother, Nolan, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A son, Paul, preceded him in death." There was no mention there of Roma, my father's sister, the woman who had shattered Kendrick's life.

My thoughts went away from the sun-glazed cemetery, away from the still gaping grave and the slow-moving people, away from my wife with the faint scent of roses clinging to her gray suit and her gloved hand tucked into my elbow.

Once more I was seven years old, and my father had driven the ten miles into Trinity to meet my aunt and uncle, who were coming west on the train to take up a homestead. It was long after dark when we heard the grumbling wheels in the stony lane. Mother rushed out to meet them, leaving the door open so that light spilled across the wooden step. The other children hung there in the doorway, but I was shy of strangers. I held back, hearing the excited chatter of grownup voices beyond the door. Then they were crowding in, carrying bundles and suitcases.

A strange woman stood across the room, her eyes seeking me out as I leaned against the table. She came to me, putting her hand beneath my chin, tilting my face to look at her.

"And this is Grant, the boy I've never seen," she cried eagerly, turning to my mother. "He looks like you, Belle." She bent to me again. "You'll have to be a playmate for Paul, Grant, even if you are four years older. Paul's my baby," she went on, whirling toward my father, who was carrying an unknown child. "Give him here, John. I want these two boys to know each other, to be friends."

She took the little boy from my father and set him down in front of me. He had on a red plush coat with big pearl buttons, and the sleeves came down over his little hands. He stared at me solemnly from big dark eyes and never said a word. Neither did I. I couldn't guess that one day he would be closer to me than my own brothers standing there watching us.

No, it was my aunt I noticed that night—the smooth coolness of her hands, her tall slenderness in the fawn-colored suit with its long, braid-trimmed jacket, the

laughter in her wide-set brown eyes, the artful tilt of her head under the mass of ebony hair and the black straw hat with its rolling brim heaped high with purple velvet pansies. Glamour was a word we were hardly aware of then, but glamour was what she brought into our lamp-lit kitchen.

There was a gap of many years between my father's age and hers. She was not yet twenty when they came to the homestead, and Kendrick was still young, too. He was a friendly man, quick to anger, but equally quick to forgive, too generous for his own good. Small, wiry, he worked hard, but his sudden enthusiasms were often followed by early discouragement, and so he had given up a little farm in the midwest to rush out here and take up a homestead.

By that time most of the good land was gone. Kendrick and Roma built their two-room cabin in one of the dry coulee beds that ran down to meet the river, rolling silvery and unconcerned beside the sagebrush desert.

We frequently visited back and forth, since it was only two miles between the places, but the days I liked best were the ones when Uncle Kendrick drove into Trinity and left Roma and Paul to spend the day with us. Very early in the morning the buggy would pop up over the crest of the coulee drawn by white Babe and black Topsy. Our dog would set up a rampant barking as the horses came trotting down the slight incline to the house, Uncle Kendrick bracing his feet against the dashboard and flourishing the whip. Roma would be holding Paul, still sleeping, wrapped in a quilt in her arms, and she would always wear the black hat, even on cold days. Then she would have a thin blue scarf, such as lady motorists wore, tied over the pansies and forward on her cheeks with the long ends wound about her throat.

Kendrick would let her off at the house, and through the morning she would be gay, helping my mother and

sister with the work and exchanging lady gossip with them. Sometimes, too, she would gather Paul into her lap, and with me listening, wide-eyed, at her side, she would tell an old story that began, "Once a miller had three sons," or she would sing a gay and tinkly song about jolly old Roger, the tinker man.

Once the noon meal was done my young aunt changed. She grew silent and restless, walking from door to window and back again. Even Paul was treated with moody preoccupation. "Get Grant to show you the kittens," she would put him off. I can see her yet, standing by the south window as dusk came on, staring up the empty road, her nervous fingers plucking at her skirt.

When the buggy came in sight she was almost hysterically happy. She would snatch Paul up from his play on the floor and circle the room with him chanting, "Here comes Papa. Do you suppose he brought us something nice?"

He always did—a paper sack of lemon drops or horehound, sometimes even a length of material for Roma, for he was generous. But to tell the truth he had a fondness for lingering in Trinity's saloons, a passion for the poker hand not yet dealt, and there were a few times when buggy and team failed to materialize in the darkening lane. Paul would be tucked in bed with me, while Roma shared my sister's sleeping place. Toward sunup Kendrick would come rattling home, and, leaving his team harnassed in the barn, would stumble into the house, giving out with a tuneless whistle and the sour odor of consumed whiskey.

Breakfast would be a dismal affair with the men trying to act normal and my mother and Roma maintaining an aloof silence. What passed between Roma and Kendrick about these lapses from grace we didn't know, but these occasions were rare.

Those first few years the rains came right, oats and wheat did well, and the livestock grew fat.

The second summer Kendrick sent for his younger brother, Nolan, to come out and stay with them. He was a big, fair young man who never had much to say, but he had a pleasant grin for those around him, and a yellow pup called Sport that would fetch a stick, and once he showed me how to make a bow out of a willow branch and sack twine.

Kendrick made money that year. He left Nolan at home to look after things and hired out on the threshing crew. He was going to use the extra cash to build two more rooms on the cabin. The last time Roma talked to us she was already planning on how she would arrange the furniture in them.

Well, it's the familiar story of two people left too much alone too long. It was October when they went away, and they made no secret of their going.

I was with my father, bringing the morning milk along the frosty path from the barn when the buggy came in sight. The team came on trotting swiftly, nor did they slacken as they neared the gate. As they drew abreast I could see that it was not Kendrick, but Nolan, sitting beside Roma. She did not have Paul, and she was wearing the fawn-colored suit and familiar hat. The blue scarf was knotted beneath her chin, narrowing her face. I got a fleeting impression of downcast eyes and gloved hands clasped in her lap as the rig flashed past.

When we went inside Mother was peering from behind the curtains. We were curious, but not unduly so, not until after sundown, when Paul came straggling up the road with Nolan's yellow pup. He was coatless, and his nose was running, and his shoes were still unbuttoned. One suspender dangled.

As Mother bathed his tear-muddied face beside the warm stove she kept asking questions.

"Papa went to get boards to make the house," he answered. "Mama and Nolan went to town. They said stay in the house till Papa came, but he didn't come, and it was cold." He sobbed again against my mother's apron.

My father and oldest brother immediately saddled their horses and rode down to Kendrick's place, but there was no one there, and to bear out Paul's statement the big team and lumber wagon were missing. My father left a note saying we had Paul.

Almost another day went by before Kendrick showed up, white and shaking, and when he found that Paul was safe he broke down and cried.

"Belle, please take care of my baby," he pleaded. "I can't, now his mother's gone. I'll pay you. Please take care of Paul."

I had never seen a man's tears before. I never wanted to again.

Gossip ran like wildfire after the runaway. Groups of grownups would grow silent as I approached, and I would know they had been talking about my aunt and Nolan. Others beside us had seen them pass that day, and they had sold the team and rig at the livery stable, using part of the money for trainfare to the next town. After that no one knew where they had gone.

For our family it was almost unbelievable. My mother especially would shake her head in bitter bewilderment.

"The way she loved that baby, and then to leave him where she wouldn't stay herself. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I'd say it wasn't true."

My father had been all for hunting his sister down, but Kendrick would have none of it. "Let them go," he said with a shrug. "I never want to see either one of them."

He lived on alone in the cabin. He never built on to it. In fact, he had not even brought home any lumber the time Roma left. After he had made the twenty mile drive upriver to the sawmill, they had not had the dimensions he wanted.

It would not have been surprising had he turned more frequently to cards and liquor for consolation, but, so far as I know, he gave up both completely. He

would watch others play pedro and pitch for amusement, but he never picked up a card. He seldom went to town either. Instead he spent his time on a big garden he irrigated from the river. He always brought us vegetables when he came to see Paul.

He loved the boy, but with a fumbling sort of affection that never seemed to get close to the child, and though he faithfully provided money for Paul's food and clothing, it was Mother who chose the clothes and minded Paul's table manners.

Paul became the little brother I would not otherwise have had. From the lofty level of nine, I taught him to button his shoes and showed him, with loving scorn for his ineptness, how to hold a slingshot.

There was one strange thing. Every Christmas brought a package addressed to Paul in printed letters. No return address was given, but they were postmarked from various places—Portland, Missoula, little towns we'd never heard of. The gifts did not grow along with Paul; they were always for a five-year-old; a teddy bear, a set of blocks, a rubber ball with the alphabet printed around it. Long after Paul died in the flu epidemic, Kendrick continued to receive the packages.

I was staying in town to go to high school when Paul passed away. After that the ranch never seemed the same when I came home; there was the emptiness in the bed we'd shared, the missing plate at the table. Even his things were gone, packed up and turned over to Kendrick. Perhaps that was one thing that made me decide to be quit of the farm and go on to college. I worked, and the folks helped me what they could. In due course I got my degree in pharmacy. It was many years before I knew that my father had borrowed the money from Kendrick for that purpose.

In 1947, the powers-that-be decided to dam the river just above his place, and Kendrick was forced to sell his land. The well-tended garden on the river went the way of the bulldozer, along with the arrowheads and other

relics of Indian encampments beneath it, and Kendrick reluctantly moved to town, buying a house on a big lot. He seemed fairly happy, keeping the house in a sort of barren tidiness, puttering around in the big garden at the rear, and lavishing produce upon his neighbors.

That was all of it. Could I step up to Nolan Warren and take his hand, pretending sympathy for a grief he could not feel?

"Grant?" My name on his lips was a question. I did not have to go to him; he had come to me.

I nodded. "Yes, I'm Grant. How are you, Nolan? Veta, this is Nolan Warren. My wife," I presented her. I was glad that she offered her hand, as I had not.

He had changed, of course. The flesh had slackened along the large frame, and the boyish, immature face had settled into lines of decision. His gray eyes were alert and steady, and his nose was rather aquiline, giving him an aspect of command. Rumor had it that he had held a position of high responsibility with some railroad company.

He smiled, and in that smile was a trace of the shy, tentative warmth he had shown as a young man. "I would like to talk to you this afternoon. There are questions I may never have another chance to ask. Could I meet you somewhere?"

"Come home with us for lunch," Veta suggested impulsively.

He hesitated. "I don't want to intrude."

"It won't be an intrusion," I assured him. "We'll be happy to have you."

As if he sensed the curiosity behind that invitation he added bleakly, " Roma has been a long time dead. It is for myself I want to know these things. Mostly about Paul."

He gestured toward a small gray stone near the freshly turned earth, on which the letters read,

Paul Henry Warren
1904-1918

"I'll tell you what I can," I promised.

It was cool in our house furnished with the accumulated knickknacks and furniture of almost forty years of marriage, and, while Veta fussed with lunch and smoke spiraled thin and blue from our cigarettes, we spoke of Paul.

I told him as gently as I could how Paul had come in the dusk with the little dog, and how our pony used to crowhop with us on the way to school. I bragged a little bit, I guess, about how Paul could take a man's place in the field by the time he was twelve. As I talked, time telescoped upon itself, and the past seemed very close at hand.

Nolan himself had little to say. During lunch Veta asked him if he had children.

"Two daughters," he answered, and added, "My wife stayed home to attend our granddaughter's graduation from teacher's college."

"One of our grandsons graduated from engineering school this spring," Veta said.

Nolan must have married after Roma's death, I thought. *We will sit here comparing grandchildren, and politeness will dictate that I do not ask where my aunt died, nor how, nor when, nor even why she went away. Why?*

It was after lunch when Nolan, tapping his long slim fingers on the tablecloth, said wearily, "You have been so kind that I am going to ask one more favor. I have to go through Kendrick's things, and my time is limited. Would you help me?"

Kendrick's house was long and low, with dust-filled windows. Once it had been painted brown, with white pillars supporting the porch roof, but now the paint was badly weathered.

Living room and dining room, joined by an archway, were sparsely furnished. The place was orderly, but overlaid with dust. In the bedroom, someone had

scrubbed the floor and stripped the bed down to the mattress.

Curiously Nolan crossed the room and jerked open the grimy white closet door. A hump-backed trunk was on the floor, and up above were shelves filled with toys—a rubber ball, a toy horse, a monkey on a string, and brown parcels that had never been opened.

The man beside me looked unwell as he shook out a white handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "Like a furnace in here, isn't it?" he muttered. "We might as well start, though."

I helped him drag the trunk into the room. He pressed the lock and lifted the lid. It was filled to the brim with a woman's clothing. Nolan Warren jerked back as if he'd seen a snake.

"Why in God's name did he keep that?" he cried.

I saw it then, the black straw hat trimmed in faded pansies, crammed down in the corner, the hat that Roma had worn the day she went away.

Suddenly all the puzzling pieces fitted together—Paul left behind, the gifts for a five-year-old, the hat jammed in the trunk.

"Roma never left the ranch, did she?" I accused. "It was a trick. But how? Was it a dummy in the buggy?"

Nolan shook his head. "Kendrick. He was not much taller than Roma, you know. When we got to the next town, he got off the train, changed clothes, and hopped a freight back to Trinity. I took the money and kept going the other way." He put his face down into his open palms. "Grant, you don't know how many times I've wanted to tell somebody, but there never was a time when I could. Not even Margaret, my wife."

"You can tell me," I insisted coldly.

"Yes. It doesn't matter any more. It happened when Kendrick started after lumber for the new rooms. We expected him to be gone overnight, but he ran into some freighters at Fiddler's Ferry, and they got a poker

game started. Kendrick lost his money. He was home at nine o'clock that night.

"Paul and I were already asleep in the back room, and I think Roma had gone to bed, too, for when the wagon wheels wakened me I heard her bare feet cross the front room to the window. In a little while Kendrick came in, and she asked him what was the matter.

" 'I'm no good,' he was whining. 'I gambled our money away.'

" 'All of it? You didn't get the lumber?' She couldn't seem to get it through her head.

" 'I couldn't get the lumber,' he told her.

"She went wild then. She brought up every mistake he'd ever made. She kept her voice down so that I didn't hear all the words, but it overflowed with scorn and fury. I caught phrases like 'lazy drunkard' . . . 'neglecting your child.' Once he told her to be quiet, but she kept sobbing about the rooms they couldn't have.

"Then I heard the crash of something falling, followed by silence, the longest silence I've ever known in my life. After a time Kendrick opened the door and walked to my bed.

" 'Come here,' he whispered. 'Roma is dead, Nolan. I didn't mean to hurt her. I want you to help me.'

"She lay by the stove where she had fallen when he struck her. Her head had hit the sharp corner of the hearth. There was hardly any blood.

"Kendrick had always been steady in a pinch. He said it would be easy to make people believe I had loved her and persuaded her to run off while he was gone.

"There was no time for arguing or shedding tears. By lantern light we dug a deep grave at the end of the vegetable pit in the garden and scattered straw over it like the rest. We hid the wagon and team down the draw so no one coming to the house would see them. We had to be away before Paul got up and asked for his mother. When Kendrick was in the buggy, it was up to me to go

into the bedroom and wake the boy and tell him to wait in the house until his father came. All my life I've seen that face with Roma's big dark eyes looking up at me with trust."

A five-year-old face and five-year-old gifts.

I groped for words, but before I found them he spoke again.

"This much was true. I loved Roma. But what would you have done, Grant, given five minutes to decide a lifetime for three people?"

"I don't know," I murmured truthfully. I thought of Kendrick consigning his son to my mother's care, of the long years of loneliness and remorse beside the garden he tended with the faithfulness of fear, of the terror he must have known when the government purchased his land. I shook my head and repeated, "I just don't know."

THE HYPOTHETICAL PLAN

Richard Deming

In the beginning I'm sure none of the three of us considered actually robbing a bank. It started as just another of the intellectual problems Charles Ashley liked to toy with, and Mel Harrison and I went along because we got a kick out of watching a genius solve problems. It was only after we all realized how foolproof the plan was that things got out of hand.

I suppose that we are the only group of college students who ever planned and executed a bank robbery.

It started on a school night. Mel and I had gotten in the habit of doing our homework at Charles' apartment, mainly because Charles gave us a lot of help with it. Charles rarely had any to do himself, of course. With his 186 I.Q. he could draw straight A's without bothering to crack many books.

We had finished our homework and were sitting around batting the fat for a few minutes before Mel and I took off for our respective rooms. Somehow, I think because one of the subjects Mel Harrison had been wrestling with earlier was abnormal psychology, the conversation turned to the criminal mind.

Charles pounced on the subject with relish and, as usual, the conversation degenerated into mainly a

monologue by him, with Mel and me merely interjecting occasional comments.

"There are few successful criminals because anyone stupid enough to engage in crime solely for profit ipso facto must lack the intelligence to plan successful coups," Charles said. "The mental agility necessary to work out a really clever bank robbery, for instance, could as easily be turned to profit in some legitimate field. Intelligent people don't have to break the law. There are too many legal ways to become rich."

"Willie Sutton worked out some pretty clever bank robberies," I commented.

Charles threw me an indulgent smile. "Is it clever to end your life in prison, Harry? As I recall, Willie's serving something like a hundred and thirty-five years. His plans for the actual robbing of banks often showed a certain rudimentary cleverness, but he was incapable of thinking beyond the jobs themselves. As a result, even after a successful job, he was always faced with the problem of being a hunted man, his identity known, his description broadcast, his picture hanging in post offices. A really clever bank robber would arrange things so that afterward no one would suspect he was the robber. I could pull a bank job and never have to run a foot afterward."

"Why would you ever rob a bank?" Mel asked. "Half the money in them belongs to you anyway."

"That's just the point," Charles said. "The only really successful criminal, by the nature of things, would have to be one who doesn't need the money, because he is intelligent enough to make it legitimately. His motive for engaging in crime would have to be something other than mere financial profit. The intellectual stimulation, for example."

"It would be strictly for money if I ever robbed a bank," I said. "My father's not a multimillionaire."

"Mine either," Mel said. "I'll take your share if you don't want it."

Charles Ashley was being a little self-deluding in crediting his wealth to his own brilliance, because he had never personally earned a dime in his life. His father was one of the richest oil men in the country, and Charles' personal fortune had been accumulated by making investments under his father's guidance, with money furnished by his father. Of course it's possible he would have become rich even if he had started out as poor as I had, because he was undeniably the most brilliant person I ever knew. But it's unlikely that he would have amassed so much money by the age of twenty-one if he hadn't been born into a situation where he couldn't miss.

We were all seniors at U.C.L.A. and had been friends since we were freshmen. We made an odd trio, but I think our differences were what attracted us to each other. I think we each felt some personal lack which we found and admired in the other two.

Charles was handsome, brilliant, and a natural leader. He was president of the senior class, president of Phi Beta Kappa, captain of the debating team, and his straight-A average made him almost certain to be class valedictorian. Yet, oddly enough, he was shy with girls, mainly, I think, because he was sensitive about totally lacking any athletic ability.

Mel Harrison was a big, slow-thinking plodder who had to pound his books just to keep a bare C average. But physically he was as outstanding as Charles was mentally, which was what Charles found to admire in him. Mel was all-conference fullback, all-conference shotput, javelin and discus thrower, and both school heavyweight boxing and wrestling champ.

My name is Harry Worth, and I am just Mr. Average Guy. I held a B average without breaking my back, but without sliding through either. I think one of the things which originally drew Charles' interest in me was that, because I got along with such easy familiarity with girls, he was under the mistaken impression that I was quite a

ladies' man. The other thing was that, while I'm no athlete, I do possess one physical talent. Because I had to work my way through school, I didn't have time for much campus activity, but I love to shoot, so I was a member of the men's rifle team. The target rifles we used were twenty-two caliber, mounted on 30-30 frames and with telescopic sights. At fifty yards I could drive a nail with mine.

The greatest difference between us was our economic backgrounds. Charles drove an expensive convertible and maintained a beautifully-furnished four-room apartment in Santa Monica. Mel's folks were well enough off to send him through school, but they weren't rich. He drove a five-year-old car and lived in the men's dorm.

I couldn't even afford that. I lived in a room over a hash joint in downtown L.A., and earned room and board by waiting tables for an hour and a half nightly. I earned my tuition and other expenses by working in a factory, summers. I drove a nineteen-fifty car for which I had paid twenty-five dollars.

Nevertheless, we were bosom pals. Charles never put on airs because of his wealth, and neither of us sponged on him. We did drink a good deal of his liquor and beer, because his apartment was our natural gathering place and he refused to let us pitch in on anything consumed on the premises. But when we went out somewhere, it was always Dutch treat. Without being in the least condescending about it, Charles adjusted his spending habits to what Mel and I could afford when we went out together for evenings on the town.

Charles said, "The crux of a successful criminal act is to insure that you can't possibly be suspected afterward. Of course many criminals make a stab at accomplishing this, but as far as their imaginations can take them is to wear some kind of mask. A really clever bank robber would arrange things so that the description broadcast after the crime would be totally different from his actual

appearance. Then he wouldn't have to flee across country, evading roadblocks, afraid of recognition every time he stopped for gas. He could simply go home and resume his normal life. He could even walk into the bank he had robbed without fear of recognition."

Mel said, "You've gotten beyond me. How would he swing that?"

"Disguise," Charles said. "Many criminals try disguise *after* a crime, when hiding out. But I've never heard of one being clever enough to disguise himself beforehand."

I said, "The Brinks robbers wore Hallowe'en masks."

Charles made a dismissing gesture. "I don't mean an obvious disguise, designed merely to shield your face. I mean a disguise which will not be recognized as one, an expert makeup job which totally alters the appearance, yet looks natural. Not just something such as a false beard, but a real Hollywood makeup job. You know how makeup experts can alter actors' appearances for movies. They put cotton padding in the cheeks to change the contour of the face, build putty around the nose and cover it with flesh-colored makeup, even build false ears. The shape of the body could also be changed by padding. Of course, it would take an expert makeup artist to create the illusion without giving a hint that it was a disguise."

"Hey, that's some idea," Mel said in a tone of admiration. "Wonder why nobody ever tried it?"

"Because no bank robber has ever possessed the brains. Even if one thought of it, he would probably botch the job by attempting to create the disguise himself. I would recruit an expert such as Benjamin Fast."

He didn't have to explain who Benjamin Fast was, because Fast had just won the Academy Award for his makeup work in the latest of the interminable series of screen versions of Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris,* which Hollywood always inexplicably misnames *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* He had been given more

publicity out of the award than movie technicians usually get, because as a gag he had made up two top stars who attended the award dinner, each to look like the other, and no one had caught on until the end of the evening, when both actors removed their makeup in full view of the television audience.

Mel asked, "How would you get a guy like that to go along with a bank robbery? He wouldn't need the money any more than you do."

"Maybe the idea would intrigue him as an intellectual exercise too," Charles said with a grin.

That's as far as the conversation went the first evening. It was several nights later, on a Sunday, when we were gathered at the apartment.

We were sitting around sipping beer and listening to hi-fi when Charles said casually, "There's one advantage to being a respected depositer which would have made Willie Sutton envious."

We both just looked at him, not understanding the comment.

"I bank at Caxton Trust, you know," Charles said. "That's down Wilshire about eight blocks."

"We know where you bank," I said. "The walls bulge a little more every time you make a new deposit."

Charles grinned. "I made a deposit Friday afternoon, then dropped in to have a chat with the bank president. He kindly showed me around the building. He was so pleased at the interest shown by a major depositor that he answered every question I asked. One of my questions concerned the amount of money kept on hand. The peak amount is usually at closing time on Friday, when there is customarily about a hundred and fifty thousand in the vault."

Mel emitted a small whistle.

"On Fridays the bank closes at six, but the vault stays unlocked until seven," Charles went on. "They have to give the tellers time to check out their cash before locking up for the weekend. All you have to do is

jump a counter and you can walk right into the vault. The president also showed me the alarm system."

Neither Mel nor I said anything.

"I've been amusing myself by working out a plan," Charles said.

Rising, he went over to a writing desk, lowered the leaf and took a sheet of paper from a cubbyhole. When he unfolded it on the desktop, Mel and I went over to look at it. It was a drawing in ink of the floor plan of a building.

"The bank?" Mel and I queried.

"Uh-huh. This is the front door, which faces Wilshire." He used a pencil to point to it, then moved the pencil to another entrance shown at the top of the paper. "This is the rear door, which gives onto the parking lot behind the building. Those are the only two ways in or out of the building."

He moved the pointer to one side, then the other, of the paper. "These long, narrow oblongs represent counters and the breaks in them are swinging wooden gates about waist high. The tellers are behind the counters on the right, the bookkeeping department is located here at the upper right. Loan and collection clerks are behind the counter to the left, and the various bank officers, with the exception of the president, all have their desks in this open area at the upper left. There are no cages, merely chest-high counters, and all employees except the bank president are in full view while working. He has a private office here at the lower left, but he leaves at five on Fridays, so the office should be vacant."

"What's this?" I asked, pointing to a square at lower right.

"The switchboard, which I'll get to in a minute. There is a single bank guard, and at closing time he first locks the front door, then the rear. The robbery takes place immediately after closing time."

Both Mel and I recognized that this was merely a mental exercise for Charles' amusement, and that when he said, "The robbery takes place," he had no real intention of robbing the bank.

Mel asked, "How do we get in, if the doors are locked?"

Charles threw him an indulgent smile. "We're already in. We come in a few minutes before closing and busy ourselves making out desposit slips or some such thing. Harry will carry a briefcase, which will contain nothing but a number of empty cloth sacks for the money. Mel and I will be emptyhanded. There will probably be other customers in the building who have not yet finished their business by closing time. As they finish, they will be let out by the rear door only. The guard stands there, unlocking the door for each as he leaves, but allowing no one else in. We kill time until the last customer has left, then take over."

"How?" I asked.

"Mel heads for the rear door. While the guard is busy unlocking it, Mel draws his gun, covers him and disarms him. The guard is the only armed man in the bank, incidentally. None of the bank officers carry guns or keep them in desk drawers. It's bank policy that amateurs shouldn't get themselves shot trying to defend the place."

I said, "What are you and I doing while Mel is taking care of the guard?"

"I go through this gate to the switchboard," Charles said, indicating the gate with his pencil. "With a pair of cutters, which I will have in my pocket, I cut the wires leading to the switchboard, thereby destroying all phone communication in the building. At gunpoint I then herd all the employees on that side of the room out into the center and make them lie on their faces. Meantime, you are herding out the employees from the other side and also making them stretch out face down. Mel and I keep

the employees covered while you enter the vault and fill the money sacks, then go back behind the right hand counter to clean out the cashiers' drawers."

"What about the burglar alarm?" Mel asked. "Isn't somebody going to push a button while all this is going on?"

"Several people, no doubt, will," Charles said dryly. "But no alarm will sound because there won't be any electricity."

"How do we manage that?" I asked.

"About a half block from the bank is a transformer which supplies the juice for that whole area. If the leads from the transformer are snipped, there won't be any electricity for a radius of six blocks."

"We climb a pole right in front of everybody?" I asked.

"Nope. We use your talent with a rifle. The transformer is on a sidestreet, right at the mouth of an alley. At about five minutes to six we pull into the alley, you step out of the car and cut the wires with bullets. At a range of not more than thirty feet you can cut a wire with a bullet, can't you?"

"I could hit the head of a pin at that range. But suppose somebody's around?"

"So what? Before anyone can react to your vandalism, you'll be back in the car, and we'll be on our way. We drive directly to the bank parking lot, and enter the bank just before three. We will be using a stolen car, of course. One of our own cars, probably not mine, because that's too conspicuous, will be parked on the sidestreet a block away. When we leave the bank, we use the guard's key to lock the door from outside. A couple of the bank officers have keys, but there will be enough delay in getting the door unlocked again for us to drive away. Before an alarm is raised, we should have switched cars. It's only eight blocks from the bank to here. By the time police arrive at the bank, we should be safely back here, removing our makeup."

Examining the diagram, Mel shook his head in admiration. "Boy, you really have things worked out to a tee. If the most important part wasn't missing, I'd be inclined to try it."

"Me, too," I said. "I could use fifty thousand dollars."

Charles frowned. "What do you mean, the most important part is missing?"

Mel said, "Your whole original idea was based on all of us being expertly disguised. You haven't solved that problem."

"Of course I have," Charles said testily. "We recruit Benjamin Fast to handle that part."

"Just saying it doesn't mean you've solved it, genius. You'd never get Fast to go along."

"No," I agreed. "You talk a good plan, Charles, but you haven't really solved the whole problem."

Charles' face reddened slightly. "You're both entitled to your opinions, but it is solved insofar as I'm concerned."

His tone was so stiff, I examined him curiously. "What are you so upset about? It's only a mental exercise, a test of coordination."

This seemed to rankle him more. Apparently our refusal to accept his plan with the unreserved enthusiasm he was accustomed to receiving from us, when he expounded on such hypothetical problems as this, was not quite forgivable. He was still exhibiting signs of wounded dignity when Mel and I left fifteen minutes later.

I hadn't realized how important it was to Charles to convince us of the infallibility of his reasoning until we gathered again at his apartment the following Friday night. I stopped by the men's dorm to pick Mel up en route, so the two of us arrived together about nine P.M.

At first, I thought a stranger had opened the door, for the man had fuller cheeks than Charles, a flattened nose, gray hair and wrinkles. At second glance, I real-

ized the wrinkles were grease paint and the nose was putty.

I burst out laughing. After a moment of astonishment, Mel joined in. We both nearly rolled on the floor.

After staring at us frigidly, Charles turned on his heel and strode away. Still so convulsed with laughter that we had to lean on each other for support, Mel and I came in out of the hall. The bathroom door slammed behind Charles, firmly chastising us.

It was a good fifteen minutes before Charles reappeared, and by then we had regained control of ourselves. He had removed all sign of makeup.

"It merely proves the point I made during our first discussion," he said distantly. "An amateur makeup job isn't sufficient. But Benjamin Fast made up Robert Good to look like Tip Calvin, and Calvin to look like Good, and nobody at the Academy award dinner suspected either was a makeup job. They sat there under bright lights the whole evening, without anyone tumbling."

"That was Benjamin Fast," I said. "You don't happen to possess the same talent."

When he reddened, I realized he had actually thought his ridiculous disguise was good. "Then we'll recruit Mr. Fast," he said in such a definite tone that I examined him curiously.

"You mean explain the hypothetical problem to him, and see if he'll agree to be a hypothetical accessory to the crime?" I asked.

Mel said, "What would that prove? Even if he agreed to play the game on paper, which I doubt he would; more likely, he'd think we were all nuts and refer us to a psychiatrist; your problem isn't solved. You haven't licked it until you can convince us that Fast would go along with the real deal, not just agree that it would be feasible."

"I said we'd recruit him," Charles snapped. "I mean for the actual job."

Both Mel and I had big grins on our faces, but they simultaneously faded.

After a lengthy silence, I said, "I don't think I quite follow you."

"Obviously the only way to convince you doubting Thomases is to pull the job," Charles said. "Or don't you have the guts?"

Mel and I looked at each other. The big fullback emitted a low whistle.

I said, "You can't be serious, Charles."

"I was never more serious in my life. I'll even make it doubly worth your while. You and Mel can split the take. All I want is the satisfaction of making you both admit I solved the problem."

At the same time that I was experiencing shock, a thrill at the thought of what I could do with seventy-five thousand dollars went coursing through me. That would set me up in business for myself after graduation. My present prospects were to go to work for a moderate salary for a big corporation, where I might or might not eventually work myself up to some indefinite minor executive position.

With seventy-five thousand dollars, I could start out as president of my own corporation.

Mel seemed to be having the same thoughts, only it took them longer to develop. He was still looking shocked while I was sorting over possible businesses to start and planning the issuance of stock. But after a time his shocked expression turned speculative, and he regarded me inquiringly from the corners of his eyes.

I cleared my throat. "They put people in jail for bank robbery."

"Only when they catch them," Charles said. "This plan is foolproof."

"Maybe, if you can recruit Ben Fast," I admitted. "How do you plan to go about that?"

"Oh, that's all worked out," Charles said in an offhand manner. "Are you in or not?"

Mel and I looked at each other again. After a lengthy pause, he said, "You're really considering it, aren't you, Harry?"

"So are you," I told him.

"I could certainly use seventy-five thousand. But I don't much like the idea of risking something like ten years in jail."

Charles said testily, "I wouldn't ask you to enter a deal which wasn't foolproof."

Mel asked, "What's your plan for getting Fast's cooperation?"

"Don't worry. I'll handle it. You'll know, when the proper time comes."

"I'd like to know now," Mel said.

I put in, "If he doesn't succeed in lining up Ben Fast, we can always back out, Mel. Even if he does, and we don't like the disguise jobs, we can still back out. We really haven't committed ourselves to anything until we walk into the bank with guns."

After thinking this over, Mel gave a slow nod. "I guess you're right. You can count me in tentatively, Charles, contingent on how you make out with Fast."

Charles looked at me and I nodded agreement.

There was no further discussion until Sunday evening, which was the next time we gathered at the apartment. Charles announced that plans were complete, and that we would hit the bank the following Friday.

I felt my heart begin to thump.

"There are a few preliminary matters which have to be taken care of," Charles said crisply. "First, you'll have to arrange to get out of your table-waiting duties on Friday, Harry. Can you arrange that?"

"Sure," I said huskily.

"Then you'll need your target rifle. Can you get hold of it Friday?"

"I can ask permission to get in a little extra target practice after we finish firing Thursday afternoon. Rifles are supposed to be locked in the rack before the field-

house closes, but Jenner goes home at five, and I can tell him I'll stick it in the rack before I leave. We won't fire again until the following Thursday, so it shouldn't be missed if I sneak it back before then."

"Fine. Now as to transportation, I think we'd better use Mel's car as the switch car. Harry's is so old, it's as conspicious as my car. I've built a wire ignition jumper, and we'll pick up a getaway car somewhere in downtown Los Angeles a couple of hours before we're due at the bank."

"Is Mr. Fast lined up?" Mel asked.

"That's taken care of," Charles assured him. "I've rented the basement of a vacant store near First and Los Angeles, in the heart of the Japanese section, as our rendezvous before the robbery." He handed us each a slip of paper with the address on it. "We'll meet there at ten Friday morning. It will probably take Fast an hour or two to make each of us up, so we have to start early."

"Why do you need the basement of a vacant store to make us up?" I asked puzzledly. "Why not right here?"

"Because we don't want some neighbor spotting the bankrobbers coming from here. Returning is a different matter. I'll leave my car out and the garage door open, so that we can drive right into the garage when we get here. I'll have a tub of water, soap and towels in the garage, so we can strip off our disguises right there."

Thinking this over, it seemed like sound planning. I asked, "How did you get Fast to go along?"

"Never mind. He's in the bag. Just show up at the rendezvous spot at the proper time."

"What's his cut?" Mel asked.

"He's in it for the love of adventure, the same as I am."

There was something here which didn't seem right. I had a feeling that Charles was keeping too much to himself. But as we wouldn't be committed until the last minute, I kept quiet for the time being.

I asked, "How about guns?"

"I've already obtained three thirty-eight automatics at a pawnshop. They're waiting for us at the store. I also picked up a secondhand briefcase and a number of cloth sacks."

"How about ammunition?"

"I'll get some during the week."

There was a long period of silence before Mel said, "I'm beginning to get scared. We're really going to do this, aren't we?"

"Want to back out?" Charles asked. "I imagine Harry and I could swing it alone if we had to."

"No, I'm in," Mel said quickly. "I'm entitled to a few jitters, aren't I?"

I couldn't think of any more questions to ask, and neither could Mel. We left earlier than usual, both of us a little subdued.

I couldn't get my mind off the robbery all week. During lectures I took few notes, and at night I couldn't concentrate on my books. Fortunatey I had no tests that week, for I would have flunked them cold.

For some reason I stayed away from Charles' apartment, I think through a subconscious fear that, if we continued to meet, we would talk the plan to death and never execute it. And by now the thought of that seventy-five thousand so gripped me, I didn't want to risk having everything go up in smoke.

I think Mel felt much the same way, for whenever I ran into him on campus, he failed to inquire, as he usually did, when I wanted to get together at the apartment.

Charles didn't invite either of us over either, perhaps for the same reason.

Thursday, at lunch, I happened to be reading the *Los Angeles Times,* and I spotted an announcement that Benjamin Fast, the Oscar-winning makeup artist, had flown back East to attend a relative's funeral. After lunch I hurried over to the Physics Building, where I

knew Charles had his next class, and caught him in the hall.

"Did you see this?" I demanded, showing him the item.

He smiled. "That's coverup to explain his absence from the studio."

"Why should he be absent from the studio?" I inquired.

"It takes time to plan the masterly sort of makeup jobs he turns out. He needed a couple of days of concentration. So he phoned the studio and gave that excuse."

There was something vaguely dissatisfying in this explanation, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. From the beginning, Charles' habit of brushing off any inquiries as to his deal with Fast had left me a little uneasy. Was he planning to ring in some imposter who would pose as the makeup artist for Mel's and my benefit?

I instantly dismissed this idea. Charles already knew, if we were dissatisfied with our disguises, we intended to back out at the last minute. He would hardly try anything that silly.

Again I decided to dismiss the matter until we actually met Benjamin Fast.

Charles said, "Don't forget that rifle this afternoon."

"I won't," I assured him. "Are we going to have any more conferences before the job?"

He shook his head. "We'll have plenty of time, while Fast is making us up, to iron out any last-minute details."

I took a deep breath. "Then I'll see you at ten in the morning."

I didn't have any difficulty getting the rifle off-campus. I disassembled it and wrapped it in a large towel I had brought along for that purpose.

Friday morning we all cut classes, of course, because our rendezvous time was ten A.M. By prearrangement, Mel came by my room to pick me up. As I lived only

six blocks from First and Los Angeles, we arrived at the rented store only a few minutes later.

It wasn't until we had parked in front of the address Charles had given us that I realized he had picked a spot directly across the street from the police building. This discovery momentarily jolted me. Then I got hold of myself by concentrating on the reassuring thought that the actual crime would take place miles from here.

The windows of the vacant store were painted over, but the gilded inscription on one window was still visible. It read: *Japanese Curios.*

Following Charles' directions, we walked along a narrow areaway between the ex-curio shop and the Japanese restaurant next to it. At the rear of the building, we found a set of concrete steps leading downward. I went first and, after trying the door and finding it locked, rapped.

When there was no immediate answer, I glanced at my watch and saw it was five after ten. I had decided that Charles was late when the door cracked open.

Then it opened the rest of the way, and Charles motioned us in.

We found ourselves in a large basement room which apparently had been used as storage space for the store above, for there were still a few empty cartons lying around. In one corner was a lavatory, and just outside it was a small sink. There were a few windows, but they were mere narrow slots close to the ceiling and were so encrusted with dirt that no light could get in. Illumination was furnished by two bright, two-hundred watt bulbs hanging from the ceiling, which bathed the room in quite a bright glare.

The place had been converted into rude living quarters by the addition of two canvas cots, a folding card table which I recognized as from Charles' apartment, and three folding chairs. There was a stack of fact detective magazines on the table, along with some paper plates, a couple of empty glasses, and a paper bag

which looked as though it contained food. Against the far wall were two suitcases and a large fiberwood case, about the size of an army footlocker. On top of the case was a coil of clothesline, a roll of surgical tape, and a rumpled handkerchief which looked suspiciously like it had been used as a gag.

A disheveled little man of about sixty sat on one of the cots with an open detective magazine in his lap. He was only about five-feet-four, and weighed possibly a hundred and fifteen pounds. Closing the magazine he had been reading, he frowned at us suspiciously.

"Meet Mr. Benjamin Fast," Charles said. "I won't mention your names, because it isn't necessary for Mr. Fast to know who any of us are."

Glancing from the little man's unshaven face to Charles I asked, "Is this guy here voluntarily?"

"Of course not," Charles said easily. "I invaded his bachelor apartment and brought him here at gunpoint Wednesday night."

Mel let his mouth hang open. "You mean you kidnapped him?"

"Nobody knows he's even missing," Charles said. "He lives alone in one of those Beverly Hills apartment houses where the neighbors don't even speak to each other. I phoned his studio, pretended I was a friend, and left word that he was unexpectedly called back East for a funeral."

"But it's still kidnapping," Mel protested in a high voice. "They put you in jail forever for kidnapping."

"Only if it's for ransom, or if the victim suffers bodily harm. This is merely abduction and forced restraint. It isn't nearly as serious."

I said dubiously, "Does bodily harm include malnutrition? This guy looks half-starved."

"I've been making him sandwiches, but he only nibbles at them. I think it's because he hasn't been getting any exercise. I've had to keep him tied up most of the time. And gagged, when I wasn't here."

"Oh, boy," I said. "That may not be bodily harm, but it's certainly cruel and unusual treatment."

"I don't think do. I've tried to be as nice as possible to him, otherwise. I let him pack a suitcase with everything he would need, but he doesn't seem to want to shave or change clothes. I even went out and bought a stack of his favorite magazines to while away the evening hours while we sat here together." He pointed to the pile of magazines on the table, then added, "I left him untied both evenings that we spent here together, until I went to bed."

All this time Benjamin Fast hadn't uttered a word, merely moving his head to look at each of us as we spoke.

Mel said, "I think you must be nuts. I don't want to be involved in a kidnapping. I'm about ready to drop out."

"When we're this close?" Charles queried. "Let me show you something."

Walking over to the fiberwood case, he transferred the coil of rope, handkerchief and tape to the table, and lifted the lid to disclose grease-paint sticks. "This is Mr. Fast's professional kit, containing everything he uses to create illusions for the movie-going public. I've explained his task to him, have described the facial characteristics, sizes and shapes of both of you in detail, and he has already worked out tentative plans for all three disguises. He has agreed to cooperate, because he realizes he won't get out of here until he does."

The thought struck me that Charles had no intention of letting the little man out of there alive, even after he had cooperated. The makeup artist would be the only person in the world who knew what our faces looked like under their disguises.

It was at that point I realized Charles was a little psychotic. You would have to be nuts to go to such lengths, merely to prove a point to a couple of friends.

But even as the thought of murder sent a chill along

my spine, I knew I had to go along. The prospect of that seventy-thousand dollars had gripped me too hard to let anything stop me now.

Charles' murderous intent didn't seem to occur to Mel. He still looked a bit dubious, but after scratching the back of his neck, he shrugged.

"Since we've gone this far, we may as well, at least, see what he can do with us."

The little man did wonders. It took him four hours to do the three of us, but when he had finished, we weren't recognizable to each other. Once he started to work he became lost in his art, seeming to forget his precarious situation, and concentrating his whole mind and skill on turning out works of perfection.

He started me by placing cotton padding inside my cheeks in order to round out my face, darkening a front tooth, and snapping a gold shell over an incisor. A tissue-thin strip of adhesive tape at each eye corner pulled the corners down to narrow my eyes and give them totally different shapes. He used similar strips to pull the corners of my mouth apart, which widened and narrowed the lips to give my mouth a gashlike appearance. Some kind of black paste rubbed into my hair darkened it and subdued its unruly wave so that, when combed back and parted in the center, it was sleek and straight.

From his kit he took a pair of small plastic tubes about a quarter-inch long and the diameter of a pencil. When he inserted them into my nostrils, the base of my nose was broadened and flattened. A thicker and stiffer type of tape than he had used on my eyes and mouth went behind my ears to force them outward so they stood at right angles to my head, like twin air scoops.

A makeup base then went over everything, concealing the strips of tape which stretched and bent my various features out of their normal pattern. Then he carefully blended a finishing coat exactly matched to my skin color, and applied this over the base coat. A light dusting of bluish powder across my chin and cheeks

gave me a blue-jowled, five-o'clock shadow appearance.

When, with colored grease pencils, he added a couple of shaving nicks and skin blemishes, the illusion was complete. In the hand mirror he produced from the fiberwood chest, I couldn't detect the slightest evidence that I was staring at the reflection of a makeup job instead of an untouched face.

Mel, when finished, had somehow been given a longer and more gaunt face, auburn hair touched with gray, and a mass of natural-looking freckles. Hornrimmed glasses with plain glass in them added an unaccustomed owlishness to his expression.

Charles was equally unrecognizable. Shell teeth over his own gave him a buck-toothed, gopherlike look, and at the same time hollowed his cheeks. His nose, which ordinarily was small, had been built to a ratlike point, beneath which there was a hairline mustache. His hair, ordinarily straight, was now slightly wavy and sprinkled with gray.

We opened the door to let in some daylight, and examined each other in that more natural light. Even though I knew I was looking at makeup jobs, I had to peer into Charles' and Mel's faces from a distance of a foot before I could detect evidence of it.

They both told me that mine was equally undetectable.

Benjamin Fast asked, "Is it warm out today?"

"About sixty," I told him. My voice was slightly slurred because of the cotton padding in my mouth.

"Then your makeup shouldn't run," the little man said. "Just don't try any facial contortions, and it should last for hours. Can I go now?"

"Not just yet," Charles said. "I'm afraid you have to be tied up and gagged one last time. We'll be back about seven to let you loose."

You mean to kill him, I thought, but I kept the thought to myself, afraid that Mel would back out if he realized the truth.

Mel and I watched as the little man stoically lay on his cot, and Charles expertly bound and gagged him.

Charles opened one of the two suitcases and drew out three black automatics. Pocketing one, he handed each of us another. Then he lifted out a briefcase and gave it to me.

"It's all packed with the necessary cloth sacks," he said. "How about the rifle?"

"It's on the floor of Mel's car."

"Then I guess we're set," he said, throwing a final glance around. "Let's get started."

"Got your wire cutters?" I asked.

He drew aside his coat to show the handle of a large pair protruding from his belt.

It was a quarter after two when we climbed into Mel's car. Obviously, it still hadn't registered on the big fullback that Charles planned to finish our caper with murder, but he had been doing a little thinking along another line.

"Soon as we release this guy, he's going to bring the cops right back here," he said. "All that stuff of yours ought to be cleared out before we turn him loose."

"It will be," Charles assured him. "My car's parked on a lot up the street, and we'll also have this one. We'll load them both up, then just walk out and leave him there."

Mel asked, "Will they be able to trace who rented the place?"

Charles couldn't smile because of his makeup, but his eyes twinkled. "I didn't exactly rent it. I just drove around until I spotted a vacant building and broke in. Let's get moving. Our next chore is to steal a getaway car."

We found one on Hope Street near Fifth, a two-year-old sedan with its windows rolled down. Dropping Charles alongside it, Mel and I rounded the corner and waited.

Charles' ignition jumper must have been an efficient

one, for he drove around the corner and passed us in less than a minute. Mel and I followed in his car. Charles took Wilshire Boulevard and followed it clear to Santa Monica.

A block beyond the Caxton Trust Company, Charles turned off on a sidestreet and drew over to the curb. Mel pulled in behind him. A moment later we had transferred ourselves, the briefcase, and the towel-wrapped rifle to the stolen car. I got in back to assemble the rifle, while Mel sat in front with Charles.

Charles drove back up Wilshire to the street just beyond the bank, turned down it, and momentarily slowed as we passed an alley.

"There's the transformer you're going to sabotage," he announced.

I peered out at it as we drifted past. It wasn't more than ten feet from the alley mouth and about twenty feet in the air. I would be able to clip the wires leading from it almost with my eyes closed.

Mel glanced at his watch and said, "It's only four P.M. What do we do for the next two hours?"

It occurred to me that none of us had eaten lunch, but my stomach was too queasy for food, so I decided not to mention it.

"We could have a look at the inside of the bank," I suggested. "I mean just walk in and give it a casual once-over. Mel and I have never been in it, and a diagram isn't as good as the real thing."

Charles agreed that this was a good idea. Driving back to the bank, he parked on the lot, and we all entered by the rear door. Charles went over to one of the center desks and pretended to make out a deposit slip. Mel took a ten-dollar bill to a teller's window for change.

I went over to the counter beyond which the junior bank officers had desks and pretended to read a poster on the counter describing the advantages of a personal-

ized checking account. Actually, I was studying the door leading to the vault.

A girl came over from one of the desks and asked, "May I help you?"

"Just waiting for a friend," I mumbled and turned away, self-conscious of her gaze on my face, even though I knew my disguise was faultless.

Mel had pocketed his change and was heading for the door. I fell in at his side and Charles followed us out.

As we climbed into the car, Mel said, "That girl at the teller's window certainly gave me a funny look. Is my disguise showing?"

Charles examined him carefully and shook his head. "You're just self-conscious about it. Did you happen to notice that plump man who walked by just as we came in?"

Mel said, "In the gray suit?"

"Uh-huh. That was the bank president. He looked straight at my face without a sign of recognition. So I guess our disguises are pretty good."

It was still only twenty minutes after four, which left us more than an hour and a half to kill. Charles drove down to the ocean and we sat looking at the waves while we went over the plan a final time.

"Did you leave your garage door open?" I asked.

Charles nodded. "I also stocked the garage with plenty of water, a washbowl, soap and towels. We'll drive straight up the alley and into the garage. When we come out again, we'll be our old selves."

At twenty of six, Charles started the engine. When he pulled into the alley where the transformer was situated, I glanced at my watch. It was seven minutes to six.

Charles stopped the car just inside the alley. When I stepped from the back seat with the rifle, there wasn't a soul in sight. Kneeling at the front of the car with my arm braced against a front fender, I centered one of the transformer's wires in the crosshairs and squeezed the

trigger. The wire parted as though slipped by an invisible wirecutter. Rapidly working the bolt, I fired once more, then jumped back into the car.

I had the rifle disassembled and rewrapped in the towel before we reached the bank parking lot. It was two minutes to six by my watch when we entered by the rear door of the bank.

There were three tables for the convenience of customers in the center of the room. Splitting up, we each moved to a separate one. I reached the center one, laid down my briefcase, chose a deposit slip and began making meaningless figures on its back with one of the desk pens. From the corners of my eyes, I saw Mel similarly occupied at the desk nearest the rear door, and Charles reaching for a pen at the desk the other side of me.

There were more customers in the bank than I had expected. There were a half dozen people lined up before each of the five teller's windows. It looked as though we were going to have a several-minute wait after closing time before the place cleared sufficiently for us to make our move.

Then it struck me that, oddly, all the customers were men. A pair from one of the lines casually moved over to my desk, one on either side of me. Alarm bells began to ring in my head when I saw other pairs drift alongside Mel and Charles.

Before I could react, a gun muzzle pressed into my left side, and the man on my right simultaneously whipped my arms behind my back. Handcuffs clicked around my wrists, and the gun was plucked from my pocket.

Dazedly glancing both ways, I saw that Mel and Charles were receiving similar treatment.

The man who had pressed the gun into my side put it away, opened my briefcase and dumped out the cloth sacks.

"Came all prepared, did you, Zip?" he said.

From his breast pocket he produced a small leather

folder, opened it and thrust it before my face. It was an identification folder showing that he was an FBI agent named Myron Sharpe.

Other men who had been in the customer lines were putting away guns and moving in to surround us. Sickly I realized we had walked into a whole nest of cops.

Mel and Charles were led over by their captors. Myron Sharpe looked them over and shook his head wonderingly.

"Hi, Red," he said familiarly to Mel, then glanced at Charles. "Our old friend, Gopher Stacey. What made you guys think you could case a bank in broad daylight without being spotted? Especially together. We never knew you three had teamed up until we got a call from the bank that you had been in looking it over. We didn't even know you knew each other."

Charles asked in a strained voice, "What's this all about? We haven't done anything."

The FBI man laughed. "Think you can brazen it out, Gopher? This is the best net we've made in years. Three from our ten-most-wanted list, all at once. But are you guys nuts? You know your mugs are hanging in every post office, and you must have realized the same mug shots would be circulated to every bank in the country. We've even had them printed in all the fact detective magazines."

Fact detective magazines, I thought sickly, finally realizing what had happened to us.

Little Benjamin Fast had pulled a fast one. He had used some photographs he found in his detective magazine as models for his art.

WITH ONE STONE

Jack Ritchie

"And so you saved the entire human race from extinction?" Professor Layton asked.

"Yes," I said. "Indirectly."

Professor Layton was a skeptic. "This is quite an impressive aggregation of machinery you have here. I suppose you call it your Time Machine and it leaps into the future?"

"No," I said, "the machine stays here. It is an *object* which I send into the future, and I am able to transport it to any portion of this earth at the press of a button."

To tell the truth, I have never really liked Professor Layton, though I have admired his incisive mind, his erudition. For an academic man, he is a person with a remarkably commanding personality.

"So the future is immutable?" he asked. "It cannot be changed?"

"I don't quite understand all aspects of that myself," I said, "but basically that appears to be true."

My first experiments had been with the common objects about me. Initially I had put a volume, *The Mill on the Floss,* in the center of my transference circle—I felt that in case something went wrong, I could easily

spare it—and proceeded to project it two hundred years into the future.

When I brought it back to the present five minutes later, it was a bit wet. Evidently it had been raining.

I next tried lamps, tables, chairs, and other objects with complete success.

Ultimately I progressed to animate subjects—a bowl of goldfish, my parakeet, and eventually I borrowed a friend's dog.

I remember tethering the animal to one of the legs of my heavy green armchair. I did not want him to wander off into another century and become irretrievably lost. It could prove embarrassing.

I sent him boldly off to the year 20,000 and when I brought him back ten minutes later, he seemed none the worse for wear and even yawned a bit.

According to my calculations I had transferred him 20,000 years into the future, but how did I really *know* that he had been there?

So, inevitably I found myself sitting in the chair and staring at the small portable control mechanism in the palm of my hand. How far ahead would I set the dial? A thousand years? Or should I approach this with caution and try for ten years? Twenty?

I remember finally smiling. It probably made no difference. Might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb and 20,000 years seemed a good journey.

I pressed the button.

Now Professor Layton lit a cigar. "And what kind of a world did you find?"

"Rather green," I said. "Quite overgrown. You see—as I learned later—it had been some 14,000 years since it happened and there had been an almost complete recovery. Of the vegetation, at least."

"Since *what* happened?"

"The atomic wars, and hydrogen, and cobalt, and all those things."

Professor Layton snorted. "I might have expected to hear that. So there had been a complete recovery as far as the vegetation went? What about the people? There *were* people? Or weren't there?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "There were people."

"Mutations? Or something of that nature?"

"No. The people looked very much like we look today, except that they were rapidly dying out."

"Radiation? Contaminated atmosphere?"

"No. As I mentioned before, that had all passed. The air was quite pure and healthy. No, the change was within them. Their minds?"

"What was wrong with their minds?"

I smiled rather apologetically. "Well, it was almost as though the human race had become tired of it all and decided that it would cease to exist. I transported myself to a dozen different places on the face of the earth and the situation seemed to be identical wherever I went. I would estimate that the population of the entire earth had declined to less than one hundred thousand."

Layton ran his fingers through his hair. "And you communicated with them? I suppose they all spoke English?"

"No. As a matter of fact, their languages seemed to have regressed to hardly more than gutturals. But I could *see* that the intelligence was still there. It was only that their *will* to live—to learn, to survive—seemed to have left them."

Layton waved an angry finger. "And you claim that you . . . *you* managed to. . . ." He pulled himself together. "How much time did you spend there altogether?"

"One week. It was all rather interesting and I did feel a bit like a tourist."

"One week?" He showed teeth. "And I suppose you encountered some sort of space-time warp? One week of time in the future is but a moment of the present?"

"No," I said. "Actually the time exchange rate was one for one, so to speak. One hour of our present is

equal to one hour of the future—one year, one year—one lifetime, one lifetime." I sighed. "You have no idea what just my appearance among them meant. I seemed to be a catalyst. I became their leader immediately—by default, I imagine—but as long as I gave them direction they would do anything I wanted, including just living. Frankly, it all rather embarrassed me."

Layton seemed to bite on his cigar. "How far into the future did you say this machine could take you?"

"Twenty-one thousand years," I said. "That seems to be the limit."

"And so you traveled 20,000 years into the future and found that the human race was on the verge of extinction?"

"Yes."

"And naturally this worried you?"

"Well, yes."

He showed teeth again. "In that case, instead of worrying, why didn't you immediately take your time machine *another* thousand years into the future and see for yourself whether the human race was or was not saved?"

"I did."

There was a silence while he studied me suspiciously. "And? It was saved?"

I nodded. "Yes. Things turned out quite nicely."

He took a deep breath. "In that *one* week you managed to—"

"Good Heavens, no," I said. "Saving the human race took a lifetime."

"And *you* did it?"

"No."

He frowned and sat up a bit in the green chair. "Then who did?"

"You," I said, and pressed the button.

OBEDIENCE SCHOOL

John Lutz

Maric's chauffeur was waiting on the dock, standing quietly by a very long, very expensive speedboat. He tipped his uniform cap neatly to William Brent and smiled.

Brent introduced himself.

"Yes, sir," the chauffeur replied, and moved into position to help him into the boat. He had apparently been given Brent's description.

They sat quietly, each mildly hypnotized by the rhythmic, somewhat choppy gray waves as the boat's engines roared and they nosed swiftly out into the glittering bay. The engines settled into a steady beat as the speedboat reached and held a fast, gently bucking speed. Beyond the rigid back of the chauffeur, beyond the raised bow of the boat, Brent could vaguely make out the purple-hued shoreline of Candle Island, where he was going to have dinner with none other than the Great Maric.

The boat was tied at Maric's private dock, alongside a spotless cabin cruiser, and Brent and the chaffeur began to walk silently up the long gravel path that led to the huge house. Candle Island was about a mile long and a little over half a mile wide at its widest point.

There were three or four private residences on it, but Brent wondered if the others were as impressive as the Great Maric's. The center of the house, the original house, no doubt, was white-shingled and had ancient wood pillars supporting a high porch roof. On either side of the original house were low, modern, brick wings stretching over a hundred feet. It looked somehow like a huge wood and stone bird that had settled to rest atop the hill.

The sun was going down as the maid opened the door. She ushered Brent into a large, plushly furnished den. A glass of sherry was on a tray on a small marble-topped table.

"Mr. Maric will join you shortly," the maid said, and left.

Brent sipped his sherry and looked about. The walls of the large den were paneled in deep mahogany. Brent, sitting in a remarkably comfortable red leather armchair, could see the darkening bay for miles from a window that covered almost half of the north wall. Relaxing in the softness of the chair, Brent wondered why Maric had issued him a dinner invitation, wondered how Maric had even known he was in that part of Mexico. There was no reason they should be that friendly, really. Brent had met the Great Maric only briefly, at a small party in New York. It had been interesting to be introduced to Maric, the one-time big cat trainer, the man who had thrilled Europe with his sensational trained dog act. They had talked for no more than ten minutes, and Brent had been surprised to hear from one of his friends a few weeks later that Maric had been asking about him. Apparently he'd made some kind of impression.

Brent, at first, had tried to discover a few things about the Great Maric to satisfy his curiosity, but no one seemed to know much about the man, only that he turned up in New York occasionally, and Miami, and London. He seemed to have no permanent home, sim-

ply appeared to be drifting in his later years on the vast amounts of money he'd earned as a renowned trainer of animals. Then Brent had forgotten completely about the Great Maric until two days ago, when the dinner invitation had been delivered at his hotel.

Brent sipped his drink and wondered idly if any of the big German shepherds that had made up Maric's last act were on the estates. He'd heard no barking, but then the highly trained animals that had performed throughout the world with such precise magnificence probably wouldn't bark at strangers as ordinary dogs might.

A servant opened the den door, and the Great Maric entered and smiled as the door was closed softly behind him. He was as Brent remembered him from their meeting of six months ago; completely, gleamingly bald, with a round, wizened face and a warm smile. "Mr. Brent," he said pleasantly in his slight, choppy accent, "it is a real pleasure to see you again." He advanced to shake hands.

Brent noticed that the short, stocky body still seemed to possess a spring and strength, and Maric's grip was firm.

"Your invitation surprised me," Brent said. "I didn't even know you lived in this part of the world."

"Ah, I do not like publicity," Maric said, shrugging his compact shoulders. "I've had a lifetime of publicity."

"I suppose it does get tiresome," Brent said.

A servant entered with two more sherrys on a tray. Brent took one of them and his empty glass was removed.

"Is the sherry to your liking?" Maric asked, holding up his own glass to the fading light.

"Excellent," Brent complimented.

"It is the finest." Maric smiled and sat down.

There was a long silence before Brent spoke.

"I was wondering, do you still have any of the dogs that you trained for your act? I should think you'd get attached to them."

"No," Maric said, "I sold them all. Of course you do form some attachment with your animals, but then I've seen so many animals in my lifetime. But they were remarkably intelligent, those dogs."

Brent let himself sink again into the comfortable armchair. "I saw your act some years ago in London. That a dog can be trained to overcome its fear of fire and jump through a flaming hoop . . . amazing."

"Not so, really," Maric said. His dark eyes sparkled. "Animals, like people, think mostly by association. They will learn to perform almost any unpleasant feat for a sufficiently pleasant reward, once they understand that they will be rewarded. Then, of course, once an animal has learned to do something unpleasant, he will always do it to escape an even more unpleasant punishment."

"I suppose the system differs with individual animals," Brent said.

Maric sipped his drink, obviously savoring it. "No," he said, "there is little difference. They all think basically alike. Mostly it is a problem of communication, of getting them to understand what will or will not happen if they do or do not perform. Of course, kindness is to be preferred, but with most animals threat of punishment is absolutely necessary. If they associate *not* performing with immediate pain they will perform, even unthinkingly."

"It sounds rather cruel when put that way," Brent said.

"Ach! Life is cruel," Maric said with a resigned smile. "The animals do not necessarily hate you, they learn to obey you." He glanced at his gold wristwatch. "Seven o'clock exactly. Dinner will be served, Mr. Brent, but do finish your drink."

Brent took a last sip of the deliciously dry sherry. "Call me Will, please," he said amiably, "or at least William."

"Very well, William," Maric said with a nod, his round, pleasantly etched face glowing.

They rose and walked together through the open den doors.

The table was long, covered with immaculate linen and fine silver and china. Brent and Maric were seated, then stood as a beautiful blonde girl walked into the room and sat gracefully in a chair held for her by a servant. She had a pale, finely boned face that needed no makeup, and she sat quietly, staring down at the table before her. Then, automatically, she picked up her folded linen napkin and placed it in her lap.

"My daughter, Christiana," Maric said in a low but unquestionably proud voice. "She has been retarded since she was nine. . . a childhood accident." Then louder, "This is Mr. Brent, Christiana. Will you say hello to him?"

Christiana raised blank blue eyes and smiled a smile that meant nothing. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Brent."

"The pleasure is mine," Brent said, feeling a wrench of pity that he was careful not to show.

Maric seemed to understand perfectly as he artfully guided the conversation. "Christiana is quite happy here with me and the servants to look after her. Isn't that so, Christiana?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, Father."

Maric smiled. "Sometimes I myself envy the life she leads."

A servant silently and gracefully placed cold jellied consomme before each of them.

"She's in fortunate circumstances," Brent said. He tasted the consomme and found it to be excellent.

"Yes," Maric agreed, "Christiana is one of the reasons I chose such a remote and beautiful homesite.

There are strangers who simply do not understand these things."

"The island certainly is beautiful," Brent commented. "I understand there are more homes on it, but I didn't see any as we approached."

Maric was eating enthusiastically. "They are on the other side of the island, those houses, where the land is more suitable for building. Here the wind comes in off the sea at times, so powerful that it uproots even large trees. But this house, Mr. Brent . . . William, is built to withstand any wind."

"It certainly looks it," Brent said, thinking of the low, ground-hugging brick wings.

When the consomme was finished a servant brought in tossed salads with a delicious dressing, followed by a good wine and the most succulent Rock Cornish hen that Brent had ever tasted.

"You have a superb cook," Brent said, as the table was cleared and rich, aromatic coffee was served.

Maric beamed. "She will be happy for the compliment. We have so little company that I expect she is putting herself out for you."

"All your servants seem to be experts at their jobs," Brent said.

"They are the best," Maric admitted. "A rarity these days. The decline in the quality of domestic help is one of the regrettable consequences of progress."

"And there are fewer people who can afford such help."

"That, too, is regrettable."

Brent sipped his coffee and looked over at the silent Christiana who returned his glance with a friendly, if uncomprehending, look.

"If your hunger is appeased, William, perhaps we can go into the den. I have some excellent brandy, and I heard somewhere that you enjoy a game of chess."

"True on both counts," Brent said. "And if you play

chess as well as you serve dinner I'm afraid I'm in for a beating."

The Great Maric didn't reply as they excused themselves from Christiana and went into the den.

The brandy was excellent, and after a few exploratory moves Brent found that Maric was an excellent chess player.

"I suppose you are wondering why I invited you to dinner," Maric said, moving a tall carved marble bishop to put Brent's king in check.

"The question crossed my mind," Brent said, studying the board, wondering why Maric had apparently wasted a move.

"I inquired about you after we met in New York," Maric said. "You remind me somewhat of myself as a young man . . . intelligent, sound physique, obviously of good breeding. In short, a notch above most of the people I meet in my travels."

"Well, I thank you for the compliments," Brent said, "and I only hope that they're half true." He moved a pawn to get his king out of check and Maric moved his bishop in another direction, capturing a pawn and putting Brent's knight in danger.

Brent sipped his brandy and concentrated on the board, beginning to realize that Maric was thinking several moves ahead of him. Were his compliments a maneuver to distract attention from the game? He was obviously a man who liked to finish first.

"Then, too," Maric said, "we get rather lonely here at times, at a loss for things to do."

"How do you pass your time," Brent asked, "now that your animals are gone?"

"Ah, I was quite bored with training animals anyway," Maric said. "I successfully trained animals of almost every known species to the limit of their capabilities."

Brent saw that if he moved his knight his rook would be captured in two moves. He sacrificed the knight and

concentrated his attack on Maric's queen. But within five moves Brent's own queen was captured, and from then on Maric played with a cool vengeance, seemingly trying to defeat Brent as thoroughly as possible to leave no doubt as to who was the better chess player. Within an hour Brent was defeated, though he was sure Maric could have checkmated him long before, without reducing him merely to his king and a few pawns.

"An enjoyable game," Maric said. He rang a bell and a servant entered immediately. He removed the board while another servant refilled their brandy snifters.

"I can't say enough about the efficiency of your servants," Brent said, trying to dismiss the unpleasant thought of his losing game.

"I think you lost because you moved your knights out too soon," Maric said, smiling. "And then toward the end of the game you were getting drowsy."

It was true, Brent realized suddenly. Drowsiness had crept up on him, a strangely unnatural drowsiness. "I think you're right," he said, setting down his brandy glass and standing. "I think it's time I should be leaving."

"But why don't you spend the night here?" Maric asked in his friendliest manner. "Surely you have nothing better to do. You have no acquaintances in this part of the world. Why, I'm sure no one even knows you are here."

"I'm sorry . . ." Brent murmured, but his jaws and face were becoming numb.

"Accept my hospitality, please," he heard Maric say.

Brent tried to keep his balance as the floor seemed to move beneath him. He took a hesitant step forward, a step into what seemed like a black and bottomless void . . .

When Brent awoke he was astounded to find that he was lying on a straw pallet and that his clothes had been removed. Sitting up, he saw that he was in a small, cement-walled room with a window near the tall ceiling to

let in light. The only furnishings were a table covered with a white linen tablecloth and a cupboard.

The wooden door opened and the Great Maric, wearing khaki workclothes and carrying some kind of an odd, short stick, entered.

"Maric!" Brent said, standing unsteadily. Whatever had been in the brandy was still having its effect on him, weakening him. "What the hell's going on here?"

Maric looked at him dispassionately. "Quiet," he said.

"Quiet? Why listen you . . ." Brent rushed at Maric and a tremendous shock ran through him from the electric cattle prod.

"No!" Maric said, pointing the prod menacingly toward him.

Brent rushed again. The 'No!' and the shock came almost simultaneously as Maric stepped expertly aside.

Brent rushed again and again, then fell back on the straw pallet unbelievingly. Maric walked to the cupboard, took out some paper plates and cups and some blunt, wooden flatware.

"Set the table," he said firmly to Brent.

"You're mad," Brent said, and the electric shock ripped through his body.

"Set the table."

Brent staggered to the table and fumbled with the plates. In his haste he dropped some of the wooden utensils on the floor. Instantly the shock tore through him.

"No," Maric said patiently, almost affectionately. "The fork goes always on the left side."

THE SOUND OF MURDER

Robert Colby

Owen Kendrick had not been asleep beside his wife though it was after two in the morning. He had been listening to sounds filtering from the next apartment beyond the thin walls of their bedroom. When he heard the man sobbing he got up suddenly and pulled on his clothes. As he was leaving he caught Elaine by the shoulders and gave her a firm shake. Nothing less would awaken her.

"I think that woman next door is in trouble," he told her. "A while ago I heard a sound like a shot, and then a man sobbing. I'm going over there."

Elaine sat up. "You probably imagined it. Anyway, I wouldn't interfere, Owen. No telling what you could get into."

"I'm going over," he repeated.

In her pale blue nightgown, a slight, shorthaired blonde with sharp little features, she went to the door with him. "Be careful!" she said softly.

Owen danced lightly down the three flights of stairs and went out. It was a great complex of three-storied, red-brick apartments; old, square buildings as graceless and practical as barracks, and the woman's apartment from which the disturbance had come was in the next

building, abutting the Kendricks'. The walls were of such flimsy construction that sounds above normal conversation were clearly audible.

He followed the walk to the adjoining section and entered, climbing the three flights of stairs on the balls of his feet. At the door to 401 he pressed his ear and listened for nearly a minute. He heard nothing further and now he couldn't make up his mind. He lifted his fist to knock, hesitated. Waiting there in an absolute vacuum he decided that having come this far it was time to go in.

Owen pounded with determination and when there was no answer he tried the door. It opened upon a living room identical to their own.

The man had been pacing toward a window. He paused and turned to stare over his shoulder, his face starkly outlined beneath the glare of an overhead fixture. It was obvious that he was in a state of shock, that he had been weeping. "Who're you?" he said tonelessly.

"A while ago," Owen replied, "I was quite sure I heard a shot."

"There was no shot," said the man. "Not in *this* apartment." He turned completely and advanced a few steps toward Owen.

"Before the shot," Owen continued, "I heard a woman pleading hysterically."

"What woman?" said the man. "I'm alone here." A thickly built, heavy-chested man who had curly brown hair invaded by patches of gray, he had a strong face with a boldly thrusting jaw. He wore an expensive dark blue suit.

"I also heard a man sobbing," Owen said. "What's happened here?" He stepped in and closed the door.

"You must be mistaken," said the man.

"I'm not mistaken. Our bedroom is just the other side of this apartment and the walls are not exactly soundproof."

"You have no business here," the man said in a voice drained of emotion. "Get out."

"Where is the young woman who lives in this apartment?" Owen demanded. "I don't know her name but I've seen her coming and going."

"Miss DiCarlo," he replied. "She's out of town. We're old friends and she often lets me use her place. Now beat it—I'm not going to tell you again."

Owen nodded. "All right. We'll let the police handle it. I'll call them." He backed to the door.

"Sit down," said the man. "We'll talk about it."

"Is there something to talk about?"

"Yes. I want you to understand the situation. Then, if you want to call the police, will a few minutes make any difference?"

Owen shrugged. He found a chair near the door and sat.

The man slumped on the sofa and for several moments, head lowered, remained silent. Then he said, "Believe me, I didn't kill her. She was dead when I got here just a few minutes ago. But for reasons which now I suppose I'll have to explain, I can't become involved in this."

Owen sat rigidly still. He kept his face blank. "Where?" he said. "Where is she?"

"Bedroom," said the man.

"Show me," said Owen.

"No! I can't go in there again."

"You don't have much choice. I'm not leaving you out here to run off."

"If I wanted to run off," said the man, "you couldn't stop me. I'll be right here when you come back."

Owen got up and moved through a short hallway to the bedroom, from which a pale light seeped through a partly opened door. At the threshold he took a deep breath and entered.

She was lying on the bed in a negligee, one arm flung

across her chest, the other at her side with the hand balled up into a tight fist. She was a young woman, still in her twenties, with jet dark hair at shoulder length, enclosing a face that was prettily fashioned but for slightly bucked teeth, their protrusion exaggerated in death by lips drawn back in a grimace.

Her eyes had been a lovely azure blue. One of these, the left, was sprung widely open in the fixed stare of oblivion. The other was much more grimly vacant since it was entirely missing, having been drilled back through her skull by a bullet apparently fired from a gun held at little or no distance.

Owen wheeled at once and left the room. He found the stranger exactly as he had left him, slouched over with his hands between his legs, head bowed. Owen regained his chair and for a space neither spoke but sat in morbid silence.

"I'm gong to be sick any minute," Owen told the man, "so whatever you have to say, make it fast. What's your name?"

"Magruder. William Magruder. I'm president of a realty company under the same name. We own and manage a score of apartment and office buildings in town. Beverly, Miss DiCarlo, was a legal secretary. She worked for my attorney and I saw her frequently. Sometimes she brought legal papers for me to sign. We became close, I fell in love with her."

He sighed, worked one hand inside the other, as if smoothing on gloves. "It's a time-worn situation. I loved Beverly and if I had met her long ago . . . But I have a wife and children whom I also love. Further, I own a multimillion dollar business and the complications were enormous.

"I did many things for Beverly in a financial way—bought her a new car and clothes, refurnished her apartment, supplied her with more money than she could ever make. She refused to quit her job, wouldn't budge from this apartment. She felt that our relation-

ship would end sooner or later and she didn't want to make any drastic changes in her pattern of living."

"That brings us to tonight," said Owen.

"Yes. Well, I had been working late on some tax matters with my accountant. I was planning to stay at a hotel where I have a suite the year round, because I live nearly two hours drive from the city. We quit about eleven, then we had something to eat and we talked shop over a couple of drinks.

"Shortly after one, on an impulse, I called Beverly and told her I was coming out here. She sounded strained. She spoke haltingly, as if she couldn't find words to explain that she was tired and didn't want to see me. I'm afraid I was insistent and a bit angry. I said I was on my way and hung up.

"Now, I'm positive that when I talked to her there was someone here. Probably she told him to leave and probably she was forced to explain that she had someone else on the string who came first. There was an argument and the man killed her. When I arrived she was just as you saw her." He paused. "Do you believe me?"

"I don't know. Why should I believe you?"

"Because, my friend, if I were the killer, you wouldn't be alive at this moment. One more life would mean nothing to me. Since only you can identify me, I would get rid of you without hesitation. Isn't that perfectly logical?"

Owen nodded agreement. "I suppose that's true," he said wryly.

"You suppose? That's not good enough. You must *know!* You must be positive!" His voice rose. "Look here, Mr.—"

"Kendrick, Owen Kendrick."

"Well, look, Kendrick, I have a gun in my pocket. See?" He produced a snub-nosed .38 revolver. "When I'm out late at night I often carry this gun because once I was attacked and robbed." He extended the gun carefully, until it was pointing directly at Owen. "Now, if I

had murdered that dear girl with this gun, wouldn't it be the most natural and logical thing in the world for me to shoot you dead here and now so that you would not be a witness against me?"

"Maybe, maybe not," said Owen. "But I'm not impressed by the .38, so you can put it away."

Magruder stood and approached with the gun. He held the weapon so that the barrel was barely an inch from Owen's face. "I wonder if I can imagine what thought is passing through your mind at this very moment, Kendrick. Among other things, it has certainly occurred to you that this could be the very same gun which killed poor Beverly. Am I right, Kendrick?"

"I don't know," he said. "How could I know?"

"How could you know!" Magruder thundered. "Your nose should tell you, of course. If this gun had just been fired, there would be the smell of gunpowder. Can you detect a trace of that smell?"

Owen sniffed reluctantly. "No," he said honestly, "There is no smell of gunpowder."

"Of course not!" said Magruder. "Because this is not the gun which killed her. She had her own automatic which she kept here for protection. It used to be in the drawer of her nighttable, but now it's missing. Obviously, someone knew it was there and used it to kill her."

He lowered the .38, put it in his pocket, returned to his chair. "I didn't mean to scare you," he said quietly. "I simply had to convince you, that's all. It's been a dreadful shock and I'm a bit off balance. Sorry."

"My wife is waiting," said Owen. "She knows that I heard a shot and came over here to investigate. If I don't get back soon she may become alarmed and call the police."

"The phone is over there," said Magruder. "Tell her there's been a little trouble but nothing serious. A gun went off by accident. You'll be home in ten minutes."

Better to play along, Owen decided. He moved toward the phone.

"Don't touch it!" Magruder warned. "Use your handkerchief. We don't want to leave prints to confuse the police, do we? I've already wiped clean anything I might have touched."

Owen lifted the receiver with his handkerchief and dialed. He gave Elaine substantially the story suggested by Magruder.

"Of course," said Magruder, as Owen again sat down, "you'll have to tell her the truth later. But for now, it's better this way. Just one more thing. If you'll look on the table beside you, you'll notice a cigarette lighter. I saw it there when I came out from the bedroom. Don't touch it because I'm sure the prints of the man who murdered Beverly are on it. Just bend down and look especially at the monogram."

It was a handsome gold pocket lighter, slender, streamlined. Between two rubylike stars across the face of the lighter there was a monogram. Leaning close under the light of the lamp, Owen was able to read the initials, L.G.

"I have one just like it," Magruder said. He crossed the room and handed an identical lighter to Owen. It bore Magruder's initials. "She got mine when she was on vacation," he said wearily, taking the lighter from Owen and going back to his chair. "It seems now that she bought both lighters at the same time and gave that duplicate to this other man." He sighed. "I'm sorry for Beverly, of course. But now that I know she betrayed me, my one thought is to protect myself and my family. The relationship I had with her was an absolute secret from everyone, and it's got to be kept a secret at any cost."

"D'you have any idea who this man is with the initials L.G.?" Owen asked.

"No. She kept him secret from me. And until tonight, I don't think he knew I existed, either. Even so, she wouldn't have given him my name. She was too clever

to risk losing a sucker like me as long as I kept the money coming."

"Well," said Owen, "none of this changes my position. Are you asking me to forget that I saw you here minutes after the woman was murdered?"

"Yes. Emphatically! The police will catch the man who murdered her, and since I'm innocent, it serves no purpose to expose me in a messy front-page scandal that will break up my home, destroy my reputation and hurt my business."

"Even if I were positive you didn't kill her," said Owen, "it would be a lot to ask of me. If I were caught concealing facts from the police I might go to prison as an accessory. Further, I'd have to convince my wife that she should also keep silent."

"There's nothing so convincing as money when you don't have it," said Magruder. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm assistant manager in a drugstore around the corner."

Magruder nodded. "If you'll come to my office at noon tomorrow, I'll have something for you. Not a bribe, mind you; just a gift to reward you for helping me at the most crucial time of my life. Shall we say ten thousand? In cash?"

At this time Owen Kendrick had slightly more than three hundred dollars in his checking account, most of which would be depleted by current bills. In his whole life he had never been able to save more than a thousand dollars, this for the express purpose of buying a secondhand car. To have a sum of five thousand all in one piece had been one of the dream goals of his existence, and ten thousand, in his limited mind, was the key to paradise.

Nevertheless, he hesitated. This was partly because he was numbed by the offer, and partly because he did not want Magruder to glimpse the truth—that for ten thousand his loyalty and silence could be bought in-

stantly, even to shield the truth in a case of murder.

"Well," he said after a proper interval of pursing his lips, frowning and gazing upward into space for heavenly guidance, "that does seem a rather generous offer, and since there's a lot at stake here, I'm inclined to accept. However, I want you to know, Mr. Magruder, that if for one minute I thought you really had—"

"Exactly," said Magruder. "Shall we consider it settled, then?" He got up quickly and gave Owen his card. "At noon tomorrow, Kendrick." He smiled gravely and stuck out his hand.

A few minutes later, in a wild gush of words, Owen was relating the entire episode to Elaine. ". . . And when he pointed that gun at me, then came over to my chair with a look of murder in his eye and stuck the barrel right under my nose—I tell you, Elaine, I was certain he would kill me. But I was as cool and calm as vanilla ice cream."

"Ten thousand!" said Elaine, sipping her coffee and reaching across the table for a sweet roll. "If we lived to be a hundred, and saved every spare penny, we'd never have that much money all in one gorgeous pile!"

"Yeah," said Owen with a grin. "Ten thousand green friends all waiting to obey our slightest command." He was thoughtful. "But d'you think he did it? How can we be sure?"

Elaine shrugged. "Who knows? And at this point, does it really matter?"

Next morning, Owen phoned in sick. Promptly at noon he stepped off the elevator onto the thirty-first floor, all of which was devoted exclusively to the William Magruder Company. Then, feeling as if the night's frantic dream were merely continued with a change of scene, he moved across the burgundy carpet to the quiet dignity of the reception area.

A blonde girl asked, "May I help you, sir?"

"My name is Kendrick, Owen Kendrick."

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Magruder is expecting you.

Through the double doors, turn right and follow the corridor to the end. Last door on your left, sir."

Mr. Magruder's secretary was gray, solemn and crisply polite. "He's waiting for you, sir. He has an appointment for lunch, so we'll have to hurry." She announced him on the intercom.

William Magruder sat behind a teak desk in a corner office larger than the Kendrick living room. His blue suit had been replaced by a charcoal gray, and in the new setting he did not seem a man recently exposed to murder and the threat of ruin. Owen Kendrick might have been an insurance salesman granted a grudging three minutes of the great man's time before lunch.

Magruder did not rise or say a word of greeting. He simply nodded toward a chair and immediately reached into a desk drawer, removed a cardboard portfolio and handed it silently across the desk. Owen fiddled nervously with the string and lifted the flap, exposing bills in large denominations. He was tempted to count, or at least finger, the bills but did neither. Instead he closed the flap and tied it awkwardly.

"Ten thousand, as agreed," Magruder said, and waited, his face stonily composed.

"Yes," replied Owen, "as agreed. Rest assured, Mr. Magruder, and I speak also for my wife, your secret will always be safe with us."

"I'm sure of it," Magruder answered with a tight smile.

"But as I said last night, Mr. Magruder, no amount of money could persuade me if I thought for a minute that you really had—"

"Precisely," said Magruder with a curt wave of dismissal. "I knew at once that you were a man of integrity and there's no need to discuss it. In fact, from this moment there is no need for any further contact between us. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now if you'll excuse me . . ." This time he did

rise from his chair but when Owen extended his hand, Magruder seemed unaware. Well, Owen was not sensitive. Besides, the warmest friends a man could ever have were tucked under his arm when he left.

The body of Beverly DiCarlo was discovered late the same afternoon and the story broke in the morning papers. The police had at least one good lead and expected an arrest within twenty-four hours, it was reported. Sure enough, a certain Lyle Gaddis, whose initials were on a lighter found in Miss DiCarlo's apartment, was hustled off to jail that evening. He was an auto salesman who had sold Beverly DiCarlo a new car. His business card had been found in her desk. When confronted with the lighter, he readily admitted that it was his, that she had given it to him as a gift.

After an argument, which had to do with her refusal to marry him or to date him exclusively, he had returned the lighter and had not seen her for nearly a week, or so he claimed. However, Gaddis was booked and held for the Grand Jury when it was found that a .22 caliber automatic was registered in his name. The shell casing from such a gun had been ejected near Beverly DiCarlo's bed, the matching slug had come to a halt in the mattress beneath her head.

At his trial, Lyle Gaddis testified that he had loaned the pistol to Miss DiCarlo when she told him that a strange man had followed her home one night. She had kept the gun in the drawer of her nighttable, Gaddis said. It was never found.

Despite his further testimony that, under pressure, Beverly DiCarlo had confessed to him that she was involved with another man who supplied her with money and gifts, including the new car, Gaddis was convicted when no such man could be named or produced by his defense. He was sent to prison for life.

Meanwhile, Owen and Elaine Kendrick leased a furnished house in an exclusive area. Owen left his job and rented an impressive new car to bolster his status in the

community. They soon discarded old friends and acquaintances in favor of their new neighbors, and Owen gave himself a fictional background in Big Business on the West Coast, pretending to be retired prematurely with an income from shrewd investments. To buttress their position, the Kendricks gave intimate little parties for selected couples.

It was not nouveau riche extravagance; there was a plan. Owen was convinced that one of the specially cultivated executives among the group would offer him an important position. Thus, from time-to-time he planted hints that he was becoming bored with idleness and regretted his decision to retire in the very prime of his life. Casually, he implied that he would be open to an offer in the top echelon of business, providing the offer were an exciting one at a salary commensurate with his ability.

Owen, a good-looking sort who had a way with women, turned his full charm upon the wives of the high brass he was conning, especially when these were young and attractive types. Elaine grew jealous and there were some stormy battles, though she had the good sense to hold her temper until they were alone. Owen defended himself, with a degree of honesty, that it was all part of the plan; any fool knew that very often the best approach to a man was through his wife. He merely neglected to mention that he was thoroughly enjoying this particular phase of the game.

The scheme might have worked if Owen had not overplayed his part. He had been a bit *too* charming with the wives of certain moguls, while others could not find a spot for him that was worthy of his own estimate of himself. Openings for key executives were rare, they apologized. Since it was too late to downgrade himself, Owen simply smiled and shrugged and said that he could afford to wait.

In spirit, at least, he could wait forever; in practical truth he could not hang on much longer. Nearly six

months had passed and, after all expenses, there was barely a thousand in the bank and a mountain of bills.

"What on earth shall we do now?" Elaine said on a dreary morning when the skies had delivered rain in sobering buckets beyond their bedroom window. "If we don't do something fast and terribly clever, we'll have to sneak away to some bug-trap hovel while you find a job as clerk in a drugstore."

"Me in a drugstore?" Owen howled. "Only idiots and flunkies work in drugstores. I've had it with that way of life!"

"Well, you're the big, big brain," she sneered. "You got us into this. C'mon, big brain, get us out. You knew it was coming to an end. Didn't you think of the future? Didn't you once look ahead?"

"Ahh, be quiet," he said. "I've known all along what I'd have to do if it ever came to this."

Abruptly he got up and began to dress in his best blue suit.

"I was rather expecting you," said William Magruder from behind his teak desk. He looked neither angry nor disturbed. With a silver pocket lighter, he flamed a cigarette and leaned back comfortably in his swivel chair. "Yes," he continued, "sooner or later, you were bound to come back. They always do."

"They?" said Owen.

"Your kind, that is," Magruder smiled, not unpleasantly.

"My kind? I resent that, Magruder."

"What you resent," said Magruder in a yet reasonable tone of voice, "is that you didn't have what it takes to hold your seat on the gravy train to the end of the line." He paused, allowing smoke to drift in lazy plumes from his aquiline nose. "You know, Kendrick, people who stumble across the kind of money they could never earn seldom have the ability to hold onto it. Perhaps, in their foolish optimism, they believe that having smiled

once, the gods will smile again and again, to infinity."

"Never mind the lecture," said Owen, uneasy in the face of the imperturbable when outrage was expected. "All I want from you is another ten thousand."

"Therefore," Magruder went on, "knowing that you would return when the well went dry, I was prepared for you. I made a couple of phone calls to learn the alternatives in handling a situation like this. There is only one. Either you appease a dangerous enemy, or you destroy him. I chose to appease—just once more. Remember that!"

He opened a bottom drawer and after a moment of searching produced an envelope. He passed it across the desk to Owen. It contained a signed check for five thousand, made out to Owen Kendrick.

"You mean," said Owen, "that you had this check here for me all this time!"

"Oh, yes," he answered. "I made it out the very next day after you left. You see, I know exactly how much extra I was willing to be taxed for your silence. It's worth another five thousand to me, not a penny more. Not that I can't afford it, but I have no intention of being caught and held in a web of blackmail which would certainly continue and escalate without end. Five thousand—that's my absolute limit. Come back again at your own risk."

"Is that a threat?"

"Yes. Definitely! It's more than a threat, it's a fact. All but the final arrangements have been made. With one phone call, I can buy two murders in the most professional style. Do you believe that?"

"Yes," said Owen; and he did.

"Now, I'm going to give you and your wife three days to get your affairs in order, and then I want you to leave town. You will place yourselves at least a thousand miles removed, and there will be no return. Understand?"

"Perfectly," said Owen, and put the check in his pocket.

"D'you think he was bluffing?" asked Elaine as she studied the check. "Would he really have us murdered?"

"No, I don't think he was bluffing, and yes, I do think he would have us murdered."

"In that case," said Elaine, "he probably did shoot that woman. Would he pay fifteen thousand to keep us from talking if he hadn't? Would he be willing to have us killed to shut us up permanently if he were innocent?"

"I don't know," said Owen, "and I'd prefer not to think about it too carefully."

She looked up sharply. "Why?"

"Because if he murdered Beverly DiCarlo, the wrong man was sent to prison."

"I see what you mean," she answered. "Well, let's get packing, shall we?"

They moved to San Diego. In case of trouble, it was close to the Mexican border. Having learned how quickly money can vanish when not supported by income, Owen banked the five thousand, then went out in search of a drugstore with an opening in management. Before their marriage, Elaine had been a traveling representative for a cosmetics firm; she found a similar job. Her territory was within the state. Sometimes she was gone three days, occasionally she stayed an entire week.

For Owen it was a made-to-order situation. Long since bored with Elaine, it gave him a chance to play the field without the risk of leaving her. That would be dangerous. She knew too much about him and, in vengeance, she might find a way to have him jailed as a blackmailing accessory to murder.

It was at a time when Elaine was in Sacramento that

Owen took his latest conquest to a night club in a hotel fronting the ocean at nearby La Jolla. In contrast to Elaine, the girl had beautiful tar-black hair which tumbled down below her shoulders in scented waves. They danced to moody music in slow tempo, provided by a five-piece combo; very romantic, with the waves pummeling the shore just below.

There was an intermission, and they sat at a table by an open window. He lit her cigarette with a smartly designed gold lighter set with two ruby-like stars, then placed the lighter on the table. She gazed at it curiously for a moment, then picked it up.

"What a beautiful lighter!" she said. "I've never seen one quite like it." She held it close, squinting. "Complete with your initials, too. My my, where did you get it?" Her jealous little smile hinted of intrigue.

"It was a gift," he replied. "Came across it today when I was going through a lockbox of secret mementoes. I'd almost forgotten that I had it. Then, on a whim, I brought it along tonight."

"I suppose some pretty girl gave it to you."

"Well, I used to think she was pretty. But that was long ago and she turned out to be a horrible person—sadistic. I was in love with her, even after I learned that she had a couple of other guys in her stable. She had given each of them a monogrammed lighter identical to this one, but for the initials."

"Really!"

"Really," said Owen, rushing on because it was a chance to unburden himself without fear of discovery. "She wouldn't give up her other two lovers, so I stopped seeing her. That took willpower, believe me, because by then I had a big thing for her. It went both ways. She was furious when I wouldn't let her have her cake and eat it.

"Well, there was a vacancy in this apartment that was beside mine. Somehow she got wind of it, and she moved right in. Soon I was able to recognize her boy-

friends coming and going. She was so close and the walls were so thin, I could sometimes hear them, too."

He gazed darkly at the memory. "That was her way of torturing me—her kind of kick."

"How awful for you!" exclaimed the girl, her face wrenched by a pretense of sympathy. "I'll bet you could have killed her!"

"With pleasure!" he said. For a moment his face tightened in anger, but under her stare he grinned suddenly and then they both laughed.

Later, as they walked arm-in-arm along the beach, he took the lighter from his pocket and made a small ceremony of winding up mightily and tossing it far out into the ocean.

JOURNEY WITH A MURDERER

Donald Honig

Mark was the kind of little boy whom you disliked on sight. One of the reasons for this was that there was really nothing little boy about him. He was unfortunately without a shred of adolescent charm, eleven years old, and already he had the somewhat warped and sinister look that comes to children who are precocious, malicious, and spoiled. Of average height, his head was just a trifle too large for his thin body, giving him an appearance of a sunflower on a stalk. He wore silver-rimmed glasses behind which his eyes alternately glowed and leered like a mad scholar's. His teeth were slightly bucked, so that when his lips came together they looked like a superior smug.

Mark had a talent for frustrating and aggravating people, and, as is the case with people of exceptional talent, he found great enjoyment and satisfaction in exercising it. He was quite intelligent, and did not deign to mix with the other children. He was by temperament and preference a loner at all times.

When the Camp Director phoned me a day or two before we left for Camp Tomahawk in the Adirondacks, he told me I was going to have Mark Russell in my group.

I must say I was, at first, privately pleased upon hearing that I was to have him in my group. I thought I could give him the sympathetic treatment he would so obviously need. A few months previously the boy had been victimized by a tragedy. His parents had died in their beds, mysteriously killed by carbon monoxide poisoning. Mr. and Mrs. Russell had been quite prominent people. Mark was an only child, so it was all very sad.

The police were at a loss to explain the deaths and, though they suspected murder, were unable to get much further than that. The son (the newspapers and everyone else remarked upon his poise and his "bravery") went to live with an aunt, and now the aunt had shipped him off to summer camp and he was coming into my group with five other little fellows.

I was prepared to like Mark. Young counselors are prepared to like everyone. We leave the hot city assured of the fact that we, and only we, will be able to make the children happy for the summer. We are prepared to teach them to swim, dance, play the guitar and sing folk songs, and to teach them baseball and basketball and all about nature and astronomy. We are prepared to be patient, sympathetic, understanding, and helpful, for we have all read at least one book by the indisputable Freud.

After one week I hated Mark. I hated him with a loathing that astonished me. Everyone in camp hated him. But I hated him the most, for he was my charge. I was responsible for him.

While the rest of the camp was engaged in activities, he would stand off by himself, arms folded, legs crossed at the ankles, smiling at me with those smug lips. It was my job to engage him in one activity or another. If I moved toward him he ran away. And if he ran away I had to chase him through brier and bramble. I would gladly have let him go, and so would the Camp Director except that, in the latter's words, "If we misplace a

child, it will give the camp publicity of an irreparably bad nature."

Mark wasn't full of mischievous mischief. No throwing of ketchup at the table for him. This little sadist would whisper to one child or another that he had just heard that one of their parents had died. More than once some wailing child went flying across the length of the camp, rent with Mark's sadistic lie. Several times I caught him torturing some species of wildlife that he had captured, a frog or garter snake or some such thing.

And then there were those other times, when he went off by himself and it was not to torment me or make me run after him. It was when he wanted to be alone, when he began to brood. He did it most often in the rain, when we were confined to our bunks. I would watch him putting on his raincoat, his rubbers, his Maine fisherman's rain hat, and he would stare back at me, waiting for me to deny him permission. But I never did. I had learned that it simply did not work.

I would watch him from the window. He invariably went down to the lakeside and there would stand or pace, watching the rain spill into the lake. He could look so forlorn that even I, his most devoted foe, could feel a twinge of pity for his loneliness.

I ought to tell a word about myself. It has some bearing to the story. I was no bargain in the camp. Oh, I did all jobs as best I could, was honest and forthright and hard-working. But I came to be known as the "Foul-up Counselor". It developed that I could not swim, for one thing. Oh, *I* had known about that, but I had neglected to inform the Camp Director of it when he hired me.

"I took it for granted," he said to me, "that any sensible human being who applied for a counselor's job could swim."

I was abashed. He had asked me to take a few deserving lads on a canoe trip down the lake. I told him I would gladly do it, but that if the canoe overturned the boys would have to save me, instead of me them. I did

take several canoe trips down the lake, where it was very lonely and beautiful, but that was in the company of other counselors. I got to know the lake quite well and loved it, despite the fact that if the water were an inch or two over my head it could have drowned me.

Not swimming was one thing. I would not take a group on an overnight camping trip because I was allergic to something or other. And there were other things.

So there I was, having to work doubly hard to earn my keep, and stuck with Mark Russell in my group, a boy who made my life and my job miserable, whose recalcitrance detracted from the general enjoyment.

I tried to give my loner the benefit of every doubt. I theorized, in the beginning, that perhaps the recent, brutal loss of both parents had temporarily demented the boy. If that was the case then he had no business being among normal, happy children. But before the summer was over I had changed my theory. I was convinced that the boy had murdered his parents.

Why did I think this? Well, certainly not for any reason that would have lasted five seconds in a court of law. I had nothing to bring to even the most zealous district attorney. It was simply my own intuition, biased maybe, but yet there it was.

Mark had a way of staring at me. He would do it during the rest periods that were a part of the daily routine after lunch and before the afternoon activity. I would be lounging on my bunk when I would happen to glance across at him and there he would be, stretched out on his cot, hands clasped behind his head, those inhuman little eyes—so inhuman they seemed almost part of his glasses—watching me. And he would be wearing his smug little smile. I would stare back at him. 'He wants me to know something,' I'd think. There was something he wanted me to know which he could not tell.

One night, before putting them to bed, I told the boys a story. It was a good camp story, one with a moral. It

involved the taking of human life and the severe punishment that befell the slayer. After telling the tale and reciting the moral to my solemnly engrossed little band of boys, I glanced at Mark. He was staring directly at me, one eyebrow slightly arched, as if to say, "Is that so?"

The cynicism of that arched eyebrow chilled me. I think it was after that when I became convinced I had a murderer in my group.

I mentioned this suspicion rather casually, half-jokingly, one night to one of my fellow counselors. He seemed startled, then interested.

"But why should he have done it?" he asked.

"The little monster doesn't need a reason," I said. "Why does he do any of the things that he does? He's just vicious and malicious. Maybe his parents wouldn't buy him something he wanted, and he became piqued and took his revenge."

"But the police don't even know how the carbon monoxide got into the room," my friend said. "I remember reading about it. They don't know a thing about any of it—motive, method *or* murderer. And did it ever occur to you that it might somehow have been an accident?"

No, it never occurred to me, not from the way that boy looked at me. No accident.

But he was still a young boy and no matter how precocious or self-reliant he might have been, many of his instincts, impulses and emotions were immature. As the summer wore on I became more and more convinced that Mark wanted badly to tell me something, and not because he liked, trusted or respected me in any way. I felt, in fact, that he rather strongly disliked me and would have liked to shock me with some bit of information, shock me, and also give himself the opportunity to brag. To keep a secret is a difficult thing for a child, and when that secret contains evidence of his own prowess or ingenuity, then it becomes the more troublesome to keep unspoken.

By mid-summer I was the only one in camp who paid any attention to Mark. The Camp Director had given up all hope of disciplining the boy, of getting him to cooperate, and as long as Mark did not interfere with the activities of the other children he had permission to do as he pleased, providing he remained on the camp premises.

I suppose my increasing interest in him was evident to Mark. I believe he was sensitive and intelligent enough to perceive it. That it pleased him I was certain.

The counselors had one day off a week. I usually got out of camp as early as I could on my day off. But on this particular day I remained in camp. I didn't know why, at first, but it gradually dawned on me that my reason was to try and get Mark alone. Why? I couldn't say. It wasn't possible to talk to him. Maybe he would talk to me.

There was a softball game in camp that day, with the boys teamed against each other and all those not participating were sitting on the sidelines watching. In all this excitement it was simple for Mark to slip off and be on his own, as was his wont.

Sitting in my bunk I could hear the cheering coming up from the field. Suddenly he walked in. He looked at me as if I were not there.

"Hello, Mark," I said.

He said nothing. He went to his cot and sat down.

"I've got an idea," I said. "It's my day off. Why don't we get into a canoe and go exploring down the lake? I've heard there are some lovely spots down there."

He thought about it. And it seemed that he was deciding more than just the idea of going canoeing; it seemed that he was considering much more, his face was quite pensive. He passed me a long, searching glance, apparently uninhibited by the fact that I was staring back at him. Then, abruptly, he stood up.

"All right," he said. "It's a good idea."

We went down to the canoe rack. Together we lifted

one off and turned it over. Mark got in. I shoved off and then hopped in with the paddle. I kept the canoe in near the shore for a while. When we were further down the lake I paddled out more toward the center. The lake waters passed under an old steel bridge and then narrowed considerably on the other side of it as the shoreline greenery closed in.

We saw no one, heard nothing. Mark sat in the prow, looking at me. He appeared to be mildly amused by something. Once he put his thin arms on the gunwales and began to rock the canoe. By the way I looked up he saw that he had frightened me.

"Hey," I said, "take it easy."

"It's true that you can't swim, isn't it?" he asked.

"Sadly true," I said, stroking the water with the paddle. "So be careful."

"I can swim like a fish," he said, not pridefully, but merely to acquaint me with a fact, and perhaps one that I should bear in mind.

After a long silence, he said, "Why did you bring me with you?"

"I thought maybe we should have a talk, that maybe you might *want* to talk to me."

"Why should I?" he asked.

"I don't know. I simply had the feeling that you might want to, that's all."

"You mean there's something you want me to tell you," he said.

"Only if you want to. Only if you trust me."

"Oh I trust you all right," he said. To my ear there was an unfriendly sound in that, an intimation that he had me in his power, that I had no choice about being trusted. "What do you want to know?"

It was very bluntly put. It was not a vague question. It had a let's-get-down-to-business ring. He was sitting back quite comfortably, quite frankly, staring at me.

I paddled silently for a few moments, thinking what I

should say. Then it occurred to me to be the same as he was . . . frank.

"I was curious as to what you knew about the death of your parents."

He put his head to the side and grinned, not at all upset or surprised, not a shred of poise gone.

"Why?" he asked.

"Curiosity," I said cryptically.

"Well, I know a great deal about it, if you must know."

"You mean things you didn't tell the police?"

"That's right." He seemed to be enjoying this. He leaned forward and stared intently at me. "Do you want to know how that carbon monoxide got into their bedroom?" He was no longer a young boy but something dark and twisted.

I said nothing, looking over the side, staring at where the paddle noiselessly stroked.

"It was very simple," he said quietly, his voice becoming interested in what it was saying. "I simply slipped out after they were sleeping, pulled the car—I know how to drive, you know—pulled it into the alley under their window and left the motor running. Then I took a long rubber tube, attached one end to the exhaust pipe and pushed the other end through the ventilator. That's all. When it was finished I put the car back and went to sleep in my own room—with the windows wide open."

"Why?" I asked.

"I didn't like them," he said, a bit annoyed. He was peering at me quite intently again. His thin arms rose and settled on the gunwales, his fingers gripping tightly. "So, now you have this information," he said. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know," I said. I had stopped paddling. The canoe was motionless on the still water. We were about fifty yards from either shore.

"I can tell you," he said. "You'll do nothing. Because I can turn over this canoe in two seconds and drop you into the lake like a stone—before you have a chance to do anything about it."

And he did. A child can upset a canoe, and this child did. With a quick twist of his body he turned it over and we both went tumbling into the lake, Mark instantly swimming and splashing excitedly, like some small bloodthirsty shark.

But his excitement turned almost immediately to shock when he saw me get to my feet and stand there waist high in the shallow water.

At no time, with the brief exception of a hundred feet or so around the bridge, had we ever been in more than five feet of water. He hadn't known that, of course, but I had. But if he had overturned the canoe when we were around the bridge . . . well, his parents' murder might never have been solved, and Mark Russell would not today be in a place where he can harm no one. As for me, I would have been at the bottom of the lake.

MURDER A LA DAVY JONES

Richard Hardwick

The phone started ringing just after Sheriff Peavy stepped out and closed the door behind him. I reached across the desk, picked up the receiver, and said "Quale County Sheriff's office. Deputy Miller talking."

"Pete," the voice said, "this is Troy Dycus." Troy was one of a dozen members—along with yours truly—in a flying club that owned an old Taylorcraft. Troy had a worried sound to his voice, which worried me.

"Say, wasn't this your day with the plane?" I said. "You didn't—"

"The plane's okay, Pete," he said, anticipating me. I relaxed and leaned back. "It's—it's about something I saw awhile ago when I was flying back from up around Wolf Island. I come to that little sand spit right off o' French Inlet and I looked down and I saw something that looked like a—a *body.*"

I straightened up quick. "A what?"

"It sure looked like a body, Pete. A dead man washed up on that little beach, probably on the last flood tide. I figured Sheriff Peavy might like to know it."

"Troy," I said patiently. I'd known Troy since he was a knee high to a warthog, and he always gave me the feeling that he wasn't quite tuned in on the same fre-

quency as most other folks. "Troy, are you real sure that's what you saw? It couldn't o' been a piece of driftwood, or some marsh wrack?"

"Considering it was getting on towards dusk and a pretty stout northeaster's blowing and that beach is too soft and tricky to set the club's plane down on," he said a little peevishly, "then I'm sure as I can get! Course, maybe the sheriff ain't interested in dead bodies laying around the beaches—"

"Thanks for calling in, Troy. You did the right thing. We'll check it out."

Quale County's venerable sheriff, Dan Peavy, was across the street in the cafe having himself a cup of coffee. I took the stool next to his at the counter and told him about Troy Dycus's call. When I was done, Dan mumbled something and dug a finger down through his thick white hair and scratched his scalp. "That Dycus boy, Pete, ain't he the one with glasses about so thick?"

"That's the one, and I ain't saying he saw a body out there and I ain't saying he didn't. All I'm doing is tellin' you what—"

Dan slurped his coffee. "Have to take a boat clear around from Frenchman's Landing to get there," he mused. I could see he didn't have much faith in either Troy Dycus or his report, but he also didn't want to look like he was shirking his job. Dan sat a moment longer, then finished his coffee and wearily hauled himself to his feet. "I reckon we better go take a look, Pete. See if you can find Jerry and tell him to keep an eye on the office while we're gone."

Just before Dan and I pulled away from the office with the outboard boat towing behind the car, Jerry Sealey, Dan's other deputy, said, "You know, there just might be something to this. That Calhoun fella that worked for Lester Jagels has been missing for four or five days."

I gave Jerry a patronizing look. "Guys like that are

always on the move," I said. "He's probably in California by now."

"Or out on that sand spit. Dead." Jerry bobbed his thin head and his Adam's apple did a little dance.

I allowed myself a chuckle. Jerry was always trying to make something dramatic out of an everyday situation.

But if a last laugh was to be had, Jerry had it, because when Dan Peavy and I got out to Frenchman's Landing, launched the boat, ran down the river to the sand spit at the inlet, and started shining our flashlights around the beach, that was exactly who we found. Alton Calhoun.

It was just like Troy Dycus had said, the body lying there a couple of feet from the edge of the water, right where the outgoing tide had left it. There were no marks of any kind in the soft sand around the body. He was fully dressed, even down to his shoes and socks and a bow tie.

Except for three things. One, his hands were tied behind him. Two, his ankles were bound together and pulled up in back and the rope tied to that on his wrists. And three, another stout piece of Manila rope was knotted tightly about his waist. When Alton Calhoun fell in, he had some help.

"Well, the Dycus boy was right," Dan said. He leaned and gingerly picked up the loose end of the rope that was tied around the body. "Here, Pete, have a look at this."

I stepped closer and shone my light on the end of the rope. It was worn through and the frayed ends below the knot were stained a brownish-red. "What do you make of it, Dan?"

"Looks like it might o' been tied to a piece of rusty iron or steel, something with a rough edge that wore through the rope."

"Then somebody must have tied him to something and tossed him overboard . . ."

Dan nodded. "So he'd sink to the bottom of the ocean where nobody'd ever find him. It sure looks that way."

I lifted my eyes and looked off into the darkness toward the harsh sound of the sea breaking endlessly on the lonely beach. The same sound it made when it pulled Calhoun up from its depths and spit him out on the shore. I felt a chill go up my spine. "Let's get on back to town, huh, Dan?"

We carried the late Alton Calhoun to Faircloth's Funeral Home, where Doc Stebbins and Jerry met us. Doc was grumbling about missing his favorite cowboy show when he started the preliminary examination. While Doc examined the body, I looked through the deceased's clothing. "Nothing here but his wallet and some seaweed caught inside his coat," I said. I went through the wallet. There was nothing of importance in it.

When Doc was done he said, "Looks like he was drowned all right. 'Course, the autopsy'll give us the whole story. I'll attend to that in the morning."

"Any of you know anything much about this fella?" Dan asked.

"Well, I heard around that Calhoun was a kind of a ladies' man," Jerry volunteered.

"That so?" said Dan, scratching the side of his nose. "You say he worked for Lester Jagels?"

"Tended the bar down at that beer joint, the Savoy."

"See if you can get in touch with Lester Jagels, Pete. Have him meet us over at the office," Dan said.

Dan Peavy was in his thinking position, leaning back in the old swivel chair with his size thirteens hoisted up on the corner of the desk. Lester Jagels, a tall, scrawny individual, scowled at him over the tops of the shoes.

"Dan," he said, "a guy like Calhoun's bound to end up with the short end o' the stick. Women ain't nothing

but *trouble*!" He looked around at Jerry and me, nodding his head.

"You think it was his likin' for women had something to do with what happened to him?"

"Well," said Jerry, "maybe his past caught up to him. Maybe he ran out on the mob somewheres and they been huntin' him for years and finally found him here. I once read a story about a guy they called the Swede—"

Dan motioned for Jerry to be quiet. "Can you give us the names of some of his women friends, Jagels?"

"See here now, Dan, my business depends right smart on good will, and I don't like to go around telling—"

"If that was you lyin' down there at Faircloth's," Dan said quietly, "wouldn't you like us to find who done it to you?"

Lester Jagel's face blanched. He licked his lips and took a breath. "Me . . .? Yeah. Yeah, I see what you mean. Well, lately I seen that young Pye girl hanging around the Savoy, giving Calhoun the glad eye."

"Amos Pye's kid?" Dan frowned. "Little Lucille?"

Lester Jagels lifted his hand quickly. "Wait a minute there! That girl's twenty-one years old! We don't serve no minors in my place!"

"Twenty-one . . ." Dan murmured. "My, don't the time fly!"

Jerry flashed a lascivious grin. "And she ain't exactly what you might call little no more either."

"There were others," Jagels went on, "but this kid was real sweet on him. She came down to the place pretty near every night. I reckon by some standards Alton Calhoun was a right handsome fella."

"When was the last time you saw him?" Dan asked.

"Well, this is Monday . . ." He closed his eyes, then slowly opened them. "Last Thursday it was. That was Calhoun's day off and I worked the bar myself on Thursdays. He come around that morning tryin' to squeeze an advance outta me."

"Did you give it to him?"

Jagels grinned. "I ain't very smart, Dan, but I got better sense that to do that! A fella like Calhoun woulda been halfway out of town the minute he got ten cents ahead of me. Never let 'em get ahead of you, that's my motto!"

We got Calhoun's address from Lester Jagels. It was a boarding house down near the shrimp docks. When Jagels left the office, the clock on the wall stood at eleven-thirty, and we called it quits for the day. It was Dan Peavy's theory that the more thinking a man was called on to do, the more sleep he needed. A theory that Jerry and I subscribed to wholeheartedly.

First thing next morning, Dan sent Jerry out to round up little Lucille Pye and told me to go to Calhoun's boardinghouse and find out what I could from that end.

I got back a half an hour later with the news that the landlord had moved Calhoun's few belongings into a storeroom when Calhoun hadn't shown up after a couple of days and had rented the room to a new tenant.

"Calhoun was pretty far behind in his rent," I told Dan. "Real far behind."

He nodded. "How about his stuff? Find anything there, any kinfolks' addresses or anything like that?"

"Not a thing, Dan. The guy was just a drifter with no ties."

The door of the office swung open and Jerry escorted a young woman in. It was little Lucille Pye, and I saw right away what Jerry meant by her not being exactly 'little' anymore. In certain dimensions, at any rate.

"Come in, Lucille," Dan said. He went around and held a chair for her and she sat down. "I reckon Jerry told you why—"

A little man burst through the door after them, his eyes blazing. "All right, Peavy, what's this all about! How come you send this—this—" he gave Jerry a

fierce look, "—turkey gobbler of a deputy around and drag me and my daughter out—"

"Hold on, Amos Pye!" Dan said firmly. "Ain't anybody dragged either one o' you down here. Maybe you heard there's been a killing, a right distasteful one, to boot."

"Got exactly what was comin' to him!" Pye shouted. "The low-down *scum*!"

Dan eased himself back into his chair and nodded his head slowly. "Now that's right interesting, Amos. Go on."

"I—" Amos Pye stopped abruptly and looked around at us. "Whoa, now! You ain't thinkin' *I* had anything to do with this?"

Jerry stepped forward. "Dan, I run into a couple o' fellas down at the docks that say Amos here had a big hassle with Calhoun one night last week. Said Amos busted up to the bar at the Savoy and commenced to cuss Calhoun for everything he was worth. Told him to leave Lucille alone or he'd—" Jerry cut his eyes toward Pye, "—or he'd get him."

Dan reached down and picked up the pieces of rope that had been taken off the body. "Amos, you keep rope like this around your shrimpboat?"

Pye grumbled and looked at the rope. He screwed his mouth around. "Show me one shrimper that ain't got rope like that on it!"

Dan let the rope fall back onto the floor and turned toward the girl. "Kind of sweet on this Calhoun, wasn't you, Lucille?"

The girl looked surprised. Then she said, "Oh, I *liked* Alton all right, Sheriff Peavy. But then I like a lots of folks." She turned and gave me a big, slow smile.

"Peavy," Amos Pye said, knuckling down on the front edge of Dan's desk. "Peavy, you either arrest me and Lucille or you let us walk outta here—*now!*"

"One more question, Amos. Where were you and your boat last Thursday?"

Pye's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "How come you're askin' that?"

The corners of Dan Peavy's mouth twitched in a little smile. "Now that sounds like something a man would ask if he had something to hide."

"I was out. Out shrimpin'. That's my business, where the hell else would I be!"

"Anybody with you? A striker maybe?"

"I got me a striker, but he wasn't with me that day. He was sick, he says. Most likely drunk." Pye was cutting his glances all around the room now, at Jerry and me, and even at little Lucille.

"Thanks, Amos," Dan said, getting to his feet. "And thank you, Lucille."

"Hate to say so," Jerry said, watching Amos and little Lucille through the window as they walked across the street, "but it looks like old Amos is our man." He turned around like a big bird. "You know why I say so—"

But Jerry didn't get to finish what he was expounding because the door flung open and Troy Dycus stalked in, squinted at us through his thick glasses, cleared his throat, and said, "I'm here to give myself up, Sheriff Peavy!"

Dan's feet slid off the desk and hit the floor. "Give yourself up? How come, son?"

Troy adjusted his glasses uneasily. "I was in love with Lucille Pye, that's why I'm surrendering."

"No law against being in love with Lucille Pye, or anybody else that I know of, boy."

"Don't you understand, Sheriff?" Troy said. "I just heard who—who it was you found last night."

"So?"

A blank look spread over Troy's face. "You—you ain't heard about me threatening Calhoun?"

Dan made a motion for Troy to sit down. "Not till

this minute. But now that we have heard about it, suppose you tell us the whole thing."

Troy folded down into the chair, obviously shaken to find he had informed on himself. "Well, Calhoun took Lucille away from me and I went in that beer parlor where he worked and I told him if he didn't leave her alone—I'd get him." He leaned quickly toward Dan. "'Course, I meant I'd bust him in the nose, or something like that! I didn't mean—*killing* him."

"How did he take Lucille away from you?" I asked.

"Just sweet-talked her, I reckon. She took to callin' me things like 'sonny' and 'little boy' and stuff like that. I—I never had much luck with girls and it kinda shook me up."

"What about her Pa," Dan said. "Did you get along with him?"

"Old *Amos*?" Troy scoffed. "He don't think anybody in the world is good enough for Lucille! He says he's going to send her to modelin' school in New York when he gets a little more money. Then she can meet some rich millionaire and all that baloney!"

"Well," said Dan, "I suppose it's natural for a father to want to see his kids get ahead. Anyhow, Dycus, you did the right thing coming in."

Troy got up and took a deep breath. He smiled at the sheriff. "That's a powerful load off my mind! If you need me for anything, I'll be around town." He turned and went out.

"It's possible," Jerry said "He could have took Calhoun out in that plane and dropped him in the drink with a hunk o' iron tied to him."

"But if the body broke loose," I said, "and Troy saw it when it was cast up on that little beach, how come he'd run tell us instead of slipping out there and takin' Calhoun back out and sinking him again?"

Jerry shrugged and scratched his head. "See what you mean."

"This rope looks just about brand new," Dan muttered. He had the length of rope in his hands and was turning it this way and that. "Pete, hand me that yardstick over there in the corner."

I did and Dan measured the three pieces of rope, the one that came from around Calhoun's waist, the one from his ankles, and the other from around his wrists. "All together there's twelve feet and six inches of it and the only place that's wore is where the thing is chafed through right here." He looked over at Jerry. "Run down to the hardware store and see if Amos Pye bought any rope this size lately, and if he did, how much."

Jerry took one of the small pieces and went out. He came back in less than five minutes. "You hit the nail right on the head, Dan! Amos bought one hundred foot of this identical rope less'n two weeks ago. Bud Boyer down at the hardware store remembered it!"

I jumped up. "Maybe Amos ain't got around to using the rope yet. Why don't I go down to the dock and see if he's there, and if I can find the rope he bought. I'll tell him we need it for comparison."

Dan nodded. I drove down to the waterfront and found Amos Pye's boat tied up at the wharf. Amos wasn't there, but little Lucille was in the galley in the deckhouse and I could smell coffee brewing.

"Can I come aboard, Lucille?" I grinned.

"Can't stop the law, I suppose."

I climbed aboard and asked her if it was all right for me to look around.

"You all think Daddy killed Alton, don't you?" she said.

"We don't jump to conclusions, Lucille. Sheriff Peavy always waits till everything's in before he makes a move. Your Pa is a suspect in the case, I reckon you can see why."

She nodded tiredly. "He's set his sights too high for me," she said. She poured two cups of coffee and hand-

ed me one. "He wants me to go away from here, Pete. Wants me to go to New York and become a—a model." She wrinkled her nose at me. "That's silly. But how do I tell Daddy that? I want to live right here. I like it here."

I was close to forgetting what I came for. I drank the coffee and thanked her for it. I found a coil of three-quarter inch Manila rope on deck, a new, unused coil. I told Lucille I'd bring it back pretty soon.

"I'll tell Daddy when he comes back," she said.

At the office we carefully measured the coil of rope. It came out to eighty-eight feet.

"Eighty-eight plus twelve and a half equals one hundred feet and a little over!" Jerry said triumphantly.

I remembered what Lucille had said on the boat, about her Pa aiming too high for her. Maybe Calhoun hadn't been good enough for her, and maybe she wasn't at all serious about him, but whatever, killing the man was a pretty drastic remedy.

"It don't set well with me," Dan said. "The whole thing just don't set well with me!"

Jerry perched himself on the corner of Dan's desk. "It's plain as the nose on your face," he said, staring at Dan's bulbous beak. "Maybe even plainer. He's got motive, he threatened Calhoun in front of witnesses, he's got a temper like a red pepper, he's got a boat, and now this—" Jerry pointed to the rope. "Dan, he's liable to make a run for it if we don't get him right now. When he finds out we picked up this piece o' rope, well, Amos Pye can add as good as we can."

"Maybe so." Dan got up and paced to the water cooler and back. The telephone rang and Dan reached down and scooped it up. All he said was 'hello' and then he started listening. I watched his expression change from puzzlement to concern to relief and finally to inspiration. "Well, I'll be—" he said, and hung up. He turned and looked at Jerry and me, then he sat down at his desk and closed his eyes for a few seconds. His head

nodded and he opened his eyes. "I think that'll do it," he said to nobody in particular. Then to Jerry, "Deputy Sealey, I want you to make an arrest!"

"Old man Pye!" Jerry grinned, rubbing his hands.

"Nope, I want you to bring Troy Dycus in. Tell him it's for the murder of Alton Calhoun!"

Troy came in with Jerry and the first thing he did was step up to Dan Peavy. "What's the gag, Sheriff? This screwy deputy of yours must be drunk—"

"Dycus," Dan said. "Do you know when duck season was over?"

"When *duck* season—" Troy glanced around at me, a smile trying to break over his face. But I wasn't smiling even though I was as puzzled as he was. I was waiting, because I had yet to hear Dan Peavy ask a question that didn't have some meat in it somewhere.

Troy looked back at Dan. "Yesterday was the last day of the season, if I ain't mistaken. Now, what's—"

"You ain't mistaken, Dycus," Dan said coolly. "I just got a real interestin' phone call from three fellas that was out enjoyin' the last day of the season. They had 'em a blind up near French Inlet, in the marsh right back o' that sand spit up there, to be exact."

Troy's face twitched and seemed to whiten.

Dan went on as though he hadn't noticed. "The reason these boys didn't call me sooner was that they got stranded out there and had to spend the night when their outboard motor wouldn't run. They just got in awhile ago, and when they heard about Calhoun, well, it seems they saw something right unusual yesterday afternoon late." Dan Peavy's eyes narrowed and the thick white brows came down like two white caterpillars. "Seems a little green airplane came over, circled a few times and then—"

"They're lying, Sheriff Peavy!" Troy broke in, his voice suddenly tight. "They're lying!" He leaned stiffly on the desk. "Whoever these guys are, they're *lying*!"

"I didn't tell you what they saw, Dycus. What are they lying about?"

Troy caught his bottom lip between his teeth and stared at Dan. Then he let it go and said, "I . . . well, there's a lot of people around that don't like me . . . I . . ."

Dan stood up. "These fellas saw the little plane circle around and then it headed into the wind and slowed down and somebody fell outta one side of it into the breakers . . ."

Troy's fists were clenching, his jaw muscles working, his eyelids shut tight. He looked like a lighted bomb with a quarter-inch fuse. *"Luck!"* Troy screamed, slamming his hands down on the desk. *"Luck!* You dumb hick cops never would of found out if it hadn't of been for your dad-blamed *luck!"* He looked around at Jerry and me, a crazy grin on his face. "Sure, I killed Calhoun! Killing was too good for that bird! He took Lucille away from me, the only girl I ever had. And I would of pinned it on that screwy old man of hers, too! Him and his ideas that nobody was good enough for Lucille!"

"You got the right to legal counsel, Dycus," Dan said.

But Troy was wound up now. "You want to know how I done it? I had it all worked out just fine! First off I swiped some of old man Pye's rope, then I gave his striker a couple of bottles of whiskey so's the old man would be working by himself for a day or so. Then, last Thursday when Calhoun was off, I got him in my car and conked him over the head and tied him up good." Troy paused a moment and licked his lips. "I drove out to the field and dumped him down at the south end in some bushes, and when I got in the plane, I taxied down there, loaded him on, and flew about thirty miles north, up to Wolf Island, and I set the plane down on the beach up there where the old fishing lodge used to be . . ."

I knew the place. The lodge had vanished the night of the hurricane in '36, and nothing had ever been built back on the little island. Too risky after what had happened, I suppose folks figured. But you could still find traces of the lodge—bricks, broken bits of crockery, the sort of things some archaeologist in the far future would puzzle over. There was a fresh water pond fifty yards from the beach, where the artesian well that had supplied the lodge continued to flow without interruption.

Troy's voice droned on. I could amost see the little green plane settling down on that deserted beach, see Troy drag Calhoun out and down to the ocean and out into the surf. Calhoun must have been fully conscious by then; I wondered what thoughts went through his mind in those last seconds. There'd have been a good deal of desperate thrashing about while Troy held the bound figure beneath the surface and, after it was finally still, he'd hold him there awhile longer to make certain.

When Troy was positive Calhoun was dead, he dragged him back up the beach, past the plane, and over the low dunes to the fresh water pond. He'd left the body there, weighted down in the shallows hidden beneath lily pads and safe from prying eyes and the vagaries of tide and current.

It made my stomach turn just listening to Troy tell it.

"And then," he went on, "I flew back up there yesterday and fished Calhoun out of the pond. I took the rope and wore it in two on a piece of rusty iron so's it would look like he accidentally broke loose, then I loaded him in the plane and flew back down to French Inlet—"

"—where you dumped him out in the surf and come on in to report a body on the beach," Dan finished flatly.

Troy grinned unrepentantly. "Admit it, Sheriff Peavy! You never woulda figured it out if it hadn't been for those fellas that seen me, would you!"

"I suppose not, boy."

The grin broadened proudly. "And I'd o' had that old man Pye right where I wanted him! Him and Calhoun both!"

Dan sighed and turned to me. "Type it up, Pete, and get Dycus's signature on it."

Dan didn't look particularly pleased with himself as he slipped Troy Dycus's confession into the desk drawer. He glanced over his shoulder as Jerry came back from locking Troy in a cell.

"How come he kept Calhoun in that pond from Thursday till Monday, Dan?" Jerry puzzled.

Dan got up and ambled over to the water cooler. "Body had to look like it'd been under water, didn't it? 'Bout the safest place Dycus could find, deserted island, small pond where the body couldn't get away, and plenty o' lily pads to hide it under just in case anybody did come around."

I cleared my throat. "Wasn't he taking a chance dropping that body in the water instead of landing and just layin' it out where he wanted it?"

Dan filled a Dixie cup and looked around at me. "If he landed the plane, Pete, there'd be tire tracks, because the tide was going out. If he'd waited till the tide was coming in, suppose the wind changed after he left and the body had been taken back out to sea. It might never o' turned up."

I nodded. "And if he dropped it on the beach instead of in the edge of the water—"

"—there'd o' been plenty of marks where Calhoun hit and rolled!" Jerry finished.

"Right," said Dan Peavy. "The way he done it made it look just the way he wanted, like Calhoun broke loose from his anchor and washed ashore. And the blame woulda pointed straight at old Amos Pye."

"Well," Jerry said, slouching down in a chair and jingling the cell keys, "I reckon he was right, huh?"

Dan crumpled the empty cup and came back to his desk. "About what, Jerry?" he said.

"We'd of probably hung it on old Amos Pye like Troy wanted us to do if it hadn't o' been for those guys that saw him dump the body out."

Dan smiled. He shook his head, still smiling. "There wasn't anybody saw him," he said.

I came up out of my chair. "You mean to sit there and say you was—was *bluffing* him all the time!"

"Well, bluffin' is a little strong, Pete. Let's say I was pretty sure of my ground and just wanted Dycus to back me up on it." He ran his hand through his white hair. "Lemme ask you something. Didn't it seem a little peculiar to you that in just four days something could of worn through a brand-new piece of manila rope?"

I scratched my head. "As a matter of fact, no, it didn't."

"Well, think about it. There's a dead man tied to some kind of weight. It would take a lot of pulling this way and that to wear through that rope that quick, even if it was tied to something jagged and sharp. A man bent on hiding a body wouldn't tie it to something that would be likely to let it go."

"Yeah, I suppose not," said Jerry.

"But—" I stabbed a finger at the telephone "—what the devil was that phone call that got you so all-fired excited?"

"That was Doc Stebbins," Dan said. "Our beloved coroner. You recall that seaweed we found in Calhoun's clothes? Well, when Doc was done with the autopsy—which incidentally showed Calhoun drowned—he happened to take a closer look at that seaweed, and he saw it wasn't seaweed at all, but pieces of water lilies."

"Water lilies . . .?" Jerry mumbled.

"Right. And water lilies don't grow in salt water, so how could a man wash ashore on an ocean beach and have water lilies hung in his duds? Well, Doc run a test on the water that came from Calhoun's lungs, but it

turned out to be salt water. That's where Troy Dycus was figuring the only slip might come, and that's why he did like he told us—drowned Calhoun in the ocean and then planted him in the pond for safe keeping."

"So how'd you tie Troy in so quick?" Jerry wanted to know.

"Adding it all up—the rope, the body being so close to the water when me and Pete found it, the old man tryin' to bust up Dycus's romance, and then Calhoun takin' the girl away from him. The water lilies was what cinched it, though. It had to be somebody trying to make it look the way it did. And what better way could a man get a dead body from a fresh water pond to a beach miles from the nearest fresh water—than to haul him by plane?"

"And you cooked up that yarn about the hunters hoping Troy would fall for it," I said.

"Which he did," Dan added.

Jerry and I looked at each other. Jerry took a breath and grinned his admiration. "So Calhoun was killed for the love of little Lucille Pye . . ."

That was exactly what I was thinking. A girl—a woman, really—that a man thought was worth committing a murder for must be something special.

I picked up my hat. "I'll drop down to the dock," I said, "and tell Amos and little Lucille that we got the murderer."

I figured there was a chance that what had happened might soften the old man's attitude about the girl and her friends. One way or the other, Wednesday was my day off and I thought I'd lay the groundwork because I intended to find out.

A QUIET BACKWATER

Stanley Abbott

I had been wandering about Malaya for many months picking up material for a book I had in mind, when suddenly I felt sick of it all. I couldn't wait to get away from the steam-sodden heat and hot-spiced native food. Even the brilliant eye-shattering colors and lush greenery which at first had seemed so exciting and attractive had become unbearable.

I needed a change. I longed for the crispness of northern California in the fall.

To catch the small coastal steamer that sails twice a month for Singapore I took a native prahu downriver to Tenah Solor. It was little more than a village with several hundred Malays, Dyaks and the inevitable Chinese quarter, clustered together close by the river; higher up, the bungalows of the white population were scattered around an immense padang. It looked like a well-kept English village green, except for the tall cassias which surrounded it and shaded the bungalows.

I had nearly a week to wait and the thought of spending it in this sleepy backwater, which looked as if it hadn't changed in a century, appalled me. I settled in for a boring stay in a bungalow belonging to the District Officer, Jeff Hawkins.

Hawkins was a bachelor and he had offered to put me up. He was very British and military-looking in khaki shirt and shorts, and we got on well together. During the day he had his job to look after. In the evenings we met on the verandah where the houseboy set out the drinks. After a couple of gin slings, if we felt like it, we'd walk over to the club to find a game of bridge.

The club was a converted bungalow and there were usually a few planters there who had driven in with their wives to have a drink. It was here one evening that Jeff Hawkins introduced me to the Thorntons and asked them if they'd like to make up a game. Harry Thornton said he would but his wife didn't play. She was just about to leave, but while Jeff went off to hunt up a fourth she stayed and talked with me. I was glad she did, for her husband had very little to say, and it had been a long time since I'd set eyes on such a lovely girl.

Harry Thornton had an intelligent-looking face, but a couple of deeply etched furrows at the corners of his mouth gave him a bitter look. Though what he had to be bitter about, with such a charming wife, I could hardly imagine.

Most of the women I'd met made the climate and the distance from civilization an excuse to let themselves go. But Julia was an exception. Her makeup was immaculate, and the coloring of her dark blue eyes and soft dark hair was set off to perfection by a pink linen dress.

She told me they'd been there about ten years. They owned their own rubber plantation and, now that there was no longer trouble from Communist guerillas, all was going well. The price of rubber was good, and there was little to complain about. Except, as she told me with a laugh, she simply could not get used to keeping her lipstick in the refrigerator.

I found myself wishing Harry Thornton weren't there. When I told her I lived in San Francisco she was

delighted, for she had been born there and wanted to hear all about it. I noticed, while we talked, that she kept glancing at her husband. It might have been just a nervous habit, but I got an impression that maybe she was frightened of him.

Jeff Hawkins returned, accompanied by a tall man, and after Julia had left I was introduced. His name was Peter Endrik; he was half Dutch, I learned later. He was good-looking in a flashy sort of way, and was only in his early thirties, but he showed all the signs of being a heavy drinker. I try not to be prejudiced, but I didn't like him. We were partners, and every time he went wrong, he tried to bluff his way out of it. We were no match for Jeff and Harry Thornton, who made full use of their opportunities. After about an hour of this we'd had enough and there was nothing to do but pay up and look pleasant.

Jeff Hawkins had something to do, so I went into the billiard room with Harry Thornton and had my revenge playing snooker. From time to time shouts of laughter came from the bar and later, as we were leaving, Peter Endrik came up to us. He had a drink in his hand and was swaying about.

"How about a game, Harry?" he asked in a thick, slurred voice.

"Make it another time, Peter—I've got to get home," Harry Thornton replied as we tried to get by.

"Gotta go home to the little woman, eh?" Endrik put a hand on Harry's shoulder to steady himself. "Well, give her my love; she'll like that." And he roared with laughter.

I saw Harry Thornton stiffen. Then he pushed by Endrik and turned to me. "Let's get out of here."

I dislike a brawl, but I was surprised he'd let Endrik say that about Julia and get away with it. With Endrik's mocking laughter to accompany us, we left quietly.

"I must say I admire your self-control," I said.

Harry Thornton dismissed it with a shrug of the shoulders. "He's just a drunken bum."

But there was a brooding look in his deep-set eyes, and he had very little to say as we walked across the padang.

Later that evening, Jeff Hawkins and I stretched out on long chairs on the verandah. It was very pleasant and peaceful. A breath of cool air was moving in from the sea and the moon had just risen, revealing the long line of jungle stretching to the mouth of the river on the far bank.

Jeff turned to me with a grin on his big red face. "Well, I suppose you're boning up on the Romance and Mystery of the Malayan jungle." There was a mocking note in his voice but I didn't mind. As a writer I've got used to it, and I can't say I blame him when I think of some of the stuff that's been written about Malaya.

"No," I replied, "far from it. That's been done to death." Then I went on, "We had a little excitement at the club earlier this evening," and I told him about the scene with Endrik.

"I wish somebody'd give him a good hiding," Jeff said. "Peter's big but he's flabby, and I don't doubt Harry could do it if he wanted to."

"There's something strange about him," I said. "I get a feeling he's like a tightly coiled spring—something kept suppressed."

"I know what you mean," Jeff replied. "Ever since they've been out here, Harry's been jealous of any man who dances with Julia or even talks to her. And she's the best looking girl for miles. What does he expect in a place like this? Of course, Peter plays on that. Knowing Harry hasn't any sense of humor, he gets even by making him the butt of his crude jokes."

A houseboy padded out onto the verandah with a note for Jeff. He read it, wrote something on it, and gave it back to the boy.

"You must have made an impression. We're invited to the Thornton's tomorrow night—dinner and bridge."

Suddenly the lights dimmed, came up and then went out completely.

"Pay no attention to it," said Jeff, "this is always happening. We've a lousy old generator and not enough money to replace it."

The houseboy appeared with an oil lamp and put it on the table between us.

"I'm afraid Peter's the one rotten apple in the barrel," Jeff went on. "The strange thing is, he's not such a bad fellow when he's sober, but he won't last long the way he's going. This climate has finished off better men than he. Also, he plays around with the Malay girls. I've warned him he'll find a kris at his throat one dark night."

Jeff knocked out his pipe and yawned. "Time I turned in. I've got to be up early tomorrow."

At the Thornton's the following evening an Englishman and his wife, whom I'd met at the club, were there. Their name was Barwell. I hoped they both played bridge so I'd get a chance to talk to Julia.

We had an excellent rijstafel served by a couple of Malayan houseboys in white jackets. But the conversation didn't match the dinner. As usual, Harry Thornton had very little to say. Then, somehow, Peter Endrik's name came up and Mrs. Barwell turned to Julia.

"Oh, darling, I forgot to tell you; did you hear what happened at the club last night?"

Barwell said it was of no importance, but she wouldn't be stopped. I couldn't help feeling that Mrs. Barwell was getting a certain satisfaction in the telling.

"And what to you think Harry did to Peter Endrik?" she asked. "He simply ignored him. I thought he was quite magnificent, didn't you, Mr. Manson?" She looked across at me, the smile of the Borgias on her pudgy face.

Thornton shrugged as he said, "He was drunk."

Julia put down her knife and fork and stared at him angrily. There was an awkward silence. I was glad when we finished and returned to the living room.

The Barwells both played bridge, so it was arranged that Mrs. Barwell should play the first rubber and then that I should take her place. Julia suggested that we sit on the verandah. It extended around the house on all four sides, and she led the way to the far end where there was a view over the mouth of the river. I guessed she wasn't interested in small talk, so I gave her a cigarette and we sat in silence watching the fireflies flickering through the bushes.

Suddenly she surprised me by asking, "Do you think I could get a job back home?"

I didn't answer immediately, for I guessed there was more behind the question than appeared on the surface.

"Is it as bad as that?" I asked her gently.

She looked at me and nodded, as though not trusting herself to speak. I waited while she slowly twisted a handkerchief to shreds between her fingers.

Presently it all came pouring out. "He hasn't spoken a word to me for over six months. You've no idea what it's like. He gives messages to the boys or leaves notes, but not a word. I don't know what to do. I'm nearly out of my mind."

Though I'd figured there was something strange about Thornton, I was shocked. It was such a cowardly form of mental bullying that I could hardly believe it.

"Has he always been like this?" I asked.

"Not in the beginning. He's always been jealous, but now, if I dance with anyone or say more than a dozen words to a man, he imagines the worst. He used to break things and hit me. Now he doesn't say a word. Once it went on for nearly a year. But I can't take it any more."

She bent her head so that I shouldn't see, but in the

dim light I caught the gleam of tears. I put a hand on hers; it must have been the first gesture of sympathy she'd had in years.

The sound of footsteps echoed on the verandah. Julia got up quickly and left as Harry Thornton came down the verandah towards us. She obviously didn't want him to see that she'd been crying.

"Do you want a drink?" he asked me, but his eyes followed Julia. He couldn't have cared less what I wanted.

"Not for me, thanks—I've had enough," I said.

Thornton stood looking down at me and it seemed a very long time that we stared at each other. I wondered what he was thinking. Then I felt I didn't care what he was thinking. I was ready to get up and knock him off his own verandah. Fortunately he turned on his heel and left me, without a word.

Julia didn't appear again, and when we left, Thornton made it clear he didn't care if he ever saw me again. Jeff must have guessed something had happened but he didn't question me and we walked across the padang to his bungalow in silence.

We both turned in but it was a long time before I slept. It was obvious Julia needed help, otherwise she wouldn't have told me what she had. And it was equally obvious she wasn't in love with Thornton. Then why didn't she leave him? It could only be a question of money. If I were right, that could easily be remedied. I could lend her the money for her passage, and I had several friends in San Francisco who would have her to stay and help her find a job. I tried to keep any emotional feelings about Julia out of it. But I found myself wondering what was going on over at their bungalow, and my imagination ran riot. It was dawn before I fell into an uneasy sleep.

I had decided to tell Jeff what had happened, as I wanted his advice. While we were having a drink that evening I told him what Julia had said.

He said quietly, "I didn't know he was as mean as that."

"What I can't understand is why she hasn't left him, or got a divorce."

"Oh, she'd be worse off than ever," Jeff said. "In this country she'd get a mere pittance, barely enough to live on."

I told him how I thought I could help with a passage and my friends in San Francisco. He looked at me steadily for some moments. "I hope you know what you're getting into."

I was about to say something when a sound like a firecracker came clearly on the still night air. It might have been a shot fired some distance away. For a moment we were alert, listening.

Jeff said, "That's probably Peter Endrik. He goes after crocodiles on the mud flats with a flashlight fixed to a rifle."

"That must be exciting."

"Too exciting for me. One false step and you've had it."

For a time we sat looking out over the river. Jeff had just finished pouring drinks when we heard someone running fast across the padang. Almost immediately a Malay houseboy in white jacket appeared below the verandah, carrying a lantern.

"Tuan, come quick," he gasped, "come quick!"

In an instant we were off the verandah, and running hard across the padang toward the lights of a bungalow. The boy led the way across a wide verandah and into the living room. On the floor beside a couch lay Peter Endrik. He had been shot in the chest. Jeff ripped his shirt away and examined him.

"He's dead," he said quietly.

Peter was lying on his back, and a few feet away was a six-chambered revolver. Jeff knelt down and looked at it without touching it.

"A thirty-eight," he said. "We'll leave that where it is for the moment."

He spoke to the houseboy in a dialect I couldn't understand, and when they went outside through a garden at the back and on to a lane that ran around the padang, I followed. It was dark and Jeff was examining the ground with a flashlight.

"The boy says the front door was locked. He only got back a few minutes ago himself, so whoever shot Endrik must have come in this way, the only other door."

But there was nothing to be found. We went back inside. The first thing I noticed as we entered the living room was a faint musky smell—strange, and yet familiar; and then that the revolver which had been on the floor had vanished.

We both made a rush for the door and the verandah. Though we searched all around and stood listening, there wasn't a sound. We could only have been out at the back about ten minutes, but it had been enough for someone to slip in and take the revolver.

"I could kick myself for a fool," Jeff cried.

He stood staring down at the body of Peter Endrik for some time, lost in thought. Suddenly he turned to me. "I'm going over to the Thornton's. Would you mind coming along?"

Their bungalow was on the far side of the padang. When we got there the lights were on. Jeff said in a low voice, "If you don't mind, I think I'd better talk to them alone, but I'd like you to hear what's said."

I nodded and Jeff went ahead.

When he'd gone in I waited, and then crept closer to the verandah, from where I could see Harry Thornton and Julia. Jeff had told them what had happened.

"But, Jeff," Harry Thornton was saying, "you don't think we had anything to do with it, do you?"

"Of course not, Harry. I just wanted to know if you saw or heard anything, but if you haven't been out all evening, how could you?"

Julia said, "I got in about half an hour ago, Jeff. I heard the shot after I left the Barwells. I thought it was Peter Endrik out on the mud flats."

"Which way did you come home?" Jeff asked her.

"Across the padang. I always do; it's shorter than the lane and not so dark."

"So at the nearest point you'd be about a hundred yards from Endrik's bungalow. Did you see any lights on?"

"Now that I remember. There were lights in several bungalows, but I can't say I noticed Endrik's."

Jeff turned to Harry Thornton.

"You say you hadn't been out all evening?"

Thornton nodded. "That's right."

Jeff said quietly, "Yet you were seen by a houseboy, I won't say whose, near Endrik's bungalow."

Thornton straightened up in his chair instantly. He opened his mouth to say something, but before he could do so Jeff stopped him.

"Don't be hasty, Harry. You would be well advised to think carefully before you say anything."

For some moments he stared hard at Jeff. Then his eyes dropped. "It slipped my mind," he said in a low voice. "I did go out, but only for a few moments. I was worried about Julia. I went to see if she was on her way back."

Julia stared at him wide-eyed. For some time not a word was said.

Suddenly the lights dimmed, came up, and then went out completely. I heard Thornton say, "Wait—I'll get a lamp."

Then I heard a crash. The silence that followed seemed endless, and I was beginning to wonder what had happened when I heard Jeff say, "Are you all right?"

A match was struck and I could see Thornton lighting a lamp. "I walked into that darned door," he said,

as he brought the lamp over and set it down on the table. He was rubbing his right hand.

"Isn't your houseboy here?" Jeff asked him.

Julia answered quickly. "I let Hassan go to his kampong for the night."

Thornton shot a look at her. "Why did you do that?" he asked.

"He said his father was sick."

Jeff turned to Thornton. "So when you went out to look for Julia, Hassan wasn't here?"

"That's right."

"Was Julia here when you got back?" Jeff inquired quietly.

Thornton looked at Julia. "No, she wasn't."

To my surprise, Jeff got to his feet and said he was sorry he'd had to trouble them. He came out, and we'd only taken a few steps when Jeff stopped and put a finger to his lips. From the bungalow we could hear voices but not what was being said. Suddenly Thornton started shouting. Jeff said, "I wondered if this would develop."

He hurried back and crept up onto the verandah. I followed him. Julia and Thornton were standing, facing each other across the table, the lamp between them. Thornton's face looked awful in the greenish-white light.

"You lied! You were in Endrik's bungalow; I saw you go in!" he was shouting.

"What if I was?" Julia flung at him. "I went to do what you should have done if you were any sort of a husband—to tell him to stop insulting me. But he wasn't there."

"You're a liar! He was your lover, wasn't he? Answer me," Thornton shouted. "Wasn't he?"

"That's not true, and if you weren't so crazy with jealousy you'd know it."

"Then why did you kill him? You were jealous of his Malayan girl, weren't you?"

Julia gave a gasp and the color left her face. Before she could say anything Thornton leaned across the table towards her and asked, "Do you realize what Jeff Hawkins could do if he knew?"

For a minute Julia was silent; then quite quietly she said, "If that was a threat, perhaps you'll tell him at the same time what you were doing out there in the dark."

Thornton's lips worked but no sound came. She'd called his bluff. He was incoherent with rage and glaring at her like a tiger ready to spring. I could see a vein standing out on his head, pulsing. I don't like to think he intended to throw the lamp at her, but he must have lost control of himself, for he grabbed it up suddenly from the table, and as he did so it slipped from his hand. He tried to recover it, but it hit a corner of the table and fell at his feet. Instantly he was enveloped in flames. A terrifying scream broke from him.

For a moment neither of us moved. We were frozen with horror. Then we raced for the double doors. Julia had fallen trying to get away. We grabbed her, and dragged her out onto the verandah just as the oil covering the floor went up with a roar. We tried to get back in but there wasn't a hope. The flames were utterly beyond control. We had to watch from a distance as the bungalow went up like a torch.

It was much later, after Julia had been taken in and cared for by the Barwells, that Jeff said something that I realized I didn't want to face. We'd returned to his bungalow, and he was mixing a drink.

"If I'd known it would finish like this," he said, "I wouldn't have done what I did. But I wanted to spring it on Thornton, in front of Julia, that I knew he was lying, that I knew he'd been out. Now it's difficult to say which of them killed Endrik."

"Do you really think Julia could have done it?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he said, handing me a drink. "After twenty-five years out here you get so you believe that

anybody's capable of anything. But somehow I can't see Harry Thorton taking such a risk. Anyway, it's all over. Endrik got what was coming to him, and Julia's got her own life to make now."

He looked at me as though expecting some comment, but I said nothing.

The coastal steamer was due the next afternoon. I couldn't make up my mind if I should see Julia before I left. I put it off until it was too late, then wrote her a note, and sailed for Singapore where I caught a plane for Manila. I had intended staying two or three weeks, but after a few days I couldn't stand it. I cabled Jeff that I was leaving for Hong Kong to catch a boat back to the States, and to forward my mail to the Palace Hotel.

I thought a lot about Julia. I couldn't make up my mind if it made any difference to my feelings about her, if she *had* killed Endrik.

Then one morning, when I was sitting in the lounge of the Palace reading my mail, Julia walked in. "George Manson," she cried, "I can hardly believe it." She had just arrived, and hadn't even been up to her room. "Can we meet in about an hour?" she asked.

She looked radiant and happy. It was hard to believe what she had put behind her so quickly. I wanted to ask her a question to which I had to have an answer, so I suggested the roof garden, which was always deserted in the morning.

When Julia joined me she looked cool and attractive. We talked of Tenah Solor. She had sold the plantation to an Anglo-American outfit and had done very well. As I leaned towards her to light her cigarette, I caught a whiff of her perfume and I had to ask the question. For a moment I didn't know how to put it; then I decided that the only thing to do was to be blunt about it.

"Why did you come back for the revolver that night after Endrik was shot?" I asked her.

The color left her cheeks. She stared at me wide-

eyed. "How did you know?" Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"Your perfume."

"Ah! Now I understand why you left without seeing me. You thought I'd killed Endrik."

I nodded.

She continued. "It was Harry's gun—that's why I went to get it. No, he didn't shoot Endrik, he didn't know anything about it, but I had to get it to protect him. It was Hassan, our houseboy."

"Hassan?" I exclaimed. "How did you know?"

"I lied to Jeff," she said. "I got home earlier than I said, and I caught Hassan coming out of Harry's room. He hurried out the back in such a suspicious way that I knew he was up to something. I looked in Harry's dresser and found the gun was gone.

"It was common knowledge that Peter Endrik had been playing around with Hassan's sister. Hassan had told me he was going to marry her. Of course Endrik had no intention of doing so. The Malays don't take that lightly; for them there's only one answer to that. But what could I do? If I were right, I couldn't stop him, even if I went after him. I was all alone, and there was no time to get a message to anybody."

"So when you heard the shot you were at home."

She nodded. "And then I remembered the gun. If Hassan had left it there, it would point right at Harry. However much I hated him, I couldn't let him be accused of murder. That's why I took the chance I did."

I felt a tremendous relief, and shame that I had doubted her.

"I'm sure Jeff Hawkins thinks you did it," I said.

She laughed. "I won't lose any sleep over that."

I moved closer and put an arm around her. "Am I forgiven?" I asked.

She nodded and put her head on my shoulder.

"I can't get over the way our paths crossed," I said; "another day, and I'd have left."

"It was fate, darling," she murmured.

I smiled to myself, for in a letter from Jeff he'd mentioned that Julia had been in to say good-bye, and had asked him where I was.

But I didn't say a word. And to this day Julia doesn't know. After all, there are some things it's better not to tell a woman, particularly if she's your wife.

THE RETURN OF CRAZY BILL

Frank Sisk

As I drink a second cup of coffee, my eyes rove idly through the inside pages of the morning paper. Whatever I may have expected seems to be there: a quick recipe for marshmallow brittle, a speculative piece on the long-range effects of LSD, an interview with a 100-year-old man who has never drunk anything more intoxicating than dandelion wine, the bannered bargains to be had in chuck roast and honeydew melons at the local supermarkets . . .

Torpidly I notice a straight news report datelined Bern, Switzerland. It concerns an inquest into the death of a woman I have never met, but as I read the several scraps of evidential matter thrice over I find myself in a swift descent down the years—thirty of them—back to the days of my childhood when my world was bordered on the east by Indian Falls and High Ridge, on the south by Fournier's Meadow, on the west by Smith's General Store & Post Office, and on the north by the infinity of the future. Looming large in this world for a time, larger even than my parents, was Crazy Bill.

By our standards, Crazy Bill was old—forty, at least. He had a scraggly graying beard and great popping green eyes, one of which was glass. He wore a high-

crowned straw hat with a wide wavy brim. He finally lost this hat, as you will see later.

Except for a fringe of gray hair that grew over his ears and joined the beard, he was bald. He always wore a checkered shirt open at the collar. His throat was scrawny. The sleeves were rolled halfway up his forearms, showing on the right one a tattoo of a snake coiled around an anchor. Invariably he wore a pair of faded blue overalls suspended from his sagging shoulders by pieces of rope. In one of the overall pockets high on his chest he carried cigar butts salvaged from around the steps of Smith's General Store. He broke these butts up and smoked them in a corncob pipe. His shoes were the thicksoled yellow kind, with leather loops at the back, and when they wore out he threw them away in the woods and stole another pair from somewhere.

He roamed the woods, of course, and lived in a cave amid the ledges and fissures that flanked Indian Falls. Crazy Bill's Cave, we called it.

High Ridge, elevation 300 feet, cannot be compared with the towering 3285 meters of Col Superieur du Tour mentioned in the Switzerland news report, but we considered it in those days the steepest height on earth.

By "we" I mean myself and my younger brother Charlie, Roger Oliver and his little brother Austin, Fred Lyons, and Red Dacey. There were several others whose names I don't remember offhand, but those I've listed are still pictured in my mind as clearly as if I'd seen them only yesterday.

My brother Charlie is all freckles and ears. (He doesn't look like that now; the freckles have become floridity in a worried round face that neutralizes the ears.) Fred Lyons is undersized for his age, with a dimpled chin receding slightly. Roger Oliver is blond and blue-eyed and possesses a daredevil smile I secretly admire. His brother Austin, also blond, is possibly the quietest boy in the county, never venturing much

beyond a monosyllable. And Red Dacey well, he's somehow the color of sand; sandy hair, pale yellow eyebrows, a glint of ocher in the retina; and he bites his fingernails when things don't go his way. Red is the one who first called our attention to Crazy Bill; first learned about him from some mysterious source; first saw him in person, it seems.

We were blazing a trail, I remember, in the woods behind Indian Falls. Red Dacey's father had given him a birthday gift of a hunting knife in a beaded leather sheath, an impossible gift for the rest of us whose parents were dead-set against knives. So there we were, doing as the Indians did, single-file behind Red Dacey, who was nicking little chips off the saplings all the way across Fournier's Meadow and up the woodland slopes to the rockier ground until we came at last to the topmost cliff of High Ridge. Below us was a jagged gray drop and off in the distance were the identifiable rooftops of our family homes. The din of Indian Falls was so loud that we had to shout to be understood.

"The shortest way home is straight down," Roger Oliver yelled.

"What do you mean?" I yelled back.

"With a rope tied to this tree," he pointed to a gnarled dogwood, "we could let ourselves down the face of the cliff easy. If we had a rope, a long enough one."

"It's easier to walk around by the old path," Charlie piped up.

"Easier. Sure. And about three times longer. Besides, it wouldn't fool anyone who might be following us."

Austin Oliver nodded solemn agreement.

And Fred Lyons asked: "Who's following us, Roger?"

"Nobody that I know of. I mean *if*, that's all. *If* somebody was on our trail, they'd lose us right here. Like we'd walked off into thin air."

We found the concept intriguing, like so many of the ideas that Roger had, and we were beginning to specu-

late about acquiring a rope when Red Dacey broke in.

"You'd get killed," he said.

"Not if I had a strong long rope," Roger replied.

"The rope don't matter any. By the time you were halfway down, Crazy Bill would reach out and grab you."

"Who's Crazy Bill?" I asked.

"Reach out from where?" from Charlie.

"He's got a cave halfway down the cliff," Red said.

"Crazy Bill?" Fred Lyons said nervously. "A cave?"

Red turned to Roger. "You mean you've never seen him?"

"I never even heard of him," Roger said.

"Well, it goes to show you ain't as smart as some people think you are," Red said. "Follow me. I'll show you the cave."

As we wended our way down the old path I felt sure I was not the only skeptic present. Red had a habit of throwing a monkey wrench in the works whenever Roger came up with a new angle on adventure. I figured this was just one more scene stealer.

Ten minutes later we arrived at the familiar clearing beside Ice Water Brook and, through squinting eyes, started a slow study of High Ridge's craggy face. We had all seen it a dozen times before and had never seen anything in particular because we had never been looking for anything like a cave.

"Well, there it is," Red said, pointing a finger.

"Where?" I asked.

"Halfway up to the left here. Where there's a ledge sticking out like a porch."

"I don't see it," Roger said.

"Look where I'm pointing and you will," Red said.

We bunched up behind him and took aim along his extended arm.

"I think I see it now," Charlie said. "Like a big crack in the cliff."

"That's it," Red said. "That's the entrance. And inside there's a room as big as a cellar."

I don't think I really saw anything, but I imagined I did and nodded my head. Red became a lawyer later in life and I've heard he had a magic way with juries.

"I think I see it now," Fred Lyons said uncertainly.

"I still don't see a darn thing," Roger said.

"That's because you probably need glasses," Red said.

"Bushwah."

"All right, wise guy, but the last kid that Crazy Bill caught alone in the woods—well, he disappeared forever."

"Who was that? Roger demanded.

"Billy Sneider."

"He moved to Syracuse. *Everyone* knows that."

"His *parents* moved to Syracuse. Not Billy."

"I never heard that before."

"It's true, though. The Sneiders moved away because they couldn't stand to live in a place where Billy just got lost."

"And you think it was Crazy Bill caught him?" Charlie asked, eyes wide.

"I can't prove it," Red said. "But I'm pretty sure."

"How come you know so much about all this?" Roger wanted to know.

"My father told me," Red said positively.

For the moment that ended the argument. In our young world a father's testimony was final. As I say, this all happened 30 years ago, before the coming of flower children.

A bit later, as we were beginning to wander back home, Red let out a hoot. "There he is. Up there on the ledge. Look quick."

We all turned fearfully.

"Did you see him?" Red asked excitedly. "He was standing there just as plain!"

"I think I saw him," Fred Lyons said.

"His face is all whiskers," Red said. "You saw him, didn't you, Austin?"

"Yes," Austin said.

"No, you didn't, Aussie," Roger said.

"Yes," Austin persisted.

"You're seeing things," Roger said. "There's nothing up there in those rocks. I'll prove it to you tomorrow without any question."

"How?" Fred Lyons asked.

"Wait and see," Roger said, smiling like a daredevil.

By some unspoken agreement we met the following morning after breakfast under the crabapple tree in Fournier's Meadow. I carried a bamboo cane. Charlie toted a baseball bat. Red wore his new knife and sheath. Roger had a hank of frayed rope (a discarded clothesline) looped over his shoulder. In a sense, we were armed against the contingency of evil.

"What are we going to do?" Fred Lyons asked apprehensively. He was equipped with a hammerless cap pistol.

"That's what I'd like to know," Red said, with a challenging look at Roger.

"I'm going to lower myself down to that cave with this rope," Roger said. "Let's go."

"You're crazy," Red said.

"We'll see who's crazy. You coming along?"

Again single file (the safest way to travel in the wilderness), we made our way up the summer slopes, where a few of Mr. Fournier's cows were ruminating, to the previously blazed trail that took us in about fifteen minutes to our goal. In unaccustomed silence we watched as Roger unshouldered the rope and tied an end of it to the dogwood tree. This rope didn't look long enough or strong enough to do the job, and finally I said so.

"Maybe you're right," Roger said. "I'll test it."

He found a boulder twice the size of a football and turned the rope around it twice and secured it with an impressive combination of knots. The boulder must have weighed more than 100 pounds because it took two of us—Charlie and me—to nudge it along the ground to the edge of the cliff. Roger payed out the rope while Fred, Red and Austin watched.

"Ready, get set," I said.

"Give me a hand with the rope, somebody," Roger said.

Austin jumped to his side.

"Not you, Aussie. You're too light."

Red was the heaviest, but he didn't move.

Fred Lyons, not much heavier than Austin, finally came forward and cautiously took some of the slack rope in both hands.

"Ready?" I asked.

Digging his heels into the stony ground, Roger nodded.

Charlie and I pushed the boulder over the side. The rope grew taut and began to pull Roger and Fred quickly forward. Fred was more hindrance than help. I grabbed the moving rope myself and reared backwards. That stopped the boulder's descent. Roger heaved a sigh.

"Now," he said, after a few seconds, "easy does it."

Together we began paying out the rope, a hand's width at a time. One-two, one-two, one—And suddenly we were flat on our back with an end of rope snapping at the air above us.

"Look at that rock bounce," Charlie was yelling.

I can hear it to this day, and especially well this morning, as it slams its way downward from outcropping to ledge until at last it concludes its bruising course in a muffled thud, which means it is half-buried in the sod near Ice Water Brook. (The news story from Switzerland reports that Miss Miriam Ryman, falling 1000

meters from a glacial precipice, was found to have broken every bone in her body when recovered two days later from a snowfilled moraine.)

The next afternoon we found one of Crazy Bill's shoes. It happened as we were engaged in one of our recurring expeditions to learn the source of Ice Water Brook. We never did find this source, as I recall, but each exploratory trip always carried us a little farther upstream and into a new realm of speculation.

"I bet it begins up on Sachem Hill," Charlie was saying.

"How far is that?" Fred asked.

"Five or six miles, at least," Charlie said.

"Hey, take a look here," Red called from a thicket of cattails.

We hastened to his side. There, amid a lush crop of skunk cabbage, was a mildewed shoe with a big hole in the sole. It was a man's yellow workshoe, a leather loop at the back, and somehow it seemed to menace us by its very emptiness.

"Crazy Bill's," Red said in a whisper.

We kept staring at that shoe in horrified fascination.

"I bet he's watching us," Red whispered again.

Peering into the alders and birches that surrounded us, we expected to see wicked green eyes (one of which we now knew to be glass, for Red Dacey had been intermittently describing Crazy Bill in minute detail) taking our measure before an all-out assault. Then we were running headlong downstream, except for Roger, who limited himself to a rapid walk, though he looked suspiciously from side to side.

A couple of days later we found the straw hat in Mr. Fournier's apple orchard. The apples were still green and hard. Again it was Red who identified the old hat as Crazy Bill's.

Roger contested the claim. "It's just any old hat. Probably belongs to one of the men who were spraying here last week."

"It's Crazy Bill's," Red said smugly.

"How can you tell?" I asked.

"I've seen him wearing it."

"Where?"

"Down at Smith's."

"He goes to Smith's?" Roger asked scornfully. "Leaves his cave and goes down to Smith's?"

"Every Saturday morning," Red said.

"I'd just like to see that," Roger said.

"When's Saturday?" Charlie asked.

"Tomorrow," Fred Lyons said. He was the only boy around who kept track of time during summer vacation.

The next morning we were loitering, not too inconspicuously, perhaps, in front of Smith's General Store & Post Office. To pass the time we were chewing jawbreakers that stained our lips along the chromatic scale from bright red to nauseous violet.

A little after nine, when the mail was officially up in the rental boxes, this old man—all of forty—drove a slow-moving, slack-backed horse with wagon to the high curb in front of Smith's. He was hatless and his head was bald. He had a beard. His checkered shirt was open at the throat to a puff of gray hair. In short, he was exactly as I have described Crazy Bill earlier, even to the tattoo on his right forearm.

"Is that him?" Fred Lyons asked through orange-colored lips.

Red Dacey nodded, obviously pleased with himself.

Crazy Bill gave the old horse an affectionate pat, feed bag over the horse's bowed head. His glass eye glittered fiercely.

"Gee whiz!" Charlie said in a low voice.

Crazy Bill gave the old horse an effectionate pat, then entered Smith's.

I remember wondering why he should like horses and hate kids. Another incongruency half came to mind also: where would a cave dweller keep a horse and wagon like that?

"I'm going to buy a brand new rope," Roger Oliver was saying.

"Yes," Austin said.

"What for?" Red asked.

"To lower myself down to that cave," Roger said. "If there's any such thing as a cave."

"You'll find out," Red said.

"I'll find out a lot of things, maybe," Roger said.

"Like what?" Red said.

"Like the truth," Roger said.

"Oh yeah?" Red seemed to be getting mad about it. "A lot you know about the truth. Besides, a good rope'll cost you probably more than a dollar."

"I got two dollars saved up," Roger said, and without further argument he left us on the run to get his savings.

We hung around a while longer, the rest of us, and pretty soon Crazy Bill came out of Smith's with a few pieces of mail in his hand and nosed around the stone steps until he found a cigar butt of suitable length, which he pocketed. Then he took the feedbag off his horse and, as he climbed aboard the creaking wagon, we scattered to the four winds full of the mysterious depravity that we had seen close up.

Early that evening, just after suppertime, Mr. Fourneir and his beagle found Roger Oliver's broken body at the foot of High Ridge. The state police came and investigated. They even asked Charlie and me a few questions and they smiled when we told them about Crazy Bill. In the end, Roger's death was attributed to the accidental breaking of the rope.

We kids knew better. We knew Roger would never spend his hard-saved money on a rope not strong enough for the job.

A few Saturdays later, my father and I were coming out of Smith's when Crazy Bill drove up.

"There he is, Pa," I whispered excitedly. "The man I've been telling you about."

"You mean Jim Punch?"

"Crazy Bill we call him. He's the man who killed Roger."

My father's face grew stern. "Stop that nonsense, boy. The man on the wagon is Jim Punch. He lives with his crippled old mother over in Palmerston. A bit simple, perhaps, but he wouldn't hurt a fly."

"But he lives in a cave in High Ridge," I insisted.

"He lives on a hardpan farm in Palmerston," my father said.

"But *somebody* had to cut the rope," I said. "It was new. It wouldn't just *break*, would it?"

"Don't you remember what the police said, boy? The rope was likely cut by the flinty edge of the rock formation. Either that or it had a flaw."

That's what the police said. They said it thirty years ago, before investigatory techniques had attained certian refinements quite commonplace today, and intuitively I have always felt the police were wrong.

The inquest into the violent death of Miss Miriam Ryman proves how right I was. For instance, a microscopic examination of the broken strand of nylon rope found around Miss Ryman's waist convinced the Swiss authorities that a sharp knife had performed the severance.

Suspicion that Miss Ryman's death might not be accidental was first aroused, according to the news story, when her fiance, Leonard Hull, a junior partner in the New York law firm of Dacey & Mitchell, went to the police with a tale of passion and jealousy.

Miss Ryman was the private secretary to the firm's senior partner, W. R. Dacey, who had conceived an ungovernable passion for her. Though married himself and the father of three children, Dacey would not listen to reason. Upon hearing of Miss Ryman's betrothal to Hull, he flew into a fit of jealous rage, but several days later, apparently reconciling himself to the inevitable, he had suggested a combined business and pleasure trip to Switzerland. The pleasure consisted of skiing and

mountain climbing and ended for Hull with a broken ankle.

"I was in a cast that fatal day Miriam and Bill decided to try conquering Les Trois Cols," Hull allegedly told police. "We were to leave for Paris the following morning. Knowing Bill's dog-in-the-manger complex, I should have . . ."

W. R. Dacey. William. Bill. Not until this morning did I realize this was Red's given name.

THREE MILES TO MARLEYBONE

Henry Slesar

The bell would sound no more from the second floor bedroom. There would be no more walks up the carpeted stairs, carrying the silver tray with Daddy's breakfast, lunch, and dinner dishes. Now the bed upstairs was empty.

Mr. Bogash accompanied Mary home from the funeral. He had been Daddy's lawyer; now he seemed to be hers, as part of the total inheritance. In the car going back, he had patted her arm with his gray-gloved hand and said, "We'll have a nice long chat soon. As you probably know, your father's will leaves you everything. There's a good deal of money involved, of course," lowering his voice to churchlike solemnity, "and a good deal of responsibility therefore . . ."

Therefore, whereas, so be it, Mary murmured to herself, grateful when Mr. Bogash had driven away and left her alone with Sophie, the housekeeper. Not so grateful when Sophie walked into the living room carrying the afternoon mail, and began her familiar refrain.

"You've got to think of yourself, child. I've told you that a thousand times, only now it's more true than ever. You've got to make plans, Mary. A life of your own, marriage . . ."

"Please, Sophie. Couldn't we talk about it some other time? Is that the mail?"

Sophie watched with folded arms as Mary opened the yellow envelopes, reading the telegrams of sympathy with dry-eyed detachment. Most were from Daddy's business associates; he seemed to have dozens of them. After a while, the somber words began to run together in a meaningless jumble.

Then she cried out, *"Sophie!"*

The housekeeper started, fearing an outburst of grief. But Mary was actually smiling, her eyes shining. "Sophie, it's from Uncle Vernon! *Uncle Vernon!* He's alive, Sophie, he's coming to the funeral!"

"But we just had the funeral."

"I guess he didn't know when it was. His telegram says he'll be here as fast as he can. It's from New York." She looked up. "Uncle Vernon's *alive,* Sophie. My father's brother! I haven't seen him since I was a child."

"And where's he been all this time?"

"Everywhere, I suppose, all over the world. He's in the theatre, a song-and-dance man. He once played for the King of England, Sophie, a command performance!" She re-read the telegram eagerly. "I thought he must be dead. We hadn't heard from him in ever so long . . ."

"Mm," Sophie said, her lips folded in a frown. "Song and dance is what it sounds like, all right. What kind of a man doesn't show up until his brother's dead?"

"Daddy never talked about Uncle Vernon much. I don't think they got along. He was always popping up unexpectedly when I was a little girl. I was twelve last time . . ."

"You're acting like you're twelve right now." But the glow in Mary's eyes was undiminished, and Sophie decided to share her pleasure. "Well, I suppose he'll want to stay a while. The blue guest room has not been straightened up in months; I'd better see to it. Mary . . ."

She touched her shoulder. "Don't go getting all involved with this one now, uncle or no uncle. It's a young man you need, someone to love and marry."

"I guess I am acting pretty silly," Mary said. "I haven't seen him in so many years. We've both probably changed a lot . . ." Her mood deflated, she stood up. "I'm awfully tired, Sophie. I'm going upstairs."

But she took the telegram with her.

Hostilities were declared at eight-thirty the next morning, when Sophie answered the sprightly ring of the doorbell and came face to face with Uncle Vernon Somerset. They took each other's measure, recognized the gulf of interests that made them implacable enemies, and then resumed the amenities. With the smile of a troubador he whisked off his Alpine hat, bowed low so that Sophie could admire the thick, parafin-like hair that covered his head, and inquired after his niece.

Mary came hurtling down the stairs, looking prettier than Sophie had seen her look in months. Mary had her mother's Dresden features and her father's good Swedish bones, but the combination had never looked so appealing before.

"Mary!" Uncle Vernon said, spreading his arms wide. "Oh, Mary, child, Lord love you!"

Her sudden rush ended in timidity. Yes, it was Uncle Vernon; but it was a stranger, too, so much smaller than she remembered, the broad collar wilted and the bow tie rumpled, a paunch straining against his vest, the eyes pouchy and dull.

Then the moment passed, and she fell laughing into his embrace, laughing and then crying, and Uncle Vernon's plump hands patted her back comfortingly, while moisture spilled on cue from his own pouchy, dull eyes.

"Oh, my little moppet," he crooned. "Oh, in what sad times we meet again, my little Mary moppet."

An hour later, on the verandah, Uncle Vernon was wolfing his second order of fried eggs and bacon. It was a wonder he found time to eat at all. He talked without

pause, punctuating with his fork, stabbing in the air at the exotic place names that fell from his lips as if pinning them to a map of the world.

"Bombay!" he said. "Hong Kong! Paris! The Ginza in Tokyo! The London Palladium! These old softshoes of mine took me more places than a sea captain!"

"Where were you last, Uncle Vernon?"

"Why, Europe, darling, the Continent. I just happened to be in New York when I heard the sad news. I'd come back to talk to my agent about—well, something very exciting . . . in the theatre, I mean."

"What do you mean? Will you be coming back to America?"

He chuckled, and buttered another toast. "Even we old ghosts come back now and then. I knew Broadway couldn't do without us song-and-dance men forever."

"That would be wonderful! We could see each other often then. Do you have to go back to New York soon?"

"No-o-o, these things take time. My agent's promised to call me here as soon as he learns anything. So you'll just have to put with your old Uncle for a while."

"As long as you want," Mary said happily. "The longer the better."

Sophie, standing in the doorway, folded her arms.

In the days that followed, Sophie was a cat waiting patiently at the mousehole for the first false step. But Uncle Vernon was a gray old mouse, and for the first two weeks, his behavior was a model for house guests. If he made himself a bit too comfortable, ate more than normal appetite could demand, appropriated the most comfortable armchairs, there was still no real cause for complaint. So Sophie continued to wait.

It was Mr. Bogash who first brought the mouse out into the open. Uncle Vernon was on the town the evening the lawyer dropped in. It hadn't taken him long to discover the hospitality of the vicinity's friendliest tavern, the Swordfish.

Mr. Bogash didn't mention Uncle Vernon until his initial business was concluded. There were papers for Mary to sign, endless papers, crammed with jargon beyond her comprehension. Then Mr. Bogash delicately lifted his coffee cup, and said "By the way, this Uncle of yours . . ."

"I wanted to ask you about that," Mary said. "Of course, there's no mention of him in Daddy's will; we all thought he was dead."

"No," the lawyer said. "Your father knew he was still alive. The will simply doesn't make any bequests to him, nor can he rightfully demand any, no matter what you have been told."

"What I've been told?"

"I thought your Uncle might have said something."

"Why, no, not a word. Why do you say that?"

Bogash cleared his throat. "Well, he came to see me."

"Uncle Vernon?"

"Yes. He came by the office yesterday afternoon, to inquire about the estate. I told him exactly what I told you."

"I knew it!" Sophie said triumphantly. "That's the only reason he came back, to see what he could get for himself!"

"I can't believe that!" Mary turned worried eyes on the lawyer. "It isn't true, is it?"

"Well, I wouldn't really say that. When I told Mr. Somerset the conditions of your father's will, he said it was exactly what he expected, and considered it fair."

"You see?" Mary said.

But when the lawyer had gone, Sophie said, "No, I *don't* see. I can't trust that Uncle of yours, Mary. He makes my corns ache when I look at him."

"Sophie, please!"

"He treats me like a servant, Mary; that's something you haven't done to me ever. He's a sly old codger . . ."

Mary whirled on her, a Mary she didn't know.

"Why, you're jealous of him, Sophie, that's all it is!"

"Mary!"

"Don't you ever speak of him like that again! I mean it, Sophie. I really do."

She stormed out of the room, and Sophie gasped, like a wading child suddenly finding herself in mid-ocean.

Uncle Vernon had been in the house three weeks to the day when the letter arrived.

"It came, moppet!" Uncle Vernon caroled happily, waving the envelope. "From little old New York, my agent!"

"Then it's really true? You're going back on Broadway?"

"The backers of the show want me to audition tomorrow morning. If I don't fall off the stage, chances look pretty good. I'll have to pack a few things tonight."

"I'll help you," Sophie said dryly, ignoring Mary's quick frown.

But there was a catch. "It's only an audition, you understand," Uncle Vernon said. "I won't be gone more than two, three days. I'll be back around Friday—with good news, I hope."

His intention to make the trip a short one was clear the next morning; the small parcel he carried couldn't have held more than one change of clothing. But Mary was almost as tearful as if the parting had been final. She drove him to the depot, and stood waving from the platform until the train was out of sight. When she returned home, her mood was melancholy again.

On the train, Uncle Vernon Somerset's mood was better. Whistling, he took the letter from his pocket and read it for the third time. It was a brief message, but it held a promise of wonderful things to come. Good old Harry Domino! If he knew that Vernon had described him as an "agent" he would have turned purple. Harry abominated agents, and always had. Domino, the Great! Uncle Vernon chuckled, and then leaned against

the train window, half-dozing, half-speculating; speculating about Harry, wondering how the years had treated him. Wondering if inactivity had cost him his skill, that mysterious knack that Uncle Vernon couldn't think of without a shiver of awe. Good old Harry! Uncle Vernon shut his eyes and saw his name as if on a theatrical poster, the billing bold and scarlet: Domino, the Great; Domino, the Man with the Miracle Eyes.

It was hard to remember when the sleeplessness began. It wasn't long after Uncle Vernon's return from New York, that much she knew. Were the two connected? Was it the effect of the old man's disappointment? He had returned like a defeated warrior, with pennants dragging on the ground. He had tried bravely to hide what he felt, but Mary's heart shriveled when she heard his report. No, he hadn't slipped off the stage; but he was just too old.

Was that the cause of her insomnia? Or was it something else? Was she waiting for a sound she would never hear again, the ring of a bell in the empty bedroom across the hall? Was she missing her father so much? Whatever the cause, Mary wasn't sleeping.

Sophie had the practical approach. She found Mary in the kitchen at three one morning, warming a pan of milk at the stove. "You've got to see a doctor," she said firmly. "Mary, a person can't live without sleep. It isn't natural!"

"I'm sure it's just nerves, Sophie."

"Yes, and I shouldn't wonder. I've had a bad case of nerves myself, ever since Mr. Show Business moved into this house."

"This has nothing to do with Uncle Vernon."

"Well, maybe it's a vitamin deficiency or something. Nobody can tell you except a doctor. Will you make an appointment with Dr. Hazelton tomorrow?"

"I'll see."

"Oh, Mary," Sophie groaned. "Why is it you don't

listen to me anymore? Should I just be a servant around here, the way your uncle wants?"

Mary reached for her hand. "Of course not. I'll see Dr. Hazelton, Sophie, tomorrow."

She took the convertible into town the next day. The rush of air against her face was tonic itself; it improved more than outlook; it improved her appearance. The wind took her unruly hair and combed it back in a clean auburn cascade. She found herself enjoying the ten-mile journey into the neighboring town of Montcalm.

Dr. Hazelton's home was his headquarters, a neat white Colonial on a sidestreet, within walking distance of the main thoroughfare. Mary had always thought of him as "old" Dr. Hazelton; he had been white-haired and elderly even during her childhood gamut of measles and mumps and whooping cough.

In the small anteroom, she recognized the voice of the matronly receptionist she had spoken to by phone. While she waited on a bench, the inner door opened and a young man with a slightly mashed nose, a humorous mouth, and dark eyes, peeked out and said something to the matron. His white coat labeled him "doctor."

Mary said, "Who was that? The man that just poked his head out."

"Why, that's Dr. Hazelton."

"Marvelous!" Mary said. "What kind of vitamins did he take?"

"I beg pardon?"

It was Hazelton's son, of course; she knew that the minute she entered the examining room. Old Dr. Hazelton couldn't be practicing still; he might even be dead. This was his son and heir, inheritor of all the tongue depressors and thermometers and local complaints. He had already established a new era of science; there were shiny new sterilizers and cabinets and X-ray machinery.

He caught her puzzled face, and said, "You weren't expecting to see my father, were you?"

"I suppose I was. He's not . . ."

"Dead? No, they'll have to kill Dad with a stick. But he retired eight months ago, and I took over his practice. You don't have to worry. I'm ten years out of medical school, been practicing in Boston. Then Pop talked me into coming here." He grinned. "For the first time, I think maybe it was a good idea."

Mary knew she was blushing. But the change of color had an immediate effect on the young man; he became all business. He carefully noted Mary's name, age, address, and previous medical history, and then asked about her current complaint. She told him about her problem, hesitantly at first, but his gentle questioning and professional demeanor made her feel at ease. By the time the examination took its physical form, she was almost—not quite—free of embarrassment.

When it was over, he sat at an ancient rolltop, apparently the only survivor of old Dr. Hazelton's reign, and told her what he thought.

"I don't think it's organic. I'll run some tests on that blood sample, but I'd say you were in fine health. Would you describe yourself as a coffee or tea addict?"

"No, I wouldn't." She raised her chin. "I suppose it's my nerves. That's the usual explanation, isn't it?"

"Well, maybe. But they've got other kinds of doctors for that. All I can do is see that you get some sleep. I'll prescribe something."

"All right."

She watched as he wrote out the prescription. Curiously, his slightly mashed nose made his profile even more attractive. His hands were strong and well-shaped. Their fingers touched when he handed her the prescription blank.

"You'll take these every night about half an hour before bedtime. As soon as you sleep normally again, stop taking them. And—I'd like to see you again."

"When?"

He grinned.

"Suppose I call for an appointment?"

When she left the office, the matron greeted her with a smile, as if guessing that her spirits, if not her health, were already improved. Later, she looked at the prescription blank to get the doctor's first name. It was Bartholemew.

Mary left the prescription at the drugstore in Marleybone. At home, she found that Sophie had taken the station wagon for her weekly trip to the Montcalm supermarket, and Uncle Vernon was in the study, rearranging the clippings in the faded scrapbook that was part of his traveling gear. She told him the results of her visit.

"Well, that sounds sensible enough. What time will the pills be ready? I've got to drive into town in about an hour."

He returned with them late in the afternoon. The small plastic bottle contained a dozen little white pills, no bigger than aspirin tablets.

Mary took the first one at eleven, and went to bed half an hour later, hoping the medicinal magic would work. Her heart was pounding, and her arms and legs were stiff. *I'm trying too hard,* she told herself. *I've got to relax.*

She was still awake an hour later. She gripped the sheets and prayed for the release of sleep.

In the morning, Sophie looked at her dark-rimmed eyes. "Didn't you take it, for heaven's sake? The pill?"

"I took it," Mary said numbly. "It just didn't work."

"That doctor! If his old father were still here . . ."

Uncle Vernon was even more critical. "My poor Mary! Didn't I tell you doctors don't know everything? Now you listen to your Uncle Vernon. Just before you go to bed, you take a nice hot bath to relax . . ."

Mary took the bath, shortly after downing the sleeping pill. Soaking in the water, she felt her limbs unstiffen and her eyes grow heavy; the prescription seemed to

be effective at last. She climbed into bed, feeling warm and relaxed.

But sleep didn't come, not until after three that morning, when she dozed off with tears drying on her cheek.

Uncle Vernon cornered her the following day. "Now you listen to me, moppet. I know I'm a foolish old man with nothing in his head 'cept a lot of silly songs and old vaudeville jokes, but I've got an idea about this sleeping business. Will you listen to me?"

"I'll listen," Mary said.

"You'll probably say I'm crazy," he warned. "Only I've seen this work, Mary. Even your fancy doctors today admit there's something to it . . ."

"To what, Uncle Vernon?"

"You won't laugh? Hypnosis, Mary."

"Hypnosis?"

"Don't go getting that funny look on your face. I know what you're thinking, black magic and all that junk. Well, it's not so, Mary; it's perfectly respectable. They've even got a nice scientific name for it now, hypnotherapy."

She smiled. "I think you're really serious."

"Of course I'm serious! Listen, when I was doing the circuit in the old days, practically every other show had a hypnotist on the bill. They'd get a bunch of people up from the audience and make them do the darndest things . . ."

"I've seen stage hypnotists, Uncle Vernon."

"But it's not just a lot of foolishness any more. They pull teeth with hypnotism, cure people of things. Why, women have had babies, without anesthesia, just with hypnosis."

"Yes, I've heard that."

"There was this fella I met on a tour down South back in, oh, I guess 1946 or thereabouts. He was a hypnotist, and he got to be the unofficial sawbones of the

troupe. Like he helped this Oriental acrobat get rid of headaches, just by hypnotizing. And he also fixed up a mean case of insomnia."

Mary watched him intently.

"It was a woman," he said. "Name was Angela, and she was half of a dance team named Tony and the Angel. This Angela was having trouble with her husband. Tony was something of a Casanova, you see, and Angela was having these sleepless nights. One day, she hears about what the hypnotist did for the acrobat, and she asks if he can help her. Well, he says he'll try."

"And did he ?"

"He did," Uncle Vernon said solemnly. "Cured her in less than a week, Mary, so help me."

Mary said, "And what happened to Tony?"

"Well," Uncle Vernon chuckled, "Tony ran off with the girl in the juggling act, but that was something even a hypnotist couldn't stop." He came over and took her hands. "But I'm serious about this, Mary. I hate to see you suffering."

"It's very sweet of you, Uncle Vernon. But—well, I'm not sure I *can* be hypnotized. I don't suppose everyone can be."

"Most people can, darling. Why, for all you know, you might need only two, three visits and your problem will be solved. Will you let me look into it, moppet?"

"All right," Mary said. "It can't hurt me, can it?"

She was thinking about Uncle Vernon's advice later that day, with some faint amusement, when the telephone rang.

"This is Bart Hazelton," the voice said. "I'd like to make an appointment this week. Do you think you might be free tonight?"

She laughed, and said, "Is this a house call?"

"Yes, I'll pick you up at seven. There's a place on Marleybone Road called Anton's. I prescribe their steak."

"You're the doctor," Mary answered.

The prescription turned out to be a good one, and Mary attacked it with an astonishing appetite. Bart waited until after the main course before questioning her about the other prescription, the less effective one.

"Sleeping pills don't always work, of course," he said, "depending on the strength and the amount of resistance a person might have to sedatives. Still, I don't understand it."

"Maybe I'm just a nervous wreck," Mary said. "Maybe I should see an analyst, or do what my Uncle suggested."

"What was that?"

"You'll probably think it's a lot of nonsense, but he was so darned enthusiastic about it . . . " She took a sip of water. "He wanted me to see a hypnotist."

For a moment, Bart seemed to have no reaction.

"Well, I've heard nuttier ideas. Hypnotherapy's getting to be recognized more and more as a useful kind of treatment. To tell you the truth, I've done some of it myself."

"You have?"

"At college. At one point, I had thoughts about going into psychiatry, and I thought it might be interesting to study the technique. Got to be pretty good at it, too."

"Do you think hypnosis might help me?"

"I'd say it was possible." He grinned crookedly. "Only don't ask me to be your Svengali, lady. If I had you in my power, I'm not sure I could trust myself."

"But you can't hypnotize people into doing what they don't *want* to do, isn't that so?"

"That," Bart said, holding up a finger, "is a dangerous assumption. Sure, if the hypnotist gives you a command that goes counter to some moral or religious ethic, you won't obey. But there are ways around it, my pretty one."

"What ways?"

"Well, this is pretty crude, but let's say I handed you a loaded rifle and told you to shoot that cat." He

nodded at a sleeping tabby near the fireplace. "Do you think you would?"

"Certainly not!"

"No, you wouldn't," Bart said. "But what if I told you that it wasn't a cat, but a deadly rattlesnake. You might fire that rifle then, Mary, on a moment's notice."

"If you're trying to scare me, you're succeeding."

"I don't want to do that. I happen to think hypnotherapy is a good thing. Just be careful of your choice of doctors."

They took a drive after dinner. For a newcomer, Bart seemed to know the countryside well. He showed her a drive that afforded a breathtaking view of the lake.

"You've been here before," Mary said accusingly.

"Once or twice."

"I won't even ask with whom."

They absorbed the view in silence for a few minutes, and then Mary said, "Bart, do you think there's something wrong with me? Mentally, I mean?"

"I don't know," he said seriously. "I think something's bothering you, Mary, but I don't know what. If I had to make a guess, I'd say it was some kind of guilt."

"Guilt? But that's ridiculous. What would I feel guilty about?"

"I couldn't say."

"I think it's Daddy that's upset me this way. I think it's because—I miss him so much."

"Is that what you think?"

"Yes!" she said sharply. "Yes, I do! I loved Daddy very much. I took care of him for years . . ."

"Of course you loved him, that was only natural. But a person can love and hate at the same time, Mary. We can resent the love that others demand of us, and that's what can tear us apart."

"That's nothing but cheap psychology!"

"I didn't say it was expensive. It's just possible that people can even feel a sense of relief at the death of someone they love. That's where the guilt comes in."

She stared at him in unconcealed horror.

"Do you think I was *glad* when Daddy died?"

He touched her arm. "I'm not talking about *you*. I don't know you well enough yet, Mary, but I'm trying to get the chance. So let's drop the subject, huh?"

"Yes," she said coldly. "Let's drop it. If you don't mind, I'd like to go home now."

He tried further remonstrance, but she didn't answer. Their good-byes at the door of her house were brief, and there was a finality in their brevity.

Mary was going upstairs to her bedroom when Uncle Vernon called out from the study.

"Did you have a nice time, darling?"

She avoided his eyes. "Yes, it was fine."

"That doctor of yours looks like a fine man. I was wondering if you asked him about our conversation this morning. Did you remember?"

"The hypnotist? Yes, I did. He seemed to think that it was a good idea."

"He did?" Uncle Vernon beamed. "Well, that's wonderful, Mary. I'm very glad. Because I went ahead and called some people I know, to get their advice. And I think I found somebody."

"You have?"

"His name is Dr. Herbert Dudley, and he's got an office in Boston. His specialty's hypnotherapy, and he's one of the best." He came over to hold her hands. "Don't be angry with your old Uncle Vernon for this, Mary, but I went ahead and called him."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he sounded very nice. I explained the problem, your insomnia and all, and he was very encouraging. He's sure he can help you, Mary. Will you see him, moppet, for me?"

She looked into his loving, supplicating eyes.

"Yes, Uncle Vernon," she said. "Of course I will."

The address was an apartment building on Common-

wealth Avenue. Nothing identified the doctor's residence except the small black nameplate over the bell:

HERBERT L. DUDLEY, M.D.

The name itself was reassuring; she was comforted to see that it bore the familiar initials. Mary pushed the little white button, and soft chimes brought the doctor to the door.

Her first thought was about his eyes. Somehow, she expected a hypnotic practitioner to have black, compelling eyes, but Dr. Dudley's were soft, brown, and overhung with shaggy gray brows that dimmed their luster. He was elderly, stoop-shouldered, and weary of expression, but his voice had surprising vigor.

"Miss Somerset?" he said. "Come in, my dear."

She entered the apartment shyly. It was only that; there were none of the usual medical appurtenances, no examining room or glass cupboards or instruments. Dr. Dudley operated from his desk. The oversized leather chair in front of it was obviously reserved for his patients.

She sat at his bidding, and they chatted for a few minutes. He asked the usual questions, and she answered mechanically, her hands moving nervously in her lap.

"Please relax, my dear," he said soothingly. "You won't find this at all difficult. Once you've let yourself surrender to hypnotic suggestion, you'll find the experience pleasant and agreeable. The first thing you must learn is to trust me. Think you can do that?"

He went to the double window behind the desk, and drew the blind. Then he lit a small desk lamp with an opaque shade, and came to the front of the desk to face her.

"That's it," he said. "Just lean back in the chair and relax. It's a comfortable chair, isn't it? You know, some of my patients are so well-conditioned that they fall into a trance the moment they sit down in that chair."

He's so nice, Mary thought. *He's a kind man . . .*

"We're going to try the fascination method," Dr. Dudley said, moving an object into the light of the desk lamp. It was a small mirrored wheel mounted on a pedestal, and the electric cord trailing from the base indicated that the wheel was powered. When he flicked a switch, the wheel began to revolve, the light of the lamp reflected in the spinning mirrors. "As you can see, the thing *is* sort of fascinating. Your eyes adhere to it, you want to keep watching the mirrors spin. Watch it, Miss Somerset. Just watch it and clear your mind of everything. If you feel a little drowsy that's fine . . ."

She felt his hand stroking her arm, and as if from another room, Dr. Dudley asked if she could lift her right hand from the arm of the chair, lift it even though it had now become as heavy as lead. She shook her head no, and he seemed pleased with her reply. Then he said, "How are you feeling?"

Mary replied, "Why, fine," and looked into his kindly face, wondering why daylight was cast upon his lined features. She looked toward the window, saw that the blinds had been raised, and that the little mirrored wheel had stopped.

Dr. Dudley was smiling at her, aware of her puzzlement. "Yes, Miss Somerset, you were in an hypnotic state. You're a most cooperative subject, so we'll get along just fine."

"But I don't remember anything about it."

"I've instructed you not to remember what happens during the hypnosis. I think that's good therapy at this point. I'm hopeful for immediate results this evening."

"You mean my insomnia?"

"We'll see," Dr. Dudley said. "At any rate, I'd like to see you again on Thursday at this time."

"Yes, of course." She stood up and gave him her hand. "Thank you, doctor. It—it really wasn't so bad."

He laughed, and walked her to the door.

Mary was feeling elated when she walked into the house, but some of it dissipated, seeing Sophie. "So it's

true," the housekeeper said, thin-lipped. "You really went to that quack, didn't you?"

"Please, Sophie, I'd rather not discuss it."

"A hypnotist! I suppose it'll be a witch doctor next."

"Is Uncle Vernon in?"

"No, he's out with his pals at that gin mill. He had a fine old time while you were gone today. He borrowed your camera, the good one."

"My camera?"

"Yes. Your Uncle's turned into a shutterbug all of a sudden. He took the camera and the station wagon and went around taking pictures of the scenery."

"Nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"I didn't want to lend it to him. I said it wasn't my place to lend it. But he was so insistent, I had to. I can't understand that uncle of yours, Mary. For the life of me, I can't."

"I'm going to change," Mary said, and went upstairs.

That night, she approached her bed gingerly, almost afraid to put the day's experience to a test. She climbed between the sheets, wondering if there was truly a post-hypnotic suggestion in her subconscious that would finally bring her the sleep she craved.

She turned off the bedside lamp. Oddly, it took a long time to dim. When it did, the darkness was so total that there was hardly any need to shut her eyes against the light. But the lids were heavy, and the eyes closed of their own accord, and Mary Somerset slept.

When she came down to breakfast, Uncle Vernon was sitting on the veranda with a cup of coffee balanced on the rail and a copy of *Variety* in his lap. She came straight to him and kissed his forehead. He looked up with gratified eyes.

"Oh, my little moppet," he said softly. "It's worked, has it? It's really worked?"

Sophie heard the good news with less gratification, but tried not to show it. She was happy Mary was sleep-

ing again. But she knew that she had lost an important strategic position in the household.

At three that afternoon, Bart Hazelton called. Mary's "hello" was frigid.

"Don't get upset," Bart said. "This is merely a professional call. How are you feeling?"

"Just fine, thank you."

"The insomnia?"

"I said I'm fine. As a matter of fact, I slept very well last night, without the sleeping pill."

"You did, huh, Listen, Mary, I would like to see you again sometime; in the office, I mean. It's nothing serious, but I'd just like to doublecheck that blood sample I took."

"Why? Did you find something wrong?"

"Let's say it was something out of the ordinary. Your bloodtest showed a rather abnormal uric acid content."

"What's uric acid?"

"Well, it's something that might indicate an overdose of caffein in your system. Maybe you're ingesting more of the stuff than you realize, and that could account for your problem."

"I don't think I have a problem anymore," Mary said stiffly. "I'm starting to sleep again."

"Well, it wouldn't hurt to doublecheck."

"I'll see," she said.

When she hung up, she felt the need to talk to someone, and went in search of Uncle Vernon. She found him in the study, a row of glossy photographs placed on the desk blotter as if arranged for a game of solitaire. He looked up rather sheepishly as she came in, and started to gather them together.

"Sophie told me you were taking pictures," Mary said. "I didn't know you were interested in photography."

"Well, I'm no expert," he chuckled. "Some of these are pretty bad. Some friends of mine asked me about

where I was staying, so I thought I'd send some pictures."

"May I see them?"

He hesitated, and then handed over the stack. "Nothing very fancy, just a few snaps."

Mary skimmed through them, most were readside scenes, obviously taken from the car window. There were several photos of a portion of Marleybone Road between Marleybone and Montcalm, a sharp corner of the highway, she had never liked because of the sudden precipice beyond the railing. There was a large road sign a few yards ahead of the corner, that bore the words:

MARLEYBONE—3 MILES

"What in the world did you want this for?" Mary smiled. "A picture of a road sign?"

"Oh, that," Uncle Vernon laughed. "I'm sending that one to some friends in England. I thought they'd get a kick out of the way the Yanks spell Marleybone over here."

He took the photos from her, and said, "Listen, Mary, I hope you'll keep on seeing this Dr. Dudley. One good night's sleep doesn't make a cure, you know."

"Oh, I'll see him again. I've got an appointment on Thursday, same time."

"I'm glad," Uncle Vernon said.

Mary slept almost as well that night, but less so the following, and on Thursday she was actually eager to see Dudley again, to have the hypnotic prescription renewed. Almost from the moment he drew the blind she began to feel a pleasant sense of drowsiness; the mirrored wheel had hardly begun to gather speed when she yielded to his kind, persuasive voice. She slept that night at the first touch of head to pillow, slept dreamlessly, and woke to a sunny, optimistic morning.

On her third visit, Mary discovered an odd phenomenon, that she herself now appeared to be more relaxed

than the doctor. Something seemed to make his voice less vigorous; his stooped shoulders seemed to bear a heavier burden than before. But his power over her subconscious was as great as ever.

"It's really working, doctor," she told him. "I've slept every night since I saw you last."

"That's fine, my dear, I'm very glad."

"How many more sessions do you think will be necessary?"

"Not many, no," Dudley said abstractedly. "Perhaps —perhaps even the next time might be the last."

"You've helped me a lot, Dr. Dudley, I'm very grateful."

"Yes," the doctor said. "Shall we say next Friday?"

She had shaken the doctor's hand at her previous departures from the office, but he didn't offer it this time. He stood up behind the desk and smiled vaguely as she showed herself out.

When he was alone in the office, Dr. Dudley's smile faded slowly. He sighed, sat down again, and spread his hands out on the desk blotter. Then he slid open the top drawer, and removed the stamped envelope that constituted the sole contents of the drawer. With trembling fingers, he plucked the glossy photograph out of the envelope.

It was a picture taken at a sharp bend in a rural highway, a corner where a sudden precipice gaped beyond the protective railing. There was a sign a few yards before the curve.

MARLEYBONE—3 MILES

Mary had known that war clouds had been gathering between Sophie and Uncle Vernon since the day of his arrival, but she had hoped that her own neutrality would prevent open conflict. But now the war was over; the surrender had come at last. All that Sophie could salvage from the defeat was pride. That was why she remained firm in the face of Mary's tears and entreaties.

"I'm sorry, Mary," she said, concentrating on packing her luggage. "Your Uncle and I could never get along, not in the same house . . ."

"I'll talk to Uncle Vernon," Mary said. "I'll tell him how you feel, Sophie. We'll work things out."

"I couldn't ever trust that man, Mary, not if he turned sweet as blueberry pie. He's made you think he's something he's not."

"Do you think I don't know what he is?" She came to the housekeeper's side. "I'm not as dumb as all that, Sophie. I know the truth. I know he's just a silly old man who never did anything with his life, but it doesn't make any difference, not to me."

"He's a phony," Sophie said bitterly. "A good-for-nothing leech. All those stories he told you . . ."

"All right, they were illusions. Uncle Vernon needs illusions about himself, Sophie. Maybe we all do."

Sophie's look was both pitying and loving.

"Yes," she said sadly. "We all need illusions, I guess. Only I've run out of them, Mary. That's why I have to leave."

Uncle Vernon was in the livingroom when Sophie came downstairs with her suitcase. She held her head high, unwilling to appear humbled in her defeat.

The next day was Friday. Mary didn't have time to brood about Sophie's departure; she had a journey of her own to make, to the Boston office of Dr. Herbert Dudley, and to her final hypnotic treatment.

She slept well Friday night, but she was troubled by a dream, a dream of running in darkness that frightened her and made her glad to see daylight.

"Going shopping?" Uncle Vernon asked.

"Yes, I'd better," Mary said, looking at him across the breakfast table. "Until the employment agency comes up with somebody, I'll have to do the housekeeping."

"Want me to come along, moppet?"

"No, thanks, I can manage. I'll take the station

wagon to the Montcalm supermarket. I'll be back in time to fix us lunch."

When Mary drove off, she saw Uncle Vernon framed in the livingroom window, watching her.

It was a fine, warm summer's day. The cloudless blue sky restored some of her lost contentment. She thought of Sophie, but not without hope. She couldn't believe Sophie would really desert her. There was always the chance she would return.

The Montcalm supermarket was a bright and cheerful institution, and she enjoyed the expedition. She wheeled the wire cart up and down the aisles, forgetting her carefully made list, and piling up one impulsive purchase after another.

At a shelf displaying imported delicacies, she was just reaching for a jar of brandied peaches when a hand beat her to it. It was Bart Hazelton's hand, and she flushed when she saw his grinning face.

"Uh-uh," he said. "Wouldn't recommend that. You're liable to make a bedtime snack and spoil that sleeping record."

"Office hours over, doctor?"

"Even a doctor gets a Saturday off once in a while."

She turned her cart away.

"Look, how about a truce?" he said. "You can't really be that angry with me, just for a couple of stupid remarks."

"I'm not angry, I'm busy."

He trailed her to the checkout counter. The only items he carried were a loaf of bread and a jar of peanut butter. "Lunch," he said. "This is my speed on a Saturday."

She found herself smiling. "You are breaking my heart."

"Of course, I could always go to a restaurant. Now if you'd consent to join me, we could patch up this punctured romance."

The clerk at the cash register was listening with flagrant enjoyment. Bart pulled her aside.

"I mean it," he said soberly. "I want to see you again, Mary."

"I do have to get home, Bart. I have to see about Uncle Vernon's lunch; Sophie left yesterday . . ." She met his eyes. "Why don't you come back with me? I can fix three lunches as well as two."

"You've got a customer," he grinned.

If it were possible for a fine day to turn finer, it had. Mary's mood was lighthearted as they drove towards Marleybone.

"I can't believe she really means it," Mary resumed about Sophie. "I know she couldn't stay away forever."

"It's a question of pride, I guess. But Sophie sounds like a softie to me; she'll be back, all right."

"I hope so," Mary said, suddenly believing it was true, that things would be better from now on.

She approached the sharp curve in Marleybone Road that had always intimidated her, and automatically her foot reached for the brake pedal even before she saw the traffic warning. A moment later, another sign appeared ahead:

MARLEYBONE—3 MILES

"I hate this corner," Mary said. "That sheer drop on the other side—they should really do something about it."

"Just take it slow," Bart said.

She took it slow. The sign loomed up larger, its faded letters more clearly visible. She began to feel a strange uneasiness. Her hands perspired on the wheel.

"Someone in the road," she murmured.

"What?"

"In front of the sign . . ."

Her foot jerked on the accelerator suddenly, and the car shot forward. Bart said, "Hey, take it easy!"

Now she saw him plainly. He walked into the middle of the highway, unconcerned about the onrushing car.

He wore a gray tweed coat and a homburg hat, and beneath the coat she saw the incongruous stumps of his pajamaed legs; the sunlight made two glaring spotlights of his eyeglass lenses. He was lifting his arms about his head, as if waving for her to stop. Then she saw his face, and the sight was too terrible to withstand; her hands left the wheel and she flung them in front of her face to cover her eyes, screaming in horror over the sound of the racing motor, over the terrifying screech of the car wheels as they skidded crazily, careening them towards the edge of nothing ...

Mary was sobbing in hysteria, yet a part of her mind was rational enough to wonder if Bart would hit her, if he would slap her face and bring her back to reality. But Bart was merely holding her, pressing her cheek against his.

"My God," she said. "I could have killed us . . ."

"It's all right now, it's over. That was a pretty nutty thing to do, Mary. What the heck did you see out there?"

"The man! Didn't you see him?"

Bart shook his head.

"He stepped right out on the road, in front of the sign. He was wearing an overcoat and, I know it sounds crazy, but he had on pajamas underneath it. We almost hit him."

"There wasn't anybody there, Mary."

She stared at him.

"But I saw him," she whispered. "I saw him plain as day!"

"Okay, so you saw something. But you weren't trying to avoid him, Mary. You just took your hands off the wheel."

"His face!" she moaned. "I couldn't bear to see it, Bart. I couldn't look at it. I *had* to hide my eyes, I had to!"

"What was the matter with his face?"

"I don't know! He wore glasses—I couldn't see his

eyes, the sun was shining on his glasses—"

"You've got to believe me, Mary. There was no man on the road; you had some kind of hallucination."

"Oh, no! Do you think I'm crazy, Bart?"

"Of course not. We all see things at one time or another. And the sun's pretty bright today, it might have been a shadow."

"It wasn't a shadow," she said, shivering. "I saw it, Bart, I really saw it."

Bart grabbed the door handle. "Okay, let's trade places."

"What?"

"I'll do the driving now. Only I don't want to drive to your house, Mary, not yet. I'm going to turn the car around and then head back in this direction."

"Why? What for?"

"We'll take that curve again," Bart said. "I want you to see it once more, see that there's nothing there. Maybe it won't prove anything, but I'd like to try."

"Do we have to?"

"Yes, we have to."

They drove in silence back towards Montcalm; about a mile south of the sign, Bart backed up into a side road and made a left turn onto Marleybone Road.

They were within sight of the sign three minutes later, and Mary's eyes were fixed on it until the words were visible.

MARLEYBONE—3 MILES

Then the man in the overcoat stepped directly into their line of travel, the cloth of his pajama legs whipping in the breeze, the sun gleaming on his eyeglasses. But Bart didn't stop, even when the figure raised its arms above its head, even when its terrible face watched the onrushing station wagon with an expression so ghastly that Mary flung her arms in front of her face, and started to scream in endless rising cadenzas of horror . . .

She was cradled in softness, and something warm was pressed against her neck. "Come on," Bart's voice said coaxingly. "Just a sip and it's down."

She took the pill and put it on her tongue. Then she swallowed the water Bart offered, gulping so fast that she began to cough. She sat up on the sofa in Dr. Hazelton's office, and realized that the warmth against her neck had been his hand.

"I guess I did a blackout," she murmured.

"It was a dumb idea, that experiment," Bart said. "But I had to find out, Mary."

"To find out what? That I was crazy? You didn't see anything on the road the second time either, did you?"

"No, I didn't."

"*But I did.* I saw him again, Bart, that same man. The tweed coat, the homburg, the pajamas on his legs—that awful face!"

"What was so awful about it?"

"I don't know!"

"Wow," he said, with a weak grin. "When you have an hallucination, you really have a beaut." He stood up, turning away his head. "Look, Mary," he said soberly. "We might as well talk frankly about this. We spoke about another kind of doctor . . ."

"I've been to another kind of doctor, Bart."

He said: "What?"

"I—I didn't want to tell you before. I've been seeing a man in Boston, a Dr. Dudley. He's a hypnotherapist."

He came back slowly.

"You've been getting hypnotized?"

"Yes."

"Did it work? Did he put you under?"

"Yes, easily. I started sleeping better right away." She stopped. "Do you think there's a connection? You once said hypnosis could do funny things to people."

"No," he said flatly. "Not things like this. What did you say this man's name was?"

"Dr. Herbert Dudley. He was wonderful, Bart, really."

"What's his address?"

Mary told him, concerned by his expression.

"What are you thinking?"

"I'm not thinking anything. I'm not the greatest expert on the subject, but I've never heard of this kind of post-hypnotic reaction. Just take it easy for a while. I'll be right back."

She leaned back and closed her eyes.

A moment later, Bart was standing over her, calling her name. Only it wasn't merely a moment; from the change of light in the window, she knew some time had passed; by the change of his expression, she knew he had learned something important.

"What is it?" she asked, sitting up.

"I've been checking up on this therapist of yours, Mary. I've checked every directory, but he doesn't exist."

"That can't be! I've been to his office."

"I called the office, but there wasn't any answer, so I tried the building superintendent. He'd heard of Dudley, all right. Dudley rented the professional apartment, furnished, on a weekly basis. He moved in around July 3rd, which is just about the time he started 'treating' you." He paused. "He vacated the apartment last night, Mary."

"What does it mean, Bart?"

"It means he's a phony, a quack of some kind—"

"But it can't be true! The man helped me."

"He may have helped you with hypnosis, but that doesn't make him a doctor. Not every hypnotist has a medical degree."

"I'm sure Uncle Vernon didn't realize . . ."

Bart went to the office window.

"Your uncle recommended this Dudley, didn't he?"

"Yes." She got up and went to him, forcing Bart to face her. "Say what you're thinking, please."

"All right, I'll say it. Something crazy happened on that road, Mary, something that might have cost you your life."

She clung to him.

"You were *made* to see what you did. It wasn't any ordinary hallucination. Something ordered you to see that figure in the road, at that particular place, to put your hands over your eyes so you wouldn't have to see it. That kind of hallucinatory response to hypnotism is rare, Mary, but it's possible."

"You mean he *told* me to see it? Dr. Dudley?"

"Yes," Bart said bluntly. "You were given a strong post-hypnotic suggestion. If you went back to that road sign right now, you'd probably see that figure again."

"But why?" she wailed. "I don't know the man."

"No, you don't. But he knew you, Mary, or something about you. Something that made your death profitable."

"My death?"

"Mary, this was a *murder* attempt. You've got to see that. You would have been found at the bottom of that precipice on Marleybone Road and nobody would have thought it anything but an accident."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "It's not true what you're thinking, Bart. It just isn't so!"

"It must be true. I hate to say it. The thought makes my blood curdle. His own niece . . ."

"No, not Uncle Vernon, Bart! If you knew him . . ."

"He's given you a good performance, Mary. That's his trade. But he came back to Marleybone for only one reason, your father's money. Then he found you in the way . . ."

"You're wrong!" she cried, pulling away from him.

"Can't you see how he planned it? Even that sleeplessness wasn't natural. He must have been introducing caffein into your food and drink, just to keep you overstimulated, to make you feel the need for medical attention." He took her arm.

"Let me go," she said. "Please, Bart."

"He fixed it up with this phony hypnotherapist. He was probably a stage hypnotist, Mary. He told him about this dangerous curve in the road, and arranged this little accident."

She had a sudden wild thought of Uncle Vernon's photographic expedition, but she thrust it out of her mind.

"I want to see him," she said. "I want to talk to Uncle Vernon."

"I can't let you leave, Mary, not this way. You've still got that hallucination in your brain. It's like carrying around a live bomb. We've got to get rid of it."

"How?" she said miserably. "How can we?"

"You'll have to put your faith in me. I want to hypnotize you myself, Mary. I want to expunge this damned ghost of yours, do you understand?"

She began to relax in his grip. "Yes," she said. "Yes, we could do that . . ."

"You'll have to trust me, Mary."

"I trust you, Bart," she said.

Mary returned to the sofa, and Bart lowered the shades.

"Now just take it easy. Dudley's already proved you're a good subject, so just lean back and relax."

She began to breathe deeply.

"That's right, listen to the sound of your own breathing. You can't hear any other sound now, just my voice and the sound of your breathing. Your eyelids are getting heavier as I talk . . ."

Her eyes closed.

He talked to her for a while, pushing her deeper and deeper into the trance state.

"You'll remember everything that happens now, Mary," he said. "When you wake up, you'll feel much better for knowing the truth." He leaned closer. "Mary, who is Dr. Dudley?"

"The hypnotist."

"Can you remember what happened in his office?"

"No, I can't remember."

"He talked to you about a sign in the road, didn't he? He told you that you would see a man in front of that sign."

"Yes," Mary murmured. "A man."

"The man would frighten you, he would scare you so much that you couldn't look at him. You'd have to throw your hands over your eyes. Did he tell you that, Mary?"

"Yes."

"You're not going to see that man anymore, Mary. The next time you pass the Marleybone sign, or at any other time, you'll never see him again. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

Bart looked into her face, relieved at her acquiescense, but still puzzled and uncertain.

"Mary, who was that man? Who did you see in the road? What frightened you so much?"

"No," she moaned. "No, I can't tell . . ."

"The man wore pajamas under his coat, Mary. Why did he wear pajamas? Was it because your father did? During his illness?"

She was sobbing.

"*Mary, was the man in the road your father?* Answer me. Was it?"

"Yes!" she screamed. "He was Daddy!"

Mary paused at the doorstep before putting the key into the lock. Then she let herself into the house.

"Who's down there?"

"It's I, Uncle Vernon."

He came to the head of the stairs, and looked down at her, his face empty. *Are you surprised, Uncle Vernon?* she thought.

He came downstairs. By the time he reached the landing, his face was round with joviality. "Well, well,"

he said. "You've been shopping a long time."

"I'm sorry," Mary said. "I met some friends."

"Oh, you don't have to account to me, moppet. I fixed my own lunch. I'll go out to the car and fetch the groceries." He went to the door, but paused. "Must have been nice driving today."

"Yes," Mary said. "Yes, it was so nice I came the long way, by the way of Holrood Hill."

"Ah," Uncle Vernon said. "Yes, that's a beautiful drive."

Mary went into the living room. She listened to the sound of Uncle Vernon's whistle as he brought the bundles from car to kitchen. She sat in a chair near the telephone and watched the receiver expectantly, willing it to ring.

It rang five minutes later.

"Well?" Bart's voice said.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Bogash," Mary said.

"Go ahead," Bart told her. "I've just asked you and Uncle Vernon to come down to my office."

"Well, I suppose we can, Mr. Bogash. Of course I'll have to ask my Uncle . . ." She weakened suddenly, feeling limp. "No," Mary said, "no, I don't think I can do it . . ."

"You've got to!" Bart said intensely.

"I can't! I really can't!"

"You'll never know the truth if you don't!"

She hesitated, and then said, "All right, I'll ask him—if you think it's that important."

She hung up. Even during his trek between car and pantry, she was sure that Uncle Vernon had overheard. He came to the doorway and asked, "Who was that, moppet?"

"It—it was Mr. Bogash," Mary replied. "The lawyer. There seems to be some kind of problem about Daddy's will, with the probate court. Mr. Bogash wants us both to come to his office, just as soon as we can."

"Both of us?"

"Yes, he'd like to talk to you, too. Is it all right?"

"Of course, moppet. Whatever you say."

They left the house five minutes later. Mary took the wheel of the station wagon, and Uncle Vernon sat beside her, commenting on the balmy air of the approaching evening, at the promise of the glorious sunset in the low, sloping hills.

"Oh, it's a pretty sight," Uncle Vernon said. "I've traveled all over the world, Mary, but you give me a good old U.S.A. sunset every time."

She drove slowly towards Montcalm, hands tense on the wheel.

"Yes, I'm through with wandering," he said. "I've decided to settle down at last, Mary. This is my home, this is where I belong; they'll have to pry me loose with a crowbar."

They drove past the rear end of the Marleybone road sign, and Uncle Vernon looked casually from the window as it went by.

"I hope there's no trouble about this probate business," he said. "It wouldn't be like Ralph to leave a messy will."

"You never wrote Daddy all those years you were away, did you, Uncle Vernon?"

"No, moppet, I knew that even my poor letters wouldn't be welcomed by your father." He sighed deeply. "No, Ralph and I just never saw eye to eye, I'm afraid. In his eyes I was a failure, a good-for-nothing loafer." He forced the smile back into his voice. "But what's done is done, moppet. Things will be different now. The sun's setting on the old days . . ."

She began to slow down, her heart pounding.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "The papers!"

"What's that?"

"The papers Mr. Bogash had me sign. He wanted me to bring them to the office when we came down."

Uncle Vernon clucked. "We're halfway there now. Couldn't you bring them some other time?"

"No, he said it was important." She braked, and then turned the station wagon into a driveway, putting the car into reverse.

"You're not going back?" Uncle Vernon said. "It's getting late, darling, the sun's going down."

"But I *have* to go back. Mr. Bogash said to be sure and bring all the documents; no use going there without them." She pulled out into the road and accelerated quickly. "We'll be home in ten minutes; I'm sure he'll wait."

"But I can't do it, moppet, honest. I've got an appointment this evening. There's a fella I'm meeting at the Swordfish . . ."

She pressed the pedal more firmly, as if eager to return home and get their business finished. The needle of the speedometer moved rapidly over the dial, and the distance between them and the Marleybone sign grew shorter and shorter.

"Don't speed, darling!" Uncle Vernon gasped. "I think I'm feeling sick, moppet. Couldn't we pull over a minute?"

"We're almost there now," Mary said.

"Pull over, darling, pull over!" he said pleadingly. "I can't catch my breath, Mary, please!"

"You'll be all right soon," Mary said, her eyes fixed grimly on the road. "We're getting there, Uncle Vernon. I can see the Marleybone sign ahead of us . . ."

"*Stop the car!*" he shrieked, tugging at her arm. "Have you gone crazy, child? Mary, I tell you I'm sick!"

"I see it, Uncle Vernon, I see it!"

"Mary . . ."

"There's something on the road," Mary said, squinting into the twilight. "Do you see something, Uncle Vernon? It looks like a man."

"Stop, stop!" he cried. "You'll kill us, Mary. You'll kill us both!"

"There he is! There! In front of the sign!"

She heard him scream, and felt an emotion closer to satisfaction than anything else. But then he was fumbling at the door handle; a rush of air struck her face, and the wind howled inside the car. Suddenly the seat beside her was empty, and the bitter satisfaction vanished with the realization of what Uncle Vernon had done to escape the fate awaiting them on the winding road ahead.

She slammed on the brake and brought the car to a screeching halt. Then she clambered out and went running blindly down the road. Mary was hardly conscious of the other car parked on the shoulder, or that Bart Hazelton was already stooping over the stilled, broken figure sprawled in the roiled dust of the highway.

"Wait," he said, rising and blocking her vision. "It's nothing for you to see, Mary. You've seen enough for one day."

"It was true," she said. "He went crazy when he saw that sign coming up, Bart. He thought we'd go over, so he jumped out of the car . . ." She fell against him, exploding into sobs.

Bart held Mary tightly until the tears were gone.

The police arrived fifteen minutes later; and Sophie came back to Marleybone the next day. She never nagged Mary again, not about marriage; but then, there was no longer any need for that.

THE SHERIFF'S RAINY DAY

Elijah Ellis

The sheriff pulled the county car off the highway and came to a stop on the muddy shoulder of the road, just behind the blue and white highway patrol cruiser. The wreck up ahead didn't look too bad. The two cars involved sat at drunken angles to each other across the highway's center line. Their front ends were pretty well crumpled, and there was a scatter of broken glass and twisted bits of metal strewn across the rain-slick road.

But I'd seen worse. I glanced at Sheriff Ed Carson. He was gripping the steering wheel of our car so tightly his knuckles stood out taut and white. I could guess what his thoughts were as he looked at the wrecked cars ahead.

I coughed uneasily. "Well, at least the rain's let up."

"What? Oh, yeah. So it has." Carson gave a tug to the brim of his hat, opened his door and got out, his ancient rubber slicker crackling as he moved.

I slid across the seat and followed him out. Harry Shelley of the highway patrol had spotted us, and walked toward us through the bleak, misty-gray afternoon. His partner stayed over by the wreck, taking pictures of the two cars. I noticed another man leaning against the back fender of one of the cars. He was puff-

ing at a cigarette as if his life depended on it.

Harry Shelley reached us, shook hands and asked, "What brought you fellas out here?"

"We were out in the county, seeing some people about a case, when we heard your call to patrol headquarters over the squawkbox," I told him. "Thought we'd drive over and see what'd happened."

Shelley nodded. "Good. I got a prisoner for you." He waggled a thumb toward the man leaning against the wrecked car. "Speeding, reckless drivin' not to mention he'd been hittin' the bottle."

Carson made an angry sound. "Who was hurt? We passed the ambulance heading into town, few miles down the road in a hurry."

"Well, the old lady drivin' the other car got bunged up some. Cracked ribs, busted nose, maybe internal injuries, accordin' to Doc Johnson. He won't know till he gets her to the hospital in Monroe. If she'd just been wearin' a seatbelt she'd have been alright. But these darn fool people just won't believe—"

The patrolman suddenly broke off. He glanced at Ed Carson. His broad face turned red. "Sorry, Sheriff. I wasn't thinking . . ."

"It's alright, Harry. Go on with what happened."

"Well. Same old story. That guy was headed north, makin' too much time for the road conditions. He topped that rise down there and hit a slick spot. Skidded across the center line and smacked into the old lady's car. I came along not more'n a minute or two after it happened. Good thing, too, I'm thinking."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, me and my partner both got the idea that fella was about to take off for the woods, afoot. He'd crossed the ditch and was standin' by the fence borderin' the field yonder when we drove up. When he seen us, he started holdin' his head and actin' like he didn't know what he was doing." Shelley paused to wave a passing car on by. "But he knew, alright," he said then calmly.

"Was he hurt?" Carson put in.

"Nah. Old Doc Johnson looked him over. Not a mark on him. Not even a bruise." Shelley laughed shortly. "He was wearin' a seat-belt. Wouldn't you know it?"

The three of us were walking slowly along the edge of the highway toward the accident. A wrecker had just arrived from Monroe and was jockeying into position behind the nearer of the damaged cars.

"What's this guy's name? I don't recognize him," I said to Shelley.

"No, he ain't from around here. Transient. Name's Milton Cord, or so his driver's license says. He claims he's been workin' down in the south part of the state, and now he's headed up into Tennessee to take another job."

The man called Cord stood on the far shoulder of the road with Shelley's partner, watching the wrecker crew work at the smashed cars. He turned as we approached, his close-set gray eyes flicking nervously over Carson and myself.

Shelley ignored him. The two patrolmen drew away a few yards and discussed the accident report the second patrolman had filled in. The drizzle had thickened into a shower, and Shelley held the skirt of his raincoat up as a shield for the clipboard the other man had in his hands.

"Who're you guys?" Cord asked now. He was a tall, slender man with a mop of greasy black hair, and skin as white and soft-looking as a baby's. He wore a short khaki jacket with the collar turned up, and a pair of wrinkled slacks.

"This is Sheriff Carson," I said. "My name is Gates. I'm the Pokochobee County Attorney."

For a moment Cord didn't move. What little color there was in his face drained away. His eyes darted from side to side like those of a trapped animal. Then he gave an uneasy laugh. "The sheriff and the county

attorney? Geez, why didn't you bring along the governor?"

Ed Carson asked quietly, "What happened here?"

"Nothing. I mean, it was just an accident. I don't know why all the fuss. It wasn't my fault. That old woman in the other car, she swerved right into me—"

"That ain't the way the patrolmen tell it," Carson said, still speaking quietly. Too quietly.

"Ah, what do they know? Just because I'm a stranger, and that that old gal lives around here, they figure they'll stick me with some bum rap." Cord spat on the pavement. "Nuts."

Harry Shelley rejoined us now. "If that lady should up and die, you'll think 'nuts,' " he prophesied.

Cord burst out, "What the heck, it was her fault—damn woman driver, got no business on the highway."

The sheriff abruptly turned and walked away.

"What's the matter with him?" Cord asked.

I took time to light a cigarette. Then I said, "About a week ago, his wife was driving to a store in town. At an intersection a drunk slammed into her car broadside. Mrs. Carson was killed."

"Well, that's nothing to do with me," Cord whined.

"No. But if I was you, I'd keep my mouth shut about women drivers," I told him.

Cord shrugged. "Nuts."

It was raining harder. The wrecker crew had the damaged cars off the highway. A man was sweeping up the broken glass and other debris. Shelley said, "Let's wrap this up."

The sheriff walked back toward us. There was no expression at all on his leathery face. But I noticed the ridge of muscle standing out along the line of his jaw. "Ready to go?"

"Before long," Shelley said. "Why don't you take Cord on in, now? No use all of us gettin' soaked."

Carson nodded. Cord made a few halfhearted pro-

tests, but no one paid any attention. The sheriff, Cord, and myself started toward the county car. Then Harry Shelley called, "Hey, Lon?"

I turned. "Yeah?"

"Listen, would you mind waitin', and ridin' into town with me? I'd like to talk to you about that trial I'm supposed to testify at, next week."

I hesitated. I didn't particularly like the idea of Carson taking the prisoner in alone. But what the heck, the sheriff could handle Cord, if he made any trouble.

"Well, okay," I said. "Ed, you go on."

Carson nodded, and a few moments later the county car made a "U" turn, and headed for Monroe, Milton Cord sitting on the front seat beside the sheriff.

"Old Ed sure took it hard, didn't he, about his wife," Harry Shelley said.

"Yeah. They'd been married—what? Twenty-five years?"

Shelley nodded. "Well. He'll get over it, I guess."

I tried to imagine how I'd feel if it had been my wife crushed to a bloody pulp in a senseless accident. "I doubt it," I said then. "I doubt he'll ever get over it . . ."

The patrolmen finished their work, and we started for town, driving slowly because of the rain. We reached downtown Monroe and the courthouse square about half an hour behind Carson.

Leaving the patrol cruiser in the parking lot, we hurried across the open ground and into the ancient courthouse. We went along the dingy corridor to the sheriff's office on the ground floor. A deputy was on the phone at one of the desks in the big outer office. Carson was alone in his private cubbyhole, leaning back at his desk with his feet up, a paper cup in his hand.

The sheriff lifted the cup in a greeting. "How about a drink?"

Shelley shook his head. I got a cup from the rack and helped myself from the bottle Carson kept in the bot-

tom drawer of his desk. After a quick one, I asked, "Any trouble?"

"No . . ." The sheriff looked puzzled. "Cord was as quiet as a mouse all the way in. No problem a'tall. Got his prints here in the office, then I took him on over to the jail. An' I'll be damned. The jailer and me had no more got him in a cell, than he started blubberin' and yellin', and beggin' the jailer not to leave him alone with me. You never heard the like."

"What brought that on?" I asked.

The sheriff tugged at one end of his shaggy pepper-and-salt mustache. "Don't ask me, Lon. Durnedest thing I ever seen. Feller didn't have a word to say, up till he started yellin', there in his jail cell."

I poured myself another short one. "I'm beginning to get some ideas about Mr. Milton Cord. None of them good."

"Uh huh. Well, we'll get his prints and description off to the State Bureau here directly. Old Jack out there is on the phone to them now. Maybe they'll have something on Cord."

The phone on Carson's desk rang. He leaned forward, picked it up. He said, "Yes?" He listened a moment. A frown crossed his lined, weather-beaten face. He said, "Okay," and slowly replaced the phone.

"What now?" I asked.

"That was the jailer. Said I'd better get over there in a hurry. Somethin' to do with Cord . . ."

The sheriff rose, reached for his hat. He walked quickly out of the office. Harry Shelley and I tagged along behind him. We went out the back door, trotted across the wide parking lot to the jail. It was raining harder than ever.

The jailer, Pete Tillman, was waiting just inside the heavy jail door. He licked his lips nervously when he saw Shelley and me trooping in after the sheriff. "Ah, Ed —maybe I better see you alone for a minute—"

"It's alright, Pete," the sheriff said. "What's up?"

Tillman shuffled from one foot to the other. "Well, it's that Cord feller you brung in while ago." He hesitated, then burst out, "He claims you beat him on the way into town, Ed. And that you threatened to kill him if he said anything about it."

The sheriff blinked at the jailer, then at me. He shook his head as if to clear it. I snorted, "Oh, for—surely he doesn't think he can pull something like that?"

Tillman glanced at me, and quickly away. "Maybe you all better see him, Mr. Gates."

"That's a right good idea," Carson snapped angrily.

As we trooped along the musty-smelling hallway to the cell-block, Tillman muttered to the sheriff, "Cord asked me to call him a doctor. But I figured you'd want to see—"

"Yeah," Carson replied. "I sure do want to see."

The lights were on in the cell block. Cord was lying face down on the iron bunk in the center cell. He turned his head to look at us. When he saw Carson, he cringed away, pressing his back against the brick wall.

"No," he wailed. "Don't let him—please, don't let him near me—"

"What is this, Cord?" the sheriff asked.

"You know what it is," Cord said. He got to his feet. He was shaking like a leaf, and his white face was wet with tears. He looked beseechingly toward me, then Harry Shelley. "He said he'd kill me if I told—but I couldn't hold out. The pain—"

"Ah, come off it," I said disgustedly. "Pain from what?"

With trembling fingers Cord unbuttoned his shirt, stripped it down over his shoulders. The overhead light beat down on his bare chest and belly. The white flesh was crisscrossed with angry reddish-purple welts.

For a long moment, no one spoke. Then Harry Shelley said in a shaken voice, "For heavens sake, Sheriff."

Carson was staring at Cord with unbelieving eyes. He

opened his mouth to speak, then shut it again.

"Now do you believe me?" Cord said. Slowly he pulled his shirt back up over his shoulders. He gulped, winced, and went on, "It—it happened when we were about halfway into town. He stopped the car, and pulled his gun on me. He was like a crazy man. Crazy. He made me take off my jacket and open my shirt. Then he—he took out a blackjack and started hitting me, and hitting me, all the time cursing at the top of his voice, about how I'd killed his wife . . . He's crazy, I tell you!"

Harry Shelley swore under his breath.

The sheriff stammered "He's lyin', you all know that. I didn't touch the man."

I felt sick. I remembered Shelley telling us that Dr. Johnson had examined Cord and hadn't found a bruise on him. But now—

I turned to the jailer. "Go call Doc Johnson. You'll probably catch him at the hospital. Tell him to get over here as fast as he can."

Tillman glanced at the sheriff. But Carson appeared to be in a daze. The jailer hurried away down the corridor toward the office.

Cord was sitting down on his bunk, his face buried in his hands. He didn't move when I asked, "What really happened, Cord? How'd you manage to get beat up like that?"

In a muffled voice he said, "I told you."

I looked in through the bars at the small cell, the bare iron bunk. On the opposite wall was a washbasin, and a toilet in the corner. Otherwise the cell was empty. Nothing was there that Cord could possibly have used to inflict the injuries on himself. There was only one other prisoner in the block, and he was way down at the far end, several cells distant from Cord.

I tried to think of some way, any way, out of the belief that Ed Carson had beaten a helpless prisoner. But there was no way out of it. No way at all.

The sheriff looked twenty years older than he had a few minutes ago. He turned his head and met my glance with dull, unseeing eyes. He didn't speak. Neither did I.

Harry Shelley muttered, "Damn, Sheriff. We all knowed you was upset about your wife dyin', and all, and you ain't really been yourself since it happened a week ago. But this—"

Carson shook his head, turned away. He walked slowly along the hallway toward the front of the building. After a moment, Shelley and I followed. We stood around the little office waiting for the doctor. No one had anything to say.

Doc Johnson arrived about ten minutes later. He waddled in, took off his hat and shook rain from it, looked around inquiringly. He wiped his big, red, jowly face on a bandana, and wheezed, "Well, Mrs. Dickens, the woman in the wreck will be alright. She's a tough old hen. I'd just barely got through tapin' up her cracked ribs when she was wantin' to get home. What's goin' on here?"

"Back here," I said, and led the way into the cell block. Shelley came along. The sheriff and Tillman stayed in the office.

The fat doctor entered Cord's cell when I had unlocked the door. "Well? Well?" Doc Johnson puffed. "What's ailin' you? Don't try to tell me you was hurt in that wreck, 'cause I know better."

Cord silently took off his shirt. The doctor breathed, "My God, boy."

In a minute or two he turned, glared at me.

"He claims Ed Carson beat him up," I said.

"Somebody sure did," Doc Johnson snapped. Then he blinked. "But—Ed?"

I nodded. "That's what this guy says."

"Don't believe it," the doctor snorted. He opened his medical bag, delved inside, came out with a bottle of antiseptic and a couple of cotton tipped swabs.

As we worked on the angry welts on Cord's chest, I

heard a stir in the corridor and turned to see a short, pudgy man wearing an old-fashioned raincape bustling toward us. I groaned silently. Jeremiah Walton. The editor of the Monroe *Herald-Gazette,* and a bitter political enemy of both Ed Carson and myself. The very last man on earth I wanted to see.

Walton gave me a toothy smile, while his narrow, shoe-button eyes darted curiously toward the doctor and Cord. "Well, Lon, howdy. I was over at the courthouse, and heard there'd been an accident out north of town. Thought I'd—"

He suddenly broke off. Dr. Johnson had moved aside, giving the editor a clear view of Cord.

Walton said softly, "Well, well. Just what have we here?"

He soon found out, once Cord understood who he was.

The editor stormed out of the jail, leaving a volley of promises. He'd have the best lawyer in the county for Cord. The best medical care. He'd tell the world of this infamy. In the jail office he paused long enough to give Carson a withering glance. He said, with ill-concealed glee, "You finally done it. Finally hanged yourself!"

Carson lunged toward the pudgy editor. "Get out of here."

Walton hurriedly left, chortling to himself.

"There's going to be hell to pay now," I said. No one disagreed with me.

Harry Shelley left, pointedly ignoring the sheriff. Tillman went back to the jail's kitchen to prepare supper for the prisoners. Carson and I sat in the little office.

Finally Carson looked up at me. "Go ahead and say it."

"What's to say?"

"You think I beat up that man, too. But I swear to you, I didn't touch him."

I sighed, drummed my fingertips on the scarred desk. "Then what happened?"

Carson scrubbed his hands over his face. "I don't know."

"He was fine when you left the wreck out there for town. You got here, put him in a cell. There's not a thing back there he could have used to hurt himself like that. No one went near him, except old Pete; and he certainly didn't take a club to the guy. So . . ."

I looked at him hesitantly. Then I went on, "Ed, you've been under a real rough strain here. Not sleeping enough, not eating. And there's the similarity between this accident today and last week, when your wife—well. I was thinking, maybe you kind of blacked out. You know? Just for a couple of minutes. It could happen."

The sheriff stared down at his clenched fists. He shook his head slowly. "No. I remember every minute of the ride into town. I'm as positive I didn't lay a finger on him as I've ever been of anything in my life."

"Then what's left?"

Before Carson could answer, we heard a call from the cell block. It was Cord. When we got back there, he was leaning against the bars of his cell, nervously tapping a ballpoint pen against the crossbar of the cell's door.

"Listen," he said. He paused, cleared his throat. "Listen, I don't want to cause no trouble—"

Carson gave a short, bitter laugh.

"No, I mean it. All I want is out of here. I heard you talking when the Doc was here, about how that old woman was okay, not that it was my fault she got hurt anyhow. But anyway, just let me take off. I'll be out of this county, out of the state so quick it'll make your head swim. You forget about these two-bit charges against me, and I'll forget about this." He tapped a finger against his chest. "How about it?"

Carson didn't answer. I stared at the prisoner, then said, "It's a little late to make a deal, isn't it? After the way you shot off your mouth to Jeremiah Walton."

Cord grinned uneasily. "Ah, what the heck! What can he do, if I ain't around to back him up? I promise you. Just open this door, give me my billfold and stuff, and I'll be out of your stinkin' town in fifteen minutes. You can keep that old car, it's not worth me bothering with it."

I believed him. But—

"We'll think about it," I said.

Carson and I walked away. Behind us, Cord said, "Think quick, Mister. I might just change my mind, and blast the both of you right out of office, you know?"

I was getting more and more confused, if that was possible, about this whole business. The Milton Cord we had just talked to was not at all the same quivering, frightened man who had blubbered on Jeremiah Walton's shoulder.

But there was no way to get around the fact that he had been beaten up. I was going in circles.

"I need a drink," I said.

Carson grunted absently. We left the jail, crossed the wide, muddy lot to the back door of the courthouse. The rain had stopped and the clouds were breaking overhead. It would be dark soon.

When we were in Carson's private office with paper cups full of bourbon in our hands, I asked, "What about it, Ed? You want to spring Cord? He's right, you know. With him gone, we can spike Walton's guns and forget the whole thing."

Carson slammed a palm down on his desk. "No. You know better than that."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Okay, then."

"But how the heck did he do it?" Carson growled. "How did he get those blasted marks on him?"

"Maybe he did it with that ballpoint pen he was playing with," I said. I chewed my lower lip a moment. "Ed, if it comes to it, will you be willing to take a lie-detector test?"

He frowned. "Yes. You bet I will."

A few minutes later the phone rang. It was the State Crime Bureau. I went into the outer office, picked up an extension phone and listened in. Carson was saying, "Yeah, go ahead."

A crisp, businesslike voice said, "Well, about this man you're holding, one Milton Cord. From the description your deputy gave us earlier, he sounds like a fellow we're very interested in finding. Of course, we won't know for sure until we get his prints from you."

"We sent them off, special delivery," Carson said. "You ought to get them first mail in the morning."

"Good. In any case, hang on to him. If it's the man we want, he has an armed robbery and a murder count waiting for him, over in Beckham County. He held up a gas station and shot the attendant four times when the attendant tried to jump him. Poor guy lived long enough to identify the suspect. His real name's Martin Curtis—not at all a nice fellow. Got a record long as your arm."

No wonder Cord wanted to make a deal, I thought.

The State Bureau man went on, "We traced this character through the country and lost him. Then last week we got a line on him again. He was working with a touring carnival, down in the southern part of the state. A thing called Reid Brothers Greater Shows, or the like. But by the time we could get there, he'd taken off. That was day before yesterday. He just took off in the middle of the night, when the carnival was playing at Thomasville."

I did some rapid figuring. Thomasville was about three hundred miles southwest of Monroe. If Cord, or Curtis, had holed up somewhere around Thomasville until this morning, then headed north, it would put him in Monroe just about the right time to be involved in an accident on the highway north of Monroe this afternoon.

"I kind of think you've got the right man, Sheriff," the Bureau agent said. "I'd almost bet on it. You see,

Martin Curtis used a phoney name at the carnival."

"What's that?" Carson asked.

The agent gave a discreet chuckle. "Milton Cord."

Moments later, we hung up. I went back to Carson's cubbyhole, sank into the chair beside his desk and reached for my drink. "Well," I said.

"Yeah," Carson agreed. "How about that?"

"That pretty well explains Milton-Martin Cord-Curtis, why he'd try to frame you, claiming you belted him around, and why he was so anxious to get out of jail and be on his way. And if that didn't work, he had Jeremiah Walton in reserve to complain about 'police brutality,' which just might have some effect on his trial for the murder rap, even though it's in another part of the state. You know how juries are, at any hint that a suspect has been slapped around, no matter what the suspect has done."

Carson was up, pacing back and forth. He swore angrily. "I'm a good mind to go over to the jail and really let him have it. At least, I'd have that comfort when I get run out of the county."

I went around behind Carson's desk, sat down and picked up his phone, and asked for long distance. He stopped pacing, looked at me questioningly.

"I'm going to call Thomasville," I said. "Try to talk to somebody at that carnival who knew Cord."

"What good is that?" Carson snorted. "What happened, happened here, not clear down in Thomasville."

I agreed. But I couldn't think of anything else to do. Eventually I got through to the manager of the Reid Brothers Show, at the hotel in Thomasville. His name was Ludlow, and he was not overjoyed to hear from me, especially when I mentioned Milton Cord.

"There's not a thing I can tell you, sir," he snapped. "I hardly knew the man. He traveled with us only a couple of weeks. When he left, everyone here said good riddance."

"I understand that," I said. "Just what did he do with your show?"

"Ah, he worked as a stick-man at some of the games, general stuff. Then he had this crummy little act he worked sometimes in the freak tent."

This was getting us nowhere. I was about to thank Ludlow and hang up. But instead I asked, "What kind of act?"

"Nothing to write home about. This Cord, or whatever his name is, had some kind of skin condition. Something called 'dermo' something or other."

I suddenly sat forward in the chair. "What was that? Explain what you mean, Mr. Ludlow."

"Heck, I don't know," he said, in a surprised voice. "He just had this whatever it was wrong with his skin. His act was, he'd let the marks write their names on his bare chest, with the blunt end of a pencil, or whatever. In a few seconds, where they had written would light up like a neon sign, you know? The names would stand out in big long welts across his skin. Some of the rubes got a big charge out of it. He billed himself as The Great Dermo."

"How long did these—these welts last?" I shouted.

"Why, I don't know. Couple or three hours, I guess."

"Thank you, Mr. Ludlow. Thank you very much."

I hung up, looked at Ed Carson. I started laughing. "You know what? We've got a celebrity in jail. The Great Dermo, of all people."

Ed stared. He said anxiously, "Lon, maybe you better go home and have dinner. Get some rest—"

But I was already on the phone again, calling Doc Johnson. "Yes," Doc said slowly, when I explained what I wanted to know. "Yes, I've heard of it. Never seen a case though. I think it's called 'dermatographia,' which is just another way of sayin' 'skin-writing.' Why do you ask?"

I told him. He said he'd be right over. By now, Ed Carson knew what was going on. For the first time in

days there was a smile, if a somewhat grim one, on his face.

When Dr. Johnson arrived, we trooped over to the jail. We went along the corridor. We stopped at Cord's cell. He rose from his bunk, looked at us apprehensively.

"Come over here a moment, son," Doc Johnson said.

Cord walked to the cell door. "What the—?"

Dr. Johnson suddenly reached a big hand through the bars, tore open Cord's shirt. The doctor had a ball-point pen in his free hand, the ball retracted into the body of the pen, just like the pen Cord had been playing with earlier. Dr. Johnson dragged the pen across Cord's chest.

Cord yelled and tried to pull free, but the doctor held on. For several seconds nothing happened. Then a red line appeared on Cord's chest, and rapidly widened and swelled into an angry reddish-purple welt.

Sheriff Ed Carson said softly, "How are you—Dermo?"

One look at the man's crumpling face was enough to tell us that The Great Dermo had given his last performance.

CONSULT THE YELLOW PAGES

Phillip Tremont

John Mynandahl tore off the top of his pajamas and wrapped it around his forearm. He staggered to Peggy's vanity table and smashed its mirror with a backhand blow of his arm. Then he sat down on the satin-quilted bench. He folded his arms in the litter of broken glass and cosmetic jars and rested his head on them, his mouth close to the plywood backing of the broken mirror.

They found him that way, an hour later. His face was a healthy-looking cherry pink from carbon monoxide poisoning. He was dead.

They decided he had broken the mirror, mistaking it for a window in his confused state, to get fresh air into his oxygen-starved lungs.

Peggy's first husband, Ted Kleyberg had died much the same way three years before. Only Ted had set the mattress afire himself, accidentally.

Peggy took Ted's insurance money and what she got for the furniture and the equity in the mortgage and went down to New York. She put most of the money into a little dress shop in Greenwich Village. From the very beginning, it did poorly. After a few months, the city ripped up the street to put in a new sewer line. By

the time the sewer was in, Peggy was out. She was broke.

But John Mynandahl was in love with her.

He was forty-five, seventeen years older than she. He owned the building where she had opened the dress shop, and eight others. John was bald and paunchy. He had a cigarette cough and he drank too much. Peggy married him, anyway.

John bought Peggy a luxurious new car. He bought a three-bedroom house on a one-acre wooded plot in Huntington, Long Island for thirty-nine thousand dollars. The house was fully air-conditioned, and the windows of the master bedroom in the rear faced on a fine stand of Lombardy poplars.

John wanted to fill the other bedrooms with children. When Peggy vetoed that idea permanently, he started drinking more heavily than ever.

Peggy stood it for a year. Then she started meeting her brother-in-law, Danny, once or twice a week. After the third date, she always went directly to his apartment.

Danny was thirty-one. He was very different from his brother. He didn't have much money, for one thing. He was a New York City fireman. And, for another, he was trim and broadshouldered, with curly black hair and an infectious, white-toothed grin. He had hated John cordially all his life.

"I hate him, too," Peggy told him late one night.

"Why did you marry him?"

"Money. I was broke after a year with that dress shop."

"You should have had a quiet little fire there. All covered with a nice little insurance policy. Know what I mean?"

"I've already had one fire in my life. Once is enough."

"Uh-huh. Arson is a tricky business. Every department has experts who know more about detecting

phony fires than any professional firebug knows about setting them. Chem labs, spectroscopic analysis, the whole works. . . ."

Peggy put her arms around Danny's neck and pulled herself close against him. "Honey, if he were dead, would you marry me?"

Danny kissed the side of her neck. "Uh-huh. Is he planning to die soon? A heart attack, maybe? Or get hit by lightning?"

"Wouldn't it be nice if he did? We'd have each other. And all his money."

"Uh-huh."

"Danny. Would you?"

"Would I what?"

"Would you—help me kill him?"

Danny was silent for a long time. "I'll think about it," he said.

Danny thought about it for a week. The next time Peggy came to his apartment, he asked immediately, "Do you still want to?"

She nodded solemnly. "Yes."

"I've got a plan."

"What is it?"

"You may not like it. John will die the same way your first husband did."

Peggy's hand went to her throat. She was suddenly very frightened. "Won't they be suspicious?"

Danny's eyes held hers. "Yes, they will be suspicious. But no matter what anybody thinks, the way I'm going to work it, they'll have to write it off as coincidence. You'll have a perfect alibi. And everyone knows John drinks himself blotto a couple of times a week. And he chainsmokes cigarettes."

"But he's stopped smoking."

Danny frowned. "He's stopped before, hasn't he?"

"Yes. Every time that cigarette cough of his gets worse, he starts worrying about lung cancer and quits

for a week or two. Then he'll get drunk, light one up, and start in all over again."

"Yeah. It doesn't matter if he happens to be off cigarettes at the time we do this. Just buy a carton of cigarettes and leave them in the house. That'll be all the evidence they need that he was smoking again."

"Will it?"

"Uh-huh. And save a tray full of butts and ashes in a paperbag. I'll just empty it into a tray beside his bed."

"Tell me how we're going to work it."

"We'll get everything we need right out of the phonebook. First of all, you look up a mailing service in the city. Hire the service under some phony name. Don't do it in person. Make the arrangements over the phone. Send them a money order, not a personal check."

"Why do we do that?"

"Because we need an untraceable front for you to buy a smoke mask. We're not going to take any chances. Remember, I'm sticking my neck as far out on this as you are."

"Okay. Then what?"

"Then call a few companies listed in the phonebook that sell fire department equipment and tell them to mail you their catalogue, to the mailing address. After a couple of days, you call up your service to check if the catalogues have arrived. Then you pick up the catalogues in person and bring them to me. That's only one of the two times anyone will ever see you there."

"What will be the other time?"

"After we get the catalogues, I'll pick out the mask I need. Then you send a money order to the firm and have them ship the mask to the mail service. You'll have to go over again and pick up the package when it arrives, but the next month you don't send any money to the mail service, and they suspend your service and eventually forget all about you."

"Couldn't you steal one from the fire department?"

"Sure I could. But I'm taking no chances of this being traced back to either of us. If they could once hook up John's death to a suspicion of me having stolen one of those masks, they'd never let up on either of us."

"I see."

"Next. You go to a department store and buy a pair of coveralls for me, and a metal dustpan and a pair of those long firetongs they sell for fireplaces."

"I still don't know what you're going to do."

"I'm coming to that. Once we've got all this stuff—the smoke mask and the coveralls and the firetongs, and so on—you keep it locked up in the luggage compartment of your car until we need it. We'll need it the first time John drinks himself under the table. The first time he does it on one of my nights off, anyway. I'm not going to call in sick and leave a trail that might start people wondering. This thing's liable to get a pretty thorough going-over, you know. From the insurance companies, as well as the cops."

"It scares me."

"I've thought of everything. Don't be afraid."

"Why the coveralls?"

"To absorb the smoke, and keep my clothes from smelling of it afterwards. When you phone me, I'll drive out to Huntington and park across the street from your house. You will have already taken all the stuff out of your car and put it in the house, where I can find it. When I get there, I'll blink my lights on and off and you drive away. When I leave, I'll take all the stuff in my car and get rid of it so it will never be found."

"What about my alibi?"

"You go to some bar where you're known and hang around for an hour. Tell the bartender and a couple of other people who will be sure to remember that you left the house because your husband was getting drunk and you couldn't bear to watch it."

"Do I stay there all night?"

"No. It would be suspicious if you were gone too

long. After an hour, you call and I'll be able to tell you how things are going."

"This is too risky, Danny. You'll be in the house, and someone may spot the flames and call the fire department."

"I've seen fires like this, baby. There aren't going to be any flames. It's just going to be a minor blaze, a smoldering mattress throwing off smoke. And your bedroom windows face the woods in back. Nobody will see any flames and go running to a fire-box to pull an alarm."

"That's all we do?"

"Just about. We'll find an outdoor phone booth and take down its number. You drive there and wait. I'll call you as soon as I know he's dead. Then you drive back to the bar for one more drink before you come home."

Peggy stood and put her arms around him, molding her body to his. Danny's arms tightened around her. They kissed fervently.

"Oh, Danny, Danny, you're smart," she breathed.

The first little hitch developed the next morning.

Peggy called a mailing service she found in the yellow pages and inquired about their rates. A polite female voice informed her the minimum charges were ten dollars a month, and then told her she would have to fill out a form to be filed with the post office. With some trepidation, Peggy drove into the city.

She sat at an extra desk in the office and filled out the form with her left hand, disguising her writing as best she could. The form directed the post office to forward all mail for the Empire State Electronics Institute to the mailing service. It was a name Danny had made up the night before, after checking the phone directories to be certain there was no actual "Empire State Electronics Institute" to which the mail they wanted might be mistakenly routed. Peggy signed the name of one of her Huntington neighbors, Eugenie Reynolds, and gave a

fictitious Manhattan address. She paid the girl ten dollars in cash and left.

When she was down on the street, she found she wanted a drink. The visit to the mailing service had unnerved her. But, she reminded herself, the office had been busy with constantly ringing phones and people going in and out. She would be seen up there only twice more. It was inconceivable that she would be remembered.

After the drink, Peggy drove to a department store. It took the best part of an hour, going from department to department, to buy the dustpan, the firetongs, coveralls and workgloves that Danny would need. When she had them, she locked them in the trunk of the car and drove back to Huntington.

After a three-day wait, which the girl at the mailing address had told her would be necessary for the post office to process the form, Peggy called three "Fire Department Supplies" firms listed in the yellow pages and asked each to send its catalogue to the Empire State Electronics Institute. She was able to pick them up in time for her next date with Danny. Together they searched through them in his apartment. The first two offered mainly hose and truck accessories, and a bewildering array of things like nozzles and monitors and playpipes.

Finally, Danny jabbed his finger at a picture in the last catalogue.

"Here it is, baby. You call the Fire-End Products Company and get the price on their item number A81226—better write that down. Then send a money order for it, and have it mailed to our little Institute."

Peggy dutifully noted the number of the "All-Service" Gas Mask, Model "S".

The next day, when John had left for his office, she phoned the firm and asked about price and shipping costs. The price, seventy-four dollars, rather startled

her, but she placed the order, then drove to the post office and sent out a money order.

The package arrived at the mailing service a few days later. Peggy drove in and picked it up and brought it to Danny's apartment, thankful that this would be the last time the girl in the office would see her.

Danny slipped the mask out of its waterproof fibre carrying case and tried it on, adjusting the rubber headbands to fit the face piece snugly to his head. A canvas belt fitted over his neck and buckled at his waist to hold the two canisters. The lenses were huge, ending well below his cheekbones.

Peggy shook her head at him, laughing despite her nerves. "You look like something out of a science-fiction movie."

From behind the mask, Danny said clearly, "Pretty, it ain't supposed to be," startling her.

"Gosh, you can talk through it?"

"It has a built-in speaking diaphragm. How else did you think I was going to be able to talk on the phone to you?"

"I didn't even think of that."

"You let me do the thinking, Peggy. You just do everything I tell you. This is a serious thing we're doing. The most serious thing anybody can do. Understand?"

Danny slipped the mask off his head and began unbuckling it. "I'll put it back in the case. You take it with you tonight when you leave, and keep it in the trunk with the rest of the stuff."

There wasn't much to do after that but wait. Peggy drove around until she found an outdoor phone booth on the Northern State Parkway, not far from the bar she had chosen to establish her alibi. She phoned its number in to Danny.

There was another small hitch. John had stopped smoking again.

"Don't worry about that," Danny told her. "Just buy

a carton of his cigarettes, take one pack out and throw it away. You've already saved a bag full of butts and ashes like I told you to, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then stop worrying. All we have to do now is wait. Just wait until the slob gets himself drunk again."

They had to wait almost two weeks. Then, on a rainy Saturday night, Peggy called Danny shortly after eight o'clock, using the phone extension in the basement playroom.

"I think this is our chance, honey. He's been drinking all afternoon. He didn't eat any dinner, and he's on his second bottle already."

"Has he passed out?" Danny's voice was hard and tense.

"I don't know. He's in the bedroom. He was singing to himself, but that stopped a while ago."

"Go and look. I'll hang on."

Peggy laid the phone on the bar and went upstairs on shaky legs. She paused in the hallway leading to the bedroom she shared with John. The flush plywood door was partly open, light streaming out of it, but she could hear no sounds of her husband. She pushed the door silently inward. John lay on one of the twin beds, breathing heavily through his open mouth. The bottle of bourbon stood on the floor beside him, carefully corked. His clothing was scattered about the room. Surprisingly, he had dressed himself in pajamas before falling on the bed.

With stiff fingers, Peggy poked him sharply on his fat, soft arm. John made no response. She jabbed him again. His eyelids opened laboriously. He stared up at her, his eyes not focusing. He made a noise something like "Whassit y'want?" and his eyes shut again. Peggy went back to the basement.

"He's dead drunk," she said into the phone.

"He'll be a lot deader than that in a while," Danny said decisively. "Is he smoking?"

"No."

"Where's the carton of cigarettes I told you to get?"

"They're in the bedroom closet, on the top shelf."

"Where's the rest of the stuff?"

"I'll get it now and put it in the playroom."

"Okay. I'm starting right away. I have to be back in the city by midnight to start a midnight-to-eight shift. Wait until you see me pull up and blink my lights. Then go out to the car and drive to the bar. Wait an hour before you call me back at your place. And don't forget to leave the garage doors open."

"Yes, honey," Peggy said. Then she asked, "How long will it be before I see you?"

"Tomorrow, I suppose. Maybe the day after."

"Don't forget I love you."

"Me, too," Danny said. "I love you, too." He hung up.

It began raining heavily along about the time Danny passed Muttontown on the Hempstead Turnpike. He rolled the window of his three-year-old car all the way up and nodded approvingly. The rain would keep people inside. There would be no bumbling dogwalkers out to catch a whiff of smoke.

He pulled up across the street from John's house shortly after nine-thirty. He blinked his headlights twice and then turned them off. He glanced around at the neighboring homes. The houses out here were all spaced at least two hundred feet apart. Few lights showed.

He saw a door open in the side-entry two-car garage. Peggy's car came rolling down the blacktop driveway and turned off in the opposite direction. Without turning on his lights, he started the motor and drove up into the garage. He lowered the doors behind him, and let himself into the kitchen through the inside door. Peggy had turned off all the lights in the house, as he had told her.

Danny took a tiny flashlight from his pocket and flicked it on. It cast a feeble, light, just enough for him to make out the shapes of furniture and the locations of doors. He took a sharp paring knife from a kitchen drawer and walked boldly back to the bedroom.

He flicked off the flashlight, letting his eyes accustom themselves to the dim moonlight in the room. He could hear John's solid snoring, smell the bourbon fumes on his breath. When he could see well enough, he walked to the space between the beds. He raised John's limp shoulders and slid an arm under them, and gathered up his knees with the other. Grunting with the effort, he lifted his brother free from the bed and put him on the floor. The only sign John gave of being disturbed was a slight stir in the rhythm of his breathing.

Danny left him and went to the playroom. Using the flashlight again, he found the smoke mask in its carrying case and the zipper bag lying beside it. He checked the contents of the bag. Coveralls, firetongs, work gloves, metal dustpan, paper bag of cigarette butts and ashes, all were there.

Danny pulled the coveralls on over his clothes. He slung the mask around his neck and buckled it at his waist, leaving the facepiece to dangle on his chest. Then he pulled on the light cotton workgloves and brought the zipper bag and the mask case back to the bedroom.

By touch, he found an ashtray on the bedtable and emptied the contents of the paper bag into it. Then he plunged the paring knife into the bed on which John had been sleeping and sawed a hole out of sheet, mattress cover and ticking. Then he dug his hands into the stuffing and yanked out a handful of cotton felt. He carried the bundle of cotton out to the kitchen.

Danny turned on a burner of the stove. He tore a ball of the stuffing from the wad he carried and dropped it on the lighted burner. The cotton felt began to burn. It did not burst into flames, but blackened and showed tiny sparks where tiny fibers incandesced. Plumes of

thick black smoke streamed upwards from the ball of stuffing. Danny went back to the bedroom for the tongs and the dustpan.

He used the tongs to move the burning cotton to the dustpan. He carried it back to the bedroom. Holding the burning waste in the dustpan he put the wad into the hole he had cut in the mattress.

The room was filling with smoke. He put the tongs and the dustpan into the zipper case and pushed the bedroom door shut. Dense clouds of smoke were rising to the ceiling, but he had no difficulty breathing through the mask.

The phone rang once. He looked at the luminous face of his watch, startled that an hour could have passed so quickly since Peggy had left the house. But it was the code they had arranged. Peggy would dial the number, let it ring once, then disconnet and dial again. Danny had figured that out, to guard against the possibility of his answering a call from some other person at a time when no one was supposed to be in the house except John, and he too drunk to hear it.

He stepped around John and picked up the bedroom extension when it rang again.

"Danny?"

"Yes," he said through the speaking diaphragm of the mask. The room was growing surprisingly hot although no flames showed.

"Is everything all right?"

"Not yet. But it soon will be. Leave the bar now and drive over to that phone booth you picked out. Park there. I'll phone you as soon as it's safe for you to come home."

The room was one dense cloud of smoke now. He could see only the dim gleam of the windows and the dressing table mirror, and a ring of tiny sparks where the ticking was burning at the foot of the column of smoke pouring sluggishly up from the burning bed.

A sudden inarticulate bellow from John startled him.

Unbelievingly, he saw his brother clamber awkwardly to his feet. John lurched away from the burning bed, croaking wordlessly.

Danny braced himself against the door, set to stop John if he tried to get out. *I can hold him until the smoke gets him,* he told himself. *I've gone too far to stop now.*

John turned in a drunken dazed circle in the center of the room.

Danny waited . . .

The firemen had been at the house for ten minutes before Peggy returned. The bedroom windows were broken out, the mattress soaked and dumped into the bathtub to douse it. They were working perfunctorily on John with an oxygen tank.

Peggy collapsed. She was taken to Huntington Hospital in her own car, and put to bed with a sedative. Before she fell asleep, she told the doctor her brother-in-law was Daniel Mynandahl of the New York City Fire Department, and asked that he be informed. The doctor promised that he would be.

Danny was back in the city in plenty of time to begin his twelve-midnight-to-eight shift. The smokemask, firetongs, dustpan, coveralls, and work gloves were all safely locked in the trunk of his car.

Danny got out to Huntington the next morning at nine o'clock. A uniformed Suffolk County policeman was guarding the house. There was a larger crowd of onlookers around it than Danny had expected. He remembered, with a faint feeling of surprise, that this was a Sunday. Danny identified himself to the policeman's satisfaction as the dead man's brother.

"It must be a sad thing to see the room where your brother died, this way," the cop said. "Still a young man, too, wasn't he?"

"I've seen a lot of fires," Danny said abstractly. "I'm a fireman." And then, because it seemed proper, he ex-

temporized, "But I never thought John would go this way."

He was studying the room with professional detachment. The fire had been fought efficiently, he could tell. The mattress had been carried into the bathroom and dropped into the tub to quench it. The windows had been broken out, but the only water damage had been to the beds and the walls and carpeting.

Downstairs, Danny opened a bottle of beer for the policeman and left him in the living room, promising to bring back Peggy's keys from the hospital to lock up the house and let him go on his way.

There was a neighbor woman with Peggy when Danny entered her room. "This is Eugenie Reynolds," Peggy said. She was dry-eyed, but still drowsy from the sedative. "She lives on our street. She's promised to pack a few clothes for me so I can go to a hotel for a couple of days."

Mrs. Reynolds went out into the hall to leave the widow and bereaved brother alone for a few minutes.

Peggy held out her arms to Danny.

He kissed her briefly. "Don't get any lipstick on me," he warned. "We'll have plenty of time for that."

He straightened up. "Where's your purse?" he asked. "I'll need the house keys and your car keys."

It took Mrs. Reynolds nearly an hour to pack two bags for Peggy. Danny sat in the living room and drank a beer with the policeman until she was finished. Then he locked up the house and put the bags in the back seat of Peggy's car. He dropped the cop off at the station, then took Mrs. Reynolds to the hospital so she could pick up her own car.

Danny took the bags up to Peggy's room and left her to dress. He went down to the street and moved his car to the parking lot. Then he drove Peggy to Manhattan, and checked her into a quiet hotel in the East Forties. He did not stay long in the room with her.

"We can't spend more time with each other than we would be expected to, for a while," he explained. "After the funeral, you can take a cruise, or something, for a couple of months. Then, after the customary year has gone by, we can get married."

Everything went smoothly for the next few days.

On Monday, the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's Office released John's body to the undertaker, after an autopsy had determined that he had died from asphyxia due to carbon monoxide inhalation, and that there was a sufficient quantity of alcohol in his blood to have rendered him unconscious before he breathed it in.

On Tuesday, the wake was held.

On Wednesday, John's remains were quietly and tastefully cremated.

On Thursday, four men and a woman came to Peggys' hotel room.

Two of the men were detectives from Homicide, Manhattan South. The other two, and the woman, were Suffolk County detectives. The woman eyed Peggy with open antagonism. The men were polite enough, if formal.

"Mrs. Mynandahl," the senior Suffolk County detective, a tall greyhaired man said, "we're here to arrest you. We have warrants charging you with arson and the murder of your husband, John Mynandahl."

Peggy staggered back into the room until her calves struck the edge of the bed. "There's some terrible mistake. My husband set fire to the bed with a cigarette, after hed'd been drinking."

"We don't think we're making a mistake, Mrs. Mynandahl," the detective said, "Your husband didn't smoke. Dozens of people have told us he quit."

"He started again! Saturday afternoon, when he was drinking! He always started smoking again when he was drunk."

"There were no cigarettes in the house."

"But there were! Cigarette butts in the tray beside

the bed, a carton of them in the bedroom closet where—"

"There weren't any cigarettes in the house. It's been searched. And the police chemists found those butts in the tray were stale, weeks old."

Peggy collapsed weakly on the bed.

"We even found the sales slips for the firetongs and the dustpan and the coveralls," the detective went on. "It was foolish of you to save them."

"But I have an alibi," Peggy managed to say. The sales slips were proof of nothing, she told herself. "People saw me in the bar. I can prove it!"

"Alibi for what? You simply started the mattress burning, closed the bedroom door and went out of the house. The mattress smoldered for hours, until your husband smothered to death. We even found pieces of mattress stuffing leaving a trail back to the kitchen where you set it on fire, traces of charred felt still in the dustpan—"

"I don't even know what you're talking about," Peggy shrilled. "You're crazy, all of you!"

"Come off it, dearie," the policewoman said. "We traced the smokemask, through its serial number, back to the Fire-End Company. The handwriting on the order and on the post office form matches yours. The girls at the mailing service place have identified your picture."

If they had the smokemask and the other things, then they must have Danny too. Suddenly, Peggy was very frightened. "I'll fight this!" she burst out. "I'll get the best lawyers in the country!"

"Don't plan on spending too much money, dearie," the policewoman said nastily. The detective shot her a reproving glance. "A murderer can't profit from his crime. Your husband's money will all go to his brother."

Peggy looked up at the detective. "D-Danny?" she asked, stupid with shock.

"We might never have suspected anything," the detective said, "if Danny hadn't started us wondering. We didn't have much real evidence until he suggested looking in the trunk of your car, and we found the smoke-mask and the rest of the paraphernalia."

Peggy stared at him, openmouthed, for a long time. Then she suddenly understood who had taken the cigarettes out of the bedroom closet. And she remembered Danny leaving her alone in the hospital room after Mrs. Reynolds left. He had gone down to the parking lot with the keys to her car.

Peggy put her head in her hands. She began to weep.

COME ON TO MY HOUSE!

Alfred Hitchcock, that well-known host of horror, has decided to throw a blast to end all murder orgies. Every fan of the master of the macabre is invited to come to his little marble crypt at the edge of the cemetery to enjoy the fiendish fun. You can be sure of the quality of the entertainment when you take a look at his guest list of spell-binding writing talents, with novelettes and stories by such great names as:

Henry Slesar
Frank Sisk • John Lutz
Donald Honig • Fletcher Flora
Phillip Tremont • Talmage Powell
Richard Deming • Richard Hardwick
Robert Colby • Mary E. Nutt
Elijah Ellis • Jack Ritchie
Stanley Abbott

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