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DEPARTMENT OF THE DEPARTED

ALFRED J. HITCHCOCK

I have long been fascinated in my association with the criminous and the strange by the instance of *mysterious disappearance.*

At times, whole populations vanish, such as the colony in the early days of Virginia. The famous Sir Walter Raleigh tried to find the colonists, but was unsuccessful.

Then there are smaller groups that disappear from most unlikely places, such as the crew and passengers aboard the *Marie Celeste.* The ship was found in sound condition, under full sail, water casks unspoiled, and—some reports have it—with the tables set for dinner and the plates still *warm.*

However, the most interesting disappearances, in many ways, are those of individuals. The gentleman who stepped out of his front door one morning and was never seen again. Another gentleman, years and years ago, who walked around some horses and was lost forever. The well-known judge in New York—

Upon reflection, it would seem that such vanishments have no rhyme or reason and that they are special to no particular group so far as geographic situation, profession, or age is concerned. I have noted in the press instances of a brave television cameraman who stepped into a witch doctor's hut in the Congo and was never seen again—a paperhanger who received an emergency call at one o'clock in the morning and who disappeared somewhere between home and appointment—a young man off to his first day at college who was never seen again, although it was found that he had taken two books from the library that noon. The books are now long overdue, and the fines, at this writing, are quite large.

All these strange and awful disappearances seem to warrant more careful study and investigation, but alas! being so far from the scene of most of them and having so little time because of other commitments, I have never had the opportunity to look into them. Think, then, how fortunate I felt when a disappearance of equal merit occurred in my own backyard, so to speak.

A gentleman whom I knew very slightly disappeared one Sunday afternoon last summer. At first, no one thought anything had happened to him. He did not come home in time for dinner, but this had happened before. He did not return home by nightfall. Now, this was unusual, but several reasons could be put forward for such behavior.

The next day, the police were asked to investigate. All their efforts proved fruitless. The gentleman had been home during the morning. He had gone out for a short time for the Sunday papers and had then returned home. The papers were found in the living room; there was nothing unusual in them.

In the early afternoon, he had talked to a neighbor over an adjoining fence and then had gone back into his house to watch a baseball game on television. The neighbor never saw him again.

In routine questioning of the gentleman's wife, it was established that the television set had suddenly gone out of order. The gentleman tried to fix it, but to no avail. His wife had then suggested that he adjourn to a local tavern to watch the conclusion of the baseball game. He left the house, the wife reported, at approximately two thirty-five.

I was most interested in the proceedings and carefully read all that was published on the case. Continued investigation showed that no one saw the gentleman leave his house, no one saw him on the street, no one saw him in or about the tavern. After some weeks of search, the police had to give up. The gentleman was never found.

A most interesting situation.

I learned through a mutual acquaintance that the wife took her husband's disappearance unusually hard and that she was treated by several physicians. One suggested that she take up some new hobby to take her mind off her

troubles, and she seems to have gone in for masonry. She's now at work on a new patio in the rear of her house, and I hear that she's already done a splendid job of refinishing her basement floor.

Had I been the lady's physician, I would have recommended reading a good volume—and if you are feeling tense, unhappy, abandoned, I suggest you read the following pages and wish you a shudderingly good time.

—ALFRED HITCHCOCK

CONTENTS

A LITTLE PUSH FROM CAPPY FLEERS

GILBERT RALSTON

It wasn't long after Pop died and the bank took the place back, when I hitched a ride on a truck to New Orleans to get some construction work, or maybe ship out on one of those Gulf freighters. I hung around for a while but couldn't find anything unless I had a union card, which I didn't. So I thought I'd go to California and pick fruit, or maybe get in the movies. Billy Jo Cartright, a fellow I met, went with me. We hitched rides as far as San Antonio, then Billy went to work for his uncle, who grew cotton. The uncle said I could stay too, but I kind of had California in my head, so I said no thanks and went on. I had sort of a plan if I couldn't find anything to do in Los Angeles, so after I saw the lines of fellows in front of the employment places, I went to the dime store and bought a hammer and nails and a can of paint, and made a shoeshine box. I spent three dollars for some polish and a couple of brushes and went looking for a building, out on the bus all the way to the Sunset Strip, which I had heard about. Out by La Cienega there was a long row of the kind of buildings I wanted, two-story, with maybe twenty offices, and no doormen. I went to the rental agent and asked him if I could go around the offices and shine shoes. He talked to me for a while; then said okay, so I began in the upstairs corner office. That's how I met Mr. Danny Froken.

He had a big place, with some girls at desks in the outside room. One of the girls looked up at me. "I'm the shoeshine boy," I said.

"Just a minute," she said, and pressed a thing on her desk. "Mr. Froken, want your shoes shined? The boy's here." Then she told me to go in. There were actors' pictures on the wall and a big desk at the end of the room with a little man at it, looking at some papers. I went over by him and sat down on the shoeshine box. He didn't look

up, just stuck his foot out. I remember the shoes because they were small, like a boy's, and hardly needed a shine at all. When I was through, he stuck a hand in a pocket and gave me fifty cents. He looked kind of surprised when I gave it back to him.

"You're my first customer," I said. "This one's free."

He had a funny face, all tight and wrinkled and very serious. He looked at me for a moment. I got sort of uncomfortable, then he smiled.

"What's your name?" he said.

"Cappy," I said. "Cappy Fleers."

"That's an odd name."

"Not where I come from, Mr. Froken," I told him.

"Where's that?"

"Seneca, West Virginia."

"You're a long way from home, Cappy."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Thanks for the shine."

"You're welcome, Mr. Froken." I started out.

"Cappy."

I turned back.

"Come every day at ten o'clock." He smiled again as I went out. I went through that building like a field of wheat and the next one to it in the afternoon. Made enough to pay my room and had two dollars left for food.

Everything went fine after that. Pretty soon I had a whole string of offices to go to and everybody knew me by name. Mr. Froken was the best to me. Every day, when I did his shoes, we'd talk a little. He was interested in the way I lived in Seneca and would ask me questions.

About two weeks after I started the shoeshine business, Miss Faulkner, the lady on the desk outside his office, stopped me when I started to go in.

"Hold it a minute, Cappy," she said. "Mr. Froken's got a houseful."

I waited while she pressed the key on her desk.

"Cappy's here, Mr. Froken," she said. "All right to send him in?"

Mr. Froken said it was okay.

The office was full of people, sitting around on chairs, all

talking at once. They were arguing about a movie script, two fellows in the corner pretty excited. Over in the other corner I saw Ray Prestwick, the big actor. He just sat there big as life, listening and smoking a cigarette while I did Mr. Froken's shoes. When I finished, Mr. Froken said, "This is Cappy Fleers. If you two could write as well as he can shine shoes, we wouldn't be here." Everybody laughed.

"Go ahead, Cappy. Shine 'em up," Mr. Froken said.

I did the writers' first, while they got back into their fight, mostly with each other. I never heard such an argument. Finally I got to Mr. Prestwick. He had some nice brown shoes on, English leather. I got a big charge out of doing his shoes. He paid for them all. It was a funny feeling, getting paid by a big star, even for a shoeshine.

"Thank you, Mr. Prestwick," I said, and headed for the door.

Mr. Prestwick called after me. "Hey, Cappy," he said. "You know anything about yard work?"

"I know some farming," I told him.

"This is not exactly farming," he said. "Mowing, and things like that."

"If it grows, I guess it wouldn't be strange to me," I said.

"I need a man on my place. Want a job?"

"Who'll do Mr. Froken's shoes?" I asked him. Everybody laughed, even Mr. Froken. I felt kind of bad that he thought it was funny. He smiled at me again, with that nice sort of look, so it was all right.

"Take the job, Cappy," he said. "I'll send 'em over."

Next thing I knew I was in the outside office with an address on a piece of paper in my hand. I sat for a long time in the cafeteria on the corner, thinking about it, and Mr. Froken, and how things happened.

The address worried me some when I looked at the map. It was way up in a place called Laurel Hills, in the mountains back of Hollywood, without any bus. I figured I'd have to get some kind of car to get there to work each day, but with only $73.00 in the box in my room I didn't see how I could work it. I thought about it some when I went back to finish off with my customers.

The next day was Saturday and I was supposed to go to Mr. Prestwick's house in the morning. I got up early and took the bus way out on the Sunset, where Laurel Street cut in. Then I walked the rest of the way. They lived on top of a hill on a street without any sidewalks, all full of houses that looked like castles. I opened the gate and went into the yard. They had a lot of it, all green and big trees and plants around, everything wet and cool looking, sprinklers going, up near a big stone house. There was a lady over at the side. She had a pair of shears in her hand for cutting flowers and an armful of them already cut.

"Hello—" she said. "Cappy?"

I said I was. She was the prettiest little thing, dark-haired, with her face all lit up with the flowers.

"Ray said you'd be coming up today. Come in, and we'll talk." She led the way into the kitchen. It was the biggest one I ever saw, all white tile and machinery. She sat me down at the table and gave me a cup of coffee.

"Mr. Prestwick will be back soon. Was it a hard walk?" I knew then that she had seen me coming up the street.

"No, ma'am," I said. "I was watching the pretty day."

"So was I," she said. "That's how I saw you."

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

"Come on out. I'll show you around."

We went outside again, and walked around the grounds. Everything looked pretty good except some of the trees needed pruning back and the oleander bushes on one side were choking for space. The grass was nice and healthy, with the spring of good turf under it.

"We just got this place," she said. "The old owner took the gardener away with him. That's why we need you."

"I've never done this kind of work before, ma'am. I hope I'll satisfy."

"Mr. Froken told me you were a farm boy. If we get stuck, we'll get a book."

"Mr. Froken?" I said. "You know him, ma'am?"

"Mr. Froken is my husband's agent. He's a good friend. That's how we heard about you."

"I'll bet that's why Mr. Froken used to ask me about Seneca. And all those other things."

Then she took me back to the pool. There was a shed there with enough mowers and edgers and seeders and things to open a store.

"I think you'll find everything you'll need here, Cappy. If there's anything else, just let me know."

"We could put in a stand of alfalfa with this, ma'am." I told her. She laughed like a little girl.

"Your room's over the garage," she said.

I must have looked surprised.

"Didn't he tell you?" she said. "Mr. Prestwick expected you to stay here. We're away a lot. We want a hand on the place."

I just listened, marveling at the way things happened.

After we looked around a little more, she showed me my room. There was a bed and a dresser and two chairs, even a television in the corner. It even had its own bathroom.

"I'll try to keep it neat, ma'am," I said.

She looked at me for a moment, a funny expression in her eyes.

"You do that, Cappy," she said finally. "You do that."

I moved my stuff in the next day, after church, and started on the yard. I had an itch to prune those trees and was up in one of them when Mr. Prestwick came out. I climbed down, and said good morning.

"Everything all right, Cappy?" he said.

I said everything was just fine.

"You'll find lunch in the kitchen at one o'clock," he said. "The cook's name is Rosa. Stay on her good side. She's a terror."

I didn't have any trouble with her. She was a fat Italian lady who really set a table. I didn't talk much to her at first, just stayed polite and enjoyed the food, which seemed to please her. After a few days we got to be pretty good friends, and sometimes when the Prestwicks were out we used to talk and she would tell me about the Old Country and how she lived in Italy when she was a girl. We were both farm raised so I guess that helped.

It took a while to get the yard and house the way I liked it, all clipped and roomy with the flowers healthy and bright. I put in a new piece of grass in the back and made

a little sitting place like a rock garden back of the pool. It was a pretty place, looking out over the tops of the hills. Mrs. Emma, that's what Rosa told me to call Mrs. Prestwick, liked to sit there when she read a book.

It was a strange time. I didn't have a car, except Mr. Prestwick said I could borrow one when I had an errand or something I wanted to do, but, even so, at first I didn't leave the place much. Once in a while, Mrs. Emma would talk to me when I was in the yard, or Mr. Prestwick would ask for something, and I would get it for him in the car. Then I started driving Rosa around when she wanted to go somewhere, or taking Mr. Prestwick to the studio when he was working. He didn't like driving and I did, so that made it nice. I'll say one thing. That yard *shone*. Even my Pop would have liked it.

Time sort of slipped by. Then one day I was clipping the hedge and turned around and Mr. Froken was standing there. He held out a hand to me, that little smile of his on his face again.

"I forgot to send the shoes, Cappy," he said.

"Mr. Froken," I said. "Am I glad to see you!"

"You're doing a fine job, Cappy," Mr. Froken said. "The Prestwicks couldn't do without you."

Somehow, hearing him tell it was better than anything I heard in my life. I couldn't stop smiling. Like a fool, I couldn't say much.

"I hope you're happy here."

"It's a wonderful place," I said.

He turned to go into the house.

"Mr. Froken," I said.

"Yes?"

"Thank you," I said.

"That's all right, Cappy," he said. "An active agent has to look after the welfare of his clients."

I picked a big bunch of flowers and put them in his car.

Just before Christmas was a big and exciting time at the house, all kinds of people coming and going, Mr. Froken in and out, Rosa and I so busy we didn't have time to think about anything, which was just as well for me. Christmas used to be pretty good at our house, even after Ma died

and there was only Pop and me. When I thought about it, I got pretty low, so it was better to be busy.

Christmas Day was another high time. The house was full of people, we had some extra help in to serve, and I took care of the cars and helped with the drinks, except for Mr. Prestwick, who only drank coffee. Rosa and I started at six in the morning to get ready, so when the last of the people left we were pretty tired, sitting in the kitchen with coffee when Mr. Prestwick came out. He said Merry Christmas to us both and gave us each a hundred dollar check. Old Rosa gave him an Italian hug and I shook hands. Then I went to my room. On the dresser was a little Christmas tree, all covered with spangles. Under it was a package. I opened it. It was a wallet, the most beautiful leather I ever saw. Across the front of it was my name in golden letters, "Cappy Fleers"—in *gold letters.* I just looked at it and at the card. It was from Mrs. Emma, who wrote "Love from the Prestwicks" on it. Next to it was a scarf from Rosa. I sat on the bed, holding the presents in my hands for a long time. Then I noticed something else. On the dresser was another box. In it was a watch, a gold watch, with a gold band on it. My name was on that too, on the back. It said "Cappy Fleers with the affection and admiration of Danny Froken." Well, I was overcome.

After that, Mrs. Emma decided that I'd better go to school nights, two or three times a week, so I did, the Adult Education course at the high school. I enjoyed it, especially the English. I read a lot of books. Mrs. Emma used to pick some new ones up for me when she went shopping, then when I saw her in the yard she'd talk with me about them.

I met a girl at the school. Mrs. Emma deviled me a little about it, till I asked Norma—that was her name—to go to the movies with me. She wasn't a very pretty girl but I liked her a lot. She was kind of quiet, like Mrs. Emma, and fun to be with. We had some good times together.

All this time, I took care of the house and yard, and drove Mr. Prestwick to and from his work. I used to drive him down in the morning and go and get him in the afternoon. The fellows on the gate at the studio got to know

me, and used to wave me right in when I drove up, and let me park the car right outside the studio door where Mr. Prestwick was working. Sometimes I'd go in and watch the picture being made, and once in a while Mr. Froken would be there and he'd smile that funny smile of his and I'd look at the time where he could see me, so that he could see that I was wearing his watch. It was a little game with us. Mr. Froken was getting old. Each time I saw him he seemed to shrink a little. You could almost see the bones under the skin of his face, he was so thin. I talked to Mrs. Emma about it. She said that Mr. Froken wasn't very well. She said maybe the layers were peeling off a little so that the kindness and integrity were beginning to show through. Mrs. Emma worried me, she was so sad. Not only about that, but about the trouble that began with Mr. Prestwick.

I guess actors are different in the way they think about things. Mr. Prestwick was always nice to me so I had no complaint, but it was different somehow. Maybe down underneath he cared, but I always thought he kind of saw himself in a place or situation, then did what he thought he was supposed to do. Anyway, he wasn't like the others. They always said exactly what they meant. Mr. Prestwick said what he was *supposed* to mean. That's a big difference. Anyway, when he won that Oscar, things began to change. Mr. Prestwick was busier than ever and the next thing we knew he was playing in that war picture with Kitty Lamson, and was a real big star again. He went away to Mexico to do the location shooting for three weeks and when he came back he was different. That's when he bought me the uniform and cap to wear when I took him in the car. I didn't mind, but I heard Mrs. Emma fussing about it to him. Anyway, I wore it and took him to the studio first time I had it on. They were making the interior shots of the war picture and I figured I'd arrive a little early that afternoon so I could watch some of the scenes. I came back at five o'clock, and didn't see Mr. Prestwick anywhere. I knocked on the door of his dressing room at five-thirty. That's the first time I ever saw him with a drink. He told me to go back to the car and wait for him. When I turned at the door of the studio, I saw Miss Lamson come out of

the dressing room with him. By the time they got to the car, I was waiting with the door open. He put her in and gave me an address at the beach in Malibu. Every once in a while as I drove them, I watched her in the rearview mirror. She had an actress face, very beautiful, black hair and big red lips. She laughed a lot and made jokes all the way to her house. When we got there, he got out and took her to the door. She said something and he laughed and went in. When he came back he was pretty drunk, didn't say much, just rode home in the back seat of the car. That was the first thing I noticed. Two days later he phoned and asked Rosa to tell me to get a bag packed for him so that he could go away for two days' location. I brought the bag to the studio and left it in his room. On my way out I saw Al Morgan, the assistant director. I asked him where the location was they were going to. He said that it was on the beach at the other side of San Diego. He told me that the company would be there Monday and Tuesday. This was only *Friday*. That was the second thing. I worked on the lawn that afternoon, thinking about it.

Wednesday, when Mr. Prestwick had a day off, Mr. Froken came. Mrs. Emma was out and Rosa was shopping, so I went into the house to see if they needed coffee or anything. They were in Mr. Prestwick's den and I could hear him yelling all the way out in the hall. So I didn't go in, and I didn't listen. After a while Mr. Froken came out, got in his car and drove away. I never saw him look like that before—worried and sad and nervous. That was the third thing.

Next day I saw Mrs. Emma in the little garden place I fixed up for her. She was sitting in her chair all alone. I went to see if she wanted anything. She told me that Mr. Prestwick had another week's location to do and would I please ask Rosa to pack his bag and take it down to the studio. When I looked back at her, her face was all twisted up and tears were running down it. She just sat there, crying. I went to get the bag, my stomach all tight and knotted up.

This time when I went to the studio dressing room, Mr.

Prestwick was in it. He called me in and looked at me, hard.

"Cappy," he said. "I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"I am going to stay at the Malibu Beach house for a few days. I want you to call for me there, each morning."

I said I would.

"And I want you to keep it to yourself. Man-to-man. Okay?"

I started to speak, then didn't.

"Yes, sir," I said.

When I got to the studio door again, I felt like I might throw up. When I looked up, Mr. Froken was standing there.

"Mr. Froken," I said. "What am I going to do?"

He looked at me for a long time. "Nothing, Cappy." I guess I must have looked funny. He put a hand on my shoulder. "This is not your trouble," he said. "It's mine—and Mrs. Emma's. Do one thing for me?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"If he starts to drink, call me. Sometimes he can't stop." Then he went on while I got into the car.

Everything was terrible after that. Mr. Prestwick was living down at Kitty Lamson's house and didn't come home at all. Mrs. Emma looked sick and thin, and wouldn't eat, even when Rosa tried to make her. Rosa looked at me most of the time like I was some kind of a traitor. I brought things down to Mr. Prestwick when he asked me and drove him to work until the picture was finished. Even then he stayed away. All the time Mrs. Emma got thinner and thinner. Then the papers began to write about it, every day some dirty little thing. Reporters called Mrs. Emma. It was a rotten time. Then the phone call came for me. I took it in the kitchen. It was that Kitty Lamson. She was sort of whispering, but very serious.

"Cappy," she said. "This is Miss Lamson. Better get down here. Mr. Prestwick needs you right away."

I didn't like the way her voice sounded, so I ran to the car and drove out of the yard without telling anyone. When I got to the beach house, Miss Lamson let me in. She was

sort of laughing and sly in spite of being very pretty, and I could see that she had drunk a lot. She could barely walk, and just pointed inside. I went into the living room looking for Mr. Prestwick, then onto the porch. The house was way up on a cliff, over the ocean, on the Palisades, and had a big cement porch all across the back, with a stairway going to the beach, crisscrossing right down the cliff. All the rooms faced on the porch and when I turned back I could see Mr. Prestwick in the one next to the living room. He was on a chair, his head down and hanging. I ran in. She was there behind me, giggly and horrible.

"Take him home, Cappy," she said. "He's a mess. A real mess." Then she laughed. Mr. Prestwick looked sort of grey and his breath was making funny noises. I grabbed him up and laid him on the sofa. Then I ran to the phone and called Mr. Froken. He got right on the phone and said to hold everything till he got there. Miss Lamson had gone into the other room. I could hear her in there playing some loud music on the phonograph. I took Mr. Prestwick's tie off and washed his face. His hands were cold. I rubbed them. I was still working on him when Mr. Froken came. He took a look at him, with his face sort of hard and set. "Let him sleep a little, Cappy," he said. "Then we'll put him in a hospital. I know a place." We went out to the other room. She was still there, still with the crazy music on the phonograph. She was dancing, whirling around and around without her shoes on. Mr. Froken crossed over to the phonograph and shut it off. She stopped like a cat, still laughing. Mr. Froken just stood there, his hands shaking.

"You filth!" he said.

She just stood there looking at him, then she slapped his face. He stood, without moving. Then she spat, right in his face. I grabbed her and put her down on a chair. Mr. Froken took his handkerchief out and wiped his face. He let the handkerchief slip to the floor and walked away from her out on the porch. I watched her for a minute. I was afraid to leave her. Then she got up and began to dance again, wild, round and round the room. I looked out at Mr. Froken. He was way out by the stairway, down to the beach. She was running the whole length of the room,

back and forth, under her breath humming music. When she ran out on the porch I ran between her and Mr. Froken. Then I saw him. He was all bent over and holding on to the top of the stair rail. He looked up at me.

"Cappy—" he said. "Cappy." Then he fell. I ran for the rail. He was maybe twenty steps down, all crumpled up. I went to him. I held him in my arms. Mr. Froken was dead. I wished it was me. I loved Mr. Froken.

After a while I carried him back up the stairs. He was light, like a little boy. She was standing there her hand on her mouth. I went by her and put Mr. Froken down on the sofa in the living room. I called on the telephone for the ambulance, then just stood there, looking at Mr. Froken. The ambulance came, and two fellows from the Police Department a little later. They took Mr. Froken away. Miss Lamson sat in a chair, not saying a word, just kind of shaking her head while the policemen looked around the room. They asked me who the man was in the other room and who I was. I told them. They were making notes, sort of slow about it. Then they talked to her. She sat in the chair, quiet. It was wonderful how she had changed, hardly drunk at all. She told them he fell down the stairs and that she didn't see it. She said I saw it all. Then they turned to me.

"Tell us about it, Mr. Fleers." It was the old quiet one who asked.

I sat in the chair, not saying anything for a moment, then I looked right at him.

"She pushed him," I said. "She hit him, then she pushed him when he was by the stairs. She was drunk. She hit him, then she pushed him."

"Liar," she screamed at me.

"I'll swear to it," I said.

Suddenly she was at me, clawing and scratching and screaming dirty things. They pulled her off. "That's what she did to him," I said. "She was so drunk she can't remember."

After, when they took her away, I took Mr. Prestwick home. Mrs. Emma put him to bed. Then I went down to the police station and wrote down what I had said. They

said I'd have to come back when the trial came up. I said I would, and they took down a lot of other things I told them. It wasn't really a lie. About the pushing, I mean. She did push him. She pushed us all, Mr. Prestwick, Mr. Froken, Mrs. Emma, Rosa, me—the whole family. I just pushed back a little.

Things are getting back to normal now. I can't tell you what's happened to Miss Lamson. I feel so bad about Mr. Froken, I don't even read the papers about it, and her trial hasn't come up yet. I'll bet you one thing. I'll bet she won't get off. Not after what I wrote down at the police station.

THE SAFE STREET

PAUL EIDEN

Bahrwell's two-toned-blue Continental came up the gently winding street an hour after supper. Kyle sat in the Swedish blonde armchair in the picture window, his big shoulders sagging, watching them get out of the car and come up the walk. He did not get up for the first plangent peal of the door chimes, or the fourth. The Book was closed in his hand, but his trigger finger held his place in the Psalms.

Lee Kyle came from the back of the house, her hat on, ready for church, and opened the door. Bahrwell lifted his homburg from the full head of white hair that made him look like a casting director's idea of a Senator. "Mrs. Kyle? I'm Jim Bahrwell, and this is Vic Hopper. We've got to talk to George."

The look on the woman's thin, pinched face grew even more anxious and she pulled the door wider and gestured them in. "We've got news, George," Hopper said as they came into the living room. He was a big man who carried two hundred and thirty-eight pounds. His face was broad and genial-looking, his eyes wary. "And it's all bad."

"We'd like you to stay, Mrs. Kyle," Bahrwell said. "This

affects you too." He watched her sink wordlessly onto the edge of a chair before he chose one himself. He said to Kyle's back: "The Supreme Court denied the appeal, George. That means you'll have to surrender in a week or so and begin serving your sentence with Nichols and Dickinson and the rest."

"They would not allow a plea of entrapment," Kyle said and at last turned to face them. His speech had taken on a studied, Biblical cadence in the past months. "I thought it would be so. God punishes us for the evil we do."

Surprise touched the earnest faces of the two men as they saw the change in him. Hopper, ever direct, said: "My God, George! You've lost weight!"

"F-fifty-five pounds, Mr. Hopper," Lee Kyle said piteously. "He can't eat. You've no idea what these past months have done to him!"

"And he got religion," Hopper said angrily to the room.

Bahrwell shot a commanding look at him. "A little of that never hurt any of us." He turned to Kyle. "Briefly, George, the situation is this: Vic and I have always known we couldn't beat the case. The DA has only been holding it up long enough to see what disposition the Court would make of the entrapment appeal. We were counting on that to save us."

The white-haired man jiggled his homburg in his hands. "Now we know we're licked there, too. It means jail for us, along with you and the others. We're over here today to see what can be done."

"I have been wicked," Kyle said in his new, slow, ministerial voice. "I betrayed my trust as a police officer. I took bribes from ungodly gamblers and passed them on to other police officers. I deserve to be punished."

Bahrwell shot a look at Hopper. The big man's face was flaming with rage. The huge fists balled the cloth of his trouser legs. Bahrwell shook his head at him.

His eyes above all their heads, Kyle gestured toward his wife with the hand that held his Bible. "I married a good woman. A devout woman. The daughter of an honest, God-fearing man who never took a penny of tainted money. He raised eight children on the salary of a police lieutenant.

They lived in poverty, but God made His countenance to shine upon them. I have brought her and him to shame and humiliation."

"George, Vic and I have wives and families," Bahrwell said. "We do nothing but accept bets on the horses and numbers from people who *want* to gamble. We provide a service to them. If we deserve to go to jail, half of the people in this city should go with us."

Kyle bowed his neck and glared at the white-haired man with burning eyes. "You and they must make your own peace with the Lord. As for me, I shall deliver myself into the hands of His servants, and I shall be cleansed again."

A silence fell on the sunken, gleamingly expensive living room. Finally, Bahrwell turned to Lee Kyle. "You understand, don't you Mrs. Kyle, that even if your husband doesn't testify against us in the trial on this next indictment that we, and he with us, will be convicted?"

The thin woman nodded, chewing a bloodless lip, her eyes darting from man to man fearfully. "He was the go-between," Bahrwell said. "Captain Burckhardt never got a bribe directly from us, the way he did with Nichols and Dickinson. He never got our voices on that damn little tape recorder of his. But the good Captain does have George's voice, naming us as bribers. Neither George, or anyone else, can controvert that evidence. The only thing that can save us now is that George not be at that trial. With him out of the way, the indictment can't possibly be prosecuted."

Mrs. Kyle gasped and shrank back in the chair.

"No, no!" Bahrwell said hurriedly. "You mistake my meaning, Mrs. Kyle. We're not gangsters—we're businessmen." He smiled winningly, letting a chuckle come out. "We don't look like gangsters, do we? All we have in mind is that George disappear."

Bahrwell waited patiently, for a long time, while the woman thought about it. "You mean become a fugitive?" she asked at length. Bahrwell nodded. "But what kind of a life would that be for him?" she wailed. "And for me?"

"It could be a much better life than what's in store for you this way," Bahrwell said. "We're prepared to see to

that." He leaned forward to touch the woman's trembling hands. "Listen to me. You owe seventeen thousand dollars on the mortgage for this home." Bahrwell smiled. "We've done some checking, you see. You can never hope to pay it off. You'll lose this home, most of the money you've put into it, and all this lovely furniture."

Bahrwell's eyes held her gently. "What would become of you with George in prison, Mrs. Kyle?"

"We—we've talked about that," Lee Kyle said. "I could always support myself. I worked for eleven years as a legal secretary. I could go back. I could make very good money." Her colorless lips began to tremble. "But I could never hope to keep the house, unless it was paid up."

The tears came then, and she bent her head. Bahrwell watched the foolish straw hat bobbing with her sobs and turned to look at Kyle. The gaunt man's eyes were on the limp leather Bible in his hands.

Bahrwell stood and crossed to the woman slumped in the chair. Hat in hand, he patted the thin back until the sobbing stopped. "It doesn't have to be that way, Mrs. Kyle. George could go away on a little vacation until it's time to surrender himself—and *just not come back.*"

The woman was looking up at him, now, her eyes swimming, the pinched nose red. "He hasn't done anything terrible," Bahrwell said. "He doesn't really deserve jail. And if he does go away, Vic and I are prepared to pay off the outstanding debt on this house in one lump sum. In a short while, you could sell out quietly and join him wherever he has begun his new life. You could buy another house, just like this."

Mrs. Kyle's eyes went past him to her husband. While Bahrwell watched, her gaze went hopelessly on out to the serpentine street beyond the picture window. The street was laid out in twisting curves to slow traffic and safeguard children. The Kyles had no children, but they had had three years in a forty-thousand dollar home on this scientifically safe street.

"George?" she asked quietly, her voice a quavering prayer in the room. "George, dear? It's up to you—whatever you say."

Kyle raised his hollow fanatic's eyes. "I am sorry, Lee. But I have done evil. The innocent must suffer along with the guilty."

Kyle's wife broke then, crying in muffled sobs, bent almost double, grinding her eyes against the thin, bony knuckles on her knees. Hopper leapt to his feet with a profane roar. "You phony creep, Kyle!" His big voice filled the house. Bahrwell moved quickly to him, his arm up warningly.

"I knew you for a rat the first time I saw you!" Hopper shouted. His big hands were opening and closing menacingly at his sides as Bahrwell leaned against him.

Kyle's martyr's head came up. His glowing face drank the abuse like parched soil sponging rain. "Heap contumely on me, sinner!"

"And this Christ act doesn't fool me, either," Hopper bellowed. Bahrwell was pulling him toward the door, his handsome face worried and angry. "I remember you a year ago," Hopper shouted down into Kyle's attentive face. "It was Good-Time Georgie, then. Fat and saucy, making more money than you ever saw before, chasing every tomato in town. And I remember what you said when the trouble broke!"

Hopper shook Bahrwell off with a shrug of his shoulders. His huge chest swelled as he fought his anger. " 'I'll never let you boys down,' you said. 'I know who my friends are! I swear it on my mother, Vic!' "

Hopper took a step toward Kyle, heedless of Bahrwell straining against his arms. He bent over Kyle and spat into his face. Kyle smiled gently as the mucous ran down the hollow of his emaciated cheek.

Hopper straightened and dragged a shuddering breath into his lungs. His foot resting on the single step up to the foyer, he pointed a thick quivering finger at Kyle. "That's something I learned when I was a kid, Kyle! A real man tells the truth to his friends and let's it go at that, *because he respects himself!* They can believe him or they can go to hell. When a guy swears something on his mother, or his kids, he's lying to you! Every time!" Bahrwell had him

tightly by the arm then, leading him out the door, down to the car, the Continental.

Bahrwell sat behind the wheel, and, without starting the car, lit a cigarette. "It never does any damn good to get emotional," he said.

Hopper, beside him, was still shaking with rage. "Who does he think he's fooling with that phony act?"

"There's nothing phony about it," Bahrwell said bitterly, his eyes going over the street. "Kyle's got religion from here on in. He's converted."

"You're crazy, too, he was never like that."

"If you'd read something beside a racing form once in a while, you'd recognize what you just saw. And watch your mouth." Bahrwell blew out a stream of cigarette smoke. "Kyle showed us the whole conversion syndrome—prolonged anxiety, physical debilitation, guilt feeling about what he's done to his wife. And, of course, she's the ever-present religious stimulus." Bahrwell shook his head. "You don't have to be Sigmund Freud to see it. Kyle got the whole works in the past year."

"Yeah, yeah," Hopper said. "But I'm not going to jail because some Jesus stiff won't play ball." He looked directly into Bahrwell's eyes. "I'm not that much of a big-shot businessman."

Bahrwell smiled derisively. "You're going to have him shot." He jerked his head savagely. "Take a look across the street." He waited until Hopper's eyes found the car with the two cigarette coals burning behind the windshield. "And there'll be a couple more around in back. All night long, until the day shift comes on."

He snapped his cigarette out the window and ground the starter into life. "The DA's no fool. He had them out there as soon as he got the word from Washington. They'll be there until Kyle is safely locked up."

Hopper slammed his big fist down on his knee. "I tell you, I'm not going to jail."

"We're not dead yet, Vic," Bahrwell said.

"Yeah," the big man said. His eyes began to light. "He can still change his mind. He's got five years hanging over him already, and seventeen G's is a lot of money." Hopper

lifted his head. "We're not quitting yet. Anything can happen. Maybe he'll die in his sleep—he looks bad."

"Or commit suicide," Bahrwell said.

It was a little more than three months before they came back to the house again. A strong wind was blowing over the handsome houses, and a thin powdering of snow swirled in the curved street. The collars of their topcoats were turned up when they got out of the car.

"It's wrong," Hopper said stubbornly as they started up the walk. "Why pay *her* off?"

"Quit crying," Bahrwell told him. "The money was already set aside for them. We give it to her and we make her happy. There's no telling what she might be able to prove."

Kyle's widow opened the door at the first peal of the chimes, and let them in. Their faces were red with cold; Bahrwell's handsome and benevolent, Hopper's sulky and scowling.

"It's been a long time, Mrs. Kyle," Bahrwell told her, pulling off his homburg. "We should have been here sooner to offer our condolences, but—" He shrugged and smiled slightly. "What with the publicity and all linking our names to George's, we thought it best for you that we didn't attend the funeral. I trust the flowers arrived?"

Lee Kyle nodded, her chin moving a bare quarter of an inch, as though she feared any distraction from her anxious, hopeful study of Bahrwell's face. "Can I—can I offer you some coffee?"

"No. No, thank you very much." Bahrwell smiled down into the pinched, bloodless, pathetic face.

"We have an appointment on the other side of town," Hopper told her angrily. "We're late already."

"That's right," Bahrwell said. He studied the perfection of his manicure for a moment. "Mrs. Kyle. During his last days, George and Vic and I had our difficulties. But there was nothing, now that he's gone, which we will let spoil our memory of an old and dear friend."

Bahrwell withdrew a long manila envelope from the inner pocket of his cashmere raglan. He placed it in Lee Kyle's trembling hand. Hopper moved his feet angrily. "Mr. Hopper and I intend to see that his widow does not

suffer unduly from his untimely passing." Bahrwell patted the thin shoulder. "As promised." he said.

Lee Kyle clutched the envelope to her bony chest and sank onto a chair, a tiny moan coming from her lips. "We'll let ourselves out," Bahrwell told her. Hopper followed him with his chin drawn in and his shoulders rigid. In the foyer, he spun around. "Mrs. Kyle!"

Her head came up. "Yes?"

Hopper grinned cruelly. "Was it really suicide that night, after we left?" He cocked his head. "Didn't you help him out a little?"

The woman's face dissolved in a scream, and she bent double in the chair as they had seen her once before. Bahrwell seized Hopper's arm and whirled the big man around. He struck his chest with both stiff arms, hurling him back. "Shut up! Get out to the car!"

It took him a quarter of an hour to calm her down. After he had finally stopped her tears and she began to tell Bahrwell over and over what a kind man he was, he felt it safe to leave her. She walked with him to the door.

"It was just the way you read it in the newspapers, Mr. Bahrwell," she told him. "If I had only been awake, to stop him! I would rather see George in prison than dead!"

Bahrwell put the homburg neatly on his white head, and, standing on the flagstone walk, said: "You must try to forget all that, Mrs. Kyle. And try to forgive Hopper. He's a crude, ignorant man."

He turned down the walk to the car. "I swear it's true," she called after him. "I swear it on my mother's grave."

NO ONE ON THE LINE

ROBERT ARTHUR

Over the top of his *Wall Street Journal,* Harvey Benson watched his wife. She was reading—at least, she was holding a book. But she hadn't turned a page in the last five minutes.

He lowered his paper. "Linda, that a good book you're reading?" he asked.

Linda looked up with a little start. "Oh yes, it's very exciting. It's the new murder mystery everyone is talking about." She held it up so that he could see the jacket—a black dagger silhouetted against a crimson background. "You'd like it."

"I would have guessed it was rather dull—" Harvey tapped ash from his cigar—"from the way you've been looking at the same page all these minutes."

"Oh, was I? I must have been woolgathering."

Had she flushed, as she spoke? Many women were good liars, Harvey reflected, but Linda was not one of them. As she sat there, her fair hair framed against the shade of the lighted lamp, she looked very lovely. And she also looked like a woman in love. But not with him, he thought, feeling a growing anger. In five years of marriage, never with him.

"It's too bad about your poker game tonight, Harvey," Linda said. "I know how you look forward to your Wednesday evening poker parties." She smiled. "Probably because you always win."

"Just as well it fell through," he told her. Actually, it hadn't. He had decided to stay home. The unexpected announcement, after dinner, that he wasn't going out that night had seemed to disturb her. Or had he just imagined that? "I'm afraid I've been neglecting you."

"Of course you haven't, dear," Linda said. "A man owns his own business, he often has to work late."

And maybe that's been a mistake on my part was Harvey's unspoken retort. Just then the phone rang. He had been expecting it to ring. For a big man, he moved fast. He had reached the phone almost before Linda could get to her feet.

"I'll answer it, Harvey—" she began, and saw he already had it.

"It may be my broker," he said over his shoulder, and into the receiver he said, "Hello?"

Linda sank slowly back into her chair. Harvey waited a moment and said "Hello!" again. The line remained quiet

except for a slight humming. After a long moment he said "Hello," once more and then there was a clicking sound and he hung up.

"Funny," he said. "No one on the line."

"How strange." Linda picked up her book and turned the page. "Maybe the phone's out of order."

"No, it can't be that," Harvey said. "I heard it click as someone hung up. Just like the other morning when I was late leaving for the office. Well, maybe it was a wrong number." He yawned slightly. "What do you say we turn in? Tomorrow may be a hard day."

The next morning at his office Harvey Benson plunged into his work as he always did, assessing the situations that confronted him and disposing of them, one after another, quickly and decisively. On the wall of his office hung a plaque of Honduras mahogany with the single word *ACT* carved in it. He despised people who were indecisive—and felt that most people were.

He had been tempted to linger at home over his coffee, to stay long after he was expected to be gone, just to see if the phone would ring again, with no one on the line when he answered it. But to do this was unnecessary. After all, Mungo had phoned to say he would report today. And he had told Mungo to report when, and only when, Mungo was certain. Obviously, Mungo was quite certain now.

Just before noon his communicator buzzed. It was his secretary, to tell him that Mr. Mungo was calling to see him.

"Ask him to wait," Harvey told her on a sudden impulse. "I'd like to see you for a moment first, Miss Woodard."

"Certainly, Mr. Benson."

His secretary entered a moment later with her notebook, a tall, bony woman with some last touch of youth and hope lingering despairingly on her face.

"Yes, sir?" she said, as she sat down.

"You won't need your book," he told her. "I just want to chat, for a moment."

She looked at him with an air of panic. "I don't understand, Mr. Benson. Is something wrong?"

It amused Harvey to see how frightened his employees became when he did anything unexpected. And he liked to

take them by surprise every so often—usually an unpleasant surprise. That kept them alert, on their toes.

"I just want to talk to you, that's all," he said pleasantly. "I don't believe we've ever talked before, as person to person, have we?"

"Why—no, sir." She still sat on the chair's edge, rigid and ill at ease.

"But then," Harvey said, "I don't know that I've ever needed a woman's advice before. Make your own decision and act on it is my motto. But now I'm going to ask your advice—as a woman, not as a secretary."

"Why, I—I'll try to be helpful if I can."

"Good." He leaned back and laced strong fingers behind his massive head. "I'm going to ask you to picture to yourself a woman, Miss Woodard—a woman who has always been practical, and, let's say, cool and self-possessed. Suddenly, this woman becomes dreamy and absentminded. She stands for minutes looking at nothing. You speak to her, and she hardly hears you. What would you deduce from that?"

"Why—I'd say she was in love," Miss Woodard said, her horsey features brightening in a blush.

"Exactly. Now suppose this woman is married. Suppose on two occasions when her husband is unexpectedly home at a time he is usually away—You're following me, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Suppose on these two occasions when her husband is unexpectedly present, the phone rings and this married woman answers and tells the calling party that he has a wrong number. What do you make of that?"

"Why, I suppose that could happen, Mr. Benson." Miss Woodard frowned a little. "I get lots of wrong numbers myself."

"To be sure. But now, Miss Woodard—" Harvey leaned forward and smiled at her, showing his teeth—"suppose on two other occasions, when the husband is also unexpectedly at home, he answers the phone and the party at the other end hangs up without speaking?"

"Why—" Miss Woodard looked severe—"it sounds like

someone trying to call the wife without the husband's knowing about it."

"Exactly. I felt I couldn't be wrong, but it's helpful to have your opinion to back me up. Thank you very much, Miss Woodard."

"Why—why, not at all, Mr. Benson, I'm very glad to be of help."

"And now send in Mr. Mungo."

A sudden flare-up of anger caused Harvey Benson to chew on his cigar. Of course Linda was in love. And just as certainly, she'd never been in love with him, her husband. Not even when he had proposed to her. But she was in love with someone now. And it was a love that somehow had to be erased, wiped out, before he could regain the cold, balanced judgment which had guided him so well all through his life.

"Well, was I right?" Harvey Benson demanded as Mungo entered the room, smiling ingratiatingly, and seated himself in the chair Miss Woodard had just vacated. "Has she been meeting one of the men whose names I gave you?"

"Yes, sir." Mungo's smirk broadened. "She has."

"Well, which one?"

"Not the one you thought most likely, Mr. Benson. Not the doctor. Mrs. Benson has been seeing the architect one."

"Arkwright? Donald Arkwright?"

"Yes, sir. I've checked on him all the way back to Cleveland, his hometown."

"Yes," Harvey said, trying to control his impatience, "Mrs. Benson comes from Cleveland, too. She knew him there. I told you that."

"Yes, sir." Mungo's smile was sly. "But you didn't tell me they went to high school together and were sweet on each other for several years. He keeps her picture in his room and there's a photo of them in the high school annual with their arms around each other. And the caption says that they're a blissful twosome."

"She never told me any of that."

"I imagine not," Mungo said. "Well, they've met several times in the last two weeks."

"They have, have they?"

"She hasn't met anyone else."

"Where'd they meet?"

"At Drover's Restaurant, for one," Mungo said. "It's true I only saw two meetings there—"

"You said several."

"Yes. But they weren't all at the restaurant. On five occasions, I followed Mrs. Benson from your home to downtown. Each time she went to Drover's Restaurant. Three times she ate alone, paid her check, then went to the rear where the ladies' lounge is. She didn't come out. Obviously, she left through another door, then went out the back of the restaurant to keep her—rendezvous."

"You didn't follow her!" Harvey exclaimed in anger.

"I can hardly be in two places at once, can I? Anyway, it stands to reason those times she slipped me she went on to meet this Arkwright someplace else. Because the other two times, he joined her right there at the restaurant and ate with her. They sat very close together and talked intimately. I was only two tables away, but I couldn't hear what they said. Both times he left first, paying the check. Mrs. Benson had some more coffee, complimented the manager on the service, then left by herself fifteen minutes later. She met him ten days ago. The other time was just last Monday."

Harvey leaned back. Yes, it was on Monday evening that Linda had acted as if she were walking on clouds. And on Tuesday morning, when Harvey had purposely lingered over his breakfast a full hour past his normal departure time, that the first phone call had come—the one he had answered to find no one on the line.

"I'm not surprised it's Arkwright," he told Mungo. "She has mentioned him a couple of times, in that light manner a woman uses to make you think someone is unimportant to her. What else have you got?"

"Well, he's phoned her five times this past month, according to the switchboard operator at his apartment house. Probably a lot more from outside phones. Naturally, she always waits for him to call her, because from where you live out at Pacific Beach, it's a toll call into the city and would show up on your phone bill. Now, if you want me

to keep following her until—"

"That won't be necessary."

"You can be sure it's him," Mungo said, rising. "If you'll excuse me for saying it, you know I've had experience in these affairs. And I could see by your wife's face when she went into that restaurant she certainly was going to see somebody she was in love with."

"You've told me what you've found out, haven't you?" To his own surprise, Harvey found he was almost shouting. "I haven't asked for the benefit of your experience."

"Yes, sir." Mungo fell back a pace. "I only meant that while we know who the man is, we haven't any evidence yet—divorce evidence, that is."

"Who said I'm looking for divorce evidence? All I wanted was the identity of the man. Now give me your report and forget the whole thing."

"Very good, Mr. Benson." Mungo edged up, dropped a folded sheaf of papers on the desk, and sidled toward the door. "I'll forget the whole thing, like you say. I haven't even made any notes in my records yet."

"Then don't."

"My bill—"

"My secretary will pay you in cash. On your way out."

"Yes, sir." Mungo eased himself out the door and was gone.

Harvey used the communicator to tell Miss Woodard to pay Mungo out of cash on hand and enter the sum against Harvey's personal expenses. Then he lit a new cigar and sat back in the chair, blowing smoke toward the ceiling. Yes, he thought, Linda was in love. A first love that had been renewed again after a chance meeting three months before. And she was now undoubtedly on the verge of telling him she wanted a divorce. Linda, he knew, would not give up easily. But there was one circumstance under which she would have to give up.

Harvey Benson thought for a moment more, then reached for the report Mungo had left. It contained Donald Arkwright's telephone numbers, both home and office.

After memorizing the numbers, he tore the report into tiny shreds and dropped them into the wastebasket. Then

he dialed on his direct line. A moment later the voice he remembered from that single meeting at the Johnson's housewarming party answered.

"Hello, Arkwright!" he boomed. "Harvey Benson speaking. Linda's husband. Listen, I happen to need an architect to give me some ideas about a property I'm thinking of developing. Any chance you could run out and look at it with me—oh, say after lunch? Good! I'll pick you up at two, then."

He hung up and sat back, puffing smoke with enormous satisfaction. The thing he had in mind was as good as done.

Harvey turned the little foreign car off the macadam road and onto the rudimentary track that ran across five hundred feet of grass-tufted soil to the edge of the cliff. Beside him, the tall young man with the sandy hair looked around eagerly. Don Arkwright had an engaging boyishness that, Harvey supposed, would appeal to women. Anyway, it appealed to Linda.

"This is the property, Mr. Benson?" he asked.

"Four hundred acres," Harvey told him, using a tone genially expansive. "A quarter mile along the clifftop, overlooking the Pacific."

He shifted the little car down into the second of its four speeds. Bill, at the garage, had suggested he take the big sedan, but he had decided on the import even though it needed washing. "Going to be dusty where I'm going, Bill," he had said.

Now, stirring up dust behind them, he headed the car toward the cliff's edge.

"Doesn't look like much now," he said. "But properly developed, it can be worth millions. My idea is a planned community, a little jewel of a spot with a superb view of the ocean."

"Sounds wonderful," Arkwright said with enthusiasm. "Provided there's an adequate water supply, of course."

"That's a problem," Harvey agreed, "but I think we can lick it. What I want now is some preliminary ideas."

He stopped the little car a dozen feet from the edge of

the cliff and they got out. Arkwright stretched and sniffed the ocean breeze. A hundred feet below them, the blue Pacific curled up on white sand studded with rocks.

"Look, over there!" Arkwright shouted. He pointed northward. "Seals are out there on the rocks! I didn't know they came this far south."

"Oh, yes." Harvey could see a score of tiny black shapes stretched out on flat rocks in the water nearly half a mile up the beach. "They used to be quite plentiful around here. I'd heard a few were back."

He used the moment to study the entire landscape to the north. There were no trees, just a jumble of rocks, and there was no sign of anyone—campers, hikers, or sunbathers. Nothing moved. He swung around. There was no traffic on the road they had left a moment earlier. South was an equally blank expanse. They could have been the two last men on earth, there in that lonely area. He had counted on this isolation.

"The spot offers wonderful opportunities," Arkwright said, as Harvey finished his survey. "Believe me, I certainly appreciate your giving me a chance to tackle the job."

"It was Linda who suggested you," Harvey said, and smiled.

"Well, it was certainly nice of her," Arkwright said. He grinned, boyishly. "I wasn't even sure she'd remember me when we met at that party. "

"Oh, she remembers you very well." Harvey's tone was sardonic. From the corner of his eye he watched a lone sedan come down the macadam road, pass them, and go on. "I could see how happy she was to see you once again. But after all, you were sweethearts back in high school."

"Well, we did have some good times together," Arkwright said. "To think twelve years have gone by. It's hard to believe." He knelt and peered over the edge of the cliff. "We might want to remove this overhang," he suggested. "Just as a precaution."

"I'm a great one for precautions," Harvey agreed, coming up behind Arkwright. "And this is one of them!"

As Arkwright straightened, Harvey put out his hands and thrust, his intention to push the younger man straight

forward and over the edge. But Arkwright was turning and so the push merely spun him around, half off balance.

"Mr. Benson!" he screamed. "What are you doing?"

"Taking precautions!" Harvey growled and drove his fist into the other man's jaw. Arkwright sagged, but grabbed Harvey's arm. Harvey jerked his arm free, planted the heel of his palm in the middle of Arkwright's chest, and pushed. Arms windmilling wildly, the architect tottered backward to the edge of the cliff.

"No!" he screamed. "For God's sake—"

Then he was gone. His cry of pain and terror gradually diminished; then it too was gone.

Harvey spun around, looking for a possible witness. The area, in all directions, was still deserted. Breathing hard, he walked forward to the edge of the cliff to peer down. Donald Arkwright lay sprawled far below on the sand and rocks. He was quite still, certainly dead.

Harvey Benson then got into the little sedan and started the motor, then with the emergency brake on, eased it into low gear. He slid out, released the brake, and the car gathered speed until it plunged over the cliff. It turned end over end in midair and came to a crashing halt a dozen feet from Arkwright's body.

Harvey made one more survey to be sure there had been no witness, however distant. Then he turned and strode toward the road. It was some time before a car came along to take him to the state police substation that lay six miles to the south.

The interview with Lieutenant Grayling—young, poised, confident—was brief. Harvey told his story with just the proper amount of distraction. He and Arkwright had driven out to inspect the property. When they were ready to leave, Arkwright had volunteered to turn the car around. Apparently unfamiliar with the four-speed shift of the foreign car, he had put it into forward instead of reverse. Panicking, he had scrambled out, instead of stopping the car, and he and the car had gone over the cliff side by side, simultaneously.

"Nobody else saw the accident?" Grayling asked, taking notes.

Harvey shook his head. "It's a very isolated spot. It was a long time before a car even came by to give me a lift. I didn't try to get down to the beach—poor Arkwright was obviously dead."

"I see." Grayling made another note. "There's a Boy Scout camp about two miles north of that spot. Thought some of the kids might have been out hiking."

But they hadn't. Harvey was quite certain of that. Grayling put away his notes and reached for the phone.

"We'll send men out for the body," he said. "It may take some time—those cliffs are steep and rugged. Do you want to wait?"

Harvey mopped his face. "Naturally, I'm a bit shaken up," he said. "I'd like to go home. Unless there's something I can do—"

"Oh, no," Grayling said. "Nothing at all. I have your address. If I need any more information, I'll phone you. And there will be the inquest, of course."

"Of course," Harvey said. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Now if you could call me a cab—"

It was four-thirty when the cab dropped Harvey off at his home—a good hour and a half before his usual arrival time. In the patio arranging some flowers, Linda looked startled when he strode in.

"Why, Harvey," she said, "you're home early."

"Obviously," he replied. He felt in a savage good humor. He went to the cellarette, got out a bottle of Scotch, and poured himself a liberal two fingers. "Had an interesting experience today," he said, after the first swallow. "Very interesting, Linda."

"Interesting?" she asked, puzzled.

"I met your boy friend."

Her hands, busy with the flowers, stopped abruptly. A flush mounted from her throat to her cheeks.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Oh, come now, Linda," he said with a chuckle. "Surely you don't think you've deceived me these past few weeks. The way you were mooning around, even an idiot would have known you were in love. And then those phone calls

—those wrong numbers and these last two times when I answered and there was no one on the line—good Lord, don't you suppose I guessed long ago what was going on?"

"Nothing has been 'going on,' " she said, quietly, calmly. "But it's true, Harvey. I am in love. I was going to tell you tonight. Harvey, I want a divorce."

He took a long swallow of the whiskey this time and laughed.

"Divorce, my dear? On what grounds?"

"Because I'm in love with someone else. I never was in love with you. You knew that, Harvey. You felt that I'd eventually come to love you, and I tried, but it never happened. Now—"

"Now you're a little mixed up, my dear. And that happens to many women. But you'll get over this love of yours. And it should be easier knowing your boy friend is dead."

"Dead?" Her hands went to her face. "Dead? You think I believe you? You're just trying to torture me!"

"Not at all. This morning I called him. Made an appointment—business, I told him. Drove him out to that property I own at Cliffside. We got out of the car—he fell over. Killed instantly."

"Are you telling me—that you killed him?"

"Certainly not. A man would be a damn fool to say a thing like that—even," he added slyly, "if it were true. The car went over and he went over. Both of them smashed—"

"You killed him!"

"You're upset, Linda, so I'll just overlook what you're saying."

"You killed him, didn't you?"

"Just think of me as a man who protects what belongs to him."

"And you think I belong to you! Why, you do. That's just what you do think."

She ran off the patio and into her room. He heard the door slammed and locked. He followed without hurry and knocked.

"Linda," he called. Inside he heard bureau drawers being opened—something dragged. "Linda."

"I'm leaving you, Harvey." Her voice was muffled. "I'm going as soon as I can pack a bag."

"Now don't be foolish, Linda," he said.

When she didn't answer, he walked back into the patio and lit a cigar. Her purse was lying on a table. He opened it and took out the twenty-three dollars it contained. She couldn't go far without money and she had no checking account. She would come to her senses quickly.

He had smoked half the cigar before she came out. She was wearing a suit and carrying an overnight bag. She stopped at the entrance to the patio.

"I just want my purse," she said. "I'll send for the rest of my things."

"You're upset," he told her. "Where will you go? You have no money. I just found out you don't even have cab fare."

She snatched up her purse and looked in it, going white.

"You *are* a monster!" she said, trembling with anger. "I'll walk. I'll sleep in the street if I have to. But first of all I'm going to the police to tell them you killed him."

"You'll make a fool of yourself. It was an accident and no one will ever prove it wasn't."

"I know you're terribly, terribly clever. But don't think that will stop me from trying."

Sudden anger stirred him. He stepped forward and grabbed her by the arms.

"Don't be a fool, Linda! Get it through your head that Donald Arkwright is dead. It was an accident, and no one is going to listen to anything you say to the contrary."

The shock in her face made him release her.

"Donald Arkwright?" she gasped. "You've killed—Don Arkwright?"

"I didn't say that. I said he's dead. Now come to your senses, Linda, and unpack that bag. You know you've no one to turn to."

But she was staring at him in blank astonishment. "Why, Donald meant nothing to me," she said.

"What do you mean, he meant nothing to you?"

"He was just an old friend who was lonely and phoned me a few times. I let him take me to lunch sometimes.

When you mentioned the restaurant, I thought you really knew."

All Harvey could do was stare at her.

"The reason I always went to Drover's Restaurant is because it gave me a chance to see the man I am in love with. He's the manager there. And now I'm going to him."

She grabbed up her bag, turned, ran to the door and out. He would have followed, but the ringing of the phone stopped him. Almost with a sense of premonition, he snatched up the receiver.

"Hello!" he yelled. "Hello!" He waited, a long, long moment, then said it again. "Hello?"

But there was no one on the line.

Harvey Benson was half drunk when Lieutenant Grayling arrived, half an hour later, with two city detectives. There had been, Grayling told him, witnesses after all. In the jumble of rocks eight hundred yards north of where he had killed Arkwright, a scoutmaster and five Boy Scouts had been hidden, watching the seals playing on the rocks in the water below. When Harvey and Arkwright had arrived, they had turned their glasses curiously on them, and through binoculars had seen the whole thing.

Six witnesses—

ANTIQUE

HAL ELLSON

Curtains, dusty and fragile with age, darkened the somber rooms of the house. The climate was glacial. Only the kitchen contained any warmth at all. Lena sat in that retreat. Age had watered her eyes and dimmed their luster, her jowls sagged, all the flesh on her frame conceded to the same terrible affliction. Picked clean of the last shred of meat, a few chicken bones lay on her plate. A glass of whiskey stood beside them. Tomorrow the soup pot would claim the bones, the whiskey was to warm her now.

She eyed it, lifted the glass, emptied it quickly, and came alert to the footsteps on the stairs. Ray, her dead sister's husband, was coming down. Quickly she put the whiskey glass in the closet and sat again as the door opened. Behind her footsteps sounded in the foyer.

He doesn't knock any more, she thought, resenting this familiarity. He entered the kitchen, greeted her. She looked up and nodded, glad for his company now that he was here. He took a chair at the opposite end of the table and sent her a searching look. She'd been drinking again, and there was no whiskey for him. He nodded to the bones on the plate, noting how she'd stripped them clean, and remarked that she was eating a late lunch, intimating a slight rebuke.

"I didn't think you were coming," she said.

"Ah, I wouldn't disappoint you, but I got to thinking upstairs that I've been making a pest of myself."

"But I enjoy your company," said Lena. "Oh, the way this house once was, all the visitors, parties, wonderful times. It's not been the same since Philip died."

"True," Roy admitted, thinking of her husband. It was ten years since he'd passed on, and Lena had aged frightfully, but worse were her ways, particularly with money. A wonder she can spare the beer, he told himself, and caught her gaze.

"A penny for your thoughts?" she said.

He shrugged the question off, complained of the chill in the house and wondered how she stood it. The stove had gone out because the coal was worthless, she said, like everything new. When he tried to explain that all coal was old, she ignored him and vehemently attacked the present. It was an age of cheapness and shoddiness.

He smiled. She didn't understand. Once more he tried to explain the genesis and nature of coal. The attempt was futile. She cut him off, and he surrendered to her ignorance and senility. "All right. I won't dispute the point," he said. "But are you going to sit here and freeze?"

She glanced at the stove and decided it was too much bother to start a fire. They could sit in the dining room. "Another icebox," he countered.

She agreed to light the oil stove, and led him to the dining room. Once there, Ray gazed at the room, which was a veritable museum crowded with antiques, many of them valuable. More were in the parlor, and packed away in the cellar. Collecting dust, he thought, nodding.

Lena caught this and asked him what was wrong. "Nothing," he lied. "I was just looking at your antiques."

"There's so many. I can't take care of them all. I haven't the strength any more. Ah, it's a shame to neglect such beautiful things, so sad. But what else can I do?"

"Couldn't you sell them? You'd make it a lot easier for yourself," he suggested, and she looked at him aghast. Everything that belonged here would remain. As for the money, she wasn't in need of it.

Which was true. He glanced at the huge diamonds sparkling on her fingers. She saw the look in his eye and qualified her statement. She wasn't in need, but neither was she rich. It was an old defense.

The old hag. Who does she think she's fooling? And, damn it, where's the beer? To wait like this irritated him, but she wasn't to be hurried. She'd had her whiskey already and her blood ran warm, even if her mind was no longer alert. Whiskey and senility made a bad mixture. He saw her watching him again.

She invited him to a glass of beer, laughed when he quickly accepted, and arose from her chair, a bit unsteady on her thin wasted legs. He didn't miss that. Probably she'd been hitting the bottle all morning. He watched her to the kitchen, then got to his feet and crossed the room to a shadowed corner. A group of figurines stood on a rack. There was no time for selection. He picked the nearest and dropped it in his pocket.

Footsteps warned him, the chair he'd been sitting in was too distant. He moved to the sideboard where crystal sparkled, two tall decanters of beautiful design, one amber, the other a dark rich red.

Lena entered the room with a bottle and two glasses. She set the glasses on the table, filled them and looked at Roy. "I've been admiring your decanters," he said.

She sat and nodded. "They're beautiful. You don't see

anything like them any more, do you?"

"Hardly." He returned to his chair, and she reached for her glass. "Philip gave them to me when we were first married," she sighed. "In the old days they were always filled with the best sherry, the finest port."

"No one to speak of drinks sherry or port any more," said Roy, lifting his glass of beer and saluting Lena. She toasted to the old days, and they drank. Later, she raised her dress, took a key from a petticoat pocket and asked if he wanted another bottle. He didn't mind in the least, and she gave him the key that was for the cellar door. "You'll find the beer in the back. I don't trust myself on the stairs of late," she said.

He promised to be up in a jiffy and headed for the cellar door, still amazed that she'd given him the key. It was proof she was doddering. He smiled to himself, paused at the bottom of the cellar stairs, took the figurine from his pocket and examined it. Next, he examined the cellar. Two bins, both locked, contained heaven knew what. A half dozen trunks lined a wall, old furniture, oil lamps, dishware, glasses, statues, items of every description filled every available inch of space.

In the rear, a door stood ajar. He entered a bin and row after row of dusty bottles met his eye. He took two and went back upstairs. "I thought you lost yourself," Lena said as he entered the dining room.

"I almost did. How do you find your way down there with all that junk?"

"It may be dusty, but it's hardly junk. All my best things are there."

"If they are, they must be rotting away."

"No more than I am," Lena said with a laugh. "But that's enough about them. Pour me a glass."

He obliged. They soon finished the bottle, opened the second and topped it off. By this time the room had grown warm, and Roy had had his fill. He got to his feet, said he was leaving. Lena merely nodded, but when he turned to the door, she asked for her key. Senile or not, he knew one thing, she wasn't giving him free access to the cellar.

Still, he'd fooled her, for the figurine was still in his

pocket. Off he went to an antique dealer named O'Mara. Once in the shop, he set the figurine on a counter and asked for an offer. O'Mara examined it and offered ten dollars.

"Are you crazy, man? It's worth a good deal more," said Roy, but he was talking. He had no idea of the figurine's worth. O'Mara admitted it was a beautiful piece, and raised his offer to fifteen. Roy demanded twenty, but conceded when O'Mara dropped three crisp fives on the counter.

Out he went with the money clasped tight in his fist. It wasn't much, but he was out of work at the moment. In fact, it was something he avoided whenever possible, so the money was a windfall and there was more to come with so many antiques in Lena's house.

Two days later he called on her again. She was eating in the kitchen and offered him nothing. When she finished, they went into the dining room. He wasn't his usual self, his cockiness had deserted him and he waited nervously for her to mention the figurine. When she failed to, he realized she didn't know what she owned and he felt lifted. She gave him the key to bring up some beer from the cellar.

Several hours later he left, with another figurine tucked in a pocket. Straight as an arrow he went to O'Mara's shop and this time was disappointed. O'Mara offered him five for the figurine, raised it to ten, and ended the dickering. "It's not worth a cent more," he explained. "I'm going overboard."

"Sure, you are," said Roy, but he accepted the money and stalked toward the door.

The next day he dropped in on Lena, without any qualms. As usual, she was in the kitchen and looking morose. This didn't disturb him. "The fire out?" he said as she looked up with grey, watery eyes. "Good heavens, don't be afraid to spend a little on the heat. No wonder you look so miserable."

"The heat's the least of my worries," she answered, drawing her shawl tighter.

"Worries? You've had everything and got everything. What more could you want?"

She stared at him as if she hadn't heard, arose from the

table, entered the dining room and sat in her ancient rocker.

"You're not putting the heater on?" he asked.

"Light it for me. I don't feel well."

He obliged and looked up with a grin on his liquor-flushed face. Lena's was ashen. "What is it?" he said. "Go on, say it. Sure, I've been drinking."

"That's your business, and it does no harm. But that's not what's on my mind. Two of my figurines are gone," she said, pointing across the room.

With the drinks in him he wasn't upset. "Someone took them? Come on, Lena. That's not so. You probably misplaced them. With all the stuff you have in this house, it's a wonder you know where anything is."

"But I do know. Nothing's been moved in years and I know exactly where everything is."

Roy nodded, face serious, a bit nervous, but still brazen. "Well, I'm your best visitor. Maybe I took them."

She shook her head. "Not you, Roy. I hope you don't think I'd put it on you?"

"Of course not," he said, grinning again. "But I've a good idea what happened."

Unable to follow, Lena frowned and asked him to explain. He suggested a beer first. She was in no mood, but it was part of the ritual. She handed him the key to the cellar and down he went for a bottle. Returning, he poured two glasses and said, "I better not bring it up. You wouldn't want to hear it from me so I'll be quiet."

His play only roused her curiosity. "If you have something to say, say it," she told him.

He sighed deliberately. "All right. Perhaps it's for the best. You're getting on. You were eighty last month, and your mind isn't so sharp. You forget little things. Then the important things."

Her nostrils flared. "If you're thinking I'm beginning to dodder, you've another think coming," she snapped.

He smiled and told her not to be angry, that, if one lived long enough, this happened. Not to her, she answered, but a strange look came into her eyes. She was frightened.

He noticed and said, "You don't want to admit it but you did forget where you put those figurines." He patted her

shoulder. "No need to worry. They're somewhere in the house, aren't they?"

With both fear and confusion in her eyes, she stared at him and finally nodded. "I suppose I did misplace them," she said in a voice barely above a whisper.

"There, you see. It's nothing to be bothered about. You'll run into them in a closet or trunk."

"And suppose I don't?" Her helplessness made him smile. Everything was working as he'd wanted it. "Don't worry. Better have some more beer," he urged her. "It'll do you good."

When she agreed, he went down to the cellar, examined it, and discovered a trunk with an enormous lock. His heart pounded. This was where she kept the real stuff, he decided, and tried the lock. Its strength added to his conviction. Smiling, he brought up four bottles of beer, entered the dining room, and found Lena with her head bowed. "Ah, now, this'll straighten you," he said, opening the first bottle.

It took an hour to do away with the four quart bottles. By that time, what with the liquor he'd had before dropping in, Roy was drunk but alert enough to know what he was doing. As for Lena, she was in no condition to leave her rocker; her eyes were closing.

"Better sleep," he suggested, and she nodded. Her chin fell to her chest, her breath came in heavy rasps.

"I'm going now, Lena."

No answer. He grinned and stood up, with the key to the cellar in his pocket, but he needed one for the trunk. A ring of keys hung in the kitchen. He took them and left, but didn't go directly to the cellar. Too wise for that, he went upstairs, waited and came down.

There was no trouble getting into the cellar. The trunk was another matter. None of the keys would fit the lock. Again and again he tried them, then went to the bin where the beer was kept. Greedily he emptied a bottle, flung the useless keys aside, and struck a huge jug. The sound made him flinch. He waited, listening for footsteps. The house remained silent. He began to search the cellar and finally found a hammer.

Swaying, he returned to the trunk and took the lock in his palm, for it was an old trick that he knew, to strike a lock sharply and spring it without damaging it so that it could be snapped shut again, with no one the wiser. A blow of the hammer accomplished nothing. Again he struck; the lock stayed closed. He listened now, heard nothing. His whole body was quaking. He raised the hammer, struck again, and the lock sprang open.

Quickly he removed it, lifted the top, and his jaw dropped. The trunk was empty. He swore, and a sound made him turn. There stood Lena, eyes grey and watery, face ashen, flesh sagging. Swaying, he stared at her, then said, "What do you want, you old witch?"

Softly she asked for her keys. "When you let me have the money you've hidden and the diamonds Philip left you," he said. Quietly she repeated herself, then suddenly she pushed him and over he toppled into the trunk, with his legs sticking out. As he tried to rise, she lifted the bottle he'd emptied and smashed him over the head. He groaned and fell back, with his legs still out of the trunk. She tucked them in, closed the lid, snapped the lock, and listened.

Not a sound from the trunk, the whole house seemed terribly empty and silent. She blinked her grey, watery eyes and appeared in a daze, but finally she moved. Her eyes brightened, jowls trembled as she bent to the trunk. Her voice was only a whisper, but there was anger in it. "You dirty ungrateful whelp. You thief," she said. "You can come out when you tell what you did with my two figurines."

When he didn't reply, she mumbled, "You'll stay there till you find your tongue," and went to the bin where she kept her beer. With a bottle clutched in her hands, she went upstairs, poured for herself, and sat down in her rocker.

Grey light penetrated the dusty curtains, the pale gold liquid in the glass seemed tarnished. She watched the bubbles rising, finally picked up the glass and set it down. Again the house seemed terribly empty and silent. Ah, it's not good to be drinking alone. Where's Roy? she wondered. He ought to be here by now.

SUSPICION IS NOT ENOUGH

RICHARD HARDWICK

The river stretched ahead of us, smooth as a waxed tabletop, as the first rays of the morning sun began to sift through the oaks along the high ground. The outboard knifed across the water, rocking the perfectly reflected images of the shore in its wake and bobbing an occasional gallon jug, marking a submerged crab trap.

"You think he'll be there, Dan?" I shouted over the sound of the motor. "He might be out tending traps."

"We'll find him. No rush," was Dan's reply.

It occurred to me that was a strange attitude for a man in Dan Peavy's position to take. Dan had been sheriff of Guale County for so many years, most of the citizenry under the age of thirty thought Sheriff Peavy was one word. But something was happening this year. It was election year, and Dan had some mighty formidable opposition in the person of young Clay Blalock. Blalock had backing, and a lot of time and money was going into the campaign to pry Dan Peavy out of office. It seemed to me that Dan was helping the opposition more than he was helping himself. We couldn't get him to make a fight out of it. Part of the reason was stubbornness. He said, "If the people around here don't know by now what kind of a job I can do, getting out on street corners telling them ain't going to help." Which, in short, shows Dan as more a man of action than words.

That's why Dan and I—I'm Pete Miller, deputy—were going up the Turtle River that morning, instead of going around town shaking hands and patting babies. Judd Trawick, who operated a boat and bait place on the causeway, had disappeared a few days before, and we had gotten a tip that he and Harry Bixler had had a little trouble the day before Trawick turned up missing. We were on our way to Bixler's to ask him some questions.

Harry Bixler was a crab fisherman and just about as peculiar a duck as you'd find, which fact didn't put him in a class too far apart in our county. One of his peculiarities was that he lived alone on a tiny hummock island in the big marsh out past Kenston Point. He was tight. Some folks said he was too tight even to have a dog keep him company out there. Bixler was the sort of man who couldn't stand seeing anything—regardless of how insignificant it was—go to waste. He was a two-legged pack rat. Things he found floating in the rivers while he was tending his crab traps, he'd haul into the boat and take back to his hummock island. Things he'd find on beaches—driftwood, old crates, scrap metal, anything. But he lived alone and seldom bothered anyone, so he had a right to be just as peculiar as he pleased.

Bixler was our only lead, so we were following up on it. Dan and I didn't talk much the rest of the way to Bixler's, what with having to shout over the motor. I sat at the motor, steering the boat along the winding river. Dan sat on the middle seat, hunched over as if he was thinking, his gray hair blowing and a cigarette hanging from between his lips. In the years I had been Dan's deputy, I had grown to respect him. He was a dedicated man, which is often a hard thing for a man in political office to be. The job to be done was more important to Dan Peavy than his being the man to do it. Public or private opinion held no sway over him, as long as he was certain he was right.

We rounded Kenston Point and out ahead of us lay the miles-wide marsh, stretching out to the strips of ocean beach on our right, and the mainland far off to our left. It was dotted with hummocks, some of them of considerable size.

I turned up the creek that went to Bixler's place, and a couple of minutes later we were pulling in to the ramshackle dock. The tiny hummock, in addition to the dock, held a shack made of driftwood, two gnarled salt cedars, and piles of junk—the myriad things Bixler had brought home over the years.

I shut the outboard off, and Dan climbed onto the dock and made the painter fast.

"Looks like he ain't home," I said. Bixler's crab boat was gone, and it was a cinch he hadn't loaned it to anyone.

"Let's take a look around while we're here," Dan said.

We walked over to the shack and the sheriff knocked on the weather-beaten door.

"He ain't here, Dan," I repeated.

"Got to observe the amenities," he answered, and the door opened.

"What are we looking for?" I asked.

Dan browsed around, then stopped and picked up something from beside the single cot. It was a shoe. "Kinda fancy for a man that lives out in the middle of a marsh." He turned the shoe in his hand. "Wouldn't think a fellow Bixler's size would wear a shoe this big."

I looked at it. It wasn't fancy, but I saw what Dan meant. It was a tan oxford. Dan dropped it to the floor and went on with the search. I pulled the thin mattress back from the cot.

"Hey, Dan, look here." Under the mattress was a rifle. A Springfield 1903. "If I remember right, Judd Trawick used to keep one of these things. Said he used it in the war with Kaiser Bill."

Dan looked the rifle over, then bent down and sniffed at the barrel. "Smells like it's been fired recently," he said, "which, of course, don't mean nothing."

"If it's Trawick's rifle, it means something."

"How would you go about proving it was Trawick's, unless Trawick himself could identify it?" He didn't wait for an answer. He turned and went outside.

The whole island, that is the high ground, wasn't more than twice as wide as a football field and three times as long as a telephone pole. We walked about among the stacks of litter—pieces of driftwood, rusted engine blocks, tangles of rusted wire, rotted out skiffs that Bixler had probably found lying in the marshes or along a beach, window sashes without glass in them, hundreds of tin cans, wrecked furniture, and plain unidentifiable junk.

"You reckon this fellow ever threw anything away?" Dan said.

"What do you reckon he does for drinking water here?"

"Brings it out with him, I suppose," replied Dan.

I cocked my head. "You hear something? May be Bixler coming."

It was a motor. An old one-lunger, from the sound of it. We listened as it slowly grew louder, following the sound as it headed first one way, then the other, as the boat wound its way up the creek. We were standing on the dock when it pulled into view around the last turn of the creek. Bixler was in it all right, and he seemed to stiffen when he caught sight of us. His face was a mighty scowl when he pulled into the dock and cut his engine.

"What you doin' on my place, Sheriff Peavy?" he grumbled. "You got a warrant?"

"You got a deed showing this is your place, Bixler?"

Bixler grunted and climbed past the two drums in which he kept the crabs he caught. I looked down into the drums. He had had a good haul for the morning.

"What is it you want?" Bixler asked. "I got work to do. I wouldn't be back here, but I seen you come in the creek and for all I knowed you was somebody come to *rob* me!"

Bixler climbed up on the dock and glared at Dan and me.

"No, Bixler, we ain't here to rob you. Just want to ask you some questions." Dan pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket, stuck one in the corner of his mouth, and held the pack out to Bixler. Bixler regarded it as if a rattler might be coiled inside, then took one. Dan went on, nonchalantly lighting Bixler's smoke then his own. "Want to ask you some questions about Judd Trawick." Dan looked him squarely in the eye. "Maybe you heard. Trawick's disappeared."

"More'n likely off drunk. What's that got to do with me?"

"Nothing, maybe. Except I heard you and Judd had a run-in at his place a few days back."

"The no-good shyster was trying to *rob* me!" Bixler flared. "Said he give me fifteen gallons of gas when *I* know it was *fourteen!*"

"The way I heard it was that Trawick was kind of riding you, calling you a *cheapskate* and a *miser,* among other things."

Bixler choked. "Weren't none of his business, nor anybody *else's,* what I do with what's mine!"

"Never said it was," Dan said. "What I want to know, did you and Trawick come to blows?"

Bixler turned away and started for the shack. "Suppose we did."

"And he knocked you off his dock into the river?"

Bixler had trouble opening his mouth and getting the word out, but he finally said, "Yep."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"That was when."

"You sure?"

Bixler stopped and turned on the sheriff. For a second I thought he was going to take a poke at Dan. "I said it was, didn't I!"

"There's a rifle in your shack there. It yours?"

His brows came up. "I reckon it is."

"Where'd you get it?"

Bixler thought a minute. "Don't rightly know, off hand."

"I guess you run across a lot of rifles and just can't remember this particular one."

And before Bixler could say anything, Dan turned to me.

"Didn't you say Trawick owned a rifle like that, Pete?"

Bixler clapped his hands together. "Now I remember! *That's* where I got it! From Trawick!"

That surprised me, his admitting that the gun was Trawick's. "You buy it from him?" I said.

"Borrowed it," he said tersely.

"That musta been before you and him had your fight," Dan said.

"Told you I ain't seen him after that," Bixler said, sensing a trap.

"That's right," Dan nodded, "you sure did." He nodded his head a few more times, scuffed at the ground with the toe of his shoe, then looked over at me. "Ready to go, Pete?"

"Go?" I said. I wondered if he intended taking Bixler with us, but while I wondered, Dan climbed down into the boat.

I clambered down behind him and went back to start the

engine. Just before I pulled the starter cord, Dan looked up at Bixler, untied the painter, and said, "If you think of anything that might help us, Bixler, be sure to let us know."

Bixler grunted, and then Dan and I started back for the mainland.

I was itching to ask him why he hadn't pulled Bixler in for more questioning. Sometimes it's easier to get what you want out of a man at the office, than on his own stomping ground. Not that we pull any *rough* stuff, you understand.

It's all psychological. There was too much tying Bixler up with Trawick's disappearance to let him run loose. Too much explaining he had to do, it seemed to me. But I couldn't ask Dan while we were running down the creek from Bixler's place, because I'd have had to shout to make myself heard, and my voice would have carried straight back to Bixler. Dan knew what I was thinking, because he looked around at me once and smiled. I wondered, just for a second, if he was just playing this thing along so that Clay Blalock would have something to do when he took over as sheriff of Guale County.

On the way back up Turtle River, Dan talked about fishing and pointed out places where he had caught trout as big as your arm, which, of course, was a lie.

We were in the car and almost back to the sheriff's office before he let me ask my question.

"Why didn't we bring him in?" he repeated my question. "For what?"

"Why—why, suspicion! Hold him on an open charge for investigation!" I was surprised that he hadn't thought of it.

I pulled into the parking lot beside the office. "And tomorrow he'd be out," Dan said, "and where would we be?"

I was getting mad. "You know what *I* think? I think that little rat killed Trawick, that's what I think! And I also think that if you don't do something about proving it, Clay Blalock will be sitting in this office."

Dan laughed. "So we go into court with a case like that. The county prosecutor steps up there and says, 'Gentlemen of the jury, Deputy Sheriff Pete Miller thinks this man murdered one J. Trawick—' "

"Don't make it sound so stupid! You know that ain't what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

He opened the door and stepped inside. Jerry Sealy, Dan's other deputy, was sitting behind Dan's desk, his feet propped up and a long cigar crammed into the corner of his mouth. He spoke around the cigar. "Find anything?"

"Ask Pete here," Dan said, "he's full of ideas." He pushed Jerry's feet gently off the desk, and Jerry got up and went to the water cooler as if he had been intending to all along.

"We found plenty," I said to Jerry. "Stuff that belonged to Trawick." Jerry pulled the cigar out of his mouth and raised his eyebrows. "Only Dan didn't think we had anything on him."

"Now I wouldn't go as far as to say we didn't have *any*thing on him, Pete," Dan said. "It's just that we didn't have *enough* on him."

"Dan—" I couldn't help wagging my finger at him. "Do you realize Friday is election day? And here it is Tuesday already?"

"Why, so it is! So it is!" Dan said, serious but with his eyes twinkling.

"Okay. Okay. Coast along and you'll coast right out of office!"

"Pete," he said, "You haven't told me what you want me to do."

"For crying out loud, let's get out and find out what happened to *Trawick!*"

"We will," Dan said, swinging his own feet up on the desk, "We will."

Jerry took a drink of water, his big pointed Adam's apple bobbing like a fishing cork. "Maybe he did just up and leave," Jerry said. "Maybe nothing happened to him."

"I don't think so," Dan said. Then he changed the subject. "Blalock made another speech last night, didn't he?"

"Yep," Jerry said, "I went down and listened, just to find out what they're up to, mind you."

"And what are they up to?"

"Same old stuff, Dan. A real rouser it was, though, about

graft in office, new broom sweeping clean, touched pretty heavy on Trawick's disappearance as an example of what can happen to citizens in Guale County."

"That's all?" Dan said.

"Pretty near. He closed with a few words about youth coming to the fore and all—"

"Youth!" Dan jumped up from the desk. "Since when is fifty-five doddering old age!"

"I didn't make the speech, Dan," Jerry said in his own defense.

Dan stalked up and down the office for a few minutes, Jerry and I watching him like spectators at a tennis match. Then he stopped.

"Come on, Pete. Let's go back out to Trawick's and see if we can turn up something we missed!"

The wheels of justice had been turning all along. Only now it seemed that the election was dripping a little oil on them.

The sign said: *Live Bait—Boats to Rent.* I pulled off the causeway onto the shell parking area and set the brake.

"Five days, now, ain't it?" Dan said, taking the key from his pocket and opening the padlock on Judd Trawick's combination home and office. "I never knew him to stay away from here *one* day before."

"Then you do think something's happened to him!"

"Sure, something's happened to him!" Dan opened the door and we stepped inside. "But what, and how. And if he's dead, where's the body?"

We went over the place again. "Seems kind of strange that he wouldn't have more stuff in the kitchen than's here. Look here, Pete." He held up a small boiler. "That's the only thing here to cook in. There ain't any flour or meal, and the refrigerator is about empty."

He came in the other room where I was looking around. "Any shoes here?" he asked me. I pointed to a pair of brogans sticking out from under the bed, and Dan picked one of them up. "Look to be about the same size as those shoes we found up at Bixler's, wouldn't you say?"

I looked at it and nodded.

"Still can't prove anything, can we?"

"I suppose not, Dan. But it ain't right! I *know* Bixler did something with Judd Trawick!"

"Well, I guess we ain't going to find anything else here. Let's go."

"Dan, you think Bixler's killed him, don't you?"

He sighed. "I suppose so."

"You want to win the election, too, don't you?" I said. "And you know this business about Trawick is going to have a pretty powerful influence Friday."

"Yeah, Pete, it is. Now, come on, let's go back to the office."

We went back to the office, and Dan got back of the desk in the swivel chair and just sat there. Jerry and I agreed that we were worried about Dan and about his prospects for reelection, but we didn't know what we could do about it. We also knew that Guale County was lucky to have a man of Dan Peavy's caliber wearing the badge. But how could we convince a bunch of fickle voters of that?

"Maybe he's already given up," Jerry said, nodding towards the sheriff. I looked and saw that Dan had unrolled a chart on his desk, a chart of the waterways around Guale County.

"Come here, Pete," Dan said.

I went over to his desk and looked down at the charts.

"Pete," he said, "didn't you tell me that you were a pilot?"

"Flew a B-25 in the war."

"I mean now, not fifteen years ago."

I smiled. "Yeah. As a matter of fact, I own one-sixteenth of a Piper Cub! But if you're thinking about making an air search, the CAP has already done it. At your request, if you remember."

"That ain't exactly what I was thinking. Is it safe to go up with you?"

I bristled. "Would I be risking my own neck if it wasn't?"

"Well, let's me and you take a little spin after lunch," Dan said, grinning and rolling up his charts.

At the last minute I thought that Dan was going to back out. He stood there looking at the little yellow Cub, shaking his head. The engine cowl had been misplaced some years

ago, and Dan made a few vague remarks about the engine not being fastened onto the plane properly. But he had something driving him, some idea, and he climbed into the plane and pulled the strap tight over his lap.

We took off and banked out over the river. When I levelled off at five hundred feet, Dan turned around and shouted, "Follow Turtle River up to Kenston Point, then out over Bixler's place!"

I nodded back at him. We followed the tortuous course of the river as if we were hanging over it on a monorail, Dan peering down intently every inch of the way, not looking around, but keeping his gaze right down on the river. I looked down too, trying to figure out what he was looking for, but all I could see was water, marsh, and the little dots in the water that were the glass-jug buoys of the crab traps. Occasionally, we passed over a fisherman's skiff, or roused a flock of birds, but for the most part the scene below was unvarying.

Then, suddenly, just as we reached Kenston Point, Dan straightened up in his seat and said "Hah!" and turned around toward me with a big smile on his face and motioned for me to head back to the field. I threw the plane into a bank, peering down the while to try to see what had made us turn back, but there wasn't one blamed thing down there that hadn't been there before. No boat. No body. No *nothing!*

Dan wouldn't tell Jerry or me anything, only that he knew where the body was, leaving us to surmise that he was going to pull the Trawick case and the election out of the fire with the same pair of tongs.

"Pete, you got the boys lined up?" Dan said, licking his thumb and flipping through the telephone directory.

"All set," I replied.

He nodded his head and copied a number from the book. "Say, what's the fella's name down at the Clarion?"

"Benson. Jim Benson." Dan had known Jim Benson all his life. He was just whetting my and Jerry's curiosity. He picked up the phone and dialed.

"Mr. Benson," he said, then waited a few seconds, whistling through his teeth while he waited. "Hello, Benson?

Sheriff Peavy. That's right. Say, I thought you might want a little item for tomorrow's paper. It ain't too late to get in tomorrow's paper, is it? Good! What's that? No, it *ain't* a paid political announcement. A news item. *Big* news!" Lord! I hoped Dan knew what he was doing! "No, it ain't happened yet," he said. "That's why I called you. Thought you might want to go along, get the story firsthand, as it were. If you're over at my office in five minutes, you're in!"

Dan slammed the phone down and got up from his desk. "You boys ready?" he grinned at us. "Then, let's go!" He jammed his hat down on his head.

"Ain't you going to wait for—" I didn't get to finish what I was going to say, because Jim Benson of the Clarion bolted through the door.

"What's it all about, Sheriff Peavy?" he panted.

"Come on. You'll see! You'll see! Stagnatin' in office, am I!" He went out the door, with the three of us close on his heels.

We went in two boats. One containing Dan, Benson, and myself, and the other with Jerry and the two boys we had brought along to help drag. They had a big grappling hook in the other boat.

We headed up Turtle River, past Kenston Point and up the little creek that led to Bixler's hummock island. Rounding the last turn in the creek, I saw that Bixler himself was there standing out on the dock with the Springfield rifle hanging from his hands, ready to throw it up to his shoulder.

"Put the rifle down, Bixler!" Dan shouted at him. Bixler hesitated a minute, then stood at a sort of informal parade rest with the rifle. We pulled up to the dock. "Come on down here, Bixler," Dan said to him. "I want you to go with us to take a look at something."

"What you want with me?" Bixler complained. "You got no right—"

"Let's quit worryin' so much about whose rights are getting stepped on. Right now, let's take a little trip back up the river."

I thought I saw a slight quiver cross Bixler's face, just before he climbed down into the boat.

We ran back down the creek, one boat after the other, and turned back up into Turtle River. Dan stood up in the boat, steadying himself by holding onto Jim Benson's shoulder.

"These your traps, ain't they?" he said to Bixler, pointing to the jug buoys that went by.

Bixler nodded, looking at the sheriff strangely, warily.

Dan didn't say anything else, keeping his eyes on the river ahead of the boat. After awhile, he held up his hand. It was just about the spot where he had me turn back in the plane.

"Slow her down, Pete," he said, and I throttled back on the outboard. I tried to see Bixler's expression, but his face was turned away from me. As for Jim Benson, he looked as puzzled as I felt. Behind us, the other boat slowed, then pulled up alongside.

Dan looked around, scowled, frowned, and pulled at his chin. That was theatrics. He knew what he wanted done. "Jerry," he said. "You fellows put out the grappling hook and head right for that pine tree on the bank yonder, the one with the busted limb."

They did as Dan directed; Jerry in the bow of the boat pushed aside a trap buoy and they headed for the pine. Dan stood there in the boat, watching them closely. The tide was slack and so I cut the motor on our boat.

The other boat was almost at the shore, when Dan hollered, "Come on back! You musta missed him. Head right for us!"

They came back toward us, passed us. Dan scratched his head and Bixler seemed to relax. "Run her through there again!" Dan bellowed.

They started back for the pine. No one in our boat spoke. All eyes were on the line that angled down into the muddy water behind the other boat.

"Hooked onto something, Sheriff!" Jerry shouted, and when he did, Bixler made a lunge for the river. But Dan's hand shot out and pulled him back by the seat of his britches.

"Got your handcuffs, Pete? Then put 'em on this bird!"

It was Judd Trawick's body that they pulled up from the

bottom of the river, weighted down with old engine parts and naked as a jaybird. I won't go into details left better unsaid about a body that's been in the water for the better part of a week, especially since Guale County is the center of the world's crab industry, as the Chamber of Commerce says.

"That make tomorrow's edition?" Dan asked Jim Benson while Jerry and the boys hauled the body into the other boat.

"Front page stuff, Sheriff," Benson said. "But there's more to this than just riding out here and finding a body. How did you know where to look?"

They draped a tarp over Judd Trawick's mortal remains.

Dan grinned wryly and pulled at his chin. "Reckon you could work into your story something to the effect that a little age on a man don't always mean he's *deterioratin'*, but that he's also rackin' up a little experience?"

"Sure thing, Sheriff Peavy, but about the body—"

He'd got his crack in at the opposition; now he was ready for the case at hand. "I say it always pays off when you got a stumper like this to play a suspect for all you got! If you got a suspect like Bixler, study him! Know your man!"

I knew we were at last getting Dan Peavy's campaign speech. He turned to me. "Now, Pete, if there's one thing about Bixler that stands out to your way of thinking, what would you say it was?"

"Well," I looked at Bixler and thought about all that stuff I'd seen out on his island, "I'd say he's overly thrifty. Tight, as a matter of fact."

"Right!" Dan said, and I thought I was beginning to get a glimmer of what he was driving at. I found it hard to believe.

"He killed Trawick," Dan went on. "There probably wasn't too much premeditation about it. I doubt if he had any ideas about robbery when he did it, but the stuff in Trawick's shack was too great a temptation for him, especially the rifle and the shoes. He knew Trawick wouldn't be needing them any more, so he hauled them back to his

place. Probably find other stuff belonging to Trawick out there."

"But the *body*, Sheriff—" Benson insisted.

"Yeah," Dan said, "the body." He looked down at Bixler. "You see, the way I figured it, Bixler couldn't bring himself to waste *anything*. Take a look there where we found the body."

We had drifted off a hundred feet or so while Dan was talking, and everyone looked back. Everyone except Bixler.

"Notice anything in particular?" Dan said.

In a couple of seconds it hit me. "The *traps!*" I said, snapping my fingers.

"Yep," Dan said, "just about a circle of 'em around where the body was anchored. Must have attracted an awful lot of crabs in six days! An awful lot!"

We all looked at the circle of traps. I was thinking that with a pretty clear idea of what he was looking for, that circle must have looked just about like a bull's-eye to Dan when he saw it from five hundred feet up. Benson was scribbling furiously in his notebook, and no amount of paid political announcements would get through to the voters of Guale County after they saw Page One.

I looked admiringly at Dan. He stood there, his jaw knotting, a faraway look in his eyes. He was thinking, no doubt, of the effort involved in running for public office.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

TALMAGE POWELL

I spent a good part of the day discussing a case with the state parole officer over in Asheville. It was late afternoon before I drove back to Comfort. Nestled high in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, Comfort is a nice little town that fits its name.

Sheriff Collie Loudermilk wasn't in the office. I sat down at my desk, picked up the metal plaque, and polished it with my sleeve. The plaque has my name on it: Gaither Jones, Deputy.

I'd spread a hand of solitaire when Collie came in. He was a skinny, sandy man, who could be any age over thirty-five. He looks like he couldn't take the rigors of a mountain winter, but he's a lot more rugged than he looks, and a good sheriff, with over twenty years experience in the office.

"Solved a mystery while you was gone," Collie said.

I turned a card. "How so?"

"Found out where Judd Gibson went when he disappeared, hide and hair, last year."

I dropped the cards and looked up. Collie laughed.

"Thought that'd get you, Gate."

"Well, where?"

"To his grave, that's where Judd went."

"No!"

"Yep. Couple of them rock-hound tourists that prowl the creeks and scratch the mountains every summer hunting for gem stones, they found him. They was digging around the dump below an abandoned mica mine. Struck wood. It turned out to be a pine box constructed good and solid. They was curious, naturally, and had no idea it was a coffin. One of them used his pick to pry the lid loose—Poor fellow," he added, and I knew he was talking about the rock-hound.

"You sure it was Judd?"

"There was sufficient remains for identification," Collie said in his gentlemen-of-the-jury voice. "Fact is, the remains was in a remarkable state of preservation. Sound coffin, good drainage location. And though the grave was shallow, it was protected by rock from the dumpage that had been piled on it."

"Where is Judd now?"

"Over to Doc Weatherly's. He's already started on the post mortem. First guess is, Judd didn't die from bullet or club. No shattered skull, bullet-busted bones, or signs of spilled blood." Collie filled and lighted his pipe. "So now we got a bigger mystery than ever. No record of his death or burying. Until today, with no contrary evidence, we all assumed he'd up and walked off. Wish it could have stayed that way."

"You told any of the family about the coffin being found?"

"Nope. Just took the body over to Doc's little while ago."

I got up and fetched my hat from the old hall tree that set against the wall.

Lindy Alston was at her desk in the real estate office down the street. I looked at her through the window before I went in. She was mighty easy to look at, a golden-haired dream.

She quit typing when I went in. "Hi, Gate."

"Hullo, Lindy."

"You sound and look as if—What's wrong, Gate?"

"I got to talk to you. Private-like."

"Well, quit trying to tear the brim off your hat and go ahead. Mr. Sprinkle's out of the office."

I eased onto the chair beside the desk and laid my hand over hers. "Lindy, they've found your stepfather."

She showed nothing in her face. "Tell me about it."

I told her.

She stood up, got her purse and hat. "We'd better tell Mama and Hugh and Benny."

"I reckon we had."

"Won't be long before the whole town knows."

"That's right, seeing as how Comfort is like it is."

We went out of the office and got in my car. Lindy and I were all set to get married a week from now. We'd figured on it a good long while, saved our money, paid down on a house. It was just like that crumb Judd Gibson to pop up now, to unsettle things.

We drove out to the small frame house that Lindy's natural father, a schoolteacher, had left his family. It had happened suddenly, the result of an unexpected heart attack. Aletha, Lindy's mother, had been left with three small kids and a big crack in the foundations of her world. Judd Gibson had come along about a year later. He'd been a smooth talker, fast worker, and before anybody knew quite how it happened, including Aletha, he was a married man whose wife possessed a free and clear, if modest, little house and a few hundred dollars in the bank.

I stopped the car, and Lindy and I got out. Judd had

never spent a penny on the house. It had looked like a shack when he left. Now it was spruced up again, with a coat of paint on it and Judd's old piles of rusty junk hauled out of the yard.

We heard the humming of Aletha's sewing machine as we neared the porch. It was an industrious but soothing sound in the late summer afternoon. Aletha was a real expert with thread and scissors. In the past months she'd rebuilt her little business, Judd not being around, drunk and mean, to insult the customers or to steal their garments and trade them for popskull.

Aletha heard us and came out of her sewing room, a portion of which was her bedroom, cut off by a studio screen.

Aletha was the image of her daughter, only twenty years older. The lines of care and despair that Judd had put in her face had just about disappeared. She could now afford dress material and a touch of cosmetics from Doc Weatherly's drugstore, which is down the block from his undertaking parlor.

"Hello, Gaither," Aletha said.

"How are you, m'am."

"Fine. You're home early, dear," she said to Lindy. "Or is it later than I thought?" She had a real fine smile. "What are you two so secretive about? Find that dining room furniture you were—"

"Mom," Lindy said, "they've found Judd Gibson."

"Oh?" Aletha reached for the support of a chair back.

I moved over to her and put my arm around her shoulders. I gave her the details and felt her steady down. "I think," she said dazedly, "that we could all use a cup of tea."

While she was in the kitchen, Hugh and Benny came in. They were twins, rangy, clean-cut, blonde boys. Fresh out of high school, both were working on summer jobs to get to college this fall.

Hugh and Benny were no strangers to work. Only difference now was that Judd Gibson wasn't taking what they made or coming around to their employers drunk and trying to get advances on their pay.

Aletha came in and looked at the boys, and for just a second there was this feeling of gloom and fear in the house, the way it had been during those years when Judd Gibson had been lord and master here.

"Boys," Aletha said, and Benny and Hugh broke off their time-of-day with me, "please sit down. I have something important to tell you."

Benny and Hugh glanced at each of us, then went over and sat on the wicker settee. Aletha swayed slightly and leaned against the bookcase. The bookcase was nearly full again, just naturally so on account of the family's love of reading and nobody around that despised the printed word and scorned book-reading people.

"The body of your stepfather," Aletha said, "was discovered by two amateur gem collectors—"

She spelled it out, and there was a long silence when she had finished.

Hugh and Benny looked properly solemn, but they were too honest to express any fake regrets. They went out to wash up, and then Aletha served tea. I sure had to admire the control and breeding they all showed. They were in for an ordeal, and they knew it.

I stayed for dinner on Aletha's invitation. Shortly after we'd eaten, Collie Loudermilk came in. He expressed his sympathy, but I knew he didn't mean it. The family had needed that when Judd was alive. I figured Collie was fishing for something, but I couldn't tell what. He asked about the last time they'd seen Judd, if Judd had made any new friends or appeared with any strangers prior to his disappearance. The answer was no new friends, no strangers. Had Judd talked about going anywhere? He'd always talked of leaving the lousy jerkwater cemetery, which was his description of Comfort.

"I know," Collie said, "but he never meant it."

"Perhaps he did, the last time," Aletha said, looking as if she understood that Collie was doing a necessary job without desire to hurt her personally.

Collie asked a few more questions and got the same kind of straightforward answers.

He left with the revelation that the cause of death had

not yet been determined, exactly, but that he was pretty sure in his own mind that it hadn't been a natural cause. You rule out the natural and you rule in—well, you know what you rule in.

I didn't feel very festive; neither did Lindy. But she insisted that we go out to Big Barney's Bar-B-Q as we'd planned.

We drove out and listened to the juke box and danced a couple times. People would look at Lindy, put their heads together, and whisper. I began to get really sore, but Lindy said quietly, "Air your collar, Gate. Comfort's got something to talk about, and we'd be talking too, if the shoes were on other feet. But it'll pass quickly enough." I sure admired the serene way she took it.

While we were at Barney's an event in another part of Comfort affected us. The parolee whose case I had worked on tried to back up an argument with a switchblade knife. The four-man municipal police force failed to catch him. Next morning, the parolee's father called in. The youth was out on the farm, sober and plenty sick now.

So I had to go out and pick him up. I took him over to the parole officer and had to wait for a spell while the boy bemoaned his fate in a cell. What with the details, it was afternoon before I got back to Comfort.

I could tell by the set of his jaw that Collie Loudermilk had been busy, fruitfully so.

"They were sure genteel about it," Collie muttered darkly.

"What you talking about, Collie?"

"The killing of Judd Gibson."

"Killing?"

"They had reason enough, didn't they?"

"Come on, now, Collie—"

"Don't come on with me, Gate! You're sweet on the girl, but don't let it put blinders on you."

"Now wait a minute, Collie! You're making ugly talk, saying the family killed Judd."

"Killed him and disposed of the pressing problem of the corpse by giving him a right decent burial."

Collie wasn't a man who went off half-cocked. His face

took on fearsome aspects to me. "How?" I asked. "How'd they do it?"

"Loaded a bottle of whiskey with sleeping pills. Gave it to him, or waited for him to find the lethal dose and kill himself."

"What gave you that idea?"

"Ain't an idea. It's an established fact. Doc Weatherly says there was definite traces of barbiturates."

"That doesn't mean—"

"Coupled with other things, it means plenty," Collie said.

"Why'd they do it?"

Collie gave me a you-dumb-critter look. "They couldn't bear up under his way of life any longer. Kids were growed up. They dasn't leave their mama alone with him, at his mercy. And Aletha was determined that her children have a chance for college, good marriage, decent life. That kind of determination is deadly, Gate, distilled in secret over years of fear and mistreatment." Collie fluttered his lips in a sigh. "Must have been a real red-letter day for them, knowing Judd had gone to sleep for good."

Collie had a point. Judd, with a roof over his head, had figured he had a good thing until the day he died—which is how it had turned out. He wouldn't leave or give Aletha the chance to take her children and go away. If she'd tried to divorce him, he'd have laid for her and maybe beat her to death. Anyhow, he worked enough to keep from being proven vagrant, and North Carolina is a hard divorce state, nothing in the law saying a woman can divorce a man because he's trash. Hills is full of tired women putting up with the likes of Judd—only Aletha and her brood weren't hillbillies.

A shiver crossed my shoulders. "Where'd you get these ideas, Collie?"

He picked up a sheaf of paper from his desk. "These here are the facts.

"One, Judd was last seen, far as I can make out, around the first of December.

"Two, Benny was then working afternoons for Doc Weatherly, delivering for the drugstore. In the light of the

autopsy, Doc remembers that Benny knocked over a bottle of sleeping pills. He told Doc it was an accident. Told him also that some had got dirty and he'd thrown them out.

"Three, Hugh asked Cal Joyner where he could buy a pint of moonshine. First time in his life Hugh had tried to buy liquor. He said it was for Judd.

"Four, Lindy ordered pine planking from Corson's lumber yard on December second. She said it was to build some shelves, but it turns out to be about enough for a coffin, according to the copy of the order I had Abe Corson look up.

"Five, same day the lumber was ordered, Aletha showed at the pawn shop with a dollar and half and took Judd's black suit out of hock. Suit, it would appear, that he was buried in."

Collie dropped the papers on his desk. "Thing about sheriffing in a small town, odds and ends ain't hard to chase down. And you know things about folks, such as that black suit being in pawn most of the time."

Dry-mouthed, I had to ask the next question. "What happens now, Collie?"

"Yeah, that's a good question. I *know* what happened. They made it a family affair, scattering each step so's no one of them would look guilty. Judd expires. They bury him and let Comfort think he finally acted on his talk of leaving.

"But *proving* it in the face of a good defense lawyer is another hair on the dog. Nobody saw Benny swipe any pills. Judd ain't around to say that Hugh didn't buy the liquor on his orders. There's new shelving in the house, and who's to say it was all put in after Judd's disappearance? Aletha has only to swear that Judd wanted the suit to go away in."

"How about the grave?" I ventured.

"Well, on that score, I figured they'd sit in court like nice people and say they know nothing of it. No witnesses to the digging of the grave, and no matter how it looks, you think a jury of hill folks will convict a whole family, them being such nice people, for the riddance of Judd Gibson? It'd take more than circumstantial evidence, Gate."

Collie was slouched glumly behind his desk when I left the office. He'd get over it. Wasn't the first defeat for him, and not likely the last, although Collie, being smart, isn't a good candidate for failure.

I was in time for dinner. Aletha had roast chicken for a main course. We all had good appetites.

I was glad Collie hadn't thought of the final logical bit of business in connection with the demise and burial of Judd Gibson. Mean as he'd been, Judd nevertheless was a human creature going to his eternal fate. As a future member of the family, I'd had the privilege of conducting the funeral.

GRANNY'S BIRTHDAY

FREDRIC BROWN

The Halperins were a very close-knit family. Wade Smith, one of the only two non-Halperins present, envied them that, since he had no family—but the envy was tempered into a mellow glow by the glass in his hand.

It was Granny Halperin's birthday party, her eightieth birthday; everyone present except Smith and one other man was a Halperin, and was named Halperin. Granny had three sons and a daughter; all were present, and the three sons were married and had their wives with them. That made eight Halperins, counting Granny. And there were four members of the second generation, grandchildren, one with his wife, and that made thirteen Halperins. Thirteen Halperins, Smith counted; with himself and the other non-Halperin, a man named Cross, that made fifteen adults. And there had been, earlier, three more Halperins on hand, great-grandchildren, but they had been put to bed earlier in the evening, at various hours according to their respective ages.

And he liked them all, Smith thought mellowly, although now that the children had been abed a while, liquor was flowing freely, and the party was getting a bit too loud and boisterous for his taste. Everyone was drinking; even

Granny, seated on a chair not unlike a throne, had a glass of sherry in her hand, her third for the evening.

She was a wonderfully sweet and vivacious little old lady, Smith thought. Definitely, though, a matriarch; sweet as she was, Smith was thinking, she ruled her family with a rod of iron in a velvet glove. He was just inebriated enough to get his metaphors mixed.

He, Smith, was here because he'd been invited by Bill Halperin, who was one of Granny's sons; he was Bill's attorney and also his friend. The other outsider, a Gene or Jean Cross, seemed to be a friend of several of the grandson-generation Halperins.

Across the room he saw that Cross was talking to Hank Halperin and noticed that whatever they were saying had suddenly led to raised and angry voices. Smith hoped there wouldn't be trouble; the party was much too pleasant to be broken up now by a fight or even an argument.

But suddenly Hank Halperin's fist lashed out and caught Cross's jaw, and Cross went backward and fell. His head hit on the stone edge of the fireplace with a loud *thunk* and he lay still. Hank quickly ran and knelt beside Cross and touched him, and then Hank was pale as he looked up and then stood up. "Dead," he said thickly. "God, I didn't mean to— But he said—"

Granny wasn't smiling now. Her voice rose sharp and querulously. "He tried to hit you first, Henry. *I* saw it. We *all* saw it, didn't we?"

She had turned, with the last sentence, to frown at Smith, the surviving outsider.

Smith moved uncomfortably. "I—I didn't see the start of it, Mrs. Halperin."

"You did," she snapped. "You were looking right at them, Mr. Smith."

Before Smith could answer, Hank Halperin was saying, "Lord, Granny, I'm sorry—but even that's no answer. This is *real* trouble. Remember I fought seven years in the ring as a pro. And the fists of a boxer or ex-boxer are legally considered lethal weapons. That makes it second degree murder even if he did hit first. You know that, Mr. Smith; you're a lawyer. And with the other trouble I've been in,

the cops will throw the book at me."

"I—I'm afraid you're probably right," Smith said uneasily. "But hadn't somebody better phone a doctor or the police, or both?"

"In a minute, Smith," Bill Halperin, Smith's friend, said. "We got to get this straightened out among ourselves first. It *was* self-defense, wasn't it?"

"I—I guess. I don't—"

"Wait, everybody," Granny's sharp voice cut in. "Even if it was self-defense, Henry's in trouble. And do you think we can *trust* this man Smith once he's out of here and in court?"

Bill Halperin said, "But, Granny, we'll *have* to—"

"Nonsense, William. *I* saw what happened. We all did. They got in a fight, Cross and Smith, and killed each other. Cross killed Smith, and then, dizzy from the blows he'd taken himself, fell and hit his head. We're not going to let Henry go to jail are we, children? Not a Halperin, *one of us*. Henry, muss that body up a little, so it'll look like he was in a fight, not just a one-punch business. And the rest of you—"

The male Halperins, except Henry, were in a circle around Smith now; the women, except Granny, were right behind them—and the circle closed in.

The last thing Smith saw clearly was Granny in her thronelike chair, her eyes beady with excitement and determination. And he was also aware of the sudden silence, which he could no longer make his voice penetrate. Then the first blow rocked him.

THIRD PARTY IN THE CASE

PHILIP KETCHUM

Through grade school, junior high, high school, and college they had been inseparable companions, and of course, all the way, they maintained a casual rivalry. Their grades

were average, their I.Q. rating exactly the same. In general they liked the same things. They went out for athletics, and in college, while Jim Walters was named as one of the best running backs in the conference, Eddie Tait was considered as one of the best blockers. In basketball, as forwards, they were sensational, gained a national reputation. Their coach explained their skill by saying that if Eddie got the ball, he did not have to look to see where Jim was. He knew instinctively where to pass the ball. And this worked the other way. Their minds seemed to be completely attuned to each other. Their thoughts ran in the same channels, their gestures matched.

This led them to a little difficulty, for it was not unlikely that they would get interested in the same girl. They had several quarrels during college, but they patched them up. At least they patched up all but one. In their senior year in college, a junior transfer named Lydia Baumer came to the school, and she was something special. They traded dates with her, both fell in love with her, neither wanted to give her up.

In the end, Jim Walters was the lucky one to marry her. Eddie served as best man. He stood through the wedding ceremony with a frozen smile on his face. Afterwards, he kissed Lydia on the cheek and wished her well. He tried to seem genuinely pleased. He put on a good act. Without much question no one but Jim Walters knew that he was boiling up inside.

Before Jim and Lydia went away on their honeymoon, Jim and Eddie had a brief meeting in one of the upper rooms of Lydia's home. No one else was present.

"Well, Eddie?" Jim said.

Eddie shrugged. "What do you want me to say? I hate your guts—and you know it."

"I would have felt the same way, if you had married her."

"That's a lot of help."

"What are you going to do, Eddie?"

"I don't know—yet."

"What about the plans we've made?"

"I don't know."

Jim spoke slowly. "I don't have much money. Neither

does Lydia. Neither do you. Before very long I'll be needing money, so will you."

"So we both need money," Eddie said.

"We work together pretty well."

"We tried two jobs."

"Weren't they smooth?"

Eddie motioned vaguely. "All right, I'll think about it. When you come back, give me a ring."

"We'll be back in two weeks," Jim said. "See you then."

He didn't offer to shake hands. Eddie said nothing more. He turned away, left the house, went to the small apartment where he lived, and got out a bottle of bourbon, took a stiff drink.

He had another, and another, and another. He got bitter, profane. He could picture in detail just how Jim and Lydia would spend that night—and the next night, and the next, and the next, and all the days that were ahead. He had more bourbon, but that did not help. He remembered a girl with whom he could spend the night, but he didn't want her. He wanted Lydia—only he would never have her. She belonged to Jim Walters. The hate he was feeling made him shaky.

He was twenty-three, tall, solidly built. His looks might have been average. He was not too handsome, his features were not unpleasant. He would not stand out in a crowd, but that was fine. There were times when he would not want to be noticed. In a way, this was true of Jim Walters. He wasn't flashy. He fitted into the crowd. What was special about him was the way his mind worked, quickly, decisively, and in a pattern that Eddie had learned—for he thought the same way.

A year ago when he and Jim had still been in college they had been taking a walk one night, grousing about being almost broke. They had been in the lower part of town, had seen a man leaving a tavern, staggering, hardly able to walk.

"Let's help him," Jim said.

"He needs it," Eddie said.

They caught up with the man, and as Eddie steadied him, Jim reached under the man's coat, took out his wallet. As

the man started to cry out, Eddie cracked the back of his neck, stunned him. By that time Jim had taken the money from the wallet, had replaced the wallet in the man's coat pocket. Together, then, they propped the man in a doorway—and left him. Not a step of this had been planned, but when Jim had reached for the wallet, Eddie had known instinctively what Jim meant to do.

A number of times after that they pulled the same stunt, working quickly, efficiently, working as though by pattern. But this had not produced any real money. The average drunk usually had already spent his money. If they were going to take a chance, they might as well try something that would pay. They drove to a neighboring town one night, hit a liquor store that was open late, and drove away with nearly three thousand dollars. No trouble. They tried a filling station about four months later. That job had paid fifteen hundred. And they had no trouble.

Eddie had almost a thousand dollars left, but of course a thousand dollars wouldn't last forever. Possibly, Jim had saved even more, but two weeks of a honeymoon would be expensive. Unless he was badly mistaken, Jim would be broke when he got home. He could take a job, of course, but he wouldn't want to—any more than Eddie did. That meant they would have to try another job.

The bourbon was nearly gone, and Eddie was having a difficult time thinking clearly. But he was trying, and in his mind he was setting up two images of Jim Walters. One was the Jim who had married Lydia—and he hated that Jim with so much bitterness it made him sick. The other Jim was an efficient machine, thoughtful, clever, ruthless if necessary, and equal to almost any possible emergency. If possible, he would like to work with Jim—the machine. He would forget the Jim who was married to Lydia. At least, he would try.

Jim and Lydia returned from their honeymoon, and within a few days Lydia telephoned Eddie, to invite him to dinner. Eddie avoided this, offering a plausible excuse. If he was to work with Jim, the machine, he couldn't look at Jim, the husband. He could not risk seeing Lydia.

That same week, Jim and Eddie tried a payroll job. It

worked out nicely, no complications, and they walked off with over fifteen thousand dollars. Split into two parts, they each had a year's income if you were conservative in what you spent. Eddie knew he wouldn't be able to be conservative. He doubted that Jim would. Anyhow, and just to get away from Lydia, Eddie took a trip to Mexico.

He tried Mexico City, and liked it. He flew on to Rio, and liked it there. He met a number of women but he didn't get seriously interested in anyone. After about three months most of his money was gone, so he came home and telephoned Jim Walters.

"I've been expecting to hear from you," Jim said over the telephone. "How's your money holding out?"

"It isn't," Eddie admitted.

"Mine isn't either," Jim said.

"Have you got a job in mind?"

"I have two lined up."

"Worth it?"

"I think so. Where are you?"

"Downtown. Webster Hotel."

"Remember Taggart's Tavern? Meet me there in an hour."

"In an hour," Eddie said.

Taggart's was on a side street. It usually wasn't crowded. Jim was there, at the bar, when Eddie came in, and Jim saluted him by lifting his glass. "Order your own poison," he called. "Here's to you."

Eddie took beer. Then, he and Jim stood at the bar and didn't say much. Eddie was uncomfortable. He knew Jim felt the same way. Finally, Eddie made a try at covering the past few months. "I've been traveling. Enjoyed it but it cost. Carried a portable typewriter. I told people I was a writer."

"I've been selling insurance," Jim said. "Not much, but it's a cover. I play a lot of golf. You can spend money at home just as well as if you travel."

Eddie wanted to ask about Lydia, but he didn't. Jim looked in wonderful condition. Without any question, he and Lydia were getting along fine. In his heart, Eddie had known they would. He scowled at his beer and spoke

gruffly, "Why not get down to business?"

"We'll take a booth," Jim said.

He was smiling as he made that suggestion, and he straightened up. Jim Walters, just as much as Eddie, was anxious to get down to business.

They talked for twenty minutes. The two jobs Jim suggested were in two suburban towns, similar to the town where they lived. One was an out-and-out robbery, but of a rather exclusive club where they might be able to make quite a haul. The other job was a payroll job. Jim had studied both jobs. Neither was a pushover, but if they worked quickly, got in and got out and didn't run into any bad luck, the results would be worth it.

Eddie didn't hesitate for a moment. He had decided ahead of time that he needed Jim Walters, his planning and decisive action. He knew Jim was uneasy about him, and he was uneasy about Jim. But if they were out on a job together, depending on each other, he knew he could count on Jim. He knew Jim felt that way about him. From a business standpoint or from a criminal standpoint, they made a good team, a perfect team.

After their talk, they left, and Jim headed for home. Eddie went to his hotel, but on the way, bought a fifth of bourbon. He would need it tonight. Tomorrow he would meet Jim, and for the next two days they would be together —but that was all right—that was business. Tonight, however, Jim was going home to Lydia, and it wasn't easy for Eddie to remember that. Possibly the bourbon would help. Of course, it didn't.

Eddie checked out of the hotel the next morning. He took a cab to the airport, where he was met by Jim Walters who was driving a three-year-old car. It looked just like thousands of other old cars, nothing distinguished about it. They drove to Rockwell, had lunch in a crowded cafeteria, drove on to Webber City and just after dusk entered the Wayfarers Club. This was just at the cocktail hour. A good many people were about, but it is doubtful if many noticed the two men who entered the club manager's office. He was easily frightened. He opened his safe and at that moment felt a blow on his head. When he awoke the two men who

had frightened him were gone, and the safe had been looted. More than twenty-five thousand dollars was gone.

Jim and Eddie spent less than eight minutes in the Wayfarers Club, most of that time sauntering toward the club manager's office, or walking away. They were in the club manager's office just a little more than three minutes. In the next thirty minutes they were twenty miles away and had checked into a motel. They had several drinks, then a good dinner.

"If we can do as well tomorrow, we ought to be set up for the next year," Jim said. "How do you feel, Eddie?"

"You're thinking we shouldn't try this too many times," Eddie guessed.

"That's it," Jim said. "We work by pattern. If we tried this too many times, the police would see the pattern, would start after us. I think if we are clever about this, if we handle only about a couple jobs a year, we could get by for a long time."

Eddie nodded. This was sensible, he knew. If they tried another job, and another, and another, and another, sooner or later they would run into a trap. Greed had proved to be the downfall of many a criminal. It wasn't smart to be greedy.

"You ought to settle down," Jim said. "You ought to dabble with some kind of job. Take me, for instance. I sell insurance. People don't wonder if I spend a little money. I'm supposed to sell a policy now and then."

Eddie smiled sourly. "Didn't you know I was a budding writer?"

"You need something more ordinary. Why don't you settle down somewhere and advertise that you're a tax consultant. You wouldn't have to take any jobs—say you were busy."

"I'll think about it," Eddie said.

Jim looked at his watch, then stood up. "Have to make a telephone call. I'll see you in the room."

"Sure," Eddie said. But he was scowling as Jim walked away—to telephone Lydia. That was the person he was calling. Eddie could sense it. Lydia! He could see her in his imagination—tall, slender, beautiful, smiling, her eyes

sparkling. Where would he ever find another Lydia? But of course he never would. It was time to dig out the bourbon.

The payroll they were interested in was to be delivered in an armored car. But five minutes after the payroll was delivered and after the guards left, Jim and Eddie moved in. It took them less than five more minutes to cower a small office force, pick up the payroll money, and leave. They had practically no trouble at all.

They made a good haul. Twenty-five thousand from the club and thirty-two thousand from the payroll totaled fifty-seven thousand. Divided, Jim and Eddie received twenty-eight thousand five hundred each. Not bad for two days' work.

In the mid afternoon, Jim dropped Eddie at the airport. From there, Eddie would take a shuttle plane to Washington. There was no more indiscriminate crowd than those on a shuttle plane.

"Don't know exactly where I'll go," Eddie said. "I'll drop you a card."

"Put some roots down somewhere," Jim said. "You might even get married."

"I might at that," Eddie said.

But he didn't mean it, and as Jim drove away he watched the car until it was lost in a curving ramp. His smile was gone. His lips had tightened. And inside, he felt the same bitter hate as on the day Jim and Lydia were married.

During the next five years Eddie did settle down—in a way. That is, he took a modest apartment in Miami Beach and spent most of his time there. He tanned himself on the beach. He went swimming. He took up golf. In the evenings he tried the dog tracks or jai alai. A number of women moved into and out of his life. One he thought might become permanent, but after a trial she could not measure up to Lydia, or at least to his conception of what Lydia was like. Once or twice a year he would hear from Jim Walters and would join him. They averaged about three jobs a year—and never did they have any trouble. Jim picked the jobs very carefully. They moved in quickly, then moved out. They averaged close to fifty thousand dollars a year each on what they picked up this way.

At the beginning of the sixth year of their partnership, Jim telephoned Eddie from Cleveland. He never telephoned from his home, or from near there; and he never said much that might have been revealing. He was very cautious about what he said.

"How's the sun down there?" he asked. "Wish I could get there, but I can't."

"It's been a hot summer," Eddie answered. "In fact, I could stand a little of your autumn weather."

"It has been pleasant here," Jim said. "I'm going to get away next weekend, head for the hills. But that's all the time I can give up. When I make it to Miami Beach I want more than a few days. I'll try to make it next year."

"Next year then," Eddie said. "Don't get lost in the hills."

"I won't. Take care of yourself," Jim said. Then he hung up, but the mention of getting away for a weekend was a signal. Something was cooking—another job.

Eddie packed a briefcase. He carried very little baggage. Extra underwear, one shirt, shaving material, and a gift package. The gift package held a gun. His gun. The gift wrapping was just a way to carry it. Then, after he had packed Eddie had to make a telephone call, break a date. That was simple enough. In another hour he was at the airport, waiting to board a plane to New York.

No one met him in New York, but then he hadn't expected to be met. Jim couldn't have known what plane he would take. Anyhow, to get to where he and Jim would meet was no real problem. A taxi carried him to midtown Manhattan and the Statler. Through Jim, a reservation was on file. Eddie went up to his room, telephoned for a bottle of bourbon and ice, and sat down to wait.

He did not have to wait too long. Jim came in right after the bourbon and ice. He was carrying a light topcoat and a newspaper, and he tossed them on the bed.

"Drink?" Eddie suggested.

"I'll fix it," Jim said. "Any problem about getting away?"

"Had to break a date," Eddie said. "But she wasn't really important."

"What did you tell her?"

"Said I had to go to New Orleans. She hates it there. Anyplace else, she'd have liked to tag along."

"Ummm," Jim said, and poured a drink. Then he said, "Eddie, I sure hope you covered your trip. I'm supposed to be in Cleveland, from where I telephoned. It's set up definitely, that I'm there, but not where I can be reached by telephone."

"I'm covered," Eddie said. "No one knows I'm here. Used another name. Didn't know anyone on the plane. What's up?"

Jim took a deep breath. "This is big—mighty big. If we put it across, we're really set. That's why I asked if you were covered. How will you leave?"

"Shuttle plane. Safest would be to take the one to Washington."

"No. Make it the Pennsylvania, and a coach. You can stand it on a railroad as far as Washington. Could be the airports will be watched."

"I could stay here for a time."

"No, I want you out of town."

"How will you get back to Cleveland?"

"I'll take a bus to Boston, fly to Cleveland from there."

Eddie poured another drink, but then hesitated. "Do we do the job tonight?"

"Yes, tonight," Jim said.

Eddie put the drink aside. "You might mention what we're going to do."

Jim nodded. He sat down on the edge of the bed. Gradually, during the past five years, he had put on a little weight. He wasn't actually fat but at least he was heavier, his neck thicker, his face more puffy. In a contrasting manner, Eddie was thinner, and deeply tanned. He drank too much, he had lived pretty loosely, but physically he was still in good shape.

"We just fell into this," Jim said, and he motioned to the newspaper on the bed. "Not a word of it in the newspapers, yet. Or to the police or the F.B.I. I got it by accident. Couldn't believe it at first, but it's true."

"What's true?" Eddie asked.

"Have you heard of T. T. Halburton?"

"Who hasn't? Doesn't he own half of Texas?"

"Just part of it, but it's all in oil. Lives there, but he has an apartment in Manhattan, too, on the Avenue—penthouse. His married daughter lives with him, and she has a daughter. I mean, she did have a daughter. She's been kidnapped."

Eddie was frowning. "When did this happen?"

"Three days ago."

"How old is the girl?"

"About eleven."

"I don't want to cut into a kidnapping. You ought to know that."

"We're not cutting into it," Jim said. "We'll stay on the outside—but we'll pick up the ransom money."

"And what will happen to the little girl?"

"Eddie, she's already dead."

"You mean the kidnappers—"

"They didn't want to take any chances with her. They killed her—smothered her I think."

"How do you happen to know so much about it?"

Jim motioned with his arm. "As I told you, I just fell into it. I was out a couple nights ago, noticed a man in a tavern who was loaded, picked him up and we walked out together. He started talking, mumbling what he had done, about a little girl and a lot of money. Eventually he mentioned a few names—T. T. Halburton, Mike Ellender, Herm Keller. You know who Halburton is. Mike Ellender and Herm Keller are two hoods. Eventually I got the full story. It almost scared me."

Eddie was glad he hadn't taken another drink. He was listening carefully to Jim's story. So far it had come out in a very tailored fashion. It might be true, and again it might not. For the moment Eddie was puzzled. He should have been able to guess, instantly, whether or not Jim was telling the truth. Possibly their thinking had grown apart. He looked up and said, "Go on, Jim. What happened?"

"I didn't get the story all at once," Jim said. "It came out in chunks. I had to put it together, but when I put it together it fits like this: Mike Ellender, Herm Keller, and the drunk I was with kidnapped the little girl. They had her

in a car—took her out on the island—and on the way she was smothered. They buried her near Farmington, drove back to a motel—the Briarcliff. You know where it is."

"I know," Eddie said. "Go on."

"Well, that's about all—except another name was mentioned. Ben Cosgriff. He's a private detective, but he's in on it for a cut of the ransom. He telephoned T. T. Halburton, said he had received a telephone message from the kidnappers. That got Cosgriff to Halburton and it puts the ransom money into Cosgriff's hands. If the police stay out of the picture, and the F.B.I., Cosgriff will pick up the money—and deliver it. That's where we step in. We'll take the money."

"One question," Eddie said. "If you learned all this three days ago, what's been the delay? I thought kidnappers worked fast."

"Three days—that's fast," Jim said. "It took T. T. Halburton a day to get over the shock, then a couple days to gather half a million dollars, in old bills."

"And how do we check on the delivery of the money?"

"That was easy. I happen to know Cosgriff's wife. She plays golf. We've become good friends."

"Did you say half a million dollars?"

"Half a million. How do you like that?"

"I like that very much," Eddie said, and he laughed.

But at the same time he was thinking harder than ever in his life. There was something wrong with Jim's story. It was too coincidental, too pat, too impossible. He took a deep, shaky breath, glanced in the mirror. There he could see Jim watching him, a sardonic expression on his lips. An old truth came back to his mind. Jim had never liked him any more than he had liked Jim. From the very beginning they had used each other. They still did, but what if the time ever came when they didn't need each other—

"I've brought you a gun," Jim was saying. "I have another for myself. Cosgriff is no pushover."

"I don't like guns," Eddie said.

"We're talking about half a million dollars," Jim said.

Eddie scowled, but accepted the gun. It was a .32 auto-

matic. Its clip was filled. Eddie tried the gun's mechanism. It seemed in perfect shape.

"Just put it in your pocket—in case," Jim said. "I'll go ahead of you, stop Cosgriff. You move in. If you can slug him, drop him, okay—but I warn you he's fast. He will be carrying a suitcase. I'll take it, we'll walk around the corner, grab a taxi. We'll make a couple changes before we get back here."

This was about as far as they went in making a plan. They set up an objective, outlined an approach and an escape. The details of the action they fitted to the needs of the occasion as they arose.

The telephone rang. Jim answered it, seemed to be talking to someone named Helen and while this brief conversation continued it occurred to Eddie that if Jim could pick up half a million dollars, he wouldn't be needed any more. On the other hand, if he could take the half million, he didn't need Jim. Then he smiled wryly. If he was thinking that way, the same possibilities had occurred to Jim. Through a flash intuition Eddie could see what was ahead. Probably, with no trouble, he and Jim would pick up the ransom money. But what would happen then? What did Jim have in mind? He could feel a surging excitement. If this was the end of the road for one of them, he didn't mean to be the one to be dropped.

Jim hung up the telephone. "That was Helen Cosgriff. We have about five minutes before we have to leave."

Eddie frowned. "Does she know the score?"

"I don't know—but she won't waste any tears over Ben Cosgriff."

"Maybe she's interested in you?"

Jim laughed, and there was almost a taunting note in the sound. "At least I'm not interested in her. Lydia is all the woman I'll ever need. If you've been waiting for her, you're out of luck."

"I almost forget what Lydia looks like," Eddie said.

But he was lying. He could remember Lydia too well, and inside, right now, he was raging, resentful of what Jim had said. He looked away at the wall, briefly, not at all sure Jim had been truthful about his relationship to Lydia. At

first, of course, they must have been close. But in six years things could have changed. With money and time on his hands, had Jim been faithful to Lydia? He doubted it very much.

"Time to get started," Jim said, and he stood up.

"All right with me," Eddie said.

He put the .32 in his coat pocket, and casually he felt the lumpy object under his shirt and to the side. The gun from the gift package in his briefcase. He had put the gun there before Jim arrived. He was glad the extra gun was there.

Jim and Eddie never had an easier job. They closed in on Ben Cosgriff, slugged him, took the suitcase he had been carrying, and after that Jim put a bullet through the man's head. That was so that later he couldn't identify who had taken the ransom money. Half a minute later, Jim and Eddie were out of the apartment lobby and around the corner. In another forty-five minutes and after changing taxis they got back to the Statler and up to Eddie's room.

Every instant since they had picked up the money, Eddie had been tense, on guard, but Jim had scarcely glanced at him. He was tense, too, but Eddie expected that. As he unlocked the door to the room his tensions tightened. Whatever was going to happen between him and Jim Walters would happen in this room—and very quickly. It occurred to him that Jim was just waiting for him to be careless—but he didn't intend to be careless.

Eddie had clicked on the lights as he opened the door. Now, he and Jim stepped inside, and Eddie stopped to close the door and to turn the door lock. He stayed there by the door, and said, "Jim, you can spread the money on the bed or on the table."

"The bed will be all right," Jim said, and he walked that way, his back to the door.

Eddie spoke again. "I'm holding a gun. Maybe that's because I'm a little nervous."

"I knew you'd want all the money—and that you'd pull a gun," Jim said. "That's why I brought you one that wouldn't work."

He left the suitcase on the bed, whirled around, his own

gun in his hand. A thin, tense, triumphant smile pulled at his lips.

Eddie glanced down at the gun he was holding. He could have smiled, too. The gun he held wasn't the one Jim had brought. It was the one which had been under his shirt—it would work perfectly.

"Had to do this," Jim said. "You see I'm neck deep in this kidnapping. Had to have someone who can carry some of the heat. You will do very nicely. That is—"

Eddie sensed a movement in the door to the bathroom. He heard the sharp crack of a gun, and Jim stiffened, uttered a sharp cry. He twisted half way toward the bathroom but then collapsed, his gun slipping from his hand. He fell against the bed, slipped to the floor.

In a rather vague manner, Eddie noticed the way Jim fell. He realized he was dead, but he hardly thought of that. He stared at the woman in the bathroom door—Lydia! Tall, slender, still beautiful. Of course she wasn't smiling now, but in time she would. And her eyes right now were hard with anger, but in time that look would disappear.

He lowered the gun he was holding, whispered the woman's name. "Lydia—Lydia—"

Lydia was staring at the figure on the floor. She spoke, but she seemed to be speaking to herself. "I should have done this long ago. You were never any good—never. That little girl you killed—"

"Jim did that!" Eddie gasped.

"Yes. But that's only part of what he's done. This time I followed him—to Cleveland and back here. This time—"

"If the years were bad for you, they were bad for me too," Eddie said. "We'll make up for them."

For the first time Lydia raised her head, looked at him, her eyes uncompromising, steady. "What did you say, Eddie?"

"I said we would make up for the bad years. I love you, Lydia. I always have."

She shook her head. "Love? What do you know of love? You are a copy of Jim—and nothing else. You belong with him."

As she was speaking she raised her gun, leveled it straight at him, and fired it.

Eddie had started toward her. He tried to cry out her name but the sound of the shot muffled what he said. A stabbing, blinding pain tore through his chest. This couldn't be happening. It was impossible. Lydia—Lydia—Lydia—

HILL JUSTICE

JOHN FAULKNER

James and Jesse Arnold, double first cousins and almost as alike as twins, stood at the filling station across the road from the main gates at Parchman, the state penitentiary. They had just been released after serving a sentence for cattle stealing back in the hills. It was not their first offense nor their first sentence. They were trying to catch a ride back home.

The prison supply truck came out the gates on its daily trip to Clarksdale and Memphis. They flagged it and climbed in the empty back end.

At Tutwiler, the crossroads North and South and East and West, Jesse dropped off. James remained in the truck.

"Ain't you coming home now?" Jesse said. "We can catch a ride from here."

"I ain't coming home," James said.

"Where are you going?"

"Memphis. Arkansas, maybe."

"When are you coming home?"

"Don't know. Maybe never."

The truck moved on. Jesse stood watching James in the empty rear.

It is early April, a month later, in the flatlands at the Arkansas foothills. Lights of scattered cabins sprinkled the night. One was in the living quarters in the rear of a combination filling station and grocery store. The front of the building was dark. There was no other light near it.

A car, secondhand and battered, pulled to a stop on the

apron in front of the building. Four figures got out and walked to the front door. One of them banged on the panel with his fist. An inner partition door opened limning an old man in the light from the back room.

"I'm coming," he called. "Just a minute."

He turned the light on in the store, crossed to the front door and opened it. He peered out, saw the car beside the gas pump.

"You fellows want some gas?" he said.

The four pushed past him, pushing him aside.

"No," one of them said. "Cheese and crackers."

"You needn't to be so rough about it," the old fellow said.

"Step on it, old man," the first man said. "We're in a hurry."

"You ain't going to get nowheres running over folks."

The first man brought his hand up with a pistol in it and raked it across the old man's head.

"I said, hurry it, old man," he said. "Now get that cheese and crackers out here on the counter."

The old man put his hand to his head from which the quick blood flowed. He looked up at the man who had hit him, startled fear in his eyes. He scuttled around behind the counter still holding his head and with one hand and a hip lifted the hoop of cheese from a shelf to the flat surface before the men and set a box of crackers beside it.

"Who is it, Henry?" came from the back room.

The old man turned his head toward the partition door and opened his mouth to call when the man with the pistol said,

"Tell her you'll be back there in a minute, and not to bother you."

The old man closed his mouth, looked toward the man, opened it and turned again to the partition door.

"Go on. Tell her," the man said, raising his hand with the pistol in it.

"I'll be back there in just a minute," the old man quavered.

The man laid his pistol on the counter, and the four of them began eating the cheese and crackers.

A few minutes later the voice came through the door again.

"Henry?"

The man picked up his pistol. The old man looked at his face.

"OK, men," the man said. They all stopped eating. "Let's have what money you got, old man," he said.

The old man's eyes suddenly grew secretive.

"I ain't got none here," he said.

Like a striking snake the hand reached across the counter and raked the old man's face. The old man jerked away from the blow and bumped into the shelves behind him. Both hands were to his face now and fresh blood welled through his fingers.

"Don't make me have to do that again," the man said.

The sound of the disturbance reached the back room.

"Henry?"

"Get over there and look in his cash box," the first man said to one of the others.

The man spoken to vaulted over the counter, looked quickly under its edge, located the cash drawer and gave it a wrench. A small bell tinkled under the counter. The drawer refused to open.

"Hand him that axe," the first man said to another of the men, nodding with his head toward an axe beside the front door.

The other man crossed to the axe, brought it back to the one behind the counter. He pried at the cash drawer and it came open with a small splintering of wood. From the back room came the voice again.

"Henry?"

"Hell, there's nothing here but pennies," the man at the cash drawer said.

The first man had been watching the man with the axe. Now he turned to the old man.

"Alright, old man. Where is it?"

"I ain't never done nothing to you fellows," the old man said from between his hands.

The first man struck this time viciously, leaning far over the counter and bringing the pistol barrel down across the

old man's head. The old man crumpled to the floor behind the counter.

"You guys get over there and help find where he's got it hid," the first man said to the two still beside him.

"Red, I cain't," one of them said. "I'm going to be sick."

Red whirled and slapped the man almost as viciously as he had the old fellow behind the counter but with the flat of his hand this time.

"I told you not to call me by name," he said.

The one who had been slapped swayed and almost fell but caught the edge of the counter for support.

"Lemme go get a drink," he said.

"Let him go," one of the other two said. "He ain't worth much to us like he is now."

"OK," Red said to the man holding onto the counter. "But hurry back."

The almost sick one loosed his hold on the counter and plunged for the door.

The two men searching behind the counter finished their search and one of them said, "Ain't nothing back here. Maybe he keeps it in that back room."

They all three looked toward the door to the back room.

"One of you stay out here and watch," Red said. He started for the back door. One of the men came around the end of the counter and joined him.

"What about him?" the man still behind the counter said, jerking his head at the old man on the floor.

"Watch him," Red said without turning his head.

"What about him out front? He's at that jug."

"Keep him up here if he comes in."

An old lady was in the back room. She was sitting by a table with a lamp on it. A shawl was around her shoulders. She looked up as the door swung open and the two men entered.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she said. "Where's Henry?"

"Where does Henry keep his money?" Red said.

"What have you done with Henry?" the old lady said,

placing her hands on the arms of her rocker to thrust herself erect.

The two men had come to a halt before her. She struggled from the chair. The shawl fell from her shoulders. She stared from one of them to the other then broke into a tottery run toward the door that led into the front of the store where Henry had gone.

The man with Red moved to stop her but Red said, "Let her go. She'll be out of the way."

They went to work on the room then, pulling out drawers and tearing at the covers on the bed. They found the canvas sack of money under the mattress. Red stuffed it in his shirt and said, "Let's go."

When they came back into the front of the building, they couldn't see the woman. She was on her knees behind the counter hovering over Henry, cradling his head, moaning and crying.

The fourth man was back inside now. He had the jug with him.

"Have a drink, Red," he said, waving the jug at Red and taking one staggering step toward him.

Red slapped him across the face again, this time with the pistol in his hand.

"I told you once before not to call me by name," he said.

The jug crashed to the floor. The man staggered back against the counter with one hand to his cheek. He leaned there a moment, gathering his wits that were fogged by one drink after another since he had gone to the jug. Now he pushed away from the counter and tugged a pistol from his pocket. Red stood with his pistol poised, waiting.

"Take it easy," one of the others said. "You're drunk."

The fourth man paid him no attention. He spoke to Red.

"You think I ain't good enough for your gang, don't you? You think I ain't brave enough. Well, watch this."

Before they could stop him he leaned across the counter and shot the old woman in the back of the head.

Four men huddled about a campfire back in the Arkansas hills. Night was coming on.

"Let's build the fire up a little," one of the men said,

shivering, huddling into an old quilt.

"You want everybody in this part of the country to know where we are?" another said.

The first speaker drew the ragged quilt closer about him.

"I stay so cold at night I cain't stand it much longer," he said.

"If we build this fire up and somebody comes in here and finds us we'll all be hot aplenty. Specially you."

The shivering one lay back on the ground, on his side, and brought his knees up against his chest in the ragged folds. He lay with his back to the others.

Soon the fire died completely and was not built up. The other three rolled into their ragged covering. Night closed in.

The next morning they all lay shivering in their thin cover until daylight set in, and then they lit a small fire and cooked breakfast. Immediately after, they covered the fire with handsful of dirt.

The one who had complained the night before huddled to the dying warmth and then said, "By heaven, will I ever be warm again!" He stood then, with the quilt clutched about him and walked stiff-legged toward a nearby thicket.

One of them, still squatted by the mound of dirt that covered the fire, said, "Watch him."

"Who, Red?" one of the others said. He looked up at Red. The third man looked up at Red too.

"Him," Red said.

The two of them followed Red's gaze.

"Oh, James," one of them said. "What's wrong with him?"

"Watch him," Red answered.

"Oh," they said.

It was later that same day. They were lying on their quilts spread on the hillside in the sun. James was on his side, propped on an elbow, staring at the ground beside him where his hand plucked ceaselessly at small twigs and blades of grass. His lips moved, forming soundless words. He looked up to find the others watching him. He started, his hand became still. He looked from one to the other of them, dropped his gaze, then looked up again.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" he said. "You been astaring at me all day. Watching me like—like—"

"Like what?" Red questioned.

"Like—like—like you are now. What are you watching me like that for? Quit it."

His gaze held theirs for another moment then dropped back to his hand. The hand plucked once, twice, at the grass. Then abruptly he rose to his feet and flung away down the hill, almost running. One of the others made a quick move to get to his feet but Red said, "He ain't going anywheres—yet."

It was almost an hour before James came back. He swaggered across to his quilt and dropped on it. He was different, confident, like a man who had solved a problem secretly, to his own advantage.

"You guys think I had run away?" he asked with bravado. He flicked a quick gaze across their faces. "I could have if I had wanted to. I don't reckon nobody here could stop me."

No one answered him. They lay there watching. His gaze flicked their faces again. Suddenly his confidence became less than it had been. Abruptly he again jumped to his feet and started toward the near thicket. Halfway he stopped and turned and came back a step. His hands were clenched at his sides.

"Quit watching me," he said, his voice rising to just below a scream. He was panting. "Cain't a guy even go to the bushes without you setting there watching, watching, watching?" He stopped talking. He stood there glaring at them, panting, then he whirled and bolted for the thicket.

Supper had been finished long since. The fire was out. The men lay huddled in their covers in the darkness.

A head rose slowly from a lumpy cover. It listened toward the other forms, then slowly the whole man rose and rearranged the cover to look like someone was still in it, then slipped away down the hill. As soon as it faded into the shadows another head thrust up and a low voice said, "Jake?"

"Yeah. Yeah," Jake said. "What is it?"

"Follow him."

"James?"

"Yeah."

"Which way?"

Red pointed towards the hill.

Jake slid from his covers and Red said, "Be easy. Don't let him hear you."

The third form stirred.

"What is it?" it said.

"He's gone," Red said. "Jake's tailing him."

It was not far from daylight when Jake came back. The two still at the campsite were awake, shivering in their quilts. Jake squatted beside them.

"He made a deal with the cops," he said.

"You hear him?" Red said.

"Yeah. There's a phone in that third house down there. I heard him through a window. Named everyone of us to the cops. Drew his pistol on the old man that lives there and told him he'd kill him if he ever let out anything about it."

"Where is he now?"

"Behind me. Not too far back."

"What's his plan?"

"Going to meet the cops at midnight tomorrow—that is, tonight, down where he phoned from and bring them in here."

"OK. Get in your quilt."

Toward evening, that night, not quite dark, they had eaten supper, and Red spoke.

"We are going out on a job tonight."

They all looked up at James then.

"Tonight?" he queried. "Tonight?"

"What's wrong with tonight?" Red asked.

"Nothing," James replied. "Nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing's wrong with it. I just didn't know we were going to leave here anytime soon."

"You act like you are sort of surprised about it," Jake said. "About us not going to be home tonight."

"Shut up," Red said.

James' eyes darted from one to another of them.

"I just didn't know we were going anywhere tonight," he said.

"Let's get going," Red said, standing erect.

The others rose, James last, and followed him down the hill.

It wasn't far to where their car was hidden, just off the trail. They got in, Jake and James on the back seat, Red and the driver up front. James kept looking from one side to the other as the car drove down the mountain. At last they reached the concrete highway at the foot of the hills and sped eastward through the night across Arkansas. James no longer looked from side to side of the car. He sat slumped in the back seat, silent, unmoving, his chin on his chest, the picture of dejection.

Through the early hours of the night they drove, crossing the flats of Arkansas, the River, and into the hills of North Mississippi. Here on a back road they stopped. Red got out of the car and opened the door beside James.

"Get out," he said.

"What for?" James asked, looking up through his brows at Red.

Jake caught him roughly by the shoulders and thrust him through the door. He fell sprawling at Red's feet. Jake descended from the car, and he and Red stood over the sprawled figure in the dust. James got to his hands and knees and began backing away toward the edge of the road.

"What— What are you aiming on doing?" he said, still backing.

"Turn the car around," Red said over his shoulder to the driver in the car.

The car backed, cutting back and forth over the narrow road and, as the lights swung past, Red stepped forward and sliced down with his pistol and laid James flat on the road shoulder, his feet in the roadside ditch. Jake pushed his body into the ditch with his foot, and he and Red followed and went to work methodically on the writhing form with their clubbed pistols. James lay there moaning, writhing, his hands covering his face and head, his knees drawn up like a fetus in a womb. At last Jake and Red

stepped back, mounted to the road, and walked toward the car standing there with its motor idling, the driver behind the wheel. Just before they reentered the car Jake said, turning to the figure in the ditch, "Stay here where you belong, you Judas. We don't need your kind in Arkansas." He got in the car then, beside Red, and they drove away.

James stayed cringing in the ditch 'til the sound of the car faded; then he rose, trembling, to his feet in the ditch and listened toward the way the car had gone. Hearing only silence he shook his fist that way and cursed the occupants of the vanished sound.

He was not so badly hurt as he had pretended. He had whined and groaned to make them think so. His head and face were scarred and cut, but not badly; his hands and arms had taken most of the blows. Now he mounted to the road and looked about him. As he looked he thought, "What damned luck. I had to turn my name in to them policemen to get them to listen to me, and now the rest of them have got away to hide somewheres where cain't no one find them, and I'm left here all by myself with nowhere to go." He was almost crying in self pity. The Arkansas patrolmen could trace him easily through his record at Parchman. They likely already had checked there. Now the Mississippi Patrol would begin checking his and Jesse's cabin every time they passed to see if he had returned. No place to go, he thought. No place for James Arnold. He stood there, near tears, cursing his luck.

It was then he began to recognize where he was. During the ride he had paid no attention to where they were going. He had sat on the back seat, his head on his chest, not noticing anything. Now he began to recognize landmarks. By chance, Red had dumped him out not far from his own home, his and Jesse's cabin. And I bet Jesse is safe and snug in it right now, he thought. And me out here in the cold and no place to go. How come it's Jesse in there and not me? How come he has all the luck and I don't have none? It ain't right. It could just as easy be me in there where he is. They wouldn't no one know the difference. Even the neighbors had never been able to tell them apart.

If he could just swap places with Jesse, no one would know it, and he would be safe and sound, and Jesse could find out what it meant to be out in the cold with no place to go. Jesse had no more right to be safe than he did. By heaven, he would swap places with Jesse. He would show him.

Then it came over him that fate, luck, had taken a hand in his affairs at last, else why had he been brought back by chance to where he could carry out this new plan that had just formed, just come to him out of the clear blue, like. Things like that didn't just happen. They were meant to be. If he wasn't meant to trade places with Jesse, why was he brought back here, of all places, where he could? James began walking briskly through familiar lanes and woods toward where he was certain Jesse would be waiting in his appointed place. He no longer cursed his luck, no longer was irresolute; he moved briskly forward along the path his destiny had pointed out.

James approached the cabin from the rear, circling through the woods. He paused by an outhouse, scanning the cabin's back. A glow was in the sky, off to one side. Intent on the cabin he paid no attention to it but continued stealthily across the yard and peered in a back window. A room, the kitchen, was lighted. Jesse was in there bent over a lamplit table, his back to the kitchen door. It was another sign to James, another OK, another stamp of his new luck. Jesse was there as he had known he would be, in the lighted kitchen with his back turned. James tiptoed to the woodpile, selected a piece of dried oak, hefted it, and returned to the door. It opened softly. James took two quick steps and brought the stick down with all his force on the back of Jesse's head. Jesse crumpled but James continued to beat him as he lay on the floor. At last he desisted and leaned against the table, panting heavily as if he had just won a long race, his lips writhed back in a grin of triumph and accomplishment.

It was then he noticed the pan of water on the table and a washrag in Jesse's still hand. The rag was red, the water had a pinkish cast.

"What the hell was he doing washing his face this time of night?" James said. "And what's that pink in the water?"

He leaned over Jesse, turned his head sideways on the floor to look in his face. There were cuts and bruises there, Jesse had been cleaning blood away in the water.

"Now what has he been into?" James said. "Some sort of fight, I reckon."

His hand went to his own face, to the cuts and bruises there. They were about like Jesse's, another proof he would be able to take his cousin's place, another sign from fate. He was almost glad Red and Jake had beat him like they had.

"If it was a fight ever'body will know about it and these scars will prove better than ever I am Jesse," he said.

Now the problem was what to do with Jesse's body. A quick solution was there, too. Within a quarter of a mile of where he stood was a bottomless quicksand hole in the creekbed. Stock had been lost in it never to be recovered, a man had been lost in it, and a child. Nothing had ever been found of any of them. It was directly beneath a bridge that spanned the creek at that point, of easy access.

Before throwing the body over his shoulder for the short trip to its disposal forever, James went through Jesse's pockets. Jesse usually had a little money on him, and James needed it. It was another reason for James' feeling of vengeance toward Jesse. James never had any money, for long, that is. Jesse always had a few dollars. Well, he wouldn't need them where he was going. James went through his pockets and found a few dollars and some change, then he found a separate wad that he found contained three hundred dollars.

"Now where in hell did he get that?" James said. "Must of stole himself some calves and sold them."

He stuffed Jesse's wallet with the few dollars in it and the wad of three hundred in his own pocket and, slinging the body over his shoulder, left the house by the back door.

It did not take him long to reach the bridge over the quicksand hole. He flung Jesse's body into it and stood there watching it sink from sight. He was about to leave when suddenly he thought of the contents of his own pocket, his wallet with his driver's license in it. He flung this into the quicksand too. "Good-bye, James, you hard

luck beast," he said, and smiling lightly, began his journey back through the woods to his cabin.

James was standing there in the kitchen in the lamplight with the three hundred dollars in his hand when a quick step sounded on the front porch, and before he could get the money from sight a man entered the door without knocking. James was in plain sight as the man crossed the front room and came into the kitchen, calling over his shoulder to someone behind him, "He's here."

The man had a pistol in his hand. It was pointed at James. Other men came in the door, also with drawn pistols. Two men came in the back door as if they had been sent around that way to prevent an escape of any kind.

"What the hell is he doing still here?" one of the men who had come in the front door said. "If I was him I'd be long gone by now."

"He figgered that house would burn down on old man Jones and couldn't no one identify him," another man said.

"What is this?" James said. "What are you fellers doing here?"

"As if you didn't know," a man said.

The lead man stepped up to James and took the money from his hand. James did not resist. He simply stood there.

"What are you fellers doing here at this time of night with them pistols?" he said.

"You'll find out what we aim to do in the morning," a man said.

James attempted to argue but the men would have none of it. They told him to shut up, and one threatened him with his gun.

"Ed," the lead man said to one of the others in the room, "You and George take the first watch. Two of us others will relieve you in a couple of hours." He weighted the money in plain sight on the table. "We want to keep this in sight at all times so they won't be no doubt about it being the money you fellers seen me take from his hand when the time comes in the morning—the same money."

Through the rest of the night, the change of guards, James was made to keep a seat in a chair by the table. He was not allowed to talk, to speak to anyone. He sat there

sullenly, glowering at them, a little frightened, too. He did not believe an armed posse would have come for Jesse for the simple crime of stealing cattle. He did not know what Jesse had been into. The next morning he found out.

Court was convened in Jesse's own frontyard at eight o'clock to try him. A chair and table were brought from his house to serve as bench. Judge Pruitt presided.

Judge Pruitt was not really a judge. He was a Justice of the Peace. As such, his powers and authority were not clearly defined and therefore almost unlimited. He read from an indictment he had prepared.

"You, Jesse Arnold, are accused of the murder of Dan Henry Jones—"

"Murder?" James said. "Murder? I never even knowed he was dead. I never murdered no one," he lied.

The judge frowned on him for interrupting. The man beside him jerked on his arm to silence him. The judge continued.

It seemed that Jesse had known old man Jones kept money in his house. It was common knowledge in the community. The old man did not trust banks. Jesse had attempted to slip in and steal the hoard and had been discovered in the attempt. A scuffle had followed. Blows had been exchanged. The old man had told them he had scarred Jesse's face. Finally Jesse had struck him down with a poker from his own hearth and had left him for dead. He had set fire to the house to burn up all evidence of his crime. That was the glow James had seen but had paid no notice as he slipped across the yard last night to peer in the window at Jesse bent over the kitchen table. Jesse had fled the burning house with the money, three hundred dollars, the old man had told them. Neighbors had seen the fire and had arrived in time to drag the old man in the clear. He had lived long enough to tell them what Jesse had done. He had made a sworn statement before he died.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" the judge asked, leaning forward across the table and looking up into James' face.

"Not guilty," James shouted. "I ain't even Jesse. I'm James."

"James is over in Arkansas. He never come home after he got out of Parchman the last time."

"But I just got back last night. I don't know nothing about old man Jones."

"Where did you get them scars on your face?"

"Why, I—I—Some fellers beat me up."

"Who?"

"Look," James shouted. "Jesse was here when I come in last night."

"Alright," the judge said. "Where is he?"

Jesse. Gone past all recovery in the quicksand hole.

"He's went. He left. He went away last night."

"He ain't went near as far as we are aiming on sending him," a man said.

"Silence," an appointed bailiff said.

"Where is Jesse?" the judge said.

Suddenly James thought of his fingerprints at Parchman.

"By my—my—"

He could not say it. The Arkansas police would be waiting to take him back for the murder of the old woman in the filling station. Parchman would be alert for any trail that led to him. He had sold himself for thirty pieces of silver that he no longer dare reach out and grasp.

"Who do you claim to be?" the judge said. "James or Jesse?"

Again James could not speak, could not force himself to make the choice, for he had none except that of a choice as to the state in which he should hang. He looked numbly at the judge from that point of no return to which his own sorry contriving had brought him.

The judge now leaned back, turned half-face to the jury standing double-ranked at the end of the table.

"The jury will now retire and find its verdict," he said.

The jury retired to the far corner of the yard. They were back in less than five minutes.

"Have you reached a verdict?" the judge asked.

"We have, your honor," the jury said.

"What is your verdict?"

"We find the defendant guilty as charged and sentence him to be hanged by the neck 'til dead."

IF THIS BE MADNESS

LAWRENCE BLOCK

St. Anthony's wasn't a bad place at all. There were bars on the windows, of course, and one couldn't come and go as one pleased, but it might have been a lot worse. I had always thought of insane asylums as something rather grim. The fictional treatment of such institutions leaves a good deal to be desired. Sadistic orderlies, medieval outlook, all of that. It wasn't like that, though.

I had a room to myself, with a window facing out on the main grounds. There were a great many elms on the property, plus some lovely shrubs that I would be hard pressed to name. When I was alone I would watch the groundskeeper go back and forth across the wide lawn behind a big power mower. But of course, I didn't spend all of my time in the room—or cell, if you prefer it. There was a certain amount of social intercourse—gab sessions with the other patients, interminable ping-pong matches, all of that. And the occupational therapy that was a major concern at St. Anthony's. I made these foolish little ceramic tile plates, and I wove baskets, and I made potholders. I suppose this was of some value. The simple idea of concentrating very intently on something that is essentially trivial must have some therapeutic value in cases of this nature—perhaps the same value that hobbies have for sane men.

Perhaps you're wondering why I was in St. Anthony's. A simple explanation. One cloudless day in September I left my office a few minutes after noon and went to my bank, where I cashed a check for two thousand dollars. I asked for—and—received—two hundred crisp new ten-dollar bills. Then I walked aimlessly for two blocks until I came to a moderately busy street corner. Euclid and Paine, as I remember, but it's really immaterial.

There I sold the bills. I stopped passersby and offered the bills at fifty cents apiece, or traded them for cigarettes, or

gave them away in return for a kind word. I recall paying one man fifteen dollars for his necktie, and it was spotted at that. Not surprisingly, a great many persons refused to have anything to do with me. I suspect they thought the bills were counterfeit.

In less than a half hour I was arrested. The police, too, thought the bills were counterfeit. They were not. When the police led me off to the patrol car, I laughed uproariously and hurled the ten-dollar bills into the air. The sight of the officers of the law chasing after these fresh new bills was quite comic, and I laughed long and loud.

In jail, I stared around blindly and refused to speak to people. Mary appeared in short order with a doctor and a lawyer in tow. She cried a great deal into a lovely linen handkerchief, but I could tell easily how much she was enjoying her new role. It was a marvelous experiment in martyrdom for her—loving wife of a man who has just managed to flip his lid. She played it to the hilt.

When I saw her, I emerged at once from my lethargy. I banged hysterically on the bars of the cell and called her the foulest names imaginable. She burst into tears, and they led her away. Someone gave me a shot of something—a tranquillizer, I suspect. Then I slept.

I did not go to St. Anthony's then. I remained in jail for three days—under observation, as it were—and then I began to return to my senses. Reality returned. I was quite baffled about the entire experience. I asked guards where I was, and why. My memory was very hazy. I could recall bits and pieces of what had happened but it made no sense to me.

There were several conferences with the prison psychiatrist. I told him how I had been working very hard, how I had been under quite a strain. This made considerable sense to him. My "sale" of the ten dollar bills was an obvious reaction of the strain of work, a symbolic rejection of the fruits of my labors. I was fighting against overwork by ridding myself of the profits of that work. We talked it all out, and he took elaborate notes, and that was that. Since I had done nothing specifically illegal, there were no charges to worry about. I was released.

Two months thereafter, I picked up my typewriter and hurled it through my office window. It plummeted to the street below, narrowly missing the bald head of a Salvation Army trumpet player. I heaved an ashtray after the typewriter, tossed my pen out the window, pulled off my necktie and hurled it out. I went to the window and was about to leap out after my typewriter and necktie and ashtray and pen when three of my employees took hold of me and restrained me, at which point I went joyously berserk.

I struck my secretary—a fine woman, loyal and efficient to the core—in the teeth, chipping one incisor rather badly. I kicked the office boy in the shin, and belted my partner in the belly. I was wild and quite difficult to subdue.

Shortly thereafter, I was in a room at St. Anthony's.

As I have said, it was not an unpleasant place at all. At times I quite enjoyed it. There was the utter freedom from responsibility, and a person who has not spent time in a sanitarium of one sort or another could not possibly appreciate the enormity of this freedom. It was not merely that there was nothing that I had to *do*. It goes considerably deeper than that.

Perhaps I can explain. I could *be* whomever I wished to be. There was no need to put up any sort of front whatsoever. There was no necessity for common courtesy or civility. If one wished to tell a nurse to go to the devil, one went ahead and did so. If one wished, for any reason at all, to urinate upon the floor, one went ahead and did so. One needed to make no discernible effort to appear sane. If I had been sane, after all, I would not have been there in the first place.

Every Wednesday, Mary visited me. This in itself was enough reason to fall in love with St. Anthony's. Not because she visited me once a week, but because for six days out of every seven I was spared her company. I have spent forty-four years on this planet, and for twenty-one of them I have been married to Mary, and her companionship has grown increasingly less tolerable over the years. Once, several years ago, I looked into the possibility of divorcing her. The cost would have been exorbitant. According to the

lawyer I consulted, she would have wound up with house and car and the bulk of my worldly goods, plus monthly alimony sufficient to keep me permanently destitute. So we were never divorced.

As I said, she visited me every Wednesday. I was quite peaceable at those times; indeed, I was peaceable throughout my stay at St. Anthony's, aside from some minor displays of temper. But my hostility toward her showed through, I'm afraid. Periodically I displayed some paranoid tendencies, accusing her of having me committed for one nefarious motive or other, calling her to task for imagined affairs with my friends (as if any of them would want to bed down with the sloppy old woman), and otherwise being happily nasty to her. But she kept returning, every Wednesday, like the worst of all possible pennies.

The sessions with my psychiatrist (not mine specifically, but the resident psychiatrist who had charge of my case) were not at all bad. He was a very bright man and quite interested in his work, and I enjoyed spending time with him. For the most part I was quite rational in our discussions. He avoided deep analysis—there was no time for it, really, as he had a tremendous work load as it was—and concentrated instead in trying to determine just what was causing my nervous breakdowns and just how they could be best controlled. We worked things out rather well. I made discernible progress, with just a few minor lapses from time to time. We investigated the causes of my hostility toward Mary. We talked at length.

I remember very clearly the day they released me from St. Anthony's. I was not pronounced cured—that's a rather difficult word to apply in cases of this particular nature. They said that I was readjusted, or something of the nature, and that I was in condition to rejoin society. Their terminology was a bit more involved than all that. I don't recall the precise words and phrases, but that's the gist of it.

That day, the air was cool and the sky was filled with clouds. There was a pleasant breeze blowing. Mary came to pick me up. She was noticeably nervous, perhaps afraid of me, but I was quite docile and perfectly friendly toward

her. I took her arm. We walked out of the door to the car. I got behind the wheel—that gave her pause, as I think she would have preferred to do the driving just then. I drove, however, I drove the car out through the main gate and headed toward our home.

"Oh, darling," she said. "You're all better now, aren't you?"

"I'm fine," I said.

I was released five months ago. At first it was far more difficult on the outside than it had been within St. Anthony's heavy stone walls. People did not know how to speak with me. They seemed afraid that I might go berserk at any moment. They wanted to talk normally with me, yet they did not know how to refer to my "trouble." It was all quite humorous.

People warmed to me, yet at the same time they never entirely relaxed with me. While I was normal in most respects, certain mannerisms of mine were unnerving, to say the least. At times, for instance, I was observed mumbling incoherently to myself. At other times I answered questions before they were asked of me, or ignored questions entirely. Once, at a party, I walked over to the hi-fi, removed a record from the turntable, sailed it out of an open window, and put another record on. These periodic practices of mine were bizarre, and they set people on edge, yet they caused no one any real harm.

The general attitude seemed to be this—I was a little touched, but I was not dangerous, and I seemed to be getting better with the passage of time. Most important, I was able to function in the world at large. I was able to earn a living. I was able to live in peace and harmony with my wife and my friends. I might be quite mad, but it hurt no one.

Saturday night Mary and I are invited to a party. We will go to the home of some dear friends whom we have known for at least fifteen years. There will be eight or ten other couples there, all of them friends of a similar vintage.

It's time, now. This will be it.

You must realize that it was very difficult at first. The affair with the ten-dollar bills, for example—I'm essentially

frugal, and such behavior went very much against the grain. The time when I hurled the typewriter out of the window was even harder. I did not want to hurt my secretary, of whom I have always been very fond, nor did I want to strike all those other people. But I did very well, I think. Very well indeed.

Saturday night, at the party, I will be quite uncommunicative. I will sit in a chair by the fireside and nurse a single drink for an hour or two, and when people talk to me I will stare myopically at them and will not answer them. I will make little involuntary facial movements, nervous twitches of one sort or another.

Then I will rise abruptly and hurl my glass into the mirror over the fireplace, hard enough to shatter either the glass or the mirror or both. Someone will come over in an attempt to subdue me. Whoever it is, I will strike him or her with all my might. Then, cursing violently, I will hurry to the side of the hearth and will pick up the heavy cast-iron poker.

I will smash Mary's head with it.

The happy thing is that there will be no nonsense about a trial. Temporary insanity may be difficult to plead in some cases, but it should hardly be a problem when the murderer has a past record of psychic instability. I have been in the hospital for a nervous breakdown. I have spent considerable time in a mental institution. The course is quite obvious—I shall be arrested and shall be sent forthwith to St. Anthony's.

I suspect they'll keep me there for a year or so. This time, of course, I can let them cure me completely. Why not? I don't intend to kill anyone else, so there's nothing to set up. All I have to do is make gradual progress until such time as they pronounce me fit to return to the world at large. But when that happens, Mary will not be there to meet me at the gate. Mary will be quite dead.

Already I can feel the excitement building within me. The tension, the thrill of it all. I can feel myself shifting over into the role of the madman, preparing for the supreme moment. Then the glass crashing into the mirror, and my body moving in perfect synchronization, and the poker in

my hand, and Mary's skull crushed like an eggshell.

You may think I'm quite mad. That's the beauty of it—that's what everyone thinks, you see.

ANATOMY OF AN ANATOMY

DONALD E. WESTLAKE

It was on a Thursday, just at four in the afternoon, when Mrs. Aileen Kelly saw the arm in the incinerator. As she told the detective who came in answer to her frantic phone call, "I opened the ramp, to put my bag of rubbish in, and *plop* it fell on the ramp."

"An arm," said the detective, who had introduced himself as Sean Ryan.

Mrs. Kelly nodded emphatically. "I saw the fingers," she said. "Curved, like they was beckoning to me."

"I see." Detective Ryan made a mark or two in his notebook. "And then what?" he asked.

"Well, I jumped with fright. Anybody would, seeing a thing like that. And the ramp door shut, and when I opened it to look in again, the arm had fallen on down to the incinerator."

"I see," said Ryan again. He heaved himself to his feet, a short and stocky man with a lined face and thinning gray hair. "Maybe we ought to take a look at this incinerator," he said.

"It's just out in the hall."

Mrs. Kelly led the way. She was a short and slightly stout lady of fifty-six, five years a widow. Her late Bertram's tavern, half a block away at the corner of 46th Street and 9th Avenue, now belonged to her. After Bertram's passing, she had hired a bartender-manager, and for the last five years had continued to live on in this four-room apartment on 46th Street, where she had spent most of her married life with Bertram.

The incinerator door was across the hall from Mrs. Kelly's apartment. She opened this door and pointed to

the foot-square inner ramp door. "That's it," she told the detective.

Ryan opened the ramp door and peered inside. "Pretty dark in there," he commented.

"Yes, it is."

"How tall's this building, Mrs. Kelly?"

"Ten stories."

"And we're on the sixth," he said. "Four stories up to the roof, and the chimney up there is your only source of light."

"Well," she said, a trifle defensively, "there's the hall light, too."

"Not when you're in front of it like this." He stooped to peer inside the ramp door again. "Don't see any stains on the bricks," he said.

"Well, it was only stuck for just a second."

Ryan frowned and closed the ramp door. "You only saw this arm for a second," he said, and it was plain he was doubting Mrs. Kelly's story.

"That was enough, believe you me," she told him.

"Mmmm. May I ask, do you wear glasses?"

"Just for reading."

"So you didn't have them on when you saw this arm."

"I *did* see it, Mister Detective Ryan," she snapped, "and it *was* an arm."

"Yes, ma'am." He opened the ramp door again, stuck his arm in. "Incinerator's on," he said. "I can feel the heat."

"It's always on in the afternoon, three till six."

Ryan dragged an old turnip watch from his change pocket. "Quarter after five," he said.

"Took you an hour or more to come here," she reminded him. She didn't like this Detective Ryan, who so obviously didn't believe a word she was saying. For one thing, his hat needed blocking. For another, the sleeves of his gray topcoat were frayed. And for a third thing, he was wearing the most horrible orange necktie Mrs. Kelly had ever seen.

"Arm'd be all burned up by now," he said, musingly, "if it was an arm."

"It was an arm," she said dangerously.

"Mmmm." He had the most infuriating habit of neither agreeing nor disagreeing, just saying, "Mmmmm." To which he added, "Shall we go on back to your living room?"

Furious, Mrs. Kelly marched back into her apartment and sat on the flower-pattern sofa, while Detective Ryan settled himself in Bertram's old chair, across the room.

"Now, Mrs. Kelly," he said, once he was seated, "I'm not doubting your sincerity for a minute, believe me. I'm sure you saw what you thought was an arm."

"It *was* an arm."

"All right," he said. "It was an arm. Now, that would mean somebody upstairs had murdered somebody else, chopped the body up, and was getting rid of the pieces in the incinerator. Right?"

"Well, of course. That's obviously what's happening. And instead of doing something about it, you're sitting here—"

"Now," he said, interrupting her smoothly, "you told me you were so startled by the arm you dropped your bag of rubbish and had to pick it all up again. So you stayed at the incinerator door a couple minutes after you saw the arm. And you opened the door twice more. Once to see if the arm was still there, and once to throw your own bag of rubbish away."

"And so?" she demanded.

"Did you see or hear any more pieces going by?"

She frowned. "No. Just the arm." At the expression on his face, she added, "Well, isn't that enough?"

"I'm afraid not, ma'am. What's our murderer planning to do with the rest of the body?"

"Well, I'm sure *I* don't know. Could—could be that that arm was the last part to go down. He'd thrown down all the rest of it earlier."

"Could be, Mrs. Kelly," Ryan said. "But frankly, I think you made an honest mistake. What you thought was an arm was really something else. Maybe a rolled-up newspaper."

"I tell you, I saw the fingers!"

Ryan sighed, and got to his feet. "I tell you what, Mrs.

Kelly," he said. "What you got here isn't enough for us to go on. But if a report comes in on somebody being missing in this building, that would kind of corroborate your story. If somebody's been murdered, he or she will be reported missing before long, and—"

"It was a woman," said Mrs. Kelly. "I saw the long fingernails."

Ryan frowned again. "You saw long fingernails," he asked, "in just a couple of seconds, in that dim incinerator shaft and without your glasses on?"

"I saw what I saw," she insisted, "and I only need my glasses for *reading.*"

"Well," said Ryan. He stood there, fidgeting with that awful crushed hat, obviously wanting to be done and away. "If we get word on anybody missing," he said again.

Mrs. Kelly glared at him as he left. He didn't believe her; he thought she was nothing but a foolish old woman with bad eyes. She could hear him now, once he got back to his precinct house: "Nothing to it, just an old crank not wearing her glasses."

And then he was gone, and she was alone. And her irritated anger gradually gave way to something very close to fear. She looked up at the ceiling. Somewhere on the four floors above, someone had murdered a woman, and chopped her up, and thrown her forearm down the incinerator shaft. Mrs. Kelly looked up, realizing how close that terrible murderer was, and that there was to be no help from the police, and she shivered.

The next afternoon, that was a Friday, at just around four o'clock, Mrs. Kelly once more brought her rubbish bag to the incinerator. This wasn't a coincidence. Having lived alone for five years, Mrs. Kelly had developed routines and habits of living that carried her smoothly through her solitary days. And at four o'clock each afternoon, she threw the rubbish away.

On this Friday afternoon, very much aware of the murderer lurking somewhere in the building, she peeked out into the hall before hurrying across to the incinerator door. Then she quickly dumped the rubbish, but someone had

thrown something greasy away recently, and a piece of paper stuck to the ramp. Wrinkling her nose in distaste, she reached in and freed it.

That's when it happened again. This time, it was an upper arm, elbow to shoulder, and it didn't pause at the sixth floor. It sailed right on by, elbow foremost, and left Mrs. Kelly staring at the blank brick walls of the shaft.

She was back in her own living room, the door locked and the chain attached, before she had time to think. And when she recovered sufficiently, she decided at once to call that smarty Detective Sean Ryan, because now she knew why there had only been the forearm disposed of yesterday.

Of course. The murderer was afraid to drop all of the body at once. It would take him half an hour or more, and someone on a lower floor would be bound to see something in that time. Besides, he might be afraid the whole body wouldn't burn in just one day.

That's why he dropped just one piece, each afternoon at four. The incinerator had been burning for an hour by that time, and so would be nice and hot. And it would have two more hours to burn before it was turned off.

Ah-hah, Detective Ryan, she thought, and reached for the phone. But then she stopped, her hand an inch from the phone, suddenly knowing exactly what Detective Ryan would have to say. "More arms, Mrs. Kelly? And this one didn't even stop, just whizzed right by? Do you know how fast a falling arm would go, Mrs. Kelly?"

No. Mrs. Kelly wasn't going to go through another humiliating interview like the one yesterday.

But what could she do? A murder had been committed, and what could she do if she couldn't even call the police?

She fretted and fumed, half-afraid and half-annoyed, and then she remembered something Detective Ryan had said yesterday. Corroboration, that's what he had said. Proof of murder, proof someone was missing from this building.

Very well, corroboration he would get. And then he'd have to swallow those smart-alecky remarks of his. How fast does a falling arm go indeed!

All she had to do was find proof.

Almost a full week went by, and no proof. Every afternoon at four, Mrs. Kelly stood by the incinerator door and in growing frustration watched another part sail by. Saturday, the left forearm. Sunday, the left upper arm. Monday, right foot, knee to toes. Tuesday, right leg, hip to knee. Lower half of the torso on Wednesday. Left foot, knee to toes, on Thursday.

And Mrs. Kelly knew she had only three days left. The upper half of the torso, the left leg, and the head.

For the first time in her life, Mrs. Kelly disliked the automatic privacy that was a part of living in a New York City apartment. Twenty-seven years she had lived in this building, and she didn't know a soul here, except for the superintendent on the first floor. But the people in the sixteen apartments on the four floors above her were total strangers. She could watch the front door forever, and never know who was missing.

On Tuesday (right leg), it occurred to her to watch the mailboxes. It seemed to her that this murderer, whoever he was, would be staying in his apartment as much as possible, until the body had been completely eliminated. There was a possibility he wouldn't even leave to pick up his mail. If there were a stuffed mailbox, it might be the clue she needed.

There wasn't a stuffed mailbox.

On Wednesday (lower half of the torso), she thought to go back to the mailboxes again, this time to get the names of the occupants of the sixteen apartments up above. That afternoon, clutching her list, she watched the piece go by, and repaired furiously to her apartment.

It was all that Detective Sean Ryan's fault, that rumpled man. He must be a widower, or a bachelor. No woman would let her man out of the house as rumpled as all that. Nor wearing a necktie as horrible as that wide orange thing Detective Ryan had had around his neck.

Not that it made any difference. Mrs. Kelly had had trouble enough for one lifetime with Bertram, rest his soul. Housebreaking a man was a life's work, and a woman would be a fool to try to do the job on two men, one right

after the other. And Mrs. Aileen Kelly was certainly no fool.

Though she was beginning to feel very much like a fool, as day after day the pieces of that poor murdered woman fell down the incinerator shaft, and Mrs. Kelly still without a shred of proof.

Thursday, she considered the possibility of hiding in a hallway, where she could watch the incinerator door. According to the way the pieces were falling, there were four parts left. If Mrs. Kelly were to spend each of the four days hidden in the hallway on each of the four floors above, sooner or later she would catch the murderer red-handed.

But, how to hide in the hallways? They were all bare and empty, without a single hiding place.

Except, perhaps, the elevator.

Of course, of course, the elevator. She rushed out of her apartment, got into the elevator, and peered through the round porthole in the elevator door. By pressing her nose against the metal of the door and peeking far to the left, she could just barely catch a glimpse of the incinerator door. It would work.

Accordingly, she was in the elevator at five of four, and pushing the button marked 7. The elevator rose one flight and stopped. Mrs. Kelly took up her position, peering out at the incinerator door, and so she stood for three minutes.

Then the elevator started with a jerk, cracking Mrs. Kelly smartly across the nose, and purred down its shaft, stopping at the fourth floor. Someone else had called it.

Furious, Mrs. Kelly glared at the overcoat-bundled man who stepped aboard at the fourth floor and pushed the button marked 1.

On the first floor, the overcoated man left the building, while Mrs. Kelly dashed to the incinerator door, opened it, opened the ramp, and watched the left foot go falling by, to land in the midst of the flames below.

That did it for fair. There were only three days left now, and four floors to check. And if she didn't find out who the murderer was before Sunday, he would have disposed of the body completely, and there wouldn't be a shred of proof. Mrs. Kelly stormed back to the elevator, thinking,

"Three days and four floors. Three days and four floors."

And the roof.

She stopped in her tracks. The roof. The top of the incinerator shaft was up there, covered only by a wire grating. It wouldn't be hard to bend that grating back, and drop something down the shaft.

Which meant it didn't have to be somebody in this building at all. It could be someone from almost anywhere on the block, coming across the roofs to drop the evidence as far from home as possible.

Well, there was a way to find out about that. It had snowed all day yesterday and last night, but it hadn't snowed today. The flat roof would have a nice thick layer of snow on it. If anyone had come across it to the incinerator shaft, he would have had to leave tracks.

Getting into the elevator, she pushed the button for the tenth floor, and waited impatiently as the elevator rose to the top of the building. Then she mounted the flight of stairs to the roof door, unbent the wire twisted around the catch, and stepped out.

She had been in too much of a hurry to stop and dress properly for the outdoors. It was cold and windy up on the roof, and the snow was ankle-deep. Mrs. Kelly turned the collar of her housecoat up and held the lapels closed against her throat. Her old scuffy slippers were no protection against the snow.

She hurried off to the right, to the incinerator chimney, circled it, and found no footprints beyond her own.

So, she'd wasted her time, frozen half to death and ruined her slippers, and all for nothing.

No, not for nothing after all. Now she knew for sure the murderer was somewhere in this building.

Friday morning, Mrs. Kelly awoke with a snuffly head-cold and a steadily increasing irritation. She was furious at Detective Ryan, for making her do his work for him. She was enraged at the terrible creature upstairs who'd started this whole thing in the first place. And she was exasperated with herself, for being such a complete failure.

She spent the day sipping tea liberally laced with lemon juice, and at four hobbled out to the incinerator to watch

the upper half of the torso bump by. Then, snuffly and miserable, she went back to bed.

On Saturday, the cold was just as bad, and her irritation was worse. She sat and looked at her list of sixteen names, and searched desperately for a way to find out which one of them was a murderer.

Of course, she could simply call Detective Ryan and have him come over at four o'clock, to watch the piece of body fall down the incinerator shaft. She *could* do that, but she wouldn't. When she called Detective Ryan, it would be because *she* had found the murderer.

Besides, he probably wouldn't even come.

So she glared at the list of names. A silly thought occurred to her. She could look up the phone numbers of all these people, and say, "Excuse me, have you been dropping a body down the incinerator?"

Well, come to think of it, why not? It was a woman's body, which probably meant it was somebody's wife. With her husband the murderer. Most of the people in this building were middle-aged or better, couples whose children had grown up and gone their separate ways years ago. So far as she knew, there were no large families in the building at all.

It would have to be an apartment in which there were only two people. The murderer wouldn't be able to hide the dead body from someone living in the same apartment.

So maybe the telephone would be useful after all. She could call each apartment. If a woman answered she would say she had a wrong number. If a man answered, she would ask for his wife. The apartment without a woman would be the logical suspect.

With a definite plan at last, she ignored her stuffed nose and sat down beside the telephone to look up the phone numbers of her sixteen suspects, and start her calls.

Two of the sixteen had no phone numbers listed. Well, if the other fourteen produced nothing certain, she would have to think of something else for those two. And she was suddenly convinced that she would be able to think of something when the time came, with no trouble at all. She was suddenly oozing with confidence.

She started phoning shortly after five. Eight of the four-

teen answered, five times a woman's voice and three times a man's voice. Mrs. Kelly apologized to the women for calling a wrong number, and asked each man who answered, "Is the Missus at home, please?" Twice, the men answered, "Just a second," and Mrs. Kelly had to apologize to the women who came on the line. The third time, the man said, "She's out shopping right now. Could I take a message for her?"

"I'll call back later," said Mrs. Kelly quickly. "Do you know when she'll be back?"

"Fifteen, twenty minutes, probably," said the man.

She waited an hour before calling that number again, and she was so nervous she actually did dial a wrong number to begin with. Because this might be the end of the search. If the wife still wasn't home—

She was. Mrs. Kelly, disappointed, made the eighth wrong-number apology, and crossed the eighth name off her list.

She tried the remaining six numbers later in the evening, and only once found someone at home. A woman. Mrs. Kelly crossed the ninth name off the list.

She tried the five remaining numbers shortly after ten that night, but none of them answered. Deciding to try again in the morning, she set the alarm for eight o'clock and went to bed, where she slept uneasily, dreaming of bodies falling from endless blackness.

The upper half of the torso had fallen on Friday.

Mrs. Kelly's cold was worse again on Saturday. She forced herself to the telephone around noon, managed to lower the number of suspects from five to three, then gave up and went back to bed, rousing only to watch the left leg plummet by at four o'clock.

Only the head remained.

Sunday morning, the cold was gone. Not even a sniffle remained. Mrs. Kelly got up early, went to eight o'clock Mass, and hurried back home through the January cold and the slippery streets to have breakfast and make more phone calls.

There were three numbers left. One of them was answered, by a disgruntled man who said his wife was asleep,

but the other two still didn't respond. She tried again at eleven, and this time the disgruntled man turned her over to his wife. Two numbers left.

Her second call was answered by a man, and Mrs. Kelly said, "Hello. Is the Missus at home?"

"Who's this?" snapped the man. His voice was suspicious and hoarse, and Mrs. Kelly felt the leaping of hope within her breast.

"This is Annie Tyrrell," she said, giving the first name to come to her mind, which happened to have been her mother's maiden name.

"The wife ain't here," said the man. There was a pause, and he added, "She's gone out of town. Visiting her mother. Gone to Nebraska."

"Oh, dear me," said Mrs. Kelly, hoping she was doing a creditable job of acting. "How long ago did she leave?"

"Wednesday before last," said the man. "Won't be back for a month or two."

"Could you give me her address in Nebraska?" Mrs. Kelly asked. "I could drop her a note," she explained.

The man hesitated. "Don't have it right handy," he said, finally. Then, all at once, he said, "Who'd you say this was?"

For a frantic second, Mrs. Kelly couldn't remember what name she had given, and then it came back to her. "Annie Tyrrell," she said.

"I don't think I know you," said the man suspiciously. "Where you know my wife from?"

"Oh, we—uh—we met in the supermarket."

"Is that right?" He sounded more suspicious than ever. "I tell you what," he said. "You give me your number. I don't have the wife's address right handy, but I can look it up and call you back."

"Well, uh—" Mrs. Kelly thought frantically. She didn't know what to do. If she gave him her own number, he might be able to check it and find out who she really was. But if she gave him some other number, he might call back and find out there wasn't any Annie Tyrrell, and then he'd know for sure that someone suspected him.

He broke into her thoughts, saying, "Say, who is this,

anyway? What's my wife's first name?"

"What?"

"I asked you what's my wife's first name," he repeated.

"Well," she said, forcing a little laugh that sounded patently false even to her, "whatever on earth for? Don't you even know your own wife's first name?"

"*I* do," he said. "But do you?"

Suddenly terrified, Mrs. Kelly hung up without another word, and sat staring at the telephone. It had been him! The sound of his voice, the suspicious way he had acted. It had been him! She looked at his name on her list. Andrew Shaw, apartment 8B, two floors up, directly over her apartment.

Andrew Shaw. He was the killer, and now he knew that someone suspected him. It wouldn't take him long to realize the call had come from someone in this building, someone who must have seen the evidence in the incinerator shaft.

He would be searching for her now, and she didn't know how long it would take him to find her. He might be much more resourceful than she; it might not take him so long as a week to find and silence the person who was threatening him.

Pride was pride, but foolishness was something else again. It was time to call Detective Ryan. She had the murderer's name for him now, and the head of the murdered woman hadn't yet been disposed of. It was time for Detective Sean Ryan to take over.

Thoroughly frightened, Mrs. Kelly fumbled through the phone book until she found the police station number, and had it half-dialed when she remembered it was Sunday. Of course, some policemen were at work on Sundays, but not necessarily Sean Ryan. Well, if he wasn't working today, some other policeman would have to do. Though she did hope it would be Sean Ryan. Simply to see the expression on his face when he saw she'd been right all along, of course.

When the bored voice said, "Sixteenth Precinct," Mrs. Kelly said, "I'd like to speak to Detective Ryan, please. Detective Sean Ryan."

"Just one moment, please," said the voice. Mrs. Kelly waited for a moment that seemed to go on forever, and then the same voice came back and said, "He's off to eleven o'clock Mass now, ma'am. Be back in about an hour. Want to leave a message?"

She knew she should settle for another policeman, that this was no time for delays, but she found herself saying, "Would you ask him to call Mrs. Aileen Kelly, please? The number is CIrcle 5-9970."

She had to spell her first name for him, and added, "Would you tell him it's important, and to call right away, the minute he gets there?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you very much."

And then she had nothing to do but wait. And wait. And look at the ceiling.

He didn't call till two-thirty, and by then Mrs. Kelly was frantic. In the first place, she was afraid her phone call to Mister Andrew Shaw might have him worried about maintaining his four-o'clock schedule. He might decide to get rid of the head at three o'clock, when the incinerator first went on, and then there wouldn't be any more evidence. And in the second place she was terrified that he would find her right away, that any moment he would be knocking on the front door.

Half a dozen times, she almost called the police again, but every time she told herself that he *must* call in a minute or two. And when he finally did call, at two-thirty, he stepped directly into a tongue-lashing.

"You were supposed to call me directly you got back to the precinct house," she told him. "Directly after Mass."

"Mrs. Kelly, I'm a busy man," he said defensively. "I've just this minute got back to the station. I had some other calls to make."

"Well, you hotfoot it over here this instant, Mister Detective Ryan," she snapped. "I've got your murderer for you, but with all your shilly-shallying around, he's liable to get off scot-free yet. They turn the incinerator on at three o'clock, you know."

"It's this business about the arm again, is it?"

"It's about the whole body this time," she informed him. "And there's nothing left of it but the head. Now, you get over here before even that is gone."

She heard him sigh, and then he said, "Right, Mrs. Kelly. I'll be right over."

It was then twenty to three. In twenty minutes, the incinerator would go on. She was positive by now that he would change his pattern, that he would get rid of the head just as soon as ever he could. And that would be in twenty minutes.

And then it was fifteen minutes, and ten minutes, and five minutes, and still Ryan didn't come, though the precinct house was only a block and a half away, up on 47th Street.

At two minutes to three, she couldn't stand it any longer. She peered out the peekhole at the hall, and saw that it was empty. Carefully and silently, she unlocked the door and crept down the hall to the incinerator. She opened it and stood staring in at the gray brick walls of the shaft, expecting any second to see the head go sailing by.

And still Ryan didn't come.

At three o'clock on the dot, she heard a thump from above, and knew it was the head. Without stopping to think, she thrust her arm into the shaft in a frantic attempt to grab it and save it for evidence. With her arm stretched out like that, she couldn't see into the shaft, but she felt the head when it landed on her wrist a second later. It was freezing cold, so he'd been keeping it in a home freezer all this time, and it was held by her wrist and a wall of the incinerator.

It was also sticky, and Mrs. Kelly's imagination suddenly gave her a vivid image of exactly what she was touching. She gave a shriek, pulled her arm back, and the head went bumping down the shaft to the fire far below.

At that moment, the elevator door slid open and Detective Ryan appeared.

She glared at him for a speechless second, then shook her fist in fury. "*Now* you come, do you? Now, when it's too late and the poor woman's head is burned to a crisp and that Andrew Shaw is free as a bird, *now* you come!"

He stared at her in amazement, and she shook her fist at him. "The last of the evidence," she cried, "Gone, burned to a crisp, because of—"

For the first time, she noticed the fist she was shaking. It was red, ribboned red, and as she looked, the cold ribbon spread down her arm, and she knew it was the poor woman's blood.

"There's your evidence!" she cried, raising her hand to him, and fell over in a faint.

When she awoke, on the sofa in her living room, Detective Ryan was sitting awkwardly on a kitchen chair beside her. "Are you all right now?" he asked her.

"Did you get him?" she asked right back.

He nodded. A woman whom Mrs. Kelly recognized as her across-the-hall neighbor, though she didn't know her name, came from the direction of the kitchen and handed Mrs. Kelly a steaming cup of tea.

She sat up, still shaky, and realized thankfully that someone had washed her hand while she'd been in her faint.

"We got him," said Detective Ryan. "The incinerator had just gone on, and we got it turned off in time, so the evidence wasn't destroyed after all. And we got him stepping out of the elevator, his suitcase all packed. And he talked enough."

"Well, good," said Mrs. Kelly, and she sipped triumphantly at the tea.

"Now," said Ryan, his tone changing, "I believe I have a bone to pick with you, Mrs. Kelly."

She frowned, "Do you, now?"

"All week long," he said, "you've been watching pieces of body being disposed of, and not once did you call the police."

"I did call the police," she reminded him. "A smarty-pants detective named Ryan came and refused to believe me. Called me a foolish old woman."

"I never did!" he said, shocked and outraged.

"You as much as did, and that's the same thing."

"You should have called again," he insisted, "once you'd figured out his schedule."

"Why should I?" she demanded. "I called you once, and

you laughed at me. And when I finally did call you again, you lollygaggled around and showed up late anyway."

He shook his head. "You're a very foolhardy woman, Mrs. Kelly," he said. "You have too much pride."

"I solved the case for you," she told him.

"You took totally unnecessary chances," he said sternly.

"If you're going to give me a sermon," she told him, "you'd better get a more comfortable chair."

"You don't seem to realize," he began, then shook his head. "You need someone to look out for you." And he launched into his sermon.

Mrs. Kelly sat, not really listening, nodding from time to time. She noticed he was wearing that horrible orange tie again. In a bit, when the sermon was over and she felt less shaky, she'd go on out to the bedroom. She still had most of Bertram's clothes, his neckties included. There had to be one there to go with that brown suit of Ryan's.

That orange thing was going down the incinerator, it was.

A COOL SWIM ON A HOT DAY

FLETCHER FLORA

Suddenly awake, he opened his eyes in a glare of morning sun. The glare was blinding and painful, and so he closed his eyes again quickly and lay without moving in the soft shadows behind his lids. He could hear a clock ticking in the room. He could hear a cardinal singing in the white light outside. Something seemed to be scratching at his brain. The remembrance of something.

And then he remembered. He remembered the night and the night's shame. The focus of the night was Ellen's face. The sound of the night was Ellen's voice. The face was cold and scornful, remote and strange. The clear and precise articulation of the voice was more appropriate to proud defiance than to a confession. Lying and remembering, fixed in despair, he held to the slender hope that he remembered a dream.

After a few minutes, needing to know, he got up and walked across the room and into a bathroom and through the bathroom into a room beyond. Ellen was lying on her bed in a gold sheath. He had put her there himself, he remembered, after shooting her. Ankles neatly together and one hand folded upon the other below her breasts. The hands covered with a definitive gesture of modesty, as if it were something intimate or obscene, the small hole through which her life had slipped out and away between her fingers. He had removed her shoes.

So it was not a dream. He had killed her indeed in the shameful night, and there on the floor where he had dropped it was the gun he had killed her with. He looked at the gun and back at her. *Oh, golden wanton. Oh, sweet and tender harlot wife.* Having killed her, having laid her out neatly on a quilted satin cover, he had gone to sleep in his clothes in his own room. But this was an oversimplification and therefore a distortion. He had not merely gone to sleep. He had withdrawn, rather, into a deep and comforting darkness in which, if nothing was solved or made better, everything was at least suspended and grew no worse. He had slept soundly.

Now, of course, he was awake and faced with the necessity of doing something, and what he must do was perfectly apparent. The loaded gun was there, and he was there, and he had now, since last night, not only the negative motivation of not wanting particularly to live, but also the positive one of wanting and needing to die. But there was no urgency in it. He felt a kind of indolence in his bones, a remarkable lassitude. Walking over to the gun on the floor, he bent and picked it up and put it in a side pocket of his jacket, in which he had slept. He stood quietly, with an air of abstraction, watching Ellen on the bed. In his heart was a movement of pain which he fancied for a moment that he could hear faintly, like the dry rustle of cicada wings. Turning away, the gun in his pocket, he went out of the room and out of the house and began walking down the street in a tunnel of shade that breached the bright day.

He had no destination. He did not even have a particular

purpose in leaving the house, except that he was not quite ready to die and felt compelled to do something, almost anything, until he was. He had a vague notion that he might walk into the country and kill himself there in some quiet spot, or perhaps, after a while, he might return to the house and kill himself in the room with Ellen, so that they might later be found together. This was an enormous problem, where finally to kill himself, and at the moment he felt in no way capable of coping with it. His mind was sluggish, still fixed in the gray despair to which he had wakened, and now, besides, his head was beginning to throb like a giant pulse, measuring the cadence of his heart.

It was a very hot day. A bright, white, hot day. Heat shimmered on the surface of the street in an illusion of water. The sun was approaching the meridian in the luminous sky. The shimmering heat had somehow entered his skull, and all at once he was very faint, hovering precariously on the verge of consciousness while the gaseous world shifted and wavered and threatened to fade away. He had left the tunnel of shade and was now hatless in white light, the sun beating down directly upon his head.

Still walking, he pressed a hand across his eyes, recovering in darkness, and when he removed his hand at last, looking down at his feet, he was filled with wonder to see that his feet were bare. On the tip of the big toe of the left foot was a small plastic bandage, signifying that the toe had been lately stubbed. The bare feet were making their way on a gray dirt road. The dirt was hot and dry and powdery, rising in little puffs of dust at every step and forming a kind of thin, gray scum on faded blue denim.

For a second or two he could not for the life of him remember where he was or where he was going or how he had got there, but then it all came back clearly—how he had been sitting under the big cottonwood in the side yard at home, and how he had been thinking how good a swim in the creek would feel on such a hot day, and how at last he had decided to walk out and have the swim. So here he was, on the way, and everything was familiar again after being momentarily strange. He had just crossed Chaffee's pasture to reach the dirt road where it junctioned with

another road at the northeast corner of Mosher's old dairy, and there ahead was the stand of scrub timber along the creek in which the swimming hole was.

With an odd feeling of comfort and assurance, he said softly to himself, "I am Dewey Martin, and I'm going to have a cool swim in the creek on a hot day."

It appeared to be only a short distance on to the creek, but it was farther than it looked, nearly half a mile, beyond a cornfield and a pasture that were part of Dugan's farm. Dewey left the road and crawled between two strands of a barbed wire fence into the field. He walked around the edge of the field to the other side, around the standing corn, and stopped there by the fence and surveyed the pasture to see where Jupiter was. Jupiter was Dugan's bull, and he was dangerous.

There he was, sure enough, down at one end of the pasture, a safe distance away, and Dewey slipped through the fence and hurried across before old Jupiter could make up his mind whether to chase him or not. The creek was quite near now, no more than twenty yards away, but Dewey sat down in the shade of a hickory tree to rest before going on. He was curiously tired and still a little light-headed, and he was slightly disturbed by being unable to recall anything between the time of leaving home and the time of suddenly seeing his bare feet on the dusty road by Mosher's dairy. He had a feeling of having come a long way from a strange place, but this was surely nothing but a trick of the heat, the bright white light of the summer sun. After a few minutes he quit thinking about it and went on to the creek and stripped off naked and dived into the dark green water.

It was wonderfully cool in the water, and he stayed in it for about an hour without getting out once, but then he got out and lay for quite a long time on the bank in a patch of sunlight, his bare brown body shining like an acorn. After that, when his flesh was full of clean white heat, he dived back into the water, and it was cooler than ever by contrast, the purest and most sensual pleasure that anyone could hope to have on earth. Altogether, he spent almost all the afternoon by himself at the creek, and he could tell

by the position of the sun when he left that it was getting late, and that he would have to hurry on the long walk home.

It was not quite so hot going back. A light breeze came up, which helped, and he made it all the way to town without stopping to rest or feeling light in the head a single time. Cutting across several blocks to the street on which he lived, he started down this street in the direction of home, hearing as he walked the good and comforting sounds of mowers and sprinklers and the first cicadas, and smelling a supper now and then among flowers and cut grass.

Ahead of him, standing beside the walk, was a girl about his own age in a pink dress. It looked like a party dress, with a blue sash at the waist and a bit of lace at the throat. The girl had golden hair woven into two braids, and she was far and away the prettiest girl he had ever seen. As a matter of fact, he had instantly a notion that he had seen her before, although he couldn't remember where or when. This could not be true, however, for if he had seen her, pretty as she was, he would not have forgotten.

As he came abreast of her, she smiled and spoke.

"Hello," she said.

He stopped, watching her, and said hello.

"Do you live in this neighborhood?" she said.

"Down the street a few blocks."

"I live here. In this house. We just moved here yesterday."

"That's nice. I hope you like it."

"I don't know anyone yet. I'm a stranger. I may like it when I get to know someone. Would you come and talk with me sometime?"

"Sure. Maybe tomorrow."

He was painfully conscious of his dusty jeans and bare feet with the plastic bandage, somehow a survivor of the swimming and walking, still stuck on the one big toe. He edged away and began to turn, lifting a hand in a brief, shy gesture of good-bye.

"What's your name?" she said.

"Dewey. Dewey Martin. What's yours?"

"My name is Ellen," she said.

The sound of it was like an echo in the fading afternoon as he hurried on his way, but he did not recognize it as a name that he had known in the future.

BY THE SEA, BY THE SEA

HAL DRESNER

From the journal of Guy Dance:

Thursday, April 5

8 AM. A lovely morning spoiled before it began. Up at dawn, heavy with new thoughts squirming to be born. Coffee on the veranda. Cotton clouds swabbing sky with gentian violet. Pink mist rolling back to sea. Both reefs bared like bleached bull's horns.

Walked along shore toward St. Croix. Sand salted with gold dust. Thoughts of Aurelia in Chapter VI. Should she mention R.G. or wait till party? Imagined entire ballroom shimmering on face of sea.

Then disaster! At far edge of shore where sand was still glazed by tide, body of precious silver fish, still sweetly odorous. A crescent of lovely breast torn away by savage turtle jaws. Barbaric!

10:30 P.M. Impossible to write after horror of morning. Light lunch. Read Rimbaud in garden. Isobel pruning bougainvillea; orchids need new bedding.

Excellent dinner by Edgar Sam. Guacamole; sautéed fish meunière. But with reason: Isobel promised him week's holiday tomorrow, without my approval! Now it is too late to get another boy. Very poor planning for former private secretary. In punishment, no playing tonight. Listened to two *Brandenburgs* alone in study. Tried to capture Aurelia's opinion for scene with L. V. Overtaken by throbbing headache. Opened bottle of Barolo, '52; fair.

Friday, April 6

2:15 PM. Woke late. Fitful night, dream of silver fish. No appetite for breakfast, work.

Read Racine's *Cinna* on terrace. Maximus is overdrawn. Sky, pitiless blue; air clear. Mainland of St. Thomas is profile of Nephthys—but desecrated by crown of that tourist hotel. Isobel says they are building more. Soon those noxious jets will be preying on us like rocs. Animals know it. Odd stillness in underbrush lately; they have withdrawn to depths. No herons near beach in weeks. How long till this fragile beast shall also be flushed from his cloister?

Ironic to think that today. House a tomb. Edgar Sam gone; Isobel to Charlotte Amalie for shopping and "bargain hunting." Absurd after all these years. Yet she thrives on such activity. Look of unwilling exile in her eyes.

11:30 PM. Irony compounded; predilection of intrusion has come true. Guests tonight; first since Bronson and that cretinous producer. And just when secret of Chapter VI was near! Could have garroted Isobel when she came up walk with them. Mr. and Mrs. Pross ("Phil and Dotty") from Des Moines, Iowa. Tourists! Isobel met her in market, floundering with college French. An imbecile but with a bright *sang-froid* charm. Slender; pale walnut hair; dazzling teeth.

But he! The Dim American from Chapter III in flesh. A living vegetable. Bland egg face, olive pit eyes, anchovy smile, everything! Like conversing with my own creation. State College. Sells Insurance. Follows Baseball. Reads Condensed Books. Wary of Island Water. Suggested barbeque pit in our garden!

Dinner on terrace, an atrocity: burned gigot, gelatinous bechamel sauce. Isobel is helpless without Edgar Sam. Lush night, too. Diaphanous moon; pearl waves scuttling up shore like crabs; symphonic wind through palms. All wasted save for one lyrical moment: In silhouette, head raised, sea breeze spreading her hair like gossamer, "Dotty" (that *cannot* be her given name!) looked for an instant like Aurelia standing on cliffs at Whitford. Strange.

Opened a bottle of Chablis, '54; bad. Pross loved it. Wrote name in black memo book. Torpid conversation. He relates every topic to insurance. In desperation, played. Beethoven: *Sonata Operas 109, 110;* Chopin's *Concerto 1.* Superb in tonal changes. Women appreciative. But then

too late for trip back to mainland. With luck they will be gone by luncheon.

Saturday, April 7

3 PM. Uninspired day. Opal sky, stratus clouds. Ocean placid to peak of reefs, where waves froth like porpoises. Prosses swimming; Isobel, a proud mother, watches from shore. She is wearing that ochre playsuit!

Useless to try work while they are here. Gambol about like monkeys. Luggage still unpacked in hall. Agreed to it for Isobel's sake. Seems so hungry for "outside news"; more alive than in months. "Dotty" helped her make lunch. Saucisson en croute; good. If their combined talents equal one half Edgar Sam, week may be bearable. Should talk to Pross for dialogue, but he is *too* dull. Isobel shouldering burden; feigning great interest in insurance. But that leaves "Dotty" casting warm glances here. Preposterous to imagine that—must discontinue. My collegiate siren approaches, slick from her swim in Tyrrhenian. Her suit is slightly immodest.

11:45 PM. Her name is Dorothea. Thank God! Has read all my books. Did not mention it before because she "supposed everybody had." Charming, impressionable intellect. Discussed Redon, Bresdin, Fragonard all afternoon. Father owned gallery for time; mother a fashion model.

Pleasant evening due to her dinner: chicken and rice; good. Wore stunning lemon voile. She is tanning peach. Isobel (in mauve crepe) contributed salad; salty. Opened incomparable bottle of Auslesen, '48. Breeze from sea was eau de Coeur-Joie. Played Schumann's *Fantasiestucke* with variations. Dorothea enraptured; Pross requested "Stardust." Their marriage is inconceivable.

Sunday, April 9

1 PM. Up at seven, exhilarated. Amethyst sky; gulls wheeling like scythes. Reworked five lines in Chapter IV. Croissants for breakfast.

Suggested tour of islet. Pross too painfully sunburnt (He is fuchsia!); Isobel cooking. Walked with Dorothea to Boar's Head. Wore blue slacks, sleeveless blouse. Arms like willows. Talked of *Proud Voyage*. She identified with Lise. Wrote college theme on Garden of Eden symbol. Incisive

understanding. Compared my status to Mann, H. James, J. Joyce and several others.

Returned inland route. Parrots, trogans in trees. Native boys hunting agouti. Victoria cruziana blossoming on Button Pond. Dorothea called them "green pancake plants." Discussed my work in relation to Conrad, Dinesen, Hughes. Her eyes are liquid sienna.

10:30 PM. Languid afternoon. Fragrant wind rippling curtains of sea. Read Shelley aloud on terrace. *Prometheus Unbound; Epipsychidon; Song.* Pross slept; Isobel cooked; Dorothea folded at my feet like dawn.

Isobel's dinner unspeakable. Pross raved. Bridge saved evening. Dorothea's playing daring, imaginative. In beautiful contract we soared like flames. Unconquerable vulnerability. Pross and Isobel in stodgy, cautious partials.

Monday, April 10

11:15 AM. Restless night. Isobel breathing like hornet. Up at eight. Bleak sky; sea fresh. May rain tonight. Breakfast alone in study. Changed Aurelia's description in Chapter II, more use of "serene" (Dorothea's favorite word).

Pross and Isobel into Charlotte Amalie for shopping; Dorothea still sleeping. Her window is open. Will awaken her by playing Grieg. One of her favorites, and mine.

10 PM. Day of rapture! Lunch on terrace. Cold chicken; nice Montrachet. Read Dorothea first chapters of book. Enthralled; says it will be "most important novel in 300 yrs." Wore white shorts, exquisite striped jersey. Sea wind tangling her hair, prickling her golden skin. Feeling of time embalmed in sunset.

Then at six, a rainstorm. Sky black, palm fronds lashing at French windows. As we frantically closed down, Isobel called from mainland. Storm ravenous there. Impossible to return till morning.

Hilarious dinner of uncooked fish, burnt potatoes. Finished magnum of marvellous Bollinger Brut, '55. Played Moussorgsky in fugue to lightning. Both wildly drunk. Watched ocean from terrace. Snarling gray beast gnashing teeth on rocks. Embraced like tides. Her mouth brandy: Grand Marnier.

Now bathed and scented, she awaits in her bed. Rain is

ceaseless. God's blessing on us.

Tuesday, April 11

Noon. Dorothea is Aurelia. Vainglory not to have seen it from the first. Through study window, she is visible on terrace. In beige shorts, her thighs white as birth; beneath lime sweater, her breasts are quail. Torment to see and not touch her!

Pross sprawled like moss on chaise longue, going on about automobiles, supermarkets, electric saws. He is an electric saw. A more civilized society would have him dismantled. Now he drones insurance again. And Isobel listens attentively, paying premium to his policy.

They returned at ten in a fortunate abundance of noise. Scurried like Pan from my love's bed. An embarrassed breakfast. Isobel garrulous about accommodations at Paradiso. An adventure for her!

Will remain here until dinner reading Blake. ("My silks and fine array/My smiles and languish'd air/By love are driv'n away.")

10:30 PM. A dreadful evening. Light salad for dinner. We had no appetite but for love; Pross and Isobel still gorged from yesterday's feast at hotel. Small favor, he is not possessive. Sat with her on terrace and talked publicly but our hands touched! Behind us, in their suburban minds, Pross and Isobel chattered like macaws. Sea was a ribbon begging to be tightened about Isobel's neck. Wind keened and mocked us.

Impossible to sleep knowing he shared my Aurelia's bed.

Wednesday, April 12

2 PM. Luck! Isobel and Pross took walk about islet. No doubt he will sell some poor native an endowment policy. We waited till they were past reef.

Love is no less sweet for being fleeting. Sugarbirds sang in choirs; sunlight clothed my Aurelia in lamé.

She wants to leave Pross. But what of Isobel? In her inanity she has served me well. It was my bad choice not hers. Divorce would be slow death for her. A shameful return to family. Stuttering explanations. Forced admissions of inadequacy. It is inhuman to even suggest it. She lacks strength to survive. She would go mad. Also it is not un-

thinkable to imagine she would make demands.

Yet to forsake all for this private secretary convenience saw me marry? Would not Art be better served with Aurelia? She understands my work; shares my purpose. More than honing pencils, she ministers to my soul. Decision is agony.

Chiffonade salad for lunch; a bottle of Moselle, '57: fair. *9:45* PM. They returned at four babbling banalities. We were on beach reading Landor; *The Hamadryad.* Could not bear seeing her with him; retired to room. Slept till eight. No taste for dinner. Read some Hazlitt in den. Spoke to no one.

Thursday, April 13

5 AM. Tortured night, no sleep. Walked in garden. Orchids Isobel planted staring plaintively. She has tended them with all the love she has, yet their color lacks rarity. She has transformed nobility into commonplace. So also with this soul's flower. In her care it may grow but never blossom. A new gardener is needed.

3:30 PM. Had sacred moment with Aurelia. Told her killing Isobel is only solution. Agreeable. She will wait decent interval before divorce, return here. Intimated healthy dowry of alimony. My beloved!

Lunch by Pross. Surprise brought from Charlotte Amalie: franks and beans. Indigestible. How long, O Lord?

6:15 PM. Introspective day. Planning. Aurelia sunbathed; Pross read lurid best seller; Isobel sketched. Drowning is best way. Tide shall bear her away. Must be done while they are here. Better.

11:30 PM. News! Over bridge Pross related plans to leave Saturday. And Edgar Sam returns tomorrow! Had forgotten. So it must be done tomorrow morning. Weather looks promising. Velvet sky; diamond stars. Chill breeze from the singing sea.

Too excited to write more. Do not recall dinner.

Friday, April 14

10 AM. They are all upstairs dressing for beach. It is arranged with Aurelia. She will take Pross near north reef, out of sight. Sea is perfect. Crystal blue darkening to royal. Around south reef serpentine currents beat waves to spray;

sky is streaked with crimson.

Had no breakfast. Must hurry into my suit now.

10:45 AM. Dazed, feeling faint. But must record this while possible. Feeling thoughts receding. Too horrible.

Led Isobel by hand into wilderness of sea. Waves crowding about us like children. Aurelia, Pross, undefinable on far side of north reef. Swam toward rocks, beckoning Isobel to follow. Water darkening; undertow growing. Isobel flailing desperately, face delighted. Waited for her within yards of reef. Between waves, rocks rising like headstones. Took her by waist, guided her gently into current. Water towering in dark horns. Isobel frightened. Held her shoulders, smiling. Closed eyes. Under.

Thrashing! Struggling! Invisible strands drawing emerald world about us. Felt stone peaks beneath feet. Surfaced, breathed, then with current, lashed her head against rocks.

Calm. Tide returning to ocean. Isobel with it. Swam toward shore. Thought of Swinburne; *Ballad of Death.*

"From brows wherein the sad blood failed of red
And temples drained of purple and full of death
Her curled hair had the wave of sea-water
And the sea's gold in it."

Breathless, quivering, started toward north reef. Phrased declaration of horror:

"Help! Help! She's drowning!"

Across white fire of beach, saw Pross running toward me. But not to help. He had not yet heard me for he was shouting also. The same words! And in the same shrill rehearsed way!

Must tell Edgar Sam to put some beer on ice for police.

BODIES JUST WON'T STAY PUT

TOM MacPHERSON

This will be the last season that Dorothy goads me into turning over the back lawn. I've lost count of how many successive Septembers she has gotten me to sow new lawns,

back or front or both. Each fall I gripe that it's me we're killing, not the crabgrass. It was inevitable that one day I'd realize that her gardening would kill me if I didn't kill her first. So this year we will turn over the back lawn again, but when I seed it, Dorothy will be lying underneath.

My twist to this familiar plan is so foolproof that I'm sorry I didn't think of it one, two, five years ago. Each year Dorothy nags until I agree to hire old Krajewski to bring in his rotary plow and turn over either or both lawns. Then, while she spends the next four days at the flower show in Newark, I spread fertilizer and seed, and water every four hours. This September I'll help her pack her bags, then just before she leaves I'll rap her over the head. I will dig a trench in the newly turned-over lawn, put her in, then the next morning I'll do my seeding. The quick germinating ryegrass in the seed mixture will sprout within three days. By the fifth day, when I will have to report her missing because she didn't return from the flower show, the lawn will have a uniform stand of young grass.

Old Krajewski turned over the back lawn just before supper. We knew he'd do it late, for he forces himself to give his truck farm a full day's work before he hires out for odd jobs. By the time he had it raked smooth, it was getting dark.

After supper I carried Dorothy's bags out to the garage and put them in the car. I didn't back the car out; instead I abused the starter while alternately flipping the ignition key off and on, off and on. As I knew she would, Dorothy got impatient waiting on the driveway.

"Oh, Miller," she snapped, "you flooded it."

As I slipped out of the driver's seat, I heard her clacking into the garage, her hard-hitting heels spelling out her exasperation. It was now 7:31. I knew Marion Gorton would have sprinted to her kitchen window, for the ninety seconds duration of the first commercial on Wagon Train. She would have heard me working away at the starter, and most likely she had seen Dorothy make her bad-tempered entrance into the garage.

I moved around the front of the car to open the door on Dorothy's side. As she stooped to climb in, I hit her one

solid crack with the oscillating sprinkler. It wasn't through a diabolical sense of revenge that I used the sprinkler; it just happened to be handy, hanging on the exposed 2 x 4 studs. Dorothy went down soundlessly, and I slammed the door shut.

"I guess I did flood it, dear," I called out, "but if we wait a few minutes it'll turn over."

I dragged Dorothy over to the corner and covered her with the burlap bags we had accumulated over the years for covering new seed. I climbed in behind the wheel, pulled the door quietly onto the first latch, and started the motor. I headed in the general direction of the railroad station, but just outside of town I detoured to the town dump where small mountains of refuse were smoldering. Dorothy never spent money on anything but her garden, so the suitcases were nothing but composition-board and would be ashes by morning. Just to be sure, I had brought along the gallon can of gasoline we used for fueling the lawn mower. I poured gasoline over the opened suitcases and her clothes, and touched them off with a match.

When I got back to the garage, Marion Gorton was putting out a milk bottle.

"Hi, Miller," she said, "Dorothy off to the flower show?"

The first thing I noticed about the little detective with the gray and saffron walrus mustache was that no one else seemed to notice him. But I knew, right off, that he was the one I had to be careful of. He was on the front walk with Detective Lieutenant Delaney and the other two plainclothesmen. When they arrived, they didn't come right up to the house. I watched through the blinds of the window in the front bedroom as the lieutenant huddled with the other two. Little Whiskers stood offside a few feet, peering at the clusters of azaleas Dorothy had set out as a skirmish line in front of the house. He held a small open notebook in one hand, a pencil in the other. The way his left arm was crooked, I was surprised not to see an umbrella hooked on it. When the huddle broke up, Delaney turned to Whiskers while the other two went to the front doors of the houses flanking mine.

As I came down the stairs, I heard the knock on the front door.

"Mr. Davis?" Delaney asked, showing his identification card. I was surprised that he didn't recognize me, for I had noticed him sizing me up when I was at headquarters reporting Dorothy missing. That was on Thursday, only two days ago. I opened the door all the way, and he walked in. Little Whiskers hung back, then noticing that I kept holding the door open he nodded sharply, broke loose from where he was standing with a little jig step, and walked briskly in and past Delaney.

"I know you told Missing Persons that Mrs. Davis didn't make any hotel reservation," said Delaney, "but Newark police checked, and they report she didn't register at any hotel there. So that brings us right back here, to start looking from where she was last seen." I almost waited for him to add *alive.*

Dorothy never reserved a hotel room when she went to the flower show. She always found a room somewhere. Maybe I should have made a reservation for her this time, but I was afraid to introduce any action contrary to her normal habit. That may have been a mistake on my part, for even when I had told them down at headquarters that she never made advance hotel reservations, they obviously hadn't been convinced.

Delaney wanted some answers about Dorothy's habits, hobbies, and whether she had any friends or relatives in other towns. I said her habits and hobbies were all dirt gardening, and gave him the address of her sister and male cousin, both in California. Then he asked did I mind if they looked around the premises.

Little Whiskers had been standing at the dining nook window, looking out at the back lawn. When Delaney and I walked to the side door in answer to a knock, Whiskers executed an about face with that little breakaway jig and trotted over. I opened the door and the other two detectives were standing in the driveway. Delaney beckoned them in. All except Whiskers went down into the basement. With his grimy little notebook in his left hand, the little man went out the side door and walked around the back. I

went over to the window where he had been standing, and from there I watched his movements.

Whiskers was careful to stay on the slates and not step on the new grass. I watched him circle the back lawn twice, slowly. Then the lieutenant's voice, right at my shoulder, made me jump.

"What's that mound out there?" he asked, pointing to the southeast corner of the backyard.

"That? Uh, why, uh, that's a compost heap."

My stuttering did it. He looked at me—I guess you'd call it piercingly. "Compost heap, huh? I think we'll take a look at it."

I tried not to look too relieved, for I didn't want him to realize that what had actually made me jumpy was Whiskers squatting and peering at different sections of the new lawn.

Delaney got a rake and shovel from the garage. While the compost heap was brought down to ground level, I tried to appear nonchalant and disinterested. I gazed everywhere, but at the digging operation. I looked at the houses surrounding our three-quarter acre plot, and could imagine slats of window blinds being held apart for inquisitive eyes.

"Want us to keep digging, Delaney?" one of his men asked.

I was surprised by how close to me the lieutenant was when he answered. He was studying my face, and I guess my confidence was showing. "No," he said. "Knock off."

The two men leaned on the handles of their shovel and rake and looked unhappily at the several small piles they had made of the compost heap. I felt sorry for them and gallantly offered to take care of the mess later.

"No," said the lieutenant. "Leave it just as it is. We'll send out some men to shovel it back. Or we may be out again."

The three men walked out front, while Little Whiskers hung back. So did I. He lifted his notebook to within eight inches of his nose, and made some marks in it while he mumbled, "did—quad—S four—first." He peered again at my lawn, then suddenly pocketed his notebook as though surprised to find the others had left. I was so close to him

that his breakaway jig dumped me smack into the zinnia patch.

Another too frequent and maddening chore I usually got out of my wife's gardening was transplanting her zinnias. As Whiskers apologetically helped me to my feet, I realized my wife was still capable of making me dig dirt. Now I had to transplant Dorothy, because Whiskers had made a map of the lawn and gridded it like a road map. I didn't know where S four might be, but I knew for certain that the whole lawn would be torn up until the police either found Dorothy or gave up.

I was thinking of my precarious situation, standing there where Whiskers had left me, when my nervous system got jolted again by a voice beside me saying, "Can't see any sign of the old crab, huh Miller?"

"What? What's that?" I whispered hoarsely, turning, seeing the grinning face of Herb Gorton.

"The crabgrass. You finally got it licked. I don't see a sign of the old crab."

Some people never are convinced that turning over a lawn sends the crabgrass underground, millions of seeds waiting for next year. I never could convince Dorothy of that—"You're just lazy!" she'd always say—so we still turned over one or both Davis lawns every fall. The Gortons and their crabgrass, on the other hand, lived amicably side by side.

Herb had come over to ask, "What's with the two carloads of cops?" Of course, he and the rest of the neighborhood knew what the police were looking for, but I was glad to see Herb. I wanted to find out whether my staging of Dorothy's departure had fooled his wife. It had. Herb told me that Marion swore that she had seen me take Dorothy off to the station and that Dorothy had waved to her from the car as we backed out. That bonus cheered me up plenty. But I was still facing the problem of "S four."

I couldn't risk transplanting Dorothy to a spot under the compost heap. I wasn't sure whether Delaney had been considerate or suspicious when he'd discouraged me from shoveling the small heaps back into a single mound. I walked around the lawn and in and out of the garage

without getting any inspiration. Inside the house I paced through all the rooms, but it was in the basement that I found the ideal spot. We had two of those old wood barrels, used by movers and so hard to find these days. Dorothy had intended to have me plant strawberries in them some spring, but right now both were half full of miscellaneous junk. The old cotton-crepe bedspread that Dorothy used to cover them was inside out, and Dorothy would never have covered them that way, so I knew the detectives had uncovered the barrels and probably had searched carefully through their contents.

The Gortons had planned a Saturday night block party. One of the things Herb came over for was to ask if I would prefer that they call the party off so that I might have some quiet. I had talked Herb out of canceling the party, feeling that it could help me in getting Dorothy moved unnoticed. I set my alarm for four in the morning. I knew the party would break up between two and three, and that all the neighbors who didn't get invited to the Gorton's parties would certainly be catching up on lost sleep by four o'clock.

Before daylight, Dorothy was in the strawberry barrel down in the basement. I had used the spade to lift the divots of new grass carefully before doing the serious digging. When I finished, I replaced the divots. In full daylight, the next morning, I opened a bale of peat moss and began laboriously breaking it up and spreading it thin over the top of the lawn. Thus I covered up any possible indications of what I had done.

When Herb came over about noontime, I sanctimoniously explained that for Dorothy's sake, wherever she was, I would do my utmost to create a perfect lawn. Herb sighed, placed a consoling hand on my shoulder. After a moment of silence, he headed back to his own place—for breakfast, I supposed.

Although I saw Whiskers driving slowly by in a '51 Ford late Sunday afternoon, it wasn't until Tuesday that he and Delaney came out again. Delaney said he just wanted to check on whether I had heard from or about my wife. He told me they had contacted her sister and cousin through

the police out in California, and that neither knew anything about Dorothy's whereabouts. He reminded me to call headquarters if I heard anything. Neither he nor Whiskers looked at the lawn.

As he was about to leave, Delaney remembered the compost heap. He apologized for forgetting to send some men out to put it back together and promised they'd be out in the morning. Whiskers put his notebook up to within eight inches of his nose, and as he scribbled I heard him mumble, "Cesspool."

That made me jump, and I was glad the lieutenant was already walking away so he didn't see I'd been startled. Earlier in the day I had plugged the drain under the basement wash tubs. I was going to fake a cesspool stoppage and get old Krajewski to dig up the front lawn and uncover the cesspool. I knew Krejewski would arrive just in time to dig down to the cesspool cover before dark. Then during the night I'd drop Dorothy in, replace the cover, and start shoveling on the dirt myself. By daylight, I'd resume shoveling openly and if anyone asked, I'd tell them it had been a drain stoppage all the time. Now, with Whiskers thinking cesspool, I'd have to unplug the drain and try to come up with a better hiding place for a body that just wouldn't stay down.

By Thursday no one had come to dig up the back lawn, nor did any police arrive to do anything about the cesspool. Dorothy was getting pretty strong in the strawberry barrel, and the sprays and wicks that I had around weren't too much help. Three men did come out late in the day, however, to work on the compost heap. First, they dug about three feet below the surface under the spot of the original heap. The lieutenant had ordered that, they explained. They were about to start shoveling everything back, when I decided to take advantage of their muscle. Herb had come over to watch. And while we were all guzzling the beers I'd brought out, I asked the diggers to leave the hole open.

"The wife always wanted a big weeping willow tree," I told them, "and since I now got a hole all dug, I can put one in," I almost said *in memory*, "as a surprise for her when she comes home."

I knew I could get Dorothy into that hole and well covered during the night. And the next day, I could leisurely replace the compost heap. If the police diggers reported to Delaney that they had left the hole open, so I could plant a willow tree, and he got suspicious as to why I'd changed my mind, I could always tell him the willow idea had been sort of an impulse that I'd dropped after a little thought. The next day, when Herb helped me shovel the compost heap back, I told him I had reconsidered putting a tree in. I'd realized that it isn't right to plant a large tree close to a neighbor's plot, since its branches would hang over his, Herb's, property.

Whiskers came out alone the next day. But not before I had the compost heap all neatly piled up, covered with a bag of manure, and water until the aroma was much stronger than Dorothy had been when I'd rolled out the barrel. Whiskers didn't talk at first. He just walked around the backyard, occasionally squatting to peer at the lawn or the flower beds. Then out came that dog-eared notebook again and up it went to that spot eight inches short of his nose.

"The police didn't dig up your cellar floor yet, did they?" he asked.

When I heard my jaws snap, I realized my mouth had dropped open as far as it would go. I looked at him for a good long moment, then swallowed some saliva and shouted, really shouted, "The *who* didn't what?"

He blinked his eyes, pulled down his notebook, and looked a little hurt. Then he repeated it, haltingly, "The police didn't dig up your cellar floor, did they?"

"The *police!*" I bellowed. "You're talking about them as if you're not one of them!"

He answered with a soft "Oh." While I stood with my eyes bugging, he got into his unmarked '51 Ford and drove away.

The lieutenant was laughing. I laughed, too. When I'd started downtown, I was going to storm into headquarters screaming my indignation. But as I got closer to the police, I cooled off considerably.

" 'Whiskers,' as you call him, has never been on any police force," said Delaney. "Maybe he took a correspondence course somewhere. I wouldn't know. You've heard of fire buffs, well I guess we got us a homicide buff. The first time he followed us on a case, we didn't even realize he was along until one of the boys spotted him making one of those crazy grid maps of a backyard. We chased him away, but that night we got a phoned-in tip that our suspect was out in the dark digging up his yard. We sneaked out and let him finish the shovel work before we grabbed him and the corpse. Naturally, now we don't feel the same way about Whiskers following us around. Say, that's a good name you got for him—Whiskers."

"You know, Mr. Davis," Delaney continued, "we almost came out to tear up your lawn. But, when we found there wasn't much insurance on your wife, and you had no other motive we could tumble to, we decided against crowding you just yet. Then when your neighbors told us how you worked like a dog every year and this was your best lawn yet, we figured to let the whole thing ride. Besides, we still don't know that anything has happened to Mrs. Davis. All we know right now is that she's missing."

When I left headquarters, I felt so good I had to stop the car a few blocks from home and work my face into a harried look again. Just as I drove up to the door, I noticed a huge flatbed truck from Wilton Nurseries backed up on the Gorton driveway. A big tree hanging over the tailgate extended to our back lawn near the compost heap. Or, rather, to where the compost heap had been.

Herb Gorton intercepted me and placed both hands on my shoulders, in a fatherly fashion, while he chokingly explained, "Miller, after you said how Dorothy always wanted a weeping willow, your neighbors decided to chip in and buy one. It's sort of a token of our feelings for you and Dorothy, wherever she is, while you are both going through this trying time. We don't mind a bit if it hangs over into our yard. What do you say, we go over and watch those nurserymen dig? At the rate they're going, fella, won't be able to watch them long—"

THE DANGERFIELD SAGA

C. B. GILFORD

In the beginning, there was the discovery of the gun. Quite a surprising discovery actually, when one considers that this was a household that had never harbored a weapon any more deadly than the iron poker by the fireplace. Not that a poker can't be deadly. But it does have a peaceful purpose also. A gun, however, is quite another thing.

This was a pretty little gun. Nickel-plated, shining, obviously brand-new. And small, petite, almost feminine-looking. You might say, a female of the species. And there it lay, in a desk drawer in the library.

Miss Jennifer Dangerfield had just rustled downstairs in her floor-sweeping black silk in search of a postage stamp. A half-century veteran of spinsterhood, she was a formidable woman, tall, broad-shouldered, spare without seeming thin, and of stern, almost forbidding countenance. Yet when she opened that certain drawer and saw the little gun, she screamed.

The scream was lusty and genuine enough to be heard beyond the library. There were hurried footsteps descending the stairs. And hardly had the final echoes of the scream died away, when Philip Dangerfield rushed into the library. But then when he saw that Miss Jennifer was alone and unharmed, he halted and stared at her with a puzzled look on his face.

"Auntie, what's the matter?"

He was a good-looking boy—man, really. He still limped slightly from the shrapnel wound he'd taken at Chateau Thierry, even now, more than a year afterward. He had on a white shirt with a high, stiff, round-tipped collar, and his tie was only half-tied. He'd been dressing upstairs when he'd heard the scream.

"What's the matter?" he repeated.

"There's a gun in that drawer," she said, and pointed as if toward a spider or a snake.

Philip crossed the room and glanced down at the open drawer. "Whose is it?" he wanted to know. "Where did it come from?"

"That's what I intended to ask you. Is it yours? You know my opinion on firearms?"

Yes, he knew her opinion. He'd brought a German Luger home from France as a souvenir, and she had made him give it away. "It's certainly not mine," he told her. "I've never seen it before."

"Well, somebody brought it into the house. Maybe it was your wife." She spoke the last words with a contemptuous curl of her thin lips.

Philip reddened above the stiff collar. "I'll ask her," he said.

He went out of the room and called from the bottom of the stairs. "Ivy, can you come down a minute?"

"Right away, darling!" The answer trilled clear as a bell. A lovely voice. And the girl who appeared at the top of the stairs was just as lovely.

Ivy Dangerfield was twenty-three. Her face was flawless, pale except for a spot of color in each cheek. Her lips were full, pink, provocative. Her eyes were blue-green, sparkling, and moist. Her abundant honey-blonde hair topped her head like a golden cloud. And then there was her figure. She wore a white middie blouse, open at the throat and swooping down to a red bow, rather alarmingly low for the fashions of that particular year. But her navy-blue skirt, cut slim and straight, reached appropriately just to the high-tops of her shoes. In between was the smallest possible waist. All in all, she was something—quite something.

Philip held up his hand, and she ran down the stairs to him. He led her into the library, where Jennifer still stood. The two women exchanged no cordialities.

"I found a gun in that drawer," Jennifer stated flatly. "Does it belong to you?"

Ivy continued to hold onto Philip's hand, but she didn't seem frightened. "Yes, it's mine," she said.

Only Philip was surprised. "Darling, I had no idea you owned a gun."

"I didn't until day before yesterday. Then I saw it in a

pawnshop window, and promptly bought it."

"But why on earth?"

She squeezed his hand a little, turning toward him and giving him an uncertain but still enchanting smile. "I hope you'll forgive me, because it really, I suppose, wasn't any of my business—"

"What are you talking about?"

"I was worried, you see. I know I've mentioned it to you, Philip. But I've felt it ever since I came to live here. There are so many valuables sitting around this house, the silver especially—and all that jewelry, which is old-fashioned, but worth quite a lot, I'm sure—and the money your aunt keeps here. I've always thought it was an open invitation to burglars. That's dangerous to the people in the house too, don't you see? We needed protection. And then when I saw that little gun in the window, I rather fell in love with it too—"

She was smiling so entrancingly at Philip that he found himself smiling back at her, his hand more closely intertwined with hers, and his whole being drowning in her eyes. He withdrew himself slowly and with effort.

"You see how it was, Auntie—"

Jennifer was staring at them in cold disapproval. "I certainly do see," she said. And she marched stiffly past them out into the hallway.

They didn't follow her, but puzzled, they heard her at the telephone. She contacted the operator, and asked for the police. Then she requested, "Sergeant Ramey, please." Her conversation with Ramey was even more curious. Without stating why, she asked him to come over. Then, finally, she returned to the library and told them, "Sergeant Ramey will be here in five minutes. Please wait right here."

Ivy glanced apprehensively at Philip, but Philip's warning look quieted her. So she let herself be led to a chair and sat down. Philip chose to pace a little before the fireplace, nervously watching his aunt all the while. Jennifer stationed herself in the doorway to the hall and steadfastly refused to look in the direction of her prisoners. The gun still lay in the open drawer.

"Surely, Auntie," Philip said after a moment, "if it's only

a matter of getting rid of the gun, I don't see why the police are necessary—"

Stony silence answered him. He didn't try again.

Sergeant Ramey was punctual. He'd come on foot, but the station was fully four blocks away. They heard his heavy, pounding step on the front path and his heavy hand on the knocker. Jennifer admitted him and brought him quickly into the library.

Ramey was a member of the plainclothes force, a big, square man not quite yet thirty. He looked reasonably intelligent, but more stolid than shrewd. He had blue jowls and craggy black brows that made a straight line over his deepset gray eyes. Right now he seemed a bit winded from his journey.

"You remember my nephew Philip," Jennifer told him. "And this is Ivy, his new wife."

Ramey nodded, looking somewhat like a bulldog.

"Sergeant Ramey," Jennifer went on to explain, "has consulted with me several times before on the matter that Ivy seems so concerned with. About keeping valuables in this house, that is. Now, Sergeant Ramey, for the benefit of these young people, will you answer this question? Do you think the police provide adequate protection for this house?"

The Sergeant beamed with pride. "We sure do, Miss Dangerfield. You haven't had anything stolen yet, have you?"

"I certainly have not." She shot Philip and Ivy a glance of triumph. "Now, Sergeant, will you take a look at what I just found in this desk drawer?" She led him across the room and pointed.

Ramey bent over and examined the gun with interest, though without touching it. "Now whose is that?" he wanted to know.

"It belongs," Jennifer said, "to this young lady." She strode purposefully toward the fireplace. "Now, Sergeant, come over here and sit down please, and I'll explain exactly why I called you. And you sit down too, Philip. Here."

Both men obeyed her. She was a woman whom people found it necessary to obey. She herself took up a position

near the fireplace, and for a moment the small hissing and crackling of the fire were the only sounds in the room. The flames cast flickering shadows against her face, and her eyes, as black as her dress, glinted steadily out of those shadows.

"This young lady's story," she began finally, "is that she bought the gun to protect the contents of this house, even though these contents are not her own property to worry about. None of her business, wouldn't you say, Sergeant? And she a mere girl, a self-appointed watchman going armed about the place. Tell me truthfully, Sergeant, don't you think that's a preposterous explanation for the purpose of a gun?"

The crimson color rose hotly on Ivy's delicate throat and ascended to her cheeks. "I'm willing to admit, Aunt Jennifer," she said quickly, "that it was probably a foolish idea."

The older woman sniffed. "I think, Sergeant, it was more than a foolish idea. I think it was devious and dark."

Philip broke the short silence which followed. "Aunt Jennifer, just what do you mean by that? Please explain."

"What do I mean? I mean that I think it's quite possible that your dear wife bought that gun to murder me with."

Ivy arose quickly, but she said nothing. Words seemed to tremble on her lips, and her hands clenched into small fists at her sides. Philip rose too, after a moment, but he merely stood beside his wife, too stunned to reply. It was Sergeant Ramey who finally spoke.

"Miss Dangerfield, that's a serious accusation. On purely circumstantial evidence. And not even much of that."

Jennifer was undaunted. "If you will let me continue, sir. We've already established, I believe, the inadequacy of the girl's excuse for the gun. Add to that these facts: I'm worth half a mililon dollars. I've made a will by which my nephew Philip, my only living relative, is my sole heir. Philip, as you know, served in France. He returned to this country only two months ago. He made the mistake of lingering in New York. That was where he met this girl. He married her after knowing her less than a month, and without my approval. Since she's come here, I've questioned her myself.

She's very reticent about her family background and about her own past activities. I'd already come to a definite conclusion. The girl is a fortune hunter. She'd found out that Philip had a rich old aunt in her fifties, and she married him for the money he would inherit. That was bad enough. But I managed to tolerate the girl because Philip seemed temporarily fond of her. I didn't dream until today that she might get impatient about inheriting the money and decide to hurry the process a bit."

Sergeant Ramey was pondering all that Jennifer had said, his brows contracted, a frown covering his whole face. "It's a situation," he decided, at last, "where there's a possibility of premeditated mayhem. But we still have no real evidence that a crime was or is intended."

Jennifer smiled at the young couple. She had made her point. "Don't misunderstand me, Sergeant. I am not making a direct accusation of attempted murder. I'm not asking you to put anybody in jail. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't know whom to put in jail. There's a possibility too, you know, that despite his protested innocence Philip might also be involved. As you may have noticed, the girl is pretty. She could have turned his head."

Philip was entirely too astonished to defend himself.

"I'm merely asking you another favor, Sergeant. I've asked you before to keep a special eye on my house. And you've done a fine job of it. Now I'm asking you to keep an eye on me. Should anything happen—should I pass away suddenly, for whatever apparent cause—I'd like you to remember what I just told you. If they should try anything, I wouldn't want them to get away with it."

Sergeant Ramey rose heavily from his chair, a look of relief on his broad face. "Well, I can surely do that, Miss Dangerfield—"

"That's all I ask," Jennifer said in a tone of imperious dismissal. "Thank you, Sergeant."

A little embarrassed perhaps, Ramey didn't look at the young people. "Good-bye then," he said, and ambled away.

Philip didn't come to life till the Sergeant was out of the library. Then, dragging Ivy with him, he ran out into the

front hall and caught the policeman at the door.

"Sergeant Ramey," he said quickly, "surely you don't believe those things my aunt just told you. You couldn't possibly."

Cornered, the Sergeant shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and scratched the back of his head. "A policeman always has to be suspicious," he said finally. "There's no other way."

"Do you mean you think Ivy or myself might actually murder Aunt Jennifer?"

"No, I don't think that—necessarily. If you're not planning a murder, then there won't be any murder. And then there won't be any trouble for you or me or the young lady or anybody. We'll just wait and see."

Philip, a bit recovered now from his initial shock, was becoming angry. But Sergeant Ramey remained stoically placid and businesslike.

"By the way, Mrs. Dangerfield," he said, "do you have a permit for firearms."

"No," Ivy admitted.

"Well, I think then it would be safer all around if you gave me the gun."

"Of course you can have it!" Philip exploded. "Of course!"

He marched furiously back into the library and picked the revolver out of the drawer. Jennifer watched him without comment. He returned to the hall and thrust the weapon into Ramey's hands.

"Now get out of here," Philip said.

The Sergeant permitted himself one of his slow, infrequent smiles. "That's an excellent bit of playacting, Mr. Dangerfield. But unnecessary. We of the police are impressed only by facts, you know. Yes, only facts."

And with that thinly veiled warning, the Sergeant stowed the gun in his pocket, bowed to Ivy, and took his leave.

That evening Philip and Ivy held a sort of council of war in their bedroom. It was not a large room. It had been Philip's before he left for the war, and it still had a masculine atmosphere and furnishings. Not the sort of place to

bring a bride. But it had been Jennifer's only offering and Philip, with no independent means, had had little choice but to accept.

Ivy sat on the edge of the bed, her hair disarranged, her eyes full of tears, but no less beautiful. "Philip," she said for the dozenth time, "it's just that your aunt is jealous of me and hates me. So she's trying to ruin our marriage. She really doesn't think I wanted to kill her."

"Well, we won't allow her to ruin our marriage," Philip answered for the dozenth time. But instead of comforting his wife with caresses and embraces, he was pacing the carpet, trying to augment his fury with exercise.

"Take me away from here," Ivy pleaded, not for the first time either. "I don't care about your aunt's money."

"Well, I do care about her money. There's the principle of the thing besides. And there's still another reason too. I was a machine gunner in France. That's the only profession on this earth I've been trained in. Jennifer, as I see it now, took pains to make sure that my education was of the most impractical sort. So now that the world has been made safe for democracy and there are very few opportunities for machine gunners, I don't know what I should possibly be able to do if I were cast adrift. I married you, my darling, on the assumption I could keep you in the style you deserve —on Jennifer's money, of course. I refuse to ask you now to live the life of a clerk's or a laborer's wife."

Ivy smiled at her husband's devotion, even though the sadness did not leave her eyes. She sat thinking while he continued to pace.

"Philip," she said after a very long time, "suppose something should happen to Aunt Jennifer? Just suppose."

He whirled on her in amazement, his face suddenly a shade paler. "What are you getting at?" he demanded.

She caught his implication. "If you're thinking, Philip, that I meant that we arrange for something to happen— well, I didn't. How could you ever—"

He was instantly contrite. He threw himself on his knees in front of her and took her hands. "I'm sorry, darling," he said. "You see how upset I am. Please forgive me."

"Of course," she told him. "But what I meant, Philip, was

this. Your aunt has alerted that frightening character, Sergeant Ramey, to suspect foul play if anything should happen to her. Anything at all. Don't you see? If anything should happen we'd automatically be blamed."

He stared at her. "We'd be innocent, of course. So nothing could be proved."

But Ivy continued to sit there like Cassandra, her eyes clouded, contemplating a future doom. "Innocent people have suffered before," she said. "At best their reputations are ruined. At worst they're falsely convicted and sent to prison. Sometimes even to execution. I've read of cases like that, Philip." She leaned forward suddenly and kissed him. "Let's leave this place, darling, before something awful does happen. Please, Philip, I know we should leave."

He comforted her, stroking her hair. "If that's the problem," he told her, "then it's up to us to make sure that nothing suspicious does happen to Aunt Jennifer. As long as she's safe, darling, so are we. Don't you see?"

Obviously she didn't, but his caresses were terribly nice, and they were very much in love in those days.

Ivy being too delicate for such matters, Philip enlisted the help of the maid, Sarah, in his project. Sarah, dour, plump, and in her tired thirties, had little stomach for the work, and Philip had to goad her on. "Most accidents occur in the home," he reminded her again and again.

Sarah went about it grumblingly. She couldn't understand, for instance, why her perfectly done floors had to be meddled with. "Slippery floors are dangerous," he insisted. "Off with all that extra wax. Just barely enough for a shine, that's all." And then she had to comb the house for oily rags and all such combustibles.

He himself tinkered with the kitchen stove and the furnace in the cellar. He searched the house for unlabeled poisons. But it was not till he started tacking down the loose carpet at the top of the front stairs that Jennifer discovered him.

"What are you up to?" she wanted to know. They'd grown noticeably cool toward each other, and these were the first words she'd addressed directly to him since Sergeant Ramey's visit.

He could scarcely deny his intention. "The carpet was loose," he explained. "Somebody could have tripped over it."

She seemed to come instantly to the correct conclusion, but with a kind of evil glee, she pretended that she hadn't. "You never before bothered yourself with the condition of this house," she pointed out. "But now I suppose you're concerned for your dear Ivy."

"Of course I am," he lied sullenly. He picked up his hammer and tacks and retreated quickly down the stairs.

He would have escaped her completely, but she called to him from the top. "Wait a minute, Philip. I want to talk to you." And she hurried down.

When he had time to think about it later, he was quite certain that Jennifer acted deliberately. He stood obediently at the foot of the stairs, waiting for her to descend. Whatever it was that happened, happened when she was about halfway down. Perhaps she caught her shoe in the hem of her long skirt, or her footing was unsure.

At any rate, she hadn't been holding onto the railing. And she had been coming fast. Then suddenly she gave a little scream and lost her balance. Terrified, Philip dropped his tools and held out his arms to catch her. She fell straight into his widespread arms.

Jennifer was no small, feather-weight woman. She was both heavy and bony. When she crashed into Philip she bore him to the ground and landed on top of him.

She was up almost instantly, rearranging and brushing off her skirt. Philip lay where he was, taking stock of the sudden pains in his back and elbows. She looked down at him with an unfathomable smile.

"I might have broken my neck," she said. "You saved my life, Philip. Thank you." But she said it in a way which revealed that she knew precisely the motive for his gallantry.

He lay there and watched her sweep into the library. It was a long time before he could raise his aching body from the floor.

It was perhaps a week later that, sitting in the library

together, Philip and Ivy heard the scream. It was a scream that might have heralded the Day of Judgment, and it came from Sarah upstairs. Philip leaped out of his chair, rushed from the library, and climbed at a madman's pace toward the source of the scream. Ivy, though confined in a hobbled skirt, was not far behind him.

They found Sarah at the open door of Jennifer's bedroom. The woman was babbling rather incoherently, but Philip shook her unmercifully and finally gathered the facts. Less than half an hour earlier, Jennifer had complained of stomach pains and taken to her bed, asking Sarah to look in on her now and then. Well, Sarah had just looked in, and discovered her mistress in a state of unconsciousness.

"Go for Doctor Page!" Philip shouted in a panic.

While Sarah headed downstairs and out the front door, he and Ivy ventured into the bedroom. Jennifer lay, fully dressed even to her shoes, atop the lacy spread on her huge, four-poster bed. Pale, motionless, her eyes closed, her arms stiff and straight at her sides, she had the look of a corpse.

"She's dead," Ivy said in a hushed tone.

"We don't know that," Philip argued. "But we'd better find out."

Nevertheless he approached his aunt somewhat gingerly. He walked over to the bed, but didn't touch its occupant. He bent over and stared closely at Jennifer's face. Then he put the palm of his hand close to her nostrils. "I'm sure she's breathing," he said softly.

Ivy, despite her better judgment, might have looked disappointed.

Philip then started taking his aunt's pulse. "She's alive all right," he said, "but the beat seems a little slow to me."

They stared at each other for a moment. Then, by mutual agreement, they went to work. Neither knew what to do, but they had to do something. Ivy got a wet cloth and massaged Jennifer's brow. Philip chafed his aunt's wrists, trying to rub life and circulation back into them.

That's what they were doing when Sergeant Ramey spoke from the bedroom doorway. "Well now, what do we have here?"

They both started guiltily, as if they'd been interrupted in

the dispatching of Jennifer rather than in an attempt to save her.

"I was passing by and saw the front door wide open," the policeman said. "Which was out of the ordinary on a chilly day like today—"

"Sarah must have left it open," Philip answered hastily, "when she ran after Doctor Page."

"Doctor Page?"

"My aunt got sick suddenly. We don't know what's wrong with her—"

"Don't you know?"

Philip exploded with sudden anger. "No, we don't!"

The Sergeant remained his placid self. "Well, we'll see when the doctor arrives. Meanwhile, I suggest you let the poor lady alone."

"We were only trying to help her."

"Sure you were."

Philip turned away in rage. And as he turned, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of a strange phenomenon. But when he looked hard and directly, what he thought he'd seen was already gone.

And he was sure he'd seen what he'd seen. The ghost of a smile, quite conscious and aware, on Jennifer's face. Before he could call it to the policeman's attention, however, it had flitted away.

Jennifer Dangerfield didn't die, of course. Doctor Page called several times, but could never decide what had been wrong with her. Jennifer recovered quickly and made no charges or accusations. Nonetheless, Sergeant Ramey became more vigilant. He paid frequent calls to the Dangerfield mansion, averaging a visit every week or so.

Spring came and went, and summer arrived. Jennifer thrived on the change of seasons. Philip and Ivy didn't. Or at least their marriage didn't.

There were incidents like this.

Jennifer had spent nearly a whole lifetime being morbidly afraid of water. Now suddenly she developed an equally morbid fascination for canoes. Philip and Ivy, in their new roles of fearful guardians, could not allow her to go off

boating by herself. If something should happen to her, Sergeant Ramey might imagine nautical sabotage. So they were forced to accompany her. Philip, as oarsman for his two ladies, developed quite impressive calluses.

The inevitable day arrived when Jennifer rocked the boat. They were certain she did it deliberately and that in fact it was the planned climax to the whole sport.

They were in the middle of the quite sizeable park lake when Jennifer spotted an acquaintance on shore. "Hello, Sergeant Ramey!" she shouted, and stood up and waved violently.

The result was foregone. Philip, not an accomplished swimmer, managed by herculean efforts to get Jennifer ashore. Only then did he think about Ivy, and by then Ivy was waterlogged and very nearly drowned. Sergeant Ramey saved the day with his training in artificial respiration when Philip finally dragged his wife in.

The event proved a turning point in their marriage, and the delicate, intricate relationship was never quite the same again.

"You let me drown," Ivy reminded her husband again and again, "while you worried about that vulture aunt of yours."

"But you didn't drown," he would answer logically. "And you know very well what would have happened if Jennifer had gone under right in view of Sergeant Ramey."

"You were more interested in your aunt's money than in me."

"Let me recall to your memory, my dear, that my aunt is our livelihood, both present and future. It's this miserable state of affairs or starve in the streets. What choice do we have?"

"I'd rather starve."

"Well, I wouldn't. And I won't allow you to."

"You prefer to go on being your aunt's bodyguard."

Which is what Philip—or actually both of them—had become. Jennifer, although she never said so, seemed to delight in the new relationship. She could court all sorts of dangers and come through them unscathed. As a consequence, she became a seeker of thrills.

On this particular day, Jennifer had sneaked out of the house and no one, not even Sarah, knew where she had gone. Philip was terribly disturbed. He sat in the library and drank cognac. It was a habit he had acquired overseas, and which he had reacquired in recent weeks. Ivy sat and watched him drink.

"Lord knows what she's up to," he said once. "She might be off somewhere killing herself."

"I would not regret that one bit," Ivy told him.

"I wouldn't either, if she'd do it in a way that'd be impossible for us to have had a hand in it. But I seriously doubt Aunt Jennifer would cooperate to that extent. It's too much to hope for."

Their conversation was interrupted at that point by a sound. It was a sound that seemed to approach slowly from a distance and to grow in volume and intensity as it came remorselessly nearer. It was a roar, not steady but staccato, and punctuated now and then by whines and explosions. The sounds were frightening.

Puzzled at first, then temporarily petrified, the two listeners in the library finally rushed out the front door to find the cause of the disturbance. A monstrous thing was just pulling to a stop before the Dangerfield gate. It was huge, dull black, and it arrived in a cloud of dust. When it halted, the roaring ceased, and out of the cloud of dust stepped Jennifer. She was wearing a pair of goggles and a look of wild exultation.

"How do you like it?" she asked them, pointing to her new possession with pride.

They were too appalled to answer.

"I just bought it today. And as you can see, I've already learned to drive."

In their bedroom, Ivy was packing a suitcase. Philip was watching her dully, not quite aware of what was happening to him.

"Where will you go?" he asked while she was trying to press the lid of the suitcase shut.

"I don't know. Anywhere away from here."

He crossed the room and put his hands on her shoulders. She whirled around, out of his grasp, and faced him. She

wasn't the same Ivy who had first come to live in the Dangerfield mansion. She was no less beautiful, but it was no longer her sweetness that made her beautiful. Her eyes were both fire and ice.

"Your aunt is a fiend, Philip. I can't endure her any longer. I can't bear to go on like this, spending my whole life trying to keep her alive when actually I want her dead."

"Ivy!"

"Don't act so shocked, Philip. You feel exactly the same way. Why don't you admit it?"

He looked stunned for a moment. "Of course I feel like that, don't I?"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she challenged him.

They stared at each other for a long moment. Undoubtedly the idea had entered both their minds at exactly the same time.

"It's the only way, isn't it?" she said eventually.

He nodded. "It would be self-defense. That's something to salve our consciences with at least."

"Sergeant Ramey wouldn't see it that way."

"Well then, Sergeant Ramey mustn't ever know. He mustn't ever suspect."

"An accident—"

"Yes, that's it. An accident—It's the only way."

The plot was positively diabolical. It was simple, clever, and absolutely safe because it featured a built-in alibi for both of them. It had about it too a kind of cunning, cruel and barbaric. And it had all, surprisingly, come out of Ivy's pretty little head. It was a perfect plan.

Most beautiful of all, the plan took advantage of certain well-established habits of Jennifer's that were known to Sergeant Ramey. Therefore, a pattern was already set, and the accident—when it happened—would, to all intent and purposes, be an accident of nature, not of human design.

Jennifer went to church that Sunday morning as usual. When she came home, she changed immediately into her motoring costume. This had become her custom, a drive

and a picnic on Sunday afternoons. Philip and Ivy had endured half a dozen of these Sabbath rituals, but this time they demurred.

"I don't think we'll go along today, Auntie," Philip announced. He had just come from the garage, and there were black smudges of grease on his hands and face as well as his coveralls.

"Do you trust me out in the car alone?" Jennifer asked incredulously.

"I've spent all week working on it," Philip said. "It's in perfect shape."

He was telling the truth. He had indeed been forced to become a mechanic. Sergeant Ramey wouldn't have been above blaming him for any sudden failure of brakes or steering, for instance. And Jennifer, of course, was well aware of the reason for Philip's devotion to her automobile.

"But I'm going out to Sloan's woods," she persisted. "There's that old quarry—"

Philip knew about the quarry. Hadn't he kept her from falling into it three weeks ago? But he was untouched by her reminder.

"And there's the quicksand—I might fall into it."

"But you know where that treacherous spot is now, Auntie. So I'm sure you can stay out of it this time."

"And there are wild beasts. I'm sure there must be bears and wolves—"

"That's ridiculous, Auntie. There aren't, and you well know it."

"Well, there are poisonous snakes. What did you say they were? Copperheads?"

"Yes, there are copperheads. But now that you know what they look like, Auntie, I'm sure you can avoid them."

She was furious with him. He could see that. His only fear was that she would decide against going alone. So his next argument was a planned master stroke of psychology.

"Actually, since you mention it, Auntie, Sloan's woods is an awfully dangerous place for a picnic. Why don't you change your mind? I think you should. We can all go another time."

She smiled wickedly. "My mind is made up," she said. "And if something happens to me, you know whose fault it will be."

He argued as much as he felt was necessary, and then when he was commanded to, he went into the kitchen to fetch the picnic hamper. It was Ivy's job every Sunday to prepare the lunch. Ivy was there, and so was the hamper. She was just fastening the lid. She was pale and scared-looking when she turned to him.

"Is she still going?" she asked, tension showing in her voice.

"She's still going all right. Because she's so stubborn. She thinks we're going to be terribly worried about her, and that pleases her. Did you fix everything?"

She nodded. "The usual lunch, so everything will look quite normal. The snake is right on top of the food."

"Are you sure it'll bite her?"

"It tried to get at me. And it was quite angry at being shut up. And I'm sure it'll crawl away after it's bitten her. So no one'll be able to guess that it was ever in the basket."

Philip crushed her fiercely to him. "Darling," he said, "you're absolutely wonderful. I'm so proud of you. This is such a splendid idea. And you're so brave too. I'd have never had the nerve to handle the thing."

Ivy shuddered inside his embrace. "It did take a bit of nerve," she admitted. "Even with the stick you have to be nimble—"

The stick—along with a pair of huge, thick gloves—was lying on the shelf. She broke away from Philip and picked the stick up, seemingly fascinated with the recollection of her exploit. "I did it exactly the same way I did when we captured the snake in Sloan's woods." The stick was a sturdy thing, with a fork in it at one end not unlike a boy's slingshot except that the prongs of the fork were scarcely two inches long. The handle part though was a good, safe three feet.

"I opened the lid of the box the snake was in, using the stick, of course. It popped its head up, took one look at me, and lunged. I was expecting that, so I stayed clear. And it gave me the chance to pin the head to the floor." She illus-

trated. "Then while you hold it down with the stick, you simply grasp it right behind the head and pick it up. Of course it coils around your arm rather violently, and you must be careful not to be frightened into letting go. It does give one the shudders."

Philip was trembling and sweaty, and despite the fact he'd unheroically and ungallantly let his wife do the job, he was still very much in love with her. "You should have used those heavy gloves," he remonstrated. "The man I bought them from said they were just the thing to protect the hands from snakes while one is roaming through the woods."

"Oh, bother the gloves," Ivy said, replacing the stick on the shelf. "I couldn't have held onto the snake with those things on. And besides, darling, we didn't want the snake biting into a glove. We want him to save all his juice for Jennifer, don't we?"

Philip had to bow to his wife's superior practicality.

They carried the hamper out together. Jennifer was in front of the hall mirror, tying the ribbon of her bonnet under her chin. And standing just inside the open front door was the ever attentive Sergeant Ramey.

"The Sergeant dropped by to see how things were," Jennifer announced. "Since I have quite a lot to discuss with him, and since I was going to be alone, I've asked him to picnic with me. Give Sergeant Ramey the basket, Philip. He shall carry it for me."

There was a long moment of silence during which Philip seemed to be trying to speak. His face was dead-white, his eyes glazed. Sergeant Ramey, one shaggy brow cocked suspiciously, took a step toward the basket.

It was Ivy who intervened. The fiery gaze which she directed toward her husband and the sweet smile she gave the Sergeant were oddly contradictory. "I know the Sergeant likes those plum preserves," she said. "Take the basket into the pantry and put some plum preserves in, Philip."

He shoved the basket at her. "I don't know where they are," he stammered.

But she wouldn't take the basket from him. "They're

right on the first shelf, darling." She walked away a few steps and spoke to her husband over her shoulder. "That is, unless you want to let the Sergeant do without."

Trapped, Philip retreated slowly toward the kitchen. When he was finally out of sight, Ramey betrayed his curiosity. "He doesn't look at all well," he said.

"He's been under a strain," Ivy said.

"Perhaps he should see a doctor to find out what is troubling him."

"He may have to."

At that moment Philip reappeared, almost running. He brought the basket with him. But also the forked stick. And he was wearing the huge, thick gloves.

It was the policeman who noticed the faux pas first. He accepted the basket from Philip, and then he couldn't refrain from commenting on the other paraphernalia. "Might I ask, Mr. Dangerfield, the purpose of this peculiar equipment? Were the plum preserves that dangerous—?"

The resourceful Ivy prevented Ramey from blundering toward more horrible suspicions. Ivy with her gay, silvery laugh. "Philip bought the gloves and carved the stick," she explained, "to give to his aunt so she could protect herself from snakes when she goes out on her picnics. Philip worries so much about his aunt, you know, Sergeant—Philip darling, why don't you give the things to Aunt Jennifer."

Dazedly Philip handed over the stick, and then the gloves. Jennifer accepted the items with pleasure. The Sergeant was not quite so completely convinced. Obviously, the incident still puzzled him. He would probably tuck it away in his mind for future reference. He and Jennifer departed. From outside came the spluttering roar of the automobile engine. It built into a crescendo, then finally began to recede. Philip, completely shaken, collapsed into a chair.

"Where's the snake?" Ivy asked.

"In the garbage can."

"Dead or alive?"

"Quite alive the last I saw of it. But maybe it will

smother in the can. That's the only way now, I suppose, with all our equipment gone—"

"Were you bitten?"

"The gloves were. Twice."

Ivy sat down too, straight, stiff, a look of infinite sorrow on her face. "It would have done such a fine job on Jennifer."

"It almost did a fine job on me. Why'd you make me take it out? I could be dead by now."

"We're in this together, aren't we?" she asked, showing no sympathy whatsoever. "Then we just must share the risks."

He was still trembling, and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. "Well, if that's the case, we'll have to try something else the next time. Something less dangerous," he said.

Ivy's face grew hard. She was not so pretty as she once had been. "All right," she said, "let's begin planning right now. Unless we have something to look forward to, we shall both go mad—"

It was in the deep of winter that Jennifer, perhaps bored with the antiseptic safety of her existence, took up another modern fad—cigarette smoking. Philip and Ivy reacted calmly, biding their time. It was Sarah who objected. Smoking was unladylike and made the house smell, she said.

But when Jennifer was laid up with a slight attack of rheumatism, Sarah became very disturbed. Smoking in bed, she'd heard, often resulted in people being burned to death. Jennifer responded calmly. Smoking was one of the few pleasures she had left. And surely her family wouldn't allow an accident to happen.

She voiced this hope directly to her nephew and his wife. And they both replied unctuously that they'd keep an eye out.

"It's a beautiful opportunity," Ivy told her husband when they were alone. "Sarah will be witness to the fact that she warned Jennifer. And there will be absolutely no way to prove that Jennifer didn't destroy herself."

"I like it," Philip said. "The old girl has gone too far this time. She's been doing everything she could think of on the assumption that we'd break our necks to protect her. I'm sure that's what's behind this smoking trick. But she's miscalculated. Not even Sergeant Ramey will be able to twist this around to look like murder. Just let him try."

They decided not to wait. Jennifer might abandon the smoking habit at any time, and the opportunity would vanish. Right now, this very night, was the propitious moment, while Sarah still had the matter fresh in her mind. And besides, they'd already waited long enough.

Lately, Jennifer had been spending most of her time in bed, coming down only for meals. Even so, she invariably retired early. She was always asleep, they guessed, by ten. Just to make doubly sure, they delayed till past eleven before making a move.

They left their own room, in night dress, and listened in the upstairs hall. From Sarah's room came the sound of snoring. From Jennifer's room deep, audible, heavy breathing. They pushed the door open on silent hinges and crept inside. Cold winter moonlight streamed in through the window and across the bed. In the bed, under a fluffy, inflammable comforter, Jennifer lay obviously asleep. They crept out into the hall again, for a final, whispered conversation.

"It'll be easy," Philip said. "She's a sound sleeper."

"But she might wake up and scream," Ivy argued in a sudden mood of pessimism. "Sarah might run in and drag her out of the bed before the job's quite finished. And then Jennifer'll swear she wasn't smoking when she fell asleep. Oh, Philip, what would we do then?"

Philip kissed his wife to silence her. "Darling, if Jennifer does scream and Sarah does wake up, we'll just have to create confusion, that's all. We'll send Sarah for the fire department, and I'm sure she'll go. Then we just won't be able to rescue my aunt in time. And if Sarah doesn't wake up, why then, we'll sleep through the whole thing, too."

Ivy nodded her approval, finally. "You have one of Jennifer's cigarettes?" she asked.

He drew a cigarette from his pocket and placed it between his lips. Then he lighted a match with his fingernail, and applied the flame to the cigarette end. He inhaled, and the cigarette glowed bright crimson. Ivy blew out the match.

They held hands as they padded back into Jennifer's room. They walked noiselessly to the bed and paused there, making a last reconnaissance. Jennifer, they saw, hadn't stirred. Philip took the cigarette from his mouth, selected a nice cozy little fold in the comforter in which to place it, and bent down swiftly and silently to drop it there.

"So you *do* want to murder me," Jennifer interrupted suddenly. Her eyes flew wide open and she sat up in the bed.

The two conspirators were entirely too surprised and devastated to speak.

"I knew it from the first moment that I saw that gun," Jennifer went on triumphantly. "I've never slept soundly since that day. Do you think that just because I go to bed first that I go to sleep first? Don't you realize that I've checked on you two every night to see if you were asleep before I dared to sleep myself? Well, I was right, wasn't I?" And she almost laughed, she was so pleased with herself and her cleverness.

It was Ivy who recovered from the shock first. "We'll wait in our room while you call Sergeant Ramey," she said bitterly and resignedly.

"I don't intend to call Sergeant Ramey." It was Jennifer's second bombshell, and she obviously enjoyed dropping it.

"You're not?" Ivy exclaimed.

"I don't need to. In most of my occupations, I'm constantly protected by my fond nephew and his fond bride. For their own self-protection, of course. And as for their clumsy attempts to commit murder and make it look like an accident, I have perfect confidence in my own wits. I decided long ago that if I'm not smarter than you two put together, I deserve to get killed off, and you two deserve to inherit my money. But I don't think it will happen that

way. And, meanwhile, I'm enjoying things the way they are—So now if you don't mind, it's very late, and it's time for all of us to get to sleep. You may leave now."

With that she lay down and closed her eyes again. The two plotters were left with nothing better than inglorious retreat. They went out quickly, closing the door behind them, and scurried back to their own room. There Philip discovered that he was still holding the lighted cigarette and that it was burning his fingers. He ground it out on the dresser top with a curse.

"Well, are you ready to leave this house now?" Ivy asked, her voice trembling, her equilibrium completely shattered. "Are you going to give her the satisfaction of staying here and letting her make fools out of both of us? It is absolutely unendurable."

Philip lay stretched on the bed, staring blankly at the ceiling. "We're not fools," he answered in a monotone. "We're just incredibly unlucky."

"Well, I give up, Philip. Murdering your aunt is impossible. The woman leads a charmed life. If you're not coming away with me, then I'm going alone. Make up your mind."

He still spoke softly. "Do you know what Jennifer would do if we left? She'd swallow some slow-acting poison, and then on her deathbed she'd swear to Sergeant Ramey that we'd given it to her and then skipped off somewhere so we'd be a long way off when she actually died. The Sergeant would have us back here and facing murder charges in jig time. And if she didn't do this particular thing, she'd do something just as bad. Believe me, Ivy, I know it would happen."

Ivy sat down. Lines seemed suddenly to have appeared in her face. "What shall we do then, Philip?" she asked meekly.

"Do?" He closed his eyes. "We'll go on doing what we've been doing. We'll keep Jennifer out of harm's way, prevent any accidents that would look like murder. And keep on trying to find a way to make murder look like an accident. Over the long pull, darling, the odds are bound to be in our favor—"

They were in the library when the doctor came downstairs and told them that Jennifer was dead. Ramey, who had left Sarah instructions to be called whenever it happened, arrived just a few minutes later. They saw him go upstairs. He was down again in a few minutes, and he brought them out in the library.

"Well, Mr. Dangerfield," he said, "your aunt has passed on."

"Yes, we know." Philip did not feel like being hypocritically polite to the man.

"Do you care to make a statement, Mr. Dangerfield?"

"No, why should I want to make a statement?"

"As to the possible cause of your aunt's death."

"She died a natural death, that I know. But the exact cause is up to the doctor, isn't it, Inspector Ramey?"

"Precisely, Mr. Dangerfield. It's up to the coroner, let's say. You'll be hearing from us—"

Philip had had enough. He stood up angrily. "Inspector Ramey, my aunt was ninety years old. I think it's quite obvious she died of old age. You can't possibly think otherwise."

The Inspector cocked his gray brows and the lines in his face deepened as he smiled cryptically. He had officially retired years ago, but he had waited for this moment. "We'll see, Mr. Dangerfield, we'll see." He walked out. They heard the front door slam shut and moments later his car racing away.

Philip turned to his wife. His gaze roved for a moment over her tired, thin face, and the slightly unkempt hair that was like a fleecy white cloud above it. Poor Ivy. Then he saw her eyes, hard, feverishly bright, and found that they were questioning him.

"Did you give her anything, Philip?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, neither did I."

"That's a relief—I suppose—"

"Is it? I'm glad you can be so calm and sure, Philip. It's just occurred to me that she might have taken something herself."

NUMBER ONE SUSPECT

RICHARD DEMING

The new bread man asked, "How many loaves do you usually take, Mr. Jones?"

Before Henry Jones could reply, his fat wife bustled from the rear of the grocery store and said, "Another new man on the bread truck? What's the matter with your company, they can't keep a man on this route?"

"He asked for a transfer," the bread man said. He turned back to Jones. "How many did you say, Mr. Jones?"

Hazel Jones said testily, "I do the ordering around here, mister. Henry, go mark those soup cans like I told you. How many times I got to tell you to do something before it gets done?" Returning her attention to the bread man, she said, "Two dozen. And be sure you take the old ones out. Don't let me catch you putting the stale ones on top, and don't try giving me stale loaves you took out of some other store. You hear?"

"Yes, ma'am," the bread man said in a pained voice.

Picking the four remaining loaves of yesterday's bread from the bakery shelf, the man carried them out to his truck. At a glare from his wife, Henry Jones scurried over to the canned-goods section, picked up a stamp pad and price stamp, and began stamping price marks on soup cans.

Delivery men all asked for transfers to some other route after a month or two of dealing with his virago of a wife, Henry thought. *It was too bad husbands couldn't ask for transfers. Twenty years of being treated like a stock boy, doing all the menial work, while Hazel strutted importantly around giving orders. If she actually* did *something, it wouldn't be so bad,* he thought. But she wouldn't even wait on customers. She was the executive type, good only for telling other people what to do.

If she only knew what was in store for her tonight, he thought with grim satisfaction, viciously slamming the

ink stamp onto the top of a can. *It would shock her speechless to realize even the lowest worm can turn.*

The bread man returned carrying a double armload of loaves. He stacked them on the empty shelf to the accompaniment of a steady tirade of criticism of the bakery's service, the quality of its product, and its unreasonable prices. When he finished, he silently handed Hazel the slip to sign and went out without saying good-bye.

He would be asking for a different route in a week, Henry thought. Then he paused with the stamp upraised and mentally corrected himself. *The man wouldn't ask for a transfer at all, because after today he wouldn't ever have to deal with Hazel again.*

Behind him Hazel's rasping voice said, "You posing for a statue, bonehead? Hurry up and get that marking done. We need soap powder from the stock room."

With a spastic movement Henry brought the stamp down on the can it was poised over.

Henry Jones was a mild-looking little man in his late forties with a slight paunch and a fringe of sparse hair about his ears. The eyes behind his rimless glasses always seemed to be faintly apologetic, as though he were constantly asking the world's pardon for existing. He looked as little like a potential murderer as it is possible to look, and knew it. He considered this his best defense, for he had read enough true-crime stories to know the husband is always automatically a suspect when a wife is murdered, even when all clues point to someone else.

All clues *would* point to someone else in this case. And he banked on his widespread reputation for softheartedness as insurance against the police giving him more than cursory consideration. He could visualize the neighbors and customers scoffing at police questions. "Henry Jones?" they would say in unison. "Why, Henry wouldn't swat a mosquito he caught in the act of biting him."

The neatest thing about it was that the police would find no one anywhere to negate the neighborhood picture of him as a softhearted man, because he really was one. With the exception of human beings, there wasn't a living thing Henry could have brought himself to hurt. Up to now

there had never been an occasion where it was necessary for him to express his poor opinion of the human race. Even now he wouldn't have dreamed of harming Hazel if there were any other solution. But he had exhausted all alternate plans. He suspected that if he suggested divorce, Hazel would kill *him*. Running away and changing his identity meant losing his beloved store. The only other alternative, that of continuing to put up with her domineering after twenty years of subservience, was unthinkable. Henry had had it.

It was to be that night.

Jones' Grocery Store stayed open until nine nightly six days a week in order to compete with the chain stores, which closed at six. The routine at closing time was always the same. Henry would follow the last customer to the door and lock it after him in deference to Hazel's chronic fear of holdup men. Then, as Hazel counted the money and, in this case, a Saturday night, bagged the week's receipts in a night-deposit bag, Henry covered the vegetables and, if it didn't look like rain, carried the trash can out to empty into the burner, so that it would be ready for a match in the morning.

Tonight Henry deliberately departed from routine. When the last customer, Mrs. Hoffman from up the street, left the store, he pretended to be busy rearranging the contents of a shelf until she was out of sight. This was important to his plan because he couldn't afford to have the last customer testify that he had locked the door behind her.

Hazel called, "What's the matter, you don't lock the door, bonehead? You want some holdup man to walk in while we're all alone and take our money?"

"Sorry," Henry muttered. Hurrying over, he locked the door and dropped the keys in his pocket.

A moment later he departed from routine again by starting out back with the trash can before covering the vegetables.

"You in a trance or something?" Hazel yelled after him. "You never covered the vegetables."

Henry didn't have time to cover the vegetable bins. The chore usually took a good ten minutes, and he wanted to

act as soon after Mrs. Hoffman's departure as feasible.

He said in an apologetic tone, "As soon as I come back in, Hazel. It doesn't make any difference which I do first, so long as it gets done, does it?"

"Well, just don't forget," Hazel said irritably.

Just outside the back door Henry set down the trash can and opened the lid of one of a number of cardboard boxes piled against the rear of the store. Groping inside, he drew out the nickel-plated hammerless revolver he had bought in a pawnshop six months before and thrust it into his belt under his apron. He reached inside again and drew out a small pinch bar. He picked up the trash can, one hand holding both a side of the can and the pinch bar, and carried it to the incinerator near the back fence at a rapid trot. Quickly dumping it, he set down the can, pushed open the rear gate, and stepped into the alley.

The only light back here came from a green-shaded bulb over the store's rear door, which cast a circle of light on the ground only about fifteen feet across. The reflected glow from this was just enough to make for bare visibility in the alley. It was sufficient for Henry to make out the broad metal disk imbedded in the alley's center.

Kneeling, he used the pinch bar to pry up one side of the manhole cover. Getting his fingers under it, he dragged it partially off the manhole, just enough to leave an opening about six inches wide. He dropped the pinch bar through the hole and, after a moment, heard a satisfying splash some distance below.

Uttering a silent prayer that no automobile would drive up the alley during the next few minutes and wreck both itself and his plans by dropping a wheel into the manhole, he pushed back through the gate, picked up the trash can and hurried back into the store.

As he set the can down in its accustomed place, Hazel said, "You took long enough. You been walking around in a daze all day."

She had finished bagging the money and the night-deposit bag lay next to the register. Glancing through the front windows at the street, Henry saw that no one was in sight.

"Did any customers try to get in while I was outside?" he inquired, and held his breath for the answer. If some late-arriving customer had tried the locked door, all plans would have to be off for tonight. He couldn't afford having a possible witness who could testify that Hazel had still been alive after the door was locked.

"You crazy?" Hazel said. "Everybody knows we close at nine."

Henry went over to the door, took the keys from his pocket, and unlocked it. He pocketed the keys again.

"You in your second childhood?" Hazel yelled at him. "You think it's morning, we should be opening up already?"

Henry made no reply. Walking toward her until only the counter separated them, he drew the nickel-plated gun from under his apron. Hazel's eyes widened in shocked disbelief when he pointed it at her.

Henry shot her in the chest three times.

Hazel's body had hardly hit the floor when he was racing behind the counter. Thrusting the nickel-plated gun into his hip pocket, he jerked open the drawer in the counter immediately beneath the cash register and drew out a blue-steel thirty-eight revolver. Kneeling, he grasped the dead woman's right wrist, placed the gun in her hand and curled her fingers around the stock. Then he pulled it from her hand again, closed his own fingers around the butt, and rose to his feet. The whole operation took no more than thirty seconds.

A glance through the front windows told him the street was still deserted. But he knew it wouldn't be within thirty more seconds. In this quiet neighborhood the blast of pistol shots would bring curious neighbors to investigate from all directions.

Sweeping the night-deposit bag into his left hand, Henry sped for the rear door and outside. He made the back gate at a dead run, slammed through it and stooped over the manhole. The night-deposit bag went in first, then the nickel-plated gun. With his heel he pushed the manhole cover back into place.

Straightening, he aimed the blue-barreled pistol down the alley in the direction of the street and fired two spaced

shots. Then he turned and slowly plodded back inside.

When he reentered the store, elderly Tom Bower, who lived in one of the apartments next door, was leaning over the counter staring down in horror at Hazel. Mrs. Caskin, from the apartment house on the other side of the store, was just coming in. Behind her other neighbors were converging from all directions.

Henry said in a deliberately dull voice, "I think I hit him, but he got away."

Bower gulped and looked at the gun in Henry's hand.

Seeing that the old man hadn't comprehended what he said, Henry made it clearer. By now Mrs. Caskin and several other neighbors were in the store, and he spoke for their collective benefit.

"It was a holdup man, Mr. Bower. I forgot to lock the front door and he got in while I was out back emptying the trash. When I came back in, he was pointing a gun at Hazel. He turned to cover me and ordered me behind the counter with Hazel. When he turned his head, Hazel jerked open the drawer beneath the register, where we keep a gun." He held up the gun in his hand. "This one. When she pulled it out, he shot her. Then he picked up the money bag and ran out the back way. Hazel had dropped the gun on the floor. I grabbed it up and chased him. I shot at him twice while he was running down the alley, and I think the second shot hit him, because he staggered. But he kept running and disappeared around the corner toward Grand Avenue."

A dozen people had crowded into the store by the time he finished the explanation. Those who had arrived too late to catch the first part of it asked earlier arrivals what it was all about. The babble of low-toned voices kept increasing as the first to arrive repeated the story, and it was relayed on to others still coming in.

Mrs. Caskin moved behind the counter and knelt over Hazel. Rising, she said in an awed voice, "I think she's dead."

Setting his pistol on the counter, Henry leaned over to look down at Hazel. Then he let his shoulders slump and buried his face in his hands.

There was a moment of silence before someone said awkwardly, "Maybe we better call a doctor. And the police."

One of the neighbors went after old Doc Mauser, who was only a block away over on Eichelberger. The doctor got there at the same time a one-man radio car arrived with a uniformed officer driving it. There was nothing Dr. Mauser could do for Hazel, except pronounce her dead, so he turned his attention to the bereaved widower. Henry had managed to work up a pretty convincing state of shock, only half simulated. The doctor gave him a tranquilizer.

By the time Henry had swallowed his tranquilizer, the uniformed policeman had managed to sort out the simultaneous explanations thrown at him by a dozen neighbors. He asked Henry for a description of the bandit. This was easy, because Henry had been memorizing a description for months.

"He was big," Henry said in a low, grief-crushed voice. "Six one, I'd say, and maybe two hundred pounds. I'd guess he was around thirty-five years old. He was wearing a brown felt hat, a tan jacket and brown slacks. He had a swarthy complexion, a big, hooked nose, dark hair and there was something wrong with his left eye. The lid drooped lower than the right one. There was a black mole on his right cheek with hair growing out of it and a red scar running from his left ear clear down to the corner of his mouth. It made that side of his mouth kind of pucker up."

The policeman looked impressed by this detailed description. He went out to his car to call it in over his radio and have a dragnet thrown around the area.

When he returned, he contented himself with making a list of everyone present, including the corpse. He didn't ask Henry anything else, seeming to feel that in his upset state it was better to leave the principal witness to the experienced hands of the Homicide Squad.

A Sergeant Harry Newton from Homicide showed up about a quarter of ten. He was a stolid, square-faced man of middle age with deceptively sleepy eyes, which never missed a thing. He had with him a thin, lanky man in civilian clothes who carried a laboratory kit and a flash

camera. Sergeant Newton addressed the man as Mac, and Henry got the impression he was a civilian employee of the police lab.

Meantime an ambulance from City Hospital had arrived and was standing by to take Hazel to the morgue when the homicide officer released her body.

Sergeant Newton first listened to the uniformed officer's account of what had happened. After a bare glance at Henry, now seated in a chair someone had thoughtfully brought from the back room, he turned to Dr. Mauser.

"What's the dope, Doc?" he inquired.

"There's almost no bleeding, Sergeant, so she must have died instantly. Any of the three bullets could have done it. All three hit her directly in the heart."

The sergeant glanced around. "Any of you people know anything you haven't told the officer here?"

When no one said anything, he asked, "Which one of you was first on the scene?"

"I was," old Tom Bower told him.

"Okay," the sergeant said. "What's your story?"

Bower explained that he lived in a downstairs apartment next door and had been sitting in his front room, which had its windows open because of the warmth of the night. He said that when he heard the shots, he knew instantly they were gunshots and not merely backfires.

"How come?" Newton asked.

"Well, they sounded like they came from inside. I don't know how I knew, because the way they sounded, you couldn't tell what direction they came from. But I was sure they came from over here. Right away I thought of a holdup, and I came running."

The sergeant thoughtfully tugged at an earlobe. "Why'd you think of a holdup?"

"Mrs. Jones was always afraid the store would be held up some night. Lots of times when I was the last customer out, she'd yell for Henry to lock the front door when I was only halfway to it. If he didn't move sharp, she'd make some crack like did he want a holdup man to walk in on them alone and take their money. I knew she kept that gun in the drawer under the register, and what I really thought

was that she'd blasted some bandit. Didn't even occur to me he'd blasted her. If it had, I wouldn't of been in such a hurry to get over here."

Sergeant Newton emitted a noncommittal grunt.

"The front door was unlocked when I got here," Bower continued. "I couldn't see anybody inside, so I come on in. When I got to the counter, I seen Mrs. Jones lying on the floor behind it. About then a couple of more shots sounded out back and a minute later Henry come in by the back door with a gun in his hand. He told me what happened."

The sergeant looked around at the circle of faces, but no one had any further details to offer. To his general inquiry as to what time the shots had been heard, the consensus was that the first three had sounded about five after nine, the ones in the alley only about a minute later.

"You got all these people's names and addresses?" Newton asked the man in uniform.

"Sure, Sarge."

"Then all of you please clear out of here," the homicide officer directed. "Give us some room to work. You can leave too, Doc."

Reluctantly the assemblage drifted outside. But no one, with the sole exception of Dr. Mauser, went home. The rest stood on the sidewalk watching the goings on inside through the front windows.

At Sergeant Newton's direction the thin man named Mac snapped pictures of the corpse from several angles. Then Newton told him to dust the gun for prints.

All this time Henry had been sitting dully in his chair, apparently paying little attention to what was going on around him. Now he roused himself.

"Why do you want to check that gun for fingerprints?" he inquired. "It isn't the one the holdup man used. That's ours—the one Hazel kept in the drawer."

"Just covering all bets," the sergeant said laconically.

After carefully dusting the gun with a silver-colored powder, the lab man used inch-wide Scotch tape to lift the fingerprints which appeared. When he had fixed the tape to some white cards, he had a permanent record of the prints.

"Take his prints," Newton said, pointing at Henry. "Then the dead woman's."

Laying an ink pad on the counter, the lab man motioned Henry over. Henry put a puzzled expression on his face, but he made no objection. Docilely he allowed his fingers one at a time to be rolled over the pad, then gently rolled over a white card.

When the process was completed, Sergeant Newton asked, "Got anyplace to wash up here?"

"Upstairs," Henry said. "Our apartment is right over the store."

The sergeant permitted him to go upstairs to wash the ink from his hands while Hazel was being fingerprinted. When he returned, the lab man was comparing the two sets of prints with the ones he had lifted from the gun.

"Checks out," he said to the homicide officer. "A clear set of his superimposed over hers. Hers are mostly smudged, but a couple of partials are good enough for comparison purposes."

Henry was thankful that he had taken the precaution of closing Hazel's hand around the pistol grip. While he hadn't been sure the gun would even be checked for fingerprints, he had read enough not to want to risk the lack of Hazel's prints on the stock.

Sergeant Newton said, "Stick that gun in your kit to take back to ballistics, Mac." Then he said to the man in uniform, "Tell those guys out front they can have the body now."

As the policeman went out to relay this message to the ambulance attendants, Newton finally turned his attention to Henry.

For the next twenty minutes Henry repeated his story, answered questions, re-described the bandit and, finally, went out back with the sergeant to show him exactly where he had been standing when he fired at the fleeing robber and just where the man had been when he staggered as though hit.

Back inside again Henry noted that Hazel's body was now gone and that the ambulance was missing from in front. The crowd on the sidewalk still lingered, however.

Sergeant Newton asked, "How much money did he get?"

"The duplicate deposit slip should be in the register," Henry said. "It was quite a lot because it was a full week's receipts. We make a night deposit on Saturday night, you see, so that money isn't lying around over the weekend. Do you think he may have been watching the place for some time and knew the most money would be here on Saturday night?"

"He probably had the job cased," Newton agreed.

Walking behind the counter, carefully avoiding stepping where Hazel's body had lain, Henry opened the register and lifted out the duplicate deposit slip Hazel had left there. He winced slightly when he saw the total. It was a lot of money to have thrown down a hole, but he hadn't dared risk hiding it somewhere. He had decided in advance to leave no loose ends whatever lying around for him to trip over accidentally. It was this planning which had made him pick Saturday night for the crime, despite the cost involved. Having a logical mind himself, it had seemed to him more plausible for a professional holdup man to strike at a time when the take would be greatest.

"Fourteen hundred and twenty-eight dollars and seventeen cents," he said in a low voice. "Let's see. There's three —almost four hundred in checks, which I suppose I can get people to stop payment on. But it's still over a thousand in cash."

"Describe the bag."

"It was a regular night-deposit bag," Henry said. "With Security National stamped on its side. The keys to the bag and the night vault must be in Hazel's pocket. I always drove her over and waited in the car while she made the deposit."

Sergeant Newton was silent for a moment, apparently going over all the testimony in his mind and mentally checking to see if there were any questions he had missed. Presently he glanced about the store.

"Where's the empty trash can you were carrying when you came in from out back?" he inquired.

Henry pointed to where it stood against the wall over by the meat counter.

Newton's sleepy-looking eyes drooped half shut. "How'd it get way over there? That's halfway across the store from the back door and also from the register. When he ordered you behind the counter with your wife, did you carry the trash can clear over there first?"

Henry's stomach gave a lurch. Thinking furiously, he said, "I—I guess I just reacted automatically. For so many years I've been carrying that empty can in the back door and setting it down in the same place, I went right ahead and carried it over where it belonged when he pointed the gun at me and told me to put it down. That's when Hazel made her break. He had to turn half away from her in order to keep me covered."

This explanation seemed to satisfy the sergeant, for he didn't pursue the matter. Turning to the uniformed policeman, who was still standing by, he said, "Get on your radio and find out if the dragnet has pulled anything in. If it hasn't, have a half dozen officers report to me here. I want that alley scoured for the two bullets Mr. Jones fired."

He returned his attention to Henry. "I guess that's all we can do here tonight, Mr. Jones. As soon as my assistants get here and I set them to work, you can lock up and we'll go down to headquarters."

"Headquarters?" Henry repeated, his stomach lurching again. "What for?"

"Want you to look at some pictures," the sergeant said mildly.

Relief flooded over Henry. For one terrible moment he had thought he was under arrest.

It was well past midnight before Henry got back from downtown. In the interim he had looked at hundreds of mug shots of men with records of armed robbery. He had identified none, of course. To make it look good, though, he had hesitated over one or two before finally moving his head in definite negatives.

Sergeant Newton drove him home and told him he would get in touch with him as soon as there were any developments.

On Sunday Henry phoned a funeral director to make arrangements for Hazel's interment. When he explained the

circumstances of his wife's death and that her body was presently at the city morgue, the mortician told him that a date couldn't be set until they learned when the morgue planned to release the body. He told Henry not to worry about it, however, as he would contact the morgue himself and let Henry know.

In the middle of the night it started to rain. When Henry arose Monday morning it was coming down in such solid sheets, he could barely see the other side of the street from his front-room windows. A river of water gushed along the gutter out front, piling up at the intersection to form a small lake because the curb sewer slots there couldn't drain it off fast enough.

Just as Henry finished breakfast Sergeant Harry Newton dropped in. The detective wore a raincoat and rubbers, but they hadn't been adequate protection against the deluge. When he shed his rubbers and raincoat in the upstairs hall, the lower legs of his trousers were soaked through and his shoes sloshed when he walked.

"Want to dry your trousers and shoes over the kitchen range?" Henry asked solicitously. "I'll loan you a robe while they're drying."

The homicide officer shook his head. "They'd only get wet again when I went back outside. This is going to last all day."

Sloshing into the front room, he carefully seated himself on the sofa so that the damp lower part of his trousers didn't touch the upholstery.

At first it appeared to Henry that the only purpose of the man's visit was to brief him on developments. He told Henry that the three bullets recovered from Hazel's body were all good enough specimens so that ballistics would readily be able to identify the murder weapon if it ever turned up. He added casually that they hadn't been fired from the gun Henry had used, and weren't even the same caliber, as the murder weapon had been a thirty-two instead of a thirty-eight.

"We recovered one of the bullets you fired from a telegraph pole in the alley," the sergeant went on. "We

couldn't find the other, so maybe you did wing the guy. We've issued his description to all area doctors, in case he tries to get a wound patched up. I spent yesterday talking to a lot of your neighbors."

"Oh?" Henry said, a trifle confused by the abrupt switch of subject.

"Uh-huh. Seems to be general knowledge that your wife was kind of a shrew. Always on your back. Nobody thinks you'll grieve over her very long."

Flushing, Henry said nothing.

"On the other hand, everybody says you're the most softhearted guy in the world, that you wouldn't even set a trap for a mouse. Let alone kill a human."

Henry felt his stomach turn over. In a faint voice he said, "You mean—you mean—" and couldn't get any more out.

"I mean we haven't swallowed your story whole," Newton finished for him. "Not that you're under more than routine suspicion. We always automatically suspect the husband when a wife is murdered."

"But in a case like this!" Henry protested.

"It wouldn't be the first time a guy rigged a robbery to cover uxoricide. That's wife-murder, in case you don't know the word. We haven't got any concrete evidence that you did, but there are a couple of angles we don't like."

"What?" Henry managed.

"One is your description of the bandit. You must have a photographic mind, it's so complete. I'm not saying you made him up. All I'm saying is you might have. It's the sort of description an amateur murderer might dream up, thinking the more complete it was, the more convincing it would be. Another thing is the location of that trash basket. Maybe things happened like you say, but it's hard to imagine a bandit letting you walk clear across the store like that. Seems more likely he would have ordered you to drop it right where you were and get behind the counter with your wife."

"It's the way it happened," Henry insisted, sweating.

"We can't prove it didn't, Mr. Jones. The thing I have

most trouble swallowing is your chasing the guy and shooting at him. Doesn't seem in character for a mild guy like you."

Henry said faintly, "He'd—he'd just shot my wife. I guess I saw red."

"Maybe," the sergeant conceded. "People do odd things under stress. But I have to ask you this question, because it's part of our routine. Did you kill your wife and rig this robbery?"

"Of course not," Henry said with forced indignance.

"Well, if you did, you'll probably get away with it," Newton said.

Henry stared at the man in fascination. The homicide officer stared back at him speculatively.

"Why do you say that?" Henry finally got out.

"What can we prove? You've got a pretty good story. And if it was rigged, you did a thorough job. Even down to such details as your wife's prints being on that gun under yours. I imagine you'd be smart enough to dispose of the other gun and money bag so we'd never find them. We looked, of course. We sifted every ashpit, garbage can, and trash can in that alley. If you did kill her, we'd never prove it in a million years, unless we got a confession."

As Henry stared at him numbly, Sergeant Newton said, "This is just routine suspicion, of course. It doesn't mean I think you killed her. It just means I think you might have. I hope I haven't upset you. As I said before, we always consider the husband as a possibility."

With that he rose, bid Henry a laconic good-bye, and sloshed out into the hall to put back on his dripping raincoat and useless rubbers. It was a half hour after he left before Henry stopped shaking.

During the next two nights he had trouble sleeping. Partly this was because the rain continued to come down in torrents and its steady beating on the roof disturbed him. But mostly it was because he kept visualizing being dragged down to headquarters and questioned for hours on end with a white light in his face. He wondered if the local police employed rubber hoses to make suspects talk.

But when he heard nothing further from Sergeant New-

ton, his alarm gradually subsided. It *had* been just routine suspicion, he decided, and the sergeant merely had an unsettling way of expressing himself.

For several reasons Henry didn't open the store during this time. For one thing he felt a period of mourning would be expected of him. For another, funeral arrangements and the funeral itself took up so much time. For a third, there would have been little business anyway because the torrential rain kept everyone indoors except those who had vital errands.

Fortunately Henry's basement was so well sealed, he only got dribbles of water in it. But according to news reports, many basements were flooded to the rafters. The city streets became shallow rivers, with water reaching to the hubcaps of the few automobiles whose drivers were brave enough to venture onto them. The mayor declared a state of emergency and business came to a virtual standstill as the city waited for the downpour to stop.

It stopped abruptly on Wednesday morning, and the sun came out hot and bright. By noon the overtaxed sewers had drained away the surface water, and the streets were steaming moisture.

Hazel's funeral had been tentatively scheduled for Wednesday afternoon, depending on the weather. With the streets now unflooded, it took place as scheduled. Henry managed to look appropriately sad during the service.

By Thursday morning the sun had baked the streets dry, and the only evidence of the fifty-five-hour deluge was a few rapidly evaporating puddles on lawns where there were low spots. Henry engaged young Thad Bower, Tom Bower's grandson, to help out as a combination clerk and stock boy, and opened for business.

He still had heard nothing more from the police.

Friday morning, when Henry went out back to set a match to the trash deposited in the incinerator the night before, he found a truck marked *Department of Streets and Sewers* parked in the alley. A tall, lean man wearing hip boots and a cap with a miner's lamp on it was prying up the manhole cover with a crowbar. A stolid, middle-aged man in a rumpled brown suit stood watching him. Henry's heart

began to thump when he recognized the latter as Sergeant Harry Newton.

Henry forgot the incinerator. Pushing open the gate, he stepped into the alley.

The homicide officer glanced at him with sleepy eyes. "Morning," he said in an unnaturally husky voice.

Henry said, "What—what's going on?"

Sergeant Newton drew out a handkerchief and blew his nose. "Had a cold all week," he said hoarsely. "Guess I should have dried out my shoes like you suggested. Just making a routine check."

"On what?"

The sergeant blew his nose again, put the handkerchief away. "Fellow named Lischer came in to make a report last night. Seems he drove up this alley the night your wife was killed. His headlights hit this manhole just in time to save him from running a wheel into it. He says it was part way open. He managed to swerve enough to straddle it, and he drove on with his heart in his mouth. He only lives over on Delor, a couple of blocks from here. He was pulling into his garage when it occurred to him he should have stopped and shoved the cover back in place so nobody else would wreck a car. So he backed out again and drove back here. He says he was back within ten minutes, but by then somebody had replaced the cover. He figures he arrived the second time about a quarter after nine. He didn't hear any shots either time he drove through the alley, so all the shooting must have taken place between his two trips. He drove back home again and forgot about it until he read about the robbery-murder."

Henry didn't say anything. He was watching the man in hip boots, who now had the cover off and was placing a circular metal guard rail around the open hole. When this was in place, the man drew a garden rake from the rear of the truck and descended into the hole.

Sergeant Newton said, "When Lischer read about the murder, he got to thinking about the open manhole and wondered if there was any connection. He wasn't sure your store was in the same block as the manhole, though, so he decided to drive over and take a look before saying

anything. But the rain kept him indoors the first part of the week. Like a lot of people, he didn't even make it to work. And Wednesday he just didn't get around to it. On his way home from work yesterday he drove past your store, then around into the alley. When he saw the manhole was directly behind your place, he came in and told us about it."

Henry swallowed a couple of times before managing, "What do you suppose it means, Sergeant?"

The homicide officer shrugged. "With all the water that's been rushing through the sewers since that night, anything dropped down there has probably been washed for blocks. There's twenty blocks of sewer pipe between here and the River Des Peres. But there's also ten manholes. A Department-of-Streets-and-Sewers worker is climbing into each of those holes with a rake right now. Whatever's down there, we'll find."

Henry felt ill. He said, "I'd better get back to the store. I've got a brand-new clerk I don't like to leave alone."

He pushed back through the gate, forgetting to set a match to the trash as he passed the incinerator. Inside he collapsed into a chair in the back room and stared helplessly into space.

Ten minutes later young Thad Bower came back hunting for him to ask the price of potatoes. Rousing himself, Henry accompanied the boy out front and took over the waiting-on of the customer himself.

For the rest of the morning Henry functioned automatically, his lips smiling at customers, but his insides churning. Every time there was a lull in business, he went to the back room to glance out at the alley. The city truck was still parked there.

At noon Henry sent his new clerk home to lunch. Ten minutes later Sergeant Harry Newton came in the back door. Henry's heart rose to his throat when he saw what the sergeant carried. In one hand he held a small pinch bar, in the other a nickel-plated revolver with spots of rust on it.

"We found this a block away," the homicide officer said, hefting the pinch bar. "The gun was two blocks away. They could both have been dropped through the manhole

out back and carried that far by the rushing water."

Henry gulped.

"The other guys didn't find a thing," the sergeant said. "Or at least nothing we can connect to the robbery. They turned up a lot of miscellaneous junk ranging from flashlight batteries to a set of tire chains. I was hoping we'd find that night-deposit bag, but it must have washed clear to the river."

"Why did you expect that to be in the sewer?" Henry asked in a squeaky voice.

"Seems obvious what happened," the sergeant said. "Or at least two alternatives are obvious. The first is that the bandit opened the manhole just before he pulled the job, so that he'd have a place to dump the bag after removing the money. He'd know about the bag, if he had the job properly cased, and he'd want to get rid of incriminating evidence as soon as possible. After using the gun, he'd want to get rid of that too. So it could be that when he ran out back, he cut open the bag with a pocket knife—he'd have to cut it because it was locked and the keys were in your wife's pocket—took out the money and dumped the bag and checks down the sewer along with the gun. He'd have time to do that and kick the cover back in place while you were scrambling around for the gun your wife dropped. Maybe that's what delayed him enough for you to get a couple of shots at him. If we had found the cut bag, it would tend to support that alternative."

"I see," Henry said, afraid to ask what the other alternative was.

Sergeant Newton told him anyway. "Then it could be that there never was a bandit, that you rigged the whole thing and dropped the murder weapon and the bag down the hole yourself. If we'd found the bag uncut and with the money still in it, we'd know you rigged it."

Henry managed to ask in a relatively steady voice, "Which do you think happened?"

The sergeant shrugged. "Without the bag showing, it could be either way. This may not even be the murder weapon of course. But if ballistics says it is, we can probably trace the gun."

"How?" Henry asked, relatively secure on that point because he had given the pawnbroker a fake name when he purchased the gun six months before.

"We'll send the serial number to the manufacturer and get its original retail outlet. The outlet will have the name of the original purchaser recorded, and we'll let him explain what he did with it. We've traced guns through a half dozen different owners that way. We won't even have to go to all that trouble if it turns out the gun was bought in some local pawnshop."

"Oh? Why not?"

"It'll be registered at headquarters. A city ordinance requires pawnbrokers to report the purchase and sale of all small arms."

Henry's feeling of security began to evaporate.

"If the gun came from a pawnbroker, it will be a snap," the sergeant went on. "Even if it was bought under an assumed name. Pawnbrokers have a remarkable memory for faces. Particularly for the faces of gun buyers, because they get questioned about them so often. We'll give him a description of the bandit and show you to him. He should be able to tell us which of you bought it."

Henry was unable to make any comment whatever. He just stood there numbly.

Sergeant Newton didn't appear to notice Henry's reaction. With a final remark that he would keep Henry informed of any developments, he left by the same way he had entered.

When the back door closed, Henry started doing some furious thinking. Fortunately no customers came in during the next few minutes, so he was able to devote his full attention to the problem. The solution came to him quite suddenly.

The police still had possession of the thirty-eight revolver which Hazel had kept in the drawer beneath the cash register, but there was still a box of thirty-eight-caliber shells in the drawer. Henry pocketed six.

When Thad Bower returned from lunch at one PM, Henry announced that he would now take his lunch break, added that he planned to take a brief nap after eating and

requested the boy not to disturb him during the next hour.

"If you don't know the price of something, make a guess," he said. "Don't be running upstairs to wake me every five minutes."

"Yes, sir," the boy said. "I'll manage all right."

Henry went up the front stairs, walked through the apartment and quietly descended the back stairs. He eased his car from the garage into the alley and let it roll backward to the side street.

Twenty minutes later he parked in front of a pawnshop on Franklin Avenue.

It was a little cubbyhole of a place, and no one was in it but the same bent and wizened old man who had sold him the thirty-two six months before.

When Henry asked, "Do you have any thirty-eight-caliber handguns?" the old man peered at him with a flicker of recognition.

"Didn't you buy a gun here once before?" he asked.

The question dispelled any doubts Henry may have had about what had to be done. It was also reassuring to his conscience that the man was so old and looked vaguely ill. He told himself that it would be a blessing to the old man to be put out of his misery.

"I was in a few months back," Henry said in a steady voice.

The pawnbroker unlocked a case beneath the counter and brought out a thirty-eight police special. Handing it to Henry, he said, "Here's a fine buy. Hardly been fired and not a spot of rust on it."

Breaking open the cylinder, Henry peered down the barrel. Then he drew the six shells from his pocket and thumbed them into the cylinder one at a time, keeping his eyes fixed on the old man as he performed the operation. The pawnbroker's expression grew increasingly worried. He started to open his mouth, then closed it again when Henry clicked the cylinder back into place and pointed the gun at him.

"Get into the back room," Henry ordered.

"The money's in the cage," the old man said, nodding toward a steel-latticed cage at the end of the counter.

"Get into the back room," Henry repeated.

Shrugging, the pawnbroker came from behind the counter and shuffled through the open door to the back room. Following, Henry closed the door behind him.

When the old man turned around with an inquiring look on his face, Henry pressed the gun muzzle against his heart and fired.

The muzzle being directly against the man's body muffled the explosion to a dull roar, loud enough in the small room to make Henry wince, but hardly loud enough to carry through two closed doors to the street. Henry felt reasonably sure that it couldn't have been heard outdoors.

The old man fell on his back without a sound and lay there with his mouth open and an expression of indignant surprise on his face.

Whipping out a handkerchief, Henry rapidly wiped off the gun. Kneeling, he wrapped the dead man's fingers around the stock.

The front room was still empty when he peeped out. Carefully he wiped both knobs of the back room door and pulled the door shut behind him with his handkerchief over the knob. He used his handkerchief again to open the street door, paused to glance up and down the street, then wiped the outer handle before letting the door click shut behind him.

The only person on the street was a man on the other side looking into another pawnshop window with his back to Henry. Climbing into his car, Henry drove away.

Twenty minutes later he eased his car back into the garage, crossed the rear yard, and quietly climbed the rear stairs. It was five minutes until two.

In lieu of lunch he drank two glasses of cold milk from the refrigerator, descended the front stairs and reentered the store at exactly two PM.

"Everything went fine," young Thad told him. "I'm catching on pretty good. Have your nap?"

"A little one," Henry said. "Better get some canned peas from the stock room. We're running low on the shelf."

Just before the nine-o'clock closing hour, Sergeant Harry Newton phoned.

"That gun we fished out of the sewer was the murder weapon all right," he reported. "We traced it to a pawnshop on Franklin."

"Oh?" Henry said.

"It was registered as having been sold to a George Williams at a nonexistent address up on the north side. Obviously a fake name, since the address was fake. But unfortunately we can't get a description of the buyer from the pawnbroker."

"Why not?"

"He committed suicide this afternoon. I'd be suspicious of the timing if circumstances didn't make it suicide for certain."

"What circumstances?"

"He used one of his own guns. Since they were kept in a locked case, unloaded, a killer could hardly have gotten at it. And he had a motive. A week ago he found out he had cancer and had only a matter of months to live. It would have been a pretty painful death."

Henry felt pleased. Actually he had performed the old man a favor.

"Anyway it brings us to a dead end," the sergeant said. "If you rigged your wife's death, I guess you get away with it."

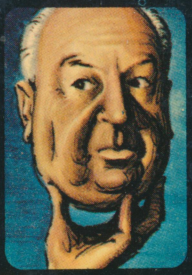
"I'm getting a little tired of your implications, Sergeant," Henry said.

"I'm not very subtle," the sergeant admitted. "Sorry if I offended you. As I've said before, you were never under more than routine suspicion. There's still an A.P.B. out on your scar-faced bandit. If we net him, you'll hear from us. Otherwise I probably won't be talking to you again."

"I hope you catch him," Henry said a trifle stiffly. "Goodby, Sergeant."

Hanging up, he said to Thad Bower, "You can empty the trash while I check out the register." He tossed the boy his key ring. "Lock the front door first. We don't want any more bandits walking in to hold us up."

Who's Afraid Of Alfred Hitchcock?



Here are 16 haunting stories from the few stout-hearted men who aren't afraid of the gentleman... and nearly scared him to death.

Richard Deming
Donald Westlake
Hal Elison
Lawrence Block
Talmadge Powell
Richard Hardwick
Fletcher Flora
Fredric Brown
and eight other specialists in weird and wonderful suspense

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