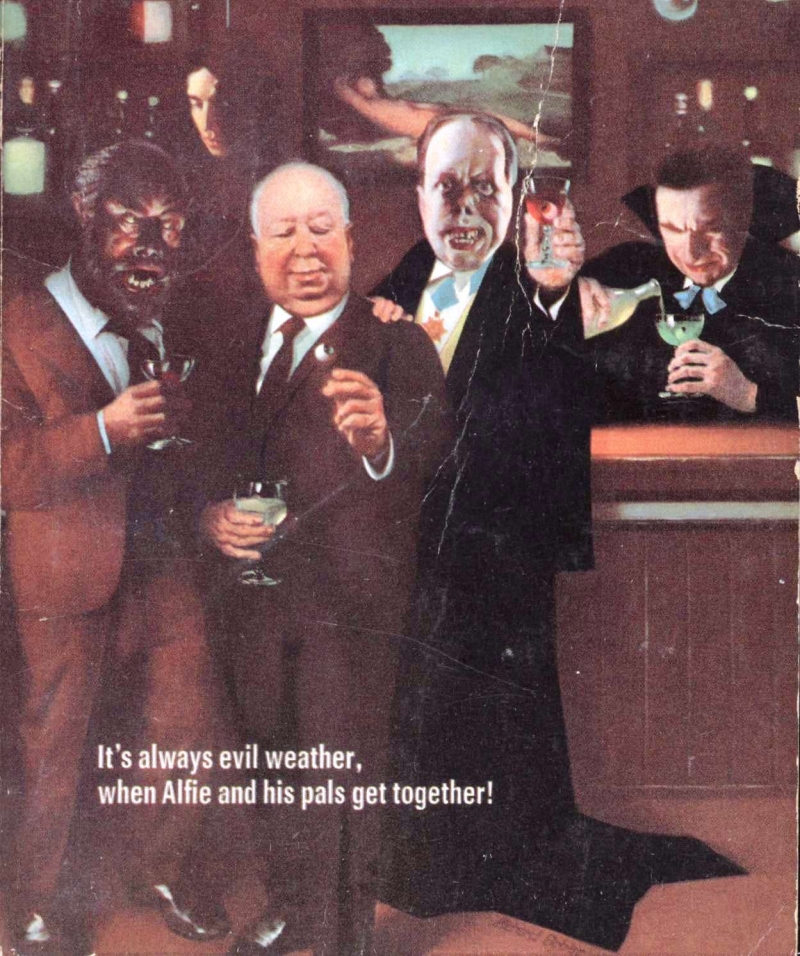


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THE BEST OF FIENDS



**ALFRED HITCHCOCK,
Editor**

A DELL BOOK

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Introduction

Sir Chesley Cavendish Epps of legendary fame has just died tragically—and in some quarters, it is felt, ludicrously—when he lost his head over a bit of scarf. This will need some explaining, and I'll get around to it. It is his demise that releases me once and for all from the vow of silence that I gave him some years ago. I'm certain that you're familiar with his life. For those who are not, Epps amassed a fortune worth millions in shipping, motels, oil, and false eyelashes, meanwhile gaining a worldwide philanthropic reputation.

The man known as Sir Chesley Cavendish Epps resided in a splendid castle in Scotland, and as his fame grew, a veritable crush of kings, queens, presidents, business magnates, foreign ministers, ambassadors, and assorted plenipotentiaries called upon him. Doubtlessly they left with the impression that they had visited with one of the great ones of the earth. Nothing, I think, could be further from the truth, which is that the real Sir Chesley Cavendish Epps died many years ago in a remote South American jungle village.

To clear this up, at least partly, the man who called himself Sir Chesley Epps, that is, the one who just died, was really Wilson Smirgle of Florfina, Pennsylvania, an author. In Florfina he was also known as the "Red Ace of Florfina" because of his penchant for riding a huge motorcycle while wearing Baron von Richthofen flying goggles and a leather helmet with an attached red scarf streaming in the wind. Wilson Smirgle was an impostor.

When Wilson Smirgle's first book, called *Stab or Be Stabbed*, was published, the critics were all agreed that the story was an unusual, very interesting, and a most admirable first offering. The book, they concluded, had wit, style, and a great degree of accuracy—since the subject matter consisted of various crimes and injustices that were perpetrated upon the public by gangsters, politicians, banks, insurance companies, mortgage holding companies, food suppliers, automobile manufacturers; in short, practically everyone. I was naturally interested. I read the

book with enjoyment and was delighted with the solutions that Smirgle put forth for man's survival, surrounded as he was by all this thievery and deception. Smirgle's premise was that it is better to be the stabber rather than the stabbee in this world, or it is better to do unto others before they do unto you. He then described in a tongue-in-cheek manner how to rob banks, defraud insurance companies, and hijack trucks, planes, and ships on the high seas. Other plans were of lesser magnitude for the theft of silver from restaurants and frankfurters from cart vendors by employing diversionary tactics, such as setting their shade umbrellas afire. I was very much impressed with this tactic. Furthermore, I was convinced that he was a man of total and fascinating irresponsibility.

Determined to see him, I departed for Florfina immediately. Speaking with him proved to be an impossibility, although I had many glimpses of him as he tore through town hunched over the bars of his motorcycle while his flaming red scarf trailed after him.

Usually, the roar of the bike's engine preceded him as he came into view, followed by the townfolks' comments. "Here he comes. There he goes. That boy will go far, mark my words." Another who knew him noted that Smirgle had the largest eyeballs in the world.

I departed and forgot about him. Ten years later he was brought vividly to mind when the cruise ship *Alexander the Great*, carrying a cargo of gold bullion, was hijacked in the Caribbean while her passengers were ashore.

One of the hijackers forced the captain at gunpoint to order the ship to sail. Ten miles out, the gold was carried to the deck, and shortly thereafter a helicopter arrived and departed with the gold and the hijackers. It was last seen heading toward the open sea. To this day the bullion has not been recovered, nor have the hijackers been apprehended. What struck me then was that the identical operation had already been carefully laid out by Smirgle in *Stab or Be Stabbed*. I was convinced that the hijacker had gotten the idea from the book.

This proved not to be the case. Smirgle himself turned out to be the hijacker who had masterminded the operation according to his own formula. I discovered this quite by accident one afternoon when I decided to spend a Sunday visiting Sir Epps's magnificent world-famous castle.

It was truly worthwhile, but imagine my surprise if you

will, when I spotted a familiar hunched figure wearing Baron von Richthofen goggles, leather helmet, and a billowing red scarf streaking across the front lawn on a motorcycle.

"Who is that?" I asked a guard.

"That, sir, is Sir Chesley Cavendish Epps," he replied.

To the guard he was Epps, but to me he was Wilson Smirgle, the Red Ace of Florfina, Pennsylvania. I arranged to have my card and a note requesting a meeting sent to him.

Later, when I saw him alone in his study, my suspicions were confirmed. His eyeballs were enormous, and I immediately recalled a comment by one who knew Smirgle, that Smirgle had the largest eyeballs in the world.

"Hello, Smirgle," I said.

He merely smiled and produced a pistol from a desk drawer and said, "What was that you said?"

"You, sir, are Wilson Smirgle, the Red Ace of Florfina, Pennsylvania, and also the author of *Stab or Be Stabbed*."

"How did you determine this?" he asked.

"I saw you riding your motorcycle in Florfina, Pennsylvania, years ago. Today I recognized you at once." He paled perceptibly, and I pressed on. "I also believe that you have acquired this castle by hijacking the *Alexander the Great*."

"Blackmail, or are you going to the police?"

"I'm neither a blackmailer nor an informer," I protested.

"But I would like to know how you managed to get away with it. That would interest me."

"I would need your word that it won't go beyond this room." We shook hands on it, and he told me what had happened.

While on a South American motorcycling trip, he'd run across Epps and discovered they shared a remarkable physical resemblance. Epps was an eccentric with no use for civilization and he said that he didn't intend to return to his castle in Scotland, which was being maintained by visitors' donations in his absence.

Smirgle said that he would be very happy if he owned the castle and also the name "Sir Chesley Cavendish Epps."

Epps made a joke of it and offered to sell his name and identity for a million dollars. Subsequently, Smirgle pulled the hijacking job, brought Epps the money, and the deal

was made. Shortly thereafter Epps took a dip in the wrong river and was devoured by a school of blood-thirsty piranha.

Of course, as you all know, Smirgle met his end while motorcycling, when a low-hanging branch of a tree caught his scarf, with grisly results. He literally lost his head.

You may lose your head over the collection of stories that follows, but I assure you that it will only be in the figurative sense.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

SWEET, SWEET MURDER

by H. A. DeRosso

I don't know why everyone thinks we Smedleys are unusual. We're like everybody else, with two arms and two legs and a head and a body. And our brains are always working. I remember my great-uncle Simeon, who was the intellect of the family and cleaned up after horses in the days before automobiles, well, he took up yoga or something and while in suspended animation thought up a whole book and wrote it down afterwards in Greek. Anyway, that's what every publisher he sent it to said it was.

And people think my cousin Albert is strange because he walks around at night with a lighted flashlight, looking for dew-worms. It isn't his fault he's allergic to night air and has to look for dewies in his living room. And take me—I like peanuts salted in the shell. I throw the peanuts away and eat the salted shells because I like them, and how else are you going to get salted shells except with peanuts? Everybody has their little idiosyncrasies. But people just seem to make more fuss over those adopted by the Smedleys.

This brings me quite naturally to Uncle Phil. Everyone else in our family thinks of Uncle Phil as the black sheep, but to me he always was and still is a great man. Unfortunately, he was born ahead of his time, and what he did, I am sure, would have found favor in a later era. In a way, he was a pioneer, and pioneers always have tough going. Look at the Donner party that was caught in the Sierra Nevadas in the middle of winter, but that's another story.

To get back to Uncle Phil, he was the only one who ever understood me. Maybe that's why I can sympathize with him. When two people are just about outcasts, they tend to lean on each other for understanding and compassion. It was like that with me and Uncle Phil, though he was thirty years older than me. Still, there was a rapport between us, if you know what I mean, a feeling of *muy simpático* or *lebensraum* or something.

Anyway, this closeness, this mutual sympathy, developed when Grandmother Smedley died. The rest of the family—the brothers, the sisters, the aunts, the uncles,

the cousins and second-cousins, the nieces, the nephews—were all somewhat scandalized by his attitude. I was the only one, young as I was, to realize that he was only being philosophical and practical about her death.

Neither Uncle Phil nor I had hated Grandmother Smedley. Oh, I'd had my differences with her, but I realized that she was old and crabby because she couldn't help being either, and so I tried my best to be tolerant. Even when she killed my pet mosquito, Annabelle, a week before she died, I kept myself from hating her. I told myself that her eyesight wasn't too good, I think she had cataracts or something, and so she hadn't recognized Annabelle and squashed her with one well-aimed slap. Of course, she would never believe that I had trained poor Annabelle not to bite people. Afterwards, I tried to find another pet mosquito, but I never could find one quite like Annabelle.

Well, the relatives came from far and near for Grandmother Smedley's funeral. With all that company it seemed like a holiday to me, but Mother and Father didn't approve of my attitude. Only Uncle Phil agreed, because he felt the same way.

You could hardly blame Uncle Phil. He worked in the iron-ore mines, deep underground, ten hours a day and six days a week. This was before unions; so there was no such thing as holidays with pay or vacations with pay. There were no vacations, period. Not only that, but if a miner missed a shift, he'd get fired. So it came as a welcome relief, an answer to a prayer, when Uncle Phil was allowed to take three days off from work, without pay, for the mourning and the funeral, and without jeopardizing his job.

That was why he understood the way I felt and I understood the way he felt. He found me after Mother had given me a severe talking-to and I'd run off to sulk behind the woodshed. I was working off my spite, hanging a grasshopper, when Uncle Phil walked up.

He hunkered down on his heels and watched the grasshopper kicking for a while, then he reached over and adjusted the noose better. Then he watched a few moments more and nodded approval. After that, he turned his pale blue eyes on me. They always looked soft and wet, as though great sorrows were constantly tormenting him, even though he was usually smiling.

"I heard your mother, Paul," he said to me, "but don't mind her. She doesn't understand people like you and me. You know how she picks on me just because she's my sister. She, all of them, have the wrong attitude about death. Look at them up in the house, talking in hushed voices, sighing, twittering, crying. What did they expect, Grandmother to live forever?"

He prodded the grasshopper, which had stopped kicking, with a finger, and nodded, satisfied, when it didn't move.

"This is really a break for me. Grandmother couldn't have picked a better time to die—middle of summer with the sun shining and all that. You don't know what it means to me to be able to walk around in the sun. Do you realize in the winter I go to work before daylight and come home after dark? What kind of a life is that? A man should be entitled to some time off from his job once in a while. Grandmother must have understood. That's why she took it upon herself to pass away now, so on these days off I can enjoy the sun and the outdoors. She made me a gift. Should I cry over that? Am I an outlaw because I don't feel like joining the others in their mourning and weeping?"

His eyes were wet, but, like I said, they always looked that way. He smiled brightly at me. "Let's go for a walk, hey, Paul? We're buddies, me and you. . . ."

I still sigh when I think of that walk. A feeling of peace and contentment came over me as we walked through the fields. The sun shone in a deep blue sky; a couple of fluffy white clouds drifted by. The air was rich with the smell of ripening timothy and clover, and sweet with the singing of birds. It was the most comforting feeling I'd ever known.

I caught a frog, and me and Uncle Phil hanged it. Then we did some other interesting things. I really had a wonderful time on that walk, and I know Uncle Phil did, too.

"Am I going to hate going back to work day after tomorrow," he said on our way home, and sighed deeply. "What the miners ought to have is a five-and-a-half-day week." Tomorrow was Grandmother's funeral. "It's so nice having a vacation."

"Maybe Aunt Selma will die," I said, trying to comfort him, because for once he wasn't smiling, and really

looked like he was ready to cry. "She looks pretty old, and I heard her coughing something terrible."

"It's that corncob," Uncle Phil said, almost absently, and I could tell his mind was on something else. "She should switch to another kind of pipe."

"Maybe she'll die anyway," I said, trying to cheer him up, "and you'll have another vacation."

He looked at me for the first and only time with disapproval. "Hush now, Paul," he said. "You mustn't say things like that."

That hurt and made me mad. "You sound just like Mother," I said, and ran off, crying.

Well, we buried Grandmother, and that brings up Cousin Newfry. He was Uncle Phil's nephew, like me, but he was grown up. I never liked him, because he was all-fired bossy. I remember that in church I couldn't help myself, and got a giggling jag. Mother tried to shush me, and though I got a belly-ache from my efforts, I couldn't quit giggling. So Cousin Newfry, who was in the pew behind me, rapped me one on the skull real hard, and that made me bust out crying, right out loud. That was when they took me out of the church and really gave me something to cry about.

The only one to understand and show me sympathy was Uncle Phil. "I hate Cousin Newfry," I told Uncle Phil between sobs. "I'd like to hang him right from the belfry."

He didn't swat me one like the others would have done. He just tousled my hair and nodded thoughtfully. I took care to stay next to Uncle Phil throughout the rest of the doings. He was the only protection I had.

Cousin Newfry lived in the southern part of the state, and I could hardly wait for him to go home. I thought he'd leave right after the funeral or the next day, but he hung around. There was something about a will, I think, and the way I got it from Uncle Phil, it was Cousin Newfry causing all the trouble—which didn't surprise me any.

What did surprise me was how Uncle Phil suddenly started playing up to Cousin Newfry. It also disgusted me very much. Here I thought I was Uncle Phil's favorite nephew, and all at once he starts preferring Cousin Newfry to everyone else.

He invited Cousin Newfry to stay at his house. And

two weeks later, on a Sunday, the only day off he had from the mine, he took Cousin Newfry fishing with him. I ran off and hid in the woods and just bawled when Uncle Phil didn't ask me to go along. I looked around for something to hang, and when I couldn't find anything, I cried harder than ever.

Well, it happened that Uncle Phil and Cousin Newfry went out on the lake in a boat, and somehow the plug in the bottom came out, and the boat sank. Uncle Phil said he just barely made it to shore, but Cousin Newfry, who couldn't swim, drowned.

I tell you, I didn't shed any tears for Cousin Newfry. I went around with a hand over my mouth to keep from laughing out loud, and that got me plenty of dirty looks from all the Smedleys, who had gathered again, and a good whipping from Father. I was behind the woodshed hanging a chipmunk when Uncle Phil found me this time, but he cut the chipmunk down before it was dead, and I stared at him. For once he didn't make any sense to me.

"Paul," he said gently, "you've got to realize that people can't understand why you act the way you do. Just like the big boss at the mine not understanding me when I spoke up for all the miners not getting enough time off. I understand you, yes, but no one else does, and so you've got to act the way they expect you to."

"But I'm glad Cousin Newfry is dead," I said. "Aren't you glad, too?"

His eyes watered more than ever. "Newfry was a guest in my house. He was my sister's son. How can I be glad?"

"You got another vacation and—"

He clapped a hand over my mouth and looked around. "Leave us not say what our hearts feel," he said solemnly, sounding just like the minister. "It is possible to rejoice within and mourn without. Do you follow me, Paul?"

"Sure, Uncle Phil," I whispered when he took his hand away, awed by all his wisdom. "I follow you. . . ."

By being kind and reasonable he taught me a lesson I never forgot. Uncle Phil had a way about him with children, and it's too bad he never had any of his own, although I heard Mother often say thank God for that. I have to disagree with her, however. All she and Father thought was necessary to teach me something was with the back of a hand or the front of a stick. Uncle

Phil was different. He used psychology, which is why I've never forgotten the things he taught me. That is why I say my Uncle Phil was a great man, with some shortcomings.

Anyway, I learned how to behave when people were dead, and that came in handy the following summer, when, in a period of perfect weather in July, Aunt Donora died.

Now, Aunt Donora was Uncle Phil's wife. They seemed to get along real good, though Uncle Phil let his hair down with me a few times, but to everyone else he pretended everything was just fine between him and Aunt Donora. He would say "Yes, dear" and "Right away, dear" and "Certainly, dear" and "You're ever so right, dear." But that was for public consumption. To me, his only confidant, he related the miserable life he was living.

"It isn't that I don't love Donora, Paul," he said, "but if she'd only quit nagging. She's always finding fault. I don't know why, because I never do anything wrong. Yet she nags me for putting ketchup in my soup and gravy on my salad. She nags me for picking between my toes. All I'm trying to do is have perfectly clean feet. I sleep better then." He sighed deeply, and my heart went out to him. "I have a cross to bear, Paul, I really have."

Well, anyway, that July he had just bought a car, one of those Model T's with the shift pedals in the floor. I could never figure out which pedal was which. I only knew they made the car go. They sure were confusing. You had to have the emergency on, I think, to get it in low, and then leave the pedal out for it to go into high, or something like that. It really was confusing, and that was how Aunt Donora was killed.

Uncle Phil really wasn't used to the shift pedals yet, having just bought the car. I know he was having trouble with the pedals, mixing up the low-and-high one with the reverse, and that's how it happened. He took Aunt Donora for a ride out in the country, and the car got stuck or something, and Aunt Donora got out to push, with Uncle Phil driving, and he accidentally stepped on the wrong pedal, putting the car in reverse and running over poor Aunt Donora.

Of course, Uncle Phil got to have another vacation, no argument at all from the big boss down at the mine,

since Aunt Donora was Uncle Phil's wife. Uncle Phil even cried real tears, he was so broken up. I remembered what he had taught me, about how to act when people are dead, and I tell you, I didn't do any smiling or laughing, and I behaved very well all through the services and afterwards at the cemetery. When it was all over, Uncle Phil patted me on the head and said I had learned real well.

"I sure hate to think of going back to work in the morning," he told me when we were alone. "But I suppose, under the circumstances, it will be good for me to get out of the house for a few hours. Too many memories here. Poor Donora." And he sniffled for real again.

By now I was starting to catch on, and so I began to play a little game, trying to figure out who it would be the next time Uncle Phil got the urge to have a vacation from the mine. The summer wore on, and autumn came. I figured that Uncle Phil would wait until next spring, at the earliest, because he liked his vacations when the weather was nice. But he fooled me. He picked the fall, bird season.

Uncle Jarvis—he was my uncle because he was Aunt Donora's brother and Uncle Phil's brother-in-law—anyway, Uncle Jarvis brought up something about some insurance Aunt Donora had that peeved Uncle Phil a little. But Uncle Phil wasn't one to quarrel with anybody. I don't think he spoke a single word in anger in all his life. He was gentle that way. He sure believed in live and let live. Anyway, he listened to what Uncle Jarvis had to say, and then they had a long discussion, and everything got patched up so that Uncle Phil and Uncle Jarvis were the best of friends that day late in October when they went hunting partridge.

The way this one happened was that somehow the barrel of Uncle Jarvis' twelve-gauge got plugged up with mud, and when he went to shoot a partridge, the twelve-gauge exploded in Uncle Jarvis' face. That didn't surprise me at all. The surprise came when the sheriff interrupted Uncle Phil's vacation and arrested him.

I don't care what they say, but I'll bet they gave poor Uncle Phil the third degree to make him talk. They say they found the same kind of mud that had exploded the twelve-gauge on Uncle Phil's clothes and under his fin-

gernails. Maybe, but how come Uncle Phil confessed to killing Cousin Newfry and Aunt Donora, too, just so he could have vacations from the mine? Don't tell me they didn't give Uncle Phil the third degree.

Anyway, just because Uncle Phil said he killed those people to get time off from his job, they sent him away to the state hospital at Winnebago. All the Smedleys thought this was something terrible, and none of them ever spoke Uncle Phil's name again. I did a few times, at first, and promptly got licked each time.

I'll never forget Uncle Phil. Like I said, he was a pioneer. He was the first in these parts to feel that a working man is entitled to some time off from his job and to do something about it. I'll admit he was a little selfish, thinking mainly about a vacation for himself, but none of us are perfect.

Anyway, the unions finally came to the mines, and now that the miners are organized, they have their vacations every year, and with pay besides. But there are still some stubborn people who don't think that it's right for anyone to get time off from a job and be paid for it. Mr. Self, who owned the hardware and appliance store where I work, was one of these.

Mr. Self never did give in to our demands for a union. He fought it all along, because he wanted us to work six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. We had to like it or lose our jobs. Well, we finally got a few days off, because when me and Mr. Self were delivering a refrigerator to a second-floor apartment, the dolly to which the refrigerator was strapped slipped from my grip, and the refrigerator fell smack on top of Mr. Self and killed him.

FINAL PERFORMANCE

by Dick Ellis

It was not a particularly warm night. But Marie Devon could feel clammy beads of sweat sliding down her cheeks as she lay rigidly on the bed beside her sleeping husband. She stared up at the shadowy bedroom ceiling. She waited. And . . . there!

There it was again—the soft, scraping, gnawing sound that she had heard a moment ago, in the midnight stillness.

Marie slowly sat up. She was shivering violently under her light silk nightgown. With painful care she slid toward the foot of the huge double bed. Then she climbed over the sprawled legs of her husband, and got out of the bed.

For another long moment she stood there, listening.

No sound other than the rasping snores of Edward Devon. He turned over on his side with a grunt. Marie glanced down at her husband's gross bulk, barely discernible in the faded moonlight that filtered into the room from the open windows in the wall beyond the bed. Even now, in spite of her fear, Marie's nose wrinkled in disgust.

Edward Devon was such an animal.

Marie picked her way across the bedroom to the corridor door. She eased it open and stepped out into the pitch-black hallway. She felt her way along the hall to the closed door at the end that opened into the kitchen. Again she paused.

There was a thin, pale line of light showing through the crack at the bottom of the door. So it was time.

Marie took a deep breath. Squeezing her eyes tightly shut, she pushed open the door. A voice whispered, "All right, kid. Take it easy—all be over in a second."

A fist crashed into her jaw, and a great pinwheel of yellow flame blossomed behind her closed eyelids. Then there was nothing. Only darkness. . . .

Barry Chambers caught the limp body of his sister as she sagged to the kitchen floor. Gently he lowered her

on down, stretching her on her back. He looked at her in the dim cone of light cast by his small flashlight.

He hoped he hadn't hit her too hard. But she seemed to be all right—just out cold. For that matter, it would be just as well if he had broken her jaw. That way, she'd have a good excuse not to do any talking for a while.

Chambers' thin lips twisted in a nervous grin. He shook his head, turned quickly to the cabinet beside the sink across the kitchen. He opened drawers until he found a stack of cotton dish towels. Working with silent urgency, he knotted the end of one towel to the end of the next until he had a crude rope.

He tested the knots by jerking the rope between his hands. Satisfied, he went back to the unconscious body of his sister. He turned her over on her stomach, crossed her wrists in the small of her back, and tied them tightly together. Then he carried the free end of the rope down to her ankles and repeated the process, stretching the rope so taut that Marie's feet were lifted a few inches above the floor.

Chambers got up. The kid was going to be uncomfortable when she came to. But if everything went right, she wouldn't have to stay tied up more than a couple of minutes, after he'd finished the job and left the house.

Finish the job. Yeah. No time like the present.

Chambers picked up his flashlight from the floor. Holding it in his gloved left hand, he put his right hand in his jacket pocket and pulled out a seven-shot .22 automatic.

He walked on tiptoe along the hallway to the open bedroom door. He switched off the flashlight. He could hear Edward Devon snoring contentedly on the bed. He licked dry lips, aimed the automatic pistol toward the bed, and stepped into the room. He found the light switch beside the door and turned it on. In the same instant he began yelling at the top of his voice.

Edward Devon reared up on the bed, his bald head glinting in the overhead light, his jowly face blank with shock and sudden terror. "What? Wha—?"

Chambers fired. Once. Twice. Three—four—five times. The man on the bed slowly crumpled forward until his head rested on his knees. His body twitched with the impact of the small but deadly slugs. One fat arm

dangled over the edge of the bed. The fingers clenched into a fist, then opened, and did not move again.

Chambers gave a final yell. Then he turned and ran back along the hall and into the kitchen. Frantically he turned on the light there. His sister was beginning to regain consciousness. She was moaning, trying to turn over.

Chambers was shaking so badly he had to grip the butt of his smoking gun with both hands. He aimed at a spot on the wall well above his sister's body, and fired the last two shots. Marie gave a sudden choked scream.

"That's it, that's it—scream," Chambers chattered. "Scream like hell!"

He raced on across the kitchen, through the door, and down the steps into the shadowy back yard. His car was parked in the alley. As he ran across the yard, he could see lights flicking on in a house east of the Devon home.

At the alley, he turned to look west. Yes, lights were on at the house over there, too. Good, good. It was going exactly as he'd planned. The yells, the shots, and now Marie's keening screams cutting through the night.

It should be enough to wake up the whole neighborhood.

He jumped into the car, started it, barreled down the alley to the cross-street, turned north, and sped away. As he put the blocks behind him, he gradually reduced his speed until he was doing a steady forty-five.

Chambers lived in an apartment house, a bit more than two miles across the northern part of the city from the Devon home. It took him a bit more than three minutes to get there.

He parked his car in the parking lot behind the big, dark building. He entered the building, went to the self-service elevator, rode up to the third floor. He did not meet a single person. When he reached his apartment, he opened the door, entered, locked the door behind him.

Then he put his back to the door and allowed his body to slide down until he was sitting on the floor. He began to shake. Sweat poured down his face and dripped from the point of his chin. His teeth chattered wildly.

He made no effort to get control of himself; he knew the reaction would soon pass.

"Damn, damn—I did it! Now, if Marie will just—but she will, she will. Rough part's over. Now just the wait-

ing. Few months, and then—money, man, money—all the money in creation. Work and sweat for years. Then just in a couple seconds, just by twitching your trigger finger a couple times, all the money in—damn.”

He swayed from side to side, and slowly his breathing returned to normal. He got up. He was still trembling, but the worst was over. Already his mind was reasserting its usual discipline over his body.

A couple of drinks and he'd be steady as a rock, ready to play his part to perfection.

He turned on lights. He crossed to the little liquor cabinet and brought out a bottle of vodka. He poured a double shot, drank it, and poured another.

Let's see now. He probably had at least another ten minutes before the phone call from Marie. Or, more likely, from one of the cops who, by now, would be swarming all over the Devon house and the surrounding neighborhood.

During that time, he would undress, wash his face and hands, and put on pajamas. The gun was no problem. He'd stolen it from a sporting-goods store when he was twelve years old, more than twenty years ago. Tomorrow he'd drive out into the country and bury the gun in some remote spot.

For now, it'd be safe enough in the water tank of the toilet in the bathroom.

He finished his drink and got busy.

When the gun was safely hidden, and he had his pajamas on, he strolled back into the living room. He frowned at the silent telephone. Then he shrugged and went to pour another drink. But no, better not. He had a part to play tonight.

Drinking before going on stage didn't work.

Barry Chambers should know. The bottle had gotten him fired from enough jobs during the years he'd tried to make it as an actor. The bottle, and stupid unfeeling directors, and even more stupid producers. They were all stupid.

His thin, handsome face contorted in a scowl. Well, who needed them? In a few months he'd have enough money, through Marie, to buy his own damn theater—and he just might do it.

He sat down in an easy chair, crossed his legs, and relaxed. He thought about his sister. Marie was twenty-five.

And about as dumb as it was possible to be. Chambers stirred uneasily in his chair. He lit a cigarette.

But Marie did have one great talent. She could follow orders to the letter. If old Devon hadn't plucked her out of that touring theatrical company and married her, she'd quite likely have gone on to be a very good actress.

Not that she had any creative talent at all, but she could follow direction to the letter, once you got across to her what you wanted. You had to show her, make her believe it, but once she did, she lived it. It was her.

That, of course, was the reason for the elaborate staging of the murder of Devon. The rehearsals during the weeks just past—during the day, when Devon was at his big office downtown.

And tonight had been the actual performance. And a smash hit it was, too. Chambers grinned. It had gone off without a single hitch. No, he didn't have to worry about Marie. Caught up in her part, she'd convince anybody—even an audience of cynical cops.

Besides, all she had to do was tell the exact truth.

Just relate step by step what had happened, from the time she heard the faint noise of a prowler prying open the back door of her home—an unknown, faceless, nameless prowler.

It was perfect. Absolutely perfect.

Chambers rose, stretched luxuriously. And that old, tight-fisted Devon. He had no one to blame but himself. After Marie had left the road company and married Devon, she had written to Chambers. He was down and out in a flophouse in a poor section of Los Angeles at the time.

When he'd found out Devon was a wealthy man, he'd lost no time in asking Marie to wire him money for bus fare to pay the newlyweds a visit.

He'd figured to move in and live off Devon's bounty.

But it hadn't worked that way. During the months since he'd hit town, he'd had to get along on the few bucks Marie was able to slip him on the side, without Devon's knowledge, and whatever he could pick up working the joints on the city's skid row.

Well, that was all over now.

Marie would inherit Devon's whole bundle. And Marie, poor dumb Marie, would gladly pass it on to Cham-

bers. Everybody happy. Except maybe Edward Devon, who should have known better than to marry a chick half his age, in the first place.

The phone rang.

Chambers stretched out his hand toward it, then quickly dropped the hand to his side. First he had to wake up, get out of bed, stumble from the bedroom into the living room. He closed his eyes, visualizing these movements. The phone shrilled on and on.

Finally Chambers picked it up. He muttered sleepily, "Lo? . . . Yeah, this is Chambers. Who—? The police?" Then, bringing his voice up to full timbre: "What? . . . My God! . . . My sister—yes, of course. I'll be there as quickly as I can."

He slammed down the phone and hurried into the bedroom. From the closet he grabbed a pair of trousers and a jacket, drew them on over his pajamas. He chuckled softly to himself.

He left the apartment, went down to his car, drove rapidly through the deserted streets. As he'd expected, the big Devon house was ablaze with lights. Several police cars were parked at the curb in front. Chambers found a space, parked. He jumped from the car and ran up the walk toward the house. A group of people in nightclothes and robes stood on the lawn. They turned to stare at Chambers. A woman shrilled eagerly: "Oh, that's Mrs. Devon's brother!"

A uniformed cop was at the front door. He nodded when Chambers gave his name, let him enter.

The long, expensively furnished living room was full of men, both plainclothes and harness bulls. Cigar and cigarette smoke made the air hazy blue. Through it, Chambers spotted Marie, huddled on a corner of the big sofa over by the fireplace. At the same moment, she saw him. She cried, "Barry!"

Great tears rolled from her already red and swollen eyes.

She was giving the performance of her life. The last nagging doubt died away inside Chambers, as he rushed across the room, sat down beside her, and took her trembling body into his arms. . . .

An hour later it was just about all over. Most of the cops had gone, the morgue wagon had departed with what was left of Edward Devon. Chambers and Marie

still sat side by side on the sofa. Marie kept a tight hold on his hand.

She'd played it beautifully. Every gesture, every tremulous word as she'd answered the interminable questions. Several times she'd wept. The bruise on her jaw where Chambers had slugged her was a blot of greenish-purple against her white skin.

Now nothing was left to do except one more reading of the statement Marie had made, and signing it. The homicide detective who had done most of the questioning sat facing them. He was a squat, ugly man with sympathetic gray eyes. He held the typed statement in his hands, glancing at it now and then. Two other detectives stood over by the front door.

The detective, whose name was Kimmons, cleared his throat. He looked kindly at Marie. "Just a few more minutes, then your brother can get you out of here."

Marie lifted her chin bravely. "I'm—I'm all right."

Chambers gave her hand a comforting pat.

"We'll go over this very briefly," Captain Kimmons said. "Right around midnight, you were awakened by some sound you could not identify. A moment later the sound was repeated. Half-asleep, you got out of bed, went to the kitchen door. You pushed the door open, and that was the last you remembered, until you came to and found yourself tied hand and foot on the kitchen floor. Just then a man burst into the kitchen, fired two shots at you and fled out the back door. You could not see the man at all clearly, and can't give us any description. Natural enough."

The detective paused. He coughed softly. "Oh, I think it's all very clear what happened. There've been several reports of prowlers in this neighborhood in recent months. Tonight, unfortunately, it was your turn. The prowler jimmied open the back door and came inside. You, Mrs. Devon, interrupted him. He knocked you out and tied you up. By then your husband had been awakened. Perhaps he called out. In any case, the prowler went into the bedroom, probably intending only to threaten your husband. But then Mr. Devon began shouting—and the man panicked and shot—"

"Oh, please," Marie moaned. Her body quivered. "Please."

Chambers said curtly, "Can't she just sign the state-

ment, and end this thing—at least for the night? She needs a doctor's care, and—"

"Yes, yes," Kimmons said. "I'm sorry."

He held out the document and a pen. Marie took them in trembling hands.

The detective lifted his voice. "Joe? Bill? You want to come over and witness this?" The other two detectives came across the room to stand behind the couch, as Marie signed her name at the bottom of the paper.

Kimmons gently tugged at his ear lobe. "Just one other small item, Mrs. Devon," he said. "I've been married fifteen years. Joe and Bill, there, are also married men. And one little thing has kind of puzzled all of us about this."

Marie looked up, blinking her swollen eyes. "I—I beg your pardon?"

"Well, you assured us over and over that you and your husband were on the best of terms."

Chambers felt a small cold wind blow up his spine. "What are you talking about?" he snapped at the captain.

Kimmons gave him a benevolent smile. "I understand that you're a bachelor, Mr. Chambers."

"Yeah, yeah, but what—?"

"That's very interesting. Very," he said.

Chambers swallowed. He tried to think. The wind on his spine was cold as ice now. "I—"

But the detective interrupted, "You see, one thing all married women have in common, no matter how they may differ otherwise. It's a rare case when a woman gets up to investigate a noise in the middle of the night. Huh uh. Not with her husband lying right there beside her, in the same bed. . . . Now, Mrs. Devon, do you want to tell us what really happened?"

Silence. Marie stared blindly in front of her. Her mouth opened, then shut, then opened again. Slowly her head turned toward Chambers. The performance was over.

"Barry?" she said. That was all. But it was enough.

Chambers didn't even try to bluff it through. He knew that Marie, without lines to speak and a part to play, would fall to pieces at the first probing.

It was all over. He buried his face in his hands. All for nothing. He knew it even more clearly when the detective said quietly to his men, "We'll search his place."

Chances are a hundred to one he got rid of the gun already. But you never know with amateurs."

One of the detectives laughed shortly. "If the rod is at his place, I'll lay you odds on where it'll be. In the water tank of the toilet. It never fails."

SAY "CHEESE"

by Ed Lacy

At seven minutes past midnight the desk lieutenant rang and said, "Lew, I think this is a crackpot call. Something about seeing a murder, but the guy sounds nuts to me. See what you make of it."

"Okay, sir." Lew waited for the connecting click, then said, "Detective Moran speaking."

"Is this still the police station?" a man's small voice asked.

"This is the Detective Squad room. What's the trouble?"

"No trouble. My name is Howard Burton and I . . . eh . . . as I told the other officer, I want to report witnessing a murder."

"What's your address, Mr. Burton? I'll send a radio car over. Are you in any danger?"

"Me? Oh no, sir, no danger at all. And there's no need to rush. I'd come down to the police station myself, but it's too bulky to carry."

"Bulky? Do you mean the body? Have you killed somebody?" Lew asked, motioning for another detective to call a car from the garage.

"No, no, I merely happened to witness the killing. A man was knifed in the back. The—"

"Can you still see the killer?" Moran cut in.

"Sure. He's right in my living room. I mean, I can see him here."

"What's your address, Mr. Burton? Where did this killing take place?"

"I live at 27 Moore Place. As for the murder, it took place about twelve hundred miles from here, some two weeks ago. But I just saw it now."

"Burton, what the devil are you talking about?" Lew growled. "If this is a drunken joke or—"

"Officer, I'm quite sober, and it isn't any joke. My wife and I returned from a cruise to Nassau about nine days ago, and tonight we were out—"

"What about this killing?"

"That's what I'm trying to explain, officer. When we came home tonight, we ran off some movies I took. In

the pictures, near the docks, behind the Straw Market, well, it seems we unknowingly took a picture of a man being stabbed to death. My projector is too heavy to bring down to the police station, but we thought we ought to report it."

"I'll be right over."

The Burtons lived in an old wooden house. Howard Burton was a thin man in his late fifties, while his wife, Eunice, was a plump fifty. They both were upset. Howard said, "You see, I used to own a small candy and newspaper store over on Twelfth Street. We sold it recently."

"Ran the store for nearly twenty-eight years," Eunice put in nervously. "Best years of our life went into the store."

"Yes," Howard said. "The point is, the entire block is being demolished to build an apartment-house project. We sold the store for a fair price and decided to take a vacation, the first we've ever had. We took one of these cruises. We were in Nassau for two days, returned the Saturday before last."

"It was lovely," Eunice added.

"I sent my movie films to be developed, and we found them in the mailbox when we came home tonight. I was running them off, and we saw . . . Well, look for yourself, officer. Eunice, please turn off the lights."

There was a new projector on a table in the center of the living room, facing a small white screen on a stand. Moran saw pictures of a sleek liner as Howard said, "That's the boat. Now, I took these from the tender ferrying us ashore. There, that's the Straw Market, famous for its straw bags and hats. Now you see Eunice haggling with one of the native sellers over a hat. They expect you to haggle."

"I bought quite a few hats," Eunice said.

As Lew watched the sharp, clear, color pictures, Howard told him, "That's the post office and—"

"No, dear, that's a hotel."

"It doesn't matter. On another roll I have shots of us at Paradise Beach. But watch this. Eunice had bought several hats, and I thought it would be funny to take shots of her trying them on. There, you see her, with the docks in the background. Watch."

Eunice's smiling fat face was looking at them from the

screen as she modeled several gay straw hats. Suddenly her face became a blur as it went out of focus and the tall grass in front of an empty dock came into sharp view. A gray-haired man, wearing a white linen suit and a straw hat, was walking along when a burly man with a dark skin, wearing ragged pants and shirt, ran out of the tall grass, plunged a knife into the other man's back. As the man in the linen suit staggered, Eunice's sweaty face came back into focus, giggling as she put on a cone-shaped hat several feet high.

Burton shut the projector and his wife snapped on the lights, both of them staring at the detective. Eunice said, "I have the hat here if you'd like to see it."

Blinking at the light, Lew said, "Let me see that knifing again."

"Yes, sir." Burton rerolled the film, and when Eunice darkened the room again he started the projector, stopping the film as the ragged man stuck the knife into the other man's back. It was difficult to make out either man's features, but the one in the linen suit seemed to be a white man and the other a native. Burton said, "I'm not too good with the camera. We bought it just before taking the cruise, and I must have accidentally zoomed in on the killing. That's why Eunice is out of focus in the foreground. Now, when I run it . . . Okay to run it, officer?"

"Go ahead."

"Now, you see, Eunice is back in focus, and the dock area is just a white blur. I'll finish the roll. That's another shot of the boat as we were returning, and here—"

"Turn on the lights, please," Lew said.

"Roll will be finished in a second, officer. There's Eunice sitting beside the ship's swimming pool. That's me, jumping into the pool, waving at the camera. And . . ." The screen turned a bright white, and the reel was over. Snapping on the lights, Eunice said, "I'm so plump, looks like the suit is ready to burst."

Lew grinned politely. "Do you know either of those two men?"

"No, sir," Howard said.

"Did you ever see them before?"

"Of course not," Eunice said. "Soon as we saw the pictures, I told Howard to phone the police. I mean, even though it happened outside the USA, we thought we should report it."

Lew asked, "After you took the pictures, before you got on the tender again, did you notice a crowd gather where the man was stabbed, any of the local police?"

"No, sir, I didn't." Howard looked at his wife. "You recall seeing any crowd, hon?"

Eunice shook her head. "If there had been a crowd, we would have gone over to see what was going on. You know how nosy tourists are. Matter of fact, I remember after posing we started back toward the main street to buy some rum. From the liquor store we went to the tender. It was very hot. I was hungry, and there was no sense eating ashore when we'd paid for the meals on the boat."

"That's right," Howard added. "Care for a drink, officer?"

Lew shook his head. "Did you pass the spot where the man was knifed when you returned to the tender?"

"I don't see how we could have. The tender was tied up at a dock on the other side of the Straw Market. No, I'm sure we didn't."

"That's so," Eunice said. "I recall the first time we stepped off the tender, we walked right into the Straw Market."

"Was the man in the linen suit a passenger?" Lew asked.

"I don't think so," Howard told him. "Didn't hear anything about a passenger missing. As I told you, we never saw him before."

"Was there anything in the papers down there about a killing?"

Eunice giggled. "You don't go on a cruise to read papers. Besides, the ship left that same afternoon, a few hours after we took the pictures."

Lew took out his notebook. "Can you give me the exact date when this happened?"

The Burtons stared at each other. Mr. Burton said, "Let's see; we returned on Saturday, that was the Saturday before last, which would make it September 23rd, so . . ."

"September 21st, dear."

"Anyway, we sailed from Nassau on Thursday. Wednesday we'd been out to Paradise Beach, left our shopping for the last day. Yes, this had to be on Thursday, September 19th, around noon, since we were going back to the ship for lunch."

"That's right," Eunice said. "The ship was sailing at four, and I wanted to go ashore again, to buy a few more souvenirs. But Howie said we'd spent enough, and besides, it was so hot, I was tired. We remained on the ship, took a swim after lunch. Oh, I remember *that* day very well. I won in the bingo game that night!"

Lew stood up. "I have a car outside, Mr. Burton. Can you take the film and the projector down to the squad room, run it off for us there?"

"Certainly, officer."

"I'm going to bed," Eunice said, adding with a giggle, "I do hope the other policemen won't laugh at me in my bathing suit."

At 8:30 A.M., Lieutenant Dave Wintino told Lew, "You might as well go on home. Downtown has been in touch with Nassau. An American, one Leonard Wyckoff, was found murdered there on the night of September 19th. Their coroner puts the time of death at about noon, so that checks. The Nassau police reported it to our officials there. Wyckoff was a retired man, quiet sort, kept to himself, been living in Nassau for the last five months. The killing was a sensation down there. Not only is homicide rare, but tourism is a major industry and this—"

Lew yawned.

"You're off-duty, go home. This isn't our baby. Mr. Burton has agreed to let us send his film to Nassau. That ends it."

"Maybe. One angle on this hit me wrong. See what you think."

Lieutenant Wintino was a short man with wide shoulders which made him look even shorter. Hunching his shoulders now, in a mock gesture, he said, "Come on, Lew. We have a busy house here, so don't play the all-seeing-TV-eye on a case in another country. But what's the wrong angle?"

"Just the way the Burtons kept saying 'murder,' they seemed so sure the man was dead. Okay, it turned out that way, but every knifing doesn't end in death, Dave."

Wintino shrugged again. "Look, if a layman sees a knife parked in somebody's back, what else would he think but it's a killing? Get some sleep, Lew. Let me be the eager-beaver of the squad."

Moran reached his apartment by 9:30 as his wife was

making breakfast. Kissing him, she said, "What a novelty, I see my husband!"

"You know my shift of tours, Ruthie."

"You bet I know. You're coming home as I'm leaving for the office. If you get to sleep fast, perhaps we can take in a movie tonight, before you return to that precinct house! Other wives can look forward to a Saturday night with their husbands, but if you're married to a cop you—"

"You expect him home when you see him," Lew said, kissing her again. "I'll eat a light breakfast and try to hit the sack at once. We'll be able to have supper together and then take in a show."

At noon Ruth Moran shook her husband awake. "Squad room on the phone. Bad enough you have these crazy hours, but they don't even let you sleep. Sometimes I wish you'd never passed the exam!"

Lieutenant Wintino asked, "Lew? This is Dave. Sorry to get you up, but something new has broken in that Nassau knifing. Turns out the deceased was a vault attendant in the bank on 141st Street and Broadway, in our squad area. He retired on a pension seven months ago."

"Lucky him," Lew said. "So what?"

"Exactly what I told Downtown, but they seem to think it gives us an interest in the case. I have a squad car on the way to your place with the film, expense money, and a ticket on the 1:30 jet to the Bahamas, so pack a fast bag."

"Me? You're sending me?" Lew Moran asked, sleep vanishing from his voice.

"Sure. It's your case, and you deserve an easy assignment for a change. Take your swim trunks along. If you want to relax for a day down there, okay, but I expect you back within four days. Understand?"

"Yes, sir! And thanks, Dave. Oh, one thing, while I'm gone, check out the Burtons for me."

"Will do. Now, stop yaking and get dressed."

As he jumped out of bed, Ruth asked, "Will you be back in time for supper; can we still take in the movie, Lew?"

Stopping to give his wife a fast kiss as he raced for the bathroom, Lew said, "Hon, I won't be back for a few days."

"Oh for . . . ! Another lost weekend for us. Really, Lew, this is too much. Where are you going?"

"Nassau," Lew called over the sound of the shower.

"Nassau? Out in Long Island?" Ruthie asked loudly.

"No, Nassau in the Bahamas!"

"You're going to the West Indies? Why you—you big bum! Can I go along?" she shouted, almost screamed. . . .

Wiping the perspiration from his face Lew stared at Detective Inspector Davis-Johns, the dark brown face in sharp contrast to the snappy white uniform, including the tightly buttoned, stiff collar, and Lew wondered how the man could look so cool in the tropical heat. They were standing in an empty lot not far from the Straw Market (which hadn't impressed Lew much, although he bought a few items to bring home to Ruthie). An empty dock stood in the background. Pointing to the spot where Wyckoff's body had been found in the tall grass, Davis-Johns said with his very clipped, British accent, "The body of the deceased lay here for over five hours, hidden by the high grass. Now, assuming the man taking the pictures of his wife was about over there, roughly two hundred yards, the question in my mind is this: if his camera saw the blooming stabbing, why wouldn't the man have seen it?"

Lew touched the cheap motion-picture camera he'd purchased on the way to the plane, now hanging from his neck. "For one thing, on a bright, sunny day, it's pretty hard to see anything two blocks away. Secondly, I've been fooling with this camera a bit, and if I'm looking through the range-finder, or whatever they call this thing, all my attention would be on the person I was photographing. The knifing probably happened so fast, a thrust in the back and the killer ran, that Burton wouldn't notice it. I understand robbery was the motive, sir?"

Davis-Johns shook his dark head. "In light of the film I've seen, I now doubt that. It is not in the criminal pattern of our island. True, we have petty thefts and some bashings, but never an unprovoked stabbing as a robbery pattern. Mr. Wyckoff was an elderly man, could have been easily overpowered. Also, while his wallet was taken, his watch and ring were not touched. At first, I thought this was because the killer had been bloody well rushed, but the film shows no one around him. Your Mr.

Burton claims he saw no one, so if theft was the motive, why didn't the robber crouch in the high grass and weeds beside his victim, and take the ring and watch?"

Lew shrugged. "Any prints on the murder weapon?"

"None, a cheap knife of German make, a type sold the world over. Detective Moran, it is my belief the solution to this crime will be found in the victim's past."

"Mind if I take a few pictures of you, sir?" Lew asked. "Since I have the camera handy."

Lew focused on Davis-Johns, who looked a bit annoyed, but struck a pose. Lew wondered if the inspector was trying to put the blame for the murder on an outsider for the sake of the tourist business. He asked, "You mean a hired killer, sir?"

"Exactly, sir. Perhaps a killer expressly sent from the United States to—"

"Sir, this is a movie camera, so wave your hands or walk about."

"Blast your camera! This isn't a bloody cinema studio; we're here to solve a murder!" Davis-Johns exploded.

"Yes, sir," Lew said quietly, taking pictures of the angry officer. "Do you know anything about Mr. Wyckoff's past?"

"Indeed not. He was a retired chap, in all ways, I am told. A timid-like man whom one would never associate with a crime, which is exactly why his murder arouses suspicion of an outside killer in my mind. Mr. Wyckoff was rather good with silver, wanted to open a shop here to manufacture souvenirs. Of course, in our poor country for a noncitizen to go into business, well, I'm afraid the venture was bogged down in red tape. Would you care to see some of Wyckoff's silver work? He was really quite an artist."

"I would," Lew said, putting his camera away. "And I'd also like a tall drink in the shade, if possible."

Davis-Johns smiled at him. "Very possible. Your face is lobster-red. You Americans burn easily; don't drink enough tea, you know."

Three days later Lew ran off his reel of film in the squad room, using Burton's projector. When he finished and had turned on the lights, Lieutenant Wintino asked, "Okay, Lew, I rushed to have your film developed, and what does it prove, except you cut off hands and heads,

jerked from one subject to another? Plus that, Davis-Johns isn't much of an actor. You sure got a nice tan down there."

"It proves I'm a lousy movie photographer," Lew said. "But it also proves Howard Burton has a very expensive camera and is a damn good photographer, although he claims he only purchased the camera shortly before they took the cruise."

"Still on the Burtons, Lew? They're a tired, middle-aged couple, not killers."

"Maybe, but Dave, the quiet of a jet is a great place for thinking about a case. Wyckoff also was a tired, middle-aged joker. In fact, he and the Burtons have that in common. Now, isn't it a fat coincidence that the only slip Burton makes in his reel, his only mistake, he manages to zoom in on a man being stabbed? Not even a professional photographer could be that lucky! Also, Burton doesn't say he saw a man being hurt, but that the man was *murdered*."

Dave shook his head. "Too much sun has melted your one-track brains. Lew, if Burton was involved in this, why would he start an investigation by showing us the movies in the first place?"

"I gave that a lot of thought, too. Dave, there's a brace of reasons why he showed us the film. First, he's an amateur killer, thinks he's pulled the perfect crime, and like all perfect crime nuts, he gets a charge out of rubbing our noses in his alleged cleverness. But . . ."

"Come on, even a nut doesn't take pictures of his crime."

"On the contrary, Dave. Burton thinks the movies not only give him and his wife an alibi, but he's so smart *he's showing us the actual murderer!*"

"Now Mrs. Burton is in on the killing, too?"

"I think so. But the film isn't an alibi. I took that shot of myself on the beach by starting the camera, then stretching out on the sand. Simple enough to do with these automatic, battery-driven cameras. According to the Nassau police, Wyckoff always took a pre-lunch stroll along the docks, which were near his rooming house. See the picture? Assuming the Burtons came to Nassau to kill him—and it's another coincidence they went to Nassau, not to San Juan, or one of the other islands—they had two days to learn of his walking habits."

"Come on, Lew, thousands of tourists go to Nassau. Don't forget that in Burton's films the killer is obviously a heavysset, dark-skinned man."

Lew nodded. "I considered that, but a single can of makeup turns a white skin brown. Dave, suppose Burton came ashore with some ragged clothes and makeup, plus padding—stuff he'd brought from the States? Be a cinch to take it ashore in one of the straw baskets they'd bought the day before. Knowing where Wyckoff takes his usual walk, he sets up the camera and then changes into his disguise in the tall grass."

"Now, when we see the killing, his wife is out of focus. All we see is the blur of her cone-shaped straw hat, so they could have put the hat on a stick in front of the camera. Then she took over, zoomed in on Burton doing the killing. He changes back to his slacks and sport shirt, wipes off the makeup with a sponge, shoves everything into a straw basket, and returns to finish taking pictures of her. Later, at sea, they throw the rags overboard."

"Lew, you're the one going overboard. You saw the reports on the Burtons, a couple of small-time store-keepers. What possible motive connects the Burtons and Wyckoff?"

Lew pointed to a silver pin of intricate design on the table. "This could be the connection."

Wintino looked blank.

"Dave, let's go over what we know about Wyckoff. He's a guy who put in thirty years as a bank-vault attendant, finally retires on a small pension. Three years ago his wife died after a long illness, probably using up every cent they had. Wyckoff's silverwork hobby had to be something he's been doing for years. Okay, his retirement is coming up in a year or so, and he's broke, but dreams of retiring to the West Indies, also a dream of long standing. He needs a few grand to set himself up so he'll be able to live on his pension. Now, and this is pure guesswork on my part," Lew added, fingering the silver pin, "but if . . ."

"I'm glad you admit it's only a guess, Holmes. That jet flight went to your head like booze."

"Just listen, first, Dave. If I want to rent a safety-deposit box, I fill out a signature card, pay for the box, and the attendant gives me two keys to the box. Right?"

"I never had anything to stash away in a vault box,

but that's the procedure. What's it add up to, Perry Mason?"

"It adds to this: a guy like Wyckoff, an expert with metals, has those two keys around his desk until the box is rented. Now, when I wish to open my box, I hand him my key and he inserts it, then uses the bank's master key. The supposed safety measure is that two different keys are needed to open the box. Okay, Wyckoff is about to retire, and broke. Now, let's say he has sets of keys for, say, twenty empty boxes waiting to be rented. It would be simple for him to make a duplicate key for each of these boxes. Now let's suppose I rent a box. Wyckoff is down in the vault, alone most of the time. Using the duplicate he's already made of my keys, plus his regular bank key, he can open my box and examine the contents at his leisure. No chance of his being caught, as he has to come out of the vault and unlock the gate before anybody can enter."

"You mean he's looking for somebody stashing away money to escape taxes?" Wintino asked.

"Right. Suppose I have ten grand in my box, he can be fairly sure it's shady money of some kind, and if he takes a grand or two I'm in no position to raise a fuss."

Wintino threw up his hands. "That's a far-out theory, and there's still no connection. The Burtons ran a hand-to-mouth candy store. Also, we've checked the list of vault-box owners; no Burton."

Lew rubbed his suntanned chin. "I've done a little checking on my own, with a few stoolies. True, the Burtons' store wasn't much, but like many candy-newspaper shops, it was used as a numbers drop. Nothing big time, Dave, but two grand a year from the numbers is peanuts, so let's say over the years, being thrifty folks, the Burtons managed to put away twenty thousand dollars. My idea is Wyckoff helped himself to a grand or two, then went to Nassau. He learned that he needed four thousand dollars to open his shop down there. The deal got snarled in red tape, but Wyckoff always said he could raise the money. Again, as a pure guess, he wrote the Burtons for money. He claimed it would be his first and only bite, but if he didn't get it, he'd tell the tax boys about their dough and collect the reward there. The—"

"Lew, you're running off at the mouth like a TV badge,

making a lot of wild deductions. Doesn't give us any basis of fact on which to move."

"I think we have a move, Dave, and a simple one which will tell us if I'm right or cockeyed. Let's think about the Burtons, a hard-working couple, with their little kitty from the numbers stashed away. Their problem is they can't spend it without attracting the attention of the tax boys. If they bought a new house, or an expensive car, for example, they'd have a lot of explaining to do. Okay, Wyckoff has helped himself to a grand or two, and there's nothing they can do about it. They might not even be sure it was his hand in their vault box, although they must have suspected him. Suddenly the dawn breaks for the Burtons. This housing project is going up, they *have* to sell their store. This is their chance to live it up a little, supposedly using the money from the sale of the shop. Then Wyckoff writes asking for a few grand, and they figure they'll be blackmailed for the rest of their lives. They decide to kill him. There are two things you can do about a shakedown: either blow the whistle or kill, if you don't want to pay. That's motive enough for me, sir."

"Lew, while I appreciate your devoting so much thought and time to the case, so far your theory is all supposition and could result in a fat suit for false arrest. Also, you keep overlooking the hard fact that the Burtons never had a box in the bank!"

"They could have rented a box under a phony name or in Mrs. Burton's maiden name. It would mean our checking every box holder, especially any who canceled their boxes a few months before Wyckoff retired. Lot of work, but sir, I have this quickie idea which will test my theory in minutes. There hasn't been anything in the local papers about this, but have you told the Burtons that we know the name of the deceased?"

"No."

"Great. We phone them and say this is Jack Wyckoff, Leonard's brother, that we have a letter they'd be interested in, and to meet us at once on some street corner. It's that simple. If they show, we're in, on the right track, and can probably secure a confession from the Burtons while we take our time checking the names of the vault-box renters. If they don't show, it means they never heard of Wyckoff and my theory is a zero. Is it worth a phone call, Dave?"

Lieutenant Wintino smiled. "I'll invest a dime to prove how wrong you are."

Dave phoned from a corner booth near the Burton house. He said quickly, "This is Leonard Wyckoff's brother. I found a letter from him you'll be interested in buying. I'm on the corner of Grand Avenue and 143rd Street. If you're not here within fifteen minutes, the letter goes to the tax people," and hung up.

Wintino and Moran were waiting in a car outside the Burton house when Howard and Eunice came rushing out minutes later. On frisking them, they found a gun in Howard's pocket. All the way to the precinct house Eunice screamed hysterically at her husband, "I told you to pay him off! I told you! I told you what's five thousand! But you never did listen to me! You and your great brain, your stupid ideas!"

Later, over containers of coffee in the squad room, Dave said, "Well, this case is all wrapped up in record time. Real smart armchair brain work on your part, Lew, and I almost booted it. I'm recommending you for a promotion to—"

"Dave, that can wait. I mean, thank you, but first can you do me a big favor? Advance my vacation so I can take it next week, sir?"

"Sure, I think it can be arranged. But why the rush? You just returned from a kind of vacation."

"That's exactly why. If I don't take my wife to Nassau, there will be no living with her! Every time she looks at my suntan, she sees red."

THE CEMETERY MAN

by C. B. Gilford

Ed Jesson got into the business, the cemetery business that is, by accident. Or maybe, more properly speaking, by necessity. Because Ed had a body to get rid of. And what better place is there to plant a body than in a cemetery?

Problem was, Ed didn't own a cemetery. The owners and operators of such properties are all wealthy—a fact Ed was to discover later—but back in 1949 Ed Jesson was far from being a rich man. He was a working stiff, nothing more, a guy who got paid by the hour.

Ed wasn't looking for trouble that summer night in 1949. Sure he was restless, irritable from the heat. He'd spent the whole day in the saddle of that bulldozer, shoving junk around, and the sun had been blazing down. He came home to that crummy apartment with no air-conditioning, and then when he suggested they go to a movie to get cool, Naomi said she had a previous engagement to play bridge with the girls.

Left to his own devices and unable to endure that stuffy apartment, Ed went down to Mike's. Mike's wasn't much of a place, but it did have an air-conditioner, and the beer was ice-cold and slipped down the throat real easy. Ed knew Mike and most of Mike's customers, so the conversation was easy too.

But that particular night there was a stranger there. Name of Wade. That was all the name Ed ever knew him by. By some stroke of fate the bar stool next to Ed was vacant when Wade wandered in, so that was the stool he took.

They started to talk. Wade, it seemed, was a stranger in town, and he wondered if Ed knew any girls. Ed said he didn't, he was a married man. Oh yeah, then why was he sitting here in this bar all alone? Because Naomi was out playing bridge, that was why. Wade laughed nastily. He knew women, he'd divorced two of them, and Ed could believe that story about bridge if he wanted to. Ed resented the laugh and the insinuation. They argued, so loud, finally, that Mike told them to take their argument elsewhere.

They went outside, into the parking lot. It was one of the darkest nights Ed ever remembered, so nobody saw what happened. They drifted over toward Ed's car, Wade saying all the time that he wouldn't trust any woman in the world, and Ed maintaining that Naomi was different. They'd drunk quite a lot of beer, and maybe it was natural for the argument to develop into a fight.

They were both big men, brawny men, the kind who worked with their muscles. The fight could have gone either way, with the combatants half-drunk and the night so dark that it was hard to see your fist in front of you, much less the man you wanted to hit with it. But Ed got in a lucky punch that landed right on the point of Wade's chin. The target just disappeared.

Frightened, Ed went to the glove compartment for his flashlight. With the aid of its illumination, he found Wade's body stretched out on the gravel. The back of his head was bloody, and he lay absolutely still. There was also some blood on the bumper of the car. In the fall his head had hit that.

In a rising panic and suddenly sober, Ed Jesson realized that he had killed a man. Not deliberately; it had been an accident. He knew only vaguely about situations like this, but he was pretty sure they'd call it manslaughter. That meant prison, five years, maybe ten.

Ed Jesson had often complained about his lot in life, his unattentive wife, their lousy apartment. But he had things good enough that he didn't want to go to prison.

He had an overwhelming urge to flee. But the body would be found, if not tonight, then in the morning. And Mike, who wasn't going to risk trouble for the sake of one customer, would tell the police that the stranger and Ed Jesson had had an argument, been thrown out, and had last been seen leaving the place together, still arguing. It would be pretty hard to talk his way out of that.

Acting on a blind instinct, and because it was the only thing he could think of to do, Ed opened the trunk of his car, lifted the body and stuffed it inside. Afterwards he scuffed gravel over the bloodstains.

When he drove away from the parking lot he had no clear idea of where he was going. He had visions of dumping the body by the side of the road somewhere, or into the river, or of burying it in the woods. One by one he rejected all of these alternatives. Bodies thrown into the

water always came to the surface eventually. Even bodies buried in the deep woods were often discovered, by nosy dogs or Boy Scouts on a hike or something. And then identification, and Mike saying he remembered the argument the stranger had had with Ed Jesson.

He drove aimlessly for two hours, and when he finally went home he still had the body in the trunk. He debated about confiding his troubles to Naomi, but decided against it. He spent a sleepless night, seeking a solution and not finding it.

He rose with the dawn and ate a sort of breakfast by himself. Naomi always slept late after bridge nights. Then he went out to the car, and with his problem still unsolved, drove to work.

The minute, however, that he came within sight of the place, he knew exactly what to do. It was so utterly simple that he felt like kicking himself for being so dumb, for driving all over and spending the night awake and worrying, when he had the perfect setup all ready and waiting. What better place could there be for the disposal of a corpse than a sanitary landfill?

No hurry, do it right, he told himself. The first trucks with the garbage and the trash wouldn't arrive for hours yet, and meanwhile he was out here all alone in what was practically a wilderness.

Could there be any slip-up, any mistake? It seemed impossible, but yet he ought to think it out first to make sure. This ought to fit right in with his normal operations. The landfill site was a big area, a series of undulating, semiwooded hills, like a giant washboard. The idea was to fill up the ravines one by one, and someday this would be level land, maybe useful for something besides a dump. Ed's job was to bulldoze flat the stuff that the trucks unloaded, then cover it up with a layer of fresh dirt. All he had to do now was to drop the corpse in the middle of the trash, and bury all of it.

Was there any danger? He double-checked in his mind. A body buried here wouldn't be like a body buried in some shallow grave in the woods. Nobody came digging out here. The dozer did a thorough job of covering everything with dirt. That was what was "sanitary" about it.

But there was a problem, a single small one. Mr. Stuart, who owned this land, had explained it several times to Ed so Ed would do his job right. Mr. Stuart was in the busi-

ness to make money. He'd bought this nearly worthless land for a song, and he made a little money out of using it for a dump. Mainly, though, Mr. Stuart was thinking of future worth. Though it was miles and miles from town, Mr. Stuart intended to sell this land someday, after it was filled in and smoothed over. It could be a residential subdivision, or even a factory site. Maybe Mr. Stuart was pipe-dreaming, but Ed had instructions to make everything well-packed and solid, and the top layer of dirt plenty thick.

All of which pointed to just one thing. Wade's body had to be planted deep enough so that, even years later, some guy digging a basement for a house wouldn't come up with a human skeleton. Ed hadn't the slightest idea of how long it took bones to decay, or how good the laboratory people were on identifications. But why take the slightest chance? Bury him far down, plenty far down, so no basement digger would ever find him.

Ed set to work, took his time. He chose a ravine at least twenty feet deep, and lugged the body there. No one saw him, the place was too remote, not even close to any farms. Then he cranked up the dozer. When he'd finished a few turns, the man called Wade had disappeared forever, in an unmarked, nameless grave, in a place that wasn't even supposed to be a cemetery.

That was in 1949. Ed Jesson watched the papers, and no mention of Wade ever appeared. There wasn't a body, so anyone who knew Wade must have assumed that the transient had merely moved on. Ed felt that he had done the right thing. Wade had been a pretty worthless guy. What good would it have done for him, Ed Jesson, to have gone to prison on account of an accident?

In 1951, the trouble with Naomi started. Actually, things had been going on for a long time without Ed's knowing about them. The bridge games with the girls had been just a blind, a cover-up. With the connivance of a girl friend to corroborate the alibi, Naomi had been seeing another man.

He made the discovery quite by accident, wandering about town alone one night when Naomi was supposed to be playing bridge. He saw her with the man. But then he was too shocked to accost them, to confront Naomi with her guilt. Instead he followed them. And inside him, the hurt grew.

Later, he was waiting for her when she came home. He being awake at this hour was unusual. Naomi wasn't accustomed to being met at the door, and she sensed that something was wrong.

"Whatsa matter, Ed?" she started warily. "Why aren't you in bed?"

He had calmed considerably by this time, and had already begun to accept the situation as real. "Couldn't sleep," he told her.

"Yeah? Well, I'm dead."

He let her walk past him, but he noticed things about her. After six years of marriage, he had come to accept Naomi like he accepted the wallpaper on the wall. But now he saw her differently. Maybe she'd gained a pound or two, but her figure wasn't bad. And she had a way of walking that sort of called attention to her womanly features. Her hair, helped by the rinses he paid for, was shiny and blond. She used too much lipstick and other goop, but her face was still kind of pretty. She would certainly interest a guy who wasn't looking for a permanent attachment.

He followed her into the bedroom. "Where've you been?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Bridge at Dottie's. You know where I've been."

"I mean, where've you really been?"

She went on slipping into her robe, and she sat down in front of her boudoir table before she answered. "I said bridge at Dottie's."

"And I say you're lying."

She brazened it out as long as she could. "I don't know what you're talking about."

He crossed to stand behind her and looked at her face in the mirror. She met his gaze boldly, and he saw something in her eyes that he had never seen before. A hardness, a callousness toward him, where always before she had seemed so gentle and tender and loving.

"I saw you with the guy," he said.

Her eyes narrowed. "Okay. It was bound to happen, I guess. What are you going to do about it?"

"The question is, Naomi, what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing."

"You're not going to stop seeing him?"

"No."

"Do you love him?"

"Yes."

"What about me?"

"You!" She snickered, swung around on the boudoir stool, and rose to confront him. "Why should I worry about you? What have you ever done for me?"

"I've loved you. I've supported you . . ."

"Hah! You bum! A lousy bulldozer operator in a trash dump!"

She shouldn't have said that. The idea might never have popped into his mind if she hadn't mentioned bulldozer and trash dump. Ed Jesson hadn't been a man accustomed to settling problems by violence. But when she made that crack, he had a sudden vision—a vision of Naomi lying at the bottom of one of those ravines and then being covered over by garbage and junk and dirt. It was just too easy to pass up.

When his hands leaped to her throat, he took her completely by surprise. He had big, gnarled, sunburned hands, accustomed to manipulating the heavy steel levers. By contrast, Naomi's throat was soft and no test whatsoever for his strength. He squeezed tighter and tighter, and the fact that she fought and kicked and pleaded dumbly out of her staring eyes made no difference in the outcome at all. Her struggles, hopeless from the beginning, grew weaker quickly, and then ceased. She hung limp in his hands, and when he finally let go, she slid gently down to the floor and didn't move.

Later on, as he drank beer from the refrigerator, he realized that maybe he hadn't had to do what he'd done. Not that he really regretted it, or still loved his dead wife. And going through the motions of strangling her had been a satisfying experience, revenge for his spurned love and for the insult she had given him.

But he could have reacted less violently. He could have asked for a divorce, for instance. That would have been a complicated business, of course, costing money and taking time. His way had been simpler and surer.

Anyway, it was done now. He loaded Naomi's body into the trunk of the car, and then after a bit of thought, he put a lot of other stuff in too, her clothes, all the junk on her dressing table, the things around the place that were her personal property. Afterwards he went to bed and slept soundly.

He was up early, though, and drove out to the dump in the pink dawn. He had already decided in his mind where to plant her, so when he arrived he simply backed his car to the proper spot and quickly unloaded the contents of the trunk. He took the same precautions as before, of course, making sure the body would be down plenty deep. In fact, Naomi would be even deeper than Wade had been, thirty feet eventually.

That evening, explaining to the neighbors, Ed said that he'd put Naomi on a train that morning to go visit her sick mother. Naomi did indeed have a mother, and a couple of sisters and brothers too, but it was the kind of family whose members didn't care whether the others were dead or alive. Ed also told the landlord he was moving out immediately. When he arrived at his next home, a little bachelor's kitchenette, he described himself as a single man.

Which he was, since he had no wife. But also he was a changed man. "A lousy bulldozer operator in a trash dump!" Those were the last words Naomi had spoken to him. He brooded on them now. Was his job, and the accompanying fact that he didn't make a lot of money, the reason Naomi had gone to another man? Maybe old Wade had been right about women. You couldn't trust any of them. They simply went for the respectable guys, or the guys with the most money.

But what was he, Ed Jesson, going to do about that? He had no education, and he hadn't been real smart to begin with. All he could do was push a dozer around a trash lot. How could he make that pay? How could he become a big shot that way?

The answer wasn't long in coming. Because Ed Jesson had something nobody else had. He had what business men call a "valuable asset." In this case, a place to dispose of corpses when it wasn't convenient that these corpses should be disposed of in the ordinary manner. In other words, Ed Jesson had at least a potential boot-leg funeral and cemetery service.

There ought to be people, he reasoned, maybe lots of people, who could use a service like that. The big problem was where to find them, how to contact possible customers.

He had no worries at all about the operation. That was slick and foolproof. The town wasn't moving out in

the direction of Mr. Stuart's trash dump at all. So the site would be available for years and years. And if he buried his corpses deep enough, somebody could come in and build at this location, and Mr. Stuart and Ed Jesson, partners sort of, could move to another place.

If he just had the customers!

And then he read something in the paper about a man named Nicky Albert. Albert was a gangster, the head of a gang, in fact, who operated not in Ed Jesson's small town, but in the city, seventy-five miles away. Nicky Albert was being suspected of the murder of another hood named Jimmy Trask. They didn't know for sure. And they didn't even know for sure that Jimmy Trask was dead. Just missing. But there were some very suspicious circumstances.

Ed took time from work and drove to the city looking for Nicky Albert. The gang leader wasn't an easy man to find, and a big rough-looking, weather-tanned man like Ed wasn't the sort to be granted an immediate audience with the high mogul of gangland.

But Ed was persistent and hung around. Finally a penciled message, "I can do something useful for you, Mr. Albert," managed to get through. A couple of small, dapper underlings, with their right hands suspiciously in their side pockets, arrived to escort Ed into the presence of the great man.

Nicky Albert was a tiny fellow, which was maybe the reason he kept small men around him. He wore a gray suit that gleamed like silver, and a big diamond shone out of a crease in his necktie. He sat behind an enormous walnut desk, which didn't help his size any. But his head was large, indicating the presence of a brain, and he had piercing black eyes.

"So what can you do that would be useful to me, Mr. Jesson?" he wanted to know.

Ed had decided to be bold. "In case the body of Jimmy Trask is hanging around somewhere and getting in your way, I could get rid of it for you."

The expression on Nicky Albert's dark face never changed. He used the same words he must have used to the police. "I don't know anything about Jimmy Trask."

"I didn't say you did, Mr. Albert." Somehow he found himself talking easily and confidently. "I just said 'in case.'"

But I'm in a kind of business, you see. I'm always getting rid of things people don't want, trash, garbage, all sorts of junk. I operate a bulldozer in a sanitary landfill."

Nicky Albert flicked sharp glances at his hirelings, both of whom shrugged. "Mr. Jesson," he said then, "describe to me what's a sanitary landfill."

Ed obliged, giving full details. All except, that is, the information that Mr. Stuart's property already contained two bodies. Over the last couple of years Ed had developed a certain self-protective wariness.

"I think it would also be a good place to get rid of dead bodies," he finished. "Especially for people who can't afford expensive funerals, cemetery lots, tombstones, and stuff. You know, friends of the dead man who want to see him decently buried, but don't want the publicity, and don't want strangers nosying in on the final services. I know exactly when to expect the trash trucks, and I can see 'em coming for a couple of miles. So most of the time I'm alone, and anything I happen to have in the trunk of my car I can dump in with the rest of the garbage and junk. It's guaranteed."

Nicky Albert pursed his thick, sensual lips and was thoughtful. As far as Ed was concerned, the gangster had already given himself away. He had a body stowed away somewhere. Ed noticed another thing about Albert too. He was just a little nervous, a little eager. That body was kind of embarrassing to the gangster.

"How do I know you're not a police stooge?" Nicky asked.

"You can check on me, where I work, how long I've been there. You can come out and see the place if you want to."

Albert waved a soft, girlish little hand that was decorated with big rings. "No, I don't want to be seen there. The cops might have a tail on me."

Ed was ushered out, there was a debate in Nicky's inner office, and finally one of the underlings told Ed he could go home and he might hear from them later. Ed did as he was told, but he had a feeling he'd accomplished something.

Next day as he worked he was sure that he was being spied upon. Probably by someone quite a distance off, someone using powerful binoculars maybe. Then he hap-

pened to see Mr. Stuart in the afternoon, and Mr. Stuart was curious about a party who'd been around asking questions about Ed.

The evening of the following day, Ed received a long-distance phone call. He was told to bring his car to a certain corner in the city that same night to pick up a package.

"How much do I get for delivering the package?" Ed wanted to know.

"Two hundred bucks," the unknown voice said.

"Make it a thousand and I'll be there," Ed replied.

The voice hesitated for a full ten seconds before it answered. "Okay, a thousand."

Driving his car into the city, Ed felt better about himself than he had for a long time. Already he was a real pro in the business. And as for his old job of pushing the bulldozer around, he was finally collecting some fringe benefits.

The corner where he'd been told to go was a dark one. There was an old delivery van there with the name of some dairy on the sides. Ed was given two objects, the first a nice fat bulky envelope, and the second a big stiff oblong thing about six feet in length wrapped in brown paper.

"Why is it so stiff?" he wondered.

"Been in the icebox," the man said.

The object was so rigid that Ed had to take the spare tire out of his trunk to get it to fit. The driver of the van cursed all the time he was doing it. But the job got done, and Ed made a mental note not to make the same mistake next time.

In the morning when he planted the package he had the same feeling as before, that someone was watching him from a distance. He didn't care about that. He was doing an honest job for honest pay. There'd been an even one grand in that little envelope.

That was only the beginning, of course, back in 1951. The beginning of a lucrative, secret career for Ed Jesson. He'd picked a good customer in Nicky Albert. Nicky apparently had an inexhaustible supply of enemies, and he was the sort who believed that the best way to eliminate an enemy was to eliminate him permanently. And there was nothing more permanent, more final, more complete, than planting in the sanitary landfill. The police never did figure out how so many unsavory characters could

disappear so entirely without a trace. Ed even started to imagine that he was engaged in a kind of social work, helping get rid of a lot of people whom society could better do without.

Sometimes there were so many of those brown packages that Ed got the impression that they were being imported from all over the country, that maybe Nicky had started a profitable sideline of being the middleman in this corpse disposal business. Maybe Nicky was charging the boys in Chicago, Frisco, and other places two grand for the job and then splitting with Ed. Ed thought about arguing the point, but decided against it. Nicky had all the contacts. He handled the sales end, while Ed was in production.

Besides, he didn't want to take a chance on ruining a good thing. Ed Jesson was becoming wealthy. He was careful not to be too obvious about it. In fact, he'd become a pretty sophisticated individual. He'd heard about such dangers as curious Internal Revenue men, so when anybody casually inquired, he explained that he was a frugal, saving man, and also he could afford a lot of nice things since his wife had left him.

The nice things in Ed's life included a new apartment, comfortable though not fancy, and a well-stocked home bar. Sometimes he had companions to share these modest delights with him. The companions were invariably young, pretty, and fun-loving. Ed never remarried. He wasn't one to make the same mistake twice.

Someday, he reckoned, as his secret hoard of greenbacks accumulated, he would retire and really live it up, somewhere in a foreign country where strangers wouldn't be so curious. He planned for this day by studying travel literature. This was part of his enjoyment of life, planning for the future like any solid citizen ought to do.

He thought that future had surely arrived one afternoon when Mr. Stuart brought a man out to view the property. Mr. Stuart introduced the newcomer to Ed as a Mr. Macklin, but didn't say who he was exactly. And then when Mr. Macklin went away, Mr. Stuart was still secretive.

"What's up?" Ed demanded to know. He'd always known that Mr. Stuart had hoped to sell this property and make a profit from it. Only the town had refused to expand in the direction of the trash dump, and although Ed had marched his bulldozer across ravine after ravine,

leveling the countryside to the flatness of a billiard table, it didn't look as if it was going to make anything but a nice farm or pasture land. "Mr. Macklin going to buy this place?"

"Looks as if he might," Mr. Stuart admitted. "But don't you worry, Ed. You ain't going to be out of a job. If I sell this, I'll buy me another place north of town that I have my eye on, and we'll still be in the sanitary-land-fill business. I might even buy you a new dozer, Ed."

Ed Jesson relaxed for a while. But he had to be careful these days, because Mr. Macklin started to show up at odd times, and he usually brought surveyors and other people with him. And then one day he brought a man in a gray-blue uniform with a lot of gold stuff on the visor of his hat.

Ed quit work and rushed to Mr. Stuart's office. "What's going on out there?" he asked in real apprehension.

Mr. Stuart leaned back in his chair, plopped his heels up on his desk top, and smiled kind of sheepishly. "Guess we can't keep the secret any longer, Ed. The Air Force is going to buy my land. Going to install Minuteman missiles. Underlying rock strata seem to be just right or something. They're going to dig silos for those missiles sixty feet or so straight down into the ground."

Ed started out the door, and only half-heard Mr. Stuart's next remark. "Ain't that just like the government, though? We've been filling in for years, and now they're going to dig it all up again."

Ed went home and looked at his travel folders. Also he thought he'd better check on extradition laws. He was really a sophisticated fellow finally.

NO TEARS FOR FOSTER

by Fletcher Flora

"Bulls and Bears," said Marcus.

"What?" said Sergeant Bobo Fuller, and cursed himself silently in italics for saying it.

He should have known better. After a long and uneasy association with Detective Lieutenant Joseph Marcus, he was bitterly familiar with the lieutenant's disturbing practice of exploding abruptly and quietly with an enigmatic and apparently irrelevant expression that might mean something or nothing. He did it deliberately, a cheap trick to excite curiosity and provide another opportunity to show off the involved mechanics of his precious brain. It was Fuller's grim determination to reveal neither surprise nor curiosity when these predictable small explosions occurred, and here he was, rising promptly as usual to the obvious lure. He cursed himself silently, fluently, with practiced artistry.

"I said," said Marcus, "Bulls and Bears."

"I heard. Care to tell me what you mean?"

"The stock market, Fuller. Bulls buy on the rise, bears on the decline. Or is it the other way around?"

"I wouldn't know. On my salary, I've had no experience. You been playing the market?"

"Not I, Fuller. Not now. I used to play it when I was a kid."

"Oh, come off. What with? Nickels and dimes? A child prodigy of finance?"

"Not the market, Fuller. The game."

Now thoroughly confused, and in spite of stalwart intentions and bitter resolve, Fuller was now sucked in. "All right," he said with heavy emphasis. "What game?"

"I just told you, Fuller, Bulls and Bears; a game about the stock market, very complicated, with dice and markers and little cards and all those things. Sometimes requires hours to complete. I haven't played it for years."

"That's fascinating. I've been waiting a long time to come across a bit of information like that. Now that I've got it, though, I don't quite know what to do with it. Any suggestions?"

Marcus smiled faintly and happily. He was never so delighted with Fuller as he was when Fuller had been prodded into a display of sarcasm. He was fond of Fuller, liked him most when Fuller was surliest.

"File it away, Fuller. It may come in handy. The point is, Jake Frontenac invented it. That's what made me think of it."

"All right. So far, so good. Is Jake Frontenac supposed to be significant?"

"We'll see. Anyhow, he's dead. When he was alive, he was the father of Foster Frontenac."

"The corpus delicti?"

"The corpus, at any rate. It remains to be established that he's delicti."

"With your record, he's delicti. You can count on it."

"I relish your pessimism, Fuller. You're probably right."

"Not pessimism. Realism. You're on your way to the scene, aren't you? Where Marcus goes, murder's been."

"With Fuller at his side. Very good, Fuller. You've developed a happy knack for the apt expression. There's reason for your pessimistic realism, I must say. Foster wasn't the most engaging fellow in the world. As a matter of fact, his record, brief as it was, incorporates some astonishingly precocious delinquencies, not to mention probable felonies. An accomplished black sheep, Fuller. An available candidate for murder, you might say."

"Oh, one of those—a passel of suspects, everyone eligible for the honor."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Hate is a motive, Fuller, but there are others. Pride, for instance. Greed, for instance. Self-preservation, for instance."

"To pick one, take greed. How so?"

"It's ironical," said Marcus, "that Old Jake invented Bulls and Bears. I mean, he must have been among the world's worst speculators. He inherited a small fortune as a young man and lost it all. The market wiped him out. Then he sat down and worked out the details of this game. It was all the rage for a long while, and it still hangs on. Every Christmas you see it in the shops. I'm surprised that you never had a game, Fuller."

"I was a deprived child. What happened to what we were talking about? Greed as a motive, that is."

"Greed is always possible, Fuller, when a fortune is involved. Do you have any idea how much money can be

made in royalties from a game like that? Take Monopoly. There's a game you're surely acquainted with. How much money do you think has been taken in royalties by the inventor of Monopoly?"

"I haven't any idea."

"Neither have I," said Marcus.

Having thus truncated what might have developed into a prolonged speculation, Marcus retired into silence and addressed himself exclusively to driving. As for Fuller, removed from Marcus by an interval of animus, he slumped onto the back of his neck and gave himself up to a recurrent dream that this time Marcus would come a cropper and land in a mess from which he, Old Faithful Fido Fuller, would rescue him with deductive pyrotechnics. It was a sweet dream and endured into the suburbs. It ended under the portico of a big house of stone and stucco, less impressive than pretentious, where Marcus killed the engine of the police car, debarked, and started lengthwise from side steps across a veranda toward the front door. Fuller, returning from the possible to the probable, followed.

They were admitted by a manservant who was clearly expecting them and showed no doubt that they were clearly what he expected. In a tone of voice appropriate to a house of death, which was his normal tone, he directed them up a wide flight of stairs to a bedroom on the second floor. Dr. Clement, he said, was waiting for them there. Marcus and Fuller, Fuller a step behind, went up and along the hall to the room and entered without knocking. Inside, a young man was lying face down on a disordered bed. Beside the bed, sitting very erect in an armed straight chair, was an elderly man with thick silver hair and a clear smooth face blooming delicately pink in the cheeks. The skin of the face, instead of sagging and folding into the wrinkles of age, had apparently shrunk and grown taut with time over its frame of fine bones. The skin had a soft sheen, like off-white satin. The man, rising from his chair, turned to meet Marcus.

"Hello, Joseph," he said. "It's been quite a long time."

"I stay healthy," Marcus said.

He shook hands with Dr. Clement, the clasp lasting long enough to indicate an old affection. Fuller, who had noted the use of Marcus' first name, now timed the hand-clasp and thought sourly that this was surely, somehow,

another one of the lieutenant's shoddy little shockers, a trick employed with questionable intent. That Marcus knew the doctor and had expected to find him in attendance on a corpse, and that he had not, nevertheless, informed Fuller of either the familiarity or the expectation, aroused the latter's bruised and sensitive mind to an instant condition of irrational resentment. As though sensing all this, which in fact he did, Marcus released the doctor's hand and turned back to Fuller.

"Dr. Thomas Clement," he said, "Sergeant Bobo Fuller. It was Dr. Clement, Fuller, who called me personally at headquarters and asked me to come out here. It was also Dr. Clement who, some forty years ago, relieved my mother of a future cop. It may have been a mistake."

"Quite likely," Dr. Clement said. "You were always a pigheaded fellow, Joseph. For some strange and obdurate reason, you insisted upon becoming a bloodhound instead of taking up a sensible trade or profession. Well, here's your chance to be one. There's a body. Somewhere there's a murderer. Let's see you sniff your way from one to the other."

Having thus, in effect, thrown down the gauntlet, the doctor withdrew a few steps from the bed and became a spectator. Marcus, with an uneasy feeling that he was about to fumble the ball in the big game, advanced to the bed and looked down at the body of the young man sprawled upon it.

Foster Frontenac lay on his belly, in which position he had thrown himself down to sleep, apparently, with most of his clothes on. Very convenient for a strangler, Marcus thought. A dark red string tie extended from the body on both sides of the throat like a thin line of dry blood that had run while wet, in violation of a natural law, slightly uphill and two ways at once. Dr. Clement, diagnosing death with minimum disturbance, had wisely left the body undisturbed. Now Marcus rolled it over. Empty bulging eyes. Blackened protruding tongue. Shoes and coat had been removed. Also, of course, the tie. Shirt open at the throat. On the throat, an ugly linear bruise where something, presumably the tie, had been drawn tighter and tighter until the eyes popped and the heart stopped.

"Strangled," Marcus said.

"Obviously," Clement said. "With the necktie."

"He was a young man. No weakling from the looks of

him, yet there's no sign of an exceptionally violent struggle. Why would a young, strong man lie still while someone strangled him?"

"According to the family, he had been on the prowl all night. He came home this morning exhausted, in an evil humor. He was certainly in a very deep sleep when his murderer approached him."

"Foster had developed a reputation. Bad habits. I've heard reports."

"He was a scoundrel, a thorough bad one. The fault was in his blood." The old doctor spoke as if he were reading an indictment before the bar, his voice dull and impersonal but somehow suggesting a kind of restrained evangelical fury. "Wastrel, liar, cheat, thief, destroyer of those who might have loved him, that was Foster. He started young. There's no good in repeating all that he was. It has the peculiar dullness of repetitious evil. He killed his father as surely as if he had shot him, and he has been all his life a curse and a burden to his mother. I was Old Jake's doctor, as I have been doctor to the whole family, and I can assure you, whatever euphemism I put on his death certificate, that he died because his son killed him. Was it Shakespeare who said that men have died but not of broken hearts? Whoever said it, he was wrong. Men *have* died of broken hearts. Old Jake Frontenac did."

"A charming fellow. Foster, I mean. He must have worked hard at being a bad boy to accomplish so much in so short a life. How old was he?"

"Barely thirty. He was born on the sixth of August, 1939. I delivered him, God forgive me. I should have strangled him then with his umbilical cord."

"It all works out in the end. Someone has done it now with his necktie. Presumably."

"Better late, I suppose, than never."

"Who discovered the body?"

"I did."

"You?" Marcus' eyebrows shot up. "I assumed that you were called afterward to make the final diagnosis."

"No. You were always inclined to leap to conclusions, Joseph, even as a boy. It's a bad habit, I should think, for a detective. As a matter of fact, I dropped in to check up on Hattie, Foster's mother. She's been a bit under the weather lately, nothing serious. She asked me to look in

on Foster while I was here. As I said, he'd come in this morning after a hard night somewhere, looking sick and full of venom. Cursed his sister and sneered at his mother, came up here, and fell on his bed, apparently. Personally, I was reluctant to lift a hand to help him, even if he was dying. Better off dead; he and everyone concerned. But I'm fond of his mother, as I was fond of his father. I stopped in, as she asked, and found him as you see him."

"Did you come in here immediately after you left Mrs. Frontenac?"

"No. I was reluctant to come at all, and I went downstairs first and had coffee with Adele. A fine girl. Lovely."

"How many children are there?"

"Three. Counting Foster, that is, who was the oldest. Then comes Young Jake, a year younger. Then Adele, a year younger than Jake. Stepping stones, you might say. Hattie was twenty-eight when she was married. She didn't have Foster until she was thirty. I guess she and Old Jake decided it was getting late and stepped up the pace a little while there was still time."

"How long were you downstairs with Adele?"

"Must have been an hour, bit more or less. Then I came back up to Foster. Good thing I didn't come sooner. I might have interrupted a good job."

"So? You think this murder was committed while you were downstairs?"

"Thereabouts. It might have been done, of course, a little earlier. Not much."

Marcus went down onto one knee beside the bed. He was not a doctor, but experience had given him a degree of acumen in such matters, and the condition of the body indicated that Dr. Clement was not far off, if off at all. Obeying an impulse, perhaps triggered by what he knew of the body when it was a man, he unfastened the cuffs of the white shirt and slipped the sleeves up the arms. Afterward, for a long minute, he remained quietly on his knee in the posture of prayer, as if he were asking mercy of the imponderable powers of light and darkness for a lost soul.

"When you were reading the roster of Foster's faults," he said at last, "you omitted something. How long has he been a drug addict?"

Dr. Clement, behind him, made an odd retching sound. "I don't know."

"You did, however, know that he *was* one?"

"Certainly. The evidence was unmistakable."

"Did his family know?"

"His mother did. She discussed it with me."

"How about the rest of the family?"

"I don't know. Maybe they knew, maybe they didn't. If they did, they didn't mention it to me."

Marcus pulled down the white sleeve, leaving the cuffs loose. He stood up, stood staring down at the body for a moment longer, sighed in weary acceptance of the perversity of all things in general, murder in particular, and turned again to the doctor.

"How is she?" he said. "The mother, that is."

"She's all right. As I told you, she's just a bit under the weather. You can expect such things in a woman of sixty."

"I didn't mean that. I meant this." Marcus made a gesture toward the bed. "Shock or anything?"

"Well, with her it's hard to tell. No fainting or hysterics. Nothing of the sort. She's a tough old girl in an admirable kind of way. She rolls with the punches, and she can take a lot of punishment. Foster, over the years, has given her a lot of practice."

"Where is she now?"

"In her room. In her bed. When I told her about this, she simply climbed in without a word or a tear, and there she lies, looking at the ceiling."

"I wonder if she feels up to talking to me?"

"Probably. She wouldn't take a sedative, although I tried to give her one. In my opinion, she's lying in there waiting for you."

"In that case, I won't keep her waiting any longer."

"I'd prefer to go along with you, if you don't mind. Just in the event I'm needed."

"Fair enough." Marcus diverted his attention to Fuller, standing apart. "Take over here, Fuller. The crew should be along any minute. Also the medical examiner. Make them welcome."

He walked between Fuller and the doctor and out of the room. The doctor followed.

Hattie Frontenac was in bed, but she was no longer lying on her back looking at the ceiling. She was sitting erect, braced against the headboard with pillows at her back. Her hair, soft and dark and dusted with gray, had

been brushed and gathered in a bun behind. Color glowed faintly under the translucent skin of her face. Her eyes were bright and dry. Beneath and beyond the depletions of age, Marcus detected the lingering traces of exceptional beauty.

Dr. Clement, passing Marcus, went to the bed and leaned over her with a display of tenderness in excess of the routine sympathetic bedside manner, passing one hand gently over her smooth hair. "How are you feeling, Hattie?" he said.

"Very well, Tom." She smiled briefly, and raising a thin hand, still strong and steady, laid it lightly against his cheek, as if it were he, in her time of loss, who needed the understanding and the help. "You mustn't worry about me."

The doctor straightened and turned to Marcus. His voice sounded suddenly gruff, almost angry. "I've brought Joseph Marcus to see you. He has the title of lieutenant, I believe. For some perverse reason, he has chosen to become a policeman. My fault entirely. I brought him into the world and saw him through whooping cough, mumps, measles, chicken pox, and all the other nasty diseases that he insisted on having. As I said, he was perverse. He wants to talk with you, if you feel up to it."

"Yes. Of course. Draw up a chair and sit down, Lieutenant. I've been expecting you."

Marcus found a straight chair and drew it near the bed. Dr. Clement wandered to a window and stood looking out. Marcus sat down and hung his hat on his knee.

"I'm sorry that I must disturb you," he said. "It's my misfortune, it seems, to be forever intruding."

"Don't be sorry, Lieutenant." She folded her strong hands above the silk bedspread and stared at them with a strange effect of serenity. "If you are referring to the death of my son, as you surely are, there is nothing to be sorry about. He is dead, and I feel no grief. He should have died long ago."

"Perhaps. That's one way of looking at it. It might be argued, at least, that he should have been allowed to die in his own way and his own time."

"Be that as it may, he is dead. We must accept death when it comes, in whatever way."

"You're extraordinarily calm about this, Mrs. Fronte-

nac. Forgive me, but I am tempted to say 'indifferent.' Surely you had some love for your son. Mothers usually do."

"Once. Once I loved him above all others, but that was long ago. One cannot sustain for a lifetime her love for a degenerate."

"That bad? Why, in that case, may I ask, was he allowed to live on in your home?"

"I felt a commitment. No matter. It was something entirely personal. He was, in a way, retribution. One must bear one's cross, Lieutenant."

"Quite so. Your son came home, I understand, sometime this morning after being out all night. Is that true?" Marcus wanted to know.

"That's true. But not unusual. He was often gone for days and nights on end."

"Was he dependent on you?"

"Not at all. His father, when he died, left him quite a large inheritance."

"But he continued to live under this roof?"

"Sporadically. His room was always kept for him. I imagine that much of his inheritance has been dissipated by this time."

"Most of your husband's fortune, I suppose, was left to you?"

"This property. Half of everything else."

"The other half divided among your children?"

"Yes. Equally."

"Would you mind telling me what disposition you have made of your share?"

"Not at all. It will be divided equally between my daughter and my younger son."

"Foster was excluded?"

"Yes. I did not choose to repeat my husband's mistake."

Well, thought Marcus, there goes greed. There goes the possibility of an heir in a white hat killing the heir in the black hat to avoid wasting what will probably be a very large bundle. Good enough. One less motive to confuse the problem.

"About this morning," he said. "What happened when Foster came home?"

"There was a scene, most unpleasant. Adele, his sister, tried to reason with him. He cursed and abused her. I

attempted to intervene. He cursed me. Then he came upstairs to his room. I have not seen him since. Now that he is dead, I intend never to see him again."

"Mrs. Frontenac, do you realize that all indications are that your son was killed by someone in this house? Excluding the servants and Dr. Clement, that means by a member of your family."

"Nonsense. No one in my family would have killed Foster, whatever the provocation. He was murdered by the man who visited him in his room shortly after he went there."

"What?" Marcus was startled. "What man?"

"I don't know. I was here in my own room at the time. I heard his footsteps approach from the rear stairs and pass in the hall outside my door. I went to the door and looked out just in time to see him entering Foster's room."

"What did he look like?"

"I can't say. I caught the merest glimpse of him as he passed through the door."

"Was your son often visited by strange men in his room while he was staying here?"

"Not often. It has occurred."

"Did you know any of them?"

"Never. I'm sure that my son's associates were not men that I would care to know, or who would care to know me."

"This man this morning, was he admitted to the house?"

"I don't know. Perhaps one of the servants would."

"Could he have entered without being admitted?"

"Oh, yes. There are four ordinary entrances; the front and back doors, a side door to the terrace, another door on the opposite side of the house that opens on a landing of the basement stairs. There is a short flight leading up from the landing into the kitchen."

"Aren't these doors kept locked?"

"No. At least, not in the daytime. Anyone could enter."

"Do you suppose that your son invited this man, whoever he was, to visit him here?"

"I assume so."

"You are sure, quite sure, that you know none of your son's associates?"

"Quite sure. Possibly you could discover them for yourself. Don't the police have facilities for that sort of thing?"

"We do. It would help if we could narrow the field. Mrs. Frontenac, your son was addicted to narcotics. You are aware of that. Is it reasonable to suppose that the narcotics were sometimes delivered to him here?"

"I have no knowledge of how such things are accomplished."

Suddenly, at the window, Dr. Clement made again the sick, retching sound that he had made in the other room when Marcus, kneeling beside the body of Foster Frontenac, had discovered puncture marks in his arm. Turning away from the window, his face grown gray, the doctor returned to the bed and took up one of Hattie Frontenac's hands and held it in both of his, chafing it gently, as if it were cold, as it may have been.

"This is nonsense, Hattie," he said, his voice colored again by that strange, incongruous suggestion of anger. "You must not torture yourself so. It is unnecessary. Believe me, it is unnecessary."

She closed her eyes and went limp against the pillows. Her lips moved slightly to shape silent words which Marcus, rising, read.

"Dear Tom," he read. "Dear old Tom."

The doctor replaced her hand gently upon the other in her lap. Turning, he took Marcus by the arm.

"Enough," he said. "She's had enough. Come away, Joseph. Let her rest."

Marcus had thought she was bearing the ordeal remarkably well, but he did not protest. He permitted himself to be led from the room.

In the hall, a few steps from the door, he said, "She is an admirable woman."

"She's proud," Dr. Clement said. "Proud and strong."

"She seems to be very fond of you."

"And I of her. We are old friends. Very old friends. Many years ago I was deeply in love with her. I wanted to marry her, but I was poor at the time, and she married Jake Frontenac instead. A wise choice, perhaps. And yet, she may later have regretted it. No matter now. I remained her friend, as well as her doctor. Her very good friend. It may strike you as significant that I have never married. Anyhow, I will not have her harassed. I understand that you must do what is necessary, but I will not have her harassed. She has suffered enough."

"As you say," said Marcus mildly, "I must do what is necessary."

Proceeding slowly in the hall, they had reached the head of the stairs, where they stopped. From behind the closed door of Foster Frontenac's room as they passed had come the sounds of movement and mixed voices: the crew at work; the practiced routine in progress; the hounds were out in grim pursuit. Wasn't that, Marcus thought, what Dr. Clement had called him? A hound? To be specific, a bloodhound. Well, perhaps the appellation was just. A bloodhound, perhaps, was what he was. What else had the doctor called him? Perverse, he had called him. Marcus sighed. Sometimes, when he was tired or inflicted, as now, with a nebulous sense of nameless dread, he wondered wistfully what it would now be like if he had decided in the perversity of his youth to become something other than what he was.

"I had better talk with the other members of the family," he said.

"You'll find them somewhere about. Adele, I believe, has gone to her room." Dr. Clement turned half around and pointed in the direction from which they had come. "There's the door. This way a bit and across the hall from Hattie's."

"Thanks."

"The others, Young Jake and Lena, are downstairs. Or were, at least, when last I saw them."

"Lena?"

"Young Jake's wife."

"I see. No one, I'm sure, has mentioned her before."

"I suppose not. She hardly seems, after all, to be involved in any of this. Anyhow, here they are. Help yourself. As for me, if there are no objections, I'll be running along. I have reduced my practice lately, but there are still a few patients who rely on me."

"No objections. You've been most helpful here. I appreciate it."

Dr. Clement went down the stairs, and Marcus, doubling back, went into Foster Frontenac's room. Between the door and the bed, he met the medical examiner, a thin, gray, dyspeptic man, who was just leaving.

"He's all yours, Marcus," he said sourly. "You're welcome to him."

"Thanks. Don't bother to tell me he was strangled. I've already guessed."

"Did you see the marks of the needle?"

"I saw them."

"Mainliner. Poor devil. Death saved him a lot of grief. I suppose you want my guess as to time of death?"

"It's customary."

"Say ten o'clock. That's as close as a guess can come. I'll have the autopsy report for you in the morning. See you later."

The medical examiner went out, carrying his black bag, and Marcus went on to the bed and stood looking down once more at the body of Foster Frontenac. Poor devil—the words of the medical examiner. Poor devil was right. Poor dead devil. The lids had been drawn over the bulging eyes. The tongue had been tucked in. Even the thick brown hair, previously wildly tousled, had been smoothed down and brushed back off the forehead. The medical examiner liked to leave things tidy.

Marcus turned away and looked for Fuller.

"Fuller," he said, "find the servants. I don't know how many there are. Probably not more than three. I want to know if one of them admitted a strange man to this house this morning just before the murder. Someone asking for Foster Frontenac."

"Right," Fuller said.

Marcus went to the door and out, Fuller trailing. In the hall they diverged, Fuller going to the stairs and down, Marcus to the door of the room of Adele Frontenac, on which he knocked. He was promptly invited in, and in he went. Adele Frontenac had been standing at a window, looking out across a deep back lawn that sloped away to a line of slender poplars. Now she had turned, facing Marcus with the bright light behind her. Dr. Clement had said that she was lovely, and so she was; poised and slender, pale hair and clear, sun-browned skin, wearing a yellow pull-over sweater and a short brown skirt ending, in the current fashion, inches above the knees. She had the legs for it. Marcus had an instant conviction that he was looking at Hattie Frontenac more than three decades ago.

"I'm sorry to intrude," he said. "My name is Marcus. Lieutenant Joseph Marcus."

"I know. That is, I know you must be from the police. Come in, please, and sit down."

She indicated a chair, and Marcus sat. She, casually, sat on the edge of the bed. Her short skirt slipped up her thighs, as short skirts will, but she made no gesture of mock modesty to draw it down again. Nowadays, Marcus thought, they never did.

"Miss Frontenac," he said, "I must talk to you about your brother. Foster, I mean."

"An unpleasant topic, surely. However, I suppose it's inevitable."

"I'm afraid so. Under the circumstances."

"Have you talked with Uncle Tom? Dr. Clement, that is."

"I have."

"And Mother?"

"Yes."

"Whatever they said about dear Foster, if it was bad enough, goes double for me. In spades."

"He seems to have incited an extraordinary prejudice in this house."

"Prejudice? I don't think so. Anger. Disgust. Bitterness. Shame. Not prejudice."

"You omitted hatred."

"Did I? Let me correct the record. I won't speak for the others, but as for me, you are right. I hated him."

"Enough to kill him?"

"No. Just enough to be glad he's dead. It's a good thing for the family."

"Are you sure? Let me remind you that he was murdered. For someone in this family, it may be a very bad thing."

There was a pack of cigarettes on the bed where she had previously tossed them. She took a cigarette from the pack. Marcus, rising, supplied a light and sat down again.

"That's absurd," she said.

"Is it? Hatred, Miss Frontenac, is a powerful motive. It is stronger, sometimes, than consanguinity. As a precedent, I refer you to Cain and Abel."

"Hatred of Foster was not confined to this family. Any number of eligible people would have been glad to see him dead. Men and women."

"He was murdered, however, here. In this house. In a

room across the hall. Scarcely the most favorable circumstances for an outsider."

"Unless, of course, the circumstances were exploited deliberately to throw suspicion on the family."

A neat point. Marcus had thought of it himself, but he gave her credit, nevertheless. She was not only lovely. She was also, obviously, clever.

"Why would an outsider attempt to throw suspicion on the insiders?"

"To divert it, I should imagine, from the outside."

"That's possible. Your mother said that your brother sometimes had visitors in his room. Do you support that?"

"Yes."

"Did he have a visitor this morning?"

"Yes."

"Oh? Who?"

"I don't know."

"A man?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't you hear or see whoever it was?"

"No."

"Then how do you know there was a visitor?"

"Foster was murdered. He was murdered by no one in this family. Therefore, he was murdered by someone outside it."

"Your syllogism is faulty. The minor premise assumes something not proven."

"You are committed by your job to that position. I'm not."

"Would a visitor have entered the house without ringing and being admitted?"

"This one surely would have."

"Because he knew your brother was here and slipped inside and upstairs with the intent to kill him?"

"Obviously."

"He would have taken a great risk of being seen."

"Perhaps. Still, if he were challenged on the way in, he could simply explain that he was going up to see Foster. It's happened before. If he were challenged going out, he could at least have been gone and away long before it was known what he had done. Anyhow, murder is a risky business, isn't it?"

"It is. Under the best of circumstances."

She stood up abruptly and crushed her cigarette in a

tray on her bedside table. Marcus, never the pure aesthete, again admired her legs with tainted emotions.

"We seem to be talking in circles," she said. "I'm sorry. I'd really like to help you if I could."

"No complaints," said Marcus, rising from his chair. "You've been honest. I'm grateful."

"You must have been shocked by what I said about Foster, but I'm not such a monster as I may have sounded. Really I'm not. You must realize there's a limit to what you can accept or excuse or rationalize. Foster was outside the limit. He was born outside it. If only he had been defective in another way, physically deformed or mentally retarded, then I would have loved him, protected and cared for him, and wept for him when he died. So would we all. But he wasn't, and we couldn't. There it is, and you must make the most of it."

"If I must," said Marcus, "I must."

Which was, he thought wryly, an inane remark at best. At the door, he hesitated, looking back. She was already at the window again, slim and lovely and somehow lonely against the bright light. He opened the door and went out.

In the hall below, Marcus paused, listening. Now removed from the activity upstairs, he could discern no sound in all the house. Moving toward the rear, he pushed his way through a swinging door and found himself in the hall, although it narrowed this side to half its width on the other. It ran straight on, splitting the house, to the back door. To his left, standing slightly ajar, was a door from behind which came a soft whirring sound that he identified, after listening, as the drone of an electric mixer on low speed. He pulled the door open and entered the kitchen. A fat woman with a round, cheerful face the color of coffee was supervising the mixer with a hard rubber scraper in her hand. She was holding the scraper against the inner side of the slowly spinning bowl, forcing its contents, whatever it was, down into the action of the paddles. At the kitchen table, over milk and cake, sat Fuller. Looking as if he had been caught red-handed behind the barn with the girl across the alley, Fuller started to rise. Marcus waved him down again.

"Finish your snack, Fuller. Have you talked to the servants?"

Fuller sank back, glaring at his milk and cake as if

they had somehow betrayed him. "I have. There are three of them. The butler who let us in. His name is Hagan. The maid. Her name is Wilma Crookes. The cook—Mrs. Colepepper, this is Lieutenant Marcus."

Mrs. Colepepper flashed her teeth, and Marcus nodded.

"What's to report?" he asked.

"Nothing. Mrs. Colepepper never answers the door. The maid does sometimes, but she hasn't this morning. It's Hagan's job usually, but he hasn't admitted any strange man today. No one but the doctor earlier, you and me later, the crew upstairs."

"And none of them saw anyone inside the house who might have slipped in without ringing?"

"No one saw anyone. But they admit that someone could have sneaked in, especially through the back door. There's a narrow rear stairway that comes down into the hall near the door. There's another door to the stairway, but it's never locked. A person could easily nip in and up the stairs without being seen. As a matter of fact, the servants are certain that Foster sometimes had visitors come in that way. Once he reached the upper hall, the visitor, if he didn't want to be spotted, would only have to wait for the coast to be clear and then move along to Foster's room."

"I see. That must have been the way Foster's visitor did it this morning. Thanks, Fuller. I'm looking for Young Jake. Have you seen him?"

Mrs. Colepepper turned her broad coffee-colored face over a shoulder in Marcus' direction. "Mr. Jake and Mrs. Jake are on the terrace," she said.

Marcus said thanks and went looking for the way. He found it through a large, light room with a sliding glass door leading out onto approximately two square rods of flagstones. There, side by side in bright sling chairs, were Jake and Lena Frontenac. Marcus pushed open the sliding door, pushed it shut again behind him. Young Jake, hearing him, rose to meet him. Lena may have heard, but she did not rise. She stared at Marcus, as he came into view, with an air of indolent indifference.

Marcus introduced himself. "I'm sorry, but I need to have a few words with you," he said.

"Certainly," Young Jake said.

He waved an invitation at a third sling chair, but Marcus, having a preference and a choice, pulled a straight

metal job away from a round patio table and straddled it backwards. Young Jake reclaimed his own chair, but now he sat erect, his legs spread and his feet planted on the two sides of the sling. He was, Marcus saw, a thin man, less than average height, with sallow skin and fair, fine hair that was making a premature and permanent departure. In the merciless sunlight, his scalp showed through the remaining fine strands. Old Jake, Marcus recalled, had been as bald as a gourd, with nothing left after only forty but a miniskirt of hair clinging precariously over his ears and around the back of his neck.

"I am hoping," said Marcus, "that you can tell me something that will help to clear up this unpleasant business of your brother's murder."

"I'm afraid I must disappoint you. The possibilities are far too numerous. My brother, Lieutenant, invited murder."

"I know. I believe I've had enough of character analysis. I go on the assumption that the possibilities may be limited by the circumstances. He was murdered in this house. Although access to your brother has been established as feasible, it must nevertheless be considered restricted. Would you mind telling me where you were when your brother was murdered?"

"Are you implying that I may have killed my own brother?"

"I am merely asking where you were. Do you object to telling me?"

"Not at all. When was he murdered, precisely?"

"Precisely, we don't know. Approximately, in the neighborhood of ten o'clock."

"Very well. I was here. On the terrace or strolling on the lawn. When I came downstairs earlier, I heard the voices of Foster and my sister Adele in the dining room. I avoided Foster whenever possible, so I helped myself to coffee in the kitchen and brought it here to the terrace. I've been here, or in the yard, ever since. Lena joined me about eleven, I should say."

"Were you alone until then?"

"Yes."

"Darling," said Lena Frontenac lazily, "you're such a fool."

Young Jake turned his head to look at Lena. So did Marcus. She was lying back in the sling chair with that

special kind of indolence peculiar to certain women and all breeds of cats, domestic and wild. Her eyes were half-closed, and the shadow of a smile was touching her lips. Lena Frontenac, Marcus decided, was a restless woman. Under her indolence, she smoldered. She did not, somehow, fit in this house or with this man. Not, at any rate, without occasional release and relief; now and then a holiday with someone less inhibited. Someone, say, like Foster, and Marcus wondered if she had, indeed, taken such holidays as the chances came to her.

"What do you mean?" Young Jake said.

"Just what I said. You're a fool. Can't you see what you've done? You've placed yourself alone at the time of the murder. Motive and opportunity. Both essentials. If you had said you were in our room with me, I could have given you a neat little alibi. Now, of course, it's too late."

"Incidentally," Marcus said, "it's also too late for you."

"So it is." She looked at Marcus through slitted lids and laughed softly in some deep and wayward delight. "We might have alibied each other, you mean. But that's all right. I had no motive for killing poor Foster because, you see, I didn't hate him as the others did. He was, I suppose, everything they say he was, but I didn't mind. I found him amusing."

Marcus studied her for a moment, as a specimen. As a specimen, she was interesting; small, slim, dark, seductive; long black hair, smoky eyes, lips at ease between a pout and a smile; every move an inadvertent invitation. How, Marcus wondered, however in this cock-eyed world, did a prim and balding bird like Young Jake Frontenac wind up with something like this on his hands?

"Is it possible," Marcus said, "that we finally have a variation on the theme? Tears for Foster?"

"No." Her shoulders moved in the slightest of shrugs. "No tears for Foster. He was amusing, but he deserved killing."

Marcus sat quietly for a moment, as if suddenly abstracted, staring down at the colored flags, and then he sighed, slapped a knee, and stood up.

"Well, thank you for your help. I've disturbed you long enough." He turned and started across the terrace toward the sliding door, stopped, turned back. "By the way, did either of you happen to see a strange man in the house this morning just before the murder?"

"I wasn't in the house," Young Jake said. "I was here on the terrace or in the yard."

"Before you came out here."

"No. I saw no one. Wouldn't I have told you first thing if I had? After all, it would be most convenient for the rest of us."

"So it would." Marcus shifted his gaze to Lena. "Mrs. Frontenac?"

"I was asleep in my room," she said. "Sometimes I see strange men in my sleep, but not this morning."

A handful, that one. Young Jake's problem. Marcus went on and collected Fuller in the kitchen.

"Time to go, Fuller," he said. "We're finished here. For the time being."

They went out the back way and around to the car under the portico. With Marcus at the wheel, they turned on a concrete apron in front of the garages behind the house and started back the way they had come.

"Bulls and Bears," said Marcus.

Fuller, in spite of himself, repeated his earlier mistake. "What?"

"On the way out, we talked about Bulls and Bears."

"I remember. To no purpose that I could see then. I can't see any now."

"No purpose, Fuller. Except that it's a game, and Old Jake Frontenac invented it. Maybe a fondness for games runs in the family, Fuller. At any rate, I have a feeling that someone is deliberately playing a game with me now. Murder's a game, Fuller. A deadly kind of hide-and-seek, and I'm it. Someone's hiding, and I'm seeking. You must have played hide-and-seek when you were a boy, Fuller."

"Sure. Even deprived kids play hide-and-seek."

"You must remember, then, that there were times, no matter how hard you looked, when there was someone you couldn't find. Finally you had to call it quits. When you gave up the game at last, there was a little formula that you used to shout until the hider heard and came in: *All-ee all-ee outs in free.*"

"You planning to give up the game already?"

"Not yet. I'm just facing the possibility. You sure the servants were telling the truth about not seeing any stranger in the house this morning?"

"Reasonably. I didn't have them wired to a lie detector, of course."

"He must have slipped in and out unseen, probably the way you suggested. Up and down the rear stairs."

"What makes you so sure there *was* someone?"

"Mrs. Frontenac heard him pass her door in the hall. She looked out just in time to see him disappearing into Foster Frontenac's room. It's a big town in a wide world, Fuller. You could look a long time for a man when you don't know his name or what he looks like or where he came from or where, when he went, he was going."

"You could," said Fuller. "That you could." He worked to keep the sound of satisfaction out of his voice. Fuller was opposed in principle to letting a murderer go free. On the other hand, he was not at all opposed to seeing Marcus come a cropper. It was really rather traumatic. Fuller caught on the horns of Fuller's private dilemma.

Years ago, when he was attracted to such speculations, Marcus had read an essay by Mr. H. G. Wells in which the latter had offered his opinions on life and death and the destiny of man. These opinions, Mr. Wells had written, were reached by anguished thinking in that loneliest of all times, the deep hours of sleepless nights, when the thread of a man's life wears thinnest and the mysterious mechanism of a man's mind is most attuned to truth.

Marcus himself was given to this practice of nocturnal speculation, and now, abed, staring up into the dense and immeasurable darkness that separated him from the ceiling, he was submitting to the practice and emulating Mr. Wells. There was, however, a difference. Marcus was not engaged in formulating the articles of a personal credo. His speculation was qualified, his range limited. He was thinking, in brief, about the life and death of Foster Frontenac.

Marcus did not, in these lonely speculations, inhibit his mind by imposing upon it the restrictive rules of evidence. He was not, in the proper sense, trying to gather and organize a body of evidence at all. He was, rather, struggling for insight, the moment of truth, that blinding instant when a man sees something whole and sees it clear. He was not trying, that is, to create a case that would satisfy a prosecutor or convince a jury. He was

merely trying to satisfy himself. Therefore, in pursuit of ideas instead of evidence, he untethered his mind, so to speak, and followed it in darkness wherever it led.

Why, he thought, did Dr. Thomas Clement, when he called headquarters to report the murder of Foster Frontenac, ask specifically for Lieutenant Joseph Marcus?

Well, after all, it was natural, perhaps. He, Marcus, had known the doctor for as long as he could remember. And the doctor had known him, again Marcus, for longer; since birth. The point was, it was perhaps natural for Dr. Clement to ask specifically for Lieutenant Marcus, having known him long and well, and knowing, besides, that the investigation of murders fell within the province of Marcus' duties.

Why had Dr. Clement carefully given an alibi to Adele Frontenac while all the others went begging?

Perhaps because it was the truth. Or perhaps not. Anyhow, the alibi, such as it was, was not impregnable. Dr. Clement himself had said that the murder might have been committed shortly before he went downstairs and met Adele there.

What is the significance of an ordinary item of clothing when it becomes, in relation to an inadvertent remark, a crude symbol?

Let that one lie. Let it incubate. Symbols in murder, like symbols in literature, are apt to exist only in the imaginations of detectives and critics.

What was the meaning of Dr. Clement's remark to Hattie Frontenac that her information, volunteered to Marcus, was unnecessary?

Surely an odd remark. Or was it? In a murder investigation all information is necessary. It may later prove irrelevant, but it must be considered in order to prove it so. Hattie's information, moreover, had concerned the mysterious intruder, the stranger who had passed in the hall. Surely vital if anything was. Yet perhaps Dr. Clement had not intended the remark as it sounded. Perhaps it was merely his way of telling Hattie, as her friend and doctor, that it was unnecessary and inadvisable to distress herself further.

Incidentally, why has Dr. Clement's devotion to Hattie been so enduring?

Well, why not? He had been in love with her as a younger man, this by his own confession, and love some-

times endures. It sometimes endures when marriage fails. Besides, Dr. Clement was a rather old-fashioned man who probably clung to the old romantic values. He was just the sort who would remain committed all his life to a woman he had loved and lost in his youth.

What may have happened, if anything, between Lena Frontenac and Foster Frontenac that would have given her cause to kill him?

Possibilities were rampant. Use your imagination and take your choice. You might be wrong, but you might be right. Foster, by reputation, was a bad boy. Lena, by the implication of subtle signs, was a bad girl. Affinity. Lena was more cautious and calculating, of course. She knew the side of her bread the butter was on. But she had said she found Foster amusing. Ten to one, Foster had found ways of amusing her.

Conversely, what may have happened, if anything, between Lena Frontenac and Foster Frontenac that would have given Young Jake Frontenac cause to kill Foster?

Two men and one woman. All in the family. The eternal triangle domesticated. Perhaps that was why Young Jake chose not to rely on Lena for a fake alibi.

How do you explain an apparent deviation from a hereditary tendency?

Nothing gained from getting involved in the old dog-fight between heredity and environment. Some things were explained satisfactorily by the latter, others only by the former, and some, of course, were arguable. A mysterious and somehow frightening thing, heredity, bonding through genes the generations. Faults of the fathers passed to the sons. Faults of the mothers, too, for that matter. Passed to the sons and daughters. There's the significant point. Who passes what to whom?

Moreover, how do you explain a deviation from a long tradition of families?

Well, traditions are not physical or biological laws. Like all rules, they are made to be broken. If Old Jake and Hattie Frontenac wanted to break tradition, or at least to bend it, they surely had their own reason, and it was nobody's business but theirs. Still, it would be interesting, if not instructive, to know the reason.

Oh, yes! Did Dr. Clement have a remarkable memory for remote details, or did he not?

He was, obviously, a sharp old boy, in full command of

his faculties. If his memory was retentive, so was the memory of Joseph Marcus. Some people are like that. An incredible mental capacity for trivia. No discrimination. Cluttered storehouses of the important and the unimportant. Nevertheless, when one remembered a particular bit of trivia, there was generally a particular reason for remembering it. Again, it would be interesting to know the reason, even if the reason was another bit of trivia.

Having thus in the sleepless night posed to himself ten questions, Marcus lay precariously for a moment on the brink of dread, and then, deliberately, he posed the eleventh and the last. He did not answer it.

The next morning, having endured the night, he was early at his desk. He busied himself with odds and ends. Fuller was in and out, doing this and that. At nine o'clock, Marcus consulted the telephone directory. He lingered over a name, caught and held by the incidental revelation of something long forgotten, if ever known. He dialed the number after the name and talked briefly to the woman at the other end of the line. He hung up and put on his hat and left. He did not collect Bobo Fuller on his way. What Fuller didn't know, or couldn't guess, would never hurt him.

Under the portico of the stone and stucco house in the suburbs, he stopped and got out. He was admitted to the house by the same manservant, Hagan, who had admitted him yesterday. He was told by Hagan that the elder Mrs. Frontenac was still resting abed in her room, although awake. He was not sure she would wish to be disturbed, but Marcus felt, under the circumstances, that she would not object. He went up and knocked and was invited in. As before, she was sitting braced against the headboard with pillows at her back, and Marcus drew up the straight chair and sat down.

"Forgive me for intruding so early," he said.

"Don't apologize, Lieutenant. You have your duty, of course."

"Unfortunately. Mrs. Frontenac, I didn't sleep at all last night."

"Nor did I. Insomnia is a dreadful affliction. The hours of the night are long and lonely."

"I spent them asking myself questions, Mrs. Frontenac. One of the questions I didn't answer. I hope you will answer it for me this morning."

"What is the question, Lieutenant?"

"It's this: *Would a mother who had given birth to a son who was, she felt, hopelessly lost to honor and decency and happiness, a son who had destroyed his father and was bringing shame to his family and would surely in the end destroy himself—would this mother, I ask, destroy this son?*"

Hattie Frontenac closed her eyes. She folded her hands above the silk bedspread. Her face was serene, remarkably at peace, as if it were a great relief that the question had been asked at last.

"A kind of euthanasia?" she said.

"If you please."

"It is a terrible responsibility, Lieutenant, being the mother of a wicked son."

"It is also a terrible responsibility to take a life."

"Yes. You are right." She opened her eyes, and her eyes were untroubled. "One assumes such a responsibility, if one assumes it at all, very slowly over a long period of time. Perhaps too long a time."

"You haven't yet answered my question."

"How can I answer it? It's far too general. Some mothers might, others would not. If you want a specific answer, Lieutenant, you must ask your question specifically."

"Very well. Did you strangle your son?"

"I am an old woman. Sixty years old. Do you think I still have the strength to do such a thing?"

"He was exhausted. In a deep sleep. You could have done it. Anyone in this house could have done it. Everyone had the opportunity. Everyone, no doubt, had a motive."

"In that case, why select me in particular?"

"As you said, it's a terrible responsibility to be the mother of a wicked son. It carries with it, I should imagine, an intolerable sense of guilt, however irrational. In a way, perhaps, taking the life that should never have been given would be the expiation of a sin."

"You have a theological turn of mind, Lieutenant."

"I hope not. I remind you again that you haven't answered my question."

"I think that I won't. You must answer it for yourself."

"Will you at least hear my own answer, then, my dear lady?"

"If I must."

"All right. The answer is no. You did not strangle your son. *He was strangled by his father.*"

Her eyes widened, their strange serenity disturbed for an instant by the sudden intrusion of some secret held behind them. She bowed her head and stared at her hands.

"Are you telling a ghost story, Lieutenant? His father is dead."

"If I'm wrong, I'm sorry, but I believe that he is not. Anyhow, ghost stories can be interesting. May I tell you mine?"

"I'd be disappointed if you didn't."

"Good. As I told you, I lay awake last night and asked myself questions. Some of them were extraneous, only to be considered in order to be discarded. We won't bother with them. The others, I think, were relevant to our problem. In the first place, Dr. Clement asked for my personal attention to the case. Why? Maybe because he had known me for many years, and because he thought he could count on my sympathy and perhaps, in the end, on my vulnerability. At any rate, I had the feeling from the beginning that Dr. Clement was leading me, playing a grim kind of game. That he was, in effect, feeding me vague clues that, when added up, would reveal the murderer. Your son, for instance, was strangled with his own necktie. Dr. Clement, at the bedside, made a strange and rather brutal remark. He said that he, who delivered your son, should have strangled him at birth with his umbilical cord. Could the necktie have been used, thirty years later, as a crude symbol of the cord? Was he pointing so early as that to himself as the murderer? Or was he pointing to someone else who would later be revealed? I wondered. Something else he said made me wonder more. He said that Foster Frontenac was born on the sixth of August, 1939. Just like that, right off the top of his head and the tip of his tongue. Why should a doctor who has delivered thousands of babies remember the precise birthdate of one of them unless he had a strong personal reason for doing so?

"Well, let that lie a moment. Later, in here, he continued to say things that struck me as strange. He told you, for example, that it was unnecessary for you to tell me certain things that I considered vital. Do you remember just when he made that remark? It was just after you

told me about the strange visitor in the hall. Why? Because he knew, as you did, that there was no visitor, and because he knew, in the development of this case as he had planned it and was directing it, that there was nothing whatever to be gained from digressions and deceptions. He had loved you years ago. He was still completely devoted to you. Could you possibly think that he would permit you or any member of your family to suffer more than was absolutely necessary at the hands of the police? No. Not even when the police were represented by someone particularly chosen. Someone, as I said, who could be counted on for compassion and maybe, in the end, even for a kind of qualified professional treason.

"But let's get on with it. I'm about finished. How do you explain, I asked myself last night, an apparent deviation from a hereditary tendency? Your son was a scoundrel in an honorable family, of course, but I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about his hair. Your second son, although a year younger than the first, is already going bald, like his father. Fortunately, Foster resembled you, his mother, in facial features, but the character of his hair, which should have derived from his father, was still thick. Like, for example, Dr. Clement's. But maybe I make too much of the matter. I am not a geneticist. There was another deviation, however, that drew my attention. It is the practice in most families, when a son is given his father's name, to give it to the first son born. In this family, it was given to the second. I wondered why. This morning I dialed the home telephone number of Dr. Clement. I had to consult the directory before dialing. When I did so, I discovered something I had forgotten. Perhaps I had never known it. Dr. Clement's middle initial was F. Dr. Thomas F. Clement. F for Foster, Mrs. Frontenac?"

Hattie Frontenac had closed her eyes again, listening. Marcus, watching her, saw her lips move to shape again in silence the name they had shaped yesterday: *Tom. Dear Tom*. She opened her eyes and looked at Marcus, and in the eyes were old pain and last regret.

"You are a clever man, Lieutenant. Alone with you in this room, I tell you so. But you can have no evidence to support what you have told me. I'm afraid less intuitive people would think it fantasy."

"That may be. But we know better, you and I, don't we? We know that Foster Frontenac was killed by the man who was driven to a fury of despair by the knowledge that he had given to the woman he loved a son who destroyed her husband and was destroying her and would surely, in time, destroy himself. I believe, in this room yesterday, you called it retribution. That's as may be. Dr. Clement could not expiate his transgression, but he could at least remove the burden of his transgression from others. He could eliminate the mutant he had created. You have understood this all along, of course. He went directly from this room to Foster's yesterday morning. Finding him asleep, he strangled him with what may have been a symbol of the living tissue that had sustained his life in the beginning. Then he went downstairs and talked with Adele, your daughter but not his, before coming back up to discover the body."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"No. Not quite. At home last night, he finished what he had to do, as he had planned to finish it. He died in his sleep, quietly. Just before coming here, I talked with his housekeeper, who found his body. Well, he was getting old. He had worked hard. His heart, I suppose, simply quit. Small wonder."

Her eyes were closed again. A pair of tears forced their way from under her lids and crept down her cheeks. She made no sound and did not move. Marcus stood up.

"You had better rest now," he said. "As for me, I've got work to do. I've got to get after that man you heard in the hall. Not that it will do much good, I suspect. How can you find a man when you don't know anything about him? He came, and he went, and I guess he's gone. I'd better go, too."

Quietly, he went, stuck at last with an open case. Fuller would be delighted. He hoped Fuller wouldn't rub it in.

CODE BROWN

by Robert Colby

Gavin McCord waited until dusk, when all the cabs of the night shift were on the road. Then he went down to the West L.A. garage where, across the street on a lot, dozens of reserve cabs, fully gassed and otherwise serviced, stood ready to roll. That afternoon he had swiped an ignition key from one of the new cabs on the long feeder line out at the L.A. International Airport. All the keys were identical—one key would fit any cab of the lone company which held the franchise to blanket the city.

It had been simple enough. Drivers usually left their keys in the switches when they went into one of the terminals to buy a paper or check the schedule of arrivals. Gavin had been wearing the regulation company hat and looked like any other of the thousand-plus drivers. Leaning against a cab door behind a paper, it had been child's play to grope around the dash and lift the key.

The driver would blame himself. He would think he had mislaid or lost the key and he would send for the road super, who would furnish him with another after chewing him out.

Now, again wearing the hat and carrying a small zipper case, he entered the unattended lot and strolled among the cabs. He wouldn't be questioned, but even if he were, he was a driver who had reported in late and was searching for the cab assigned to him. He chose T-six-seven, a new Ford, radio-equipped.

As he climbed in with the case, he noted that T-five-four, an older radio cab, was parked beside him. Fine. He would identify himself to the radio dispatcher as T-five-four, a cab that would remain on the lot at least until the graveyard shift. For a safe deception, he must not use the call letters of the stolen Ford, nor the call letters of any other cab presently on the road.

He opened the case and brought out a clipboard of trip sheets and a loaded .45 automatic. Arming it with a backward jerk and release of the slide, he placed it beneath the seat with the butt toward him. The unwieldy .45 was

a lot more gun than he needed, but the psychological effect of its great size would produce quick obedience.

Now, with the trip-sheeted clipboard beside him on the seat to complete the phony picture, he inserted the stolen key and started the engine. Lighting a cigarette, he maneuvered his way from the lot, pulled the headlight button, and finally warmed the two-way radio.

Comfortable darkness had settled in, and the soft lights of Beverly Hills beckoned discreetly as he drove west on Santa Monica Boulevard, then swung south on Rodeo and headed for the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, a grand old establishment which housed many rich travelers, ranking executives, and even a movie star or two in permanent residence. It was only a two-cab stand, but as he circled the block and approached it from the rear, one cab pulled out with a passenger, and he took its place, switching to parking lights.

Shortly, the driver of the first-up cab undid himself from behind the wheel and idled over to Gavin's window. Gavin was unhappy, but not unnerved.

"How ya doin'?" the driver said. He was short, paunchy, and semibald, older than Gavin, who was a lean thirty-one.

"Don't know yet," Gavin answered. "I only been on since five, and all I got was a few jerk rides—nothing much over a buck each."

"Yeah?" said the cabbie, with a wry, disparaging face. "Well, I only come on at four, but already I made book."

"You got real talent," Gavin replied. "Some guys have it, some don't, that's all."

"Talent my eye! It's plain dumb luck. First ten minutes I got a ride to the port, then way downtown to the Statler. From the Statler a couple of old dames send me to Brentwood. Then I stand a spell and snag a walk-up to the Valley. Some days you can do no wrong, brother." He paused. "Ain't seen you around. You a new one?"

"Nope. A rehire. Been away for a while."

It was true that he had once been on the payroll. He was caught high-flagging, and they were threatening to sack him when he quit. At the time he had been driving out of the Hollywood garage, and wasn't known by the West L.A. bunch.

"It's bad when you break off and come back," said the cabbie. "You lose seniority, they shove you on the night

trick and make you drive the worst old junk they got. Hey, how come *you* rate new wheels, hardly outta the factory?"

Gavin smiled. He had felt it coming. "This wreck I had went to the shop, day man just pulled in late with this job, and they tossed it to me for a one-nighter."

The man snorted, was about to reply when he caught the flashing signal of the blue light fixed to the side of the building. "That's me around front," he said. "Hope it's a port load. See ya, fella."

Gavin turned the key and eased into the first-up spot. In that brief time when he had driven legitimately, everything had gone to hell. He had been out of a job before, and in the first month of driving he did little more than catch up with past-due bills and the rent. Meanwhile, Mary Ann was pregnant out to here and he didn't have the \$500-plus to see her through it.

They'd had a good old Chevy. He wanted five hundred, but the used-car people shook their heads and wouldn't go four. A driver, Pete Kromback, offered four and a half. Gavin accepted promptly. Pete was a day man, and as he came off, Gavin went on. They met at the garage, Pete forked over four Cs and a fifty, Gavin delivered the title and pocketed the money.

A few minutes after ten that night, Gavin plucked a couple of men from the bus depot downtown. They sent him to a dark street in a shabby section of East L.A., poked a gun at the back of his head, and demanded his money. He gave them the night's take from his wallet and swore that was it. They searched him anyway and found the four-fifty, then hammered his skull with the gun until his brain went dead, and his next awakening was in the hospital.

There was an odd little sidelight to this happening. During the three-day training period, in answer to a question about robberies, the instructor had said, "Sure, it's a big town full of hungry creeps, and a driver is an easy mark. But don't go out expecting to be robbed, and you won't. It's a funny thing, but the records don't lie. Some of the same drivers are being held up again and again, while most of the others go free. We got guys who are accident-prone and guys who are robbery-prone. Don't be one of them!"

Gavin had figured the instructor for a nut, but there

it was—in some dark pocket of his mind he had carried the fear and expectation that he would be one of the victims. . . .

As he sourly contemplated his disaster, Gavin caught the blue wink of the signal light and careened around front, braking sharply at the entrance. When he saw the rich leather bags, he bent out quickly and helped the doorman stow them in the trunk. The two customers were a plump graying man and a dark-haired slender one who danced around the other with rawning anxiety. When they were seated, Gavin swiveled his head and the old guy said, "Airport—United."

Gavin cranked the meter, circled, and came back to Santa Monica Boulevard. Heading west toward the freeway, he drove carefully and without haste. The two men were talking big-deal business, using a peculiar terminology which evaded and bored him. He tuned them out in favor of his own bitter thoughts.

The first two days in the hospital he was barely conscious and on the critical list. He slowly recovered, but though he seemed none the worse physically, he became sullen and hostile, as he now regarded the vast, esoteric forces of the world.

When he got out of the hospital the company brass were sympathetic but they wouldn't make good on the loss of his own money. He knew that technically they were not obligated, but he was deeply resentful and bitter. So he began to run with the meter off, flat-rating the customers at his own figure, high-flagging it all over the place, telling Mary Ann he would have the cash when her time came. . . .

Gavin did not take the freeway. Instead he went parallel, south along Sepulveda, ready with an excuse about a shortcut, if one were needed. But the two clowns were so busy jawing they didn't notice, probably wouldn't know one route from another.

Mary Ann was frightened, she had no faith in him, in his ability to produce—none at all. So she took off for South Carolina to live with her parents, who despised him—enough to pay for the baby's delivery and care, if only she would divorce Gavin. Or, so it seemed, for she refused to return, and certainly he wasn't going *there*, to live under the scorn of her folks. So it was a stalemate. . . .

Gavin was nearing a cross-street on which there were some dark little shops, long ago sealed for the day. Behind these shops there was an alley. Abruptly he turned into it.

He had quit the company under fire, got a job pumping gas, had a few bucks saved, and he was hanging on. The baby was born, and Mary Ann sent him a snapshot. He fell in love with the baby's picture and its dim likeness to himself, was still far gone for Mary Ann. Though she had deserted him, with her family cheering in the background, he desperately wanted her back, babe in arms. He called her.

"No," she said. "And it isn't because I don't love you, Gavin—I do. I really do! Sure, I know it's not your fault that you got robbed and clubbed half to death. But, honey, that's done and finished, and you've got to get up off the ground and fight back, until you make a solid place for yourself—for us.

"You have two hundred saved, and that's a good start. But you should bank at least another thousand to hold us in any emergency. When you have it, we'll be on the next flight. Okay?"

Okay-okay-okay, Mary Ann! See, I'm fighting back. I'm right in there punching. Oh, man, am I! I hope you'll never know, baby, what I'm doing to rustle up that dough in one big crazy night! Revenge is sweet, Mary Ann, and my turn has come!

Now the cab was rocking over the pitted pavement of the alley, and the old guy, suddenly waking up, was saying, "Hey there! Where you going, driver?"

"Shortcut to the freeway, sir. Brings us right out at the entrance."

"Well, never mind the shortcuts," he replied acidly. "We're in no hurry, and we'd prefer a nice, easy ride."

Gavin braked behind a building, erased the headlights, and showed them the muzzle of the .45. "Surprise!" he barked. "Cabbie holds up passengers. How's that for a switch!"

The two men eyed the gun with disbelief. "Is this some sort of a joke?" asked the chubby man. He looked more indignant than frightened, while the eyes of his gaping junior-satellite widened and blinked absurdly.

"Yeah, it's a joke," said Gavin. "If you get laughs out of having the top of your head blown off with a .45

slug. Now let's see some fat wallets—and don't waste any time fumbling."

"Mr. Porter never carries any money on a business trip," the slender young man announced. "I handle all the disbursements, and I have only about forty dollars left."

"That right? You handle the, uh, disbursements, huh? Well, start disbursing, junior, and we'll let Mr. Porter speak for himself. You got any cash in the wallet, Mr. Porter?"

"Of course I have money! This man was foolishly trying to protect me—and he's an idiot!" Porter declared. Both men now produced wallets, which they extended, the younger offering his with a scared, sheepish expression.

"I don't want the damn wallets," Gavin said. "Just hand me the cash—all of it!"

When they had placed the cash in his palm, Porter relieving his wallet of some large bills, Gavin climbed from the cab and ordered them out. In the gloom, they stood facing him warily, the young man slightly crouched behind Porter, as if to shield himself from a bullet with the fleshy bulk of his chief.

"What about our baggage?" Porter asked. "There's nothing of any real value to you in those suitcases—look and see, if you like."

Gavin chuckled. Watching them, he backed around to the rear of the cab. The way it worked, the license plate was fixed to a spring and could be swiveled upward to reveal the trunk lock and the key, always left inserted. It was another company gimmick to solve the eternal key problem.

He opened the trunk and hurled the cases at them with a left-handed toss. "Walk straight up the alley and don't look back," he ordered.

The young man hoisted the bags and was moving off with them when Porter caught up and disdainfully snatched his own from the other's grasp. Shoulders canted by the weight of the bags, they trudged woefully along and slowly receded. They created a ludicrous picture, yet somehow they were also sad in a way that Gavin could not have described; and for just a moment he experienced a pang of regret.

He shrugged and got into the cab, backed to the street, set his lights, and gunned away. The meter was of no importance to him, but he wound the flag up to twelve o'clock again, because with the flag down, the dome light was off, signaling the cab was occupied. Better to operate according to Hoyle, else he would be noted by other drivers and perhaps even by a road super who might be scouting the area.

Likely, in a matter of minutes, Porter and his flunkie would report to the police, but Gavin wasn't disturbed, for drivers in company hats, cruising the streets in darkness, could not be distinguished one from another. Further, as expected, neither of his victims had once looked for the cab number; like most people, they were probably unaware of such numbers, and he had not given them a chance to read the tag.

With an ear to the radio, he took the freeway to Westwood and parked at an empty stand on a dim street at the edge of UCLA to count the money. There were two hundred-dollar bills, three fifties, five twenties, a ten, and eight singles, a sum of four hundred and sixty-eight dollars. This was just a few bucks over the amount cleaned from him in the robbery, Gavin mused, and pretty good justice. Now he would collect for damages to his skull, for time in the hospital, and for the loss of Mary Ann.

He couldn't bear another week apart from Mary Ann, and wondered if she had the least idea of how many months it would take him to save her thousand-plus by pumping gas. *I went to the races, Mary Ann*, he composed, *and I bet twenty on this long-shot daily double that paid over a hundred bucks a ticket. . . .* Well, maybe that wasn't exactly a tale to inspire confidence, so he'd dream up another.

He put the cash in the zipper case and then went around and locked it in the trunk. He lighted a cigarette and sat listening to the radio. An alarm would be sent in code, but the code was simple, and he knew it by heart. There was no alarm, however, and he began to listen for a dispatch he could answer that would take him into one of the rich neighborhoods for a fresh sucker. At last the dispatcher called a stand in nearby Brentwood. When the call was repeated, he knew the stand was empty and grabbed the mike, not forgetting to identify himself as T-five-four instead of his own T-six-seven.

The dispatcher gave him an address on North Barrington, an area of regal homes, and he sped to a swank split-level in little over five minutes.

He circled up the drive and paused in front. The door stood open, and he heard the sounds of a party and saw people milling about. Gavin blew his horn, and in a moment a young couple appeared. The stocky young man with angry eyes and a block jaw wore a dinner jacket and a look of self-importance. The attractive, dark-haired girl in the silver lamé dress kept glancing at the man as she moved beside him with a drooping, apologetic air.

The man opened the cab door, and when she had entered, sank heavily beside her. "Don't you fellas ever get out and open a door for a lady?" he growled.

"Sorry about that." Gavin grinned back at the girl, who responded with a flickering smile, watching her companion from the corner of her eye as if to learn whether or not he found smiling appropriate to the occasion. The man ignored her and snapped an address on Tigertail Road, a climbing, twisting, solid-gold residential street only a couple of minutes away.

Gavin yanked the flag down and took off, descending to Sunset, where he swung west. The couple rode in grim silence, and Gavin suspected there had been a spat which had only been suspended in his presence and would be continued at home.

Well, he would give them something else to think about—a little distraction. He felt sorry for the girl, and since she'd have to walk in her tight dress and high heels, he decided to dump them near the bottom of Tigertail, a place of sparse traffic and such tree-shrouded isolation, he could not have chosen a much better spot himself without tipping his hand.

He came to the turn and left Sunset, slipped past the mouth of Tigertail, and pulled to a stop at the curb. "This is as far as I go," he said, and reached for the gun.

"Whatta ya mean, this is as far as you go!" snarled the man.

Gavin shoved the .45 at him as he blacked the headlights. "This should answer your question nicely," he said. "Just empty your wallet and the lady's purse and nobody'll get hurt."

"I'll be damned!" the man exploded. "Now I've seen everything!" The girl shrank in her corner and stared with bug-eyed fascination.

"Waiting makes me nervous," Gavin said truthfully. "Let's have it!"

"Not a dime," said the man, folding his arms rigidly across his chest. "You'll have to shoot me first."

"If I have to shoot you, then that's what I'll do," Gavin replied coolly, and was astonished at his own conviction. For one startled instant he had an exterior glimpse of himself and saw a stranger.

"Gene!" the girl said, "are you insane? Do as he says!" She opened her small, jeweled purse. "Here, I've got some money, and he has—"

That was when the man made a grab for the gun, and as his hand closed around the barrel, Gavin fired reflexively, the .45 booming with an awesome sound in the confinement of the cab. Clutching his head, the man fell sideways on the seat, the girl screamed, and Gavin was in a state close to panic. He lowered the gun and gave the cab a moment of light. The man was lying still, and the girl was bent over him, sobbing and stroking his head and then looking with horror at her hand, upon which blood now appeared.

Then the man sat up slowly, and Gavin saw that the bullet had merely grazed the side of his head. The wound was very minor, and he was more frightened than hurt, all of his bravado collapsing in shock.

Gavin switched off the light and again leveled the gun, while the girl dabbed at the wound with a handkerchief, saying, "Gene, Gene! Oh Gene, darling, are you all right?"

"That was plain stupid," Gavin declared, his calm somewhat restored. "Graveyards are jam-packed with heroes like you, buddy. Get his wallet, lady, and give me the money. Same with your purse."

She fumbled for the wallet, found it in his trousers, emptied it, and added the cash from her purse. Gavin stuffed the bills into his pocket.

"Now, beat it, both of you! You got five seconds before I change my mind."

She scrambled out, and he followed meekly, holding the handkerchief to his head. When they were clear,

Gavin made a U-turn and roared away without lights. He looked back once. The sound of the shot and the attending commotion had attracted a trio of people, who now stood on the sidewalk in a bewildered huddle as the couple went toward them, the girl glancing over her shoulder at the vanishing cab.

Out of sight, Gavin flicked on the headlights and flew down Sunset to the freeway, taking the on-ramp south, knowing that at sixty-five he could cross to traffic-swollen Wilshire and lose himself in a couple of minutes.

He had barely reached the speed limit, however, when sirens rose and fell behind him, growing in the night as bursting red lights winked evilly in his mirror and bloomed larger with every jolt of his heart. Gavin sank his pedal foot to the floor, but beyond this mechanical reaction, there was little in his head but a cyclone of fear.

It was obvious at once that he wasn't going to escape, couldn't even hold his distance. It wasn't much of a decision. You let them catch up for a shoot-out against impossible odds, or you took the first exit and prayed to the devil for his kind of luck. He would take the first exit.

But the exit was too far and the cops were too close, not a hundred yards behind. With terrible resignation he lifted his foot and let the cab drift.

There were two patrol cars. As the first came abreast, the passenger cop turned his head and gazed at Gavin with a curious expression of narrowed eyes and pursed lips, as if he were mildly disapproving. Then the cruiser sped past and was replaced by another, the performance being repeated in much the same way by a second officer, who looked back with a deep frown as his partner hustled him away.

Gavin got the full picture when he slowed for the Wilshire off-ramp. In the distance beyond, he could see that there had been an accident. Cars were stalled for a quarter-mile south of the exit, and now an ambulance swerved through traffic with a screaming demand and took possession of the emergency strip to plow ahead toward a sea of flashing lights and blazing flares. So the cops had had no interest in him, except to note that he was wildly exceeding the speed limit, a matter of small importance under the circumstances.

At any other time it might have been funny, but he was trembling as he swooped down the ramp to Wilshire

and nosed into westbound traffic. Soon he turned a corner and pulled up at the side entrance of a familiar bar, a place with a dusky interior where he could put down a couple of quick drinks while pondering his next move, and since there was no one about, he counted the take from the second stickup.

He was stunned. He had nearly killed a man for a lousy fifty-two bucks. Suddenly he was afraid to go on with it. Maybe he had better quit while he still could. He would think about it over a drink.

He put the bills in his wallet and was lighting a cigarette when a man came out of the bar, saw the cab, and moved toward it with a jaunty step. He was tall and slim and fortyish, had pure white hair, and wore a natty blue business suit. Bending, he leaned into the cab, bringing with him the faint aroma of whiskey.

"There's an office building out near El Segundo," he said. "Pacific Coast Electronics. Know where it is?"

"Sure," said Gavin. "Big tall job right off the Coast Highway. Can't take you, though. I'm about to check in."

"So you'll be a little late. I'm in a big hurry. I left a rented car in the parking lot behind the building. Gotta pick it up and then catch a plane. It would be worth an extra ten to me."

"Like you said," Gavin replied with a grin, "I'll be a little late. Hop in!"

He cranked the meter and zoomed off, purposely avoiding the freeway and heading toward Lincoln. A guy who could grease a cabbie with ten bucks would have plenty to spare. Further, it was a made-to-order setup. The P.C. Electronics building would be closed tight now, and the dark, unguarded lot would screen a holdup.

"I came down from San Francisco, first of the week," the man said. "We had a whole bunch of meetings, and then this evening one of the local brass drove me in town for a few drinks. In the bar he met some dame he knew. He was loaded and wouldn't drive me back, so here I am."

"That's the way it goes," replied Gavin. "They'll do it to you every time—the dames."

"Well, it wasn't exactly the gal's fault. This guy got—"

"Yeah, but in the background—a woman. Right?"

The man chuckled. "Right."

They were within a few blocks of the electronics building when the call came over the radio: *Attention all*

drivers! Attention all drivers! A code brown on unit T-six-seven. Last approximate twenty-one, west on Wilshire near Westwood exit of the freeway. If you have a twenty-one for this unit, green your dispatcher at once! Repeat. A code brown for T-six-seven . . .

That was it! A general robbery code to cover all situations. Somehow the holdups had been linked to the hot cab he was driving. Translated, the message meant: Robbery in progress, cab T-six-seven. Last seen westbound on Wilshire near the Westwood exit of the freeway. If observed, contact your dispatcher. . . . A driver without a fare would know enough to follow at a safe distance and keep reporting.

The patrol cops en route to the wreck, informed earlier of the robberies, likely had noted the number of Gavin's speeding cab and marked his departure from the freeway at the Wilshire exit. On the chance that this was the cab involved in the passenger stickups, they had asked the company to check it out. Then the truth had been discovered.

Behind him the man was saying, "What was that all about—the bit on the radio?"

"Nothing much," he answered. "Cab broke down. If there's a driver in the vicinity who doesn't have a fare, he's supposed to give assistance or have the dispatcher send a tow truck. Happens all the time."

"Oh," said the man. "So why do they radio something like that in code?"

"Public-image stuff. Keeps the customers from knowing that our cabs break down once in a while."

"Interesting. Every business has its little secrets, huh?"

Gavin was silent, nervously watching for other cabs and police cars, wondering if he should skip this one, let the guy go free. Yeah, that would be best. It was now only important to escape!

When he came to the building, he turned into the drive which curved to the parking lot at the rear. The building was dark, he noted as he descended the ramp and entered the lot.

"Down at the other end," said his passenger. "It's that white Buick parked on the left-hand side."

When Gavin braked beside the car he knew something was phony because the Buick was a good five years old and the U-drive-it people did not rent old cars. By then

it was too late. The man had jammed a gun in his back, ordered him to douse the lights, and was demanding his money.

"If you're for real," Gavin groaned, "this is one for the books! Some people are accident-prone, but me—I just get robbed all the time!"

"Never mind the gab. Just keep your mouth shut and fork it over. C'mon, c'mon!"

Gavin gave him the bills from his wallet. Well, there was still nearly five hundred in the case, and thanks be for small favors.

"Okay," said the gunman, "now you can get out."

He could reach for the .45, but it was a long gamble and not worth the risk. He got out.

"Now open the trunk."

"The trunk? There's nothing at all in the trunk, buddy. It's empty."

"Yeah, but in a couple of seconds it won't be. Open it!"

Gavin turned the key, and the lid sprang up.

"Thought you said the trunk was clean, wise guy. What's in the case?"

"Couple of sandwiches and a thermos I always bring along," Gavin told him, remembering how it used to be.

"We'll see about that. Toss it over."

Reluctantly Gavin pitched the case to his feet.

"Now," said the gunman, "suppose you climb in the trunk."

"You're not gonna lock me in *there*, are ya?"

"Don't worry, someone will get you out when the electronics people come to work in the morning—if you make enough noise. Anyway, it buys me some time."

"Ahh, now listen," Gavin said desperately, "I may not live in there until morning! I can't stand to be cooped up in a small space. So help me, I'll panic and die! Then you'll have a murder rap on your hands!"

The gunman hesitated. He seemed on the verge of relenting. Then he said, "A lotta cabbies were locked in trunks and came out okay. I read about it in the papers. Now hurry it up! You want a bullet or the trunk?"

Gavin sent him a last pleading look, turned, and climbed in. The lid came down sharply. Soon he heard the Buick start up and move away. He was alone in a vacuum of absolute stillness, smothering in tomblike confinement.

For a few moments he lay supine, taking slow, deep breaths, trying to keep his mind a blank, his emotions in control. Then, caught in a slowly mounting wave of fear, Gavin kicked mightily and repeatedly in the area of the lock. He was rewarded by the thunderous applause of metal holding fast.

He began a frantic gulping for air as his imagination expanded to the edge of hysteria. It was like waking up in your coffin six feet down—couldn't move, couldn't breathe! The thought made him cry out as he beat on the steel. He called insanely for Mary Ann, saying her name over and over.

At last he caught a thread of logic and followed it to a conclusion. If he were to survive, he would have to still his panic, quiet his fear. So he would lie at ease, and he would think of other things—like about Mary Ann and all their good times past, and yet to come, and his first look at their baby's picture.

In the morning he would shout and pound, and someone would come and let him out. With the fiction that he was leaving to make his report to the police, he would slip away. After wiping his prints and retrieving the .45, he would quickly ditch the cab—and vanish.

The gunman in the aging Buick was having some thoughts of his own as he approached the rooming house in which he plotted a variety of dark schemes. He was congratulating himself upon an astonishing haul—the combined cash from the cabbie's wallet and case coming to over five hundred green ones.

His joy was somewhat clouded, however, by a small doubt. The cabbie really seemed petrified at the prospect of being closed away in the trunk. If a guy lost his cool in such tight quarters and went berserk, wasn't it possible that he could die? With nothing to lose, why should he accept the odds of fate on a murder one?

In another minute he was dialing the cab company from a phone booth.

"... You say the driver is locked in the trunk of his cab!" cried the operator.

"That's right, ma'am. In the parking lot behind the Pacific Coast Electronics Building, off the Coast Highway near El Segundo."

"Can you tell me the cab number, sir?"

"How would I know! A cab is a cab. There's only one on the lot!"

"Thank you, sir. I'll report it to the police immediately! May I have your name?"

"I think not," he said, "on the grounds that it might tend to incriminate me."

Chuckling, he cradled the receiver.

LEGACY OF OFFICE

by Rog Phillips

"Not only have there been seventeen *known* murders during Sam Black's twenty-two years as sheriff of this county," Fred Ahern's voice sounded in a ringing summation from the ancient radio in the corner of the sheriff's office, "not only have no arrests been made on *any* of those murders to this day, but on top of that it is common knowledge that Sam Black's deputy, Walter Lovewell, has shot and killed six men, two of them just four months ago, men who should have been arrested and brought to trial, men who *may have been innocent*."

"Golly, Mr. Black," deputy Walter said unhappily as the radio droned on, "it'll be my fault if you don't get reelected, but I had to kill those men or they'd a killed me. If you lose your job, Mr. Ahern is sure to fire me the first thing he does."

"Don't go crossing bridges before you come to them, Walter," Sam said quietly. "Ahern's just making politics. He knows if he wins he can't get a better deputy than you. He knows you killed those men because you had to, and don't you try telling him different."

"Why would I tell him different?" Walter asked. "They made me kill them, all eight of them."

"Six, Walter. Six," Sheriff Black said.

"Oh yes, six," Walter said. "Sometimes I fergit."

"A vote for me," the radio said, "is a vote for modern law enforcement. All I ask is that you turn out and vote!"

"I'm going out," Sheriff Black said abruptly. "You mind the shop till I get back, Walter."

Outside, he got behind the wheel of the sleek 1962 patrol car. He sat there without starting the motor for several minutes, feeling lost and alone, like a father must feel when his little girl is suddenly a woman or his little boy is suddenly a man.

His town was, suddenly, grown up. He hadn't really paid any attention, and it caught him by surprise, leaving him slightly bewildered. He should have known. A man's salary isn't doubled, then doubled again, and doubled a third time in the space of five years to keep that man

happy. It was to attract a better man to the job. He could see that now. And Fred Ahern was that man, city-bred, FBI-trained. Ahern was going to win. Then what would become of Walter? What would happen to Martha and Einar Johnson? The widow Larkin? And all the others? Ahern would go after all those unsolved murders and no doubt get killed himself. He wouldn't have the good sense to leave well enough alone.

Promptly at eight A.M., the door opened, and the newly elected sheriff walked in, completely uniformed and with a modern-type badge. He frowned and said with some irritation, "I didn't expect to see you here, Sam."

"I reckon not, Mr. Ahern, after all the things you said about me in your campaign." Sam Black made no move to get up from the chair behind the battered desk. "However, I thought it only proper that I be here to turn the job over to you proper. Least I can do. Besides, I wanted to talk to you."

"Fine, Sam," Ahern said. He wondered how to dislodge the ex-sheriff from the desk that was his now, then decided to sit in another chair and wait things out. In a gesture of friendliness he added, "Just call me 'Fred,' Sam. And don't take the things I said in my campaign too seriously. You know politics."

"I know," Sam said, "but just between you and me, with no one around to hear it, a lot of what you said is true. Maybe I should never have been sheriff in the first place. I've got the wrong attitude to be one, and I'm the first to admit it—in private."

"You've been a good sheriff in my books, Sam," Ahern said.

"No I ain't!" Sam said with a flash of temper. "You know those seventeen murders you harped about on the radio?"

"What about them?" Ahern said, looking away.

"I solved 'em," Sam said, "every last one of them. But I never made any arrests—and I'll deny I told you that under oath if I have to."

"Why?" Ahern asked after he got over his surprise.

"Why are people arrested?" Sam countered. "To keep them from doing something again? To make them sorry they did it? What if they won't do it again in a million years? What if they couldn't be any sorrier they did it if

they were locked up a hundred years? To punish them? What if they punish themselves more than the state ever could? To rehabilitate them? Does it rehabilitate a good blacksmith to learn how to be a carpenter in the state pen? Or take a child, what if it just doesn't understand something, and as soon as it is explained to him properly he won't do it again?"

"How could you be sure of such things, Sam?" Ahern said. "It takes a judge and jury to decide a man's guilt. It takes psychologists and parole boards to determine if the guilty person is ready to face society again. Do you mean to say you set yourself up above the law you were sworn to uphold?"

"Your judges and juries and doctors and parole boards are sometimes wrong," Sam said. "Sometimes it doesn't take five minutes to know. When you know deep down that you're right, why wreck a person's life?"

"And you've been right seventeen times?" Ahern asked in disbelief.

"More'n that," Sam said, looking up at the ceiling. "Nineteen times, at least."

"Nineteen killers walking free in this county, and you know who they are?" Ahern said. "I don't believe it!"

"Neither would a grand jury if you tried to tell them I admitted to it," Sam said. "And you couldn't convict a one of 'em. I destroyed the evidence." His eyes twinkled.

"I imagine you did a good job of that," Ahern said, nodding. "Tell me, Sam, do—do all these nineteen killers know you know they killed someone?"

"Oh, sure," Sam said.

"Do they know each other?" Ahern said.

"Of course they do," Sam said. "But wait, I see what you mean. No, they don't know each other that way. Only I know who they are. They have a suspicion that they aren't the only one I know about, of course."

"Who are some of them, Sam?" Ahern said with a disarming smile.

"It wouldn't do you any good to know, Fred," Sam said. "You'd go after one of them, they'd all know I gave you the name. How'd you like eighteen unknown killers convinced they had to kill you right away? You'd be dead before you knew it."

"I thought you said they'd never kill again," Ahern said.

"They won't if they're left alone, and that's the truth," Sam Black said. "But even you wouldn't stop at killing a man to save your own life. Neither would they."

"Some of them might," Ahern said. "Murderers have been known to be glad when they are finally caught."

"I know that," Sam said, "but not nineteen out of nineteen. I'll give you an example of one who'd kill you. Last year we had a killing, a traveling salesman. He was found north of town in his car, but he hadn't been killed in his car."

Ahern nodded. "That's one I think you could have solved."

"Solve it, hell," Sam Black said. "I'm the one who put the body in the car and drove it to where it was found. I know who done it because he called me and told me, and I went out and took care of the body for him. Should I have arrested him and brought him to trial? And have everybody in the whole state know that Martha Johnson had been assaulted by the dead man? That's all that arrest and trial would have accomplished. Einar would never have been convicted. Or take juvenile crime—"

"So Einar Johnson killed the salesman," Ahern said in smug triumph. "That gives me something to start on."

"I didn't say . . . I did, didn't I?" Sam said weakly. "But there's only your word for it, and I'll deny I said it under oath."

"And I'll state under oath that you did say it," Ahern said. "I've met the Johnsons. Mrs. Johnson couldn't stand up under a good cross examination on the stand. You'll be a convicted perjurer, and the whole thing will come out—one way or another."

"If you live that long," Sam said. "My guess is you won't live out your first day in office."

"I think I will, Sam," Ahern said. "First thing I'm going to do is lock you up as an accessory."

"I was afraid you would think of that," Sam said unhappily. "That will get you killed quicker'n anything else you could do. I won't be free to talk some sense into those who would come to get you."

Fred Ahern was silent for several moments. "I'm a reasonable man," he said finally. "I can see how it might be impossible to find a jury that would convict Einar Johnson—so no good would be accomplished by arresting

him. If you're so positive about the other eighteen murderers, why not tell me about them?"

"I'll tell you about one," Sam said. "The widow Larkin. She was one of the first, about twenty years ago."

"Mrs. Larkin?" Ahern said, shocked. "She did the alterations on my uniform, and she refused to take a cent!"

"You ought to pay her," Sam said. "She has to earn her living sewing. It ain't right not to pay her."

"I tried," Ahern said. "I even left it on the table, but she followed me out to the street and insisted I take it back. Who did she kill?"

"Her husband. He beat her up when he was drunk, and didn't let her put a foot off the farm in seven years before she got desperate enough to kill him. She had pains that were driving her out of her mind. She begged him to get a doctor for her, and he wouldn't. He said she'd be better off dead. And she would have been dead in another couple of months, because she had a tumor. He slapped her down in the barn, and when he turned his back, she grabbed the pitchfork and drove it into his back. Now, who else will she ever kill? What good would it do to arrest her?"

"I would've made out it was an accident, but Jeb Larkin staggered out to the road with the pitchfork sticking out of his back, and Lash McCalmont—who's dead now—found him in time to hear Jeb say three words. 'Wife; barn; killed.' When Lash found her, she was covered with bruises. The doc—he's dead now too—had to operate on her for the tumor. I put it down in the books to fit the evidence—some tramp killed Jeb and beat up Mrs. Larkin. Of course, that way it had to be left as an unsolved murder. I couldn't make a goat out of some innocent tramp. The doc and I convinced the widow that was the best way. And it is, too. People don't ever look at her like they know she killed somebody. I hope you can keep from looking at her that way next time you take her some sewing to do." Sam reached quickly at a fly that was buzzing near his head, and missed. "Or are you going to arrest her to show the people how good you are at solving old unsolved murders?"

Fred Ahern watched the fly buzz angrily up toward the ceiling.

"I don't know, Sam," he said, suddenly tired. "What else can I do? It's up to the courts to decide whether

she was justified or not. You should have let it take its proper course under the law. You should have done that with all—nineteen, did you say? What would you do if Mrs. Larkin married again, Sam? Wait for her to kill her second husband before doing anything?"

"Probably," Sam said. "It's been twenty years. What does the law do? The worst she could have got would have been life, for second-degree murder. She could have been out in seven years. Then the law wouldn't bother her until she committed her second murder. It isn't likely she would murder again. Not unless the man she married locked her in the cellar and beat her regularly. Then she might."

"Well, so far it isn't bad," Ahern said. "Tell me about the others."

"They aren't all that simple and clear-cut," Sam Black said.

The newly elected sheriff waited patiently. The fly droned in lazy circles in the center of the room.

"Not all murderers are grown-ups," Sam said, taking out a battered briar pipe and a tobacco pouch. "When a fourteen-year-old kid deliberately murders someone, and you find out that it's his second murder, you'd think you had a good case of someone who ought to be put away for the rest of his life. But suppose he just plain misunderstood something, and all you had to do was explain it to him and he'd be all right from then on? What good would it do to arrest him? What would it accomplish?"

"What could a child possibly misunderstand that would cause him to commit murder?" Ahern asked.

"That's what I asked myself," Sam said, filling his pipe. "It was in 1950." He lit his pipe. "Bob Hendershot owned a blacksmith and welding shop where the new bank building is now. Anvil fell on him, crushing his skull. All the appearances of an accident. In fact, a customer had just stepped out of the place when it happened. Bob's helper, the fourteen-year-old kid, came running out and yelling for help before the customer could get in his truck. It was a two-hundred-pound anvil, and it had apparently been stored up in the loft and had taken that moment to fall.

"There were marks in the dust in the loft where it had been. The position of the corpse and the anvil were compatible with it falling, if Bob managed to stagger a few

steps before he died. I couldn't see any other explanation at the time. After the body was gone and I was alone, I started looking around. Just routine.

"I found a piece of rope with fresh blood on it, coiled up neatly on a hook where it belonged. I climbed up into the rafters and found where the block and tackle had been hooked to hoist up the anvil to where it could be tied to a beam with a slip knot in such a way that the end of the rope went down out of sight where it could be pulled loose when Bob was standing in the right place. It was cold-blooded murder, and the only one who could have done it was the boy. I would have gone to his home and arrested him right then, but the whole thing struck me as rather odd. Fourteen-year-old boys don't plan murders in a cunning fashion that way; they commit sick murders like shooting their pa because he won't let them go to a show, or a neighbor woman because they were mad and had to kill somebody. This one planned his murder, and I would have said he planned it with previous experience. It had the feel of previous experience. Know what I mean?"

Ahern nodded and said, "Spotting the anvil above where the blacksmith always stood under certain circumstances. Taking a calculated risk on the rope not being noticed if it were coiled up where it belonged. It smacks of previous success in murder." He nodded again.

"I didn't have to think about it to guess who the previous victim had been," Sam said. "Six years before, the boy's uncle had been found dead at the bottom of a fifteen-foot hole up in the hills west of town. He had died of compound fractures and exposure. The doc estimated he had been trapped in that hole for a week before he died, with a broken right arm and left leg. At the time, I had assumed it had been an accident. I went back and took another look. Six years had passed, but not much had changed. I asked myself, how could an eight-year-old boy get a two-hundred-and-forty-pound man to fall into a hole miles off the beaten path?"

"That would have been in 1944, wouldn't it?" Sheriff Ahern asked. He looked thoughtful when Sam Black agreed.

"There was an elm tree near the hole with a long branch directly over the hole, but about ten feet above the ground," Sam continued. "If a kid climbed up there to

get away from a man and that hole was covered like a jungle trap, the man might jump for the kid and fall through into the hole. But how could a kid make a man jump for him? By making the man mad. Then I remembered something that had puzzled Doc. The corpse had had splotches on its back, chest, and stomach that could have been small bruises inflicted before death and partly healed up. A kid could have made a grown man go after him simply by throwing rocks at him and running, and pelting the man with rocks if he turned his back and tried to get away. Cold-blooded—but so was digging that hole for a trap. It would have taken an eight-year-old boy a month to dig such a deep hole. There was no question now that the spot where the hole had been dug had been chosen for its isolation, and to be under that branch. A man wouldn't be killed by falling into the hole, but he couldn't climb out and he couldn't raise help by shouting."

"And you still didn't arrest the boy now that you knew he had cold-bloodedly plotted and carried out two murders," Ahern said.

Sam said, "He wasn't going anyplace. Besides, I didn't know why he had done it yet."

"For the pleasure and excitement," Ahern said. "He was a psychopathic murderer."

"No," Sam said. "If he had been a grown man I would agree with you. But not a child. Anyway, I had what could be a lead to the motive in each case. The boy's baby sister had died a year before he killed his uncle, and the blacksmith's wife had died a year before he killed him."

"Two more murders!" Fred Ahern said.

"No," Sam said. "Baby was five years old, and she died from a dried bean getting stuck in her windpipe. Bob Hendershot's wife died in childbirth. They are similar only in having happened about a year before the boy killed each man—his uncle, and his summer employer. The lead to the motive lies in the boy, the uncle he killed, the employer he killed, and the *effect of those previous deaths* on all of them.

"Let's consider how Baby died. She was playing alone in the cyclone cellar which was used to store food like spuds and dried beans. She was stuffing beans up her nose, and one went down into her windpipe. How often

does a five-year-old girl die that way? How would she get the idea to stuff beans up her nose? There's only one way I know, for an adult to tell her not to do it. The uncle could have told her that."

"Told her and her brother," Ahern said. "The boy knew his uncle was responsible, and decided to kill his uncle for revenge."

"I thought of that," Sam said, "but it doesn't fit as a motive. What we have is two men, one of whom feels he is responsible for a little girl's death, and one who feels responsible for his wife's death—and a boy with an unknown misconception which makes him feel it is his duty to kill them. That's the way he killed both of them. Like a Boy Scout, not a murderer."

"It wasn't murder; not to the boy. It was the killing of a man ridden by a strong feeling of guilt. A man who, perhaps, wanted to die. At least, the boy thought they wanted to die—and he accommodated them. Once I reached that stage of understanding, I knew I was right and I knew how the boy arrived at his misconception. So I went and had a man-to-man talk with him and explained things to him."

"Just like that?" Ahern asked.

"Just like that," Sam said. "Oh, I knew he didn't agree with me a hundred percent, but he agreed with me enough to keep him from killing again. Also, by that time, I had several killers in my string, each one thinking he or she was the only one. I discussed the boy's problem with each of them so they would all keep an eye on him. You'd be surprised how sympathetic one murderer can be toward another murderer's problem. None of them had murdered for gain or any selfish motive, but only out of desperation or to avenge a terrible wrong to a loved one. Exposure and acquittal or imprisonment would have wrecked their lives and accomplished nothing. Here was a boy they could understand and watch over, a sincere boy, an honest boy. They still watch over him. He doesn't know they do, but if anything happened to him, I think they would kill the one who did it."

Fred Ahern watched the fly droning aimlessly around the room. Sam Black knocked the dottle from his pipe against the side of his chair and put the pipe back in his pocket.

"Just what was this poor misunderstood child's miscon-

ception?" he asked in carefully controlled tones. You could sense the effort.

"Well," Sam said, "in order to understand that, you have to know his father. A bitter, cynical man inside. A man who goes to church and sings louder than anyone else—for business reasons. A man whose private philosophy is expressed in catch phrases. When he sees a pretty girl, he says, 'I hope *she* dies young.' When someone dies who could have been saved if they had gone to the doctor in time, he says, '*Wanted* to die but didn't have guts enough to do it himself.' He doesn't really mean anything by it, but it makes a pattern, and the boy grew up listening to that pattern and came to believe some of it. Especially that part about some people wanting to die and not having guts enough to do it themselves."

"Who is his father?" Ahern asked. "Or don't you think I can find out from what you've told me?"

Sam Black blinked thoughtfully. "That's right," he said. "I told you too much. Well, the harm is already done, so I might as well tell you. His father is—or was until 1947, when Offerham set up his business—the only undertaker in town."

Fred Ahern sat up straight. "Then . . . ?" he said.

Sam nodded. "The boy I've been talking about is my deputy, Walter. Your deputy now. He's never quite gotten over the idea that people who really want to die should be accommodated. It makes him a mite quick on the trigger sometimes, but he's a good deputy and I hope you aren't planning on firing him. He might mistake your reasons. And I hope you won't try to arrest him and bring him to trial. You couldn't get a conviction on what you might say I said, and it might make some people think you plan on going after them next."

Sam Black stood up and stretched. He felt uncomfortable in his church-going suit after so many years in uniform. The fly, alarmed at the outstretched fists, switched to evasive, gyrating flight patterns from long experience in evading flyswatters. Its droning sounded angry.

"I'll be going now, Fred," Sam said. "Be good to Walter. He's worried you might fire him, from what you said about him in your political campaign." Sam winked at Fred Ahern. "Like you told me, it was just politics. Wasn't it?"

The door opened, and the deputy came in from the street. He was tall and broad-shouldered under his uniform. There was a toothpick between his lips and a contented look in his eyes. A smile wreathed his face as he looked at the ex-sheriff, Sam Black, but it became slightly uncertain as his gaze switched to the new sheriff.

"Have a good breakfast, Walter?" Sam asked.

"Sure did, Mr. Black," Walter said. "Four eggs, a slab of ham, a quart of milk, and three cups of coffee. I'm rarin' to go. That is . . ." He looked hopefully at Fred Ahern.

"I've been telling Mr. Ahern what a good deputy you've been," Sam Black said, stepping out from behind the desk.

"Then I get to keep my job?" Walter said excitedly.

"I don't know anyone I'd rather have—on my side," Ahern said, his eyes on Walter's holstered revolver.

"I'll be going now," Sam Black said gruffly. "G'bye, Walter, Mr. Ahern." He walked past them to the door with shoulders straight under his suit of blue serge, his gray head held high. Without a backward glance he opened the door and went out.

DIARY TO DEATH

by Neil M. Clark

August 1. Yesterday was my wedding day—the second time out. I am forty-two. Gary Field, the congenital misogynist, threw his hands up when he heard, and said, “Any marriage is an ungodly gamble, Frank. You were lucky the first time. But twice!” he shook his cynical head. “However, I wish you luck.”

“Thanks, killjoy,” I told him. “Have a cigar.”

I do think I’ve had luck. After the surprise, shock, and mystery of Evelyn’s sudden passing, I hadn’t thought of remarrying. But I really am lucky.

The ten-day riverboat trip that I took for a rest brought it off. Most of the passengers were couples. Blanche and I, being unattached singles, were assigned places at the same table. When I learned that she was recently widowed, and as lonely as I, it made a bond. We found it easy to talk.

There was an upper deck and moonlight, soft, warm nights; the perfume she used Lights ashore in the houses we drifted past, cars’ headlights appearing and reappearing distantly like fireflies, the soothing rhythm and splash of the old boat’s paddlewheels—all created a kind of magic. When, by chance, our hands touched, the thrill was like that of young love found again, and I found myself suggesting marriage.

“Oh no,” she laughed softly, “we don’t know a thing about each other.”

“We’ve had a week to find out the important things.”

“Marriage is for years.”

“Will you be different a month from now?”

“Of course. I don’t always wear my company manners. I can be a vixen.”

“And you’ll find I’m a wife-beater.”

But she wouldn’t say a quick yes. We danced. She said I danced divinely. She was soft to hold, and her scent maddening. My proposal was not mere summer madness, and I pressed her for an answer. “There are a lot of things I’d have to know first,” she said.

“Ask me.”

"I expect you're a pretty good liar." So she was brutally frank. "How do I know you aren't one of these fortune hunters—after me for my money?"

"Do you have money?"

"A fair amount."

"Then I am a fortune hunter, provided you go with it."

She smiled, but she was canny. "Frank," she said, "I learned long ago that a woman has to be mercenary. You see, I have been married not once, but twice. The first experience was brutal and terrifying. I married, I thought, for love and supposed the money would take care of itself somehow. It didn't. My husband could never hold a job—or wouldn't—so we quarreled and fought, always about money, and love died. When John was killed in an automobile accident, I was actually relieved. Having learned how important money is, I resolved never to marry again. I started a small business of my own and did all right. But I was persuaded to change my mind. My second husband was a gentleman, and well off. We were very happy together. It's a little hard for me to think I could be that lucky again. Do you see? That Bert had to die—" She choked, and couldn't go on.

I was very much affected. "I understand perfectly," I said. "You have all my sympathy. I can only say that I would try to be to you all that you hope for."

"I think you mean it," she said gently.

A door had been opened, and I made up my mind to go through it. I told her exactly how my affairs were fixed. It was a curious way to make love, but I told her that with the family home and several rental properties (which, with some money, came to me through Evelyn) plus my own accumulations, I was worth in the neighborhood of \$200,000; and I gave her good evidence I wasn't lying. Frankness encouraged frankness from her too. She said she owned stocks and bonds worth around \$250,000, and I won't say I was displeased to hear it. We had this talk, not under a mad July moon, but soberly in broad daylight, like businessmen planning a deal.

"Poverty has always frightened me, Frank," Blanche said. "I know it shortened my mother's life. It is comforting to me, and I hope to you too, to know that together we can count on upwards of half a million dollars."

That was how she said, "Yes."

I hadn't figured the totals; she had. She is surprisingly

good with figures, in complete contrast to Evelyn, who was a featherhead that way and made the ungodliest messes of her checking account.

Blanche and I were equally frank about other things. The matter of families came up. When it turned out that neither of us has children or other very close relatives, she raised a point which wouldn't have occurred to me to bring up: did I think it was wise, she asked, under the circumstances, for a husband and wife to own everything in joint tenancy? Could there be a stranger subject for two newly engaged people to discuss? She made it seem sensible. "Bert and I did it that way," she explained. Bert was her recent husband. "Not, of course, that I had much then to add to what he had, but it simplified inheritance-tax procedure, he said, and had other advantages."

I admitted it was something I didn't know too much about, but would be glad to follow the advice of my lawyer, John Hannegan.

Yes, I think this is one marriage that really got off on the right foot. Moonlight *and* money! Tonight I feel a solid return of contentment and happiness. The future that seemed to have drawn in so close and cloudy has brightened and opened up endlessly once more.

September 15. It is pleasant to be back in the laboratory with campus and business associates, and to resume the routines of workaday life and research. So many things happen here! Dr. Inigo mentioned a curious incident which happened while I was gone. We discovered some time ago that local rattlesnakes never eat the local salamanders we are studying, even though the little newts look like a delicacy for snakes. Out of curiosity, Inigo put one of the salamanders in with a rattlesnake recently sent him from Oklahoma. The snake gobbled it up, and within a remarkably short time was dead. We'll have to conclude, it seems, that local snakes have learned by experience that we have a special breed of deadly salamanders here, and leave the critters alone; foreign snakes, of course, don't know. The evidence is now overwhelming that the salamanders' toxin is not only phenomenally powerful, but also, most curious of all, it is molecularly identical with the toxin of the pufferfish, which, according to the literature, is a fairly frequent cause of death in Japan and is used sometimes as a means of committing suicide, and even for playing something resembling "Russian rou-

lette"—*bang! bang!* Who discharges the one loaded chamber of the gun when he points it at his forehead and pulls the trigger?—who eats the morsel of poison pufferfish? *Whoosh!* There are areas connected with the identity of this poison generated by entirely different and far-removed species, which will have to be explored. It will be interesting. I cannot begin to forecast what conclusions we'll come to, but medical men working with us think there may be revolutionary results in the field of neurosurgery.

Blanche continues to be a completely delightful companion and affectionate wife. I couldn't ask for a better one. I keep discovering new facets in her character. It turns out she is a fine bridge player, near tournament level, I should think. She and I played with a New York couple recently. They were expert too. I felt outclassed, and spent a good part of the evening being dummy. When the score was added, it turned out that Blanche and I were winners by the surprising amount of \$125. I was embarrassed and would gladly have refused their check, settling for a pleasant evening. Blanche chided me a little for that when we were alone.

"We won it honestly, didn't we?" she asked.

"Thanks to you," I agreed.

"You did all right too, honey. Sometime I'll have to straighten you out a little on the Gerber convention—showing your aces. The Fords would have taken our money if they had won, wouldn't they?"

"I guess so." I didn't entirely agree, but I saw no sense in getting into an argument over a trifle. Looking back to the early days with Evelyn, and the dozens of little things we had lovers' spats about, it seems marvelous to me that Blanche and I have never yet had anything like a real quarrel. We seem ideally matched.

October 27. Blanche has finished converting everything we own to joint tenancy, as we decided. She handled the stock certificates through her broker. John Hannegan did the rest. I thought he was a little sticky about it. "You want it as tenants in common," he asked, "or WROS?"

"What's that?" I asked.

"Rights of survivorship. Survivor," he snapped, "owns it all."

"That way, naturally," I told him.

He shook his head a little. But that's the way we did

it. Now, either can legally use the other's money, and if one of us should die suddenly—heaven forbid!—it would belong to the other. John wasn't enthusiastic. He pointed out what he called some risks, but what it amounted to, I thought, was his feeling that Blanche and I haven't known each other long, and we ought to wait awhile.

"I know as much about her as she knows about me," I pointed out.

He has the cautious, lawyerly point of view, I should say. I simply pooh-poohed his ideas. I am perfectly happy with the arrangement, and Blanche, who is actually the larger contributor to the pot, seems delighted. We are settling down into a contented, quiet routine, with not too many social complications, a way of living that suits us both. We have occasional cocktails with friends, but pretty much keep to ourselves. Not much bridge. I like it that way. I think it helps my health. Those nervous-stomach upsets that used to be troublesome seem to have disappeared.

November 18. An extraordinary letter came today. It would be upsetting if it were not obviously the product of someone pathologically evil-minded or monumentally jealous. There can be no other explanation. Probably it was written by a woman. It was typed and unsigned, and it follows what I imagine is a typical poison-pen pattern. It is beyond me to conceive how any human being, if sane, could fall low enough to write anything so vicious, or even generate the hatred to prompt it. The writer had no facts, merely innuendos, and took this line:

That sweet face and cuddly manner get you, don't they? Has it occurred to you to find out how long her previous husbands lasted after she hooked them?

The writer is off her rocker or has her facts wrong. She writes as if Blanche had had a number of husbands. She has only had two, and she has told me about both marriages.

Where the signature should have been, there was: *A near relative of one of her victims (done out of \$50,000)*. Such a thing is beneath contempt and beyond understanding. I burned the letter and envelope. The postmark, I noticed, was Denver, where Blanche used to live. Someone there must hate her bitterly; I can't imagine why. The matter is so outrageous that I did not, and never will, breathe a word about it to Blanche. She might be able to

name the writer, but the letter would just upset and grieve her.

The writer's hints kept popping up in my head all day, demanding answers, though I willed them not to. I must have seemed preoccupied at dinner. I hope Blanche didn't notice anything, or if she did, put it down to office worries. It is strange, and rather frightening, to think how a drop of libelous ink can smear up a person's thinking. It spreads like a cancer, against any logic or persuasion. It's a little like that salamander toxin of ours. Those mouse experiments showed that a mere two-thousandth of a gram of the refined stuff is a lethal dose for an average-sized man. When I reflect that a gram is only about fifteen times a grain, and a grain was originally adopted as a standard because it is the weight of an average grain of wheat, it becomes fantastic to think how small an amount of something evil, a lie, a false rumor, or an unfounded suspicion, can give a twist to a person's thoughts. Thank heaven, my deep love for Blanche allows no suspicion of her to take root.

December 6. Things are all right. I feel fine again this evening. While I was fixing the drinks I was thinking how pleasantly we live. The only household task at which I am any good is preparing our modest drinks and snacks. Blanche says she never knew anyone who does it so well. She even leaves it up to me to make the dips, and that's a task I take pride in, and enjoy. She loves all seafoods, and especially likes my clam dip. She asked me what I put in it to make it taste that way, but I laughed and told her to mind her own business.

"Leave me one little secret of my own, my dear," I said.

The recipe isn't out of the ordinary, but I do put in a couple of things which give it, in my opinion, a pleasant piquancy. Blanche is a little greedy about it; I have known her to finish off what's left in the bowl instead of taking dessert. It goes well with our favorite drink, another specialty of mine. Some folks would call it a Pansy, I guess, but I call it a Frank Edwards Special, and some of our friends demand it when they drop in. The proportions are what make it or spoil it.

I heard today that I have to go to Denver after Christmas, to address a special ACS group. I asked Blanche if

she would go with me, but she said the talks would be over her head, and there was nothing else for which she cared to go. Anyway, there is some woman thing here that she's a member of, and they'll be having an important year-end meeting about then.

These meetings are a chore and time-consuming. I'll confess I was rather glad at Blanche's decision. A brief separation at this time may be good for both of us, provide a breathing spell, and give us an opportunity to review our life together so far, and get a better perspective on it and each other for the future.

December 16. Another of those damned letters came today. I was sure that was what it was going to be, when I saw the Denver postmark. Remembering how the last one upset me, I was tempted to destroy it without opening it, but decided it was probably better to find out how vile the writer could be. It was as bad or worse than the first. Again there was no signature, and the contents strengthened my conviction that both letters were written by an unbalanced and fiendishly jealous woman. As before, there was nothing definite, just hints and innuendos:

If you are ever in Denver, see Lieutenant Jagers at police headquarters. He knows things it might pay you to find out.

Naturally I'd never think of stooping so low. And of course I immediately burned the letter and said nothing about it to Blanche.

December 20. Damn! Those old stomach pains seem to be returning. Before, the doctor thought it was ulcers caused, he said, by grief and worry. But what have I got to grieve or worry about now? Since knowing Blanche, I thought I was all through with that kind of stuff.

December 28. I shouldn't have done it. I never should have gone near him. Things like this happen to others, not me. Having an afternoon in Denver free, I dropped in at headquarters and did what I was firmly resolved not to, asked to see Lieutenant Jagers. I should have stayed in my hotel room and soaked my head!

Jagers does not fit my idea of a policeman. He is a scholarly type—tall, lean, with a deeply lined face, slow-talking, and stern-eyed. A devoted man, I'd say, to his profession; the kind that when he talks, damn it, you find yourself believing him.

I was embarrassed, but told him about the poison-pen letters, saying I considered them utterly despicable, but possibly something the police ought to know about.

"You have the letters?" he asked.

"I burned them."

"It would have been better—"

"No! I didn't want them lying around where they might fall into my wife's hands. I knew how they would hurt and grieve her. She is an adorable woman, Lieutenant, without an unworthy thought in her head. We are very happily married, and I want it to stay that way." I believe I shouted it.

"Naturally. You say my name was mentioned?"

"The second letter suggested I see you."

"What was your wife's name when you married her?"

"Blanche Henderson."

"I see." I thought I sensed some slight change in him.

"What is it you want to know, Mr. Edwards?"

"I don't know. Of course I'd like to discover the reason for those insane letters, and scotch the suspicion."

"You are suspicious?"

"Damn it, no! I have no reason to be. Quite the contrary. I love my wife. She is the most charming woman I have ever met. I—trust her absolutely, and I don't want anything to raise a shadow between us. The letters," I added, "are beneath contempt. I think the writer is a dangerous person, and I'd like to have her stopped."

"Do you mind answering a question or two, Mr. Edwards?"

"Of course not."

"They will be personal."

"Go ahead."

"You are—what is your line of work?"

"Research chemist."

"In business for yourself?"

"No."

"Are you (this sounds impertinent) a rich man?"

"Not rich. Not poor, either."

"If you don't mind telling me, it would help to know about what you were worth at the time of your marriage."

"There's no reason for not telling you, though I don't see why it's any of your business. Anyhow, it was a little

under \$200,000. Not much under. Mrs. Henderson's personal estate, in case you're thinking what I think you are, was bigger than mine. She and I went into all that very frankly. She didn't marry me for my money, nor I for hers, if that's what's in your mind."

He shook his head a little. "Have you made any changes in your property arrangements, your will or anything, since you married her?"

"No . . . except—"

"Yes, Mr. Edwards. Except?"

"Just something we talked about and agreed was common-sensible. We converted everything into a different type of ownership—joint tenancy. But what that has to do with—"

"Joint tenancy with rights of survivorship, or as tenants in common?"

"Survivorship, damnit!"

He said a strange thing: "The pattern repeats."

I exploded. "Explain that!"

He looked at me with those stern eyes, and rubbed his hand slowly across his chin. I had a curious feeling. It was some time before he spoke, and then he said, "Mr. Edwards, I'm trying to decide what I ought to say. How much, and what. I could be doing the wrong thing to say anything at all. On the other hand—"

It was chilling. "You mean—what the hell *do* you mean? Is there—some basis for those letters?"

He shook his head. "I can't answer that. I don't know."

"Then what in heaven's name do you know?"

"What we did was strictly in private. Nothing went into the record, or the newspapers."

"Nothing about what?"

"Your wife. Mr. Henderson was a man of considerable importance in this city and state, financially and politically. He had influential friends. And his death—was somewhat strange. His daughter, by an earlier marriage, found herself almost disinherited, instead of being substantially well-off, as she had expected. She took it up with her lawyer. It was handled very discreetly, but the upshot was, we were asked to look into it. We did. I had charge."

"And you found?"

"Nothing, Mr. Edwards. Nothing we could call proof."

"Proof of what, Lieutenant?"

He was silent a long moment before saying, "A managed death."

"You mean murder?" He nodded, and I was horrified. "What—what kind of proof were you looking for?"

He didn't say, at first. Then, "Frankly, Mr. Edwards, probably poison of some sort."

I was too horrified to think straight, but managed to say, "But you found—"

"As I said, nothing. Not a thing we could lay a finger on. If there was—well, a poison—she was very damned clever. There were some odd things, however, about the Henderson marriage, and her earlier ones as well, concerning property arrangements. There was that pattern."

"What the hell are you talking about, Lieutenant? There was only one previous marriage. She has told me all about that. Her first husband was no good, a thorough scoundrel. He got his hands on everything she had, and went through it. He mistreated her, and expected her to work and support him. It almost set her against marriage. Her second husband, Henderson, turned out to be entirely different. He was so good to her that she got back her faith. . . ."

Jaggers was staring at me. "Then you don't know?"

"Know what?"

"Henderson was not her second husband, Mr. Edwards. He was her fourth."

"That's a lie!" I shouted. "You're making it up. She has told me—"

He spoke quietly. "We have the records, sir. And the point I had in mind was this joint-tenancy thing. It was repeated in every case, to her considerable profit. Each of those marriages ended early and left her considerably better off financially."

"I don't believe a word of it!" I was thoroughly aroused. "My wife is a wonderful woman. I have absolute confidence in her."

"I am glad of that, Mr. Edwards. I hope it is justified, and I hope what I have said does not destroy it. For I have no proof, no proof of anything, except how many times she was married, and the financial arrangements."

I left him. I never should have gone near him. How can a man keep his mind from thinking, wondering, when lies are told him about someone he loves, no matter

how well he knows her? There can't be a word of truth in any of it. Yet. . . . How true it is that a tiny drop of doubt can discolor a man's thoughts, like a drop of ink in a glassful of water. It is utterly damnable. Blanche is lovely, loving, and lovable. Sweet. Above reproach. I must—*do*—believe she is everything I have thought her. I shall never let lies come between us. I hope.

February 9. Over a month has passed. Nothing has happened, except in my mind. I am finally able to think clearly, and to plan. Her not saying a word about those other marriages is proof enough. There was a reason for it, and a hellish one. On the surface, nothing has changed between us. How I have been able to keep up the semblance of having the same feeling for her, as always, surprises me. Do I have some sort of a devil in me too? I don't think Blanche has sensed any change in me, or if so, the reasons. I have looked squarely into my heart, and I'll be damned if I'll sit like a pigeon and be her next victim. I'll not be the nincompoop who swells her fortune to half a million filthy dollars.

Hate, I'm beginning to realize, can wear the semblance of love, with a little dissembling. I held her in my arms last night and kissed her lips. Passion was there, of its kind. But I kept thinking, *what greedy thought is nestling next to your heart now, my pretty?* What a complete ass she must take me for!

February 10. The clam dip tonight was especially tasty, she said. A slightly different flavor, she said—"exotic" was the word she used. Having a headache, I didn't eat any, or drink. No one at the laboratory is likely to miss a drop or two of the salamander toxin. And poor old bumbling Dr. Helmbach will settle for food poisoning. I hope.

SING A SONG FOR TONY

by Jack Ritchie

"Did you kill Mike Lannigan?" I asked.

"Sure," Tony answered.

"Why?"

My brother idly tested the bars of his cell. "I was hired to do it."

"Who hired you?"

"Henry Allison." Tony turned. "In case you don't connect the name, that is the governor's son."

I waited for more, but Tony just smiled.

"All right," I said finally. "I'll play along for a little while more. Why did Allison hire you?"

"Personal reasons. He didn't tell me."

"How much did he pay you?"

"How does ten thousand dollars sound?"

"Fine. Is that what you want to say in court?"

"Something like that," Tony said. "I'm depending on you to plug up any loopholes."

Tony studied me and then spoke again. "I always figured that if I got to walk to the little green door, I'd go cool and easy. But that was a dream and this is for real. Now I discover I sweat when I think about the chair."

I rapped a cigarette out of my pack. "So far I don't see how anybody can keep you from it."

"Including you? My brother who did so well in law school?"

"Including me."

He grinned suddenly. "Maybe *you* can't. But the governor's son can."

"How do you figure that?"

Tony rubbed the back of his neck. "When the cops brought me in, I kept my mouth shut like a smart boy would, but I kept thinking. First, I figure that maybe my only out from the chair is to make like a monkey when I get to court and get put down for crazy. But then I'm not so sure. Nowadays they have psychiatrists who'll swear you're sane even when they see you walking on the ceiling."

Tony smiled. "And then suddenly I get this bright neon

thought: The governor's son is going to keep me from the chair, and my little brother who lives on the West Coast is going to take care of all the details and see that the whole project runs off smooth."

The phone call from Tony's lawyer had come at four this morning, and within an hour I was aboard a plane for the Midwest.

A man met me when I landed. "Philip Walker?"

"Yes."

He extended a hand. "I'm Frank Jordan, your brother's lawyer. We'll talk in the car."

The shuttle bus took us to the parking lot, and Jordan unlocked the door of his sedan. "According to the police, it happened at the Hotel Medford in midtown. A nightclub owner named Mike Lannigan had a suite on the sixth floor. So at about two this morning, there's a commotion up there. Furniture getting thrown around, and the neighbors complain to the desk clerk. He sends up the hotel detective. The man gets up there and listens, and sure enough the neighbors are right. He's just about to knock, when he hears a shot."

Jordan backed the car out of the parking lot. "The detective is just about to break in when the door opens and out steps your brother."

Jordan's car headed for the airport gate. "According to the police, he's a little surprised by the reception in the hall, because by this time the hotel dick happens to have a gun in his hand. So Tony just puts up his hands and surrenders without making trouble."

Jordan waited for an opening in the traffic and then pulled onto the highway. "So Tony gets herded back into the suite. The place is a mess, and right in the middle of that mess is Lannigan. He's lying there with a bullet clean through his forehead and not so clean coming out the back."

"What did Tony tell the police?"

"Nothing. He kept his mouth shut."

"And what did he tell you?"

Jordan was faintly irritated. "Not a thing. He just told me to get in touch with you and have you come right away, and I did just that."

I watched a car pass us and then asked, "There was no one else in that suite besides Tony and Lannigan?"

"Nobody. There's only one door to the hall, and the house detective filled that. The suite's on the sixth floor, and nobody could have gotten in or out of one of the windows. It's sheer drop; no ledge or anything."

Jordan sighed. "And another thing, I'll have trouble getting anybody to listen to a self-defense plea. Tony had the murder weapon in his shoulder holster, and it was the only gun in the place."

I gave it a little thought. "Was the house detective the only one who saw Tony coming out of the suite?"

"Unfortunately, no. The couple next door, the ones who made the complaint, had their door open and were watching to see the entertainment. They didn't miss anything."

"What were Lannigan and Tony having trouble about?"

"Tony won't say."

Jordan kept one hand on the wheel and fumbled for his pack of cigarettes with the other. "By the way, you're supposed to use another name when you go to see Tony. He doesn't want anybody to know that you're his brother."

"Why not?"

Jordan shrugged. "I suppose, because he's in trouble, he doesn't want any of the black to rub off on you."

Now, alone with Tony in his cell, I said, "All right, Tony, tell me what this is really all about."

Tony began pacing. "I'm the boy who supplies Lannigan's club with most of his liquor. You know, the kind that isn't exactly quality, but it's got the right labels and tax stamps if you don't look too close. For maybe five years I get Lannigan his booze. But then he starts cutting his order. Naturally I get curious and check. I find that his business is just the same as usual, maybe better. So I wait until early in the morning, when I know Lannigan's going to be alone back in his hotel, and I go up to see him. 'What gives?' I ask. And he tells me that I'm being undercut by somebody from St. Louis who offers a better price. That don't sit with me, so I give Lannigan notice to quit buying out of town. But he don't see it that way, and the next thing you know we're swinging away. After a while it don't do my temper any good to find myself on the floor looking up. So I pulled the gun and used it."

"It was that simple?"

Tony nodded. "That simple. Maybe you could call it self-defense, but with the reputation I got, who's going to believe it?"

"And so for some reason you want to drag in the governor's son? Why?"

Tony stopped pacing. "In this state, and maybe in all of them, for all I know, the man who hires a killer is just as guilty as if he pulled the trigger. If the killer goes to the chair, then the man who hires him goes there too."

"And you want company?"

He waved a hand impatiently. "Look, it's like this. Both Henry Allison and I get convicted of Lannigan's murder. We both get the chair. But do you think the governor is going to let his son go to the chair? No! So he commutes his son's death sentence. But can he leave it there? No. He's got to commute mine too."

"Tony," I said. "You're wild. You're reaching way out. But just for argument's sake, what kind of a motive could Henry Allison have for wanting Lannigan dead?"

Tony's eyes gleamed. "That's what started my thoughts. The motive." He brushed some hair from his eyes. "Two weeks ago I dropped in at Lannigan's for a drink. The club was pretty crowded, just before the floor show, but I noticed this one particular table. That's where the governor's son is sitting, a little guy with glasses. I don't know he's the governor's son at the time, but somebody tells me later."

"A little guy with glasses? Is that what made you notice him?"

"So it wasn't him I noticed first. It was the girl. I still don't know who she was, but she looked like that was the first time she'd ever been in a place like Lannigan's and it might be the last. I don't mean that she looked down on anything, but you could tell she didn't seem to think the place was too interesting."

He rubbed his neck. "Well, Lannigan's got a hobby. Putting feathers in his bonnet, if you get me, and when he sees this here dame, he must have figured that here's a real pretty one for the collection. You could throw all the others away and your bonnet would still be the best in town."

"So he walks over to this table and sits down. I'm on

the other side of the room and not a lip reader, but it don't take much to see that he's not welcome. Well, this little guy don't like the familiarity or the conversation, because the next thing you know he reaches across the table and slaps Lannigan."

"Slaps?"

"Right. It sort of started out as a punch, but by the time it got to Lannigan's face, his hand was open and it turned into a slap. I don't read minds either, but my guess is that he wanted to punch Lannigan, but he suddenly realized how big Lannigan was and that there would be a hard punch coming back fast. So he sort of compromised with the slap and hoped he'd get away with it."

"Did he?"

"He didn't get punched. Lannigan just blinks and grabs the little guy by the collar and the seat of the pants and tippy-toes him all the way out of the club. The rear exit is right near, but Lannigan makes a production out of it. He takes Allison through the whole place and throws him out the front onto the sidewalk."

Tony's eyes relived it for a moment. "I followed, like a lot of the other customers did, and this Henry Allison is on his hands and knees on the sidewalk looking up at Lannigan, and I never saw anybody so scared in my life. And then Lannigan just stamps on the sidewalk, like you would to scare off a cat, and the little guy squeals and starts running. For all I know, he ran all the way home."

"What about the girl?"

"She just disappeared."

"How did you find out it was the governor's son? Somebody tell you?"

"One of the boys at the bar knew who he was and spread it."

I studied the cell bars awhile and then said, "So you want to peddle the story that the whole thing bit into Henry Allison's heart so much that he hired you to kill Lannigan?" I shook my head. "It's a straw."

"It's the only straw I got," Tony said desperately. "Look, Jimmy, I'm your brother. We maybe been walking apart the last ten years, but back on the coast we was always close. Never any arguments between you and me, and I was around when you needed me. And now I need you. You can pull this thing off for me."

I stared at my hands and said nothing.

He put a hand on my shoulder. "You worried about what happens to Henry Allison after we get our death sentences commuted? Does he spend the rest of his life in jail?" Tony smiled. "No, sir. I got that figured too. For a couple of years I'm a real good boy in the pen. I go to chapel every week. And then suddenly I announce that I can't live with it any longer. I got to tell the truth. The governor's son is innocent and the only reason I dragged him along was that I thought it would keep me out of jail. But now I see the error of my ways. I repent and I'm ready to confess. And Henry Allison gets out, no worse for wear, and maybe the clean life added to his years."

Tony watched me. "You can do it, Jimmy. You can weave this whole thing together until it holds water. You always had the working brains in the family."

I took a deep breath. "I don't know, Tony. I don't know."

His voice was soft, but to the point. "It's either that or I go to the chair. It's up to you, Jimmy."

I had been sitting on his bunk. Now I got up. "I'll look at it, Tony. Maybe I can do something. In the meantime, just keep your mouth shut and say nothing to anyone."

Outside the building, I went to the nearest drugstore phone book and looked up Confidential Investigations. I copied down the address and took a taxi to the Fairmount Building. I found the offices of O'Herne and Bradley on the fifth floor.

A secretary showed me into the office of Julius O'Herne.

I took the chair indicated. "I'd like to have a man investigated."

O'Herne, a thin, balding man, picked up a pen. "Your name, please?"

"John Smith."

He looked up and smiled faintly. "All right, Mr. Smith. What's the name of this man you would like us to keep under surveillance?"

"Henry Allison."

He wrote that down. "His address?"

"I don't know. I'll let you find that out."

"Mr. Smith," he said mildly. "There are probably dozens of men . . ."

"You might find him in the executive mansion. I'm not sure. He's the governor's son."

O'Herne lifted an eyebrow.

I glared. "I don't care who he is. If my wife thinks she can get away with . . ." I stopped and cleared my throat. "I want you to find out everything you can about Henry Allison. Put as many men on it as necessary, but I want results immediately."

That made him happy. "Of course, Mr. Smith. I'll get the wheels moving right away. Where shall we send the reports?"

"I'll be back here tomorrow and I expect to see something."

The next afternoon I cashed a personal check and went back to the Fairmount Building.

O'Herne glanced at some reports on his desk. "Well, Henry Allison doesn't live in the executive mansion. He's here in the family home in Fox Point. And, from the descriptions we've been able to get, he seems entirely unprepossessing." He looked up. "But on the other hand, you never know what women see in some . . ." He let that trail off. "Allison weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. Neutral eyes, neutral hair, neutral everything. The only accent mark on him is that he happens to be a bug on chess. Did practically nothing else but play the game when he went to college."

"Does he have to do anything for a living?"

"He has an office in his father's newspaper. He reports there on working days and makes paper airplanes. The employees are polite, but nobody needs him."

O'Herne turned over a page. "Funny thing, though. From what our men have been able to discover, he hasn't left the house for more than two weeks."

"Why?"

O'Herne shrugged. "We don't know yet. He just suddenly went into hiding. He has a section of the second floor of the Allison place all to himself, and he won't see anybody." He shoved the reports over to me. "Shall we continue the surveillance and investigation?"

I shook my head. "I've had a showdown, I mean a talk with my wife, and she promised . . ." I folded the reports and put them in my pocket. "I think I have enough information, for the time being."

O'Herne was disappointed, but bore up. "If things shouldn't work out, remember that we are at your disposal. People have always found us very helpful when-

ever they needed any material that would stand up in court. Where shall we send the bill, Mr. Smith?"

"I'll pay cash now."

I had a cup of coffee at a diner while I studied O'Herne's reports, and then I rented a car.

The Allison home was located in a northern suburb of the city. I drove slowly up the long winding driveway and stopped in front of the imposing three-story structure.

It was the kind of a place that needed, and had, a butler. He opened the door and waited politely.

"I would like to see Mr. Henry Allison."

His eyes flickered slightly. "I'm sorry, sir, but he isn't in."

"Of course," I said, and smiled. "Nevertheless, would you please tell him that Professor Rogers is here. I'm representing the University Chess Club."

The butler was firm. "Perhaps you could leave your phone number?"

I retained my smile. "I am quite positive that he would want to see me. You know how concerned he is about chess, and this is extremely important."

The butler weakened. "Perhaps something like this *would* get him out of his state. Would you wait inside, please. I'll be right back, sir."

He returned in a few minutes. "Follow me, sir."

We went up wide stairs to the second floor, down a central passage to a door on the right side. The butler tapped on the door.

It opened slightly. Henry Allison peered out. He wore glasses, and he regarded me warily. "Professor Rogers? I never heard of you."

"Understandable," I said. "I came to the university in '57. I believe you left in '56?"

Henry nodded. "That's right."

"But they still talk about you at the Chess Club. You still have many warm faculty friends there."

He flushed with pleasure. "Really? I didn't think I made much of an impression." He brushed hair from his forehead. "How is Professor Schreiber?"

"Quite well," I said. "As a matter of fact, that's why I'm here."

Henry opened the door wider. "Please come in."

I glanced about the room. It was well furnished, but

comfort seemingly had precedence over taste. This was Henry's nest, his refuge from the world. Here he was warm and safe.

"Professor Schreiber speaks about your play often," I said.

Henry still retained his flush. "He always used to say that my game lacked aggression."

"True," I said. "However, he had quite a bit of respect for your defensive play."

Henry became anxious to please. "A drink?"

"Thank you. Brandy will be fine."

He scuttled nervously about, lifting books and papers from shelves and tabletops. Finally he found a key on the fireplace mantel and unlocked the liquor cabinet. He surveyed the assortment of bottles, and had to read several of the labels before he found the brandy bottle. It was Blackwell & Teague.

He brought back two bell glasses and handed one to me. He put his on an end table, where it was soon forgotten.

I took a light green easy chair. One of the arms was badly worn. Henry could undoubtedly have replaced it, but it was probably an old friend, and Henry had so few to spare.

Henry leaned forward. "Professor Schreiber talked about me?"

"Of course. The club often goes over your best games."

Henry's heart was probably beating more rapidly than usual. "The only time Professor Schreiber ever mentioned any of my games to me was when our club met Syracuse. I lost the deciding match. My eighteenth move was Queen's Knight four and it shouldn't have been."

"But until then," I said, "your maneuvering was masterly." My eyes went about the room again. Several chessboards were set up on small tables.

Henry followed my gaze. "I like to work the puzzles in the newspapers. And I usually solve them. Most of the time, at least."

I sipped my brandy. "Henry, the members of the club are planning a presentation chess set for Professor Schreiber."

"His birthday? That's the 29th of November. I remember, because I send him a card every year. He hasn't written to me yet, but he's a very busy man, you know." Henry

got up. "I have a really fine set packed away in my bedroom closet. Perhaps the club would like to present that to him?"

"Thank you," I said. "But the club has already made its selection. However, it was felt that perhaps a few select former members would care to participate in the giving of the gift."

"Of course," Henry said. "How much would you like me to contribute?"

"Ten dollars."

"Certainly." He delved through the drawers of a desk until he found his checkbook. "Ten dollars? I'd gladly give more."

"No, we decided each one of us would contribute an identical sum. No favorites, you know. And one share comes to exactly \$10.78." I paused. "Or is it \$10.87?" I began searching through my pockets. "Today is the seventh."

He dutifully wrote that on the check and then frowned. "I thought today was the eighth?"

"I don't suppose it makes any difference," I said. "As long as the check is good. Please make it out to cash."

I continued rummaging through my pockets, and as I anticipated, Henry used the time to sign the check. He waited for further information.

I took out my wallet and began thumbing through its contents. "I'm sure I have the exact figure somewhere on me. You mentioned something about a chess set of your own?"

"Yes. Hand-carved by Evans. Would you care to see it?"

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble?"

He rose. "Of course not. I'll get it right away."

I waited until he had disappeared into the bedroom, and then quickly tore the check from the book. I sat down and carefully copied the date, the signature, and the word "cash" on the following blank. It wouldn't fool a handwriting expert, but that wasn't necessary. I put the check I had detached into my wallet.

When Henry came back, I was at one of the bookshelves examining titles.

"Here it is," Henry said. "The Evans set."

I spent ten minutes admiring the pieces and then said, "Oh, about that check. The exact sum is \$10.78."

Henry sat down, glanced at the checkbook for reorientation, and then filled in the blank lines. After he handed me the check, he indicated the nearest chess board. "Would you care for a game or two?"

I consulted my watch. "I'm really sorry, but I'm supposed to meet my wife. And I'm late as it is."

Henry said good-bye to me at the door of his suite, and I went alone back down the stairs. On the main-floor landing, I stopped before the open door of what appeared to be a study. I noticed a typewriter on a corner stand.

I made sure that I was not observed, and then slipped into the room. I inserted the check I had detached from Henry's checkbook into the typewriter. In the first blank space I inserted the figure 10,000 and below it the words Ten Thousand and 00/100.

I put the check back into my wallet and let myself out the front door.

A girl was waiting beside my car. Her eyes were cool gray, she was slim, and her hair was tawny. "So you managed to see Henry?"

I smiled. "What makes you think it was Henry I saw?"

"By simple deduction. His father lives in the executive mansion in the state capital. If you had come to see one of the servants I rather doubt that you would have used the front door." She studied me. "Henry has seen no one in two weeks. What makes you so different?"

"Why don't you ask Henry?"

"He won't see me. Especially me."

I took a guess. "Are you the girl he had with him when he went to Lannigan's club?"

Her eyes flickered. "Why should he tell you about that?"

"Couldn't I be an old friend of his?"

"Unfortunately, Henry has no friends, old or otherwise. And I'm positive you would have to be even more than a friend for Henry to unburden that particular incident." Her eyes lingered thoughtfully on my car. "Do psychiatrists have those little tags on their license plates like the other doctors have?"

I smiled. "No."

She looked at me. "I'm the girl next door, and I've known Henry since he was five years old. Is there anything I can do to help him?"

"Are you in love with him?"

"I'm fond of him. But that's all. I'm the only one who talks to him as though he matters."

"Does he love you?"

"He may think he does, but I rather doubt that he can love anybody. He can just lean on people, and want to be wanted."

"Do you know why Henry has refused to see anyone? Is it because of what happened at Lannigan's club?"

She considered, and then answered, "Henry is mortally and dreadfully ashamed of himself. He regards himself as a coward."

"And he is, isn't he?"

She regarded me coldly. "The world is full of tigers to some people. I'm sure that psychiatrists are aware of that." She appraised me again. "Did Henry send for you himself? Or was it his father?"

"I'd rather not say."

She nodded to herself. "It must have been Henry. I'm sure his father wouldn't have bothered."

"Henry and his father aren't close?"

Her voice was dry. "They've seen each other on several occasions."

"What has kept his father so busy?"

"Being an assemblyman, and then a state senator, and now governor. And he has no intention of letting the governorship be the last item in his biography." Some of the hardness left her face. "I do hope you can help Henry. I hope it isn't too late."

Then she walked away from me. I watched her go and I realized I hadn't even asked her name.

I drove back to the city jail and went to see my brother.

When I finished talking, his eyes were shining. "You pulled that off good. Did you have it planned before you went there?"

"No. I just wanted to see what Henry looked like. And then one thing followed another. But we still don't have enough. We need a couple of liars to back you. We need some witnesses who heard Allison hire you, and we don't want anybody with a record."

He rubbed the back of his neck. "Clean names are hard to come by. But there's Pete Robertson. He'll do

like I want. He has no record, but I could give him one fast if I do a little talking. Remind him of that when you see him."

"All right. Pete Robertson. Who else?"

Tony kept his brain busy for half a minute. "Gillie McMasters. No record that I know of. Gillie is the type who does things for money. I think a couple of grand would buy him."

I took Henry's check, the one for ten thousand dollars, out of my wallet. "When the police brought you here, did they search you?"

"Just patted me down and told me to empty my pockets."

I gave him the check. "Then you forgot to take this out of your watch pocket."

Tony folded it and put it away. "Do I spill the story to the cops now?"

"No. Give me time to rehearse Robinson and McMasters. We'll have them go to the police first. When you hear they've done that, then you tell your story to your lawyer."

Tony grinned. "He won't believe me."

"Nobody will. At first." I touched the bars of the cell with my fingertips. "So you spend a couple of years in jail and then tell the truth. What happens to me?"

"Nothing," Tony said. "Nobody here even knows I have a brother. You just go back to the coast and you're safe."

"Your lawyer knows about me."

"He won't talk. The people at the state bar are watching him, and he isn't going to get himself into anything he can stay out of."

"What about Gillie and Pete?"

"What do we care about them? So they get a few years for perjury."

The story made the evening edition of the next day's papers. Flanked by two cops, Henry's picture appeared on the front page. He looked lost, bewildered, and something like a child.

Five weeks later, I was in the last row of the courtroom when my brother took the stand.

District Attorney Steve Carney let Tony have his head. "Tell us when you first came into contact with Henry Allison."

"It was on the seventh of last month. Just a little after midnight. My phone rings, and it's this Henry Allison."

"He identified himself?"

"That's right. And he says that he's read a lot about me in the papers, and is it true?"

"Is what true?"

Tony looked innocent. "You know how the newspapers are. Anytime someone disappears or gets found in a car trunk, the police got nothing better to do than to pick me up and make me uncomfortable for twenty-four hours, and that gets in the papers. So I got a reputation."

The D.A. smiled. "But there's nothing to it? Then please go on."

"So this Allison comes right out and says would I take care of somebody for him. Permanently."

"How did Allison get your phone number?"

"I'm in the book. I got nothing to hide."

"So he asked if you would take care of someone permanently. What did you say?"

"I told him he was nuts."

"But you didn't hang up?"

"Uh—no. I figured no harm could come from listening."

"And what did he tell you?"

"He said that I should come over to his place right away and we could discuss the thing."

"So you went right over?"

"Well, not right away. But I was curious and wanted to find what it was all about. At the same time, I was cautious about trotting way out there alone in the middle of the night. I mean, I got a few unfriendly people who might be setting me up for something."

"So you took Pete Robertson and Gillie McMasters along for protection? Were they armed?"

Tony looked wide-eyed. "No. They're legitimate citizens and got no records. I just figured that having them with me would stop anybody with ideas. Like you could gun down one man, but you think it over when you see three."

The D.A. indicated that Tony should go on, and he continued.

"So we drive to this Allison place, leave the car on the street, and walk up to the big house. The place is dark,

but when I knock, Allison opens the door right away. I guess he must have been waiting for us."

"What time was this?"

"About one in the morning."

"You knew it was Henry Allison? You had seen him before?"

"Right." And then Tony told the courtroom the story of what had happened to Henry at Lannigan's bar.

When he finished, the D.A. said, "So Allison opened the door?"

"Yeah. But he was a little leery about Pete and Gillie being with me. So I said they were just good friends, and they wouldn't be shocked by anything he said. So he leads us up to the second floor where he's dug in, and we sit down."

Tony glanced at the jury. "I took a green chair that had a worn spot on the right arm. You'd think that anybody with Allison's money could afford something better."

"Never mind that," the district attorney said. "Go on."

"Well, this Allison gets us some brandy. Blackwell & Teague, it was. Good stuff."

The D.A. was a bit irritated by the trivia. "Go on."

"Well, Henry Allison comes right out with it. He wants me to kill Lannigan."

"Did he tell you why?"

"No. But I could figure that out. What happened at Lannigan's club must have really bothered him."

Henry's lawyer objected, and the last sentence was stricken.

The D.A. continued. "You agreed to kill Lannigan?"

"No. I played it cag . . ." Tony cleared his throat. "I told him I thought he was kidding."

"And what did he do?"

"He grabs a checkbook and fills out everything but the amount. And he tells me to name that."

"And did you?"

"Well, no."

The D.A. showed white teeth. "You suddenly realized that Robertson and McMasters were there, and you didn't like the idea of having witnesses to your transaction?"

Tony looked away. "I told Allison to forget it, and the three of us said good-bye."

"But that didn't end it?"

"No. Allison follows us all the way down the stairs, waving the check and saying that he really means it. And we're ready to go out the front door when he says, 'Wait a minute!' And he goes into a side room—it's full of books and things—and I see him put the check into the typewriter. Then he brings it back and shows it to me. He's got ten thousand dollars typed in the blank spaces."

The D.A. smiled. "That's a lot of money, isn't it? So the deal was closed?"

"No," Tony said. "I told him no deal."

The D.A.'s voice was silk. "But you *did* take the check?"

Tony looked uneasy. "I was going to tear it up later."

There was laughter in the courtroom, and even the judge smiled.

"Didn't Allison say something else? Didn't he say that if Lannigan wasn't dead by noon, the deal was off and he would stop payment on the check?"

Henry's lawyer, doing the right thing at the wrong time, rose to object and was sustained.

"All right, Mr. Walker," the D.A. said to Tony. "Go on."

"Well, we left, and I drove Gillie and Pete to a corner and left them off."

"Then you went on to Lannigan's suite in the Medford Hotel, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"To kill him?"

"No," Tony said quickly. "I was just going to tell him about it. Let him know that somebody wanted him dead and he could do what he wanted about it."

"And then tear up the check?" the D.A. asked sweetly. "But what did happen?"

Tony rubbed his hands on his trouser legs a few times. "Well, maybe I didn't tell him right, or Lannigan had a few drinks too many and wasn't thinking straight. The way he got it was that I was really there to kill him, and so he went for me." Tony looked at the jury. "I killed him in self-defense."

There was laughter again, and this time the judge banged his gavel.

When silence was restored, the D.A. turned back to Tony. "These two 'legitimate citizens,' McMasters and Robertson; why did they wait more than two days after

you were arrested before they went to the police?"

Tony shrugged. "My guess is they just didn't want to buy any trouble. But then they talked it over and decided they might as well get it off their chests."

McMasters and Robertson were called to the stand, and each one of them corroborated Tony's story—right down to the Blackwell & Teague.

Henry Allison had good lawyers, but the D.A. and his staff had the ammunition. There was no pushing aside the fact that Henry's signature was on the check. And state lab technicians proved that the typewriter in the downstairs study had been used to type in the amount. As far as motive was concerned, witnesses testified that what had happened to Henry at Lannigan's club had affected him so strongly that he had been ashamed to face anyone, and he had retreated to the second floor of his father's house, there, according to the state, to plot his revenge.

Henry, of course, denied everything. But neither he nor his lawyers could explain away the facts. The jury was out only one and a half hours and when it returned, the verdict was *Guilty*.

Henry and Tony were sentenced to die in the electric chair.

I received permission to see my brother the second day after he was transferred to the death house.

I found him enjoying a cigar. He sat on the bunk and leaned back against the wall. "This is the life."

"Did it ever occur to you that the governor might commute only his son's execution? Not yours?"

Tony grinned. "Not for a second."

I drew on my cigarette. "Where's Henry?"

Tony waved a hand. "Down the corridor. Right next to the little door."

Yes, I thought. *That's where Henry would be. Right next to the little door.*

"Quiet as a mouse," Tony said. "You'd never know he was there."

When the guard let me out of Tony's cell half an hour later, I walked down the corridor to the last cell.

Henry sat before a small table working on a chess problem. He looked up and brightened. "Hello, Professor Rogers. How did Professor Schreiber like the chess set the club gave him?"

"He was very pleased."

Henry got up. "You're the first visitor I've had."

"Besides your father?"

"He hasn't been here yet." Then he added defensively. "But he will be. I'm pretty sure of that."

I made my voice casual. "Hasn't she been here to see you yet?"

"She? Oh, Madelaine?" He looked away. "They told me yesterday that she was here. But I said I didn't want to see her."

"Why not?"

He avoided my eyes. "You must have read about it in the papers. I mean about what happened at Lannigan's club." He sighed. "You know, every man, no matter how little or insignificant he may be, still has the feeling that if the time should come, he would turn into a lion for the one he loves. My time came, but I wasn't a lion. Not even for Madelaine."

"But you love her?"

He seemed puzzled. "Would I have run away if I did?" Then he shook the thought away. "Would you have time for a few games of chess?"

I looked at the guard at my elbow. He shrugged and opened the cell door.

I played three games with Henry. I could have won every one of them. But I didn't.

When I left, I found Madelaine waiting outside the warden's office.

She was surprised to see me. "You came to see Henry?"

"I saw him."

"Will he see me?"

"No. I'm afraid not. He's still pretty much ashamed."

She sighed. "Well, at least someone has seen him. That's something."

"He expects his father," I said.

She hesitated and then said, "Henry evidently didn't tell you, but I suppose you ought to know. Henry is adopted. It's quite a family secret. Henry didn't know it himself until he was twelve. Then he happened to break a window, and his father took that delightful moment to tell him the news." She met my eyes. "By the way, I don't believe I ever did get your name."

I almost told her, but then I quickly said, "David Swenson."

I visited my brother, and Henry, regularly during the next two months.

By the end of November, Tony's cigars weren't tasting as good as before. He threw one of them on the floor. "What is the governor waiting for? A public-opinion poll?"

"Almost," I said. I watched him reach for another cigar. "Tony, there's something I've known for a couple of months, but I didn't want you to worry about it. Now I'll tell you. Henry isn't the governor's son. He was adopted."

Tony stared at me, and my words took some of the color out of his face. "Look, Jimmy, you've done some wild things for me, and so far they have worked. But they don't amount to anything unless this whole thing ends happy. There's just one week to go, and I'm getting nervous about it."

"All right," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

I drove to the state capital that afternoon. At three-thirty, I was shown into the governor's office.

He glanced at the memo his secretary had evidently given him. "It isn't every day that someone comes all the way from the East Coast to see me. You *are* a reporter, aren't you?"

I took a chair. "Let us say that I represent the *Chronicle*."

"And you mentioned to my secretary that you are a *personal* friend of Senator Michells?"

"I believe I did. Casually."

Governor Allison smiled knowingly. "That was the key that got you into my office. The senator is the *Chronicle* and the *Chronicle* is the senator. The senator has twenty-seven national delegates in his hip pocket, and he can deal them to whomever he sees fit."

I accepted a cigar. "The senator thinks highly of you."

The governor supplied the light. "I'm listening."

I puffed life into the cigar. "He would rather like to know what you are going to do about this . . . this situation regarding your son."

Allison frowned. "Since I've been governor, I have let six men go to the chair. If I commute my son's sentence, you know what people will say. I would be finished politically."

I nodded. "Perhaps. But on the other hand, if you did let him go to the chair, the voters would have the vague

feeling that you lack a heart. And that could be fatal. The senator suggests that you commute your son's death sentence and that of the other man too. Wilker? Walker? You can issue a statement to the effect that the question of capital punishment has been troubling you for years."

He regarded me pityingly. "That stinks, and you know it."

I tried the cigar again. "In other words, you're going to let your son die?"

"Actually, he's adopted," Allison said. "That is something few know, but I'm arranging to have the fact accidentally come to light. That should alter things a bit. I mean, it isn't like sending your own flesh and blood to the . . ." He rose from his chair. "Look, this Saturday I have a spot lined up on the Bronson News Review. It's prime time and a national TV hook-up. My staff and I have been working on a little speech for weeks. Frankly, we think it's rather good. Tell the senator not to miss it."

He smiled. "Look, sir, other people have been here to see me about this thing, people who control ninety-six delegates. And they think I should go through with the execution."

I rose to go.

The governor came around his desk. "Senator Michells is an able and intelligent man. I'm sure, when he thinks this over, he will see that what my staff and I have decided to do is for the best. I'm a great admirer of his, and he knows that politically we travel the same road." He had an arm around my shoulder as we reached the door. "I'm having a little private hunting party in Canada in about a month. Perhaps the senator has some free time?"

"He'll probably be there," I said.

I drove back to the city and in the morning saw Tony.

He listened to me, and sweat began to form on his forehead. "So that's it, huh?"

"That's it, Tony."

He looked at the calendar on the wall, and we were silent for a while."

"Look, Tony," I said. "We tried things and they didn't work. Now I think you'd better go to the warden and set things straight."

Tony's eyes flashed. "Nothing doing. If I go to the chair, I'm taking the governor's son with me."

"Tony, you're not doing a thing to the governor by

something like that. What happens to Henry doesn't bother him a bit."

Tony wasn't listening. "I don't deserve this deal, Jimmy. I got the reputation for putting half a dozen guys away, but I never touched nobody until I gave it to Lannigan. And that don't spell chair in my book."

"Maybe not. But you're here. And taking Henry along isn't going to change it."

"I'm not doing any favors for anybody. If I get the chair, so does Henry."

"Think it over," I said. "Do that, and you'll change your mind."

When I left Tony I went down the corridor to Henry's cell. The guard opened the door for me. Henry smiled and began setting up the board for a game. I watched him arrange the pieces. He seemed to have gained a few pounds during the last two months.

"How do you feel, Henry?"

"Do you mean, am I afraid?" He shook his head. "No. I'm not."

I experienced a strange anger. "Why not, Henry? Why aren't you afraid?"

He thought about it. "I don't know. Maybe this is the way my life is supposed to end." He smiled faintly. "It hasn't been a very important one, you know."

"Do you want to die?"

He considered that. "No, not really. Despite everything, I suppose I want to live. But the point now is that I'm not afraid to die. I'm afraid of life, I'm afraid of people, I'm afraid of everything, but I'm not afraid to die. Somehow, it makes me feel like a man for the first time in my life."

My voice was harsh. "You'll be afraid to die. When you start walking toward that door, you will be."

He looked at me mildly. "You might be right. But that is another day, and today I am not afraid to die." He indicated the chess board. "Black or white?"

When I left, Tony was waiting at his cell bars. "How's your little friend?"

"He says he's not afraid to die."

Tony spat. "Like hell. I'll hear him scream when they come to get him."

Outside, I went to the nearest liquor store, bought myself a bottle, and took it to my hotel room. The next

morning I slept until noon and took aspirin when I finally got out of bed. I turned on the radio while I shaved, and that was when I heard the news.

Tony was dead.

This morning when the guard had brought him his breakfast tray, Tony had made his final play. Using him as a shield and faking a gun in his back, Tony had tried to bluff his way past the gates. But the guards had been hard to convince, and in the ensuing struggle, Tony had been shot to death.

There was still something left in the bottle. I poured it out and drank slowly.

So that was that? The whole elaborate thing down the drain, and Tony dead and soon to be buried.

And now what? Back to the coast and slip into the Walker name again? Forget about everything unpleasant that had happened?

I began packing my suitcases.

Henry set up the traveling chess board. "White or black?"

"White," I said.

I wasn't allowed to reach over the partition, so I called out my move. "P-K4."

Henry said, "My psychiatrist says that you confessed and went to jail just as much for yourself as to save my life. Therefore, I shouldn't be clingingly grateful. So I'll see you only once a month." Henry seemed a bit uncertain. "Or once every two months?"

"Be strong, Henry," I said. "Once every two months."

He nodded. "But then I suppose I can get Madelaine to fill in the gap. After all, she comes here on alternate visiting days. Perhaps I could teach her chess so that you two would have something to do?"

"No, thank you, Henry," I said. "We try very hard and manage to find something to talk about."

I looked at the wall clock. Twenty-two minutes more.

I sighed. "N-KB3."

THE REMOTE RATTLER

by Edwin P. Hicks

Big Joe Chaviski selected a drumstick from the tray of fried chicken which Maybelle Jones passed to him and piled it on one side of his paper plate that already was loaded with potato salad, baked beans, half of a dill pickle, a slice of onion, and the heel of a loaf of home-made bread. As a retired chief of detectives, Joe always attended the annual picnic of the Fort Sanders police department and their families at City Lake recreation ground, in the mountains thirty miles from town.

Now that Lucy, his wife, was gone, being around all these women made him uneasy. They all meant well, of course, but some of them, such as Captain Harry Jones's widow, and Cholly Buck's young wife, were downright man-hunters. Poor Harry had died of pneumonia three years back, despite all the newfangled drugs, antibiotics, and oxygen tents the doctors had used on him, and Maybelle, his dutiful helpmate for more than twenty years and Lucy's good friend as well, had set her cap for Joe, in a nice way of course, a very short time after Captain Jones's demise. She had confessed frankly to Joe that living alone was no life for her—and since Lucy had been gone more than two years at the time, and since they had all been friends together—well, wouldn't it be the sensible thing for them to consider marriage? Oh, not immediately—but in time?

Now Cholly Buck's frau was a different proposition entirely. Cholly was a lieutenant of detectives, and a good one, but Pearlle, his red-haired wife, was more than he could handle. At least, there wasn't a man on the force she hadn't made eyes at, and only the fear of Cholly himself had kept several of the younger fellows from following up their opportunities. Cholly was a strapping six-footer, with a solid two hundred pounds of karate-trained bone and muscle with which to patrol his fences. Even so, some of them had tried it—Jerry Hedges for one.

Joe Chaviski remembered well what had happened, because Joe was chief of detectives at that time. Pearlle

Buck had given Jerry that come-hither look, and Jerry had got the signal instantly. Within two weeks the whole police force was like a powder magazine with lighted fuse. The explosion occurred in a restaurant across the river bridge on the Oklahoma side and beyond the jurisdiction of the Fort Sanders police department. Cholly had found Jerry and Pearlle snuggled up in a booth, drinking beer.

The ensuing fracas wrecked the restaurant and sent Jerry to the hospital with three broken ribs and a couple of discs out of place, while Cholly had followed in a second ambulance, with a broken nose, fractured jaw, and two of the blackest eyes on record. Joe Chaviski's ear-to-the-ground telegraph had been a fraction slow, but he did reach the restaurant with two plainclothesmen and a motor patrolman a second before manslaughter would have occurred.

Jerry Hedges, of course, was fired from the force, but the stubborn Okie had remained in Fort Sanders and had caught on almost immediately in the sporting-goods department of a leading hardware store. In addition to his fistic ability, Jerry, who had been brought up on the banks of the Cimarron River, had a rare talent. He could put a lure in a teacup at fifty feet, using a fly rod, spinning rod, or casting rod. In fact, before his tour of duty in Korea, he had traveled for a tackle manufacturer, demonstrating his uncanny skill through the Midwestern states. Now that he was back in the sporting-goods business again, he had quickly developed a following. Frequently he was called upon for casting demonstrations before civic clubs and youth organizations.

Jerry Hedges also had a peculiar hobby that would have got him killed for sure if he had remained on the police force. Joe might have had to kill him himself, if Jerry had put a snake on him! For Jerry, among other things, was a snake fancier from Okeene, Oklahoma.

For many years, Okeene was famous for its annual rattlesnake hunts. Still is, for that matter. Jerry had hunted snakes from the time he was a kid. Used to go out with a forked stick, pin down a wriggling six-foot diamond-back, and put all ten-twenty pounds of snake and buzzing tail into an ordinary tow sack. He picked up quite a bit of money selling the snakes, for the skins, and for the venom milked from the fangs of live rattlers. Also, there's a fairly steady demand for big diamondbacks by zoos.

Jerry had developed a passion for playing with snakes. Whenever he saw one while he was patrolling the suburbs of town or along the river bank, he would bring it to the station and suddenly deposit it wreathlike around the neck of a fellow officer, just for the fun of it. Yes, Joe Chaviski was glad Jerry had been fired from the department.

Having finished his meal, Joe was starting to get up from his bench, when the breast of a chicken was deposited on his plate from one side of him, and a second helping of potato salad appeared magically from the other side. Two soft arms wrapped around his shoulders. The arm on the right side belonged to Maybelle Jones, and she had put the chicken on his plate; the arm on the left side was attached to blue-eyed, red-haired Pearlle Buck, who was young enough to be Joe's daughter but who drew no age limit when it came to men.

"But I can't eat any more!" Joe protested.

"Sure you can, Joe. I've seen you eat three times that much over at my house many a time," said Maybelle, glaring at the redhead. Even in that anxious moment, Joe Chaviski noted that Maybelle didn't explain that the times he had eaten so heartily at her home, his beloved wife Lucy had been there too.

"Here, honey, eat that," said Pearlle, "and then I've got a real treat for you. Cholly told me what you like. A double saucer of vanilla ice cream!" She smiled triumphantly at Maybelle and then ran to get the ice cream. Joe knew the meal he had just eaten would add two or three pounds to that he was already carrying, but he never had been able to resist vanilla ice cream.

Finally, he did manage to break away and head for his car, boat, and trailer. Joe loved to fish as well as he loved vanilla ice cream, and there would be no man-hungry women on the lake. He fled for his boat, promising everybody he would be back with enough fish for the whole party in time for the evening meal. This declaration brought hoots and catcalls from the men he used to call "my boys."

Out on the lake Joe chuckled to himself, wished he could have some luck and land a big bass or two, or even enough crappie to make a showing. If he did, he would bring them back to the picnic grounds and make the fellows clean them, the lazy dogs. If only Lucy could be there at the picnic! Nobody could fry fish like Lucy!

Nobody could make potato salad, or fry chicken like Lucy, and nobody could make ice cream like Lucy. No, Joe Chaviski would never marry again. He could understand Maybelle Jones's loneliness, poor woman, but he was lonely for Lucy and for no other woman.

Below the bluff on the west side of the lake, the shadows were about forty feet out from the shore. A surface lure took a two-pound bass, and Joe chuckled. Fish didn't hit too well in City Lake, but maybe today would be different. A jig and black eel was a good combination to fish the point he was approaching. Joe edged out from the point and let the boat drift. He cast towards the bank and let the jig and eel sink to the bottom, then began winding slowly, with plenty of line out, so that the lure dropped from ledge to ledge. This was a deadly maneuver for a lunker bass, but sometimes they wouldn't touch it, or anything else.

Down at the end of the lake, a red boat was anchored near a boulder on the west side. Joe frowned. The boat belonged to Jerry Hedges. What was Jerry doing up here? Then he remembered. The paper had said that Jerry was giving casting demonstrations for the lads in the boys' camp which was located just a couple of hundred yards from the spot where the police were holding their picnic. Jerry probably had given his demonstration right after lunch when all the boys were present, and then was taking the afternoon off, fishing.

Joe felt a powerful tug on the line, deep down on the bottom. A big one had taken the black eel! Careful now, careful! Let him take it. Don't strike too soon! Six inches long the eel was. Be sure he's got the jig in his mouth. Strike now! Strike hard—once, twice! Drive the point of that jig deep into the lunker's tough jaw.

Gosh almighty! What a fish! It was boring deep down now, heading for the middle of the lake with the power of a team of horses. That's the way it felt anyway. The monofilament line was peeling off yard after yard against the tension brake. Handle him carefully now. Work around the bow of the boat with the rod, because he's passing under. Now up and around the other end, around the motor. Man, what did he have at the end of that line? Now the fish was headed back toward the point. Bound to be rocks and boulders that would fray a line like the edge of a razor blade. Work him out—work him out!

Turn him and lead him away from there. There, he's coming back again; he's beginning to wear down. Get the landing net handy, get it ready. There he is—the first glimpse of a big, bronze body, three-four feet down in the water. He's not whipped yet. He'll make another lunge when he sees the boat. There he goes down the well and under the boat again. Handle him boy, handle him! You can't lose this big boy now! Joe never knew he talked to himself when he landed a big fish, but he could have been heard half a mile away now, as he fought this great lunker to a standstill. Finally Old John Bass allowed the landing net to come gently up beneath him. He was taken headfirst and half of his tail stuck out the top of the hoop.

Joe deposited the great fish, net and all, on the bottom of the boat and grabbed with both hands to still the flopping. When the bass was quiet, and Joe had regained his breath, he weighed the catch. Eight pounds, six ounces!

The middle seat of the boat contained a fish box. Joe placed the lunker in the box and grinned happily. He would show those darn flat-footed cops what a fisherman really was! He cast a half-dozen times, hopeful that lightning would strike again, but nothing happened.

He reeled in the jig and eel then, and placed a blue, imitation swimming minnow on his line. He would troll now and just rest and relax. Later he would go in and make those policemen clean the big bass, while he laughed at them.

The blue swimming minnow picked up a good crappie on the way down the lake. As Joe turned to head back up the lake he was within a hundred feet of the north shore, and within a stone's throw of Jerry Hedges' boat anchored by the boulder. Where was Jerry? What the heck was he doing, anyway?

Then he knew. Jerry was up there among the boulders somewhere, following his hobby of snake hunting, searching for a nice rattlesnake or a copperhead. Instinctively Joe Chaviski sped from that end of the lake. If by any chance Jerry should find a snake, and Joe were anywhere near, the fool would try to toss the slithery thing over into his boat.

Joe trolled along favorite spots he knew at the far side of the lake. At the end of an hour he had picked up a half-dozen crappie and a pound and a half bass. As he

started back down the lake, he saw Jerry working along the marshy side of one of the small spring-fed creeks that drained the mountain bluff and emptied into the lake. Sure enough, he had a brown tow sack in his hand. Without doubt he had a snake inside that bag—a rattlesnake, copperhead, or water moccasin—something poisonous, or he would have been carrying it in his bare hand.

Joe made a circle so as not to tangle his line in the motor, and headed back to the landing. He didn't want any part of Jerry Hedges, didn't want to be on the same lake with him.

Back at the picnic, Cholly Buck, proudly displaying his athletic body in red bathing trunks, yelled at Joe, "We're waiting for those fish!"

"Yeah, the mighty fisherman has returned!" somebody whooped.

"Well, come and get them," Joe said nonchalantly. "I did all the work of catching them, but I'll be damned if I'm going to clean them for you."

The men crowded around, laughing and jeering, and all set to give Joe a hard time. When they opened the fish box their jeers turned to cheers.

"Get those fish cleaned as fast as you can," Joe commanded. "I'm a hungry man!"

Joe was the center of attention as he sat on a picnic bench in the cool shade and ate from two dishes of vanilla ice cream which had been provided by Maybelle Jones and Pearlle Buck. He was a happy man now. There were two things he was always willing to talk about: the old days on the police force, and fishing. He sat back and ate ice cream until he felt stuffed, and he blew off enough steam about his battle with the big bass to make up for many lonely nights at home.

Maybelle Jones supervised the cooking of the fish, bless her heart. That was one thing she could do equal to Lucy, although Joe felt like a traitor to Lucy in admitting it. A whole fillet of the big bass was reserved for him when everybody gathered at the tables. The fillet had been browned to a crisp, and the white meat inside was cooked through and through.

After the safety-rest period, following the fish dinner, everybody drew around the park pool for a final swim. That is, everybody went in except Joe Chaviski and Pearlle Buck. Joe hadn't brought his swimsuit, because

he knew how he looked in swimming trunks, big and round. But Pearlle, he guessed, didn't go into the pool for just the opposite reason. She wore a two-piece swimsuit of emerald green, a shade larger than a bikini, and although she did do a couple of graceful swan dives from the lower board, she spent most of her time showing off her shape on the side of the pool. She even sat playfully on Joe's knee for a spell and pretended to make love to him.

But Joe had a good time despite all this carrying on. He was with his boys once more, his beloved police force to which he had given thirty years of his life preceding his retirement two years before. He had caught the biggest fish of his angling career, and had got to show it off before these people whom he loved. And he had a belly full of wonderfully cooked fish and vanilla ice cream.

Some of the fellows now were running from the side and jumping into the pool—a return, perhaps, to the old swimming-hole days on the creek bank, when they would dive that way. And of course every man in a swimming suit was showing off before the ladies, who screamed and squealed, and screeched aplenty when they came up from a ducking.

Suddenly there was a howl out in the edge of the grass, and Cholly Buck came hopping toward the pool on one foot, holding the other in his hands. "Something bit me!" he shouted. "Something bit me hard! I think it was a snake."

Instantly the pool was a bedlam. Women screamed in real fear now. Joe rushed to Cholly, and the men in the pool clawed up the side and came running to him. Across Cholly's right ankle were two deep gashes from which the blood was running freely.

"Stop that hopping around!" Joe shouted at Cholly. "You shouldn't exert yourself after being bitten by a snake."

"A horrible snake!" Cholly screamed. "I felt it sink its teeth in, then tear itself out!" He was shaking and pale.

"Sit down and shut up!" said Joe. "One of you fellows run and get my snakebite kit from my tackle box in the back seat of my car. Now get hold of yourself, Cholly. Did you see the snake?"

"No, I didn't see it. Didn't see nothing! But I felt it

when it hit me. Then quick as lightning, before I could look down even, it was gone."

"How far back were you from the side of the pool?"

"Just about ten feet back there in the grass. I was getting ready to run and dive."

"Everybody be careful out there in the grass. Somebody else might be bitten!" Joe boomed. "Get the women and kids in the cars where they will be safe."

The snakebite kit was brought to Joe, and he went to work immediately. He tied a rubber tourniquet just above the ugly wound. The razor blade sliced quickly and deeply across the cuts. The suction cup was applied to the cuts, sucking out the blood and venom.

"No need to panic! I reckon I got the critter that did it!"

Everybody looked up to see Jerry Hedges stalk into the lights of the pool, and in his right hand was a six-foot diamondback rattlesnake. Its head had been bashed in, but it was still twisting and wriggling.

After the screaming women had been quieted, Jerry recited his piece. "I was coming up to the pool when I heard Cholly yell he had been bit. About that time I saw this big devil crawling through the grass right at my feet. I picked up a rock and bashed his head in."

So that was that!

"You're our rattlesnake expert," said Joe. "Whatta we do now?"

"Get Cholly to a doctor as fast as you can. Get serum for a rattlesnake bite into him as soon as possible. Don't move him. Drive a car up here and load him in. Get him down to a Fort Sanders hospital pronto. Any of you got a police car here?"

"No, just our private cars."

"Too bad. If you had a police car you could use your radio and tell the hospital what had happened so they could get a doctor and have the serum ready. Minutes count in a snakebite. Minutes!"

Cholly groaned. "Oh, it's horrible!" he said. Jerry turned away, but Joe caught the half-grin on his face as he did so. He was pouring it on poor old Cholly with that minutes-count stuff, and Joe knew it.

"I have a two-way radio in my car," Joe said. "When I quit the force I had one installed in my car for old times'

sake, and for emergency duty. You get going with Cholly. I'll call the station and get them ready at the hospital."

They roared off with Cholly then, and Cholly's wife was right there in the car with him. She hadn't wasted a look on Jerry Hedges, and she was doing the best she could now to comfort her husband. Joe thought a lot more of Pearlle after that.

Joe jumped into his own car then, hit the radio, told them at the station what had happened and to get the rattlesnake serum ready at the hospital. All the time, in the back of his mind, he was thinking about Jerry Hedges coming down from the end of the bluff at the north shore of the lake, with that tow sack in hand.

It was a peculiar thing too, Jerry showing up suddenly with that freshly killed diamondback, right after Cholly had been bitten. Could he have planted that rattler in some way for Cholly to step on? No, he couldn't! Cholly was too near the pool, and Jerry was nowhere in sight. Another thing, how could Jerry see that big snake crawling in front of him so easily, way back there in the darkness, when Cholly hadn't been quick enough even to glimpse the snake when it bit him there near the pool? There was something fishy about that snakebite. Jerry had been very cooperative about telling them what to do, but Joe still remembered that half-smile on Jerry's face when he stressed that minutes counted in saving a snakebite victim—and they were thirty miles from town.

Joe switched on his lights, and turned into the graveled park road. He glimpsed something bright in the waist-high hedge that bordered the road, just a tiny flicker of brightness that his headlights caught. Joe never was quite sure why he stopped. Perhaps his police experience, the countless times he had searched for the missing gun or knife or cash box, was responsible. His sixth sense was screaming out again about that peculiar rattlesnake sequence.

He got out of his car and bent down for a closer look. A spinning rod and attached reel had been pressed down deeply into the hedge. The light had been reflected from the highly polished reel cover. Joe examined the rod closely. It was a six-foot glass rod of excellent quality. It had enough whip in it to send a lure almost any fishable distance, yet there was backbone aplenty, the type of rod an expert angler would use. But the line, a fifteen-pound monofilament line, on the rod was unusual. Even the aver-

age fisherman around Fort Sanders didn't use more than a ten-pound test line, and that was plenty heavy. The so-called experts used six-pound test lines, even four-pounds, with which a skilled angler could land any big bass in almost any body of water where the fish could be kept out of rocks or snags.

Attached to the line was a most remarkable lure. A rather large and weighted bucktail was fastened just ahead of a triple hook. Such devices sometimes were used to snag catfish beneath the spillways of dams, but a heavier rod would have been used, an even heavier test line, and the triple hooks would have been of strong steel capable of biting deep and holding firm in large fish. But these triple hooks were regulation No. 2 crappie hooks, soft wire hooks designed to bend readily so they could be pulled loose when caught in logs, and utterly worthless for snagging big fish. Two of the hooks had been spread from the shanks, and the barbs had been filed off each hook—leaving the sharp points only. There was a gooey wetness to the bucktail.

Without saying a word to any of the picnickers, Joe placed the rod in his car and headed for home. He did some more gabbing on the police radio as he sped down the highway, and when he reached the station the police laboratory technician was awaiting him.

"Let me know what you find on the points of these hooks and on the bucktail," he said. "Run it through the lab. I want a chemical analysis of everything you find."

Then he drove to the hospital. The news was good. It had been a rattlesnake bite all right, and Cholly Buck was sick as a dog, but the doctors thought he was out of danger. The serum was doing its work.

The following morning the laboratory technician had news for him—most interesting news.

A few minutes later Joe walked into the sporting-goods department of the Star Hardware Store. At his side was Freddie Wilbanks, plainclothesman.

"Where's my prize?" Joe asked Jerry Hedges.

"What prize are you talking about?" asked Jerry.

"I caught an eight-pound-six-ounce bass yesterday."

"News to me. Rules of the Big Bass contest provide you have to bring it in here and weigh it and measure it."

Wilbanks began laughing uproariously.

"What are you laughing at?" Joe asked.

"What was the prize for the biggest bass of the season?"

"Six-foot, top-quality glass spinning rod, together with reel and line," said Jerry. "But you have to bring it in here and enter it officially, like I said."

"And he let us eat that bass up there at the picnic yesterday," Wilbanks said. "What a sucker!"

"Too bad, Joe."

"Let's have a look at that rod you owe me," said Joe.

Joe looked at the prize rod, examined it closely, as well as the reel, and noted with inner satisfaction that there was a six-pound test line on the reel.

"If you don't give me this rod I won, then I'll keep your rod I found up at the lake last night. I thought for a second it might have belonged to one of the other boys, but then I remembered you and I were the only ones fishing up there."

"You son of a gun!" said Jerry. "I've been worrying about that rod ever since. I'd have had to make it good. But where in the heck did you find it? I guess I must have thrown it away when I saw that big devil of a rattlesnake headed toward me."

"Then it's your rod? You're sure?" Joe looked plenty gloomy.

"Naw, not mine. Belongs to the store. Used it in casting demonstrations. Had it up there for the boys' camp yesterday noon. Went fishing on the lake in the afternoon. Knew you folks were having your picnic, and just thought I'd visit a little for old times' sake."

"Okay, I'm a good loser. Shake hands with me, and no hard feelings about the rod you owe me," Joe said.

Grinning, Jerry stuck out his hand, and Joe clapped nippers around his wrist.

Jerry stared at the steel. "What's the meaning of this?" he said. "This is no fun, Joe."

"Nice trick, Jerry," said Joe, "milking that rattlesnake you caught up on the bluff by the lake, and putting the venom on that bucktail and hooks. I ought to have known when I saw the torn gashes in Cholly's leg that no rattlesnake fangs had done that. You used a fifteen-pound test line so you would be sure to jerk the hooks loose. Real nice shot, Jerry. How far away from Cholly were you?"

"What are you talking about, Joe?" Jerry's face was white.

"No need trying to get out of it, Jerry," said Joe. "The chemical analysis shows rattlesnake venom and human blood on the points of those two hooks and all through that bucktail. That rattlesnake you came up with didn't put that venom on those hooks himself, nor did he file off the barbs so they would jerk free."

Suddenly Jerry surrendered, his confidence and arrogance gone. "It was easy," he said. "I was only forty or fifty feet from Cholly. I dropped the bucktail and hooks about a foot in front of his ankle and jerked it back. Two of the hooks bit into the top of his shin and pulled right out, like I knew they would. That's the reason I used crappie hooks. I didn't mean to kill the so-and-so, but I thought a good dose of rattlesnake venom would make him plenty sick. I hate his guts. Always have hated him. He was the one that got me thrown off the police force."

"That bucktail idea was a good one," Joe said.

Jerry grinned rather sickly. "Yeah. I was afraid not enough of the venom would stay on the bare hooks when I cast them, so I soused the bucktail with it and poured it over the hooks too. When the weighted bucktail dragged across the guy's ankle it dripped venom all over it, and the hooks tore right through the stuff."

"I just want to straighten you out—it wasn't Cholly that got you thrown off the force," Joe said. "It was Pearl—your own sweet self," and Joe gave the nippers a little pull in the direction of the waiting police patrol car.

MURDER MOST CONVENIENT

by Gilbert Ralston

My name is Jonathan Keeler Wainright. I am forty-six years of age, a widower, at present in the best of health.

What follows is the truth. I shall not embellish it, simply stating the facts as they occurred chronologically as I remember them.

Let us begin then at noon on the twenty-fifth of June, at the lunchroom counter of the bowling alley of a town called Three Forks, a typical California suburban development, without dignity, or a decent restaurant. I sat at the end seat of the counter, steeped in contemplation of happier times, picking occasionally at a weary slab of glutinous apple pie. I have always taken pride in my appearance, and I must have seemed an outré and vaguely foreign figure in this decidedly inelegant lunchroom.

"More coffee, mister?"

The guttural croak broke in on my reverie, sending tiny flames of shock up my spine as I looked up at the counterman. I shook my head emphatically.

"That'll be a dollar thirty."

I paid the proffered check, tucking the odd two dimes under the saucer, the counterman palming them with a mumbled grunt of thanks. He was peering curiously at me as I fumbled my wallet back into my pocket, my hands clumsy with the ache to snap his turkey neck.

"Ain't you Ray Goetz?" he said.

I shook my head again.

"Funny, you look like him, sorta."

I forced a cordial smile, although the question startled me. Coincidence, I thought. Use it. Use it.

"You sellin' somethin'?" he said, making a desultory effort to clean the counter with a distasteful piece of cloth.

"Argus Pools," I told him.

"What's that?"

"Swimming pools."

"Goetz building one?"

"Yes." The counterman riveted his gaze on me, birdlike in his interest. "You sure you ain't a relative or somethin'?"

"No."

"Too bad you ain't."

"Why?" I asked.

"Goetz is loaded, that's why. Load—ed!" He returned to his blue-plate specials, pleased with his knowledge of the great.

It has always been my habit to consciously organize myself, to *gather* myself, as it were, before entering a commercial fray, making a soldier's survey of the terrain. I did so, before the flamboyant facade of the Goetz Realty Company. A small black beetle rested upon the walk before me. I crushed it carefully with my foot; then I made my way up the walk and through the entrance door, my bearing confident and crisp.

There were no tenants at the several desks in the large room, lending it a sterile and impermanent air, only the muted whine of the air-conditioner alive in the summer afternoon. I stood there for a full minute before my eyes became accustomed to the gloom; finally, I was able to read the words "Ray Goetz" on the middle panel of a door leading off, sunlight bright beneath it. I was forced to *gather* myself again, the empty room playing on my nerves. Ten deep breaths, I told myself. Then knock. Low voice. Confidence. My hands still shook a little when I rapped on the door.

I stood in the doorway after I had opened it, staring at the man behind the massive desk. "I'm Jonathan Wainright," I said. "Argus Pools."

"Figures," Goetz replied. He seemed annoyed at my hesitancy, at the way I was staring at him. "What's eating you?"

"Someone told me that we look alike. I'm startled to find it's true. I beg your pardon."

Goetz scowled at me, examining me from head to foot, finally rising. "Have a chair, Wainright," he said, affably enough. "Over there in the light. Turn your face." He circled me then like a judge at a stock show, making little clucking noises in his throat before he sat down at his desk again. "Heard about things like this," he said. "Never thought one of them would happen to me."

"It is surprising, isn't it? The resemblance."

We were almost the same height and coloring, except that my hair was grayed somewhat more than his. A cari-

cature of me, the features almost matched, except that they were somewhat stronger in his case, lips and eyes almost identical. His voice was not unlike my own, except that it was uncultured, a quality exaggerated by the crude patois of his speech.

"I quit being surprised a long time ago, Wainright," he said, "but this shakes me some. It really does." He followed my glance around the room. Then he said, "Jazzy little dump, isn't it? Monument to the great American chump." He smiled crookedly, still scrutinizing me.

"Chump?"

"That great body of installment buyers known as the common man. My dear departed customers. The great big beautiful unwashed public. The chumps." He was preening himself, spreading out the feathers of his superiority for me to examine.

"It is a handsome office," I said, looking at the black leather divan, the prints on the wall, the heavy bronze lamp in the corner.

"Not bad for a Chicago street rat," he replied, obviously pleased by my flattering appreciation. "Saw one like it in a book. Hired a character to match it for me." He reached with his left hand for a cigar out of the silver humidor behind him, lighting it clumsily from an ornate desk lighter, spitting the bitten tip onto the beige rug. (I particularly despise cigar smoke, clouds of which billowed around me as he continued.) "Fellow tried to pad a couple of bills. So I stiffed him for it. He's still hollerin'. Guess he should have read the motto there on the desk." He pointed out a small brass plaque that proclaimed: "Do Unto Others Before They Do Unto You." I read it, knowing then that this was the enemy, always and forever the enemy.

"You own the pool company?" His words were measured now, the professional, preliminary opening skirmish.

"I'm the sales and service representative."

He looked musingly at me. "Salesman," he said. "For a pool company." He went on, mouthing his expensive cigar, the tobacco a soaked horror against his lips. "Here we sit. Twins. One up. One down. How old are you?"

"Forty-six." I was hypnotized by his rudeness.

"I'm forty-seven."

"You go to college?"

"Yes."

"Got a degree?"

"Bachelor of Fine Arts."

"Married?"

"No. Not married."

"That's the way it goes. You got a college degree and expensive tastes and I got four million dollars. You have to sell pools and I retire and have a lovely wife."

Fortunately, I have learned to control myself. I ignored what he'd said and came right to the point of my visit. "I have the contract for you to sign, Mr. Goetz," I said. "For the pool."

He looked sharply at me, a speculative look in his hard blue eyes. "What contract?" he said.

"Your secretary sent me the order. In a letter. I have it here." I drew out a copy of the letter and laid it before him.

"Don't have a secretary anymore. Not here, anyway. Sold out the business two weeks ago."

I fought the feeling of disaster, knowing he was the sort who would pounce on any weakness like a cat, keeping the signs of my agitation out of my face. I remembered the order in the mail, the endless pressure from the home office to make a sale, the risk I had taken in accepting the order without a contract.

"I'm sure the work has begun," I said. I was definite, calm.

"Yes, it has," he answered. "Without a contract."

"The steel should have arrived also," I said weakly, sparring for time.

He gave me another analytical glance before he spoke. "It has."

I pointed to the pages on the desk. "Here's the contract," I told him. "It's a simple purchase order. I marked the place for you to sign." My calmness and force were having some effect on him. He reached for the pen in the holder in front of him, hesitated.

"I want to read it first," he said, flicking a contemptuous finger at the document.

"Please do," I replied.

"I want to read it *later*. Later tonight." Goetz was measuring me again, the speculative glimmer still in his eyes.

"It would be gratifying," I said, "if you could read it now, Mr. Goetz. I have an engagement in Los Angeles tonight. It's a long drive back." It was a mistake to press

him, the cheap little power complex craving a victim, hungry for an audience.

"Mr. Wainright." Even the way he pronounced my name had become a subtle insult. "You supposed to service this deal?"

I nodded.

"Service it then." Suddenly he grew affable again, his ego evidently sufficiently well fed for the moment. "Come to the house for dinner. I'll read the contract and sign it tonight."

I balanced future hours of this game of cat and mouse against another miserable meal in the bowling alley. "All right, Mr. Goetz," I said. "I should be delighted to come to dinner."

Goetz pointed to the contract. For the first time I noticed that the middle fingers of his right hand were bandaged. "Fold that for me," he said. "I have a sore hand. Caught it in a piece of machinery. Chewed the tips of two fingers off."

"I'm sorry," I replied.

Goetz looked at me, amusement touching his lips. "No you're not, Wainright. Right now you hate my guts." He smiled silkily. "But I'm not such a bad fellow when I get my own way. You'll get over your gripe."

He was mistaken.

There was an elongated convertible parked in front of the building, chromed, blatant, expensive. Goetz paused a moment near it, fishing awkwardly for the keys with his injured hand. He turned to me again.

"You got a car, Wainright?"

"In the parking lot at the bowling alley," I said.

"Leave it there. Get in."

He drove with a flourish, tooling the big car expertly through the streets of Three Forks, impatient and aggressive with the less opulent traffic. I examined him covertly as he drove, cigar clamped in his teeth. This is the way, I told myself. This is how it is done. Assurance. Arrogance. The acceptance of superiority without question. "Get a load of this toy," he said, reaching for a telephone under the dash, then placing a call to his home through the mobile telephone operator.

The Goetz residence crouched at the top of a rolling hill, overlooking the town, a fenced and manicured show-

place, flat-roofed, red-bricked, heavy with glass and modernity.

"One hundred and fifty thousand bucks," he said, as we got out of the car.

"Charming," I replied.

Goetz turned to me, a twisted smile hovering around his lips. "Come off it, pool salesman," he said. "You hate it. You're the quiet New England type. If I gave it to you, you wouldn't live in it. You'd sell it to another hustler like me and find yourself a quiet little cottage full of nice, conventional moldy furniture."

"Perhaps I would," I said.

"C'mon in."

The interior of the house was incredibly, unbelievably beautiful. I remember my feelings of shock as we entered the living room, my feet slipping deliciously into the velvety pile of the wall-to-wall carpet, the cool touch of muted music somewhere in the background. The room was done in gentle grays and black, sparsely and tastefully furnished, an occasional spray of flowers a colorful accent against the otherwise unadorned walls. Goetz did something to a hidden electric switch behind a set of white drapes, whispering them aside, uncovering a wall of glass which ran the full length of the room. I saw the patio stretching away from the house, and beyond that, the ugly scar of the excavation for the swimming pool.

"Sit down, Wainright," Goetz said. "I have a couple of calls to make. I'll go and tell my wife you're here."

He departed at once, leaving me free to give my attention to a Chinese screen in a corner of the room, unable to keep my fingers from caressing the luscious lacquer, tracing the intricate design.

"Do you like my room?"

Spinning in the direction of the sound, for a moment I was without poise, having been startled by the voice of the dark woman standing there.

"I'm Mina Goetz," she said. "You do look like him."

"Jonathan Wainright," I said. "I came about the pool."

"I know," she replied. "He told me." She waited calmly for me to speak again. Part Indian, I thought, Mescalero—perhaps Comanche.

"It is a lovely room," I said. "Did you do it?"

She was impassive, weighing her reply. "Yes," she final-

ly said. "It's easy, when you have anything you want to work with."

"It's never easy. Not really."

"Don't flatter me, Mr. Wainright. I'm not used to it." She moved quietly into the room. "Please sit down. Will you have a drink?"

"No, thank you."

"There are cigarettes beside you." She moved to the wall switch, closed the drapes. "I like that better. It filters the light. Besides, it shuts out that awful hole your men made." She curled up on the chair across from me, sinuously winding her legs into a comfortable position, the light playing on her high cheekbones, sculpturing her face. Ubasti, cat-woman, ready for the blood.

"Tell me what you do next."

"Tomorrow we put the steel in. It's like a basket. In the afternoon we spray in the cement."

"Spray it in?" She was making conversation, covering her scrutiny of me with questions.

"It's a new system," I said. "Squirts concrete out of a hose. Like a fire hose. Then we plaster, and the job is done."

"And then what?"

"We put the water in while the plaster is still wet. Whole job takes only a few days."

"How did you happen to get into this business?" she asked.

I told her a little about my background. She was an exceedingly good listener, although I found her remarks somewhat conventional and ordinary.

"Where are your people?" she asked finally.

"They died some years ago. I was an only child."

"I'm sorry. And your wife?"

"I am a widower." Hesitating before following her lead, I decided to risk it, caution giving way to curiosity. "How long have you been married?" I asked.

There was a decided pause before she replied. "Three years," she said. I could see the shadow cross her eyes as she spoke. "Three years," she said again.

"Makes it sound like thirty, doesn't she?" Goetz was standing in the doorway, a drink in his bandaged hand. "C'mon, let's eat." He moved toward the dining room, his eyes hot and savage as they flicked across his wife's face.

I turned to wait by the door for her. She was standing

in the middle of the room, her dark face placid, only her eyes alive as she watched her husband leave the room. She moved then, as though consciously willing herself to move.

Ray Goetz stood at the head of the table, the drink already at his place, a maid hovering nervously in the background. He motioned me to a place. "Sit down, Wainright." It occurred to me with some interior amusement that this was the fourth time the man had ordered me to a seat. "Have a drink."

Drinking at the dinner table has always seemed to me to be an abomination.

"Better have one. Part of your contract." Goetz could not abide a refusal of any request.

The silvery voice of his wife broke into the building tension. "Don't press it on him, Ray," she said. "Some people don't like to drink at dinner."

"So they don't," said Goetz. "So they don't." He took a deliberate swallow of his drink. "You know something?" he said. "Mrs. Goetz doesn't like to drink at dinner either. That is, she doesn't like for me to drink at dinner. I have a very stylish wife, Mr. Wainright."

My eyes went from one to the other, searching for a clue to the relationship between them. She was smiling sweetly, her even teeth bright in the candlelight.

"My husband is a drunken pig, Mr. Wainright," she said, her gentle voice calm as she began her dinner. Goetz rose out of his seat, his face murderous. "Sit down, Ray," she said. "Eat your soup."

Force coupled with gentility is power. Mina Goetz had depth, more than Ray Goetz could ever understand. Also I had begun to sense a fact which should have been obvious from the very beginning. Ray Goetz loved his wife, and was rendered desperately helpless by her. She could hurt him, and did several times before the interminable dinner faltered to a close, Goetz glowering and affable by turns, filling his whiskey glass again and again. Mrs. Goetz and I covered up our reaction to his condition with small talk, carefully engineered by my hostess, for whom my admiration continued to grow.

In many respects I found the situation captivating. I've always been titillated and intrigued by violence of any kind, and so I found our efforts to keep the conversation going an exciting counterpoint to the unpleasantness of

my host and client. It was fatiguing, however, and I felt relieved when we moved to the living room for coffee. For a moment I envied the servants their escape, as I heard their cars going down the drive; then I thought of the days of peace the eight-hundred-dollar commission for the pool would buy for me. The peace I'd have until the next time, of course. Until the next Goetz stood in my way.

"How are your fingers?" I asked Goetz, searching for a safe subject of conversation.

"They hurt some." He waved the glass in his hand. "This stuff makes a good anesthetic."

"Would you like me to look at them?" Mina asked.

"Let 'em alone. Practice on the poor."

Goetz went back to his drink. I must have looked questioningly at her.

"I was a nurse once," she said.

Goetz was weaving over her, his slack mouth gone hard again. "You want to know why I asked him here?"

"Yes," she said, "if you want to tell me."

"Wanted you to see what you might have got for yourself," he said. "Look at him! Fancy clothes. Fancy college. I've been pushing him around all day and he hasn't got the guts to tell me off."

I'd risen to my feet. The little vein began to throb in my temple, a rhythmic thump, thump, as he went on.

"Looks like me, doesn't he? Doesn't he? Except for one thing. He ain't got two dimes to rub together!" He stood over me, his drunken face a loose sneer. "He stands there taking this—for a commission, for a two-bit commission!"

I could feel his rage now, a pleasant tingle in my fingertips. *Aria da Capo*, I thought. Song of the end. This is the way. Always, Always . . .

Mina Goetz's voice cut into my concentration.

"Ray, stop it," she said. "Stop it, now!"

"Sure, I'll stop it! I'll stop it!" He reached into his coat pocket. "Here's your contract, pool salesman!" He threw it on the floor. "Take it. Go on, take it. And get out!"

The scene was a tableau for a moment, Mina standing to one side, Goetz raging and dominating the room, my head swirling, swirling. After a moment, I stooped to pick up the contract.

"It's not signed, Mr. Goetz," I said, making my voice as calm as possible.

"And it's not going to be signed, pool salesman."

I tried again, patiently, the little shocks going through me now, again and again. "You can't do that, Mr. Goetz. Why, I've the signed order from your secretary."

"My secretary? She's long gone, Mr. Wainright." He was spitting my name now. "Nobody but an idiot starts construction without a contract."

The waves were coming now, rolling up from my feet, slowly, slowly. "Do you mean you're not signing, Mr. Goetz?"

"Get out," he told me.

"I'll pay it, if he doesn't, Mr. Wainright," Mina Goetz said.

Goetz turned on her savagely. "No you won't, baby. I got you tied up. All tied up. You couldn't buy him a hamburger if he was starving."

The waves swept over me, calming me, soothing me. I gathered myself again. Goetz was glaring at me. It was wonderful, exhilarating. I faced him for the last time. "*Fattura della Morte*," I said. "*Fattura della Morte*."

"Get out!" he shouted.

I struck him, solidly, on the chin and mouth, relishing the impact of my fist. He went down, pausing for a moment on all fours, his bloodied mouth working, his eyes insane. It was good to be alive again, focused, feather-light. I struck again as he rose to his feet, a short chopping blow to the solar plexus. He would have been easy, even without the liquor. I stopped his clumsy rush with the cut to the windpipe, tripping him without difficulty, sending him crashing elaborately into the ornate coffee table.

Mina Goetz was holding the door open. "Get out of here," she said. "Run!"

Our eyes met and held while I shook my head. The room was caught in a static moment of time, unreal, a ballet scored with violence. Careless, I assumed Goetz was unable to continue. I turned just in time to avoid the direct force of his next lunge; his right hand grasped a metal statuette which had rested on the table. For a moment we circled each other, Goetz turned animal, the effects of the liquor lost in fury. He lunged at me again, bringing down the statuette with crushing force on my shoulder, the pain beyond memory, a streak of fire. I struck him again and again with my good left arm, hard, to the face,

to the body, trying desperately now for the killing cut to the back of the neck, terribly handicapped by my injured shoulder. I managed the kick to the ulnar nerve area of the arm, which forced him to drop the statuette. But he leaped at me again, maddened fingers clawing for my throat. We fell, Goetz's face a nightmare before my eyes, as I felt the inexorable pressure on my throat. I fought for breath, for vision, still hearing the animal sounds, the endless cursing that poured from his lips. Out of the whirling red haze I could see the man's wife standing over us, the statuette raised high above her head, saw her bring it down once and then again, Goetz going limp upon me as she did so. I crawled from under him and staggered to my feet. Mina Goetz was looking down at the still form of her husband, her eyes wide, her breath coming in great gulps, the bloody statuette still in her hand.

"I hate him," she said. "I hate him."

I leaned over the table, *gathering* myself again, forcing strength into my exhausted body. When I looked up, the woman was on the floor beside her husband, her hands busy and professional. She held me with her eyes.

"He's dead," she said. "I killed him."

I crossed over to Goetz and turned him over, feeling for a pulse as I did so.

"He's dead," she said again. "I know."

"What do we do now?" I asked her.

"Sit down. Rest. Let's rest first."

It was a singular moment. I was intrigued by the reaction of the woman. And I was surprised that she had not given the body of her husband a second look after assuring herself that he was dead, that she had made no protestations of sorrow or of concern, that she simply sat, thinking calmly, her long fingers quiet in her lap.

"We must notify the police," I said.

"We can't," she said. "What will you tell them?"

"The truth. What happened."

She shook her head. "We can't. I killed him. You killed him. That's all we can say."

"We could say it was self-defense."

"They wouldn't believe it."

"I suppose not," I said and, strangely enough, felt amused.

"Bury him," she said, turning her warm brown eyes on me. "Bury him. In the bottom of the excavation for the

pool. Tomorrow they'll put the concrete in. He'll never be found."

"They'd find out," I said. "Sooner or later they'd find out. They always do."

"Only in fiction," she said, and stood up quickly. It was as though she'd come to a decision.

"What do you suggest?" I asked.

"The obvious. Take his place." She was suddenly very animated, pleading. "You look like him. Take his place."

"It's impossible."

"You wanted an opportunity. Take this one. Everything could be yours. Everything. There'd be no trouble about the business. It's already sold. We were going away as soon as the pool was in. I could close everything out on the phone. Nobody would ever know. Nobody, just you and me."

"Where would we go? I've no money."

"We were ready to leave. There's money here. Enough. Tickets—passports—everything." She came close to me then, talking, talking, the pattern growing. "It's just your hair really. We could dye it. People don't notice things closely. It could be ours, all of it, the money, the house, everything. If we report it, we get nothing. Not even the money. Bury him. Take his place. I'll help you."

I weighed her statements carefully. I have a certain talent for masquerade, but this one required the coolest logic. It was a chance, a long one, fraught with danger and difficulties, but filled with drama. Perhaps this swung the scales for me. "You'll have to help me," I said.

She was at my side in an instant, her hand on my arm. "I'll help you. It'll work. You'll see."

My torn coat was left in the living room while we walked to the excavation, my shoulder numb, but less painful, which assured me that there was no serious damage.

"There's a shovel in the rear of the house," she said. "The workmen left their tools."

It was a luminous California night, moonlight flooding the bottom of the hole, turning the ugly excavation into a magic place. The digging was not difficult, the soft earth easily moved aside. Suddenly, I turned to her. "I thought of something else," I said. "The fingers. He had two injured fingers. People must know about it."

Her face was elfin in the moonlight. "I'm a nurse," she

said. "I can do it. It was just the tips." Her lips were avid now, the wet tongue flicking in and out. "I was treating him. I have some Novocain. You won't feel it."

"You're a little mad," I said to her.

"Perhaps. A little." She was smiling at me gently. "It will all be worth it."

Together, we dragged the limp and bleeding body to the hole, rolling him in face down, covering him carefully, pounding the loose soil into its old contour again, spreading the residue carefully over the bottom of the excavation. I made a last examination while she held the light.

"Now," she said. "Now we are committed."

"Yes," I replied. "We are committed."

"Come into the kitchen."

I was reeling with fatigue. "No," I said. "Not yet." She was hard, definite, as she led me into the house. "You can sleep afterward."

"Can you do it?" I asked. "Are you sure?"

"I was a surgical nurse, a good one," she answered. "I can do it. Just don't watch."

I woke from a drugged sleep hours later, her face a cameo over me, the memory of the night before a collage of wild color and blurred movements. Disoriented, for a few moments I fought reality. There was a great deal of pain, my shoulder aching where Goetz had hit me, a number of other miscellaneous contusions making themselves felt. I looked curiously at my hand, suddenly recalling the scene in the kitchen the night before, the hypodermic and the knives, the hospital smell. Now the bandages were evidence that it had all been real.

"Hurry," Mina Goetz said. "We've work to do." She pointed to a bedroom window. A truck was standing there, two workmen beginning the construction of the steel basket for the pool.

"Will they dig?" she asked.

"No. There'll be just the steel to put in."

"How long before the cement man comes?" she asked.

"Four or five hours," I said. "Maybe more."

"They'll expect you to supervise?"

"Only the steel work. The others are specialists."

"Go out there now. Do your job. For the last time." She smiled, a little secret smile. "Keep your bandaged hand in your pocket. They mustn't see it. I'll have a cup of good, hot coffee for you in the kitchen."

Dressing was a painful and awkward process, my injured shoulder and hand making it very difficult to shave. She was in the kitchen when I entered, a charming breakfast set out for me. It was the first decent meal I'd had since coming to Three Forks, a pleasant start to an eventful day.

The inspection of the pool proved routine, although I had some difficulty keeping my eyes from returning time and again to the shallow end where the body lay. Fortunately my bandaged fingers began to ache, giving me a point of concentration while the steel workers built the basket for the pool and every now and then walked over the grave.

Mina was beside me when the truck left the house, our indiscretion covered with a net of steel. "It's almost over, Jonathan. Almost over." It was the first time she had called me by my given name. "When you go in that door again, you'll start a new life. You'll have a new name and a new life." She stopped me at the door, both her hands on my shoulders. She kissed me gently, her lips soft against mine. "You're Ray Goetz now," she said. "Rich, retired, and married." Early that afternoon the cement machine started its work, spraying the layers of cement on the skeleton of steel.

"What do they do next?" Mina asked.

"They plaster it in a few days, then fill it with water. Then we may swim, if we wish."

There are a hundred little things which go to make up the public memory of a man. I listed them as carefully for the Goetz that I was to become as for the Wainright I must erase. Mina was also busy; she dyed my hair, dressed my fingers, which hurt abominably, and rummaged through the wardrobe to find clothes to fit me. As Wainright, I made a call to the Argus Pool Company, resigning without notice, taking a pleasant moment to annoy the management with a politely acid criticism of their product. Mina mailed the last of my business correspondence, returning the contract for the pool with a check in full, carefully signed, proving most adept at this minor forgery. (Actually, it is remarkably easy to forge an acceptable signature, if all the related documents are correct.) I had no family within reach, nor did Goetz. This simplified and helped. My furnished room in Los Angeles was canceled by mail, my clothes and personal ef-

fects stored through an obliging moving company. Mina dismissed the servants, and I kept out of sight while they grumbled their gratitude for a month's salary in lieu of notice.

Day in and day out, Mina helped me with my study, patiently pounding in knowledge of Goetz's background, reading and rereading the records of his investments and banking affairs which she produced from the desk in the study. It was really a surprisingly simple chore. Goetz had arranged all his affairs for retirement and, inasmuch as his investments were for the most part in real property, there did not seem to be any difficulties which could not be surmounted. There were no visitors, except an occasional deliveryman, each of whose services Mina stopped as of that date. Gradually, the personality and background of Goetz became clear to me, the cloak more easily worn, the part I was playing as definite as an actor's role and as easily assumed.

The first test of my ability came on Monday of the second week, when I appeared at the local bank to deposit several routine checks received in the mail. People are essentially unobservant, and providing that the pattern of a personality is not changed or violated, a masquerade such as the one in which I was engaged is practical and possible. I did ordinary things, on several subsequent visits to town, progressing from one small public chore to another slowly and easily, grafting the idea of the new Ray Goetz over the town's idea of the old, and by the middle of the third week had genuinely begun to enjoy my new existence, spiced as it was with danger, and made whole by the comfort and pleasure I had begun to take in Mina.

We had scheduled our departure for the end of the third week, feeling that we had sufficiently planted the idea that Goetz was still alive. (I took extraordinary pleasure in bathing in the pool, a cosmic jest which Mina did not appreciate.) It was a gracious period of my life, filled with music and laughter and the promise of better things to come. We prepared for our trip with care, first the careful scheduling of trains (I am nervous about flying), then the delightful chore of arranging the stops for our Grand Tour—Paris, Rome, Madrid, Stockholm, Copenhagen.

Perhaps the peak of my enjoyment of this adventure

came on our departure night, when we sat in the living room, a staid, wealthy American couple about to take a year's vacation. I thought then of the rare pattern of the past few days, the odd and interesting beginning, the exciting climax, the wonderfully managed but uncontrived ending which somehow still remained too simple—and unsatisfactory from a dramatic viewpoint. As we sat and waited for the taxi to take us to the station, it amused me to think of other endings I might contrive. I thought of Wainright, the man I had destroyed, and of Goetz, the man I had become, and how easy it would be for me to slip back into the character of Wainright again, picking up the threads of his life where it had stopped only three weeks before. To do so I would have to remove Mina, a simple matter in her present absurd and childish state of trust. A scarf properly applied, the body left in the bedroom, and the authorities on a merry chase for the absent but nonexistent husband—a wonderfully baffling puzzle. But there was the matter of my fingers, and above all the vast quantity of wealth which I was enjoying. It was an impractical idea, the contemplation of which ceased with the ringing of the doorbell announcing the arrival of the cab.

I smiled at Mina and opened the door, to find two men on the porch, the first of them performing that idiotic and theatrical gesture of all police officers, showing me a metal badge, mumbling the usual formula. Mina was standing by the bags, her face a living question. I believe I carried the opening conversation off splendidly, seating them, offering them a drink.

"I'm Ray Goetz," I said. "This is my wife, Mina. What can we do for you?"

"I see you are leaving, Mr. Goetz," the tall one said. "We'll be brief. Sorry to bother you."

"Please go ahead," I said. "We have allowed a little extra time."

"We are looking for a Mr. Jonathan Wainright," the tall man said.

"He's not here," I told him. "That is the name of the gentleman who came to put the pool in for us three weeks ago."

"When did he leave here?" the tall man asked.

"On Friday, June 26th, as I remember," I said, hesitating appropriately.

"Do you remember the time?"

"About five o'clock in the afternoon. I remember, because I took him to town. The clock on the bank read five-twenty-five as I dropped him off at the bowling alley."

"Why there?" said the tall one.

"He said he left his car there." (I could only bemoan my stupidity. But it had seemed perfectly safe to leave the Wainright car in the bowling-alley parking lot, adding one more bizarre note to the disappearance of Jonathan Wainright, but I had forgotten that abominable counter man, whose memory of a stranger was the undoubted cause of this visit from the minions of the law.)

"Has something happened?" Mina asked.

"Just a routine disappearance, Mrs. Goetz. The car is still there. At the bowling alley. He never picked it up. Did he say anything to you that might indicate where he was going?"

They were being professionally casual. "No," I replied. "He finished his supervisory job and left. I assumed he was going back to Los Angeles."

"Why did he leave his car in town?"

"He met me at the office. I asked him to dine with us and saw no reason why we should take two cars. He stayed here overnight, supervised the construction of the pool, then left."

"Why did he stay here?"

"He was a pleasant enough fellow. We had a spare guest room."

"We're not questioning your motives, Mr. Goetz, just trying to get a little information. How did you get back to town?"

"In my car. Down the Country Club Road." I felt secure now, the danger averted.

"What time was that?" The tall one was doing the talking, while his shorter companion was busy with his notes.

"We left at five o'clock."

"You're sure of the time?"

"Quite sure. I remember checking my watch."

"You left here at five o'clock on Friday, arriving at the parking lot at what time?"

"Five-twenty-five, by my watch."

"We are trying to pinpoint the time as precisely as possible."

"The clock on the bank read five-thirty as I went by on my way back here."

"You returned the same way?"

"Yes."

"You're sure of the time, Mr. Goetz?"

"Positive."

They rose to leave. The tall one looked at me for a moment casually. "Mr. Goetz."

"Yes."

"What did Wainright look like?"

"Rather like me, I thought."

"Yeah. We saw the picture."

They were both eyeing me now. "Would it be possible for you to take a later train?"

"Inconvenient, but possible." I was superb. "Why?"

"We would like you to come to the station and write out a statement."

"You are insisting?"

"Might as well tell you. It's kind of important we find that fellow Wainright."

"Is there something you haven't told us?" Mina asked.

"The tall officer stopped to hold the door for me. 'Yeah, Mrs. Goetz. Two things.' I savored the pulsing feel of the room while Mina waited for her answer. 'Wainright's a pathological killer. We have three fugitive warrants for him.'"

Mina, her eyes wide, looked from me to the officer. She was never more beautiful.

"Who did he kill?" she said, the words choking their way out of her throat.

"His wife, among others. Real name is Keeler—Jonathan Keeler. Sometimes he tags the name Wainright onto that."

Mina was rigid, her hands shaking, her face turned up to mine like a flower in the sun, searching, searching. I smiled at her.

"You said there were two things," she said.

The short officer answered this time. "Yes, ma'am, there is another problem. We'd like Mr. Goetz to explain how he got to the bowling alley with Wainright that Friday at five o'clock on the Country Club Road."

"I've already explained it," I said.

"Not well enough, Mr. Goetz. There was a truck overturned on that road that Friday. Big trailer truck. Had the road blocked from three to six."

Mina was past speech as I turned at the door.

"Good night, Mina," I said.

I shall always remember her face, as the complex web of circumstances drew tight around her. Fascinating, really fascinating.

My own position was ridiculous, to say the least. They were polite enough to me when they took me to the station, even apologizing for the necessity of taking my fingerprints, then maintaining the tradition of all police departments, keeping at me and at me, repeating in a hundred ways the same dull questions, over and over, annoying me to a point of distraction. I am not a patient man; nevertheless, I bore this endless repetition for nearly two hours, feeling a sense of relief when at long last I asked for and received the proper equipment to write this account, which I have done as carefully and accurately as my recollection would permit.

I am somewhat regretful about making further difficulties for Mina Goetz, but after all, the whole thing was her idea.

Signed,

Jonathan Keeler

SHAKEDOWN

by Richard O. Lewis

"May I help you?" asked the shapely young girl. She was blond and full-lipped, the lips now parted in a friendly smile that showed an even row of teeth, and she was leaning slightly forward over the display case in Gloves and Purses in such a manner as to present a hint of further charms.

Bradley Jones, which wasn't his real name, smiled back. "No," he said, "unless you can help me find the friends I am supposed to meet here."

"I'm sorry," she said, with the same friendly smile, "but I'm afraid I can't be of much help there."

Bradley summoned up a bit of charm. "Thanks, anyway. It's nice to find friends, especially *new* ones," he added meaningfully, and saw that the point was not entirely lost on her. He turned away then and sauntered down the aisle toward Cosmetics and Perfumes, a low whistle of appreciation scarcely audible on his thin lips.

Bradley was a small man of medium height, and the clothing he wore was of nondescript gray. Among the women shoppers in the department store, he looked precisely like a bored husband who had momentarily lost track of his wife—which was exactly how Bradley Jones wanted it to look.

He turned right at Cosmetics and Perfumes, paused a moment, and let his glance drift about as if in search of someone. He saw her then, standing by the jewelry display. She was tall and thin-faced, and was wearing a short coat of yellow. He saw her eyes dart warily about for an instant, and he knew exactly what she was going to do even before he saw her hand close over the brooch of costume jewelry and transfer it unobtrusively to the pocket of her coat. He knew the type. It was his business to know the type. Her next move would be toward the nearest door.

Bradley went through the door a scant few seconds ahead of her and fell into step beside her as she turned down the street. After ten or fifteen paces, she glanced nervously toward him.

"Lady," he said, "I believe you have something in your pocket that doesn't rightfully belong to you."

She faltered in her stride, and her face went chalk-white beneath its makeup.

"If you'll just step to the side of the building here, we'll have a little talk," he told her.

She stopped in front of a window filled with mannequins clad in bathing suits, and turned to face him, her eyes downcast and her jaws clamped tightly in trembling fear—which was exactly the way Bradley Jones wanted it.

"You seem to be a decent and respectable lady," he said, "and I definitely hate to think of having to take you back into the store with me. Although the crime of shoplifting is not a great one, there can be a certain amount of distasteful publicity. . . ."

"Please," she said, scarcely able to force words from between quivering lips. "I have a husband, two children . . ."

"I'm sorry. But you should have thought of that."

"Here!" she said, reaching quickly into her pocket. "Take the brooch back! It really isn't worth anything. Please!"

Bradley raised a protesting hand. "It is not quite that simple," he said, keeping his voice at a conversational level so as not to attract attention from passersby. "If your crime goes unpunished, it might only induce you to repeat the offense."

She raised her eyes slowly, and looked pleadingly into his for an instant. Then she fumbled quickly in her purse and brought forth a bill. "Take this!" she said. "Please!"

"Well . . ." There was hesitation in his voice, but the hand that took the ten-dollar bill from her showed not the slightest trace of pause. ". . . all right. But remember this," he said, tucking the bill into the pocket of his coat. "Crime does not pay!" It was his own private little joke. He liked the humor of it.

"Thanks!" she said, and turned hurriedly away.

Bradley could never quite understand why some women who seemed socially and financially well off should stoop to petty thievery. Probably most of them didn't even use the junk they took. Professional shoplifting he could understand; there was a tangible objective to it, a valid reason. But this petty pilfering was quite beyond him. Perhaps the fear of getting caught gave them some kind of secret thrill, and when he apprehended them, the

thrill reached its culmination—the thing they had been seeking all along. He didn't know. Really, he didn't care. He shrugged. Strange how at least fifty percent of them always thanked him when he took their money.

He strolled leisurely down the street. Yes, it was a good life. A different town every week, a different girl in every town. . . .

Thoughts of the blond in Gloves and Purses came suddenly to the fore. Better try to make contact there, do a little promoting. Once the recreation for the week was assured, he could go about his business untroubled. She seemed to be a bit on the young side, but—so what?

He rounded the corner, quickened his pace, and went back into the store by a different entrance. As he approached Gloves and Purses, he saw that the blond was busy with a customer, a young woman with red hair, red shoes, and a red purse. He paused abruptly by Ties, his instincts aroused. His practiced eye knew the type.

He didn't have long to wait. The blond turned away from the display case to search for something in the boxes on the shelf behind her, and several pairs of expensive-looking gloves disappeared swiftly into the maw of the red purse.

Bradley grinned. This one was not an amateur. This one was piling up expensive loot with a definite objective in view. A pro!

He considered stepping forward immediately and exposing the theft—that would put him in good with the blond, give him a grand approach—but he dismissed the thought almost as soon as it had entered his head. The blond hadn't caught sight of him yet, and there was no sense in placing pleasure before business. The blond could wait; she'd be there when he wanted her.

Bradley turned away and without seeming to hurry, hurried to the nearest exit. In most cases, the pros were easier than the amateurs. Most of them had police records, and to be caught plying their trade could easily land them in big trouble. Of course, there was a matter of ethics involved; in some circles, the shaking down of one pro by another was definitely frowned upon. But Bradley gave no thought to ethics; you could neither eat nor drink them.

Less than two minutes later, he and the redhead were

facing each other on the street in front of a window display of camping equipment.

"You look like a decent and respectable lady," he had just finished saying, "and I definitely hate to think of having to take you back into the store. . . ."

"Look, you!" she warned. "Lay off or I'll call a cop!" Her face had paled, but her green eyes were flashing angry defiance.

"Under the circumstances," he said easily, "I wouldn't advise you to call a cop or to create any kind of scene. After all, *you* have committed the crime—not *I*!" It was nice to put them into a snug little corner like that.

"Why, you—" She broke off, her eyes little more than narrow slits. She looked as if she were about to take his face apart any moment with her sharp nails. "All right!" she snapped, getting herself under control with an effort. "All right! How much?"

"Considering the value of the merchandise involved, I think twenty dollars should be about right." He was pouring it on, making her like it.

She fumbled into her purse, extracted two tens and thrust them at him, unladylike words hissing from between her tight lips. Then she spun on her heel and went clicking away down the street.

In spite of occasional moments with tough customers like the redhead, there were several gratifying facets to Bradley's profession. There was very little danger of being arrested for his activities; the victims could not afford to scream copper. Whatever money he made—and he made plenty—was his own, no tax bite. He did his banking in his own hip pocket. That way there was no record of deposits, no record of interest being paid him, nothing for the federal boys to sink their teeth into. There was no danger of running out of customers; they were in every large town he cared to visit. According to some late statistics he had read, some metropolitan areas were being shoplifted to the tune of \$50,000 per week. Best of all, he was his own boss. He could work when he wanted to, quit when he liked. At the present moment, he was considering a little vacation in Mexico.

Thoughts of Mexico brought to mind again the little blond in Gloves and Purses. Maybe she would be a good companion. He would have to look into the situation, but not at present. He had already been in the store three

times that morning and had made three marks for a cool \$40. Best to ply his trade elsewhere for a while and come back sometime in the afternoon.

By four-thirty he had made four more marks for a ten-spot each and was sauntering leisurely down the aisle toward Gloves and Purses. The blond caught sight of him as he approached, and recognition flashed into her eyes.

"Hello," she said. "Find your friends yet?"

He shook his head, leaned an elbow on the display case, and tried to let his disappointment show. "No, they must have forgotten me. Now it seems I'll be stuck with another lonely evening."

"Yes," she said sympathetically, "I know just what you mean."

He looked at her, and her hand went suddenly to her mouth in embarrassment. "Oh!" she gasped. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

They both laughed.

"Well, maybe we could solve a problem for both of us by sharing the evening," he suggested.

"Oh, I don't know about that—" A tiny frown crept across her forehead.

"At least we could have dinner together," he urged.

"Well—" She hesitated. "Well, I suppose there—there wouldn't be any harm . . ."

"Fine!" he said hurriedly. "I'll pick you up at seven, if you'll tell me where you live."

Her frown deepened. "Better not pick me up at home," she said. "I'll explain later. How about the corner of Tenth and Main?"

"Wonderful!" he said. "Until seven, then."

Bradley walked out of the store with a feeling of conquest. The day had progressed quite to his satisfaction, and there were reasons to believe the night might hold even greater satisfactions. He felt so good about the whole thing that he walked across town and made another shake-down before the stores closed.

That night, at her direction they drove northward for nearly an hour, then turned into the parking lot of a cottagelike structure bearing the neon name *Cozy Inn*.

Except for the glowing bar along one wall, the place was mellow with shaded lights. A cluster of tables filled most of the floor space, and there were secluded booths along two of the walls. She went directly to one of the

booths, and he ordered two martinis.

During the drive from town he had learned a few basic things about her. She had graduated from high school a couple of years ago and had worked in stores ever since. She was living alone with her mother who was very strict with her—which was why she hadn't wanted him to call for her at her home—and her name was Terra Wilson.

Before the arrival of the second round of martinis, Bradley had given her a brief, and highly mythical, account of his recent life as a traveling salesman and his desire to settle down, after, of course, a short vacation in Mexico. During dinner, he extolled the virtues of Mexico as a vacationland, a land of sunshine and gaiety, a land of romance.

"It must truly be a marvelous place," she said wistfully. He didn't know whether the lights that danced in her eyes were made of star dust or whether the liquor she had drunk was catching up with her. Maybe a little of both.

"It is!" he agreed. "It has everything! But—" He paused and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it would be a lot more fun for *two* than just *one*."

Yet even as he gave her the left-handed invitation, he knew suddenly that he had no intention of taking her along. Mexico had its own full share of beautiful women, and there was certainly no point in taking along a type of commodity that already existed there in abundance. But it was a good gimmick; it might serve to keep her stringing along with him for the week he intended to be in town.

"I've always wanted to go to Mexico," she sighed, "but of course I've never had the chance."

He almost felt sorry for her—but not quite.

Her hand was warm and vibrant in his upon the table, and he gave it a sudden, reassuring squeeze. "Let's go somewhere," he suggested, "so we can—talk about it."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" she said, quickly freeing her hand. "I—I hardly know you."

He captured her hand again. "But this is no place to discuss the wonders of Old Mexico!" he urged. "Romantic places should be discussed in romantic settings, and there is a beautiful moon tonight." He felt her hand begin to relax again, and he hurried to press home his point. "I'm a stranger here," he said, "but you probably know of some little place where we could go and—and just sit and talk."

"Well," she said reluctantly, "there is a little place a few miles from here, a sort of little park. But—"

"Fine!" he said, rapidly shutting off any further protests.

The road meandered through a wooded area and became scarcely more than an indefinite lane. They passed one car parked near a sheltering clump of bushes, and then he guided his own convertible into a little glade that was bathed in moonlight.

He cut the ignition and lights, turned quickly toward her, and gathered her into his arms. Her full lips were cold and distant at first, but suddenly he felt them grow warm and responsive to his own—*eager* was the word for it.

After a moment, she pushed him back and away from her. "There—there's a little lake over there," she whispered almost breathlessly, "and a sandy beach . . ."

He scrambled quickly out of the car and around to her side, and swung open the door. Her shapely legs flashed toward him as she turned to get out. She paused, and he saw her gaze shift to a point just beyond him.

He wheeled quickly, and his mouth fell open. It was incredible! Striding directly toward him was the redhead! She was not wearing red shoes now or carrying a red purse in her hand; she was wearing dark shoes, and in her hand, glinting malevolently in the moonlight, was a nickel-plated revolver, its stubby snout pointed directly at his breast bone. Fear washed through him, leaving him momentarily limp as he remembered the intense anger that had burned in her green eyes that very morning.

"Raise your hands real slow-like," she commanded. "No quick moves. I know how to use this."

The way she said it left no doubt in his mind. As if on their own accord, his arms began reaching slowly upward. "You—you wouldn't dare," he gulped. "There is a car parked near here . . ."

"Don't concern yourself with it," she snapped. "It's mine. How else do you think I got here?"

He moistened his lips. "I'll—I'll gladly give you your money back."

"There's more involved than just the twenty dollars," she said, stepping directly in front of him, the gun never wavering. "Turn around."

He hesitated. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught

sight of the little blond. She hadn't moved from the car, and he guessed he could not expect any immediate help from that quarter. Maybe the redhead wouldn't go so far as to kill him, but on the other hand, a couple of slugs placed in almost any area of his anatomy could certainly slow him down for a long time to come. He turned around.

Yes, he had been right. She was a pro. He could tell by the way she flipped the billfold from his hip pocket in one easy motion. He groaned. At last count, there had been twenty tax-free five-hundred-dollar bills there. The result of a full year's effort! He turned slowly to face her again.

"Maybe—maybe we could work together," he suggested, trying to calculate the exact distance between himself and the hand that held the gun.

"You're not the trustworthy type," she said. "You're unethical. We had a good thing going until you stuck your nose into things. We could have juggled the records for at least another month before a merchandise inventory began to catch up with us. Now we don't feel safe anymore."

She folded the bills into a neat little bundle with her left hand and began to tuck them down into the front of her blouse, her eyes straying from his for a brief instant.

He went into action. His right hand suddenly swept down to clasp the hand that held the gun. His fingers clamped hers into immobility and began twisting the weapon from her grasp.

Then a dull *klunk* at the back of his head exploded his brain into a shower of writhing lights. It dropped him to a sitting position on the grass, where he was only dimly conscious of the blond returning a spike-heeled shoe to a shapely foot.

"Well, where now, little sister?" he heard the redhead ask.

Little sister! In spite of his dazed condition, several things became startlingly clear.

"How about Mexico?" he heard the little blond say as they strolled away. "I hear it's simply an adorable place to spend a vacation!"

FALSE ALARM

by Richard Deming

I got to Rover about four o'clock on a Friday afternoon. Rover was a good name for the place, because it was really a dog. The only reason I stopped was because it was hot, I felt like a beer and the next town, according to my map, was twenty miles farther on.

I came in on a street called East Central Avenue and drove past block after block of identical square gray houses. Occasionally I spotted a small neighborhood store of some kind, but I saw no tavern signs at all. Nor did I see many people. The place gave the impression of being almost deserted, which was odd, inasmuch as a dilapidated sign at the edge of town had claimed a population of ten thousand.

I discovered the answer when I reached the center of town. There was a town square with a crumbling courthouse in its center, and all the major businesses in town were crammed along the four sides of the square.

It was no wonder the rest of the town had seemed deserted, because it seemed to me the bulk of the population must have been crowded into the square. For the most part the men wore blue coveralls and the women gingham dresses. Friday afternoon must be farmer's shopping day, I thought.

I drove into the square before I realized what I was getting into. Two lanes of automobiles were circling the square at dirt-track speed, presumably all hunting parking places. More kept surging in from the feeder streets centering each of the square's four sides. The standard method of gaining entry into the stream of circling traffic from the side streets seemed to be to close your eyes and bear down on the horn.

I made the circle twice with my heart in my throat, then escaped by one of the side streets and found a parking place a block away.

During my circling I had managed to spot a sign at the northeast corner of the square which read: **FAT SAM'S BAR AND GRILL**. When I got back to the square on foot, I headed directly for it.

Inside, there was a single large, cool room with a bar running the length of one wall and with a lot of round wooden tables spread around the remaining space. It seemed to be strictly a man's bar, because there wasn't a woman in the place. Only about half the tables were filled, but the bar was lined two deep.

As on the street, most of the men wore blue coveralls, though there was a sprinkling of younger men in slacks and jackets. I was the only one there in a coat and tie.

There was no table service. I managed to squeeze in at the end of the bar long enough to get a schooner of beer from the perspiring bartender, backed out and carried it over to one of the empty tables.

A young man of about twenty-one, neatly dressed in tan slacks and a light jacket, and also carrying a schooner of beer, reached the table at the same moment I did. We both stopped and looked at each other.

Then I grinned. "Guess there's room for both of us. Sit down."

Returning my grin a trifle abashedly, he pulled out a chair and sat. I took the one across from him. We each took a pull at our beer.

Wiping the back of his hand across his mouth, he examined my necktie and said, "Visitor?"

"Uh-huh," I said, examining him in return.

He was a thin, narrow-shouldered lad weighing only about a hundred and thirty pounds with close-set eyes and a rather shifty look. He would have made a lousy heist artist, because he looked too much like one. Which didn't mean he was, of course. Most successful heisters look honest.

"Why would anyone visit this miserable town?" he inquired.

"Just passing through," I told him. "Why do you call it miserable? It looks pretty lively to me."

"Lively? Know what the teen-age kick is here? They turn in false alarms. There are so many false alarms, it's almost an emergency situation. There's nothing else for the kids to do."

I said, "There seems to be a lot of adult activity."

"Oh, on the square, sure. This joint is always crowded. But there's no place to go except the town square, and look what you've got for companionship. A lot of dull-witted miners, drinking beer."

"Miners?" I asked, glancing around the room. "I thought they were farmers."

"Naw. They're all employees of the Rover City Copper Mining Company, our sole industry. If the mine ever peters out, this town will dry up and blow away."

When our schooners ran dry, I offered to buy two more if he would go after them. He accepted with such alacrity, I suspected he didn't have much money.

Over the second beer he introduced himself as Andy Carr. I gave the name of George Snyder instead of my real one of Charles Gagnon. While it was hardly likely that a want for a couple of liquor-store heists would have spread this far, why take chances?

I asked, "You work in the mine, Andy?"

"Naw. That's for morons. My old man does, though."

"What's your line?"

"Well, nothing right now," he said, flushing a little. "I had a store job for a while, but they don't pay nothing. Unless you're in business, the only way to make a living around here is in the mine."

Still living off his father at twenty-one, I thought. Here was a potential bum.

Glancing at the clock over the bar, he said, "A minute to five. In exactly sixty seconds old Sam will lug out his money bag. You can set your watch by him."

"Who's old Sam?" I asked.

"Fat Sam Cooney, the owner of this joint. Watch that door next to the kitchen door."

I looked in the indicated direction. Just as I glanced that way the door opened and an enormous fat man of about fifty stepped out. During the moment that the door was open, I could see that beyond it was a small office.

The fat man was carrying a large canvas sack. He walked right past us and went out the door.

I gave Andy Carr an inquiring look.

"The week's receipts," Carr said. "The bank stays open until six on Friday, and Sam leaves here to make his deposit exactly at five every week. There were about twenty-five hundred bucks in that bag."

The tone in which he said this made me look at him sharply. There had been a note of wistful envy in it. I wondered if perhaps his larcenous appearance accurately denoted his character after all.

I'm always on the lookout for possible scores, and

twenty-five hundred clams was worth at least inquiring into.

I said idly, "Probably mostly in checks, huh? I imagine a lot of the miners cash their pay checks here."

He shook his head. "The mine makes up its payroll in cash. Maybe there were a couple of small personal checks in that bag, but most of it was good old spendable cash."

Again I caught the note of wistful envy, as though he had often contemplated some means of relieving Fat Sam of one of his bags.

I sent up a trial balloon. "I should think some joker would knock the joint over some quiet night, with all that money lying around."

He snorted. "What quiet night? This joint is always jammed like this from the minute it opens until it closes at midnight. The mine runs two tricks, and the off trick is always in here, because there's no place else to go. I wouldn't want to chance pulling a gun in the middle of fifty to sixty crazy miners. Those guys are too nuts to be afraid of a gun. They'd take it away and make you eat it."

Both his tone and his words suggested he had considered the possibility of a holdup. Perhaps it had been mere idle speculation as to how some professional might work it, with no thought of making an attempt himself, but you never know.

I said, "There would be nobody here in the middle of the night. I'm surprised some burglar hasn't taken a crack at it."

He almost laughed. "Did you notice the front door when you walked in? It's three-inch oak and a bar goes across it from inside at night. The rear door has an inner door of steel bars and a burglar-proof lock. The windows are all barred. And if you got past all that, the money's kept in a combination safe bolted to the office floor."

He *had* analyzed all the possibilities of getting his hands on the money, I thought. Possibly it had been merely mental exercise for his own amusement, in the same way that some people dream up elaborate plans to rob Fort Knox without ever really intending to try, but more and more I was beginning to think he had real larceny in his soul.

I said, "Some joker could catch him at the rear door as he was locking up, force him back in and make him open the safe."

"Yeah, except the back door opens onto the parking lot of the sheriff's office and the lot's lighted with floodlights. The desk of the night-duty deputy faces a window looking right at the tavern's back door, and every night as he locks up, Fat Sam and the deputy wave to each other. I've checked."

I gave him a quizzical smile and he flushed. "I mean I happened to be back there one night and I saw it," he almost stammered. "I didn't mean—" He let it die and averted his gaze when he saw my amused expression.

"I know what you mean," I said. "You've figured all the angles you could think of, and so far have batted zero. Don't be embarrassed. I wouldn't mind taking a stab at it myself."

His face jerked toward me. "You're kidding."

With my eyes fixed on his, I gave my head a slow shake. "Were you just casing the lay to amuse yourself, or were you in earnest?"

After a moment of astonished silence, he said, "Are you—I mean is your business—"

When his voice trickled off to nothing, I said quietly, "Never mind what I am, or what my business is. Are you interested in a partnership?"

He licked his lips and glanced furtively around. He would have made an excellent movie villain. Under ordinary circumstances I wouldn't have considered him as a possible partner in anything. In a strange town he probably would be picked up on suspicion by the first cop who saw him.

In this setup he had the advantage of having thoroughly cased the lay, though, which made him indispensable.

When he was satisfied that no one was eavesdropping, he asked in a suddenly husky voice, "Are you serious?"

"Totally."

He had to look around again before saying, "Fifty-fifty?"

"Right down the middle. If you don't quit gazing around as though you just picked a pocket, somebody's going to wonder what's eating you. Cut it out and just act natural, huh? Nobody's close enough to hear us."

"Sorry," he said with a gulp. "This kind of takes the wind out of me. I mean I've dreamed about it, but I never expected—" His voice trailed off again.

I said, "Let's get on with the discussion. I'm no safe

cracker, so burglary is out. Hitting him in here is out too, if what you say is true. I've no more desire than you have to be torn apart by a bunch of crazy miners. That leaves hitting him between here and the bank. How far is the bank?"

"Right next door. And at five P.M. on a Friday there are as many miners wandering up and down the sidewalk as there are in here. We'd be up against the same thing."

The problem was beginning to compare with knocking over Fort Knox. I was contemplating forgetting the whole thing and driving on when there was a rending crash of metal from outside.

Instantly customers began streaming out the door. Andy Carr jumped up too and joined the exodus. As the only windows in the place were small, barred squares too high to see out of, the only way to learn what all the excitement was about was to trail along.

I was the last customer out of the place, leaving only the bartender behind. And even he came as far as the doorway to peer out.

On the far side of the square a couple of cars had collided. All traffic had stopped and a couple of hundred people were converging on the scene from all directions.

By the time I reached the edge of the crowd, a solid mass of humanity covered that whole side of the square. The low wall which boxed in the courthouse lawn was crammed with spectators on that side, gaping above the heads of the crowd. Others stood on the lawn and courthouse steps.

I couldn't see anything, but I did locate Andy Carr.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Just a couple of smashed fenders, I guess," he said, disgusted that it wasn't more serious. "See what I mean about this dead town?"

"How's that?"

"Everybody rushes to see anything at all that happens. It's because there's so little else to get excited about."

His words popped an idea into my head. If the accident had occurred ten minutes earlier, just as Fat Sam Cooney carried his money bag from the office, only the proprietor and the bartender would have been left in the place.

I turned to look back toward the tavern. On that side of the square some people were staring from the windows of the bank next door to the tavern, and a number of

businessmen and clerks were peering from the doorways and through the show windows of stores, but there wasn't a soul on the sidewalk. Everyone who wasn't working seemed to have rushed to see the accident.

If a similar distraction could be arranged the following Friday, just as Fat Sam emerged from his office—

I said to Andy, "How do I get in touch with you?"

"You going?" he asked.

"I want to check into a motel. Can we get together tonight to resume our conversation?"

"Sure. At Fat Sam's?"

I shook my head. "I don't think we ought to get too thick in public. Got a phone?"

"Yeah. It's listed under my dad's name. Joseph Carr on Bodie Street. It's in the book."

"I'll phone at exactly nine P.M.," I said. "Make a point of answering personally."

"Okay. The best motel is the Shady Lane, about a mile from the square out North Main." He pointed to the street bisecting the north side of the square.

I gave him a nod of thanks and walked off.

If the Shady Lane Motel was the best in Rover, I pitied the guests at the others. It consisted of a row of paintless square cabins with flat, tarpaper roofs which absorbed sunlight, converted it into heat, and poured the heat into the rooms below. The rugless floor of my cabin creaked, and the shower dripped.

It was clean, though, and it was certainly reasonable. I paid twenty-five dollars for a full week.

There was no phone in my cabin, so I lingered at the restaurant where I had dinner until nine o'clock, then phoned Andy Carr from the restaurant booth. He must have been waiting at the phone, because he answered in the middle of the first ring.

"Andy?"

"Yeah."

"George Snyder. Do you have a car?"

"No."

"Hmm. How far are you from the Shady Lane Motel?"

"Only about a half-mile. I can walk it."

"Good. I'm in cabin five. Don't check for me at the office. Just come straight there."

"Right," he said. "See you in about twenty minutes."

By the time I got back to my cabin, it had cooled suffi-

ciently for it to be quite comfortable. A knock sounded at nine-twenty-five. I opened the door, to find Carr standing there.

Letting him in, I closed and locked the door. I had already drawn the shades.

Glancing around, he said nervously. "This thing has already got me jumping out of my skin."

"Want to drop it?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he said quickly. "I'll be all right."

"Then sit down and we'll talk it over. Want a drink?" I indicated a bottle of whiskey on the dresser.

He said he did, and I poured shots in both water glasses with which the cabin was furnished. "There's no ice and no mix. Want water in it?"

"That's okay."

Carrying both glasses into the bathroom, I added water to each. When I came out again, he was seated in the only chair with his head cocked to one side, listening. I paused to listen too. All I could hear was a siren in the distance.

"Fire engines," he said, grinning at me. "Probably kids again."

"Oh," I said. "I thought you heard someone coming."

I handed him a drink and sat on the bed.

After we had sampled our drinks, I asked, "You're sure you're in this all the way? I don't want to waste a lot of time planning this score, then have you chicken out at the last minute."

"I'm in," he said sincerely. "I'd do anything for enough money to blow this burg. I need a break."

"Okay. Then I've got a tentative plan. Did you notice how fast Fat Sam's place cleared today when that accident happened?"

"Sure. They even run out like that when a jet goes over. I told you there was nothing to do here."

"Well, suppose we staged a similar diversion about one minute to five next Friday, so the place would empty just as Sam came from his office?"

His eyes grew round. "Why didn't I ever think of that?" he breathed. "What kind of diversion?"

"I haven't thought that far. It's just a tentative idea. But we have a week to work on it. Now, the next question is, do you care if, after the event, everybody in town knows you were involved?"

This apparently hadn't occurred to him, because he looked startled. His brow creased in a frown.

"It doesn't make any difference to me," I said. "I'm a stranger here, nobody knows my real name, and I don't care if I ever come back again. But this is your home town. Fifteen minutes after the heist there will be radio-grams about us going all over the state. All they'll have on me is a description, and I'm a pretty average-looking guy. But your real name will go out, your known habits—everything. What about that?"

He asked uncertainly, "Couldn't we wear masks?"

I gave him an amused smile. "You mean sit around in the joint wearing them, waiting for the diversion? Even if we did, if you disappear from town, everybody's going to know why."

It began to register on him that I was working up to something. "So what's your suggestion?" he asked.

"I don't think you ought to bug out. After the job, I think you ought to sit pat for a couple of weeks before you take off."

"But suppose I'm recognized?"

"You won't be there. I can handle Sam and the bartender alone. We'll give you the safer job of creating the diversion."

He eyed me fishily. "Then how do I collect my cut?"

"We'll work that out some way. Arrange to meet somewhere in a couple of weeks."

He gave his head a slow shake. "You mentioned a minute ago that nobody around here knows your real name, which, I suppose, includes me. It isn't George Snyder, is it?"

"Nope," I admitted cheerfully.

"Then I'd never find you if you left me holding the bag. I'm gonna stick right by your side until we split."

I shrugged. I hadn't really expected him to be that much of a patsy, but it had been worth the try. "Okay. I never skin a partner, but if you don't trust me, we'll work out something else. What's your suggestion?"

He didn't have any suggestions, so I made another one. I suggested we sleep on it.

As I unlocked the door to let him out, I said, "I want to case the lay some more. If you come in to Fat Sam's tomorrow and see me there, don't do any more than nod to me. Some of the customers may have noticed us talk-

ing today, and might think it funny if you completely ignored me. But we don't want anyone to suspect we're thick. We're just casual acquaintances."

"All right," he said. "You planning to park on the square tomorrow?"

"I'm not even going to drive onto it, if I can help it."

"Then I'll give you a tip. Lock your car. It would be safe on the square, because there's always a lot of people around there, but not on a side street. Not even on a parking lot. The teen-agers in this town carry ignition jumpers. When they're not turning in false alarms, they're joy-riding in swiped cars. They always abandon them somewhere in town, so the owners get them back, but it's a nuisance. Then, too, every so often they crack one up."

"I'll remember," I said. "Now on further contacts, when's the best time to catch you at home?"

"We eat at six. If you phoned at five of, you'd always catch me."

"All right. I'll make a point of calling you at five of six every evening, whether anything has developed or not. If something has, we'll arrange another meeting."

"Okay," he agreed. "I'll expect your call tomorrow then."

I let him out and went to bed.

Saturday morning I put on a sport shirt and jacket so as to be less conspicuous in town. I skirted the square by taking the streets a block away from it and making a complete circle around it. There were parking lots behind the buildings on all four sides, I discovered.

The one immediately behind Fat Sam's Bar and Grill was for the sheriff's office, but on the east side there was a lot behind a supermarket. An alley running east and west cut into the northeast corner of the square and ran right past the parking lot, so that the tavern entrance wasn't more than a hundred feet from the lot.

That would be the best place to leave the car while pulling the job, I decided. The next step was to carefully plan the escape route.

On the opposite side of the lot from the alley was East Central, the street by which I had entered town. I recalled that it was a stop street, clear to the edge of town, with no signal lights to slow you down.

Getting out a road map, I located a secondary road

about a half-mile beyond the east edge of town which cut south for about two miles, then linked to a main highway which ran southwest. Southwest was the general direction in which I had been heading ever since I left New York.

I drove out East Central to the secondary road, cut across to the main highway, and turned right. I stayed on the highway for a good thirty miles to make sure no construction was going on which would sidetrack me into detours. Then I pulled into a station for gas, turned around, and drove back.

It would be unnecessary to heist a car for the job, I decided. Neither Fat Sam Cooney nor his bartender knew what mine looked like, and no one was likely to pay any attention when I drove off the parking lot after the job, because I planned to arrange things so that no alarm would be raised for some minutes afterward. I figured I should be thirty miles on my way before the cops could get road blocks set up or trace my car.

Parking on the supermarket lot, I carefully locked the car and walked up the alley to the tavern. I timed the walk by the sweep hand of my watch. It took me twenty-five seconds.

The square wasn't as crowded as it had been yesterday, but there were still a lot of people roaming the sidewalks. Fat Sam's was just as crowded, though.

Andy Carr wasn't in the place.

I had one beer. Then, as it was now approaching noon, I crossed the square to a restaurant for lunch. I got back about one P.M. and sat at a table the rest of the afternoon.

The crowd never abated. As fast as customers left, others filtered in. As my partner had indicated, there was no period slack enough to make a heist feasible.

About four-thirty Andy Carr came in, gave me a distant nod and went to the bar, where he got into conversation with a miner. He was learning, I noted with satisfaction, because he didn't throw a single furtive look in my direction.

He left again at five-thirty. I waited another twenty-five minutes, then phoned him from the tavern's booth. He answered immediately.

All day I had been musing over what kind of diversion

we could plan to take place at exactly a minute to five on Friday, but nothing had jelled. I said, "No ideas so far. How about you?"

"I haven't figured anything."

"Then I'll call you again tomorrow," I said, and hung up.

The tavern was closed on Sunday, which I didn't discover until I had driven downtown in the afternoon and found the square deserted. I killed the day by checking the escape route once again, this time taking the main highway a full hundred miles southwest without running into any construction.

If only I could think of a practical diversion, it would be in the bag.

The idea hit me on Monday. After lunch, as I was leaving the restaurant across the square from Fat Sam's, I noted a small crowd gathered at the southwest corner and ambled over to see what was going on.

I must be picking up the habits of the townspeople, I thought ruefully, when I discovered what the attraction was. Like them, I was beginning to rush to rubberneck at anything which might relieve the boredom.

A workman was removing a fire-alarm box from a post and installing a new one.

I had walked away before the idea hit me. The alarm box was diagonally across the square from the tavern. Fire trucks pulling up there with their sirens whining would certainly empty the tavern. And that was something which could be timed almost to the second.

When I phoned Andy Carr at the usual time that night, I said, "Meeting tonight, same time."

Again he showed just before nine-thirty. When I had mixed drinks for both of us, I got down to business.

"I've figured out the diversion," I said. "You know that fire-alarm box at the southwest corner of the square?"

After thinking, he shook his head. "I never noticed it."

"Well, there's one there. Friday, just before five o'clock, you're going to turn in a false alarm."

His eyes widened. "In front of everybody? The square's jammed at that time."

"You'd be surprised at what you can get away with in a crowd, if you act natural," I said. "If you just casually reach out and pull the hook as you walk by, I doubt that you'll even be noticed."

"But there's a glass you have to break first," he objected.

"You can take care of that late Thursday night, when the square's deserted. Nobody's likely to notice the glass is missing, because they just installed a new box today. They won't be checking it so soon."

After thinking this over, he became a little more enthusiastic. "Yeah, it should work. When fire engines come tearing into the square, the tavern should empty like magic."

"We'll have to figure just how long it will take engines to get to the scene. Where's the fire station?"

"Out West Central, six blocks from the square. I'd guess it would take them about three minutes."

"We'll have to time it exactly," I said. "Do you happen to know where there's an alarm box six blocks from the station in some other direction than the square?"

He thought about it, finally shook his head. "I never went in for false alarms like the other kids when I was younger. I don't know where any of them are."

"I'll drive around and check tomorrow," I told him. "Meanwhile, we may as well work out the other details. Can you drive?"

"Sure."

"Then here's the plan. I'll handle the inside work, and you'll do the getaway driving. The car will be parked on the lot behind that supermarket on the east side of the square. It's a gray Plymouth sedan with New York plates. After you pull the alarm, walk without hurry over to the lot, get the engine started, and face the car toward the exit onto East Central. When I come along with the money bag and jump in, head up East Central at a normal rate of speed."

"I'll need the keys," he said. "How do I get them?"

After a moment's thought, I said, "I'll drive onto the lot at four-thirty. You be there. I'll toss you the keys and head for the tavern. You head for the southwest corner of the square. Okay?"

"All right," he agreed. "What happens after we take off?"

"Nobody will know you were involved in the heist, so I think you ought to follow my original suggestion and stay right in town. I'll divide the loot as we're driving up East Central, you can pull over and get out with your cut, a

few blocks from the scene. I'll slip over in the driver's seat and keep going."

The plan seemed to please him, for he smiled. "That sounds smooth."

"That's all for now," I told him. "I'll phone you again tomorrow at the usual time."

After he was gone, I considered means of taking off with the whole take. As I would have a gun and he wouldn't, it would be simple merely to force him out of the car empty-handed when he stopped on East Central.

I finally decided against this, though. It probably would make him sore enough to phone the sheriff an anonymous tip describing my car and giving the license number. It seemed better just to short-change him. As I would be doing the splitting and his attention would be on driving, it would be easy to count most of the big bills into my stack and drive off with two-thirds of the loot. As he wouldn't know exactly what the bag contained, he could never be sure he'd been short-changed, no matter what he suspected when he counted his cut.

Tuesday I reconnoitered the area immediately around the fire station. Aside from the one at the square, there were no alarm boxes exactly six blocks from it. I found some at four-block distance and at eight-block distance, but I wanted exact timing.

Finally it occurred to me how to get it without needing an alarm box.

That evening when I phoned Carr, I set up another meeting. When he arrived at the usual time, I explained how we would make the test.

"There are no alarm boxes at the right distance from the station," I said. "But you can phone in an alarm as easily as you can pull a hook. At exactly five minutes to five tomorrow, I want you to phone the fire station and report a fire at West Central and Clark. That's exactly the same distance as the square, but in the opposite direction. How good a watch do you have?"

"Pretty good. It loses about a minute a month."

"That's only two seconds a day," I said. "Mine gains about the same, so I'll set it four seconds slower than yours. Let's coordinate watches."

After we had adjusted our watches, there was nothing to do until the next day.

At ten of five on Wednesday I parked at the corner of Clark and Woodrow, which was a block north of West Central and gave me a good view of the intersection of West Central and Clark.

At four minutes of five I heard a siren begin to sound from the direction of the firehouse, which meant it had taken just one minute after the alarm for the first engine to get rolling. A minute and forty seconds later a pump truck pulled up at the intersection with its siren tapering off to a moan.

Andy's guess of three minutes had been within twenty seconds.

We wanted the first engine to arrive at the square at one minute to five on Friday. An earlier arrival might cause Fat Sam to run to see what the excitement was, along with the customers, before he took the money from the safe. A later one would allow him to get out of the tavern while it was still full of customers. As a few seconds one way or the other wouldn't matter, however, I decided that if Andy pulled the hook at four minutes to five, the timing would be just about right.

There was no point in holding another meeting just for that. When I phoned Andy at the usual time, I said, "All set. I'll give you the exact time when I see you at the parking lot Friday."

"Okay," he said. "Until four-thirty Friday, then."

I stayed away from the tavern the next day. At four-thirty P.M. on Friday I pulled onto the supermarket parking lot and backed into a slot. Andy Carr strolled over from the alley as I got out of the car.

I locked the car before tossing him the keys. He would have plenty of time to unlock it, and I didn't want to chance some teen-ager lousing us up by deciding to take a joy ride at the crucial moment.

"Did you take care of that glass last night?" I asked.

"There wasn't any. It's a new type of box that just has a little door you lift. When shall I pull it?"

"Exactly at four minutes to five. Let's check watches again."

They were together to the second.

Minutes later I was seated at a table in Fat Sam's with a beer before me. It wasn't until then that it occurred to me that, while Andy and I had coordinated time, we

hadn't checked to see if we agreed with the tavern clock. Hurriedly I glanced at my watch, then at the clock over the bar.

I relaxed when I saw that they were within seconds of each other.

At a quarter of five the fat proprietor came from behind the bar carrying a stack of bills, which I assumed represented the day's receipts so far. When he entered the small office, for an instant I thought he was going to jump the gun and spoil all our plans. But as time passed without the door reopening, I realized he was probably counting money and making up a deposit slip.

At four minutes to five my heart began to pump, as it always does just before a job. Andy would be pulling the hook right now, I thought. And now he's walking toward the parking lot.

At three minutes to five there was the growl of a siren some blocks away. Conversation ceased, and customers cocked their heads to listen. As the siren neared, one or two began to drift toward the door.

At a minute and twenty seconds to five the scream of the siren rose to a crescendo, then died off as the first engine entered the square. Customers scrambled toward the door in a body.

My partner would be in the car by now, I thought, and would probably already have the engine going.

Because the patrons could crowd through the door no more than two at a time, it took a little longer than I anticipated for the room to empty. But it worked out just right. The door swung closed behind the last one exactly at five.

The bartender moved from behind the bar and started to walk toward the door at the same moment the office door opened and Fat Sam stepped out carrying a canvas money bag.

Standing up, I drew my gun and said, "Freeze, both of you!"

Both stared at me with their mouths open. The barkeep slowly raised his hands.

"Drop the bag, Sam," I said, aiming the gun at the fat man.

The sack hit the floor with a plop, and his hands shot overhead.

"Into the office, both of you," I ordered, gesturing with my gun.

They didn't give me any trouble. Both scurried into the room, eager to please.

Standing in the doorway, I glanced around the room. The only window was identical to those in the barroom, high and barred.

I said to Sam, "Get up the key to this door. And do it fast."

He dropped his right hand, still leaving the left raised, and felt in his pants pocket. Producing an old-fashioned key, he tossed it to me.

Backing out, I locked them in and dropped the key into my pocket.

When I hit the street, carrying the canvas sack, no one at all was on this side of the square. The opposite side was jammed, though.

Unhurriedly I walked up the alley. The car was parked exactly where I had left it.

But Andy Carr wasn't in the driver's seat, and the car was still locked.

I turned cold. Even if I had been able to get into the car, I had nothing with which to make an ignition bridge. Rapidly I strode back down the alley and gazed at the crowd across the square. What the devil had happened to the idiot?

Returning to the car, I stood next to it in frustrated indecision for a couple of minutes. When Andy still failed to appear, I started checking cars parked nearby. All of them were locked.

Too much time was passing for it to be safe to linger any longer. At any moment the first customers would be drifting back into Fat Sam's.

In desperation I headed on foot up East Central, hoping that I could flag down a ride and take over the car at gunpoint.

There was a lot of traffic on East Central, but it was all heading for the square. I had plodded six blocks before a shiny black sedan going in my direction came along. When I signaled with my thumb, it pulled over to the curb.

Too late I saw the small round sheriff's department insigne on the front door. Before I could reach for my

gun, I was covered by the deputy seated next to the driver.

I let the sack fall and raised my hands.

On the way back to the sheriff's office, I asked bitterly, "What went wrong?"

"A couple of things," the deputy who had handcuffed me said. "For one, while it was smart of you to lock Sam and his bartender in the office, you neglected to notice the phone on his desk. He was phoning us about you as you walked out the door."

After glumly considering this, I said, "What was the other thing I did wrong?"

"Your choice of a partner. Andy Carr is locally known as the gutless wonder. The minute we realized the false alarm had been turned in to clear the tavern, we knew Andy had to be your accomplice. It took us roughly two minutes to break him down and get the whole story."

"But how did you catch up with him?" I inquired.

The deputy laughed. "We didn't have to. He waited for us. We've had so much trouble with false alarms around here, the fire department just installed a new type of alarm box. When you pull the hook, a manacle automatically closes around your wrist and holds you there until the battalion chief arrives with a key."

SUITABLE FOR FRAMING

by Mary Linn Roby

It was fairly late by the time I turned off the printing machine and arranged the finished snapshots on the table to dry. The back room of my photography shop was a pretty cozy place, with the walls covered with sample portraits and coffee simmering on the hot plate, and all my developing equipment handy.

I hummed to myself as I pulled some yellow envelopes out of a drawer, thinking I would just package these last sets and be done for the night. Then I could relax.

The very last series was an odd one—a single and eleven blanks. Some nut had taken one picture and then slipped the film out of the camera.

Still, that one print had come out well. It was the picture of a man and woman in an affectionate pose. I started to put it in the envelope and then I swore and looked at it again.

The girl had on a white uniform of some sort, and had her arms around the man's neck. Unless my eyes were failing me prematurely, I knew that man. It was H.J. Higgins from over in Danforth, THE H.J. Higgins. I didn't know him well—that sort of company was too rich for my blood—but I did know one thing. That girl wasn't H.J.'s wife.

I put the snapshot down carefully and lit a cigarette. This was an interesting development. From what I knew of H.J., he wasn't a very likable personality. He was supposed to be a big business tycoon, although everyone knew that the only money he'd ever seen was his wife's. She was loaded. Her father had bought up most of Ketchitaw County just before they discovered oil.

Yes, sir, I knew that picture was dynamite, all right. From what I'd heard of H.J.'s wife, she was no beauty. She had to be at least ten years older than H.J. Now this girl? Pure sex. Some people had all the luck—money at home and a girl like this waiting for him somewhere.

But it didn't make sense, not in a small place like this with everybody knowing everybody else. You didn't let a girl take a photograph like this and let it be developed in

a town fifteen miles away. You'd have to want a picture pretty bad for that. Not that I was much for gossip, but there were some . . .

On the other hand, perhaps H.J. hadn't known this picture was being taken. He didn't look as though his mind was on a camera. The way he was staring at that girl, like he wanted to eat her up—that sort of stuff was grounds for blackmail.

I stubbed out my cigarette and lit another. My fingers were shaking with excitement. Blackmail! Of course! That was it! That's what the picture was going to be used for. Somebody got the one shot needed, took the roll out of the camera, and brought it here.

My fingers wouldn't move fast enough as I went through my files, looking for the name of the person who had brought in the film. Here it was—Frances Damon, and an address in Danforth. I stared at the address, wondering what to do. Actually what was there for me to do except put the snapshot in the yellow envelope with the blank negatives and put it behind the counter out in the shop to be picked up when Miss Damon wanted it? There was nothing pornographic about the picture, so I couldn't very well refuse to give it back. I could pretend it hadn't developed, of course, fool around with the negative. Why, though, should I do anything like that? Higgins didn't mean anything to me. If someone wanted to blackmail the jerk, that was her business.

But was it? After all, I had done plenty of the work. Without me she wouldn't get anywhere. There was lots of Higgins money to be tapped, enough to go around.

I stood looking around the little room. Funny, but it didn't seem quite as cozy now. Actually, if I were absolutely truthful with myself I had to admit that the whole place was pretty run-down. The shop out front was scarcely eight by ten feet. The counter took up most of the room, and there was no place to display anything.

I thought of the kind of shop I'd always wanted—plush carpets, Swedish modern furniture, wide windows opening onto the street—so everyone in town could look in and see the kind of success Danny McGee had made of himself.

"His father was the town drunk," they'd say, "but the boy has made it big."

It was a familiar dream. I ran my tongue over my lips

and then went to the phone and dialed a number in Danforth.

The girl's voice was warm, not the voice of a blackmailer. I almost hung up without saying anything.

"Hello," I said, bracing myself. "This is Danny McGee in Alfredton—the photography shop."

"Is the picture ready?" She was excited. There was no doubt about that. I noticed she had said picture in the singular.

"It's ready, all right," I said. "It was a very interesting shot, I thought. H.J. Higgins ought to be real tickled with the way it came out."

There was a long silence, and then I could hear her breathing hard close to the receiver. "What do you want?" she asked finally.

"Just a little chat," I told her. "What about my bringing the picture over tonight?"

There was another pause, but I knew I had her where I wanted her. She was the loser either way. If she said *no* to meeting me, then she'd never get her hands on that picture, and if she said *yes* . . .

"All right," she said finally. Her voice was flat. "Bring the snapshot with you."

It was only a fifteen-minute drive to Danforth. At half-past nine I walked up the steps of the run-down apartment house on Grifton Street. A girl was waiting for me at the head of the stairs.

"Mr. McGee?" she said, as though she hoped it weren't.

I stared at her admiringly. She was the girl in the picture, which was just the way I had hoped it would be. I wondered if a partner had taken the picture, or had she, perhaps, rigged the camera so she could operate it at a distance?

I followed her into her apartment, taking in the slimmness of her long legs and the graceful swing to her walk. It all proved that you couldn't tell a thing by a woman's looks. This one had blue china eyes like a doll's, and here she was, taking part in one of the nastiest kind of deals one person can pull on another.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. McGee?" she said quietly.

The furniture was shabby, but everything was neat and clean. I sat and looked around for an ashtray.

"Did you bring the print?" she asked me.

I looked at her more closely now. She was standing next to the light and it was easy to see how scared she was. Her hands were clutched tightly together, and her knees were shaking.

I didn't mince any words. By the time I had finished, she was sitting very quietly in a chair opposite. Her eyes never left my face.

"All right," she said in a low voice. "It was a silly idea anyway. Not that it was mine. Oh, I'm not making this up. I work at a sauna bath just down the street, you see. I'm a masseuse."

I nodded my head. I'd never been inside a sauna bath but I had my own ideas about what went on there.

"Don't look at me that way!" the girl exclaimed. "It's a perfectly respectable profession. It's only people like you in these dirty-minded small towns who—"

"You don't have to convince me of anything," I told her.

She took a deep breath. She was pretty cute when she was mad. "All right," she said. "Well, there's this man named Higgins, see. He came in once last winter, and then he started coming back pretty regular, always for a massage."

"Any hanky-panky?" I asked her.

"You look here!" she shrilled. "I don't have to sit here and let you ask me these questions."

"You want the picture, don't you?" I said.

"All right. About a week ago I got an anonymous letter. Here."

She pulled open a desk drawer and took out a piece of stationery. It was expensive, heavy, embossed stuff. At the top was a bird that looked like a vulture, but was probably an eagle.

"Whoever wrote this suggested that I find out who the man is who comes in every Thursday. The note said he is married to a rich woman who is older than he, and that he likes to dabble around in politics and couldn't afford a scandal. It's quite a long note, says this man likes to fool around, but hasn't got caught yet."

I looked at the letter. It was just like she said. "It doesn't say anything about blackmail," I told her.

She shook her head. "But I think the implication is pretty obvious, don't you? At least that's what I thought

of right away. Oh, it was a crazy idea. I borrowed a good camera from a . . . a good friend, and . . ."

I grinned. I imagined a girl like her had plenty of *very* good friends.

". . . and he showed me how to set the time-lapse gadget. I set it up in the room where I give Mr. Higgins his massage and—well, it was easy." She stared at me defiantly.

"This 'friend' who lent you the camera," I said, "does he know anything about all this?"

"No." She looked me straight in the eye.

"Just you and I know, then," I said softly.

She got up and began to pace around the room. "Look here, Mr. McGee," she said, "I'm grateful to you for stopping me from doing something I would have been sorry for the rest of my life. You can take that picture and tear it up. Burn it. Burn the negative, too."

I uncrossed my legs and stared up at her. It was a long cool stare, just to let her know the kind of person she was dealing with. "I don't know," I said, "whether that's such a good idea."

She stared at me. She was a cute trick, but not very quick on the uptake.

"I think your original plan is clever," I said, "and I thought you might want a little help. In contacting Mr. Higgins, maybe."

It took us a couple of hours to plan the whole thing. I was to get a fifty-percent cut. We decided not to risk letting H.J. talk to either of us in person. We could send him a copy of the snap; as long as we had the negative, it didn't matter. We could tell him how much money we wanted.

"It's going to be like taking money from a child," I kept telling her.

By the time I left, she was feeling a little better. I'd told her about the kind of shop I wanted, and she'd told me about her dream of going to California. I guess she'd had a pretty rough life. Her parents worked with a carnival and she never went to school long enough in one place to make any friends. She wanted a lot out of life. So far she hadn't got much, but I was going to help her.

I wrote the letter that night. I'd read some detective stories, so I knew enough not to try to disguise my

handwriting, or use a typewriter. I cut letters out of the paper and stuck them in the right order. Then, just when I was about to put the whole thing in an envelope, I chickened out. There was something about letting H.J. have anything my hands had touched that scared the tar out of me. You could never tell what the police had up their sleeves next. Perhaps I'd been reading too much Dick Tracy. Anyhow, I decided to call him.

So I did. There was nothing to it. He was at home even though it was ten o'clock on a Tuesday morning. I thought he would be.

"H.J.," I said, without any preamble, "I've got a picture you might be interested in seeing."

He swore at me a little. He was that kind of man. He had to hang up pretty sudden, too—I figured that was because his wife must have come into the room—but he agreed to meet me that night at Frances' apartment.

Frances and I celebrated in advance. We were going to let H.J. have a copy of the print, making it quite clear that we had the negative, and then we were going to ask for ten thousand dollars. It seemed pretty reasonable to me. We were going to play fair, too, and not keep the negative, or else keep it just for safety's sake. Five thousand was all I needed. As for Frances, that was more money than she had ever dreamed of having. Before I came along, she was thinking of asking for a hundred and fifty.

H.J. Higgins came as a surprise. I'd seen him around and summed him up as a blowhard, but he was a smart fellow. I guess it takes a smart one to marry money.

Anyway, he was pretty calm about the whole thing. He sat down with a drink and looked at the picture. Then he said he was surprised at Frances, that he didn't think she'd do a thing like that. For a while I thought she was going to break down and cry, or do something stupid, but I bucked her up. I said a few nasty things to him, and he turned nasty, too. It didn't take long before she could see that H.J. was the type who deserves to get the needle.

Like I said, H.J. Higgins was sharper than I thought. First thing I realized, he was saying something about his wife being willing to pay even more than he could for that picture.

"What the devil are you talking about?" I asked him.

"The whole point of this caper is to keep your wife from seeing this."

"Oh, she knows I play around some," H.J. said.

He smoked these big cigars, and the smell was beginning to make me sick.

"Not that I want to cast any aspersions on your good name, Frances, my dear, but there have been other girls. And if there's one thing my wife doesn't want, it's publicity. Hurts her pride, I guess. She's baled me out before, but never because of a picture."

Frances and I stared at one another.

"Now, this is what we ought to do," H.J. said, leaning back in his chair. "Ask for thirty thousand for the negative. We could split that three ways nice and easy."

Like I said, H.J. was a sharp character. Ideas were his forte.

Frances was kind of hesitant at first, but I showed her what a fool she was being.

"If it hadn't been for me, you'd have come out of this with a lousy one hundred and fifty," I reminded her. "Now, the way we got it set up, you'll clear ten thousand. Don't numbers mean anything to you, girl?"

"One thing we got to make sure of is that my wife doesn't know I'm behind this," H.J. said.

He believed in being the big boss, all right. That kind of got under my skin. "We needn't deal you in at all," I reminded him. "It was a good idea you had, but we've got the negative."

H.J. laughed. "You'll cut me in, all right," he said. "Because if you don't, it's the end of the line. I've got some friends pressing me for money. If I couldn't raise some in the next few days, I was going to have to scoot out anyway. I know it's like leaving the goose with the golden egg, but I've got to pay up or get out of town. My friends are pretty tough customers. So you see, if I don't get the money, that picture's no good to you anyway. I'll be long gone before my wife could even get out the check-book and, believe me, she's not going to pay for nothing."

Well, I could see what he was driving at, all right. As long as she had some chance of preserving her marriage, she'd pay. So it would be a three-way split after all. We had a few drinks on that, and made our plans.

We agreed that I was to go to Higgins' house, show his

wife the picture, and make the arrangements. I was a little shy about this at first, but H.J. pointed out that if she didn't know I was coming there wouldn't be any tape recorders or hidden cameras or sneaking policemen. I only had to be careful to be alone with her when we talked. That way, she couldn't later prove I'd tried to blackmail her.

Bright and early next day I went up to the house. It was a big place on a hill, and my admiration for H.J. grew considerably during the ten minutes I sat in what I guess you'd call a drawing room, waiting for m'lady to come and talk to me.

Well, when I saw her I could see why she'd be willing to pay for a husband. She was probably the ugliest woman I've ever seen. There wasn't anything wrong with her face that plastic surgery couldn't fix, but she had a mean look in her eyes, and her voice was like the fine edge of a razor. Old H.J. had sure paid a price for all that money.

She almost scared me off. If she hadn't shut the door to the hall as though she meant it, I would have cleared out of that place then and there.

"All right," she said. "Mr. McGee, isn't it? What do you want?"

"What makes you think I want anything?" I asked. I could have shot myself, because my voice quavered like a boy's.

"Nobody ever comes to see me unless he wants something. Come on, now. I haven't got all day. Has it got something to do with H.J.?"

I tell you that woman was eerie. She knew what you were going to say before you said it. I don't know what I told her, but first thing I knew she had the picture and was looking at it.

"Where's the negative?" she asked.

I told her I had it, and I would have told her that I meant to keep it, but my voice broke on me again.

"All right," she said.

The picture had disappeared into a pocket somewhere.

"It's—it's going to cost you . . ." My throat was so dry that I had to swallow.

"Cost me what?" she asked.

I can't remember the name of the dame with the face that was supposed to turn you to stone, but I wouldn't

have been surprised to have felt my legs begin to harden. "Thir-thir-thirty thousand," I stammered.

She didn't say anything; didn't frown; didn't get angry; didn't cry. I tell you, she gave me the creeps.

Then, "You'll be hearing from me tomorrow," she said. "I'll send a message to your shop. You said you owned a —er, photo shop, didn't you?"

I went back to Frances' apartment. H.J. was there. He sympathized with me and, boy, now I could sympathize with him. We had a few drinks, and Frances began to get pretty cheerful. She was a great girl when she let herself relax.

The next day H.J. and Frances showed up at the shop bright and early. H.J.'s wife hadn't said anything to him that morning, but he was pretty sure she was going to pay. I wasn't so certain.

H.J. and Frances sat around in the back room, and I kept busy as usual. Around noon H.J. began to get restless.

"Why in hell didn't you ask her for the money right then?" he said. "She could have paid. She's got that much in a safe in that damn house."

"You could at least have asked her when she meant to send the message," Frances said. "I can't stand much more of this suspense."

Just then the bell on the shop door rang. I went out, and there was this boy with a big envelope. I gave him a quarter, and when he left I put the "Closed" sign on the door and went into the back room.

"Yippee!" H.J. shouted as soon as he saw what I had. "What did I tell you?"

He took the envelope and threw it at the ceiling. Frances caught it and threw it to me. We played a little touch football with it.

"All right, open up," Frances said finally. We'd all had enough by then. None of us were what you'd call fit, and we were breathing pretty hard.

I took out my pocketknife, opened it at the end, and turned the envelope upside down. I guess what we all expected to see was a bunch of green bills come floating out, but there were only three small envelopes. One had H.J.'s name on it, one had Frances', and one had mine.

"What the hell is this?" H.J. demanded. "This is her

handwriting. How did she know I'd get anything she sent here?"

He tore his envelope open. There wasn't any money in it, but there was a big fat pile of legal papers. *Divorce papers.*

H.J. sat back like a man who's lost everything. His face was white, and he didn't even notice that his cigar had gone out. "She can't divorce me," he kept saying over and over. "She can't divorce me."

It was Frances' turn next. Her envelope was smaller, ordinary letter size. She opened it and took out some notepaper. I felt sick when I saw it. It was that same thick, blue stationery on which she had received the anonymous letter. There was even that same embossed vulture on the top. I leaned over her shoulder.

"Dear Miss Damon," it read. "Thank you so much for taking the hint. I couldn't have got such a fine picture without your help. My lawyer tells me this is all I need to get rid of H.J. forever, and the lovely thing is, I won't have to pay any alimony. Yours sincerely, Isobel Higgins."

We stared at one another helplessly.

"What an incredible witch!" H.J. said finally. "I knew she was tight, but I never thought she'd go this far. It was all her idea. She's played us like puppets."

I could believe it. I remembered the look in that lady's eye. Yes, sir, she was clever, all right. I wasn't expecting any money in my envelope either, but the note that was there kind of took me by surprise. It was like kicking a man in the stomach when he was already down.

"The color snapshot of my husband that you brought to the house the other day was lovely," the note read. "I believe you said you have the negative, and I wonder if you'd do me a favor. I'd like to have an enlargement to keep as a souvenir of H.J. and Miss Damon. Use your own judgment as to the size, Mr. McGee. I'll be quite satisfied as long as it's suitable for framing."



LET IT ALL HANG OUT!

Everybody knows Alfred Hitchcock is the world's foremost connoisseur of evil, but few realize he is also a pioneering psychologist. According to Alfie, the only way to get rid of our dark and violent impulses is to give free play to them—and as proof of the gloriously grisly fun fully liberated fiends can have, he is presenting fourteen brilliant writers who follow his perverse prescription right down to the final terrifying scream. Here are great novelettes and stories by:

H. A. DeRosso	★	Neil M. Clark
C. B. Gilford	★	Gilbert Ralston
Rog Phillips	★	Mary Linn Roby
Edwin P. Hicks	★	Ed Lacy
Richard Deming	★	Robert Colby
Dick Ellis	★	Jack Ritchie
Fletcher Flora	★	Richard O. Lewis