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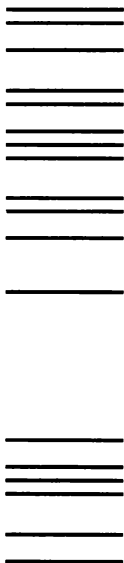
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**I AM  
CURIOUS  
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**ALFRED HITCHCOCK**  
EDITOR

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**A DELL BOOK**

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## Introduction

A theory I've had for quite some time was recently given additional credence by a story told to me by an acquaintance, a wealthy and famous Hollywood actor who resides in Beverly Hills. The actor reached home one morning just before dawn in a state of happy unawareness brought on by a night of conviviality that included a great number of Scotch-and-waters that were more Scotch than water. Entering what he thought to be his house, he stumbled over a low table, collided with a piano, crashed through a glass door, then plunged into a pool. He had got into, he discovered later, not his own home, but a neighbor's. He explained the error by saying, "All these Beverly Hills mansions look alike from the outside." Actually, of course, if, upon entering, he had switched on a light, he would more than likely have noticed that the interior of the house he had blundered into was not the same as his own.

That gets me back to my theory: that when important as well as insignificant matters are concerned, we all do a considerable amount of plunging on into the darkness, confident in our ignorance that we know where we are going and what we are doing.

Take, for example, the chore of choosing our national leaders. Politicians, by nature, speak in generalities. Yet we assume that we know exactly what they

are talking about. A man running for high office can use the phrase "fiscal responsibility," and leave us with the impression that he intends to reduce our taxes to practically nil. Because, of course, that's what we *want* to believe he means.

The man himself, though, might have an entirely different idea of fiscal responsibility. To him, it might mean stocking up on World War I observation balloons before they become popular again and prices soar.

There is danger, too, in taking the obvious for granted when choosing a marriage partner. Her curves, we may find, belong not to her but to her clothes. Moreover, in the matter of personality, what might appear during courting to be a fun-loving nature could turn out later to be mere simplemindedness. Young women, also, have to be careful. A man might promise her every and anything, yet, in the end, come up with nothing more than a small bottle of perfume—charged to *her* credit card.

Along the same lines, I think we would be wise to be leery of the personality change that has suddenly come over our banks. You recall, of course, the days when the only one who had a friend at a bank was another banker. Then, as all the radio comedians were constantly pointing out, the only way you could get a loan from a bank was to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that you didn't need it. Now, however, bankers are practically going from door to door, trying to loan money.

The metamorphosis, however, is only skin-deep. A recent experience of another acquaintance of mine, I believe, points this up. Several months ago, he visited his local bank for the purpose of borrowing enough money to finance the production of a movie. The gentleman in charge of approving loans was more



than eager to supply him with all he needed. He went even further. He threw in enough for my friend to purchase a new Jaguar (his old one was running low on petrol), a second-hand castle in Ireland, screen rights to World War III, and a plane ticket to a country with which the U.S. has no extradition treaty. Overjoyed, my friend signed his X on the dotted line. When he tried to leave, though, he found that he was secured to the loan officer's desk by a one-foot steel chain. So much for the illusion that bankers have joined the ranks of the good guys.

The opportunities for plunging into the darkness and receiving unpleasant surprises as a reward are all about us. They are everywhere, in fact, but here. The stories in this collection, though they may take you into some of the dark places of the mind, will certainly not disappoint you. Rather than leaving you in the dark, I can promise that you will find them enlightening.

—ALFRED HITCHCOCK



# **ONE-ARMED BANDIT**

Dan Sontup

On the day he robbed the finance company, Harry awoke at exactly 7:15.

He was a light sleeper, and so he awoke instantly as he heard the tiny click of the clock-radio turning itself on. He was wide-eyed and clearheaded and sitting up in bed before the radio had a chance to warm up. When the music finally came on, Harry yawned, stretched his right arm high over his head, then scratched contentedly at the stub of his left arm where it ended just below the shoulder.

He sat quietly in the bed and waited until the music ended and the announcer gave the time and then a short weather report. When Harry heard that it would be clear and cool that day, he grunted with satisfaction and got out of the bed and headed for the bathroom.

As he shaved himself with quick, sure strokes, he looked himself right in the eye in the mirror and gave another satisfied grunt at what he saw—close-cropped curly red hair, clear blue eyes, a broad nose, and a mouth that was slightly tilted at the corners in a cynical smile.

The smile was a permanent one. It was always there, and it was Harry's way of telling the rest of the whole world to go to the devil.

Harry dressed slowly and meticulously, strapping

the artificial arm on with great care. With the light topcoat and gloves that he'd be wearing today, the artificiality of the arm would hardly be noticeable, especially since he had practiced holding the arm in such a way that it looked completely natural. It was important to Harry that no one at the finance company—or, for that matter, at any of the other places he had robbed—be aware that they were dealing with a one-armed man. This was not vanity on Harry's part. It was merely protection against too accurate an identification.

The last thing Harry did before leaving his small furnished room was to unload his gun and slip it into the pocket of his topcoat, placing the bullets in the other pocket. Although he always had complete control of himself, an unloaded gun meant there'd be no accidental killings. Harry was not a man of violence, and he also knew that the penalty for murder was a lot more severe than that for robbery.

He ate a light breakfast at a luncheonette on the corner, then boarded a bus for the ride downtown. He got off at a busy intersection, walked a couple of blocks, then stopped in front of a store window and reached into his inside pocket and took out a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. Harry's vision was perfect, and the lenses of the glasses were ordinary window glass. Harry slipped them on and looked at his reflection in the store window, and the cynical smile on his lips broadened just a trifle. His face now looked completely different. This was the full extent of his disguise. He'd discovered quite by accident that glasses brought about a remarkable change in his appearance, and so he used them on every job, taking them off again once he was in the clear.

With the glasses in place, Harry started walking briskly. He passed a beggar propped up against the

wall of a building. The man was leaning heavily on his crutches, one hand extended holding out his cap, the stump of his right leg prominently displayed for all to see.

The beggar looked pleadingly at Harry, and Harry glanced at him contemptuously as he went by. *Not me, buster*, Harry mentally told the beggar. *I don't give handouts to bums.*

Harry snorted out loud and quickened his pace. Three blocks farther, he came to the parking lot he'd selected two days earlier.

Harry walked by the parking lot, noting with satisfaction that it was completely full but that the attendant was still waving cars in. These would be the cars of the office workers who drove to town, and Harry knew they wouldn't be back for their cars until after five o'clock.

He walked past the lot, then turned and entered a small alley in back of the lot. It was just as he'd seen it two days before. The alley, and a small side street off the alley was parked almost full with cars, and virtually all the cars had a parking lot tag stuck under the windshield wiper. This was where the attendant parked the overflow from the main lot.

Harry walked along, glancing at each car until he found the one he wanted—a small compact car with an automatic transmission. Harry looked about him quickly. No one was in sight. He opened the door of the car and reached in quickly under the sun visor. His fingers closed on the car keys, just where the attendant always placed them.

Harry smiled and looked around again. He was still alone in the alley. Quickly, he pulled the tag from under the wiper and then slipped into the driver's seat. It took him just a couple of seconds to start the

car and pull it out of line, and he was out of the alley and into traffic in less than a half a minute after that.

Harry smiled again as he drove expertly through the heavy downtown traffic, his artificial left arm hanging at his side, his right hand gripping the wheel confidently. The car drove smoothly, and Harry knew he'd chosen well. He now had a car that wouldn't be missed until the owner came for it after work.

In a few minutes, Harry had parked the car on the corner across the street from the finance company. He sat quietly in the car for several moments, looking around him casually. The office of the finance company was on the second floor of a three-story building on the opposite corner. From the street, the interior of the office could not be seen because of the heavy curtains in the office windows. It was an ideal setup except for one thing—the traffic cop on the corner.

Harry watched the cop standing in the center of the intersection, waving his arms vigorously at the moving traffic. It would be easy to avoid the cop, Harry thought. After the robbery, he'd come down the interior stairs in the building with the manager walking in front of him holding the briefcase containing the money while Harry walked in back of him, his one good hand holding the unloaded gun in his pocket.

At the foot of the stairs, Harry would have two choices. He could either go out the front door, across the street, passing the cop, and then directly to the stolen car. Or, he could have the manager turn and go out the rear entrance of the building to the small parking lot in back. Harry had watched the manager drive up and park there for several mornings during Harry's preparation for the robbery. The manager always arrived fifteen minutes before the office opened for the day, and he always carried a bulging

briefcase. If Harry chose the rear parking lot, he could have the manager use his own car. Harry had considered this getaway method very carefully, and then had decided against it. Once the robbery was discovered, a search would be made of the area and the police would soon find out that the manager's car was missing from the lot—and this would mean an immediate police bulletin carrying the license number and description of the car.

It was much too risky, and so Harry decided on the lesser risk of passing the traffic cop.

Harry got out of the car, then removed the key from the ignition and glanced about him quickly. No one seemed to be looking at him, and he hastily slipped the key behind the sun visor, then rolled up the windows and closed the car door.

The key behind the visor represented another risk, Harry knew, but it had to be taken. With only one hand free, he couldn't hold both the gun and the briefcase at the same time when he made his getaway from the finance office. Therefore, he'd have to use the manager to carry the briefcase. And, since he couldn't let the manager run around loose, he'd have to use the manager to drive the getaway car while Harry sat next to him and held the gun on him. The manager couldn't drive the car without the ignition key and, if Harry had this key in his pocket, then he couldn't hand it to the manager without taking his hand off the gun—and that would never do.

So, the risks had to be taken, and Harry accepted them as part of the job. Nothing was completely foolproof, Harry knew, but he planned each job carefully and thoroughly and thereby kept the chances of failure down to an absolute minimum.

Harry walked away from the car and turned the corner, heading away from the finance company.

In the middle of the block, he went into a drugstore. Inside, he purchased three rolls of adhesive tape, which he carried from the store in a neatly wrapped package.

It was time now to get down to the actual robbery.

Harry went back to the corner and waited until the traffic cop signaled him to cross, then he walked quickly to the other side and then into the building.

He climbed the flight of stairs to the second floor and, without hesitation, pushed open the door of the finance company.

The office was divided by a waist-high wooden partition with a gate at one end. On Harry's side of the partition, a customer was filling out a loan application at a small table. On the other side of the partition were two men and a girl. One of the men—the manager—sat at a desk behind a nameplate that identified him as "J. Wilson." The other man wasn't important enough to rate a nameplate, and the girl's status was indicated by the fact that she was furiously pounding away at a typewriter.

A small office, Harry noted. Just one room. That meant the take would be small, too, but Harry had expected that. Small jobs involved small risks.

Harry walked to the partition and carefully balanced the package containing the adhesive tape on the narrow railing. The manager looked up briefly, then went back to his work, and the other man rose from his desk and came over to Harry and said, "May I help you?"

"Yes," Harry said, and he reached into his pocket and took out his gun. "Please don't do anything foolish, something you'd regret."

The man stared at the gun in Harry's gloved hand and swallowed hard. The typewriter suddenly went



silent as the girl realized what was happening, and the manager half rose from his chair.

"Easy does it," Harry said softly, and the manager sat down again.

Harry glanced at the customer at the table. The man was staring at him, his pen held over the application form on the table in front of him. "Will you join the others, please," Harry said to him. "But first lock the office door, if you don't mind."

The man seemed rooted to his chair, his eyes fastened on Harry. "Please——" Harry said again, his voice rising just a little. The man snapped out of it. He dropped his pen, got up quickly, then went over to the door and latched it.

"That's fine," Harry said, and he motioned with the gun. "Now go join the others."

The man opened the gate and went behind the partition and stood next to the girl's desk.

"All right, Wilson," Harry said to the manager. "Come over here and take this package." Harry nodded with his chin at the package still precariously balanced on top of the railing.

Wilson got up from his desk and started for the partition, and Harry took an instant dislike to him. It was obvious that Wilson wasn't the least bit frightened. If anything, he seemed faintly amused by the whole affair. He walked across the office with an arrogant strut, his eyes on Harry, a wisp of a smile on his lips.

"Well," he said, as he picked up the package, "a daring daylight robbery, as the newspapers would say."

"Your sense of humor is a little flat," Harry said. "Just open the package, please."

Wilson opened the package and looked at the three rolls of adhesive tape.

"Put a piece of tape over their mouths," Harry said. "Then tape their hands behind their backs, and then tape their ankles together."

"Think you've got enough tape here?" Wilson asked smugly. "Maybe you didn't plan this job carefully enough."

"There's enough tape," Harry said. "Just do as I say—and do it quickly."

Wilson shrugged and turned to the others.

"Just behave yourselves," Harry said. "No one will get hurt if you do as I say."

Harry leaned his elbow on the railing and kept his gun pointed at Wilson as the manager very efficiently bound and gagged the two men and the girl.

"That's fine," Harry said. "Now go get your briefcase."

"Maybe I haven't got a briefcase," Wilson said.

"You've got one," Harry told him.

Wilson shrugged again and went over to the corner near his desk and picked up his briefcase. It was still bulging.

"Empty it on your desk," Harry said.

Wilson opened the briefcase, then held it high over his desk and, with a dramatic gesture, turned it over and dumped the contents on his desk. Papers and file folders fell to the desk in a big pile.

"Now, open the safe, and put the cash in the briefcase," Harry said.

"You've got the gun," Wilson said.

"Please don't forget that," Harry said. "I wouldn't like to use it."

"Of course you wouldn't," Wilson said with just the trace of a snicker in his voice, but he proceeded to do exactly as Harry told him.

"All right," Harry said when Wilson had finished. "Bring the briefcase and come out here."

Wilson came out from behind the partition, with no apparent fear.

"We're going downstairs," Harry said. "You'll walk in front of me and carry the briefcase. I want you to walk slowly and carefully because I'll have this gun in my pocket—and it'll be pointed at your back every minute."

Wilson sniffed loudly and looked at Harry with a bored expression.

"Let's go," Harry said, and he slipped the gun in his pocket. He turned slightly and said to the two men and the girl, "I don't think I have to remind you that Mr. Wilson's safety depends very much on what you do after I leave here. Please don't try anything heroic like kicking out the window to attract attention. Mr. Wilson will be the one who pays for any mistakes you make."

Harry motioned with his head at the door, and Wilson opened it and walked out into the hall. Harry was right in back of him.

"Lock the door," Harry said.

Wilson put down the briefcase, reached into his pocket and took out his keys, then locked the door and replaced the keys in his pocket.

"Down the stairs," Harry said. "Slowly."

Wilson picked up the briefcase and started down the stairs with Harry following. As they walked down, Harry mentally ran through the rest of his plan. Out the door, across the street, into the car. Wilson would drive. Harry would have him drive out of town to a stretch of road hardly used by any cars, then turn off on a small side road. There, Harry would force Wilson out of the car and tell him to start walking. When Wilson was a good distance away, Harry would turn the car around and head back. It would take some time for Wilson to reach a phone, and this would

allow Harry enough time to get back to town, abandon the car, then take a series of bus rides back to his furnished room. Neat, clean, quick, and no violence at all.

They were at the outside door now, and Wilson paused.

"Open the door," Harry said.

Wilson opened the door and slowly stepped out on the sidewalk.

Harry stood next to him on the sidewalk and looked around quickly. Everything was just as it had been earlier—including the arm-waving traffic cop.

"Across the street," Harry said, "and please don't try anything."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Wilson said, his voice heavy with sarcasm, and then he stepped off the curb and started across the street, his shoulders back, his head erect, his strutting walk even more arrogant than it had been in the office. Harry walked on his left and slightly behind him.

When they reached the center of the intersection, they were no more than five feet from the cop. The cop glanced at them, then smiled. "Morning, Mr. Wilson," he said, his arms still waving at the traffic.

"Hi, Bill," Wilson said, and he kept on walking.

Harry let out a deep breath as they reached the other side. He glanced back. The cop was busy with the traffic.

"Into that car," Harry said, motioning with his head to the stolen car. "Get in on the sidewalk side, then slide over behind the wheel."

"I'm driving?" Wilson asked.

"You're driving," Harry said.

Wilson shrugged and walked to the car and opened the door and got in and slid across the seat behind the wheel. Harry got in right behind him, swinging

the door shut with his elbow while he kept his hand on the gun in his pocket. The briefcase was now on the seat between them.

"Get the keys from behind the sun visor," Harry said.

Wilson reached up and fumbled behind the visor.

"Hurry it up!" Harry said.

"Take it easy," Wilson said, groping behind the visor with his hand.

Harry drew the gun out of his pocket and jabbed it into Wilson's ribs. It was a nasty jab and Wilson winced.

"Relax," Wilson said, withdrawing his hand and showing Harry the keys.

Harry glanced out the window. The cop had left his post and was now hurrying toward them, his hand opening the flap on his holster.

Wilson looked at the cop, then turned to Harry and said, "I'd advise against shooting me. Bill is a good cop and a dead shot. You'll never make it."

Harry thought of the unloaded gun in his hand, and he looked at the hurrying cop, and he knew there had been some small risk he'd overlooked.

"You signaled him!" Harry said.

"In a way," Wilson said. "He knows I can't drive this car."

Harry looked at him blankly, and Wilson said, "My own car is specially built for me."

Then, as the cop with his gun drawn appeared at the window next to Harry, Wilson smiled cynically and rolled up his right trouser leg and let Harry see the varnished wood of his artificial leg.

## NEVER KILL FOR LOVE

C. B. Gilford

It is perhaps a truism that marriage is often the first step toward murder. Undoubtedly it was in our case. None of us were murderers by nature or choice. It was only that detestable, loathsome, ridiculous, foolish, horrifying, not-made-in-heaven marriage that led us to it. Forced us to it, I should say. For although we cudgeled our brains to find some other solution, there was absolutely none that we could find.

I'm Porter Wyck, by the way. My friends—and I have some—simply call me Port. I'm thirty-two, decent-looking, and I have a bit of money, through an inheritance.

Then there's Aram Daniels. He's the handsome one, dark, lean, lithe, with soft brown eyes, black curly hair, and a small, clipped mustache. A ladies' man, you might say.

Athelstan Mallory rounds out our group. He's Aram's opposite in many ways. He's a Celt, big, barrel-chested, athletic, with a large ruggedly carved blond head, and hard, ice-blue eyes.

But the three of us probably would never have even met—certainly would not have become friends and conspirators—had we not been brought together by our common love for Leonora. It may be the more usual circumstance that several men loving the same woman are driven apart, but we had something else

in common, too—our loves for Leonora were mutually futile.

Not that we didn't try . . .

I remember the first time I met Leonora. I'd been bored with my own existence and I'd come down to Tanbury to see Punkie, with whom I'd had a wartime acquaintance some years back. I'd never particularly liked Punkie, but that's how bored I was. Anyway he took me to this country club dance.

"You've got to introduce me to that girl," I said to Punkie.

Some people would have called Leonora beautiful; maybe others wouldn't have. She was tall, willowy. Perhaps she didn't have the spectacular proportions some modern barbarians expect women to have. But she had exquisite pale skin, dark red hair, green eyes, and high cheekbones. She had a quality too—something about her that was really indescribable, intangible, but a thing which would make the kind of man who would fall in love with her stay in love with her for as long as he lived.

A week after I met her I asked her to marry me. She said, "No."

She came across Aram Daniels in Paris. He'd been studying painting there. I suppose it was the most natural thing in the world for an artist like Aram to be attracted to a face like Leonora's. He gave up Paris and followed her back across the Atlantic. He also proposed to her, and to him also she said, "No."

She picked up Athelstan Mallory in Egypt. (Leonora did quite a bit of traveling before her marriage.) Athelstan was an archeologist who was digging into pyramids. But he quite forgot Queen Nefertiti and followed Leonora back home just as Aram had done. Proposed like both Aram and me. And was said "no" to, like Aram and me.

So Tanbury was acquiring a veritable colony of Leonora's suitors, all of whom had labored and loved in vain, scarcely any of whom had any real hope of future success, but none of whom had the slightest notion of leaving and forgetting Leonora. As for Leonora herself, she handled the situation patiently but firmly.

"I'm not going to try to avoid you, Port," she told me, "and I'm not going to turn and look the other way when I see you. That would be silly. But I'm not going to go out with you either. That would be silly too."

So I—and Aram and Athelstan did the same thing—just hung around, trying to get as many glimpses of Leonora as I could, trying to get invited to places where she might be, trying to arrange "chance" meetings whenever and wherever possible. Which meant that the three of us by sheer coincidence and necessity became first companions, and finally friends.

And then came that dreadful day.

Of course I think we all realized, clearly, that Leonora—though she didn't love any of us—was nevertheless capable of love, would someday fall in love, and that the lucky man would be someone who hadn't yet appeared on the scene.

But Richley! Not Richley! Charles Richley was the lowest, vilest form of humanity.

That's a broad statement, I know. A pretty bold conclusion. But remember I said Leonora had a quality that made people love her. Well, Richley had a quality too. The opposite quality. People hated him instantly. At least three people did, Aram, Athelstan and myself.

We hated him, I'm sure, even before we realized how Leonora felt about him. Surely all three of us



couldn't have been psychic about the future. No, I think we hated him instinctively, apart from considerations of Leonora, simply for being himself, a monstrous defilement of human nature.

"The man's a pig," Athelstan said, "an ugly, gluttonous, and most filthy pig."

"Hyena," Aram corrected him. "An idiot beast, all mouth and voice."

You may gather from this—and be correct—that Charles Richley was fat. Not enormous, not gargantuan. But unpleasantly plump, with a soft, fat body, and soft, fat hands, and soft, fat folds of flesh around his neck and jowls. And he was a compulsive talker. He chattered and squeaked incessantly, on any subject. When there wasn't a subject, he talked about himself.

I don't know where he came from. I never wanted to know. He'd come to Tanbury on some real estate promotion scheme, probably dishonest. In the course of pushing his promotion, he made it a point to meet just about everybody in town. So of course he met Leonora.

I don't know to this day whether it was love at first sight, because I'd never seen Leonora in love. It was some while at least before we were aware of what was developing. Then it struck us like a thunderbolt. Leonora was engaged to Charles Richley!

We disbelieved the first rumor so desperately that the three of us went together to ask Leonora herself if it were true. It was a Sunday afternoon. Richley was off somewhere bargaining over some swamp land. Leonora was cool and beautiful in a green dress that matched her eyes. And I remember seeing instantly that there was a change in her. Again it was something so subtle that you saw it without knowing how

or where. Perhaps it was a heightened color in her pale cheeks, or a strange glow hovering about her like a halo.

"Yes, I'm going to marry Charles," she said.

We tried, as gentlemen, not to show our shock and horror.

"Well, I have to marry someone, don't I?" she went on.

Someone, yes. But not Charles Richley! Not that oafish, brutish blob of fat flesh that could not possibly love her as we loved her.

We left quickly. I was sick, physically sick. I wanted to vomit, or to curse, or to die. Above all, I never wanted to see Leonora again.

Aram felt the same. "I'm going back to Paris," he said. "I cannot stay here and watch the mating of those two creatures, one so ugly and one so beautiful. I'm going back to Paris."

But he didn't go. None of us went anywhere. We stayed, like moths around a fatal flame, thirst-crazed men drinking from a cup we knew was poisoned.

We lived a nightmare for the next several months. We drank. We quarreled. We concocted a hundred miserable, desperate schemes of hatred and revenge. Until Athelstan, with a sudden, stoic calm, proposed something that had the sound of wisdom.

"If we love Leonora as we claim, shouldn't we want to see her happy? And if by some mysterious working of a feminine mind, she should think she was happy with Richley, shouldn't we approve?"

In the end, there seemed nothing else we could do. We sat on the sidelines and watched. Leonora was an heiress in a small way, having inherited a good deal of Tanbury property from her stepfather. We watched while Richley took control of that property

even before the wedding, and we tried not to believe that he was marrying Leonora for her money. We had misgivings of all sorts, but we stifled them and hoped for the best.

We even attended the wedding. We sat in stunned, sick silence while Charles Richley kissed his bride. We fretted in Tanbury for a whole month, while the newlyweds were away on an ocean honeymoon. And we still lingered when the Richleys returned to Tanbury and settled into an enormous, rambling ranch house, one of those which Richley's new corporation was bringing into being.

"It is all over," Aram said. "She has endured the intimacies of the honeymoon with the monster. Now she is setting up housekeeping for him, to slave in a kitchen to produce little delicacies for his gross appetite. It is all over. I am going back to Paris."

But he stayed. All of us did. I cannot say what held us there. We would have been much happier away. But some spiritual chain bound us to the spot. Some elemental, primitive foreknowledge made us linger. We were like three half-malicious, half-protective, ever-watchful deities of the Richley hearth, brooding over the scene, perhaps waiting to be needed, to be called, perhaps waiting to perform whatever actions the eternal fates had long ago decreed.

Then one day—or one night—we knew why we were there.

It was another dance party night at the same country club where I had first met Leonora. We had been in the habit of going everywhere where Leonora might be. And she was there with Richley. We watched from afar.

They were at a table—Leonora and Charles—with two other couples. We didn't know what was being

said. Of course Richley was talking. He was always talking. We couldn't help but hear the sound of his high-pitched voice, audible even above the music.

Then suddenly Leonora left the table. She walked very fast, among the other tables, across the dance floor, past people whom she knew but didn't stop to greet. And she disappeared out through the main entrance.

"Something's wrong," I said.

We followed her, not caring whether Richley or anybody else saw where we were going. Outside, we spotted Leonora's white dress in the moonlight. She was heading toward the parking lot. We ran after her. It must have been the sound of our running footsteps on the gravel which made her whirl to face us just before she reached her car.

"What do you want?" she snapped the question at us, spitting it out with a catlike savagery that we'd never seen in her.

"You're crying," I said.

It was all I could say. The sight of her tear-filled eyes, her distorted face, unnerved me, left me speechless after two words.

"What business is it of yours?" she flung back.

And then nobody said anything for a long moment. Leonora glared at us. We stood there frightened, confused, with an anger of our own, but not directed toward her as hers obviously was toward us.

"What has he done to you?" Athelstan asked finally.

"Who are you talking about?"

"Your husband. What has he done to you?" Athelstan had a rocklike, persevering stubbornness. "You are unhappy, Leonora. What has he done?"

"I am not unhappy . . ."

"You're crying."

"All right, supposing I am unhappy. What makes you think it's Charles' fault?"

We should have stopped right there. We should have understood. Everything was clear at that one moment. But what we saw was something we didn't want to see. The fateful moment passed, and forever afterwards everything was veiled from our comprehension, mysterious, enigmatic, an eternal puzzle.

"You don't like Charles, do you?" she asked.

"How could we like him if he married you?" Aram answered, with both frankness and gallantry.

It mollified her a little. But she still didn't want any help from us. "Excuse me," she said, "I'm going home."

We stood helplessly by and watched her get into the car. The engine roared, she backed crazily from the parking place, then shot away, the wheels spurting gravel at us in a revengeful spray.

"Whatever she claims to the contrary," Athelstan said gloomily, "she is unhappy."

"No marriage runs smoothly all the time," I argued, but I failed to convince even myself.

"A man who would quarrel with his wife in public," Aram said, "who would make her cry in the presence of strangers, that man deserves a horsewhip."

And I suppose it was only our consideration for Leonora, our reluctance to embarrass her, that prevented us from returning to the club and dealing with Richley then and there—and with a horsewhip, if we'd had one.

But the worst was yet to come. In the ensuing months, Richley consolidated his real estate holdings in Tanbury, which had been started with Leonora's money and property of course. And it also became widely known that he mistreated his wife as a rather

regular thing. We fumed over the situation, but without knowing what to do about it.

The only thing we did do, for the moment, was to establish a continuous watch over the Richley house. There were three of us available for the operation, and time meant nothing to us, so that day and night there was always at least one of us there, and more often two.

Not right on the spot, of course, except sometimes at night, when we simply parked in a car a few houses down, or around the corner. Most of the time our sentry post was an office over a store about two blocks distant. From there, with aid of binoculars, we could keep pretty good track.

That was how we knew, for instance, when Leonora walked out on Richley the first time. She had no close relatives in Tanbury, and she evidently didn't like the public life of the hotel. So she drove her car to the motor court on the edge of town and stayed in one of the cabins for two days.

Actually we were happy over that at first, hoping it meant a breakup of the marriage. But it didn't. After those two days Leonora returned to Richley. But the routine became a periodic thing. Every month or so, Leonora—in some kind of despair that perhaps we couldn't quite appreciate—would pack a suitcase and go to the motor court for a day or two. But always, without fail, she returned.

Then a queer thing happened. Leonora didn't come out of the house for a week. Richley came and went; lights burned behind drawn drapes at night in Richley's absence. So she was there. She had to be there. She could not have left without our knowing it. Yet she was staying completely out of sight.

Finally, our curiosity and apprehension got the better of us. We waited till Richley left the house

one day, and then we marched straight up to the front door and rang the bell. When there was no immediate answer, our fears grew. But we kept on ringing, making it clear to Leonora that we weren't going to be discouraged. So finally we heard the bolt working, and the door opened as far as the chain would allow it. Leonora's voice came from the interior shadows.

"Yes, Port, what is it?"

"We want to see you, Leonora."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not seeing anyone."

"Why not?"

"Port, when are you going to learn that my private life is not your special business?" She didn't say it in an unkindly way, just wearily.

"Have you been ill, Leonora? We'd like to know if there's anything we can do to help—if there's anything wrong, that is." This was useless conversation, but I was stalling. My vision was slowly growing more accustomed to peering into the dimness, and I was seeing better every second.

"There is nothing wrong, Port. Now please go away . . . please . . . and don't come back." And she closed the door in our faces.

Back in our car, we consulted. I had seen what I had seen, and Aram, with his sharp painter's eyes, had seen even better perhaps.

"Her face is bruised, isn't it?" I asked him.

"Yes," he agreed.

"She could have fallen."

"If she'd fallen, she would have called a doctor. And we know that no doctor's been here. So she's been hurt in a way she doesn't want anybody to know about. That husband of hers has beaten her."

Then Athelstan gave voice to what was in all our minds. "We'll kill him," he said.

It was only the fact that we couldn't locate him that prevented us from immediately taking Charles Richley and murdering him in broad daylight, a sort of public execution. But Richley was on the move that day and kept one jump ahead of us. Everywhere we looked for him, he had just left. By the end of the day, we'd about decided just to go back to his house, wait for him there, and kill him when he arrived.

"Right before Leonora's eyes?" Aram asked.

We hadn't considered that aspect. But that thought bred other thoughts. There were numerous problems, we discovered.

"No," Athelstan said. "Why should we inflict a bloody scene on Leonora? She's suffered enough because of that brute already."

"In fact," Aram said, "I don't think she should even have to view his corpse afterwards. We can provide the necessary identification."

"But she'll have to know he's been killed."

"Certainly. But she doesn't have to be directly involved in it."

"That will require definite arrangements."

"Yes, we'll have to make arrangements. Maybe it's rather a good thing that we didn't find him."

"So he gets a reprieve then?"

"Yes, but a short one."

We went to my place. I got out a bottle of wine to aid our thinking.

"Which one of us gets the actual honor of killing Richley?" Athelstan wanted to know. "I would like to volunteer."

"Why should it be you?" I challenged him. "After all, I have seniority. I've known Leonora longer than either of you."

"I don't see how that matters. In fact, Port, I'd be



willing to submit to a duel or test of any kind to see who gets the privilege . . .”

“Shut up, both of you,” Aram intervened. “The important thing is to dispose of Richley in the best possible way. I should like to kill him myself, by myself, but personal pleasure must bow in this case to the common good.”

We agreed. We had by no means cooled down, but the fires within were under control.

“Do you suppose,” I wondered, “that Leonora would feel kindly towards whoever killed Richley? And another thought—suppose the one who kills him goes to prison or something of the sort. What would the chances be for the other two? With Leonora, I mean.”

Aram was inclined to be gloomy. “Leonora has already rejected the three of us. If she remarries after Richley, it’s not likely to be any of us. No, I’m afraid this project will have to be a bit more altruistic than that. We’d simply better think of punishing Richley, and freeing Leonora in the most painless way possible.”

“I agree heartily,” I said. “But my first question is still unanswered. How will Leonora feel toward us, singly or as a group, when she finds out we killed her husband? Lord knows, she may even feel guilty herself, knowing we did it for her sake. And then there’s the matter of public opinion. It’ll create rather a scandal, don’t you think?”

“Well, Port, what’s your solution then?” Aram demanded.

“I don’t know for sure . . .”

“I have the solution,” Athelstan said. “For Leonora’s sake—not for our own—we must kill Richley without being detected. Don’t you see, fellows? A secret, well-planned murder . . .”

On a Wednesday morning, a fortnight later, Leonora—her face healed and presentable now—left her house and drove to the motor court. She registered there, as before, as Mrs. Charles Richley. If past performances were any indication, she would stay overnight at least, perhaps two nights. To be on the safe side, however, we'd agreed our plan had better go into action the first night.

Aram had drawn the assignment of watching Leonora. He decided against renting another cabin and being too obvious. Instead, he stayed parked in his own car, in a spot from which he could watch Leonora's door.

With the binoculars, Athelstan covered the Richley house from our observation point. The house was to be our execution place, our Tyburn Hill, our Place de la Revolution, and we wanted to make sure it wasn't disturbed.

I shadowed Richley. He left the house shortly after Leonora's departure, and went about his daily round of business as if nothing unusual had happened. As a matter of fact, he looked almost smug. Leonora had left, but it had happened before, and she'd always come back. She'd come back again. He had nothing to worry about.

I hated him for his smugness. But I also rather enjoyed his air of confidence. He flitted about Tanbury that day with the vitality and enthusiasm of a man who thinks he is going to live forever. But he was going to die very soon. He didn't know it. But I did.

He must have been aware that Leonora always went to that motor court whenever she left him. If he'd had any spark of decency or chivalry in him, he'd have gone there sometime that day and begged

her to come back to him. But he didn't. He was all business, and the fact that his beautiful wife was probably shedding bitter tears didn't prevent him from talking with his architect, his banker, his lumber dealer, half a dozen customers, and probably turning every one of those conversations to his selfish advantage.

He dined in a restaurant that evening with a middle-aged couple who looked like good prospective victims for some kind of swindle. Being nervous with anticipation, I wasn't hungry myself. I nibbled and drank coffee, while Richley, still not perturbed about Leonora and still true to his old habits, stowed away an enormous meal. He took two hours or more at it.

He's prolonging his life by just that much, I thought. And he's going to die on a full stomach. I begrudged him both the extra time and that last meal.

It was past nine when he said good-bye to the middle-aged couple and started home. I followed a block behind him. There was never too much traffic in Tanbury, so you couldn't lose a car very easily.

But anyway, his destination was predictable. He turned into his driveway, his garage door opened by radio signal, and both he and his car were swallowed up. The prey was in his cage; all the hunters had to do was to walk in.

I blinked my lights toward the office where Athelstan waited, and the window blinked back at me. Then I settled down to wait, while Athelstan drove to the motor court and picked up Aram.

I kept watch on the Richley house though, just in case our bird had a late rendezvous somewhere. Lights burned now in two rooms, probably the living room and the kitchen. All the windows in the house were luxuriously and heavily draped, but even so, some illumination shone through.

When Athelstan and Aram arrived together, the latter reported that Leonora was still at the motor court. It was next to impossible, he felt, that she would change her mind and return home at this late hour.

"We're ready then," I said, with a military briskness.

We knew exactly what we were going to do. We'd planned it; we'd argued and discussed it; we'd rehearsed it as well as we could. Now there was no further talk. We went straight up to the front door and rang the bell.

"He may be a little while," I explained. "The kitchen light is on; so he's probably eating. He may be gentleman enough to swallow his mouthful before he answers the bell. And that will take a little time."

It did. It was a full minute before the lock clicked and the door swung open. Richley was in his shirt sleeves and house slippers. His face was shiny and sweaty, his jaws chomped a few last times, and his fat neck convulsed while he swallowed.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

He knew us, of course; so we didn't have to force our way in as strangers. "Charlie," I began, "we've got a little deal for you we think you can make some money out of . . ."

It was more than enough. He opened the door wide and invited us in. From the entrance foyer, he led us into the living room.

We'd never been inside Leonora's house, but I remember deciding at once that the interior reflected her more than it did her husband. The living room furniture had slim and light lines. The chairs rested on thin, tubular legs, the sofas seemed mere airy benches. The colorings were pale, fragile, like Le-

onora herself. There was nothing heavy or ponderous or ugly like Richley was.

"How about a beer, gentlemen?" our genial host asked. I'm sure it wasn't hospitality that prompted the offer, only the fact that he wanted one himself.

"We haven't time," Athelstan told him.

"Well, all right then." The choice between food or drink and money was a hard one for Richley to make. Right now he was torn between reluctance and anticipation.

He was so thoroughly distracted by those mixed emotions that I don't think he was aware that we had surrounded him. Aram stayed facing him, while I deployed to his left and Athelstan to his right. Aram was our spokesman.

"Richley, we want to tell you why we're really here. We are Leonora's friends. You have mistreated her. She is an angel. You are a beast. We are going to kill you like a beast."

For a moment, he acted as if he didn't believe what he had heard. Or believed he had heard it wrong. Or thought that we were joking. In fact, he almost laughed. Being something of a joker himself, he received Aram's announcement as preposterous.

"What is this anyway? What are you guys . . . ?" His voice squeaked, then trailed off. He'd begun vaguely to sense the reality of our intention, and his body was experiencing fear before his mind fully appreciated it.

"And may we say, Richley, that it will be a pure pleasure to kill you."

His mouth fell open, and all that loose flesh of his jowls, deprived of any support, sagged over his loosened collar. His sweaty skin grayed to the look of wet putty. His eyes traveled in horrible rotation from me to Aram to Athelstan.

With one concerted motion, we drew out our butcher knives. What weapon more fitting than butcher knives, to slaughter the fatted animal? With a second planned motion we lunged at him, I toward his heart from the rear, Athelstan toward his heart from the front, and Aram toward his throat. We killed him not singly, but together.

The blows against him so balanced one another that he did not fall at once. He stood there, repeatedly stabbed and gushing blood in sluggish fountains. When he began to topple, however, we stepped back and let him drop. He must have been already quite dead, when he collapsed into a shapeless heap on the rug.

None of us moved immediately then. We all stared down at him, breathing hard, our minds—despite our hatred—still shocked from the unaccustomed experience of committing murder.

"We should have done it some other way," Aram said finally. "This was too easy for him."

"Let's get going," I said.

We went to the kitchen together. There was the booty of a refrigerator raid spread out on the table, including a bitten-into sandwich. It was a comical sight, but we didn't linger to savor it. Instead, we washed our hands and knives at the sink. Athelstan then took charge of the weapons, would dispose of them later. None of us had much blood on our clothes. The few tainted articles could be burned. Aram's apartment had a fireplace.

When the other two returned to the corpse, I stayed in the kitchen to use the phone. I put on my cotton gloves as the others had done. Then I dialed a memorized number, waited patiently and calmly for the answer.

"Tanbury Motor Court and Motel."

"Do you have a Mrs. Charles Richley registered?"

A pause. "Yes, sir, we do."

"I'd like to speak to her."

"It may be a little late, sir . . ."

I glanced at my wristwatch. "It's only a quarter past ten. Is a quarter past ten too late?"

"Well, sir, I can see her cabin from here. I happen to notice she's there and the lights are out . . ."

"All right, never mind."

I hung up. I didn't want the clerk asking who I was. But I'd accomplished what was necessary, established firmly in the clerk's mind what time it was, together with a reminder that Mrs. Richley was in her cabin. Leonora would have her alibi.

When I flicked off the kitchen lights and returned to the living room, my two companions had already overturned several chairs and were well toward making the scene appear as if there had been a struggle. As I stood and watched, Athelstan hurled a dainty ashtray at the fireplace. It shattered into a hundred pieces. Then he looked at me. "We're having trouble, Port," he said.

"How so?"

"Some of these things are Leonora's most prized possessions. We don't want to be too destructive."

We all agreed to that. Some articles were expendable, others were not. There were items we all remembered that Leonora had collected on her tours and treasured so highly. So we spared the Siamese carvings, the Egyptian cat statues, the Bavarian glass, the Swiss music box. Other things, like the two ungainly lamps that were obviously Richley's contribution to the room, we smashed with glee. We worked at it till the place was a shambles.

We were ready then for the final detail, manufacturing our means of entrance into the house. We

could have done things in chronological order, of course, and could have actually broken into the house. But the noise of our amateur efforts might have alerted Richley. So we chose the surer way, entering first and breaking in later.

We opened the drapes at the chosen window. The room was almost dark now, what with the lamps broken. The window was of the casement type. We unlocked it and cranked it open. Aram and Athelstan climbed outside, exiting exactly like the burglars we were pretending to be. They trampled the hedges, and in so doing left blurred footprints. I, meanwhile, performed the little distasteful task I'd saved until last.

I didn't relish touching the dead body. But even amateur burglars, unnerved though they might have been by having to fight with their victim and then having to kill him, would conceivably be deterred from thoroughly ransacking the house, but they would at least take what they could find on the corpse. So I knelt and yanked Richley's watch off his dead wrist, located his wallet after some difficulty and transferred it to my own pocket.

"Shut the window," Aram was calling to me in a whisper.

The window had to be shut in order to be broken, of course. I cranked the thing shut again, then stood out of the way of flying glass while Aram punched a rock through the pane. It made a bit of noise, and Richley certainly might have heard it, if we hadn't taken care to murder him first.

The hole made by the rock was quite satisfactory, of ample size both to put an arm through and reach both the latch and the crank. I opened the window once again and climbed out through it.



We huddled together there on the dark lawn for a moment, reveling in the sweet feeling of success. "We did everything, didn't we?" Athelstan wondered.

I had an afterthought. "I've got Richley's wrist-watch," I said, "but I'm not so sure we ought to take it. Why don't we break it, put it back on Richley, and it will show the exact time he was killed? It will also correspond with the time we established for Leonora's alibi."

"That's a bit too neat," Aram objected. "The idea of the broken watch has been used in too many mystery stories. Let the coroner decide the time of death, even if he's just approximate. The broken watch would be a trap. Why, the most stupid detective in the world would notice the planned coincidence of a telephone call and a broken watch . . ."

"All right, all right," I conceded.

We returned to the cars. As per our plan, we changed our clothes right there because of the blood on the things we were wearing. Aram would go home and burn it all. I would take the stuff that wouldn't burn, like the knives and the watch, and dispose of them in the ocean.

Athelstan had the most ticklish job. He was to go to a pay telephone and ring up the police. His story would be that he was driving by, and had seen a man run away from the Richley house, jump into a car and drive away. Vague descriptions of both the man and the vehicle, of course, but very suspicious actions. Let the police come then and go through the gory business of discovering the body, thus sparing Leonora.

We separated then, each to his own task. We thought we had taken care of everything.

It came as a shock and a surprise then, when within

forty-eight hours they arrested Leonora on a charge of murder. We held an immediate conference.

"How can they do it?" Aram moaned. "Even if we made some mistakes in the house . . . maybe we did . . . but the damn newspapers don't give any hint of it. Athelstan, you told them about the man you saw running away?"

"Certainly I told them."

"And, Port, you did call the motor court?"

"Yes, I made the call. And I said what I was supposed to say."

"Then how . . . ?"

"They've got something we don't know about. That's obvious."

"All they have is a motive. Leonora had quarreled with Richley and had left home. But a motive's not enough. And the paper says she's denied it."

"Maybe it's a trap."

"For us?"

"Maybe."

"Well, I think we should give ourselves up anyway."

But it was the same old question as before. Certainly now, the way things had miscarried, we could save Leonora some inconvenience if we surrendered. But she'd still have to endure the public scandal, and she'd still have the guilty knowledge that we'd committed murder for her sake. Would it be the best thing in the long run?

"Fellows," Athelstan said finally, "don't mistake me for a coward. I'd go to prison or the gallows any time for Leonora's sake. But if this foolish accusation against her fails from lack of evidence, then we'd have been better off to keep our bloody mouths shut. And the accusation has to fail."

"We can look at it this way," I added. "If worse

comes to worse—if Leonora is ever by any remote chance in real danger, that is—we can always confess at that time.”

And it did seem the best way.

But our errors and stupidities were piling up, you see. Innocent errors. Forgivable stupidities, because we weren't professional criminals. The amateur is at a tremendous disadvantage. Like the amateur poker player. He simply doesn't know the odds. He has little conception of the strategies possible on the part of his opponent.

We were positively dumbfounded when the case actually came to trial. But conviction was still impossible, we reasoned. Leonora was pleading not guilty. And there was the alibi. So we waited.

But we attended the trial naturally. Athelstan was a witness, of course. One of the first to be called, as it happened.

“You summoned the police on the night of October second, Mr. Mallory?”

The prosecutor was a little bald fellow named Beaton. He looked mild, harmless, not even too intelligent. But we underestimated him. He was razor-sharp, vindictive, enormously persuasive. In fact, a devil.

“But you couldn't tell the police exactly what kind of car it was?”

“No.” Athelstan could scarcely change his story now.

“And you didn't see the man closely? You couldn't tell the police, for instance, how he was dressed, or how big he was?”

“No . . .”

“Exhibit A,” Beaton concluded triumphantly. He put a small suitcase up on the table and opened it. “This is the suitcase, gentleman of the jury, which

Mrs. Richley had with her at the Tanbury Motor Court. With the original contents. You will notice they include a pair of trousers and a jacket belonging to the deceased."

We should have intervened then and there. But we were confused and thrown off-balance. We waited.

". . . Mr. Matthews, you were at the desk at the Tanbury Motor Court on the night of October second, and you received a phone call."

"Yes, sir. A man's voice asked for Mrs. Richley."

"What time was this?"

"Ten-fifteen."

"Did you call Mrs. Richley to the phone?"

"I hesitated to call her because the lights in her cabin were out. The man didn't insist and hung up."

"You are sure Mrs. Richley was in her cabin?"

"As far as I know."

"As far as you know. Would it have been possible for Mrs. Richley to have left and returned to her cabin without your knowing it?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I nap off and on all night."

". . . Officer Norton, would you tell us about the broken glass in the Richley living room?"

"Well, the drape was open. The only one in the whole house that was open."

"Is that very odd, Officer?"

"Well, maybe it's not odd that the killer would open the drape so he could leave through the window. But the drape was open when the glass was broken. If it had been closed, you see, and the glass broken from the outside—as it was—the pieces of flying glass would have been stopped by the drape, and the pieces would have been right there underneath the window.

But there was glass scattered six feet inside the room."

"Now what do you conclude from that, Officer Norton?"

"Well, it looked to me like the killer broke the window after he was inside and opened the drape. Maybe an inside job, sir."

". . . Mrs. Morgan, you say you did cleaning for Mrs. Richley?"

"Yes, sir, twice a week."

"Now, Mrs. Morgan, I want you to look at these photographs. They are, as you can see, of the Richley living room. The destruction you see is that left by the apparent struggle between Mr. Richley and whoever killed him. Do you notice anything special about these photos, Mrs. Morgan?"

"There's lots of things smashed."

"But not everything is smashed."

"No, sir, I see Mrs. Richley's best things is all right. All the things she always told me to be real careful of, they're all in one piece. Now that's odd, isn't it?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Morgan."

". . . Mrs. Richley, why did you go to the Tanbury Motor Court on the evening of October second?"

"Because my husband and I had quarreled."

"Had you ever gone to the Tanbury Motor Court previously for similar reasons?"

"Quite a few times."

"You and your husband did not get along very well then, did you?"

"No, we did not."

"Can you tell us, Mrs. Richley, why items of your husband's clothing were found in your suitcase at the motor court?"

"I'd taken them there to mend them. My suitcase also contained needle and thread, Mr. Beaton."

"Very thoughtful of you, Mrs. Richley. Now, can you tell us who called you at the motor court at fifteen that same night?"

"No, because I didn't talk to him."

"It was a man's voice."

"That's possible."

"What do you mean, that's possible?"

"It's possible a man called me. I do know some men."

"Why would this man call you at the motor court? Why not at home?"

"Maybe he did call me at home. Quite a few people knew that when I quarreled with Charles I always went to the motor court. So when this man couldn't get me at home, he might have tried the motor court."

"Mrs. Richley, could you guess who this man might have been?"

"It might have been any one of several men."

It took some doing after that to get Leonora's lawyer to let me go on the stand. But when we finally convinced him, Leonora objected. It took more doing to convince her that we weren't being martyrs. But then suddenly she changed her mind. She said I could tell my story, for all the good it would do.

I was the surprise witness for the defense. I began at the beginning, and I left nothing out. I admitted we hadn't been as clever as we'd imagined ourselves, but we were prepared to accept the consequences.

The effect on the judge, the jury, and the spectators was not what we'd hoped. Instead of registering an immediate clamor for Leonora's release, everybody seemed to listen with snickering cynicism. As for

Beaton, we thought he'd surrender. But he didn't. He waited patiently for the cross-examination.

"Mr. Wyck," he began calmly, "you realize that you have been testifying under oath?"

"I realize it perfectly," I assured him.

"You have told the precise truth?"

"I have."

"And you expect the jury to believe it?"

"I do."

"Even despite the fact there is evidence against Mrs. Richley and none against you?"

"You have my confession."

"Which came rather tardily."

"I explained why we delayed."

"Oh yes, to spare Mrs. Richley's experiencing indirect guilt. Very interesting."

"I don't think you could possibly understand, Mr. Beaton. You don't seem the type ever to have fallen in love."

"When I was in love, Mr. Wyck, I expected some tangible return for my affection. Which still seems to me to be the practical point-of-view. But you have testified that the three of you—may I call you the three musketeers?—were not motivated by any hope of gaining the future affection or gratitude of Mrs. Richley. You were simply three knights in armor slaying the dragon and rescuing the fair lady. Mr. Wyck, that sounds a bit old-fashioned to me. I haven't heard of chivalry like that since I stopped reading Victorian fiction."

He'd gotten under my skin, and I replied hotly, "But I had the facts accurate, didn't I? I told you exactly what happened."

But Beaton only smiled. "Mr. Wyck, you've been in this courtroom every day. Naturally, you have the facts. You heard them all here."

It was no use. Beaton could twist anything I said. I was sick with the humiliation of failure.

But Beaton wasn't responsible for the worst thing of all. That was Leonora's doing. It happened when I left the stand and started to walk past the table where she was sitting.

Suddenly, she left her chair and intercepted me. Without warning I found myself standing there in the middle of that courtroom, with Leonora's face just inches in front of mine, and her green eyes looking up at me in a way in which they'd never looked at me before.

"Port darling," she said in a voice loud enough for the whole room to hear, "it was a nice try, and I love you."

And then she put her arms around my neck and kissed me. It wasn't like it was between friends, but the real thing, hard and passionate. It was a long time before she let me go. But finally she took her arms away, and walked back to her chair and sat down.

Which left me standing there alone in front of that crowd. I guess I knew even then how it must have looked to everybody. But I couldn't help feeling thrilled at the same time. It was the first, last, and only kiss I ever received from Leonora.

The plan was all ready to go into action. Aram and Athelstan were outside, fully armed and prepared to move. They waited only for my signal.

But I was waiting too, waiting till that guard who kept his eyes fastened on both of us should relax his vigilance for just one second. One second would be enough. This was a plan which could not fail.

But meanwhile I chatted with Leonora through the wire. "I want you to know I forgive all of you," she was saying.



I had less than half my attention on the conversation. "Forgive us what?" I asked.

"For murdering Charles. I understand how you could have misinterpreted our quarrels, and his beating me and all that. And I realize you didn't kill him for revenge or any selfish reasons. You really wanted to help me, and you actually thought you were helping me."

Her words were getting through to me now and I was distracted from my contemplation of the guard. "How long have you known that we killed your husband?" I asked her.

"From the beginning."

"Well, why didn't you accuse us?"

She smiled. It was a sweet, tired smile. Leonora was more beautiful that day than she'd ever been. "Don't you really know, Port?"

"No, I don't," I said. There was a vague horror forming inside me. I could feel it rising and welling up. Or was it fear?

"But while I'm asking questions," I went on, "I have a couple of others. Why did you act like you did all through the trial? You didn't once protest your innocence. You completely ignored the fact that you were on trial for your life. And why that dreadful last scene. What must people have thought? Kissing me like that in front of everybody . . . why, you clinched the verdict right there."

Her smile became more wistful. "I know all that, poor, dear, darling Port. And you never understood anything, did you? You never understood how I loved Charles. Even when he insulted me and beat me, I loved him. And I still do. That's why I wanted to be found guilty, to get the gas chamber. I'm going to rejoin Charles . . ."

The guard, bored finally with staring at us, turned

and glanced out the window, at the far blue sky beyond it. Now was the time. We had it all planned . . . the excitement of the chase . . . the fast car . . . the motorboat . . . the old freighter waiting . . . disguises . . . forged passports . . . the faraway places . . . Morocco . . . Arabia . . . Malaya . . . the South Seas . . . just the four of us . . . Leonora and the three musketeers . . .

But Charles was waiting too.

"Hey, buddy," the guard said. He wasn't looking out the window anymore. "Your time's up."

He was right. "Good-bye, Leonora," I said. It wouldn't have been right to kiss her now, even if I could have . . .

# THESE DAISIES TOLD

Arthur Porges

Not many men can begin a new and fascinating career at the age of sixty-five. But Ulysses Price Middlebie, Professor (Emeritus) of the History and Philosophy of Science, was one of the few, and this is an account of his first case.

Unlike most of his senior colleagues at Bateman University, he saw no reason to kick and scream over the loss of a captive audience. Although he enjoyed teaching, Middlebie had other resources. For he was a man with an enormous zest for living. Not just the life of the intellect, although that was probably his favorite mode of existence; but also the life of blood-and-bone. To him, retirement was merely a welcome change from the classroom to the open fields and busy tide-pools.

He was a tall, lean man, big-boned, and with the springy step of a boy. His physical fitness was due, undoubtedly, to many years of the "endless quest," as he called the search for knowledge. As President of the local Audubon Society, he made the study of birds only one phase in his development as a well-rounded naturalist. Middlebie could identify over two hundred species of birds in Southern California, often from just a glance at their flights or wing-patterns. He was equally at home with plants and hundreds of small animals, including, naturally, insects, the com-

mon sea-shells, and even the constellations overhead. With his brisk sparrow of a wife he had studied flora and fauna from San Diego to Santa Barbara. In short, he had the background to be expected—but not often found—in a man who presumed to teach the History and Philosophy of Science.

It was because of this universal grasp of nature that the professor acquired his niche as consultant in crime. He was used to teaching new members of the Audubon Society the difference between a plover and a sandpiper; just as he was ready to explain that the striped, fearsome-looking “bug” in a neighbor’s garden was merely a harmless sluggish Jerusalem Cricket. But it had never occurred to him that he was uniquely qualified to catch criminals.

If Detective Sergeant Black hadn’t been one of Middlebie’s students, the contact, which later proved so valuable to the police, might never have been made. But the officer remembered how quickly, on field trips, the old man’s unerring eyes had found and interpreted correctly, all those little indicators that speak volumes to a naturalist. That memory inspired him to ask for the professor’s help in a time of trial, when his own career as a detective hung in the balance.

He outlined his difficulties as they sat in Middlebie’s study, a large, sunny room, crammed with books and fragrant with the odor of good tobacco.

“It’s the matter of a missing body,” Black told him. “Without it, we don’t have much of a case, but we’re certain the woman is dead—murdered.”

“Perhaps you’d better give me all the available facts,” the professor said mildly. If he was surprised at the type of problem presented to a retired teacher, he didn’t show it. A missing body, philosophically speaking, was no different from any other object

absent from its normal place in the universe. And nothing could be altered in the real world without affecting other objects around it. Given enough of such changes, and the sequence of events could be reconstructed.

"There isn't very much to tell," the sergeant said. Then he added hastily: "I know, Sir, you always stressed the fact that we must note everything possible relating to a scientific problem; even if some of the information seems to have no connection at the time."

"That's quite right. Nobody is ever in a position to know right at the start which data are relevant. And they might not be available later if missed at the beginning. In the case of Faraday and his discovery of induction—but I mustn't digress—that's one sin of old age I mean to fight. Go ahead, Sergeant."

"Well, to put it bluntly, we're practically sure that this man, Dale Corsi, has killed his wife; but we can't find her body."

Middlebie's eyebrows rose slightly, and Black winced. He knew the mannerism. He had noted it in class when somebody had formed a unique specific conclusion from facts which warranted only several, alternate explanations.

"I'd like to hear your reasons," the professor said.

"It's simple, in a way. She's been gone for a week—disappeared completely; and nobody has seen her around or even heard from her."

"But this is a heavily populated area. One person could easily vanish if she chose to."

"Not in this case, I think you'll agree. They live on a small ranch, quite off the main highway. She didn't take her car, and there are very few buses going by that would stop there. We found no record of any-

body matching her description who left the area by any reasonable means."

"That's still not mathematical proof; but I'm sure you know that. But what does her husband—Corsi, you said?—say?"

"He maintains she must have left him; that they hadn't been getting along. The last part is true enough. We found some bloodstains in the house, but unfortunately he and his wife have the same type. So when he showed us a cut on his arm, our evidence was pretty useless. It's a million to one he cut himself purposely to account for his wife's blood, but we can't prove that either."

"Ingenious fellow," Middlebie said dryly. "Any motive?"

"Plenty. As I said, they hated each other. In addition, she owned the ranch and brought scads of money to the marriage. The cash is in a joint account—or was—he drew it out almost immediately, and deposited it in a new account, under his own name, individually."

"That would be to keep the state from tying it up once her disappearance was known."

"Right. We're told she was ready to knock his name off anyhow. That's one more reason for him to kill her."

"On the other hand, until she's presumed dead, which could take years if you don't find the body, he couldn't do much about her other assets."

"That's true; but we don't contend the murder was carefully planned in cold blood. He may have lost his temper. But afterwards he managed to get rid of—or destroy—the body; that's what has us stumped."

"I'm not clear why that should puzzle you. There are thousands of acres of farmland where a body could be buried."

"Not in this case." The sergeant spoke with conviction. "Corsi himself doesn't drive. There's a high fence around the ranch that would take some doing to get a body over or through. The neighboring places are all heavily cultivated just now—beans, orange groves, walnut trees; stuff like that. The sort of terrain where any grave would be found the next day. No, we figure the body has to be on his own land, unless it's been totally destroyed, which is not only unlikely, but is damned near impossible."

"All right, then; what makes you certain it's not on the Corsi property?"

"All I know is that we can't find it," Black said in a bitter voice. "The ground cover, mostly ice plant, hasn't been disturbed. Neither have the flower beds his wife planted, although one looked mighty suspicious at first. We even used bloodhounds to trace Corsi's movements; but they just proved he didn't leave the ranch recently. Naturally, his tracks were found all over the place; he walks quite a lot."

"You say he's an artist. How good?"

"Not very—at least, that's what the critics tell us. One of them explained he has some talent, but dabbles too much, and wastes it. He paints in both oils and watercolors, sculpts a little; uses any old material around: wood, concrete—even those crazy things made from rusty junk. 'Spirit of a Dead Hot Rod,' one of them is called. It's in the house—ugh! What the hell do people see in stuff like that?"

The professor chuckled.

"I wouldn't know; I'm rather a conservative about art and music. But I'm not foolish enough to condemn it en masse without knowing more about the subject. However, Corsi's versatility could be significant. He has a loose and active imagination, apparently. Maybe he made good use of it to dispose of the body. If

there is one," he added, with a sly twinkle in his wide-set gray eyes.

"You bet there's one," was the sergeant's grim retort. "With our own routines we're very efficient. If that woman had left the grounds, we'd have had some evidence to that effect. There's always somebody who sees something; believe me, I know."

"But you say the place is rather isolated."

"True; but she wouldn't go across country. Not a frail little thing—which is what she was. You know how those fields are. She'd have to go several hundred yards down a dirt road to the highway, and then either wait for a bus, or hitch a ride. But all her clothes are still in the house. No, Professor, he got rid of her body somehow. After all, he had almost a week before she was missed."

"Let me summarize the situation before I look for solutions. You've examined every foot of the ranch, and found no grave."

"That's right. We didn't miss any of it. There are only a few acres, and I used a dozen good men who know what to look for."

"And I presume there's no evidence of dissection, burning, or acids—not that they'd be feasible, actually. The human body is very hard to destroy completely."

"Almost impossible."

Professor Middlebie stood up.

"It's time I had a look, then. The armchair phase seems to be over. Now I need data at firsthand. Assuming you're right, and the body is actually hidden on the ranch, we should be able to find it."

"I sure hope so," the sergeant said fervently. "The captain is riding my back like a jockey." They left.

"A nice place," Middlebie said, as they explored the small ranch. "Suffering from drought like all this



region, but basically good. Notice the huge rocks that crop out here and there almost as if deliberately planned for scenic effect. They're granite; magnificent things. And I see somebody planted zinnias near this one."

"If you're thinking she's under one of the rocks," Sergeant Black said, "I'd forget that angle. There are only about three small enough to be moved even with a heavy tow-truck. He doesn't drive, remember, and the only car on the ranch is a little station wagon, anyhow. But we looked those three smaller rocks over very carefully. They haven't been budged."

"I know that," Middlebie said, a bit tartly. "It would be impossible to move them without disturbing soil and vegetation, even if the tools were available." He looked up as a flock of birds sailed by. "Curlews. Flying to the Bay." He studied the granite mass for a moment, and said: "If this was sandstone, a man might even make a hollow in it big enough for a body, given a few days to work. But not in granite—trained sculptor or John Henry himself." He peered at the patch of zinnias, and a faint frown touched his mobile face. His gray eyes were suddenly cloudy with thought.

"Look at those plants at the edge of the flower-bed," he told Black. "Notice how spindly they are? Taller than the rest, but thin and scraggly. Even their colors are not as bright."

There was a harsh, cawing sound in the distance; the old man smiled.

"Raven," he said. "Fascinating pirate of a bird."

"We didn't miss these flowers," the sergeant said. "They're the one suspicious spot I mentioned at your house. But it's a false lead. We probed with rods, far down, and it's certain the ground hasn't been dug

into. In fact, if you look closely, it's clear the soil hasn't been touched for months."

"Oh, I agree," Middlebie said. "Of course, there's no body under these zinnias. But everything in nature has a cause. I ask you, Sergeant, why this one part of a flower bed should be so atypical?"

"I don't know," Black replied, a little impatiently. The old boy was a bit pompous and longwinded today. Maybe he'd lost whatever had impressed the pupil of five years back. "Poorer soil there, maybe; disease; I'm no botanist. What's your theory?"

"I don't have one yet. Remember—first comes the harvest of the eye. Then the crop must be winnowed, to separate the wheat from the chaff. My eye has noted these aberrant flowers; what that fact means, if anything, in relation to our problem, is not clear. But I'll be winnowing mentally as we finish our inspection of the ranch. After you, Sergeant."

Black started to move away, but the old man stood there listening. A faint snapping sound came from a tree.

"Audubon warbler," the professor announced to nobody in particular. Then he followed the detective.

An hour later, they returned to the same spot. Middlebie had seemed alert enough, but Black felt that one part of the old man's mind was still busy with the zinnias.

"Well?" he asked the professor, as they stood near the large granite rock overshadowing the red and yellow blossoms.

"I'm inclined to agree with you that there's no grave on this ranch. If you're convinced he had no means to destroy the remains physically—"

"I'm convinced."

"Then it's hidden some other way. Purloined letter style, perhaps."

"But where, damn it? You've been over the place. Is this guy going to get away with it clean, just because he found some cute way of hiding a hundred pounds of flesh-and-blood right under our noses?"

"I'd like to get up on the rock for a minute," the professor said quietly.

Black gaped at him.

"There's nothing up there. The top's in plain sight. Oh," he added, looking sheepish. "You want to make a survey of the place from a higher point."

"No," Middlebie said. "That's not the idea at all." He moved to one side of the rock. "This is a good spot, right here. How about a boost? Just link your hands—come on, man." Bewildered, the detective did as he was told. With a litheness uncommon in a person his age, the professor put one foot in the sergeant's hands, and by clutching the edge of the huge boulder, pulled himself smoothly to the rugged, tilted surface. He got to his feet, then stooped to scrutinize the granite top. Rising, he repeated his inspection at two other places. Finally he stood on the very edge, peering down at Black.

"The zinnia is a flower that thrives on sunlight, and suffers badly without it," he said, as if addressing a class. "If you suddenly cut off a good part of the summer sunshine, the plant soon becomes spindly; it grows faster and higher trying to make up the loss—reaching for the light, you might say, just as we have been today.

"Now, why should one part of a flower bed abruptly be short of light? It's an interesting question. Certainly the sun's rays are not discriminating. The only reason I could think of was new shade. From somewhere, caused by something, a shadow

fell upon these few plants—a shadow that wasn't there a week ago. It couldn't have been caused by the season; not with longer days still to come. What's the answer?" He scrambled down without asking for help, and stood beside the sergeant, looking up at the massive rock.

"What do you see on top?" the professor asked him. "Take a good look."

"Not a damned thing," Black replied, circling the boulder. "Just a rough surface of rock, full of ridges and humps. I don't know what you're getting at."

"A very competent artist, Corsi," Middlebie said. "It's no wonder you don't spot his work up there. He moulded a mausoleum on top of the rock, using concrete and coloring with wonderful expertise. Even from my position right alongside, I had to take a very careful look to be sure. His concrete mix has the texture and hue of the granite; in addition, he even shaped the mass to continue the proper contours for that part of the rock. After all, who would notice a relatively small increase in the total bulk—a mound roughly the size of a little woman, and blended with the many tons around it? Just a tiny change in the dimensions. Most people see without really comprehending, anyway. I suppose few of them ever gave this magnificent outcropping more than a passing glance.

"Yes, Sergeant, she's up there, all right, along the left edge. It's a pity," he added in a lower voice, "that she can't be left just where we found her. To be on top of a sunny rock, with the birds flying near, overlooking orchards and green fields, surely that's better than a hole in the ground." He was silent for a moment, his face grave. Then he brightened a little, and gestured towards the patch of glowing flowers.

“Do you know, Sergeant, zinnias are members of the daisy family—but these finally did tell.”

## CANINE ACCOMPLICE

Grover Brinkman

The swamp fog was coming in, hugging the road like some billowy gray ghost straight out of a movie cartoon; foxfire gleamed from the marshes. The headlights picked up a moving figure as I dipped into the hollow, and I saw it was a woman, stumbling along. She stopped, half turned to face me. I noticed that she had a big fluffy dog on leash.

She was slim, statuesque, and her hair, the color of autumnal broom sedge, tumbled over her head like a muddy waterfall. But that wasn't what popped open my eyes. Her clothes were a mess!

Straight as a reed, bathed in the yellowish beam of the car lights, she wasn't the product of some neurotic pipe dream; I hadn't had a drink all day. It wasn't an illusion. She was there in the flesh, big as life.

I braked the car, then released my foot as if it was camped on a red-hot stove. "Don't be a sucker!" some little voice cautioned. "This is a setup for someone to get his teeth caved in, his wallet lifted—a setup for murder!"

You don't find babes wandering in the swamps late at night, admiring the poison ivy. This was a setup for goons. I just happened to be the first goon to drift into sight.

But still I lingered. Don't ask me why. She was

looking at me, and her lips were forming mysterious words.

"Please—help me!" she said.

I sat there, staring. One hand was on the gun in my pocket. Any second I expected to see some burly-boy crash out of the thickets, in an attempt to cave in my head and appropriate my hack.

But nothing happened. She seemed to be alone. Except for that crazy-looking mutt she had with her.

The dog tugged at its leash now, barking furiously.

"Quiet, Tibby!" she said, yanked him up short. The mutt quit barking, but continued to growl at me.

I jerked a thumb to the rear. "That's a long stretch of lonely road. Where do you fit in?"

She came closer to the car. I saw the bruises on her face.

"I was—assaulted, back there. I'm afraid that Mr. Manwaring is dead."

The name opened my eyes. I motioned to the blackness again. "Where is—back there? How far?"

"I don't really know. I've been walking such a long time. There was a cabin, with a broken-down wind-mill in the yard—"

"And who was Mr. Manwaring?"

"The man I worked for."

It looked as if she might be telling the truth. At least part of what she said was true. I'd passed this same cabin not less than thirty minutes ago.

There was supposed to be a signal, a raised flag on the mailbox. If the flag was up, I'd stop, make a delivery, pick up a package.

But the flag was down. Something had gone wrong. Suspicious, I hadn't stopped.

"Keep talking," I said.

"Mr. Manwaring and I were coming down from Memphis. We got off the highway. Couldn't find a

town, or a motel. Then we saw this cabin; a light still gleamed. Mr. Manwaring stopped to ask directions—”

One hand kept tugging at the bit of fluff that was once a dress. I reached over the seat, handed her my topcoat. “What happened then?”

She wiggled into the coat. “Two men came out to the car, pulled me out of the seat—”

“What did Manwaring do?”

“Naturally, he took a swing at the first one. But the second man slammed a gun over his head.”

She was a provocative female if ever there was one. I sat there, looking at her, trying to reach a decision.

Some intuitive instinct told me that she was lying. It was too fantastic to be true. Even so, you can’t just leave a beautiful woman, exhausted, on a deserted swamp road. I clicked open the door at last. “Get in.”

She gave me a tight little smile.

“May I put Tibby in back?”

“Okay.”

I didn’t like that big dog. He—or she—was black and fluffy, one of those comical-looking mutts with hair hanging in its eyes, wool long enough to braid.

“What happened after Manwaring was slugged?”

“I—told you. I was assaulted. Finally they went back to their drinking. I managed to slip outside—”

“What happened to your clothes?”

“The men were drunk, sadistic. They ruined my dress.”

I swung the car, headed back toward the cabin.

I saw her stiffen, once she realized what I was doing. That Grecian-doll face hardened.

“Where are you going?” she asked, sudden ice in her voice.



"Back to check on your boss."

Her fingers dug into my forearm. "Don't——"

"You don't want me to check?"

"Why? Mr. Manwaring is dead. What good can we do?"

I reached back to pet the dog. She pulled back my hand.

"Don't!" she warned. "Tibby is—quite vicious at times——"

That struck me as unusual. This poodle was a show dog, a parlor hound, not a vicious mongrel baring his teeth to a stranger's hand. Why was she so concerned about me petting the mutt?

Her hand was pressing my arm again. "Please don't go back there!"

"Give me one good reason why?"

"Our lives!"

"You can't sell me!" I said, twisting the steering wheel.

She kept tugging at me. "Take me to the next town down the road—any place—but not back to that cabin!" She shuddered, pulled the coat tighter.

"Berryville is the nearest town," I told her. "It's in the opposite direction, about thirty miles. I'll take you there—but first we check. I don't like quick decisions."

She didn't ask who I was. I didn't see any sense in enlightening her, at least not now. She slumped down in the seat, as if the world had caved in on her pretty head.

I drove slowly. The fog was patchy, the road tricky. I was getting jumpy, too, trying to figure out the reason this provocative dame was sharing the seat with me. Finally she slid over, and I felt the pleasant warmth of her hip against mine.

"Why are you so determined to go back to the cabin?"

I couldn't tell her the truth. So I began some evasive rationalizing.

"You say that there were two men. They slugged your boss. What about his car?"

She hesitated just an instant, leading me to believe I had touched a sore spot. "I—hunted for it, after I broke loose. I couldn't locate it."

"Now let me get this straight. You and your boss were coming from Memphis. You got on this secondary road by mistake. Finally you realized that you were lost. You saw this light. Manwaring went up to the cabin to ask directions."

"Yes."

"Two men came out. They pulled you from the car, into the shack. Manwaring put up a fight, got his brains scrambled."

"Yes. I—I fought them all the way——"

She was shivering. Maybe it was genuine. Or she was a very good actress.

"What about your dog—what did it do, all the time the fight was going on?"

"Tibby isn't a fighting dog——"

"All dogs are fighting dogs when someone they love is being attacked."

"They—chained her to a post."

"Okay. The two men finally went back to playing cards. You managed to slip out, escaped in the fog?"

"That's right."

"Where was Manwaring's body, all of this time?"

"In a shed——"

Her story was phony as a three-dollar bill!

This abandoned, isolated cabin was a point of rendezvous. At 11 P.M. tonight I, Nick Sylvia, was to

exchange briefcases here with a man named James Manwaring.

Only I wasn't Nick Sylvia!

Go in slowly, my orders read (or Nick's orders read), make a check, to see if the mailbox flag is up. If so, meet the man inside, exchange briefcases, get the hell out of there. No questions asked. You don't get curious in this business, just obey orders. I figured that James Manwaring worked for the same outfit Nick did, in a different locality. He was bringing down something from the North, Nick was picking it up, giving him something in return.

Manwaring, evidently, was scheduled to arrive ahead of Nick. Then why hadn't he raised the mailbox flag? Did this dame have something to do with it?

Right now, I'd lay it on the line that something phony had happened. She was mixed up in it to her pretty neck.

I doubted very much that there had been two men at the cabin. When I had passed, driving slowly, it looked very much deserted. But something had happened. Someone had messed up this dame, had put fingernails to her nice, pink skin, inflicting some sizeable scratches. She had taken some hard blows.

Her hand was on my arm again. "Please turn around. Don't go back!"

I braked the car, turned to face her.

"Look, beautiful, let's quit playing patty cake. I don't believe there was anyone at the cabin—just you and Manwaring. For some reason you two tangled. But good! Possibly he wanted to play, you didn't. So he started to wrestle. You got his gun, and you killed him."

"What are you saying?"

"I've just said it. If Manwaring is dead, as you insist, then you're the one who killed him!"

She laughed. It was brittle as peanut candy. "Well, buster, I'll tell you one thing. You'll find him dead all right—but you'll have a hard time trying to pin it on me!"

"You did it, all right!" Suddenly I grabbed her arm. "What made you do it? What was he carrying in that briefcase?"

Her face changed. The anger still was there, but caution was in her eyes as well. They narrowed. She moved over in the seat.

"Just what are you trying to say?"

"Let's level. If you came down from Memphis with Manwaring, you knew that he had a rendezvous at this cabin, with another man."

"A rendezvous?"

"With me. I'm the man he was to meet. To exchange Christmas presents."

"Why would my boss come all the way down here, to meet you in this deserted cabin?"

"Let's just say that he had something in a locked briefcase for me, and I had one for him."

"What were you trading?"

"Stuff."

"Why don't you open your own briefcase and check what this stuff is?"

I didn't think she had spotted it, lying on the back seat. I turned; the dog growled at me. The cabin must be around the next curve in the road, I was thinking. A few more moments, then we'd have a showdown——

That was the last coherent thought that registered.

Something slammed down on my head with a sickening impact, the world turned upside down, fog and all. I knew the car was skidding off the road,

heading for a pine tree. She was tugging at the wheel, trying to bring it to a stop. Then everything turned into a river of ink.

When I finally came back to the realm of the sinners, she wasn't about. Neither was the French poodle.

Bug-eyed, I saw that the car had smacked into a tree. It looked as if its roving days were over. I crawled out of the seat, wobbling like an old crone. But it seemed there were no bones broken—just that bump on the head.

She had belted me with some heavy instrument—a gun butt! But where did she get the gun?

"She slipped your gun out of your pocket, sucker," the little voice said again. "No, she did not!" I told the emptiness. "My gun was in my left pocket. She couldn't have reached around to get it——"

My mind was clearing fast now. Suddenly I realized that my fist was wrapped around cold steel. She had slugged me—but not with my gun. It didn't make sense.

I stumbled down the road, trying to think things out. The fog was thick and I was almost atop the cabin before I saw it. There was no light, no movement. The flag on the mailbox was still down.

That's when I heard the moaning sound.

It sounded human. It came from the left of the road, where the grade was steep, dropping into a gulch.

Someone was down there, at the foot of the slope. I got down at last, barking my shins on the sharp rocks. The fog was lighter here, and I saw the outlines of a car. It was really wrecked, as if it had tumbled end over end down the embankment. The moans came from a spot to the right of the heap.

I found him, sprawled grotesquely in the brush. I used my lighter, saw he was much older than I. He was well dressed, but his shirt was soaked with his own blood now. Dawn was here, but he wouldn't see it.

I got my lips down close to his ear. "Are you Manwaring?"

He didn't respond. Then I saw his lips move. And at last he got out a whispered: "Yes."

"I'm Nick Sylvia, the man you were to meet here." The lie didn't hurt too much.

The eyes squeezed open slightly, closed. His lips moved again.

"That—tramp——"

It didn't make sense at first. "You mean the woman?"

He moved his head. I bent over him again. "Tell me, were there two men at the cabin?"

"No one. She's got—the real stuff——" He trailed off.

"I picked her up. She wasn't carrying a thing——"

"I—caught her at—my briefcase. We fought, she's got a gun. Used it on me—pushed the car over the—bank. That—damned—dog——"

He was gone. What he had said didn't register. He maintained she had a gun. She had stolen the real money—the bundle he carried, for the queer I had for him. She had robbed him. He had fought her, torn her clothes. But she had shot him——

I had picked her up, empty-handed. She didn't have the money, nor a gun. Later she had slammed some heavy instrument over my head. Nothing made an iota of sense, unless it had to be . . .

"The dog!" I said at last. "Manwaring mentioned the dog. Now how could this poodle——"

I raised up as someone laughed.

Dawn was here, the fog was lifting. And there she stood, with my coat wrapped about her, the dog on leash.

The gun she held on me seemed steady as a rock. It was aimed at my gizzard.

"Now does it make sense, buster?"

She reached down, fumbled at the dog's shoulders. Then she unwound something from around his middle. It was a hair-coated band, sort of a long bandage—only one side of it was coated with long black dog hair, just like the pooch's mane. When she pulled it off, I saw that the dog had been clipped close around the middle. This girdle blended right in, when it was wrapped around the pooch's belly.

She held up the girdle. I saw the zipper, and I knew now where she had the real money—and where the gun had been concealed. I knew now why she had kept me from petting the dog. She was laughing now—that peanut brittle laugh.

"You're not Nick Sylvia, buster, as you told Manwaring. I should know—I'm Nick's ex-wife."

The gun was still on me.

"Keep talking, and make it good."

"Nick was carrying a half million in queer. Manwaring had a hundred grand in the real McCoy. Nick was always afraid to cross the Syndicate, but I'm not. So I hooked a ride with Manwaring. I fooled him with the dog, and made the transfer, the green stuff from his bag to the dog's zipper. Only he blundered in, just a moment too soon——"

"You're a real smart cookie——"

The gun came up a little. "Where's Nick, buster?"

"You gunning for him?"

"I have to—now!"

"He's on ice—in a quiet little jail."

"Then you must be a cop."

"Does it show?"

"It does—but it won't for long."

I was watching her wrist. You flex muscles when you pull a trigger. A woman does so, more noticeably than a man. Her wrist stiffened now, and I dived, rolled down the steep hill, gaining momentum like a log from a logger's truck.

She was good. Her first slug spewed dirt in my face, despite the momentum of my roll. The second went through my arm, made me grunt. But I had an old tree stump in front of me now, as a shield, and the gun was in my left hand. She was still blasting. I counted the shots. When the gat was empty I crawled out into the open and started up the hill after her. She threw the gun at my head, started sprinting down the road.

My first slug spewed mud over her, and she pulled up, licked.

The language this chick knew!



# THE ACCIDENTAL WIDOW

Robert Colby

I came upon Julie Hazelton soon after the ship sailed from New York for France. She was lounging in a chair on the Boat Deck, her eyes closed, an open book in her lap. Even beneath the heartless scrutiny of the noonday sun she was a startling attraction, and for a moment I stood awkwardly beside her chair, nervous as a diver about to take his first plunge from the high board.

In a second or two she felt my presence. Her stainless gray-blue eyes widened slowly and came to focus.

"Cal!" she said. "Cal Reese!" Her soft voice caressed my name and made it sound passionately important. "Cal—I just don't believe it!"

I grinned and held my hand toward her. "Touch it," I said. "It's real."

She took my hand and squeezed, her fingers pulsing warm and urgent against my palm. I settled into a chair beside her and lighted her cigarette.

"How perfectly marvelous!" she exclaimed, smoke trailing from dainty nostrils. "What a delightful coincidence."

"Julie," I confessed, "it's not entirely a coincidence. I was planning a vacation, yes, but nothing so extravagant as a trip to Europe, first class. Then I read an item in the newspaper: 'Julie Hazelton, widow of the late Wall Street millionaire, Malcolm Hazelton,

sailing for France on June third . . .’ Well, I couldn’t resist the temptation. It was a wild impulse.”

I watched her face for a sign of rebuke, but she was smiling and nodding happily, her expression telling me that she was pleased and excited. A few years back we had been in love and during those brief times between her three marriages the affair had continued, almost as if without interruption.

She frankly admitted that from a strictly romantic point of view, I was her first and last choice, but she couldn’t overcome her mental block against marrying the sales manager of a chemical manufacturing company who made a mere twenty-five thousand a year. “Not that I love you less, Cal,” she might have said, “but only that I love money more.”

This last is something of an exaggeration. Julie came from a poor family and was brought up in the most wretched poverty. In the formative years of her life she developed a compulsive need to have and to be—to have riches and to be “somebody,” even if it were only *Mrs.* Somebody. Her distorted sense of values, her warped concepts, goaded her on. She married three men for their money, each progressively more affluent than the other.

Julie was not the victim of insatiable greed, but rather the victim of her fear of poverty. Knowing what drove her, I forgave her. Still, I was never the sort to hover meekly in the background waiting for my day. As time passed, however, I couldn’t find anyone who came close to being her replacement. Further, Julie had made me a fantastic promise: “Before I reach thirty, I’m going to have a million dollars to call my own, and then I’m going to marry you. Wait for me, Cal—you won’t be sorry.”

Julie was intensely sincere, and a person of such determination that she never gave up until she had

what she wanted. I knew she couldn't make a million, she would have to marry it, but no man was going to part with a million and turn her loose to marry me. It was an impossible dream. Yet now she was twenty-nine, detached, and in possession of not one, but two millions.

Her first husband, Milton Shockley, owned a small chain of liquor stores. It turned out that he was mortgaged up to here and gone and was far from a millionaire. Number two was Charles Shoemaker, vice-president of a meat packing firm. He lived and acted like a millionaire but behind his big splash there was never more than a couple of hundred thousand cash to back him up.

The third was the aforementioned Malcolm Hazelton, a Wall Street mogul who was the genuine article and who could liquidate a million or so in stocks and bonds any day of the week. Julie had begun modestly, if not naively, with Milton Shockley and his limping liquor stores, reaching her target with Malcolm Hazelton and his shrewd speculations in the market.

I don't know how she'd expected to wring a million of her own out of these three partnerships, but it never became a problem. All three men died violently soon after she married them. Milton Shockley was killed in a hunting accident—a stray bullet in search of a deer found him instead. Charles Shoemaker expired in a hit-run accident. Malcolm Hazelton toppled from his nineteenth floor terrace after belting a few too many at a cocktail party.

"Disaster seems to follow me in every marriage," Julie had told me sadly with a long sigh of despair. "It's almost as if I were being punished for seeking money instead of love."

Although I didn't voice my opinion, it appeared to me that losing these unwanted husbands and gaining

their dough was hardly punishment. Wasn't it a kind of grim blessing?

I had called Julie soon after the demise of Malcolm Hazelton to offer my sympathy, thinking at the time how much more honest it would be to offer my congratulations. Julie said she had been "fond" of Malcolm and was deeply depressed. More, the accidental death of yet a third spouse had left her with an unshakable sense of guilt. I couldn't convince her that it was merely an unhappy coincidence, that no mysterious and destructive force of evil had followed her from marriage to marriage—a ridiculous superstition, I had told her.

Julie had inherited a cozy nest egg of two millions, more or less, and now she was free—free of her compulsion, and free to keep her promise to marry me. Naturally, I was just a bit eager. It had been a long wait and the addition of all that cash had done nothing to dampen my enthusiasm.

Yet while Julie assured me that her feelings had never changed toward me and that she was anxious to keep her promise, she had declared that she would not be in any frame of mind to marry again until there had been time to recover from shock and grief. "Darling, don't be a cynic. Of course I feel for Malcolm! Am I inhuman? Even the death of a little dog in the street makes me weep . . ."

Also, since the police were too skeptical and practical to accept easily the coincidence of accidental death when it struck three husbands in a row, they were snooping about unmercifully and seemed in no danger of fatigue. The police could not know as I did that despite Julie's neurotic quest for the security of wealth, she was too sweet and gentle to be capable of violence.

In any case, she had told me that she did not want

to marry me under the stigma of the smallest suspicion, however absurd. Therefore, it was necessary for us to remain entirely separate for the present. She would not even allow me to phone her, insisting that she would get in touch when she was ready, and not a moment before.

She was overly defensive and I found her attitude rather strange. Too, there were rumors that she was often seen with the notorious Gordon Cleary. I had no choice but to play it her way. Then, when she had not called or written in nearly three months, it was too much. I had to phone her. A maid said she was out of town, did not know where she was or when she would return. I called again in a few days but got another brush from an English butler, delivered in that infuriatingly polite and cool British accent which hints that you are an unspeakable cad for daring to attempt communication with royalty.

A couple of weeks later I read the item in the newspaper and made up my mind. I was going to sail on the same ship to force the issue, one way or another.

Now, as we sat close in deck chairs, I asked pointedly, "Why have you avoided me all this time, Julie? Not a word, and then you sneak off to Europe."

She gave me a quick, sidelong glance, then peered out to sea. "You want the truth, Cal?"

"Unless you know something better."

"Well, I had decided not to marry you, not to see you again."

"Oh? A million or two didn't cure the disease, so you found another moneybags."

"Nonsense, Cal. But I can't really blame you a bit for assuming the worst. No, I have all the money I'll ever need or want. And I still love you—madly! But I'm afraid to marry you."

"Why?"

She frowned and poked at her dark, wind-fluffed hair. "Because I don't want to lose you."

"Baby, make sense, will you?"

She said, "I'm not willing to risk your life. You could be the fourth—the fourth fatal accident."

"Is that all!" I laughed with relief.

"I've been thinking about it a long time," she continued solemnly. "I married three men and each died a few months later in horrible accidents. Why should you be the exception?"

I tried to come up with a decent answer. It wasn't easy. "You're reasoning like a female," I argued, "with your emotions. Your brain should tell you that you're not a witch on a broom who can never marry without bringing sudden death to your mates. That's a childish superstition."

"Yes, but——"

"It all springs from a guilty conscience. You married these men for their money and so you imagine that nothing could come of it but disaster. Were you planning to marry *me* for my money?"

She chuckled. "How silly, darling."

"Then forget it. When the heart is pure and you marry for love, no harm can come. I'll be perfectly safe."

She smiled. "How I wish I could believe that."

"Listen, Julie, I'll be on guard every minute, for your sake. But even if we had only six months or a year together, it would be worth more to me than a lifetime apart."

She took my hand and squeezed. "I believe you really mean it."

"I do."

"Then I'll think about it again. Just give me a little more time."

"How long? Weeks? Months?"

"No," she said decisively, "I'll give you an answer in the morning . . ."

At Julie's request, I left her alone to ponder. That evening, feeling restless and edgy, I went to the lounge on the main deck for a drink. Entering, I spied Julie seated at a table with a man who looked vaguely familiar. Concealing my anger behind a poker face, I sauntered over.

Julie's expression when she looked up was smiling, innocent. "Cal, how nice!" she said. "I'm glad you're here because I want you to meet a very old friend—Gordon Cleary."

I recognized the name at once and I had seen the face a few times in the newspapers and on TV, when Gordon Cleary was under senate investigation. He was an arrogantly handsome, middle-aged multimillionaire, reputedly a front man who controlled half a dozen legitimate enterprises into which syndicate money was fed.

"Glad to meet you, Gordon," I lied casually. He gave me a curt nod and showed me his teeth without smiling. The ship rolled and I leaned against the table for support.

"Mind if I join you?" I said to Julie.

"Not at all," she replied sweetly.

"She doesn't mind, but *I* do," said Cleary. "Maybe later, huh? Meanwhile, have one on me—at the bar."

"You're a real sport," I grinned. "So jump over and swim ashore!"

I sat down abruptly. Then I offered Cleary a fine view of my profile and spoke directly to Julie. She tried tactfully to weave him into the conversation but he barely grunted. After a while he got up without a word and left.

"You were terribly rude," Julie scolded. "You

could've made some effort to warm him up a little. He was obviously jealous and had nothing against you personally."

"He has now," I said.

"He's enormously wealthy and powerful," she went on. "It's foolish to make an enemy of such a man."

"How enormously wealthy is he, Julie?"

"Who counts when you have that much?"

"He's a crook on a big scale."

"Don't believe everything you read," she snapped. "He has a few underworld connections, that's all."

"He *is* the underworld," I countered. "And how come he just happened to be on this ship?"

"How come *you* just happened to be on this ship?" Her mouth twisted into a scornful smile.

"That's different."

"Is it? Well, he was much more direct than you were. He called to say he had intended to fly to Europe but would take this ship to be near me if I didn't object."

"And what was your answer to that one?"

"I told him it wasn't a private yacht and I didn't see any way that I could stop him."

"You might as well have sent him an engraved invitation. If he has so much loot, why didn't you marry him long ago?"

"Because he was already married. He recently got a divorce, you see."

"And now the road is clear in both directions—hmm?"

"Open highway, darling."

"That's all I want to know, Julie." I stood.

"Wait!" She grabbed my sleeve. "I was only needing you."



I sat down. "Prove it," I challenged. "Marry me tonight. We'll go see the captain."

Her face became grave. "I'm still thinking, remember? About *your* safety. I have no other reason to hold back."

I knew it was going to be all right then. We had a couple of drinks and I left her at her cabin door. In the passageway I met Gordon Cleary.

"If I were you," he snarled softly, "I'd stay away from Julie. You might die of a broken heart—or head."

"It's a long swim," I suggested, "but if you hurry you might still be able to make it to shore."

The next evening Julie and I were married by the captain. I moved into her much more spacious and luxurious cabin in the same hour. We remained there during most of the voyage, deliriously happy to be alone for the first leg of our impromptu honeymoon.

On the last night at sea we dressed in formal garb to attend the Captain's Ball. I was ready much before Julie and went to the bar for a drink. I had hardly taken the first swallow when Gordon Cleary appeared at my side.

"Congratulations, Reese," he said mockingly. "I do hope you'll be very happy together, though the record seems to indicate that you won't be with us long. Maybe you've noticed that all of Julie's husbands were doomed from the day they married her. They all died promptly in one frightful accident or another."

I said, "If that's a threat, thanks for the warning. I'll be expecting you. And if it's a confession, I know some people who would like to hear it, even second-hand. Now shove off!"

I watched him cross to a table where he sat in a huddle with two men, one of them a crew-cut college-

boy type who had football shoulders and was one great hunk of muscle. Julie told me later that he was a combination bodyguard and all-around flunky for Cleary. The older man was a "business associate."

Julie was upset about the implied threat. To calm her I said Cleary was probably just blowing off steam. She wasn't persuaded. She was convinced that Cleary could be real trouble. Almost from the beginning he had been hopelessly in love with her and had been in hot pursuit ever since, or so she said.

Near eleven o'clock that night, when the Captain's Ball was in high fever, Cleary came to our table and asked Julie to dance. Before I could fire a shot, she stood with a beaming smile and went off with him to the dance floor. Furious, I took a hike about the deck, pausing aft at the rail to light a cigarette.

At that moment someone came from behind and got a stranglehold around my neck. My lighter fell from my grasp and tumbled soundlessly into the churning wake below. I expected to be hurled after it in seconds. I was caught in a vise of muscle, my windpipe was being crushed and I was fading fast.

Two boisterous couples appeared just then and I was suddenly released. When I had recovered they told me that my attacker was a youngish crew-cut type with weight-lifter's shoulders. His face had been in shadow and he had gone bounding off before anyone could identify him.

Julie was in tears. She had done no more than try to help, consenting to dance with Cleary so she could mollify him, get him alone to make peace for my benefit. Now she suspected that Gordon Cleary had arranged the removal of her various husbands, that in fact the "accidents" had been cunningly engineered.

I was inclined to go along with her theory so we decided to take it up with the New York police when

we returned home. Until then, with perhaps a dozen crew-cut young apes aboard, there was little chance of pointing a finger.

Keeping our plans secret, often changing our itinerary, we moved rapidly about Europe, alighting briefly at the Riviera, fleeing on to Rome, Copenhagen and London. It was a menacing, desperate sort of honeymoon and we cut it short to fly back to the States.

The police were sympathetic but cautious. They had no doubt that Gordon Cleary was capable of ordering "hits" for each of Julie's husbands. If they could find proof, they could nail a man who had too long escaped them with legal dodges and the smoke screen of respectability. They set out eagerly in search of evidence.

Meanwhile, Julie bought an estate in Connecticut and we settled down to a comparatively normal existence, softened by easy living and beautified by plush surroundings.

Probably Cleary had been warned that he was being investigated because there were no other deadly incidents, no threats, no attempts on my life, designed to make Julie a four-time accidental widow.

In fact, Cleary's notorious career came to a halt just after we had celebrated our first anniversary. He was sent upriver to take a ten-year leave of absence while considering the consequences of failing to give Uncle Sam his full share of the take.

On the morning the news broke, Julie closed the paper with a deep sigh of relief. "Well," she said, "that does it. Now we can relax and enjoy the rest of our lives without fear. I'm only sorry they didn't convict him for his real crimes and execute him. But isn't that typical?"

"Typical," I said, and screened a yawn as the Eng-

lish butler, now my own defender against the crass annoyances of the outside world, poured second cups of coffee.

"Do you really think he did it?" Julie was thoughtful.

"Did what, sweetheart?"

"Ordered my husbands killed and made their deaths seem like accidents."

"Well, the police couldn't prove it, but they were convinced. And so am I."

"But how?" She bit daintily on a piece of toast. "I can't imagine how those phony accidents were arranged so cleverly, not leaving a single trace. I've tried to figure it but I'm not very good at crime and the criminal mind. Now that I can think of it and discuss it for the first time without shuddering, I can't help wondering."

I smiled indulgently and said, "I guess it was mostly a matter of good timing. Cleary's hired killer was patient. He watched and waited for the precise moment when he could use a ready-made situation as a cover."

She nodded. "First there was the hunting trip with Milton—and that was the perfect opportunity."

"Sure," I said. "The killer goes into the woods behind you and Shockley. He's dressed like a hunter, I suppose, and it's natural for him to carry a gun. He hides behind a tree and 'bango!'—it's all over. Then he vanishes. He even leaves *you* under suspicion, Julie, because there is no way for you to prove positively that *you* didn't kill Shockley."

Her eyes flicked up to mine and she made a nervous little sound that didn't quite come off as a laugh. "I wish you wouldn't kid about something so dreadful," she complained.

"But I wasn't kidding, Julie."

"Were you accusing, then?"

"Ridiculous, Julie! How could you think such a thing? No, I was merely trying to show you all the angles the police might work with. As for the hit-run killing of your second—Charlie Shoemaker—anyone could steal a car, disguise himself with a few little gimmicks, smash the man to a pulp as he crossed the street, and race off."

Julie squeezed her eyes shut, swallowed. "And what about Malcolm? As I told you once before, he was loaded at the cocktail party and we had a fight. He left in a rage but in not much more than ten minutes I took a cab and chased him. When I got there he had already fallen from the terrace—or was pushed. How? The front door was locked when I arrived."

"Simple. Cleary's boy must've had a key made. Or he was good with locks. It doesn't matter. Likely he knew his way around the building, he knew how to come and go and not be seen. He kept watch and waited until Hazelton was alone. Timing again."

She gazed across the table at me with admiration. "You have a logical answer for everything," she said. "Really, darling, you've got a brilliant mind."

I had to agree with her, though in truth, while there were a lot more complications than I could ever tell her without giving myself away, I had known the answers all along. I had worked out the basic plan for each murder with extreme care, leaving a certain margin of flexibility so that I could adapt to changing circumstances and take advantage of good timing. Still, if there had not been a strong element of luck on my side, I might have been caught.

Now, at last I have my Julie, the charming estate in Connecticut with its stable of horses, the tennis court and swimming pool, the servants scurrying to satisfy every whim. We belong to the so-called better

clubs where only the VIPs are seen, we have four expensive cars, and the whole world of travel and possession is no more difficult a problem than the signing of a check.

I suppose I should be in a constant state of rapture, gloating over my triumph, adoring Julie and the paradise which surrounds me. I still enjoy the easy living, the luxury and the unlimited freedom which the magic of two million dollars can buy. Yet after the first year with Julie, the conquest over, the mystery and excitement of her becoming known and unremarkable, I am truly bored with her.

Having reached her goal in the security of wealth, Julie has become bovine and docile, much too sweet and predictable to be interesting. Then too, there is no longer the challenge; the clever scheming, the stealthy hunt, the action of the kill, and the heart-thumping risk.

Lately, all against my good judgment, I find myself increasingly stimulated by one of two luscious females in our circle, especially by the wildly temperamental wife of a young man who inherited too much money. He never works at anything and is constantly racing cars, flying fast planes or skindiving, all notoriously dangerous sports which often seem to result in tragic accidents.

On the other hand, Julie is unthinkably content with her life, and far from growing disenchanted with me, she appears to be more fascinated than ever. Since there is little hope that she will have a change of heart and cast me adrift with the major part of her fortune, I am deeply concerned about her future welfare and safety.

Only yesterday she was nearly killed riding horseback when a stirrup broke away as she was taking a hurdle. No matter how hard I try to erase this evil

premonition from my mind, I can't help fearing that one day soon Julie will meet with a most unfortunate and fatal accident.

All of life is a gamble, however, and if this should happen I expect to bear it bravely. At least Julie and I have had one glorious year together.

## TWILIGHT THUNDER

Edward Hoch

Dale Fielding heard the phone ringing from his inner office, and remembered that the girl had gone out to the bank. He pressed the proper button on his phone and picked it up. "Fielding Insurance Agency, Dale Fielding speaking."

"Fielding, this is an old buddy of yours. Harvey Stout." The phone turned to ice in Dale's grip. "I just got in town and thought I'd look you up."

"Hello, Harvey." His mind was racing, tearing through a thousand possibilities.

"That all you've got to say to an old buddy?"

"What's up, Harvey? What do you want?"

"Just to see you again, Fielding. That's all." The voice still had the same bitter edge to it, the same deadly friendliness he remembered.

"I'm pretty busy, Harvey. If you're just passing through town . . ."

"No, boy. I got lots of time. Suppose I run out to your house tonight—meet the wife and kiddies. There are kiddies, aren't there?"

Dale ignored the question with a sigh. "Look, where are you now? Maybe I can meet you for a quick drink or something."

"Fine, fine! That's more like it. I'm over at the hotel. The Riverview. I'll meet you at the bar in ten minutes."



"All right," Dale managed, and hung up. Harvey Stout, after all these years. He lit a cigarette and tried to calm his jumping nerves and thought about calling his wife. No, that would do no good. The police? What would he tell them?

What would he tell anybody? Certainly not the truth. . . .

The truth was an island in the Pacific called Ie Shima, a tiny hunk of rock just barely large enough for the airfield that made it so important. It was some three miles off Okinawa, and perhaps was destined to be remembered only as the place where a burst of Japanese machine-gun fire cut through the body of war correspondent Ernie Pyle. Certainly no one but his family would remember that Captain Mason died there, in the final bitter moments of a bloody battle.

Mason, Charles F., Captain, U.S.M.C. Age: thirty-one at the time of his death. Married, no children. Born in Dallas, Texas, of an oil-rich family.

Dale Fielding knew all the statistics. He could have written a fairly lengthy biography of Captain Mason, because he'd spent a week in Dallas after the war learning more about this man he'd watched die before his eyes. Mason had been a good man back home, good to his mother and good to his wife, and the news had come as a shock to Dale, bent on justifying one evil with another. But he more than anyone should have known that men change in the service, especially during wartime. The kind, generous, loving man who had been Charles Mason had become the bitter, driving, ruthless officer Captain Mason. Just as Dale Fielding, who'd always hated the bloodshed of a mere hunting trip, had crossed a dozen Pacific islands with flame-thrower and rifle without ever a single doubt.

It had been Harvey Stout who'd first put the

thought into words, of course, while they crouched in the bloodied sand of the Ie Shima beach. "Let's kill that so-and-so Mason." Just like that, "Let's kill that so-and-so Mason." And Dale's eyes had followed his pointing finger. Further up the beach, in the midst of a fallen forest of young bodies, Captain Mason was indulging in his favorite pastime, slapping the muddy face of a sobbing young private who could go no further. The incident had decided them, after all those months.

Toward twilight on the same day Captain Mason had asked for three men to go with him on a scouting trip. Dale and Harvey had fallen out immediately, along with the third man who'd seen the beach episode, a dark-haired youth named Travello. Mason, suspecting nothing, had led them up the beach a bit, then signalled them to spread out with their rifles and follow him into the underbrush. They knew the Japanese could not be far away, but not one of the three men was thinking of that enemy now.

When Mason was some fifty feet ahead, perfectly outlined in the fading daylight, Dale saw Harvey Stout raise his rifle. Dale and Travello did likewise. The first bullet spun the Captain around and perhaps he never knew what hit him but only thought it was a bit of twilight thunder over the water. Stout and Travello kept firing until he went down, his body ripped and violated, the surprise bloodied from his face. At that last instant, for some reason, Dale hadn't squeezed his trigger. And in the noise and flame that followed, the other two never realized it. But that did not make him less a murderer, as he well understood, standing there above the Captain's body.

They carried the body back to camp, with a story to go with the blood and the bullets. Luckily they didn't run ballistics tests on Ie Shima . . .

"Hello, Fielding. You're looking good for a fellow of thirty-five."

"Hello, Harvey." Yes, he still looked the same. Even those long fifteen years hadn't changed him much. A bit heavier, perhaps, with hair that tended just a shade more toward the gray, but he was still the same Harvey Stout. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"Did I ever refuse one, boy? Scotch and water."

"What have you been doing with yourself all these years, Harvey?"

The leer he remembered so well. "Little of this, little of that. You know. Selling, mostly. Always on the road."

"Oh?"

"Gave it up, though. Decided—this is good Scotch, damn good—decided to settle down. Right here in Riverview, maybe."

The chill was back. What did he want? What twisted thoughts were going around that dark mind of his? "Why here, Harvey?"

"Well, my old buddy Fielding is here, for one thing. Thought you might help me get started, with a little money to set up a business."

Dale glanced down the bar to make certain the bartender wasn't listening. "Listen, Harvey, I'll say this once and make it clear. I don't intend to be blackmailed by you!"

"Blackmail! Fielding, I'm your buddy, remember? Don't you think back occasionally to those Pacific days when the three of us were . . ."

"Travello's dead." He'd stepped on a Japanese land mine two days after the murder of Captain Mason.

"Sure, he's dead. Does that mean you've forgotten him, boy? Have you forgotten me too, or what the three of us did out there?"

Dale sighed into his drink. "I never told you this,

Harvey, but I didn't fire my rifle that day. It was just you and Travello."

Harvey looked at Dale with eyes both deep and curious. It seemed for a moment that he was trying to comprehend something, some great mystery of life. Then the eyes cleared, and Dale saw what he'd known all along—that this admission of his didn't change anything.

"I'm not trying to blackmail you, boy. Get that foolish idea out of your head. What happened to Mason was a long time ago. It's only worth remembering because it made us buddies, and we're just as close buddies whether you helped do it or just watched. Understand?"

"I understand." He felt the other's breath on him like something unclean, sucking the air from his lungs, smothering him. "But I can't help you. I have a family."

"You insurance men got a racket! You're rolling in dough."

Now the bitterness was showing, the battle was joined. "Look, Harvey. If you want a handout I can give you five bucks. Anything more than that you've come to the wrong boy."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. That's the way it is. I'm sorry." He slid off the bar stool and casually tossed down a five dollar bill for their two drinks, turning purposely away before he could see what became of it.

"You'll be hearing from me, Fielding."

He kept walking without looking back. . . .

Dale Fielding lived in a quiet house on a quiet street where trouble never visited. Even the laughter of children at play had always seemed muted to him, though it never occurred to his preoccupied mind that

his very presence might have a quieting effect. At his own home, the last one on a street of nearly identical postwar houses, Marge and his two children would be waiting this evening, as they always were. The boys, eight and ten years old, could be seen from the street, playing at boyish pastimes in the back yard. That was good, because he wanted to speak to Marge alone.

"Home so soon, dear?"

"Yeah. Things were a little slow today, and besides, I have to make a call tonight." He tossed his topcoat over a chair, not feeling just then like hanging it up. "Marge?"

"Yes, dear?" She called him that always, but with the automatic inflection that comes perhaps after too many years of it.

"A man called me at the office today. A man I was in the service with during the war."

"That's nice, dear."

He knew what he wanted to tell her, and yet somehow the words didn't come. Then, before the opportunity came again, the boys were in from their play, clustering about him.

After supper the phone rang, and Marge came back to say it was for him. Somehow he knew it would be Harvey Stout, and he wasn't surprised. "Hello, Fielding. I was wondering if you'd changed your mind."

"I'm . . . very busy. I was just on my way out. Talk to me tomorrow. At the office, not at home."

"Sure, Fielding. I understand."

He hung up, and for a long time Dale just stood there by the phone, looking down at it as if it were a thing alive. Then, in answer to Marge's absentminded question, he said, "Nothing important. I'll be going out on that call now, I guess. Try to be home early. . . ."

The next morning he was irritable at the office, raising his voice for the first time in months to the girl who typed the fire policies. He sat dully at his desk waiting for the phone to ring, feeling his heart skip a beat every time it did. He'd been foolish to tell Harvey Stout to call today, yet in the panic of the moment it had been the only way to get rid of him. What if he ever came to the house? Or what if he ever told his story to Marge or said something in front of the children?

Dale Fielding, murderer.

The phone rang.

"It's for you, Mr. Fielding."

"Hello. Fielding speaking."

"How are you today, boy?"

"Fine. A little busy."

"What about it?"

"About what?"

"You know."

"I don't."

"Money."

"Oh."

Silence, for the space of a heartbeat. Then, "I can't fool around, boy. I need cash."

Dale cleared his throat. "I'm sorry."

"You'll be a damn lot sorrier."

"Listen—stop calling me. Stop threatening me or I'll get the police after you. Understand?"

"Hell, I'm not threatening you." The old friendly tone was back. "But we were buddies, remember? You and me and Travello? And Captain Mason. Remember?"

"I remember. I had nothing to do with that."

"Sure. But for old times' sake . . ."

Dale hung up.

He tried to light a cigarette and found that his hand was shaking. "Jean, I'm out if anyone else calls."

"Yes, Mr. Fielding."

He leaned back in his chair and thought about it all, about those dark days of war, and its aftermath. He remembered his trip to Dallas and the week he'd spent looking into the past of Charles F. Mason. . . .

The city was still caught up in the excitement of peace, year one. He'd walked among cattle-rich ranchers and oil millionaires, smiling around their thick cigars and thicker fingers. He'd stood in a grassy square and watched workmen putting up a plaque to honor the city's war dead. Captain Charles F. Mason, U.S.M.C.

Killed in action.

Dale wandered about the city, managing finally to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Mason, a slimly beautiful young woman whom he thought deserved better. But the more he dug, the more he asked, the deeper the picture seemed to etch itself. Charles Mason hadn't been a really bad man. In fact, there were those who remembered him as a rising young executive, who mourned his death as that of a hero. But surely men changed in the service, men hardened in the face of daily death and uncertain life. Perhaps Mason had been one to crack under the strain. Stout and Travello might even have been doing their duty in some obscure manner when they pumped a dozen bullets into his unexpected body.

But day by day he became more certain of the facts, more aware of the guilt. On the final evening of his stay in Dallas he sat in his hotel room and thought about the alternatives open to him. He spent three hours debating between confessing everything and killing himself. In the end, because he'd never had a really strong will, he did nothing.

That, in a way, had always been the story of his life, even to the moment in the jungle of Ie Shima. While others acted, he did nothing.

He'd come back East and married Marge and let the bitter, unfriendly memories drift into the further reaches of his mind. War is never won by men who do nothing, but Dale thought that perhaps peace was won that way at times. . . .

On his way back from lunch, Harvey Stout crossed the street and caught up with him as he walked. "I guess we got disconnected this morning."

"Yeah, I guess so, Harvey."

"Let me tell you some more about this business I want to start."

"Don't bother, Harvey. It doesn't mean a thing to me."

He started to turn in at his office, but Harvey put a restraining hand on his shoulder. "I was out looking at your house this morning, boy."

"Stay away from my wife!"

"Nobody's going anywhere near your wife, Fielding. Don't worry, I won't tell her about Mason."

"There's nothing to tell, anyway, I told you I didn't do it."

"Did you tell her?"

Dale was silent. Beyond Stout's shoulder a traffic light turned red. Finally, like a man suddenly collapsing against the wind, he asked, "How much do you want?"

"That's better. That's sounding more like a buddy."

"How much?"

"I think ten thousand would do it."

"Ten thousand!" The light turned green. "Are you out of your mind?"



"You've got a nice house, a business of your own. And I never met a starving insurance man yet."

"That's out of the question. I was thinking of a few hundred, a thousand at the very most."

"Think a little harder, boy." And then, with an expression on his face, a light in his eyes that Dale hadn't seen since the Pacific, he added, too casually, "When I was out at your house I was noticing how close it was to the woods. Must be dangerous this time of the year, with the hunters out. Stray bullet could be dangerous to the kids."

He turned and walked away, leaving Dale staring after him. Within a block he'd been lost in the noon-day crowd, and there was nothing but a blur of faces confronting Dale. A blur like a jungle swallowing up the enemies, and for a moment he might have been back there, back on a Pacific island that time forgot, facing the gloom with a rifle in his hands and determination in his mind. . . .

"Marge?"

"Yes, dear?"

"I want to talk."

"Sure. Can you wait till I get the kids off to bed?"

"I suppose so."

"You haven't been looking good, dear. Are you coming down with something?"

"I'm all right. I saw my old buddy, Harvey Stout, again today."

"That's nice. You could invite him out for dinner some night if you wanted. Is he going to be in town long?"

"I don't think he really knows. We had a sort of long talk today, and . . ."

"Excuse me, dear. I have to see what they're up to now."

"Sure."

He sat down by the window and looked out across the irregular fields to the blackness of the twilight woods. Even now the hunters were still out—a figure moved, paused, then shattered the silence with a shotgun's roar. Perhaps unseen a partridge had crumpled to earth.

Yes, they were awfully close. A shotgun slug could carry almost to the house. He remembered how it had been in the jungle, then got up and went to the basement. After a time, Marge called.

"Dear, what in heaven's name are you up to?"

"Thinking of doing a little hunting. I was just checking over my shotgun."

"You haven't used that in years."

"This buddy of mine, Harvey Stout, wants to go. Maybe Friday night after work."

Yes, it would be Friday night. He took out his cleaning gear and began polishing the weapon. . . .

For most of the next day he was busy, and there was only a vague awareness of Harvey Stout in his mind. He no longer waited in dread for the phone call he knew would come. Rather, he glowed with an inner expectation, like a schoolboy anxiously waiting to give the correct answer.

Stout, surprisingly, had not yet called at five o'clock. The glow by then was beginning to fade, and replacing it was a sort of uncertainty. Finally, at five-fifteen, he called home to make certain the children were inside, and warned Marge of the possible danger from the hunters. When he hung up his palms were sweating for the first time that day as his mind ran over the score of possibilities. Stout might have given up and already left town. He might be sick, or he might simply have lost interest in Dale. Or, and

he had to face this extreme, Stout might be plotting right now some attack on his family.

Finally, just at five-thirty, the phone rang. It was Harvey Stout. "Hi, Fielding. I been thinking. Maybe I could get by with five thousand, if you were still interested in helping a buddy. That's as low as I could go, though."

Dale felt his hand trembling on the receiver, and he steadied his elbow against the desk. "All right, Harvey, on one condition. That you get out of town and don't come back."

"Ah, now, Fielding . . ."

"That's it, Harvey. Take it or leave it."

"Five thousand?"

"I told you all right."

"When can I have it, boy?"

"Tomorrow night, after work."

"I'll come by the office."

"No. My girl will be working late. Look, you know where I live. Just past the house there's a road that leads out toward the woods. Drive out there till you come to a place where cars park. Hunters usually leave their autos there. I'll be there at five sharp."

"You make it sound like a damned TV show or something."

"If you want the money, you'll be there."

"All right," he said finally. "Five o'clock."

Dale hung up and wiped the sweat from his palms. It was done. The deed was as good as done. It was late but he knew the gun shop on the way home would still be open. . . .

"Mr. Fielding! Haven't seen you in years."

"Long time since I've hunted, Joe. I need some shotgun shells. Here, I think this is just the thing."

"What you going to be hunting, Mr. Fielding?"

"Partridge."

"Well, you don't want slugs for partridge. You want shot."

"Oh. I guess you're right."

Dale accepted the box of shells with a firm hand. All right, it just meant he'd have to get a little closer before he pulled the trigger, that was all. The police could say what they wanted, they could accuse him of anything they liked, but they'd never be able to prove it wasn't a hunting accident, pure and simple. It was the easiest way, the only way. He'd gone over the alternatives carefully in his mind. Of course he could have told Marge, but she would never have understood. She would only have seen this uncertain side to his character. Seen it, but not understood. Perhaps no one could understand who hadn't been out there, in the Pacific. Marge would have cried, and told him to call the police. And the police? They couldn't arrest Stout without dragging Dale himself through a drawn-out investigation. And if they believed Stout guilty of that long-ago crime, what would keep them from thinking Dale just as guilty?

He patted the box of shells. This was the only way it could be, the only way to be free of the man. . . .

Friday was a gloomy day, half-overcast with the threat of rain, and the dampness was thick in the air. Dale stayed at his desk most of the time, thinking about everything but the date he'd made with Stout. As the afternoon wore on, he became more and more uneasy with the knowledge that the time was nearing. Already he'd reminded Marge that he'd be a little late getting home, storing the shotgun and box of shells in the car when he left that morning. He found himself almost wishing, though, that rain would

come—anything to delay or cancel the deed which he must do.

Finally, a bit after four, he told Jean he was going partridge hunting with a friend. He drove slowly toward home, watching the clouds with a careful eye, wondering about a hundred unimportant business details left undone. There would be an inquest, of course, and perhaps he might even have to spend the night in jail. But they couldn't prove a thing. It happened every day.

He reached the point of the meeting, and was pleased to see that only three cars were there before him. With luck they would be undisturbed at the time of the planned accident, but even if someone was nearby it would not greatly change his plan. He opened the car door on the driver's side and placed the shotgun across his lap, its barrels pointed toward the empty space where Harvey Stout's car soon would be. Two shells went into the chambers, and he was ready. In his mind he ran over the details once again. The hunting license was in his pocket—Stout would have neither license nor gun, but the lack of one would explain the lack of the other. He had come along simply to watch. They might suspect differently, but certainly the suspicions would be no worse than those born of Harvey Stout's story of events on Ie Shima.

At five minutes to five a car turned off the highway and headed toward him. From somewhere in the woods came the boom of a shotgun, and the ruffled rushing of birds on the wing. The forest was a living thing, breathing, vibrant.

The last western rays of the orange sun flickered through the enveloping clouds, and the car came silently closer like a great gliding animal breaking into

the brush. Up ahead Captain Mason paused to look around, then gave the signal for them to follow. Harvey Stout paused and raised his rifle to his shoulder. Harvey Stout opened the car door and slid across the seat.

"Hello, buddy. You got the money?" Raised his rifle and so did Travello and so did Dale. Three men. The money. "What in hell are you doing with that shotgun?" The first bullet spun the Captain around, and Stout and Travello kept firing. The gun was warm in Dale's hands. He sighted at his target. The enemy.

"You damn fool, Fielding! You can't pull it, can you? You couldn't kill Mason and you can't kill me."

Dale heard the voice as if from a distance, and he knew the words were true. The shotgun was limp in his hands. Harvey Stout walked over and lifted it up. Then he slapped Dale twice with his open palm. "The hell with you. I can't fool around any longer. I'll take this gun and be thankful you got off so easy."

He threw the shotgun in the back seat of his car and climbed in behind the wheel. Dale watched the scorn on his face with a mixture of feelings. Somehow it was almost as if he had failed Harvey by not killing him.

After the car pulled away he sat for a long time staring into the dusk, until at last all was darkness around him and the other hunters had departed. Then he drove slowly home to Marge and the boys.

## IMAGES

Michael Brett

At nine I opened my eyes, blinking into sunlight; for fifteen minutes I lay in bed, waking slowly, planning the day. I'm not one of those guys who springs out of bed, ready to jump into the heat of battle without a second thought. That routine isn't for me.

My work requires an alert mind. If I move too quickly, without thought, I can get myself killed. Most jobs aren't that hazardous, but when you swim in the midst of a shark pack you'd better know what you and the fish both are doing.

Five hours isn't enough sleep for anyone, but Ingrid, that tall, curved, haughty blonde that I'd been with last night had more than compensated for any loss of sleep; a fancy dame, that one, with a Sutton Place address. She helped my image. I'd taken her to a fine restaurant, a play, and then we'd traveled the pubs until I'd dropped her off, fractured, at her place and went home myself. We're opposites. She's a classy dame with a college background, a society dame with poise. That's what I like in a babe, class and poise.

The way it is for her, she likes a free-spending, late-night, man-about-town guy. She lives for kicks. Maybe she thinks going out with a guy that the cops keep an eye on is one of them. To each his own; maybe she thinks it's doing her image some good.

I climbed out of bed, walked across thick carpeting

and looked out at Central Park. It was summer and, for New York, the day was remarkably clear and dry. It was going to be a good day. It always is when you wake up and you've already been paid five thousand dollars for the day's work that lies ahead of you.

I showered a long time, then I shaved while my coffee perked in the kitchen. I dressed, prepared breakfast, set it on the table and ate slowly. I always eat breakfast at home because I don't like the clatter of dishes and the shouts of short-order cooks and waitresses. My surroundings have to be neat and quiet and orderly in the morning and without distraction, because when the day starts I'm already at work, thinking, planning.

When I finished my breakfast, the doorbell rang. There were two men at the door, and when it comes to cops I've got no trouble recognizing them. The taller one was a burly, thick-necked man in a rumpled brown suit. The shorter one was thin, with a pinched angry face. The taller one flashed his badge and said, "I'm Detective Walsh." His partner said, "I'm Beck." Walsh said, "Mr. Orange?"

"Yes," I said.

"We'd like to talk to you," he said pleasantly.

*A nice, polite cop*, I thought, only he wasn't fooling me. I stood aside, they stepped into the room and I shut the door after them.

"Mr. Orange," said Walsh, "I wonder if you could tell us where you spent Friday night, two weeks ago, say between nine and twelve."

His question was not unexpected. I nodded and scratched my chin thoughtfully. "Between nine and twelve. Nine and twelve. Offhand I just can't remember. Why do you want to know?"

"Try to remember," said Beck. "Take your time."



"No, I don't think so," I said. "Who can remember something that happened two weeks ago?"

"You've got a short memory," Beck said. "On that Friday, between nine and twelve you were in Leclerc's restaurant, sitting in a rear booth with Oscar Middleton."

"Yes, I remember; that sounds about right, Oscar Middleton, Friday night between nine and twelve. Okay, I was talking to a guy in a restaurant. What's this all about?"

"You were the last person who saw him. He never went home and he's been missing ever since. His wife called it in."

"I don't know where he went after he left," I said. "All we did was have a couple drinks. He said good night and that was that."

"What was the purpose of the meeting?" said Beck. "What did you talk about?"

"We're friends. What do friends talk about? His business, his family, health, things like that."

"How was his business?" Walsh asked.

"He said it was all right. He wasn't complaining about it."

"He should have," Walsh said. "He was playing the stock market short, prices went up and he's in the hole for thousands."

"He told me about that," I said.

"He had to make the money good so he went to the loan sharks and borrowed thirty thousand dollars. He made a few payments, then he defaulted for a couple months and the sharks boosted that thirty grand to forty-seven grand and they doubled the vigoris. In no time at all, it was all he could do to pay just the interest. He defaulted on paying the interest, and all of a sudden the principal on the loan

has been boosted to ninety-eight thousand. He's no longer a free man, people own him. He disappears. Where do you think he is, Mr. Orange?"

"No idea," I said. "How do you know all this about him?"

"From his wife. She's worried sick." Walsh lit an inexpensive cigar. "What do you do for a living, Mr. Orange?"

"I'm in ranching; horses, you know."

"Where?"

"South America."

"Yeah, South America," Walsh said sourly. "Empty your pockets, turn them all inside out and dump the contents of your wallet on the table."

"You guys don't have the right to do this."

"I know," Walsh said calmly. He waited, then he pointed to the stack of bills that had come from my wallet. "Count them."

When I'd finished, he nodded. "Five thousand dollars in your pocket like cigarette money, and you don't have any visible means of support."

"A ranch in South America," I said. "I'm also considering Australia and Africa, among others."

"We could take you down and book you on suspicion of murder," Beck said quietly. "We can throw you in the can for that."

"How long could you keep me there? Who's been murdered?"

"Take a look around," Walsh said to Beck.

"Do you have a warrant?" I said.

"Do we need one?" asked Walsh.

"No, go ahead. Only don't get my clothes messed up."

Walsh looked at me and nodded. "Look, just for the record," Walsh said with a pained look, "we don't know all there is to know about you. You're kind of

a mystery man. We keep picking up little bits here and there. Last year in California you were arrested for suspicion of murder, the same thing in Michigan the year before that."

"I didn't murder anybody."

"Maybe, but you always wind up as the last guy who's been seen with the victim."

"It could be coincidental, Walsh."

"Never in a million years. Not when it happens three times with three different guys who just disappear. I don't buy it."

"It could happen like that," I said. "It's possible."

"Sure," said Walsh, skeptically. "And maybe you can also explain how these three guys all happened to be into the loan sharks for real heavy loot, and how all three guys couldn't come up with their payments, and all three of them disappeared after they were last seen talking to you. You're a smart guy. You're walking around with five grand in your pocket and living in a nice place like this. You ought to be able to explain it to me."

"Not me."

"All right, then I'll explain it to you. Here's the way it figures: you're working for the loan sharks; you're a collector or an enforcer."

"Wrong both times," I said.

Walsh grinned. "Maybe you're just an imported killer."

Beck came out of my bedroom shaking his head. "Nothing," he said to Walsh. "He's got some wardrobe, though. The ranching business must be pretty good," he said sarcastically. Beck motioned to Walsh and started to walk out.

Walsh stayed where he was. "Let me tell you something. I've known guys like you for years. I've seen them come and go. Guys like you, you live around

the fringes, just outside the law. Guys like you, you don't even have a record, but we know who you are and sooner or later we square the books."

I said, "Gentlemen, if you're through, I have a business appointment this morning."

Walsh wasn't in any hurry to leave. "The trouble with you is that you underestimate us. For instance, we keep an eye on known criminals and we find that you visit them."

"What are you getting at, Walsh?" I asked.

"You're working for them," said Walsh, and his voice was raised, angry.

"Wrong again, Inspector. I stopped working for other people when I was sixteen. I work for myself. I enjoy my independence."

"You think you're a big shot. You're only a wise guy. You're mixed up in the murder of three people. You think you're a big shot, because you're working for loan sharks. Sooner or later they're going to work somebody over and somebody's going to talk. We'll know where to find you when he does." He was beginning to get worked up.

"Okay," I said. I waited until they'd gone, then took the elevator down to the street level. Beck was sitting across the street on a park bench, hiding behind a newspaper. I couldn't see Walsh but I knew he was around somewhere.

I walked to a public pay phone half a block away, closed the door, dropped change into the coin slot and dialed. A woman's voice answered, "Third County Investors."

I said, "Mr. Drayton, please."

"Who's calling?"

"His cousin," I said. I gave her the number on the dial and hung up, then waited for the phone to ring. I could visualize the scene at the other end of the

line, the girl at the desk bringing the number I'd given her into Drayton's office.

Today, the Third County Investors Company are financial backers for the builders of giant shopping centers, hotels, apartment houses and many other business ventures, but it had all started with loan sharking, which still constitutes more than fifty-five percent of their business. When it runs like that, people get nervous about phones being tapped. Drayton would make his call from a public phone in the lobby of the building.

The phone next to me rang and I grabbed it.

"Okay, cousin," said Drayton. "What's up?"

"The job is scheduled for today, but there are complications. I just had two cops drop in at my place. Now I'm downstairs in the phone booth and it might be better to let the job go for a while."

"Listen, cousin, you got five thousand yesterday, in advance, for a job. The word's out that Bunson made a monkey out of the company. Other people hear that this guy beat us for over a hundred grand and they get ideas, so we don't let that happen. All right, you know where this guy is holed up. Put the blocks to him." He paused. "Okay, if you feel that the cops are going to get in your way, then a day isn't going to matter. I can square that with the company. They can wait a day or two."

"I'll see," I said, and hung up.

I waved down a cab and when we took off I could see Walsh and Beck in another cab. My destination was a shabby hotel where Bunson had been holed up for the last eight days. Bunson was a compulsive gambler with a weakness for dice, and at a floating crap game one night he was a heavy loser. He borrowed money from the loan sharks at a six for five rate of interest, payable within a week from the time of the

loan. He borrowed more money elsewhere to repay the first loan, and repeated the process when the second loan became due. In three months he was into the loan sharks for over a hundred thousand dollars. I had been hired to kill him.

The cab containing Walsh and Beck stopped half a block away when I went into the old hotel. I knew Bunson's room number, but I asked the man at the desk for it anyway. It would make things easier for Walsh and Beck. Then I took the elevator up, walked down a corridor and knocked on the door.

Bunson called, "Who is it?" When I identified myself he opened the door. He was a tall, thin man in his early fifties. He paced nervously. "They've been rough on my wife, Orange. They gave her abuse over the telephone."

"Well, she expected it, didn't she?" I said. "I warned you that might happen."

"Yes, you did. I want to get out of here and I want to get out of here now." He went to the dresser, opened the middle drawer, brought out a thick envelope. "You asked for twenty thousand. It's all here."

"Put it back where you got it from, for the time being. We may be interrupted by cops."

He paled, and put the money away. "I don't want cops. Going to them for protection wouldn't work. I made a deal with you, Orange."

"You've got it. The cops were something I hadn't counted on. They followed me here and they're probably standing outside your door right now. I don't worry about cops. If they knock on the door, we'll let them in and we'll talk to them. All I'm doing is visiting a friend. Maybe they won't even bother us. For now let's talk it through, so I know that you understand what you and your wife will have to do."

"Okay, my wife calls the police in two weeks and

reports me missing. Meanwhile, you've supplied me with a phony passport and sneaked me off to South America under an assumed name. Then my wife waits for four months before flying down to join me."

"That's right," I said. "You left a few things out. You don't get in touch with her, and I'm the one who contacts her and gets her out of the country. Is that clear?"

"Yes." He regarded me thoughtfully. "I've never worked on a ranch before. I hope I can do the work."

I said, "Think of the alternative, like bullets in the head, and suddenly ranching in South America becomes easy."

Bunson cast his eyes about the room, let them rest on the door, then regarded me. "I don't like the idea of the police. What I don't understand is why they don't worry you."

I winked. "Cops can't do me any harm. They think I'm a killer for the loan sharks. Cops, by hounding me, improve my image with the sharks, who also think I'm a killer. I get a lot of work because of it." I laughed. "I've got lots of help on my ranch. I admit, I don't pay too well, but think of all the sun and air and scenery."

"You take big chances," Bunson said thoughtfully.

"Calculated risks," I said. "But they'd be much bigger if I killed people."

## THE SKIM

Richard Deming

Eddie Adamski was not happy either in his work or in his marriage. The former wasn't particularly demanding and it paid fairly well, but his boss happened to be his brother-in-law, and he frequently reminded Eddie that he had his job only because of that relationship, and treated him as though he were a mere messenger boy.

Eddie's marriage seemed quite happy; he was even envied by some of his male friends who saw only the surface manifestations. Nancy Adamski was still as strikingly beautiful after four years of marriage as she had been on their wedding day, and in public she displayed a gay, charming, life-of-the-party personality.

In private she was sometimes quite pleasant too, but she could also be an unmitigated harridan. A good deal of their conversation in the privacy of their apartment was conducted at scream-level, but Eddie's biggest marital complaint was that Nancy was as fast with a buck as her brother was tight.

Long Jake Attila never let loose of a nickle he didn't have to, a characteristic which had been a shock to Eddie Adamski when he discovered it shortly after his and Nancy's honeymoon. Eddie had naively assumed that becoming the brother-in-law of the king of New York City's numbers racket would automati-



cally put him in clover for life. He knew in advance the salary of the job Long Jake rather condescendingly offered him would be only \$250 a week, of course, but it never occurred to him that a multimillionaire such as Jake wouldn't throw in periodic bonuses so that his sister could live in proper style.

Jake never added a penny to the \$250, even at Christmastime. When Eddie complained to him that Nancy was driving him more deeply into debt by the day, Jake merely shrugged and suggested he put her on a budget.

Eddie's discontent deepened after he met blonde Hazel Zimmer. Hazel was neither as good-looking nor as vivacious as Nancy, but she had an even disposition and never got angry. She was also seven years younger than Nancy's twenty-eight, and she wasn't exactly unattractive. You had to be fairly presentable to get the job of hatcheck girl at Madden's Supper Club.

That's where Eddie met her. As Ziggy Madden was one of Long Jake's wholesalers, the club was a regular weekly collection stop for Eddie. It started with just casual conversation each time he dropped by the club, but he sensed almost at once that she found him attractive, which inflated his ego. Eddie had always regarded himself as rather an average guy, and during his thirty years of life Nancy had been the only girl prior to Hazel who exhibited acute interest in him.

He responded like a love-starved teen-ager. On his third visit to the club after Hazel started to work there, he got up nerve enough to ask if she would like him to stop back and run her home after she got off work. She accepted. Within a week they were lovers.

Mostly Eddie had to see Hazel in the daytime, because she worked from five P.M. until one A.M., and he couldn't get away from Nancy that late very often. As Hazel had her own flat and Eddie didn't have to

account to Jake Attila for his time, so long as he got his work done, this wasn't really inconvenient. Not for Eddie anyway; Hazel wasn't too pleased with the setup.

"I never get taken anywhere," she complained with increasing frequency. "What I need is a boyfriend who can at least take me somewhere for a drink after work. The bars are still open for two hours after I get off, and I get lots of offers."

The implied threat upset Eddie terribly, because he was growing fonder and fonder of the blonde Hazel. In order to appease her he made a rather wild promise which, at the time, he had no intention of keeping. He told her that, as soon as he accumulated a decent stake, he would leave Nancy and he and Hazel would run away somewhere together.

While this device was effective in preventing Hazel from looking around for another lover, eventually it began to wear thin. When some months had passed with no indication from Eddie that the promised flight was anywhere in the foreseeable future, Hazel started to demand a definite date.

The afternoon she told him he had one more week to come up with a specific plan for their elopement or they were through, Eddie Adamski suddenly decided he really meant the promise, but how do you save up an elopement stake when your wife spends more than you earn?

Eddie went home that evening determined to discuss economy with Nancy, but he found a brand-new combination color TV-record player-radio in the front room. Instead of kissing his wife hello, he screamed at her, "What in the hell is this!"

"Don't you dare shout at me!" she screamed back. "What in the hell's it look like?"

After glaring at her speechlessly for some time, he

managed to get out in a barely controlled voice, "Like about a thousand dollars."

"Only nine hundred and ninety-nine, ninety-five," she told him. "And payments are only fifty a month for a little over two years."

Eddie dismissed the idea of economic discussion. It was a subject his wife didn't understand. His stake was going to have to come from somewhere other than savings, so he decided to be frank with Hazel. The next afternoon at her apartment he dumped the whole problem in her lap.

"All I want is to be with you," he told her, "but I want to be able to support you in style. We'd starve on what I could earn after I walk out of this job. Before Long Jake gave me a job I was a clerk in a store, and I'm not about to go back to that. We need a stake so that I can set myself up in business somewhere."

Hazel wasn't averse to being supported in style. She was pragmatic enough to know that when a couple tries to live on love alone, the love soon evaporates. Eddie having a substantial stake salted away when they eloped had been part of her dream. She went right to the heart of the matter with a practical suggestion.

"You'll have to steal it," she said.

He stared at her. "From whom?"

"From Long Jake. With all that money you handle, can't you knock some down?"

Eddie emitted a bitter laugh. "You don't know Jake's bookkeeping system. All that would get me is dead. I might walk off with a single day's take, but I doubt that I'd get very far even with that."

"How much is a single day's take?"

"It runs anywhere from ten to twenty thousand, depending on which wholesalers I'm scheduled to collect

from that day and how heavy the play was the previous week. Almost never more than twenty grand."

"So isn't twenty thousand a stake?" Hazel asked, wide-eyed.

"You don't understand. If I was ever as much as an hour late bringing in the collection money, Jake would have his goons covering the airports, rail and bus stations immediately. Even if I managed to get out of town before they got to me, it wouldn't be enough of a start. Somewhere, before very long, Jake's boys would catch up with me, and that would be the end of Eddie."

Hazel looked disappointed. "How much of a start would you need to be safe?"

After considering, Eddie said, "At least a weekend, with a lot of advance preparation. Like getting a passport under another name, for instance. With that much time I could take a train or bus to some other city, switch to the identity on the passport and fly to somewhere like Spain."

Hazel thought for some minutes. Presently she said, "Maybe we can work out some plan together. Just how big is this numbers operation?"

"I handle about eighty thousand a week on the average," Eddie said. "Roughly, about a hundred thousand dollars worth of numbers tickets move in all the boroughs each week. The wholesalers' commissions amount to ten percent, their runners get another ten percent. Mainly the runners are legit people outside of peddling numbers—shoeshine boys, elevator operators, owners of small delicatessens. The balance of approximately eighty grand I pick up and deliver to Long Jake. Of course, prize money and overhead have to come out of that; my salary, for instance, and all the goons he hires to keep wholesalers from deciding to buy from somebody else or go in business for

themselves. I figure Jake still nets about two million a year."

Hazel emitted a small, envious sigh. "All that money! There must be some way to skim off some of it. Just exactly what do you do each place you go to collect for Jake?"

"I deliver a supply of tickets for the next week and collect all the old unsold tickets, the stubs of all the sold tickets, plus the money taken in, less commissions. I give each wholesaler a receipt, which I make out in duplicate, for so many unsold tickets, so many ticket stubs and so much cash. At the end of each day I turn in the take, the unsold tickets, the stubs, and the duplicate copies of the receipts."

"Who checks your records?"

"Art Quigley, Jake's accountant. Soon as I report in. I have to wait until everything checks out. Quig has a record of the number of tickets each wholesaler had out, and every unsold one has to be turned back in. Any that are missing, there better be money in its place. There's no way to beat the system."

"I can see a flaw in it a mile wide," Hazel said. "What's to prevent you from collecting from a whole flock of wholesalers in advance of their normal collection dates and taking off before Jake finds out about it?"

Eddie chuckled without humor. "You think that possibility never occurred to Jake? He makes out my collection schedule and tells the wholesalers when to expect me. They're instructed not to turn over their takes on any other day without a personal okay from him."

Hazel said indignantly, "He's certainly not very trusting."

Eddie smiled at her. "Obviously with good reason," he said dryly.

When she caught the point of that remark, she had to smile too. "I suppose in his business he's surrounded by a lot of people who would cheat him if they could."

"Uh-huh. He wouldn't trust his own mother, let alone a mere brother-in-law. Just to safeguard himself even further against any knocking down I might try, he has Art Quigley make quarterly audits. Every three months Quig hits all the wholesalers and checks their records against the ones I've turned in."

Hazel pursed her lips and thought for some time. "There has to be some kind of loophole," she said finally. "I once read somewhere that there was no sure-fire defense against embezzlement in any accounting system. If we both think hard enough over the next few days, maybe one of us can come up with an idea."

Her tone relieved Eddie. It seemed to indicate that, now that they were making at least tenuous plans, her ultimatum of only a week to set an elopement date no longer stood.

It was Eddie who finally came up with the idea. When it hit him it seemed so simple, he was surprised that he had worked at his job for four years without thinking of it before. He hurried over to Hazel's place to see what she thought of it. Hazel was enthusiastic.

"It's foolproof, darling," she told him, throwing her arms about his neck and giving him a big kiss. "You're so smart."

"Of course the plan won't pass the quarterly audit," Eddie said, "but the next one is only two weeks off. Then I'll have a full three months to skim off as much as is safe before we blow the country together. Can you wait that long?"

"As long as you keep piling up the stake," she told him, giving him another kiss.

While waiting for the two weeks to pass, Eddie

made some necessary advance preparations. His first was to make a surreptitious check of the supply warehouse and note down the serial number sequences of the tickets scheduled to be distributed in the three-month period immediately following the coming audit. Then he took a sample ticket to a job printer he knew could keep his mouth shut and had him print over a million tickets bearing duplicate numbers.

The printing cost came to several hundred dollars, which Eddie didn't have. On the promise that he would return the money out of the first week's skim, he got Hazel to withdraw every cent she had in the bank in order to meet the bill.

Eddie stored the supply of duplicate tickets at Hazel's apartment. After he had gone to a strange bank to rent a safe deposit box under an assumed name, he was ready to start operations.

The day following the quarterly audit, Eddie started to skim. He began cautiously, knocking down only a hundred dollars the first day and gradually increasing his take until he was skimming off an even five thousand a week. The drop in take brought comment from both Art Quigley and Jake Attila, but no apparent suspicion from either. Since Eddie's records continued to be in perfect order, they merely assumed there had been a temporary drop-off in sales, which happened occasionally for no discernible reason. After all, a five-thousand-dollar-a-week decrease in take was only slightly more than a six percent drop, which could be a normal fluctuation.

Each day after making his last collection, Eddie would hurry to Hazel's apartment. There he and Hazel would open the envelopes of each wholesaler, one at a time, and spread out the ticket stubs representing the tickets sold during the past week. They would remove a sequence of stubs representing about six percent of

the wholesaler's total sales, replace it with a sequence of duplicate tickets bearing the same numbers and skim off an equivalent amount of cash. Then Eddie would carefully make out another duplicate receipt to match the adjusted returns.

Of course some of the stubs Eddie collected had been sold only that day and were possible winners for the following day. They never substituted whole duplicate tickets for those, because it would have been disastrous for some player to produce a winning ticket bearing the same number as an unsold ticket turned in by Eddie. Any winners prior to the current day would have been paid off, so all of those turned-in stubs had to be losers. As soon as the master winning number, based on the Treasury figure appearing in the paper daily, was published, winners were paid off. Jake Attila had another man in charge of payoffs who delivered the prize money to wholesalers for distribution each day, and Eddie had nothing to do with this phase of the operation.

Until Art Quigley's next audit compared the wholesalers' records to those Eddie turned in daily, Eddie could see no way that he could be caught.

Once a week Eddie made a trip to the safe deposit box and stored away the week's skim. After the first week, when he had used a portion of it to repay Hazel for what she had laid out for printing costs, it all went in.

While money accumulated in the safe deposit box, Eddie and Hazel made flight preparations so they would be all set when the time came. Eddie had to get away from home more than usual in order to complete these preparations, and for several weeks he worried about how he was going to manage this without exciting his wife's suspicion. Then Nancy's and Jake's mother solved the problem by getting sick. The



widowed Mrs. Attila lived in Buffalo, over four hundred miles away, and Nancy went to stay with her for two weeks.

This left Eddie free to do what had to be done. He started by taking Hazel over to Brooklyn and renting a furnished apartment in the Prospect Park area under the names of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Hunter. They opened a small bank account at a Brooklyn bank and a couple of charge accounts in order to establish references, then applied for passports under their new names. Fingerprinting was no complication, because neither had ever been fingerprinted before.

Eddie completed arrangements by flying to Cleveland over the second weekend that Nancy was gone and buying two one-way tickets to Rio de Janeiro. He figured that while Long Jake was certain to have his agents show his photograph to reservation clerks and stewardesses at all nearby airports, he wouldn't have airports as far away as Cleveland covered.

Eddie made reservations for a Saturday flight six weeks later, since that would take them to within a week of the next scheduled audit, and he didn't want to chance waiting any longer than that. He would have a cool fifty thousand dollars tucked away in the safe deposit box by then, and there was no point in risking last-minute apprehension by becoming greedy.

His plan, when he and Hazel finally took off, was to make some excuse to Nancy to get away for the weekend. He and Hazel would take a train to Cleveland on Friday night and catch their flight on Saturday. By the time Nancy realized he was gone for good, they would already be in Rio under their new names, with no trail behind them that Long Jake Attila could follow.

He hid the plane tickets beneath the handkerchiefs in his top dresser drawer, about the safest place in the

house. Nancy, who sent their laundry out, never bothered to put his away for him when it came back. She merely piled it on his bed for him to handle himself, so she never opened his dresser drawers.

Nancy returned from Buffalo at the end of her two-week stay in an unusually cheerful mood. Her good spirits were only partly due to her mother's complete recovery from her illness, she told Eddie. Just the change in routine had been good for her.

"I ought to get up to Buffalo to see Mom more often," she said. "It's good for both of us, and I won't have the chance to see her for many more years. She's getting on."

"Go see her whenever you want," Eddie said generously. "I can take care of myself."

Nancy took advantage of his agreeableness to return to Buffalo the very next weekend. This time she stayed only a week, but two weekends later she flew back for another week. She began spending as much time in Buffalo as she did in Manhattan.

Eddie had hopes that she would be visiting her mother at the time he and Hazel took off, but the week before their scheduled elopement Nancy flew back from Buffalo and announced she planned to stick around and pay some attention to her husband for at least a couple of weeks.

Eddie began concentrating on an acceptable excuse for going out of town over the next weekend. Then Nancy's brother unknowingly handed him one.

On Tuesday, when Eddie turned in the day's collections, Art Quigley told him Jake wanted to see him in his office. Eddie found his brother-in-law behind his desk, studying a travel folder.

"Oh, hi, Eddie," Long Jake said, glancing up. "I got a chore for you. I want you should run over to the

Duke Travel Agency on Broadway and pick up some flight tickets in my name. They're open until six."

One of the things Eddie resented about his brother-in-law was that he constantly used him as an errand boy. Long Jake had a secretary who could perform such menial chores as this, but Attila seemed to get some kind of kick from making Eddie hop to his bidding.

Eddie didn't let his resentment show. He merely asked with simulated interest, "You going somewhere?"

"Me and Polly both. Miami for a couple of weeks. We leave tomorrow morning. Quig'll be in charge while I'm gone."

This was convenient, Eddie decided. Jake and his wife would be vacationing in Florida when he took off, which considerably simplified matters.

He ran over to the travel agency, picked up the tickets and delivered them back to the office. This got him home a half-hour later than usual, which would automatically have meant a fight a few months back, but Nancy didn't seem in the least put out.

"I turned down the oven," she said after kissing him. "There's still time for a cocktail if you want one. What held you up?"

"Had to run an errand for Jake," he told her.

"He works you too hard," his wife sympathized.

Since her frequent trips to Buffalo began, Nancy's personality had mellowed so much that Eddie began to have some regrets about leaving her. He had no choice now, though. In a couple of more weeks Art Quigley's next audit would disclose the whole fraud, and there was no way Eddie could change back the records he had turned in, even if he were willing to restore the money. Too, Long Jake Attila wasn't likely

to regard restitution and a confession as extenuating circumstances.

Then, for the first time, it occurred to Eddie that Jake's leaving town in the morning gave him the excuse to be out of town over next weekend. He paused in the act of mixing a pair of cocktails to ask casually, "You know Jake and Polly are flying to Miami tomorrow?"

Nancy nodded. "Yes, he told me. He phoned just before you came in."

Eddie was momentarily sidetracked by this news. "Then how come he didn't tell you he'd sent me on an errand that would make me late?" he asked.

Nancy shrugged. "You know Jake. He couldn't care less about anyone else's inconvenience."

"Yeah, I guess." He poured from the shaker into twin glasses and handed her one. "He mention the weekend errand he's sending me on?"

"No. What's that?"

"He wants me to run up to Albany."

"Oh? What for?"

"Some payoffs that have to be made," Eddie said vaguely. "It's best you don't know anything about that, because it's not exactly legal."

"All right," she said agreeably. "How long will you be gone?"

He might as well get as much advantage as possible, he decided. He also decided on a slight change in plans, since it was going to be so easy. He and Hazel might as well drive to Albany, or even farther, sell the car and then catch a train for Cleveland. It would make the trail just that much harder to follow.

"I'll drive up Friday evening and be back Monday morning," he told his wife.

Shortly after five P.M. Wednesday, when Eddie checked into the office with the day's collections at

the usual time, he found dour Art Quigley alone. The accountant told him that Jake and his wife had arrived in Miami safely and Jake had phoned him from his hotel.

"He said to tell you to stick around home tonight in case he wants to reach you," Quigley said. "He may want you to arrange a horse bet for him. He has to check it out a little more first."

That could mean only one thing: Long Jake had wind of a fixed race somewhere. Jake Attila bet only on sure things. In the four years that Eddie had worked for him, Jake had only three times bet on horses, fifty thousand dollars each time, carefully spread among bookies all over the various boroughs. All three races had been fixed, Eddie learned later—always later—until this time. Jake hadn't bothered to pass tips to his brother-in-law that the races were fixed. Eddie hadn't placed a cent on any of them.

Eddie hoped Jake would phone from Miami. It would be fitting revenge for all the menial errands he had run to cash in just once on a tip from Jake with Jake's own money.

Eddie was home alone when the phone call came, Nancy having gone to a show with a girlfriend.

When he picked up the phone, a feminine voice said in his ear, "Long distance for Mr. Edward Adamski, please."

"Speaking," Eddie said.

"Your party is on the line, sir. Go ahead."

Long Jake Attila's voice said, "Eddie?"

"Yeah, Jake. What's up?"

"I want to get a bet down for the seventh tomorrow night at the Batavia harness races, Eddie. You call Max Turpin for me, huh?"

"Sure, Jake. On who and how much?"

"White Lightning, fifty grand on the nose. Tell Max I want it spread thin."

Eddie felt his heartbeat increase. It had to be a fixed race. But he wanted to make absolutely certain.

"Sounds like the fix is in," he said, managing to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"It's in real good," Jake assured him. "Not a chance of a miss."

"How come you had to go all the way to Florida to get a tip on a New York track?" Eddie asked curiously.

"It was set up down here. Most of them are. This is where all the big gamblers hang out when they're not in Las Vegas. You got the bet now?"

"Sure, Jake. White Lightning in the seventh at Batavia tomorrow night, fifty grand on the nose. I'll phone Max right now, but how do I get the money to him?"

"You don't. Tell him to get it from Quig in the morning. I phoned Quig at the office earlier and told him I might be making a bet, so if Max came around to pick up fifty grand, it was okay."

"All right," Eddie said. "I'll take care of it. You having fun down there?"

"I always do," Jake told him.

When Jake hung up, Eddie phoned Max Turpin and caught him in. After explaining what Long Jake wanted, he said, "What time you plan to pick up the money from Quig?"

"Oh, ten, maybe," Turpin said, "That'll give me plenty of time to spread the bets. The books will take them right up to eight P.M."

"Think I'll have you lay a bet for me too," Eddie said. "I'll drop by your place before you go to see Quig. Stick around until I get there."

"Sure," Turpin said. "I'll wait for you."

Eddie decided to risk only ten thousand of the money salted away in the safe deposit box. He wasn't enough of a gambler to risk everything, even on a supposedly sure bet. Just in case something went wrong, it wouldn't be a tragedy if he and Hazel had to squeeze by on forty thousand, but it would be if they were completely wiped out.

Eddie was at the bank when it opened. Fifteen minutes later he entered Turpin's Pool Parlor.

While the pool parlor brought its fat, balding proprietor a fairly good legitimate income, it was really only a front for Max Turpin's various semi-legal and totally illegal activities. The man was one of Long Jake's wholesalers, he was a fence for stolen goods and he acted as a go-between for big bettors who wanted to place a lot of money on a particular horse race without letting the bookies know that something was up. He had on call a small army of runners, most of whom, like Max, had a dozen other irons in the fire and therefore were content with the small amount of work he threw them. Through his runners Max could spread the bet in small amounts over as many as a hundred different bookies. He took a ten percent cut of the winnings for his service, which included a guarantee that neither he nor any of his runners would either pass on the tip or bet the horse.

Eddie found the pool hall proprietor in his private office beyond the poolroom. He tossed a stack of a hundred hundred-dollar bills on the fat man's desk.

"Spread that on White Lightning's nose too," Eddie said. "And don't mention it to Quig when you pick up Jake's dough from him."

After riffling through the bills in a rapid count, Turpin shrugged. "Sure," he said, with no curiosity in his voice as to where Eddie had gotten the money.

The race results from Batavia didn't come over the

radio until midnight. Nancy was in bed by then, but Eddie sat up to catch them. He was pleased to learn that White Lightning had won by three lengths.

He was rather disappointed at the price, however. The horse must have gone in as odds-on favorite, because he paid only \$2.80 to win. He got out a pencil and paper and figured out his profit at only \$3,600 after Max Turpin took out his commission, plus the breakage.

He had been thinking in terms of a thirty or forty-thousand-dollar profit. Still, it was better than losing.

Friday morning after breakfast, Eddie salvaged his plane tickets from beneath his handkerchiefs and packed his largest suitcase. He couldn't think of any plausible excuse to give Nancy for taking more than one suitcase, and since he was never coming back, he wanted to take along as much of his clothing and personal possessions as he could carry.

Nancy was washing the breakfast dishes in the kitchen when he carried the suitcase into the front room. She came to the door and regarded it with surprise.

"Aren't you coming home for dinner before you take off for Albany?" she asked.

"I want to get on the road early," he said. "I'll catch a sandwich en route."

He went over to give her a good-bye kiss.

"Drive careful, honey," she told him.

"Sure," he said. "See you Monday."

He phoned Max Turpin from the nearest drugstore.

"You hit," the pool hall proprietor told him. "You've got thirteen thousand, six hundred coming."

"When do I collect?" Eddie asked.

"Oh, any time after eight P.M."

"So late?" Eddie protested. He had planned to be on the road with Hazel long before then.



"My runners have to collect from half the bookies in greater New York," Turpin said. "It takes time."

"All right," Eddie conceded. "I'll see you at eight sharp."

He drove to the office, picked up a supply of new numbers tickets and started making his rounds. By humping, he made it halfway through his schedule by noon. After a half-hour break for lunch he drove to the bank and cleared out his safe deposit box. He put the money in a briefcase he had brought along and locked it in the trunk of his car.

Then he resumed his rounds and finished by three-thirty. He drove over to Hazel's, where they skimmed off a final thousand dollars from his last day's collection.

Hazel had quit her job at Madden's Supper Club several days before, had closed out her bank account and was all set to take off except for a little final packing. Their original plan had been to leave town as soon as Eddie made his final check-in, and catch dinner somewhere on the road. When Eddie broke the news that they wouldn't be able to leave until after eight P.M., she was more pleased to learn they would be richer by another \$3,600 than she was upset by the delay.

"We can have dinner somewhere in town and collect the money just before we leave," she said. "I can wait in the car."

"I'd better pick you up here afterward," he told her. "Too many people around that neighborhood know me. Why make it any easier for Jake to get on our trail by letting somebody get a glimpse of the woman I took off with?"

"All right," she agreed rather reluctantly.

"We'll have plenty of time for dinner first, if we go

to some restaurant near here," he said. "I'll be back after I check in my collections."

"All right," she said again.

The check-in went as smoothly as usual. Eddie drove back to collect Hazel and they had dinner in a nearby restaurant. He dropped her back at her apartment at twenty minutes to eight and told her to be ready to be picked up about twenty after.

"Here," he said in afterthought, handing her the plane tickets. "You better hang onto these, so we're sure they don't get lost."

She took the tickets, gave him a quick kiss and slid from the car.

At exactly eight Eddie parked in front of Turpin's Pool Parlor. There was no one in the poolroom but two oversized men playing pool. At first Eddie was surprised, because usually the place was crowded. Then he recognized the men as Bat Manelli and Tony Spatz, two of Long Jake Attila's goons, and guessed that the other clientele had departed by request so there would be no witnesses. Eddie turned to leave too, but he was too late.

"Huh-uh," a raspy voice said behind him.

Eddie paused and glanced over his shoulder. Bat Manelli wasn't even looking his way—he was drawing back his cue for a final shot—but Tony Spatz was pointing a large automatic at Eddie.

Discouragedly Eddie reversed course and walked over to the men. Spatz gestured toward the office door with his gun. Eddie went over and opened the door, with Spatz trailing him. Bat Manelli laid down his cue and followed.

Max Turpin was not in his office. Instead, Long Jake Attila sat behind his desk. Nancy was seated in a chair alongside the desk. The two gunmen closed the door behind them and leaned against it.

Eddie looked from Jake to Nancy and got a sweet smile from his wife. He looked back at his brother-in-law and met total lack of expression. He said rather inanely, "I thought you were in Florida."

"I never went," Jake said coldly. "When I phoned Nancy to tell her good-bye, she'd just found your plane tickets from Cleveland to Rio."

Eddie looked at his wife and got an even sweeter smile. "I was feeling guilty about neglecting you so much," she said. "So I decided to put your fresh laundry away."

Even in his numbed state of shock Eddie couldn't help admiring her acting ability. When he thought he was making up a plausible excuse to leave town over the weekend, he had merely been letting her know just when he planned to take off for good.

He looked back at Jake, who said, "Those tickets smelled like a knockdown to me, particularly since receipts had been off over five percent for nearly three months. I canceled my Florida trip and had Quig do some fast checking with wholesalers."

Eddie licked his lips. "You—you called me from Florida."

Attila slowly shook his head. "From my office. That long-distance operator was my secretary."

While Eddie was absorbing this, Attila went on, "I could have pulled you in and had you worked over to tell me where the money was, but it seemed simpler to make you bring it to me voluntarily. That's why the fake, fixed race. I figured you couldn't resist that. You crossed me up by only risking part of it, though; not that it really mattered. You had to come pick up your winnings, and I rigged it so the payoff would be after the time I figured you planned to blow town. That way you'd probably have everything in your car

you planned to take to Rio, including the rest of the money."

Eddie said huskily, "What if White Lightning hadn't won?"

Jake shrugged. "He was all of the experts' best-pick-of-the-day. But if he hadn't, Max would have phoned you that he hadn't been able to get your bet down, so you could come pick up your ten grand." He glanced over at the two gunmen leaning against the door. "Shake him down."

They did a thorough job, piling the contents of Eddie's pockets on the desk before Long Jake. The latter examined the bill clip, which contained only about a hundred dollars, tossed it aside and picked up the car keys.

Letting them dangle, he asked, "Anybody waiting outside in your car?"

Eddie shook his head.

"There were two plane tickets," Nancy said, no longer smiling. "The second one must have been for a woman."

"There's nobody out in the car," Eddie said.

His wife glanced at her brother. "Maybe he planned to meet her in Cleveland. Too bad. I would have liked a look at her."

"It's less complicated this way," Jake said. "If he'd brought her along, I would have had to have her shut up." He tossed the keys to Bat Manelli. "Bring everything he's got in the car in here."

The oversized gunman nodded and went out.

Nancy got to her feet. "I don't think I'll stay for the finale," she said. She went over to the door, turned and gave Eddie a final smile. "Good-bye, dear."

"Wait, honey," he said with a touch of panic. "You know what Jake'll do to me unless you ask him not to.

I know I was doing you a dirty trick, but I swear I'll make it up to you if you talk him into going easy."

Her smile widened. "You don't understand, dear. The guilt feeling that made me put away your laundry didn't come just from my having neglected you, but because I've had a lover in Buffalo for some time. It's going to be quite convenient for me to be a widow."

She swept out of the room just as Bat Manelli carried the suitcase and the briefcase in.

Eddie had the despairing thought that at least Hazel would have some small consolation for all their trouble; she had two airplane tickets she could convert to cash.

## ONE WAY

John Lutz

How did it come to pass? Here I walk alone, on this mad street, among these mad people. They see the bright blue of my uniform, the silver glitter that is my badge, and not a few of them instinctively shrink backward on the sun-warmed pavement, against the sun-warmed brick of old buildings. The old and grizzled Irishman who runs the newsstand looks at me with only passing interest; the barefoot children, the undershirted men and cheaply dressed women look at me and then look away. It doesn't bother me to see the men and women look away, but it does the children.

Horns honk, automobile tires whirl on hot concrete and the motorists look at me unconsciously for assurance, glad to see a policeman as they are driving down such a street. The sweating deliverymen in open vans that might be carrying money, they all look at me for assurance, and I look back and smile slightly, with my whole face.

A dark, shirtless child runs down the wide sidewalk, in a line parallel to my line of walk. The broken red wagon he's pulling hits a raised seam in the cement, rattling crazily and bouncing as he runs faster to get past me quickly. I place my hand on his shoulder.

"Have you seen Tony Randello?" I ask.

He stares up at me in the sudden silence of the still wagon, his eyes wide, his thin, bony shoulder squirming uneasily beneath my hand. "I don' know no Tony Randello, sir. Honest."

"Honest," I repeat after him. He looks at the ground. "I believe you, son," I say, taking my hand from his shoulder. He runs down the street and turns into an alley, the unrhythmic jangle of the wagon echoing away.

These people don't trust me, I know. How could they? It's my first day here, and it takes time, so much time, to get to know these people. There is a man about thirty years old sitting on the stoop of one of the towering, darkened tenement buildings that reach like rows of old fingers into the sky. He is wearing a brightly colored, flowered sport shirt, unbuttoned halfway down to reveal the hair on his chest. He looks at me with feigned unconcern as I start to approach him.

"Where can I find Tony Randello?" I ask.

"Wherever he's at," the man answers, his blue eyes flat.

I stare into those eyes a long time, and he looks away and reaches inside his shirt and scratches his chest where I know it doesn't itch.

"This Tony whatever-his-name-is," he says, "what's he gone and done?"

"Things he'll be sorry for," I say, and I feel an insect-like trickle of sweat inside my own blue uniform shirt and suppress the urge to run my hand over it.

The man smiles and shrugs his shoulders. "Well, it don't concern me, Officer, 'cause I never even heard of Tony somethin'-or-other, not on this street, anyways."

"How long have you lived here?" I ask.

"All my life," he answers. "Everybody lives here all his life."

I turn and walk away.

Half a block farther down I see a husky, squinting man standing next to one of those small outside fruit stands that you don't often see anymore. He's wearing a faded blue shirt, dirty, damp, with the sleeves rolled up over strong, tanned arms. His face, too, is damp with beads of perspiration, and I know that he's been standing there in the sun a long time.

I stop in front of him.

"Apples are good today," he says, his dark eyes smiling.

"Listen," I say, "do you know where I can find Tony Randello?"

"Who's he?"

"A kid about fourteen. Slim, dark hair, nice-looking, dresses kind of flashy whenever he can. He's building up quite a record with the law."

The man shakes his head. "That sounds like a lot of 'em. There's maybe hundreds like that on this street, but I don't recall the name Randello." He shakes his head harder. "No, I don't think there's no Randello around here." He makes a jerking motion with his thumb toward an old man sitting on a stoop farther down the street. "Ol' Bert, there, maybe he can help you, if he's sober. He knows everybody."

"Thanks," I say, walking away.

"You wanna taste a nice apple?" he calls after me, but I don't bother to look back.

"You're Bert," I say to the old man.

"Tell me something new," he answers. He is a very small old man, with faded eyes and a thin, withered mouth, like one might see on a shrunken head.

"I want to find Tony Randello," I tell him.

"You fellas always want to find somebody," he



says. "Makes me feel just about as good as a taxpayer."

"Just answer the question," I say, and there's something in the way I say it that makes him become serious.

"There ain't any Randellos on this street," he says.

"This is a kid, about fourteen, slim, dark."

The old man nods his head toward the ever-present children on the street. "Lots of 'em are fourteen and slim and dark."

I begin to walk away.

"Wait," he says, and he runs a skeletal hand over hair that is thin wisps of dirty gray. "There used to be some Randellos on this street, in the next block, I think. They had a kid name of Tony that was always in trouble with the law, but that's been . . . twenty years ago. Big Tony, the old man, drunk himself to the grave an' took the old lady with him." He squints his faded eyes and looks up and about at the decaying tenements. "But that ain't rare around here."

"You don't remember what happened to the rest of the family, do you?"

"I ain't even sure their name was Randello," he says. He lies back against the angled steps and closes his eyes to the sun. I see the outlines of a bottle in his pocket.

I walk on. Heat rises in waves, like gasoline vapor, from the concrete before me. It dizzies me and I stop for a moment, looking up and breathing deeply. The towering tenement buildings seem to sway against the blue hardness of the sky. I grip my forehead and look down. One building is as good as another for a place to start. They are all alike, inside and outside.

There is no door to the entrance of the building I choose, and I stand on the ancient, broken tile inside the doorway and listen to the noises of the street.

Beneath the row of useless doorbell buttons sits a broken baby stroller, and on the walls are the usual four letter words that have been ineffectually scratched out by some of the tenants. I climb the creaking stairs and begin to hear the muffled voices, the too-loud radio, the baby crying. The odor of a dozen foods clings greasily to the walls. There is something in the air that makes my eyes water.

I knock on the first door, and a woman's voice tells me from inside to go away. Somewhere above me in the building a dog barks. I move on to the next door and knock loudly. It opens.

The woman is middle-aged, stout and dark-eyed, with black hair curled too tightly by a cheap permanent. Behind her is the threadbare furniture, the cracked walls.

"I'm looking for Tony Randello," I say to her. "A young kid."

She smiles and shakes her head. "Not Randello," she says. "This is Magello."

I look past her. "May I come in?"

She hesitates, but because of my uniform she steps aside and lets me enter.

I walk across the bare floor and look into the tiny kitchen.

"I told you there is no Randello," the woman says in a worried voice. "Here there is only Magello. My husband is William Magello."

Nodding to her, I walk to a closed door and open it into a bedroom. A small girl of about ten is lying on the bed holding up a doll. She looks at me but I ignore her and close the door again. There is one more closed door. "*Tony!*" I call loudly.

"No Tony," the woman says behind me. "There is no Tony!"

"What the hell's goin' on?" a man's muffled voice

asks from behind the door. The door opens and the man stands there, wearing a robe and old slippers. His graying hair is mussed. "What is it, Officer?" he asks, seeing the uniform. "I was sleeping, I work nights." He makes a gesture toward the bedroom with his hand.

"I'm looking for someone," I say, brushing past him.

The bedroom is empty. I rip the covers and mattress off the bed. I throw open the closet door. There is no one.

I return to the living room and grip the man by the front of his robe, hear the material rip. "Where is he?" I ask, and I shake the man. I scream it this time, "*I know he lives here! I know!*"

Behind me the woman screams shrilly. Doors slam, and the dog begins to bark again.

I am crying, but it is someone else crying.

Then I hear it, and I release the man. It grows louder, the unmistakable urgent despair of police sirens.

The sirens become deafening, and then they fade to a loud growl. I walk into the hall, down the creaking stairs and outside to meet them.

Flashing red lights battle the sun. The officers look at me strangely and their eyes narrow. Their pistols drawn, they advance on me and hold me by each arm. One of them holsters his pistol, and cold handcuffs are clamped on my wrists. A silent crowd has gathered to watch the unusual spectacle, policemen holding, handcuffing a policeman.

Mr. Magello, in his torn robe, is caressing the air with his right hand and talking to a policeman while Mrs. Magello stares curiously at me from beneath her too-tight cheap permanent with something like pity. In a few minutes a green car stops at the curb

and Dr. Moritz gets out. His face is unlined, as it always is.

Dr. Moritz, also, talks to the other policeman as the two officers who are holding me lead me to the wagon. “. . . His name’s Tony Randello . . . wouldn’t harm anyone . . .” I hear him saying, “. . . escaped before . . . for the criminally insane . . .”

They open the patrol wagon doors wide, and the dim, caged interior appears cool and sheltering after the heat and the steady gaze of the crowd. I can still hear Dr. Moritz as I’m prodded inside. “. . . Grew up on this street . . . steals a policeman’s uniform and just walks around down here, searching . . .”

“Searching . . .” I repeat silently to myself.

The doors slam shut.

**THAT GUY  
WHAT  
LAUGHS LAST**  
Phillip Tremont

By the time he was sixty, Big Freddy was the most powerful criminal in America and a happy man. He had reached the top not only in his chosen profession, but also in an equally demanding avocation—the production of elaborate practical jokes. He felt fairly certain of achieving his last remaining jokes. He felt fairly certain of achieving his last remaining major ambition, which was to die in bed of old age. Thus, he was not in the least alarmed when the tall brunette lovely in the Club 22 turned out to be another brakeman's daughter.

“Who's the girl over there the boys are talking to?” he now asked Dino Clark, his vice-president in charge of off-track betting.

Dino turned to study the girl in the blue jersey sheath. “I've met her, I think. Margo Something-or-other.”

And then she was waving a pert good-bye to Bill Vitale, vice-president for the numbers racket, and Vinny Gio, unions, and the boys were coming over to Freddy's table.

“Who's your friend?” Freddy asked.

“Oh, Margo?” Bill said. “Just a girl. Funny thing the boss should ask about her, eh, Vinny?”

“Margo?” Vinny said. “Yeah, *she* was asking about

you, boss. She thinks you're the handsomest guy in the room."

Freddy flushed pleasantly. He sat up straighter to slim the bulge of his waistline and patted his thinning gray hair. "Well, boys, I could believe that twenty years ago——"

"She always liked mature men," Dino said. "Told me so."

"Some broads are like that," Bill said.

"Lots of them," Vinny said.

Freddy slipped into a Mohammedan reverie. By the time he had finished half his *bouillabaisse*, he had to know more about the girl. "She married?" he asked the table at large.

"Who?" Bill asked.

"You mean Margo?" Dino asked.

"Margo's divorced," Vinny said.

"Yeah, she lives with her father," Bill said.

Freddy puckered his lips and drummed his fingers thoughtfully. A forty-year climb up from the ranks had taught him that gangsters of prominence are more often slain by ambitious underlings than by their rivals. He had learned, too, that boss hoodlums with a despotic attitude toward the girl friends of their lieutenants tended to die younger than others. That was why he wanted time to phrase his next question, for he was frequently certain that these men would cheerfully murder him, and that the only consideration staying their hands was a three-cornered distrust of each other.

For the past decade, Freddy had been gradually relinquishing his power, delegating more and more authority to the men lunching with him now. It was a deliberate program to slip into the role of elder statesman, one above the lethal rivalries of lesser chieftains. With admirable self-discipline, he had

curbed his most rankling idiosyncrasies—an interest in beauty, providing it be feminine, and a fondness for staging complicated jokes. About the only fun he had out of life anymore was sending a case of spaghetti every Christmas to Lucky Luciano in exile in Italy.

But this Margo had gotten under his skin. He wanted only to be sure there was no violence-prone individual lurking in the background. "Is she anybody's girl?" he asked.

"No," Vinny said. "She's playing the field."

"She could make some guy very happy," Dino said.

"I wonder why no one has grabbed her off before now," Bill mused aloud.

"Her father is very strict," Vinny said.

A light began to dawn for Freddy. The responses were coming far too casually, with a tone that rang of rehearsal. He stuck his fork into a *baba au rhum*. "What does her father do for a living?" he asked.

"He's a brakeman on the Long Island Railroad," Dino said.

Freddy almost choked on the pastry. He felt a sudden warm affection for Dino, Bill and Vinny, though only a moment ago he had regarded them as potential assassins. He felt like a father seeing his son graduate with honors. And his boys had spent their lifetime in a milieu which valued crude visual humor over the spoken jest. Freddy therefore took it as a compliment that they should go to such pains to set him up for the hoax he saw so plainly now. He was inordinately pleased.

The plot they had chosen was so familiar to practical jokesters that it was known under the generic term of *The Engineer's Daughter*. The only setting required was an isolated house in the country near a railroad track. The actors needed were a beautiful

young girl and a truculent-appearing man willing to don coveralls and a railroader's cap and carry a huge pistol loaded with blanks.

The conspirators had only to convince their victim that the girl was terribly interested in him. Then, when they brought word that the fiercely possessive engineer (or fireman, or brakeman) was making an overnight run, the flattered Lothario was driven out to the waiting daughter. After the girl had enough time to say "Hi," her "father" crashed into the house, bellowing, "So you're the swine who's ruining my daughter!" and blazing away with his horse pistol. In mortal terror, the victim plunged through a window and spent the night shivering in a cornfield.

Freddy shook his head, amazed that the boys thought they could trap him with that hoary old gag—he, Big Freddy, famed for decades as the underworld's leading prankster, celebrated for the inventive comic flair he brought to even routine eliminations.

Freddy smiled inwardly, remembering . . .

There had been Big Al, for instance, boss of Chicago, where Freddy had first come into prominence. He had lured away a particularly lush chorus girl with whom Freddy had been dallying for years by the low maneuver of proposing marriage.

Freddy was a good sport about it. He sent a handsome gift to the happy couple, danced at their wedding, and slapped the bridegroom on the back as he climbed into his touring car to begin the honeymoon trip. Bride and groom expired four miles out of town where Big Al unaccountably drove the car through a fence and off a cliff.

When their bodies were found in the morning, it was noticed that the white line dividing the highway had been painted black for some distance. A new white strip had been painted in a gentle curve that



led off the road. On the shoulder of the road—beside the gap in the fence—stood a handsomely lettered new sign: Lovers' Leap.

Then there was Big Joe, who was Freddy's predecessor as boss of the whole country. A champion swimmer in his youth, Big Joe still believed in plenty of fresh air and exercise—for everybody. He held week-long conferences and get-togethers at his country estate. An inescapable part of the regimen was a plunge into the outdoor pool at the crack of dawn, no matter what the weather or the season.

Big Joe would beat his barrel chest and bellow at his bluelipped guests: "Swimming is the greatest conditioner in the world! Look at me! I can swim like a fish! I never miss my morning swim, summer or winter!"

The morning after Freddy's last stay at the estate (it was October), Big Joe bounced out of bed, climbed into his trunks and trotted down to the pool, his ardor for the rigorous life only slightly dimmed by the absence of anyone to herd into the freezing waters ahead of him. In the gray light of dawn, he dove happily into the pool and found himself sharing it with two angry, and hungry, tiger sharks.

Freddy was nursing a head cold when they brought him the news. "He could swim like a fish, all right," he chortled, in between snuffles, "but not as good as some of them!"

Freddy downed the last of his brandy and shook off his nostalgia. He gazed fondly at the three men sitting with him. *So they wanted to joust with the old master, did they? Well, why not have some fun with them? It would be like the old days.*

"I'd like to see that girl again," he announced.

"Who?" Dino asked.

"Margo," Vinny said. "The boss means Margo."

"Well, if you'd like to get together with her, boss," Bill said delicately, "we could probably arrange it."

"It'll be tough, though," Dino said.

"Why?" Vinny asked. "She's got big eyes for the boss. She told us so, herself."

"It's that father of hers," Bill explained. "He watches her night and day. She told us he packs a gun."

"Wait a minute," Freddy said, feeding them the next line, "didn't somebody say her father works for the railroad?"

"Yeah, that's right," they chorused blankly.

"Well," Freddy said, spreading his hands, "don't these railroad guys have to make overnight trips every couple of days?"

The word came from Dino two days later: Margo's father would be away all that night; the brakeman's daughter was even now ecstatically awaiting Freddy's coming at her father's remote Long Island home.

When Freddy stepped into Dino's Cadillac at the curb outside his Sutton Place townhouse, he found Bill and Vinny waiting in the back seat. He chuckled happily and slapped his knees as he settled between them.

Vinny passed out the cigars. Freddy accepted a light and leaned back to enjoy the long ride out to the Island, squirming to settle himself comfortably because the shoulder-holstered Luger was bulky under his arm. It was the first time he'd carried a gun in more than thirty years, he reflected. *By gosh, it was like old times.*

An hour later, Dino braked the car to a stop before a sagging two-story frame house in the wilds of Nassau County. Freddy glanced around him and grinned. The boys had chosen the site well. There was

no other house in sight. The only sounds were of crickets, terribly industrious ones. And fifty yards away, he could make out the hump of the Long Island Railroad right-of-way.

"This is it," Dino said.

"Enjoy yourself, boss," Bill said, swinging open the door.

"We'll pick you up in the morning," Vinny said, slapping his back.

Freddy waved to them from the sidewalk, wondering how far away they would park. Surely close enough to see him sprint out the back door, coattails flying. When he turned back to the house, Margo stood in the open door, the lamplight behind her.

She flew into his arms when he mounted the porch. "Oh, darling, I've waited so long for this moment!"

Freddy patted her back affectionately, moving inside. "You're sure your father won't be home tonight, lovely? They tell me he carries a gun."

Her hands on his chest, Margo eased him down on the sofa. "He won't be back. Tonight is ours!"

Freddy's glance took in the Scotch set out with ice and glasses on the coffee table. "Well, just in case he surprises us," he said, slipping the Luger out of the holster, "I'll be ready for him."

Margo's eyes widened in surprise and terror. "Say! What is this! They didn't tell me you'd——"

Freddy eyed her sternly. "If anybody comes through that door tonight, honey, I'll shoot this thing and shoot it straight." Carefully, he set the Luger down at his knee.

He dropped his arm around Margo's shoulders, pulling her close to him, enjoying her fright. The girl had thought she was playing a part in a harmless charade; now she was sure she was about to witness a killing.

"What are you going to do?" she wailed.

"I'm going to get the last laugh," Freddy chuckled. "I always do." He was thinking now of the poor jerk who would burst into the room in a moment, shooting off his blanks. Freddy dissolved in laughter, imagining the look on his face when he found himself staring into the Luger.

"You never heard of Lovers' Leap?" he asked the girl. Tears were streaming down his face as he tried to suck in a breath between the bursts of laughter. "You never heard of the guy who could swim like a fish?"

Margo's nails dug into his arm beseechingly. "Please! Get out of here!"

The front door slammed. "Margo!" a voice belated. "Who have you got in here with you?"

"No one!" the girl shrieked. "No one! Absolutely no one!"

"It's too late now," Freddy said, holding the Luger out, leveling it.

"So you're the fiend who's ruining my daughter!" There, like an old-time actor, stood the brakeman, in coveralls and a long-peaked cap that shaded his eyes, the spout on his oil can fully two feet long, a huge cartridge belt cinched around his waist. The muzzle of the ancient revolver in his hand looked as large as the entrance to the Holland Tunnel.

"Stand up and get your head blown off like a man," the brakeman intoned. A thick woolly mustache was glued under his nose. He raised the revolver until it was aimed dead center at Freddy's forehead. Flame and noise belched from the gun.

Freddy brought the Luger from behind his back.

"Run, honey!" Margo screamed.

Freddy aimed carefully and squeezed off the whole clip.

The ludicrous oil can dropped from the brakeman's hand. The girl leaped from the sofa and threw herself into the man's arms. Unaccountably, he was still on his feet. Freddy had known the man would not slump to the floor dead—the Luger, too, was loaded with blanks—but he'd imagined that his target would flee in fright.

Two figures emerged from the shadows of the hall and stood beside the smiling brakeman. Vinny and Bill. His arm around the girl's waist, Dino raised the hand that still held the pistol and tossed off the peaked cap and plucked loose the bushy mustache. The three men wore broad smiles.

Freddy's jaw dropped. Then he grinned shamefacedly. "You sure topped me this time boys. I must be getting old." A chill knot of fear was growing in his stomach. There was a loud roaring in his ears.

Dino glanced at his watch. "That's the helicopter, right on time."

"We figured you'd figure this old gag out," Bill told Freddy.

"And we figured you'd spring a gun," Vinny said. "Loaded with blanks, naturally. You wouldn't commit any murders at this stage of your career." He held a slim automatic in his hand, the muzzle pointing negligently at Freddy's midriff.

"The first bullet in this old cannon was a blank," Dino said.

"But the rest aren't," Bill said. He, too, held a gun.

"You see," Vinny said, "we figure we don't really need you and your corny gags now that you've given us so much power in the organization. Our problem of stepping into your shoes up to now has been that we didn't trust each other. But we worked out this way for us all to have the goods on each other."

"All we needed," Dino said, "was for your body to

be found miles away from where the cops could figure we could possibly be. In a minute, a helicopter is going to land on the front lawn. Two minutes after it puts us down on the roof of a warehouse in Jersey, fifty miles from here, we'll be guests at a testimonial dinner for a retiring police chief. Sweet alibi, eh?"

Looking into the raised pistols, Freddy still couldn't believe it. "You went to an awful lot of trouble with this scheme, boys."

"We wanted to have the last laugh, for once," Dino said.

"That's right," Vinny and Bill said.

And then they pulled the triggers.

## THE PRIVATE EYE OF IRVING ANVIL

Richard Hardwick

The plain, black, and considerably chipped lettering on the dimpled glass read: *Irving Anvil—Confidential Investigations*. The young woman hesitated before the door, her sallow face reflecting her indecision. Her teeth worried momentarily at her nether lip as she cast a longing glance down the corridor toward the vanished elevator. Then, resolutely, she lifted a thin hand and rapped.

Inside the diminutive office a small man sat at a desk and engaged in a quick catechism with himself. Lundquist, the landlord, did not have that polite overtone to his knocking, especially when the rent was two months behind as it now was. On the other hand, the tone could well be a ruse, an effort to throw him off-balance.

The knock came again, and the man pulled his feet off the desk, turned the paperback novel face down and covered it with a file folder. "Yeah? Who is it?"

The young woman eased the door open just enough to reveal a pie-slice of the cluttered room and the man sitting at the desk looking back suspiciously at her. He relaxed noticeably when he saw her, and she stepped into the office.

"Mr. Anvil?" she said in a clear and obviously nervous voice.

She did not look like a process server, he told himself, but then, a good process server should not look like a process server. His eyes narrowed. "What's on your mind?"

She closed the door and moved toward the desk where the detective waved her into a chair. She sat primly, on the very edge of the seat, as if poised to bound away at the slightest alarm.

"Do you . . . find missing persons?"

He leaned back, reading her through slitted eyes. "It depends." The clothes were well tailored, though not expensive. In fact, a talented girl could have made them herself. "What about the cops? Can't they find this person?"

"They haven't looked. What I mean is, I haven't told the police, because in a way Herbie isn't really missing—do you understand?"

He sucked slowly on a molar. "Does anybody?"

"He is, but he isn't, is what I'm trying to say."

Anvil sighed tiredly and rocking forward on his swivel chair, bent a cynical smile on his visitor. "Let me fill in the blanks. This Herman, he's your husband, right? And you think Herman and some doll have gone away for fun and games and now you want to get him back without the official fuss and bother of the fuzz. Right?"

She shook her head. "His name is Herbie, and no, sir, Herbie and I aren't married, not yet, and I know Herbie wouldn't go away with another woman, at least not without telling me."

"Without—*telling* you?"

The young woman was shaking her head again. "I'm getting this all mixed up, Mr. Anvil. Maybe I ought to start over again, at the beginning."

"A very good starting point," Anvil agreed, and leaned back to listen.



"My name is Dianne Swann," she said, gulping down a breath. "I was born in——"

"Not that beginning! Just pick it up where this Herbie disappeared—but didn't."

"Alright. Herbie Jackson and I are engaged. We've been engaged for nearly five years, and in all that time nothing like this has ever happened. It was four days ago. He called me from work—Herbie works in the shipping department of the Calgary Doll Company—and he sounded excited and nervous and said he was going to be out of town for a while and had to break our regular Friday and Saturday night dates. He said it was something secret and important and couldn't explain. Well, before I could say a word he said good-bye and hung up, and that's the last I've heard from him."

"What about this doll factory? Did you call there?"

"Yes, sir. Herbie had already gone, and Mr. Blount, Herbie's boss, said he was taking a week or two off and he didn't know where Herbie went."

"And you don't buy that?"

"Herbie's vacation wasn't due until April. Something's wrong, I just know there is."

Anvil nodded sagely, and picking up a pencil made several notes on a pad. One was a reminder to pick up his laundry. "How about his pals? The place he lives?"

She nodded again. "I talked to some of the fellows he hangs around with and they don't know anything. What really got me worried was when I went to his apartment and saw the two men coming out of it."

"Two men?"

She nodded quickly. "Two men I never saw before. I walked right by as if I were going to some other apartment, and when they had gone down the stairs I hurried back and checked the apartment. The only

things missing are three shirts, some underwear, socks, and his gray suit. And his suitcase."

"How'd you get into the pad?"

"I have a key."

A worldly smile flickered briefly on Anvil's lips. "Key to the pad, huh. And you're pretty familiar with his wardrobe, too."

"Yes, sir," she replied innocently. "I do Herbie's laundry so we can save money. We both work. I'm with the Sewage Department. I'm a clerk-typist, in Drainage."

Anvil felt unaccountably relieved at this simple and straightforward explanation. "I see. Well, getting back to your question, I do find missing persons. At least, I try. It can consume quite a bit of time, though, and to a private cop time is dough and vice versa."

"Oh, I'm willing to pay whatever it costs," Dianne Swann hastened to say. She rummaged through her purse and brought up a small sheaf of bills. "I've got fifty dollars, and if it costs more I could pay so much a month, maybe five dollars. And when you find Herbie he could pay another five dollars."

"Five dollars a month, maybe ten——" He rubbed his hand slowly across his face, wishing vainly that Lundquist could have heard that. "Let me give you some advice, Miss Swann, *free* advice. You leave Herbie be and he'll come home by and by, wagging his tail behind him. You'll still have your fifty clams and——"

Tears gathered in Dianne Swann's eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. Her lips, which Anvil noticed for the first time as being full and rather fetching, trembled.

He rose from his chair. "Now don't cry. Miss Swann, look, I—maybe we could run over to his apartment and have a look-see," he heard himself

offering. He seemed to remember having read somewhere that the most powerful force on earth was women's tears. There was something to it.

The young woman stood up, blinking back the tears. "Oh, *thank* you, Mr. Anvil!"

They left the office, and as he locked the door he said, "Don't get your hopes up. I still think your boyfriend's just off having a little fun."

Anvil had not been aware that she was so much taller than he until they walked side by side down the corridor. His eyes were barely on a level with her chin, and though he was not particularly sensitive about his height, or lack of it, he found himself straightening his spine as they boarded the creaky elevator and descended to street level.

Following Dianne Swann's instructions, Anvil tooled his vintage car across town and pulled up before an apartment house on Eighth Street. It was a section of the city which had once been considered fashionable, but which over the past four or five decades had gradually sunk into the quagmire of mediocrity and now boasted only cheap apartments and rooming houses.

Herbie Jackson's flat was on the second floor. Dianne Swann opened the door with her key and let them in. It was an ordinary efficiency, one room with a sofa bed, closet, a bathroom to one side, and an alcove containing a doll-sized stove and refrigerator on the other. On the lone table was a picture of Dianne Swann, a poor likeness, probably taken by Herbie himself, Anvil surmised.

"I can't imagine what those two men were doing here," Dianne Swann said. "Nothing seems to have been disturbed. What do you think we might find?"

"You never know," he said cryptically, walking casually about, picking up an ashtray here, a salt cel-

lar there. A piece of paper lay partially concealed behind the girl's picture, and he snatched it up. "Hmmmmmm." He frowned and held it at arm's length. "Listen to this. *I hb-pk rl-must-cats. Also detgnt.*" He pursed his lips. "Some kind of code, obviously. I think we're onto something with this."

Dianne Swann laughed, and taking the paper looked at it briefly and nodded. "That's a grocery list I wrote for Herbie! It means one pound hamburger, package of rolls, mustard, catsup, and detergent. I do——"

"I know," he muttered darkly, taking the list and tossing it aside. "You do his laundry to save money."

"Wait," she said. She picked up the paper again. "There's something on the other side. Look."

There were several lines of pencil scrawl in a different handwriting from the list. *1005* (it read) *Error ret. shpmnt 1-16. Trans-ship Blains. acct. 399. Check all poss!!!*

He looked at Dianne Swann again, suspiciously. "What d'ya make of that?"

She shook her head. "I don't know, unless it has something to do with Herbie's work. Something about a shipment?"

"Hmmmm," he said, preferring to keep his neck drawn in this time.

"That's funny," Dianne Swann said.

"What's funny?"

"Well, that 1-16, that could mean January 16th. That was the day Herbie disappeared."

"And you say his boss told you Herbie was just taking some time off?"

"Yes." Her eyes began to cloud up rapidly. "I just know something terrible has happened to him."

Anvil cleared his throat heavily. "I think I better have a talk with this guy Herbie works for. Let's go."

As they drove back across the city, a strange and disquieting feeling began to settle over Anvil. It was completely against everything he believed in, but as he stole a surreptitious glance at Dianne Swann from the corner of his eye, he realized that it was actually happening. He, Iron Irving, was beginning to tumble for this nutty dame.

"I think I'd better do this without tipping anybody down at the doll factory what I'm up to," Anvil said.

Dianne Swann, sitting attentively across the desk in the detective's diminutive office, nodded. "Whatever you say, Mr. Anvil. I just want to find out what's happened to Herbie. That's all that matters."

It gave him an unexpected tug at the old heart-strings, hearing her talk about another man that way. But there was a line between his private life and his work. "Now then, what do you know about this place? Where is it, what are the working hours, and would you happen to have a key?"

"The only key I have is the one to Herbie's apartment. It's the Calgary Doll Company, and the factory is on West Pylant, and Herbie usually got off at five. His boss is Mr. Blount, in shipping. That's downstairs someplace. Herbie told me, but I've never been in there." She bent her head, puzzled. "What will you say to him?"

Anvil smiled slyly. "We operatives have a few tricks up our sleeves, Miss Swann. I'll get what I'm after, and this bird Blount will never know he told me a thing."

"You'll never know how glad I am I came to you," she said.

Anvil knew he was blushing, though he had never done so before in his entire life. He looked at his watch hurriedly, then pursed his lips over tented fingers and said, "Well, they're closing up now. I'll

see this fellow first thing tomorrow. How can I get in touch with you?"

"Can't I help? I mean, while you're out grilling Mr. Blount, can't I stay here and answer your phone or something?"

"What about your job at the Water Department?"

"Sewage," she reminded him. "I'm in Drainage. I'll just take sick leave. Besides, I'm too nervous to be filing all those papers. I'd keep thinking about you being out *there*, and I'd get everything in the wrong place."

He had never exactly thought of himself as being "out there," but it did sound good the way she said it. "Okay. Meet me here at eight in the morning," he said.

At a quarter past eight the following morning, while Dianne Swann went about the near hopeless task of straightening his office, Irving Anvil eased his little car into the parking lot of the Calgary Doll Company. All morning, in his mirror while shaving, in every store window, each traffic light, he had seen Dianne's face, smiling trustingly at him.

He had decided to use the tried and trusty collection dodge to get the information he wanted. He went breezily into the building and told the receptionist that he wanted to talk to Herbie Jackson, who worked in the shipping department.

"Company rule against people talking to employees during working hours," the girl said. She filled in another set of boxes in the crossword puzzle.

Anvil leaned on the desk and gave her a worldly grin. "Now we wouldn't let something like company rules stand in our way, would we?"

She filled in another word. "I don't know about you, buster, but *I* ain't about to blow this job just

because you want to see some jerk in the shipping department."

"Then how about his boss, Mr. Blount? It's okay if I see him, isn't it?"

"That's different. He's a company official. Right through there and down one flight. You'll see Shipping Room on the door down there."

"Thanks, doll."

"Oh, mister!" she called after him as he reached the door to the stairs.

"Yeah?"

"What's a five-letter word for a ringed ouzel?"

"A *what*?"

"*Amsel*!" she said victoriously, bending over the paper.

Anvil let the door close behind him, made his way down to the next floor and into the shipping room, where he stood for a moment, sizing up the operation. There were a number of long tables at which people were putting small boxes into large ones. Wide doors to his right led out onto a loading dock, and to the left other doors led into the factory proper. In the center of the confusion there was a small glassed-in cubicle, with a name lettered on the door: *Mr. Blount*.

Anvil made straightaway for it and rapped lightly on the glass. A large, scowling, baldheaded man looked up from his desk in annoyance. "Yeah?"

The detective opened the door. "Mr. Blount?"

The man pointed to the glass. "Can't you read! Sure I'm Blount!"

"I'm with the Acme Collection Agency. We're trying to get a line on a worker of yours. Fellow named Herbie Jackson."

The annoyance burst into extreme suspicion. "What d'ya want with Herbie?"

"Seems he's gotten behind on his payments."

Before he could go on, Blount pulled a thick black wallet from his hip pocket and opened it. "How much does he owe, and for what? And gimme a receipt."

"How much does he——" Anvil's eyes blinked rapidly at the unexpected turn of events. "I didn't mean you should pay for it, Mr. Blount. I just want to find him so——"

"I ain't got all day, mister. How much is it and what's it for? Herbie's sorta like a son to me, you might say, and I don't like to see the kid being dunned by some louse of a bill collector. How much?"

"It's—it's ten dollars," Anvil stammered. "For an ——" he was staring blankly at an umbrella in the corner of the office "for an umbrella."

The bearlike head leaned over. "An *umbrella*?"

"That's—that's right. He ordered it special. It was monogrammed."

Blount peeled a ten spot out. "If I wasn't so busy I'd look into this further. Gimme the receipt and get outta here."

Anvil scrawled something on a piece of paper and fled. Outside, he stood beside his car for a moment trying to absorb the defeat. Then, staring philosophically at the money, he stuck it into his pocket, vowing to credit it to Dianne Swann's account. He returned to the office.

"Didn't learn much," he told Dianne without elaborating. "This Blount, he's a pretty cagey one. Any calls for me?"

"Only a Mr. Lundquist. He seemed rather anxious to talk to you."

"Yeah, a case I've been working on." He plopped down at the desk. "There's something fishy about this, alright. I think I'd better go back to the doll factory tonight, after they close."



She looked at him wide-eyed. "You mean break in?"

He tried the same smile that had failed on the receptionist earlier. "I won't exactly break in, Miss Swann." He lifted a ring of keys from a desk drawer and jingled them. "Like I said, there are ways."

"I'd like to help."

"Afraid not," he said. "This is man's work."

"But won't you need someone to wait in the car? You know, in case anything goes wrong?"

Emotion held sway over his better judgment, and he said, "Maybe that would be a good idea."

At a few minutes past one A.M., Dianne Swann touched the brake of the car and came to a stop half a block from the darkened factory. "I'll wait right here," she said. "I'll keep the motor running."

"Good girl, Miss Swann," Anvil said as he got out. "Don't worry. This is child's play for a man of my experience." He sauntered away toward the building. Keeping close against the wall to avoid the corner street light, he arrived at the side door which he had previously picked as his point of entry. Here he quietly tried half a dozen keys, found the proper one, and slipped silently into the building.

The shipping room was not the easy target he anticipated, as he had entered the factory from the opposite side from his earlier call, and for a time he became lost in a maze of corridors and offices. But eventually he reached his destination. Stripped of its hubbub and chattering employees, the shipping room was like some modern-day tomb whose archaeologists had gone home for the night. As a child, Anvil had never been able to walk up a darkened stair, or leave an unlighted room without feeling a chill at the nape of his neck. It was there now, like the tiny bare feet of a spider tiptoeing across just below the hairline.

He made his way across the room, past packing tables, to Mr. Blount's cubicle. The door was locked, a simple obstacle for Anvil's formidable ring of keys. In a trice he was inside the office.

Conrad Blount, he had to admit, was a neat man. The desk was cleared, not even a paper clip marring its scarred surface. Extreme neatness, often a sign of an unstable personality, Anvil said to himself, cataloging the observation along with those of his earlier meeting with Blount; neurotic, as in the case of the person who goes about constantly emptying ashtrays, straightening papers, leveling picture frames.

He tried the center drawer of the desk and found it, surprisingly, locked. He redirected his assault against the file cabinet. Locked. Why, he puzzled, would such redundant precautions be taken in such an ordinary place as the shipping room of a doll factory? The building was locked, the office door locked, and now the desk and files locked. He wondered if such precautions were taken even in the Pentagon.

As he picked his way through his keys in an effort to get into the desk, his thoughts still rambling on, a sound brought him up short. It came from outside the shipping room, in the corridor, and it sounded as though something were being dragged along the floor.

Anvil slipped quickly out of the office and into the shadows behind a tall stack of large cardboard boxes. He was none too soon, for the heavy double doors swung open and two men peered in.

"Push it over there," said one of them. The second man mumbled something and began to push a box similar to the one behind which the detective crouched, across the room.

"Here?" he asked.

"Yeah. Get it over a little closer to the others so's

it'll look like it was there all the time. Blount says that bunch goes out first thing in the morning."

"Where to?"

"Portugal. That's where the special box always goes. Now come on, let's get outta here."

Anvil watched from his hiding place until the men had gone, after which he came out and examined the box they had brought in. It appeared to be identical with the others, and stencilled on the sides of it was the consignee, *Tomas de Oliviera, Lisbon, Portugal*. Further investigation of the other boxes revealed this to be the only one with that particular destination.

The detective scratched his head. What, he puzzled, could this have to do with the missing Herbie—if anything?

He scurried back into Blount's office and managed to unlock the desk. Things were as neat inside as out. Dozens of bayonet-sharp pencils were lying in precise rows, scratch pads neatly stacked. On a hunch he took the topmost pad and, slanting it toward the light, saw the faint imprint of the last notes taken. He had seen it done in detective movies and on television. Taking one of the pencils and putting the lead flat on the paper, he moved it back and forth. Slowly, a negative of the note began to appear, and there, the very first word, was the name Herbie.

His heart pounding, Anvil finished with the pencil and held the results to the light. It read: *Herbie Jackson phoned from Blainesville. No luck so far at Bon Ton Toys. Checked stock on 399 and followed through on 5 sales. Unable so far to trace 3 sales. To phone by Friday at latest. Staying at Feidler Hotel under name Oscar Beaumont.*

Anvil pocketed his find and retraced his steps toward the exit of the building. He was less than a

dozen paces from the door leading out onto the street when he heard the clatter of running feet echoing down the corridor behind him. Lights blazed on suddenly, and someone shouted: "Hey you! Stop where you're at!"

No other phrase could have sent Anvil through the door quicker, and as he bounded away in the darkness there was the crack of a shot behind him and the *spoinnng* of the slug ricochetting off the masonry to his left. Seconds later, shaking like a nudist in a blizzard, Anvil stared through the windshield of the car as Dianne Swann raced crosstown in the predawn gloom.

"*Herbie?*" said Dianne Swann for the fourth time. "Herbie Jackson? Staying at a hotel in Blainesville under an assumed name? I—I can't believe it, Mr. Anvil, and neither could you if you knew Herbie!"

He leaned back in his swivel chair and tapped the note. "There it is in black and white, and it's our only lead."

"Do you think we should go there?"

He got to his feet and walked to the window where he gazed out at the grimy brick wall of the next building. "It's about a three hour drive. I'll go, you stay here."

"Oh, I couldn't, Mr. Anvil!"

He looked around at her slowly, wondering just what kind of man this Herbie was, to deserve such a girl. Anvil's jaw tightened. He had better not be playing around somewhere, he'd just better *not*. He glanced at his watch. It was not yet five o'clock.

"We'd both better get some sleep, Miss Swann. If we pull out by nine we can be in Blainesville by noon."

"How can you work all day and night looking for

Herbie and keep up with all your other cases?" she said with concern.

It occurred to Anvil that it might bring about a loss of confidence if he told her the truth, that she was his only client, so he simply smiled and said, "You let me worry about that, huh?"

According to plan, the little car streaked past the city limits sign of Blainesville at exactly noon. The first stop was at a service station where they acquired a city map and consulted the telephone directory for the address of the Feidler Hotel. After a quick lunch of peanut butter crackers and soda, Anvil and his client headed for Grundy Street and the Feidler.

The Feidler Hotel proved to be little more than a flophouse. It was a small, grimy, dilapidated establishment half a block from the railroad yards. Anvil stopped the car in front of the place. "You wait here, Miss Swann. I'll check it out, and if Herbie is here, well, I'll handle that too."

She nodded and Anvil strode into the lobby and to the registration counter. A small man in bifocals was sitting on a stool behind the counter reading a magazine. Anvil cleared his throat and the man looked up at him, annoyed.

"You got an Oscar Beaumont registered?"

The clerk groaned. "Mebbe." He turned the register around and went down the list of names. "Lotta Smiths. Always have a lotta Smiths."

"What about Beaumont?"

"Nice name, Beaumont. Wonder why more people don't use it. Yep, here it is. Oscar Beaumont, room 212."

"That's on the second floor, right?" Anvil spun and headed for the stairs.

"Hold on, young fella!" called the clerk. "I just said

that was his room number, I didn't say he was in it."

"He hasn't checked out, has he?"

"Didn't say that neither. I recollect he stopped at the desk about an hour ago. Told me he might get a long distance call, said he was taking a walk in the park and would be back."

"Where's the park?"

"Three blocks east and one block south. Can't miss it. It's the place with the trees and grass."

"Wiseneimer," Anvil muttered as he stalked out to the car. Then, on an afterthought, he took Dianne Swann's picture of Herbie from his pocket and went back to the clerk. "This is him, right?"

The clerk bobbed his head up and down to get the right lens, then shook his head. "Wrong."

"That's—that's *not* Oscar Beaumont?"

"Not the one *we* got. And it ain't a real common name." He picked the snapshot up and held it for a better light. "Funny, it does look kinda like him." But after a moment he shook his head again. "Nope. Our Mr. Beaumont is an older fella. Got a big mustache and wears big dark glasses. Ain't the same at all."

Dianne Swann's impatience had prompted her to leave the car and she met Anvil as he was coming out. "Did you find him?"

"Right! He's disguised, and he's gone for a walk in the park. Come on, let's go."

"A walk in the park? Are you serious, Mr. Anvil?"

"We'll see." Following the clerk's instructions, they soon reached the park, found a metered space, and eased the little car into it. The park was not large as parks go, perhaps four blocks square. Buildings on the opposite side were visible above the treetops. "He may be wearing a big mustache and dark glasses," Anvil said, "so keep your eyes peeled."

Young couples walked hand in hand along the winding concrete paths. Here and there a nurse or mother pushed a perambulator or walked a child. A white-haired old gentleman sat on a bench tossing popcorn to the pigeons, and leather jacketed youths waited impatiently for the coming of darkness.

Anvil and Dianne Swann walked slowly along, around the edge of a duck pond, and after a time paused at a drinking fountain in the very center of the park. As Dianne Swann sipped the water, Anvil saw a blonde nurse in a neat white uniform strolling slowly beyond a clump of shrubbery. As she emerged he saw that she held the hand of a small girl, who in turn was holding the hand of a large doll which was dragging along on the pavement.

Suddenly, as Dianne Swann lifted her head from the fountain she grabbed hold of Anvil's sleeve and pointed toward the other end of the row of shrubs. "That man!" she whispered. "I think that's Herbie!"

The man was standing partly hidden behind the trunk of a sycamore tree, and he was staring intently after the nurse and the little girl.

"It isn't Herbie's hair," she said, "and he never had a mustache like that, or wore dark glasses, but the ears and the nose, they're Herbie!"

That was roughly the description the clerk had given. "Are you sure?"

She seemed undecided, puzzled. "It's just that I don't understand why."

"Then let's face right up to him and find out."

The man had not noticed them, so intent was he on the nurse and child, and at that moment he darted from behind the tree and vanished beyond the bushes.

"Let's go!" Anvil said. "We don't want him to slip away from us now."

The two of them scurried toward the spot they

had last seen him, only to find no sign of him. A hundred paces or so ahead, the nurse and the little girl walked slowly on, rounding a turn in the path. Then they saw him. He was across the path and was peering out of a large bush just to the left of the nurse and her charge. He glanced around quickly, and apparently satisfying himself that he was unobserved, parted the branches carefully and in a half-crouch, darted out.

"What on earth is he going to do!" Dianne Swann whispered urgently.

"I haven't the faintest notion," Anvil admitted.

"He's not attacking them, is he?"

It appeared that was precisely what he was doing, for he was racing along the path now, and the nurse turned, saw him, and put her hand to her mouth in the prelude to a scream. At the same instant Dianne Swann yelled, "*Herbie! No, Herbie!*"

The man had reached them, but he did not touch either the nurse or the child; rather, he snatched the doll. But at the shrill sound of Dianne Swann's voice he stopped dead in his tracks and spun around, staring.

The detective and his client ran toward him, and the man lowered his dark glasses. "Dianne, what—how . . ." Then realizing that the nurse was still expanding for a bloodcurdling scream, he turned again and bounded away down the path, leaped a hedge, and vanished.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeooooowww!" went the nurse.

"Bawwwww!" went the little girl.

"Follow Herbie!" Anvil said quickly. "I'll try to square things here. Meet you at the car!"

As Dianne went loping away across the greenery, Anvil approached the nurse, trying by patient motions with his hands, and a ready smile, to stop the scream-



ing. He pulled out his billfold, fingering out the remaining ten dollars that stood between himself and vagrancy, and pressed it into her hand. "We've been looking all over for him. He's harmless, but he does put a fright into you, doesn't he? We'll be taking him back to the hospital now, but we would like to let him keep the doll. I trust this will cover getting a replacement?"

The woman's eyes widened. "The hospital? You mean he's off . . ."

Anvil nodded sadly. "As a bedbug. I do hope you won't press charges or anything. That could set him back badly, you see. You look like an intelligent and understanding young lady."

"Young lady . . ." she murmured, smiling and tilting her head coquettishly. "Oh, I do understand! I do!"

Anvil thanked her and sped away to join the chase. He found that the long-legged quality of Diane Swann had done her in good stead, for she had caught up to the man at the shore of the duck pond.

"Is this him?" Anvil panted as he drew up to them.

"For heavens sake, Dianne!" the man said in a tone of utter panic, his bushy mustache on lopsided. "What are you doing here? How did you—you don't know what you're getting involved in! Please—*please go home!*" His eyes darted about the park. The doll hung almost unnoticed from his left hand. "They may be here! They could be anywhere—everywhere!" His gaze stopped abruptly on a man who sat on a bench reading a newspaper. Herbie's eyes widened, he made a little gasping sound, and once more went racing away across the park.

The man got up, folded the newspaper, and walked away in the opposite direction. Now, Dianne Swann stood staring with saucered eyes. She said, "That man

—he was one of those who were in Herbie's apartment."

Herbie's fleeing form had already vanished, and as Anvil turned the other way he got a brief glimpse of the man's back before he too disappeared from view.

Overhead, in a tree, a mockingbird began to sing. Anvil scratched his head and sat down on a bench. "What do you make of it? You know this Herbie and I don't."

Her lips began to tremble and she slumped down beside him. "Herbie must have—have cracked under the strain."

"What strain?"

"Of—of facing up to *marriage!*" There was no stopping her now. The dam had burst, and Anvil took her head on his shoulder and manfully let her cry it out.

The crying done, they drove straight back to the Feidler Hotel.

"Mr. Beaumont has checked out," the clerk told Anvil, "but he did leave a note."

"A note! Give it to me!"

The clerk wagged a finger. "Hold your horses, sonny. Your name ain't Miss Dianne Swann, is it?"

"She's out in the car."

"That's who it's for. No Dianne Swann, no note. You know that."

"*Aaagh!*" Anvil growled, and went out and brought her in. The clerk smilingly delivered the note, which read:

Dianne,

Sorry no time to explain. Big things going on. International. Top security. Could throw wrench in works. Go home. Now!

Herbie

P.S. Who was that little creep with you?

Anvil swallowed his anger at the closing remark. "We saw him not fifteen minutes ago. Did he say where he was going when he left?"

"He had me call a cab for him. I noticed that because in the thirty-eight years I been desk clerk at the Feidler, that's the first time anybody ever called a cab." He grinned showing a great lack of teeth. "Police paddy wagon calls for most of our patrons."

"Didn't he . . ."

"Let me finish, sonny. Like I say, I noticed it, and I heard him tell the cabbie he wanted to go to the railroad station."

"Let's go!" Anvil said, grabbing Dianne Swann's wrist and rushing from the hotel.

Leaping into the little car, they roared away from the curb. They had gone hardly two blocks before they became aware of two things: they did not know where the railroad station was, and there was a car following them.

A traffic officer supplied them the answer to the second question as he wrote out a warning citation for speeding. He also told them where the station was, but when they reached there they were told that the last passenger train of the day had just pulled out.

"Did a tall man, wearing dark glasses and a mustache and carrying a suitcase and a doll, buy a ticket on it?"

"Carrying a suitcase and a what?" asked the station agent.

"A doll." Anvil's hands fluttered futilely. "You know, a *baby* doll!"

"Funny you should ask that. There was a fella like

that. To tell you the truth, I kinda wondered about him."

"Where was he going? Where was the ticket to?"

"Mason City. How come he's got the doll?"

Anvil whirled around toward Dianne Swann. "He's going home!"

"How long does it take the train to get there?"

Dianne Swann asked the agent.

"Three hours and four minutes. If she's on time."

The couple at his window turned and bolted for the exit. The old man scratched his head slowly. "Like I said from the start, it ain't the pay that makes this job interesting, it's the darn fool people."

On the drive back to Mason City, Anvil and Dianne Swann went over the events. Anvil reached his conclusion with some reluctance. "It just could be that Herbie has slipped his trolley, Miss Swann."

"He's always been so levelheaded, *dull*, really. It's hard to believe."

"That's the kind it happens to sometimes. They just keep bottling things up inside them and one day—*bloooey!* Figure it out for yourself. He runs off to Blainesville without so much as a by-your-leave, and we track him down to a fifth-rate hotel, wearing a disguise and using a fake name. Then we find him in the park mugging some little kid, stealing a doll. He sees you and runs like hell, excuse me, runs like heck and . . ."

"But what about the note you found in Mr. Blount's office? And what about the men who were in his apartment?"

He took one hand off the wheel and rubbed his jaw. "Yeah. Yeah, I see what you mean." Then he crammed the accelerator to the floor. "I want to be waiting in the station when that train gets in!"

They beat the train to Mason City by five minutes,

but were unable to find a place to park.

"I'll keep looking," Dianne Swann said. "You go on into the terminal."

He looked at his watch. The train was probably pulling into the station that very minute. "Okay. But get inside if you find a place." He jumped out and ran into the terminal. It was jammed with homeward-bound commuters, which served only to increase the difficulty of the task at hand.

The train from Blainesville, a raspy voice on the loudspeaker system informed the public, was now arriving on Track 12. A commuter express was departing in ten minutes on Track 13. Tracks 12 and 13, it proved, were served by the same platform, and the operative found himself swept up in a tide of homeward-bound humanity that carried him with it like a straw in the wind.

Because of his short stature, Anvil's view was suddenly restricted to the panorama of coat lapels and bosoms immediately surrounding him. In order to overcome this he found it necessary at intervals of four or five seconds to go into a crouch and fling himself upward, like a beagle pursuing a rabbit in high cotton.

"Watch it, buster!" said a man on whose foot Anvil came down. "Do that again and you'll be spittin' teeth!"

"Sorry—looking for someone coming in on the Blainesville train." He flung himself upward again in a clumsy *entrechat* and had the good fortune to spy his man just descending from a coach some thirty feet to Anvil's left.

"Excuse me!" he cried, burrowing through the throng. "Pardon me! Let me through, please!"

"Hey, shortie, watch what you're grabbin'!" snapped a frowzy blonde.

"Pardon me, ma'am, got to catch a man. Coming through please!"

He sprang upward again. There was Herbie, still wearing the mustache and dark glasses, and now sporting a Tyrolean hat to boot, with a tall feather in it. Anvil pressed on, bringing down a number of remarks regarding his immediate ancestry, as well as several elbow gougings, before he broke free of the throng. He found himself less than three paces behind his quarry.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Herbie Jackson!"

The Tyrolean hat whirled around and a hand came up to sweep away the dark glasses, knocking the mustache loose as it did so. He stared unbelievably at Anvil and gasped, "*You!*"

Under his arm was the doll, and dangling from his other hand was a small suitcase. He dropped the suitcase, and clutching the doll to his chest, fled pell-mell across the concourse toward the exits.

"Come back!" Anvil shouted, his voice drowned in the tumult of the crowd. "I only want to ask you some questions!"

The detective gave chase, only to have someone shove an unopened umbrella between his pumping legs before he had gone a dozen steps, sending him sprawling to the hard tile floor.

"Watch what you're doing!" he bawled, scrambling to his feet. To his amazement, he found that the perpetrator was the man Dianne Swann had recognized in the Blainesville park. "Now look here . . ." But there was no time for argument. A quick glance told him that the elusive Herbie had already gained the exit, and Anvil spun around and resumed the chase.

"Come back!" yelled the man with the umbrella. "Come back here! You! *Irving Anvil!*"

Anvil careened on through the exit. At the curb a cab door slammed, and the vehicle swept away bearing Herbie Jackson, who stared wide-eyed through the rear window at the detective.

"Mr. Anvil!" A small car pulled up where the cab had been. It was miracle of miracles, Dianne Swann. "I couldn't find a parking place."

A man emerged running from the terminal, waving an umbrella. Anvil leaped into the car. "Never mind that! Follow that cab!" It had a satisfying ring to it. *Follow that cab!* He had always wished for the occasion to say that. It was the first chance he'd had. "It's him! It's Herbie!"

It was not until Dianne Swann had shot back into the stream of traffic that it struck Anvil. "Hey! That guy back there in the station—he called me by my *name!*"

"Who?"

"One of the guys you saw at Herbie's flat. He tripped me and yelled my name! This thing is getting screwier all the time. What was it Herbie's note said? Something about 'international'?"

Dianne Swann glanced at him and back at the street just in time to avoid a head-on crash with a truck. "Mr. Anvil, you don't suppose Herbie is mixed up with some kind of *spy* business, do you?"

With the instinct of one who has read and re-read all Agent 007's escapades, Anvil turned quickly and squinted out the rear window. Sure enough, a black sedan was threading smoothly through traffic just behind them. "Holy Toledo," he muttered, staring directly into a pair of increasingly familiar eyes. "It's him! It's the *guy!*"

The three cars—the taxicab, the little car in the middle, and the black sedan—roared on through the city, running traffic signals, having hairbreadth

brushes with disaster, and at last emerged on West Pylant, where the cab screeched to a halt at the door of the Calgary Doll Company.

Herbie leaped out, clutching the doll. He looked back at the little car bearing down on him, tossed some money through the cab window, and darted into the building. Behind the little car he had seen a procession of three black sedans.

Dianne Swann and Anvil jumped from their car almost before it had come to a halt and dashed into the building in pursuit.

"Hey!" the receptionist, who had been straightening her desk preparatory to leaving for the day, ran out to intercept them. Herbie had sped through before she gathered her wits, but she was ready for those who followed. She backed against the inner door, spread-eagling her body against the panel. "Where do you people think you are!"

"Outta the way, miss!" Anvil barked, thrusting her aside. They continued through and down the stairs toward the sound of Herbie's running footsteps. Behind them the girl was screaming almost hysterically at someone else.

"There he goes!" Dianne Swann said. "Into the shipping room!"

They bolted through the double doors just as Herbie slid into Mr. Blount's glass cubicle and deposited the doll on the desk beneath the startled gaze of his superior.

"They're after me!" he said.

"You idiot! I told you to phone me! Not bring it here!"

"Wasn't time, chief! Here they come now!"

"Take this and clear out of here, you blasted moron!" Blount bellowed, shoving the doll back at him as if it might explode.



"Herbie!" Dianne Swann trilled. "Herbie! We only want to help!"

"Get away, Dianne! He's probably one of them!" He pointed accusingly at Anvil.

"One of who?" asked the detective.

The shipping room doors swung wide again and six intense men in dark suits rushed in. "Alright. Everybody just stand still," said the one in the lead. "Don't move and nobody will be hurt."

"You—you stupid *imbecile!*" Blount sputtered. He reached out and taking Herbie by the neck with both hands, began to choke him in dead earnest.

Two of the newcomers broke them apart and one snapped a pair of handcuffs on Conrad Blount. Another set about tearing open the doll Herbie had brought from Blainesville. He looked around at the others and nodded. "It's here, alright. This is the one."

"What's there?" demanded Irving Anvil, his head spinning.

"About one million dollars worth of illegal heroin, Mr. Anvil," the man smiled. He pulled a black leather folder from his pocket and flashed a badge. "Agent Haggerty, Treasury Department."

Herbie Jackson's already slack jaw fell further. "H-heroin?" Then he looked around with an expression like a kicked spaniel. "Mr. Blount, you told me secret papers for the CIA was in that doll. You lied to me, Mr. Blount."

In the aftermath of the confusion, after Conrad Blount and two other employees had been taken away, the operation was brought to light by the government agents. Blount, it appeared, had arranged to have illegal narcotics smuggled into the country inside specially constructed dolls which were sent back from his contact in Europe as being defective.

The usual procedure was simply to open the dolls and remove the drugs. However, Herbie Jackson had gotten the returns mixed up and sent them out to the Bon Ton Toy Shop in Blainesville. When Blount discovered this, he immediately sent Herbie to track the shipment down, concocting the story about secret papers in order to keep Herbie's mouth shut.

The plan had been to have Herbie phone if he met with success, after which caution could be taken in making contact with Herbie, in the event government agents were on his trail.

But Herbie's panic, brought on by the hot pursuit of Dianne Swann and Irving Anvil, had panicked him to the extent that he fled back directly to Blount, a fortunate error which led to a successful wrap-up of the case.

"Which makes you, sir," Mr. J. P. Calgary, owner of the firm, said to Anvil, "a hero of no mean proportions."

The T-men concurred, agreeing that Blount might have gotten away scot-free otherwise.

Anvil, to whom praise was a novelty of the first order, grinned modestly. "Actually, Miss Swann deserves most of the credit."

"Nonsense, Mr. Anvil!" she said. "I would have been scared silly if you hadn't been with me through the whole thing. You were wonderful!"

Mr. Calgary opened a bottle of champagne and made a little toast, and as the others hashed over the chase, Anvil had a word with Dianne Swann.

"I just want you to know what a lucky fellow I consider Herbie Jackson. Any fellow with a girl like you, Miss Swann, is fortunate indeed."

She sighed. "The past few days have cleared some doubts for me, Mr. Anvil. I—I just gave Herbie back his ring. I'm not going to marry him."

"You're—not?"

She shook her head. "And I'm not cut out for sewage work, either. I've decided to quit my job."

"No boyfriend, no job? Say!" He brightened. "Are you looking for work?"

"Why yes, I am. Do you know of something?"

"The fact is," Anvil said, "the publicity from this case will probably give the agency a boost. Mr. Calgary has already said he wants to talk to me about plant protection and employee investigations. I'll be needing a girl in the office, one who knows the ropes."

"I'm sure the work will be fascinating, Mr. Anvil," she purred.

"There's just one thing, Miss Swann. I was wondering if you could bring yourself to call me by my first name?"

She linked her arm in his and looked down into his eyes, smiling. "Why I'd consider it an honor, *Irving!*"

He grinned up at her. All he needed now, Anvil said to himself, was a bottle of bourbon in the bottom desk drawer and the private-eye business would begin to be what it was cracked up to be.

## HOLIDAY

Hal Ellson

Blue light trembled above the hotel; guests were already sitting in the open dining room beyond the pool when a girl appeared on the upper terrace. Down the stone stairway she came, sandals clacking, white bathing suit startling in the dusky light.

She was another lone female tourist, but different from the others. At the pool-edge she adjusted her cap and plunged in. Twice she swam the length of the pool, then floated on her back, sensuously. Roger watched her casually; no point in getting excited when she'd never more than nodded to him.

Footsteps made him turn. The hotel manager smiled. "Not dining again, Mr. Peters?"

"No appetite in this heat."

The girl in the water swam to the pool-edge, and the manager turned to her. "Enjoying a dip, Miss Boyd?"

"Yes, the heat in the city was dreadful. Isn't it ever cool there?"

"Never. By the way, may I join you at your table this evening?"

"You could, but I'm not dining."

"I'm disappointed. Reconsider?"

Miss Boyd climbed from the pool, asked for a cigarette. The manager felt his pockets, shrugged, and Roger offered his pack and a light. The manager in-

roduced them. A moment later he was called to the desk. Annoyed, he started away, stopped. "A dance at the Royal Palm tonight. I hope to have the pleasure . . ."

"Sorry, I'm not going."

"I'm more than sorry." The manager shrugged and walked away. Miss Boyd removed her rubber cap, shook her hair. "He really is sorry," she said to Roger.

"What does that mean?"

"All the men are in this place. They've only one thing in mind."

"Perhaps because there's nothing else to do."

Miss Boyd laughed. "I suppose one can't blame them. Do you think it's the climate?"

"They're probably trying to prove they're men and lovers."

"Well, making love is one way of proving it."

"Not necessarily. And certainly not when one is married, like Mr. LaFarge."

"He doesn't miss a trick, but you sound married, or perhaps you're a prude."

"Neither one nor the other."

"But you object to Mr. LaFarge's activities?"

"I don't give a damn about him and his activities."

Miss Boyd smiled. "You're from New York?"

"Who here isn't?"

"True. I came down to get away from the place, and everybody I've run into is from the big town."

"Disappointed?"

"In that respect, but the island's beautiful."

"Too hot and too lush. I prefer a cooler climate, but doctor's orders. I needed a rest. I can't say I haven't rested."

"So I've noticed."

"Really? I didn't think you knew I existed."

"The only male who hasn't made some kind of pass. I thought you might be queer."

"No such problem," Roger smiled. "As for you, I had my own thoughts."

"You thought *I* was?"

"Oh, no, just a bit of a snob, but at least you're not like the other loners, all hunting for a man."

"Anything wrong in that?"

"No, but most of them will go home disappointed."

"And yourself?"

"Me? I came for a rest, remember?"

"Oh, yes. Then I don't suppose you're permitted to drink?"

"A glass or two wouldn't bother me," he admitted encouragingly.

"Could we have one out here?"

"Of course." A drink would be just the thing. A white-jacketed boy brought them, bowed and walked away. Water splashed into the pool from the mouths of three green nymphs, a murmuring came from the dining room; otherwise, there was no sound.

"No music this evening," Roger observed. "Something big going on elsewhere?"

"Nothing unusual. Gambling at the Casino, a dance at the Royal Palm. Do you gamble, Mr. Peters?"

"Not even for fun, and I don't particularly care for nightclubs."

"You'll be lonely this evening."

He caught the suggestion and looked directly at her. "You're going dancing—without an escort?"

"Would you care to take me?" Miss Boyd smiled, and he realized he'd walked into a trap, but what difference?

"Glad to take you," he said.

The night blackened and grew cooler, the pool lay

quiet. Roger emptied his glass, glanced toward the dining room. Empty and dark; a single small light burning at the bar and no one there. The guests had fled, the hotel was deserted. He arose on unsteady legs, went to the railing, looked down. The hill below dropped swiftly away, thin trees raised dark hands toward him; the jungle below. Chilled, he turned away, for down there was the real island with its hidden terrors and violence which the tourists never saw. Now he wondered about himself. Why had he accepted Miss Boyd's proposal? Would she be like the others? He resented the thought, for it cheapened her and, by the same token, made her available.

Three potent rum cocktails in him and he felt a little reckless. But where was she? A half-hour gone since she went to dress. He entered the hotel and asked at the desk for her room number. The clerk obliged and sent him a sly smile. They must smell it, Roger thought.

A series of dim passages brought him to Miss Boyd's room—but was it hers? He struck a match. Number seven on the door. He knocked, heels clicked on tile, the door opened and she stood before him.

"I'm almost ready. Coming in?"

The invitation unexpected, he hesitated, stepped in.

"Sorry I took so long, Roger, but those drinks we had . . . I had to lie down." She smiled, a different person from the one at the pool, eyes softer, body relaxed. "It's so quiet. I don't hear anyone."

"I doubt if any guests are about," he said, and eyed the room. "Big," he commented.

"And so isolated."

"A hard time finding it."

"But you did."

"Had to," he said, and she stepped close, her arms encircled his neck, her mouth found his. Stunned, he couldn't move at first and, when he did, it was too late. She escaped and ran to the bathroom. Out again, she donned a white shawl, walked toward him, pressed her room key into his hand, saying, "We'll need this later."

A single taxi waited under the carport. The driver assisted them in. A rumbling over cobblestones, wide turn on a descending curve and the car leaped forward into the dark. Roger felt he was moving through a void. Anything can happen, he thought, feeling the key in his hand and recalling the start of the evening, Miss Boyd descending the steps to the pool, the casual introduction by Mr. LaFarge.

Simple and ordinary . . . but was it? He slipped the key into his pocket. Later, after the necessary rituals of the dancing and drinking, he'd have use for it. Nothing else remained between the formalities and the cool sheets of Miss Boyd's bed. Is she like the others? He wondered, and she spoke.

"You're not saying anything. What's wrong?" she asked him.

"I don't like this road in the dark."

"The drivers know it with their eyes shut." She took his hand. A sharp curve and she was thrown against him. There was an odor of rum on her.

"Those drinks were stronger than I thought," he remarked. "Smell the rum?"

"A bottle in my bathroom—I had a quick drink before we left."

Strange. Earlier, she'd complained about the cocktails. But what matter? The car rushed on.

Twenty minutes later it stopped in front of the Royal Palm. The nightclub was dimly lit, crowded, the native band playing a Meringue. A waiter found



them a table. The band paused, took up with another Meringue and Miss Boyd arose. "Shall we?"

"Why not?" He escorted her to the floor. Dance? She pressed too close, used her body a bit too much.

Back at their table she emptied her drink in a swallow, and he looked around. An excess of men, some tables occupied solely by them, natives, each with the look of a hungry predator. They drank and watched the women who sat out the dances. Sometimes they got up and approached them. None came to Roger's table, but they watched, one in particular.

Roger noticed him, Miss Boyd didn't; the drinks reaching her? He saw it in her eyes, felt it in the way she clung to him and used her body while they danced. She was beginning to draw attention. At the announcement of the floor show, he felt relieved. At least he didn't have to dance the Meringue for a while. He mentioned that.

"It's the craze here," Miss Boyd countered.

"Yes, like dope. Let yourself go with it and you can't stop."

She lifted her glass. "Isn't that why we came, to let ourselves go?"

How far? he wanted to say, and a loud drumming intervened. Out went the lights, silence; a white beam knifed across the dance floor, focused on an all but naked female. A slow rhythmic beat of bongos and she began to writhe. Conversation died. The dancer held all eyes till she finished. Applause followed, a group took the floor, waiters moved among the tables. Ice clinked in glasses. Roger had already lost count of the drinks he'd had. The waiter brought new glasses. Warn Miss Boyd to be careful? A bit late; her eyes were already glazed.

The near naked female dancer again in solo, the rhythm of the bongos wilder, dancer's movements

more suggestive. A burst of applause greeted her as she finished. The lights went on, the band began another Meringue.

Miss Boyd jumped up, ready to dance. Roger hesitated. As the tall man at the other table stared, he led Miss Boyd to the floor. She held him tightly, head bobbing loosely, hips everywhere; her dress slipped from her shoulders and she refused to adjust it.

Three successive dances, back to the table and the tall man appeared, bowed, smiled at Roger. "Do you mind?" Quickly he turned to Miss Boyd and asked for a dance. Smiling, she rose unsteadily and was taken by the arm.

Roger watched them on the floor, finally lost them in the crowd. They returned when the music stopped. The tall man bowed, left, and Miss Boyd flopped into her chair. "He's a marvelous dancer," she said. "Did you at all notice?"

"I did, but take care, he's had his eye on you all evening."

"Anything wrong in that?"

"Not if he just looks."

"Jealous, or just being stuffy?"

"Neither, but I brought you here, I feel responsible."

"Oh, come on. What can happen on a dance floor?"

"Nothing, I suppose, but just be careful. He'll be back for more."

"You don't want me to dance with him?"

"I can't stop you," he said.

Later, the tall one appeared at their table again. A bow, a smile, and off he swept Miss Boyd to the far side of the floor. His strategy? Roger lifted his glass. The drink was as mild as water. Was the waiter cheating, thinking he was drunk? Still, his lips

were completely numb, a looseness had invaded his body and he felt ready to do something reckless.

A bottle crashed and he turned, saw a stout middle-aged woman being helped from the floor by a man half her age. Maudlin drunk, she tried to kiss him. He held her off, gave her a familiar pat, filled her glass.

Roger turned away. A sudden change was taking place, the music louder, wilder, dancers less restrained. The almost stilted, formalized steps of the Meringue no longer held the women. Their hips were freer now as they abandoned themselves to the music.

Some minutes later the tall man returned to his table and tossed off a drink. Where was Miss Boyd? Gone to the powder room? Roger waited, finally got up and went to the other table. The tall one arose, bowed stiffly from the hips. "Miss Boyd? Another gentleman asked her to dance."

Roger turned away, searched for her, and went back to the table where the tall man sat with his friends. He looked up and smiled. "Ah, back again. You didn't find your partner? Too bad."

"What happened to her?"

"Who knows? Perhaps she went off with the other gentleman."

There was no point in continuing. The tall one lit up, his friends grinned. Appeal to them? Roger turned away, again searched the huge room and found the waiter who'd served him. He knew nothing. Perhaps the manager could help. That one shrugged. "The lady must have decided to leave."

"She didn't leave on her own. Something happened to her."

"Here? Impossible. Perhaps——"

"There's no sense discussing it with you people. Where do I find the police?"

"It'll do you no good to go to them. The Captain won't be at headquarters, I can assure you."

"He's the whole force?"

"No, but his subordinates would only refer the matter to him in the morning—if he appears."

"If he appears?"

"Yes. You see, he's not always there."

"Then where can I reach him?"

A shrug and Roger went out the door. The taxi driver who'd brought them stepped up. "Ready to go back to the hotel, sir?"

"No. Something happened to the young lady I brought here. Take me to police headquarters."

"I wouldn't advise that, sir."

"I'm not asking for advice."

"As you wish, but the Captain——"

"Won't be there till morning? Okay, the hotel."

The driver started the car. It was late now. No light shone, nothing stirred. Roger sat back. "What happens when a crime is committed on the island?" he asked.

"Sir?"

"Suppose someone is murdered, kidnapped, raped? Must you wait till morning for something to be done about it?"

The driver glanced back and grinned. "There are no kidnappings here. Rape?" He shook his head. "One doesn't have to use force where love comes so easy. Ah, but in your country it's different, I understand. As for murder, occasionally a man may kill another over a woman."

"And the Captain comes around in the morning to clear up the matter?"

The driver ignored the remark. "As a matter of

fact, we have very little crime, no gangsters, nothing like you have back in the States."

End of theme; silence reigned till they reached the hotel. "If you're going into the city in the morning, sir . . ."

No answer for him. Roger went up the steps, entered the hotel. A sleepy-eyed clerk lounged behind the desk. Ask him if Miss Boyd had returned? No. He went to her room, opened the door, flicked the light. A hollow room.

Light slipped through the blinds, laughter sounded below the balcony, the black night of the island gone. Roger went to Miss Boyd's room and knocked, then used the key. An empty room. He went off, found the manager and explained the events of the previous evening.

"You think something happened to Miss Boyd?" The manager looked at his nails. "Most likely she went off with someone for the evening and slept over. After all, that's been known to happen here."

"No doubt, but that's not the answer."

"You might wait and see if she turns up. It's early yet," he placated.

"I've waited long enough."

"In that case, you'll want to see the police, but please sit down. Unfortunately, the Captain sleeps late. He may not be up before noon."

"No one else can do anything?"

"I'm afraid not. Coffee, Mr. Peters?"

An hour later Roger drove away from the hotel. The sun blazed, the road stayed empty all the way into town. The taxi stopped in front of police headquarters. He went inside. The Captain? Not in yet. When would he arrive? Later.

The sum of later, noon—and the Captain? One and

the same as the tall man of the previous evening. "Yes, what can I do for you?" he grinned.

"It's about——"

"The young lady you were looking for last evening. You didn't find her?"

"You know damned well——"

The grin faded, the Captain's hand came up. "Enough of that. You were drinking last night, and I made allowances. Now you're sober, and I have a headache."

Heed the warning? The hell with him. "Where's Miss Boyd? You don't frighten me."

"Perhaps not. So you want the young lady? Too bad. She left the island."

"There was no plane out of here last night, as you very well know."

"She left this morning. A little trouble with a gentleman she danced with last night. Too much to drink, so she was detained."

"Where?"

"In our jail, of course."

"For what reason? You haven't made that clear enough."

"I've made it as clear as I intend to, and now if you will please leave . . . When you have the facts? Ah, perhaps you'd like to try our jail? I can hold you on several charges, and it would be most difficult for you to do anything about it. A month or so in a dirty cell . . ."

A bluff? No. He left, climbed into the taxi and it moved off.

"The young lady's safe?" the driver asked.

"She's supposed to have left on the morning plane."

"That's right. I drove her to the airport this morning."

"How could you? She wasn't at the hotel, she was in jail."

"Jail? Oh, no. She spent the night at the Captain's house. You see, it's always the same. Someone takes his fancy, she's arrested, held overnight and——"

"Put on the plane in the morning," Roger said. Reaching into his pocket then, he found Miss Boyd's key and flung it out the window.

## THE HEIR

Talmage Powell

Richie kept rubbing down the car even after the wax was emitting little squeaks under his strong, tireless hands. He gave the rear fender a final flick with the polishing cloth and stepped back at last, knuckling sweat from his forehead. Looking at the results of his morning's toil with critical eyes, his head moved in an almost imperceptible nod of satisfaction. The big car glittered like a faceted jewel on the white gravel driveway. He'd need a magnifying glass to find another mote of dust on it.

Richie enjoyed the moment of standing there and looking over the job he'd done. Then he noticed the reflection of himself in the car's mirrorlike surface. He grew intent as he studied the hazy, distorted image, the husky, big-boned frame clothed in knit shirt and poplins, the gaunt face stamped with a hard knowledge older than its seventeen years, the thick, unruly, dark blond hair.

"Man," he muttered to himself with a faint grin, "you some kind of a flip character?"

It was a good question. If someone had told him a month ago that today he'd scrounge a job to sweat through, Richie would have laughed. A month ago, he would have stolen the hubcaps for profit and then smashed the windshield of the big, shiny symbol of the Establishment for the hell of it.



Turning from the car, he bent and picked up the wax can, chamois, and small pile of used polishing cloths from the edge of the driveway. He carried the stuff toward the three-car garage, the toe of his sneaker disconsolately kicking the gravel now and then.

A month had seemed like a long time, but now that it was over, it was hard to believe it had really happened. It seemed just hours ago that he'd got his first sight of the big colonial house with the white columns and heard the soft voice of Mrs. Duffield.

His steps lagged. He lifted his eyes to gaze at the rolling green hills of the New Jersey countryside, the meadows, the white fences along the distant edges of the vast estate. The sky was so clear and blue it didn't seem quite real, and he still wasn't used to the taste of unpolluted air.

In a few hours now, he and the three others would go back, and soon all this would be a blurring memory.

The cool shadow of the garage slipped across him. He passed alongside the station wagon and shook out the polishing cloths when he reached the basin in the rear corner.

It had all started when Jim Atkins, the Vista volunteer, had called Richie, Wormy, Dom, and Cooly together in the makeshift office of the neighborhood youth corps. Outside, a steamy twilight had been settling over the noise and stink of a Newark slum.

His face more serious than usual, Jim had looked them over. They were a tattered, polyglot collection. Cooly was a gangling, loose-jointed Negro. Wormy might have passed for a skinny beggar from the alleys of Barcelona. Dom was put together like a barrel, topped by a swarthy, steaming Sicilian face. Richie

carried his rangy power with a glint of mischievous humor and challenge in his blue eyes.

"I'm sticking my neck out," Jim had said. "I wouldn't pick a rat-fink to chop it off."

"Man, we planted no bugs in your socks," Wormy had said. "What gives?"

Jim's face had relaxed in a grin. "How'd you characters like a month's vacation out where the trees grow for real?"

Eyes hooding, the four had waited with slum-bred caution for Jim to cue them in.

"The setup is simple, fellows," Jim had said. "You know how a few private clubs and individuals have opened their pools and facilities to some of us this summer. Well, one of these is a Mrs. Duffield. She owns Duffield Acres, a big estate out in the country. It's got some horses, tennis court, swimming pool, places to hike, trout stream. She'd like to have you as her guests."

The four had exchanged silent messages with their eyes.

Atkins, tall and lean and dark, was a cool cat, even though he spent his winters studying at Columbia. He'd piped the silent conversation.

"No gimmicks and nothing up my sleeve, you toms," he'd laughed. "She's just a lady along in years who says she'd like to see some splashing in the pool and hear some noise around the place."

"Well," Cooly had shrugged his thin shoulders, "if it'll make her feel good thinking she's rehabilitating somebody, I don't like to make old ladies feel bad."

His companions had nodded agreement.

"Okay," Jim had said. "Wash a shirt and meet me here tomorrow morning. We'll drive out in my station wagon, if we can keep it wired together. I'll glom

some of this deal for myself and get out there for a day or two every chance."

Knowing that they had been handpicked, screened out by Jim, had been good for a laugh. The four had got together later that night and passed around a jug of muscatel Dom had taken from his old man.

"We supposed to get converted," Wormy had said, "and help cool things for the rest of the summer when we come back."

"Yeah," Dom had nodded, "they think they so smart. But they ain't fooling nobody."

"Don't scum it, man," Cooly had said. "Take a lesson from my Uncle Howie. Two-three times a month he gets a free feed just for turning in the Good Shepherd Mission and singing some hymns."

"We got a ticket," Richie had summed up. "That's what counts. Who turns down a ticket?"

Richie had expected Mrs. Duffield to be one of two types, a socially conscious clubwoman hell-bent on being charitable, or a bugged-out old biddie who, after a greedy lifetime, wanted to con her Maker with the brotherly love bit before the lid was nailed on the Big Box.

The prejudgment had been a goof. Mrs. Duffield had fitted neither slot. Instead, she'd turned out to be people.

She was a slender, trim, active woman in her forties, with crow's feet crinkling the corners of her eyes and a sprinkle of gray adding silver highlights to her brown hair. Richie sensed her natural friendliness right off. It was like her smile, honest and real. Strange as it seemed to her visitors, she'd assumed they were four normal, nice youths and she was going to enjoy the month as much or more than they.

She lived on the estate with two servants, a grizzled

old man named Traxler who took care of the grounds and livestock, and a giantess, Hilda, who didn't talk much but who ran the big colonial-styled house and loaded that unbelievable dining room table.

The grounds, the spacious house, the beds with clean sheets weren't quite real at first, but the strangeness wore off quickly, and then the days dissolved with a rush. The four swam, hiked, fished, learned to stay on a horse. There were evening cookouts and trips to the suburban shopping center.

They learned right away that Mrs. Duffield was a cookie who could take care of her own candy. She rode like she was part of the horse. Only Dom could out-swim her, and he'd been a frog since the day his brothers had thrown him off the docks when he was four. She trimmed them all at tennis, and held her own over the pool table in the rainy-day tournament in the game room.

"We supposed to be sharks," Wormy had lamented later.

"It ain't that we so bad," Cooly had said. "Man, she just good. She do anything she put her mind to."

Best of all, a guy knew where he stood with her. If she had something to say, she said it straight from the shoulder. Then the matter was finished, no jawing about it later. It felt pretty good, knowing a person like her really cared if a guy doped off or forgot for a minute he was a decent human being.

She treated them impartially when it came to divvying up the pocket money or asking if anybody had suggestions for dinner tonight, but before long, Richie sensed that he was her favorite. For some reason, she related to him in a way she didn't to the others. The feeling grew to be more than mutual respect or mere liking. She would smile at him first,

with maternal fondness, if she joined in whatever they were doing. If she needed some help in her flower garden, she wouldn't call for Traxler. She would say, "Busy, Richie?"

"No, ma'am."

"How about giving me a hand? I won't keep you long."

"Sure."

Sometimes, working near her, or at the dinner table, he would catch her studying him covertly. She would always glance away, but not before he'd glimpsed the shadows that lurked so deep in her eyes. The others never noticed, but he did. He saw the ghosts of pain and loss.

He knew, from chinning with Traxler, that she'd lost her husband several years ago. Mr. Duffield had died from a sudden heart attack. No one had expected it. He'd never had a tremor in his chest before.

But Traxler clammed up every time Richie mentioned the third Duffield, her son. He learned that the boy's name was Albert Jackson Duffield II, that he was about Richie's own age, and that he'd elected to spend the summer away from home. That's as far as Richie got, even with trying to flatter information from Hilda.

Albert Jackson Duffield, second, began to bug Richie. If A. J. was visiting pals or spending a summer at a camp, why all the mystery? How come the bleak-eyed silence on the part of Traxler and Hilda?

Richie put two and two together, coupling the mystery with the secret suffering in Mrs. Duffield's eyes. Were they—especially Richie himself—after all, just brief substitutes to break the silence of the big, memory-filled house? When she had those quiet ma-

ternal talks with Richie as they gardened or sneaked a late snack out of the refrigerator, was she wishing her own son was there?

A month ago, Richie would have boiled at the idea; but not now. By the end of the month, he just wished there was something he could do to help her.

He woke that final morning knowing the day was going to be a drag. He hated the hours they'd have to wait for Jim Atkins and the rattling station wagon that would take them away, so to kill time, busy his hands, and dull his mind, he had rolled the big car into the driveway and concentrated on the kind of wax job the car had never had before.

He finished putting the polishing materials away and came out of the garage. Mrs. Duffield had come from the house and was standing to one side, looking at the car. When she heard the crunch of his footsteps, she glanced in his direction. Richie knew she understood about the wax job. It was the only way he had of saying thanks.

"Thirsty?" she said after a moment.

"Like I could drink the creek dry," he grinned.

"Let's see what we have in the house."

He followed her into the huge kitchen with its gleaming porcelain, stainless steel, and racks of copper cookware which Hilda kept burnished to the brightness of new coins.

She opened the refrigerator and lifted out a pitcher of lemonade and two frosted glasses. Richie took the pitcher and glasses and crossed to the table. They sat down across from each other, and Mrs. Duffield poured. She didn't sip her drink right away, but sat watching each little movement Richie made.

"I'm going to miss you, Richie."

"I know," he said. "I'm on that scoreboard myself."

She studied his face, feature by feature. "You're

more intelligent and sensitive than most. Don't let anything or anybody ever twist it up inside of you, Richie."

His face pinked. "I'll try, Mrs. Duffield."

"And never stop trying. Each of us has to try, day by day, whatever the circumstance or background."

Was she trying to tell him something? Was it bugging her so bad she had to let it out?

He lifted his eyes slowly. "Did he stop trying—your son?"

He had the uncomfortable feeling that she was looking right through him.

"My son desires to live in a Greenwich Village rat-hole," she said.

"Please, Mrs. Duffield. I'm sorry. I'm a fink for bringing it up."

"His hair is long and filthy," she said. "He never bathes."

He had to look away. The lines had deepened and drawn her face into a mask of despair.

"All he wants from me is money," she said. "He won't see me or talk to me anymore. I tried everything, even to telling him I wouldn't support his habits. He said he would steal—or kill himself and his blood would be on my hands. He hates everything I am, everything I stand for."

The room seemed close and hot to Richie. "Please—you must be wrong. Hate you? Hate all this?"

"Despises might be a better word." Her voice thickened, choked. "Nothing is quite good enough for him. He escapes the hatefulness of existence with drugs."

Richie had no more words. Still unable to look at her, he felt her cold fingers touch the back of his hand.

"Thank you, Richie. I feel a little better, sharing it with someone at last."

Her fingers trailed away. He heard her get up and

leave the room. He sat staring at the window, his face moody, his eyes reflecting a growing determination.

Mrs. Duffield was herself again when the time came to say good-bye. She walked with them to Jim Atkins' station wagon. She shook hands with them one by one, receiving their thanks and telling them what a pleasure their company had been. She saved the farewell to Richie until last. She held onto his hand, studying his face as if impressing a portrait in her memory.

"Maybe things will work out," he said.

"Good-bye, Richie."

"So long, Mrs. Duffield."

He got in, and Jim goosed the accelerator to coax the station wagon on its way. Richie resisted the urge to look back.

That evening Richie, Wormy, and Cooly slouched on the stoop in front of the tenement where Cooly lived. Dom had a good reason for being absent. He'd got in a fight with his old man and the juvenile fuzz had picked him up.

The night was hot and sticky. Through a pall of boredom, traffic inched, little kids played tag on the sidewalk, guys propped up lamp posts and gassed on street corners, girls in cheap miniskirts strolled past.

"She's got a son," Richie said.

"Who?" Cooly asked. "What you talking about?"

"Mrs. Duffield, you dope."

"Oh, her. Nice lady. But it's over and done, Richie. Why you trouble your soul?"

"You think I'm stewing because I had a look at the other side?"

"Ain't you?" Cooly asked.

A man and woman came out of the building and had to walk around the three youths sprawled on the steps.



"The Village ain't a very big place," Richie said. "And how many hippies in the colony? A few hundred? Guy put his mind to it, he shouldn't have much trouble turning up Albert Jackson Duffield, the second."

"Who?" Wormy said.

"Her son, musclehead."

"Why you want to find him?" Wormy asked.

"Give him a little eye-opener," Richie said. "Change the spots on the dice. Make him see what he's thrown away, what he's doing to himself—and to her. We owe her that much."

"I don't owe nobody nothing," Cooly said, a stubborn note in his voice. "But I got plenty coming to me."

"Me too," Wormy echoed.

Richie raised from his propped elbows and looked at them. "I'd like some traveling company."

He read their refusal in their silence. He got up and dusted off the seat of his pants. "Okay," he said. "I guess I'll have to fly it solo. Keep it cool, you rat-finks."

He stepped down to the sidewalk and walked away in the darkness.

A week after he'd hitched a ride with a trucker and crossed into Manhattan, Richie was still haunting the hippie hangouts in the Village and asking the same questions. He got along on his hoarded pocket money that Mrs. Duffield had so freely passed out. But the time was long and the money short, and self-doubts were plaguing him the night he put the question to a brassy blonde waitress in a sleazy MacDougal Street coffeehouse that featured the music of a psychedelic quartet.

"Know a brother named Albert Duffield?"

The music twanged with hypnotic insistence; the lighting rose and fell in weird shades of yellow and green.

"Sure. He comes in. That's him over there."

Richie's gaze jumped in the direction of the girl's pointing finger. He almost tipped his chair over as he got up. He wound his way past half a dozen contorting dancers and paused at the table where A. J. D., number two, sat alone. He didn't even look up.

The figure before Richie had spurned its one-time promise of lean, virile manhood. The guy was a scarecrow in greasy slacks and baggy shirt open to his navel. Love beads lay in a hard glitter against his sunken chest. His finely featured face was all but lost in the filthy mat of beard and unkempt dark-blond hair.

A final dissonance shimmered. The Dantean lights subsided. Richie slipped into the chair across the table from Albert.

"Do I know you?" Albert looked at him with blood-shot eyes.

"No," Richie said, "but your mother does."

Albert sat up. "You're not part of the scene. Fade, pops."

"Don't bug me, kid. All I want is a little talk."

"Yeah? How much is she paying you? What's the pitch? To chum it up? Bridge the communication gap? Cop out, creep."

Richie curled his hands to keep the tension inside. "You don't know what you're doing to her."

"I could care less!"

"Or yourself. Come on, kid. I'm trying to be a soul brother. Can't we talk about it like men?"

"About what?" Albert's teeth were already yellowed and old behind his savage sneer. "The gold-lined trap? The stupid, shiny gadgets? The rotten mess she and her kind have made of everything?"

Richie sat staring with the feeling that the specter couldn't be quite real.

Albert lurched to his feet, still talking. "You came for a message? I got one, man. Go back and tell her she's the symbol of everything that stinks!"

Watching the boy's headlong flight, Ritchie half-rose from his chair. Then he slumped back. He shuddered slightly with a sense of being out of focus. Everything seemed drawn and twisted. Even the air was slimy with filth.

The amplified music resumed its assault on the senses. Richie was almost immune. His mind was too occupied with other things.

He felt like a dope, yet he'd got himself too teed-off on this thing to shuck it, like that, from his mind. He'd let the mental picture become too vivid to erase it easily, of the boy walking the private road to the house with the tall, white columns and of Mrs. Duffield's face as she ran forward to meet him.

Richie ordered an espresso, sipped, watched, tried to dig the scene. He gave it up at last and motioned to the waitress.

"I forgot to tell Albert something. Know where he pads?"

"Sure," she said. "Down the block. You can't miss it. It's in the walkup over the secondhand book stall. The stairway opens on the sidewalk between the store and empty place next door. Try the right rear apartment."

The worn and creaky stairway was so dark Richie had to grope his way. The corridor was lighted by a tiny bulb that shed a little more light than a firefly. The smell was worse than Richie's Newark home. It churned his stomach as he made his way to a door where patches of old paint clung in dirty blisters.

He knocked, and when several seconds ticked off

without an answer, he knocked again, harder. The lock was broken, and his knuckles jarred the door open a few inches. He pushed it wider and thrust his head inside. "Hey, kid? You home?"

He didn't get a reply, but he heard—or imagined he heard—shallow breathing. He fumbled along the grimy doorjamb. Failing to find a switch, he pushed the door wider and scratched a match. In the flare, he got an impression of Albert's body sprawled on a bed.

He stepped inside, heeled the door closed, and pulled a dirty string that brought dim life to a naked bulb that hung from the cracked ceiling.

He looked around, and his slum-hardened senses were sickened. An animal wouldn't have lived in the place. In a flurry of faint scratchings, roaches scurried from a table cluttered with dirty dishes and scraps of rotting food. Gnats swarmed the sweetness of empty beer cans strewn on the ramshackle bureau. Tiny rat eyes peered briefly from behind a soggy garbage can. Filthy socks, shirts, pants lay in careless rancid wads where they had been taken off.

The final touch was the limp, unconscious form on the swaybacked, sagging bed. Albert lay on a lumpy mattress that had dirty puffs showing where the filthy ticking was torn. He'd shucked his shirt, and one naked arm was curled up about his head, the other at his side. He was deep in drugged slumber.

Studying the wasted face, the open, hanging mouth, Richie shook his head slowly. He imagined Mrs. Duffield seeing Albert like this. She'd have wished she was dead.

Richie's gaze lingered on the needle marks pocking the arms like a rash from a scabrous disease. Then his eyes moved to the rickety table beside the bed. The hypo syringe, candle, and teaspoon lay where Albert had dropped them after popping the mainline.

Richie's finger toyed with the folded squares of paper scattered just beyond the syringe. There were five of them, each a little packet of heroin cut with milk sugar. Plenty to keep Albert happy for quite a while.

This is living? Richie wondered. This is her son? The punk I wanted to send back?

He was nonchalant as he struck a match and lighted the candle. He crossed the room, drew some water from a rusty tap into a grimy glass. Returning to the bed, he opened a packet of horse and mixed it with a little water in the teaspoon. Quite calmly, he heated it over the candle until the drug dissolved. Then he picked up the needle and filled it.

"So long, punk," he said. He pulled Albert's arm a little away from his body, and the needle lowered toward the vein.

The next afternoon Richie sat on the stoop in front of the tenement in Newark and read the story on an inside page of a New York newspaper.

Wormy drifted up. "What you reading, man? They going to kill the poverty program?"

"Says here the scion of a prominent New Jersey family killed himself accidentally with an overdose of drugs over in the Village Hippieville," Richie said. "The fuzz made a routine investigation, and that's it. The matter is all closed up for keeps. It happens all the time."

"Yeah," Wormy said. "What's a scion?"

"Well, it's like . . . it means an heir," Richie said. He got up, tossed the paper to Wormy. "Read the funnies."

"Where you going, Richie?"

"For a bus ride," Richie said. He gave Wormy a long look, his eyes touched with nostalgia. "Good-bye, Wormy. Good-bye and good luck."

Richie started along the winding private road as,

behind him, the big inter-city bus closed its door with a sigh of air and trundled on its way.

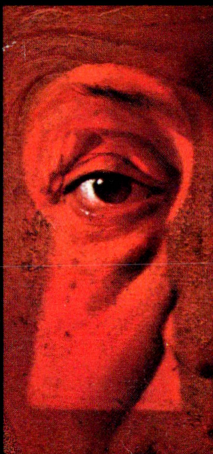
In a few minutes, Richie rounded a bend beyond the row of maples, and the view spread before him, the white fences, the lush meadows under the clean sky, the cottage where the caretaker lived, the three-car garage, and the beautiful home with the white columns that crested a rolling green hill.

Richie's feet became eager pistons. He put Albert forever to rest in his own mind with a final thought: Guy spits out his candy, it's up for grabs.

He saw her then, crossing from the house to the garage, already clothed in black. He shouted and waved. Mrs. Duffield stopped and stared, as if not believing her eyes. Then she turned toward him and stretched out her hands.

*I'll make one hell of a fine son, Richie thought, the kind the Duffield name and money should have had from the start.*

He closed the distance between them with a rush.



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