

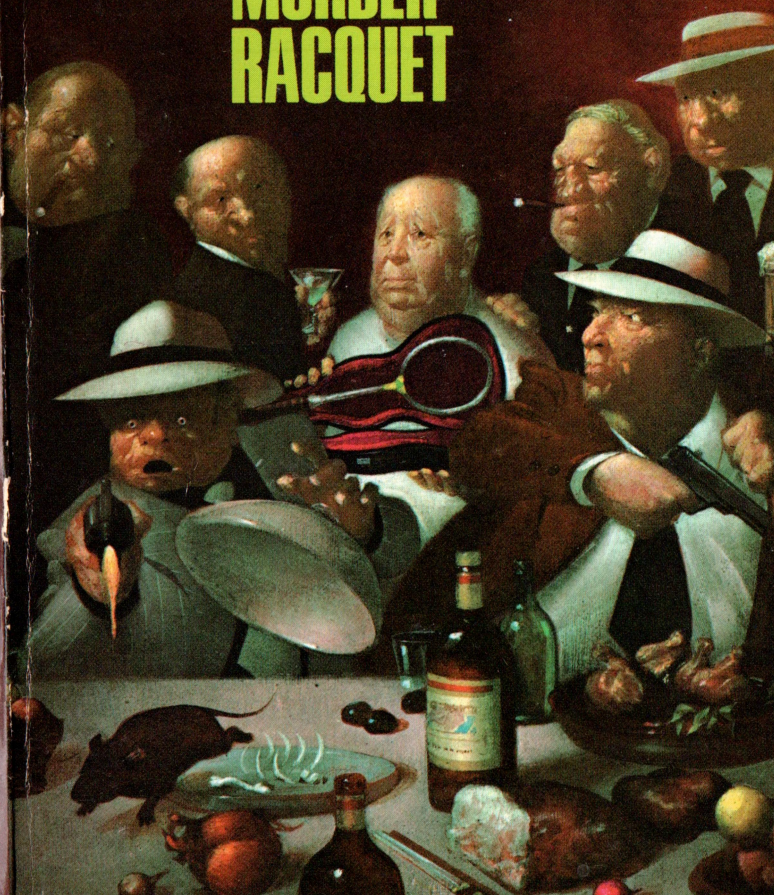
DELL

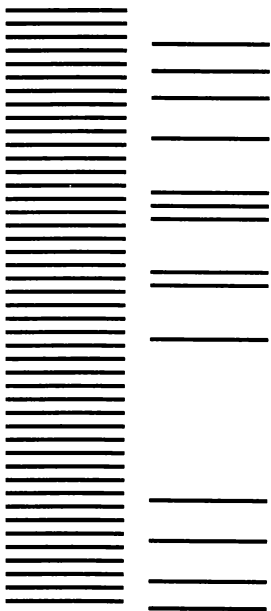
5931

95c

First time in paperback!  
Brand new aces of evil—  
served up by the greatest pro  
of them all

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MURDER RACQUET





# The Hitchcock Cup

Believing that good unhealthy competition is the spice of death, Alfred Hitchcock is thinking of offering a splendid cup for the finest fiend of the year.

Entries would be welcomed from every country, and this is one sport that doesn't require fair play. In fact, the dirtier the deed, the better your chances of winning.

As for the winner, he or she would be able to proudly hide this cup from the police for the entire year—and Hitchcock would even provide a special treat.

The cup would not come to you empty—oh, no. It would be stuffed with a sight to delight your eyes—your very own corpse . . .

Here are 14 leading contenders in the great tournament of terror—

## THE MURDER RACQUET





# **Murder Racquet**

**Alfred Hitchcock**  
EDITOR

A DELL BOOK

Published by  
Dell Publishing Co., Inc.  
1 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza  
New York, New York 10017

Copyright © 1975 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc.  
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced  
in any form or by any means without the prior written  
permission of the Publisher, excepting brief quotes used  
in connection with reviews written specifically  
for inclusion in a magazine or newspaper.  
Dell ® TM 681510, Dell Publishing Co., Inc.  
Printed in the United States of America  
First printing—July 1975

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**THE SAWBUCK MACHINE** by Frank Sisk—Copyright © 1966 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**CONTRABAND** by James Holding—Copyright © 1964 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**FOR EVERY EVIL** by Douglas Farr—Copyright © 1959 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**YOU CAN'T WIN 'EM (AT) ALL** by Ed Lacy—Copyright © 1967 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate and the agent for the estate, Howard Moorepark.

**MURDER IN MIND** by C. B. Gilford—Copyright © 1971 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**CHARLEY'S CHARM** by Alice-Mary Schnirring—Copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**MURDER DOOR TO DOOR** by Robert Colby—Copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**RANSOM DEMAND** by Jeffrey M. Wallman—Copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**I'LL RACE YOU** by Fletcher Flora—Copyright © 1969 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author's estate and the agents for the estate, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**"I AM NOT A THIEF, MR. KESTER"** by Gilbert Ralston—Copyright © 1961 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**MOUSETRAP** by Edwin P. Hicks—Copyright © 1968 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**MILDLY MURDEROUS** by Elijah Ellis—Copyright © 1966 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**AN ELEMENT OF RISK** by Richard Deming—Copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

**A NEIGHBORLY OBSERVATION** by Richard Hardwick—Copyright © 1971 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> by Alfred Hitchcock	7
<b>The Sawbuck Machine</b> by Frank Sisk	11
<b>Contraband</b> by James Holding	20
<b>For Every Evil</b> by Douglas Farr	28
<b>You Can't Win 'Em (at) All</b> by Ed Lacy	43
<b>Murder in Mind</b> (Novelette) by C. B. Gilford	52
<b>Charley's Charm</b> by Alice-Mary Schnirring	74
<b>Murder Door to Door</b> by Robert Colby	82
<b>Ransom Demand</b> by Jeffrey M. Wallman	97
<b>I'll Race You</b> by Fletcher Flora	102
<b>"I Am Not a Thief, Mr. Kester"</b> by Gilbert Ralston	107
<b>Mousetrap</b> by Edwin P. Hicks	111
<b>Mildly Murderous</b> by Elijah Ellis	130
<b>An Element of Risk</b> (Novelette) by Richard Deming	142
<b>A Neighborly Observation</b> by Richard Hardwick	168



## INTRODUCTION

by Alfred Hitchcock

I have become intrigued lately by the bleep—that sound that pops up every now and then on television, indicating that a word or phrase that might corrupt us viewers has been intentionally excised, or bleeped out. I'm certainly in favor of the bleep. I have always feared becoming corrupted by some chance word or phrase that slipped up on me while I was mesmerized by the fascinating conversation on a late-night talk show.

My feeling is, however, that the bleep has an untapped potential, that it has not been employed to the utmost. The same was once true of electricity. After Ben Franklin proved that it could be used to burn old kite strings, it was used for no other purpose for years. We might still be doing nothing more productive with it if Marconi hadn't seen the nonsense of that and put electricity to use to send flowers by wire.

Think of me as the Marconi of the bleep. My idea is to employ it not as an empty hole in an otherwise perfectly good statement, but as a substitute for something meaningful and, I hope, useful.

For example, I see no reason why bleeps could not serve as stand-ins for the words and phrases delivered in the heat of a campaign by politicians. Instead of promising us lower taxes and more services, lasting peace and a stronger army, higher wages and lower prices, the candidates could offer us simply *bleep*, *bleep*, and *bleep*, with the bleeps representing any or all of the promised goodies. The practical advantages are obvious. The voters on the left could assume that the bleeps stood for what they wanted, and the voters on the right could assume the same. Thus, conflict between the opposing forces would be reduced to a mini-

mum. And the end result would be the same as it is now, since I can't recall any candidate's ever living up to his campaign promises after being elected, anyway.

How many of us read the labels on food packages or the warranties we receive when we purchase appliances? Hands on this, please. Just as I thought—only one out of seven. Isn't it a waste of paper, then, to print those lists of ingredients on labels? And to provide us with those legally worded warranties which, when understood, merely inform us that the instant the appliance breaks down the warranty becomes null and void?

Why not, instead, have the information on the labels and warranties on file somewhere (I volunteer my attic) and replace it with the single word: *Bleep*. The bleep would signify to the one out of seven persons who really wants to know what is contained in his can of corned-beef hash, or why he can't get his money back on his toaster, that he can find out by checking the central file (if it's my attic, no visitors after 9 P.M.). And the paper that would be saved by abbreviating the wording on the labels and warranties could be used for . . . Well, never mind, one untapped potential at a time, and I'm developing the bleep at the moment.

Newspaper headlines, too, it seems to me, offer the bleep considerable opportunity to work its space-saving miracle. Time and time again I see the phrases PEACE PARLEY and GANG WAR and LOVE NEST and the like in the headlines. PEACE PARLEY BEGINS. GANG WAR ERUPTS. LOVE NEST INVADED. I have reached the point where I automatically assume that any beginning refers to a peace parley, any eruption to a gang war, any invasion to a love nest. So why take up space with those lengthy phrases? Why not: BLEEP BEGINS. BLEEP ERUPTS. BLEEP INVADED? In those three examples alone, eleven letter spaces have been eliminated. Add that to the space saved by doing away with warranties and cutting down on the size of labels, and we may have room enough to build on that addition to the house after all.

I've even found a better use for the bleep on television. Rather than having it last, as it does, for only a fraction of a minute, why not let it run on for a full half-hour? By that I mean, use it to replace the programs. Content will certainly be no problem—some of the programs I've seen have had a great deal less than that as a basis. On the possibility that a half-hour-long bleep might become monotonous, though, I suggest that the tone be varied, rising and falling, producing a tunelike effect. We'll call it "music." I have the ideal name for the television set, too, after it's been modified to provide us with this music. We'll call it The Radio.

If you'll excuse me now, it's time for my bleep. While I'm gone, feel free to browse through this volume of mystery tales. You'll find them, I promise, suspenseful, spine-tingling, and bleep-curdling.





## THE SAWBUCK MACHINE

by Frank Sisk

Most people never remembered it for long, but Julian's last name was TenEyck. Julian TenEyck—a promise of aristocratic grandeur hardly fulfilled by the quiet young man in person. His notable attributes seemed to be very blond eyebrows, extra-thick rimless glasses, a plaid bow tie and, when on duty at Patterson's Clam House, a red velveteen vest. Most people called him Julian the first few times, then jollied it to Julie, and after that always thought of him that way.

He didn't resent it. Though nearly thirty, he still thought of himself as much younger, except at school, and there he generally felt confused and uncertain. He taught a class in social science at a junior high five days a week. Two nights a week he filled in at Patterson's as spare bartender, Mondays and Tuesdays, which were always slow nights in the offseason.

He told anyone who asked that he bartended to save money toward the day of his marriage, although he was not too sure this was the reason. He was not too sure of the girl either. Her name was Lydia, and she taught first-year French.

Sometimes he secretly admitted to himself that the real reason for moonlighting at Patterson's Clam House was the riverside view from the tall grease-glazed windows opposite the bar, and the tangy smell of salt water when the tide cruised up from the Sound. He also rather liked the difference of the people from those he met in his other, his professional, his expected way of life—clam diggers, fishermen, men who owned barges and men who owned yachts, men who stayed close to the water for a living and men who lingered near it for the sport; the long and the short and the tall; the rich and the poor, with very few in between at this time of the year before the summer vacationers be-

gan to arrive. But they all had one thing in common, an appreciation of good food and drink, and they all drank a lot.

Among the regulars there was only one one-drink man. Nobody seemed to know his real name but everybody called him Goliath. Goliath was a one-drink (and draught beer, at that) man because, as Julie surmised early in the game, he was a one-quarter man. Each night at five five on the dot, Goliath lumbered into Patterson's, took a stool at the bar, and opened a hamlike fist to release a quarter onto the dark old mahogany.

This meant he wanted a beer. He never ordered it in so many words, but expected the man behind the bar should know without being told. Julie's first encounter with Goliath's slack-jawed taciturnity, some months earlier, had resulted in a certain amount of confusion.

"Yes, sir. What's your pleasure?"

Goliath simply stared at his quarter.

Thinking the man might be deaf, Julie raised his voice a little. "What'll it be, sir?" Perhaps the guy's dumb, Julie thought. He looked dumb, or deaf; or both.

Goliath just sat impassively on the stool, staring from under painfully granulated lids at the silver coin on the dark wood.

Julie took a beer glass from the drainboard and held it aloft as if to invite comment.

Goliath's watery eyes regarded the glass without comprehension. He blinked after a few seconds, and uttered a word that sounded like "Quarr."

One of several clam diggers at the other end of the bar broke away from the group conversation long enough to say, "What he wants, kid, is a glass of that strong ale, whatever ya call it; the spigot there with the gold head. Better give it to the poor slob before he busts."

After this incident Julie began, on subsequent Mondays and Tuesdays, a desultory study of Goliath. He noticed that the big man's total attention was always concentrated on the quarter until the beer was served. The quarter seemed to be the focal point of his life.

Once the foamy glass was in front of him, he divided his attention, obviously with considerable effort, between that and the coin en route to the till. When the dime in change was set beside the glass, a grimace that might have been a smile momentarily tightened the loose moist lips. Then he sat in a state of drooling cataplexy for the next two hours—"Yes, two whole hours," as Julie emphasized to Lydia—over the single beer and the single dime. It was the life of a moron, in short, but Julie had never met an adult moron before (at least not to his knowledge) and he found this one both fascinating and terrifying.

Lydia kind of summed it up. "*Il est nuit dans ces sombres hivers.*"

"What exactly does it mean, honey?" Julie asked.

"You know, not quite—" said Lydia.

In the beginning, Julie tried to strike up a conversation with Goliath whenever the bar was free of other customers, which was quite often on Monday night. Occasionally Goliath responded to a point.

"You work around here anywhere?"

"Shad bone."

"Interesting. I teach school myself, days. Live around here somewhere?"

"Nacker barn."

"I see. Alone? I mean any relatives?"

"Nacker."

"By the way, Goliath, what's your real name? Your family's?"

"Sammich."

"Sammich? Sam *what*? Say it once again."

It was useless. What there was to know about Goliath came offhand from other sources, other customers, other drinkers. He lived with a family named Nickerson, very old-line fishermen, with two boats considered good-sized in that area. They sold most of their catch commercially, but also maintained a retail outlet where Goliath was employed in boning out such spiculate fish as shad. That accounted for the long thin knife he always wore in a bruised leather scabbard attached to his belt.

Goliath didn't live in the Nickersons' house. He lived in a room they had built for him in their barn. If he was to any degree related to them by blood, the Nickersons were not known to have acknowledged it. All that was known was they gave him shelter, food, employment and twenty-five cents a day. It sounded like peonage to Julie, and he said as much to Lydia.

She said with a sigh, "*N'en parlons plus.*"

That was where matters stood between them on the Monday night when the man with the sawbuck machine came to Patterson's.

He had been there before, but never on Monday. He liked a crowd. The sawbuck machine paid off in a crowd, and nobody got mad at it. They treated it as entertainment. But tonight the sawbuck-machine man (nobody appeared to know his name either) looked a bit sloshed to Julie's not especially sharp eyes, as if on a small but deliberate bender, but he had his machine with him. He was the type who had mixed business with pleasure so often that he could no longer separate the fundamentals.

"Hiya, kid," he said, gay. "Now don't tell me. I'll remember. But what's your name again? Not yet, though. Let me guess."

"Julian TenEyck."

"I told ya not to tell me. But okay, the harm's done. No use crying over it, the way I say. So okay, Julie, let's get down to the serious business and mix me up a very intoxicating rum collins."

The man placed the sawbuck machine on the bar. It resembled an old-fashioned coffee mill. The crank was connected to gearage at the crown, which was set on a small cupola of wood. At the front of this cupola was a brass-plated slot large enough to take a coin the size of a dime or a penny, but an embossment above it read "Dime Only." A broad base underneath contained a small drawer with two miniature copper knobs.

"Dark or light rum?" asked Julie.

"A bit of both. Why not?"

"Quarr," said Goliath, who was the only other person present.

"Hey," said the sawbuck-machine man, "we got a live one." He pushed his machine a few feet along the bar in Goliath's direction and followed it. "Like to examine the greatest little invention in the world?" He gave the machine a pat of affection. "Not another one like it anywhere else on this old terrestrial globe of ours. An apparatus both singular and unique." He pushed it a few feet farther. "Don't be shy and dainty, Big Boy. Step right up and examine this fabulous little instrument absolutely free and gratis."

Goliath was staring fixedly and perhaps defensively at his dime on the bar beside the hour-old beer.

"I beg your pardon, Big Boy," said the sawbuck-machine man, cupping hand to mouth in a gesture of broad humor, "but could it be you're a trifle hard of hearing? A mite deaf maybe?"

Goliath took a small sip from his glass and swallowed it with relish.

The sawbuck-machine man noticed the dime. "Well, you got the wherewithal, Big Boy, if you ain't got nothing else. You don't need hearing to enjoy the benefits of my unique little device. You don't need brains or fancy clothes. You don't need blue blood or royal ancestry. This little machine pays no mind to race, creed or color, my friend. Its cogs are cognizant, I repeat, its cogs are cognizant of only one thing in this whole wide world and that one thing is nothing more than a thin dime and a thin dime only. Of which, I notice, one of which you are in possession," he said very provocatively.

"Here's your drink, sir," said Julie, setting the glass at the spot on the bar where the sawbuck-machine man had made initial contact.

"Just a minute, son."

"He's not up to that sort of thing," said Julie.

"He's not? Why not?"

"Well, it's not the sort of thing you like to discuss in public. Why not try your drink here and give me a chance at the machine myself?"

"Well sure," said the man, towing the machine to the drink. "You mean you've never invested before?"

"Not personally. I was in here, busman's holiday, a few Fridays ago, and saw you demonstrating, but I didn't invest personally."

A sound like a growl issued from Goliath.

"I think he wants to invest too," said the man.

"No, he doesn't," said Julie. He glanced sidewise at Goliath and was surprised to see a spark of interest in the usually dull eyes. "He's burping, that's all. He's not—you know—quite right, quite normal." He gave these last two phrases the significance of *sotto voce*.

"Whatever you say," said the man, lifting his drink expansively.

"Well, mister, here's my dime."

"Put it in yourself. The dime entitles you to full control of the operation. That's always been my policy."

Julie dropped the dime in the slot. "Now what do I do? Just turn the crank?"

"Clockwise, ten times."

As Julie began to crank and count, the machine emitted a soft asthmatic whistle.

"Faster," the man said, "or you won't get the full benefit."

Julie cranked faster and the whistle grew shrill. At the count of ten he stopped and so did the whistle. Trying to keep a childish excitement from his voice, he asked, "Now I open the little drawer, is that it?"

"That's it," the man said. "That's just about it." He spoke the words with oracular emphasis.

Julie opened the little drawer. Inside was a ten-dollar bill. He reached for it with a delight disproportionate to the already known facts of the case.

"Pick it up by the corner," the man said. "The ink is still wet."

Exercising great care, Julie lifted the fresh sawbuck from the drawer and deposited it on a dry part of the bar. Then he removed his glasses and began to polish them with a handkerchief, thinking, *Wouldn't it be wonderful if it was real just once, just a couple of times, or ten at most? Some men make it as easy as that. The stock market for instance. Or the daily double. Or oil wells.*

"Not a bad return on your investment," the man was saying.

*Lydia would think he was nuts. If he ever told her.* He replaced his glasses. "Not bad at all," he said with a small laugh. Leaning forward, he hopefully studied the picture of Alexander Hamilton; and on the scroll underneath he read, as was to be expected, the word "Counterfeit."

The sawbuck-machine man seemed to follow his thoughts. "That's what makes it legal, kid—the word there, instead of Hamilton's name. I mean it don't make me a criminal or something, a hot-money man. I'm open and aboveboard, a joker line. And a little lower down on the bill I give myself added protection, and you too. Take a look."

Julie took a look. Instead of "Will Pay To The Bearer On Demand," the legend had become "Wont Pay To The Bearer On Demand," with the unapostrophized key word in italics.

"That covers the law," the man continued, swishing the remains of his drink around in the glass. "It keeps the game legal. And look at the laughs it gets."

Still somewhat bemused, Julie said, "Yeah, I guess you're right. How long does it take for the ink to dry?"

"Overnight, more or less. Well, I got to be going to my lady love, kid." He drained the glass and picked up the sawbuck machine. "Goodbye again." He left quickly.

A second after the door closed Julie realized the sawbuck-machine man hadn't paid for the rum collins. He started around the bar, and then something unusual happened.

Goliath had gotten to his feet and was leaving too. What is more, he was leaving behind half a glass of beer and his beloved dime, change from the quarter. The development was so incredible that, for the moment, it immobilized Julie both physically and mentally. Only after the door closed the second time did he return to his usual place between the cash register and the telephone, picking up a bar rag on the way.

Ten minutes later, when he had about decided to

dump Goliath's beer and put the dime in an escrow glass, the big fellow returned, and he was carrying the sawbuck machine.

Stupefied, Julie watched Goliath resume his accustomed seat. He watched him set the sawbuck machine on the bar. He watched him toss off the flat beer in one enormous gulp. Incredulous, he watched him insert his dime in the machine and crank out a wild piercing whistle; watched the plump red fingers fumble at the tiny knobs of the tiny drawer; watched the sawbuck being clumsily extracted and placed thoughtlessly in a slick of beer; imagined the wet image of Alexander Hamilton darkening out of countenance.

"Boll," said Goliath. "Whiskey boll."

He spoke with a note, wholly new, of demented authority, snapping Julie from his stupor. "How did you get that machine, Goliath? Speak up now. You didn't hurt that man, did you?"

"Boll," said Goliath, tapping the bogus bill with a stubby forefinger. "Whiskey boll. Now."

"Not until you tell me how you got that machine," said Julie in what he regretfully recognized as his schoolteacherish way.

Goliath got heavily to his feet and patted the scabbard that contained the fish-boning knife. Then he drew a finger across his throat and sat down again.

It took Julie several seconds to get it. "You mean you—oh no, you don't mean—"

His doubts were dispersed by the expression of insane satisfaction on Goliath's face.

"Why, that's simply horrible! Goliath, I'm ashamed of you. This is big trouble. Big. You don't understand it but it's very big trouble, and I'm going to have to call somebody. The police or somebody."

"Whiskey boll," said Goliath. "Now. Quarr, quarr." He picked the smeared bill off the bar and held it out.

"And besides the money is no good, Goliath," said Julie sententiously as he went to the telephone. "It's play money. It has no value." He lifted the receiver and dialed the operator. As the signal began buzzing in



his ear he turned to tell Goliath in simpler terms what was meant by a counterfeit, but he had time only to see the blazing wing of steel in flight and to think *What a silly way to—*

## CONTRABAND

by James Holding

They registered at the Hotel Excelsior in Naples on Friday evening just at cocktail time. Their afternoon flight from Zurich had gone off without incident, despite Anne's vague forebodings.

The desk clerk examined their registration card in a perfunctory manner, after Arthur had filled it in. "Ah, yes," he said, "Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Benson, Davenport, Iowa." He pronounced it "Ee-owa." Benson nodded. "Your room is ready, Signor Benson. Number fifty-two. I saved it for you especially. It is on the front of the hotel where you have a view of the bay."

He tapped a silver bell on the desk to call a bellboy. The Bensons waited for him to say something more, something that would give them a hint as to how to proceed, but all he said was, "You have quite a lot of luggage, I see. I'll assign two porters."

Two middle-aged bellboys gathered up their luggage. The Bensons turned to follow them. Only then did the desk clerk suddenly snap his fingers with the air of a man who reproaches himself, and, raising his voice to the limit of gentility, call after them, "*Scusi*, Signor Benson! One moment, please. I have been holding a message for you."

In some embarrassment he took a stack of "hold till arrival" mail from a shelf under the desk and quickly sorted through it. He extracted a plain white envelope and handed it across the desk. "I am sorry," he apologized. "I forget it."

Benson smiled with relief and said, "Thanks," as he turned away to rejoin his wife. His quick glance showed him the envelope had his name written across its face in violet ink in a bold masculine hand.

The view of the bay from the small balcony fronting

their room was spectacular. The water seemed impossibly blue. Vesuvius slept peacefully in the red twilight off to their left, beyond Castel del Ovo. A snatch of accordion music reached them from one of the cafes on the Santa Lucia waterfront, directly below.

When the bellboys, overtipped, departed, Anne Benson said, "Isn't it lovely, Arthur?" and tossed her small hat on one of the twin beds. She stepped through the open door onto the balcony, a new animation in her movements and expression. "So this is the place? At last, at last."

"This is the place, darling," Arthur Benson said, smiling at her slender back. With both hands resting on the balcony rail, and body drawn to full height on her high heels, Anne looked as handsome as ever, Benson thought; she was just as young and desirable as she had been twenty years ago when he had fallen in love with her. He felt a rush of tenderness.

The determination took momentary charge of his emotions. He said quietly, "I suppose this is the contact, Anne, this letter the desk clerk was holding for me." He held it up. "I don't think he forgot it at all. I think he just waited until he sized us up and made sure of our discretion, and integrity."

Anne turned into the room from the balcony with an abrupt movement. "Don't open it, Arthur," she said urgently. "Please don't." She seemed suddenly deflated; all her excitement drained out of her, to be replaced by anxiety.

Benson answered, "But the man in Zurich said . . ."

"I don't care what he said!" she interrupted fiercely. "We were mad to listen to him! To come here to this hotel on such an errand at the recommendation of a total stranger! It's dangerous, Arthur!"

"Maybe it is," her husband said. "But it's too late to back out now." He waved the envelope at her.

Anne walked over to him and put her arms around his neck. Tears glistened in her eyes, he noted with concern. "Oh, Arthur, I'm so frightened! You've never

done anything really wrong before. You've always been honest and—and upright. It hurts me terribly to see you deliberately planning a thing like this."

"Oh, come on now, Anne, it's not that bad!" He patted her back, comforting her, although he felt strangely shaky himself. "After all, it's only smuggling. And smuggling has been going on ever since Old Testament times, by respectable people, too. It's really more a manifestation of independence than a crime, darling. Don't you see?" He needed the reassurance of this easy sophistry as much as she did.

She dried her eyes and went to sit down in one of the uncomfortable armchairs the room contained. "Let's go down and have a cocktail before dinner, Arthur. I need a drink quite badly."

"Okay. In a minute." Arthur slit open the envelope with his thumbnail. He drew out a slip of paper and looked at it.

"What does it say?"

"It's just a telephone number."

"No name?"

"Nothing. But I guess they have to work this way—sort of deviously."

"It's terrifying." Anne's voice showed tension again. "I *do* wish we hadn't got mixed up in it, Arthur."

"But we are mixed up in it, Anne. I'm going to call the number. Then we'll have a cocktail and dinner."

He went to the telephone and asked the hotel switchboard operator to get him the number on his slip of paper. He waited.

Presently a harsh voice said, "*Pronto!*" The diaphragm in Benson's receiver rattled faintly.

Benson said, "This is Arthur Benson speaking."

"Benson? Ah, yes." A degree of cordiality entered the harsh voice. "Where are you staying?"

"The Excelsior."

"An excellent hotel." The man's English was unaccented, quite American in its inflections. "And how did you get my telephone number?"

"In an envelope from the desk clerk."

"Excuse," said the voice, "but what color was the

ink in which your name was written?"

"Violet."

"So," said the voice quite briskly now. "Then you *are* our Mr. Arthur Benson, introduced very kindly by a mutual friend in Zurich."

"And who are you?" Benson asked incautiously.

A laugh came over the wire. "I ask the questions, Signor, please. You don't need my name. All you need is money. You have it?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Then meet me in fifteen minutes at the Cafe Mazzini in Galleria Umberto. The Arcade, you know it? No? You can walk there. Anyone will direct you."

Benson said weakly, "My wife and I were just going down to the bar for a cocktail."

"Let her drink alone. We want no women sticking their noses into our conversation tonight, Signor Benson. Come alone if you really mean business. I'll be sitting at the third table from the front of the cafe. I'll be wearing a red sweater under a plaid jacket. Fifteen minutes."

There was a click as he hung up.

Benson replaced the receiver, hoping the switchboard operator hadn't been listening. He said to Anne, "I'm afraid you'll have to drink your cocktail alone, darling."

She was pale. She said in a low voice, "I could hear what he said, Arthur. Don't worry about me. I'm all right, now that it's begun. You only have fifteen minutes."

The man with the harsh voice, the red sweater and the plaid jacket turned out to be short, fat and ruddy, with almost no neck, and with a bristly, crew-cut bullet head of graying hair. Benson slipped into the other chair at the third table from the front of the Cafe Mazzini. He was right on time.

The fat man was eating ravioli. He looked up at Benson, chewing noisily, but said nothing. Benson waited until he swallowed, then murmured, "I'm Benson."

The man reached a powerful stub-fingered hand

across the table and shook hands. "Glad to meet you," he said. Then he took another bite of ravioli. If he had been in America during Prohibition, Benson thought, he probably would have been a bootlegger. But he had a crinkly look around the eyes that bespoke geniality, perhaps.

At a loss how to begin, Benson said, "Our friend in Zurich told me . . ."

"Wait." The man held up one hand. "Please. I know what our friend in Zurich told you, that I'm a dealer in rare and generally unobtainable goods, right? It's true. But we don't shout about it in public, Signor. No." He looked with theatrical caution at the sparsely occupied tables around him. "Nor do we agree to supply you with merchandise until we are satisfied as to your qualifications."

"What do you want to know?"

The short man wiped his lips, shiny from ravioli sauce, with a clean white napkin. He didn't offer Benson anything to eat or drink. He put down his fork, lit a cigarette and said, "How long have you been in Europe?"

"Almost a year. We've been taking the Grand Tour. Neither my wife nor I have ever been to Europe before, and we thought we'd take our time and see it right, since there was no hurry about getting home."

"Very sensible. You take a quick trip abroad and they get suspicious. But a year is okay." He nodded his head. "Have you ever handled our commodity before?"

"No."

"An amateur," the man said deprecatingly. "I didn't know that. You've had no experience at all?"

"None. But surely it isn't as difficult as all that?" Benson found himself on the defensive. It infuriated him. He thought, here I am practically begging this character to let me commit a crime. He suddenly felt furtive and ashamed. He started to stand up, but the fat man motioned him calmly into his chair again. And for some reason, Benson meekly subsided. He thought of Anne back at the Excelsior, alone, but he said, "How much are you asking?"

The man shrugged. "A thousand dollars is the best I can do. In lire, of course. It has to be cut several ways, you understand."

"A thousand dollars!" Benson goggled at him, incredulous.

"You'd be surprised how hard they are to locate," the man returned, obviously irritated by Benson's amazement. "After all, they don't grow on trees. The few owners who are willing to sell can't advertise, you can see that."

"Of course." Benson hastened to soothe the Italian. "I can afford a thousand dollars." He had been prepared to pay more.

"In lire," the man repeated. "And you take the goods sight unseen. You have to trust us."

"I'll trust you," Benson said, eagerly now.

The Italian smiled for the first time, showing a gold tooth. "But we don't trust *you*," he said silkily. "I'm only an agent, *amico*. You understand that. The owner I represent must approve this transaction, too."

"Well, that ought to be easy to arrange."

"Will you have dinner tomorrow at Cesare's, on the Vomero hill, between one and two o'clock?"

"Alone? Or may I bring my wife?"

"No matter. We won't embarrass you, I promise that."

"All right. And if your owner approves?"

"I'll make delivery tomorrow afternoon at five; on the corner of Via Morelli and Via Partenope."

"That sounds pretty public."

"All the better. We'll have the goods well-wrapped, I assure you. No one will look at it twice."

"Okay," said Benson. He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Once you've passed the goods along to me, you'll be in the clear. But how about me? How do I get it home safely?"

The Italian shrugged. "It hasn't been registered, understand. Officially it doesn't exist. Are you staying over in Naples for a while?"

"That depends."

"Well, stay until Monday, anyway. That's my ad-

vice. On Monday all the offices will be open. You can take your precautions against any charges from the American authorities then. It shouldn't take you more than half an hour."

The fat man took a deep draught of the sour red wine he had apparently been saving to celebrate their bargain, if one should be struck. He showed his gold tooth again briefly. "Payment on delivery, then." He shook hands with Benson once more. "In lire, please. Don't forget that."

Benson bowed and went back to the hotel to find Anne.

Arthur and Anne had dinner at Cesare's next day, as instructed. The restaurant clung to the side of the hill high above the city. From here, the view was even more spectacular than from the balcony of their room. It was a sparkling clear day. Arthur persuaded himself that he and Anne could faintly see the blue misty presence of the Sorrentine peninsula against the horizon.

Benson didn't see any sign of the fat Italian with the bristly hair, although he kept looking around him at intervals. But he and Anne must have been inspected surreptitiously and passed muster. Because at exactly five o'clock that afternoon, as he waited on the designated corner, fighting down his trepidation and clutching a thick pad of lira notes in the side pocket of his coat, Benson saw the fat, ruddy-faced Italian of the Cafe Mazzini approaching across the intersection. He was dodging nonchalantly through the heavy pedestrian and wheeled traffic, carrying under one arm a wicker container shaped like a laundry case.

Without a word, Benson stepped forward, intercepting the man, and handed him his bundle of money. The Italian accepted the lire politely, not counting it, but thrusting it at once into a pocket. Then he passed his wicker package to Benson and strolled away. Over his shoulder, departing, he winked and murmured conspiratorially, "*Va bene, signor. Mille grazie!*"

Ten minutes later, Benson laid the wicker case on



his wife's bed in their room at the Excelsior. Awkwardly he began to unfasten the lid. Anne watched him with utter concentration. After a moment she said, "Hurry, Arthur, hurry!" unable to bear his fumbling.

Arthur disengaged the lid. When it was removed, and the inner wrappings pushed eagerly aside, the Bensons looked down at the contraband they intended to smuggle into the United States.

A wide-eyed beautiful Italian baby looked back at them.

At last, though all the legal channels of adoption had failed them, the Bensons had a baby. Never again, as in the early years, would they be rejected as adoptive parents because of inadequate income. And never again, as so often in recent years, even with wealth to spare, would they be judged too old by adoption agencies to care for a new-born infant.

Never again. For on Monday they would register this baby at the American consulate in Naples as Arthur Benson, Jr., a new American citizen born to Anne and Arthur Benson of Davenport, Iowa, during a year's sojourn abroad.

The baby made a wet beguiling noise, and his new parents smiled.

## FOR EVERY EVIL

by Douglas Farr

It must have been clear to anyone who watched the scuffle that night in Sam Jessup's bar who was the good guy and who was the bad guy. First of all there was the matter of size. The little man is always the underdog. You root for the underdog, so that makes him the good guy.

Charles Ames was five-six and maybe he could make a scale read a hundred and thirty. He had small thin hands which didn't knot too convincingly into fists, and a pointed nose which no one should carry into a fight. His unruly yellow hair, pale complexion, and innocent blue eyes were all features of a boy, even though Charley was thirty-eight.

On the other hand, Frank Kasten had all the appearances of a man, or in fact, almost of a gorilla. Big, broad, and black-hairy, he had enormous hands and a flat, pugnacious nose. And he had a matching disposition.

Nobody remembered exactly how it all started, least of all Charley Ames. Charley had dropped into Sam's bar, as he always did right after quitting time at the bank. This was a habit not too reprehensible, since Charley was a bachelor. He had his little double bourbon, taken neat, and the vicissitudes of the banking day began to lose their sharp painful edge and to dull into the unimportant past.

Then suddenly Frank Kasten was there, filling and darkening Charley's horizon. Frank stood at the bar at Charley's shoulder and began to pour out his troubles.

There was his kid first of all, Frank complained. Fifteen years old, and completely worthless. Wouldn't study at school, sassed his parents, drove the family car without a license and without permission. How do you

handle a kid like that? You beat him, Frank said.

Which probably provoked Charley's remark, "Shouldn't beat a kid." Charley wasn't making specific reference to Frank's boy, but was remembering the physical punishment of his own youth. The old razor strap on his lean and bare posterior, shamefully administered in the bathroom.

But Frank took it personally. He fixed a bloodshot eye on Charley. "Who asked you?" he wanted to know threateningly.

Possibly Charley didn't even hear him. Under the influence of his own harsh memories, he ordered another double bourbon, sipped it mournfully.

Then there was Frank Kasten's wife. Always taking the kid's side. Making it seem, to hear her talk, that everything was Frank's fault. Pestering him, nagging him, reproaching him. Then, when the fool kid was getting his lumps, crying and shrieking hysterically. What do you do with a woman like that? Well, you beat her too. Every time you beat the kid.

"Shame on you," Charley said.

Frank turned around again, his eyes narrowed, his shoulders hunched menacingly. "What did you say?" he asked.

"I said, shame on you," Charley answered. He was seeing visions of his own mother, her face swollen and bruised, and in his ears his father's drunken curses rang again.

"What do you know about it?" Frank demanded.

"I know everything," Charley said. "I'm an authority."

"Well, keep your nose out of my business!"

The bourbon was racing through Charley's blood, making him grandly brave, heroically angry. "Nobody has his own business," he orated in a voice louder than his usual. "We are all mankind together. No man is an island. If you beat your wife and your son, Frank Kasten, you are beating me. And I command you to stop. You're a cruel, vicious, blackhearted monster. You ought to be horsewhipped . . ."

Frank had had a couple of drinks of his own. And at best he wasn't a man to accept criticism or interference. He acted instinctively, according to his nature. His big right hand coiled suddenly into a fist, and with a jabbing motion, not a swing at all, smashed against his tormentor's jaw. Even without full force behind it, the blow might nearly have decapitated Charley, except for the fact that neither his head nor his body offered much resistance. Like a tennis ball propelled by a racket, he caromed down the length of the bar, collided with a table, skated along with the table to the far wall, and there collapsed with it onto the floor.

But, with something of a tennis ball's resilience, he bounced up again. Blood from a cut lip trickled down his pale chin. Nevertheless, when he regained his feet, he started back toward Frank.

There were a dozen other men in the bar. Two of them intercepted Charley and held him back. The rest threw themselves upon Frank. For a moment though, the outcome was uncertain, what with the ferocity of the combatants trying to get at each other.

Sam Jessup, a huge, fat, red-faced and angry buddha behind the bar, bellowed with rage at both of them. "I'll call the police, I will!" And for a more immediate threat, he grabbed two empty bottles by their necks, poised them in the air, and gave the impression of a man who would break a skull rather than countenance any destruction of his premises. Possibly it was Sam Jessup who restored order.

"All right," Frank conceded, straightening his clothes when he was let go of. "But tell that pipsqueak to stay out of my way," And with that he stalked out.

Sam and the customers all offered aid to Charles, but he disdained it. He wiped the blood from his chin and assured them he was not hurt. He stayed in the bar for a long while, neglecting his dinner, drinking far more than his usual quota. The liquor burned his cut lip, but he scarcely felt the pain. Far deeper inside him quite another pain was burning. Primitive, almost forgotten urges writhed within his soul. Shame, resentment against Frank Kasten, but also against people

now dead. And a desire for revenge. Some people, the dead ones, were beyond the reach of that revenge. But Frank Kasten wasn't . . .

It was fate, not planning nor premeditation, that brought the two brawlers together again. Neither had sought out the other. Frank Kasten might even have forgotten the whole thing. And Charley Ames had been merely wallowing in his unholy desires, without the capacity for organizing himself to action.

So it was chance entirely which brought them face to face on a dark night a week later. Of course, in that small town they were bound to meet again some time. But not necessarily alone. Not necessarily in the dark. And not necessarily with Charley on his way home from Sam's bar, having imbibed more than of old, in accordance with his new custom.

They halted a few paces apart there on the sidewalk, recognizing each other more instinctively than by features. And they exchanged silent stares for a long moment.

"Got any more advice for me, pipsqueak?" Frank asked finally.

The rage for vengeance stirred to life in Charley, warmed and fed by Sam Jessup's bourbon. But a germ or two of wisdom soured the brew. He knew he was no match for Frank. His jaw was still sore from that punch of Frank's a week ago. Still he was not wise enough to make a conciliatory answer.

"I still have my opinion of you," he said.

Frank started walking slowly in Charley's direction, shambling like the gorilla of a man he was. Charley held his ground for a second or two. Then good sense told him that no matter how he might thirst for vengeance, he could not quench that thirst at this moment under these conditions. He turned and ran.

This abrupt retreat might have been expected to satisfy Frank. But it didn't somehow. Charley was terrified to hear Frank's pounding footsteps behind him. His terror energized him to a new burst of speed. The terror was partly of memory. He remembered running

away like this a long time ago and being pursued.

His mind worked now with the instinctive, automatic cunning of an animal or of a child, a cunning that operates under and independent of a conscious fear. He ran the length of a block, then turned to the right. The footsteps behind him turned also. He dodged down an alley where the darkness was deeper. But the pursuing footsteps seemed to gain on him.

He left the alley and began to traverse a series of back yards. Now, because of the softness of the ground, he couldn't hear the footsteps in his rear. But he didn't dare stop and turn to see if Frank were still back there. A new terror, that of uncertainty, overwhelmed him.

But it was just then that fate intervened again. He saw the low picket fence, because it was painted white. Still, it was a prodigious leap for a man of Charley's age and athletic attainments. But he had to leap or turn and backtrack. He made it, by how much he didn't know. But he wasn't more than three or four steps beyond the barrier when he heard the crash and thud behind him. And this time he did stop and turn around.

There was just moonlight enough for him to see what had happened. Frank had attempted the same hurdle, but had lacked either Charley's agility or his luck. A few boards were dislodged from the fence where Frank's flying feet had made too low a clearance. And there was Frank himself, face down on the turf, apparently stunned from his fall.

Charley Ames stood still for a moment, his breath coming in tortured gasps, his complaining heart pounding in his chest. He listened and looked around him. There was a row of houses on either hand, with a light in a window here and there. But none of the inhabitants of those houses seemed to have been aroused by the chase through the yards, not even by Frank's crashing contact with the fence. There were no sounds except the frenzied working of Charley's lungs and heart.

The precautions once taken, Charley's decision came swiftly, and surely. He did not hesitate or question. Now that his enemy lay helpless, vengeance could have

its way. Frank Kasten is an evil man, Charley Ames' mind decided. He intends great harm to his family, to me, unless . . .

His eyes searched the yard quickly for a suitable object. And there it was immediately, a rock from among the many which bordered a little flower bed. Charley stooped and picked it up. He walked with it to the prone but breathing body of Frank Kasten. He poised and aimed it. Then he dropped it.

And afterwards he walked home. Forced himself to walk rather than to run, for his terror of Frank had been supplanted by another.

But the next morning he felt better somehow, with a new day beginning and the sun shining brightly. He ate a good breakfast, and walked to the bank, as was his custom. He greeted his fellow employees with equanimity. And when he passed the president's office, where the president himself, Mr. Sidney Lenker, stood in the doorway watching his minions assemble, he bowed his usual little bow.

"Good morning, Mr. Lenker," he said.

"Good morning, Charley," Sid Lenker answered. The president was a portly, pompous little man with rimless glasses. From behind those glasses his beady eyes appraised Charley shrewdly.

"You all right this morning, Charley?" he asked.

Charley froze. "Of course, Mr. Lenker. Why shouldn't I . . . ?"

"I've heard a rumor that you've been drinking quite a bit lately, Charley."

Charley's relief was such that he even managed to smile. "Oh, I do toss one now and then, sir," he admitted. "But never so much, sir, that it affects my work here in the bank."

Sid Lenker didn't smile, but he relaxed a bit. "Well, that's the important thing," he said. And with that, he turned and disappeared into his office.

Stingy old slave driver, Charley thought. All he cares about me is whether or not I can do my job. And he'll fire me the minute I can't.

Thus Charley was thinking about Old Man Lenker, and so it was that he saw Tom Madden enter the president's office about nine thirty. Tom Madden held the title of local Chief of Police, and Charley could guess why he'd come to the bank. A moment later both men came out to the doorway of the president's office, and Lenker pointed out Charley's desk over in the corner.

Charley sat still while Tom Madden approached. But there was no sense pretending that he didn't see him. So he watched Tom coming all the way. Tom was a heavy-set, kindly looking gray-haired man, but he looked grim this morning. Tom didn't often have to deal with murder.

"Hello, Charley," he said when he arrived. He pulled up a chair close to Charley's and sat down.

"Hello, Tom," Charley said. "What can I do for you?" He listened to his own voice. It sounded calm and innocent.

"Where were you last night, Charley?" Tom Madden was looking hard and searchingly through his spectacles.

"I was at Sam Jessup's bar for a while. Why?"

"You didn't see Frank Kasten, did you?"

Charley had wondered what he would say if he were ever asked such a direct question. But now he said it, smoothly, without hesitation, "No."

"Frank Kasten was killed last night. Murdered. Found him in a back yard. Somebody crushed his skull with a rock."

Charley waited for the proper interval before he answered. "And you're thinking I did it, is that it, Tom?"

"Everybody knows about the fight you had with him a week ago, Charley."

"Tom, I'll tell you something. I ain't sorry Frank Kasten was murdered. But are you accusing me of doing it?"

Tom Madden fidgeted and glanced away for a moment. His suspect's taking the offensive seemed to have unnerved him a bit.

"You and I have been friends for a long time, Tom,"



Charley pursued. "So tell me the truth. Do you think it was me?"

Tom blinked for a minute, then finally looked back to Charley with a sheepish grin. "Shucks, no," he said. "I'm sorry, Charley. I shouldn't even have come here. You're not the kind of man to commit a murder." He stood up and thrust out his hand. "We're still friends, ain't we?"

Charley stood up too, and took the Chief's hand. "Sure, why not?" he answered.

Then he stayed standing there, watching Tom depart. He believes me now, he thought. But what's he going to believe when no other candidate turns up? He'll start wondering about me again probably.

But I'm not sorry! This thought came to him suddenly. I had a chance to destroy something evil, and I took it. I'd do the same thing again.

Charley Ames sat at his desk in the bank and stared down at the papers which had come across his desk for processing. Foreclosure. Mrs. Earnshaw. Sixty-two. Widow. Behind in payments. Destitute. Foreclosure.

He must have sat there for a long time, motionless, doing nothing but staring down. Because he didn't see or hear anything else till the voice boomed out practically in his ear.

"What's the matter, Charley? Don't you feel good this morning?"

Startled, Charley glanced up and saw his boss. Sid Lenker was looking very prosperous this morning, very important. Both his hands were pressed against his ample belly, and in his mouth was a cigar that matched his own corpulence. Somewhere in the past the sight of this monster hovering over his desk might have struck terror into the heart of Charley Ames. But not now.

"Mrs. Earnshaw's house," he said, "won't bring enough on the market to cover the amount owing on the mortgage. But if we let her stay, she might find a way to make an occasional payment. What can we lose?"

Sid Lenker's cigar almost exploded from his mouth. "What can we lose?" he repeated. "We can lose our integrity. We can lose our reputation as a financial institution and become a charitable one."

Then he leaned over Charley's desk and spoke more softly. "You were at that bar again last night, I suppose. Well, if that's where you pick up such hare-brained ideas as the one you just mentioned, I suggest you either give up going there every night, or give up coming here every morning."

Mr. Lenker straightened up, very satisfied with himself. He seemed very huge. But in Charley's mind, images swirled and contorted, became confused, lost and changed identification. Charley was remembering another banker. Long, long ago. And a woman, his mother, not Mrs. Earnshaw, not as innocent as Mrs. Earnshaw. But still . . .

"You shouldn't throw people out of their houses," he said aloud and clearly.

Mr. Lenker wasn't the same kind of man that Frank Kasten had been. And perhaps he was more discerning. Perhaps he saw something in Charley's face that Frank Kasten had overlooked. Sid Lenker backed away, then turned and retreated ignominiously into his private office. And he didn't bother Charley again the rest of that day . . .

Charley Ames sat at his desk in the bank the next morning and waited. But what was strange about Charley's sitting at his desk this particular morning was that no one else was sitting at his. They were all milling around, there was an awful lot of chatter, and there was absolutely no work getting done.

Because first of all the big boss, Mr. Sidney Lenker, hadn't ever appeared that morning. He hadn't been standing there in the doorway of his office to greet them all as they arrived. And then secondly, about nine thirty, Tom Madden and two of his uniformed policemen had arrived, and Tom had announced that Mr. Lenker was dead. Mr. Lenker had been murdered.

So there was all this hubbub. Tom Madden got a key and went into Mr. Lenker's office. Then he talked for a while with Mr. Lenker's secretary. Then he talked with a few other people. And Charley Ames sat at his desk waiting his turn.

Maybe it was ten thirty or eleven when his turn came. Since the bank couldn't possibly do business that day, most of the employees were told they could go home. The hubbub subsided a little bit, although there was still plenty of it. Then finally, inevitably, Tom Madden came sidling over to Charley's desk. It seemed he came unwillingly, painfully. And he sat down heavily.

"What can I do for you?" Charley asked.

"Where were you last night, Charley?"

"I stopped at Sam Jessup's bar."

"Did you go any place else before you went home?"

"Like where, Tom?"

"I asked you, did you go any place else?"

"No."

"Somebody paid a visit to Sid Lenker's house real late last night. It must have been somebody Sid knew because apparently he let this visitor in. Then this visitor hit his host over the head with a paperweight from the desk in the library."

"I can't say as I'm sorry that Sid is dead . . ."

Tom Madden chewed his lower lip. "It's kind of funny, Charley," he said, "that every time somebody is murdered in this town, it's always somebody you're not sorry is dead."

Charley didn't get excited. He didn't even feel afraid. "I do have opinions about people," he admitted, "and I can't help expressing them."

Tom shifted his weight in the chair, leaned a little closer. "Yesterday," he said, "Sid Lenker dictated a memo to his payroll and personnel department, telling them to fire you."

"I figured maybe he'd do that," Charley said.

"But why was he going to fire you?"

"We disagreed about a mortgage foreclosure." He

looked at his friend squarely. "Say, Tom, you don't think I killed old Sid just on account of this stinking job of mine, do you?"

But Tom wasn't so easily put off this time. "If you were in my place, Charley, what would you think?"

"You got any evidence, Tom?"

"Nary a bit."

"Then we can stay friendly, can't we, Tom, until you find some?"

But Tom Madden didn't offer his hand as he had before.

The bank had given him a month's notice, but instead of taking his salary for that period as a free gift as he might have, Charley Ames went on working at his old desk. And in the evenings he haunted Sam Jessup's place and did some drinking.

"Dirty shame," Sam Jessup remarked. "They didn't have to mind old Sid after he was dead."

"It was his last wish," Charley answered calmly. "Sort of a sacred thing."

"What are you going to do for whiskey money when you're out of a job?" Sam wondered then.

"I hadn't thought about that," Charley admitted.

"Well, you'd better think of it. You've kind of gotten used to the stuff."

"Sam, you mean after all these years of my being such a good customer, you wouldn't carry me for a while?"

To Sam it was a joke. He threw back his head and the laughter came out of his immense body deep and rumbling. "Charley," he said when he'd stopped laughing, "I ain't in this business for my health."

Charley stared for a moment. He had never seen Sam before in quite the light in which he saw him now. "Why are you in this business then, Sam?" he asked quietly, softly.

"I'm trying to make a living, Charley boy," Sam answered with a wide grin.

"And you don't care how."

"What do you mean I don't care how?"

"You don't care about the people you serve your whiskey to. You don't care who they are."

"Not as long as they can pay for it, Charley boy."

"And you don't care what your whiskey might do to them."

"Hell no. That's their worry. Everybody who comes into a place like this is twenty-one . . ."

No, they're not all twenty-one, Charley contradicted the bartender silently. Because he was remembering again. That other bar hadn't been so much different from this one, and the man who served the drinks not so different from Sam. And there'd been a boy named Charley who had come to that other bar so often to look for his father—only to have that bartender tell him, you're crazy, kid, if you think I'm going to help you take your pop out of here as long as he can pay for his drinks 'n' stand up 'n' drink 'em.

"Whiskey is an evil thing," Charley said.

Sam Jessup kept on grinning. "You ought to know all about whiskey," he said.

"And the people who serve it are evil too. You ought to be run out of town . . ."

Sam had a sense of humor that covered a lot of territory but didn't include himself. His grin vanished suddenly. "Charley," he said, "I don't need your money so bad that I got to listen to that kind of stuff."

"You shouldn't make money out of the weakness of humanity!" Charley shouted.

That was when Sam Jessup came around from behind the bar, put his big hands on Charley Ames and personally escorted him to the door.

And Charley was waiting again, but this time in his own bare little bachelor's room. He heard the footsteps ascending the stairs, and he knew they were Tom Madden's. When the heavy knock sounded at his door, he said, "Come in, Tom."

The man who strode into the room was Tom Madden all right. But his face was both grim and haggard. His hard eyes fastened right on Charley.

"You had an argument with Sam Jessup two nights

ago," Tom began. "Last night after closing time Sam was all alone in his bar, and somebody threw some sticks of dynamite. The place is a wreck and Sam Jessup is dead. Are you glad he's dead, Charley?"

"I'm not sorry," Charley admitted.

"Then you'd better come with me, Charley."

"Where to?"

"Down to the jail."

"Have you got proof I killed Sam Jessup?"

"Haven't got a lick of proof. But I know in my own mind that you did. So I've got to lock you up for safe-keeping, Charley. I'll think of a charge later."

Charley Ames stood up and put on his jacket. "You think I'm crazy, don't you, Tom?" he asked.

Tom Madden's grim expression softened a little. "I'm no psychiatrist," he said. "Maybe George Kasten deserved to die. And maybe Sid Lenker and Sam Jessup too. But I ain't their judge, Charley, and neither are you."

Now Charley Ames sat alone in his cell and waited without knowing what he was waiting for. Tom had said he could call a lawyer, but so far anyway he couldn't see why he needed one. Then Tom had locked him in this cell and left him.

It was a tiny jail. There were only two other cells. One was empty but the second had an inmate, an unshaved fellow whom Charley failed to recognize, asleep on a cot. A drunk probably. There was a corridor in front of the cells, which led to a big room in the front of the building where there were a number of desks. The door to this big room was left open, and Charley could hear occasional voices from there.

But he didn't listen much to the voices. He had his own thoughts to keep him company. He had a lot of thinking to do, in fact.

He wasn't crazy. That he knew. In legal or criminal terms, crazy meant not knowing the difference between right and wrong. And he certainly knew that. He knew that Frank Kasten and Sid Lenker and Sam Jessup were all evil men. That was why he had killed them.

No, it was just the question of whether he, Charley Ames, had the right to judge and punish these men. This was where he and Tom differed. The trouble was Tom didn't know what evil really was. He didn't understand it. He hadn't seen it operate like Charley had.

No, Charley decided finally, he wasn't sorry. When a man encounters evil, he has to strike out against it. There can't be any compromise with it. For every evil there must be punishment, and the evil thing must be destroyed, deprived of its power to hurt ever again. Wherever the evil thing is, whoever it is.

Maybe it was when he had reached these conclusions, and his mind was once again at peace, that Charley started listening to the voices up in front. But maybe too it was because they were new voices, loud voices.

"Lemme go! Lemme go!" one of the voices was yelling. A young voice. A boy's voice.

"Joey! Joey!" A woman's voice, tearful, pleading.

"It won't do you no good!" The boy. "I'll run away again. I'll keep running away. I don't care how many times they bring me back I'll run away again. I don't want to live with you . . ."

"Joey . . . Joey . . . you're all I've got left." The woman again. Down on her knees maybe, like a beggar. "You can't leave me alone, Joey . . . I need you . . ."

Charley Ames clapped his hands to his ears, shutting out the awful screaming voices. But it was too late. He had heard too much. The wheels inside his own brain were already spinning, churning up memories again. Always memories. There were too many of them. If only the mind could ever once forget, completely . . .

*"Charley . . . Charley . . . you're all I have . . . please don't leave me . . ."*

*"I don't want to stay here . . . why can't you leave me alone? . . . let me go . . ."*

He pounded both his fists on his head, but the voices would not stop. The memories would not go away. They jostled inside his brain, fighting for his attention, always changing, always getting louder, more insistent,

more accusing, more damning . . .

*"But I wasn't really gone very long, Aunt, May . . ."*

*"Not very long, Charley? Three years is a long, long time. At least it was to your mother . . ."*

*"But why didn't she let me know? I'd have come home . . ."*

*"How could she know that, Charley? After the way you left . . ."*

*"But why did she do it? Why, Aunt May? Why?"*

*"After the way your father treated her . . . and then you deserting her . . . what did she have to live for, Charley?"*

Charley Ames looked around wildly. He was trapped. There was no escape from the voices screaming inside his head. Now they had to be confronted finally, dealt with at last.

Tom Madden mopped his brow with profound relief. He had just sent them off, mother and son, in some kind of truce. But he doubted if the problem was permanently solved.

"Damn kid," he said to his assistant. "I feel sorry for that poor woman. Been mistreated all her life. I don't know why she doesn't let well enough alone. She got rid of her husband. And the kid's no better. She shouldn't have sent us after him. Mark my words, that Joey Kasten will give his mother plenty of trouble before he's finished."

Tom got up from his chair, shrugged off his weariness. "Guess I'd better go see how Charley's making out," he said, and he trudged back toward the cells.

He didn't have to go all the way. He could see Charley Ames' body from the doorway at the head of the corridor. It reminded him of a rag doll hung up by its collar on a wall peg.

Crazy, the Chief of Police thought, he must have been crazy.



## YOU CAN'T WIN 'EM (AT) ALL

by Ed Lacy

The municipal casino in Nice, France, is one of those clumsy old buildings like something out of a creepy movie. What I mean is, maybe a hundred years ago it held a couple of concert halls and was probably called "grand." Today, the upstairs part is jazzy with the real casino, a fancy nightclub and an expensive restaurant, but the big hallway downstairs is dim and drab, divided by thick old dark curtains hanging from the high ceiling. The *boule* room is in the rear. *Boule* is the poor man's roulette. The numbers run from one to nine, an ordinary rubber ball is used and the payoff odds are seven to one. You can walk in without a tie, even in shorts.

To give you a hint of how badly my luck was going, I'd started for the *boule* room, made a turn into a darker and smaller hallway and was lost. True, I was juiced on French booze, but not that drunk. Lighting a match, I saw I was in this dusty, curtained passageway. I heard sounds ahead of me and, parting a curtain, burning my fingers before I got another match working, I saw a small door. Opening this, I was on top of the *boule* room chatter, with only another old curtain between me and the room. Peeking through a slit in this, I saw the *boule* room okay, but it wasn't an entrance. Somehow I'd ended up behind the change desk, the cashier.

Cussing silently, I turned around, stumbled out to the main hallway, and finally made the entrance to the *boule* tables. I paid my franc to get in and didn't see Frankie, nor did I expect to. I played a handful of francs and lost, as usual. The crazy drinks I'd had were making me a trifle sick, so I went to our hotel room. Frankie wasn't there, either, which didn't help my mood.

On Nice's rocky beach that afternoon we'd been making a play for a large Dutch blonde in a skimpy bikini. I knew I was going to win because Frankie's a bag of bones in trunks, while my 230 pounds of solid muscle cuts that well known figure. Of course, neither Frankie nor I spoke Dutch, but when the big babe started walking gingerly across the pebbles toward the blue Mediterranean, obviously needing help, we both jumped up. Skinny Frankie ran across the damn rocks like a native and reached her first. Those big pebbles were killing my feet, and as I neared her I took a prat-fall. She turned, along with all the others on the *plage*, and laughed at me, while Frankie put his arm around her waist, helped her down the rocky slope and into the water.

I don't like being laughed at; in fact, I wanted to belt blondie. Instead, I eased to my feet like a punchy fighter and finally reached our dressing room. I left the *plage* to tie one on, leaving the lush bikinied blonde to lucky Frankie.

It must have been about two A.M. when Frankie came into our hotel room and turned on the john light to undress, whistling softly. When I sat up in bed, Frankie asked, "Where've you been, Mike? We looked all over for you. She had a friend, another fine blonde and so lonely. Man, a couple of sex boats. Shame, they're leaving in the morning, part of a tour."

See the way my luck has been? All lousy.

My being in France seemed like a break at first, and maybe I've no right to beef. I'm living good over here. It started a month ago, back in the States. I was at the track and by the fourth race I'd taken a bath, was broke. I was hanging around the \$10 WIN window, hoping to see anybody I knew, to make a touch. This skinny guy, who looked like I'd seen him before, came along followed by a big slob giving him a fast sales pitch. When skinny shook his head, the goon tried to grab a ticket from skinny's mitt. Glancing at me, the thin guy called, "Mike, help me!"

I flattened the slob with a gut belt and as the guards

started toward us, this thin guy said, "Mike, let's cut!"

The races were over and we lost ourselves in the crowd. Once we were outside, this guy said, "Thanks, Mike. Don't you remember me, Frankie Dill?"

"Sure," I said, although the name didn't ring any bells.

"When you were bossing the Turbans, I used to hang around with the gang."

He came into focus then. All that was eleven years ago, when I was sixteen and the Turbans were the roughest bopping gang in town. Frankie Dill had been a runty kid I used to send to the store for sodas or butts, an errand boy nobody paid any attention to.

"What are you doing these days, Mike?" he asked.

"Nothing much. Working the docks, a bouncer in a bar over the weekends. You holding a winning ticket on the last race, Frankie?"

He grinned. "I got the Twin Double, worth \$2,194! That punk back there was trying to fast-talk me into letting him cash it, said he had a phony Social Security card, so I'd save the tax bite. I told him no dice and he—"

"Frankie, *you're holding a \$2,194 ticket?*"

"Yeah, I've been lucky the last year or two, winning five or six hundred bucks a week—cards, to the track office in the morning—and the Double last month for a grand," Frankie said calmly. "Let's take a cab back to the city. I'll go down to the track office in the morning to cash my ticket."

"Then you'll have to pay the income tax bite?"

Frankie shrugged narrow shoulders. "I don't mind giving Uncle Sam his cut. I got a fifty-dollar gambler's stamp, play it legit, including my taxes. Keep out of trouble that way."

In the taxi Frankie suddenly asked, "How much time did you get for that stolen car, years ago?"

"Six months. Why?"

"Ever been in stir again, Mike?"

I shook my head. "What you bringing up all this old stuff for, Frankie?"

"I been thinking I ought to take a vacation. That guy you slugged might be looking for me. I'm pretty well loaded and I've always wanted to see Europe, but I don't like traveling alone. I've no record and if you only did six months, you can get a passport. I speak high school French, let's see what's cooking in Paris, Mike. I'll pay your way."

Six days later we were on an Air France jet. Frankie isn't tight with his loot; he bought me a couple of suits and in Paris we put up at a swank hotel. Frankie slipped me two hundred bucks. "Spending money, Mike. When you need more, shout."

Let me tell you, Paris was a drag. We got there in a cold rain on a Thursday and it was still raining on Sunday when Frankie said, "We seen the nightclubs and striptease joints, the hell with this rain. Let's head south to the Côte d'Azur. They say it's a sunny ball."

Five hours later we were taking the sun on a *plage* in Nice, watching the bikini babes. Nice is great, and you'd think with a setup like this going for me I'd be content. But I wasn't. Frankie took care of the bills, but it annoyed me to be dependent upon him. When I was bossing the Turbans, Frankie would have been delighted to shine my sneakers. Now I felt like his flunky. I mean, I've always stood on my own two big feet. I wanted to show Frankie I could make out without him.

Nothing broke for me, though. Like we played *boule* a couple of times, neither of us winning, but Frankie liked the game and said he was working on a system to beat it. Monday night we went to the trotters in a city outside Nice named after Jimmy Cagney, although they spell it Cagnes. Horses are horses in any language, but I dropped sixty bucks' worth of francs while lucky Frankie, who kept telling me to follow his picks, won himself eight hundred francs for the night, which is about \$160.

In Paris I'd bought a couple of lottery tickets at three francs each. Each Wednesday they pick the national lottery winners in France. On Thursday morning I stumbled through a French newspaper while we were

eating the rolls and coffee the hotel called a breakfast. I didn't see my numbers and was about to tear up my slips when Frankie said, "Let me see them. Here, you big dope, you won a hundred francs. They also pay off on the last number and you got a 'five' in the 'O' series."

A hundred francs is only twenty bucks but it gave me a lift, as if my luck was finally changing. I asked, "How do I collect? Do we have to go back to Paris?"

Frankie tried reading the news item, then he said, "No. I'll show you where to collect here in Nice."

After breakfast we left the hotel and I stopped for my usual ham and eggs at a sidewalk café. Then Frankie took me to a tobacco shop where they sold lottery tickets. I gave them my ticket and got a hundred-franc bill. The good feeling left me when Frankie handed in a lottery ticket of his own. He had the last three numbers and had won a thousand francs!

Holding up the bills as we left, he asked, "Need more spending money, Mike? I'd be glad to—"

"No!" I only had about fifty bucks left but I was damned if I'd ask him for any more money. We bought a couple of lottery tickets for the next week and then went down to the *plage*, where lucky Frankie also won the big blonde.

Lying in my bed, staring at the darkness, listening to Frankie breathing evenly in the next bed, I started thinking about how I'd got lost in the casino, ending up behind the change desk. At that desk you get chips for your money and money for your chips, if you win. I figured at least a couple of grand was lost in the casino every night and it was all at that little change desk.

It would be a cinch to come up behind the desk again, clout the one guy there, grab all the paper money and scam the way I'd come. They had three floor men working the *boule* room but they were always watching the tables. Nobody kept an eye on the change desk.

I kept twisting the idea in my mind, sweating a lot, a little hungover. I hadn't pulled a job in a lot of years

and I sure didn't want to do time in a French can. But with two grand of *my own*, I'd feel like a man again, instead of Frankie's pet ape. Although he never said anything, I knew he enjoyed giving me a handout, making up for being a bag of bones and for the brush-off I'd given him back in the teen-gang days. Yeah! I'd flash the two grand and say I'd gone to Monaco, won at the Monte Carlo Casino. Still, I knew it was risky. In a strange city it would be "iffy," but in a strange country it's stupid. In fact, the only reason Frankie and I didn't gamble upstairs at the real casino was, we didn't understand this *chemin de fer* and the rest of the card games.

I slept on the holdup idea and awoke in the morning with a headache. It was another sunny day and Frankie suggested we take the bus to Cannes, which has a sandy beach.

I enjoyed the sand, showed off my swimming and was feeling great. I told myself the holdup bit was a wrong move. When we were dressing in our *cabine*, I said something about why didn't they clean up the place, and kicked some old newspapers under the bench. Frankie, who was sitting on the one chair putting on his shoes, asked, "What was that yellow thing, Mike?"

"Just some dirty cardboard."

Frankie reached under the bench and damn if he doesn't pick up a dirty pigskin wallet. It belonged to some cat from Lincoln, Nebraska, and held one thousand dollars in traveler's checks, about seven hundred francs and fifteen very green U.S. ten-buck bills!

Handing me a couple of tens and some francs, Frankie said smugly, "I told you to look at it. The traveler's checks are no good to us, so we'll toss them and the wallet into a mailbox."

That tore it! I was fed up with being a jerk—I knew I was going to rob the casino, purely for my own self-respect!

We returned to Nice and had a good steak and a *salade-nicoise* in one of those little, non-tourist restaurants Frankie was always finding. He suggested we take

in a movie, that he'd translate for me. I told him to go it alone; French movies left me all mixed up and feeling dumb. Like in Paris we saw a U.S. western, but with the talking dubbed in French.

Going to the casino, I found the curtained passageway. It was less than two hundred feet long. Gently opening the door, I stared through a slit in the curtain at the back of the change guy's head. He was a plump little guy in a blue tux. On a shelf under the desk he had piles of 10, 20, 100, and 500 franc notes, with trays of chips stacked at one side. I studied the *boule* room, everybody standing two or three deep around the tables, including the floor men. There was a small bar across from the change booth, but the bartender was busy washing glasses. Two hundred feet. I'd cover that in a few seconds, another second to sap the change guy, catch him by the collar so he'd fall without any noise. With my reach, it'd be no trouble reaching through the curtain and scooping up the paper francs. I'd wear a coat, stuff the dough inside my shirt. The only real risk was somebody coming to the desk for chips, or my being seen after leaving the main hallway, meeting somebody on his way in to play *boule*. He'd remember a clown my size.

That was the chance, but I'd stroll in casually and stop to light a cigar if anybody was around. Then, less than three minutes later, I'd casually stroll out, stuffed with francs.

It sure would be a bang to dump the dough on my bed, bull Frankie how lucky I'd been at the Monte Carlo Casino, which is only about a half-hour bus ride from Nice. I was tempted to pull the job there and then, but I decided on the next night. I like to figure all the angles, never pull a job too fast.

The next afternoon we met a couple of U.S. college girls on the *plage*. I knew nothing would come of it, but Frankie said it was a pleasure to talk to them, suggested we buy 'em supper.

I told him, "You take 'em to supper, since you all speak this amateur French. I think I'll see what this Monte Carlo's all about."

"You'll lose your shirt there, Mike, stick to *boule*. Hey, tomorrow night we'll go to the trotters again."

"I at least want to say I been in the Monte Carlo Casino. I'll take it easy. Maybe I'll see Princess Grace."

Frankie gave me a sad look. "Citizens of Monaco aren't allowed in the casino, they're too smart to gamble. Okay, enjoy yourself. Need money?"

"No."

I ate alone in some tourist trap, got nicked twenty-five francs for a meal not half as good as the eight franc ones Frankie found in his restaurants. I bought a heavy cake of soap and put it in a sock, and a small flashlight. Then I sat on the Promenade, watching the waves, and figured by midnight the change desk would have its top money.

At five after twelve I had a fast drink and walked into the Nice casino. It seemed too quiet downstairs, although the good jazz band was playing upstairs in the nightclub. I walked into the curtained passageway without being seen. When I opened the door back of the last curtain, it was so quiet that at first I thought the *boule* room was shut. But looking through the slit in the curtain I saw the usual crowd around the tables. The bartender opposite the change desk was reading a paper. Nobody seemed to be talking much. I took a deep breath and put my left hand through the slit in the curtain, grabbed the change guy's collar and pulled him back. His head and my soap sap, in my right hand, hit the curtain at exactly the same time. With my left hand, I lowered him gently to the floor. Not a soul had noticed anything.

When I put my left hand through the curtain for the money, I got a bad shock. There were only a few paper bills on the shelf! Not knowing what to do, I grabbed them and ran back along the passageway. Shoving the bills in my pocket, along with the flash and sock, I cased the main hallway. It was empty. Walking out, I crossed the street to the neat park, tossed the crumpled cake of soap in a trash can. Then I walked to the



Promenade, wiped any possible prints off the flash, put it into the sock and hurled that into the sea. Sweating like a bull, I stopped at a sidewalk café for a beer.

I counted the bills in my pocket—eleven 10 franc notes, three 20 franc bills and one 50 franc note: 220 francs.

I started sweating more. I'd risked a foreign jail for a lousy forty-four bucks! Maybe the prints of my left hand were on the change guy's collar? No, he'd start sweating when he came to, mess up any possible prints, and nobody had seen me reaching through the curtain or leaving.

It took another few beers to brace my nerves and at one A.M. I went to our hotel room. Frankie was reading a magazine in bed. He asked, "How was the Monte Carlo Casino?"

"Aw, I never went in, just walked around the town and took a bus back to Nice. You get anyplace with the college broads?"

Frankie waved a slim hand in the air. "Stop it; I didn't expect to. A couple of nice kids." He pulled back the cover at the foot of his bed, revealing stacks and stacks of French bills. "But my system scored in *boule*! It was a gasser, Mike. I went to the casino at eleven P.M. and I could do no wrong. By midnight I'd broken the bank there and left. I won \$1,763 in francs! I never was so lucky. Help yourself to all the francs you . . . Hey, what's the matter, Mike, you look like you're going to bawl or something!"

## MURDER IN MIND

by C. B. Gilford

It began, Cheryl Royce remembered, as a kind of parlor game—a slightly dangerous game, dealing with the dark unknown, but it was the danger, and the venture into the unknown, which made it interesting.

Hypnosis.

“Sure, I can hypnotize people,” Arnold Forbes said.

Nobody at the party except the hosts, the Cunninghams, knew Forbes very well. Naturally, someone challenged him, someone else begged him for a demonstration, then Liz Cunningham very sweetly chimed in, “Arnold used to do a nightclub act. Would you like to show them, Arnold, dear?”

So Arnold Forbes performed. He was a short, chubby fellow, very jolly; very deceiving. His blue eyes could suddenly transfix one with a very penetrating, very commanding stare. Somehow, maybe because he thought she was pretty, or maybe because she looked like a scoffer, an unbeliever, he chose Cheryl Royce.

With Forbes’ blue eyes probing into her own, she “went to sleep” in about thirty seconds. Only she didn’t exactly go to sleep. Her eyelids closed, but she was far from unconscious. She could hear Forbes’ voice quite clearly. “Your eyelids are very heavy . . . your arms are heavy . . . your entire body is very heavy . . . very relaxed . . . you are drifting down . . . down . . . down . . . into a very deep sleep . . .”

*No, I’m not,* she answered silently. *I’m not going to sleep, because I can hear you. Besides, I know I’m not asleep. I’m sitting in this easy chair, and everybody is gathered around, and . . .*

Nevertheless, she had to admit that the state she was in was strange indeed. Her body did feel heavy, and yet almost weightless. She hadn’t wanted to close her eyes,

and yet she had closed them. Now she wanted to open her eyes, and she couldn't.

She was entirely at the hypnotist's mercy. He gave her commands—to read a book, type a letter, drink a glass of water—and she obeyed him, pantomiming the actions, even though she knew perfectly well that the objects weren't there, and even though she resented going through the silly motions. Forbes passed his finger around her wrists, "tying" her to the chair arms, and she couldn't move, even though she knew there was no rope binding her. The game went on and on, and all the while she felt foolish, for being tricked, for being helpless.

Yet when Arnold Forbes wakened her finally, with a snap of his fingers, she laughed and joked about it, playing at being a good sport. Forbes found another victim, and Cheryl drifted off to the sidelines, gratefully out of the limelight.

Wint Marron followed her. Wint was darkly handsome, in his middle thirties, with a pretty blonde wife. Cheryl had attended perhaps three or four parties where the Marrons had been present.

"How did it feel being hypnotized?" Wint asked her.

"It was fun," she said.

"No, it wasn't," he contradicted her. "You hated it. You fought that guy every minute."

She stared at Wint Marron for a moment. "How do you know that?" she demanded.

He smiled, showing his perfect white teeth. "I know a little about hypnosis. One of the things that happens sometimes is that under hypnosis, telepathic powers are sharpened. Maybe you and I are on the same wavelength. Anyway, I saw into your mind all the time you were asleep there. You kept telling Forbes, 'No, I won't do it . . . I don't have a glass of water in my hand . . . you don't have a rope to tie me with.' And you were angry."

"You saw that from the expression on my face," she argued.

He shook his head, still smiling at her. "Your ex-

pression was completely serene. Ask anybody." He waited for an answer, but she had none. "It's interesting, don't you think?"

"I don't know . . ."

"Don't worry that I'll be able to read your thoughts all the time. I won't. It doesn't work that way." He had leaned closer. They were all alone. Everybody else was watching Arnold Forbes and his act. "Telepathic powers are sharper while under hypnosis, like I said. But I might catch a random thought of yours some other time. For that matter, you might catch a thought of mine. It usually works in both directions. Like I said, we seem to be on the same wavelength."

"What am I thinking now?" she demanded.

He hesitated, looking straight into her eyes. With an effort, she met his gaze. "You don't like what I've been telling you," he said finally. "You think your privacy has been invaded. The whole thing disturbs you. Now tit for tat. What do you think I'm thinking?"

She didn't want to, but she kept staring back at him. Was she trying to read the expression in his dark brown eyes? Or was she going beyond his eyes . . . to his thoughts? Then she found herself saying, involuntarily, "I think you want to kiss me."

He laughed softly and winked at her. "I don't know what you're using now, honey," he said. "I don't know whether it's telepathy or not. But you're close. Mighty close . . ."

She didn't see Wint Marron again for months. Perhaps she was even, subconsciously, trying to avoid him. During that interval she perhaps thought *about* him a time or two, but she certainly didn't receive any telepathic messages from him, for which she was grateful. And she didn't send him any messages. At least she didn't think she did.

Once, however, she saw Paula Marron, Wint's pretty blonde wife, in a dim corner of a dim cocktail lounge. She was shoulder to shoulder with another man, acting in a way no married woman should act with a man not her husband.

The incident shocked Cheryl, for several reasons. Paula's obvious infidelity, for one, and that she should be unfaithful to a man as attractive as Wint Marron, for another. Wint was handsome, charming, and doing very well in advertising. Why should Paula be dissatisfied?

It was a while after that incident, a month perhaps, that Cheryl first began to get the strange sensations. Sensations . . . she looked for a better word to describe the experiences: forebodings . . . feelings of uneasiness . . . that came to her at odd times and for no apparent reason.

They came for no apparent reason because everything seemed to be going so well in her life. She'd met Alan Richmond, and had almost decided that Alan was her long-awaited dream man. He was tall, lean, pleasant-looking, ambitious, very fond of her, very devoted to her. They'd been going out together frequently; she'd been with Alan when she'd seen Paula Marron in the cocktail lounge. Her life was happy, and there was the promise of even greater happiness.

But there were those queer sensations, the feeling now and then that a threat lurked somewhere. More than that. An emotional response to that threat . . . a vague kind of anger . . . or hatred . . . or jealousy . . .

Jealousy. She could almost laugh at the notion. She had no cause for jealousy. Alan had proposed marriage—she could have him any time she wanted him—and she knew that he didn't go out with other girls. Why on earth should she be jealous where Alan was concerned?

Well, she couldn't be, and she wasn't. She wasn't jealous . . . *she* wasn't jealous . . . why then did she feel . . . ?

The answer came suddenly.

She'd had a difficult day at her job, had begged off going to the movie with Alan. She was tired. She was in bed, in her dark bedroom, falling asleep, perhaps already asleep. When it happened, she came awake with a jolt.

For a sudden, searing, painful moment she wasn't in

her bedroom. She was in that dim cocktail lounge. There was Paula Marron sitting in that corner with that stranger, leaning her shoulder against the stranger's shoulder, stroking his chin with her fingertips, whispering into his ear, her lips very close to the ear. Then Paula turned, distracted by something. Paula was full-face, her expression blank for a second, then her eyes widening, her lips parting.

Paula said one word, loud, in a tone of complete surprise. "Wint!"

The vision faded. Cheryl Royce was in the darkness of her bedroom again. The cocktail lounge, the strange man, Paula Marron, had all departed.

What was left, and it was inside Cheryl Royce, was a bursting flame of anger . . . hatred . . . jealousy! Her hands clutched the blanket in a death-grip, her mouth contorted, she stared at the empty air. It was a minute or two before the feeling subsided, and she lay there afterward, limp, drained, her skin clammy with perspiration.

She knew then exactly what the experience had been. Wint Marron had discovered his wife in the company of that other man. Wint Marron was insanely angry and jealous. She, Cheryl Royce, knew all that, because she had been there in that cocktail lounge with him. She had read his mind, been inside his mind.

She and Wint Marron were on the same wavelength.

She didn't confide in Alan, or in anyone. She considered trying to find Arnold Forbes, the hypnotist, asking him to help her. She wanted to get off Wint Marron's wavelength. She didn't want to share his thoughts. But she didn't seek out Forbes. The whole business was too ridiculous, too embarrassing—too incredible, in fact.

She didn't want to believe it. It was quite possible, wasn't it, that she'd been dreaming there in her bed? She had once seen Paula Marron in that cocktail lounge, and so she was able to dream about it. The dream had put her, as it were, in Wint Marron's place, but there was an explanation for that too: the power of

suggestion. Wint Marron had suggested that they were "on the same wavelength."

So she spoke of the matter to no one, and she was sorry for that.

Just three weeks later, on a Thursday, at dusk, her consciousness sat inside Wint Marron's skull again, looked out through his eyes, felt his emotions, and decided upon an action.

She was alone again, sitting at her dressing table, combing her hair in front of the mirror. Alan was due to pick her up in half an hour. Her thoughts were on Alan, not on Wint Marron, but then they were wrenched violently away from Alan. Her own face disappeared from the mirror. She was looking not into the mirror, but through the windshield of an automobile.

Ahead was a road, dim and shadowy in the dusk; not a road that she recognized. Then, however, she lost awareness of herself completely.

The car was going slowly at first. The road curved. The headlights swept a border of trees that lined the road. The lights were very bright. The trees showed up very distinctly, but not the road. The road was blacktop, dark.

Something appeared in the road . . . or at the edge of it . . . or just at the side of it . . . the right side. Something white, very brilliant in the lights, in great contrast to the blacktop. White, fluttering . . . a woman's dress.

A woman was standing there by the side of the road, as if waiting to be picked up. Yes, to be picked up, because in her right hand she carried a small suitcase. Definitely a suitcase, blue, very bright blue against the whiteness of the dress.

But she was not waiting for the driver of this car. No, because when she saw which car it was, she made a funny little gesture of surprise, throwing up her left hand, the fingers spread wide. The face registered surprise also. The car was close enough now for the driver to see her face.

Paula Marron's face, almost as white as the dress.

Framed in yellow-blond hair. Blue eyes very wide, very blue, as blue as the little suitcase. Emotion in the eyes. Fear.

Emotion in the driver too. Relentless hatred, and soaring triumph. Here was Paula, the hated object, caught in the act. Where were you going, Paula? I thought if I took your car keys away from you, you'd have to stay home. But you're waiting for your chauffeur, aren't you? *Him*. Where are you going with him? For how long? You're taking the small suitcase, I see. So maybe it's just overnight. Or maybe not. Maybe you're going for good, and you decided not to bother to take all those "rags" hanging in your closet. Well, you're not going anywhere, baby. Now with *him* you aren't!

The car was going faster now. The engine responded to the accelerator with a rasping roar. Paula seemed to comprehend suddenly. She tried to back away, off the road, into the trees. She'd be safe among the trees. The car couldn't follow her there.

But she wasn't quick enough. She hadn't comprehended soon enough. She dropped the suitcase, tried to turn and run, but in her high spike heels she stumbled on the rough gravel along the road. She wasn't in costume for racing a car, and she seemed to know that she couldn't win. She turned again toward the car. Her arms stretched out in a gesture of pleading.

*Don't kill me, Wint!*

The gesture of the arms changed. They rose, trying to shield that soft white face from the onrushing metal. The face grew larger, almost filled the windshield. The red mouth opened wide, and a scream competed with the roar of the engine, overcoming it for a moment.

In the same instant there was the impact, so hard that the glass in the windshield shook. The trees, the whole scene pictured through the windshield, shuddered as if in an earthquake. The white face and the white dress sank down out of the picture. The last visible parts of Paula were her white hands with their long tapered fingers . . . reaching upward . . . begging . . .



The car didn't stop. It went relentlessly forward, the tires protesting as they dug into the gravel at the side of the road. Why was the ride so bumpy? Why was the woodsy scene in the windshield jarring up and down? Were the wheels of the car passing over something? Was there an obstacle in the road? Ah . . .

The road smoothed, the jarring ceased. The car swerved back onto the blacktop, negotiated the curve adroitly . . .

And as it did, the windshield scene faded. Cross-faded rather, into a face in the mirror. The face of Cheryl Royce, contorted into an ugly mask of hatred.

Hands went to the face, Cheryl Royce's hands, covering the staring eyes, desperately trying to shut out the vision. *What did I just see?*

After a long time, the hands lowered, and Cheryl looked at her own face again. The ugly lines had softened, but there were beads of perspiration on her forehead, and her hands were shaking.

She staggered from the dressing table to the phone, managed to dial Alan's number. "I can't go out tonight," she told him in a trembling voice. "I have this terrible headache."

Which was true.

There was nothing in the morning newspaper, but the afternoon edition told the story completely.

Paula Marron, aged 28, apparently had been the victim of a hit-and-run driver. The accident had occurred sometime early last evening, on Morton's Mill Road, almost in front of the Marron home. Mrs. Marron was struck, run over, and then dragged along the road for about thirty feet. She had died, the examining physician said, immediately. There had been no witnesses.

The Marrons lived in a wooded, exurban area of rather expensive houses, each set on five or six acres. The Marron home was several hundred feet from the road, and the road was invisible from it. Mr. Marron, who was at home at the time of the accident, stated that he had not heard any unusual sounds, nor could

he explain why his wife was walking along the road at that time of the evening. Police were questioning neighbors, hoping to find someone who had seen the hit-and-run car.

Cheryl Royce read the newspaper account with growing horror. She had really seen Paula Marron die. In a fit of jealousy, her husband had run her down with his own car. He had committed murder. Cheryl had seen him do it. She had practically ridden in the driver's seat with him.

So of course she should go to the police.

Then she stopped, right there on that crowded downtown street where she'd bought the newspaper. What was she going to tell the police? All that stuff about telepathy, thought-transference, mental wavelengths? Could she, Cheryl Royce, who had been in her own apartment at the time of the murder, qualify as a witness? She felt she had to try.

At police headquarters she was eventually allowed to see a detective sergeant named Evatt, who listened frozen-faced to her story.

"You realize, Miss Royce," he said at the end, "we'd have to have more evidence than what you just told me." Evatt was lean, tired-looking, but polite.

"Yes, I know," she told him, "but I thought this might alert you to look for evidence in Wint Marron's direction. Doesn't a car usually get a bent fender or broken headlight or something if it hits a pedestrian? You could tell them to look at Wint Marron's car."

Evatt nodded. "I can pass on the tip," he agreed, but not too convincingly. "Now, you mentioned, in one of these scenes you imagined—excuse me, one of these times you saw into Mr. Marron's mind—you said you saw another man with Mrs. Marron. Who was he?"

"It wasn't anybody I recognized—well, I really didn't look at him. I was looking at Mrs. Marron most of the time, you see."

"It would help," the detective pointed out, "if we knew something about this guy. It would establish a possible motive."

"Yes, I realize that," she said, "but I don't think the man was anybody I know."

"Well, I'll pass the word on to the officers investigating the accident," Evatt promised, and he jotted down her name, address, and telephone number. But he had called the case an "accident," she noticed, not a murder or a homicide.

As she left the detective's tiny office, she thanked him, and then she paused in the doorway. "I could be wrong, of course," she said. She felt forced to make the admission. "It could have been my imagination."

Evatt nodded again. "It could have."

"I'm not accusing Wint Marron of . . ."

Evatt seemed to understand. "If the boys ask Marron any questions or look around," he promised, "your name won't be mentioned."

She left feeling better. She had done what she could. It was up to the police now. If Wint Marron had committed murder, it was their job to bring him to justice, not hers.

She had dinner with Alan that evening. The restaurant was a quiet place, the music soft and unobtrusive, the lights dim. She didn't confide in Alan. He apparently hadn't even read the newspaper, didn't know that Paula Marron was dead.

She was uneasy the entire evening, as if she were trying to think of something, to remember something, and the elusive little fact kept dodging away. Finally, however, after a long time, the message came through.

*Cheryl told them.* The three words beat in her brain over and over again. *Cheryl told them.*

Then she knew that Wint Marron knew. Either his suspicions had been aroused by a visit from the police and fresh questions asked, or else he was seeing directly into her mind, as she'd seen into his.

She sent Alan home early, spent the rest of the night tossing in bed, unable to sleep. In the morning she called Detective Sergeant Evatt.

"Your story interested the officer in charge," Evatt told her. "He went back to the Marron home. He made

an excuse to get into the Marron garage. There were two cars there, neither with any signs of front-end damage. But the car Mr. Marron usually drives is a Jeep. It has an oversize, reinforced front bumper. The officer concedes you could possibly hit someone with that bumper and not get a dent in it. But possibility isn't proof."

"What about the little blue suitcase?" she asked.

"No sign of that."

"Wint Marron could have retrieved it from the scene of the accident," she argued. "There might be blood on it. Though he could have washed it off—or burned the thing . . ."

"Miss Royce," Sergeant Evatt interrupted, "I've also mentioned this matter to the lieutenant. He doesn't seem to think that the kind of evidence you've offered us is really enough to ask for a search warrant. We don't have any real grounds for suspicion. You weren't exactly an eyewitness."

"So you're not going to do anything."

"There isn't anything we can do right now."

"You think that I'm a crackpot?"

"Nobody said that, Miss Royce. But we've followed it through as far as we can go—for now, anyway."

She confided at last in Alan, and Alan scoffed. No, he would not try to sneak into Wint Marron's garage to inspect his Jeep, or into Marron's house to look for a bloody blue suitcase. Perhaps she had received telepathic signals or vibrations from Marron, but if Marron had murdered his wife, that was the business of the police—not his or hers. She was furious.

That was one of the reasons why she left the city. Another reason was that she was frightened of Wint Marron.

She had no logical explanation for her fear. She had already communicated with the police, and Wint knew she had. Therefore, he wouldn't dare do anything violent to her. What could he do, then? Well, he could annoy her, threaten her. She was almost certain that he

would. So she wanted to escape, get away, let time pass. Then perhaps she'd stop seeing into Wint Marron's mind. Perhaps then she could forget.

She begged leave of absence from the agency and drove away that afternoon. Nowhere in particular, not in any special direction. Just out of town. To somewhere different.

She ended up, toward sunset, at the Northway Motel in a small town, not more than a village, called Northway. The motel was a typical long building, with the rooms side by side, and space in front of each unit for the guest's car. A restaurant adjoined. She had a sandwich, and when she strolled back to her door, night had fallen and the stars were out. She checked her car again to make sure it was locked, then went inside.

Guessing that she would need them, she took two sleeping tablets, indulged in a long hot shower, propped herself up in bed on the motel's excellent pillows, and tried to read. It was a futile exercise.

Hours passed. She squirmed restlessly in the bed. The book did not interest her. She turned the light out finally, then stared into the darkness.

She couldn't get Wint Marron out of her mind. He knew that she knew—but did he know how much she knew? Surely her mind couldn't be a completely open book to him. Might he even be afraid that she knew more than she actually did? How he had disposed of the blue suitcase, for instance. Or the identity of Paula's companion in that cocktail lounge.

Since she didn't want to share any more of Wint Marron's guilty secrets, could she send him the message that he had nothing further to fear from her, that she was finished playing public-spirited citizen and informing on a murderer? But would he believe her, would he trust her . . . ?

In the darkness of that strange room she suddenly sat upright. He didn't trust her! Wint Marron was saying that to her, right at this moment.

She came near to panic. For she knew something else too. Whether it was telepathy this time, or a kind

of animal instinct for the proximity of danger, or whether she had actually heard a small noise, she wasn't sure. But she knew! Wint Marron was there.

She eased out of the bed. In the front wall of her room near the door was a large window, heavily draped. She inched the drape aside to make a small peephole, found a venetian blind, bent down one of the slats.

At first she saw nothing outside. The driveway was fairly well lighted. Her car was there, a hulking lump of shadow.

Then she did hear a noise, this time unmistakable, the scrape of the sole of a shoe on the sidewalk close to her door. A dark shape passed the window, paused beside her car.

A man. Wint Marron. It could be no other. If she clung to any desperate doubt, however, that doubt was erased when the man walked around to the rear of the car and the light fell on his head and shoulders. Cheryl Royce saw Wint Marron's lean, dark, handsome face.

He had followed her. Quite easily, of course, because she had sent him the message. Northway, the Northway Motel.

Now he was interested in her car—making sure it was the right car, and since it was parked there, checking which was the right door, the right room. He was going to do something to the car, or try to enter her room . . . or perhaps simply wait for her to come out.

Panic overwhelmed judgment. She could phone the motel clerk, ask him to call the Northway police. But the police would never believe her. They hadn't before. They wouldn't now. Not until Wint Marron did something, and then it would be too late. Besides, the police were her enemies. Going to the police had caused Wint Marron to fear her, then to pursue her. Her only safety was in convincing Wint that she'd never go to the police again.

But right now, while he was still angry with her, she must escape. How? *Don't plan . . . don't plan*, some part of her brain warned her. *Wint can read your*

*mind, don't you know that? If you plan where you're going, he'll be there waiting for you. So leave your mind blank . . . use instinct . . . act blindly . . . don't panic . . .*

She dressed quickly, feeling in the dark for her clothes. She refused to think. *I'm getting dressed . . . no, I must not even think that*, she reminded herself. *I must think about neither the future nor the present.*

She stood fully dressed now in the middle of the dark room. It was difficult, almost impossible, to keep her mind blank. The apparatus just isn't constructed that way. But she tried.

The room had a rear window also. She had to pull aside the drape and raise the blind. The window itself resisted for a moment, but finally moved upward. There was a small squeak and a groan as it did so, perhaps not audible on the front side of the building. Without hesitation, without considering the problem that she might be seen, avoiding concentration on the matter, Cheryl eased one leg through the opening, then her torso, then the other leg.

She was standing on a grassy lawn. *Where now?* No, she mustn't think. Just act, move.

She heard traffic noises from the highway, out front. Although she had been in bed for some time, the hour still wasn't late. There were people around, no need to be afraid.

She walked past the rear of the motel restaurant. Inside were a waitress and a customer or two, but the place appeared ready to close. No refuge there. Wint could follow her there anyway.

She walked on, trying not even to note her surroundings, trying not to reflect upon the sense images her eyes gathered. Something large loomed in her path: the rear of a truck. She walked around the more shadowed side of it. Not too long a truck. Not a trailer rig.

A man stood near the front end, smoking a cigarette. Maybe the driver. He heard her footsteps, turned to watch her approach. There was no light on his face,

only the glowing tip of the cigarette. She stopped close to him.

"Is this your truck?"

Apparently startled, he didn't answer for a moment.

"Yes," he said finally.

"Are you going somewhere or staying here?"

"I'm leaving," he said after another hesitation, "just as soon as I finish this cigarette."

"Will you give me a ride?"

The tip of the cigarette glowed more brightly as the truck driver took a long drag. "Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter."

"Look, I'm going to . . ."

He stared at her, puzzled, but her face was as much in shadow as his. He dropped his cigarette butt on the gravel and didn't bother to grind it out. What he was thinking was as obvious as if he too were on her mental wavelength. He couldn't guess what kind of risk he might be taking, but the proposition was intriguing . . .

"Hop in," he said after a long moment, and opened the door for her.

*I've never ridden in this large a truck before,* she thought as she climbed into the cab. But then she told her mind to be still. *Don't think words . . . be quiet . . . go to sleep . . . yes, sleep . . . hypnotize yourself.*

The driver climbed in on his own side, started the engine, and the truck rolled out. Cheryl kept her eyes closed, but in trying so hard not to, she sensed that they had turned left onto the highway. Did Wint notice the truck's departure? Maybe not. Surely he couldn't read her every thought. He needn't know that she was in the truck.

"I don't know whether I should be doing this," the driver was saying. "You on drugs or something?"

"No, I'm not on drugs."

"You're not the other type. So you must be running away. Who from? Your husband?"

"No. I'm sorry. I can't explain."



"I may be doing something illegal."

"No, you're not. I guarantee you that."

They drove in silence for a while. Cheryl tried to keep her eyes closed, not to notice road signs. The driver glanced at her sideways now and then, she realized. But whatever he might be thinking, she had less to fear from him than from Wint Marron.

"Is there a car following us?" she asked suddenly.

She regretted the question instantly, because the driver became alarmed. He glanced at his mirror. "Nobody back there now. Look, who are you expecting to follow us?"

"Nobody."

"You might be running away from the police."

"I'm not."

"I don't want to get mixed up in anything."

"All you have to do is take me somewhere. Anywhere."

"I'm just going to Jackson Harbor."

She gave a little shriek, and put her fingers in her ears, but it was too late. The name of their destination pounded in her brain . . . *Jackson Harbor* . . . she couldn't stop it. And she knew, she knew absolutely, that the name was vibrating through the ether, straight back to Northway, back to Wint.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Let me out!" she screamed. "Just let me out!"

"Look, I said I'd take you—"

"Let me out, or I'll jump!" She poised with the door half open.

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Let me find a place where I can get off the pavement."

He'd put the brakes on, and the truck was slowing down, so she waited. He picked a place finally, and edged off onto the shoulder. But long before the truck had come to a dead stop, Cheryl had the door open, had climbed down to the running board. "Thanks," she called back to the man, and jumped.

She landed on her feet, stumbled, but didn't fall. Only then, when she was safe, did she look to see

where she was. A road marker loomed in the bright headlights of the truck. Junction . . . K.

*Wint will know exactly where I am*, she thought. She shouted to the truck driver. She wanted to get back in, but already the engine was roaring and the big rear tires were spitting gravel at her. Before she could catch up with it, the big vehicle had turned back onto the highway. In a moment it had diminished to a pair of taillights, then it was gone completely.

She was left alone, afoot and in darkness, her exact location pinpointed to Wint Marron as the junction of Road K with the main highway.

Her first instinct was to try to hitch another ride, till she realized the possibility that the first car to stop for her might be Wint's. Or maybe he wouldn't stop. Wint had another method of dealing with female hitchhikers who had displeased him.

A pair of headlights came hurtling down the highway toward her. She dropped into the weeds at the side of the road. She lay there until the lights and the car flashed by.

This main road was dangerous; too many cars. She picked herself up out of the weeds and ran in the only direction left open, down Road K.

Wint knew where she was going, of course, for the moment. *Road K* pounded in her mind in the same rhythm as her feet pounded on the gravel. But she would get lost—lost, that was the answer to her problem. If she didn't know where she was, neither would Wint. She would find an even smaller road than this, a dirt road, and follow that. Or simply run across fields or through the woods.

But she hesitated to plunge off into the darkness. She had only a vague idea of the geography of this area. She knew approximately where Northway was. How far toward Jackson Harbor had they gotten? Jackson Harbor was on the lake, of course. But there were other bodies of water in between, as she recalled the map, a couple of small rivers . . . and weren't there marshes or swamps? Quicksand, maybe?

Was she doing the right thing, running away from civilization, running into a sparsely populated semi-wilderness? Maybe she should have stayed in the truck, stayed with people. But it was too late now.

It was a clear night, with moon and stars. She could see her way along the road. The woods would be dark, though. She couldn't bring herself to leave the road. She'd find that unmarked side road.

But she didn't. Panting, she had to slow to a walk. And then she stopped.

*Where did you go, Cheryl?*

It was as if the question had been spoken aloud, it was so clear, precise. But she was alone there on the road. She knew, however, exactly where the question had come from.

Wint Marron was standing by the open rear window of her room at the Northway Motel. That had been a mistake, hadn't it, to leave that window open? Wint stood there, and she was with him, looking at the window through Wint's eyes.

Then he climbed inside, and she accompanied him. A flashlight beam searched the room, glided over the walls, lingered for a moment on the empty, mussed bed.

*We're communicating, aren't we, Cheryl? Like a voice, speaking to her from within her own brain. You know I'm here. There was a long pause. And I know where you are.*

Was he lying? She closed her eyes and ground her teeth together in a desperate mental effort not to think about the lonely gravel road and the dark woods on either side.

*Don't try to hide from me, Cheryl.*

She pressed her lips together to smother a gasp.

*You hitchhiked, didn't you?*

He was groping, guessing. He didn't know as much as he pretended to. She went on trying to keep her mind blank.

*You went to the police. I knew that, didn't I, Cheryl? And I found the Northway Motel, didn't I?*

He was goading her, trying to panic her. If he succeeded, she would lose control and perhaps betray her whereabouts.

*It's your own fault, you know, Cheryl. You butted into a private affair. It was a while before I realized you were butting in. I guess I should have been more careful, because I was the one who discovered that we could share our thoughts. I even mentioned to you that this telepathy thing could run in both directions. It's too bad, though, it turned out the way it did. You're a cute girl, Cheryl. I did want to kiss you that night we met. After I got rid of Paula, and things had settled down a little, I might have looked you up. Yes, it's your fault, Cheryl. Even after Paula, you didn't have to go to the police. You didn't have to turn against me. Not when you and I were so intimate. Couldn't you understand? Couldn't you sympathize? Haven't you ever been jealous? When I saw Paula with that Don Bruno . . .*

She screamed, a short, choked, stifled scream. Don Bruno, not a very ordinary name. That detective had said that if she could identify the other man in the case the police would have something to go on. Now she knew who the other man was—but she didn't want to know!

*Cheryl!*

He must not have been aware that she hadn't known before. But now he surely realized the slip he had made. He had given her a weapon against him, and now he must disarm her, silence her.

She started running again, on the gravel road, Road K. Turn off into the woods? No, not now. Wint could run through the woods faster than she could. No, she had to stay on the road, find somebody, find help, find a telephone. It had to be on this road. Going back to the highway would mean rushing to meet Wint. This was her only road. This road led somewhere. And when she found that telephone, she would call Sergeant Evatt, and she would shout to him, "The man's name is Don Bruno! Locate him! Make him admit that he was

going to pick up Paula Marron, who would be carrying a suitcase! Don Bruno can tell you enough so you can arrest Wint Marron for murder!"

She ran on. If the rough gravel hurt her feet through the thin soles of her shoes, she wasn't aware of it. She'd gotten her second wind now. She could make it. Wint was still miles behind her, getting into his car, consulting his map, searching for Road K.

She concentrated on not thinking, on not letting her surroundings impinge upon her senses. *Don't give Wint any clues. Don't give him any landmarks. Don't let him know if this road is going through woods or swamps, or by a stream or near a lake. Don't see any of those things. Just look for one thing. A light. A light that will mean human habitation.*

How much time passed? In her state of suspended awareness she didn't know. Minutes . . . miles . . . neither had meant anything.

Until two sensations came to her at exactly the same moment. One that she welcomed and one that she feared. One from the front and one from the rear. A sight and a sound.

Up ahead, still distant, she saw it, a mere pinhead of illumination amid the woodland foliage. And simultaneously, behind her, she heard the far-off growl of an automobile engine.

She raced that approaching sound. It was coming down Road K, she knew that, and as it drew nearer she even thought she recognized it. She'd heard it once before, the evening that Paula Marron was struck down by a hit-and-run driver. Wint was pursuing her in his Jeep, that Jeep with its reinforced front bumper which wouldn't dent when it smashed into a human body.

But the light grew closer too. The road curved and the light swung to a new position, almost straight ahead. A yellow light, growing larger and larger. A porch light? It didn't matter. Any kind of light meant people, safety.

The Jeep engine was loud in her ears now. She thought she could hear too the rasp of its tires on the

gravel. But the light loomed brighter and closer too.

She saw other things now. A reflection of the light, a vertical gleaming bar of yellow. On water, a stream or a narrow inlet, and the light was on the far side.

For a dreadful moment she supposed that she was lost, isolated from that help on the other bank. But then the light illuminated—ever so slightly, and off a bit to the left where the road was curving again—a *bridge!*

Not much of a bridge. Wooden. Old. Rickety. But a bridge nevertheless, leading to the other side of the water and to the light.

Behind her—only yards—the roar of the engine and the scream of tires clawing gravel rose together into one deafening crescendo.

Her flying feet touched the first board of the bridge. Then the Jeep's headlights, swinging around that last little curve of the road, suddenly illuminated the whole world . . . herself . . . the floor of the bridge . . . the dark shining water just ahead of her outstretched foot . . .

She couldn't stop. It was too late for that. Her foot leaped ahead of her out into space. There was nothing else beneath it, until the black surface of the water rose up to meet her.

Just as she sank into it, rubber tires hit the boards of the bridge and the hurtling Jeep found the same emptiness in front of it. It sailed over Cheryl's head, darkening the sky, just as her head went under water.

In the water then she felt the exploding pressure waves as the metal monster plunged in just beyond her. She bobbed to the surface.

There was nothing there. The sky was empty. The roar was silenced. Nothing but huge ripples, almost waves, spreading out from the spot where the Jeep had disappeared.

*Wint!*

She blurted his name, silently, inside her brain. But there was no answer, no communication. The connection was cut. The line was dead at the other end.

Yes, dead . . . or dying. She sensed that somehow. Wint Marron's head had hit something hard, like the windshield. Unconscious, helpless, wedged into his seat, he was drowning now.

She swam a stroke or two toward the source of those ripples. "Wint!" she called aloud.

A numbness seized her. A coldness. She became certain of an unalterable fact. Wint was dead.

So she swam back, toward the bridge . . .

Bridge? She looked at the wooden structure in the moonlight. Not a bridge at all. Only a pier.

She shivered then, not at the coldness of the water. She had killed him. She had killed Wint. Had he known differently, he might have been able to stop the Jeep. But her brain had sent him the wrong message. Not pier. Bridge . . .

## CHARLEY'S CHARM

by Alice-Mary Schnirring

Charley was depressed—very depressed. Never mind about Charley's last name; you'll see, later, why it would be inadvisable to mention it. For one thing, his boss would be seriously embarrassed.

Charley was, and is, a salesman, one of the best in the business today; but there was a time, just about a year ago, when the tide of Charley's fortunes was pretty far out, necessitating pants pressed under a boardinghouse mattress, chop-suey dinners in dubious "Chinese" restaurants, and 25-cent movies, if any, for recreation. A salesman on a commission basis was Charley and, after the unreasonable custom of manufacturers, commissions were paid only on orders shipped. In order to ship an order, the salesman first has to get it, and Charley—well, you see?

For reasons that will develop later, we will not mention the item with which Charley was struggling. For one thing, it is nationally known today. Let's call it a patented bottle opener; that's close enough. It was what is known in the trade as a good gift item, but Charley had not been able to convince buyers of that; at least, not many.

On the day my story starts, he had just come from what was at least his fifth call on Mr. Nieuwelpost, buyer for the Housewares Department of McCord's Department Store, and a very tough apple indeed. Moreover, this apple looked upon Charley as a worm. The worm, having been thrown out on his ear, with an injunction never to come back, was walking up Fifth Avenue feeling, as I say, depressed.

He walked slowly, staring at the sidewalk; hands in his pockets, slouching a little, definitely not the brisk, alert, well-tailored youth with sprightly step and eager



eye that manufacturers like to envision descending upon housewares buyers. No, Charley was more like what they are apt to get.

Mutterings issued from Charley's lips, causing several of the more timid passersby to look at him nervously and edge away from him rather nearer the curb than is healthy, Fifth Avenue traffic being what it is. He crossed 39th Street and, as he stepped onto the curb, his foot kicked something metallic. A coin? Swooping like a hawk, he picked it up, only to find that while it did, indeed, appear to be a coin, it was not one that would get him much in America. It was covered with what looked like Arabic squiggles, too large to fit in a subway turnstile, but Charley put it in his pocket anyway. There are always telephone booths.

He resumed his moody way, mumbling and grumbling more aggrievedly than ever, and at 42nd Street his mumblings resolved themselves into coherent, if unpleasant, speech. "Old lug!" said Charley with passion. "He can go take a running jump in the lake, that's what!"

Mention of the lake made him think of Central Park. It was a lovely afternoon, the air had the winy feel characteristic of a New York September, and where else could a disgruntled salesman spend his time better? The Park is free.

So Charley walked to 59th, into the Park and down to the lake, and watched the children feed the ducks. It was soothing, and remained so for about half an hour. Then Charley became aware of hoarse and distant cries, coming nearer, if not less hoarse, each minute. Pounding feet—many pounding feet—came closer and closer to the erstwhile quiet scene and suddenly, to Charley's mingled horror, disbelief and awe, there appeared a single figure followed by a heterogeneous crowd of policemen, small children and balloon-sellers. The single figure was in excellent form and puffing only slightly, considering that it had run such a distance. Charley knew the distance, too; the determined athlete was that tough apple, Mr. Nieuwelpost.

Jumping from the bench in an unreasoning attempt to hide (his first hazy thought was that Mr. Nieuwelpost, angered beyond endurance at Charley's repeated calls, had somehow snapped under the strain and determined to annihilate Charley once and for all), Charley managed to stumble almost into the buyer's path. However, Nieuwelpost ignored him completely, except for shoving him aside with an arm not noticeably weakened by his sedentary life, and then continued on his way—which was not far.

Even while Charley picked himself up, Mr. Nieuwelpost—head up, elbows in, and running very well indeed—took a running jump into the lake.

Charley did not hang around asking questions but, to Mr. Nieuwelpost's embarrassment, several reporters did. (His only statement, which was made *not* to the press but to a hastily consulted psychiatrist, was that he had suddenly felt an inexplicable compulsion, while interviewing a salesman for a line of kitchen hardware, to run to Central Park and plunge into the lake. The psychiatrist recommended a complete change of scene, and Mr. Nieuwelpost subsequently returned to McCord's a more thoughtful man.)

No, Charley went away from that place with all possible speed, laughing like a madman.

In fact, he felt so elated that he determined to make one more call. "If I can't sell when I feel as good as this," mumbled Charley to himself, and bubbling with laughter, "I might as well give up. I'll go call on—let's see—on Hanneman, of R. D. Swift & Co., by golly! And I bet I'll sell him at least a gross, maybe two!"

Now, R. D. Swift was the biggest store in town, and Hanneman was—and is—Mr. Big among the buyers, seen only by appointment, and even then not very often nor for very long. Charley, of course, had no appointment. Nobody *ever* gave Charley appointments. For once, however, it didn't bother him.

He walked into the outer office, past the chairs with their burden of patient salesmen, and headed for Hanneman's office door. The girl at the desk in the outer

office leaped from her chair with a strangled cry.

"You can't go in *there!*" she said indignantly, as he turned the doorknob. "Mr. Hanneman won't see you without an appointment!"

"Oh, he'll see me!" said Charley confidently, and at that moment the door opened and Mr. Big stood there, looking at Charley. "I'll see you," said Mr. Big, cordially, and while a hush like that which covered Pompeii after the eruption of Vesuvius settled over the outer office, Charley walked briskly into the inner sanctum and closed the door crisply behind him.

"Mr. Hanneman," said Charley, who was still in an out-of-the-world state of mind, "I have been thinking for some time that you should stock the Little Dandy Can Opener. I am here to take your sample order."

Mr. Hanneman *seemed* all there, but his response made no sense whatever because, on no further prompting than that anemic and highly unconvincing little sales talk, he said at once, "Why, certainly! I was thinking of a gross; maybe two?"

"Just what I had in mind!" replied Charley, and it was just about then that the pieces began to fall softly into place in his mind; all except the most important one—why? (You know, and I know, that it was the Charm he had picked up. Charley didn't know—yet.) Cautiously experimenting a little, he said, with excitement welling up in him, "What about three gross?"

Hanneman replied, emphatically, "Certainly not!"

"You *ought* to have three gross," said Charley, more to save face than for any other reason.

"I certainly should, at that," said Hanneman promptly. "Make it three."

So that was how Charley made a start at finding out how the Charm worked; a direct statement, yes; a stated wish, no. There was no use, for example, in saying, "I wish so-and-so would do such-and-such." No, as with Nieuwelpost, it had to be "He can go jump in the lake."

Well, Charley went out of Hanneman's office with a signed order for three gross of Little Dandy Can Open-

ers and mailed it to his home office. It was accepted by a surprised sales manager, who had given Charley up some time before as being probably a Mongoloid idiot and certainly a cretin, and it was shipped.

At no time did Hanneman try to cancel the order, in spite of the raised eyebrows of the merchandise manager; instead, he stuck firmly to his guns, insisting, "I have a hunch about them. I feel we *ought* to have them. Mark my words, we really *have* something here."

The merchandise manager, baffled, muttered something to the effect that they had something, all right; they had three gross of an item that looked like a lemon to him, and wait until inventory time came around. To his pleased surprise, the silly things actually began to sell and, in fact, sold so well that Hanneman had to wire for an additional five gross; but that is not germane to the story at hand.

That night, Charley reviewed the day's happenings, and a mounting excitement grew in him. With delighted awe, he recalled the brisk executive figure of Mr. Nieuwelpost jumping with decision into Central Park Lake. *Why*, he thought joyously, *I have that big lug in the hollow of my hand! Tomorrow I'll call on him and make him eat crow—and buy ten gross of can openers for a starter. I don't*, thought Charley prudently, *want to push my luck too far.*

So the next morning, behold Charley, wearing his best suit (the one he had been saving in case a buyer ever accepted his invitation to lunch, which no one ever had, and a good thing, too, considering the present state of his finances), and walking briskly up to Mr. Nieuwelpost's door. As before, in Hanneman's office, he headed past the other salesmen and the girl at the reception desk gasped, "You can't do that!" As before, Charley said confidently, "He'll see me!" and, as before, the door opened and there stood Mr. Nieuwelpost.

"Get out of here!" invited Mr. Nieuwelpost.

Charley, flabbergasted, fell back as the buyer advanced in a threatening manner.

"I *tried* to keep him out," said the receptionist, almost tearfully, "but he *wouldn't* go!"

"He'll go, all right," snarled Mr. Nieuwelpost. "He'll go out of here so fast that he'll look like Halley's comet, and if he doesn't come back until Halley's comet is due to make its next appearance, that will be all right with me!"

Charley went.

That night, as he took his meager change out of his pocket, what should catch his eye but the Charm. It had been lying on the battered golden-oak dresser all day. All day! Something rang a bell in his brain.

He picked it up, thought hard for a moment, and said, "There is a ten-dollar bill lying on my dresser." He looked at the dresser—there wasn't. "The hell with it," said Charley, and tossed the coin into the wastebasket.

Then a thought struck him, and he picked it out of the wastebasket. "Mr. Fineman," said Charley, slowly and clearly, "is going to come in here in . . . in thirty seconds and give me a ten-dollar bill."

Mr. Fineman was Charley's landlord, a gentleman of mature years whom age had mellowed like an old pistol.

For thirty seconds Charley waited, his heart pounding. At least he thought it was his heart; but as the door burst open he realized that the thumping noise had been Mr. Fineman's feet on the stairs. The poor fellow had run like mad from the basement, spurred by the thirty-second time limit, and when he got to Charley's room (third floor back, with unobstructed view of city dump), he was so winded that he could hardly gasp, "Mister—it gives here the tan dullars I am owing you."

"Thank you, Mr. Fineman," said Charley with quiet dignity, elated equally with the ten dollars and the proof of his theory. "Good night. Take it slow going downstairs."

Well, once he had found that the amulet worked only on (1) a direct statement, (2) people and their

actions, and (3) not upon inanimate objects, no matter how cussed, it was a cinch for Charley to get ahead.

Get ahead he did, but that wasn't excuse enough for what he did to Mr. Watt, president of the Little Dandy Can Opener Company (and that isn't its name, remember!).

By now, Charley was Little Dandy's star salesman. The day after his final glorious discovery, he went back to McCord's; but did he linger at the Mourner's Bench, with the other salesmen? Not so you could notice. Again he walked confidently to the office door; again the receptionist shrieked in protest; and again he said, but this time with complete conviction, "Nieuwelpost will see me." (Not *Mr.* Nieuwelpost, you notice.)

This time the door opened and Nieuwelpost greeted Charley almost with tears of affection. Charley walked in, closed the door, and said, "Nieuwelpost, you need fifteen gross of Little Dandys," and Nieuwelpost said—but you know what Nieuwelpost said.

Well, that was only the beginning. Finally—and mind you, it was entirely due to Charley, although of course the can openers were a good product or they wouldn't have sold to the consumer—finally, I say, Mr. Watt decided that Charley was making too much money on an item that was, by now, a "demand item," as trade usage has it. So Mr. Watt made a decision that was, indeed, a terrible mistake. He made McCord's, R. W. Swift & Co., and some half dozen other large department stores into house accounts.

That, for your benefit, is an account on which a salesman gets no commission; the "house," or company, sells them direct, and keeps the 10 percent.

When Charley received the letter that broke this news to him, he was furious. He went out and got drunk. Well, why not? No, I can't blame Charley for that. But what I *do* blame him for—

He wasn't alone; always gregarious, he took a buyer with him; in fact, it was Mr. Big himself. (*That* shows you how Charley had progressed.) Charley was drunk, all right, but not so drunk that he didn't know what he

was saying—so *that's* no excuse for him.

On his eighth (and to keep the record straight, Mr. Big's eighth) bourbon, Charley thrust out his jaw.

"That Watt!" he said, passionately. "That big stuffed shirt! Do you know what?" he said, leaning toward Hanneman and shaking a furious finger under Hanneman's somewhat roseate nose. "Do you know what he can do with his Little Dandy Can Opener? He can take it—"

I won't go on. There really isn't any excuse for Charley. That was just last week, and today I picked up a trade paper and read:

PERSONAL NOTES IN  
THE HARDWARE  
FIELD

Mr. W. Watt, president of Little Dandy Can Opener, is reported to be recovering from the recent ailment which necessitated his removal to Samaritan Hospital. Nature of the operation was not disclosed.

## MURDER DOOR TO DOOR

by Robert Colby

It was near eleven on Monday morning. Judy had just returned from the supermarket to the apartment on Cypress Way in which she lived with her husband. She had married Tom Ralston only seven months before, when he was released from the Army Signal Corps after a tour of duty in Germany.

Tom had persuaded her to quit her job as hostess in a downtown restaurant, but that was a mistake. Now she was lonely and restless, with little to do but rattle around the apartment reading and watching TV until Tom came home for dinner.

Judy, 23, had fine auburn hair, and the pleasant structure of her face was only a little spoiled by an irregular nose and slightly protruding teeth. When she married Tom her figure had been enticingly proportioned. But with the boredom of idleness she had put on weight, and now there was about her the suggestion of overabundance.

Judy sorted the week's groceries she had bought at the market, storing meats and other perishables in the refrigerator, placing the remaining items on appropriate shelves. She was adjusting a roll of paper towels on the rack when the bell chimed.

Peering from the spy slot in the front door, Judy observed that her caller was a young woman who was smartly attired in a flame-red jersey dress. She carried an attaché case under her arm, supporting it with a white-gloved hand. Her features were remarkably pretty, and she stood tall and proud, with an air of authority.

Judy opened the door.

"Good morning, dear," said the woman, and then smiled in a way that was charming, yet gave up nothing



of herself. "My name is Sheila Newberry," she continued in a voice rich with confidence, "and I've brought you an exquisite gift from Global Electric, the people who make the finest in portable radios." Here she paused, her pink-petal lips parted expectantly, her large, unblinking eyes brightly focused.

"Well, it's a good name—Global Electric," Judy said. "But—"

"I'm not *selling* anything, dear. I'm *promoting* the new Spaceway portable radio. Your husband would be interested, I'm sure."

"Perhaps," said Judy. "But he's at work. Besides, there's no point in taking up your time. Because I'm afraid we don't have money for luxuries just now."

"Well, how stupid of me, darling! Didn't I make it clear? There's nothing to buy, not a penny to spend. We want to make you a *gift* of one of our little radios. It's strictly a promotional idea. We distribute these new portables to special people here and there, and all we ask in return is that you show the new Spaceway to your friends and tell them where to go and buy one like it."

"Oh, that's quite different," said Judy with a small sigh of relief. "But am I so special? Why did you choose me?"

Sheila Newberry chuckled delightedly. In mock shame, she daintily covered her face with a gloved hand. "Well, now you've caught me, honey. With my little red face hanging out! No, we pick people at random, more or less. But once you own a Spaceway, you do become very special. Right, dear?"

"Yes, I suppose." Judy laughed good-naturedly. "May I see the radio?"

"Good heavens! Have I been standing here all this time without letting you see the little gem? See it, play it and *have* it. That's the name of the game, darling!" Sheila quickly unfastened her case and, poking a hand inside, displayed the radio, holding it up with a little flourish.

The portable had a shining ebony face with gleam-

ing metal trim. The dial was set with green and gold numerals; beside it there was a tiny jewel of a clock.

"How precious!" Judy said.

"Exactly the word, darling," Sheila agreed. "Perfectly precious! It has both AM and FM, an electric clock to awaken you gently with music, and a telescoping antenna. Yet it's so compact, you could carry it in one of those oversized handbags. And it has a beautiful sound. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes, I certainly would."

"Fine, dear. If you'll show me where I can plug it in . . ."

"It doesn't play on batteries too?"

"Yes, but they don't provide batteries when it's a gift. Sorry about that." Sheila made a comic face.

Judy stepped back from the doorway. Sheila entered and glanced about. "What a sweet little place. Just the two of you, dear? No children?"

"Well, we've only been married a short time."

"Ahh, I see."

"You'll find an outlet right there below the desk."

Sheila plugged in the radio, set it on the desk and twisted the control knob. Switching to a variety of stations and sounds, she kept turning to eye Judy. Sheila wore a small, curious smile and altogether her expression now seemed detached from the whole business, as if her attention had shifted abruptly to another center of interest.

The woman had strange eyes, Judy decided. They hinted at some sly purpose larger than the moment.

Though Judy had remained standing, Sheila sank uninvited into a chair, took possession of it. Behind her, the portable belted the room with the unmusic of a rock combo.

She crossed her long-stem legs, encased in the tight clutch of navy-colored, opaque hose. About her neck there was a blue and white kerchief which spilled into the valley of her generous bosom. Deep black hair showered her shoulders, stark against the unblemished skin of her pale, delicate features.

"What's your name, honey?" she said as she constructed a white pyramid of gloved fingers, her tone now more personal, really impertinent.

Judy sat uncertainly on the edge of a facing chair. She wanted to get rid of the woman and keep the radio and do it all gracefully, yet swiftly. Because there was something hostile about Sheila Newberry that posed a sneaky threat; made her nervous, intimidated her.

"My name is Judy Ralston," she said with a spastic wink of smile, her voice frail behind the unmusical music of the precious radio.

Sheila nodded. "Judy, huh? That's a ridiculous name for a woman. It says nothing, goes nowhere."

"Is that so?" Judy tried to conceal her annoyance. "Well, unfortunately, we don't get to name ourselves when we're born."

Sheila pursed her lips. "And since the day you were born did you ever do anything wild and wicked, something really exciting, Judy? Ha! I'll bet not. You were a good little girl who did what mama and papa told you. And believed all their idiot, middle-class lies about life and how it should be lived purely and decently—and monotonously—in dull, middle-class conformity. And then you married some witless slob with the same lack of imagination—naturally. And so of course you'll die without ever knowing what it was all about. Poor Judy."

Judy compressed her mouth. "Now, listen, that's about enough! I'm not interested in your personal opinion of my—"

"On the other hand"—Sheila pushed on with an imperious gesture for silence—"maybe I'm being too hasty. One should never make snap judgments about people, my dear mother used to say. And mother was *always* right." Sheila nodded judiciously. "Yes, it's possible that behind the drab little housewife there is another Judy hiding, the evil one with the fascinating secrets. And, darling, I'm a compulsive listener. I adore the unmasking of sin and depravity. Tell Sheila all your dark secrets. Show her the naughty-naughty girl

squirming to break loose from little Judy twinkle-toes."

Judy stood, smoothing her skirt with tremulous hands. "I want you to leave," she said. "Right now. This instant! I don't understand your game, but it's obvious that you're demented. At the very least you should be kept off the streets and out of the homes of *normal* people. Just go, and don't come back, or you'll have more than me to deal with. Yes, and take your silly radio. I don't want it."

Sheila also stood. "I'm glad you don't want the radio, dear. I had no intention of leaving it. Good heavens, it cost me thirty-two fifty, plus tax." She groped inside the case, which had been resting on her lap. "But I do have a little gift for you, after all, darling."

She held up a hunting knife, handsomely fashioned with a wide, brilliant blade. "It's an expensive one," she said. Made of the finest steel. Isn't it precious? And so practical!

"Now, this time, my sweet, I won't disappoint you. I'm going to let you have this lovely knife. All of it. For keeps!"

The detective sergeant from Homicide, with his partner, stood watching in the hallway as the blanket-draped body of Judy Ralston was carried into the elevator. Newspaper reporters, and news photographers snapping pictures, scurried about. Some squeezed into the car and rode it down, others dashed for the stairs.

The sergeant shook his head solemnly. "You ever see anything like this before, Nate?"

"Nope. Saw a woman who got clobbered by a freight train once. But I think she came out better."

The sergeant puffed his cigarette. "I might make a little sense of this one if rape were involved. But no, Doc says it looks as if the lousy creep just butchered the poor girl. It's an overkill. Probably a vengeance kick. How'd you like to come home for dinner and find that gory thing all sliced up on your bed?"

"I don't think I could handle it, Ben. Not if it was my wife."

"Neither could Tom Ralston," said the sergeant.

"He just sits and stares. A vegetable."

"Judy Ralston, a lamb to the slaughter."

The sergeant pursed his lips. "Maybe she wasn't such a lamb."

"You think she had something going on the side? A boyfriend?"

The sergeant shrugged. "Possibly. Because the guy didn't break in. Would she invite a stranger? So we'll check it out. But one thing is certain. This boy is a psycho. His type of mutilation you don't get from a sane human being. Yeah, it's gotta be some bird with a scrambled brain. Yet a clever one. Leaves nothing behind. No weapon, no clues."

"We've still got the prints to sift."

The sergeant snorted. "Lots of luck, Nate. If this baby is consistent, none of those prints will be his."

"Then we have just one hope," said Nate. "That little red sports car the manager saw parked out front. It didn't belong to any of the tenants, and it wasn't owned by somebody visiting a tenant. Manager says she knows it was a Triumph because her sister has a green one like it."

The sergeant sneered. "Sure, but she didn't get the tag number. And how many autos like that are in a town this size? It's a mighty slim lead. Just the same, we'll take a close look at everyone who owns a red Triumph sports. And if all the cards're stacked for us, maybe we'll make it through the list before they turn us out to pasture on retirement."

It was past eleven on the following Friday morning. Sheila Newberry, dubbed in the headline of one newspaper as the Mad Slasher, and rightfully known in some quarters as Bobby De Marco, yawned, stretched and slid from the warm luxurious folds of his queen-sized bed.

Bobby pulled an exquisite silk robe over his pajamas. The robe was embellished with intricate Oriental designs against a vivid background of Chinese red. Red was his favorite color. Red was vibrant, alive; it suggested the very stuff of which life was made.

The one possession in red that had to go was the little Triumph sports car. The Bobby mind knew that Sheila was a genius, but a genius was still a mortal and should be allowed an occasional goof—and that red car was a bad one.

Some idiot reporter had pointed his nasty finger at the red Triumph; a sneaky implication right on the front page. So that sweet set of wheels would have to be discarded and eventually replaced. Meanwhile, take a bus, take a train—take a walk! But get there, baby, just get there! Right, Sheila?

Bobby eased his pedicured toes into fuzzy slippers. He crossed to a wall of glass and pulled the drape cord. A slanting burst of sun stabbed the room, toasting Bobby's pretty face. Squinting, he gazed across the park that bordered the opulent Glenview section. The park rolled north for long blocks of combed greenery, sprouting massive old trees, great shaggy bushes and splashy decks of flowers; boasting tennis courts, playgrounds and an amphitheater.

A grand place to live, thought Bobby. A divine address! Right, Sheila?

Stirred by the sun, Bobby now assumed a prone position and did a series of push-ups, followed by bending and stretching exercises. Though not in the least depleted by this daily routine, Bobby always quit after only a few minutes. It was imperative to keep that marvelous body sleek and trim. But too much muscle flexing and straining could give one bulging biceps. Well, Sheila, do we want to look like a weight lifter?

In the bathroom, Bobby shaved the minor stubble of blond hairs with fussy attention, inspecting the velvet skin minutely under the magnification of a hand mirror.

Next he brushed the small, matching pearls of teeth energetically; showered, sprayed cologne, and dabbed perfume. Then, still wearing his robe but protecting it with a ruffle-edged, gaudy-print apron, he fixed a Spartan breakfast. It was a meal devoid of those high-caloried goodies that would tend to make Sheila plump or flabby.

Afterward, Bobby sat with petrified stillness in a livingroom chair. Head slightly bowed, eyes closed, his gaze turned inward and fastened upon the vista of himself. Bright images of thought, both violent and sensual, were projected upon the dark wall of his mind. They were like capsule dramas, complete with sound. Especially a sound of voices. And a distant screaming.

With the images came the unbearable hunger, and he knew it was time to move again. The hunger, too many years contained, was now beyond endurance; and for that hunger, another temptress had to be sacrificed, had to be punished.

Bobby unlocked Sheila's special closet and inspected the tidy row of costly dresses with a practiced eye. No, for this occasion, a suit—the beige knitted one. Yes, and the green jacket with matching gloves. Just lovely. Perfect!

Studying himself in the mirror of a vanity, Bobby completed the Sheila look with a black wig over the blond hair, and selected items from an enviable assortment of the most expensive cosmetics. Few women could equal his judgment in the art of make-up. Too much and it would be a burlesque, a caricature of Sheila. Too little, and the shadow of Bobby might be detected behind the mask of Sheila.

When it was done, there was only Sheila—body and soul. In the full-length mirror, Sheila smiled and winked, and declared herself utterly feminine and delightful.

From a shelf, Sheila removed the attaché case and the precious portable radio. Then, from the sealed drawer of a desk, came the cunning knife of the hunter, its remorseless blade appearing freshly scrubbed, looking cool and surgical.

With these clever tools of entrapment and dissection closed inside her case, Sheila donned her jacket and gloves and departed in search of a second victim.

Susan Brundy, a petite young blonde wearing a mini-dress and knee-length boots, walked briskly up Grand Boulevard from the shopping center and turned

into Logan Street. In the gleaming daylight of early afternoon, it never occurred to Susan that anyone might be following her, certainly not a woman. So when she entered her half of the duplex house on Logan, she didn't notice Sheila watching her covertly from the corner.

Susan had just settled into a chair and was reading the newspaper she had bought when the doorbell rang. She tossed the paper aside and went to answer.

The caller appeared to Susan to be a woman in her late twenties. A beige knitted suit embraced her striking figure. Over it she wore a green jacket with matching gloves. Her long black hair was startling in contrast to the pale skin of her dainty face. She had long lashes and large, extraordinary eyes which, like the full pink mouth, seemed faintly mocking.

Susan spotted the tan leather attaché case and was immediately prepared for a sales pitch.

"Good afternoon, dear," said the woman, and flashed a neon smile. "My name is Sheila Newberry and I'm with Global Electric, the people who make Spaceway portable radios, the very latest and the finest in the world. Oh, my—I can see that I've lost you already. Well, don't rush off, because I'm not *selling* anything, dear. I'm *giving* away several of these lovely portables as part of our campaign to promote this new product in the community."

Sheila Newberry reached into her case and produced the radio, holding it aloft dramatically. "There!" she said. "How do you like it? Isn't it precious?"

Susan nodded. "Yes, but there's a gimmick somewhere, that's for sure."

"No gimmicks, darling. I'm going to play the radio for you and show you all the clever built-in gadgets it has, extras you'll never find in any other portable so tiny. And if you're completely sold on the marvels of this fantastic portable, would you be willing to show it around to all your friends and urge them to buy one like it? Because you see, dear, that's the whole point—to spread the good word about Spaceway."



"Well, I knew there had to be *some* catch to it," said Susan. "But it's not much to ask and if you're sure it won't cost me anything, I'll be glad to give the radio a boost to everyone I know. I'll even mention your name."

"Oh, would you! How terribly sweet! Just tell your friends to say, 'Sheila Newberry sent me,' when they buy at the store. Right? And now, since the gift portables don't come with batteries, we'll have to plug yours in somewhere if we're going to demonstrate it. Won't we, dear?"

"I see. Yes, of course. Well, then, won't you come in, Miss Newberry?"

They went inside and vanished behind the door. Some forty-five minutes later, still chic and poised, clothing fresh and spotless but for certain rusty stains on the green gloves now concealed in the attaché case, Sheila Newberry reappeared on the walk outside the duplex, and clipped along Logan Street. With the luck of the devil, a block east on Grand Boulevard, Sheila caught a bus in a matter of seconds.

A few days later and a few miles removed, Sheila was again tempted. And the third "temptress" was still more savagely "punished." Sacrificed to the god of Sheila's strange hunger was a 24-year-old night-trick nurse, slashed to death in her apartment. There were no suspects and no clues—not even a little red Triumph.

The nurse was Louise Hemming. A single girl living alone, she was easily the most attractive of the three victims. And, as if to bewilder further the swelling number of police, criminologists and psychiatrists assigned to unravel the case—she had been raped.

On the night of the Louise Hemming murder, Bobby De Marco's headline performance at the *Cherchez La Femme* was not up to its usual standard of excellence. Bobby had been drinking relentlessly between shows. The ceaseless barrage from the news media, full of

outrage and panic over the third butchery of sweet innocence, had shattered his cool, smirking bravado.

The *Cherchez La Femme* was an off-beat nightclub where female impersonators did their thing, and did it better, more convincingly than others at any place of its kind in town. Billed as Sheila Rose, Bobby De Marco was the star of the show. When people said that Bobby was "beautiful," they did not speak of his character, which was both dubious and mysterious. The accolade referred strictly to the classic symmetry of his features and the grace of his figure—as a man—and more especially in his nightly role as a woman.

It was the boast of his fellow performers, his friends and even his enemies that no one outside the fold could detect the man behind the woman when Bobby was dressed for the part.

The basic revue at the *Cherchez La Femme* was simple, roughly an imitation of the genuine follies in which true women displayed their talents. As the lead, Bobby De Marco was out front and center of the chorus. He sang solos, acted in skits and told suggestive jokes. Near the close of the revue, he did a masterful semi-strip, which was funny and yet strangely provocative.

The last bows of the last performance were taken at one thirty in the morning, the final round of drinks served just before two. As a rule, Bobby lingered over a cocktail until closing, but on this night he was desperate to be gone; to take shelter in the sanctuary of his lavish, over-decorated and emasculated apartment. In the distortion of his fear, he had imagined that beyond the floodlights there was a squinting row of detectives, and perhaps their probing eyes had uncovered those other impersonations, the secret violations of Sheila Newberry in three forbidden acts of horror.

So Bobby made a dash for his dressing room at the instant the curtain fell. He had already decided not to change into slacks and sport jacket because the papers were now screaming of the city-wide hunt for a dangerous man-animal, considered to be powerfully constructed.

He snatched a fur-trimmed coat from his wardrobe and pulled it over the satin gown, stuffed his wallet into an evening bag, and hurried toward a rear exit. He had almost made it unseen when one of the "girls" of the chorus stepped from the men's room, right into his path.

"Bobby!" shrieked the dancer. "Where are you going in that frantic getup? Listen, lover, you very well know the law about walking the streets in drag. If the heat puts the arm on you, don't call *me*, Bobby, baby. Just remember that."

"Ahh, shut up and go play with your dolls," Bobby growled in the rich baritone of his own voice, then shoved past, out the door.

He was in the parking lot but there was no little red Triumph to whisk him home. He had driven it to the body shop of a neighboring city, where it was being repainted a conservative dark blue. He would take it to his home town three hundred miles east, trade it in on some massive opposite, visit briefly with his mother, and return.

He wished it were possible to confess to his mother, for she of all people might understand his tortured confusion. Playacting the part of a girl from his youth, he became a woman at heart, yet despised women at those times when they lured him with the evil attraction his mother denounced.

Because those evil women tempted him, they had to be punished! As his mother often said, "When the woman's evil tree of seduction ripens, it must be cut down and destroyed!" And his mother was *always* right.

Bobby crossed the parking lot, dodged through an alley and thence to a street a block removed. In another block he came to a cabstand, but it was deserted, so he swished on to the bus stop and waited in a frenzy of impatience, peering back toward the club to see if he had been followed by some sharp-eyed cop from the audience.

The Cherchez was a rendezvous for some borderline characters, and the fuzz dropped around all too often.

In the guise of Sheila, Bobby thought as Sheila, and as Sheila waited for the bus, a battered old sedan pulled to the curb.

"Going my way, sweetheart?" The man had ancient eyes in a young face.

"No, I think not," said Sheila. "What is your way, love?"

"My way is your way, baby."

"Sorry," said Sheila, who was mildly amused, despite the anxiety of the moment. "My mother told me never to ride with strangers—and you look very strange to me."

The man took off with a howl of rubber.

Sheila noticed a couple of men in plain dark suits approaching on foot from the direction of the club and recognized one of them at once. The Cherchez's owner had pointed him out as a vice-squad cop. At intervals he would suddenly appear at the club bar, where he sat for hours, nursing a beer. The other, obviously the vice detective's partner, was a new face.

Sheila wondered if, on special assignments, they ever paired Vice with Homicide, and when the cops paused to light cigarettes while exchanging muted remarks with blank faces, Sheila was at the brink of hysteria.

Just then the bus rumbled up and halted with a plaintive sigh of brakes. After a jolting heartbeat of indecision, Sheila climbed aboard. At the last instant the cops also entered, mounting with the graceful agility of physically disciplined pros. Then, as if from established procedure, they moved to the extreme rear of the bus. Here they sat hard-eyed and silent, apparently intent upon nothing, yet in position to see everything.

Sheila sank into a seat nearest the forward exit. She made ladylike adjustments, gathering the fur of the coat in front to screen the excessive cleavage, smoothing satin skirt over black hose.

As the bus rattled onward, Sheila gave the cops a slanting eye, noting that they were now faking a casual conversation, complete with smiles and chuckles. It was puzzling. Why did they choose to ride the bus and

signal their presence to the all-knowing Sheila? Why did they not rather coast behind in one of their drab little sedans, those unmarked squad cars? Then they could pounce on Sheila at will, when she alighted.

What did Bobby think? asked Sheila. Well, Bobby thought maybe it was because he was in drag, and they wanted to observe his conduct on the bus before making the arrest.

To be busted for the drag bit would not be much, nothing serious. Likely just a fine and some heavy words of warning. Still, the last thing Sheila wanted was that sort of close attention from the heat. They might uncover all of the Sheila Newberry secrets—if they hadn't done so already.

Sheila would have to escape, that's all. If not permanently, long enough to measure the degree of danger. There might never be another chance.

So when the bus ground to a halt at a stop in Glenview two blocks from home, Sheila bolted down the steps just as the driver was reaching to close the door.

They had been skirting Glenview Park, and now Sheila dashed into it and turned to watch the bus.

It was astonishing! Either the cops had been caught napping, or they were riding the bus for another purpose beyond guessing. In either case, they did not get off, and the taillights were receding in the distance, easing his apprehension.

Sheila waited another minute, pondering the situation while fingering the wig to learn if it were properly positioned.

Suddenly a shadow loomed at the corner of her vision, and when she turned about sharply, there was the glimpse of a young face with ancient eyes before an arm whipped about her neck.

"Told you we were going the same way, sweetheart. You coulda saved your little bus fare, baby."

Sheila vanished and Bobby De Marco fought wildly, punching and kicking with the man-muscle of rage and fear. Even in the confinement of that wrenching arm, Bobby was taking him, beating him off—until the at-

tacker reached into a pocket and brought up a lead pipe, hoisting it above Bobby's head while locking the arm tighter about his neck.

In that final second, the strangled cry of a man came from the mouth of a woman—Bobby trying to deny Sheila.

Bobby's skull crushed.

Bobby De Marco was dead.

## RANSOM DEMAND

by Jeffrey M. Wallman

Frances Bartlett sat in her husband's easy chair, her big hands clasped loosely in her lap, a plumpish auburn-haired woman in her late thirties, wearing a quilted robe over her pink nightgown. She was watching the *Today* show on television after having packed the children off to school, but this particular morning she wasn't relaxing as she usually did.

She was worried. She wanted to know what had happened to Paul.

Her husband was supposed to have been home sometime after two this morning, after his flight from Chicago landed. Frances had awakened at three-thirty A.M. from the instinct bred of ten years of marriage to a sales manager, and had tossed and fretted in the dark for an hour before calling the airline. A clerk told her the plane had arrived on time, but she'd have to wait until the business office opened to learn if her husband's name was on the passenger manifest or if he had transferred flights. Sorry . . .

Touched slightly by hysteria, Frances had phoned long-distance to the hotel at which Paul had been staying; he had checked out the previous evening without leaving any messages. Sorry . . .

She hadn't been able to sleep the rest of the night.

At least there hadn't been a crash, she told herself as she sat watching the television. She'd have heard about it if there had been, and surely she'd have been notified if there'd been an accident or Paul had gotten sick and was in a hospital. It was probably nothing, a mix-up of some kind—but it wasn't like Paul not to let her know. Where was he? Oh, God, where was Paul?

She glanced at her wristwatch. Another hour and she'd phone the airline's business office, and if they

couldn't help her, she'd wait for the next flight from Chicago. If he weren't on that, she'd . . . Frances shivered, not wanting to think about what she would have to do then. The police, Paul's boss, the publicity, questions and embarrassment; the prospect seemed too dreadful for words.

A commercial began, and she went into the kitchen for another cup of coffee. She was stirring it absently when the phone rang. She set the cup down and hurriedly picked up the receiver on the extension phone near her. "H-Hello?"

"Mrs. Bartlett? Mrs. Paul Bartlett?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"We have your husband, Mrs. Bartlett."

"What?" she said blankly. "What?"

"We have your husband," the voice repeated.

"What? You have Paul? How?"

"This is a ransom demand. Now do you understand?"

"Oh, my God . . . !" Frances sucked in her breath, trying to steady herself with her free hand. She knocked over the cup, coffee spilling across the counter; she never noticed it. "Paul, is he all right?"

"He's fine. He'll stay that way only if you do what I tell you."

"Let me speak to him. Please, let me just—"

"No. Listen to me, Mrs. Bartlett, and listen closely." The man's voice was low and flat. "We want ten thousand dollars in unmarked bills, nothing over a twenty. Is that clear?"

"Yes, but I don't have—"

"Hock your jewels if you have to, but get ten thousand together by noon if you want to see your husband alive again. Take the money in a lunch pail to McKinley Park. You know where that is?"

"Downtown," she answered quickly. "It's downtown."

"Right. There's a statue of McKinley in the middle of it. At exactly twelve fifteen, walk along the north path and put the pail beside the third bench from the



statue. Got that? Third bench, north side."

"I-I'm afraid I don't know which is—"

"The north side faces Woolworth's. Then keep on going and don't look back."

"I won't. Twelve fifteen, third bench, facing Woolworth's," she recited numbly. "When do I . . . see Paul?"

"Tomorrow night."

"That long? Can't you—"

"Don't call the police, Mrs. Bartlett. We'll be watching you, and if you try to double-cross us, you'll never get another chance."

"I understand. But can't you let him go sooner? Please, can't you?" Then she realized that she was talking into a dead receiver; the man had hung up. She stood holding the phone for another moment, still stunned, and then slowly replaced it with mechanical deliberation.

"No," she cried out to her still, empty house. "*No!*"

Frances had been unable to sit still since she'd returned from McKinley Park. Now, with school over and her children playing in the yard, she paced aimlessly through the house, the phone serving as the base of her wanderings. She would walk to the living-room window and move the drapes aside to peer out; let them drop to pace through the hall and up the stairs, gazing abstractedly into her bedroom, hers and Paul's; down the stairs to smoke a cigarette and drink a cup of coffee, only to leave them half-finished; return once more to stare at the phone, occasionally touching its bright plastic.

She knew she would carry this day alive and painfully fresh in her mind for a long time. She wouldn't forget her initial panic, when she'd almost called the police, followed by her longer, cold dread of the chance she'd be taking if she did. She wouldn't forget how frantic she'd been at the bank, closing out the accounts and cashing most of their bonds, or how acutely she'd had to control herself when she'd left the pail and

simply kept on walking. Or now, despairing, hoping she'd done right and praying Paul would be released unharmed. She kept asking herself *why*? They weren't rich or famous, only an average, middle-class family like millions of others. Why had *they* been picked?

The phone rang again. She ran to it, clutching it. "Hello? Hello?"

"Honey?"

"Paul!" Tears of relief welled, blurring her vision. "Oh, Paul, are you all right?"

"A little tired, but otherwise I'm OK. What's the matter?"

"Where are you?"

"Philadelphia."

"Philadelphia?"

"Sure. The meeting just broke up—it lasted longer than I thought."

"Meeting?" Frances felt dazed and bewildered. "Paul, I-I don't understand. What meeting?"

"This new accounts thing that came up at the last minute. I tried calling you last night to tell you I had to go, but the line was busy. Didn't you get my wire?"

"No, I didn't. You mean you're all right?"

"I told you, I'm OK. Just what's going on, anyway?"

"You mean you . . . you weren't kidnapped?"

"Kidnapped!" Her husband laughed. "What makes you think I was kidnapped?"

Frances thought about the phone call and the ransom demand—then she thought about the ten thousand dollars, and fainted.

Lew Sieberts lounged in his swivel chair, tapping his thick fingers on the battered oak desk, impatient for his shift to be over. He was still amazed at how smoothly the job had gone, and every once in a while he'd have to look in the third drawer of his desk just to be sure the pailful of money he'd picked up on his lunch hour wasn't a figment of his imagination. Man, if he had to get fired, this was the kind of severance pay to leave with; the job was proving to be the best he'd ever had,

even if it was the shortest. He'd stick around to pocket his regular severance tomorrow morning, but then he was getting out of town before that Bartlett guy returned. To New York City, maybe—it had the action, and he could get so lost there he'd never be caught. Yeah, New York sounded real good to him . . .

The teletype across the room began to chatter. When its bell rang, Sieberts went over to it and tore off the flimsy. It read:

BLTMR XLT1960 JS DL PD KANSAS CITY  
MO 6/21 340P XXX CAROLE WILSON 424  
MAXWELL CT BALTIMORE MD 467 9073  
XXXX MUST GO TO SPRINGFIELD FOR  
TWO DAYS STOP UNEXPECTED BUSINESS  
SORRY STOP DONT WORRY LOVE PETER  
STOP END XXXX

Sieberts sat down again, studying the message. It was very similar to the wire Bartlett had sent yesterday. He leaned back until he could see out of the dusty window of the telegraph office and smiled faintly, wondering if he could pull the same trick twice in a row. Well, twenty grand was twice as much as he had now . . .

He swiveled around and picked up the phone, dialing the number printed on the telegram. The line buzzed and a woman's voice answered.

"Mrs. Wilson? Mrs. Peter Wilson?" he said to her. "We have your husband . . ."

## I'LL RACE YOU

by Fletcher Flora

Miss Malin in 912 wanted a bucket of ice and a fifth of gin. The ice and the liquor were taken up by the bellhop named Fritz. He happened to notice when he got to her door that it was exactly 11 P.M. She had left the door cracked for him, but he knocked and waited for her invitation before he entered.

It was apparent that Miss Malin had been drinking. Not that she was disheveled or loud or in any way offensive like a lot of women get when they've been drinking; on the contrary. She was wearing a smart little black dress with a very short skirt in the current fashion, and there was a single strand of cultured pearls around her throat and small gold rings with matching pearls in her ears. Her short brown hair was brushed and glossy, and there was about her that delicate and enchanting fragrance that meticulous women invariably have right after a hot bath and a careful toilet. Miss Malin, in fact, was a doll, strictly high class. She looked now as though she had dressed herself for an occasion. The fact that she had been drinking was apparent to Fritz's practiced eye and ear, after a few moments, only in the excessive restraint of her movements and the exaggerated precision of her enunciation.

"Just set it there on the table beside the bed," Miss Malin said.

The only light in the room came from a small lamp burning on the same table on which he set the ice and gin. Miss Malin was standing outside the perimeter of light at the glass doors opening onto a terrace. She turned into the room and sat down on the edge of a chair with her knees and ankles neatly together and her hands folded in her lap. She sat there staring at her

hands. Fritz lingered, thinking of his tip.

"Will that be all, Miss Malin?" he said.

She turned her head and looked at him, her face toward the light, and he noticed that her face appeared tired and her eyes were full of shadows. Perhaps she had not heard his question, or chose for her own reasons to ignore it. Anyhow, instead of answering it, she asked one of her own.

"What is your name?" she said.

"It's Fritz, Miss Malin."

"Fritz. That's a nice name." She nodded her head gravely. "I used to have a dog named Fritz. When I was a little girl. It was a toy fox terrier. It got run over and killed."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Miss Malin. They're nice little dogs."

"I cried when it happened, but it didn't do any good, of course. It never does any good to cry. I've learned that. Something has always happened to things I loved. Things and people. They died or went away or got lost, and it never did any good to cry. Have you ever been alone, Fritz?"

"Sure. I guess everyone's alone sometimes."

"You're mistaken, Fritz. Not sometimes. Always. You're always alone. You or me or anybody, all alone in the universe."

"Is that a fact, Miss Malin?"

"Yes. Yes, it is. I thought and thought about it, and it finally just came to me in a flash. It was a kind of revelation or insight or something. Aloneness, you see, is the only *reality*. Everything else is illusion. Lovers and friends and dogs named Fritz, they're all illusions."

"How about me, Miss Malin? Am I an illusion?"

"You're real in your universe, and I'm real in mine. The trouble is, we can't get *to* each other. We can't *reach* each other. There you are, and here I am, and there's no way between. There's no way to get here from there, or there from here."

"Okay, Miss Malin. If you say so."

"Thank you, Fritz. I'm glad you agree with me. It's

a question of seeing the truth, you understand. It's a question of being aware of reality. Some people are aware only once in a while, in little flashes once in a while, and so they *feel* alone only once in a while. You see what I mean, Fritz? Do you see? When they are sad or discouraged or depressed about something, they have these little flashes, their moments of truth, and know that they are alone, all alone for all their lives in the universe. But usually they live with the illusion of comfort and company and love that aren't really there. That's it, Fritz. Comfort and company and love are the big lies that aren't there."

"Never mind, Miss Malin. You'll feel different in the morning."

"You think so? That's very sweet of you, Fritz. It's very sweet and kind of you to try to comfort me. But comfort is a lie, nothing but a lie, and lies in the end are cruelest of all."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Miss Malin."

"Not deliberately. Not to be cruel. You're a very kind young man, Fritz, and you would never be deliberately cruel. I can see that. It's not your fault that you are not aware of reality; at least not oftener than now and then. It's not your fault that you tell lies out of kindness. Do you know where I am this instant, Fritz? Can you tell me?"

"You're right there. Right there where I can see you and hear you and could touch you if I wanted to. You're there, and I'm here."

"You see? You are not *aware*. You simply don't understand that it's all an illusion. You must understand that I am *not* here. Not really, that is. I am naked and cold and alone in a universe that was created with me, the instant of my birth, and will end with me, the instant of my death. I can't escape, and you can't get in. I'm alone in my private universe."

"Sure. Just you and God."

"No." She shook her head and stared down at her hands again. "Just me."

Fritz was feeling uneasy. He was beginning to feel,

indeed, that he had gotten over his head in something he had better have avoided. In his own defense, he effected a slightly condescending manner.

"You know what you need, Miss Malin? You need another drink. You like me to open your bottle and make you something? Service of the house."

"No, thank you, Fritz. I'm not at all sure now that I care for another drink. If I have another, I shall certainly have several more in addition, and then I'll simply go to sleep and wake up again in the morning. I am very tired of going to sleep at night and waking up again in the morning. What I am thinking about is going to sleep and *not* waking up in the morning. It seems to me, everything considered, that it would be much more satisfactory."

"You don't mean that, Miss Malin. You oughtn't to talk that way."

"Haven't you ever wanted to die, Fritz?"

"Not me."

"Haven't you ever even *thought* about dying?"

"Not seriously. And when I thought about it at all, I can't say the idea appealed to me."

"I have, Fritz. I'm very addicted to thinking about dying. Do you know that dying is quite complicated? It is. There are so many *details* involved. So many ways of *doing* it. You would hardly believe how difficult it is to make up your mind." She had looked up from her hands at Fritz as she spoke, and now she turned her head away slowly and stared at the glass doors with the little balcony outside. "I was standing there thinking about it when you came." She looked back at Fritz and saw that he had begun to edge toward the hall door. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"It's been a busy night," he said. "I'd better get back to work."

"I don't suppose you'd care to make love to me before you go?"

"I couldn't do that, Miss Malin. I might get into all kinds of trouble."

"I didn't think you would. It doesn't matter. It

would only be an illusion anyhow."

Fritz had by this time edged his way to the door. He paused there, his hand on the knob, and looked back at her.

"You take my advice, Miss Malin. You have a nice strong drink or two and go to bed. You'll feel better in the morning."

"Are you going downstairs?"

"Yes."

"I'll race you," she said.

He went out, closed the door, and started down the hall toward the elevators. He felt a compulsion to run, but he didn't. He knew somehow, however much he hurried, that she would be downstairs ahead of him.



# "I AM NOT A THIEF, MR. KESTER"

by Gilbert Ralston

August 21st

Mr. S. J. Kester  
Kester Farm  
Elmira, Ill.

Dear Mr. Kester:

*I am not a thief.* I am writing this to you because I bought a California paper and read in it where you said you think I and your daughter Millie run off with your money last week—a very untrue statement which I must correct. I may not be very much, but *I am for sure not a thief, Mr. Kester.*

I better tell you what happened. You remember how Millie always talked a lot? Everytime I come home she talked a lot, even when I was trying to think about something she would read the paper to me. I told her lots of times to shut up but I guess she can't. (Some people can't stop things as easy as others.) Once she cut some of the flowers off the bushes in the garden, a whole bunch of camellias I grew. I sure was mad when I come home and found the dish full of them on the table, all cut off, and killed. I hit her a couple times with a stick so she wouldn't do that any more.

I bet there's lots of things you don't know about me and Millie. Like I met her at the Beauty Contest in Santa Monica, at the beach. I had a nice old truck I was living in down there and they have Beauty Contests and like that right down the road at Santa Monica. I been living on the beach maybe a couple of months when they have this contest and all the surfers and beach rats go for laughs. That's where I saw her the first time. Boy, could she fill up a bathing suit. Next day I take her swimming and we have hot dogs and

stuff. Then we go to the free dance on the pier that weekend and lap up all that cool music.

Next day I throw Carlo Benson (that's my friend who was living in the truck with me) out and Millie comes to stay with me. I bet she never told you that. Ha ha.

Anyway she told somebody, because about a week later some old bag pulls her car in to the parking lot next to the service station where I have my truck early in the morning and hollers at me till I get a headache. She says she's Millie's aunt and I gotta marry Millie. I finally get her shut up long enough to say o.k. I'll marry her. So that's how we got married.

Anyway Millie made the old bat promise not to tell you so that's why this is a surprise. (Boy, did those two put the old ring in my nose!) Before I know what's happened I'm living in a rented house on Mason Street and every day working at the nursery over on Tyrone where they grow all that stuff. I kind of like it at first, then that bald creep that runs the nursery gets down on me and keeps grinding me about why I'm late and like that. Boy did we get in a beef. He like to run himself to death trying to get away from me when I got after him.

One of the other guys down there held the front door shut while he got away in his car, then I got to laughing and lost my mad. Anyway, I got canned and went home and told Millie. She didn't say much for once, just went out next morning and got some crazy job. Pretty good money though, considering she was a girl. We could live good on it.

Remember the garden I fixed up during this time? I filled the whole back yard with stuff I had swiped from the nursery and put away for when I had time, flowers and everything. I like flowers best.

That's when Millie started to yammer at me I should go back to work. I tell her I'm not ready, but she says I got to. So I got mad, but didn't say nothing. I figure I did all right, marrying her and like that. Then the whole thing you know about started. One night I got tired of Millie's mouth pounding away at me and hit

her a couple of times to shut her up. That's when the neighbors come in. Boy, its amazing to me how some people can't mind their business. Next thing that happens, I poke the nosy jerk from next door and his old lady calls the law. I get booked, and you get telephoned to all the way out there in Elmira.

I don't really blame you for what you said when you came in the next day. You were pretty mad when you saw the place and talked to Millie. I admit I got sore when you tried to get her to move away from me, because after all, what's the percentage? Well, you know the rest. We make a deal. I get a thousand dollars if I sign some papers, and get lost. You get Millie. Sounds okay. I say yes. Boy, that Millie. Could she holler!

Well here's the explanation about the money. I signed the papers. You gave me a check. I blow, everybody's happy, except Millie. Well, that night I get to the room I rented. There's a message from Millie, saying I should call. I call her like she says. What does she do? She invites me to dinner. Big deal. Big farewell dinner.

I figure what have I got to lose? I went to the house like always. I go in. You know what? Everywhere in that house are my flowers, all cut, all *dying*. There's glasses full of them. On the table, on the apple boxes we used to put lamps on, even in the sink.

After a minute Millie comes in from the back room, all dressed up. She's got camellias from my bush, *dying* in her hair, some more in her front. I just look at her. I couldn't say anything. Then there was a red haze, like, blotting everything out, before both my eyes.

Anyway, Mr. Kester, I didn't stay to dinner. I couldn't eat in that house with all those dead things in it. And I didn't take your money.

Respectively yours,  
Chuck

P.S. I can prove it about the money. Dig up in the camellia bed. Millie's got the check in her hand.

P.P.S. When you dig, be careful to keep the roots of the plants moist. Camellias can't stand too much moving around.

P.P.P.S. I am with a widow lady now. She is a very nice lady but talks a lot like Millie.

## MOUSETRAP

by Edwin P. Hicks

There was a pounding on his front door. Joe Chaviski turned on the light. It was two A.M. by his bedside clock, a full hour before the alarm was set to go off, rousing him to go fishing. The pounding continued. Who the devil would be wanting him at this hour?

"All right! All right!" Joe shouted, as his 260 pounds suddenly came alive. His great feet hit the floor lightly. He looked like a king-size teddy bear as he switched on the overhead light and started toward the front door. After turning on the porch light he peered through the glass of the door into the frightened face of Frank Waverly, Fort Sanders' leading contractor.

Joe threw open the door. "Come in, Frank. What the hell—"

Waverly pushed through the door as if demons were clutching at his coattails.

"What's wrong, Frank?"

"I'm in trouble, Joe!"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Murder!" Waverly was shaking violently, his black eyes staring wildly. His suntanned face was three shades lighter than usual.

"Sit down!" Joe said. Waverly sank into the leather divan. "Here, light up a cigarette, and tell me what this is all about."

"Joe, I came to you for advice—and help. The police will be after me tomorrow as soon as the murder is discovered."

"Whose murder, Frank?"

"Sally Caviness," Waverly said. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"Sally Caviness!" Joe knew plenty about Sally Caviness. She was a pretty red-haired divorcee, and Frank

Waverly's mistress. "Let me make some coffee," Joe said. "We'll both feel better."

While the coffee was perking Waverly would have time to pull himself together. This was going to be a mess! He and Frank Waverly had always been good friends. What a man does in his private life is his own business, and Joe had never mentioned Sally to Frank. Yet Joe and Wanda Waverly were good friends, too, and Wanda was Frank's wife. Wanda had the money in the family, an inheritance, and she had financed Frank's early construction work until he had reached his present status as an extremely successful contractor, the builder of buildings, bridges and highways.

Frank was about forty-five, and Wanda was seven years younger. They had been married fifteen years, and there were no children. Sally Caviness? Joe shook his head. It was the old, old story of a well-to-do businessman making a fool of himself over a much younger woman. Sally wasn't yet thirty, and she was beautiful, extremely beautiful, with a figure that caused men to turn and watch when she passed on the street.

Joe turned off the three-o'clock alarm on the bed-stand clock. There went his fishing trip to Cove Lake. It was the 10th of October, the time of year when they hit on the surface.

He took the coffee into the living room. Frank Waverly was sitting there with his face buried in his hands. He looked weary, like an old man.

"Here, get some of this hot coffee in you," Joe said.

Slowly, sentence by sentence, Frank told his story. He had left Sally's apartment in the Superior Arms at nine thirty that night. She was happy when he left because, he said, he had told her that as soon as he obtained his divorce from Wanda they would be married. After a long pause, Waverly continued. "When I returned sometime after midnight with some good news, she was dead—she was lying on the floor on her back. And she had been shot!"

Joe put down his empty cup. "Did anyone see you go to, or leave, her apartment?"

"The elevator operator, in the early part of the night. He took me up about eight o'clock, but he was gone when I left at nine thirty."

"What about the second time?"

"No one saw me. It is an automatic elevator, and the operator goes off duty at nine o'clock."

"You say you returned after midnight with good news. What was the good news?"

"I think it was a quarter after midnight. I went there to tell her we had caught Wanda—my wife, you know—in a compromising situation and that now Wanda could not possibly contest our divorce."

"What do you mean by 'compromising situation'?" Joe asked, bristling. He had known Wanda Waverly since she was a little girl. A police officer for thirty years knows pretty well what goes on in his hometown—both on the surface and beneath. Wanda had a temper, all right, no question about that, but never had he heard the slightest word against Wanda's character.

"Just what I told you," Waverly said. "We found her in a compromising situation. I want you to keep this in confidence, Joe. We trailed her to the Picardy Hotel. She was there with a man."

"What man?" Joe said coldly.

"Harry Vallery."

"That son— You framed her, Frank. I *know* you framed her!"

"Yes, I framed her. She refused to give me a divorce so I could marry Sally."

"And now what do you want me to do?" Joe asked sharply.

"Joe, I haven't anybody to turn to now."

"How about Wanda?"

"Joe, man, I didn't kill Sally! I swear I didn't. But as soon as she's discovered, the police will be after me. They'll question the elevator operator and find out I was there last night. This whole town knows about Sally and me."

"Who else would be interested in killing Sally except you—or Wanda?"

"That's just it!" Waverly moaned. "And Wanda has a perfect alibi. She checked in at the hotel sometime shortly after nine, was there all the time until we caught her there with Vallery, sometime between ten thirty and ten forty-five. Then after we left, Vallery rode around with her for about thirty minutes. She seemed pretty much upset."

"Who's 'we'?" asked Joe.

"My private detective, Choc Churchill. And there was a photographer, Jim Durnell; and the hotel manager, and I."

"Then what?"

"I was waiting for Vallery in front of the Superior Arms, as planned. We sat in the car and talked and checked scores, to be together in the divorce proceedings if Wanda contested it. Then I went up to see Sally."

"Did you see anyone enter or leave the Superior Arms while you waited outside?"

"No."

"Where's Sally's divorced husband?"

"In Leavenworth prison, on a Dyer Act violation. He was a repeater and still has a year to serve."

"Why did you come to me?"

"Joe, you and I have been friends for a long time. You know I'm no saint, but I wouldn't kill anybody. I watched you for years on the police force. You're level-headed. The boys there will be hard on me, but they respect you. You've got influence there. Please, Joe."

"The first thing I'm going to do," Joe said, "is call the police and tell them Sally's been murdered."

"Wait, Joe. You can tell them, all right, but I want you to go to the apartment and look the place over. See if you can dig out anything that points to the killer—and it's not me. You're the best detective they ever had. Those cubs they've got there now don't know what to look for."

"Go home, Frank."

"Go home? I haven't any home to go to after tonight."



"Then go to your hotel."

"I'll be at the Wardlow."

"Okay. You be there when we want you." Joe reached for the telephone.

Chief Detective Marty Sauer and Detective Frank Hopp were waiting in front of the Superior Arms when Joe drove up. Johnnie Brooksher, identification officer, got out of a parked car, carrying his camera and fingerprint kit.

"Sally Caviness was Frank Waverly's girl, wasn't she?" Sauer said.

Joe grinned. He had trained Sauer. He hadn't told headquarters who his informant was, and already Sauer was connecting Waverly with the crime.

Brooksher powdered the doorknob to Sally's apartment, then swore. "Nothing; clean," he said.

Joe opened the door with Waverly's key. They entered—and there was Sally lying in the middle of the floor in front of a divan. She was wearing a sheer blue nightgown and transparent negligee. There were three bullet holes in her chest.

"Twenty-five-caliber automatic," said Brooksher, pouncing on three empty brass cartridges on the floor. An expensive stereophonic phonograph was playing a thunderous Beethoven sonata.

"Stop that racket," Sauer said. "It gives me the creeps."

"Would rock-and-roll sound any better at a time like this?" Joe growled. He turned off the stereo.

"Somebody must have been planning a celebration," Sauer said, "but if they were all that happy, why did he have to kill her? Somebody throw a sprag in the wheel?"

Again Joe was pleased. Let the boy's mind work. Ten years ago when Sauer moved up from car officer, the last thing anyone would have accused Sauer of was thinking.

Now Hopp was examining a framed photograph which he had found on Sally's dressing table in the bedroom. It was a recent photograph of Frank Waver-

ly, and at the bottom was written, "To my darling Sally."

"A shame for a man like Frank Waverly to lose his head over a girl like this," Hopp said. "But she sure was a pretty one—and built!"

They let Brooksher photograph the body and the room, the glasses on the table, the bottle of champagne in the ice bucket. Then they began digging into things. Beneath a ruffled pillow on the divan Sauer found an ivory-handled .25-caliber automatic.

Brooksher examined it, then shook his head disgustingly. "Wiped clean."

"All right," Sauer said, "tell us what you haven't told us, Joe. What do you know?"

Joe told them about Waverly coming to see him.

"All right, let's go pick him up," said Sauer. "He's bound to have done it—or if he didn't he knows something about it."

"Sure," said Joe, "only there's one thing I don't understand. If Frank Waverly had a quarrel with Sally and shot her, why would he leave the murder weapon, assuming that's the gun that killed her? And if he was fool enough to leave the gun here, because of some subconscious psychological quirk demanding that he be caught, why did he so carefully wipe the fingerprints off the gun?"

"Let's go ask Frank Waverly," Sauer said.

"You go ahead," said Joe. "He's at the Wardlow Hotel. Here's the key to Sally's apartment. I'm going home."

At home, all up in the air, Joe cooked breakfast. He was thinking about Frank Waverly and the pitiful sight of gorgeous Sally Caviness lying dead on the floor of her apartment, but most of all he was thinking of Wanda Waverly.

He knew Wanda as one of the finest women in the city of Fort Sanders. She was wealthy. She could be hard. She had a reputation of ruling women's organizations to which she belonged with a firm hand. But as

far as anyone knew she was a faithful and devoted wife. There hadn't been a breath of scandal about her, even when the town was buzzing about Frank and Sally. Frank had been seeing Sally now for two years—just another damn fool man and a pretty gold-digger of a girl.

Say that Frank and Sally had had a quarrel—maybe Sally had threatened to blackmail him. Few men ever shot a woman blackmailer. He might slap her around or beat her up or, in a rage, even strangle her. Yet if Waverly had done the unusual and shot Sally, why had he carefully wiped his fingerprints off the gun and left it where it would be found?

Another thing, too—that little ivory-handled .25-caliber pistol was a woman's choice of weapons. A man would use a larger gun, a .32 or a .38 at least. That ivory handle also pointed to a woman's touch. Yet what woman? The only two women so far in the case were poor dead Sally and Wanda Waverly. Yet Wanda had been in the Picardy Hotel at the time the murder must have occurred, and she had witnesses to prove it—the very best of witnesses—her husband, a private detective, a photographer, the hotel manager, and Vallery.

Joe Chaviski decided to go fishing anyway. He wanted to hit Cove Lake right at sunup. He was leaving an hour later than he'd planned, but by driving fast he still might make it.

The car, boat and trailer moved at seventy miles an hour along Highway 22, then south from Paris, around the winding hill road at a slower pace. The top of Mount Magazine was wreathed in a fog, but the eastern sky was all ablaze and the water of the lake was still cloaked in shadow as he backed his trailer down the launching ramp. He loaded the boat, *Lucy*, with his rods, his tackle box, his water jug and lunch-box, and two life preservers. He put in his gasoline tank and attached it to the motor, then he threw in a paddle.

Joe moved to various hot spots about the lake, cast-

ing diligently. On this date for the last two years he had caught big bass, but Old John Bass was not at home this morning. At times Joe sat back and just enjoyed being out. There was a ripple on the surface as the sun moved over the hill and transformed the opposite shore into a kaleidoscope of color—the red of sumac, persimmon, sweetgum and water oak, the green of cedar and pine, intermingling with shadowing blue haze and gray crags.

Joe fished until noon, catching a few small ones and releasing them as fast as he caught them. He devoured his lunch hungrily, topping it off with a quart of sweet milk he had kept in the ice box. Then he turned his boat back toward the landing and soon had it on the trailer and heading home. His trip had been a disappointment, but he had done a powerful lot of thinking—going over all the angles of the Caviness murder.

As soon as he had unloaded his boat at home and changed clothes, he drove to the police station. Brooksher had news for him. The bullets removed from Sally's body in the autopsy had been fired from the little automatic found beneath the pillow, and Frank Waverly had admitted buying the gun three years before. The prosecuting attorney would file a murder charge against him in the morning.

"Has Waverly cracked yet?" Joe asked.

"No," Brooksher said. "We advised him of his rights not to answer questions, but he waived everything. We grilled him then for several hours. He swears he knew nothing of Sally's death until he walked into her apartment and found her lying on the floor. Then, he said, he beat it to you, hoping you could help him."

Joe went to Waverly's cell and sat down with him on the cot. "What about the gun, Frank? They say it's yours."

"Sure it's mine. I told them I bought it at the Star Hardware Store three years ago."

"How do you explain it being the murder weapon?"

"I can't explain it—except it was taken from my cottage on Sugar Loaf Lake in a break-in a little over a

week ago. The sheriff has a report on the burglary."

"What was it doing at the cottage?"

Waverly hesitated before he answered. "It was Wanda's. I bought it for her three years ago."

"How did they gain entrance?"

"Broke out the window with a rock, then climbed through it."

"You still sticking to your guns, you didn't kill Sally?"

"Joe, you know I didn't. I'm innocent. I'm asking you to help me."

Joe waddled out of the cell. At the door of the corridor he came face to face with Frazier Amanda, one of the city's best criminal lawyers. Amanda nodded and walked on toward Waverly's cell. Well, there went ten thousand dollars of Waverly's money at the very least, Joe said to himself.

As Joe drove up in front of the Waverly home, the woman who came out and got into a taxicab seemed disturbed, and didn't speak to him, although he knew her well. It was Elizabeth Andrews, the last survivor of one of the oldest families in Fort Sanders, and a friend of Wanda Waverly's since childhood. Perhaps she had stopped in to offer her sympathy to Wanda. The story of Sally's murder and of Frank Waverly's being picked up had been on television throughout the day.

A maid answered the doorbell. Wanda Waverly came into the living room almost immediately.

"I'm glad to see you, Joe," she said.

"Wanda, what's all this nonsense about you going to the Picardy with Harry Vallery?"

She colored, but quickly recovered her composure. "Joe, my husband, Frank—he has not— Mr. Vallery is a charming man."

"And you are a charming liar," said Joe. "Come on, help me out, Wanda. You're a smart woman, and I know you better than that."

She laughed. "Who are you working for—for Frank?"

"Yes, for Frank, but not for money. He came to see me last night after he found Miss Caviness' body."

"Yes, I know. It has been on television all day. The police came to see me this morning, but of course I knew nothing about it. Poor Frank. I was afraid he would wind up in a mess with that Sally Caviness."

"Frank told me that he framed you last night, set up a little deal with Harry Vallery."

Again she laughed, but she said nothing.

"Wanda, I came to you first. If you don't play ball with me, I'm going to Harry Vallery. A man has a way of getting a rat like Vallery to talk, and legally. Frank admitted he framed you. I know darn well you weren't infatuated with Harry Vallery. You're too sensible a woman. And I know you didn't go there to make Frank jealous. You had always opposed giving him his freedom to marry Sally. It just doesn't add up, you suddenly going to the hotel with Harry Vallery."

Wanda studied Joe for several seconds. Then she smiled. "All right, Joe. I knew when I first walked into this room that you would keep after it until you got the truth. I wasn't seduced by that gallant young Casanova, Harry Vallery. He's ten years younger than I—and I'm a married woman and—well, I'm not that kind of a gal."

"Then why—"

"It was obvious from the first that Frank had hired Harry to make up to me. Frank was making out-of-town trips more often than usual—to give Harry every opportunity of seeing me. Harry took me out to dinner several times, became very ardent—finally propositioned me, in a gentlemanly manner of course—and let it slip that Frank was playing around with Sally, something I had known for a long time.

"I forced his hand, bribed him with a little money, and learned Frank was paying him a thousand dollars to get me to go to a hotel with him. He was doing this, of course, to compromise me so I would be easy pickings in the divorce suit which he would file."

"So you played right into his hands?"

"Yes, but for a purpose. By matching Frank's money, I got Harry's promise to tell the whole drab story when the case came up in divorce court. I was confident that when the whole picture went before the judge, my lawyer and I could make Frank Waverly hate the day he had ever seen Harry Vallery—or Sally Caviness."

Joe whistled. "I would hate to play poker with you, Wanda."

She laughed. "I'm no angel, Joe. My father didn't leave his money to me to have a man like Frank Waverly take it away—nor a Sally Caviness either. When it comes to fighting dirty, I can get just as dirty as they can—or a little dirtier. I've always been able to hate, Joe. I never forget, never forgive."

"Okay," said Joe. "I was going to ask what you wanted me to do about Frank. After all, you must have some affection for him after fifteen years of marriage."

For a moment the poise and bravado left Wanda. "I loved Frank dearly, Joe, gave him everything. I was entirely faithful to him in thought as well as deed. Then this hussy, Sally Caviness, came into his life. All he has wanted for the past two years was a divorce, and that hurt, Joe. But, in addition, he wanted the lion's share of our joint holdings—for Sally, understand—for Sally!"

Now she was laughing again. Joe thought she was near hysteria.

"I wish," she said, "I wish I could have seen his face when he walked into her apartment and found her lying dead, *dead* on the floor!"

That evening Joe cornered Harry Vallery. Within five minutes, Harry was spilling everything he knew—how Frank Waverly indeed had hired him to seduce his wife and how Wanda had suspected what he was up to and had induced him with more money to betray Waverly.

"When did she agree to play along?" Joe asked.

"About two weeks ago. Let's see, it was the night her husband was supposed to be in St. Louis. Yes, it

was two weeks ago last night. She said she would go along on a fake date to the hotel—and a fake was all it was.”

That night, after Joe had finished his supper, he walked the floor for more than an hour, pounding his fist at intervals, and scrubbing at his grizzled, short-cropped hair. “Dammit!” he said. “Dammit!”

He reasoned there had to be a fourth party in the murder case. It couldn't be Harry Vallery, for Vallery's movements were accounted for every second the night Sally Caviness was murdered. He was with Wanda Waverly, or at his apartment waiting for a call from Wanda, or with Frank Waverly, every minute between the time Frank had left Sally's apartment and had returned there to find her body. It couldn't be Wanda, although he knew now, from the moment she had lost her poise, of the agony that Frank and Sally had caused her—and of her bitterness and hatred not only for Sally but perhaps for Frank as well. He knew that she was woman enough to kill Sally, had the opportunity presented itself, but Wanda's alibi was Harry Vallery and the hotel. Hopp and Sauer had checked at the hotel, and she had been there from nine fifteen on. She'd had coffee sent up to her room at nine thirty, had returned the tray at ten.

It most surely was not Frank Waverly—that is, there was no reason for it before the raid on Wanda and Harry at the hotel. All this was being done so that Frank and Sally could marry—by compromising Wanda into giving him a divorce. Yet if Frank had killed Sally when he went to her apartment the second time, what was the reason? Why had he carefully wiped his fingerprints off the murder weapon and then left it at the scene of the crime, carefully placed beneath a pillow on the divan? No, it wasn't plausible that he had done it. The bottle of champagne in the bucket of ice was mute testimony that Frank and Sally had planned to celebrate if everything went well in framing Wanda at the Picardy Hotel.

There just had to be somebody else, some fourth



party involved in all this mess, who hated Sally Caviness. Could it have been a discarded lover? You never could tell when a jealous man was going to get violent. If so, how did the Waverly gun figure in it? A coincidence? Had the discarded lover broken into the Waverly cottage, stolen the gun, and then shot Sally? The odds against such a coincidence were too great to consider.

Definitely someone was out to get Frank Waverly—to mousetrap him. *Mousetrap*? Joe stopped short in his pacing and stood there scratching his head.

*Mousetrap*—in competitive business, Joe knew, a firm might try to make the opposition think they were going to do one thing, and then do another, as a clever criminal might bait a trap, then clobber the victim who walked into it. But in the killing of Sally Caviness? What about a clever amateur—how would he or she operate? Joe felt there was something phony about this Sally Caviness murder, yet for the life of him he couldn't fit all the pieces together. He decided to fall back on regulation police routine.

He rechecked the hotel, backtracking Sauer and Hopp. Their report on Wanda Waverly's stay there—the time of registering, the time she called room service, the time she sent back the tray—was entirely accurate. Next, Joe drove by the Black and White Cab Company headquarters. Had Wanda driven to the Picardy in her own car or had she called a cab? Waverly had told him that Vallery and Wanda had driven around for about thirty minutes after the raid on the hotel room, but he hadn't said whether Vallery had taken her directly home or back to the hotel, where Wanda would have left her car—perhaps parked on the street.

There was no record of a call to the Waverly address. Joe began checking the calls the cabs had made to the Picardy that night. There had been eight. Five of them had been in the early part of the evening between six and nine o'clock, one had been at ten ten, two had been around midnight.

The ten-ten call was interesting. It had been made

by cab No. 150, and Chuck Frambers was the driver. The dispatcher's assistant located him at home. Sure, he remembered the call. It was a good-looking dame about forty years old. She had been wearing something blue. He had taken her from the hotel to her home at 201 North Sixteenth Street. He ought to know her name, but couldn't think of it right off. No, she wasn't drinking, wasn't a hustler or anything like that; a nice woman. She was blonde and "real pretty" in his estimation.

A check of the calls between eight-thirty and nine-fifteen that night showed none to 201 North Sixteenth Street, but that didn't mean anything. The woman could have gone to the hotel with a friend and then come home by cab. Or she could have walked the short distance over to Main Street and been picked up there by a cab. Or, she could have dined at a restaurant somewhere and gone to the hotel from there.

In the old days Joe could pretty well have named every person living on North Sixteenth. It was in the better section of the older part of Fort Sanders. He would drive past 201 North Sixteenth Street. This "nice" attractive lady going home alone from the Picardy at ten o'clock at night—no women's party or anything like that—intrigued him.

First, Joe drove by the other cab company, the Checkered Cab. He was lucky immediately. Their call records showed No. 235 had made a call to 201 North Sixteenth at 9:08. The driver, Lem Johnson, was called to the office.

"Let's see," he said. "Sure, that was a snappy-looking lady I picked up at the old brick house. Sure, I remember her—dressed in a light-blue suit. No spring chicken, but a real dazzler. Kinda tall but good shape. Dark hair. Never seen her before, but I'm new in this town. I took her to the Picardy Hotel. Seemed kinda excited. No floozie—a real nice lady. That's all I can tell you."

Blonde . . . brunette! A brunette going to the hotel, a blonde coming from the hotel! Otherwise identical description. One of these guys must be color-blind. Joe

headed for 201 North Sixteenth. Then, on the way, it hit him—he knew who lived there. He headed for the police station.

Marty Sauer was just getting into his car. He was calling it a day.

Joe drove up beside him. "Come on, get in the car," he said.

"What for?"

"Going to talk to someone."

"What about?"

"You coming, or do I get the sheriff?" Joe asked.

Sauer piled in beside Joe. "Where we going?"

"We're going to have a little chat with Miss Elizabeth Andrews about the Sally Caviness case."

Sauer whistled. "I never heard Waverly was fooling around her, Joe."

"Neither did I," Joe said.

They parked in front of an aging brick house with white columns, apparently in need of repair. Two giant magnolia trees stood in front, and the yard was covered with dead leaves. It was nearing sunset, and a mockingbird was trilling from one of the magnolias. A faded sign above the door read "School of the Drama."

Joe gave a twist to the old-fashioned doorbell. Elizabeth Andrews came to the door wearing a blue housecoat. She was a woman of impressive beauty, and the styling of her platinum-blond hair was a work of art.

"Why, Mr. Chaviski—I hardly recognized you. I'm so excited I hardly know what I'm doing. I'm closing my school, Mr. Chaviski."

"Closing your school!"

Elizabeth's eyes were red; she had been crying. She led them to the living room. "Yes, closing it. There will be an announcement in Sunday's paper. I'm returning to Hollywood. But be seated, gentlemen. What can I do for you?"

"Returning?" Joe said.

"Why, yes. I'm sure you remember. I was out there years ago—it's been too long. It's wonderful to be going back."

"Signed up for another picture?"

"Well, not exactly. I'm going out there to spend the winter, and confer with my agent. I'd like to get into television. But, Mr. Chaviski, this is—"

"Marty Sauer. Detective Marty Sauer of the police department."

"Police department! Goodness! I've been rattling along. Why have you come to see *me*?"

"It's about this Frank Waverly case," Joe said bluntly.

Elizabeth's face suddenly went white—then very red.

"You are a good friend of Wanda Waverly's, aren't you? I saw you leaving her house yesterday afternoon."

"A very, very dear friend, Mr. Chaviski. I was so grieved when I heard on television about Sally Caviness, and Frank Waverly being held, I went right over to see Wanda. Wanda didn't deserve this. She made Frank what he is today. He wasn't anything until he got her."

"Yes, yes—I know." Chaviski's eyes swept about the room. A bit of plaster the size of his hand was missing near one corner of the ceiling. There were cracks in the plaster on the opposite wall. The covering on the arms of his chair was frayed. The carpet had been worn through in front of the door and in front of the chairs. "We've come to take you over to Wanda's," Joe said.

"But Wanda doesn't want to see me again. I've done all I can do."

"I don't think so," said Joe. He smiled without mirth.

She studied him. "All right," she said quietly. "Let me get something on."

Elizabeth was silent all the way to the Waverly house. When Wanda appeared she looked pale, but she still carried her head high.

"You again, Joe? And you, Liz?"

Joe came directly to the point. "This is Detective Marty Sauer of the police department. We have been checking Miss 'Andrews' movements the night Sally Caviness was killed."

Elizabeth half rose from her chair, her hands going quickly to her mouth. "Wanda, I haven't told them a thing!"

"Don't you want to tell us all about it, Wanda?" Joe said.

"Tell you about what, Joe?"

"Just how deeply is Miss Andrews involved in this thing with you, Wanda? It would be a shame if she missed the chance to go back to Hollywood."

For the first time, Wanda dropped her head. She began speaking in a voice hardly audible. "It's no use—no use denying it. You wouldn't be here if you hadn't figured it out. And I thought I was being so clever!" Then she raised her head, and her old voice came out defiantly: "Elizabeth is entirely innocent, Joe, damn you." She softened the oath with a smile. "She put two and two together when she heard about Sally on television yesterday, and came over here to have it out with me. I told her to keep her mouth shut, forget what she didn't know and merely suspected—and I would pay her expenses in Hollywood for at least six months."

"I haven't told them a thing!" Elizabeth repeated.

Wanda smiled. "Don't worry, Elizabeth. The deal still stands. You see, up until yesterday all Elizabeth had done for me was to spend an hour or so in the role of Wanda Waverly at the Picardy. I knew she needed money desperately, and I told her I would pay her two hundred dollars if she would register in my name at the hotel. I told her that Frank was trying to frame me, and that it was necessary for me to be in two places at once that night. She agreed. She went to the hotel early, made up like me—same clothes, same accessories, and a dark wig matching my natural hair. She called room service in twenty-odd minutes, as I had directed, and had them send up something. This was to establish proof that 'I' was in the room all the time. Then after a time she sent the empty plates back down again, tipping the waiter very well so he'd remember. The desk clerk knew neither one of us. That's all in the world Elizabeth knew or did."

"We won't press charges against Miss Andrews," Joe said, but he knew she'd be a key witness in the event of a trial.

Wanda continued: "When hate takes a person over she becomes blind to reason. Frank became contemptible in my eyes. I actually began to hate him more than I did Sally. It wasn't just a case of protecting my own money, the money my father left me. I wanted to hurt Frank in the worst way."

"So you mousetrapped him," Joe said. "You agreed to the deal with Harry Vallery, in this way setting up a perfect alibi. You had Miss Andrews, impersonating you, register in your name at the Picardy. The arrangement was that when you were ready you would call Vallery at his apartment, and he would come to your hotel room—to be followed fifteen minutes later by your husband, the photographer, and other witnesses."

"Yes, Joe. While Elizabeth was registered in my name at the hotel, I waited half a block down the street from the Superior Arms until Frank left Sally's apartment. Of course I had known for months where the love-nest was located. I had the little automatic with me, the one reported stolen from the lakeside cottage. Frank came out about nine thirty, got in his car and drove off to meet with Harry at his apartment. I entered the Superior Arms immediately, wearing a blonde wig in case I should meet someone, which I didn't. Sally didn't recognize me in the wig when she opened the door a crack. I whispered to her that I had a message from Harry Vallery, and she let me in. I removed my wig then, so she would know who I was, turned up the stereo—and shot her three times as she whined for mercy. You know the rest."

Joe nodded. "You went to the hotel then, relieved Miss Andrews, and made your call to Harry Vallery at his apartment. You figured you had the perfect alibi—'you' had been at the hotel all evening, now you were meeting Harry Vallery there—and your husband and his raiders would be witnesses to the fact that you

couldn't possibly have murdered Sally Caviness."

Wanda lifted her head regally. "Eliminating Sally gave me more satisfaction than anything I have ever done," she said.

## MILDLY MURDEROUS

by Elijah Ellis

The robbery suspect appeared to be the calmest person in the sheriff's office. He was a short, slight, middle-aged man with a bush of gray hair that gave him a top-heavy look. There was something like a twinkle in his faded eye as he glanced around, from the witnesses, to Sheriff Ed Carson, to me. He ignored the sheriff's two deputies, who hovered in the background.

Ed Carson was behind his desk, going over the pages of notes he'd made while the witnesses—a man named Jess Harper and his wife, Selena—had made their statements.

"Let's see if we've got it straight, now," the sheriff said. "This feller came into your store out on the west highway at eight o'clock—about half an hour ago. And—"

"Knowed who he was, right off," Jess Harper broke in. He was a paunchy man, half hidden behind a cloud of smoke from the cigar he was puffing. "Recognized him from his description that's been in the papers."

"Uh huh," Carson said. "Well. The store was empty of customers just then. So this feller walked directly to where you were standin' behind the counter, Jess, and pulled a gun. Told you to hand him the cash from the register."

"Yes, I played along with him, just waitin' for my chance," Harper growled. He shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, gave the prisoner a stern look. "I went along to the register, pretendin' like I was scared. He follered me. He had his gun down low, kind of hid under his coat, but it was aimed straight at me."

The sheriff waited patiently for Harper to run down. Then he said, "I see. All right. You took money from



the register and started to hand it to him. Just then your wife came out of the back of the store, and gave a yell. The robber turned toward her—”

“An’ that’s when I grabbed him,” Harper said expansively. “I knocked that gun out of his hand, and throwed him down. Told him if he moved a muscle, I’d stomp him.”

The prisoner shifted in his chair by the wall, with a deputy on either side of him. His upper front teeth were missing, and he spoke with a pronounced lisp as he said, “Mighty tough man, Mr. Harper is.”

There was a brief silence. Then Ed Carson glanced toward Selena Harper. She was a thin, stooped woman, wearing rimless glasses that kept sliding down on her nose. Her eyes seldom left her husband.

“That about it, Mrs. Harper?” Carson asked. “The way it happened out there at your store?”

She gave a timid nod. “Yes, sir. Soon as Jess had that man down on the floor, he told me to call your office.”

There were a few more minor details to be cleaned up, then the sheriff told the Harpers they could go. Jess Harper was more than ready.

“Still more’n a hour till closin’ time,” he said as he lumbered toward the corridor door, trailing a cloud of cigar smoke behind him, “An’ this is Saturday night, best night of the week at the store. Come on here, Selena.”

His wife padded after him. At the door she paused, ducked her head toward Carson and me, gave the prisoner a brief glance, and followed her husband out of the office.

The prisoner, who had told us his name was Roy Falk, said mildly, “It was really the woman, if it makes any difference. She come up behind me and started swattin’ at me with a broom. Up till then that old big-mouth was scared green. Wasn’t till she’d knocked my gun out of my hand that he jumped on me.”

I studied Falk as he lifted his handcuffed hands to his face and wiped away sweat. It was a summer eve-

ning and the ancient ceiling fan did little to dispel the muggy heat. It was hard to believe that this mild-looking little man had pulled more than a dozen armed robberies around the country during the last couple of months, but he had. There was no question he was our man.

He returned my gaze with faded blue eyes, gave me his gap-toothed smile and said, "Since you're the county attorney, Mr. Gates, I reckon you're the one who'll be takin' me to court. But shoot, there ain't no use in a trial. I figure I'll just cop out. When a skinny old woman can put me down, it's time to quit."

Sheriff Ed Carson said, "What I'd like to know is how you got away with it this long. How'd you manage to disappear after these jobs you pulled?"

Instead of answering, Falk lifted his hands to his head and gave a tug. The bushy mop of hair came away. It was a wig. Now we saw that his head was bald as an egg, except for a skimpy fringe above his ears. He tossed the wig on Carson's desk, then delved into the breast pocket of his denim jacket and brought out a small object which he fitted into his mouth. He smiled widely—and this time he had front teeth. He looked radically different, and also familiar.

"Sure," he said, nodding. "You all know me. I been workin' days as a fry-cook, over at the Courthouse Cafe on the south side of the square." He chuckled. "Sheriff, I've cooked you and Mr. Gates many a hamburger, when you all come in for lunch over there."

Carson groaned.

Deputy Buck Mullins let out a sudden guffaw, joined by the other deputy. "Wait'll the newspaper gets hold of this," Mullins gasped. "Oh, boy."

I shuddered. The editor-publisher of the local *Monroe Herald-Gazette* was anything but friendly toward Carson and me. What he'd do with this tidbit I hated to imagine.

We questioned Falk for a while longer. He readily admitted his guilt, even adding a couple of filling-station holdups he'd pulled, over in an adjoining county, that we hadn't known about.

The sheriff threw up his hands. "Buck, take him on over to the jail. We'll talk more in the mornin'."

Giving us a friendly nod, Falk walked out, followed by the hulking deputy.

I sighed, "Talk about anti-climaxes . . . There goes a pip."

Carson nibbled at the ragged lower fringe of his pepper-and-salt mustache. "I don't know, Lon. He did pretty well for himself until tonight. I wonder—"

The phone rang. At Carson's nod, his second deputy, Jack Avery, crossed over to take the call at another desk. From his end of the conversation, we gathered it was someone complaining about a barking dog.

I looked at my watch. It was barely a quarter till nine o'clock, still plenty early enough to take my wife out for a couple of drinks somewhere. I got up.

"One thing for sure," I said. "That little bum has more gall than a brass monkey. Working at that cafe, not two hundred yards from here."

The sheriff smiled wryly. "Yeah. Well, see you in the morning."

There were pounding footsteps in the corridor, and Buck Mullins came reeling in through the open office doorway. He was rubbing the side of his neck.

"Sheriff!" he blurted. "That guy got away from me!"

For seconds I thought the huge, muscular deputy had to be joking. Then he dropped his hand. I saw the purple welt on his neck, just below his right ear, and the tears in his eyes—and the empty holster hanging forlornly on his gun-belt.

Carson lunged to his feet. "What happened?"

"We was crossin' the parkin' lot toward the jail," Mullins gulped. "About in the middle of the lot, he pointed off toward the street an' said, 'Who's that?' I-I looked that way. Next thing I knowed, I was flat on my back. He slugged me with his handcuffs. Grabbed my gun an' took off."

"Which way?" I put in.

Mullins shook his head in dumb misery. "I don't know. I wasn't out, but it was like I was paralyzed

there for a minute. I could hear him runnin', but I don't know where he went."

Carson rapped out a string of short, ugly words. "It's my fault," he ended. "Sit here and let him con me like—"

"He conned all of us," I told him. "But it's only been a couple of minutes since Buck took him out of here. He can't have got far."

While Carson hurriedly notified the Monroe city police of the bandit's escape, Deputy Avery unlocked the gun cabinet and handed loaded riot guns to Buck Mullins and myself.

Then the four of us left the office, ran along the echoing ground-floor corridor and out the back door of the courthouse. A driveway bisected the square here. Just beyond was the parking lot, a graveled rectangle bordered on both sides by high hedges. The two-story brick jail building was at the far end, perhaps a hundred yards away.

"Remember he's got a gun," Carson said. Then we separated, each man working outward toward a corner of the square.

It was a dark, windy, overcast night, with occasional flares of lightning in the distance. The trees scattered about the wide lawn tossed in the wind. By the time I reached the corner I was bathed in sweat, and my fingers ached from the grip I had on the short-barreled riot gun. And Roy Falk had grown from a bald, insignificant little twerp to an ogre ten feet tall.

At the corner—a well-lighted intersection of streets crawling with Saturday night traffic, with plenty of people strolling along the sidewalk and in and out of the open stores on the far side—I stopped, propped the gun against a tree, and lit a cigarette. I needed it.

A city police car swept by. It skidded to a halt and backed up. Its spotlight hit me in the face. A voice from the car growled, "Heck, that's the county attorney." The voice lifted, "See him yet, Mr. Gates?"

I shook my head.

"Well, he can't have got far—not with handcuffs hindering him."

I agreed, and the car pulled away down the street. Falk might be wearing handcuffs, but they wouldn't interfere too much with his ability to fire a gun. I just hoped we recaptured him before he shot somebody. Particularly if the somebody turned out to be me.

Picking up the riot gun, I worked my way back across the lawn to the dark bulk of the courthouse. The sheriff's office was empty when I got there, but Carson came in a moment later. He hadn't had any luck, either. The two deputies were still looking around the square.

Carson got on the phone. The city cops had nothing to report. Ditto the highway patrol trooper stationed in Monroe, who had joined in the search.

At last Carson hung up. He sighed. He doubled a horny fist, looked at it thoughtfully, then slammed it down on his desk.

"Yeah," I said. "I agree one hundred percent."

It was nine o'clock. Falk had been free roughly fifteen minutes. He had to be caught soon. How far could you get, in the busy heart of town, wearing handcuffs?

That was the one small break we'd had—Falk didn't find the key to the cuffs when he frisked Buck Mullins after slugging him. Buck had the key in the sweatband of his hat.

The phone rang, and Carson grabbed it. Then his look of expectation changed to sour anger. "No," he snapped. "I don't have any statement to make—none whatever. What? Yeah, I'm sure you'll find something to say. You always do." He banged down the phone.

"Jeremiah Walton?" I asked.

"Naturally," he nodded. "He was fairly bubblin' over with joy."

"At least he won't be able to get his knife into us till Monday morning," I said. "There's no Sunday paper."

Carson grimaced. "You're forgettin' that Walton now owns the local radio station. An' you can be sure they're makin' announcements every minute, on the minute, about this."

I hadn't thought I could feel any worse, but now I did, and as the minutes trickled by, and nine thirty

came and went, I felt worse still. My wife called. She'd heard the news over the radio at home. I promised her I wouldn't commit suicide without letting her know in advance.

There were other calls, but they all added up to one thing: Roy Falk had pulled another of his disappearing acts. And there wasn't a hint as to how, or where, he'd gone, or what he'd be likely to do.

"What must have happened, he found a car with the keys in it, on one of the streets around the square," I said, "and took off in it. Before long we'll probably get a call from some citizen saying his car has disappeared."

Carson nodded absently. "I suppose. But, believe me, with that slippery little squirt, there's no—"

He broke off as the two deputies came in. Buck Mullins looked like he might start bawling any second. He was still rubbing the swollen welt on his neck.

"Not a trace," Deputy Avery said wearily. "He must've just evaporated into thin air."

"At this point, I could almost believe it," I told him.

Mullins repeated my earlier thought, that Falk had somehow got a car, either by taking one parked near the square, or by flagging down some passing motorist and at gun-point forcing the driver to get him out of Monroe in a hurry.

Then, his jowly face pale, the big deputy voiced what all of us were thinking. "I wonder if he'd really shoot somebody?"

No one cared to answer that until five minutes later, when the phone rang again. Carson took the call. He listened, and said sharply, "We'll be right there." He put down the phone and rose to his feet.

Staring at him, I asked, "What now?"

He was looking at Buck Mullins. "Yeah, he'd really shoot somebody," the sheriff said. "He just did—out at the Harper store!"

It was about a fifteen-minute drive from the courthouse through the western part of Monroe, on out the west highway to the grocery store and filling station

owned by Jess Harper. We made it in something under eight minutes.

Selena Harper was leaning against a display case just inside the store's front door. As we rushed in, she turned, blinked at us vaguely and said, "He—that man—he come back."

Jess Harper was sprawled face down on the floor between two counters stacked with canned goods. He was lying in a large pool of blood. The sheriff went to him, knelt, and lifted Harper's head. Then Carson quickly stood up.

"Right through his forehead," Carson muttered to me. "Dead before he hit the ground."

The woman had followed us. She repeated, "He came back. Weren't more than a minute ago, or so it seems like. Jess and me was fixin' to close up for the night."

We got the dazed woman away from there, put her in a straight-backed wooden chair I found behind a counter and drew out into the aisle. We talked to her while Carson's deputies looked around the store and the grounds outside.

"Jess was walkin' to the front door to lock up," she said, staring down at her knobby hands clenched together in her lap. "We'd been right busy—always are on a Saturday night—but then we heard on the radio about that feller gettin' loose, so Jess decided to close up early. Then all of a sudden there the feller was, pointin' a gun at Jess, an' makin' him back up. An' when Jess got there where he is now, this feller poked the gun in his face an' shot him. Said somethin' like, 'You talk too much,' and somethin' else like, 'This time I aim to take your money, for sure.' Then—he shot Jess . . ."

I had noticed a bruise on the woman's narrow jaw. I asked her, "Are you hurt?"

She blinked at me through her glasses. "Me? Oh, you mean this?" She touched the bruise. She shook her head. "No, I got that when the feller give me a shove out of the way, after he'd shot Jess. I fell against

the counter yonder, by the cash register."

Carson said gently, "What happened then?"

"Why, he opened the register and took out the bills. Must've been two hundred dollars there. He put the wad of them in his pocket, an' backed out the door. Kept that gun aimed right at me. I-I—"

She buried her face in her hands. Her thin shoulders shook. I looked at Carson over her bowed head. He turned away, went over to where Avery was using the phone to call the county coroner in Monroe.

I said, "Mrs. Harper, try to hold on a little longer. Did he have a car?"

She nodded, not lifting her head. "I heard him drive off, after it was over. He headed west, goin' real fast."

"You're positive it was the same man? Roy Falk?"

Again she nodded. "Course it was. I knowed him the minute he walked in. Why'd he have to go an' shoot Jess? Maybe he-he talked too much, an' loved a dollar a little too much, but there weren't no real harm in Jess."

Clumsily, I patted her shoulder. Carson came back now, his leathery face set in grim lines.

"The Doc will be here quick as he can," Carson told me. He studied the frail, sobbing woman, then sighed.

Doc Johnson arrived in an ambulance a few minutes later. He examined the body. Then he gestured the sheriff and me to one side, and said, "Shot twice. Once in the neck, once in the head. Most of the blood came from the neck wound, but it was the other one that killed him. Bullet's still in his head there. I'll dig it out when I do the autopsy."

Doc waddled his bulk over to supervise the ambulance attendants as they loaded the body on a stretcher and carried it out of the store. Mrs. Harper didn't seem to notice, and didn't look up until the wail of the siren cut the night sky as the ambulance headed back for town.

Then she got to her feet stiffly. Like a robot, she walked up one aisle and down the next, pausing to rearrange some cans on a shelf here, straightening a row of boxes there. She was obviously in a state of



shock. I started to go to her, but Carson put a hand on my arm.

"Nothin' you can do for her now," he muttered.

When we were ready to leave, she at first refused to go with us, repeating in a dull monotone that this was her place, and she meant to stay right there.

But the sheriff insisted. "I don't want to scare you, Mrs. Harper. But Falk just might come back again. You're the only witness to the fact he murdered your husband. You understand? Now, come along."

She widened her red-rimmed eyes. "I hadn't thought of that," she said hoarsely. "All right, Sheriff."

The ride back into town and to the courthouse was mostly a silent one. In the sheriff's office, Carson settled the woman in a chair and got her a drink of water. I was still expecting her to go to pieces any second. She didn't; there was evidently more to her than I'd thought.

Reports came in rapidly now. The whole state was on the alert for Roy Falk, but still there was no trace of him.

We talked some more with Mrs. Harper. In fact, after a time, I began to think Carson was carrying it too far, the way he kept digging at her.

Then a lot of disjointed impressions that had been gnawing at a corner of my mind suddenly came together. I gave a gasp as I realized the truth. But it was the sheriff's party, so I kept my mouth shut.

"Let me be sure I have it now," Carson was saying. "Falk came into the store about nine forty-five. He still had on handcuffs. He was holding the gun in his two hands, out in front of him. Uh huh. Well, after that—"

Selena Harper snapped, "Mr. Carson, I'm tired. I'm wore out. I want to go to the hotel and lay down. Try to sleep some, an' try to think what I'm goin' to do now that—now that I'm alone in the world."

"Of course," the sheriff said soothingly. "In just a minute. There's just one last thing I ain't completely sure about. That's exactly why you shot and killed your husband, Mrs. Harper."

For several long moments she just stared.

"No, ma'am, it won't do," Carson said, almost gently. "First place, you gave the whole thing away when you told us you recognized Falk right off, that he looked just the same as when you saw him here in my office. But he didn't, Mrs. Harper, not at all. What you saw here was a man with bushy white hair and no front teeth. The hair is layin' right over yonder on top of my desk; Falk was baldheaded. An' when he escaped, he had his false front teeth in his mouth—an' no reason he should've took them out later."

The woman started to get up. Then she sagged back in the chair. Her pale eyes flicked from side to side. "Why, you're crazy," she stammered. "Plumb—crazy."

Carson went on as if she hadn't spoken. "Second place, you claim this man poked his gun right in your husband's face and shot him. But Roy Falk took a .45 pistol off my deputy, Mrs. Harper. A .45. At close range, a bullet from the gun would've torn your husband's head practically off. No, no. It just won't do."

Silence. Then Selena Harper drew in a deep breath, let it out slowly. She shrugged. "All right. All right." Her thin lips turned down in a scowl. When she spoke, her voice was hard and clear. "He's had it comin' for a long time. Workin' me like a dog, treatin' me worse—that's how I got this here bruise on my jaw, him slap-pin' me around tonight. Just because I wanted to close up early, for once. But no, not Jess Harper. Not when there was a dollar to be made, by stayin' open."

The two deputies had come over and joined Carson and me, making a ragged semi-circle facing the woman, who sat erect in the chair, spewing out her hate.

"Then it come over the radio about that feller gettin' away from you all. An' I knowed right then what I was goin' to do. There was a little old gun we kept in the back of the store—little bitty thing. I don't know nothin' about guns, but I knowed enough to take aim an' pull the trigger . . ."

There was more, but most of it was repetition. After killing her husband, she'd hid the gun and the money

from the cash register in a hollow tree in a field behind the store before calling us.

And that was that.

We stood around, looking down at her, a skinny, mousy woman who kept pushing her glasses back up when they slid down on her tiny nose.

Finally, Ed Carson sighed. "Well. That lets Roy Falk out, far as this killin' goes."

"That's the best news I've heard tonight," a voice said from the corridor door. We wheeled around. Roy Falk stood there, his cuffed hands dangling in front of him, his bald head gleaming in the overhead lights.

"Well, I'll—be—darned," the sheriff growled.

Falk gave a deprecating laugh. "I got to thinkin'. Really ain't no place for me to run to—or anything to do once I got there."

"But where the heck have you been?" I cried.

Falk came on into the office. "Shoot, Mr. Gates, that ain't any mystery. Once I got loose from that feller there, I come right back into the courthouse and went up to the third floor. Been up there in the men's room ever since. You'll find your gun up there, Mr. Mullins."

We stared at the little man. He was, without doubt, the calmest person in the sheriff's office.

## AN ELEMENT OF RISK

by Richard Deming

When I learned my brother-in-law was going to be out of town for a whole week, I got pretty upset about my sister being alone for seven nights when a psychotic killer was running around loose. I was having Sunday dinner with them at their place when Lyle casually mentioned he was flying to Chicago the next morning.

"For how long?" I asked.

"I'll be back the following Monday."

"Seven days!" I said so loudly that I startled young Tod into dropping a spoonful of mashed potatoes and gravy onto his high-chair tray. "You're going to leave Martha alone in the house for seven days!"

The moment the words were out, I wished I hadn't raised my voice. I liked Lyle, but he was so touchy you had to be careful how you talked to him. I had seen him abruptly withdraw from conversation at some imagined slight and sit without uttering a word for hours.

Martha was having the same thoughts, because she threw him a concerned glance, but this time he seemed undisturbed.

Relieved, she said lightly, "I'll have Tod to protect me."

Big deal. My namesake nephew was two-and-a-half-years old.

The boy, whose high chair was between me and my sister, looked from me to his mother and inquired, "Why Unkie Tod talk so loud?"

"Because he has a vivid imagination," she told him. "Eat your mashed potatoes."

My fears were hardly imaginary, though. The wraith known as the Stocking Killer had so far strangled six local women with their own stockings, and incidentally had inspired a couple of other nuts in Kansas City and

Chicago to imitate him by each killing one victim. All six St. Louis women had been young, attractive married women, alone in their homes when murdered. In two cases their husbands had been out of town, but in the other four they had merely been out for the evening.

The M.O. had been the same in each case. The killer had obtained entry after his victim was asleep, had searched the house until he found a pair of stockings recently worn by the victim but as yet unlaundered, then had strangled the woman with one stocking and had carried the other away.

There had been no evidence of sexual attack in any of the cases, and no strange fingerprints were ever found, leading the police to believe the killer wore gloves. The only clue was that a female witness had seen the man who probably was the killer, just after he left the home of one of the victims.

Unfortunately she had seen him only from the back and by moonlight. The victim and her husband had lived in the lower flat of a two-family building and the witness lived in the upper. At two thirty in the morning the witness had gone down the back stairs to let in her squalling cat, and as she opened the back door she saw a man just disappearing through the rear gate into the alley.

Aside from describing his dress and approximate size, she hadn't been able to tell the police anything about him. He had been dressed all in black, she said, with matching slacks, sweater and cap. She had estimated his height as from six feet to six-two and his weight at 180 to 200.

In a more moderate tone I said, "I'm serious. One of those killings was less than a mile from here."

Martha said, still in a light tone, "He might be in for a surprise if he picked me. Don't forget I had judo training as an Army nurse."

"Yeah, about two lessons, wasn't it?" I said dourly. "And how do you know the Stocking Killer doesn't know judo too?"

Martha elevated her chin. "We trained an hour a

week for twelve weeks. I could toss *you* all over the room, big brother."

I made a dismissing gesture. "I'm out of condition from eating my own cooking. The one witness who saw this guy described him as being as big as Lyle, and you can't weigh over a hundred pounds."

"Ninety-nine," Lyle said. "But she'll lock the doors after dark, and I've instructed her not to open to anyone until she's established his identity."

I leaned forward in order to emphasize what I was saying. "Listen, Lyle. I've been on this story since the first murder, and I know a few things the general public doesn't. The police asked the press to sit on it, because they're afraid of public panic, but from crime-lab examination of the barrels of the door locks of a couple of the victims, they've decided he's expert with a picklock. It seems a picklock leaves certain distinctive scratches that show up under a microscope."

Martha looked at her husband. Lyle frowned. "Maybe there ought to be draw bolts on the doors," he conceded, "but I have to catch a plane tomorrow morning before any hardware stores will be open." After a pause, he said, "Would you have time to pick up a couple of bolts tomorrow and install them, Tod?"

"I could take the time, but that still wouldn't be enough protection. In one case, where the woman had her doors bolted from inside, the Stocking Killer used a glass cutter to make a neat little hole next to a window catch. That was the one where the published report was that he gained entry by breaking a window. The cops were afraid that if the public knew what an efficient break-in man he was, the warning might make some woman jittery enough to shoot her husband when he came home late and keyed open the door. How necessary is this trip of yours?"

"The company's sending me. It's the annual electronics manufacturers' convention, and all the new products will be on display."

Lyle worked as a parts-procurement agent for an electronics firm, a job which periodically took him out

of town, but usually only for a day or two at a time. He also supplemented his income by doing a little TV repair work evenings. He had taken a correspondence course in television repairing under the G.I. educational program after he came out of service.

Actually, when he took the course he had intended to go into that business, but had ended up in his present job instead. Nevertheless it came in handy as a means to make extra money. Although his salary was nearly ten thousand a year, inflation had made that just barely enough for a family of three to exist on, these high-priced days.

In a definite tone I said, "Then I'm going to move in here with Martha and Tod while you're gone."

Lyle shrugged. "It's all right with me, if you don't mind the daybed in the den."

"Reporters can sleep anywhere," I told him.

Little Tod said, "You stay for a visit, Unkie Tod?"

"Yeah," I said. "For a whole week."

Martha said, "Actually, if it won't inconvenience you, I would feel better with you here. Not that he'd be very likely to pick on me. So far he's only picked pretty women."

Cocking an eyebrow at her, my brother-in-law said loyally, "That includes you, honey."

She gave him a fond smile, but she knew that if he meant it, she was pretty only in his eyes. The best adjective to describe my sister was plain. She certainly wasn't ugly, but no one except a man blinded by love could possibly have considered her pretty. She was thin, with matchlegs, and had the unfortunate Conner nose. It was thin and pointed and too long, making her rather resemble a bird.

In short, she looked like me, except I was eight inches taller. At the paper I'm known as Nose Conner. The editor who nicknamed me claims he thought up the sobriquet because of my skill at nosing out stories, but I suspect most of my colleagues associate it with my appearance.

Martha was one of the sweetest, most understanding

women around, though, and there was no doubt about Lyle being nuts over her, so maybe he did think she was pretty.

Although they did their best not to show it, I'm sure most of our friends were astonished when Martha returned to St. Louis with such a handsome husband in tow. Lyle Barton was tall and muscular, with blond, curling hair and the features of some mythical Greek hero. He also had a certain charm about him that made both women and men instantly like him, despite his occasional moodiness and his tendency to be oversensitive to people's remarks.

As fond as I was of my baby sister, I have to confess I was surprised too, until I learned some of the details of their romance.

Martha had been serving as a psychiatric nurse at the Fort Ord Army Hospital when Private Lyle Barton was shipped back from Vietnam with combat fatigue. He had also been wounded slightly, but had fully recovered from his physical wound before he arrived at Ord.

It seems that many emotionally disturbed patients tend to reach out desperately for love and understanding. According to Martha, patients in psychoanalysis usually develop parent complexes about their analysts when both are of the same sex. If they are of different sexes, it is almost routine for patients to go through periods during treatment when they fall in love with their analysts.

Also, according to Martha, in military hospitals the case loads of psychiatrists are generally so large that they have to concentrate most of their time on the more severely disturbed patients, usually seeing those with less serious problems only briefly on their periodic visits through the wards. The result is that these patients never establish the rapport with their doctors that almost always develops during analysis, but the need is still there, so the less disturbed patients tend to fall in love with their nurses.

While Lyle was pretty disoriented when he first ar-



rived at the hospital, he was deemed by his assigned psychiatrist to require merely rest and tranquilizers instead of psychiatric treatment. Martha was his day nurse.

She told me in confidence that she was quite aware of the psychological reasons that made Lyle think he was in love with her. As a matter of fact, she had gone through similar experiences with a number of previous patients who eventually recovered from their infatuations at the same time they recovered their mental health, but she had an odd and disturbing premonition that Lyle's feeling for her wasn't going to change when his condition improved.

She couldn't explain why, but she candidly confessed that it might have been merely wishful thinking, because she had fallen hopelessly in love with him too. She waited to see how he felt when he recovered before committing herself to anything, though.

When he was discharged from the hospital, and simultaneously received an honorable discharge from service, he was still insisting he loved her. At the time, Lyle was twenty-six, the same age as Martha, which she figured was too mature an age for it to be puppy love. Nevertheless, she was still afraid it might be only an unusually prolonged attachment of the usual sort common in nurse-patient relationships, and she insisted that he take more time.

Lyle had no parents, but the uncle and aunt who had raised him were still alive and lived in Wisconsin. He had some terminal leave coming, so Martha suggested he visit his uncle and aunt for thirty days, and told him if he still felt the same at the end of his visit, she would marry him.

He arrived back at Fort Ord on the twenty-ninth day, and they were married a week later.

Lyle had only a high-school education, and under the G.I. educational program he could have gone to college with all expenses paid, plus \$200 a month for living expenses, but he preferred to go to work. He took a civilian job at the post exchange.

Since he was so set against college, Martha didn't push that, but she hated to see him throw away entirely his veteran's benefits. It was largely at her urging that he took a correspondence course, in television repair, because he had always had an interest in electronics.

Lyle had barely finished the course when Martha requested release from active duty because she was pregnant. His PX job wasn't important enough to worry about leaving, so they came to St. Louis for Lyle to look for another job. Until he found one I put them up in the single bedroom of my bachelor apartment and took over the front-room sofa.

Lyle quickly discovered that the field of television repair was lucrative only if you owned your own shop. No one wanted to offer a decent salary for an assistant. So he widened his sights and almost immediately found a job in another field, in the parts-procurement department of one of St. Louis' largest electronics firms.

They stayed with me for only a month. Since then, Lyle had been promoted twice and they had bought a two-bedroom home on Bellerive Boulevard in South St. Louis.

Lyle still had a little emotional trouble, as evidenced by his touchiness and his occasional fits of depression, but it seemed to be nothing serious. It was just enough to get him a 10 percent disability compensation without interfering with either his work or his home life. He wasn't under treatment, unless you counted his annual psychological checkup at the Jefferson Barracks Veterans Hospital just south of the city. That was required in order for him to continue to receive his disability compensation.

Otherwise they seemed to have no problems. I got the impression that both of them were still as deeply in love as the day Martha brought Lyle home. I know she was, from a conversation we had the first evening Lyle was away.

Tod was already in bed and we were companionably drinking together in the front room. The alcohol loosened her tongue enough to tell me some things about her relationship with Lyle that she had never

mentioned before. More or less idly I asked if Lyle's emotional condition was improving any. She took so long to answer that I sat up straight and peered at her.

"Well, it's not really likely to, you know," she said finally.

I hiked my eyebrows. "I know he had a bad time in Vietnam, but I thought everybody eventually got over combat fatigue."

"Most do, when there's no physical damage accompanying it. But Lyle's problem is a little more than just combat fatigue."

"Oh?"

"Since I was his nurse, naturally I know his complete medical history. He had a rather severe emotional problem before he ever entered the Army. In fact, he spent a year in a Wisconsin mental hospital."

I stared at her. "Diagnosed as what?"

"Mild schizophrenia."

"Schizophrenia!" I said incredulously. "How'd he ever get in the Army?"

"He neglected to mention it, and the Army didn't discover it until he'd been returned to the States. Under Army regulations he could have been discharged as mentally unfit for service, or even have been given a discharge other than honorable. That's not the same as a dishonorable discharge. You still have all veterans' rights. It's just sort of like graduating with a D-minus average. But Lyle had picked up a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star Medal in action, and the brass tends to overlook minor indiscretions by war heroes. Since he was being discharged in any event, they gave him an honorable one."

"But schizophrenia!" I said. "Doesn't that mean he's dangerous?"

"Of course not," she said, frowning at me. "Severe cases of schizophrenia can be dangerous, but I told you Lyle's was diagnosed as mild. He's far from psychotic. You probably know a dozen people you consider normal who have schizophrenic tendencies. It isn't that uncommon."

"Suppose he gets worse?"

"He isn't likely to. He isn't likely to get better either, though. It's just a matter of learning to live with his occasional withdrawals into some private little world of his own."

I took a long, slow sip of my drink before saying, "Don't misunderstand this, Sis, because I like Lyle. But knowing his diagnosis, how'd you ever happen to marry him?"

She stared at me. "I love him."

"That's no answer," I said. "Would you have married Jack the Ripper if you had loved him?"

"That's hardly a comparable example!"

"Don't get sore," I said placatingly. "I'm not trying to run Lyle down. I'm just trying to understand how a girl with your background in psychiatry brought herself to taking the risky step of marrying a diagnosed schizophrenic."

"Not a schizophrenic, dammit, Tod. Merely with schizophrenic tendencies."

"Okay, okay. But despite what you say about his condition not being likely to worsen, you must have known before you married him that it could. And that seems pretty risky to me."

She made no reply for nearly a minute, during which she took several angry pulls at her drink. Then she calmed down and gave me a sheepish smile.

"I know you're just being protective, so I have no right to get mad at you. Particularly since you're right. I did consider the risk. But he loved me too, you see."

I cocked an eyebrow at her. "What's that got to do with the element of risk?"

"Nothing, really," she said with a shrug. "But Lyle's the only man who ever gave me a second look."

When I frowned at her, she said quickly, "Don't misunderstand me. It wasn't just a matter of a love-starved spinster jumping at the only chance she ever had. I wasn't just *settling* for what I could get. Even if I had been the belle of the hospital, I would have picked Lyle. He's the handsomest, most charming, most wonderful man I ever met."

I said nothing, merely taking a gulp of my drink.

"You've never been in love, Tod," she said softly. "The way I feel about Lyle, I'd continue to love him if he became a raving maniac. I'd do anything in the world for him."

The drinks were affecting me too, or I would never have said what I did. "Even stand still for a bullet if he decided to kill you?" I asked bluntly.

She blinked, but instead of getting angry again, she merely turned defensive. "That's not fair," she said. "He's *not* going to get worse." After a beat she added, "Yes, I guess I would, though."

I felt a chill crawl along my spine as I suddenly had a mental vision of Martha standing with an expression of loving forgiveness on her face as Lyle, his face maniacally contorted, pumped bullets into her.

Shaking myself, I said, "Maybe we'd better drop the subject. You love him and I like him, and all we're doing is getting each other upset. You want a night-cap?"

"I think I could use one." Then she glanced at her wristwatch and said in a surprised tone, "Maybe we'd better not. It's nearly eleven, and don't you have to get up at six?"

"I never sleep more than six hours," I told her. "One more isn't going to hurt either of us."

In the kitchen I set the empty glasses on the counter next to the sink and was turning toward the refrigerator for ice when a sight across the alley caught my eye. The window over the sink looked directly at the rear of the house across the alley. Through a lighted second-story window I could see into a bedroom where a young and shapely blonde was just beginning to undress.

I don't think I'm any more of a Peeping Tom than the average guy. It wouldn't even occur to me to make a deliberate attempt to see into a neighbor's window, but I doubt that any normal man deliberately turns his back when a view such as that is unexpectedly offered. I stood there and watched.

She took quite a while to undress, because she was neat. She hung her dress on a hanger and put it in a closet. After removing her stockings, she disappeared from view for a while, then reappeared without the stockings and in no further stage of undress. I guessed that she had washed them and hung them to dry in the bathroom.

The rest of her undressing didn't take very long, and she was stark naked when Martha came into the kitchen to see what was delaying me.

When she saw, she burst out laughing instead of being shocked by my depravity.

"You too?" she said. "I catch Lyle in here watching the show about once a week."

"Doesn't she ever draw her drapes?" I asked without taking my eyes off the blonde. She was now putting on a filmy nightgown.

"Only on weekends, when her husband is home. He works nights. Then I imagine it's he who draws them. Lyle and I have decided she's not an exhibitionist, though, because she never shows the least self-consciousness. She would almost have to if she suspected she were being watched, don't you think? Besides, we've had a little casual neighborly conversation with them, and she's quite obviously fond of her husband, so it seems unlikely she's looking for anything. We think she's just careless about drawing drapes."

The light in the bedroom suddenly went out. Belatedly I began mixing the drinks.

"Doesn't it upset you when you find Lyle watching her?" I asked.

"Why should it?" she asked cheerfully. "It's *me* he goes to bed with, not her. And the show always puts him in the mood for love."

The next morning on the way to work an unsettling thought occurred to me. I had left word at the city desk that I would be staying with my sister for a week, so they knew where to find me in an emergency, which meant I could be called out on some special assignment in the middle of the night before Lyle returned from Chicago.

That didn't happen too often but, just in case, I decided to take Lyle's suggestion and install drawbolts on both the front and back doors.

En route back to the paper from an assignment, I stopped at a hardware store and bought two bolts.

After work I drove to South St. Louis straight from the paper, getting to Martha's place about five. Although it was only the end of March, we were having an early spring and it was pleasant enough for people to be out on their porches. Little Tod was riding his tricycle on the sidewalk while Martha sat on the porch watching him.

"Hi, Unkie Tod," the little guy called. "Watch me!"

I stood and watched a few moments as his fat little legs pumped the pedals and the tricycle raced along at the desperate speed of perhaps two miles an hour. My applause made him grin with delight.

Climbing the steps, I held up the paper bag I was carrying for Martha to see. "Just in case I get called out on an assignment some night, I decided to take Lyle's suggestion and install a couple of drawbolts after all. Where's Lyle keep his tools?"

"In his workshop in the basement."

Going inside, I shed my coat and necktie in the den, then went downstairs. One whole side of the basement had been partitioned off to serve as Lyle's workshop. A long workbench had tools of every description hanging on the wall over it: everything from hammers to a set of bolt cutters. The dismantled innards of a television set stood on the bench, and two more sets were on the floor.

I selected a screwdriver of the size I would need, then began to open drawers in search of a drill. In a top drawer containing nothing but woodworking tools I found a hand brace and a set of bits. I could have used that, but I was sure that for his repair work Lyle would have an electric drill. I started searching the other drawers.

In one of the bottom drawers there was nothing but a small leather case and a tin box. When I found it was locked, I snapped open the leather case.

It contained five items. There was an extremely thin-nosed pair of pliers, a glass cutter, a small rubber suction cup with a metal ring attached to it large enough to fit over a man's finger, a pair of black kid gloves and a long, thin implement that seemed to be made of spring steel.

I puzzled over the last item and the rubber suction cup. I figured out the spring-steel implement first. It was a picklock.

Then I realized the purpose of the suction cup. If you pressed it against the glass of a windowpane, then cut around it with a glass cutter, it would prevent the cut-out section from falling inside and perhaps shattering on the floor.

I like to think I'm at least as quick on the uptake as the average guy, but my initial reaction was merely puzzlement at why Lyle would possess what appeared to be a rather simple burglar's kit. I suspect this was a quite normal reaction, though. On the basis of such a bare hint, it would be abnormal to jump to a monstrous conclusion about anyone as close to you as a brother-in-law. As a matter of fact the normal reaction would be not just to reject such a thought, but to refuse even to let it form.

Whether it was intuition, subconscious suspicion or merely my reportorial nosiness that made me try the picklock on the tin box, I don't know. At any rate I did try it, and because it was a simple lock, I managed to get it open after only about five minutes of fumbling.

The box contained nothing but eight nylon stockings.

This being a little more than a bare hint, the monstrous thought did occur to me; but because I sincerely liked Lyle, I instantly began a mental search for some less monstrous explanation for this cache.

Almost immediately I was able to think of something that seemed to make it highly unlikely that he was the Stocking Killer. According to Martha, Lyle had repeatedly watched the blonde who lived behind them undress. She was as attractive as any of the Stocking Killer's victims, and Lyle knew her husband



worked nights. If Lyle were the killer, why hadn't she been a victim?

The depressing answer to that hit me almost as quickly as the question. Insane people aren't necessarily stupid. The blonde was simply too close to home to be worth the risk.

I turned back to trying to think of some alternate reason anyone would keep a secret cache of women's stockings.

I couldn't think of any, particularly after examining the stockings more closely. At least four of them had no mates. One was longer than all the others, another shorter, and two didn't match any of the others in shade. The other four were the same shade and size, so might have been two pairs; but it was equally possible that they were single stockings from four similar pairs.

I took some hope from the fact that there were eight stockings, while there had been only six murders. Then I thought of the one in Kansas City and the one in Chicago that the police assumed were merely apings of the Stocking Killer by a couple of other nuts who had read about him.

Lyle made periodic business trips to both cities. I decided to find out if he had been to either or both places when the murders occurred.

I had to play this very cool. I had to be absolutely sure before I went to the police, and I had to be equally sure that they would guarantee me anonymity as their informer. I didn't want my sister living with a homicidal maniac, but I also didn't want her thrusting me out of her life. Even if Lyle were guilty, I knew she would never forgive me for turning him in.

Fortunately there was time for some thorough checking. It was only Tuesday, and Lyle wasn't due back from Chicago for six more days.

I put the nylons back in the tin box and managed to get it locked again with the picklock. Then I searched some more drawers until I found the electric drill, went upstairs and installed the two door bolts.

During dinner I casually remarked to Martha, "Lyle gets to Chicago quite often, doesn't he?"

"Only about twice a year," she said. "Last time he had to be there over Thanksgiving, remember?"

I did recall, now that she mentioned it, because she had invited me for Thanksgiving dinner, and Lyle had been away at the time. I tried to remember when the Chicago murder had occurred, but could place it in my memory only as sometime last winter. I could look it up at the paper tomorrow, though.

I said, "Yeah, I remember. His last trip to K.C. was over some holiday too, wasn't it?"

"Oh, no. That was way last summer, around the middle of June."

I let the conversation drop.

The next morning, as soon as I arrived at the paper, I went down to the news morgue in the basement.

The K.C. murder had been on Wednesday, June 16th, of the previous year. The Chicago murder had been on Friday, November 26th, the day after Thanksgiving.

I went up to the city room, sat at my desk and phoned Dr. Sam Carter at his home. I called there instead of to his office because it was only a few minutes after eight, and he didn't reach his office until nine.

Sam was now a hundred-dollar-an-hour psychiatrist, but in our youth, when he was a pre-med student and I was studying journalism, we were fraternity brothers at Washington U. We still kept in touch and were still good friends.

When I got him on the phone, he at first said he couldn't possibly see me until evening. When I told him it was urgent, he said he would cancel his first appointment and see me at his office at nine A.M.

I arrived exactly at nine and his receptionist sent me right into his private office. Sam was about my age, thirty-five, but a lot better-looking. He was tall and lean, with a strong-featured but amiable face and thick, slightly graying hair.

He pointed to an upholstered leather chair before his desk. "Have a seat, Tod. Or would you rather lie on the couch?"

Seating myself, I said, "It's not a personal problem. I just want some information."

"Okay. Shoot."

I said, "Would it be possible for the Stocking Killer to be a happily married man, a good father and in love with his wife?"

Sam looked interested. "Possible. There have been cases where apparently normal family men with seemingly happy marriages have turned out to be pretty nasty sex criminals. I would have guessed that the Stocking Killer was a loner, but it's not impossible he's the sort of man you describe, that's sure."

"Okay, next question. If the guy I have in mind is the Stocking Killer, he keeps the mates of the stockings he used to strangle his victims in a locked tin box. Why would he do that?"

Sam shrugged. "I'm a psychiatrist, not a clairvoyant. If you want some blind guesses, I can give you a couple. Maybe he keeps them as the record of his victories, sort of like scalps. Maybe he just has a stocking fetish. Maybe he's saving them to stuff a pillow."

"You're in the wrong profession," I said sourly. "You should have been a stand-up comedian. Will you do me a favor?"

"Sure, so long as it's legal and doesn't require me to violate medical ethics."

"It is and doesn't. But first I want to stress that what I'm going to tell you is strictly confidential."

He nodded. "Most of what I hear in this office is confidential."

I took a deep breath. "I think Lyle Barton is the Stocking Killer."

He gazed at me in astonishment. "Martha's husband?"

"Uh-huh."

"And on just what do you base that incredible theory?"

I told him, in detail, including the history of Lyle's mental illness.

When I finished, he was no longer looking aston-

ished, but only thoughtful. "What's the favor you want?" he asked.

"I'd like you to check out Lyle's psychiatric history. Since he has his annual disability checkup at the local V.A. hospital, I assume his Army medical records would be on file there. As a psychiatrist, you'd have better access to them than I."

"No problem. I'm on the staff out there. His file should include not only his Army medical records, but a detailed report from that Wisconsin mental hospital. Almost certainly the V.A. would have asked for one."

"When can you get out there?" I asked.

"Not before this evening. I can't possibly cancel any more appointments, and I'm booked solid right up to five."

"That's okay," I said. "There's still five days to work on this. Suppose you phone me at Martha's when you get back from the hospital?"

"I'll need a little time to evaluate whatever I find in the case record. I'd rather make it in the morning."

"All right," I agreed. "But I don't want to make you cancel any more appointments. Could you get yourself up in time to meet me here at eight A.M.?"

"I'll make that sacrifice if you're willing."

"It's no sacrifice for me," I told him. "I check in at the paper at seven thirty."

Thursday morning we arrived at Sam's office simultaneously. Again I took the leather chair and he sat behind his desk with his hands folded across his stomach.

"There were some interesting things in Lyle's case file," he said. "Did you know his father strangled his mother, then blew his own brains out?"

"Martha never mentioned that," I said in surprise. "When?"

"When Lyle was twelve. According to what he told the psychiatrist assigned to him at the Wisconsin mental hospital, he felt his mother deserved it. He hated her and loved his father. He described her as a very beautiful woman, but a cheat. Apparently he became aware at a very early age that she was having numer-

ous lovers. From the case record, I gathered that she made little attempt to conceal it from him, but periodically threatened to beat him senseless if he ever told his father. He never did, but one day he deliberately neglected to give his mother a phone message in the hope that his father would find her out. His father phoned from out of town that he would be home a day earlier than expected, and would arrive around midnight. Because Lyle failed to relay the message, when his father walked in, he found his wife in bed with another man."

"And killed her?"

"Not right then. He kicked the lover out, stormed out himself and went on a five-day drunk. Then he came back, still drunk, strangled her and shot himself."

I said, "So Lyle developed a guilt complex because he had caused the tragedy?"

He gave me a mildly irritated look. "You armchair psychiatrists have guilt complexes on the brain. What makes you think everybody who's mentally disturbed has to have a guilt complex about something? Neither the Wisconsin report nor the considerably briefer and more cursory reports of the various Army and V.A. psychiatrists who have examined him indicate he ever felt the slightest guilt about either parent's death. He was deeply grieved by his father's death, but he blamed it on her, not himself, and he was quite happy that he had been indirectly responsible for his mother being killed. He felt he had been an instrument in wiping out evil."

"All right," I said. "If no guilt complex, what?"

"Probably a mixed bag of emotions. These things are never simple, but what comes out most clearly is that he had a strong mistrust of good-looking women. At the risk of hurting your feelings, I suggest it's possible that's why he chose Martha. He may have felt he could be sure she wouldn't cheat on him."

"You can't hurt my feelings," I said. "No Conner has ever won a beauty contest. Then his hangup is simply that he hates beautiful women? Each time he kills

one, in fantasy he is killing his mother?"

He got that irritated look on his face again. "Don't put words in my mouth, Tod. If I could get Lyle on the couch for a half dozen sessions, I might be able to figure out his motives, if indeed he is the Stocking Killer. But I don't make diagnoses by long-distance. That *could* be it, and even may be it, but it's only a guess. Psychologically it has a large hole in it. If he picks victims as substitutes for his despised mother, they should be not only beautiful, but also unfaithful."

After thinking this over, I said slowly, "Maybe they were. They were all married."

He shrugged. "How would Lyle know that they were cheating, if they were? No connection between any of the victims has ever turned up. So how could he separately have met six attractive married women who didn't know each other, then have gotten to know them well enough to learn they were cheating on their husbands?"

The answer came to me in a blinding flash of inspiration. "On TV repair calls," I said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Lyle does spare-time TV repair work evenings. Maybe these women were all customers. Maybe they all made passes at him. He's just the sort of guy discontented wives on the make would pass at. He's built like a gladiator and has the face of a matinee idol."

Sam pursed his lips, then shrugged again. "So why wouldn't he kill them when they made the passes?"

"Opportunity," I said promptly. "Maybe the husband was home, but in another room. Maybe kids were wandering around. Or more likely, maybe because it was early enough for neighbors to see him coming and going. He makes these calls in the early evening, remember. I'm not suggesting that the victims invited him into their bedrooms. Maybe they just dropped hints that they were available, if he wanted to come by sometime when their husbands weren't home. Couldn't that be enough to set him off?"

"Sounds possible," the psychiatrist conceded. "I

wouldn't comment on its probability without first getting Lyle on the couch."

"You have a vested interest in scientific skepticism," I said, rising from my chair. "But to me it's good enough to take to Sergeant Burmeister, and I do mean right now."

Sergeant Fritz Burmeister was the detective in charge of the Stocking Killer case. I found him at his desk in the Homicide squad room. He was a burly, beetle-browed man of about fifty with the perpetually sour expression some old-time homicide cops develop.

"Hi, Nose," he greeted me with dour friendliness. "Sit down and rest your bones."

Taking the chair alongside his desk, I said, "How would you like to wrap up the Stocking Killer case?"

His expression became alert. "I'd love it."

"I can give you a strong lead. It may not pan out, but I kind of think it will. There's a condition, though."

"Okay," he said impatiently. "You get an exclusive."

I shook my head. "That's not the condition. I want a guarantee that you'll never disclose to anyone where you got the tip and that I won't be called as a trial witness."

He raised his eyebrows. "Will we need your evidence to convict?"

"No."

"Okay. You got it."

I told him the whole story.

On the basis of what I had told him, Sergeant Burmeister requested the husbands of all six victims. Three of them reported that TV repairmen had been called to their homes. Unfortunately, in two cases arrangements had been made by their wives, the husbands were out when the repairman arrived, and they had no idea who had been called. The two men who had been out of town when their wives were murdered both had traveling jobs. Neither knew of any TV-repair work being done in their homes, but both conceded it was possible their wives had called repairmen and had just neglected to mention it. The sixth man

was sure no TV repairman had been to his home, but the man who had arranged for the service call himself said he had called Lyle Barton, and had a canceled check to prove it.

No response resulted from a subsequent public appeal, after Lyle's arrest, for whoever had made the TV service calls to the two homes where the husbands didn't know who their wives had engaged, but a number of things transpired before that.

On Friday, Sergeant Burmeister descended on Martha with a search warrant. In deference to me he explained he was there because it had been learned her husband made a TV service call on one of the victims of the Stocking Killer, and may have called on others, and that the police wanted a look at his repair-service records. However, along with authorizing the look at Lyle's records, the warrant authorized search for tools that might have been used for illegal break-in and for "items which may have been illegally removed from the premises of any of the victims."

Martha was considerably upset by the search, but she had no idea that I had instigated it.

The leather case and tin box were found where I had told the sergeant they would be, but Lyle's records showed no repair calls to any of the victims' homes other than to the one Burmeister already knew about.

Six of the stockings found in the tin box matched those used as murder weapons. The police lab stated there was no way to establish them as definite mates, because similar stockings were manufactured by the millions, but at least they were established as possible mates. The other two stockings were sent respectively to Kansas City and Chicago.

Monday afternoon Lyle was arrested when he stepped off the plane from Chicago.

Martha nearly fell apart. I thought she was going to have a nervous breakdown. Deciding she shouldn't be left alone, I continued to stay with her instead of moving back to my own apartment.

Naturally I had myself taken off the story, because it



was too close to home, but I kept in close touch with Fritz Burmeister so that I would know what was going on.

The sergeant was convinced Lyle was guilty, but his case was far from airtight. One thing that bothered him was Lyle's records showing a service call to only one victim. Burmeister was morally convinced he had made at least the two other calls known about, and perhaps had also made calls to the homes of the two traveling men. He thought Lyle had been cunning enough not to enter anything about those calls in his records, but to enter the one where he had been paid by check because the visit could be proved.

He wouldn't be able to make that sort of speculation from the witness stand, though.

Another setback was the reports from Kansas City and Chicago. Neither stocking matched the ones used to strangle the victims in those cities. It was also established that Lyle had arrived back in St. Louis from Kansas City the day before the murder there. So apparently the original police theory that those murders had been imitations of the Stocking Killer by other psychos was right after all, if Lyle actually was the Stocking Killer.

Burmeister had a possible explanation for that setback too, but it would never have been admissible as evidence. He theorized that Lyle had broken into a couple of places, intending to commit murder, had gotten as far as locating a stocking to use, then had somehow been frightened off and had carried the stocking away with him.

Despite these loopholes, Burmeister thought he had a pretty strong case. It was going to be difficult for the defense to explain that miniature burglar kit and the cache of stockings that included six exactly matching the six used as murder weapons. Then a second search warrant turned up a pair of black slacks, a black long-sleeved sweater and a matching black cloth cap in Lyle's closet. The witness who had once seen the Stocking Killer from the rear, and had described him

as wearing similar clothing, was asked to view him wearing the outfit from behind. She couldn't identify him as the man she had seen that night, but she was willing to testify that he was of the same height and general build. On top of all that, Lyle's psychiatric history was bound to influence the jury.

It was a boon to the prosecution that Lyle had no alibi for any of the murder dates. There is little question in my mind that Martha would have sworn he was never out of her sight on any of the occasions, except it was a matter of record that he was.

Because Tod was so young, Martha didn't care to work regularly, preferring to be at home with her son, but she filled in at Barnes Hospital when nurses went on vacation, or simply wanted nights off. She was on call only for night duty, so that Tod could be left with Lyle, thereby saving baby-sitter costs.

It just happened that Martha was on nursing duty every night that the Stocking Killer struck—except Sergeant Burmeister surmised that it hadn't "just happened" at all. He suspected Lyle had deliberately chosen those nights to commit murder because his wife was away.

Despite my concern over her, Martha rather quickly recovered from her initial emotional collapse. By Tuesday she had regained full control of herself, although she remained pale and drawn and refused to eat anything. Meantime a friend had taken Tod into her home until Martha could completely quiet down.

Even in the face of the devastating circumstantial evidence against her husband, Martha fiercely denied any possibility of his guilt. She hired George Brinker, St. Louis' top criminal lawyer, to defend him.

I accompanied her when she went to see the man for the first trial-strategy conference after he had interviewed Lyle and had studied the evidence against him. He was a plump, smooth-looking man in his mid-forties with considerable personal charm.

He started off by saying, "The evidence against your husband is entirely circumstantial, of course, Mrs. Bar-

ton. And the prosecution must establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. It's not up to us to disprove his guilt. All we have to do is cast doubt on it."

"How do you plan to do that?" I inquired.

"Let's start with the so-called burglar kit. That's what the prosecution is calling it, but we're calling it an emergency repair kit for electronic appliances. Your brother-in-law has explained to me how that so-called picklock is used as a tool to test electrical contacts, and how, when it is used that way, the gloves are necessary for insulation."

I noticed he made no mention of the glass cutter and rubber suction cup. I said, "How are you going to explain the stockings?"

"Ah, but we don't have to, Mr. Conner. It's up to the prosecution to prove they are the mates of the ones used in the murders, and the two extra stockings are certainly going to confuse that issue. We don't have to explain why the defendant kept nylon stockings in a locked box. I don't care if the jury thinks he's eccentric; I just don't want them to think he's a murderer."

He similarly felt that he could cast doubt that Lyle had met his victims by making service calls to their homes. He planned to block any reference by the prosecution to the two service calls where it had not been established who the repairman was, which would leave them with only the one call Lyle had admitted making to present to the jury. The lawyer felt he could convince the jury that was pure coincidence.

When we left Brinker's office, I came away with the feeling that he really didn't have much hope of acquittal, but had been optimistic merely for Martha's benefit. From her pinched expression, I suspected she had gotten the same impression, but I didn't mention it.

By now Martha seemed well enough not to require me underfoot any longer. She moved Tod back home and I returned to my apartment. Periodically I dropped by to check on her, and while she seemed terribly depressed, she was holding up well enough to function.

Trial had been set for six weeks after the arrest,

which put it in mid-May. A week beforehand I happened to be in the city room when a call came in that there was a murder on Dover Place, down on the south side. I volunteered to go out on it, and thus got the assignment.

I didn't realize until I got down there that Dover Place was the street just south of Bellerive Boulevard. The house was the one whose back faced the rear of Lyle's and Martha's.

There were several people inside in the front room: a couple of uniformed cops, a man from the police lab, a dazed-looking man of about thirty seated in an easy chair, and Sergeant Fritz Burmeister. The lab man was just leaving, apparently having finished his work.

When I glanced curiously at the seated man, Burmeister said, "Husband. Come on upstairs."

I followed him up the stairs. In the same bedroom I had once looked into from Martha's kitchen window, the same blonde I had watched undress lay on the bed wearing a filmy nightgown. Her face was purple and was horribly bloated because a nylon stocking had been knotted tightly around her throat.

"Husband found her when he came home this morning," the sergeant said wearily. "He works nights. Same old story. No sexual assault, no prints. Both doors have inside bolts. A small square was neatly cut out of the glass pane in the back door, right next to the bolt. As usual, the second stocking is missing."

I tore my gaze away from the dead woman. "What's this do for Lyle?" I asked.

"Clears him," he said in the same weary voice. "How the hell could he be the Stocking Killer when he's locked in a maximum-security cell?"

That's almost the end of the story. Lyle was released with full apologies and again he and Martha seem radiantly happy.

There have been no more Stocking Killer murders, but recently I've been thinking. I keep remembering Martha saying, "The way I feel about Lyle, I'd continue to love him even if he became a raving maniac."

I'd do anything in the world for him."

I also keep remembering that Martha had judo training when she was an Army nurse. An hour a week for twelve weeks, I think she said, certainly not enough to win her a black belt, but maybe enough to handle another woman not much larger than herself.

Anybody can buy a glass cutter. They're on sale in every dime store.

Martha doesn't work at the hospital nights anymore either. Now she's on call only for days, and arranges for a baby-sitter when she's called in.

The last time they had me down to dinner, little Tod took me down to the basement to show me something. The partition had been taken down and there was no longer a television repair shop there.

I was afraid to ask why Lyle had gotten out of the TV repair business, but I can't help wondering if Martha insisted on it, just to remove future temptation.

## A NEIGHBORLY OBSERVATION

by Richard Hardwick

Jeanette eased the drape back with a red-nailed finger and peered across the street. She had done the same thing half a dozen times since lunch, and now she had apparently come to some decision, for she turned and marched to the sofa.

"Lou, there is definitely something funny going on over there."

Lou Meakin gestured impatiently. "In a minute, Jeanette, huh?" It was the bottom of the ninth, the bases were loaded, two out, and a full count on the batter.

Jeanette reached out and clicked the set off. "I want you to take a look. I haven't seen Betty all morning and he's over there with two men loading all their things into that truck."

Lou frantically flicked the television back on. The picture showed the crowd moving out of the stadium, and he sighed and picked up his beer.

He went to the front window. "Why do you have the drapes drawn in the middle of the day?"

"So he can't see us watching him." She eased the drape back. "Take a look."

He looked, then shrugged and went back to his seat on the sofa. "We knew they were moving. What's so strange about Tom and two guys loading their things in a truck? Personally, I'd be a little surprised if they left everything there when they moved."

"All right," she said, miffed. "But did you see *her*? Did you see Betty? You did not. She hasn't been there since the day before yesterday. At least . . . well, I won't say it. Not yet."

"Won't say what?"

"What I'm thinking. He was a brute to her, you

know that, don't you? Big, hulking thing like that, and Betty as tiny and fragile as a rose."

Lou frowned. "What's this past-tense business?"

"We'll see," she said cryptically. "Lou . . ." She was peering out again. "Lou, walk over there and tell him we'd like both of them to drop over for a cup of coffee before they leave. That way he'll *have* to say something."

He pressed his palms against his temples. "Good Lord, Jeanette—"

"All right, I'll do it!"

"Never mind." He knew well enough how she would make it sound, like a challenge rather than an invitation. She never had liked Tom Regan. She had always harbored some vague distrust of him ever since they became neighbors a year ago.

Lou put on a light jacket and went out. The day had an edge to it. For late April it was cool, and the heavy clouds scudding along only a few hundred feet above the budding trees held the promise of rain before the afternoon was done.

Across the street, Tom Regan came out of the house carrying a cardboard carton. He put it on the tail gate of the rented truck, saw Lou, and with a grin came out into the street to meet him.

"Hi, pal! I was going to call you. Wanted you to help me polish off a few beers I've got left in the box."

Lou glanced over his shoulder uncertainly, knowing full well Jeanette was taking it all in from behind the drapes. "Sure . . . but first, Jeanette says for you and Betty to come over to our place for a cup of coffee. I've got something a little stronger for you and me."

Regan seemed surprised. "Betty left day before yesterday. I thought she called Jeanette. She took the car and drove ahead, you know, to sort of get things ready on the other end before I got there with the truck. Look at me telling you about moving. You've done it as much as I have. Now, come on, let's finish up that beer so I can get rolling."

They walked on into the Regans' house, past the two

men who were helping load the truck. They were, Lou thought, a lot alike, he and Tom. Lou was an industrial engineer, Tom a draftsman. They were both always looking for that greener pasture, switching jobs every year or so, moving all around the country. There was a whole breed of people like them, skilled gypsies, really. They never stopped long enough to put down real roots.

Half an hour later the two laborers came into the kitchen. "That's it, Mr. Regan, except for this table and two chairs."

"Take 'em away, boys," Tom said. He stood up and held his hand out to Lou. "So long, pal, and good luck to you."

"I feel it in my bones, Lou," Jeanette said after hearing Lou's report. "Look! He's pulling away now in the truck! Lou . . . I've got the funniest feeling that Betty's right there in that truck . . ."

"In the *truck*? You're crazy, Jeanette! Why, I was over there talking to him and he said she went ahead in the car day before yesterday. What the devil would she be doing in the truck? Tell me that!"

"That's precisely my point," she replied without turning away from the window. "She's not *doing* anything. Did you notice that shiny new cedar chest those men loaded? I happen to know for a fact they didn't even own a cedar chest, at least not until the past few days. He must have bought it when he—when he planned what he did."

"When he planned what?"

She did not answer him directly. "I know Betty wouldn't have gone without at least phoning me." The departing truck turned the corner at the end of the street and disappeared. Jeanette drew the drapes, letting the gray afternoon light into the room. "They were fighting like cats and dogs for the last month, Lou, did you know that? He threatened her, she told me. A big brute like Tom Regan, he could take a little thing like Betty in his two hands and . . . well, you know."

"No, Jeanette, I don't know, and neither do you. As



for Betty not phoning you before she left, Tom explained that. He said she tried, but nobody was here."

She pursed her lips and looked around at him. "That's what *he* said."

Lou found himself wondering now. Regan had looked very pleased about something, and it was certainly true the Regans did not get along at all well. "You think that Betty was . . . was *in* the cedar chest?" he said.

"All I'm going to say is that if I don't hear something from her within a week, I'm going to do something."

"What do you mean, *do* something?"

"Betty was a friend," was all she would say. "I've got a responsibility and a duty."

Three days later Jeanette called Lou at his office at ten o'clock. It was the first time, as far as he could recall, that she had ever phoned him in the morning. There was an occasional afternoon call to remind him to come straight home, or to pick up something at the store.

"I'm downstairs, Lou," she said in a taut whisper. "Come down right away!"

"What for, Jeanette? I've got work to—"

"It's about *them*!" she rasped. "I was right! I've got *proof*!"

He put his work aside and hurried down. Jeanette was waiting beside the elevator bank. She had the conspicuous look of someone trying to appear inconspicuous.

"You wouldn't believe me, would you?" she said victoriously.

"What on earth are you talking about, Jeanette? Please explain."

"You'll see. Come on."

Their car was at the curb and with Jeanette at the wheel they roared off. Moments later, less than three blocks away, she spun the wheel and darted into a used-car lot.

"Follow me," she said. They threaded their way be-

tween rows of shiny automobiles; then Jeanette stopped suddenly. "Take a look!"

She had a finger aimed at a two-tone blue sedan. Lou walked slowly around the car, his frown deepening with every step. "You . . . you think this is the Regans' car?"

"I don't think anything of the sort. I *know* it's their car. Now what do you think of Mr. Tom Regan saying Betty drove ahead with it?"

"It does look like their car." He laughed uneasily, not taking his eyes off the blue sedan. "But there must be a million just like it—"

"With this exact dent here?" she broke in, indicating a place on the left rear fender.

At that moment a smiling salesman appeared. "Can I help you folks?" He gave the blue sedan an affectionate pat on the hood. "This is a good, clean, one-owner job. Low mileage, good rubber, make you a real deal on it."

"Who was the owner?" Lou said, still staring at the car.

"What was that?"

"You said the car was a one-owner job. Who was the owner?"

The salesman seemed irritated. "I won't kid around about it being a little old lady who didn't drive anywhere but down to the mailbox. What—"

"Look, buddy, how about checking in the office. I want to know who brought it in. If that's too much bother for you, we'll look someplace else."

"Sure, mister, sure. Hold your horses, I'll be right back." He walked across the lot and into the small pre-fab office. When he returned he held a file card in his hand. "Here it is. It wasn't a trade, but an outright sale. Fellow was moving to the West Coast, taking a new job. I talked to him myself. He said his new company was supplying him with a car and he didn't need—"

Lou reached out and took the card. With Jeanette peering over his shoulder, he read the name aloud. "Thomas Regan . . ."

\* \* \*

"That doesn't prove a thing," Lou insisted as they drove away from the used car lot, "except that Tom sold his car."

"He said she drove ahead, didn't he?"

"Yes. But—"

"And I didn't see her before she was *supposed* to have gone, did I?"

"No. But—"

"You told me yourself, Lou, that he had a smug look the day he left."

"Damn it, Jeanette, I didn't say smug. I said . . . well, pleased."

"With him it's the same thing. You'll never convince me he didn't kill poor Betty, put her body in that cedar chest, and just drive away from here as boldly as you please! Somewhere between here and the West Coast he stopped, buried her where nobody will ever find her, and now he's out there on a new job, among people who never even knew he was married. He's having a great big laugh, but he's not going to get away with it!"

He had to admit that a lot of what Jeanette said added up. Still, he was skeptical. Whether his skepticism stemmed from a genuine doubt or from fear of putting his nose into something that was none of his business—and might easily backfire—he did not know.

"You're jumping to a pretty gory conclusion, Jeanette," he said. "I mean, just because he said one thing and did another, that doesn't mean—"

She broke in angrily. "All right, Mr. Einstein! *You* explain it!"

He opened his mouth, but no explanation was forthcoming, so he shut it.

"You know something, Lou," Jeanette said after a moment. "If it hadn't been for me, that horrible man might very easily have gotten away with it."

"What are you going to do? Just remember, Jeanette, if you start throwing accusations around, you could get us involved in a lawsuit."

"I'm not going to make any accusations—yet. In fact, I'm going straight to the horse's mouth."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

She pulled the car to a stop outside Lou's office building. "You'll see." She smiled grimly.

The following afternoon when he got home, Lou Meakin was met at the door by an inspired Jeanette. "He was clever," she said, "but not clever enough!"

He sailed his hat toward the hall table. "Oh?"

"I don't think you even *care* whether Tom Regan killed poor Betty or not! If I hadn't thought something was funny when he moved out, and if I hadn't just happened to see their car sitting on that lot, well . . ."

He went into the kitchen and got a beer from the refrigerator. "Okay, what's the latest?"

"He didn't move where he said he was moving, that's what's the latest!" she answered smugly.

He paused with the opener in his hand. "What?"

Jeanette nodded. "He said he was going to Los Angeles, didn't he? Said he'd found a better job there, didn't he?"

"That's right."

She crossed her arms. "Well, *I* remembered the name of the rental company on the side of that truck he drove away from here. I called them and I found out that he didn't go to Los Angeles at all, but to *Chicago!*"

Lou opened the beer slowly. It all seemed to sink in at once, and he found himself wondering if she didn't really have something, after all.

"I'm going to the police, Lou," Jeanette said. "That—that monster is going to pay for what he's done!"

"Now wait a minute, Jeanette. Wait just one minute. I realize I can't explain all this, but there could be an explanation. Let's not stick our necks out too far."

"And while we keep our necks safely drawn in, that murderer escapes!"

"Look, if Tom is a—a murderer, he probably thinks he's in the clear. So wherever he is, he's probably going to stay. Why don't we sort of sit on all this for a few more days, huh?"

Jeanette sighed impatiently. "All right, Lou. But if I don't hear anything from Betty by Monday, I'm going straight to the police!"

It happened Sunday afternoon. Lou sat before the television watching a tight game between the Braves and the Dodgers. Jeanette was at the dining room table pecking away on a portable typewriter, carefully documenting the progress of her case. The doorbell rang, and still deep in thought Jeanette got up and answered it.

Standing on the stoop was the petite figure of Betty Regan, very much alive. "Hi, Jeanette," she said.

"It . . . It's . . ."

"You busy? Can I come in a minute?"

"How . . . What . . . ?"

Betty smiled guiltily and stepped inside. "Hi, Lou. I guess you two wondered what was going on between Tom and me."

Lou nodded. "Jeanette did mention it, I believe."

"I didn't think Tom would say anything about it. He's terribly proud, you know. I guess it was his pride that really came between us."

"It happens that way sometimes," Lou nodded.

"Well, we had this fight and I left him. He had a job all set in Los Angeles, you know, but he didn't take it. I guess he was all smiles when you last saw him, huh?"

"Well . . . I guess you could say that."

"That's the way he is, smiling on the outside, crying on the inside. I found out later that he sold the car and the furniture and moved in with his brother in Chicago. I felt so sorry for him. Well, I phoned him and he just broke up completely, begging me to come back and all that . . ."

The two girls went on talking and after a while Lou sat down again to watch the ball game. The Braves were up. The big first baseman stood there at the plate, wagging his bat. Out on the mound the pitcher went into his windup.

Lou picked up his beer and took a swallow. The fig-

ures on the screen faded from his consciousness. Lou was thinking about what had happened, and about something Jeanette had said. It could have happened just as she had it figured, and Tom Regan could very possibly have gotten away with it if it hadn't been for one nosy neighbor. It had been sort of like a dress rehearsal, pointing up the good and the bad, *stressing the things to be avoided*.

He put the beer down and picked up the morning paper. Turning to the classifieds he reread the ad that had caught his attention earlier. It occupied an entire page, and it was headed with the hook: *Engineers! Want a Whole New Lease on Life? Come to Southern California! Ace Aircraft Needs You . . .*

# LESSONS FROM THE MASTER

It has not been widely publicized, but Alfred Hitchcock has set up a training camp for all those who wish to become masters of his favorite sport—the murder game. Hitchcock will show you the proper form for plunging a knife, pulling a trigger, pouring poison, giving a push off a precipice, or any other of the moves that make the difference between a good hit and a messy miss. And just to give you a bit of inspiration, he has personally assembled the most chilling champions in the field. Here are fourteen novellettes and stories by such great and ghoulish winners as:

Frank Sisk • James Holding • Douglas Farr • Ed Lacy  
C. B. Gilford • Alice-Mary Schnirring • Robert Colby  
Jeffrey M. Wallman • Fletcher Flora • Gilbert Ralston  
Edwin P. Hicks • Elijah Ellis

Richard Hardwick

Richard Deming

