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ELLERY QUEEN'S DOUBLE DOZEN



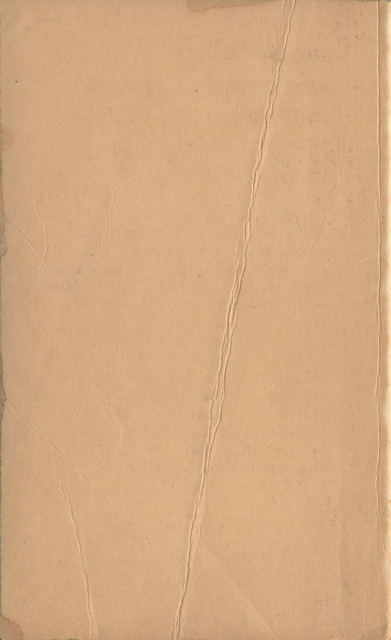
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ELLERY QUEEN'S DOUBLE DOZEN

**24 Stories from
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine**

Edited by ELLERY QUEEN

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JOHN D. MacDONALD

Funny the Way Things Work Out

Sheriff Wade Illigan said, "To get any good out of a Purdley woman, you've got to be meaner than she is." And the Sheriff didn't think Will Garlan was that mean a man . . .

The range of all his pleasures and satisfaction had narrowed in these past years until there were only the smallest things left—like trimming the big pepper hedge, standing on the stepladder before the sun got too high, working the clippers with a slow oiled snick, and making the top of the big hedge flat as a table. He could make the trimming last a long time, pausing to look out across the inlet where the tide ran smooth, where mullet leaped near the green-black shade of the mangrove islands. Afterward he would rake up the cuttings, load them in the old tin wheelbarrow, and take them out to the pile beyond the shed.

He was a big mild man in his middle sixties, his body thickened and slow, his face deeply lined. The fringe of white hair and his pale-blue eyes were in striking contrast to the deep tropic tan. He wore a faded sports shirt and shapeless denim pants. It was a still May morning, full of the first heat of a new summer. He braced himself on the ladder and started working the clippers.

He heard Sue coming toward him across the back yard, coming from the rear of the house. He could hear her, and he guessed the folks in the trailer park could hear her, and the men fishing in the skiffs on the far side of the inlet could hear her.

"Will!" she squalled. "Will Garlan!" After years of experimentation she had learned to pitch her voice at exactly that shrill and penetrating level which he found most distasteful. It made him hunch his shoulders, as though some angry sharp-beaked bird were diving at his head.

He laid the clippers on top of the hedge and turned slowly, careful of his balance, to watch his wife striding toward him,

her thin face dull-red with anger, her features pinched into an ugliness of hate. She was a lean woman, forty-five years old. She wore frayed yellow shorts, too large for her, and a grimy white halter. She had fierce gray eyes and a sallowness the sun never touched. Her black hair looked lifeless in the morning sunlight.

She stopped abruptly ten feet from the stepladder. "I tole you and I tole you a hundred times maybe," she yelled, "don't you never leave this stinkin' smelly thing in the bedroom, you hear?"

She held a shaking hand out, showing him the pipe he had left by accident on his night table.

"Sue, honey," he said humbly, "I guess I just forgot . . ."

"Forgot! You damn ol' man, you oughta be put away some place, the way you getting weak in the head. And this is the last time you get it back. Next time I plunk it right out in the bay, hear?"

As he started to say something, she drew her wiry arm back and hurled the pipe at him with startling force. He tried to duck but it struck him painfully under the left eye. He nearly lost his balance, but saved himself by grasping the top of the ladder. Through the immediate prism of his tears he saw her stalking back toward the house.

Suddenly he imagined himself grasping the wooden handles of the clippers, hurling it at her, saw it turn once, slowly, glinting in the sun, and chunk into her naked fallow back, points first, exactly between the bony ridges of her shoulder blades . . . He felt sweaty and cold in the sunlight. The screen door slammed.

When his vision cleared he got down from the ladder and started looking for the pipe. He looked for a long time. He finally saw it in the pepper hedge. When he reached in for it, the movement of the branches dislodged it and the pipe fell to the ground.

He squatted and picked it up. The grain of the bowl was a dark cherry-red. It had an even cake and a sweet taste, and smoked dry. He oiled the bowl on the side of his nose, burnished it on the faded shirt, put it in his pocket.

He climbed the ladder again and began to clip the tall hedge. Within five minutes he knew it was no good. The pleasure was gone too, like all the others. The thing that he had to do came back into his mind. For a long time it had been something he would think of in the middle of the night while Sue lay nearby, her breath a rasping, nasal metronome.

Lately it had begun to occur to him during the day. And now, quite suddenly, he knew the day had come.

He left the hedge half done. He put the ladder and the clippers in the shed. He got into the old gray sedan and managed to back it out to the road before Sue came running out of the house.

"Where you goin'?" she yelled. "Where you goin', Will Garlan, damn you?"

He did not answer. He started up. She ran in front of the car to stop him, but he drove directly toward her, not fast. She scrambled back out of the way. He got a glimpse of her face, insane with fury, and heard her incoherent yelpings as he headed toward town.

Center Street stretched wide and sleepy under the heat of May, the parked cars glinting, the few shoppers moving slowly under the awning shade. He parked diagonally across from the Palm County Court House and walked around to the far side, squinting against the glare.

At the high desk a deputy told him that Sheriff Wade Illigan would be back in a few minutes. He sat on a scarred bench and waited. He felt very sleepy. He wondered if the sleepiness was a reaction to the decision he had made. He felt as if he would like to find a bed in some cool place and sleep for a week.

He jumped and opened his eyes when Sheriff Illigan said, "Hey, Will. How you?"

He stood up slowly and said, "Wade, I got to talk to you. You busy? It may take some time."

Illigan looked at his watch. "I got nothing till noon, and that's an hour. That time enough?"

"I think that's time enough, Wade."

They went into Illigan's big cluttered corner office. The Sheriff closed the door. Will Garlan sat in a corner of the deep leather couch. Illigan sat behind his desk, tilted back, and crossed his tough old legs across a corner of the desk.

"You know, Will, we've done no fishing together in one hell of a while. 'Way over a year."

"And we aren't likely to ever go fishing together again, Wade."

Illigan raised grizzled eyebrows. "How so?"

Will Garlan took his pipe out and studied the grain. "Lately I keep thinking how it would be to kill Sue."

"No law against thinking."

"It's a thing I might do. I get a kind of blind feeling, Wade. My ears roar. I could get like that and . . . hurt her. So I want to fix it so I can't. That's why I came in. I think I hate her. That's a terrible thing, I guess."

After a reflective pause Illigan said, "I'll talk straight, Will. Anybody that knows you two can understand hating that woman. She's plain mean. All those Purdleys have always been mean as snakes. When you married her she was a beautiful girl, and on a girl like that it somehow looks more like high spirits than ugly spirits. When the looks are gone, you can see what it is, plain and clear. Sue hasn't got a friend in Palm County, and that's for sure. I'd say this, Will. If you'd been raised here, you wouldn't have married a Purdley no matter if she did make a fellow's mouth run dry a hundred yards off. But nobody knew you good enough to warn you, and I guess you wouldn't have listened anyhow."

"I wouldn't have listened."

"What I say, Will, you should just pack up and get out. You got good years left, and it just isn't worth it living nestled up to a buzz-saw woman like that making every day miserable."

"You make it sound easy, but it wouldn't be easy. I can't do it that way. I've got to do it my way."

"What have you got in mind?"

"Wade, just what do you know about me?"

"Know about you? You moved down here from the north about . . . let me see . . ."

"Twenty-four years ago last month. I was forty-one years old. What did folks find out about me?"

"Found out you were a well-educated man, and you'd done well in some kind of business 'way up north, and then your wife died and it kind of took the heart out of you, so you retired early, with enough to live on if you took it easy. And there was something about your health being shaky."

"I had to let folks think that so they wouldn't think it strange a man that age doing nothing at all."

"Well, you bought a couple acres of land out there at the inlet, and you built that house all by yourself, learning as you went along, and it must have been a little over a year after you moved down you married Sue Purdley, a girl twenty years younger, a girl been in several kinds of trouble around here, enough so folks figured she made herself a pretty good deal."

"She was the most beautiful thing I ever saw," Garlan said.

"They all got looks when they're young enough," Illigan said. "If she hadn't hooked you, Will, about the only thing left for her would have been some cracker boy from back in the sloughs to keep her swole up with kids, barefoot, and beat the tar out of her every Saturday night."

"If we could have had children, maybe it would have . . ."

"It wouldn't have been a bit different. To get any good out of a Purdley woman, you've got to be meaner than she is, and you're just too gentle a man, Will."

"Know anything else about me?"

Illigan shook his head. "Guess not. You live quiet. You're a good man to go fishing with. You keep your house and grounds up nice. What is there I should know?"

"I'm a methodical man, Wade. I plan things carefully. I never thought I'd be telling anybody this. I feel scared to tell you now, but I don't know why, because the life I have isn't worth living, and that isn't the way I planned it. Way back in 1935 I started planning it all out. And in 1938, ten days before I arrived here, I walked out of a bank in Michigan with a hundred and twenty-seven thousand dollars."

Illigan's feet thumped hard against the floor as he came erect in his chair. "You what!"

Will Garlan stared out the window, his face placid. "I studied the mistakes all the other ones make. They go to foreign places where they stand out like a sore thumb. Or they get to spending too much. Or they have to talk to somebody about it. One thing I decided. You have to have a new identity all ready and waiting. I came down alone in 1937 and got that identity sort of started down here, so it was ready and waiting when I came down. My name isn't Will Garlan, naturally. But I've used it so long it feels like it was. The name I started with feels strange in my mind now. J. Allan Welch. The J was for Jerome. People called me Al. They looked for J. Allan Welch for a long time. Maybe they're still looking. Probably the bonding company still is, anyhow. I guess it was a shock to them."

"Do you know what the hell you're saying, man?"

"I was the Assistant Cashier. There was one little flaw in the way the worn-out money was handled, when we sacked it up to send it back to the Federal Reserve Bank for credit. Everybody checked everybody else, but there was one little flaw, and after I found it, I got them used to seeing me with a big box.

"I used to order stuff to be sent express and pick it up on my lunch hour so I'd have a box around, wrapped in brown paper, tied with cord. Then I made a box. It looked solid and tied, but you could pull one end open—it was on a spring. When it was shut, the cord matched. I had the cord glued on. I cut newspaper into stacks the size of wrapped money and I

had it in that box. The other tricky part was the seal on the heavy canvas sack. I figured a way to fix the sack so it would look sealed when it wasn't.

"I had a dummy sack in my cellar at home and I practised until I got the time 'way down. I got it down to where it took me just eighteen seconds to open the sack, exchange the wrapped money, and reseal the sack the right way.

"I waited until we had the right kind of accumulation—three big sacks for pickup, with one stuffed with nothing but wrapped bundles of twenties and fifties. I rigged the seal on that one. I made the exchange one Friday morning, and all that day I worked with that parcel of money closely. I had no cause to worry. The sack was the right shape and heft and I'd sealed it right, and nobody would find out anything until it got to the Federal Reserve Bank and they started to check the amount and denominations against the outside tag and the inside packing slip.

"By then I had a car nobody knew about, registered in Indiana in the name of Will Garlan. I had a wallet full of identification for Will Garlan. I had clothes and everything in that car. When I left work, I didn't even go home. I went right to that car and headed south. I spent all that first night in a tourist cabin going over that money, weeding out everything too badly torn and weeding out gold certificates. I burned all that in a ravine the next day. I had a hundred and twenty-seven thousand left.

"Soon as I settled here, Wade, I got me a post-office box and I sent for a lot of cheap stuff so I'd get on so many mailing lists nobody would notice I wasn't getting any personal mail. Or any money. That's the thing about me nobody has ever seemed to notice much. No investments, Wade. No bank accounts. No social security. I deal in cash. I buy things on time and pay the installments in cash. For twenty-four years, Wade, I've been living directly off the money I carried out of that bank in that box."

"Where do you keep it?"

"When I built that house, I built me a good place."

"How much do you have left?"

"I don't know exactly. I sealed it into fruit jars to keep the dampness and the bugs from getting into it. There's ten jars left and I'd say there's somewhere between five and six thousand in a jar. I've lived small, Wade. It keeps people from wondering."

"Does Sue know about this?"

"What do you think?"

"I'd say she doesn't."

"You're right. That's the one thing I've never let her know anything about. For years she's been at me to find out where the money comes from. She thinks it comes in the mail. I take it out when she's away from the house. Then I make her think I've brought it back from town when I make my next trip. If she ever knew she was living right on top of money like that, she'd find it and start spending like a fool, I wouldn't be able to stop her."

Slowly, wonderingly Illigan shook his head. He made a clucking sound in the silence. "Be damned," he said softly. "Why didn't you just wait one day when she was away from the house and take it all and go some place else?"

"I guess a man can run just one time. I'm settled here. This is my home. I've got no heart for running again, Sheriff."

"Don't you know what I have to do to you?"

"I guess you have to tell those people up there to come and get me. There must be some kind of reward in it for you. And it will surprise them to recover so much of it after so long. I guess I'll go to prison, Wade. And I'd rather go for that than for killing Sue. Or hurting her. Anyhow, none of it has ever been like I thought it would be. There's nothing left. I guess I wouldn't have too bad a time in prison. Maybe they'd give me something to do and leave me alone."

"I don't know what the hell to say, Will. I just honestly don't."

"There isn't anything to say. I suppose you'll want to come out with me and get the money. I could pack a bag and you could bring me back here. I wouldn't want to stay there, Wade. Not another minute." He paused. "I guess I could be charged with bigamy too. But Lillian is dead now. I read it in one of those crime magazines a couple of years ago, about unsolved cases. They wrote about the Welch case, and they said she died in 1954."

"I don't think they'll be concerned about bigamy."

"I guess I'll have to talk to a lawyer. Seeing I'm not legally married to Sue, except maybe common law, I'd like to make sure she gets the house free and clear."

"Were there any children by your . . . other marriage?"

"A boy. He was killed in 1935. On his bike. Then there wasn't any reason for staying."

Illigan shook his head again. "I guess we better go out and get that money, Will. Why do you want Sue to get the house?"

Garlan sighed and shrugged. "I was a fool marrying a

young girl because I thought that's what I wanted. So it hasn't been all her fault. I didn't love her, Wade. I just wanted her."

The two men stood up. Illigan came around his desk and said, "Why'd you do it in the first place? Why'd you take all that money?"

Garlan tried to smile. It was a strange and touching grimace. "I had to get away from Lillian. She was . . . a cruel, vicious, domineering bitch. I had to get away from her. She was making my life a living hell. I almost didn't care whether they caught me or not. Isn't that something?" He tried to laugh. "The one thing I always wanted was a sweet loving woman. So after I get away from Lillian, I tie myself to the same . . ."

"What's the matter?"

"I better sit down a minute, Wade. Just for a minute. This has taken a lot out of me."

"Sure. You rest a little, Will."

Garlan flexed his left arm. "I guess I strained my arm a little, clipping my pepper hedge."

"When you feel up to it, we'll go on out there."

"I got so mad at her this morning, it made me feel weak and sick. That's when I finally decided to come on in."

"Can I get you a glass of water?"

"That would be . . ."

He stopped abruptly. He tilted his head as though listening to some sound outside the office. His mouth opened. The color drained out of his face.

When the full shock of the coronary occlusion struck him, he made a mild whimpering noise, dug his fingers into his thick chest, leaned forward, and toppled onto the floor, unconscious, his face muddy-gray and shiny with sweat.

He died as they were easing him onto the stretcher.

Though Will Garlan had been buried only a week ago, Wade Illigan saw the signs of neglect as he parked the county car in the driveway. He got out and looked at the pepper hedge, half neat and half ragged.

As he walked slowly toward the house, Sue Garlan came out onto the small front porch, her thin arms folded, and said, "What the hell do you want, Wade?"

He put his foot on the bottom step and looked up at her and pushed his hat back. "Wanted to see how you're coming, Sue."

"Since when is that any business of yours?"

"Will was one of my best friends. You know that."

"He didn't give a damn who he had for a friend, did he?"

"He had a few. How many you got?"

"One thing I've been fixing to ask you, Wade. What was he doing in your office that morning he keeled over?"

"Just stopped by. We were going snook fishing one night soon."

"The way he went out of here, he didn't act like he was going off to make no fishing date. He tried to run me over with the car. Did you know that?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Well, he did. That old man was getting meaner every day he lived. Meaner and dumber."

"He took pretty good care of you, Sue."

"Want I should break down and cry about it right here and now?"

"Not likely."

"It sure isn't. I give him the best years, didn't I?"

"You're a sweet generous woman, Sue."

"I get along."

"I wonder how you're going to keep on getting along."

"My, my! I'm touched you should fret about me, Sheriff. Will, he had his income coming in the mail right along. I got the key to the post-office box now, and I expect money will keep on coming in. There was no insurance, and I owe for burying him, so it better be coming in."

"Suppose it don't?"

"Then I'll sell this place off and go live with my sister. It's free and clear and it'll bring a good price, Wade. So don't worry about me a bit. Sam Redlock, owns the trailer park, he's ready to buy it in a minute. And he's got first call. What are you *doing* coming here anyhow, Illigan?"

"First call, eh?"

"That's right. For a good price."

"Hear you've been going to Mike's Tavern about every night."

"What's that to you! I'm a new widow. I got to keep my spirits up. You want I should crawl in the graveyard with him?"

"Quite a fuss going on at Mike's last night."

"Took you long enough to get around to why you come out here."

"Mary Harn swore out a warrant, Sue. They took six stitches in her mouth."

"She started it, butting in like that on me an' a gentleman friend!"

"No good you yelling. She said who was there. They say it

happened like she said. So you get what you need and you come on in with me right now."

She gave him a startled look and bolted into the house. By the time he'd cornered her in the kitchen, trapped her wrists and backhanded her across the face to take the fight out of her, he was winded and she had furrowed the side of his throat with her nails.

He waited while she changed her clothes, packed an overnight bag, and locked the house. She was docile, but her mouth was hard, her eyes bright with compressed fury.

He took her in and booked her, and had her put in the cage in the female wing of the Palm County jail. He let the matron know Sue Garlan had resisted arrest, had been arrested before, long ago, and a little overnight stay wouldn't do her any harm at all.

At dusk he drove out to the Garlan house. The fifth key he tried worked. He was inside the house a little over two hours. From there he drove home. His daughter, Ann, who kept house for him, was mildly annoyed at him for being so late. She had kept his supper warm. She'd eaten with her two children and both kids had gone back to school for some kind of rehearsal. After Ann served him, she walked up the street to visit a friend who had just come back from the hospital with a new baby.

Sheriff Wade Illigan ate, then rinsed his dishes and made two trips from his car to his bedroom. He made certain strategic rearrangements of the varied items in the back of his closet. He made a phone call, left a note for Ann, and drove out to the home of County Commissioner Elmo Bliss on Lemon Ridge Road.

He sat with Elmo in his study, and after some leisurely small-talk, Illigan came to the point. "I changed my mind about what you asked me, Elmo. I don't want to run for Sheriff again."

Elmo Bliss looked startled. "Why, there wouldn't hardly be any contest at all, Wade. It would be yours for the asking. You know that."

"I know. And I'm grateful and all that, but . . . I guess I'm just losing my heart for the law business."

"But don't you have Ann and those grandkids to support?"

"Bud Walther has been after me the last couple of years to go in with him on that marina business. I thought I just might do that when my term runs out."

"Maybe you wouldn't make enough, doing that."

"I got a feeling I'll get along well enough."

Elmo sighed. "Well, I guess it's your choice to make. But it won't be as secure as the sheriff business."

"Maybe I haven't got the right attitude to be a law man, Elmo."

"You been a good one."

"I decided I'd better tell you soon as I had my mind made up."

"Thanks. We'll have to find somebody. Another drink?"

"No, I got to be getting on back home."

"Say, I hear you locked Sue Garlan up this afternoon."

"She didn't take to the idea."

"Didn't take her long to get into trouble again, did it?"

"Not long."

"Isn't she some kind of kin to you, Wade?"

"Not blood kin. It was her half brother, Tod Annison, was married to my Ann. Run off with her."

"Sure. I remember now. I remember she came back with the kids, and later on something happened to him."

"They're good kids," Wade said. "They're bright and they're good and they deserve the best anybody can give them."

"What was it happened to that Annison?"

Wade stood up. "About what you'd expect. A year after he deserted my daughter, he was shot dead while trying to rob a bank up in Waycross, Georgia. But she had her divorce by then."

Elmo walked him to the door. He shook his head musingly. "Funny the way things work out, isn't it? Today you have to jail the half sister of the father of your grandkids." He clapped Wade on the shoulder. "Anything you need, fella, you call on Elmo, hear?"

"Thanks," the Sheriff said. "I think I'll get along pretty good. I got a feeling I'll get along all right from here on."

JAMES M. ULLMAN

The Happy Days Club

In the December 1962 issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine we presented a new kind of crimebuster—a stock-market detective, a specialist in industrial skulduggery. Here is the second in this unusual series—the second adventure of Michael Dane James and his "Archie Goodwin," Ted Bennet, who are not only stock-market sleuths but also industrial espionage agents. In their second case they investigate a "leak" in one of the big mutual funds . . . You say that you too are a shareholder in a mutual fund or a member of an investment club? Then you will be especially interested . . .

"Ted, I've got one right up your alley," Michael Dane James announced over the telephone.

Ted Bennett, sprawled in a chair beside a customer's man in a broker's boardroom, replied without taking his eyes from the tape moving overhead. "Mickey, if it's another scheme to drift me into a Detroit tool and die plant in the guise of a laborer, climb a tree. I don't care *what* the 1965 Whozit is going to look like."

"It's a defensive assignment," James said, "and won't compromise your principles one bit. One of the nation's biggest mutual funds, with assets of half a billion dollars, thinks its secrets are being stolen by a little investment club in Iowa."

"You're kidding," Bennett chuckled.

"I'm leveling," James went on. "So meet me in front of Sam's at five o'clock. Our Wall Street friends want to talk to us there before they commute home to suburbia. They don't think it would look good for us industrial spies to be seen in their offices."

A sign in the window proclaimed SAM'S—HOME OF THE 25-CENT MARTINI. The price prevailed only during the cocktail hour, but as a result the place was jammed,

mostly with executives from the financial district. James, a stocky man with horn-rimmed glasses riding his pug nose, and Bennett, tall, lean, and hatless, pushed through the crowd to a rear booth tagged *RESERVED FOR MR. ALLEN*.

Victor Allen, president of the Gibraltar Fund's management group, rose to shake hands. He was big and burly and in 1934 had played tackle for the Green Bay Packers. He introduced James and Bennett to the other occupant of the booth—Stuart Clark, chairman of the fund's stock selection committee.

"Mickey and I," Allen told Clark as they sat down, "banged heads one year in the old N.F.L. We both got out alive somehow. Mickey's an industrial espionage consultant now, and Bennett works for him. Sam, a couple more here."

"Is this," Bennett inquired, settling in a corner, "where you boys decide which stocks the Gibraltar Fund will buy? Booze up and then shove a pin through the Big Board listings in the *Times*?"

"Hardly," Clark smiled. "Let's just say that here we review in more relaxed surroundings decisions made elsewhere."

"Show him the clip, Stu," Allen said.

Clark drew an envelope from his pocket and removed a newspaper clipping. He pushed it across the table. A waiter brought two drinks and set them down.

"This clipping," Clark explained, "was forwarded to us by the branch manager of a brokerage house in Des Moines, Iowa. It's a story from a small daily newspaper, the Canfield, Iowa, *Gazette*. The story is the usual feature that papers print now and then about a local investment club."

"The Happy Days Club," James read aloud, "'is composed of fifteen residents of the Westlake subdivision. Its members are drawn from all walks of life.'"

"They seem," Bennett observed, peering over James's shoulder, "to have done rather well."

"There's something remarkable about The Happy Days Club," Clark went on. "That's why my friend in Des Moines sent me the clipping. He sells a lot of shares in our fund, you see, and knows our portfolio. And he noticed in the past eight months that The Happy Days Club has been buying or selling only those stocks which *we* bought and sold."

"It could be coincidence."

"It could be," Allen broke in, "but even more remarkable is the fact that their buying and selling took place *before* we announced we had bought or sold the stocks, and in some cases, *after* we had reached a decision but *before* we had

even completed a transaction. That story gives the dates of their sales and purchases and we checked them against our records. The club didn't buy every stock we bought, of course—they don't have that much money. But there's not a single stock in their list that we didn't buy. And not a single stock we sold that, if they owned it, they didn't sell."

"Secrecy," Clark added, "is essential at a certain stage in our business, Mr. James. We're required to report quarterly on our purchases and sales. But we're allowed enough leeway so that we don't have to report on the transactions we're making *at that time*. Our minimum investment in any stock is about two million dollars. Naturally, we don't go into the market and buy two million dollars' worth of stock in one day—the purchase, or sale, is spread out over a period of weeks or months. The brokers we buy through are carefully screened for their ability to keep their mouths shut about what we're doing. Because if word got out that we were putting two million dollars or more into a company a lot of speculators would buy the stock, too, hoping for a killing."

"Secrecy isn't as much of a consideration," Allen explained, "when we buy widely held blue chips like AT&T or Jersey Standard. But it's a prime consideration when we buy into a lesser-known company which we think may become a blue chip in the future. And it's that class of stock, incidentally, which The Happy Days Club has been buying into with us."

"So you believe," Bennett said, "that The Happy Days Club has a pipeline into the innermost circles of the Gibraltar Fund."

"Exactly," Clark said. "We're not so concerned that these fifteen Iowans are stealing our judgment, so to speak, as we are with the fact there *is* a leak in our organization. If word of our decisions reaches many people before we announce them, the price of every smaller company we start buying into will be bid up to the moon. What's more, we're one of the big funds in the country. If the story ever got out that a little investment club was able to steal information from us, we'd be held up to ridicule. Someone might even investigate us. You know how things are these days."

James fingered the clipping. "Any of these names—the fifteen club members—strike a responsive chord?"

"None whatsoever."

"Well," James concluded, "I'd say the way to begin would be for Bennett, here, to go right to the source and find out how The Happy Days Club arrives at their decisions. Meanwhile, I'll have Barney, my sound man, see if your phones are

being tapped or anything. And I'll run a check on the backgrounds of everyone involved in your stock transactions."

"We don't want to alarm those people in Iowa," Allen said.

"Don't worry," Bennett said. "Bennett will appear in appropriate disguise."

A day later Bennett flew to Chicago, took another plane to Davenport, and then rented a car. He drove south along the Mississippi, reaching Canfield, a river town of some 20,000 population, as dusk fell. He checked in at a motel, wolfed a paper plate of fried chicken at a drive-in, and returned to his room for a good night's sleep.

In the morning he drove to downtown Canfield. He breakfasted on tomato juice and toast, stopped at a news agency for a *Wall Street Journal*, and then, *Journal* and an attaché case in hand, entered the offices of the Canfield Savings and Loan Association. The newspaper clipping had identified the president of The Happy Days Club as Robert Gordon, a loan officer at the institution.

Gordon, a genial, portly man in his fifties, greeted Bennett with a puzzled smile.

"You say you're from New York? Are you buying real estate in our town, Mr. Bennett?"

"No," Bennett said, shaking Gordon's hand and taking a chair, "I'm a writer. Free-lance. I'm working up a magazine piece on investment clubs."

"You've come a long way for that."

"I know," Bennett explained, "but that's the point. I want to get away from the usual slick big-city and fancy suburban crowd—advertising men and sales executives and all that. I want a good part of my article to deal with the way an investment club works in small-town America, the folks right across the street." He pulled a photostat of the clipping from his pocket. "I've had a clipping service send me everything they could find on small-town investment clubs. And as soon as I read about The Happy Days Club in the *Gazette*, I knew it was the club I wanted to feature in my article."

"I'm flattered," Gordon said. "I'm sure the whole club will be flattered. In what magazine will your story appear?"

"I have a tentative commission from the editors of *View*," Bennett said, handing Gordon a faked letter written on *View* stationery. "But if they decide they don't want it, I don't expect to have much trouble selling it elsewhere."

"Will there be pictures?"

"Of course. I have my camera at my motel."

"Well, won't that be nice," Gordon said, beaming and returning the faked letter. "Tell you what. Meet me for lunch at the American Café around the corner. Meanwhile, I'll phone the members and try to set up a special meeting as soon as possible."

Bennett walked to the *Canfield Gazette* building. He told the managing editor the same story he had told Gordon and got permission to use the newspaper's library for background material on the club and its members.

He spent two hours going over the *Gazette's* clipping files. When at last he left the building, a police car slowly followed him around the corner and down the block to the American Café. Bennett tried without much success to pretend it wasn't there.

"All our members have been contacted," Gordon announced over coffee. "Most of them can make it at my house tomorrow night. They'll be there at eight. But I wish you'd drop in tonight and have dinner with my family."

"Delighted," Bennett said. "By the way, who makes the buying and selling decisions for your club?"

"We have a three-man selection committee—Cromie, Hubbard, and Price. When anyone has a suggestion for a stock to buy or a reason to sell a stock we hold, it's forwarded to the committee. When we were first organized, the whole membership used to vote on what purchases or sales to make. But recently we've let the committee make the actual decisions, since they say timing may be important."

"Who's chairman of the committee?"

"We have no chairman. Just the three men. But the selections they've been making lately have been doing so well that we haven't changed members of the committee in nearly a year. Before that we had an awful lot of losers."

Bennett had almost reached his car when the police car pulled up behind him and stopped. A tall, husky man in uniform emerged.

"Sir," the officer said cordially, "would you mind coming with us?"

"What's the trouble?"

"No trouble. The Chief wants a word with you."

Bennett shrugged and climbed into the back of the police car. He flipped through his *Wall Street Journal* as they rode to the station in silence.

The Chief of Police, a huge, crew-cutted man of about Bennett's age, late thirties, smiled and nodded toward a chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Bennett. I understand you're a writer."

"That's correct," Bennett said. He put his attaché case and

the *Journal* on a radiator under the window and sat down. Inwardly, he debated whether to volunteer to show the Chief the faked *View* letter. Something about the Chief made him decide not to.

"What magazine do you write for?"

"I may do this story for *View*."

"Would you mind naming some other magazines where your work has appeared?"

Bennett rattled off the names of several nationally circulated publications. He felt much as he had one day in 1944, when a German officer asked why a French farm laborer who stubbed a toe should know so many American obscenities. That had been a bad day too.

The Chief wrote the names on a pad. "I don't suppose you'd mind," the Chief asked, "if we checked these out."

"Not at all," Bennett replied. "And now I'd like to know why you've taken such a sudden interest in me."

"Well, it's funny," the Chief explained, "but a lot of people from the big city think we're kind of slow out here. They try to sell our citizens traps for mortar mice and all sorts of things. And this morning one of our citizens called me and said there was a man in town from *View* who wanted to meet the members of The Happy Days Club. He said he was suspicious because he'd heard of confidence men approaching investment clubs in one disguise or another, for the very good reason that people in investment clubs have money to invest. He didn't say *you* were a confidence man, understand. He just asked us to check and make sure you're a writer."

"Who was this called?"

"I'd rather not tell you."

"You asked me in here on the basis of that?"

"Not entirely," the Chief said. "We've had writers around here before, Mr. Bennett. A year ago, when a farmer outside of town chopped up two mail-order brides and buried them in an onion patch, a lot of writers came down. I called one of those boys—he works out of New York too—and he said he never heard of you. So far nobody else he's asked ever heard of you either—including, by the way, the editor of *View*. And the librarian here has been going through the *Reader's Guide* and she can't find any record of where you ever had anything published. Maybe if you'd tell me the dates where some of your stuff ran, she could look it up, and we could both forget the whole thing."

"At the moment," Bennett said blandly, "I just don't remember."

The Chief considered this. "Well, that's too bad," he said.

"Now, you haven't done anything illegal I know of yet, so I can't charge you and put you in jail. Your name is Theodore Bennett—we know because you showed identification when you rented that car in Davenport. We checked. We're great respecters of the law out here. We don't push people around because they're strangers. But the way it is, though, I'm afraid there'll be a squad car or a police officer at your elbow every second you're inside the city limits until I'm satisfied you *are* a writer. So if you want to operate under those conditions, you go right ahead."

Bennett managed a weak grin. "Well," he said, "I'm not going to argue. It's ridiculous. But on the other hand, I'm not going to waste my time giving Canfield and The Happy Days Club national publicity if this is the treatment I receive here." He rose. "I saw a pay phone near the sergeant's desk on my way in. I'll telephone Gordon and call the whole thing off."

"Use my phone."

"Wouldn't think of it. I don't want to waste a cent of your taxpayers' money."

Bennett left the Chief's office. He fumbled clumsily through a telephone book for Gordon's number, taking plenty of time. Then he called Gordon and abruptly informed him he was leaving town and wouldn't write a story about The Happy Days Club after all. He hung up, leaving Gordon in mid-sentence, and returned to the Chief's office for his attaché case and *Wall Street Journal*.

"A couple of my boys," the Chief said genially, "will go with you to your motel and see to it you get packed proper and on the right road back to Davenport. If you drive fast, you might reach there before dark."

Two uniformed officers drove Bennett to where he had parked the rented car, then followed him to the motel. Bennett packed in five minutes and checked out. They stayed with him to the city limits, pulling to the curb and watching as Bennett gunned the motor and roared out of sight over a hill.

Bennett drove at high speed for about five miles. In the future, he vowed, he'd provide himself with a solid cover story and appropriate supporting documents no matter how innocuous the assignment seemed. Apparently he had vastly under-estimated the sophistication of Iowa investment clubs—and of the Iowa police.

When Bennett came to a strip of roadside stores and drive-ins he bounced to a stop in a gravel parking area. He hauled his attaché case from the back seat and opened it, exposing a transistorized tape recorder built into the bottom.

Bennett had activated the recorder just before placing the attaché case on the radiator in the Chief's office. No matter how the conversation went, it had seemed a good idea.

Quickly Bennett reversed the tape, pushed the playback button, and lit a cigarette, listening to a recording of their conversation, to the point where the Chief had said, "Use my phone."

"Wouldn't think of it. I don't want to waste a cent of your taxpayers' money."

Then he heard the door close as he left the Chief's office to telephone Gordon. And then the Chief did what Bennett had hoped he would do. He picked up his own telephone and dialed a number.

"Hello. Mrs. Price? Chief Waner. Your husband home? Hello, Frank. You were right. He must be some kind of swindler, although I never heard of this investment club approach before. But he sure isn't a writer. Don't worry. We had a little talk and he's leaving Canfield this afternoon. He seemed sensible enough not to try to come back. Thanks. Glad you put me on to this guy before he did any damage."

The Chief hung up.

Frank Price, Bennett knew without having to check his list, was a member of The Happy Days Club. What's more, he was one of the three men on the stock selection committee.

Bennett turned the recorder off and looked around. What he needed now was a woman.

He found her behind a counter in a diner. She was reasonably articulate and, from the way she talked back to truck drivers, she seemed to have plenty of nerve. Bennett had to drink two cups of coffee before the place cleared out and he was alone with her. The cook in the back was engrossed in a telecast of a baseball game.

"Miss," Bennett asked, "can you dial Canfield direct on that pay phone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well," Bennett said, "I'll give you twenty bucks if you make a call for me. It will take you less than five minutes."

"You're crazy," she said.

He pulled twenty dollars from his wallet and pushed it across the counter. "There it is. No fooling. In fact, I'll make it thirty." He extracted another ten.

"I don't want to get in trouble," the girl said.

"You won't."

"Why don't you call?"

"Because I want someone to impersonate a telephone operator."

"That sounds illegal." She advanced and fingered the bills.

"It is a little illegal," Bennett admitted, "but there'll be no risk for you. You've heard of private investigators, haven't you? I can't tell you any more than that. But if you make the call and hang up, nobody will be able to trace it. And even if they did trace it, you could always say some woman came into the diner and used the phone."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Say, 'This is the long-distance operator. The charge on your call to San Diego is twenty-eight dollars and nineteen cents.' I have reason to believe this party just made a long-distance call, although probably not to San Diego. The party will probably be so mad at you that he'll volunteer information about any long-distance calls he did make this afternoon. If he doesn't, ask him if he made any long-distance calls, and to where. Get the out-of-town number if you possibly can. If you can't get any information after a minute or two, say, 'This is Albany 4-5634, isn't it?' He'll say no, because his number is Albany 4-5624. Then say you're sorry you made the error and hang up."

"Albany 4-5634," she repeated, reaching for the thirty dollars. "Okay, hon. I'll go along. Got a dime?"

Twenty minutes later Bennett climbed into his car and drove to the next river town. There he turned right and crossed a bridge over the Mississippi into Illinois. The road wound down the river's foothills and then flattened out into farm country. It was dark when Bennett checked in at an eight-unit motel in a tiny junction called Blackford.

There was a telephone booth in the parking lot and Bennett called James from there.

"Where've you been?" James demanded. In the background, the roar of guns from a television set mingled with youthful screams. "I got a pack of Cub Scouts in my living room and can hardly hear you."

"I got chased out of Canfield," Bennett reported, "by the Chief of Police. He knows I'm not a writer and he thinks I'm a confidence man."

"Some industrial espionage agent you are," James said sarcastically. "What happened? Your false mustache fall off?"

"Wait a minute," Bennett said. "The Chief didn't think this up on his own. He was tipped by a club member named Frank Price. Frank Price is also a member of a three-man committee that decides what stocks the club will buy and sell."

A moment of silence ensued.

"Are you thinking," James asked slowly, "what I'm thinking?"

"It occurred to me at the time," Bennett said, "but I figured it was just one chance in a million."

"Well, the odds are shortening. I'll have Barney work on that angle first thing tomorrow. Where are you now?"

"Blackford, Illinois. I'm going to sack in here tonight."

"You'll never get back to New York the route you're taking. Drive to some place with an airport and catch a plane. I'll send another agent to Canfield with a better cover."

"I'm at Blackford because I had a girl call Price to find out if he placed any long-distance calls after I was run out of town. She pretended to be a long-distance operator. And Price did make a long-distance call this afternoon. To Eaton, Illinois, which is twelve miles from Blackford."

"It's probably a waste of time."

"Maybe. The girl couldn't get the Eaton number that Price called. But Price has a brother, William, who lives in Eaton. I learned that from some social notes about him in the *Canfield Gazette* morgue. It will only take a day to check the brother out and see if he has any connection with the Gibraltar Fund."

"Since you're there anyhow, go ahead. I'll hold up on that other agent. Come to think of it, Price called that Chief of Police so fast when he heard you were in town it's like someone pushed a button. He must have known you were coming. I got a hunch that by this time tomorrow we'll both have arrived at the same conclusion."

In the morning Bennett drove to Eaton and parked on a side street. He walked a block to the business district, entered a drug store, bought a *Wall Street Journal*, and stepped into a telephone booth. He flipped through the book to PRICE, WILLIAM J. and dialed the number.

A woman answered.

"Good morning," Bennett said. "Is your husband there?"

"He's asleep. He's always sleeping at this hour. He doesn't get in until three."

"When can I reach him?"

"Who is this?"

"I represent a firm doing market research for an advertising agency in Peoria. We're surveying all property owners in Eaton."

"Well," she said irritably, "why don't you get him at work, then? He doesn't like to be bothered at home. Call him at the restaurant this afternoon."

"What restaurant is that?"

"Why, Betty's, of course," she said, hanging up.

Bennett hung up and opened the book to the yellow pages. Under "Restuarants" he found a display ad for *BETTY'S—Steaks, Chops, Chicken, Cocktails, Open 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. Mill Price, Prop.*

He left the booth and walked back to the car. He drove to the address listed in the telephone book for the restaurant, getting directions from a small boy on a bicycle. The restaurant would be as good a place to begin an investigation of William J. Price as any.

The restaurant, a roadhouse, had been converted from an old farm building on the outskirts of town. Bennett pulled into the parking lot but didn't get out of his car. He didn't have to. Because a foot-high sign in the window proclaimed: *BETTY'S—HOME OF THE ORIGINAL 25-CENT MARTINI.*

Michael Dane James handed the report to Allen—he, Allen, and Bennett were sitting in James's office.

James explained: "Sam, the owner of that comfortable two-bit cocktail-hour martini joint across from your building, wired your reserved booth for sound. The mike was hooked to a tape recorder in his office. Barney found the mike in ten minutes when he joined us for a drink yesterday. A restaurant or bar owner bugging tables isn't unheard of, you know. Usually they say they're just checking customer reaction to food and service and whatnot. In this case it's obvious one of Sam's motives was to get tips on stocks. His location in the financial district would be a natural for that. His twenty-five-cent martini between five and six would be a lure to bring people in. And when he got the right people—like top decision-makers for one of the nation's big mutual funds—he reserved a booth for you regularly, to make sure he could hear everything you had to say."

"As I get it," Allen said, "Sam's connection with The Happy Days Club was through his brother-in-law."

"That's right," Bennett said. "Sam came from Eaton originally. He and his sister, Betty, ran a roadhouse there. After Sam left for New York, Betty married William J. Price, and he took over the roadhouse. As time went on, and Sam got established here, he started relaying some of his inside stock information to his sister and her husband, William Price. And William, in turn, passed it on to his own brother, Frank, who lived in Canfield. Frank belonged to The Happy Days Club and got on the selection committee. Once on it, it wasn't

much of a trick to control it. If necessary, he could take one of the other two committee members into his confidence, and the two of them could always outvote the third member. I'm sure most members of the club had no idea they were using information stolen from the Gibraltar Fund."

"Sam taped our conversation the day we were in his place and you gave us the assignment," James said. "He knew, then, that Bennett was going to Canfield in one role or another. And he had a brief look at Bennett when you ordered martinis for us. When Sam heard the tape he must have panicked. No doubt he called his brother-in-law, William, who in turn called Frank and warned him Bennett was on the way. So the minute Frank Price learned Bennett was in Canfield, he asked the police to check Bennett, hoping Bennett would be run out of town."

"The mystery is solved," Allen admitted, "but it does leave me with a dilemma."

"I don't think," James smiled, "that The Happy Days Club will follow the Gibraltar Fund's lead any more. This probably scared the daylights out of William and Frank Price."

"Nevertheless," Allen said, "the problem remains: What do we do about Sam? If we expose him, we may still get all the publicity we've been trying to avoid. And if we say nothing, he'll go on eavesdropping on his patrons."

"If it were up to me," James suggested, "I'd pass the word discreetly to your employees never to go into that place again because it's bugged. The news will get around the financial district fast enough, and Sam's will die a slow but certain death."

"Why," Bennett offered, "don't you just sit there, drink his martinis, and pass along tips on stocks you think will go down instead of up?"

"I like that," Allen grinned. "Between all of us, we could give Sam enough bad advice to bankrupt him in thirty days. But we don't want to hurt any innocent investors—even in Canfield, Iowa. No, I think we'll adopt Mr. James's suggestion."

L. E. BEHNEY

Three Tales From Home

In the August 1962 issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, we published Mrs. Behney's "first story"—"On the Road to Jericho." It was, you may recall, an impressive "first," with sharply delineated characters and subtle, emotional overtones. Now we bring you a group of stories by this new author—and to the best of our recollection, this is the first time in the twenty-three-year history of EQMM that we have included three stories by the same author in a single issue or in a single anthology . . .

The author tells us that everything she writes "deals of necessity with everyday people." She claims to know nothing about "society people, or wealthy people, or highly cultured people." She was raised on a small farm, and has always lived in the country. When she was a child, "even staying overnight at a friend's house in a nearby, sleepy, one-horse town was a great adventure."

So now you know what to expect. You will find the three stories entirely different from one another—and yet they are interrelated and intertwined in a curious way, and as homogeneous as if they were cut from the same bolt of cloth—as indeed they were, the bolt of cloth being Mrs. Behney's mind, her remembrance of things past.

We think you will find both sensitivity and texture in these three short stories—a moving and perceptive quality, rich in detail, that has the pulse and bitterness and impact of realism. And you will find all three stories intensely American—yet the people are as universal as the sun and the earth. In the first story, for example, you will observe the daily mosaic, piece by piece, of the work and chores of an American farm woman—but couldn't Marcy Bayliss be any farm woman in any land, or for that matter, in any time?

I: The Day of the Fair

Marcy was putting on her pink gingham best dress when she heard the truck start. Her fingers hurried with the row of white pearl buttons down the front of the dress. It was like Joe to try to scare her like that. She shouted, "I'm coming!" Thrusting her bare feet into her good black shoes and snatching up her purse and her hairbrush she ran through the kitchen and out onto the front porch.

The truck was already moving. She ran after it, despairing and then crying. She could see the back of Joe's fat red neck through the rear cab window. The kids were looking back at her, their faces pale and frightened.

The truck picked up speed. Through a cloud of dust it roared down the lane, up the long hill on the other side of the draw, and then disappeared from sight among the scrub pine and chaparral.

Marcy dropped to the dry grass beside the road. She was sobbing breathlessly. He didn't have to leave her, she wouldn't have been any trouble to him. It wasn't right, it wasn't fair. She had wanted to go so badly. She and the kids had planned this day for weeks. It had to be a Saturday so they would be out of school and it had to be a day when Joe was home so he could take them. Marcy could drive the truck, but the red Ford was Joe's proudest possession and he would sooner Marcy and the kids walked all the way to the city than let her touch it.

She had managed to get him to promise to take them by being mighty nice to him and fixing all the things he liked to eat and never saying a mean word back to him no matter what he said or did. Keeping a cage on her tongue hadn't been easy. He wasn't an easy man to be married to, Joe Bayliss wasn't. Lazy and mean he was. Gone off most of the time with his friends, leaving the farm work to her and the kids.

Gary was twelve, big for his age, and near as much help as a man. Kathy was nine and blonde and cute and she helped out a lot too, mostly with the housework. She was getting to be a real good cook. Danny was only six, but he could hoe weeds and pick up apples and gather eggs and dry dishes. They were wonderful kids, and that was why she had wanted to go to the County Fair so much. Just to see them enjoy themselves without a worry but to have a good time . . .

Marcy Bayliss stood up and brushed the dust and grass

from her best dress. She took off her shoes and walked back to their weathered cabin, her feet scuffing in the soft red dust. She stood on the porch and felt the cool of the roof shade on her back and the splintery boards under her feet. She listened a long minute; maybe Joe might come back after her. He might have been teasing her. Just like him to joke so mean.

A jaybird scolded in the orchard and the hens were singing busily around the yard. It was the first week of October. The sun still burned with summer's heat but the sky had a soft haze and the distant back-country peaks were a deep violet-blue. Near at hand the willows in the creekbeds were starting to change from silver-green to pale gold. The fields and hill-sides wore tawny lion-colored pelts of dry grass. The air hung hot and still, and the red truck had vanished as though she had only dreamed of it.

Marcy sighed. She went into the silent house. "Busy, busy, busy," her mother used to say, buzzing her swift tongue with the sound of bees. "Git busy if you're hankerin' fer the time to git by." Marcy went into the bedroom and took off her good clothes. She put on a pair of clean but much mended Levis and an old shirt and hung up her dress carefully. She brushed her shoes and put them away on a shelf.

In the kitchen she put two small sticks of wood in the firebox of the old black range and put the dishwater on to heat. She started to clear the breakfast table. There in the middle of the table, hidden behind the syrup-jug, was her money can. She snatched it up. Empty. Joe had taken her money. It had taken her a whole summer's careful scrimping to save that \$20. She had saved it for a special treat for the kids. Together they had decided it was to be one big wonderful day at the County Fair.

Marcy stared at the empty can. She had told Joe about the money when he had growled that he was broke and couldn't afford to take them. Joe was using the money for the things they had planned. What if she *wasn't* there? Pretty soon the kids would be home full of excited talk and she could listen and imagine that she had been along to share their fun. Joe would surely be good to them—he sometimes was. Sometimes, when he had been lucky in a card game, he would come home with armloads of expensive gifts for the kids.

Marcy did the dishes. Then she made the beds, swept the house, filled the woodbox beside the range, and carried water from the spring for the washing. She filled the copper boiler on its fireplace in the back yard and started a pine fire under it. She filled the rinse tubs on the back porch beside the old gasoline-motor washing machine. She was proud of the old

machine. It beat hand-scrubbing all hollow and it was a present to her from Gary. The boy had worked all last summer piling brush for a logging crew to make money enough to buy it for her. He was a fine boy and not one little bit lazy or mean like his Pa.

While the water heated, Marcy carried the soiled clothing out to the back porch and sorted it and went through the pockets. Once she had found a live frog in one of Danny's pants pockets. Today he had two marbles and a dead beetle. In Joe's clothes she found a woman's lace handkerchief. It smelled of cheap perfume and was stained with lipstick. Tight-lipped, Marcy threw it into the fire. In the first years of their marriage she would have fought with Joe about it, been hurt and bitter. Now it didn't matter. Except for an inexpressible disgust.

By noon she had the washing done and hung out on the line. She ate a slice of bread and drank a glass of milk, went out to the hillside pasture, and caught the horses. She hitched them to the disk plow and worked the orchard and the garden plot below the spring. She loved to work with the big, slow-moving team. There was something so good, so satisfying about the powerful way they moved. She liked their smell and the way they whickered at her and the way their great, shining eyes watched her.

She liked the feel of the cool ground against her feet and the clean smell of the fresh-turned earth. She had been raised on a farm on Stony Ridge and had shared the outside work with her brothers. Her Pa used to say, "Marcy's as good a man as any of you fellers." She'd been proud even if she wasn't as pretty as her sisters. Maybe that was why Joe Bayliss had come courting her. He was so all-fired lazy he'd figured on getting his farm worked without having to pay a hired man's wages.

The sun was nearing the top of Deadwood Mountain when Marcy finished the disking. She turned the team out to pasture and started the chores.

The farm was hidden in cool shadow when she finished tending the chickens, milking the cows, and feeding the stock. She strained the milk into big shallow pans and set it to cool in the cellar. She sorted the bucket of eggs and packed them into cartons. She gathered in the dry, sun-smelling clothes. The house, still warm from the afternoon's heat, was lonesome-feeling in the dark.

Marcy shivered. She lighted both kerosene lamps but the dim, golden lampglow only made the house seem more empty, more forsaken. Listening, Marcy peered out into the

dusk. In the west the sky was still pale and in the east a full moon was rising like a great, round yellow eye. There was no sound of Joe's truck. The paper down at the store had said there would be fireworks on Saturday and Sunday evenings. The Fair people wouldn't be firing them off until it got good and dark. Maybe Joe and the kids decided to stay and watch.

Marcy started a fire in the range and heated a bucket of water. She carried in a tub from the back porch and took a bath in the corner behind the stove. The lamplight glistened on her flat hard body and on her long muscular arms. When she finished bathing she dressed in clean underclothing and her pink gingham dress. She brushed her short, sun-streaked hair and used her lipstick. She thought, when she peered at herself in the cracked mirror above the kitchen worktable, that she looked right nice.

She carried out the tub of bathwater and mopped up the splashed floor. The clock on the shelf over the stove said 8:30. She'd have to wait a time yet, but it shouldn't be too long. It took about an hour to drive home from the Fair and they ought to be home by ten, maybe a little after. Marcy felt that if she sat down to wait she'd go plumb crazy.

She sorted the clean clothes, dampened the clothes to be ironed, and put the others away. Oakwood was best for a long-burning hot fire. She put a big chunk in the firebox and set her heavy irons on the front stove-lid. When the irons sizzled at the touch of her wet finger she got out her ironing board and began to press the clothes. Homemade shirts for the boys, feed-sack school dresses for Kathy, Joe's fancy store-bought shirts . . .

The waiting was so hard. Maybe they'd run off of the road, or got hit by a long truck. She strained to hear every sound. Again and again she went out to the front porch to listen. In the bright moonlight she could see her work-rough hands twisting in the folds of her pink gingham skirt.

The slow hands of the clock reached and passed eleven o'clock. Then Marcy heard the sound of the truck. They were coming at last!

Thankfully she rushed about putting away the pressed clothes and the ironing board, setting the table with her best cloth and plates, bringing in fried chicken and cake from the water cooler on the back porch, slicing fresh bread and tomatoes. She put a pitcher of milk and a pat of butter on the table and checked the coffee pot on the stove.

The truck came into the yard and stopped. Joe came in grinning at her. The children stumbled after him, Gary carrying his sleeping brother, Kathy sleepily clinging to his

arm. Marcy hugged the children all at once. Gary looked away from her with a queer, ashamed look.

"I got a bite of supper all fixed for you," Marcy said. "Come and eat a little and tell me about everything."

"We're not hungry," Gary said and pulled roughly away from her. He carried his small brother into the bedroom. Kathy trailed unsteadily after him, rubbing her tear-stained eyes with a grubby fist.

Joe had seated himself at the table and loaded his plate with food. He ate noisily, stuffing his big mouth and smacking his thick lips. The fat bulk of him filled the chair. He was in a good mood and between bites he grinned at Marcy derisively.

Nothing was the way she had thought it would be. The kids hadn't said one word about the Fair. Of course they were tired—just plumb beat out.

She asked Joe, "How was the Fair?"

"Best Fair I ever seen," he said, grinning slyly at her.

"Why did you leave me, Joe?" The words had burst out.

"Learn ya to be so slow. Nag an' tease a man for weeks, and then keep him waitin'."

"I was coming," Marcy said numbly.

Joe ate a slab of cake. He shoved his chair back and stood up. His small eyes surveyed her. "Come on to bed, Marcy. Ya look real cute tonight."

He swaggered across the kitchen to their bedroom. The curtain that covered the opening closed behind him. She heard him sit on the creaking bed, heard his heavy boots hit the floor, heard his bulky stirrings—and then silence.

"Hurry up, ol' woman."

"In a minute," she called evenly. She slid her feet out of her shoes, turned out one lamp, and carried the other one into the children's room.

Danny and Kathy were asleep in their bunks, looking like smudged angels, but her older son's eyes were dark and troubled in the lamplight. She stood beside his bed, leaned down and kissed him softly on the forehead. His hard young hand caught her arm.

"Ma?" It was a tortured whisper.

"Yes, Gary?" Marcy set the lamp on the dresser and knelt beside the bed.

"I'm sorry about this morning, Ma. I should've—should've made him stop. I tried. Honest I did."

"I know. Don't be blaming yourself, Gary. You couldn't make your Pa do nothing he didn't have a mind to."

"Some day I'll be big enough."

The boy's thin body was tense as a newly stretched wire fence, his lips taut, his dark eyes staring past her.

Marcy touched his cheek. "How was the Fair? Don't matter I wasn't there. I do truly hope you had a fine time. All the things to see . . . Did Kathy and Danny get to ride the merry-go-round all they wanted? Did you all have candy apples and spun sugar candy on a stick and ride the Ferris wheel and see the clowns and the whole building full of fruit and vegetables in baskets and the cattle all fixed up pretty and fancy? Did you get to see all that?"

The boy's young face twisted as he fought against crying. His worried eyes searched her shadowed face. "Pa said we weren't to tell you, said he'd skin us if we did. But I never did lie to you, Ma."

"No, son." Marcy felt a sudden cold fear.

"Pa said to tell you we went to the Fair, all of us. But we didn't. He gave Kathy a dollar and she and Danny went. They were waiting right at the gate when we got back. Kathy was crying but she was all right."

"Where did you go, Gary?"

"I don't know—some place on the west side of town. Pa said it was time I started living like a man. He didn't want any sissy sons, he said. We went to a place, sort of in back of a store, I guess. Anyway, it was a big room and a lot of men were there and some women, too. There was a jukebox and it was kind of dark and funny-smelling. Everybody seemed to be having a real good time. They danced some and talked loud and laughed a lot. Everybody liked Pa and he took me around and told everybody I was his son. They were real friendly. Pa started playing cards with some fellows. One of the ladies brought me some cookies and a sandwich and something to drink—soda pop, it was. It was sort of smoky in there and I got to feeling sick and after a while I went to sleep. Then Pa woke me up and said it was time to go home."

Marcy was so quiet and motionless that the boy finally touched her face. "Ma, please don't be mad at me."

"I love you," said Marcy Bayliss fiercely. "I love you and Kathy and Danny so much I can't find words enough to tell you how much. You know that, Gary?"

"Sure, Ma."

"Then don't you worry any more. Everything's going to be all right." She rose and picked up the lamp. "Go to sleep," she whispered, and stroked his tangled dark hair.

The boy's tense body relaxed. His face lighted with a brief smile. He turned on his side and his eyes closed heavily. Marcy smoothed the quilt over him.

Then, moving as silently as the monstrous black shadow that followed her along the rough board walls, she went into the kitchen. Her strong hand closed on the bone handle of a kitchen knife. The long blade was worn to a thin point, razor-sharp, gleaming in the yellow lamplight. She carried the lamp in her left hand, the knife in her right. She brushed aside the curtain and entered the bedroom.

Joe lay on his back, one arm stretched out across her pillow. His naked chest, thickly matted with black hair, rose and fell with his breathing. He looked at her and his eyes shone, catlike, in the lamp's dim glow. "Come on, Marcy," he said. "Hurry up, ol' woman."

She set the lamp on the packing case that served as a table beside the bed. She leaned over him and with both hands and all her strength she drove the knife into his chest clear to the handle.

He made a hoarse sound and struggled to sit up. His fingers fumbled with the knife. He stared at her with horrified unbelief. He coughed and blood gushed down his heaving body. Then he fell back on the bed.

Marcy turned down the lamp wick and blew out the flame. The small room flooded with the black and silver of the moonlight. The woman leaned against the bed frame. Now that it was done she was trembling and sick, but she was glad. The children were hers—she had borne them, she had raised them . . .

Slowly her strength came back to her and her hands were steady as she changed to her work clothes. She went out to the toolshed in the back yard and got a shovel. She dug a grave for Joe beneath a young Black Twig apple tree in the orchard. The ground was hard and the grave deep so that the night was almost over when she had finished.

She wrapped the body in the stained bedclothing and dragged it out through the house, across the back porch, and across the yard to the grave. When she had tumbled it in, she stood gasping for breath. Joe was a big man and heavy. The moon, low in the west, gave an eerie unearthly look to the dark bulk of the familiar mountain ridges, and its pale light made weblike shadows of the tree branches in the lifeless grass. Only the brightest of the stars blazed with chill, diamond brilliance in the black velvet sky. It seemed a time set aside for death.

Marcy shivered. She hurried back into the house and brought out the clothes Joe had worn. Sitting on the mound of fresh earth, she searched his pockets—some of her \$20 might be left. She found the keys to his red Ford truck and a

roll of bills. She counted the money—nearly \$200! No wonder he had come home in such a good humor—the card game had been lucky for him.

Marcy dropped Joe's clothes into the grave and then quickly filled it in. She smoothed the ground and spread the extra dirt into the freshly disked orchard rows. She cleaned the shovel and put it away and washed her face and hands in the spring's icy overflow.

The eastern sky was growing light with the coming of the sun when Marcy Bayliss finally sat on her front-porch step. A rooster crowed in the hen house and a coyote sang in the dark canyon below the house.

Marcy smiled. The eastern sky faded into gold and palest blue. It was a new day—a fine new day to go to the County Fair.

II: Cross My Heart . . .

Louise lay flat on her stomach on the lumpy bed under the poplar tree in the back yard of her home. She lay with her knees bent and her calloused bare feet twined and twisted with a snaky life of their own as she looked at the bright-colored pictures in an old Montgomery Ward catalogue. She removed one grimy hand from her chin as she turned a page. Behind her thick-lensed, black-rimmed glasses her dark eyes were glassy with longing. She leaned on her elbow and stabbed at the pages with a grimy forefinger.

"I wish I had that," she said. "And that—and that—and that—"

Above her head the heart-shaped poplar leaves hung limp and dark, unstirring in the morning's oppressively humid heat. Her mother's White Leghorns car-r-rked lazily as they dusted themselves in the powdery dirt of the chicken pen. Bees hummed sluggishly in the alfalfa patch beyond the unkempt yard. Over the flat fields the sun flung a pale, wavering haze of moisture drawn from the irrigation ditches and the soaked earth. The hot air smelled of steaming plant growth and stagnant water.

Louise turned on her back. Her eyes stared sightlessly up into the inert dark leaves. She felt herself sinking delightfully into her own inner world where she seemed to hang suspended in space, cushioned in the softest down, caressed tenderly by unseen hands.

She closed her eyes and waited breathlessly. Silken billows lifted her and she saw herself standing on a stage in front of a huge audience. The people in the audience were indistinct

mouths smiling at her and shining eyes looking at her with love. She stood apart and saw herself and she was beautiful with a skin like ivory satin and a little red mouth and great dark eyes. And her dress felt light as a moonbeam and was of palest rose chiffon.

There were jewels in her ears and around her throat. She stretched out her arms to the people, a hush fell on the audience, a crescendo of violins played—and she sang. Her voice was clear and true and incredibly sweet. She sang and sang and when she had finished the audience stood as one and shouted and cried and rained flowers on her—all but two who crouched, black as vultures, in the wings of the vast stage.

Louise tried to hold onto the wonderful dream but the two evil figures tore her away from all the beauty and warm delight. Their faces grew and swelled until they were close, staring at her, pointing their long clawlike fingers . . . The faces belonged to Miss Miles and Miss Henderson.

Louise had been in the cloakroom that last week of school in June. The children were supposed to play outside during recess, so she had stepped back into a corner behind an old coat when she heard the thump of sensible heels on the board floor. Then they had come into the room, Miss Miles and Miss Henderson, who taught Louise's sixth-grade classes.

Miss Miles said to Miss Henderson, "What do you think of that Carter girl?" Her voice sounded funny as if she were speaking about something unclean.

Miss Henderson said, "I never saw such a thoroughly unattractive child." Her voice had the same sound as Miss Miles's voice.

"I know it," said Miss Miles. "I can't bear to have her close to me. I know I shouldn't feel that way, but she makes my skin absolutely crawl!"

"I wonder," began Miss Henderson thoughtfully. "It's an odd thing—"

She and Miss Miles talked some more, but they began to use big words.

The rest of the week Louise had kept as far away from her teachers as she could. But in her mind, with dreadful relish, she had destroyed them a hundred times.

Now, as she lay quietly on her back under the old poplar tree, she ran them down with her powerful red sports car. It wasn't as gruesome as some of her other methods of destruction, but it had its juicy points. The two teachers were walking down a steep banked road in a dark forest—Miss Miles, round and fat, Miss Henderson, thin and flat. They

heard her coming—the deadly whirr of the powerful engine, the vengeful scream of the racing tires on the rough pavement. They looked back over their shoulders. Their eyes grew wide. They looked funny—Miss Miles, her round face like a pale sugar cookie with raisin eyes, and Miss Henderson, her long face like a slab of colorless cheese with a carrot nose. They ran. They screamed. They clawed at the steep bank, but it didn't do them one bit of good. Louise ran over them and over them and over them until they looked like printed linoleum rugs, one round and one long and narrow.

"Louise! Louise!"

The girl heard the voice faintly.

"Louise, you lazy good-for-nothin'! If I have to yell once more, I'll come over there an' swat you good!"

The dream burst into a thousand crimson bubbles that floated into the dark forest and vanished.

The girl opened her eyes and saw the leaves of the poplar tree and the shattered glass sparkles of the sun. She moved her head. "What d'ya want?"

Her mother stood on the back porch of the old frame house. She was a tall graying woman in a faded housedress. She was all angles and flat unyielding planes. A sour and bitter defeat shone in her tired eyes and in the bitter harshness of her mouth.

"Rosellen's come over to play," she said. "And you play nice with her or I'll whale the livin' tar out of you."

"Like fun you will," the girl said under her breath. Aloud she said, "Sure, Ma."

The woman went back into the house slamming the door behind her. The girl lay quietly, her thin body flat and shapeless on the worn quilt that covered the bed. She became aware of the sounds and the heat of the day. In the mesh-fenced pen a hen sang proudly of a newly laid egg. Across the fields drifted the somnolent purr of a moving machine and the irritating monotonous chir-r-r of cicadas in the dry grass.

Around the corner of the house a small figure appeared picking its way along the overgrown path. Rosellen was a tiny, exquisitely fashioned child with vacant, round blue eyes and curly blonde hair. Louise despised her for many reasons, and her dislike was mixed with a hopeless envy. For her part, Rosellen's somewhat simple mind couldn't conceive that in all the world there was a person who did not like and admire her. She lived in a large, beautifully kept house close to the road and her father was the Carters' landlord. She seldom came to see Louise and when she did, the older girl's sullen

dislike was so apparent that Rosellen went home puzzled and unhappy—which alarmed Louise's parents so much that they threatened her with dire punishment if she didn't behave more civilly.

Louise watched her small visitor approach with coldly impassive eyes. Rosellen was wearing a blue-and-white checked pinafore. Her hair was slicked into two braids with blue ribbons and she wore tiny white sandals. She carried a long flat box.

"Hello," Rosellen said, looking down at Louise with a testy superiority.

"Hello," said Louise flatly.

The blonde child fidgeted. "Mama said I was to go play and leave her alone. Annie's gone and Laura's gone and Sally went to the coast with her mama, so I came over here. Do you want to play paper dolls? I brought mine."

"They stink, stink, stink!"

The round blue eyes stared. The childish red lips pouted. "They don't either! If you don't play nice with me I'll tell your mama on you."

Rosellen leaned forward and set the flat box on the bed. She tugged open the lid. As she did so, Louise saw a heavy gold chain around her visitor's neck and a heavy something that swung below it.

"Whatcha got on the chain?"

The blue eyes widened self-consciously. A small dimpled hand touched the lumpy pinafore. "That's a secret," said Rosellen mysteriously. "I got it out of Mama's jewel box." Defensively she added, "Mama never told me I *couldn't* wear it."

"Lemme see it."

The blue eyes regarded Louise with a cool importance. "You got to promise you won't tell anybody."

"I promise, lemme see it."

"Mama'd be awful mad if she knew."

"Thought you said she let you wear it."

"N-no—she let me look at it though. Daddy doesn't even know she's got it. She said he'd be mad and make her send it back."

"I bet! You're making up stories, Rosellen. It's some ole dime store junk somebody gave you."

"It is not!" The blonde child flushed. "A nice man my mama used to know sent it to her from South America."

"Quit making up stories. Ole brass chain—turn your ole neck all green!"

Rosellen pulled the heavy chain out from the front of her

pinafore. "There, see! It's not any ole junk! It's a real ruby! Mama said so!"

The jewel at the end of the chain was the most beautiful thing Louise had ever seen. It was a deep-red stone as large as a sparrow's egg, surrounded by clear brilliants and smaller red stones, all intricately wrapped in fine gold wire.

"Oh-h-h-l!" Louise sat up straight. Her eyes glowed. Never in all her life had she seen anything so beautiful or envisioned anything so desirable, even in her most precious dreams. The red gem glowed at her like a beckoning ember.

Rosellen smiled proudly. "It's terribly valuable," she said with insufferable self-importance. "It's a real, real gen-u-wine ruby. I bet you never saw one before, did you?"

"I bet it's nothing but glass," Louise said automatically. She put out her hand to touch the wonderful red stone.

Rosellen jerked away from her. "You'll get it all dirty putting your fingers on it."

"I just want to see it a minute."

The blonde little girl dropped the jewel down the front of the dress. "If you aren't going to play with me, I'm going home."

Louise caught her arm. "Don't leave yet," she said. "Let me just put it on a minute. Then I'll play anything you like."

"I've got to go home," said Rosellen uneasily.

"No, you don't. Just let me wear it a *little* while. I'll play dolls with you an' I'll be real nice."

"Give it right back?"

"I promise."

"Well—all right. You've got to take it off when I say so. You promised."

The chain was unsnapped from the slender white neck and clasped around the bony dark one. The gem seemed to burn Louise's skin as she slid it down inside the open collar of her old shirt. It settled and seemed to be at home between the swelling bumps of breasts.

She held her hand over it and through the thin fabric of her shirt and the blood-red web of her fingers it seemed to glow with a marvelous and sinister light. Her thoughts folded in on it. It would be her lucky talisman, her protector, her friend. Something really truly would happen to old Miss Miles and old Miss Henderson—something awful, much worse than she could ever imagine. She felt her whole being transformed and made beautiful by the miraculous presence of the jewel against her body.

Rosellen laid her paper dolls out on the bed. She hummed

to herself with housewifely zeal. "You can have Maria for your mama," she said brightly, "and Kathy and Dora for your children. I'll take Debbie for my mama and Alice and Susan for my little girls."

She spread the brightly colored dolls and sorted out a pile of elegant paper clothing for each one.

Louise sat silently, her hand clutching the stone beneath her shirt, her thin, ugly face translucent with an inner light.

Rosellen said importantly, "I'm all ready, Louise. You can come visit my house first." She stared doubtfully at the darkly silent girl. "Louise, come on. You *said* you'd play. You promised." She shook Louise's arm insistently. "If you don't play I'm going home. Give me my mama's necklace!"

Louise sat silent and immovable.

Rosellen's blue eyes filled with angry tears. "I'm going to tell your mama you won't play with me. You'll git it! You'll see!"

She started toward the house.

Louise leaped from the bed and caught her by the shoulder. She dug her wiry fingers into the soft flesh. "You tell my mama anything, I'll tell your mama you stole her necklace!"

Rosellen began to wail.

"Shut up! Mama'll hear you!"

The children returned to the bed.

"You said you'd play with me," Rosellen sobbed. "You *promised*!"

"I didn't say where I'd play, did I?" Louise asked. Behind her thick glasses her eyes gleamed redly. "Let's take the dolls an' go up to the ditch. I've got a nice playhouse up there, all cut out of the weeds. Just like a real house. It's got rooms an' a little table an' chairs."

"I don't want to go up there. Mama told me not to get dirty."

"It's got real rugs on the floor. You won't get a bit dirty." Louise began to press the dolls into the box.

"I don't want to go. I want my mama's necklace and my dolls. I'm going home. You're not nice."

Louise seemed to swell darkly. "You do like I say or I'll fix you! I'll follow you around all day an' I'll bite you an' I'll hit you an' I'll kick you and I'll tell all the kids nasty stories about you!"

"I want my mama's necklace!" The tearful blue eyes were frightened. The small lips pouted stubbornly.

"You can't have it till you do as I say."

"P-p-please, Louise!"

"Come on. When we get up there to my playhouse I'll really truly give it to you. Come on. Hurry up."

The blonde child followed reluctantly as they trotted through the hot dust to the irrigation canal that crossed the fields behind the houses. The canal banks were covered with water willows, silver-leaved in the sun, white-flowered, lacy yarrow, water grass, and silky milkweed. In stagnant pools cattails raised pithy spikes. Except for the path it was a secretive, impenetrable wilderness.

The children followed the tunnel-like opening and the grasses closed vibrantly over their heads. They came out of the thick vegetation onto the concrete abutments of the head-gate that controlled the flow of water into the smaller ditches. In the wide spillway the water ran swift and dark as it poured in a thick greenish torrent into the deep pool below. The water moved silently except for an oily lapping against the rough walls of the spillway. Dimpled whirlpools formed on its surface and vanished with sucking gurgles. Things moved in the greenish depths—swirls of moss, flickering shadows, sibilant things.

"Look here," Louise cried, standing close to the edge.

"No," Rosellen sniffed, drawing back. Her small face was pale beneath the sweat and tears. "I'm scared. I want to go home. I bet you haven't got any ole playhouse. I want my mama's necklace."

"Don't be a baby. Come look."

"L-l-look at what?"

"There's a turtle. A big yellow one with red eyes. Come look, then you can go home. I promise."

"You'll give me Mama's necklace?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die."

The oath was a fearful one. Rosellen edged closer to the dark water. She stretched her slender neck. Her yellow braids fell forward over her small shoulders. "Where's the turtle? I don't see any ole turtle."

"Right there," said Louise, pointing downward. "You watch. He'll come up again in a minute."

Around the children rose moist hot air, thick with the smells of slimy mud and decay. Blue dragonflies hovered on silken wings above the green water.

"See. Here he comes." Louise held the jewel against her skinny chest. Her fingers caressed its carved edges.

"Where? I don't see any ole turtle!" Rosellen leaned forward.

Louise put her free hand against the small warm back—and pushed.

There wasn't much splash and only a choked scream. The struggling child came to the surface once. Her small hands reached out toward Louise. Her eyes were round and black with terror. Her mouth opened and closed soundlessly.

Louise, still leaning a little forward, watched impassively, her left hand still clenched around the blood-red stone that seemed to throb like a living thing.

A whirling current seized Rosellen and pulled her under. The checked pinafore and the blue-ribboned braids vanished in the greenish depths.

Louise straightened. She had put the paper-doll box on the ground and now she picked it up and threw it into the water. It drifted like a small flat boat across the pool and then capsized and sank, slowly turning. The paper dolls floated down the stream. They might have been gay flowers on a peaceful lily pond.

Louise sat on the bank and drew the necklace from its hiding place. The crimson lights leaped and danced in her hand. She held the stone to her eye and lay back on the grass.

Quickly and effortlessly a crimson, silken softness came up about her and carried her away to a small room where a dinner party was in progress. It was a wonderfully rich room with deep-red velvet carpets and red silk wall hangings. Everything was jeweled with gold and diamonds, and soft lights glowed from crystal chandeliers. She was there inside herself, feeling all the delicious things, and yet she was watching herself with all-seeing eyes.

She was more beautiful then ever. Her dress was of glittering cloth of gold, and rubies covered her wrists and neck. Rubies smoldered in her high-piled black hair. People with smiling mouths and admiring eyes crowded around her. She lifted a golden cup and drank sweet red wine that tasted better than the smell of perfume and the touch of soft feathers. Her whole body tingled with a rapturous delight. Her pulses throbbed with a dizzying ecstasy. She seemed to be floating in a world of brilliant, gilded, crimson light and high, clear, ringing sounds that were unbelievably beautiful.

Then the vision, despite her best efforts to sustain it, began to grow dull. The melodies faded, and a strident something was pulling her down, down into a dark pit.

"Louise! Louise!" It was her mother's angry voice. "Where are you? Come here this instant!"

The girl sat up on the bank. She drew a deep breath. She felt weak and languidly spent. She smiled slowly and dropped the pendant back inside her shirt and buttoned the collar high around her throat.

She stood up and peered into the water. Then she turned and began to run and scream.

She burst through the tall grass shrieking hysterically, "Help! Help! Mama, come quick! Rosellen fell in!"

III: The Sound of Women Weeping

The houses faced each other across the dingy street; one was weathered, white-painted, two-storied, the other squat, drab-brown with a wide veranda and a screened-in side porch. They seemed to regard each other with suspicious eyes—the two-story one from narrow windows pinched beneath a high, white-walled forehead, and the squat one from beneath the beetling veranda roof that projected like a thick, dark brow. The pale and wintry light of the late afternoon sun made barred shadows across the dead lawns. The street was quiet. Only an occasional car scuttled by, crisping through the fallen leaves.

Ed Crossman stood behind his front windows and gazed with somber gray eyes across the street at the brown house. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a gentle and deep-lined face. The black suit he was wearing was too small for him and smelled faintly of moth spray. He drew his hand over his face with a gesture of inarticulate grief and turned from the window to the stairs.

At the bottom of the steps he leaned against the banister and listened to the silence of the old house. In the kitchen the refrigerator hummed monotonously; beneath the floor some timbers creaked faintly; against the outside wall the thin cold wind drove a branch with a stealthy tapping—all the sounds seemed to intensify the hollow emptiness of the rooms. The house seemed to be waiting, listening—for the gay laughter and skipping feet that would never come again.

Since that night of horror, Ed Crossman had never been alone to think of the future, to plan the things that must be done. Doctor Miller had come first and then the police and the ambulance crew. Later the neighbors had appeared, and the relatives with their tears and their shocked faces, and inevitably the reporters with their notebooks and cameras, and finally the curious with their prying eyes and pointing fingers. Carloads of them had come, staring and whispering under the bare-limbed elms that lined the street.

It was over now—the unbelievable, the unbearable thing that had happened; and he and Ellie must face the long darkness that lay ahead. Ed Crossman straightened his shoulders and climbed the stairs. He tapped at the door of the front bedroom, and when there was no answer he pushed open the paneled door.

His wife lay motionless on the big fourposter bed. She hadn't changed her dress after the funeral and the limp, black silk made her small body look shrunken and shapeless. Her eyes were closed and her hands folded inertly on her breasts. She lay so quietly that the man hurried to her side with a sudden cold fear. He touched her cheek and felt the burning dryness of her skin. She opened her eyes and stared dully up at him.

"Everybody's gone," he said. "We're alone, Ellie."

He sat on the bed and took her fevered hands in his—small hands, work-hardened hands, good hands, busy hands; through all the years of their marriage they had never been idle until now.

"Get her up, get her busy," Doctor Miller had said. "Don't let her lie there and brood about it. Make her angry, make her cry, make her feel something. She needs to cry. If she doesn't, she may drift away from us into a world of unreality."

But Ellie Crossman hadn't cried—not since that night.

"Ellie," said Ed Crossman. "Do you hear me, Ellie?"

Her eyes stared at him blankly.

He shook her gently. "Ellie, I want to talk to you. We've got a lot to do, a lot to decide."

She looked at him. "Why?" she asked. "What does anything matter?"

"You can't give up," he said. "We've got to go on living and the sooner we get at it the better for both of us."

Ellie closed her shadowed eyes. "I don't care any more, Ed. She was all we had. There's nothing left."

"I know how you feel . . . she was my daughter too. My life. Everything." The words were hollow dust in his mouth. He said, "I want to do something that is very hard for me. Right now, this afternoon, and I need you. I need you with me where you've always been."

"Not today, Ed. Let me be."

"Today, Ellie, while I have the strength. Tomorrow bitterness may be too much a habit. I want to go see Steve and Alice."

Her body jerked and tensed, her fingers dug into his hands,

her eyes blazed at him. "Why?" she cried. "How can you forget? How can you even speak their names?"

Ed Crossman shook his head. "It wasn't their fault, Ellie. You can't blame them any more than you can blame yourself. None of us knew what was going to happen. If we'd stayed home, if we hadn't left her alone . . . None of us knew there was any danger—in this house, in this quiet street, in this peaceful town. Who could think . . . It was one of those stupid, senseless things, without reason or meaning. We can't live the rest of our lives blaming ourselves—or blaming anyone."

He stood up and crossed the room to the front window. He looked down on the dry front lawn and suddenly it was spring and long ago. The grass was green, the flower beds blazed with color, and children played with shrill laughter in the golden sunlight. He remembered the day so long ago and so long forgotten—Steve's son, Carl, standing by the hedge, his still eyes watching, his dark face frowning.

Had Ed felt a cold premonition even then? The vision was so real that he felt again the swelling half-awed pride he had known that day as he had watched his chubby, blonde-headed little daughter. So beautiful and perfect she had always been to him . . .

His eyes lifted now to the squat brown house across the street, and the happy voices were silent, the withered lawn empty and cold.

A car came slowly down the street and clattered up the opposite driveway. A small man got out of the car and stood a moment leaning against it. His thin body was stooped and aged and the wind sent his wisps of dark hair flying.

Ed Crossman turned from the window and spoke to his wife. "Steve just came home and I'm going over there. Come along, Ellie. They're still our friends. They've got awful trouble."

The woman moaned and covered her face with her hands. "What's their trouble compared to ours? Our child is dead! I hate them, Ed. I'll hate them as long as I live and I don't want to ever see them again. How can you be so—so—unfeeling?"

The man rubbed the side of his face. His big hand shook. He said slowly, "Ellie, I know I'm asking a lot. Too much, maybe. But look at it this way. If the kids were sick or got hurt in an accident, wouldn't you and Alice comfort each other? If our Joanie died and Carl was terribly injured wouldn't you do all you could to help Alice?"

The woman turned on the bed and stared at him with burning eyes. "It's not the same, Ed."

"No," the big man agreed heavily. "It's worse. Our pain and sorrow are clean things and all our memories of our daughter are tender and good. But think of Steve and Alice. What will they have to remember all the rest of their lives? Come with me. Please, Ellie."

The woman shook her head and buried her face in the bedclothes. Ed Crossman covered his wife with a blanket and went out of the room and down the stairs.

The wind was cold and damp on his face when he reached the street. There was a feel of fog in the air, and a trace of rising mist paled the thin light of the sun. Ed Crossman walked slowly through the rustling leaves. How Joanie had loved to tumble in the big leaf piles! How she had shrieked with delight as she raced the falling leaves, her eyes blue as the sky, her yellow curls flying. It was as if the recent years had never been, as if he remembered her most vividly as a child. Sometimes she seemed to skip beside him, her small warm hand clasping his. In these moments his crushing sense of loss was so great that it seemed unbearable.

He stood before the brown house. The windows were dark, the shades drawn, the porch leaf-littered. With leaden feet he climbed the porch steps. He was sweating coldly. Beyond the closed front door some malevolent presence seemed to lurk. He knew it was only his tortured mind that made it seem so, but it was with the greatest difficulty that he forced himself to raise his hand to the knocker.

He tapped gently. No answer. He struck the knocker more firmly. This house where he had always come and gone almost as though it were his own had become an unfriendly thing.

The house remained coldly silent. Almost with relief he turned away. And turning, he heard the savage chuck-chuck of a hoe in the back yard. He went down the steps and around to the back.

Steve Parkson was wielding the tool with violent slashing strokes as he dug into the earth of his vegetable garden.

Ed Crossman watched him a moment, then called his name.

The small man swung around. He had been crying and the pale light glinted on his thin, tear-streaked cheeks. He stared at Ed with incredulous eyes and his face twisted in an anguished grimace. Then their hands met.

Steve Parkson said huskily, "You didn't need to come, Ed."

I know how you must feel and, God, I can't blame you. I can't believe it's happened. It's a damn dream, a nightmare. I keep thinking I'll wake up and—and I'll see Carl and Joanie . . ."

"I know, Steve, I know."

"Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if we'd had other kids. But I guess it wouldn't matter. It'd be the same. I got to talk to someone. You, Ed? You want to talk? You got time?"

"I've got time, Steve."

The men sat on a stone bench in the fading sunlight. Behind the back-yard fence and out of the wind the sun had a faint warmth. They were silent for a time, each buried in his own thoughts.

"I went to see the boy today," Steve Parkson said with a shuddering effort. "They got him in a cage like an animal. He walks up and down, up and down. He said he's sorry and if I saw you I was to tell you he didn't mean it. He didn't mean to hurt Joanie. He said something just sort of snapped. He loved her. I guess he always did, even when they were kids, only it was play then."

"If he loved her," Ed Crossman cried, "how could he kill her?"

"I don't know, Ed. I don't know." Steve Parkson pounded his fist on the stone bench. "I tried to raise him right, teach him right from wrong. I guess I'm not much of a teacher. I figured if I just loved him enough he'd come out okay. Inside I knew there was something wrong. He was such a quiet boy but he had a temper—he always did even when he was a little kid. You know how it is, you can't believe there's anything wrong with your own kid. Other people's kids, yes—but not your own. Sometimes he was such a good boy. Helped his ma, helped me. And always when I'd see him growing so big and handsome and strong, it was like a flame warming me, my pride in him. I loved everybody because he was my son."

"I know, Steve, I know." The big man put his arms around the small man's shoulders.

"I knew something was wrong with him. But I just wouldn't believe it." The small man choked, tears sliding down his cheeks. "I saw a lot of things. I kept making excuses for him. It's my fault. If I'd beat it out of him, maybe? I don't know. I did lick him good once, the time I saw him burn Mrs. Carter's cat in the incinerator. He swore up and down he didn't, but I saw him. The cat scratched him. I licked him more because he lied to me, I guess, and then I was scared because he'd do a thing like that. If I'd taken him to the doctor then, maybe this wouldn't have happened."

"You didn't know, Steve. You can't take all the blame on yourself for what happened. Maybe if we hadn't left her there alone . . ." The night of the lodge party. He and Ellie had wanted to go. It had seemed safe enough. Joanie had laughed at his fears, called him her Darling Worry Bug. "I'm sixteen," she had laughed. "I don't need a baby sitter. For goodness' sakes, Father, I'm practically grown up!" He could see her face, the smooth curve of her cheek, the roundness of her slender neck . . . Looking at his daughter from the open door, Ed had felt an urge to go back and kiss her goodbye, to tell her how much he loved her. All the rest of his life he would have that deep regret . . .

"Why did he kill her? What did he tell you?" Ed asked with slow pain.

Steve Parkson looked far up into the opaque and empty sky as though he too searched for an answer. "He talked to me today," he said. "He never told the police anything except that he killed her. He told me that he loved her. Nobody could ever understand how much. She wouldn't be true to him, he said. She wanted to date other fellows."

"She was just a youngster, just past sixteen!" Ed Crossman cried.

"He says he saw you and Ellie leave and he went over to talk to Joanie. That was all he meant to do, just talk. They had quite an argument about it. Finally Joanie told Carl to leave. He says that's when he—well, then something snapped. She looked so pretty when she was mad, with her eyes full of sparks and her cheeks all pink. He tried to kiss her. He told her if he couldn't have her nobody else would either. She pushed him away and ran into the kitchen. She tried to get out the back door. Next thing the boy knew, he was standing over her with a kitchen knife in his hand and Joanie was on the floor . . . and blood over everything."

Ed Crossman closed his eyes. They had come home early, driven by his unrest. It had been a night of brilliant full moon, clear pale light, and velvet shadows. He had been putting the car into the garage when Ellie had begun to scream. Rushing up the walk, he had found her kneeling over Joanie's body. Bright red blood on the black and white tiles of the kitchen floor.

The unbelievable nightmare had begun then and it would never end. It would never end for Steve and Alice either. All their lives were caught up in this one senseless, maniacal act.

It was hard, hard not to hate. Ed drew in a deep breath and put his hand on his friend's thin shoulder. "I'm sorry for all of us," he said. "Most of all for Joanie. Her life would

have been such a happy time. To her everything was wonderful. I know she wouldn't even—even hate Carl for what he did to her. And because it wasn't in her to hate, I can't either—not and be fair to her. I'll do what I can for your boy, Steve. Taking his life isn't going to bring back Joanie. Maybe I can help. I'll do what I can."

Along the back fence a row of bronze chrysanthemums bloomed in bright defiance of the coming winter. The dying sun touched the top flowers and they glowed bright gold. Like Joanie's hair, Ed Crossman thought with a quick stab that tightened his throat.

Parkson touched his arm almost timidly. "Thanks, Ed," he said. "There aren't many guys in the world would say what you just did."

"We've been friends and neighbors—thirteen years, isn't it, since you moved in here?"

"The fall of forty-eight." Parkson hesitated a moment then asked, "How's Ellie?"

Ed Crossman rubbed his cheek. "She's still feeling the effects of the shock, Steve. She and Joanie were very close. She's upstairs in bed now."

The big man stood up. The air was rapidly growing colder and pale mists were gathering in the still air. The bare trees along the street raised skeleton arms.

"I've got to go home, Steve."

"I'd ask you in but Alice—she don't feel so good either. She hasn't slept since we heard about the boy. At night I feel her lying so stiff and full of pain beside me. I know she is thinking like I am—of all the things we did we shouldn't and what we didn't do we should have. She never cried, not even when I told her—she just stared at me. She keeps it all bottled up inside her. She won't go to see the boy. She doesn't even ask about him. It's like he never was. You know what she does, Ed? She cleans house like it's killing her. We've got the cleanest house this side of hell."

The small man looked at Ed Crossman. "I'd like to ask you in but Alice, she says she don't want to see anybody."

"Sure, Steve. I understand."

Their hands met and Ed Crossman turned away. He looked across the street and saw Ellie coming toward them through the chilly dusk. She had changed her black silk for a clean starched housedress and her soft, graying hair was brushed back neatly. She walked with a firm step and her grief-lined face was calm. She saw the men and came toward them.

"Hello, Steve," she said and touched his shoulder. "Where's Alice?"

Steve Parkson nodded toward the house. Ellie looked at her husband. "You were right, Ed," she said. She leaned forward and her dry lips brushed his cheek. "I saw you and Steve sitting together, talking together, and I knew this can't be the end of things for us. I belong with you."

Ed Crossman looked at his wife and knew that he had never loved her more. She climbed the back stairs and let herself in the back door. She called, "Alice! Oh, Alice! It's me, Ellie!"

The men heard the sound of women weeping.

MICHAEL GILBERT

The Future of the Service

It is a long time since we have offered you a series of secret service stories. Surprisingly, the secret service story was not as common as one would think. Many of the demi-detectives of fiction, created by such authors as E. Phillips Oppenheim, William Le Queux, Sax Rohmer, and Edgar Wallace, have flirted persistently with international intrigue—but from a realistic point of view they are strictly amateurs or dabblers. Occasionally one of the master manhunters of fiction has taken a fling at counterespionage—Sherlock Holmes, for example, in "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans" and "His Last Bow"; but, as we once remarked, these are random shots in otherwise stately, if not affairs-of-stately, careers.

Now we bring you the first in Michael Gilbert's new series of secret service short stories in the modern tradition—in the tradition of W. Somerset Maugham's "Ashenden" . . . Meet Mr. Calder and his deerhound Rasselas and his old friend Mr. Behrens—they are secret agents (including the dog) of the "old school," yet they are as contemporary as today's spy and counterspy and spycatcher . . .

"The young man of today," said Mr. Behrens, "is physically stronger and fitter than his father. He can run a mile faster—"

"A useful accomplishment," agreed Mr. Calder.

"He can throw a weight farther, can jump higher, and will probably live longer."

"But not as long as the young lady of today," said Mr. Calder. "They have a look of awful vitality."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Behrens—he and Mr. Calder, being very old friends, did not so much answer as override each other, and frequently they both spoke at once—"nev-

ertheless, he is, in one important way, inferior to the older generation. He is mentally softer—"

"Morally, too."

"The two things go together. He has the weaknesses which go with his strength. He is tolerant—but he is flabby. He is intelligent—but he is timid. He is made out of cast iron, not steel."

"Stop generalizing," said Mr. Calder. "What's worrying you?"

Mr. Calder considered the matter, at the same time softly scratching the head of his deerhound, Rasselas, who lay on the carpet beside his chair.

Mr. Behrens, who lived down in the valley, had walked up—as he did regularly on Tuesday afternoons—to take tea with Mr. Calder in his cottage on the hilltop.

"You're not often right," said Mr. Calder at last.

"Thank you."

"But you could be on this occasion. I saw Fortescue yesterday."

"Yes," said Mr. Behrens. "He told me you had been to see him. I meant to ask you about that. What did he want?"

"There's a woman. She has to be killed."

Rasselas flicked his right ear at an intrusive fly; then, when this proved ineffective, he growled softly and shook his head.

"Anyone I know?" said Mr. Behrens.

"I'm not sure. Her name, at the moment, is Lipper—Maria Lipper. She lives in Woking, and is known there as Mrs. Lipper, although I don't think she has ever been married. She has worked as a typist and filing clerk at the Air Ministry since—oh, since well before the last war."

Both Mr. Behrens and Mr. Calder spoke of the "last war" in terms of very slight derogation. It had not been *their* war.

"And how long has she been working for them?"

"Certainly for ten years, possibly more. Security got onto her in the end by selective coding, and that, as you know, is a very slow process."

"And not one which a jury would understand or accept."

"Oh, certainly not," said Mr. Calder. "Certainly not. There could be no question here of judicial process. Maria is a season ticket holder, not a commuter."

By this Mr. Calder meant that Maria Lipper was a secret agent who collected, piecemeal, all information which came her way, and passed it on at long intervals—of months, or even of years. No messenger came to her. When she had sufficient to interest her masters, she would take it to a col-

lecting point and leave it. Occasional sums of money would come to her through the mail.

"It is a thousand pities," added Mr. Calder, "that they did not get onto her a little sooner—before operation Prometheus Unbound came off the drawing board."

"Do you think she knows about *that*?"

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Calder. "I wasn't directly concerned. Buchanan was in charge. But it was her section that did the Prometheus typing, and when he found out that she had asked for an urgent contact, I think—I really think—he was justified in getting worried."

"What is he going to do about it?"

"The contact has been short-circuited. I am taking his place. Two days from now Mrs. Lipper is driving down to Portsmouth for a short holiday. She plans to leave Woking very early—she likes clear roads to drive on—and she will be crossing Salisbury Plain at six o'clock. Outside Upavon she turns off the main road. The meeting place is a barn at the top of the track. She has stipulated a payment of five hundred pounds in one-pound notes. Incidentally, she has never before been paid more than fifty."

"You must be right," said Mr. Behrens. "I imagine that I am to cover you here. Fortunately, my aunt is taking the waters at Harrogate."

"If you would."

"The usual arrangements."

"The key will be on the ledge over the woodshed door."

"You'd better warn Rasselas to expect me. Last time he got it into his head that I was a burglar."

The great hound looked up at the mention of his name and grinned, showing his long white incisors.

"You needn't worry about Rasselas," said Mr. Calder. "I'll take him with me. He enjoys an expedition now and then. All the same, it is a sad commentary on the younger generation that a man of my age has to be sent on an assignment like this."

"Exactly what I was saying. Where did you put the backgammon board?"

Mr. Calder left his cottage at dusk the following evening. He drove off in the direction of Gravesend, crossed the river by the ferry, and made a circle round London, recrossing the Thames at Reading. He drove his inconspicuous car easily and efficiently. Rasselas lay across the back seat between a sleeping bag and a portmanteau. He was used to road travel, and slept most of the way.

At midnight the car rolled down the broad High Street of Marlborough and out onto the Pewsey Road. A soft golden moon made a mockery of its headlights.

A mile from Upavon, Mr. Calder pulled up at the side of the road and studied the 1/25000 range map with which he had been supplied. The track leading to the barn was clearly shown. But he had marked a different and roundabout way by which the rendezvous could be approached. This involved taking the next road to the right, following it for a quarter of a mile, then finding a field track—it was no more than a dotted line even on his large-scale map—which would take him up a small re-entrant. The track appeared to stop just short of the circular contour which marked the top of the down. Across it, as Mr. Calder had seen when he examined the map, ran, in straggling Gothic lettering, the words *Slay Down*.

The entrance to the track had been shut off by a gate and was indistinguishable from the entrance to a field. The gate was padlocked too but Mr. Calder dealt with this by lifting it off its hinges. It was a heavy gate, but he shifted it with little apparent effort. There were surprising reserves of strength in his barrel-shaped body, thick arms, and plump hands.

After a month of fine weather the track, though rutted, was rock-hard. Mr. Calder ran up it until the banks on either side had leveled out and he guessed that he was approaching the top of the rise. There he backed his car into a thicket. For the last part of the journey he had been traveling without side lights. Now he switched off the engine, opened the car door, and sat listening.

At first the silence seemed complete. Then, as the singing of the engine died in his ears, the sounds of the night reasserted themselves. A night jar screamed; an owl hooted. The creatures of the dark, momentarily frozen by the arrival among them of this great palpitating steel-and-glass animal, started to move again. A mile across the valley, where farms stood and people lived, a dog barked.

Mr. Calder took his sleeping bag out of the back of the car and unrolled it. He took off his coat and shoes, loosened his tie, and wriggled down into the bag. Rasselas lay down too, his nose a few inches from Mr. Calder's head.

In five minutes the man was asleep. When he woke he knew what had roused him. Rasselas had growled, very softly, a little rumbling, grumbling noise which meant that something had disturbed him. It was not the growl of imminent danger; it was a tentative alert.

Mr. Calder raised his head. During the time he had been asleep the wind had risen a little and was now blowing up

dark clouds and sending them scudding across the face of the moon; the shadows on the bare down were horsemen—warriors with horned helmets—riding horses with flying manes and tails. Rasselas was following them with his eyes, head cocked. It was as if, behind the piping of the wind, the dog could hear, pitched too high for human ears, the shrill note of a trumpet.

"They're ghosts," said Mr. Calder calmly. "They won't hurt us." He lay down and was soon fast asleep again.

It was five o'clock and light was coming back into the sky when he woke. It took him five minutes to dress himself and roll up his sleeping bag. His movements seemed unhurried, but he lost no time.

From the back of the car he took out a Groener .25 bore rifle, and clipped on a telescopic sight, which he took from a leather case. A handful of nickel-capped ammunition went into his jacket pocket. Tucking the rifle under his arm, he walked cautiously toward the brow of the hill. From the brow, a long thin line of trees, based on scrub, led down to the barn, whose red-brown roof could now be seen just over the slope of the hill.

Mr. Calder thought that the arrangement was excellent. "Made to measure," was the expression he used. The scrub was thickest round the end tree of the windbreak, and here he propped up the rifle, and then walked the remaining distance to the wall of the barn. He noted that the distance was exactly thirty-three yards.

In front of the barn the path, coming up from the main road, opened out into a flat space—originally a cattle yard, but now missing one wall.

"She'll drive in here," thought Mr. Calder, "and she'll turn the car, ready to get away. They always do that. After a bit she'll get out of the car and she'll stand, watching for me to come up the road."

When he got level with the barn he saw something that was not marked on the map. It was another track, which came across the down, and had been made, quite recently, by army vehicles from the Gunnery School. A litter of ammunition boxes, empty cigarette cartons and a rusty beer can suggested that the army had taken over the barn as a staging point for their maneuvers. It was an additional fact. Something to be noted. Mr. Calder didn't think that it affected his plans. A civilian car, coming from the road, would be most unlikely to take this track, a rough affair, seamed with the marks of Bren carriers and light tanks.

Mr. Calder returned to the end of the trees and spent some

minutes piling a few large stones and a log into a small breast-works. He picked up the rifle and set the sights carefully to thirty-five yards. Then he sat down, with his back to the tree, and lit a cigarette. Rasselas lay down beside him.

Mrs. Lipper arrived at ten to six.

She drove up the track from the road, and Mr. Calder was interested to see that she behaved almost exactly as he had predicted. She drove her car into the yard, switched off the engine, and sat for a few minutes. Then she opened the car door and got out.

Mr. Calder snuggled down behind the barrier, moved his rifle forward a little, and centered the sight on Mrs. Lipper's left breast.

It was at this moment that he heard the truck coming. It was, he thought, a fifteen-hundred-weight truck, and it was coming quite slowly along the rough track toward the barn.

Mr. Calder laid down the rifle and rose to his knees. The truck engine had stopped. From his position of vantage he could see, although Mrs. Lipper could not, a figure in battle-dress getting out of the truck. It was, he thought, an officer. He was carrying a light rifle, and it was clear that he was after rabbits. Indeed, as Mr. Calder watched, the young man raised his rifle, then lowered it again.

Mr. Calder was interested, even in the middle of his extreme irritation, to see that the officer had aimed at a thicket almost directly in line with the barn.

Three minutes passed in silence. Mrs. Lipper looked twice at her watch. Mr. Calder lay down again in a firing position. He had decided to wait. It was a close decision, but he was used to making close decisions, and he felt certain that this one was right.

The hidden rifle spoke; and Mr. Calder squeezed the trigger of his own. So rapid was his reaction that it sounded like a shot and an echo. In front of his eyes Mrs. Lipper folded onto the ground. She did not fall. It was quite a different movement. It was as though a puppet-master, who had previously held the strings taut, had let them drop and a puppet had tumbled to the ground, arms, legs, and head disjointed.

A moment later the hidden rifle spoke again. Mr. Calder smiled to himself. The timing, he thought, had been perfect. He was quietly packing away the telescopic sight, dismantling the small redoubt he had created, and obliterating all signs of his presence. Five minutes later he was back in his car. He had left it facing outward and downhill, and all he had to do was take off the handbrake and start rolling down the track. This was the trickiest moment in the whole opera-

tion. It took three minutes to lift the gate, drive the car through, and replace the gate. During the whole of that time no one appeared on the road in either direction.

"And that," said Mr. Calder, three days later to Mr. Fortescue, "was that." Mr. Fortescue, a square, sagacious-looking man, was manager of the Westminster branch of the London & Home Counties Bank. No one seeing Mr. Fortescue would have mistaken him for anything but a bank manager—although, in fact, he had certain other, quite important functions.

"I was sorry, in a way, to saddle the boy with it, but I hadn't any choice."

"He took your shot as the echo of his?"

"Apparently. Anyway, he went on shooting."

"You contemplated that he would find the body—either then or later."

"Certainly."

"And would assume that he had been responsible—accidentally, of course."

"I think that he should receive a good deal of sympathy. He had a perfect right to shoot rabbits—the area belongs to the School of Artillery. The woman was trespassing on War Department Property. Indeed, the police will be in some difficulty concluding why she was there at all."

"I expect they would have been," said Mr. Fortescue, "if her body had ever been discovered."

Mr. Calder looked at him.

"You mean," he said at last, "that no one has been near the barn in the last four days?"

"On the contrary. One of the troops of the Seventeenth Field Regiment, to which your intrusive subaltern belongs, visited the barn only two days later. It was their gun position. The barn itself was the troop command post."

"Either," said Mr. Calder, "they were very unobservant soldiers, or one is driven to the conclusion that the body had been moved."

"I was able," said Mr. Fortescue, "through my influence with the army, to attend the firing as an additional umpire, in uniform. I had plenty of time on my hands and was able to make a thorough search of the area."

"I see," said Mr. Calder. "Yes. It opens up an interesting field of speculation, doesn't it?"

"Very interesting," said Mr. Fortescue. "In—er—one or two different directions."

"Have you discovered the name of the officer who was out shooting?"

"He is a National Service boy—a Lieutenant Blaikie. He is in temporary command of C Troop of A Battery—it would normally be a Captain, but they are short of officers. His Colonel thinks very highly of him. He says that he is a boy of great initiative."

"There I agree," said Mr. Calder. "I wonder if the army could find *me* a suit of battledress."

"I see you as a Major," said Mr. Fortescue. "With a 1918 Victory Medal and a 1939 defense medal."

"The Africa Star," said Mr. Calder firmly.

One week later Mr. Calder, wearing a Service dress hat half a size too large for him and a battledress blouse which met with some difficulty round the waist, was walking up the path which led to the barn. It was ten o'clock, dusk had just fallen, and around the farm there was a scene of considerable activity as F Troop, B Battery of the Seventeenth Field Regiment settled down for the night.

Four guns were in position, two in front of and two behind the barn. The gun teams were digging slit trenches. Two storm lanterns hung in the barn. A sentry on the path saluted Mr. Calder, who inquired where he would find the Troop Commander.

"He's got his bivvy up there, sir," said the sentry.

Peering through the dusk Mr. Calder saw a truck parked on a flat space, beyond the barn, and enclosed by scattered bushes. Attached to the back of the truck, and forming an extension of it, was a sheet of canvas, pegged down as a tent.

Mr. Calder circled the site cautiously. It seemed to him to be just the right distance from the barn and to have the right amount of cover. It was the place he would have chosen himself.

He edged up to the opening of the tent and looked inside. A young subaltern was seated on his bedroll, examining a map. His webbing equipment was hanging on a hook on the back of the truck.

Mr. Calder stooped and entered. The young man frowned, drawing his thick eyebrows together; then he recognized Mr. Calder and smiled.

"You're one of our umpires, aren't you, sir," he said. "Come in."

"Thank you," said Mr. Calder. "May I squat on the bedroll?"

"I expect you've been round the gun position, sir. I was a

bit uncertain about the A.A. defenses myself. I've put the sentry slap on top of Slay Down, but he's out of touch."

"I must confess," said Mr. Calder, "that I haven't examined your dispositions. It was something—well, something rather more personal that I wanted a little chat about."

"Yes, sir?"

"When you buried her"—Mr. Calder scraped the turf with his heel—"how deep did you put the body?"

There was silence in the tiny tent, which was lit by a single bulb from the dashboard of the truck. The two men might have been on a raft, alone, in the middle of the ocean.

The thing which occurred next did not surprise Mr. Calder. Lieutenant Blaikie's right hand made a very slight movement outward, checked, and fell to his side again.

"Four feet, into the chalk," he said quietly.

"How long did it take you?"

"Two hours."

"Quick work," said Mr. Calder. "It must have been a shock to you when a night exercise was ordered exactly on this spot, with special emphasis on the digging of slit trenches and gun-pits."

"It would have worried me more if I hadn't been in command of the exercise," said Lieutenant Blaikie. "I reckoned if I pitched my own tent exactly here, no one would dig a trench or a gun-pit inside it. By the way—who are you?"

Mr. Calder was particularly pleased to notice that Lieutenant Blaikie's voice was under firm control.

He told him who he was, and he made a proposal to him.

"He was due out of the army in a couple of months time," said Mr. Calder to Mr. Behrens, when the latter came up for a game of backgammon. "Fortescue saw him, and thought him very promising. I was very pleased with his behavior in the tent that night. When I sprung it on him, his first reaction was to reach for the revolver in his webbing holster. It was hanging on the back of his truck. He realized that he wouldn't be able to get it out in time, and decided to come clean. I think that showed decision and balance, don't you?"

"Decision and balance are *most* important," agreed Mr. Behrens. "Your throw."

GEORGE SUMNER ALBEE

Foreign Agent

Michael Gilbert's "The Future of the Service" and George Sumner Albee's "Foreign Agent"—we simply couldn't resist the impulse to couple two counterespionage stories, both by outstanding authors. You will find the contrast interesting—indeed, we found it fascinating—the contrast between British and American intelligence ops at work, one at home, the other in a foreign land, and each playing a deadly serious, if not a desperate, game of wits at high, tremendously high, stakes . . .

Algiers is pronounced not Algiers but El Jay; the Sahara is spelt with a Z and looks more like Texas range-land than it does the dune-breasted desert you see in the movies; and there are other things in North Africa about which we Americans have unrealistic notions. But there are things, also, about which we are quite realistic.

The young Arab who stepped down at Bou Zanna from an old Chevrolet truck piled high with canned tomatoes and slab codfish wore scuffed slippers with tire-tread soles, an undergarment like a rayon nightgown, a burnoose of whitish wool to reflect the sun and keep him cool, and a pale blue turban. Not having bathed for nine weeks, he stank, but in the dry air not too badly—something like a bunch of over-ripe bananas. His skin was dark, his eyes were darker. He came from Sioux Falls and his name was Warren Tate.

The truck bustled on southward toward Ghardaya, over the good road the French had laid down in safer times for luxurious P.L.M. buses, and Warren balanced his cheap fiber suitcase on his turban and walked splay-footed into the village. The Arab walk was not hard to mimic—not in such shoes.

Bou Zanna was a cluster of mud-brick huts the color of cocoa. There was a *fonduk*, a corral good for half a dozen dromedaries at most; there was a dusty public square in

which the owner of an ambulatory restaurant was broiling chunks of fresh-killed mutton over charcoal.

"Peace," said Warren Tate. "I seek my Great-Uncle, Ahmed ben Ahbes."

"The two-story house at the end of the street," said the restaurateur, his arms gloved with blood and flies. "You will see his horses with their heads out of the windows on the ground floor. Beauties."

Ahmed the son of Ahbes was a powerful, dignified man of forty-odd with a square beard, dyed blackest black, and lime-green eyes far handsomer than those of the women who, peering and tittering, gathered behind him.

"Good evening, Uncle," said Warren. "I'm Sellim."

"You are expected." Ahmed eyed wives and daughters with no great enthusiasm. "Hens cackle," he said. "Leave your suitcase. We will promenade ourselves." He used the French expression.

They passed some ragged boys playing with a hoop who, touching fingertips to forehead, lip, and breast, saluted them respectfully because Ahmed was a man of substance. Under dusty palms, barefoot women hoisted water from Bou Zanna's only well. Fifty meters farther along they stepped onto open desert. With the sun setting, it was the color of a ripe apricot, every ledge casting its long purple shadow. The clearness of the air was beyond belief; pebbles, cobblestones looked as if they had been scrubbed clean and thrust beneath a magnifying glass; each foot-high shrub threw golden sparks. An expanse of black pumice a mile away shone like a reef of coal.

"Your Arabic is very good," commented Ahmed.

"I learned it at a United States Army language school," replied Warren. "But I've been in Algeria six months, and I have a good ear."

"You're the first American I've seen since tourist days," lamented Ahmed. "I used to rent horses to Americans, and sell them sand roses—*vous savez*, the little crystalline flowers made by the heat of the sun. Tell me, what do your fellow Americans think of this mess of ours?"

"We admire you. Ten, twenty Moslems a day murdered since the cease-fire, and you take it with restraint. These last few months you've won over not only America but the whole free world to your side."

"We're behaving like good Christians, eh?" Ahmed smiled wryly. "*Alors*, De Gaulle behaved honorably, he gave us hope, and we can understand the last few *colons* hanging on—we Arabs don't like change, either."

"You bring me to my reason for visiting you," said Warren. "Since the army blasted Bab-el-Oued last March, the *colons* and their *piedsnoirs*, their gutter riffraff, know they're beaten. But there are still shootings every day. Someone is paying for them, someone is coordinating them—and he isn't a rebel general, and he isn't in Algiers."

Ahmed combed his dyed beard with strong, broad-tipped fingers. His nails were orange-brown with henna. "I must say this is a possibility that has not occurred to me."

"He could be in a submarine off your coast, but I doubt it. I think he's here on the desert—near enough to get his commands into the city, but far enough away to keep from being picked up by the army patrols."

"But surely the police know all foreigners. They have to fill out police cards. And if a man came ashore illegally, or slipped across the border, he couldn't go into a village for so much as a handful of dates without having his papers verified."

"Nobody has checked mine," said Warren, "and if an American agent can dye his skin and learn Arabic, so can a Russian. But the police are doing a good job of looking for the dyed Russian. My assignment is to have a look at foreigners with valid reasons for being on the North Sahara. I've checked out Dutchmen drilling water wells, Englishmen looking for oil, Hindus, Syrians—is every Syrian a salesman? Now I want a German in a Volkswagen bus, last seen near Bou Zanna."

"Last seen when I glanced at him two seconds ago," said Ahmed, deadpan but relishing his surprise. He pointed. Out toward the expanse of black pumice, smoke rose straight into the air like a magician's rope. "He sleeps in his automobile and cooks his own food."

"Dog-son-of-a-dog!" exclaimed Warren. "On his passport his name is Herwarts and he's an anthropologist. What's he doing?"

"He has a machine that spins little plastic wheels," replied Ahmed with a shrug. Islam finds machinery unimpressive. "He pays people to sing for him, then he records what they sing on a ribbon."

"Folk music! What a cover for mass murder!"

"Now that you suggest it, yes," said Ahmed. He cursed.

"It looks as if I'll be here a few days. Can you let me have a room? I'll pay."

"Do not speak of paying, to a patriot," said Ahmed. "Anyhow, you are a relative by marriage, we must remember. I'll just throw out one of the women, preferably an old one."

The clay walls of the tiny room gave off the dry, spicy fragrance of an old Spanish mission church. After prayers toward Mecca and kous-kous, Warren made a quick count of his tools. He had very few along: a spool of fine, insulated wire of unusual tensile strength, a knife, a transistor radio, a longish automatic that fired soft-nosed 9-millimeter cartridges without flash or noise, a dozen boxes of cough drops that might be salesman's samples, a packet of franc notes, and a bottle of anisette that looked and smelled like liquor but that stained skin and hair. Taking only the automatic, he locked away everything else, using not only the visible lock on the suitcase but the secret one under the flap.

"Come to the café," said Ahmed. "You must meet my friends."

Hand in hand according to custom, they walked to the café, a mud hut like any other except that its walls were lime-washed blue and it had a few deal tables and crude benches. Formally, under the gasoline lamps swinging from the sapling ceiling, Ahmed presented the sporting set of Bou Zanna: jaunty teenagers with sprigs of mint up one nostril, a cavalryman in Spahi bloomers and leather stirrup cuffs, the tailor, the teacher, an aged farmer blinded by glaucoma. Salutations and compliments were exchanged. So far as Warren could tell, nobody suspected him. Arab families are so ramified that stray relatives arouse no great curiosity. Leaving the others to their gossip, which could have borne the title *Notable Horses of the Past Thousand Years*, he and Ahmed ordered mint tea and took a table by themselves.

"If it's this Germanized Russian," asked Ahmed, "why are you waiting? Why don't we just go out there and blow off his head?"

In spite of himself, Warren laughed. "For one thing," he explained, "I'm not sure he's my man. And even if he is, I want to find out how he's getting his murder orders into Algiers when we're reasonably sure he doesn't have a radio transmitter."

"*Hélas*, you Americans are squeamish. Wait until your population explosion kills a million of you a year from starvation, and you won't put so much value on human life. Let's kill him tonight. If the murders in Algiers stop, we'll know he was the right man."

"I'll work as fast as I can," promised Warren. "Every hour I delay means more bodies on the sidewalks in the city, I know that. Pretty soon you Moslems are going to get sick of it and start rioting again—who could blame you?—and then

everything De Gaulle has accomplished will go down the drain, and there'll be dancing in Red Square."

"How can I aid you?"

"The murders are still selective. Unless Herwarts has a detailed timetable, pharmacists on Tuesday, bus drivers on Thursday, something like that. His orders for today's executions had to leave yesterday—leave here, I mean—yesterday or the day before. How is he managing it? Telephone? Telegraph? Homing pigeons? Couriers?"

Ahmed called over a slim boy with a fastidiously trimmed, down-turned mustache. "This is Djalil, my sixth son, the postmaster. Djalil, our relation has certain questions," he said.

"Has this Herwarts used the telephone or sent a wire, yesterday or the day before?" Warren asked the boy.

"No."

"Did he send a letter?"

"Herwarts"—Djalil pronounced the name perfectly, since Arabic is as throaty a language as German—"sends no letters. Only packages, addressed to himself."

"To himself?"

"To his own name, Rue de Joinville, Algiers."

"What sort of packages?"

The young *chef des postes* touched a saucer on the table. "This size."

"Tapes. And tapes are as good as letters," said Warren.

"Did one go off yesterday?"

"Yes, and another today."

With the father and son, Warren walked to the *Postes et Telegraphes*, under stars that were like Christmas tree ornaments. He put through a call to Chardin, the *Deuxième Bureau* chief in the city, reaching him at a restaurant.

"Herwarts is recording native music. There should be a reel of tape in your central Algiers post office right now," he said, in English. "Look for a package about eight centimeters square with his name on it. Play the recording for an expert, will you, and find out if the music is authentic? Then put a cipher man on it."

"Do I let the package go through, afterwards?"

"It's a hell of a choice," said Warren. "If you do, and I'm right, it means more deaths tomorrow. But it may be our best chance of stopping them the day after."

"D'accord, it's a nasty choice . . . Our cryptographer is painstaking—this is going to take all night. I'll report to you in the morning," said Chardin. "How do I reach you?"

"Phone me. The postmaster here is loyal—I'm with him now. Call me at eight," directed Warren.

The blasting sunlight of the desert woke him at 5:30. Through an old brass telescope which was Ahmed's most treasured possession other than his horses, he studied the camp out toward the black lava. A lone man moved about a fire—presumably, Herwarts breakfasting.

Warren helped Ahmed to feed and water the gray stallion and the matching mare. Then, a little before 8:00, he strolled to the *Postes et Telegraphes*. The priority call came through promptly.

"The music is authentic, all right," reported Chardin. "The only thing about it that might be fishy is that it's commonplace stuff that was recorded twenty years ago on disks. But maybe your East-German doesn't know that or maybe he wants it re-recorded in high fidelity. There are three ballads, and one instrumental passage with a nose flute, a reed horn, and a drum. Neither the words nor the notes show recurrent patterns. Our cipher chap insists they're clean."

"Did you go over the reverse side of the tape with a camera?"

"Yes—with ultraviolet. And we also fumed it for invisible inks. Nothing."

"That's bad news."

"I know. Sorry. We resealed the packet, and it'll be delivered in the mail an hour or so from now. We're watching the carrier to see he doesn't relay it on the way. The concierge at the Rue de Joinville *pension* will put it into Herwarts' room there. But I have more bad news for you. We've been into the room. There are a dozen tapes on the table, and they don't look as if they've been opened, although of course they may have been. It looks as if Herwarts is simply mailing them for safekeeping. . . . *Allo, allo?*"

"I'm here," Warren assured him, "I'm just beating my brain. I have a feeling we're missing something, don't you?"

"No. Perhaps I'm tired. We'll do anything you say—"

"I don't know what to say, that's the trouble. Well, stake out the Rue de Joinville address, anyhow, will you, Chardin? If a stranger goes in, pick him up and sweat him—he might just still take you to the pistol boys."

"That," said Chardin, "would be a pleasure."

Disappointed, Warren walked back along the dusty street to Ahmed's two-story mansion-stable.

"They say it isn't the tapes, Ahmed. So it has to be a courier."

"Nobody in Bou Zanna would work with the S.A.O.," said Ahmed stiffly. "No man, no boy."

"Knowingly, no. But suppose Herwarts asked someone to

do an innocent favor for him in the city—deliver a book, for instance.”

Ahmed shook his turbaned head. “In a place this small, everybody would know in five minutes. In any case nobody has gone up to the city. I am positive.”

Warren pondered. “Herwarts has his bus. He could drive down the highway a few kilometers, stop a northbound truck, and ask the driver to deliver a message.”

“That is much more probable. Many truck drivers are Communist,” agreed Ahmed. “He could have an accomplice among them, for that matter. But, once again, you run up against fact. Herwarts has been here a week, and in that time he has not once left the village.”

“Has anybody visited *him*?”

“It could be managed at night, I suppose, but only with the greatest difficulty. The dogs would bark . . . No, only our own people who have gone out to sing for him. He pays well.”

No matter how he looked at it, it appeared to be a dead end. “I’ve got to see Herwarts’ camp,” decided Warren. “Have one of the women teach me some old song he isn’t likely to have heard, will you? Does he speak Arabic?”

“No—only French.”

“Ride out with me, then, and be my interpreter. If I try French, any European will spot my American accent as soon as I open my big mouth.”

The song was merely a conventional catalogue of teeth like pearls and hair like the midnight sky, a tin-pan version of the Song of Solomon; but the elderly aunt from whom Warren learned it vouched for its antiquity.

“Do not be uneasy; the stallion is a perfect gentleman,” said Ahmed, and, rocking comfortably in the high-backed, chair-like saddles of scarlet leather, the two of them rode out. Herwarts welcomed them cordially, offering them coffee. He was a squat creature in shorts, nailed shoes, enormous of chest, cropped of skull, and ugly as a shaved gorilla.

“This is my nephew Sellim, who wishes to sing for your machine,” said Ahmed. “He has no French, but I am here to translate.”

Herwarts brought out a hand microphone with a long cord. As he did so, Warren got a good look into the little bus. There were two German-made tape recorders—big, battery-driven ones with all the gadgets. But, other than clothing, supplies, and a sleeping bag, there was nothing else of importance in the Volkswagen. There was no radio, not even a receiver. He did glimpse a pair of field glasses.

Warren sang, accepted compliments on his exquisite voice complacently as a native would have done, and took his pay in dirty franc notes. He would have been overjoyed to see new, counterfeit notes, but the intelligence business is never that easy. Herwarts thanked his guests once more, wishing them a pleasant ride. There was no further reason to stay.

Riding back into town they passed the oasis, with its be-draggled palms. Over the flat roof of a hut near it, wisps of white vapor curled in the breeze.

"Ahmed," demanded Warren, "is that a steam bath?"

"Yes. Ours is a good well."

"But why didn't you tell me, man! I need a bath so bad I can taste it! That's a slang phrase."

"How about your dye?"

"It'll stand water. But how about my hair? It's still much too short for a Moslem."

"Wear your turban. Some men do. Just remember to cover your sex with your left hand, never your right," advised the Arab.

The public bath, its interior walls and floor faced with black slate, was as dark as a coal bin. Only now and again could Warren glimpse, through the steam, a shining brown arm or leg. Soaping himself generously for the third time, he called for a boy to douse him with a bucket of warm water. Sitting with his back against the warm wall, he slumped comfortably—and it was the sudden, unanticipated slumping that saved his life.

Steel rang. He felt the sting of stone splinters on his neck. A throwing-knife with a broken point slid down across his chest into his lap.

Charging like a halfback, he lunged into the steam. His hands recognized Herwarts' khaki shirt and shorts, even though his eyes could barely make out the man's bulky figure. Hooking, with his left, he drove for the midriff with his right. Both punches landed, but Herwarts stamped down with hobnails on his bare foot. The pain was dizzying. Before he could get in another blow—there were shouts, now, and men running—Warren felt himself lifted bodily and slammed against the wall. His head struck stone.

When he came to himself he was on the couch in his room at Ahmed's, alone, with an ache like a skewer through his head. Where, he asked himself angrily, had he gone wrong? What blunder had he made, to give himself away? All he had done was open his mouth to sing a mawkish ballad for the

Russian . . . and picturing himself with his mouth open, he groaned.

His teeth, of course! He could not have offered Herwarts a better view of his molars if he had taken them out and handed them to him. And no Arab past the age of twenty has a full set of teeth; no Arab has gold inlays fashioned by an American dentist. All that Herwarts had to do, after such a revealing dental display, was watch the American agent through his field glasses, note that he went into the bath, laugh heartily, and follow.

"Ahmed," called Warren. The skewer jabbed his brain.

"I broke open your suitcase looking for medicines," said Ahmed, coming into the room, "but you have none."

"I'm all right. Did anybody catch him?"

"No, unhappily."

"He's a fast man." Warren sat up, wincing. "He's on his way, now, damn him. He'll either head for Algiers and go underground there, or he'll try to make the border."

"His bus is still out on the desert. His campfire is burning, too. He may be out there, but I didn't want to move against him without your orders."

"He's not out at his camp. He made a try for me and kept right on going," disagreed Warren. "He doesn't want the Volkswagen any longer; he knows I'll wire the police to look for it. No, he's walking, Ahmed. If sunstroke doesn't get him, or sand vipers, he'll walk until he catches a ride on a truck—or on a dromedary. And meanwhile he'll go on ordering killings because I didn't crack his communications system!"

"The killings are continuing, it is true. While you were in the bath, we heard on the radio that *piedsnoirs* broke into a hospital and murdered eight patients in their beds."

"Oh, I'm a great all-round success," said Warren bitterly. "What time is it?"

"Five in the afternoon."

"Saddle up. We'll have a look at the camp. Maybe in his hurry he's left something behind."

"Take your automatic, my son. I will take the old revolver I used in the *maquis* in the Second World War."

The camp was deserted. The campfire smoldered. Warren knelt beside it. "What's that I smell?"

"Skin," replied Ahmed. "Leather."

Warren raked the embers with a stick. "Here's a piece. Why would he destroy something made of leather, I wonder. A code book, maybe."

"Only Allah knows."

Warren sighed. "Anyhow, you own a Volkswagen. I'll drive it back to town for you; I have to send my wire to Chardin in Algiers."

"As you wish." Ahmed spat into the embers. "I'll ride Dusk. The mare follows well."

The dusk for which the dapple-gray stallion was named descended on the North Sahara like a snowfall of gray powder. Stars winked on, and, below them, gasoline and carbide lanterns. His telegram to Chardin on its way, Warren left the Volkswagen parked beside the post office and handed over the keys to Ahmed.

"Don't censure yourself too severely," said the older man. "When you are as old as I, you will know life is just one error after another. We think we think; but that, also, is an error more often than not."

"I need a drink worse than I need food," responded Warren glumly. "Let's go to the café. I'll buy you an anisette."

"First I will lock my new automobile to discourage thieves," said Ahmed. "Take Dusk—I'll be along in a moment."

The brightly lighted café was full of men who crowded round to offer their sympathy. Herwarts had attacked him because they'd had a quarrel, Warren told them, but he doubted very much if they believed the story. He ordered drinks for the house. After a few minutes Ahmed appeared, sending home the horses in care of a small, delighted youngster.

"What will you do now?" asked Ahmed.

"There isn't much I can do," replied Warren realistically. "He knows me. There's no point in my following him, even if I knew where to look."

"You don't think he might still be nearby? We could mount a search party."

"We'd never find him at night. And night is when he'll travel. No, I'll go back to Algiers and ask to be reassigned. I've blown this one, that's all."

The owner of the portable restaurant came in from the street waving smoking lamb chops, and they bought a plateful from him. In a corner, a trio of musicians spread mats on the floor and began to play—two flautists and a drummer with a set of small, thin drums not unlike tambourines. The music rippled like water, the ceaseless dream of every desert dweller.

Ahmed patted Warren's hand as though he were a small boy. "If you came of a race as old as mine," he said comfortingly, "you would know that the one thing man can count on

is man's stupidity. Herwarts, too, will do something stupid, attend to my words."

"Not Herwarts. No such luck."

Smiling mischievously, the Arab stroked his black beard. "Would you care to wager your magnificent automatic," he inquired, "against my poor old black-powder pistol?"

"You've got yourself a bet, Great-Uncle."

"My bet," said Ahmed, "is that Comrade Herwarts is still in Bou Zanna. As you have pointed out, the intelligent thing for him to do was to run. Therefore he is still here. Why? Because he is in panic, and panicky men are even stupider than the rest of us."

"Get together your search party!" exclaimed Warren. He leaped to his feet. "Let's go."

"There is no need," murmured Ahmed, gently waving him down. "He will deliver himself to us, believe me. It is all arranged. Another anisette?"

"Ahmed, you realize how important this is. If—"

"Tranquelize thyself."

The music changed. The rhythm became staccato, the flutes quickened their pace, and Warren felt his pulse respond. "*Wah'shah'lah*, get hot," someone cried. Several of the younger men, stretching arms in simulation of the long flintlocks their great-grandfathers had carried into war, formed a ring and whirled into a crouching, hopping dance. The drummer waved a small drum high over his head, his fingers tapping it so fast they became a blur.

"The best jazz drummer in the United States couldn't do that," marveled Warren. "He's syncopating the beats, too. Why, it's impossible!"

"He smokes hemp to heighten his sense of rhythm," said Ahmed. "They all do. They tighten the leather of the drum over a fire."

"The leather—" Warren frowned into his drink. He looked up. "The piece of leather we found in Herwarts' campfire was what was left of a drum, Ahmed. Now I know how Herwarts sends his messages. He taps them out on a drum in ordinary Continental code, at high speed, as an accompaniment to the instrumental music he records. Dubbing, recording engineers call it. All that his accomplice in Algiers has to do is play back the tape at low speed, decode, and reseal the package. The accomplice is somebody living in the *pension* on the Rue de Joinville."

"Technology," said Ahmed, "is beyond my poor understanding. Nevertheless, I must congratulate you."

"I must phone—"

From somewhere not too far off came the crash of an explosion.

"Ahmed—" began Warren sternly.

"I found your detonators when I forced your suitcase," confessed Ahmed, with a little shrug of apology. "They led me to examine your red and green cough drops. We used something similar in the Second World War, although our explosive was more like a jelly. I felt sure Comrade Herwarts would try after all to escape in his Volkswagen, parked so conveniently, so I left the keys in it for him."

Warren shook his head. "You've lost an automobile, Great-Uncle," he said.

"And a post office too, I rather imagine," replied Ahmed, deadpan. "But, on the other hand, I have just won a superb automatic with a silencer, which will be something far more useful to me in my small affairs."

HELEN NIELSEN

Death Scene

Leo was a cool, calculating opportunist. He was also a handsome devil, with nerve and vitality . . . all of which make a dangerous combination for a lonely and susceptible woman . . .

The woman who had driven in with the black Duesenberg fascinated Leo Manfred. She stood well, as if she might be a model or a dancer. Her ankles were arched and her calves firm. Leo wriggled out from under the car he was working on in order to examine her more closely.

She was dressed all in white—white hat with a wide, school-girl brim; white dress, fitted enough to make her body beckon him further; white shoes with high, spiked heels.

But it was more than the way she dressed and the way she stood. There was something strange about her, almost mysterious, and mystery didn't go well in the grease-and-grime society of Wagner's Garage. Leo got to his feet.

Carl Wagner, who was half again Leo's thirty years, and far more interested in the motor he'd uncovered than in any woman, blocked the view of her face. But her voice, when she spoke, was soft and resonant.

"Mr. Wagner," she said, "can you tell me when my automobile will be ready?"

Automobile—not car. Leo's active mind took note.

By this time Wagner was peering under the hood with the enthusiasm of a picnicker who had just opened a boxed banquet.

"It's a big motor, Miss Revere," he answered, "and every cylinder has to be synchronized. Your father's always been very particular about that."

"My father—" She hesitated. There was the ghost of a smile. It couldn't be seen, but it was felt—the way some perfumes, Leo reflected, are felt. "My father is very particular, Mr. Wagner. But it's such a warm day, and I don't feel like shopping."

Carl Wagner wasted neither words nor time. The fingers of one hand went poking into the pocket of his coveralls and dug up a set of keys at the same instant that he glanced up and saw Leo.

"My helper will take you home," he said. "You can tell your father that we'll deliver the car just as soon as it's ready."

If Leo Manfred had believed in fate, he would have thought this was it; but Leo believed in Leo Manfred and a thing called opportunity.

Women were Leo's specialty. He possessed a small black book containing the telephone numbers of more than 57 varieties; but no one listed in his book was anything like the passenger who occupied the back seat of the boss's new Pontiac as it nosed up into the hills above the boulevard.

Leo tried to catch her face in the rear-view mirror. She never looked at him. She stared out of the window or fussed with her purse. Her face was always half lost beneath the shadow of the hat. She seemed shy, and shyness was a refreshing challenge.

At her direction, the Pontiac wound higher and higher, beyond one new real estate development after another, until, at the crest of a long private driveway, it came to a stop at the entrance of a huge house. Architecturally, the house was a combination of Mediterranean and late Moorish, with several touches of early Hollywood. Not being architecturally inclined, Leo didn't recognize this; but he did recognize that it must have cost a pretty penny when it was built, and that the gardener toiling over a pasture-sized lawn couldn't have been supplied by the Department of Parks and Beaches.

And yet, there was a shabbiness about the place—a kind of weariness, a kind of nostalgia, that struck home as Leo escorted his passenger to the door.

"I know this house!" he exclaimed. "I've seen pictures of it. It has a name—" And then he stared at the woman in white, who had been given a name by Carl Wagner. "Revere," he remembered aloud. "Gordon Revere."

"Gavin Revere," she corrected.

"Gavin Revere," Leo repeated. "That's it! This is the house that the big film director Gavin Revere built for his bride, Monica Parrish. It's called—"

The woman in white had taken a key out of her purse.

"Mon-Vere," she said.

Leo watched her insert the key into the lock of the massive door and then, suddenly, the answer to the mystery broke over him.

"If you're Miss Revere," he said, "then you must be the daughter of Monica Parrish. No wonder I couldn't take my eyes off you."

"Couldn't you?"

She turned toward him, briefly, before entering the house. Out of her purse she took a dollar bill and offered it; but Leo had glimpsed more than a stretch of long, drab hall behind her. Much more.

"I couldn't take money," he protested, "not from you. Your mother was an idol of mine. I used to beg dimes from my uncle—I was an orphan—to go to the movies whenever a Monica Parrish was playing."

Leo allowed a note of reverence to creep into his voice.

"When you were a very small boy, I suppose," Miss Revere said.

"Eleven or twelve," Leo answered. "I never missed a film your mother and father made—"

The door closed before Leo could say more; and the last thing he saw was that almost smile under the shadow of the hat.

Back at the garage, Carl Wagner had questions to answer.

"Why didn't you tell me who she was?" Leo demanded. "You knew."

Wagner knew motors. The singing cylinders of the Duesenberg were to him what a paycheck and a beautiful woman, in the order named, were to Leo Manfred. He pulled his head out from under the raised hood and reminisced dreamily.

"I remember the first time Gavin Revere drove this car in for an oil change," he mused. "It was three weeks old, and not one more scratch on it now than there was then."

"What ever happened to him?" Leo persisted.

"Polo," Wagner said. There was a time when everybody who was anybody had to play polo. Revere wasn't made for it. Cracked his spine and ended up in a wheel chair. He was in and out of hospitals for a couple of years before he tried a comeback. By that time everything had changed. He made a couple of flops and retired."

"And Monica Parrish?"

"Like Siamese twins," Wagner said. "Their careers were tied together. Revere went down, Parrish went down. I think she finally got a divorce and married a Count Somebody—or maybe she was the one who went into that Hindu religion. What does it matter? Stars rise and stars fall, Leo, but a good motor . . ."

Twelve cylinders of delight for Carl Wagner; but for Leo

Manfred a sweet thought growing in the fertile soil of his rich, black mind.

"I'll take the car back when it's ready," he said.

And then Wagner gave him one long stare and a piece of advice that wasn't going to be heeded.

"Leo," he said, "stick to those numbers in your little black book."

For a man like Leo Manfred, time was short. He had a long way to travel to get where he wanted to go, and no qualms about the means of transportation. When he drove the Duesenberg up into the hills, he observed more carefully the new developments along the way. The hills were being whittled down, leveled off, terraced and turned into neat pocket-estates as fast as the tractors could make new roads and the trucks haul away surplus dirt. Each estate sold for \$25,000 to \$35,000, exclusive of buildings, and he would have needed an adding machine to calculate how much the vast grounds of Mon-Vere would bring on the open market.

As for the house itself—he considered that as he nosed the machine up the steep driveway. It might have some value as a museum or a landmark—Mon-Vere Estates, with the famous old house in the center. But who cared about relics any more? Raze the house and there would be room for more estates. It didn't occur to Leo that he might be premature in his thinking.

He had showered and changed into his new imported sports shirt; he was wearing his narrowest trousers, and had carefully groomed his mop of near-black hair. He was, as the rear-view mirror reassured him, a handsome devil, and the daughter of Gavin Revere, in spite of a somewhat ethereal quality, was a woman—and unless all his instincts, which were usually sound, had failed him, a lonely woman. Celebrities reared their children carefully, as if they might be contaminated by the common herd, which made them all the more susceptible to anyone with nerve and vitality.

When Leo rang the bell of the old house, it was the woman in white who answered the door, smiling graciously and holding out her hand for the keys. Leo had other plans. Wagner insisted that the car be in perfect order, he told her. She would have to take a test drive around the grounds. His job was at stake—he might get fired if he didn't obey the boss's orders.

With that, she consented, and while they drove Leo was able to communicate more of his awe and respect and to make a closer evaluation of the property, which was even

larger than he had hoped. Not until they returned and were preparing to enter the garage did he manage to flood the motor and stall the car.

"It must be the carburetor," he said. "I'll have a look."

Adjusting the carburetor gave him additional time and an opportunity to get his hands dirty. They were in that condition when a man's voice called out from the patio near the garage.

"Monica? What's wrong? Who is that man?"

Gavin Revere was a commanding figure, even in a wheel chair. A handsome man with a mane of pure white hair, clear eyes, and strong features. The woman in white responded to his call like an obedient child.

When the occasion demanded, Leo could wear humility with the grace of his imported sports shirt. He approached Revere in an attitude of deep respect. Mr. Revere's car had to be in perfect condition. Would he care to have his chair rolled closer so that he could hear the motor? Would he like to take a test drive? Had he really put more than 90,000 miles on that machine himself?

Revere's eyes brightened, and hostility and suspicion drained away. For a time, then, he went reminiscing through the past, talking fluently while Leo studied the reserved Monica Revere at an ever decreasing distance. When talk wore thin, there was only the excuse of his soiled hands. The servants were on vacation, he was told, and the water in their quarters had been shut off. The gardener, then, had been a day man.

Leo was shown to a guest bath inside the house—ornate, dated, and noisy. A few minutes inside the building was all he needed to reassure himself that his initial reaction to the front hall had been correct: the place was a gigantic white elephant built before income taxes and the high cost of living. An aging house, an aging car—props for an old man's memories.

Down the hall from the bathroom he found even more interesting props. One huge room was a kind of gallery. The walls were hung with stills from old Revere-Parrish films—love scenes, action scenes, close-ups of Monica Parrish. Beauty was still there—not quite lost behind too much make-up; but the whole display reeked of an out-dated past culminating in a shrine-like exhibition of an agonized death scene—exaggerated to the point of the ridiculous—beneath which, standing on a marble pedestal, stood a gleaming Oscar.

Absorbed, Leo became only gradually aware of a presence behind him. He turned. The afternoon light was beginning to

fade and against it, half shadow and half substance, stood Monica Revere.

"I thought I might find you here," she said. She looked toward the death scene with something like reverence in her eyes. "This was his greatest one," she said. "He comes here often to remember."

"He" was pronounced as if in reference to a deity.

"He created her," Leo said.

"Yes," she answered softly.

"And now both of them are destroying you."

It was the only way to approach her. In a matter of moments she would have shown him graciously to the door. It was better to be thrown out trying, he thought. She was suddenly at the edge of anger.

"Burying you," Leo added quickly. "Your youth, your beauty—"

"No, please," she protested.

Leo took her by the shoulders. "Yes, please," he said firmly. "Why do you think I came back? Wagner could have sent someone else. But today I saw a woman come into that garage such as I'd never seen before. A lovely, lonely woman—"

She tried to pull away, but Leo's arms were strong. He pulled her closer and found her mouth. She struggled free and glanced back over her shoulder toward the hall.

"What are you afraid of?" he asked. "Hasn't he ever allowed you to be kissed?"

She seemed bewildered.

"You don't understand," she said.

"Don't I? How long do you think it takes for me to see the truth? A twenty-five-year-old car, a thirty-year-old house, servants on 'vacation.' No, don't deny it. I've got to tell you the truth about yourself. You're living in a mausoleum. Look at this room! Look at that stupid shrine!"

"Stupid!" she gasped.

"Stupid," Leo repeated. "A silly piece of metal and an old photograph of an overdone act by a defunct ham. Monica, listen. Don't you hear my heart beating?" He pulled her close again. "That's the sound of life, Monica—all the life that's waiting for you outside these walls. Monica—"

There was a moment when she could have either screamed or melted in his arms. The moment hovered—and then she melted. It was some time before she spoke again.

"What is your name?" she murmured.

"Later," Leo said. "Details come later."

The swiftness of his conquest didn't surprise Leo. Monica Revere had been sheltered enough to make her ripe for a man who could recognize and grasp opportunity.

The courtship proved easier than he dared hope. At first they met, somewhat furtively, at small, out-of-the-way places where Monica liked to sit in a half-dark booth or at candlelit tables. She shunned popular clubs and bright lights and this modesty Leo found both refreshing and economical.

Then, at his suggestion, further trouble developed with the Duesenberg, necessitating trips to Mon-Vere where he toiled over the motor while Gavin Revere, from his wheel chair watched, directed, and reminisced. In due time Leo learned that Revere was firmly entranced at Mon-Vere. "I will leave," he said, "in a hearse and not before"—which, when Leo pondered on it, seemed a splendid suggestion.

A man in a wheel chair. The situation posed interesting possibilities, particularly when the grounds on which he used the chair were situated so high above the city—so remote, so rugged, and so neglected. The gardener had been only for the frontage. Further inspection of the property revealed a sad state of disrepair in the rear, including the patio where Revere was so fond of sunning himself and which overlooked a sheer drop of at least 200 feet to a superhighway someone had thoughtfully constructed below. Testing the area with an old croquet ball found in the garage, Leo discovered a definite slope toward the drop and only a very low and shaky stucco wall as an obstacle.

Turning from a minute study of this shaky wall, Leo found Monica, mere yards away, watching him from under the shadow of a wide-brimmed straw hat. He rose to the occasion instantly.

"I hoped you would follow me," he said. "I had to see you alone. This can't go on, Monica. I can't go on seeing you, hearing you, touching you—but never possessing you. I want to marry you, Monica—I want to marry you now."

Leo had a special way of illustrating "now" that always left a woman somewhat dazed. Monica Revere was no exception. She clung to him submissively and promised to speak with Gavin Revere as soon as she could.

Two days later, Leo was summoned to a command performance in the gallery of Mon-Vere. The hallowed stills surrounded him; the gleaming Oscar and the grotesque death scene formed a background for Gavin Revere's wheel chair. Monica stood discreetly in the shadows. She had pleaded the case well. Marriage was agreeable to Gavin Revere—with one condition.

"You see around us the mementos of a faded glory," Revere said. "I know it seems foolish to you, but, aside from the sentimental value, these relics indicate that Monica has lived well. I had hoped to see to it that she always would; but since my accident I am no longer considered a good insurance risk. I must be certain that Monica is protected when I leave this world, and a sick man can't do that. If you are healthy enough to pass the physical examination and obtain a life insurance policy for \$50,000, taken out with Monica Revere named as beneficiary, I will give my consent to the marriage. Not otherwise.

"You may apply at any company you desire," he added, "provided, of course, that it is a reputable one. Monica, dear, isn't our old friend, Jeremy Hodges, a representative for Pacific Coast Mutual? See if his card is in my desk."

The card was in the desk.

"I'll call him and make the appointment, if you wish," Revere concluded, "but if you do go to Hodges, please, for the sake of an old man's pride, say nothing of why you are doing this. I don't want it gossiped around that Gavin Revere is reduced to making deals."

His voice broke. He was further gone than Leo had expected—which would make everything so much easier. Leo accepted the card and waited while the appointment was made on the phone. It was a small thing for Leo to do—to humor an old man not long for this world.

While he waited, Leo mentally calculated the value of the huge ceiling beams and hardwood paneling, which would have to come out before the wreckers disposed of Gavin Revere's faded glory.

Being as perfect a physical specimen as nature would allow, Leo had no difficulty getting insurance. Revere was satisfied. The marriage date was set, and nothing remained except discussion of plans for a simple ceremony and honeymoon.

One bright afternoon on the patio, Leo and Monica, her face shaded by another large-brimmed hat, and Gavin Revere in his wheel chair, discussed the details. As Revere talked, recalling his own honeymoon in Honolulu, Monica steered him about. The air was warm, but a strong breeze came in from the open end of the area where the paving sloped gently toward the precipice.

At one point, Monica took her hands from the chair to catch at her hat, and the chair rolled almost a foot closer to the edge before she recaptured it. Leo controlled his emotion.

It could have happened then, without any action on his part. The thought pierced his mind that she might have seen more than she pretended to see the day she found him at the low wall. Could it be that she too wanted Gavin Revere out of the way?

Monica had now reached the end of the patio and swung the chair about.

"Volcanic peaks," Revere intoned, "rising like jagged fingers pointing Godward from the fertile, tropical Paradise . . ."

Monica, wearied, sank to rest on the shelf of the low wall. Leo wanted to cry out.

"A veritable Eden for young lovers," Gavin mused. "I remember it well . . ."

Unnoticed by Monica, who was busy arranging the folds of her skirt, the old wall had cracked under her weight and was beginning to bow outward toward the sheer drop. Leo moved forward quickly. This was all wrong—Monica was his deed to Mon-Vere. All those magnificent estates were poised on the edge of oblivion.

The crack widened.

"Look out—"

The last words of Leo Manfred ended in a kind of eerie wail, for, in lunging forward, he managed somehow—probably because Gavin Revere, as if on cue, chose that instant to grasp the wheels of the chair and push himself about—to collide with the chair and thereby lose his balance at the very edge of the crumbling wall.

At the same instant, Monica rose to her feet to catch at her wind-snatched hat, and Leo had a blurred view of her turning toward him as he hurtled past in his headlong lunge into eternity.

At such moments, time stands as still as the horrible photos in Gavin Revere's gallery of faded glory, and in one awful moment Leo saw what he had been too self-centered to see previously—Monica Revere's face without a hat and without shadows. She smiled in a serene, satisfied sort of way, and in some detached manner of self-observation he was quite certain that his own agonized features were an exact duplication of the face in the death scene.

Leo Manfred was never able to make an accurate measurement; but it was well over 200 feet to the busy superhighway below.

In policies of high amounts, the Pacific Coast Mutual always conducted a thorough investigation. Jeremy Hodges,

being an old friend, was extremely helpful. The young man, he reported, had been insistent that Monica Revere be named his sole beneficiary; he had refused to say why. "It's a personal matter," he had stated. "What difference does it make?" It had made no difference to Hodges, when such a high commission was at stake.

"It's very touching," Gavin Revere said. "We had known the young man such a short time. He came to deliver my automobile from the garage. He seemed quite taken with Monica."

Monica stood beside the statuette, next to the enlarged still of the death scene. She smiled softly.

"He told me that he was a great fan of Monica Parrish when he was a little boy," she said.

Jeremy handed the insurance check to Gavin and then gallantly kissed Monica's hand.

"We are all fans . . . and little boys . . . in the presence of Monica Parrish," he said. "How do you do it, my dear? What is your secret? The years have taken their toll of Gavin, as they have of me, but they never seem to touch you at all."

It was a sweet lie. The years had touched her—about the eyes, which she liked to keep shaded, and the mouth, which sometimes went hard—as it did when Jeremy left and Gavin examined the check.

"A great tragedy," he mused. "But as you explained to me at rehearsal, my dear, it really was his own idea. And we can use the money. I've been thinking of trying to find a good script."

Monica Parrish hardly listened. Gavin could have his dreams; she had her revenge. Her head rose proudly.

"All the critics agreed," she said. "I was magnificent in the death scene."

ROY VICKERS

The Color of Truth

GOOD NEWS: *The first new Department of Dead Ends story in five years! . . .*

BETTER NEWS: *and this new DDE novelet is first-rate—an excellent example of Roy Vickers' technique by which he projects the events leading up to the tragedy so realistically, and the events leading up to the solution so convincingly, that again you will think you are reading the facts in a true case . . .*

BEST NEWS: *and, most exciting of all, Mr. Vickers has promised that this story will be the first of a new series about the never-say die, elephant-remembered DDE . . . Welcome back, Department of Dead Ends—welcome home!*

It is unreasonable to call a murder successful merely because the murderer cannot be apprehended. No sane man plans a murder only to escape detection. He plans to alter the pattern of his own life—for his own future enjoyment—and the murder is but a troublesome and dangerous preliminary. By a murderer's scale of values, he owes it to his victim to have a good time on the proceeds.

Harry Finchmoor failed to have a good time even when the money rolled in and the "unsolved mystery" was comfortably tucked away in the Department of Dead Ends—and it was this failure which led to his undoing.

The murder had been occasioned by the victim, John Chester Brendwright, playing dog-in-the-manger with nearly a square mile of poor agricultural land which had suddenly acquired a high industrial value. There was no "dirty work" in the deal. If Brendwright had been as ready as Finchmoor and the rest to make a large and legitimate profit, he would not have been murdered.

The murder, clumsy enough in itself, was covered with some ingenuity, but Finchmoor can hardly be credited with

this. He lurched along a path paved by the personality of his victim. It was as if Brendwright had plotted to get himself murdered.

Brendwright was close to seventy, unmarried, his only relation was a niece who lived in London. He was entitled to call himself Colonel but refused because the Army had offended him. For three centuries his family had owned this comparatively poor estate situated at Thaleham, a village some forty miles from the edge of London. A crank and a dreamer, he pictured himself as the ideal landlord, loving the land for its own sake.

A landlord he certainly was, but on a time lease. At the death of his father he had been unable to meet the duties. He was compelled to sell the land—but contrived to cling to it. He sold it below its low value—on the condition that he should remain tenant for life. The purchaser was a London businessman, then resident in the neighborhood—Harry Finchmoor's father.

When Finchmoor senior died, Harry inherited the family business in London and the title deeds to all the land at Thaleham except the manor house which Brendwright had retained. Harry would step into complete ownership on Brendwright's death. While Brendwright was alive, neither could sell a square foot of the land without the other's consent.

When the big chance came, Brendwright refused his consent.

Harry Finchmoor did not know that the big chance had come until the niece, Lorna Brendwright, rang him at his office.

"Lorna Brendwright here. Harry, can I talk to you about Uncle John?"

"Lorna!" He was embarrassed. "First, tell me how are you."

"That's civil of you, Harry, but it's about Uncle John. May I come to your office?"

"Lunch would be nicer. What about the Besc Chinar?"

In their teens at Thaleham he had adored her—until she repulsed him and in no gentle manner. There had been no resentment, only a hangfire shock to his self-esteem. He had no craving to see her again. For ten years he preserved the memory of her as she was when she was living with her mother at Rose Cottage—it could not escape that name, there really were roses round the door.

Was she as good-looking as he had thought her? He was still uncertain when they met in the restaurant. He noted that she was dressed with a disciplined femininity that suggested a good office background.

"You still look like a tennis star," she greeted him. "Why have you avoided me?"

"I was once fool enough to fancy my chances, Lorna."

Lorna tended to take that kind of remark at its face value.

"You mean that day when we were on a wander? You were showing me an outworked gravel pit when you suddenly grabbed me. I was frightened."

"Not half as frightened as I was. I'm glad you told me. Now I shall enjoy my lunch." He added, "Is your uncle ill?"

"I don't know. He says the doctor told him he can't live another two years. It's not the way doctors generally talk." She spoke with indifference, and then: "Harry! Graun Limited intend to set up a factory at Thaleham. They will want housing for two thousand families. Semi-detached houses with gardens. A square mile of them."

The Big Chance. Ushered in by Lorna, as if she intended to take charge. He held back the obvious questions until he had ordered lunch.

"Yesterday," resumed Lorna, "was my birthday. Uncle John always comes up to London and takes me out to dinner. We talk about his land, ignoring the fact that it's really your land." Her voice had a pleasing tone but she spoke as if to a younger brother. "He then gives me five pounds which he cannot afford and which I do not need. As we part, he takes me by both hands—very awkward because my bag always gets in the way—and reminds me that all that he has will one day be mine—which means the manor house, mortgaged to the hilt, which is all he owns."

He could barely listen. "Why didn't they approach me first?"

"Please!" Lorna did not like to be interrupted. "Last night the land talk was wilder. I was offered the story of King George III staying at the manor house to learn about farming from Uncle's ancestor. In time he told me that a man from the County Council had informed him that the Council intended to welcome the factory and to facilitate the building program. If necessary, the Council would itself step in under the Compulsory Purchase Act."

"Compulsory Purchase!" Harry repeated. That was a blow and she was playing it up. Her old game of trying to lead him. But he was older now and could take care of himself.

"That means his tenancy and my land would be bought at agricultural valuation. And the Council would build the houses for Graun's."

"That will happen," she said, "unless you can give guarantees—within one month—that the houses will be built by private enterprise. The Council will send you a sort of ultimatum in a few days."

His spirits rose. Lorna, he supposed, knew nothing of the mechanism of high finance. "I can get a financial company to come in and fix the whole thing."

"But, Harry, you can't do anything at all to that land without Uncle's consent. And he won't give it. He loves not giving it. He says he'll be dead before the houses can be built and while he's alive he intends to be loyal to his land. And I shall get the manor house and the mortgage. You see, I'm not wholly disinterested."

"Leave it to me, Lorna." To soften it he added, "Your uncle doesn't understand that I shall buy back the tenancy from him—at a substantial profit to himself."

She gave him the look that had intimidated him in his teens.

"Rose Cottage!" she exclaimed. "It needed repair when we were there. It's much worse now. Well, he has scraped together fifty pounds to start restoring—"

"Surely, we need not bother about Rose Cottage—"

"Harry! Do you remember the elaborate set-up he ordered for Mother's funeral? His 'kinswoman,' of course. Yesterday he said that as soon as the cottage was restored he wanted *Mother and me* to live in it again."

"Momentary absent-mindedness."

"No. It's dissociation—it's been creeping on him for at least a year. He cannot wholly distinguish between his dream of himself and the real life going on around him. I don't think he fully realizes that he has signed away his ownership of that land."

"Then I'll show him his own signature. The title deeds, correspondence, and whatnot are at the Safe Deposit. I'll get 'em out after lunch. I'll go down by rail—so's I can sort out the papers in the train."

"I hope he will listen to you," she said, but without conviction. Her doubt of his ability stung him to boastfulness.

"He must. I'll drench him in money talk—offer him a juicy cut. He can't be so mad as to throw it away for the love of talking tosh about his ancestors. It'll be all right, Lorna."

In the train he was less cocksure of his ability to knock

sense into the old man. But the nearest he came to planning murder was to weigh up what the doctor was alleged to have said. If Brendwright could not live for two years, for how much less would he live? Twenty-three months less than two years? Nothing else would be any good.

He opened the deedbox he had brought from the Safe Deposit, separated the Thaleham papers from other interests, and put his selections on top. A bundle of stodge, but he would do his best.

His thoughts returned to Lorna. It was tactful of her to say she had been frightened that day when he had grabbed her in the outworked gravel pit and fumbled a kiss. But in fact she had not been frightened. She had been amused. In ten years he had not forgotten her amusement. But now, of course—

At Thaleham the stationmaster-porter greeted him as an old acquaintance and immediately spoke of the proposed factory.

"I hear say that Mr. Brendwright is against it—though he needs the money as much as anybody. It'll be a shame if Thaleham gets left out again."

"It isn't so easy to stop a thing as big as this, Mr. Hawkins."

"Ah!" Hawkins eyed the deedbox as if it were a doctor's bag. "I hope you've got a cure for his trouble in there, Mr. Harry."

Very encouraging! The whole countryside wanted the factory. Carrying the deedbox awkwardly by one of the side handles, he stepped out on the five-minute walk through the village, passing Rose Cottage, which now suggested only decay.

As he entered the drive of the manor house he came on Brendwright, pushing a barrow. He had not aged unduly—in fact, he looked good for another ten years, though the barrow was making him puff.

"Ha!" He glared at his visitor. "Don't tell me. I knew you at once. You're young Harry Finchmoor."

"Correct. I hope you are well, Mr. Brendwright."

"I *look* well, don't I!" He drew himself up, posing. "My doctor could tell you a different tale. Never mind that. I expect you've heard about this wildcat scheme to turn my land into a filthy slum."

"My" land! Finchmoor let it pass. His offer to push the barrow to its shed was declined. Brendwright washed his hands at an outside tap, dried them on sacking. He opened the front door with a latchkey of modern type.

The house had the air of having slunk unobserved into the twentieth century, achieving a bedraggled character of its own. It had sixteen rooms but Brendwright had his on the ground floor—assisted, three days a week, by a woman from the next village. In the hall a huge sideboard sustained a telephone and a silver tray on which a single letter awaited posting.

"Miss-is Harbutt!" It was a parade-ground bellow that snarled Finchmoor, but the next words were an ingratiating plea. "Will you please serve tea for two?"

The one-time dining room, now an all-purpose living room, had kept its massive table that could have seated thirty. Beside an eighteenth-century fireplace hung a Victorian bell-rope whose tassel touched an almost-new radio set. A Louis XV *escritoire*, a set of carved footstools, and a gilt settee cohabited with one armchair and four cane-backed uprights.

They stood in a bow window, looking over the land that had grown corn, passed to mixed farming, then to market gardening, and now was no more than pasture. The fading light of an October afternoon dealt kindly with the remains of the farm buildings.

"All sorts and conditions of men have stood where we are standing now, Young Harry. Poets—preachers—generals—admirals—statesmen. Why, even royalty—George III had the intelligence to study farming. Did I ever tell you?"

"I think not, sir. I'd like to hear the yarn if you feel inclined." Finchmoor was ready to let him blow off steam.

Mrs. Harbutt came in with the tea. She set down the tray, switched on the lights, drew the curtains, then interrupted the story of George III.

"It's just five now, sir, and I'll be going if there's nothing else you want. I've made a cottage pie out of what was left of the joint—for your luncheon tomorrow. Remember to light the gas in good time and it'll be nice and hot. And there's plenty o' bits an' pieces to carry you over to Thursday morning."

"Thank you, Mrs. Harbutt." Again the ingratiating tone. "Will you please post the letter on the hall table?" To Finchmoor he added, "Rose Cottage. I've just written an order to start restoring it."

Rose Cottage, at worst, was better than George III. After tea Finchmoor managed to reach bedrock. Brendwright took the armchair, and Finchmoor one of the uprights. Between them on the floor was the deedbox. Finchmoor unlocked it and arranged his papers on the inside of the lid.

First was a handwritten letter of several sheets.

"You wrote this to my father, Mr. Brendwright. Your deal with him was based on that letter."

Brendwright regarded the letter with admiration. "Hand-writing firm as a rock. And legible."

"I'd like you to reread it, please, Mr. Brendwright. It will remind you of your general position in regard to the land. I have brought with me the documents, abstracts, and correspondence."

"I remember it all as if it were yesterday." Glowing with good humor he returned the letter. "The general position, as you say. I went into all that with the man from the Council." He chuckled elaborately. "I was very polite to him, Young Harry. I told him I would give earnest consideration, see my lawyer, and explore every avenue."

"Splendid." Finchmoor was puzzled. "There's nearly a month—"

"Nearly a month? You haven't heard the rest of it. My lawyer tells me it takes a full year to obtain a compulsory purchase order, even when there's no opposition. And there's going to be plenty of opposition. I shall conduct my own case. With one point after another I can keep it hanging about the High Court for two or three years. The factory people can't wait all that time. They'll build their precious factory somewhere else."

So that was what the chuckle had meant. Finchmoor felt himself cornered. By the time he had paced the room and come to rest on the hearthrug he had decided to damp down on diplomacy.

"In a few days, Mr. Brendwright, that man will approach me—"

"Then he'll be wasting his time. Nothing can be done with my land as long as my tenancy continues. They'll have to break that up, first."

"Suppose we break it up ourselves, Mr. Brendwright? You and I as partners. I could get a financial company to build these houses for Graun's."

"I don't follow you, Young Harry." It was a growl but Finchmoor ignored it.

"Then we'll start at the other end. As of today you own this house and garden—marginally. Nothing else of the estate—not even Rose Cottage. Forgive me for suggesting that you must have many financial anxieties. Join hands with me and you will enjoy a comfortable retirement."

"Retirement from what?" demanded Brendwright.

"From the misery of squeezing a bare living out of this land. For your life tenancy you paid my father two thousand

pounds in the form of reduced purchase price. I will pay you two thousand the day you surrender the tenancy to me. Further, I will allot to you one-fifth of the shares allotted to me by the financing company. Wait, please!" He broke off as Brendwright rose from his chair. "Tell me your objections when you've heard what you're objecting to. I don't know what your share will be worth. You can be reasonably certain that it won't be less than ten thousand pounds and it might well be substantially more. This land has become a little gold mine—"

Finchmoor's voice sank as he saw that he was getting nowhere. The big chance was slithering into the mud. He was failing. Lorna would again be amused.

"So I am to hand my land over to the hucksters and take my thirty pieces of silver!" There was hatred in the old man's eyes—he was goading himself into fury. On the off chance that Mrs. Harbutt might still be available to create a diversion, Finchmoor pulled the Victorian bell-rope.

The full length of the bell-rope came away in his hand.

"Clown! Get out of my house—d'you hear, get out! And take your lawyer's bag o' tricks with you."

Brendwright kicked the deedbox, spilling the contents.

Then he turned his back.

Finchmoor looped the bell-rope.

Little gold mine or not, it was the animal violence of kicking the deedbox that had sparked an explosive mixture of emotions in Finchmoor.

The hysteria passed when part of him became certain that Brendwright was dead. Emotionally exhausted, Harry stood erect, stretched himself, and yawned as if waking from sleep.

He dropped into an armchair and lit a cigarette.

I've killed a man, ran his thoughts. Lorna was right—hell, Lorna didn't say I was to kill him. I did it myself and I don't feel any of the things I ought to feel. I must be a pretty low type, and the most ghastly fool. What's the next step? Pretend I didn't do it. How? Who benefits by this man's death? I do. Where were you at six o'clock yesterday? They wouldn't need any clues.

Before the cigarette was finished he was making a sober assessment of his position. If he felt no remorse he certainly felt no panic—it was all too stark for panic. Time—place—motive—those were the three rocks. The hour of death could be revealed by the corpse—but not after the lapse of a few days. Therefore he must conceal the corpse for a few days. That would cover "place"—and he need not deny that he was at the manor house at six. So "time" was all right.

Blueprint for getting away with murder.

He might be caught in the act of moving the corpse. But he would certainly be caught if he did not move the corpse. And that would apply to every act. Therefore: take risks cheerfully and bluff that everything was going according to plan.

Bluff everybody—including Lorna. Better to start on Lorna at once, before his nerve failed. He hurried to the telephone in the hall.

"Harry speaking from the manor house. It's all right, Lorna. Your uncle has accepted the terms I offered and will surrender the tenancy at once—I'm to see the lawyers tomorrow." He waited while she expressed somewhat guarded congratulations. The bluff must be heated up. "Would you like to say a word to him—tell him you're pleased?"

"I will, if you think it advisable."

"Hang on while I ask him." He put down the receiver noisily and ". . . Nothing doing. Your uncle said he's too tired."

"Did he? It's very unlike him to admit it."

"It was a bit of a shake-up for him. For me, too—but I thought you'd like to know at once."

Lorna accepted his news. Her chatter about it would not be factual evidence, but it would be good color.

Next: move the body before daylight. That would mean going back to London for his car. There was a train at 6:20 from Thaleham. He glanced at his watch—twelve minutes past six. It was of great importance that he should catch that train—and it was at least five minutes walk to the station, maybe a bit extra lugging the large deedbox.

He felt no emotion while he possessed himself of the dead man's latchkey, but it took time—and more time to detach the key from the bunch. It was now fourteen minutes past six.

The deedbox was upside down, spreadeagled, about half its contents scattered. It would take, say, another minute to collect the papers—and he would probably miss the 6:20.

"If anyone comes into this house before I've moved the body I'm sunk, whatever I do," he said aloud. "The deedbox can wait until I come back. Good murderers don't panic."

What about the lights? Better put them out. Before switching off in the hall he observed that the stamped letter was no longer on the tray—posted, presumably, by Mrs. Harbutt. No concern of his.

"If anyone sees me leaving he may wonder why there was no light in the hall. That's the sort of risk I shall have to keep on taking."

As he reached the end of the drive and was about to step onto the road a light flashed in his face—from the lamp of a bicycle.

"Why, it's Mr. Harry Finchmoor! You haven't forgotten George Dobson, Mr. Harry?"

"Of course I remember you, Georgel" Again he had beaten off panic. Here was merely another witness that he was leaving Thaleham at this time. "I'll be down again next week and we must have a drink. As it is, I have to hurry for the 6:20."

"You won't make it." George was looking over the valley and could see the lights of the train at the bend. "I'd say you've only got three minutes. Here, you take the bike, Mr. Harry, and I'll pick it up at the station."

Finchmoor thanked him profusely and accepted the offer. In this business of cop dodging, luck cut both ways and would tend to cancel itself out. He had not ridden a bicycle since boyhood. The first twenty yards were perilous, but at worst it was faster than walking—if he could stick on.

The train was at the platform and the stationmaster was holding a door open for him.

"Hop in, Mr. Harry. Any luck?"

"Smiles all the way, Mr. Hawkins," grinned Finchmoor. More color. But did the police take any notice of color?

In the train he contemplated the problem of hiding the corpse. He could return after the village had gone to bed. There was always a little through traffic at night. Barring accidents, it would be easy enough to get away.

And then? This would be the difficult bit. He was no hand with a spade. What a pity he could not consult Lorna.

Lorna!

You grabbed me in an outworked gravel pit—That gravel pit was in the Wey Valley, about fifteen miles from Thaleham—off the main road on a patch of derelict land with a "cliff" of about twenty feet and a thick undergrowth of brambles. Just what he needed!

What about Lorna's own reactions when that gravel pit came into the news? Risky—but not half so risky as cruising about the countryside in the dark, looking for somewhere to hide his cargo.

Arrived in London, he dined at his club—signing his bill, as did most members, to be settled by monthly check. He chose a single table so that he could elaborate the Blueprint, which seemed to him to be shaping up very well. All the details were arranging themselves neatly. Rain had started but he always carried rubbers and a plastic mackintosh in t

car. By eleven he was turning into the short drive of the manor house.

He entered the house with a certain complacency, but when he had replaced the latchkey on its ring he had a sharp reaction of self-pity. An abominable thing had happened to him, causing him to prowl at night, performing ghoulish acts in order to erect a barrier of deceit between himself and the kind of people he respected and liked—the men he met in business—at the club—women like Lorna Brendwright. Well, at least he would do the job intelligently—so that the whole horror could be forgotten in a week or two.

He thought it as simple as that because he had never interested himself in the literature of crime and knew nothing of the subsidiary problems facing a murderer, and he knew next to nothing of the methods of the police—except that they used fingerprints. In a couple of minutes his complacency returned and he proceeded to make one mistake after another—mistakes that did not have to be made.

He went to the kitchen quarters, first pulling on a pair of light gloves. His fingerprints in the dining room and the hall would be expected, but there must be none elsewhere.

He found Mrs. Harbutt's cottage pie on a shelf in the gas cooker. He turned the regulator to full heat and then, somewhat awkwardly in gloves, applied a match. When the potato crust had been browned, he served a portion on a plate and then flushed the portion, leaving a dirtied plate and fork on the table. According to the Blueprint this would convince the police that Brendwright had been alive at midday on Wednesday. *Later, Mrs. Harbutt, of course, was able to assure the police that if anyone had eaten part of the pie it was certainly not Mr. Brendwright—and the police noted an attempt to fake a "time" clue.*

Finchmoor had thought of Mrs. Harbutt only in connection with the Victorian bell-rope whose absence from the wall she would be certain to notice. He removed the rope from the body—some eight feet of it with a large tassel at the bottom and a large rosette at the top. The bell-rope, he discovered, was a dummy, secured with four wall-plugs, one of which was missing. He cobbled the rope back into position without it. *Later, police routine found the missing wall-plug in the fringe of the hearthrug. Routine, too, led from the wall-plug to the wall, then to the bell-rope, which was detached and sent to Laboratory. Thus, Finchmoor's little flourish made the police a present of the murder weapon and of an attempt to fake a clue as to "place."*

He collected his papers from the floor, locked the deedbox,

and put it in the car. Then came the labor of stowing the body and hiding it from passing lights. He returned to the house for a final check-up, though there was really nothing, in Harry's opinion, to check. He dawdled, as if he were reluctant to leave—a superstitious feeling, perhaps, that everything was proving too easy.

He drove the fifteen miles to the outworked gravel pit and stowed the body in the brambles.

By four in the morning he was back in his flat in Wengrove Square, which is in West London. The square is an open car park and he was as confident as he was entitled to be that no one in London had observed his movements with the car.

The Blueprint gave place to a formula—that on the Tuesday afternoon Brendwright had accepted Finchmoor's detailed offer. Thus, on the following morning, Wednesday, Finchmoor went to his office as usual. After returning the deedbox to the Safe Deposit he instructed his lawyer to start the ball rolling.

On Thursday morning his secretary handed him a telephoned message from Lorna: *Re Thaleham: please ring my flat.* He guessed her news *Re Thaleham.* He did not ring. In half an hour he was on his way to her flat in West Kensington.

"Uncle John is missing." She spoke as if telling him gently that he had bungled. "Mrs. Harbutt rang me before I left for the office." Presently she was describing the functions of Mrs. Harbutt.

"She's a very sensible woman. This morning she found the house empty. There was some rigmarole I couldn't follow about a pie which he had or had not eaten. For some reason the pie incident upset her. His bed had not been slept in Wednesday night—she poked about and found that he must have left the house in the clothes he was wearing. So I rang the local police and told them what I suspected."

That revealed to him some of his mistakes.

"And what *do* you suspect?"

He had to wait for her answer.

"This is going to be difficult, Harry. Please be patient with me," she pleaded. "I was staggered when you told me on the telephone that he had accepted your offer. You had been in the house for less than two hours. In that short time you cured him of his obsession. I tried to believe it."

"Go on," he invited. This was getting very near the knuckle. "What did you believe instead?"

"That he was putting on an act. He saw that the land

would be taken from him—your payments would seem to him a sort of sellout of his honor. I believe his mind was upset and that he went out and drowned himself."

She would soon learn that it had not been suicide. And she would still not believe that he had talked the old man over. His position would need some strengthening.

"I don't think suicide was in his mind," he said weightily, "but I think death was. Perhaps that doctor really did scare him. Anyway, he said that if he were to die while our deal was still being dolled up by the lawyers I must promise to transfer the whole deal to you, as beneficiary. I gave him my promise."

Like the traditional pirate, he was dumping some of his cargo in the hope of shaking off his pursuers. Not as a bribe—you couldn't bribe Lorna. He was paying—say, £12,000—to give his statement the color of truth.

"He was a pathetic old dreamer!" There was compassion in her voice and gentleness in her eyes. "The obsession again! Like Mother, I am his 'kinswoman.' He wanted to provide for me in this left-handed way."

"Very sensible of him, I'd say."

"Uncle John was not very sane. And of course I shall not hold you to that promise."

"You *could* not hold me to that promise and you *cannot* release me," he said. He had come near to bluffing himself that he was behaving in an honorable and generous manner. "My lawyers will handle it—if your uncle really is dead."

He expected her to protest that she would refuse the money. But she did not.

"I see that was a foolish remark of mine—I apologize," she said. "I will not obstruct your lawyers."

Not even a thank-you. Very reasonable, in view of the explanation he had given her. Most women, he felt, would have fluttered a little—stammering out something about an honorable and generous act. But not Lorna.

After lunch he told his lawyers the little tale about the promise. It would be better, he said, to embody the reversion to Lorna in the Agreement.

On Saturday the local police called in Scotland Yard. On the following Thursday a local constable, patrolling the Wey Valley with a dog, found the body. It missed the evening editions—Finchmoor heard about it from a radio news flash and hurried home to await the police. But his only caller that evening was Lorna.

"I was wrong about suicide," she said, in a tone in which she might have remarked on the weather.

"Come inside, first. You look tired out."

She stopped in the doorway of the sitting room.

"He has been murdered—strangled." Her voice was thin and uncontrolled. "He was found—*Harry*, the body was found—in an outworked gravel pit in the Wey Valley."

"Steady!" He led her to a chair and gave her brandy.

She sipped and put down the glass. "I don't know why I behaved like that. It did not occur to me that it might be *our* gravel pit until I came into this room."

She meant that she had suddenly glimpsed the possibility that he might be the murderer, even if she had already put the thought aside. She could suspect him if she liked—the police certainly would. But nobody could now prove the exact time of death.

"Let's stare this in the face," he said. "There are at least a couple of hundred ex-gravel pits in that stretch of the valley. Still, it might turn out to be *our* gravel pit. But can we call it *our* gravel pit? I don't really feel sentimental about my act of youthful loutishness."

"You're quite right," she said. "We've met again as adults—as different persons." She talked about her interview with the police. "A Chief Inspector Karslake—a pleasant enough man but asking wearisome questions about Uncle John. Oh!—he asked me if anyone profited by his death and I said I thought you did."

"Actually, I don't—but it doesn't matter—the police will come to see me anyway."

Karslake called in the morning—at Finchmoor's flat, before he left for the office. He began by asking the effect of Brendwright's death on the land development scheme.

"No effect at all on my interest in the deal." He brought in the little tale about Lorna as beneficiary. "If you want the details, my solicitors will give you the layout." He could not resist adding another bit of color. "The truth is, Mr. Karslake, the murderer came too late to be of any use to me."

He was equally ready to account for his movements.

"In my mind the saga begins when I had lunch with Miss Brendwright on Tuesday, when she warned me the Compulsory Purchase was threatening. From the Besc Chinar to the Safe Deposit to collect relevant documents—then Thaleham by train, catching the 6:20 back—dinner at my club—then home, to work into the small hours. Between then and now—office—deedbox back to Safe Deposit—lunch—solicitors—office—home—late work again. Oh, yes, one morning visit to Miss Brendwright's flat."

There were gaps, of course, which Karslake probed but without finding a sensitive spot. In short, the alibi stood up.

If Finchmoor had no motive for the murder, who had? Beginning with the owner of the village pub, Karslake found about fifty persons who would benefit, indirectly, but certainly, from the building scheme which Brendwright was known to be opposing.

The medical evidence boiled down to the opinion that death had occurred within twenty-four hours of midday on Wednesday. Police work had established that the murder had been committed in the house, after Mrs. Harbutt had left it at about five on Tuesday afternoon and before she returned at eight on Thursday morning.

There was evidence that clues of time and place had been faked but no evidence of the identity of the faker. There was no evidence that death had been inflicted before Finchmoor left the house on Tuesday evening—nor that his account of his subsequent movements was untrue in any particular.

Moreover, it would have been physically impossible for the same person—say, Finchmoor—to have committed the murder, obtained the use of a car, transported the body fifteen miles and hidden it, and then returned to Thaleham in time to catch the 6:20 train to London.

By the end of a month every line of inquiry had been followed to its end. The dossier was sent to the Department of Dead Ends, together with the Victorian bell-rope and the laboratory report stating that glandular deposits had been present on the rope which would be consistent with the theory that the rope had been used for strangulation.

Detective Inspector Rason was fascinated by the bell-rope, considered as a murder weapon. Some liked a gun, a knife, or a cosh, but this one liked a nice bit o' bell-rope. It looked more like a woman's trick.

The dossier lent little support to the suggestion that Lorna Brendwright had strangled her uncle and removed the body. Rason thought no more about the case until a five-line paragraph appeared seven months later in an evening paper. It was headed *Thaleham Mystery Echo* and stated that the restoration of Rose Cottage had been interrupted by Mr. Harry Finchmoor, who had ordered its immediate demolition. The echo may have been faint, but Rason—as not infrequently happened—heard it as a bellow . . .

In those seven months there had been no hitch in what we may call the business side of the murder. The financial company had allotted 50,000 one-pound shares to Finchmoor, of

which he had assigned 12,000 to Lorna Brendwright—effected through lawyers, with no personal acknowledgment by Lorna. The separate sale of the mortgaged manor house—to be used as a clubhouse in the housing development—brought Lorna next to nothing. Rose Cottage, which the developing company did not want, since it was on an isolated site on the other side of the village, remained Finchmoor's property.

As murders go, this one had turned out very well. Finchmoor congratulated himself on—roughly—everything. There was now no reason why he should not proceed to have a good time.

But there was no good time. Instead, there was Lorna—though she never deliberately did him any harm. In the sense in which Brendwright had provoked his own death, Finchmoor groomed Lorna as "the fatal woman"—a role for which she was singularly unsuited.

The self-congratulation soon staled, if only because he did not value success as a criminal. He was not deeply in love with Lorna and could easily have kept his distance. It would seem that he regarded Lorna's company at a restaurant or theater as a passport to the civilization he had never wished to repudiate.

Even so, her intelligent chatter had a bitter-sweet quality. She was apt to speak suddenly of the death of her uncle, as if it were always at the back of her thoughts.

"Uncle John actually paid that fifty pounds to start restoring Rose Cottage. I feel I have the duty to him to go on with it. Will you sell me the cottage, Harry?"

"Certainly not!" He said it with a smile. "I will restore it to your specifications. I'll be your landlord, and your rent will be a real peppercorn placed in my hand in the presence of witnesses—it's probably never been done before."

At the back of his mind was the thought that they would marry and use it on week-ends. Similar thoughts about her were always at the back of his mind. He now rather liked her slight bossiness. Physically she attracted him, though he was not yet ready to make love—he was waiting for something which he failed to define.

"As you please, Harry." There was a polite smile at his little joke about the peppercorn. Nothing about preferring to have it on a proper business footing. In a month she sent him a surveyor's report and specifications. Nothing—not one word—about his kindness. Some weeks later, in a pause following discussion of a film, she remarked, "Mrs. Harbutt says that

when she came in with the tea tray that day, Uncle was telling you about George III."

"Quite right! And very glad I was to see her." So far, his finesse had always succeeded and he tried it again. "I was amused by the way she instructed him to warm up some food she had prepared for the next day."

"She told the police that somebody—not Uncle John—had warmed up the pie and pretended to eat it."

There was no follow-up, nor did she expect him to make any answer. He wondered why she would blurt out that sort of thing, like a feather-head, when she was in fact an uncommonly self-possessed woman. He was not afraid of her. All her blurting could be done in the presence of the police without the possibility of their learning anything dangerous.

The climax came in the eighth month—in a theater, of all inappropriate places. The play was a successful light comedy and both responded to it. As the lights were lowered after the second act, she leaned toward him.

"I drove down to the Wey Valley last Saturday. You said there were at least two hundred outworked gravel pits. There is only one. And it's *our* gravel pit."

He sat through the last act, not hearing a word of it. But he did hear her laughing. She was attending to the play and she smiled and applauded when the cast took their curtain calls.

He gave the taximan his own address. As they entered the flat together, he had the impression that she knew what he was about to say.

"Lorna, dear. Will you please tell me whether or not you believe I killed your uncle?"

"I do not *believe* that you killed Uncle John," she answered without hesitation. "Wait, please, Harry. I do have the feeling sometimes—like a sort of waking dream—that you might have, even that you *did*. I hoped the feeling would pass if we went out together—"

"—While you drop in little bits like that bit about the gravel pit? To see how the puppet dances on the string?"

"That's unworthy of you. It's—petty."

"I know it is, but I can't help it. You've known me from childhood but you're able to believe that I *might* turn out to be the kind of uncivilized brute we both despise."

"It's not as clear-cut as that—it's a sort of nervous twitch. Doesn't it count that I want us to be friends?" She was almost pleading. "Can't we go on as we are?"

"I don't think so," he said carefully. "I can never drive out

that—waking dream—of yours, because I am an ordinary man, the ordinary mixture of good and evil. Capable, no doubt, of all sorts of abominations, but not very likely to put them into action. But that's not good enough, is it?"

"I never guessed it would seem to you like that." She was grave and unhappy. "Do you want us not to meet again?"

Her words suddenly fanned a passionate desire—as if he demanded her body to prove to himself that he had not forfeited his civilization. Now or never.

"Wrong side up, Lorna. I want us to come closer. I want us to cut out haverings and daytime nightmares. You know that I love you and have been waiting for you to give me a chance to say so." He dropped onto the settee beside her. "Yes? No? . . . You don't know? In a minute we'll both know."

As once before, in an outworked gravel pit, he made a scuffle of it. She remained inert while he engaged himself in the unrewarding business of kissing her. Then she stood up and in that moment he knew that it was fear of her contempt that had stampeded him into the murder. Puppet.

"When you're not offered what you want, you grab it." Her voice shut out himself and his misery. "Goodbye, Harry."

"All right! But we needn't be stagey. Let me drive you home." She had turned her back and was already letting herself out of the flat. "Unless you're afraid of being grabbed and murdered on the way," he shouted after her.

That certainly was petty, he reflected. All right, so it was petty. And there would be some more pettiness tomorrow. If she thought she would still get Rose Cottage without even saying thank-you, she would find she had pulled the wrong string. He was *not* a puppet. Rose Cottage was inconsiderable as a property, and as a symbol it symbolized only—puppetry.

Before he went to bed he wrote an order for its demolition.

A man was behaving in an unusual manner with a cottage. A man had behaved in an unusual manner with a bell-rope. There was nothing to connect the two events—nothing except the mind of Detective Inspector Rason.

From the local contractor he heard the whole story of Rose Cottage, and he enjoyed every word of it. He interviewed various local persons including George Dobson, who told him the bicycle story and other things which were already in the dossier—events which he now re-interpreted by pinning them all on the bell-rope.

A week later he reported to Chief Inspector Karslake.

"Thaleham case. Remember that bell-rope? What does a

sane man want with a bell-rope? He wants it to ring a bell. See what I mean, sir?"

"No," said Karslake. "Do you?"

"Brendwright never agreed to deal. The old loony got hot about it and Finchmoor wanted to ring the bell hoping it would bring somebody to help cool him down—not knowing that the bell-rope was a dummy. Meaning, they quarreled like hell and in the end Finchmoor lassoed him with the bell-rope."

"Maybe," grunted Karslake. "Look—unless you've got a witness that Finchmoor did not dine at his club at 8:15 and then go back to his flat and stay there—"

"If I'd got that I'd have pulled him in. I wrote him a nice letter, asking him if he could drop in one day this week and tell me why he's demolishing Rose Cottage. He's downstairs now. If I may use your intercom I'll tell 'em to show him into my room."

"All right," Karslake conceded, holding himself in, "but if you bring in any of that bell-rope bilge I shall break up the party."

When Finchmoor was announced Rason admired his stance. Not the slightest trace of anxiety. Indeed, Harry felt no anxiety. He knew that, by the nature of the case, no new event could rivet the time of death to his movements.

Civilities were exchanged. "Mr. Finchmoor has kindly come along to clear up the mystery of Rose Cottage for us," said Rason.

"It's not very mysterious," began Finchmoor. He outlined the facts, beginning with Mrs. Harbutt posting Brendwright's letter enclosing the check for fifty pounds to start restoration. "When I found Miss Brendwright had lost interest I thought I'd clear the site for a modern house."

Finchmoor's self-satisfaction, thought Rason, made it easy to hit him.

"If Brendwright was alive when you left the house—you mustn't mind my putting it like that, Mr. Finchmoor—why didn't he write at once to cancel the order and save his fifty quid?" Rason added. "I mean, you tell us he had just made a deal with you which blotted him out from everything except the manor house. Looks as if he didn't understand what he was doing."

"He certainly did understand," asserted Finchmoor. "He was quite clear about his legal position. I had brought all the papers in the case but he only glanced at one letter—he accepted the documents as read."

"Then try it this way," persisted Rason. "You expected a bit of an argument. But within a short time you clinched the deal. Weren't you a bit surprised at your success?"

"I don't know about that," smiled Finchmoor. "I certainly expected it to take a bit longer."

"Then why were you in such a mortal hurry, Mr. Finchmoor, to catch that 6:20 train?"

That told Finchmoor there was more in it than Rose Cottage.

"I hardly know, after all this time. I suppose it was in my mind that I would have to make a digest of our discussion and link it up with the documents—for my lawyers."

"You would have missed that train but for George Dobson's bike—you very nearly missed it with the bike. Dobson says you wobbled all over the road."

"I hadn't ridden one since I was a boy—but I did manage it."

"We know that Mr. Finchmoor caught the 6:20," put in Karlake.

"We do, sir," beamed Rason. "We checked it by the time at which he dined at his club, didn't we? But I'm still worried about all those legal documents, et cetera, which Brendwright did not read."

"He didn't need to read them, Mr. Rason," said Finchmoor patiently. "He accepted my statements—"

"Yes, but I mean what did *you* do about 'em. When you were wobbling about on Dobson's bike, *were you balancing a big heavy deedbox on the handlebars?*"

Good murderers don't panic. Finchmoor's boast now helped him to keep up appearances.

"I don't remember."

Rason kept up the pressure.

"Dobson remembers that you were carrying nothing. So does Hawkins, the stationmaster, who bundled you into the train. So—when you caught the 6:20, you had left your deedbox in the manor house." Rason shuffled papers from the dossier, but it was only stage business. "The following morning you returned that deedbox to Safe Deposit—you said so yourself. Now, Mr. Finchmoor, *how did you regain possession of your deedbox?* Did you return that night in your car—"

Finchmoor was not listening. He was thinking about Lorna—and the color of truth . . .

BORDEN DEAL

Tough Cop

Miss Millie had been his old schoolteacher, 'way back in the tenth grade, and now she had been brutally murdered . . . Mr. John was glad he was a tough cop.

I'm tough enough, though it's not anything to brag about. It's part of my job—like being a good typist for a secretary or liking people for a politician. I catch most of the dirty work, not just because I'm tough but because I look tough. That's part of my natural equipment, too.

It doesn't bother me. I can look into the mirror every morning and shave that ugly mug of mine—with the under-slung jaw and the little eyes and the nose that got broken twice when I tried to do a little boxing in my younger days—without worrying that I'm not Tony Curtis. There's a lot of satisfaction in knowing that you're good at the work you do. My face and my big hands and my hulking shoulders are just as much a part of my equipment as the gun on my hip.

I do a lot of the interrogation. So I wasn't surprised to get a call from the jail asking me to come down and question a suspect in the Miss Millie Burden killing. I was still out at the Burden house, watching the younger fellows go through the routines they learned at the F.B.I. school. The body was already gone by then, and there was really no use in my hanging around there any more.

But I did. I'd known Miss Millie for a long time. A small town like ours, you know everybody. Miss Millie had taught me in the tenth grade at school. She was a little sprite of a woman with a sharp kindly face, one of the toughest teachers in the school, the kind of tough teacher that you either like a lot or you hate the guts of. I'd always liked her. And now she had had her brains knocked out of her head all over her kitchen floor.

She lived alone. It was the big old house the Burdens had always lived in. They were all gone now but Miss Millie.

She'd retired from teaching long since, of course, living on her social security and the little bit of Burden money that was still left—nobody knew how much or how little it was—and puttering around in her garden all day every day.

I looked around the kitchen one more time after I put down the phone. "They've got somebody down at the jail," I said to the eager bloodhounds.

They stopped hound-dogging and looked up at me, their faces blank and somewhat disappointed because the suspect had been picked up by the old police routine instead of being detected by their new methods.

"Found any fingerprints?" I asked them.

One of them shook his head. "Whoever did the job was careful," he said. "No prints here but Miss Burden's."

I nodded. "I'm going down to the jail," I said.

I walked through the hall of the big silent house and out onto the porch. I went down the walk to my car and got in. I looked back toward the house, wondering what was going to happen to it now. It was a shame. Some people you expect to die violently—but not Miss Millie. I shook my head and went on.

I was at the jail in ten minutes. I walked into the office and looked at the Sheriff and the Chief of Police. They were both big men, but the Chief had a pleasant face, full of smiling. The Sheriff was a grim and impressive man. The Chief had been on the force nearly as long as I had been, and the Sheriff had been in and out of office almost as long.

"Have you got him?" I said.

"We haven't talked to him yet," the Sheriff said. "We were waiting for you, Mr. John."

I nodded. "What's the deal?"

"He was picked up out on the highway, trying to hitchhike out of town," the Sheriff said. "We got him on a routine sweep of strangers and suspicious characters as soon as we heard about Miss Millie."

I nodded again. "It figured to be simple," I said. "Let's go look at him."

The Sheriff picked up his hat. "I'll check my men," he said. "No use me hanging around here. You can handle it from here on."

"Sure," I said. "See you."

He bobbed his head and went out. I led the way back to the cells. The kid was sitting on a bunk, staring down at the floor between his feet. He looked up when I stopped in front of the cell door.

"Searched him yet?" I said to the policeman guarding him.

"No, sir, Mr. John," he said. "The Sheriff shook him down for weapons. But we waited for you."

I nodded. That was the way I liked it. There's an art to interrogation. If I was going to do the job, I didn't want anybody messing up the field beforehand.

I opened the cell door. "What's your name, kid?"

He looked up at me. He was young. He was scared and defiant at the same time. "Billy Roberts," he said.

I paused, studying him for a moment. His face was dirty but it was the open, friendly kind of face you can like right off the bat. There was nothing to him of the television juvenile delinquent—his hair was cropped close to his head in a crew cut and he didn't wear any of the television-type clothing. He had on a pair of shabby pants and a fairly new sports shirt. His hair was sandy, with a touch of red in it, and if he ever washed his face you'd probably see freckles there. I thought of Miss Millie. Just the kind of guy she'd bring into her kitchen to feed him a meal.

"Come along," I said. "And bring that." I motioned to the battered suitcase resting against the bars on the outside of the cell.

I turned my back and walked along the corridor. I didn't look back to see if he followed. That was the job of the patrolman. I was already working on the interrogation procedure, you see, and I had to let just enough of my toughness show to make him uncertain about his own stamina.

The Chief came along, too. I led the way to the Interrogation Room. It's a plain room with a table in the middle where we drink—coffee, usually—but all that had been cleared out for this job. I stopped and turned around.

"Empty your pockets," I said.

His voice was high, jerky. "I didn't do anything," he said. "I tell you."

I kept on looking at him. "Empty your pockets," I said again in a reasonable voice.

He jerked his hands toward his pockets and began turning them out. There was a small penknife, a book of matches, a package of cigarettes, a wallet, a few coins. That was all.

I picked up the wallet in my big hands and looked inside. There was a dollar in the bill compartment. I began probing the card sections with a thick finger, taking out his driver's license and photographs, all the junk everybody carries around. Then I hit pay dirt. In the last compartment, folded thin, I found some bills. There were a good many of them, mostly fives and tens, with two or three twenties. I guess there was maybe a hundred and fifty dollars all told.

"Where did you get the money?" I said.

His face closed up tight and stubborn. I stood watching him for a moment, holding the bills. They were old bills, worn and crumpled, and they felt gritty under my fingertips. I looked at them closely, then shook them against the table. Tiny white crystals shook off onto the surface. I thought about the sugar bowl in Miss Millie's kitchen. It had been smashed on the floor, the white sugar spilled out of its brokenness just like her brains had spilled out of her broken head.

"Where did you get the money?" I said.

"It's mine," he said in his high jerky voice.

"Sure," I said. "But where did you get it?"

"I was working for a circus," he said. "Up until a week ago. Cosmos Brothers. They were about to fold, so I blew the lot before they started skipping paydays. That's the money I saved."

"What did you do?"

"I was an elephant man," he said. "You know . . ."

"An elephant man with a circus can save that kind of money?"

His face closed up again. He reached for the cigarettes and fumbled one out of the pack. I waited until he had put it into his mouth and had reached for the book of matches.

"Leave the cigarettes alone, kid," I said.

He looked at me without believing. I took the cigarette out of his mouth and put it into my own. I lit it, slowly, watching his face hungry for the steadying assurance of the tobacco. I puffed the smoke at him.

"Let's see what's in the suitcase."

The Chief and the patrolman watched as the kid lifted the suitcase to the table and opened it. I poked at the jumbled clothing inside—another pair of pants, two shirts, and some underwear. I tumbled it out, dropping it on the floor piece by piece as I went through.

Then I turned my attention to the suitcase itself. In one pocket there was a toothbrush and a razor and a bar of soap wrapped in toilet paper. In the other was a watch. I took it out, looked at it, and laid it on the table.

I heard the Chief's breath suck in. It was an old-fashioned lapel watch, like ladies used to wear. Miss Millie Burden had worn it when she taught me in the tenth grade. I could still remember her gesture when she'd tilt it with one finger and look to see if the class period was nearly over.

I turned to the kid again. "You didn't have to kill the old

lady," I said in my slow even voice. "You could have robbed her without that, an old lady like her."

His face paled. His eyes wavered away from my face and he looked desperately around at the other men. "I didn't kill anybody," he said. "Honest. I didn't even know that was why I was picked up."

I watched him for a moment. Then I winked at the Chief when the kid wasn't looking at either one of us.

"We're fixing to find out about that right now," I said.

"Mr. John," the Chief said in a nervous voice, picking up his cue.

I ignored him. I went to one of the lockers and opened it. I took out a soiled white kid glove with heavy ridges on the back. I took out a length of rubber hose and a pair of lemon squeezers. I brought them to the table and laid them down.

"Mr. John," the Chief said again, this time in a tighter voice.

I looked at him then. "I'm going to find out," I said in a quiet voice. "Miss Millie was my teacher in the tenth grade. She was a fine old lady."

"Don't get personal about it, Mr. John," he said. He motioned toward the equipment on the table. "I've warned you about these things."

"If you don't like it, fire me. But just give me half an hour," I said. "I'll know by then."

The kid was looking at the Chief's kindly face. He watched the Chief's eyes waver away from mine, saw him turn his back. "I'd better go see how the men are doing," he said, muttering the words as he hurried out of the room.

It was pretty much of a standard routine that we'd worked out over the years. It made me the villain of the piece and later on, if need be, the Chief could come back and be buddy-buddy with the suspect. Usually he didn't have to work that part. Not after I got through.

Now, I'm not fond of the third-degree method, even if I am tough enough for my job. I've always considered it a failure when I had to lay a hand on a guy. It's all in the atmosphere. If you can shake the bravado out of him you'll generally get close enough to the truth. Lots of guys you can hurt and never find out a thing. Most guys can stand hurting a lot better than they can stand the thought of hurting.

I nodded at the patrolman and he went out too. Then I looked at the kid again.

"Let's start telling," I said.

He was as pale as clay. His hands lying on the table were

trembling and he knotted them together. "There's nothing to tell," he said. "I don't know what you're talking about."

I picked up the rubber hose and bounced it off the palm of my hand. I kept on bouncing it and his eyes followed it, hypnotized, as it moved limberly in my hand.

"That old lady was lying up there on the kitchen floor with her head bashed in," I said in a quiet voice. "You didn't even do it until you'd eaten the meal that she gave you, there on the end of the kitchen table. Or maybe you killed her and then ate the meal. I don't know. Then you searched the house. You found the money. You took the lapel watch off her body. Then you left. Like an idiot, you started right out of town on the highway, where you were picked up. Didn't you know you'd be picked up? Wasn't that kind of stupid of you?"

"I didn't kill her," he said. His voice was low, hopeless. But it was insistent.

"Take off your shirt," I said.

His hands flew to the buttons as though he was glad to please me with something. He fumbled at the job and it took him a while to get the first three buttons undone. Then he stopped.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you about it."

"Talk," I said, not easing the pressure at all.

"There was a guy," he said in a fast voice. "I met him out by the railroad tracks, where I was planning to spend the night. He was drunk and he offered me a drink. He had two pints of Cabin Hollow corn whiskey. We had some drinks together. After a while he passed out." He looked up at me. He had some of his defiance back. "So I rolled him. That's where I got the watch and the money. He had all that money on him."

"That's a pretty good story," I said. "Too bad it's not the truth."

"It is the truth. He was already drunk when I got with him. He passed out in fifteen minutes." He wrinkled up his face. "And that corn whiskey—it was awful . . ." His voice ran down.

"Describe the man."

"He was tall, shabbier-looking than me. He had a long face and real big hands. His skin was dead-white and he was nearly bald. His feet were big, too, I remember them."

I put the rubber hose down on the table. I sat down in a chair. I looked at the boy. I hadn't really looked at him before. You don't want to look too deep into a guy you've got to get tough with. Just let him be a face where you can see

the reactions moving through him, see whether you're succeeding or not.

But I really looked at him now. He had a friendly kind of face. There was the kind of toughness there you pick up when you're on the road young. But it was an open face, too, in spite of being frightened and nervous. You could tell he'd been picked up in strange towns before.

When you've been a cop as long as I have, you go on instinct more than you go on fact. That's why I don't have much use for these young fellows and their F.B.I.-taught methods—they don't leave any room for a cop's instinct.

The kid's story had the feel of truth in it. Looking at him, I just knew in my bones he was the kind that was perfectly capable of rolling a drunk. But the capability in him didn't reach as far as cold-blooded murder. There were no real facts to pin it on, only his bald statement—except that he'd described very accurately our town drunk. But I knew that I had hold of the truth now, like holding one end of a string.

I know that a man can kill his mother and smile and smile and keep smiling. But I could feel the innocence in this kid, and that was why I'd been uneasy ever since I'd first laid eyes on him, why I'd had to push myself through the routines of the questioning. Hell, I liked the kid. If he had really murdered old Miss Burden, I just couldn't have liked him.

He began to get more and more nervous as I sat staring at him. He couldn't look directly at me, and he couldn't look away.

"Where are you from, son?" I said finally. "What are you doing on the road, anyway?"

"I'm from Canton, Missouri," he said. He tried to smile but he didn't make much out of it. "I'm on the road because I just like to travel, I guess."

"Where did you pick up the description of the man you said you rolled?" I said. "Did you see him on the street somewhere?"

He made a brave show of looking straight into my eyes but he couldn't manage it. "I met him out by the railroad yards," he said. "Like I said."

I got up from the chair. I went to the door and called the patrolman. "Take him back to his cell," I told him.

I watched the two of them go down the corridor. The boy, from the back, had a good pair of shoulders, leaning down to narrow hips. He'd never be a slob like me. I've always been big-hipped, even when I was a kid. Well, a man gets used to his own ugliness, I reckon—especially when it's useful in his work. I went to the office. The Chief looked up from his desk

when I came in. "Is he ready for a statement?" he said. He motioned toward a patrolman. "Sam here is waiting to take it down when you're ready."

"No," I said. "He's not ready."

The Chief lifted his head again, looking at me sharply. "What's the matter, Mr. John?"

"Maybe there won't be a statement," I said. "Maybe the boy is innocent."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," the Chief said. "You expect us to start believing in miracles? He's a road kid. He's got the money on him and he's got the watch. I figure it would take a jury about fifteen minutes. What more do you want?"

I could feel the stubbornness coming up in me. The same kind of stubbornness that the boy had shown. "I don't doubt that," I said. "Nobody would feel very bad about hanging Miss Burden's murder on him. The Prosecutor could rant and rave to his heart's content. The Judge could be wise and legal. The jury could be self-righteous as hell. A good time would be had by all."

"What's the matter with you, anyway?"

I laid my hand flat on his desk, leaning on it. "I tell you he's not guilty."

He drew away from me. I kept on looking at him. I was on the force before he was. He was Chief now and I would never be Chief—never in a million years. But he knew me. I was Mr. John.

"What makes you think so?" he said in a respectful voice.

I relaxed. "He's got a good story," I said. "A pretty good story. Told me how he got the money and the watch. He found Peanuts Morgan drunk and he rolled him."

"How do you know it was Peanuts?"

"Described him to a T. You couldn't mistake him for anybody else."

The Chief sat still for a moment in thought. Peanuts Morgan was the town character. An alcoholic, he was dim-witted in an amiable sort of way. He lived in an old shack out across the railroad tracks, making his living and his drinking money by shining shoes on the Square, by running errands, and by begging. Once in a while we had to pick him up and dry him out. People remembered when he was a star basketball player—that was a lot of years ago—and once in a while they'd give him enough money or whiskey to really tie one on.

"Peanuts isn't exactly an upright citizen," the Chief said. "But he's always been as harmless as they come."

"He murdered Miss Millie," I said violently.

"How do you figure that? Just because the kid . . . Why, that kid would lie in his teeth to get out of this rap."

I was breathing hard. "He wasn't lying," I said. "And it would be easy for Peanuts. You know Miss Millie fed him now and then because she taught him in school. She wouldn't pay any attention to him. Maybe while he was eating she took the money out of the sugar bowl for some reason. He took one look and went crazy in the head, thinking about how much liquor all that money would buy."

The Chief sighed. "All right," he said. "We'll pick him up."

"I'll pick him up," I said. "And when I get him I'm going to learn the truth."

"Sure," the Chief said soothingly. "We'll work the same game."

I stopped at the door. "You can't scare Peanuts," I said. "He's not bright enough." I could feel the grimness in my mind. "But I'll get the truth. The only way there is to get it."

I didn't bother to look for him downtown. I headed out across the railroad tracks toward his shack. I was driving fast when I bounced across the high railroad grade and went down the other side. I could feel the conviction riding me hard and I couldn't wait to prove that me and the boy were right. It's crazy when you think about it. A tough cop like me, who's heard it all, the way I began believing that boy the minute I looked at him.

It wasn't anything I could put my finger on. But I've listened to men lying for years. Most people just automatically lie to a cop. And you get to where you can feel the guilt inside of them, no matter what their face or their voice is saying. But that kind was as open as a book.

I banged on the door of the shack, then I shoved it open. Peanuts was lying on his broken down bed, snoring. I went over to him, grabbed him by the shoulder, jerked him off the bed. He came up thrashing and yelling. I jammed him back against the wall and put the cuffs on him. I fanned him but he didn't have a thing except a nearly empty pint of Cabin Hollow corn in his front overalls pocket. I looked at it, tossed it on the bed.

"What . . . what's the trouble, Mr. John?" Peanuts said in a shaking voice.

I put my face close to his. "Why did you kill Miss Millie?"

He collapsed. I could see the collapse inside his raddled face. I shoved him toward the door without waiting for an answer, stooping to pick up the pint bottle, and hustled him to the car.

In five minutes we were back in the jail. I led him into and through the Chief's office, shaking my head when he started to rise from his desk to follow us. I put him into a chair in the Interrogation Room.

He was shaking all over. "My God, Mr. John," he said. "Whatever makes you think I killed Miss Millie? Why, she fed me, she . . ."

I stared down at him. He was a wreck of a man. He'd been a star basketball center on the high school team many years ago. He'd been tall enough for the job, fast enough. For two seasons, mostly because of him, the local team was undefeated. Now he was a raddled, half-witted bum, no use to himself or anybody else.

"Where did you get the whiskey?" I said.

He brightened. "A kid gave it to me. Took it right out of his suitcase and told me I could have it. He had two whole pints and he . . ."

I could feel myself getting mad. He was dim-witted, all right, but not so he couldn't think of something. They can all think of something when it's murder.

"You're going to confess," I told him. I could feel the hardness in my voice. "Before I leave this room you're going to sign a statement."

He looked into my ugly face and shrank back into his chair from what he saw.

Forty-five minutes later I walked into the Chief's office. I was sweating and shaking in a way I'd never been before. I'd done things I'd never done before, too.

"Go on in and take it down," I said to the patrolman. "Tell him I said word for word, or I'm coming back in there."

The patrolman went out with his shorthand pad. The Chief stared at me. "You mean he confessed?"

"He confessed," I said. "It was him, just like I told you."

I stood up, then, and picked up the key ring. I went back down the corridor to the boys' cell. I unlocked the door and opened it.

"All right," I said. "I got it out of him."

I watched his face. It lit up from inside and it came all the way out, the way he was feeling. I guess my face was trying to show something, too. He stood up from the bunk and for the first time he was really shook.

"You mean—you mean I can go now? I don't have to . . ."

"Not yet," I said. "There'll be a trial and you'll be the principal witness. About him having the whiskey and the

money and the watch. That, together with his confession . . . It'll be next week, because court session starts then and this town won't want to wait a year to see justice done."

"Do I have to stay in jail until then?"

I thought about it. "If you won't leave town . . ."

His shoulders slumped. "How can I stay?" he said. "No place to live, no money to eat on. I guess I'll have to stay in jail."

"You can come out to my place," I said then. "If you want to do that."

He looked at me and for the first time he smiled. It was a good kind of smile, that warmed you all the way through and made you grateful you'd been able to do something to bring it out.

He stayed at my place on the lake for three days. I was glad to have him because it's lonesome out there sometimes. Besides, I liked the kid the minute I laid eyes on him. He was grateful to me for saving his neck, too, and that's not hard to take, even when you're a tough cop. Maybe especially when you're a tough cop.

I took him fishing a couple of times. He liked that. We talked a lot, when I was off-duty and could spend time out there. He was nervous about the trial, but I assured him. I told him he wouldn't even need a court-appointed attorney, because there wouldn't be any charges against him for rolling Peanuts. I'd see to that.

I'd never had a visitor before. I keep pretty much to myself, anyway. I never could find a woman who could stand my ugly face and my rough ways, and most people don't trust a cop enough to like him. So off-duty I read a good bit and I fished a lot, a lonely kind of life but all right for the likes of me.

I enjoyed having the boy around. I might as well admit it. He softened me, maybe, had from the very first, but maybe a guy needs softening once in a while. If I'd ever had a son, I'd have wanted him to be like Billy Roberts. But then if I'd had a son he'd have probably looked just like me.

On the third day Peanuts Morgan hung himself in his cell. I found out about it when I checked in. I went right back to the cabin. Billy was sitting on the screened porch when I drove up. I got out of the car and went up the steps, opened the screen door.

"Well," I said. "There won't be a trial after all."

He looked up at me very quickly. "What happened?" He started standing up.

"Peanuts Morgan killed himself," I said. "Hung himself in his cell last night, with the belt that the stupid jailer forgot to take away from him."

Billy sat down slowly. "Now why would he do a thing like that?"

"I guess he finally sobered up enough to realize what he'd done, to understand that he was going to die in the electric chair," I said. "Either that, or be sent to the hospital for the criminally insane."

Billy put his hands over his face. I could see that he was shaking. "That poor guy," he said.

"Don't let it throw you," I said. "It's just one of those things."

He looked at me in a peculiar sort of way. "I guess I'd better be on my way," he said. "I want to thank you, Mr. John, for all that you've done." He shivered. "If it hadn't been for you, it would have been me in that cell."

I looked into his face. "You don't have to go," I said. "I can find you a job here, a good job. You can stay out here with me until you get on your feet. You've got to quit rambling one of these days, son. It might as well be here and now. Maybe the next trouble you get into . . ."

His face sobered. "You're right, Mr. John," he said. "But I'm going home." He lifted his head, looking at me. "I owe it to my family, Mr. John. Go back and show them I'm through with living the way I've been living. Maybe one of these days I can come back here."

I hated to see him go. But it satisfied me. He went inside and packed his old suitcase. Then I volunteered to drive him out to the highway. I could have offered him money for a bus ticket, but I knew he wouldn't take it.

We were silent in the car. There wasn't much to say, I guess. It had been a good time, having that boy staying with me, and now it was over and I was still a tough cop in a small town.

I stopped the car at a good place for hitchhiking and got out of the car when he got out. He hefted his suitcase in one hand.

"Goodbye, Mr. John," he said.

"Goodbye, son," I said. "Keep your nose clean now. You might not be so lucky next time."

I don't know why. Maybe he just couldn't hold it in any longer. Maybe he couldn't bear me not knowing what I'd done. Maybe he wanted to show me how soft I'd gone inside.

"You're right," he said. His face did not change at all—it stayed open and friendly and handsome as all hell; the face of

a nice kid that even a tough old cop like me couldn't help but like. "It would be hard to find another cop as stupid as you are."

It was like a blow in the face.

I shocked back an involuntary step, the way a man does when he's hit by a bullet.

"You killed her," I said.

"Sure," he said. "I knocked off the old lady."

I took a step toward him. "You . . ."

"What are you going to do about it?" he said. "Take me back and tell them you made a little mistake, that you beat a confession out of the wrong man and now that man has killed himself? You're hooked, copper. You're hooked good and solid. You can't ever tell anybody what you did."

He was dead-right. I could never tell them how wrong I'd been. Besides, Peanuts was dead now. Dead and gone. With his signed confession that I guess any man, dim-witted and addled with whiskey or not, would have signed to stop what I was doing to him.

But my boy Billy forgot one thing. I'm tough enough for the job. For any job that comes along. He forgot that one thing.

I shot him right between the eyes. And I watched him kick and fall.

FLETCHER FLORA

Mrs. Dearly's Special Day

Mrs. Dearly got a special joy out of living—everything contributed to her heightened sense of excitement and exhilaration and sheer sensuous delight.

After what had been done last night, it was mostly a day of waiting for something to happen. Waiting, however, can be a great excitement. If one possesses the quality of character to sustain composure, the excitement all inside and growing, waiting can be the most exhilarating experience imaginable.

The day began consciously for Mrs. Dearly at exactly nine o'clock, when she awakened. She had left her windows open and the drapes drawn back before going to bed, and her room was now, at nine o'clock in the morning, full of warm and golden light. It was clearly going to be one of those andante days expiring through minutes and hours to slumberous summer sounds.

Mrs. Dearly loved that kind of day, so softly sensuous and replete with drowsy dreams, and she was aware of this one instantly in her flesh and bones. She yawned and stretched, lifting golden arms into the golden light. Looking down the length of her body, its senses astir in a sheer mist of blue nylon, she felt a kind of innocent narcissistic delight. Holding herself in child-like affection, quite uncorrupted by vanity, she was truly grateful for being what she was—so perfectly made for love and lovely things; but her gratitude was unformed and undirected, and she hadn't the faintest notion to whom it was owed, or how it might be acknowledged.

She lay in bed for perhaps another half hour, absorbing and transforming all the subtle manifestations of the day, and then she stretched again and got up and shed the blue mist on the way to the bathroom. It lay on the floor like something conjured out of her dreams, a giant handful of the bubble bath foam in which she soaked until ten. Returning then to the bedroom, she began to remove the bright enamel from

her fingernails, and when this was accomplished she began, with equally meticulous attention, to put on another coat of enamel.

Inasmuch as the new coat was the same color and shade as the old, the effect, when she was finished, was identical with the one it replaced; but in the meanwhile she had measured the heightening of her anticipation and excitement by the precise performance of a small task that occupied her pleasantly and brought her so much closer to where the day was taking her.

It was almost noon when she was finally dressed in a tan sleeveless dress, tan stockings and shoes, and a tiny hat of deeper shade. She inspected herself in her full-length mirror with the same child-like innocence and delight with which she had looked at herself earlier in the blue mist, turning slowly now for the effect from all sides; and then, carrying her purse and a pair of white gloves, she went downstairs prepared to leave the house, going out the back way to a terrace where she expected her husband to be—and there he was, sure enough, reclining in a blue and yellow sling chair.

Mrs. Dearly crossed the terrace and kissed him lightly over one eye, patting his head at the same time with a display of that kind of affection one generally bestows on small boys and dogs.

"Good morning, dear," she said.

"Morning? In case you don't realize it, it's noon."

The words alone, unqualified by inflection, had a carping connotation; but his voice was, in fact, amused and indulgent—as if it were understood and agreed that she should be immune to the imposition and demands of time, and that it would, really, be rather absurd if she were otherwise.

"Oh, I've been up for hours," she said. "Honestly I have."

"You're dressed for the street," he said. "Where are you going?"

"I have some shopping to do downtown. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least. But don't you want some lunch before you go? I suppose it's too late for breakfast."

"I hardly ever eat breakfast, as you know, and I'll have lunch downtown. What will you do?"

"There's plenty to do in the flower beds, and I'm going to mow the grass."

"I knew it. I was looking out at the lawn last evening, and I said to myself that the grass was getting high. Cal will mow the grass tomorrow, I said."

"You were right. That's exactly what Cal is going to do."

"You shouldn't work so hard at it, dear. Why don't you hire a gardener to do such things?"

"Because I wouldn't get any pleasure out of having a gardener do it. I enjoy doing the yard work—you know that perfectly well. All week I look forward to the week-end when I can get my green thumb into the ground. Things grow for me, and the grass somehow looks better when I mow it. I'm a frustrated horticulturist, I guess."

This was true. He had made several millions in real estate speculations, but he took more pride in his grass, his roses, his flowering and evergreen shrubs. He even had the rough look of a man who lived close to the earth. Now, on the wide terrace behind his costly house, he was wearing a coarse blue shirt tucked into worn jeans, and his shoes were the shoes of a working man, not of a dilettante gardener—thick-soled, hard-toed shoes laced up around his ankles.

Mrs. Dearly, although willing to concede something to his more numerous years—which were twenty more than her own—still felt that the addiction of a rich man to rough pursuits, like digging in the ground and mowing grass, should adhere to more fashionable lines. There was no reason, for example, why Cal couldn't work just as well in a colorful sports shirt and in presentable trousers and shoes as in the crude outfit he was now wearing. Moreover, to put it candidly, he stank. When she had bent over to kiss him and pat his head, the odor of perspiration had been strong. She could not see that it was made less offensive by being the result of earthy labor.

"Well, you must be careful of the heat," she said. "You may have a stroke or something if you're not careful."

"I'll be careful, thank you. An old fellow like me has to be, you know."

"Nonsense. You're a perennial boy. Will you look after yourself properly while I'm gone? Have a good lunch, I mean, and don't stay too long in the sun without resting."

"I'll be all right," he said. "I'm strong as a bull."

Bending to kiss him again, she thought that he not only was as strong as one, he also smelled like one.

"Goodbye, dear," she said. "I may be just a little late."

"Shall I back your car out for you?"

"Don't bother, thanks. I don't in the least mind doing it myself."

As a matter of fact, she preferred it. His handling of her beautiful little Jaguar was, she felt, a kind of physical violation only a little less disturbing than that imposed infrequently on herself. Having now evaded the former—as she

did, whenever possible, the latter—she drove the ten or twelve miles downtown in a considerably shorter time than obedience to the speed limits would have permitted.

She loved driving fast, could not resist the sense and excitement of high speeds, and it was fortunate that she also drove expertly, with a casual mastery to which the Jaguar submitted as if it were somehow an extension of its driver. Sometimes she really felt this, especially on the highway, that she and the powerful little car were organically joined, and that it experienced in its tempered-steel body the same thrill she experienced in her soft and yielding body. This was nonsense, of course, a private fantasy, but it amused her . . .

Downtown, she parked in the Municipal Garage two levels underground and walked through a brightly lighted tunnel to an elevator that carried her up into the lobby of a hotel across the street. She was hungry by then, so she had lunch by herself in the hotel, and after eating like a bird she went to several department stores in the area where she bought a great many things, mostly personal and wearable, all of which she left in the stores for delivery. This took quite a while, lunch and shopping requiring about three hours; but the time passed agreeably and almost before she knew it, it was 3:30—which was the time she was supposed to meet Douglas.

She returned to the hotel where she had lunched, going this time to the cocktail lounge instead of the restaurant, and it was cool and seductive there, in an artificial dusk suspended mistily between light and darkness. She paused just inside the door while her eyes adjusted to the shadows, listening to the soft serenade of recorded strings and feeling her happiness and quiet excitement stir and swell inside her with an effect of almost painful pleasure; and all the while she was looking around for Douglas, and there he was, as she had hoped and expected, at a small table in a corner.

There was such a sudden sharp intensification of her pleasurable pain that she almost whimpered, and she thought at the same time, with incongruous detachment, that it was odd that he should have the capacity to make her feel that way, for he was not an exceptional young man at all. He was, in fact, rather dull at times, and incited her at once to exasperation and tenderness.

Seeing her approach, he started to rise, but she slipped so quickly into the chair across from him that he was no more than half up when she was entirely down. He resumed his seat after remaining a moment half risen, as if he were fighting an impulse to leave at once, and she took one of his hands and held it lightly on the table.

"Darling," she said, "have you been waiting long?"

"No. Just a few minutes."

"Have you had a drink?"

"Not yet. I was waiting for you."

"That was nice of you. You are always so nice. What shall we have? Martinis?"

"I suppose so. We always do, don't we?"

He gave the order to a girl who was waiting for it, and after the Martinis had been mixed and brought, Mrs. Dearly looked at him fondly—and wondered why she was here looking at him at all. His face in repose, boyishly handsome beneath a falling lock of dark hair that seemed contrived, was like a cheap air-brush portrait by an inferior artist in which all other features were subordinated to a sulky mouth. Douglas was, in fact, an inferior artist himself, an instructor in an art school, and she had met him almost six months ago when she had gone to the school to learn to paint in water colors, for which, as she quickly learned, she had no talent whatever. This knowledge—and Douglas—were all she had acquired from the effort.

Sipping her Martini and speaking over the thin edge of glass, she said, "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing much. Nothing of consequence."

"Are you working on something remarkable?"

"I'm not working on anything at all. It's impossible."

"Darling, are you still feeling guilty about Cal? If only you could understand what a waste your guilty conscience is. You have done him no harm, and neither have I, and we have done each other a great deal of good."

"I doubt that Cal would think so."

"Oh, nonsense. Cal doesn't think about it one way or another. While you are sitting here making yourself miserable, he is at home this instant as happy as can be, digging in the flower gardens and mowing the grass."

"You make everything sound so simple and acceptable."

"Because it is. You must learn to accept things as they are and without complicating them in your mind."

"Well, it's not so easy to accept your going on indefinitely as Cal's wife."

"You must be patient, darling. Something will work out for us eventually—perhaps sooner than you think. In the meanwhile, let's have another Martini before I go."

"Why must you go so soon?"

"Something to do at home—but it's really too tiresome to talk about."

Her second Martini, which was consumed slowly to the

sound of strings, proved a considerable challenge to her resolution to go home; but she went, nevertheless, about 4:30. The traffic was heavy on the streets, crippling the Jaguar, which could not get free to run until the last few miles—so that it was five when she pulled into the driveway behind a car which sat there, blocking the way to the garage.

Mrs. Dearly, mildly annoyed by the trespasser, got out of the Jaguar and walked around the house to the rear; but there was no sign of Cal or anyone else. She went into the house through the kitchen, and there in the hall which ran forward from the kitchen to the front entrance was a short man in a dark blue suit, a stranger with an odd little potbelly like a melon held in position by his belt; and this man had obviously come out of the living room to meet her, as if he had become, by some strange trickery in her absence, the master of the house and she the stranger.

"Mrs. Dearly?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "Who are you?"

"My name is Dickson. Police."

"Police? What on earth are you doing here? Where is my husband?"

"You had better talk with Lieutenant Hardy about that. He's waiting for you in the living room."

He half turned and gestured toward a doorway, still with that curious implication of inviting her to be his guest. She walked past him into the living room, where another man was standing in the middle of the room with his back to a bank of windows bright with the late afternoon sun. He was even shorter than the man who had called himself Dickson—a thin, consumptive-looking man of indeterminate age in a wilted seersucker suit.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Dearly," he said. His voice was as wilted as his suit, and perfectly supplemented by a languid, hesitant gesture of his right hand, its middle and index fingers stained by the smoke of countless cigarettes. "I'm Lieutenant Hardy. Sorry to intrude."

The apology was hollow, a mere concession to form. For a moment Mrs. Dearly had a terrifying feeling of helplessness, of being swept into a play of forces she could not control, and at whatever cost she was compelled to assert herself in a way that would restore her position and assurance.

"Your car is blocking the drive," she said. "Please be good enough to move it."

"Certainly." His right hand moved again, seeming to gather in Dickson. "Go move the car, Dickson, and drive Mrs. Dearly's back to the garage."

"The key is in the ignition," Mrs. Dearly said. "Have you ever driven a Jaguar?"

"I'll figure it out," Dickson said.

He went out, and Mrs. Dearly turned back to Hardy.

"Perhaps now, Lieutenant, you'll explain why you are here. And I would like to see my husband, if you don't mind."

"I'm afraid that's impossible. He isn't here."

"Where is he? Has something happened to him? Tell me at once."

"I had hoped to break it to you a little more gently, but I see that I can't. The fact is, your husband is dead."

"Dead? Did you say—dead?"

She moved to a chair and sat down with an effect of excessive care, as if moving and sitting had become all of a sudden a precarious business. She sat erect in the chair, her back unsupported, her eyes staring past Hardy through a bright pane of glass behind him into the side yard beyond the drive.

She was oddly sensitive in that moment to the details of sight and sound, and she noticed that the yard had been partly mowed, the power mower standing at rest on the clean line dividing the clipped and shaggy grass. She heard the rich roar, quickly reduced, of the Jaguar in the drive.

"Are you all right?" Hardy said.

"Yes, thank you. I'm quite all right."

"Would you like me to tell you about it?"

"I think you had better."

"Well, there isn't much to tell, when you come right down to it. Our only witness is your neighbor on the west, Mr. Winslow, and he didn't really see anything much. He was upstairs in a room on the second floor of his house this afternoon about two or two thirty, he couldn't be exact, and he looked out the window and saw your husband reclining in one of those canvas sling chairs on your rear terrace. He said your husband had been mowing the grass, and Winslow assumed, naturally, that he had merely taken a break to rest and cool off, which was probably true. It's been a pretty hot day, as you know.

"Anyhow, Winslow happened to look out the window again about twenty minutes later, and your husband was no longer in the sling chair. He was lying on his face on the terrace. Apparently he had stood up, taken a step or two, and collapsed. Winslow was alarmed, as you might expect, and he hurried over. To put it bluntly, if you will excuse me, your husband was dead. Before dying, he had been very ill. To his stomach, I mean."

Hardy stopped, watching Mrs. Dearly, and Mrs. Dearly

continued to stare through the bright glass into the bright yard. Her face in profile was beautiful and composed. It was almost, Hardy thought, serene. Being basically an old-fashioned man, he found an old-fashioned simile in his head: *she has a face like a cameo*, he thought.

"I've warned him and warned him about it," she said at last.

"About what, Mrs. Dearly?"

"Working so hard in the hot sun. He loved working in the yard, you know, and he insisted on spending practically every week-end at it. Sometimes, whenever he could, week days also. He was getting too old for such work, especially in the hot sun. He had a stroke, I guess. A heat stroke or something. Doesn't someone with a heat stroke become violently ill to his stomach?"

"I think so. I'm not sure about it."

"Where is my husband now? His body, I mean. And why are the police involved? Is it normal for the police to be involved in such a matter?"

"We were called by the doctor who was summoned by Mr. Winslow."

"Why should the doctor call the police?"

"He thought it wise, considering the circumstances of the death. He was not prepared to certify the cause without an autopsy."

"An autopsy? Is that where Cal is? Have you taken him away somewhere for an autopsy?"

"Yes. Sorry. We tried to locate you, but we couldn't."

"Can you perform an autopsy on my husband without my permission?"

"If you want to make an issue of it, we can get an order. But it would be much better if you would simply agree. I don't see why you shouldn't."

"Since you will obviously do it in any event, I might just as well agree. You are right, anyway. There is no reason why I shouldn't."

"Thank you. The body will be returned to you as soon as possible." He paused for a moment, apparently trying to put in order the words to express properly what needed to be said. "I must say that I admire the way you are taking this. I was afraid it might be an ordeal."

She turned her face toward him then, lighted by the sun on one side and softened by shadows on the other. Her lips assumed the shape of the merest smile.

"I'm not the hysterical type, Lieutenant. I suppose I'm a bit numb, really, I can hardly believe that Cal is dead. It's

often that way when someone dies suddenly, isn't it? Later it will strike me fully and all at once."

"Will you be all right here alone? It's a large house, but apparently there are no servants around."

"We have a cook and a housekeeper, but they were given the week-end off. Cal and I were on our own for two days."

"Too bad. If someone had been around, something might have been done in time to save him."

"Yes. Poor Cal. Dying alone like that. I think, Lieutenant, if you don't mind, that I would like to go upstairs. Is there anything more you want of me?"

"No. I'm finished here. I can't tell you how sorry I am that we had to intrude this way."

"Not at all. Under the circumstances, as you said, there was nothing else you could do."

"You're gracious to say so. Goodbye, Mrs. Dearly."

"Goodbye, Lieutenant. Please find your own way out."

"Yes. Of course."

He looked thin and worn, almost ravaged, in his wilted seersucker. His right hand moved again in that hesitant gesture as he turned and went out of the room.

Standing quite still, listening, Mrs. Dearly heard his steps receding in the hall, then the front door closing behind him. She continued to stand there, listening intently. She had heard the movements of the police car and the Jaguar in the drive, and now, after several minutes, she heard the police car in the street, its engine starting and the swiftly diminishing sound of it as it sped away.

The silence of the house gathered around her, and she turned in silence and went through the hall into the kitchen and downstairs from the kitchen into the basement. She walked directly to the wall to her left, the wall toward the side yard where the power mower stood at rest between the clipped and shaggy grass; and she was just reaching overhead for the circular handle of a valve when someone spoke behind her.

"I don't believe I'd do that if I were you, Mrs. Dearly," the voice said.

How strange it was! she thought afterward. Following the first moment of terror, when her breath stopped and her heart withered, she was immediately calm and lucid and without any fear whatever. She thought clearly before turning around that Douglas must surely be kept a secret now, however difficult it might be, for he would be considered a motive at the very least, if not a conspirator—and the funny thing

about it was that Douglas was not a motive at all, but only a kind of fringe benefit.

"I thought you had gone, Lieutenant," she said.

"Dickson went," he said. "As for me, I must confess to intruding again. I came in through the basement window there."

He walked over and stood beside her, looking up at the valve she had intended to turn. To the right of the valve, slanting down toward the basement floor, were about six feet of pipe that made a right turn, by means of an elbow joint, and passed through the concrete foundation.

The Lieutenant began again. "While I was waiting for you to come home this afternoon from wherever you were, I got to wondering how your husband might have been poisoned—if he was poisoned, which was at least a possibility. In a container of something to drink, perhaps? In something he ate, perhaps? But that would have been dangerous, and foolishly so. The container to be analyzed. The remains of the food, ditto. Then I walked along the side of the house, and I noticed that the ground under the outside faucet was damp—and it came to me. What does the kind of man who loves working in the yard, as your husband did, almost invariably do when he gets hot and thirsty? He takes a drink from the outside faucet. Usually from his cupped hands. That's what your husband did, Mrs. Dearly, and that's what you *knew* he would do."

The Lieutenant paused, still staring up at the valve with an expression of admiration, almost of wonder. Perhaps he was waiting for Mrs. Dearly to speak, but at the moment Mrs. Dearly did not feel like speaking.

"It was clever," he went on. "You're a clever woman, Mrs. Dearly. Between that inside valve and the outside faucet there are six feet of one-inch pipe. It was almost perfect for your purpose, wasn't it? A perfect container. First, you closed the inside valve and drained the six feet of pipe. This you did merely by opening the outside faucet, letting the water in the pipe flow out, then closing the faucet afterward. Then, with a wrench, you disconnected the six feet of pipe below the valve and put into the pipe, your perfect container, whatever you used to kill your husband. This done, you reconnected the pipe to the valve, opening the valve to let water run through and fill the pipe. By closing the valve after the pipe was filled, you had a deadly liquid ready to run from the outside faucet whenever it was opened.

"It wouldn't run long or as freely as it would have run with

the valve open, of course, for six feet of one-inch pipe will hold by my arithmetic only about one quart of water. But that was enough. It was sufficient to give your husband a long, fatal drink. And now you have come down here to open the valve again and to flush from the pipe what may be left of the poison. What kind of poison did you use, Mrs. Dearly? Well, never mind. I don't expect you to tell me. Something nearly tasteless, of course, and soluble in water. We'll find out."

Mrs. Dearly sighed and dusted her hands by brushing them softly together. She was feeling positively exhilarated.

"It is not I who is clever, Lieutenant," she said. "It's you. What you have said is logical and rather convincing, I'm sure, but it is only a theory, and it will be quite exciting to see if you can prove it or not."

But Mrs. Dearly's exhilaration was only that of excitement, no more. The Lieutenant had no difficulty proving his theory—there was enough poison left in the pipe, and it wasn't long before they found Douglas . . .

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Blood Money

This story has a curious history. It gave your Editors what might be called "the daisy petals"—did we like it, did we not . . .

Obviously, the last daisy petal said "yes" to us, but whatever the last petal may indicate for you, this is an important story. It has something important to say, something that should be said, something that we should all listen to . . .

It was shortly before five o'clock in the afternoon of August 10th (the hottest August 10th in eighty-six years, the newspapers pointed out helpfully) that Charley Rosco saw, and at once recognized, Ben Lomax.

For three days in a row the heat had been killing; the plant wasn't air-conditioned (what laundry ever was?), and each day fewer and fewer employees had turned up for work. Some had taken their cars and headed for cooler climate, others sought refuge in deliciously chill bars or movie houses, others simply stayed at home and drank cold bottles from the refrigerator and turned the fans up.

As a result, Charley had little to deliver that day. He had a private hospital and two nursing homes on his route, and by pleading "Emergency" to Max White, the foreman, had managed to get most of their linen finished. After delivering that, only a few bundles remained in his truck. Most of these, he found, belonged to customers who had evidently also fled the sweating little city.

So he had nothing to do, really; by one o'clock he could have gone home. If his car had been in good repair—but it wasn't. Marie, his wife, didn't take the heat too well—it made her cross, and when Marie was cross with anything, Marie was cross with everything.

So Charley did something he almost never did: he gold-bricked. He thought of it in exactly that term, and thought,

too, that it had been a long time since he'd heard anybody use the word.

Anyway, he parked the laundry truck in an alley, gathered up the few bundles, and went around the corner to a bar. He made two bottles of beer last over three hours as he watched TV and joined in the conversation. It was all very pleasant, and he hated to leave.

Charley saw the man bent over the motor of the car, hood up, when he was driving back to the laundry. Sympathetic, remembering his own out-of-commission automobile, he slowed down as he came abreast of it, with some thought of stopping and offering help. The man lifted his head, and Charley, incredulous, recognized him instantly.

The man's hair was matted with sweat—not neatly combed back, as in the pictures—and his hairline mustache was almost obliterated in stubble: but it was him. There was no doubt about it. It was Ben Lomax.

The man wiped his wet face with a grease-smeared arm, bent over the engine again immediately. Obviously he hadn't realized he'd been spotted. Charley Rosco, his heart thumping queerly, drove on, wondering what to do. And as he drove he saw another laundry truck ahead of him. This had to belong to Lew Livingston, whose route adjoined his own.

Charley blew his horn, waved Lew over to the curb, jumped out of his truck, and ran up to him.

Lew was a stocky sort of fellow, with a seamed face. If Charley ever got sorry for himself thinking over his own domestic troubles, he thought about Lew's problems, and his own went away.

"Listen," he said, panting a little bit.

"Whaddaya holding me up for, Charley? I gotta get back to the *plant*!"

"Listen, Lew—back there on Hargraves, near Poplar—there's a guy trying to fix a car. I'm sure he's Ben Lomax. Y'know—?"

For a moment Lew continued to scowl irritably. Then he made a long face, pushing out his mouth. "Benny the Barber? The—the bank robber?" Charley nodded quickly. "You sure?"

"Lew, I'm *sure*. What should I do, Lew? Huh? What's your idea?"

Livingston didn't hesitate. "*My* idea? Call the cops! Let *them* handle it. He killed a guy, that last bank he robbed, didn't he? So let the cops take the risk. They get paid for it!"

A sudden idea seemed to strike Lew. He pulled his head

back into the truck, turned the truck ponderously around, stuck his head out again.

"Stay here, Charley," he said. "I'm gonna take a little ride—see if he's still there, see if it's really him . . . Wait here."

What with the beer, the heat, and the excitement, Charley Rosco didn't feel like moving, much, anyway. He stood in the shade of his truck and fanned himself with a bundle of laundry tickets. He had never taken any part in having anyone arrested, and he felt somewhat uncertain about the whole thing.

Charley Rosco had some vague idea that it would go like this: Lew Livingston returning, followed by several squad cars. *You positive it's Benny the Barber?* the cops ask. *Absolutely*, says Charley. The cops exchange glances. *Benny's a hard man*, one of them says. *And a dangerous one*, the other says. They reflect. *Tell ya what we're gonna do*, one says at last. *You—addressing Charley—you park your truck across the road at Linden. The cop turns to Lew Livingston. You do the same at Poplar. That'll cut that block on Hargraves completely off, so he won't be able to make a getaway in his car. You're not scared, are you?* the cop asks. Lew snorts. *I'm not afraid a nothing*, he says, tough. Charley's reply has more dignity. *I know my duty as a cit—*

Charley looked up, his train of thought abruptly cut. Lew was back. Alone. He seemed annoyed.

"The cops picked him up," he said.

"Then it was him?"

"How do I know? Think I tagged along? You crazy? I watched from two blocks away, through my rear mirror. They picked him up and they left his junk-heap sitting there in the street." Lew hesitated, seemed about to say something else. He shook his head instead. Then he muttered, "Gotta get back to the damn *plant*," and was off.

After a moment's confused thought, Charley followed him.

After he got home and took a shower, he was about to tell his wife. But Marie put an envelope in front of him, then busied herself setting supper—cold cuts, pickles, delicatessen potato salad, iced tea—from commercially bottled concentrate—and supermarket cake. It had been too hot for cooking. Charley picked up the envelope, addressed in his daughter's not-yet-firm script, and took the letter out.

Dear Mommy and Dady,

*We went swimming and boating today it was lovely
Johnny was bad*

*your loveing daughter
Jeanette*

Underneath, in a string of wild print, up hill and down dale: *Lier i was not Dear Momm and Dad ples send me dolar love Joh*

A wormlike squiggle at the margin evidently did duty for the missing terminal. Charley said, "What the heck, they're supposed to go swimming and boating *every* day, aren't they?"

"They do," Marie said, "but she loves it so much she just has to mention it."

Her husband nodded. By severe saving and self-denial, and by borrowing on their insurance policies, they had managed to send both children to summer camp for the first time. Thinking of this made Charley think of something else.

"Uncle Eddie Aurelius in town today?" he asked. She nodded. It was her uncle who, by agreeing to take a second mortgage, had enabled them to buy the house: Uncle Eddie Aurelius, so-called to distinguish him from Uncle Eddie Jackson, who didn't have a button to his name. "What did he say?"

"He said not to worry about it."

The little knot in Charley's stomach went away. He reached for a slice of head-cheese, dropped it, smacked his forehead.

"It's those screens," Marie said hopelessly. "The mosquitoes—"

"No, no! Listen, Marie, what do you think happened today?" And he told her.

When he was finished she said very quietly, "Are you crazy? Are you out of your mind?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Why did you have to tell *Lew* anything? Why did you need *Lew*? You could have told the police yourself."

"I don't get you, Marie. What difference—"

"Charley. Are you the only person in town who doesn't know that there's a ten-thousand-dollar reward out for Benny Lomax?"

Charley gaped. After a moment he said, "I forgot. Would you believe it? I forgot all about it. Yeah, I did know, but I—"

"Well, you can be sure Lew Livingston didn't forget. You notice how quick he went to the police without coming back for you?"

Reflecting, Charley did notice. The more he thought, the more he thought he saw.

"The devil with it!" he said abruptly. "If that's what he wanted—the reward—he can have it. You think I'd touch it?"

"Listen here!" Marie's voice went shrill. "Don't be so generous! *He* can have it? *Oh*, no—"

Charley slammed his hand on the table. "*Shut up!*" His own voice went shrill. "You realize they could send this guy to the electric chair? How do you suppose I'm going to feel if that happens? If I'd stopped to think about it this afternoon, maybe I never would have done it. I never had anybody's blood on my hands before! What do I need it for now?"

Very quietly she said, "He killed a man. If he wasn't captured, maybe he would've killed a lot more."

Her husband nodded. His fingers played with a piece of bread. "Okay," he said after a moment. "Granted. I *should* have turned him in. It was my duty as a citizen. Okay. I had to do it. But I don't have to take blood money. *Oh*," he went on, speaking more quickly, "I know what you're going to say. There are so many things we could do with the money. There always is. The house. The kids. Sure. Suppose I take it. I pay off what we owe. I buy a piano. I buy bikes. And then one of the other kids says, 'You bought this piano with blood money. They electrocuted a man so your dad could get the money for that bike.' Huh? Sure they would. You know that."

Marie looked down. Charley continued, "What am I breaking my back for, carrying bundles of laundry up and down stairs—just to keep a roof over their heads, just to send them to camp? *Marie!* I am trying," he said doggedly, hitting each word hard, "I am trying to raise them up, and so are you, to be honest people. To know that you just don't do something *just* to get money. That if a person can't get money in a good and honest way, then they do without the money, and what it can buy. I—"

His voice choked. Very gently Marie said, "Eat your supper." And he knew he had won.

It was after he finished the iced tea that he reflected, aloud, that he still didn't know, after all, if the man *was* Ben Lomax. Call the police, Marie said. And so he did.

"Headquarters, Sergeant Callan speaking."

"Say . . . This fellow you picked up on Hargraves Street a little after five—is he Ben Lomax, or isn't he?"

There was a pause. Then Sergeant Callan said, "Who is this? Who are—who wants to know, huh?"

Confused, annoyed, and with the average man's almost instinctive reluctance to give his name to the police, Charley asked, "What difference does it make, who? All I want—"

The voice of Sergeant Callan, which had kept caution for its main note, now became openly hostile, "Yeah? Well, don't worry about it!" the Sergeant snapped, and hung up.

"They must of thought I was one of his gangster pals," he told Marie. Later it occurred to him that perhaps the man had turned out not to be Lomax after all, and that the police were too embarrassed to discuss it. He was wrong, of course, on both counts.

As he found out the next afternoon.

Lew Livingston, face inflamed with sun and rage, came over to him, half on the run, waving a newspaper, shouting as he came.

"You see this? Charley! You see the paper? Those dirty, rotten—" His voice went on and on.

Charley took the local paper, tried to concentrate. There it was. The same picture of Lomax, neat and slick, that the papers and television and reward posters had featured; next to it the picture of the man as he had been when Charley saw him—dirty, stubble-faced.

And the headline read: *CITY POLICE TAKE BANK ROBBER.*

Ben ("Benny the Barber") Lomax, whose successful \$50,000 holdup of the Second National Bank last month resulted in the death of bank guard Frank Foster, was captured here yesterday. Arrest was made by Patrolmen Thomas V. Colcott and Edgar Trapp. The keen-eyed police officers . . .

After that everything moved so fast that Charley, afterward, was not so clear about the details. Lew was loud and outraged, Max White the foreman came out to protest. It was still hot, the plant was steamy. Charley went to get a drink of water, but even the water was almost hot, it seemed. A picture came to him of Benny the Barber being led to execution, the grease from the motor of his car still there on his forehead where Charley had seen him wipe it.

He tried to obliterate the picture with another—of Frank Foster, the bank guard, struggling to rise from the pool of his own blood. Foster had been shot in the stomach, and Charley remembered that long ago he'd heard that this was the most painful kind of gunshot wound. In the Army they'd said that a man with a gunshot wound there should never be given anything to drink—no, no matter how much he begged for it, screamed for it . . .

He was still thirsty. The water had a coppery taste to it. He took his lips away from the tiny bubble of water . . . There was a reporter. Max had called him. Charley told him the story, then Lew—calmer now, though not by much—told him his.

"You two better go with him," Max said. "What do you

mean, your deliveries?" he said fretfully to Charley's low-keyed protests. "Those few bundles? The route man will take care of them, and take care of Lew's too. Go on."

First they went to the editor of the paper. He called the Commissioner, the Commissioner called the Chief of Police. Then they were all in the Commissioner's office—Charley, Lew, the reporter, the Commissioner, the Chief, and the two cops, Colcott and Trapp.

Trapp brazened it out all the way, but Colcott got confused. It didn't take long before the Chief got him to admit he'd been lying. What was the idea? the Chief demanded. How come they tried to file a false report?

Sweating copiously, standing on one foot, then the other, Colcott said, "Yeah, but Chief, all right, I agree—"

"You agree! Thanks a lot!"

"Yeah, but Chief, me and Syd, Patrolman Trapp, I mean, uh, *we* took the risks. Right? *You* know, a guy like that, a hood like The Barber, it was just luck he wasn't armed, but *we* didn't know that, we took the risk he could of shot us both, maybe, like Foster—"

"Will you for crysake get to the point?"

Trapp, blank-faced, but with a note of something close to contempt in his voice, said, "The point is the reward, Chief."

Then:

Lew: "There! You heard him! Did you hear—"

Reporter: "Now we're getting some place!"

Chief: "What reward, you blockhead?"

And the Commissioner, lips compressed to a thin line, moist hands folded across his bulging, translucent shirt, nodded his head.

"Now listen," said the Commissioner. "Everybody. Okay?" Everybody listened. "All right. Too hot to shout. Now. The policy of this department, like the policy of most other departments of public safety, is that police don't collect rewards. Right, Chief?"

The Chief nodded. Once.

"The reason is," the Commissioner went on patiently, "that they cannot take outside money when the City is paying them. See? You took a risk? Correct. That's your job. If you hadn't tried to make monkeys out of the Chief and me, maybe we would've seen to it you got a department medal." Trapp's mouth went ugly. "In fact, if I'm not mistaken, the courts have held that a peace officer isn't entitled to a reward for an arrest made in his own jurisdiction. You go to the beach, you pick up somebody there and turn him in to the local authorities like any private citizen, you collect the re-

ward. If there is one. But for any arrests you make here, or any information you give here, you don't collect a reward."

"Charley and me collect it," Lew said.

The Commissioner's face showed a degree of annoyance, very quickly concealed. Lew, after all, was a citizen, residing locally, and might possess a large family of actual or future voters.

"I trust you may, Mr. Livingston," he said. "I sincerely hope that you and Mr. Rosco will collect the reward. I'm sure you deserve it. But let's not be premature." The smile left Lew's face. "The reward money was put up, as you probably know," the Commissioner continued, "partly by the bank, partly by the County Bankers' Association, partly by the newspaper and the Chamber of Commerce, and the rest was contributed by private citizens. Now," he said briskly, as Lew began to become restless, "the reward was offered in the usual terms—for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Ben Lomax, alias Benny the Barber, and so on. He's been arrested. But he hasn't even been indicted, let alone brought to trial and convicted."

Lew gaped, showing the backs of his teeth. He seemed shocked. The Commissioner got up, shook hands with him and Charley and the reporter. "Public-spirited citizens are an example to everyone," he said. Then he asked them to excuse him, as he and the Chief had some official business to conduct. His eyes rested on the two policemen. Their eyes did not rest on him. Colcott looked at the floor; Trapp looked, first at Lew Livingston, then at Charley. Hot as the air in the office was, Charley felt the coldness of that look, and wondered at it, but not for long.

The reporter's questions made him forget Patrolman Trapp.

"What are you planning to do with your shares of the reward," the reporter asked.

"That's *my* business," said Lew, automatically truculent. He had sense enough to amend his words at once, "I mean, I dunno exactly what my plans are, as yet. Let's not be premature," he concluded, his words a forlorn echo of the Commissioner's.

The reporter then put the same question to Charley. The answer was almost whispered.

"What did you say?"

Louder, but still low: "I wouldn't touch it."

Nor would Charley elaborate. Lew, for once, had nothing to say. He seemed in a reverie.

Charley's refusal to explain was not allowed to stand. And

so, later, he got the reporter off his back by making a short statement:

"My only reason for reporting Lomax was my fear that he was capable of killing more people"—so ran the polished, published version of Charley Rosco's faltering words. "I did my duty as a citizen, and not for a reward. Lomax's fate is up to the jury. He will probably be sentenced to death, or at least to life imprisonment. I couldn't accept any money for that." He thought that only his mind had repeated the words, blood money; but there they were in the newspaper. *It would be blood money.*

The account held a further surprise for him. *Lewis Livingston, who joined Rosco in reporting the killer's whereabouts to police, concurred in his coworker's decision.* Somehow, Charley thought he would not want to talk to Lew about it.

Other people wanted to talk to Charley about it, though.

Patrolman Colcott: "Well, I guess you got the right idea. I thought you was trying to beat us out of the money, was all. To tell you the truth, just in confidence, it wasn't my idea to put in that report. But I got, like, carried away, you know? It was somebody else's idea. The Commissioner, he really threw the book at us. But I got to admire you for sticking by your principles."

Jeanette Rosco: "'Oh I was so exited when I read the nespaper clippings and shoewed them to everybody in Camp and Ant Sussan our cownsilser said your father is not only breave he is ethicle to and I was so prowed.'"

Uncle Eddie Aurelius: "Well, Marie, that's quite a guy you married. But me, I'd think twice before turning that much money down."

John Rosco: "'Dadd he shut any bulits at you Ples send me a suvenir of the robbery alll the gys say you are rite its blood money.'"

And so, finally, Lew.

"I don't know what got inta me, Charley. I just kept thinking of all the things I could do with the money—I didn't even think of it as \$5,000, just the whole amount. I mean, to get so carried away that I didn't even think of *sharing* it!"

"You couldn't share it with *me*, Lew. Far as I'm concerned, you can have the whole amount."

"Ah, no. Ah, no. No blood money for me. I put the whole thing out of my mind. Hey—you know—I was talking to one of my customers, name of Bergdol, I think he must change his tablecloths after every damn *meal*—half his wash is tablecloths! Well, so he says, Lomax got off with, what was it? \$73,000? Besides those other jobs he pulled. So he can *afford*

the best criminal lawyer, Bergdol says, and maybe he can get a hung jury or a, whaddayacallit, a mistrial. After all, it's been *done*. But that's not *all*: Bergdol says he could do it again, with a big lawyer, even a second trial. Fix the jury, maybe.

"Well—"

Lew, carried away by Mr. Bergdol's fancies, swept on. "So if he does it *twice*, Charley, maybe gets a reversal or one of them legal things, and the government or the D.A. figures, What the *hell*. How much is this going to *cost*? So they wait till everybody's forgot about it and they let him go. Happened *before*. So—bloong!—there goes your reward. Huh? So I put the whole thing outa my mind."

But Charley couldn't put it out of his.

Whatever the sum of money was that Ben Lomax—he had, for one brief fortnight, fifteen years before, been a student at a barber college, which was enough for an imaginative reporter to tag him "Benny the Barber"—had made off with, none of it remained with him. Not one of Mr. Bergdol's high-flying conceits was realized. Lomax was defended by a court-appointed lawyer, who used no histrionics, no movie or television techniques, baffled no witnesses, found no legal loopholes, demanded no mistrial.

In his summing-up he reminded the jury that although the defendant had been convicted of bank robbery twice before, he had never been accused of violence against any of his victims, and this, the attorney said, lent credence to the defendant's claim that he had not intended even to fire his gun during the commission of the crime he was now charged with; that it had gone off by accident. Therefore, even if the jury should find the defendant guilty of first degree murder, they would have ample grounds to make a recommendation for mercy.

The jury was out two hours and brought in a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree. There was no recommendation of mercy.

Lomax said he hoped his case would be a lesson to young people everywhere to "keep clean." He did not elaborate.

The judge confined his words to the legal formula of the sentence itself.

"We will appeal," said the condemned man's lawyer. "Of course we will appeal."

He did not bother to point out that one appeal was mandatory—and free. After that, the condemned man might appeal, of course, as many times as he could pay for. As he could not pay for any, there was no reason to believe that he would not

be executed in the briefest time that the ponderous progress of the law allowed.

"Well, what do you think about it?" everybody—it seemed like everybody—asked Charley. He said that he didn't want to think about it. But that night he dreamed about it. Once again he saw Ben Lomax, grease-smeared, led to execution; once again Frank Foster lay writhing in his life's blood.

But this time there was something else: he, the dreamer, was compelled to look at his own hands. Unwillingly, in fear and trembling, he finally looked. His relief at finding them clean of any trace of blood was so great that he awoke.

The local newspaper carried an editorial which briefly reviewed Lomax's crime, his trial, and its own role in setting up the reward. The editorial went on to say, "That it is entirely proper for such rewards to be offered, goes without saying. Nevertheless, public opinion has not always been kind to those who have accepted them. It was the hope of a reward, not civic consciousness, which brought about the downfall of Jesse James, as cold-blooded a killer and thief who ever lived. It is ironic that the bandit himself has been glorified by those who should know better, while Robert Ford, who shot him, has gone down in popular history as 'a dirty little coward.'

"No such stigma can be placed on two local men whose prompt, courageous actions resulted in the career of a latter-day Jesse James being brought to an end. Charles Rosco and Lewis Livingston deserve the plaudits of their fellow-citizens. They did what decent men should do, and they staunchly refuse any reward for having done so. What a lesson their brave, selfless conduct should be to those, alas, too many, who are always seeking handouts."

And the editorial concluded with a denunciation of subsidized medical care for the aged.

Charley's children (now back from camp with summer's end) returned from school with shining eyes and flushed cheeks to report that their teachers had read the editorial aloud in class, and that the principal had made it the subject of an address during assembly.

"All right. This is what your mother and I always try to teach you," Charley said. "You do the right thing because it *is* the right thing. And if you know that it's wrong to take money for something, well, you don't take it, even though you might need it, for instance," he wound up—somewhat confused, not being used to moralizing. And the two children listened to him, soberly, intently, without wriggling.

Strangers stopped him in the street to shake his hand.

Lomax's appeal for a new trial was refused by the court.

Another date was set for the execution of the death sentence. His lawyer, occupied with a trial for embezzlement, said he could not discuss plans for another appeal. Professional etiquette prevented his asking, "Who's going to pay for it?" Only action by the Governor could prevent a certain electrician, name never mentioned—thus giving the impression that it was not a man, but some impersonal force—from earning his fee of \$250 for killing Lomax. And there was no reason to expect the Governor to act.

And then, one evening, Lew Livingston visited the Roscoe home. Marie set out coffee and crackers, apologizing for there being no cake. "How is Clara?" she asked.

Lew made a gesture which almost upset the coffee.

"It's not Clara," he said, answering, not Marie's question, but some question unmasked outside of his own mind. "It's her old lady."

"Mrs. Barnett is sick?"

"Sick in the *head*!" said Lew in a rush of words. He hesitated, then let it all come out.

"The old lady gets up at six in the morning and turns on the television. She sits and she looks at the college professor—don't ask *me* what the hell she understands—she just sits and looks. She watches all the programs for the little kids who aren't even old enough to go to school, she— Listen." Lew's mouth worked, his hands moved, before he could catch hold of his words. "All day long, from six in the morning until whenever the Late Late Show goes off, the old lady sits in the living room and watches the television.

"She *eats* in front of the television, Clara has to bring it to her. She's hard o' hearing, so she keeps it up high. Her eyes aren't too good, so it's focused just right for *her*, which means it's blurred for everybody else. You dasn't turn it down for even a minute, you dasn't focus out the blur even for a minute, you dasn't try and watch another program even for a minute—and, Charley, lemme tell *you*, may heaven help you if you try to turn that damn box *off* for even so much as *half* a minute!"

Charley and Marie made sympathetic noises. This was not news.

"I'm going outa my *mind*," Lew said, holding his head as if only the pressure of his hands could keep the skull from falling into two separate parts.

"But that's not the worse," he went on. "Ohmigod, that's bad enough, because what can ya *do*? You try to fix the television any way but the way she wants it and she carries on. She screams, she yells, she grabs my hands. What can ya

do? The kid gives me a hard time, but can I hit an old lady? They'd put me in jail. We have company in the house, we hafta have 'em in the kitchen.

"But that's not the worse of it . . ." He paused, and the furrows in his long face deepened in misery. "The kid is fourteen years old now. But she's, uh, well, she could pass for seventeen, eighteen, easy. The kids nowadays, they seem to grow up like mushrooms, you know? Overnight.

"She sleeps in the same bedroom with the old lady. Tiny little room, two beds, one dresser. *Our* bedroom, Clara's and mine, the same size. But suppose she wants to bring in a friend? Where's she going to go? Entertain anybody in the same room where that loud, blurry set is blasting away? She going to entertain her friends in the kitchen?" Lew's eyes were bloodshot.

"When she was little and she had a girl friend, so they went and sat on her bed together. But she ain't little any more . . . What's the result? The result is she's hardly ever at home any more. She says she's with this friend, with that friend, at their house, and they do their homework together. Maybe so. But—*all the time*? Charley, she's a pretty girl, the boys all like her, she likes them. Not the ones her own age, a boy fourteen years old doesn't have a car—"

Marie sighed deeply, nodding.

Abruptly Lew said, "So I'm taking my share."

After a second Charley asked, "Your share of *what*?" And almost instantly understood.

"With that," Lew said, nodding his head as he spoke, "I can put another room on the house. The kid can have a decent room of her own to fix up. Move her bed out of the old lady's room and I can move that damn television set *and* the old lady *in*. *She* won't care. Then the kid can have her friends in, with the living room to themselves, and Clara and me can sit in the kitchen—what the hell?—but keep an eye on things, you know . . ."

His voice died away.

"It's up to you," Charley said.

"Maybe you don't know how easy it is for a girl to get in with the wrong crowd, your kids are too young, but if you were in *my* shoes you'd do just what I'm doing—take the money, put on the extra room, and have your kid stay around the house instead of going off who knows where and doing who knows what with a bunch of wild kids older than her."

"It's up to you," Charley repeated.

"She looks like sixteen or seventeen, see, but she's only got the sense of her own age, only fourteen—"

"Lew," said Charley slowly and stiffly, "for the last time—it's up to you."

Lew relaxed. "Then you agree, huh? It's all right, then. We take the money."

The stiffness left Charley in an instant. "We? There isn't going to be any *we* about it! You want the damned money, you take it. That's your privilege. I wouldn't touch it with a—"

Lew bounded to his feet, his face convulsed. "So you're still on your high horse, huh? You're gonna leave me take the dirty looks and the wisecracks all by myself! You're gonna be the good one, huh, and I'm gonna be the bad one, huh? What makes you so high-class? When did you become a preacher, Rosco? 'Rosco'? *That's* a laugh, all by itself. My old man knew your grandfather when he couldn't speak six words of English. *His* name wasn't no *Rosco*! Rocco—that's what it was, *Rocco*! And you—"

Charley got up and Marie quickly ran between the two of them and grabbed her husband's arm.

"Get out of here," he said. "Get out, Lew—"

"Wait," said Lew as he left. "*You wait!*"

They heard him drive away. Then Marie said bitterly, "That's a nice enemy you found for yourself."

"I found?" He stared at her. She met his eyes defiantly. He yelled. "You know what that money is? It's the price of Frank Foster's blood!" He pounded on the table. "Did anybody give Frank Foster's widow five thousand dollars?"

"That has nothing to do with it," she yelled back. And then they shouted at each other, neither hearing the other, till they suddenly fell silent on seeing the children at the door of their room—open-mouthed, astonished, all set to whimper.

Charley turned on his heel and walked out.

Next morning, Max White, the foreman said, "Boss wants to see you, Charley?" And he repeated it, assuring him it was no joke.

So Charley made a brief trip to the washroom and then passed through the outer office, where he almost never went, into the inner office, where he had absolutely never gone before.

He could remember quite well when old Mr. Damrosch had not been old, had been in the full flower of vigorous late middle-age. Mr. Damrosch had not been seen too often around the plant in those days; he had let his brother-in-law, Mr. Cooper, stay in the office while he himself had spent long, long vacations in Saratoga Springs, Daytona Beach, Ber-

muda, and similar places. But Mr. Cooper was dead, the laundry business was not what it was, and although he still wore spats and a flower in his buttonhole, Mr. Damrosch nowadays stayed on hand most of the year—"Minding the stoor," as he put it.

He looked very natty this morning. And very old.

"The fact of the matter is, Charles," he said, as if continuing a discussion only recently interrupted, "that this business is not growing." He waved his hand: he had conceded a point, but it was not, the gesture said, a very important point. "But on the other hand," he stroked his neat white mustache, "on the other hand, neither is it shrinking. Not any more. Not for the past few years. You've noticed that. Everybody who wants a washing machine has got one. Everybody who prefers a laundromat goes to one. We have leveled off, you see. We have a sound business here, a very sound business.

"The hospitals and nursing homes are not going to go out of business, and neither are they going to make the tremendous investment of putting in their own laundries, having to hire extra help, and so on. Not worth it. No, sir. Neither will our linen supply customers go out of business. As long as hair grows, people will need barbers, barbers will need towels, jackets, and so on. Hotels—"

He leaned forward as if something had just occurred to him. "And I tell you *what!*" he said. "I shouldn't be surprised to see, oh, any number of *motels* opening up on the outskirts when this new highway they're talking about goes through! And why shouldn't *we* get some of those, eh?—some of their business. No reason why old Ben Steinberg should be allowed to get it all, eh, Charles?" And as he mentioned the name of the owner of his chief competitor, the old man quirked one side of his mouth. Charley recognized a Traditional Joke, and smiled.

"Well, I don't mind saying, Mr. Damrosch"—Mr. Damrosch nodded his head rapidly and encouragingly, as if he very much wanted to hear what Charley didn't mind saying—"that if any of these new motels should happen to be opened on my route, well, it would certainly be very welcome."

Almost before Charley had finished the old man began to talk. "Oh, you can do better than *that*, Charles," he said, almost reproachfully. "You can certainly do better than *that*. Sure . . . We can do better than that for you."

"What do you mean, Mr. Damrosch?"

Mr. Damrosch opened his humidor, took out a cigar which certainly had never come from Havana, and offered it to

Charley, who declined. The old man lit the cigar with deliberation, and puffed. Then he said, "You know this has always been a family-owned corporation, Charles. Stock has never been available to the general public. *But—*" His voice took the last word on a rising note, and he cocked his head and looked at the smoke. "The Cooper Estate is willing, for the first time, to make some of its shares of stock available." The Cooper Estate, as everyone knew, consisted of Mr. Damrosch's niece, her son, and her third husband. The old man himself, a widower, was childless.

"There have been certain expenses which have to be met rather quickly." He gestured again. Details, details, the gesture said—unimportant details. "I have a certain say in the matter, and *I say—*" his eyelids, coming down, emphasized his words. "*I say, Charles, I do not want this stock to fall into the hands of outsiders, new faces with unfamiliar ways.*" He paused. "I want *you* to be the one to take it. Don't disappoint me, Charles."

Charley swallowed. "I don't have any money, Mr. Damrosch. Just my salary."

The old man's eyes, hand, mouth, cigar, signified: An acceptable gambit. One which need not, however, detain us very long.

"For five thousand dollars, Charles," said Mr. Damrosch, "you can secure a nice little block of stock in the firm for which you have worked all these years. Which has given you the possibility of maintaining your family. You realize, Charles, this would, in effect, make you my partner. How about that?"

"I don't have five thousand dollars."

The old man smiled. "Oh, I understand . . . You'd like a little cash, a nice roll of bills, to play around with, eh? Only natural. Get the wife, the kiddies, some presents. Go away to a decent place on your vacation. *I understand. I'm with you. I can swing it. I'll tell Lundquist—you know Harmon Lundquist, he was poor old Joe Cooper's lawyer—I'll just tell him that he will have to modify his demands. Forty-five hundred, I'll say, is the most you can offer. Or,*" he looked sharply up, as Charley still said nothing, "*four thousand. He'll have to sit still for it. That will give you a thousand to play with, and you'll have four thousand dollars' worth of stock in the plant to sock away till your kids are ready to go to college. Plus the div-i-dends, Charles. Plus the div-i-dends.*"

Speaking rather more loudly than he intended, Charley said, "I just don't *have* that kind of money, Mr. Damrosch!"

"Oh," said the old man softly, "*but you can get it. All you have to do is pick up the telephone. Eh?*"

"Lew Livingston can do that if he wants to. Not me."

The old man asked him if he'd prefer if *he*, Mr. Damrosch, did the telephoning? He could take care of everything. He could promise that nothing would even appear in the newspaper.

"No."

Suddenly the old man became pathetic. He slumped. They were coming at him like lions, he said, like wild lions. Money—that was all they wanted. His own flesh and blood. They wanted to give the business away to strangers. He'd bought stock from them—and bought again, when they wanted more. But he couldn't go on buying it, could he? He simply didn't have that much capital any more. He looked up, pleading.

"No," Charley said. He wondered if Mr. Damrosch had approached Lew and been turned down. Probably.

Mr. Damrosch shook his head. He seemed crushed. Then, very slowly, still shaking his head, he straightened up. "I'm older, a lot older than you, Charles," he said, "I've seen more of this rotten world than you, and I'll tell you what, Charles, I'll tell you this: *money never stinks.*"

But still Charley shook his head.

Mr. Damrosch sighed. "Well, you'd better get back to your route," he said. "If you see Freddy Choynsky outside, send him in. He's been hanging around, asking for a route. There's none open, but—well, I don't know, maybe we can find one, somehow."

Charley didn't need to have this spelled out for him. Fear, anger, despair . . . "Freddy Choynsky?" he said. "Didn't you say, when you fired him that last time, that you couldn't stand to see his face around?"

The old man's hooded eyes held him fast.

"Well . . ." the old man said deliberately, "maybe I could learn to . . ."

When he got home that evening Charley found Uncle Eddie Aurelius there.

"Look who's here," said Marie brightly, with a tight smile. "Uncle Eddie came in especially to see you." Her eyes and mouth sent him an unmistakable message.

Uncle Eddie Aurelius was a keg-shaped little man, with no neck and no hair, snapping blue eyes, and a cauliflower ear.

"You going to stop this nonsense?" he demanded.

Charley felt very tired. "How about some coffee, Marie?" he asked.

"You listen to what Uncle Eddie has to say," she said implacably.

What Uncle Eddie had to say was to recount, omitting no detail, the story of how he was asked to take the second mortgage in order to enable the Roscos to get their house; of what Charley had said, of what Marie had said, of what Aunt Loraine (Mrs. Uncle Eddie) had said, and, finally, what he, Eddie Aurelius had said. He then reminded them of each and every time a payment had been late and of what he had said on each occasion, having invariably been understanding and magnanimous.

"I know, Uncle Eddie. I *know*. You been very, very—"

"I've been very, very kind," the uncle snapped. "I know I have. I haven't pressed you. Am I a bloodsucker? I'm no bloodsucker. You are in to me for plenty of money. Do you think I'm a millionaire? Well, I'm not, kiddo—get that idea out of your soft head right now. Long as I knew you didn't *have* the money," he said, "long as I knew you couldn't *get* the money, I was willing to wait. But why in the hell should I wait now, when all you got to do is just pick up the phone and *ask* for the money?"

Charley said, "I can't."

"Oh, yes, you can," snapped Uncle Eddie, quick and fierce. "Oh, yes, you can. And you will, too. You want to be a hero? Not on *my* money, sonny, you're not going to be any hero. Listen. I wouldn't put you out of the house. Couldn't do it. But if I don't get the money owing to me, the money that's coming to me, I'm going to drop the whole thing. Sell out. Turn the mortgage over to a mortgage company. You think *they* will let you wait like I done? Ho *ho*. That dirty dog up there in the State pen, you think he's going to be grateful to you for not picking up the check?" He snorted, sought Marie's eyes.

She began to cry.

Charley threw back his head, spread his arms. He struck the table with his clenched fist. He seemed to be striking it into a pool of blood. Deeper and deeper his fist went into the blood. He sobbed. He sat and looked at his hands.

Then he walked over and picked up the telephone.

WILLIAM O'FARRELL

A Paper for Mr. Wurley

A fascinating story: how George Bostwick, high school senior, discovered the terrible dangers that lurk in our everyday lives . . . If you were George's English teacher, what mark would you give him?

My name is George Bostwick and next June I'm going to graduate from Santa Monica High School. Maybe. The reason I'm only maybe going to graduate is Mr. Wurley. He teaches English IV and he's a—you know, perfectionist?

He gave the class this practically impossible assignment that has to be handed in today. The assignment is that we have to write a paper on any subject that we're interested in, and I sat up most of last night thinking about subjects I was interested in, and they were and still are football, cars, detective stories, and girls, not necessarily in that order.

But I have a feeling that Mr. Wurley would think that I should not be interested in these things to the exclusion of, say, Percy Bysshe Shelley or Lord Byron, and when I fell asleep I was still waiting for the inspiration that had not yet come.

"Just write it in your own words," he said, "as though you were talking to a friend."

Okay, friend:

So, on account of having stayed up most of last night, I slept late this morning and missed the school bus. My Mom and Dad are back east visiting, so I'm staying with my cousin Freddie who has a little house up Malibu Canyon. But right now Freddie is off on this fishing trip and he didn't wake me up. It was nine o'clock when I got down to the Pacific Coast Highway and started thumbing rides and worrying about the paper that I hadn't written and about what would happen to me when I didn't hand it in.

Pretty soon this lady came along in an Austin-Healey Sprite. She stopped and I saw that she was a nice-looking

blonde lady but kind of old. She wore a wedding ring and must have been around thirty.

"You got a driver's license?"

"Sure," I said.

"Okay," she said, and started climbing out. "We're headed the same way, so you can drive me home." She got her knees jammed up against the steering wheel and had a hard time breaking free. "Like trying to get out of a sitz bath," she said.

Well, a Sprite's a sports car, and a little one at that, and it's not too easy for people of a certain age to get in and out of one, but that wasn't why she was finding it so tough. When she finally made it and walked around to climb into the other seat I saw what her trouble was. She was stoned! But stoned!

They got a thing in California called "Drunk in Auto." You can go to jail for it. Well, it was just last week that Freddie gave me the loan of his car to take the driving tests. My license being new and all, I wasn't sure I wanted to drive her anywhere.

"Maybe you'd like me to go over to the Mayfair Market and call a cab," I said.

"Young man," she said, "you leave me sitting on the highway, I'll have your Good Samaritan card picked up. You won't even be a Bad Samaritan. You'll be a Lousy Philistine. I live just this side the Sea Lion. Hop in the car and drive."

So I did what she told me to. And I'll say this for her—that was a real sweet car she owned. A stick job with four forward shifts, a tachometer, a windshield washer—the works. She wasn't any trouble, either. By the time we passed Malibu Pier she was asleep.

I looked in the side pocket and found her registration. Her name was Phyllis Bennett and she lived near the Sea Lion Café, like she'd said. A lot of picture people, actors and what-all live around there. I parked outside the gate in this thick wall and woke her up.

"You're home, Mrs. Bennett," I said. "Thanks for the lift."

For a minute she looked as though she was wondering who I was and how I'd come into her life. Then she smiled. "Hello, kid. Give me a hand."

I helped her out and through the gate and into a patio. Man, when I got inside was I surprised! It was real cool. Not fancy, you understand, but nice. You could hear the sound of waves down on the beach. There was a garden with flowers in it and a big white table with chairs around it and a red-and-white umbrella over it, and down at the other end of the patio there was a little swimming pool shaped like a kidney bean.

The house was nice, too. No tricked-up gingerbread—just a comfortable place to live. The beach stairs were on the right and there were three steps just ahead that led up to the door. Mrs. Bennett started for the door but, passing the table, she gave this sort of sigh and suddenly sat down.

"Got to rest a minute. Who are you, anyway?" she asked.

Well, I'm not what you might call gabby and I don't much like talking about myself, but I answered her the best I could. I told her my name and where I lived and how I was first-string tackle on the team at Samohi. She listened politely but she couldn't have been paying much attention because, while I was giving her a play-by-play rundown on last Saturday's game, she got up in the middle of the second quarter.

"Think I can make it now," she said.

I helped her up the steps. The door was open. She was starting to sag again when we went into the living room.

"Max! Hey, Max!" she called. Then she said, "Oh, I forgot. He's in Las Vegas with his red-headed so-called secretary. I'm talking about my husband, Max."

She went over to a sort of cabinet near the picture window and looked inside. "Well, what do you know!" she said. "Max went off and left me high and dry. Do me a little favor, George?"

"Well, I'd like to," I said, "but I'm already a half hour late for school. Would it take long?"

"Ten minutes, give or take a little, and I'll make it worth your while." She opened her handbag and handed me a bill. "Run up to the Mayfair for me and you can drive my car to school. Bring it back this afternoon."

I saw myself pulling up at Samohi in my little old Austin-Healey Sprite. "What should I get for you at the Mayfair, Mrs. Bennett?" I said.

"A fifth of scotch."

"What kind? Hey—this is a hundred-dollar bill!" I said.

"They can change it. Get any kind—grab the first bottle you see and make it fast," she said.

She sat down on a couch and I went out to the Sprite. A girl was sitting in it. She was pretty. In fact, she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. I knew who she was, too. What's more, she acted like she knew me.

"Hi, George. How's about a lift to Santa Monica? Would you be kind enough?" she said.

Would I be kind enough! When Dorothy Dupree, star of screen and TV, asks for a lift she's the one that's being kind! "I'd be glad to, Miss Dupree," I said, "but I got to drive up to the Mayfair first. How come you know my name?"

"I've seen you playing football, George. I watch you every time I get the chance, which is every time my drama coach will let me. I think you're wonderful. Call me Dorothy," she said.

"Okay, Dorothy." I vaulted happily into the driver's seat. "Want to run up to the Mayfair with me?"

"I can't," she said. "That's where my drama coach has gone. She'd see me and I'd never get to Santa Monica today. I live next door"—she pointed to another gate—"and when I saw you bringing Phyllis Bennett home I thought, this is my chance!"

"To do what?"

"To get off on my own a little while," she said. "To skip going to the studio just for once. No lines to study. No interviews. No dancing lessons. Is that too much to ask?"

I thought about it and decided that it wasn't. "Everybody ought to have some time off once in a while," I said. "When is this party you mentioned coming back?"

"Any minute now."

"And she'll make you do these things that you don't want to do?"

"That's her job and she's an expert at it," Dorothy said. "My mother's in Reno, see, and while she's establishing residence my drama coach is Head Disciplinary and Chairman of the Board combined."

I thought some more and came up with an answer. "There's a drainpipe a short ways up the beach," I said. "It's a big pipe and this time of year there isn't any water in it. If you're not afraid of maybe getting your clothes a little dirty—"

"Sandals, shorts, and sweater? They're expendable," she said.

Sure enough, that turned out to be what she had on. It was funny that I hadn't noticed them before. I must have been concentrating on her face. Her face was—you know, angelic? She had black hair, and the way the sun hit it made it look as though there was a halo perched on top.

"So you go down to the beach," I said. "Crawl through the drainpipe and wait for me on the other side. That's one place nobody will think to look for you. Okay?"

"Like it's a deal," she said.

That's beat talk, that "like" jive. You can't just say "okay." You got to say "like okay," and if you're real beat it's "like okay, man." I never went for it, being a—you know, purist?—and anyway it's sort of dated now. But coming from Dorothy I got to admit it sounded cute.

I watched her climb out and walk towards her own gate. Then I swung the Sprite in a U-turn and drove up to the market. I left it in the parking lot and went into the liquor department of the Mayfair. There were bottles of scotch lined up on the shelves on my right. I took one and carried it to the man behind the counter. I gave him Mrs. Bennett's hundred-dollar bill.

"Got a bag to put the bottle in?" I asked.

He didn't move, just stood there studying the bill. At last he looked at me. "I.D." he said.

"Come again?"

"Let's see your identification. I got to know how old you are."

"Look." I set the bottle on the counter. "It's not for me. I'm buying it for a lady, Mrs. Bennett. She—"

He broke in. "Mrs. Phyllis Bennett?"

"That's right," I said. "She lives—"

"I know where she lives. Sorry, but I can't sell you liquor. If you'll wait a minute I'll call Mrs. Bennett and explain."

He got a phone book and started looking for the number. The bill was lying in front of me where he'd put it down. I put it in my pocket. It was Mrs. Bennett's money and I had to see that it got back to her intact. He dialed the number he had found.

I got restless, waiting. Mr. Wurley's class was the first period after the lunch hour. I might be able to alibi not having any paper finished enough to hand in, but at least I had to make the class on time. And there was Dorothy waiting for me in the drainpipe—

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Don't she answer?"

"No," he said. "You sure she's at home?"

"She was a few minutes ago, and she didn't look as if she was going anywhere," I said.

He shrugged and kept on listening to nothing on the phone. I said, "Forget the whole deal, please," and started to leave. He said something about holding on a minute because there was a question or two he'd like to ask, but I made out as if I didn't hear.

I went out to the parking lot and got into the Sprite. I put the stick in what I thought was low-low, let in the clutch, and backed into a black-and-white job just behind me.

It turned out to be a Sheriff's car. Two deputies got out and walked towards me, both wearing that sort of sad, disillusioned look that deputy sheriffs seem to cultivate.

"Operator's license, kid," one of them said.

I handed it to him. He read it. "This your car?" he asked.

"No, sir. It belongs to Mrs. Phyllis Bennett. I was running an errand—"

"Registration."

I fished it out of the side pocket. He looked it over, gave it back. He looked at the front license tag and called out the number to the other deputy.

"Ring any sort of bell?"

"Not on the list." The other deputy stopped staring at me long enough to shake his head.

The first deputy wrote me out a ticket. "Next time you'll be more careful, won't you, boy?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "Couldn't you just—?"

I was going to point out that, after all, I hadn't hurt his car and ask him to go easy on me, my driver's license being practically virginal and all, but as he handed me the ticket I saw a complication headed in our direction and I changed my mind. The complication was the man from the liquor department. He was coming straight towards us and I foresaw a whole career ahead of me just answering questions. I put the ticket in my pocket and got out of the parking lot.

I drove straight back to Mrs. Bennett's and left the Sprite where I had parked before. I went through the gate, and the three steps, and through the door. Mrs. Bennett was lying on the couch. "So that's why she didn't answer the phone," I thought. "She passed out."

Then I saw the hole in her head where the bullet had gone in and knew that this particular pass-out was going to be permanent. She was dead.

My heart started banging and my knees got rubbery, and there was a time—I don't know how long it lasted—when I went here and there and back and forward, expending a lot of energy but not getting much of anything constructive done. I started for Mrs. Bennett. I thought I'd better feel her pulse or maybe hold a mirror over her face to see if she was breathing, but it didn't take a mirror to tell me that she wasn't and to know she didn't even have a pulse.

So I stumbled over to the telephone. I picked it up, and then I put it down because I didn't know whether to call the Emergency Hospital or the Sheriff's office first. So I ran into the patio intending to find one of the neighbors and pass the buck to him, but thinking about the neighbors reminded me that Dorothy was one of them and that she was waiting in the drainpipe. So I stopped again, just inside the gate.

While I was standing there, feeling numb and not thinking clear but sort of hazy, I heard this car pull up. There was a hole in the gate with a little cover to it that you could push

aside. Like a spy-hole? I took a quick look through it and reacted automatically to what I saw. Before those same two disillusioned deputies had time even to start knocking on the gate, I was down on the beach and the drainpipe was rapidly coming up. This pipe is maybe a hundred yards long. It runs underneath the highway and the other end is inland from the beach. I was out of breath when I got to the other end.

It was pretty there. I came out in a gully that had trees on both sides and even a little grass and such. I couldn't see any houses, which was fine. But I couldn't see Dorothy either, and that wasn't. I looked all around and she wasn't anywhere in sight.

"Dorothy?" I called.

The answer came from above me on the south side of the gully. "Here." I looked up but all I could see was this eucalyptus tree.

"Where?"

"In the tree."

That's where she was, too. Ordinarily a eucalyptus is one of the hardest trees there is to climb, but this one happened to have a branch that was only about ten feet above the ground. She was sitting on it. I climbed the side of the gully and shinnied up the tree and sat beside her.

"Jane climb tree good," I said when my breath finally came back.

"Jane learn climb tree in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer jungle. Jane climb up, see when Tarzan come back in Sprite."

I looked where she was looking and, sure enough, I could see the Sprite parked outside Mrs. Bennett's gate across the highway. The Sheriff's car was right behind it. Just seeing that black-and-white job gave me the shivers. It came to me all of a sudden—everything I'd done wrong. I hadn't exactly been a moron. I'd been a stupid moron, which is worse. Instead of explaining things to that liquor department man I'd turned his suspicions to super-suspicions by walking out on him. And of course he'd unloaded on the cops.

A kid drives up in a cool sports car, tries to buy liquor and to pay for it with a C-note, and the lady he says he's doing it for doesn't answer the telephone—well, that'd make anybody give the kid a second look. Brother! I could just see those two deputies over in Mrs. Bennett's house. I knew what they were thinking. One of them was probably making a phone call right this minute.

"It was the Bostwick boy, all right," I could hear him saying. "He murdered her and took off with a hundred bucks. Send out an all-points bulletin. Advise caution when ap-

proaching. This criminal is desperate and probably he's armed."

And right there on the phone that he was holding, life-size and in living color, *I could see my fingerprints!*

"I'm in a jam, Dorothy," I said.

"So brief me."

I filled her in on the details.

Naturally she was shocked. But after a while she accepted the fact that Mrs. Bennett had been murdered and stopped talking about her and started thinking about me. "They can't pin it on you, George. You didn't kill her," she said.

"I know that, but the cops don't. You ever hear of circumstantial evidence? It's the only really reliable evidence there is."

"Cops may rely on it. I don't."

"I'm afraid that's—you know, immaterial?" I said.

"It won't be when I tell them what I know. Her husband did it—Max," she said. "I'd been sitting in this tree, oh, maybe three, four minutes, when I saw him coming through the drainpipe. He buried something just this side of it. Then he sort of slunk over to the highway and a woman came along and picked him up."

I said, "Max Bennett's in Las Vegas. With his so-called secretary. His wife—his late wife, that is—told me."

"I don't believe that for a minute. Maybe that's what he told Phyllis, but I know better. He's not the kind of man would take his secretary to Vegas. And I tell you I just saw him, George!"

"Was the woman who picked him up a redhead?"

"I couldn't tell. She was inside the car. But Max was right down there." She pointed. "I couldn't have made a mistake!"

"What's he look like?"

"Well," she said, "he's tall and real distinguished. He's only thirty-three but he's got this hair like graying at the temples. Like, you know, worldly?"

I said, "I just can't see it. Such a distinguished type and all, why would he want to murder his own wife?"

"If you'd known Phyllis, really known her, you wouldn't have to ask. She was a succubus," Dorothy said.

"A which?"

"Like in a dream there's this evil woman?"

"Well, it takes all kinds," I said. "What did Mr. Bennett bury?"

"Let's go see," she said.

We unclimbed the tree and slid down into the gully. Sure enough, the ground was loose in a spot near the drainpipe

that Dorothy pointed out. I could dig into it with my hands. I scooped it out and, only a few inches down, I felt something cold and hard. It was an automatic, a Smith & Wesson .38. I gave it the standard procedure, sniffing the muzzle, counting the cartridges in the clip. One bullet had recently been fired.

"You called it right, Dorothy. This is what killed her," I said.

"I've seen that gun before. It's Max's. You realize what this means, George? You're in the clear. Hot-diggity!" she said.

"Hot what?"

"Like it's the most," she said.

I didn't say anything for a while. I was thinking. I guess I was thinking harder than I'd ever thought in my whole life. "I wish you'd got the license number of that car," I said at last. "We'd have a pretty good case if you'd remembered to do that."

"I did get it! Wait a minute—" She concentrated. "It was a California license—SHM 578. Isn't that enough for you to take to the police?"

"Well, not quite," I said. "They'd have to check a lot of things, and all the time they were doing it I'd be in jail. I'm supposed to be in Mr. Wurley's class at one o'clock."

"Who's Mr. Wurley?"

I told her, and about the paper I hadn't even started writing yet. "But if you'll help me," I said, "I got an idea that ought to make the cops and Mr. Wurley happy, both."

"I'll be glad to help you, George. Just tell me what to do," she said.

So that's how come we're sitting in this booth in The Top o' the Sea Café on Malibu Pier. We got here the easy way—just walked along the highway until we came to it. Nobody stopped us. Lots of people looked at us, but it was only Dorothy they saw.

Jack Levin runs this place. He's a friend of Freddie's, and he let us have some coffee and gave me this writing paper and loaned me his fountain pen. I'd have offered to pay for the coffee but the only money I have is this hundred-dollar bill, and I'm holding that as evidence.

So, Mr. Wurley, here's the paper I was supposed to do *plus* my alibi for not showing up today. I don't dare go anywhere until the cops arrest the murderer. Dorothy has promised to bring this to you, but I don't think she'll read it. Who reads the literary efforts of a high school senior unless, like you do, they get paid for it? I'm pretty sure she'll give it to you. It's what the innocent juvenile non-delinquent she's playing today would do.

But don't forget that lovable young innocence is only one of a lot of parts she's played in her time. Remember her in *Teen-Age Terrorist*? She's versatile. And old, Mr. Wurley. She's been a sub-ingenue for lo, these many years, and she must be twenty-five if she's a minute.

It's what she said when I found the murder weapon that finally blasted off my brain and sent it into orbit. Nobody's said "Hot-diggity!" since I grew up. So, after that, when she told me that the license number of the car that picked up Mr. Bennett was SHM 578, it was all daylight and champagne, like Shakespeare says.

You see, that's the number of the sports car that Mrs. Bennett drives. I ought to know. The deputy wrote it on the ticket he gave me and the ticket's in my pocket. What happened was—she'd been watching the Sprite and SHM 578 was the first number that came to her. You know, subconsciously?

So what I'd advise you to do, Mr. Wurley, is to think up some excuse to keep her waiting while you call the cops. Because she did it. You only have to listen to her talk about him to know she's got a thing on Mr. Bennett, and that's why she killed his wife.

She must have been outside the gate while I was telling Mrs. Bennett about my being first-string tackle and all, and inside the patio when Mrs. Bennett asked me to run up to the Mayfair Market for her. Anyway, when I came out she had her routine down pat. After I started for the market she went in the house and shot Mrs. Bennett with Mr. Bennett's gun.

The cops will find my fingerprints on it, and probably nobody else's—remember, I dug it out of the drainpipe. I'll say this much for Dorothy—she's smart. She's pretty, too, and if you don't look too close you'd never notice those little lines at the corners of her eyes.

One more thing. Chances are that Mr. Bennett really is in Las Vegas. Anyway, he's certainly nowhere near Malibu. If there'd been the slightest chance of anybody thinking that he might have done it, Dorothy would never have told me that she'd seen him. Last thing she wants is to have Mr. Bennett put in jail.

And of course she never had any intention of telling the cops the same story she told me. That was going to be something I had just dreamed up. For publicity or something, to drag her name into it when all she was doing was doing me a favor, taking my paper into class.

Wherever Mr. Bennett is, I don't know whether they'll find his secretary with him or not. Or care. That's his business and

if the cops want to make it so, it's theirs. My business is somehow to get off the hook. So will you get me off, sir, please?

And how's about it, Mr. Wurley, do I pass?

IN MEMORIAM—William O'Farrell died on April 11, 1962 at the age of 57. He was a fine novelist and short-story writer—his "Over There—Darkness" was awarded the Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" as the best mystery short story published during 1958; and every story by Mr. O'Farrell that has appeared in *EQMM* has been distinguished. "A Paper for Mr. Wurley" is probably the last short story that William O'Farrell wrote before his death—and it is one of his finest. William O'Farrell will be missed . . .

NORMAN DANIELS

A Funeral for Patrolman Cameron

If this story doesn't get under your skin, if it doesn't tug at your heartstrings, if it doesn't make you feel angry and sad and—yes, proud . . .

Captain McDermott, in charge of Headquarters between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M., rarely found moments when he was alone in the big main office behind the long, bar-like desk. This was one of them, and he was idly wondering what to buy Mabel, his wife of twenty-seven years, for her birthday. He liked to give it considerable thought because he never had too much to spend and this year he wanted something special.

He heard the sharp, attention-getting cough and looked up. He could see clear to the open main door and there was nobody in sight; but then, as he kept looking, because he could hear the scuffle of feet, a small blond-topped head slowly raised itself above the level of the desk. A pair of very bright, very serious, and thoroughly unfrightened blue eyes looked across the desk and straight at him in as disconcerting a manner as Mabel could summon when she was angry.

Captain McDermott got up slowly and walked around the desk. The boy had hoisted himself up so that he stood on tiptoe with his chin resting against the edge of the brass rail that protruded from the desk.

"Well, now," McDermott said, "how can I help you?"

The voice may have been small, but it was firm. "I want to see the Chief of Police."

"Suppose you tell me why," McDermott said. "And while you're at it, come on around so I can see what you look like."

The boy went behind the desk with no hesitation. McDermott guessed his age as about nine. A sturdy, if not large, youngster, clean and well dressed—as well as any boy his age can be. His shoes were scuffed, which was normal; there was

a large soiled mark on one sleeve of his coat, but a boy's arms get into the craziest places; and his hair needed combing though perhaps no comb on earth could have curried that unruly mane.

"Now," McDermott said, "what's it all about?"

"Officer Clarence Cameron, sir."

"Cameron?" McDermott wondered what this boy could have to do with an old cop like Cameron, who had died only yesterday.

"Yes, sir. You see, I go to Lakeside School and Officer Cameron—he was the traffic cop there—and I'm on Safety Patrol and I worked with Officer Cameron. Well, my mother told me he died yesterday and I want to know if he's going to have a big funeral."

McDermott was no more startled than if he'd been asked how many miles it is to the moon. Which he'd been asked more than once.

"Sit down, son," he said. "First of all, what's your name?"

"Jason Palmer, sir."

"Good. Where do you live and with whom?"

"225 White Street, sir, and I live with my mother. My father's in the Navy, sir, and he's been away a long time. I dunno what he's doing, but it's got something to do with geodetic . . . survey?"

"That might be it. Okay, now we have those details attended to, tell me why you think Officer Cameron is going to have a big funeral."

"On account of he rates it."

McDermott nodded. "Undoubtedly. He was a very good friend of mine. Still, I'd like to know how come a funeral—even for a nice guy like Cameron—is of interest to a boy like you."

"He was my friend too and he did traffic duty at my school for twenty-seven years. He told me, and he said nobody ever got hurt there. Not once."

"Well, that's probably true. He was a fine officer."

"He sure was and that's why he oughta have an Inspector's funeral."

"A what?" McDermott gasped, then caught himself. "Yes . . . yes, I know what you mean. We—ah—don't have an Inspector's funeral here, Jason. The department's not big enough to have an Inspector."

"What're you?"

"I'm a Captain."

"Okay. Is he gonna have a Captain's funeral?"

"Now, Jason," McDermott said, "I'm beginning to under-

stand what you're driving at. You think Cameron was a fine officer and he ought to have a big funeral."

"Sure. Like all the heroes. In New York a cop shot it out with some bandits. He killed two of them and he got killed himself, so they gave him an Inspector's funeral."

"I read about that. He was a very brave man."

"Sure. And I read about another cop who shot a man who was holding a woman prisoner. Only the cop got killed too."

"Yes, I remember the case."

"Does a cop have to kill somebody to be a hero?"

McDermott wondered what ever happened to the kids who were too scared to walk into a police station and whose parents used to make bogeymen out of cops.

"That's quite a question, Jason. I don't know. But still . . . those officers *were* heroes."

"So was Officer Cameron. He never let anybody get killed or hurt. I guess that makes him a hero . . . kinda . . . I guess he didn't make much noise like shooting, and he didn't kill anybody, but he was sure a hero."

"In a way," McDermott conceded. "Yes, in a quiet sort of way he was a hero, I suppose. But . . . I'm afraid he won't get an Inspector's funeral, son. Not even a Captain's. Oh, it'll very likely be a big one because he had a lot of friends . . ."

"But all the cops won't march?"

"No."

Jason Palmer rubbed one eye with his knuckles and thus smeared some foreign substance on his cheek.

"I wanna see the Chief of Police," he said.

"But you can't, Jason. He's home and he's sick. He can't see anyone. Now—about school . . ."

"Okay, okay, I'm not playing hookey. I'll just be a little late, that's all."

"You run along now. I like your ideas, Jason. They're very kind and unselfish. I wish I could help you."

"You think Officer Cameron oughta have a Captain's funeral, sir?"

"Indeed I do."

"Should I ask the principal of my school? He's—well, kind of a stinker, I guess, but if I asked him . . ."

"You have the right to ask anyone, Jason. But if you don't get back to school, there'll be all sorts of trouble."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"That's all right. I'm glad you dropped in."

The boy walked out carefully, but broke into a run as soon as he reached the street.

"Just like a taxpayer," McDermott said to himself. "Only he knows what he wants."

The telephone started a short, busy spurt and it was after two o'clock when the principal of Jason's school called on the phone.

"Captain McDermott," he said, "this is Principal Harris of the—"

"I know, Mr. Harris," McDermott interrupted. "You couldn't possibly be calling about anyone except a boy named Jason Palmer."

"He came into my office with the most fantastic idea—"

"What did you actually think of it, Mr. Harris?"

"Impractical, juvenile . . . but interesting. No one but a child could possibly have thought of it. He told me you said it was all right for him to ask me—and that you approve of the idea."

"I do—but it can't be done," McDermott said.

"Cameron wasn't a—well, a spectacular sort of policeman, was he?"

"Not spectacular in any way except his devotion to duty. No, he didn't rate any medals and he won't get a hero's funeral, but I've seen worse cops."

"I told Jason the faculty would send a floral tribute. He was not impressed."

"No, he wouldn't be. But that's all there'll be to it, Mr. Harris. Only one small boy has been disillusioned, and he'll get over it."

"Yes, I suppose so. Thank you, Captain."

McDermott hung up and attended to the booking of a drunk carried in on a stretcher. He knew him. He thought he knew all the drunks on earth. After that there were bail bonds to arrange, pedigrees to be taken, reports to be read, beat assignments to be made.

At three the phone rang and Chief Bradley was on the wire, speaking with the croak he always developed when he had a bad cold.

"There's some kid here says you sent him. Mac, what's it all about? He talks of Cameron's funeral, but he doesn't make much sense to me and anyway I feel so lousy . . ."

"I know the boy," McDermott said. "He was here. I told him you couldn't see anyone, but he's quite a persistent tyke. I'll explain the whole thing when you feel better."

"Well, he's camped on my front porch. Kid like him belongs in school. Send a car for him. He walked all the way from the center of town. Imagine that? I used to walk it every night on my beat, but I couldn't do it now."

"I'll send a car," McDermott said. "I'll personally take him home and read a mild riot act to him. Tell him to sit tight."

"I couldn't pry him off my porch with a crowbar. Send a car right away, before I find myself listening to him and then I'll be in trouble."

McDermott rang for a driver and sent him to the Chief's house with orders to bring the boy back. It would be around four by the time they returned. McDermott decided he'd better put a firm end to Jason's "idea."

He had changed to civilian clothes by the time the car brought Jason in. McDermott clambered into the back. Jason sat up front with the driver, somewhat nervously but quite defiantly. He wasn't beaten.

"Hi, Jason," McDermott said. "You were wrong in going to see the Chief."

"Yes, sir. You told me not to, but I went anyhow. My mom says I'm as stubborn as my dad who's in the Navy and I guess she's right."

"I'm going to take you home now and have a little talk with your mother. Do you mind?"

"No, sir. I been trying to make her understand too, but she don't seem to neither. *Nobody* does—well, maybe you do. I *think* you do, but nobody else."

"I think I do too. In fact, the more I think about Officer Cameron, the more I think you're right, but—well, I think further than you, Jason, and I see how impossible it is."

"Why should it be, that's what I'd like to know. Gosh . . . if a guy has to kill somebody and get killed himself to be a hero, I sure don't want to be no hero."

McDermott said, "Do you get the drift of this, Brophy?"

The driver shook his head. "No, Captain, I don't figure it."

"Keep your ears open and you'll get an education when Jason is around!"

"Yeah," Brophy said, "I got two boys of my own. You ain't telling me something I don't know. But this kid seems a little deeper somehow."

The police car pulled up before a neat two-story, one-family house on a street where it was one of a row of two dozen others just like it. The police car drew all the kids in the neighborhood.

Jason got out of the car and walked rather proudly, with McDermott towering over him. His mother opened the door and some of Jason's assurance left him.

"Is he in trouble?" she asked, eying the official car and the uniformed driver.

"No, ma'am," McDermott said. "I'm Captain McDermott."

Jason came to have a little talk about his pal, Officer Cameron. I think your son is a remarkable boy, Mrs. Palmer. That's why I brought him home myself—to tell you so."

"Do you really think so, Captain? I try very hard to keep Jason from doing anything wrong—his father's away so much . . ."

"Let me tell you something, Mrs. Palmer. Jason has ideas that are much wiser than lots of people I know. He believes Officer Cameron was a hero, and he thinks Cameron deserves the send-off of a hero. I agree with him. It's impossible and maybe even a little—well, absurd. But I agree with your son and I'm very happy he thought enough of his idea to follow it through."

"Thank you," she said. She was a rather attractive woman, this mother of Jason. The lad had her eyes and he had the cut of her jaw too. McDermott was glad he didn't have to argue any point with this woman—not concerning her son, anyway.

"Well, so long, Jason," McDermott said. "And good luck."

"Thank you." Jason suddenly came to life—came out of the lethargy he'd fallen into when his prospects had seemed to dwindle.

Later, McDermott told himself he should have known. To wish good luck to a boy with only one idea on his mind is tantamount to encouraging him to go ahead with it.

The Captain got the phone call around ten thirty the next morning. He was busy—police court had adjourned for the day and all the bookkeeping from that procedure had to be done: two prisoners, each with a mittimus, to be sent to jail; bonds to return; possessions to be given back to those who'd been locked up overnight.

McDermott didn't like being disturbed with all this routine work on his hands and he usually let Sergeant Anders handle other details. But a call from the Mayor's office wasn't a detail.

"This is Loomis, the Mayor's secretary, Captain."

"Hello, Mr. Loomis," McDermott said with forced heartiness. He didn't like Loomis, and when it came right down to it, he didn't like the Mayor either. Lots of people didn't. One of the two daily local newspapers had been blasting the Mayor for months.

Loomis had a nasty edge to his voice. "Do you know a boy named Jason Palmer?"

"Oh, my gosh, don't tell me . . ."

"He's here and the Mayor is raising the roof. The boy got in to see him and—well, I'll explain when you get down here."

"When I get down there?"

"You heard me. And get here fast. Take this kid off our hands. He won't budge. He says he's got certain rights or . . . something. Anyway, come over here and *get* him. Take him back to school, turn him over to the truant officer—do something!"

"I'll be right over," McDermott said.

"You'd better. I don't like your friends, Captain. This one especially. He bites."

"Now, listen," McDermott roared, "if you pushed that boy around . . ."

"Will you get over here? Can't you get it through your head that the Mayor is your Commander-in-Chief?"

McDermott snorted, but he hung up and buttoned his uniform jacket and got his cap from the locker in his office. It was a short walk to City Hall.

Loomis was a rotund man with a red complexion, but now his face was fiery with rage. Seated beside the secretary's desk, swinging his feet nonchalantly, sat Jason. He managed a sickly smile for McDermott's benefit. Spread on Loomis' desk was another cause for his anger. An early edition of the *Globe-Dispatch* called the Mayor "a perfection of inefficiency"—part of their long-running campaign against him.

"You get this boy out of here, Captain, and if you ever send anyone like him here again . . ."

"He didn't send me," Jason said mildly.

"You keep out of it. You've had your say." The secretary transferred his attention and fury to McDermott. "I tell you, the Mayor is really upset. This boy walked in and sat down beside a ward heeler—I mean," he hastily corrected himself, "an aspirant for alderman in next month's election. This man had an appointment with His Honor and when he was called into the office, this boy simply walked in with him. I thought they were father and son—"

"No-o-o," McDermott said smoothly. "His father's a naval officer, not a ward heeler. Big difference."

"No matter. Now take this boy home and lecture his parents. Then notify the principal of his school about what has happened. He really should be arrested."

"The principal?"

"No, damn it, the boy!"

"What for, Mr. Loomis? Isn't the Mayor the servant of the people?"

"He is far too busy a man to be bothered with . . . what was it? Some funeral?"

"I'm afraid you wouldn't understand," McDermott said. As

he spoke, he folded the newspaper idly and held it in his hand. "I doubt the Mayor would and, as you say, he's too important to talk to a boy. Jason, we'll be leaving now."

"Yes, sir," Jason said. They walked out into the cool, marble-walled corridor. "I guess I didn't do very good, did I?"

"No, it seems you didn't."

"I'm sorry. I'll go home now. Boy, mom's gonna make a fuss. I played hookey."

"Well, you did have legitimate business with the Mayor."

"I sure didn't get far. I had to tell him three times what I wanted because he couldn't understand me. I wouldn't vote for him. He's kinda dumb."

"Some call him worse names than that. I can't give you a ride home, Jason. I walked over from the office."

"Aw, that's all right. Boy, I got myself into a mess this time all right. And it didn't do any good. Nobody listens. Nobody cares about Officer Cameron and honest, the cops just *gotta* march at his funeral. They gotta tell everybody he was a fine cop."

"If things get too rough, let me know, Jason. I'm your friend."

"Yeah, I know that all right. But we can't do much, can we?"

"Not a great deal sometimes, and then again, sometimes we can. You see, it's hard for people to understand why an ordinary policeman, who does his job for forty-odd years and does it well, isn't a hero. As you say, everyone seems to think heroes are made only in a hail of bullets."

"Nothing more I can do," Jason said, biting his lips.

"Not unless you can shout it from the rooftops, Jason."

Jason kicked at a politician's fat cigar butt on the marble floor. "Gosh, how's a guy to do that? Heck, nobody'd even hear me."

"Well, when I say rooftops, I'm being—well, symbolic, sort of. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"If people hear about it, read about it . . . well . . . if I try to help, I'll be in trouble. So we have to part company, Jason."

They went down the wide red-brick stairs outside City Hall. At the bottom McDermott handed Jason the folded newspaper he'd taken from the Mayor's office.

"You can read this on your way home," he said. "You ought to enjoy what they say about the Mayor. This newspaper doesn't like him. They don't like him so much they're

very friendly with anyone else who doesn't like him. Now me, I'm a public official and I can't take sides, but a newspaper can. So long, Jason—and Jason?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't stop fighting."

"Yes, sir," Jason said.

The boy walked down the street—a small, apparently unimportant little figure of what some day would be a man. He was stopped by a red traffic light and he unfolded the newspaper and scanned it. Then he forgot about crossing the street and turned the corner instead. He was moving fast.

McDermott sighed deeply and went back to the police station. He had a notion that it might be an interesting afternoon.

When Captain McDermott, in his best uniform, rang the bell of Jason's home the next day, it was Jason who let him in, somewhat wide-eyed.

"Oh, boy," he said, "I guess I'm gonna be arrested."

Jason's mother invited McDermott in. On the living-room table lay the late evening edition of yesterday's *Globe-Dispatch*. The front page had temporarily omitted the international headlines. There were no photographs of car crashes, no studio shots of movie stars announcing another divorce, nothing from Washington, Paris, London, or Moscow.

There were three pictures. The middle one was a fine shot of Jason; it was flanked by a photograph of his father in Navy uniform and of Patrolman Clarence Cameron, also in uniform.

The story, told in large type, was the one Jason had related to a sympathetic editor who had a political bone to pick with the incumbent administration. But there was more than mere political badgering in this story. McDermott had read it four times and it was easy to tell that someone else had understood Jason.

"Did this get you into trouble, Captain?" Mrs. Palmer asked. "I'm dreadfully sorry if it did."

"No, ma'am," McDermott said. "No trouble. I'm here on official business. I'm here to tell you that Patrolman Clarence Cameron has been cited for meritorious duty as befits a man who guarded thousands of school kids in his career and always had a kindly word for each one of them—and most of whom are grown up now and hollering their heads off."

"They're going to give him a—an Inspector's funeral?"

"You might call it that, ma'am. Of course the Chief of Police, the Mayor—everybody had ideas about honoring Cameron all along and it was only the fault of subordinates that Jason never got to see the big shots—I'm sorry, I refer to

the Mayor mostly. This is known as passing the buck and I'm grateful I had nothing to do with it."

Mrs. Palmer smiled. "I rather think you had quite a lot to do with it, Captain. Jason has told me . . ."

"Well, that's neither here nor there. I dropped by to pick up your son. He's riding with us—in the first car."

"You're taking me?" Jason said in a shrilly excited voice.

"See this badge?" McDermott brushed it reverently. "It's made of gold, but if I show up without you, Jason, tomorrow it'll be tin. And we've got to hurry. Every man on the force—or almost all, we had to leave a skeleton force on duty—is ready to start marching."

Jason whirled and pounded up the stairs with an ear-splitting din.

"Hold on," McDermott called out, "we've got to leave."

"I forgot something," Jason called.

"Thank you, Captain," Mrs. Palmer said. "This means so much to Jason."

"He rates it," McDermott said crisply. "More important, Patrolman Cameron rates it."

Jason raced down the stairs just as noisily, avoiding breaking a leg or his neck by some miracle of Providence watching over excited boys. He paid no attention to where his feet landed. He was too busy buckling on the slightly soiled, white Sam Browne belt and armband proclaiming him a member of the school traffic patrol.

He looked up at McDermott very seriously.

"I forgot my uniform," he said.

HUGH PENTECOST

In the Middle of Nowhere

This story opens with the violence of Nature against Man—and closes with the violence of Man against Man . . . an exciting tale of suspense that might be called a perfect example of "the modern American thriller."

Rain beat against the windshield of the Imperial so hard it was as if someone were playing a hose on it from the front. The narrow two-lane road was awash, and it sloshed against the bottom of the car in recurring waves. The thin man at the wheel leaned forward, trying to see anything but water in the beam from the headlights.

"Can't see over ten yards ahead," he said. "Butt me."

The plump man sitting beside the driver fished a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it with the dashboard lighter. He passed it on to the driver, who sucked smoke deep down into his lungs.

Police and F.B.I. had records on these two men. The thin driver was Ray Stack, with a long background of larceny and assault. The plump one, with an almost baby face, was Perry McVey, wanted for bank robbery and murder. He was classified as one of the most dangerous wanted criminals in the country.

"I've just about had it, Perry," Ray Stack said. "Couldn't we pull up for a little bit? The rain's bound to ease off."

"Why? It hasn't eased off for two days, has it? Any rule says it will ease off if we pull up for a few minutes? You been noticing the streams and brooks we've been crossing? Water right up to bridge level in most cases. We're right in the middle of a flood area, kid, and you better pray we get out of it before it closes in on us somewhere. Pull up, my foot!"

"It gets worse as we go along," Stack said.

"According to the road map we should be crossing the Massachusetts Turnpike in another ten or fifteen miles. After that we've got some choices depending on how things look.

But we got to stick to this route until we cross the turnpike."

The car hit a small pond in the middle of the road. The big motor skipped a beat and then purred on.

"Get water in the distributor and we've had it, brother!" Stack said. He crushed out his cigarette in the dashboard tray and slid it closed.

Suddenly McVey leaned forward, peering through the swirl of rain on the windshield. "Light up ahead—small, moving light."

"Looks like someone waving a torch!" Stack said.

The plump man's lips tightened as he reached for a brief case on the seat beside him. He zipped it open and produced a .45 automatic from its soft leather interior. "Road block!" he said, grimly.

Stack's hands tightened on the wheel. "We talk our way through?"

"Don't be a damn fool," McVey said. "We're not stopping. Not now. By now we're probably famous."

"But, Perry—"

"You sucker!" McVey snarled. "You want to die right here on this stinking country road? Step on it!"

They were almost on top of the waving flashlight. Stack pushed the accelerator to the floor. The big car leaped forward, straight at the frantic torch. For just a moment the headlights picked up the figure of a young man, his mouth opened in a scream. Then the car hit him head on, with all the impact of its three-hundred-odd horsepower.

"Look out!" McVey shouted. "Bridge ahead—covered bridge! Left, Ray! *Left!*"

There was a screech of rubber as the car swung left and dove into what was a dark tunnel—one of the few remaining covered bridges in New England. For a moment the rain was gone.

"He's caught under the car." Stack said in a shaking voice. "We're dragging him!"

"Keep going!" McVey had swiveled around in the seat and was peering out the back window. "Doesn't seem to be anyone else."

The car jounced as though it had hit a bump in the wood floor of the bridge, and then raced on smoothly. Stack wiped sweat from his face with the sleeve of his coat. "We left him there," he said.

The car burst out of the bridge and into the torrential rain again.

"Pull up!" McVey shouted.

"You crazy?"

"He may not be dead," McVey said. "Pull up. Give me the flashlight out of the glove compartment."

"It's right in front of you."

Stack had stopped the car. Now he leaned forward, his forehead pressed against the wheel.

McVey, gun in one hand, flashlight in the other, climbed out into the rain. Wind tore at him, sent him zigzagging back along the road toward the covered bridge. The car had gone a good fifty yards past it before it had stopped. McVey had retraced about half the distance, flashlight focused on the mouth of the bridge, when it happened. There was a thunderous roar of water, the noise of splintering timbers, and like a child's toy the covered bridge exploded into a thousand bits and pieces and was swept out of McVey's sight on a tidal wave of water.

McVey sprinted back along the road toward the car. A tail-flick from the mass of water caught him and sent him somersaulting into the ditch beside the road. He managed to scramble to his feet, spitting out water and mud, and staggered for the car. He literally fell into it.

"Get moving!" he shouted. "It's a cloudburst, or something!"

The big car jumped forward. "You see him?" Stack asked, his eyes peering straight ahead.

"He's dead," McVey panted. "Bridge broke up like matchwood. He'll be hamburger when they find him. Nobody'll know what really happened to him. First good break we've had in the last twelve hours!"

"You suppose it was a cop trying to stop us?"

McVey wiped muddy water from his face with his handkerchief. "What difference does it make now? We couldn't take a chance, could we?"

The summer floods of 1955 which turned such Connecticut towns as Winsted, Torrington, and Danbury into national disaster areas, had bypassed the town of Lakeview. On this summer night in 1959 when nightmare floods struck again, Lakeview was prepared for the worst, but again was spared from the heaviest kind of destruction. Power went. Phones went. Cellars filled with water and in some cases cesspools overflowed and carried their filth into the main streets of the town.

But there was no loss of life—or there had been none until the covered bridge at the north-end town line went. When that happened, Lakeview sat dark, water-soaked, and cut off from the outside world. There was no news except that of the

flood itself and that news came over the emergency radio channels.

People outside the mainstream of the disaster were being urged to stay put. Travel over state highways was next to impossible. Streams were swollen beyond belief, bridges gone.

"Unless you are in critical danger where you are, stay there! You'll only add to confusion in harder hit areas by leaving whatever shelter you have! Rain and wind are not expected to subside until sometime late tomorrow. Conditions will grow worse rather than better. Boil your water. I repeat—boil your water. Do not use water for any purpose whatever without first boiling it. Repeat—do not risk highway travel. Streams have altered their courses. The Governor has declared a state of emergency, but intelligent instructions will not be possible until a survey by air can be made in tomorrow's daylight."

Lakeview was dark, water-soaked, isolated—but without panic. Household radios were useless, but they got the emergency bulletins over car radios. The small civilian defense unit had acted efficiently. A few sick people had been moved to places of greater safety. Stores of food had been taken from the two local grocery stores to the school, which was on high ground.

The town's three doctors had set up a headquarters in the school. As long as daylight had lasted most of the able-bodied men had been helping to herd the dairy cattle from outlying farms, where flood conditions would do the most damage, to high pasture lands nearer the center of the community. Dairy farming was the main business of Lakeview—that and a few fancy black Angus beef farms.

Red Egan, the sheriff, and a group of hastily sworn-in deputies, had gone from house to house with emergency instructions, since telephones and regular radios were out. But most country people own cars and had already heard over the car radios what they should do. They were surprisingly good-humored. Anxiety was mostly for friends and relatives in neighboring towns. Lakeview was proud of itself. They had planned four years ago just what to do if floods came again, and now they had carried out those plans without hysteria or confusion. They would wait till daylight to find out just how bad things were.

At close to midnight the only signs of life were in the very center of the business block on Main Street. The sheriff had parked six cars across Main Street, three facing north and

three facing south, rear bumpers to rear bumpers, in a sort of road block. The cars had their parking lights on, but a deputy was stationed in each one, ready to switch on full lights if a car came toward them.

Right next to this blockade of cars was Hector Trimble's drug store. Hector Trimble was a respected and trusted man and a first-rate pharmacist. He kept a modern store and did a good business. But someone had once said that Hector was the kind of pessimist who wore both suspenders and a belt. Suddenly in the flood it had paid off. He had an emergency set for sterilizing and cooking with bottled gas, so that when the power failed he could still make coffee, still sterilize his tubes and retorts, and there were even emergency gas lights in the store.

Things were suddenly wanted and it turned out that Hector had an extra supply—"just in case." Hector's twelve-year-old boy Joey ran his legs off carrying messages for the sheriff. Hector's wife, the former Esther Crowder, had—"just in case"—taken a course in practical nursing and was helping the three doctors with patients who would have been removed to the hospital if there had been any way to get them there.

And there was Uncle George Crowder.

George Crowder was a character, even by country standards. He came from one of the oldest and best families in town. He had started out in life like a ball of fire, gone to the State University, graduated with honors from law school, and had quickly become the County Attorney. People said in those days that George Crowder would most likely find himself in the Governor's mansion some day. It never came about for a special reason. George Crowder had prosecuted a murder case in the county, got his conviction, and sent the victim to the chair. Then a year later a confession and corroborative evidence proved the executed man had been innocent.

The next day George Crowder closed his law office and disappeared from Lakeview. When he came back, twenty years later, he was a changed man. Some said he'd drunk his way through his money and had to come back to be supported by his sister, Hector Trimble's wife.

At any rate, he built himself a little shack in the woods a couple of miles from town. He lived there alone with his setter dog, Timmy. In his mid-fifties he was tough as rawhide, had a keen, dry wit, was one of the best woodsmen the town had ever known and certainly Lakeview's best shot with a rifle or shotgun. Uncle George, however, was a sort of cross Hector Trimble had to bear. He was, by Hector's rules, a shiftless do-nothing and a very bad influence on young

Joey, who idolized his uncle, and spent every free hour he had with the old man and his dog in the woods.

On the night of the flood, with midnight closing in, Hector Trimble and Joey and Uncle George were in the drug store with Janet Graves, the eighth-grade schoolteacher who helped out in the store during the busy summer months. They were having coffee—all except Joey, who was sucking a Coke through a double straw. If there was any one person who threatened Joey's undivided loyalty to Uncle George, it was Janet Graves. This was Joey's first serious affair of the heart. "And showing mighty good taste very early in the parade," Uncle George told his sister. "If I was a few years younger—"

Just before midnight, headlights appeared at the north end of Main Street, fuzzy-bright in the rain. No one would be out traveling this time of night unless it was an emergency. Uncle George slid off his stool at the counter and buttoned his oilskin up around his neck. Joey, automatically prepared to follow, glanced at Janet Graves. She smiled at him, a smile as warm as the red color of her hair. Strange lumps bobbed up and down in Joey's stomach. They made him too weak to go with Uncle George.

As the headlights appeared at the far end of the street, the three cars Sheriff Egan had facing north turned on their lights full.

You couldn't run through or over that kind of block, so the big Imperial slowed down and came to a stop. Sheriff Egan went around to the driver's side. He looked at the tense, white face of Ray Stack at the wheel and the pudgy smiling face of Perry McVey, who seemed to be reaching into a leather brief case for something.

"You're strangers!" Red Egan said, as if he couldn't believe it.

"Yes," Ray Stack said. "Headed for New York—and in a great hurry, if you don't mind."

The sheriff gave him a friendly grin. "I don't mind, Mister, but it ain't goin' to make much difference one way or another. No way for you to get there. Not tonight—not for the next day or two, maybe. What's itchin' me is how you got here in the first place. No way to get out, no way to get in."

"We came along Route 21," McVey said.

"Across the covered bridge?" Egan asked.

"Yes."

"I'd of sworn it was gone by now," Egan said. "And I've sworn it wouldn't have taken that car of yours for the last five-six hours. Didn't our man stop you?"

"You mean the fellow with the flashlight?" Stack asked.

The light from the car dashboard was too dim for Egan to notice the murderous glint in McVey's small eyes as his head swiveled toward his partner.

"Yes, he stopped us," McVey said quickly. "But we decided to risk it. I'm afraid we got bad news about your man, though. Just after we got across the bridge the whole thing went, and your guy was right at the mouth of the bridge. Like a tidal wave—took him and the bridge, and damn near took us, fifty yards away!"

A nerve twitched in Egan's cheek. "It's a miracle you got across. But now you're here, Mister, you're here to stay. No way in God's world to get out." He turned toward the man with the deeply lined face who had come up beside him. "Russ Toomey's gone, George," he said. "Washed away with the bridge."

"I heard," Uncle George Crowder said, pain in his pale blue eyes. He peered in the car at Stack and McVey. "You're dead sure he went with the bridge?"

"Saw it with my own eyes," McVey said. "He's a goner, all right. Tossed him fifty feet in the air. Tough luck."

"Somebody'll have to tell his old lady," Uncle George said. "It's gonna cut Joey up pretty bad, too. He and Russ were good friends."

"You fellows better go in the drug store and have a cup of hot coffee," Egan said.

"We've got to get on," McVey said.

"I wouldn't kid you, Mister. You can't. That old covered bridge was the last way in or out, and we wrote that off hours ago. That's why we sent Russ out there. You're just dog lucky you got across, Mister. Now you pull up to the curb there and have yourself a cup of coffee. Hec Trimble's got a radio in there and you can hear the emergency reports yourself. There's no traveling in this neck of the woods—not till morning when they've seen what they're up against and put some emergency crews to work."

McVey and Stack stared at each other. "I guess a cup of coffee would taste good," McVey said.

They pulled the Imperial over to the curb and got out, McVey carrying his brief case, the flap unzipped.

"In here's the coffee," Uncle George said, leading the way into the drug store.

Hector was back of the counter with Janet Graves. She was washing some coffee cups. Young Joey, sitting on the stool at the front end of the counter, turned around to see what was what.

"These gentlemen are the last ones in or out," Uncle

George said. "Covered bridge is gone—they saw it go." He put a strong brown hand gently on Joey's shoulder. "And they got bad news."

"Coffee, gentlemen?" Hector asked in his crisp voice.

"Yeah, thanks," Stack said. He looked at Janet Graves and moistened his lips.

"Bad news, Mr. Crowder?" Janet asked.

The brown hand moved around Joey's shoulder. "Russ Toomey went with the bridge," he said. "He warned these gentlemen off and they decided to risk it anyway. Right afterwards the bridge went—and Russ with it."

Tears welled up into Joey Trimble's eyes. "Poor Russ," he said in a small voice. "But—but he was doin' his job. He'd have liked it that way." Joey struggled with his tears.

"This Toomey boy was a great friend of Joey's," Janet said in a gentle explanation to McVey. "He was maybe twenty years old, but he and Joey were real close."

"Well, you can be proud of him, son," McVey said to Joey with an air of kindness. "Like you say, he did his job. He stopped us. He warned us about the bridge. We said we'd try it. He argued with us and argued with us, but we went ahead anyway. Then, right after that—pow! The whole works went."

Joey turned quickly to McVey. "He argued with you?"

McVey nodded. "Told us over and over the bridge wouldn't hold us, but we had to risk it. Had to get to New York. Still do."

Joey's eyes were very bright. "Then it couldn't have been Russ!" he cried.

"Of course it was Russ," Hector said. "Russ is the one Egan sent to the covered bridge. Everyone else is accounted for."

"But it couldn't have been Russ!" Joey protested. "Don't you see—?"

"Joey!" Uncle George said sharply. His pale eyes were suddenly as cold as two newly minted dimes.

"But it *couldn't* have been Russ!" Joey persisted. He smiled happily at McVey. "Russ couldn't have argued with you, Mister, because he's deaf and dumb!"

There was a deathly silence in the little store. McVey's pudgy hand reached for the brief case he'd put down on the stool beside him. Joey, sensing something wrong, still couldn't stop the flow of his relief.

"So it couldn't have been Russ!" he explained again.

Uncle George turned slowly away toward the door.

"Hold it a minute, Pop," McVey said in a new voice, a hard, cold voice. He'd taken the .45 from the brief case. He

didn't point it at Uncle George. The round, chill barrel was pressed against Joey's head just above the left ear. "Before anyone goes anywhere let's just get the facts straightened out here, shall we?"

Hector Trimble stared at his young son, McVey's .45 held against his head; at McVey, whose round chubby face was suddenly a mask of smiling evil; at Ray Stack, who had moved around and taken a second gun out of the open brief case; at Uncle George Crowder, who stood by the door, tall, gray-faced, and motionless as a statue; and at Janet Graves, her pallor accentuated by the dark red halo of her hair.

Hector exploded. "What kind of melodramatic nonsense is this?" he demanded. "Put away those silly guns. We're all too tired after what's happened today to—"

"Just stand still, Dad," McVey said with a smile that made Hector feel queazy, "and have a rag ready to mop up this kid's brains off the counter in case anybody moves until I say so."

"You were sore because I just mentioned the guy with a flashlight!" Ray Stack said in a cracked-sounding voice. "Then *you* have to go invent a whole story about an argument when it turns out the guy can't even talk!"

"Shut up," McVey said. He nodded his head toward the radio on the counter. "That thing work?"

Hector moistened his lips. "It's a battery set I keep—just in case—" he said.

"You can get news about the flood on it?"

"Only thing you c-can get," Hector said. "Conelrad station. All the network programs are off."

"Tune it in." McVey's piglike eyes darted toward Janet. "Just keep your hands up on top of the counter where I can see 'em, sister. Ray, have a look around back of the counters. Sometimes in a hick store like this they keep a gun in back. Might be a holdup or something." He gave Hector a wider smile. "And you lock up, Dad. I don't want anyone coming in here to pass the time of day while we talk."

"But I promised the sheriff I'd—"

"Un-promise him—and quick!" McVey said.

Uncle George's voice broke in sharply. "Don't move, Joey!" He'd seen something on the boy's face that warned him Joey was thinking in terms of romantic heroism.

"Now there is a guy knows the time of day," McVey said. "You do like he said, boy. Don't move! You! I said turn on the radio."

There was a sputtering noise as the battery set warmed up.

"—Change until late tomorrow morning. High water levels have probably not been reached as yet. Again authorities warn against any attempt at highway travel. It is not simply that it is dangerous, but there is probably not a bridge left in the northwest corner of the state. If you are safe where you are, sit tight. Boil your water. Repeat—boil your water. In the Hartford area—"

McVey reached forward with his left hand and cut off the machine. "Aren't they reporting any other kind of news?"

"You mean like an account of your particular crime?" Uncle George asked in a flat voice.

"You're a pretty wise old fossil," McVey said.

"My Uncle George isn't an old fossil!" Joey said in a shaky voice. "He's the best lawyer in the State, and he'll—"

"Lawyer, eh?" McVey said. "Well, explain to them, Uncle, that you go to the chair for one killing, so it don't matter how many more you add to it."

"What did you do, run Russ Toomey down?" Uncle George asked. "Think he was a police road block or something?"

"A real wise old fossil," McVey said. "So now get practical, Uncle. There has to be some way out of this godforsaken burg and one of you here better know it. If we can't get out by car there has to be a way to walk out. If that's the way it is Ray and me are going to walk out, see—with the kid! Because we don't want you two characters or the doll here to be doing any talking. So we take the boy, and maybe, if we get away, we send him back."

"You can't take Joey!" Hector said. "That'd be kidnaping."

"You amaze me," McVey said. "What about it, Ray?"

"No gun," Stack said—he had finished his behind-the-counter search.

"Now let's talk very rapid turkey," McVey said. "How do we get away from this town?"

"Lakeview is in a valley between two ranges of hills," Uncle George said. "You came in one end of it. You know there's no way out there. The other end is worse—river winds in and out across the highway. Right now the whole south end of the valley is a lake. Unless you're a first-class channel swimmer—"

"Never mind the comedy," McVey said. "So we can't go out either end. So we walk out over one of the ranges of hills."

Uncle George snorted. "In this kind of a rainstorm and in pitch darkness?"

"If someone smart showed us the way," McVey said.

"I bet even Uncle George couldn't take you out on a night like this," Joey said, holding his head quite still, "and he knows the woods better'n anyone in Lakeview!"

A dry smile twisted Uncle George's face. "Don't you figure you've done just about enough talking for one night, Joey?"

McVey chuckled. "Helpful kid. So Uncle George is the top guy in the woods around here. So you take us out along with the kid, Uncle George. And we start now, quick, before someone gets thirsty for a cup of coffee and we really have to get rough."

Janet Graves turned to Uncle George. "You can't let them do this, Mr. Crowder. You can't help them to do it."

Uncle George turned his cold blue eyes to the school-teacher. "I've come across a few genuine killers in my time, Janet," he said. "I've seen a rattlesnake coiled to strike. I've seen a wildcat crouched to spring off a rock ledge over my head. There's times when you move against 'em, and times when you don't. I'm afraid I think our fat friend here means business. Unfortunately, he's got his gun on Joey and not on me. I wouldn't mind taking a slug or two to bring Red and the boys in from outside. But not Joey or you or Hector." He turned back to McVey. "I'm going to tell you the truth," he said.

"Make it snappy," McVey said.

"I'm not sure I can take you out. Streams coming down the mountain may have cut off trails. And one thing is certain. We wouldn't have a chance without showing a light or two. And lights moving in the woods will bring the sheriff and some of his deputies to see what's wrong."

"Fix it so they don't," McVey said.

"How?"

"Tell them we've offered to pay you well to take us out."

"And how do I explain taking Joey along?" Uncle George asked.

McVey grinned. "For the adventure of it!" he said. "Boys are strong for adventure, aren't they, Joey?" The smile went out like a blown light bulb. "And right now, Uncle," he said. "Every minute we wait somebody's going to come in here and knock things end-wise."

Uncle George sighed. He was flexing his fingers nervously. "We'll need some pure water in your camp canteen, Joey. Maybe Miss Graves'll make a few sandwiches. We won't get out the other side till tomorrow afternoon, even if we don't have any trouble."

"I'll get my camping kit out of my room," Joey said.

"You'll sit right where you are, Joey," McVey said. "Let the

tootsie get the stuff. You, Ray. You go out with Uncle George while he breaks the news to the sheriff."

"We'll need extra flashlights," Uncle George said. "You got some in stock, haven't you, Hector?"

Hector nodded, dumbly, eyes on his son—and on the .45 held so close to the boy's head.

"I'm giving you just five minutes, Uncle, to clear things with the sheriff. Then I'll know you've made a wrong move and little Joey gets it. Clear?"

"Clear," Uncle George said. He looked at the boy and spoke gently, but his hands were still nervous. "You keep your mouth shut, Joey. Don't say a word—not a word. I'll be back inside the five minutes."

"Leave your gun here, Ray," McVey said. "I'll hold 'em both. Don't want anyone bumping into you or suspecting anything. And keep one thing clear in your head, Uncle. I won't do anything to try to help Ray or myself without first pulling the trigger on this kid. Clear?"

"Clear," Uncle George said.

He turned and walked out the door, Stack at his elbow. The street was dark except for the parking lights of the cars that Egan had parked across the road. It was noisy outside, wind roaring down the narrow street, and behind it the distant thunder of angry waters.

When Uncle George rapped on the window of the first parked car, Egan rolled down the glass and looked out.

"These two gents are real anxious to be on the move," Uncle George said casually. "They got a big deal on in New York. They've offered me quite a nice hunk of change if I'd guide 'em out over the west ridge into New York State."

Red stared at Uncle George as though he was crazy. "Over the west ridge—?"

"We might make it," Uncle George said. His voice was outwardly calm but his hands, still working, seemed to show his inner anxiety. "Over on the other side things might be so they could get to the railway. We can't do worse than get lost for a while. I figure if we go south down the road a piece till we come to where Hyland Brook has overflowed we could follow the stream up past the Devil's Slide to its source. That'd bring us pretty near the top of the Ridge. Be daylight by then and we shouldn't have any trouble getting down into New York State on the other side."

"Sounds crazy," Sheriff Egan said.

"Well, Joey and me are going to try it anyway. Didn't want you worrying if you saw lights moving around up in the woods."

"Joey!" Egan cried. "You're taking the kid!"

"Shucks, he'll get a kick out of it," Uncle George said. "Chance to use that new camp kit you gave him."

The sheriff opened his mouth and then snapped it shut. "I think you're all crazy!" he said. "I expect we'll see you all trekkin' back here by daylight for some grub."

"Like to get the gentlemen's car out so we can head south toward Hyland Brook," Uncle George said.

"Yeah," Egan said. "Sure."

Uncle George turned and walked back into the store, Stack still a half step behind him.

"All smooth as pie," Stack told McVey.

"We'll go south in your car as far as we can," Uncle George said to McVey. He looked at the counter where Joey's canteen and a camp roll lay. Janet Graves, her eyes wide as saucers, said there were some sandwiches in the roll.

"I want a piece of rope or clothesline," McVey said. "The boy'll walk right alongside me to the car. But once we start climbing—well, we'll tie an end of rope around him and the other end around me. Like mountain climbers, eh, Joey? And if you try any tricks I'll just yank you back to me and blow your brains out. Clear?"

Hector Trimble, his face the color of ashes, gripped the edge of the counter for support.

"Pleasel Please don't hurt the boy!" he whispered.

McVey gave him an almost angelic smile. "Entirely up to Uncle George, Dad. Entirely up to him," he said.

Hector told Janet Graves to get a roll of clothesline—they sell everything in drug stores nowadays. Uncle George picked up the camp roll and slipped his arms through the straps so that he carried it on his shoulders like a knapsack. He handed the water canteen to Stack.

"You better carry this, Mister," he said, "and carry it real good. We may need it bad before we're through."

McVey took the coil of clothesline Janet brought and slipped it into the brief case. "One last word before we go," he said. "For you, Dad, and Miss Janet here. You may get the idea of running out and telling the sheriff the whole story once we're gone. I advise against it. Because I'm telling you, Dad. We see any signs of being followed, or we suddenly walk into anything looks like a trap, and we take care of Junior before we bother to ask any questions. Clear?"

"Clear," Uncle George said—it was a word he was forced to keep repeating. He stood by the door, his face like stone but his hands moving restlessly as though he were now impa-

tient to be off. Janet Graves stared at him, disbelief in her wide eyes.

McVey took Joey by the shoulder and gave him a little shove toward Ray Stack. "You walk along with Ray, Junior. You and Uncle'll ride in front with him. I'll walk right behind you to the car, and I'll sit in the back seat behind the two of you, and all the time this gun'll be aimed right at the back of your head. Now—march!"

Joey gave Hector and Janet a confident little smile, and then he went out into the night with the two men and Uncle George. The big Imperial had been moved through the blockade of cars and was headed south. Sheriff Egan stood by the driver's side, rain lashing against his leathery face. He squinted at Uncle George.

"You still figure on going south to Hyland Brook and over the west ridge into New York State?" he asked.

"You got a better idea?" Uncle George asked.

"Nope," Egan said laconically. "I still think you're all nuts. You won't be able to follow any trail in the dark, George. Trees down, brooks runnin' out of their courses. You're just wastin' time to start before daylight."

"The gain of an hour or two might mean everything to our business deal," McVey said pleasantly. He stood close to Joey. "I understand Mr. Crowder knows these woods inside out."

"He's the best," the sheriff said. "But sometimes even the best can't do the impossible."

"I think we ought to get started," McVey said with an apologetic smile.

Stack got in behind the wheel. Joey, Uncle George, and McVey walked around to the other side of the car. The old man and the boy got in front and McVey climbed into the rear seat. The doors were closed. The motor hummed.

"Good luck!" Egan called out above the noise of the storm.

"So far so good," McVey said, looking out the rear window. "You played that nice and casual, Uncle."

Uncle George sat wedged in a corner of the seat, his gnarled fingers clenching and unclenching in his lap. In the faint light from the instrument panel Joey stared at his uncle, as though hoping for some magic trick to emerge from behind the scowling forehead.

"You may not be able to go more'n a mile or so down this road before we hit pretty deep water," Uncle George said. "But I figured all the walking we could save—" His voice faded off.

A few moments later the car slowed down. "Looks like a lake up ahead," Stack said, peering ahead through the space in the windshield cut by the lashing wiper blade.

"I guess this is about it," Uncle George said. "That'll be the overflow of Hyland Brook. Better pull up over to the side here, Mister."

The car stopped. McVey's orders were precise. He and Joey and Uncle George would move out and stand in front of the car in the headlight glow. Stack would keep them covered while McVey tied the clothesline to Joey and himself.

Presently, each of them equipped with a flashlight, they started off across a muddy field, following the side of the flooded brook. Uncle George led the way, with Joey behind him. The imprisoning rope trailed back to where it was lashed around McVey's pudgy midsection. Stack brought up the rear.

The violence of Nature against Man in these periodic eruptions is terrifying and costly beyond an accountant's ability to totalize. But Man, hiding in the securest place he can find, is seldom a witness to the awful damage that Nature inflicts upon herself in these moments of convulsion. Three men and a boy struggled slowly up the first gradual rise of the west ridge, and they saw trees uprooted, boulders laid bare, great jagged ditches dug in the earth by angry waters.

With only the flashlights to see by, they came suddenly to an impasse and had to scout blindly, through the wind and rain-swept darkness for a way around. They fell, scrambled up, fell again—the drive for escape still strong in McVey and Stack. Uncle George, like a gaunt, bent tree, moved steadily and slowly, always up. Occasionally he would reach back to help Joey.

The noise of the storm seemed to grow louder. McVey yanked on the rope and signaled Joey that he wanted to talk to Uncle George. The four of them huddled together. McVey had Joey by the arm, the gun held firmly against his ribs.

"Sounds like a waterfall!" he shouted at Uncle George.

The older man nodded. "Called the Devil's Slide. We want to stay as close to the edge of the stream as we can here. Otherwise we'll have to take a big circle around. Cost us a lot of time. Once we get above the falls the going should be easier. But stay right behind me. You don't want to lose your footing in this next bit." He looked down at Joey. "Getting tired, old timer?"

"I'm fine," Joey said, a little breathless.

They started up again. The stream to their left was an

angry torrent, and straight ahead of them the water thundered over the Devil's Slide. The climb was steep now. McVey kept turning his flashlight from the boy to Uncle George ahead of him.

They were halfway up the side of the foam-lashed falls when Uncle George seemed to lose his footing. Even over the noise of wind and water they could hear him shout. He staggered to the left, arms flung out to save himself, then pitched headfirst into the boiling falls.

McVey, gasping for breath, scrambled up beside Joey, who crouched on the edge of the falls, shining his flashlight down into the murderous water, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"Uncle Georgel Uncle Georgel!"

The two men were silent, shaken by the suddenness of it. Stack turned his flash around. "We better move," he said, licking his lips. "You can see where the bank's undermined here in spots. It gave way with the old guy right here."

"Come on, let's get away from the edge," McVey said. He yanked on the rope that was attached to Joey, pulling the dazed boy away from the falls.

"We gotta try to find him!" Joey wailed.

"You crazy?" Stack said. "Nobody could live through that. He's already pounded to death on the rocks." He looked at McVey. "So now what?"

McVey shone his flashlight on Joey's white, fear-struck face. "It looks like it's up to you, Junior," he said grimly. "You know these woods, don't you? Been out here with the old boy before, haven't you?"

Joey nodded, as though he only half heard.

"Your uncle said there was a way around the falls. Longer, he said, but it's probably a damn sight safer. You know the way?"

"There's an old logging road," Joey said. "I—I think I could find it from here."

"You better," McVey growled. "I'm warning you, sonny-boy, you try to pull one on us and I go back after your old man and your old woman, and that pretty teacher—"

"I—I think I can find it," Joey said in a shaken voice.

"So—get started!"

For half an hour they floundered around in brush and fallen tree limbs. Suddenly Joey turned, pointing with his flashlight. "Old logging road. You can see it," he said to McVey.

They moved with greater ease now. The road was rough, but there was no obstacle of undergrowth.

"Even if it is longer we can move faster," McVey said to Stack. He gave a little jerk on the rope and gestured to Joey to speed it up.

And then things happened so suddenly that McVey had no chance to act.

Directly in front of them the headlights of a car sprang into light. At the same instant Joey plunged forward, flat on his face. McVey had only a fleeting glimpse of the figure that stepped into the beam of light ahead of them—the dripping figure of Uncle George. He had raised a rifle to his shoulder and quite methodically he pulled the trigger. McVey's body jerked upward like a marionette on strings, then pitched sideways into the darkness. There was a round black hole in the center of his forehead.

Uncle George turned the gun slightly to the left.

"No!" Stack screamed. "Don't shoot!" He swung his arm and threw the .45 he was carrying into the underbrush. "Don't shoot!"

"Hold it, George!" another voice said. "We need him to do some talking." Sheriff Egan stepped forward into the light, a shotgun cradled in his arm. "You hold dead still, brother, unless you want a double load in your gut!"

Uncle George took three quick steps to the fallen boy and knelt beside him, cradling him in his arms.

"You did fine, boy," he said unsteadily. "You did just fine!"

It was all Joey could do to keep awake. His mother had given him two aspirins and a cup of hot tea. He was wrapped in blankets, and the heat from the kitchen range made him so drowsy that he felt his head drooping and he had to fight to listen.

Joey's mother and father, and Uncle George, and Sheriff Egan and the lovely Miss Graves were all there. They had all made a great fuss over Joey. Miss Graves had actually kissed him. His mother kept telling him he ought to get to bed, but she smiled at him gently and didn't press the point.

"These guys knocked over a diamond merchant in Montreal," the sheriff was saying. "Killed him and got away with about a half a million dollars in stones. Had 'em in that brief case all the time! They figured they could drive away at night—and ran right into the flood. When they saw Russ Toomey waving his torch at 'em they thought it was a police road block and they deliberately ran him down."

"I still don't understand the rest of it, Mr. Egan," Esther Trimble said. "How did you know to go to George's shack in the woods? And how did Joey know what to do?"

"It's George's story," Egan said.

Uncle George chuckled, and his pale blue eyes moved affectionately to Joey, who smiled back sleepily. "Fellow with a gun always figures he's stronger than the fellow he's covering," Uncle George said. "And he usually thinks he knows more than the poor sucker who's looking into his gun barrel. That was McVey. He fell into a trap when he made that up about arguing with Russ Toomey, but he was still top man—the smartest guy on earth. We didn't have any choice, it seemed, but to do just what he said—not with that gun pointed at Joey's head! But we weren't entirely licked."

"I'll say!" Red Egan chuckled. He was sitting next to Janet Graves and Joey guessed she must be too interested in the story to notice that the sheriff's hand was resting against hers.

"I tipped Red off right away there was trouble," Uncle George said. "Told him I was heading 'south to Hyland Brook.' Hyland Brook is north of here in the next county! I told him I was going to take these fellows over the west ridge into New York State. Red knew as well as I did that if we went over the west ridge we'd wind up in Massachusetts. Told him we were taking a camp kit he'd given Joey—which he never gave him. Mistake after mistake that the two strangers couldn't suspect—so Red knew there was trouble, and he also knew enough to let me play it my way!"

"Always let you play it your way, George."

"Then I told Miss Graves here to tell Red to meet me at my shack in the woods and stay under cover till he heard from me."

"How could you tell her?" Hector interrupted. "You were never out of McVey's sight—or the other fellow's."

"There were three people in this town who made friends with Russ Toomey," Uncle George said. "There was Joey, first and best, and me, and Miss Graves, who tried to teach the poor deaf and dumb boy a little on the side. So we learned to talk his way—with our hands! I stood at the door with McVey staring right at me and told Miss Graves with my hands what to tell Red. And then in the car I told Joey what was up—the same way. You remember the Devil's Slide, Esther—when we were kids? Water comes over the falls—overhang up top. At the bottom there's a pool hid right behind the water coming over the falls. I told Joey I was going to dive in there. They wouldn't be able to see me through the overflow—not in the dark with only flashlights. Then Joey was to stall a while and finally lead 'em along the logging road to my shack."

"You were taking a pretty big gamble with Joey's life," Hector Trimble sputtered.

Uncle George's face was grave. "Yes, I was, Hector. But don't think for a minute McVey was going to let us go after we'd served his purpose. He'd have left us both in the woods—dead. Had to take a chance. So while Joey was leading 'em around in the woods I lit out for the shack. Red was there, and we parked his Jeep heading straight up the road. I'd told Joey the minute the headlights came on he was to dive flat on his face."

"You told him that—with your hands?" Esther Trimble said.

"Right in the car—right in front of Stack. You might say Russ Toomey brought his own killers to justice," Uncle George said.

"But weren't you scared, Joey?" Esther asked. "Weren't you scared maybe George hadn't made it back from the falls? Joey?"

Uncle George looked tenderly at the boy. "I guess we could all do with a little sleep," he said.

VICTOR CANNING

Flint's Diamonds

The second in a new series—how the members of the Minerva Club came to the rescue of Flint Morrish in his terrible predicament . . .

The Minerva Club—of which most people have never heard—is in a turning off Brook Street which, as you probably know, is very handy for the Ritz. It is a very exclusive club, chiefly because its membership is restricted to those who have served at least a two years' prison sentence and are able—beg, borrow, or steal—to pay yearly dues of £50.

Outside the Club, the members are free to carry on their professional activities without any fear of being expelled—no matter what trouble they get into. But inside, there is nothing but good manners and the most honorable behavior. You could leave your wallet on the edge of a hand basin and find it there a month later. In other words, it is an oasis of tranquility after the cut-and-thrust of the outside world where every man is for himself. The membership includes some distinguished names from the criminal calendar—Milky Waye, the Club's Secretary; Solly Badrubal, Chairman of the Wines Committee; Jim O'Leary, Treasurer—others including Horace Head, Marty Martin, Dig Sopwith—dozens of them. And Flint Morrish.

This story is about Flint. He was one of the nicest men ever to have done time. He had a wooden leg—the result of something that went wrong with the gelignite in an early safe job; he had a beaming country-squire kind of face and an incurable faith in human nature—particularly in the female side of it.

Flint was always looking for the perfect woman—and always being disappointed. In romantic affairs he was as short-sighted as his own eyes—and he did nothing about either

defect. He wouldn't wear glasses and he wouldn't learn by experience.

His latest "little number" was a blonde perfection, weighing about a hundred and ten pounds, somewhat top-heavy in her physical distribution, and with a pair of blue eyes that were like sultry lagoon-pools. She came into the ring listed as Lottie Larson, age twenty-eight (unsubstantiated by any birth certificate). And Flint was gone on her. For him she was *the* woman, and for her he was *the* man—as soon as he could, no matter how, produce a properly authenticated bank balance of £10,000.

At the time of this story, Flint had about £5,000—which was high for him—and he was working on the balance. In fact, although he had taken Lottie on holiday to a small seaport town in Hampshire called Brankfold, Flint never missed a chance to pursue his calling—Flint was a man who always had both eyes open for the slightest tip of the head from Opportunity.

One day, driving by himself—Lottie had stayed in the hotel with a headache—he passed a large country house just in time to see a man and a woman and two children drive out of the main gates. Flint stopped up the road and then wandered back to the house. He went round to the servants' entrance and knocked. If there had been any reply he would have tried to sell the cook a complete set of the *Child's Wonder Book of Nature*, £14, delivered by post as soon as the check was cleared . . . But there was no answer to his knock.

So Flint went into the house through a convenient window, and wasting no time on reconnaissance he quickly found the study and the safe. It was a laughable safe to a man of Flint's experience. He opened it up with a collapsible jimmy (which he always carried with him), and found himself with about £50 in notes and a small wash-leather bag of uncut diamonds. At a quick and happy glance he knew the diamonds would be worth about £20,000 from any fence.

Flint drove back to his hotel whistling and found that Lottie, according to the hall porter, had recovered from her headache and gone off to the Pier Ballroom to a tea dance. Now Flint, because of his wooden leg, was not much of a dancing man. However, for Lottie's sake, he did his best. So he went after her, eager to show her the bag of diamonds.

Squinting around the ballroom, he finally picked out her blonde topknot. She was dancing with a man who, as far as Flint could see, was just a tall length of Donegal tweed with a black thatch on top.

Flint pushed his way across to them on the floor and took Lottie by the arm. It should be mentioned here that Flint was by nature a very jealous man where his "perfect women" were concerned—even though Flint knew that there were some limits to perfection.

Very politely Flint said, "Excuse me, the lady is tired," and started to lead his beloved away. But the face under the black thatch said to Flint, "The lady is not tired and is enjoying this dance with me. Stump off, you old pirate."

Now this was a most unfortunate thing to say to Flint. Flint didn't mind a bit being ribbed about his leg by members of the Minerva Club—but for any nonmember even to show he had noticed it, let alone draw a crude allusion to it, was like putting a match to a powder keg.

Flint let go a roundhouse and put the man on the floor; but the man jumped up to an accompaniment of shrieks from the dancers and a drum roll from the band, and flashed over a quick right cross to Flint's jaw that dropped him to the floor as if he'd been shot. After that there was a few minutes of sharp give-and-take, during which Lottie disappeared, and then the police arrived. Flint and the other man were hauled off to the local police station—charge, disturbance of the peace.

Now on the way to the station Flint did some quick thinking. He knew that he would be up before the beak the next morning and he knew that with his record he would get at least a month—while the other fellow, such is justice, pleading he had been assaulted, would probably get off scot-free. The thought of a month didn't worry Flint much. In his profession the calendar was always coming up with such temporary blanks—but, of course, he was worried about the diamonds.

At the police station he was bound to be searched and his belongings taken. In the end Flint did what any intelligent monkey would have done: he pouched the small wash-leather bag inside his mouth up against his right cheek and all through the journey he sat with his hand against his face as though he had got a swollen jaw in the fight.

It worked in front of the desk sergeant. Flint was relieved of all his possessions and went mumbling into the detention cell.

The next morning he appeared before the judge and tried to mumble his way out of the charge against him. Maybe, if Flint could have spoken up clearly, the beak would have given him only a month; but the beak was a bit deaf and Flint's mumbles, though each one was over twenty carats in

value, merely irritated him. Flint got a sentence of two months, and the other man was discharged.

Now the jail at Brankfold was a small one, adjoining the Chief Constable's house—all one building, in fact. There were only eight cells, and business in Brankfold was never enough to fill them all. Flint was given a top-floor cell with a view of the sky and nothing to look forward to except visiting day when he knew that Lottie would be around.

Flint was aware, of course, that while he had got away with the swollen-face gambit, he could not keep it up for two months. Fat jaws just do not last that long and somebody would get suspicious. So he decided to unpouch the diamonds, hide them, and only pouch them again on the day he left jail.

Being a man of resource, he proceeded to unravel enough thread from his bed mattress to make a length of string. He tied the wash-leather bag to it, stood on his bed, and lowered the diamonds through the grille of the ventilator up in the corner near the ceiling, tying the other end of the string neatly and inconspicuously to the grille frame. Then he settled down patiently to do his two months. Sixty days and he would be out—with scads of money in the bank—and Lottie—and bliss forevermore.

On the first visiting day he told Lottie about the diamonds and about the splendid future that lay before them. Her eyes turned to limpid pools which promised exotic delights. She began to describe the kind of house she would like to live in, and the color she already fancied for the dining-room curtains.

Flint congratulated himself on his good taste in falling for a woman who was not only beautiful and shapely but such a magnificent home builder. The idea of home, it must be mentioned, was something very dear to Flint since he had never had one, having been found in a railway carriage when he was three and having flitted from then on through various institutions and remand homes to Borstal and, finally—the crowning achievement of his career—five years in Dartmoor. Yes, Flint was all for a home of his own—with his perfect woman.

But the next week, when Solly Badrubal came to see him, he was a bit shaken.

"To tell a woman you have a packet of diamonds stashed away is folly, Flint—sheer folly. She could sell you out just for the reward she could get for the return of stolen property."

"Not Lottie—there is no such baseness in my Lottie."

"Then she's no woman."

"That," said Flint firmly, "is something I know to be untrue. Don't you worry about Lottie. Just you get hold of a good fence and tell him I'm coming out with a packet and to have the money ready. I don't want any delay in getting off on my honeymoon. Lottie is all for the Bahamas. She is going up to London next week to choose her outfit."

Well, all might have been smooth sailing. Lottie could have gone to the Bahamas with Flint, they could have been happy for as long as the money lasted—which is as much as any reasonable person can expect—but things went wrong.

At the end of the first month there was a fire in the kitchen quarters of the jail, and these were directly under Flint's cell. He woke up one night to find his cell full of smoke, the floorboards like a hot plate, and before he could do anything, a couple of officious guards had come in and rescued him.

Flint was very annoyed with this prompt rescue—he'd been given no time to retrieve his diamonds. The fire was put out smartly, and Flint, for the rest of his time, was lodged in another cell—and never once did he get a chance to go back to his original cell.

Eventually he was released, empty-handed, and he came back to London to discuss his problem with some of the boys at the Minerva Club. And let it be said, here and now—when any member of the Club was in trouble, the others rallied round with advice and help and with only a minimum thought of self-interest.

Well, there were several opinions offered. Solly Badrubal said, "Go back and get pinched again in Brankfold. Slug that same fellow—then maybe you'll be put back in the same cell they first gave you."

Flint shook his head. "When I left they hadn't even begun to repair it."

Milky Waye suggested that Flint try and get a job as a guard there. They could easily fake his credentials.

"They'd recognize him by his wooden leg," said Jim O'Leary.

Horace Head said, "You could bribe one of the warders to get the rocks for you."

No one took any notice of Horace.

So there was Flint in a curious predicament and the prospect of a bright future slowly tarnishing—until one day Lottie came swaying on stiletto heels into the Ladies' Annex of the Club, was settled with a large pink gin, and announced to Flint that she had the answer. Ever since leaving Brankfold, she said, she had subscribed to the *Brankfold Courier*.

"Why?" asked Flint.

"Because we had such a nice time there. I'm sentimental like that."

"Ah, yes," said Flint.

"And look at this," said Lottie. She placed a copy of that week's *Courier* in front of him. There on the front page was the story of how the Brankford jail, so little used, had been declared obsolete by the Prison Commissioners and was to be put up for auction at the end of the month—the whole bloomin' business, Chief Constable's house, eight-cell block with kitchen and offices, and an exercise yard that could be converted into a nice garden.

"But I don't want to *buy* it," said Flint.

"You don't have to, darling. But they must let people look over the property—people who are *thinking* of buying. You just go down and get an order to view, get into that cell, and pinch back your diamonds."

Although it was strictly forbidden to indulge in such an act in the Ladies' Annex, except on guest nights, Flint took Lottie in his arms, upset her pink gin, and gave her a resounding kiss.

The next day Flint was off to Brankford with Solly Badrubal, Jim O'Leary, Horace Head, and Lottie. Flint had no intention of going into the prison himself—some of the staff were still there and might recognize him—and there was still a hullabaloo going on about the original theft of the diamonds. No, Flint was much too clever for that.

They all stayed at the Royal Hotel and Solly tried his hand first. He got an order to view from the auctioneers.

When he came back he shook his head. "No luck, Flint. A young man came with me from the auctioneers. Couldn't shake him off—and he wasn't very keen even about me going into the cell. The floor's still unsafe."

The next day Jim O'Leary tried. But it was the same story. The auctioneer's young man had stuck to him like a leech and just couldn't be shaken off.

The next day, without much hope, they tried Horace. Horace came back beaming. "You know, it would make a nice place, that prison. Good garden. Nice young man from the auctioneer's told me it'll go for about ten thousand. A snip."

"What about my diamonds?"

"Oh, them. Well, I didn't fancy that floor. Even if I did—the young chap wouldn't leave me alone."

"Damn the fellow," said Flint. Then he turned to Lottie, desperation stimulating an idea in him. Although Flint—out of chivalrous respect—never involved any of his perfect

women in his professional schemes, this seemed a very special case. He said, "You must try, darling. You go over the place and when you get to that cell, you faint—calling out for water. He'll dash off and leave you alone for a minute or two—and that's all you need."

"What—faint on a floor that's unsafe?"

"Don't be silly. Faint in the doorway. Anyway the floor will hold you."

Lottie hesitated for a moment, then she said, "All right, darling. It seems the only way left—and it means so much to us both."

"It means twenty thousand knicker," said Solly. "For that I'd go into a coma for a month."

So Lottie went off the next day and did her stuff. She came back, upset, with a patch of burnt wood ash on her neat little rump, and said angrily, "It didn't work. I fainted, calling for water—and what do you think that fool of a young man did? He caught me up in his arms, pulled a brandy flask from his pocket, and damned near choked me. And when I said I wanted water, he *carried* me down into the kitchen. I couldn't shake him off. I've had enough of this diamond hunt, Flint. I'm going back to London and you can call me when you've got the diamonds."

And she left in a huff. Flint wasn't going to have his perfect woman unless he cracked his problem—and soon. Flint was a little upset but he saw her logic: you can't expect a perfect woman to hang around forever, waiting for a payday that never comes.

However, that evening in his bedroom the four of them got down to it over a bottle of whiskey, and with the help of a telephone call to Milky Waye the problem was solved. They would go to the auction and buy the prison. Flint had £5,000—the rest, if necessary, could be raised after the sale on a mortgage. Once the prison was his he could get the diamonds—the others taking a small cut for their help—and then Flint could resell the prison, maybe at a profit. It was Milky's idea. Milky said that he would come down and bid for Flint at the auction. Which he did.

The auction was held outside in the exercise yard of the prison and there were a lot of people there. As Flint said, "Who the hell wants to *buy* a prison? They must be mad."

Only Horace answered. "You could make a nice place of it—nice garden—"

"Shut up," said Jim O'Leary. "It gives me the creeps just being in this yard. Think of all the poor souls who've slogged around here, longing for a butt to smoke."

The bidding was brisk and went quickly up to £7,000. There it lagged a bit, then got its second wind, and finally, Milky Waye had it knocked down to him at £11,000.

As the crowd dispersed, the auctioneer said to Milky Waye, "If your principal will just sign these papers . . . and give me his check for the deposit . . . Thank you. Here are the keys—we'll get the deeds and all that settled later. There may be a little delay because I'm short-handed at the moment—staff trouble, you know. Wonderful little property—full of possibilities . . ."

"Oh, full . . ." said Milky.

Then the five of them stood about, waiting for the crowd to go, the bunch of cell keys in Flint's hands. When the last person had left, Flint stumped off toward the top cells with the others following him. He unlocked the door and held the rest back.

"Floor won't hold us all," he said, and then added with a grin, "Don't want any misfortune at the last moment, do we?"

But that was exactly what he got.

He went gingerly over the floor and got up on the bed. The end of the string was still tied to the ventilator grille. He pulled it up—all two feet of it—and there at the other end was the wash-leather bag.

Flint jerked it free and went back to the others, who crowded round to see the diamonds. But already thunderclouds had gathered on Flint's face. The only thing in the bag was a large sheet of mauve notepaper, carefully folded and smelling of scent.

"No diamonds—I've been robbed!" stormed Flint.

"Perhaps you've got the wrong cell?" suggested Horace.

"Shut up," said Jim O'Leary.

"Read the blasted letter," said Solly Badrubal, "though why should I be anxious for bad news?"

"It's a woman's writing," said Milky. "That's a bad sign."

"It's Lottie," said Flint, and then more weakly, holding the letter out to Milky, "You read it—I can't . . ."

"You really should get some glasses," said Horace.

"Shut up," said Milky, and he began to read the note, which said:

Darling Flint,

I know this will distress you, but it is so much better to be honest and hurt a person than to be dishonest and store up unhappiness for us both. It is not just your wooden leg—after all, many a woman has truly loved a man with physical disabilities—

"This," said Milky, "was not composed by Lottie. It is not her style. She had help."

He went on:

—but it is rather your blemishes of character, particularly your quick temper, which have decided me. I think I knew this from the moment you came to the tea dance and were so brutal to sweet Duncan Brown—

"Who the hell," said Flint, "is Duncan Brown?"

"Search me," said Solly.

"I know," said Horace. "He's that tall, dark-haired chap who wears a Donegal tweed suit—the one from the auctioneer's office. We had a long talk together. Yes, Duncan Brown—that's his name."

Milky was saying, "Just listen to the rest of it—"

From that moment I knew you were not the man for me. Duncan and I love each other—for a long time I was not sure, but when I fainted in here, meaning to do all you said, he was so kind and chivalrous, so wonderfully tender and understanding, that those few moments in his arms—

"Enough!" roared Flint. "She's bilked me."

"They are," said Milky, finishing the reading of the note to himself, "honeymooning in the Bahamas. And I guess that's why the auctioneer is short-staffed."

Flint turned—a broken man—and stumped away, saying, "I need a whiskey. A very large one. And what the hell do I do now—with a prison on my hands?"

Well, of course, if Life is full of disappointments, it also has its compensations. Nothing is so bad as it looks. In fact, in this case, it was much better.

Flint tried to sell the prison but never got a decent offer for it. In the end he converted it into a private hotel for "special" guests recuperating from misfortune or just wanting to be anonymous for a while. Most of them were members of the Minerva Club who wanted to get quietly away into the country, and all of them appreciated the irony of living comfortably in a converted jail.

Flint—with occasional help from Horace—made over the exercise yard into a garden, and discovered that he had green fingers, that he had no further longing for "the perfect woman," and that at last he had found a home which, not only in appearance but in association, was full of the rich memories of the past.

HELEN McCLOY

Number Ten Q Street

A new and different kind of crime story—of bootlegging, addiction, subversion in the future . . . and surely a most unusual story from the creator of psychiatrist-detective Dr. Basil Willing . . . or is it?

When Tom began to snore, Ella switched off the TV and moved quietly toward the hall closet. He had drunk six cans of neo-beer, one right after another. That was usually enough to put him out for a good hour, and one hour should be enough.

She pulled open the door of the closet. The hinges didn't squeak. She had oiled them this morning when Tom was out at the bowling alley. Or was it the poolroom? She could never remember which were Tom's bowling days and which were his pool days.

She slid her arms into the sleeves of her coat and buttoned the collar high under her chin. She reached for her handbag and—oh, God!—the car keys fell on the floor with a loud jangle.

Tom stirred, without opening his eyes, and muttered, "Ella?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Whereya goin'?"

"Nowhere, dear. Just out for a breath of fresh air."

"Ge'me packa cigs, willya?"

"Yes, dear."

"An' leave on Chann'l Twenny-four."

Ella switched on the TV. A crash of canned laughter filled the room. Tom began to snore again, but this time she left the TV on. Perhaps it would function as a lullaby, keeping him quiet until she got back.

She closed the door softly behind her and walked toward the automatic elevator. When it was first installed, she had used the fire-stairs, even though she lived on the tenth floor.

Others, who shared her phobia, did the same until the management found out. Now all the doors to the fire-stairs were locked.

"Suppose there's a fire?" Ella had asked the man in charge of maintenance.

"I'll come around with the keys."

"Suppose there isn't time?"

"Can't be helped. Can't have you folks sabotaging General Elevators."

"Not using one elevator is sabotaging General Elevators?"

"That's for sure. If everybody went back to using stairs, General Elevators would go out of business and where would our economy be then?"

So she had to use the unmanned elevator in which she firmly believed that anything could happen. She could be stuck between floors, alone, sealed inside a mechanism she didn't understand. Or she could be attacked and beaten by some of the bored and idle boys who were always drifting in and out of the building. Not for money. Just for fun. Automatic elevators were a favorite place for such beatings. No one really blamed the boys. What could anyone expect when there were no schools beyond third grade for those who lacked engineering aptitude? The only skill most people needed was ad-literacy and that could be acquired in three years.

Tonight the elevator was empty. The lobby, too. As she stepped into the street, a bitter blast of winter wind snatched her breath away. She bent her head as if she were diving and moved into the harsh current of air. She didn't dare take the car. Someone might notice the license number. Pedestrians were subject to many rules and regulations these days, but, at least, they didn't have license numbers—not yet . . .

The cold wind had swept the street clean of people. Now and then a car glided past, but there was no real traffic. Would there be more when she got to Q Street? She had never been to this particular place before.

She had not risked writing the address down, but it was fixed in her mind: *Number Ten Q Street*. Easy to remember. She had only to think of *Queer Street*.

But every time she thought of it, she had a searing sense of shame. Why couldn't she be like other people?

But she wasn't. That was all there was to it. She could go for weeks, for months even, without satisfying her abnormal craving and then . . . the Desire became so overpowering that nothing else mattered. Once she had been forced to put a sleeping pill into Tom's neo-beer after dinner in order to

get away. She wasn't really that sort of person. Or . . . was she becoming a different sort of person, now?

She shivered, not from cold. What would Tom do if he ever guessed the truth about her? He was so simple, so-normal. He had no morbid desires. He could never be made to understand a person who did . . .

Her flying feet brought her to a squalid neighborhood. The moon had risen. Its cold light was pitiless to the diseased buildings. Peeling, eczematic paint. Scabrous, suppurating brick. Cramped, arthritic fire escapes. Filth everywhere—on grimy windowpanes, in trash cans and gutters, on worn steps before dark doorways. She looked up at a sign: Q Street.

She thought she saw darkness move in one of the doorways. Now she was really afraid. This was like stepping into the elevator alone and hearing a step behind her and then turning to see a tall, strong boy with a bicycle chain in his hand.

But she couldn't go back. She had come so far and she didn't know when she would have the chance again.

Once more the darkness moved. And this time she saw the gleam of a knife.

"Oh, no! Please . . ." Ella could barely speak.

And then, faintly, it came—that sweet, memorable, enticing fragrance.

Her fear melted.

"Oh, please let me go in! I must, I must!"

The boy was young, surely under twenty, but he was looking at her with the ancient contempt of panderers for the vices they live on. "You goin' in Number Ten? What's the word?"

Her voice quavered over the word a friend had whispered to her weeks ago—a word salvaged out of the faraway past. "Speakeasy," Ella whispered.

"Okay." His thumb jerked toward the last house in the row behind him. Silently he slid back into his doorway. A guard. Of course. They would have to take such a precaution.

Outwardly, Number Ten was just another dingy tenement—street door open, doorbells and letter boxes in a vestibule, inner door locked. She had been told to ring the bell marked 3A. A wheezing mechanism, one of the earliest forms of automation, opened the inner door.

She drew her coat away from the greasy walls as she climbed the stairs. If Tom could see her now . . .

There were no bells on the third floor. She knocked on the door marked 3A—three short knocks and two long. It opened on a chain. A bloodshot eye looked at her through the slit.

"Yeah?"

She stammered a little as she gave the second countersign. "J-joe sent me."

The door swung open. She darted inside. In an instant the door had slammed behind her.

The room was large and relatively clean. Waiters moved among small tables covered with red-and-white checked cloths. At the far end was a long counter where people sat on stools. It would be cheaper at the counter, so she found a vacant stool.

The counterman wiped a place in front of her. "Kind of young to be here, aren't you, lady?"

"I'm of voting age."

"Yeah?" He was sadly skeptical. "What'll it be?"

She moistened dry lips with her tongue. "If you please—if you could let me have . . ." It was hard to say the words. But now the fragrance came again, stronger, more enervating, but irresistible. She threw shame to the winds.

"I want a slice of real bread!"

The sadness in his face deepened. "And I suppose you want real butter, too? Butter made from cream that comes from cows. Filthy, smelly, old cows covered with mud and straw and dung and flies."

"Yes—yes, I want real butter."

"Are you sure? Don't you ever read ads? Even if you can't read, you must listen to commercials! Wouldn't you rather have Low-price Spread, test-tube fresh, synthesized in General Nourishment's fully automated laboratories? A spread that's not just clean, but sterilized. It can be kept fresh forever because no mold or bacteria can grow in it. Not enough nourishment for a single bacterium. Yet it will fill your stomach and keep you from feeling hunger."

She lowered her head. She couldn't meet his eyes. "But I want *real* butter. And *real* jam, made with fruit and sugar and nothing else, not even a preservative."

"That's going to cost you plenty."

"How much?"

"One hundred dollars for the bread. Twenty-five for a pat of butter. Thirty for two ounces of jam."

"I have cash." She clawed open her purse, counted out \$155 in small bills, and tossed them on the counter. "I've been saving for months."

He scooped up the money, then paused as he noticed her wedding ring. "I don't often try to help the girls who come here, but you're married and—you're so young. You do know what you ought to do, don't you? Pick up that money and

walk right out of here as fast as you can before it's too late. Go straight home to your husband and heat up one of those delicious frozen Tastee-good Teevee Dinners manufactured by General Nourishment. Nylon meat; chlorinated, aerated cotton bread; dehydrated, homogenized potatoes; synthetic, chlorophyll vegetables. Will you do it?"

"No." Ella's voice was firm.

The counterman sighed. "Do you know what's in this bread you're asking for? Flour. Real flour. And that's made by taking two dirty old stones and grinding up the fruit of a weed called 'wheat' that grows in soil—rightly named—soil, mud, earth—the earth that both human beings and animals walk on. Have you ever tasted the stuff? Or is this your first—"

He faltered as his gaze went beyond Ella. She turned. Another man was standing behind her—a short, fat man with a smooth face and slitted eyes.

"Preaching again, Marvin? That's not what I pay you for! Take the little lady's money and give her whatever she wants. If I catch you trying to reform my customers again—"

He patted Ella's shoulder. She shrank from him, but a moment later all that was forgotten. There, right in front of her, was a slice of real bread, still warm from the oven, crusty and munchy between her teeth, tasting of ripe grain and sunshine and rain from heaven. And running with real butter, golden, melting, scented with clover. And the jam was made of real black currants and real sugar, sweet and tart.

She didn't care what the commercials said. Jam synthesized from carefully selected peanut shells and old shoesoles did not taste like this. Any more than what the Kremokup people put in their Instantkaff tasted like real cream in real coffee—any more than the orange powder which General Nourishment had christened Tango-Seville tasted like juice from real Seville oranges.

Recklessly Ella ordered another slice of bread.

A man sat down on the stool beside her. "A steak, please," he said brazenly. "A real steak, cut from a steer, and broiled rare."

"Anything with it, sir?"

"Yes, real potatoes, French fried, and hearts of lettuce with chives and Roquefort dressing."

"You know what that will cost you? Two thousand dollars."

"Okay."

Ella was impressed. This man was no member of the consuming classes. They didn't have that kind of money. She

stole a glance at him and knew, instantly, that she had seen him somewhere before.

But where? He couldn't be a friend of Tom's. All Tom's friends, like Tom himself, were simple consumers. Could she have met this man at one of her mother's big parties? Her mother had a great uncle who owned some stock in General Transportation. Now and then a few stockholders and scientists turned up at her mother's parties. But if this man had met Ella at her mother's, he might recognize her now. He might tell her mother he had seen her here. Good God, he might even tell Tom—

She ought to leave now, at once, before the man noticed her. But she couldn't, not until she finished eating that second slice of bread and butter.

She risked another glance at the stranger. He looked important. A lean, craggy face. Dark eyes sunk deeply under black brows. Even his clothes . . . She had never seen real wool, but the suit he was wearing didn't look like any synthetic she knew. He even wore a ring on the little finger of one hand, a massive ring that didn't seem a bit like the "Jool-junk for He-Men" advertised on TV. Could it be real gold?

Her second piece of bread was served at the same time as his steak. She had never smelled a real steak before. She could feel saliva gather on her tongue.

The man was looking at her. "Like a bite?"

Never, never talk to a strange man in a dive, but . . .

"Could I? Just one little bite?"

"Why not?" Even his smile was tantalizingly familiar. Still she couldn't place him.

She chewed the morsel of steak, closing her eyes in ecstasy.

He was still smiling when she opened her eyes. "Why didn't you order steak yourself?"

"I don't have two thousand dollars."

"Then we must share this."

"That wouldn't be fair to you."

"Oh, come on! You're a pretty girl. I like you." His voice was almost a drawl, lazy, reassuring. Ella hesitated. Then he, too, noticed her wedding ring. "Married?"

"Yes. To a good man. He's never been in a speakeasy in his life."

"Unemployed?"

"Of course. He has no scientific aptitude and machine-minding jobs are so scarce. He's been on the waiting list for years. But he'll never get one. It doesn't bother him any more—not since we went on Full Automation; he gets paid a full salary for consuming instead of working."

"How does he spend his time when he isn't consuming?"

"He bowls and plays pool on alternate days. Then he comes home and drinks neo-beer with his Tasteegood Teevee dinner, and watches commercials and goes to sleep. He believes everything he sees and hears on commercials."

"But you don't?"

"No. I think they're bunk." The steak and bread and butter together had gone to her head. She had forgotten the old adage: Never mix foods.

"Tom consumes everything that is advertised on TV," she went on. "Everything from underarm deodorants for football players to the kind of cigs mountain climbers smoke on cliff tops. And as for food! Tom loves every synthetic that General Nourishment puts out—even the laboratory-tested, artificial eggs with the chemical formula stamped on the edible, plastic shell. He consumes about five thousand calories a day and then, when he gets overweight, he goes on General Nourishment's Reducto Wafers to get himself back into shape for consuming again."

"How is he on clothes?"

"The best consumer that General Garments ever had! You should see his sports shirts. When they vaporize themselves at the end of three months, he goes right out and buys more. After all, as he says, 'That's what I'm paid my salary for—for consuming.'"

"I suppose most people are like Tom," mused the stranger. "Perfectly willing to consume anything they are told to as long as everybody else is doing the same thing. People like you and me are deviates, sports of nature. Lucky there are so few of us."

"Why?"

He looked at her surprised, almost shocked. "Surely you realize that an Expanding Economy Under Full Automation will collapse unless everyone consumes as much of the same things as possible; and these things must be the cheapest things possible—which means they must be synthetics. We should do everything we can to support General Nourishment, General Transportation, General Buildings, General Communications, General Entertainment—all the General Organizations. They've brought plenty to everyone."

"Plenty of what?"

"Food, cars, houses, TV sets—everything that makes life worth living."

"But all synthetic," said Ella. "All mass-produced and all exactly alike."

"They have to be. Otherwise there wouldn't be enough to

go round and still make a profit under Full Automation. Can you imagine how wasteful and downright wicked it was in the old days? Think of the human labor and time, the capital and raw materials invested in just one pot roast made of real meat and real vegetables. Absolutely uneconomic and inefficient! Today General Nourishment's automated food laboratories can turn out in less than three minutes as many as five hundred thousand synthetic pot roasts, frozen and imperishable, at a cost of less than one-tenth of one cent each."

"I suppose so, but . . ." Ella frowned. "Once you've tasted real food, you just can't enjoy synthetics. Why don't we do as the English do? Let addicts buy a little real food once in a while on a doctor's prescription? Then there wouldn't be all this bootlegging and crime."

"You'll be saying next that you approve of the French system—medically inspected, government-licensed restaurants where real food is sold openly."

"You think that's bad?"

"I know it is. For one thing, the medical inspectors are underpaid and careless. The indigestion rate in France is appalling, and it increases every year."

"It's hard to realize that in our great-grandparents' day everybody ate real food and no one thought of it as a crime."

"Their death rate was higher than ours."

"But they had more fun while they were alive."

He grinned. "You really are subversive, aren't you?"

"I don't see why something that was normal for our great-grandparents has to be abnormal for us."

"A few hundred thousand years ago primitive man thought sexual promiscuity was normal, but for us it would—"

His voice was drowned by the shriek of an alarm bell.

"RAID!" shouted the counterman.

The fat man with the smooth face made his voice carry without shouting. "Keep your seats, everybody! Be calm—we'll handle this!"

The stranger's face was grim. "I mustn't be found here."

Ella's lips tightened. "Maybe—if we could phone a lawyer—"

"You forget the telephone's on full automation, too. Besides, we'd never have time to dial the complete area-code number."

The waiters moved like lightning. In a few moments every trace of food had vanished from the room and Ella could hear the grinding noise of an old-fashioned garbage disposal unit in the kitchen. Roulette wheels were placed on some of the

tables, dice and cards on others. And just in time. Only a few moments later an ax crashed through the door and a dozen uniformed policemen poured into the room.

One officer turned to a man in a resplendent uniform. "Must have been a false tip, Chief. Nothing going on here—nothing but a little gambling."

"Wait." The Chief of Police held up his hand. "Do I, or don't I, smell freshly baked bread?"

The fat man moved forward, a smile on his smooth face. "Not one crumb of bread in the place, Chief. Take my word for it." As he spoke his hand went out. Ella thought she saw something pass from one man to the other. She was almost sure that the Chief of Police put his hand in his pocket immediately afterward. He was smiling now. "Guess it was a phony tip at that. Carry on, folks! If I wasn't on duty, I'd join in the blackjack game."

"He didn't even look in the kitchen," whispered Ella.

"He was paid off. Didn't you notice?"

"How awful!" She rose. "I must go now. Goodbye and—I don't know how to thank you for the steak."

"It was a pleasure. I'll walk with you to the end of the street. This neighborhood isn't safe for a young woman alone."

They went down the greasy stairs together, out into the cold windy night. The shadowy figure of the boy on guard had vanished from the doorway. In the moon's light the street seemed empty—as empty as a lunar landscape.

I hope he's not going to kiss me, thought Ella, just because he met me in a speakeasy.

She halted with a gasp. She was looking across the street to a car parked at the curb, a black car with white letters on one side—the dread letters A.E.P.

"That car!" Ella's voice shook. "You know what those letters mean?"

"Advertising Enforcement Police." His voice had changed. It was no longer the lazy, confidence-inspiring drawl of a man weak enough to indulge himself in bootleg steak. It was now the stern voice of a dedicated moralist. Even his eyes had changed, and he made no effort to hide the deep contempt in them.

"I'm an Inspector of the A.E.P." In his hand she saw the identity card—signature, photograph, government seal. "I've been following you for some time."

"So that's why your face was so familiar!"

"Tonight I recorded your conversation with me in the speakeasy. My ring is a microphone."

"But it has no wire connection!"

"You little fool! As long ago as 1963, they had microphones without wire connections. You're under arrest."

"But . . . you led me on! You're a member of the secret police—"

"Of course. How else could we ever make an arrest?"

"And the charge?"

"Subversion of the whole economy by failure to perform your duty as a consumer of synthetics willingly, cheerfully, and patriotically. Conviction is certain. With Full Automation and computers on the Bench, a miscarriage of justice has become impossible."

"And the penalty?"

"A deep-freeze cell for life. We can't have people like you around. This sort of thing might become contagious."

"May I call my husband? Please!"

"No."

Ella screamed as he shoved her into the car. She was still screaming as the A.E.P. car drove away in the moonlight.

JOHN REESE

Hearing Is Believing

An ingenious and amusing adventure of two college seniors, with an old wrinkle on smuggling but an exceedingly new wrinkle on detecting . . .

"Are we ready?" said Jerry Runkle.

Mort Lisky made a fast examination of his circuits. Ready-lights glowed on both tape recorders. Microphones were in place, amplifiers plugged in, his monitor earphones "hot." His long sensitive fingers caressed the switches lovingly. "I guess so, but I wish I could test the filter on an incoming call."

"No time," said Jerry. "They're not going to horse around about contacting us. They've got a lot of heavy scratch riding on this caper."

Mort gave him a pained look. "You were in that workshop original about gangsters, weren't you? Kid, you gotta stop letting freshmen write your lines!"

"Corny or not," said Jerry, "it's true. And if you didn't try to make friends with everybody after two beers, we wouldn't be in this fix. You're the genius who picked up those two characters!"

"But you're the one who loaned Fox your camera, and that's where we found the jewels," said Mort. "I still think we ought to call the cops, or the customs agents, or somebody with badges and guns."

Jerry shivered. "Not yet. Face it, Mort—until we can prove the jewels aren't ours, we are the smugglers. We did bring them in, don't forget that!"

"Forget it? How can I?" Mort said hollowly. "All right, maestro, we'll do it your way. The script gets off to a fast start—I'll say that for it. But are you sure you know what your third-act curtain's going to be?"

No answer came from Jerry, who was a serious, blond youth of twenty-one, a senior majoring in theater arts at San

Diego State College. Jerry did not yearn to be an actor himself. Once he had, but all that had been discarded with other purposeless yearnings of his callow years. Now Jerry wanted to write, direct, and produce, manipulating players as well as lines, to the greater glory of the modern theater.

Mort Lisky towered over him by six inches, being a swarthy six feet four of bones, chin, nose, and ungentle sarcasm. He too was a senior, but if Jerry felt himself ready for life, Mort knew his education was no more than started. True, he could make a living, and a good one, in any branch of electronics.

But next year Mort would begin postgraduate work at the University of California, one of a picked group of seniors from all over the nation, on something called Interplanetary Communications Project 9-D. Since time immemorial, men have projected their souls to the distant stars, seeking to draw from their constancy some inkling of their own fickle fates. To Mort, the stars talked back.

Jerry and Mort had shared an apartment for three years. They were totally unlike in ambitions, attitudes toward life, and politics—wherefore they were close friends. They had just returned from Mazatlán, Mexico, along with a hundred other San Diego Staters, where they had enjoyed the surf-bathing of Easter Week. They were tanned by the winter sun, exercised to healthy exhaustion, and exceedingly well nourished on the cheap but delicious Mexican beer. They should have felt very fit indeed.

They did not, and all because of a discovery Jerry had made just after crossing the border in the cab that took them from the Tijuana airport to their San Diego apartment. Jerry had decided, at the last minute, to have the cab stop so that he could leave the films of his Mazatlán outing at a photo shop. He remembered having loaned his fine, German-made reflex camera to Mr. Wilfred "Bill" Fox, attorney for that nice American investor, Mr. Barney Cupp. It was hardly likely that Mr. Fox would leave any film in the camera, but if he had, Jerry figured he might as well have that developed too.

So he opened his suitcase which, like all students' baggage, had been given a once-over-lightly by the U.S. customs guards. There was no film in the camera, but it didn't feel right to Jerry somehow. He opened its back, and a small cloth bag fell out. Call it a hunch, but at the same time Jerry's heart fell so many millions of light-years that the most sensitive interplanetary radio could never have made contact with it.

"Ail Ail Ail" said Jerry.

"You sound like a puppy that had its tail rocked on," said Mort. "What's wrong? Speak, boy!"

"Look what I found in my c-c-camera," Jerry gurgled. "It f-f-f-feels like beads inside."

Mort took the small cloth bag and opened it. His father was a jeweler and Mort had grown up in the shop, so his was no amateurish guess. "Nine diamonds, seven emeralds, and two of the finest rubies I have ever seen," he said. "Uncut stones come in duty-free, but these have been cut, and are subject to duty. I'd say they'll wholesale for around a hundred thousand dollars. Where did you pick up these baubles?"

"I loaned Mr. Fox the camera to shoot those girls water-skiing off Olas Atlas," Jerry quavered. "They—they must be his."

"And we're not going to be a bit surprised when he comes after them, are we?" Mort said softly. "Because he got our address and phone number from me, and he and Mr. Cupp were on the same plane with us!"

"They're smugglers!" Jerry moaned.

"Wrong," said Mort. "We're the smugglers. They are just a nice Beverly Hills investor and his nice attorney, who have been having a nice vacation while inspecting the very nice investment opportunities in Mazatlán. Jerry, we're in trouble! What are we going to do about it?"

"I think I'll swallow poison," said Jerry.

Mort hefted the pouch of jewels. "There's enough here to keep us for life, most of it in Leavenworth," he said. "Let's hunt up the nearest gendarme and cop out, as our fellow criminals put it."

That expression, "cop out," must have triggered the creative detonation in Jerry. To throw themselves on official mercy was too simple, also too risky. Because they were, after all, smugglers until they proved otherwise. In Jerry, self-preservation and the creative impulse both pointed to something more dramatic. Mort went along mostly because he had access to the electronic gear, and because, as he said, he was a born schmoe.

"I have to see which way the coin drops, even when it's my coin and somebody else wins," he said. "That is a schmoe's function in life—to call 'heads' just as it turns up tails. I have just one request to make."

"What?" said Jerry.

"Choose somebody else for your cellmate. They say they've got a good library at Leavenworth. I'm going to catch up on

all the comic books I missed in college, and I don't want any more of your stupid interruptions."

That had been three hours ago. The combination living-dining room of their apartment now looked like any other student's combination living-dining room—a mess. But this mess concealed some of Mort's favorite wires, which in perfect concealment led through the kitchenette to the dead-end of a back service hall. There Mort had set up his tape recorders and control panel.

"Well," said Mort, "I hope it works."

"Of course it will work!" confidently exclaimed Jerry. "They won't dream we looked in the camera. They'll give us time to unpack, but they won't wait too—"

The phone rang.

Mort clawed at his switches, his black eyes lighting up as he beheld the flickering of certain needles. "Give it time to ring a few times," he yelled. "Don't want to let 'em think we were sitting here waiting for their call. Besides, I want to check my gain on the ringing signal before you answer."

Jerry let it ring a few times. He was a little surprised to hear the voice of Mr. Fox, the attorney, instead of that of Mr. Cupp, the nice investor.

"Jerry-boy?" Mr. Fox said gaily. "I'll bet you're surprised to hear from me so soon!"

"Not exactly," said Jerry.

Mr. Fox apparently missed that. "Got a favor I'd like to ask you, keed! My sister here in San Diego had a new baby while I was in Mexico, and I'd like to shoot some pictures. I hate to use that cheap camera of hers. I wonder, Jerry-boy, would it be asking too much to borrow yours again for a couple of hours?"

Mr. Fox's voice recalled his unappetizing person. He was a small, furtive, dirty-minded man with sandy hair, freckles, and pale, nervously blinking eyes. Witty but not funny, a tab-grabber who never let Jerry or Mort pay for anything, Mr. Fox had been tolerated in Mazatlán only because it was nice Mr. Cupp's money he was spending.

"Skip the build-up, Mr. Fox," Jerry said, trying to get the right quaver of fear into his voice. It came quite easily. "I have already looked in the camera."

"Oh," said Mr. Fox. "Oh, I see. You say you have already looked in the camera?"

"Yes, and I want to speak to Mr. Cupp."

"Why, may I ask?"

"That was a dirty trick you played on me, Mr. Fox, and I just don't think he'd stand for it, that's why!"

There was a brief hesitation. "Jerry-boy," Mr. Fox said, "unfortunately, Mr. Cupp was detained a while by the customs officers. They searched his baggage again and again, and of course couldn't find anything. But they were still trying when I left, so it will probably be a little while before we can reach Mr. Cupp. Meanwhile, you understand it's urgent that you and I get together. I'll admit frankly that I played a dirty trick on you, but I'm going to make up for it."

"How?"

"Jerry-boy, I'm going to bring you two of the fattest little old hundred-dollar bills you ever saw, when I come out there to see you."

"Only you're not coming to see me," said Jerry. "Not without Mr. Cupp."

"Jerry-boy, listen to reason!" Mr. Fox cried. "Barney Cupp is a respectable, honest businessman and I'm a dirty, rotten, double-crossing heel. Now I've made a mistake, a serious mistake, perhaps. But I'm going to make up for it to you. Why involve Barney in what I did?"

"All right then, I'm going to go to a policeman I know. He gave me a traffic ticket once, but—"

"Jerry-boy, think of Barney Cupp! Why bring in some cop who is not only an ignorant slob, but a thief besides?" Mr. Fox's voice fell half an octave. "I don't like to frighten you, keed, but think! Are you in any position to go to a slob of a policeman? If you like Mr. Cupp, and you value your own well-being, you're not going to be so foolish, are you?"

"Mr. Fox, either I see Mr. Cupp or I go to a policeman."

"Jerry-boy, I'm sure you don't mean that," Mr. Fox said softly. "I'm sure you realize it would be about the most dangerous thing you could do!"

"I'll bet you wouldn't threaten me if Mr. Cupp could hear you!" Jerry almost shouted. Then in a whimpering voice he went on, "Let's cut this short, Mr. Fox. I've never been in any trouble like this before, and it makes me nervous. I don't want to talk to you any more until I've seen Mr. Cupp!"

"Barney isn't available yet. But if I know him, he'll tell you to take my advice. Meawnhile, you have every right to be nervous. Suppose I make it three hundred bucks?"

"No!"

"How about five? Does five suit you, Jerry-boy?"

"No. Listen, Mr. Fox. I'm getting out of here right now!"

"Shut up and listen to me." Mr. Fox's voice was suddenly as frigidly poisonous as quick-frozen cobra venom. "If you must see Barney, I'm sure we can get together later this evening. Meanwhile, I wouldn't want anything to happen to

that camera package, and I don't believe you do either. It wouldn't be healthy for you, see, keed? Stop being childish! Leave there? Where would you go?"

"I'll quit school. I'll mail the jewels to the police and go to—to Hawaii. Or Alaska."

"Jerry-boy, there is no place on earth you can hide if you double-cross me. Barney Cupp is a gentleman, but he can't stand a dirty, cowardly rat either. Now, why can't you and I get together on a friendly basis, without bothering him?"

"No, sir!" Jerry shouted. "Listen, this is final. I'll be here at eight this evening, with the package from the camera, and you and Mr. Cupp can both come then. Both of you, you understand? Because if it's just you, I won't even open the door, and there's no use coming before then because I'm leaving right now!"

He slammed down the phone. Almost immediately, it began ringing again. He ignored it to run toward the back of the apartment. When he reached the back service hall, Mort Lisky was already dismantling his recording equipment.

"Better get this inside, in case they try to kick in the back way," said Mort. "Won't take long to set it up for this evening again. Here, you take this tape and work from it where you can watch the front. I'll keep an eye on the back—and I've really got a job of rectifying to do! I told you I should have had more time to check that phone induction coil."

"I was tremendous, wasn't I?" said Jerry. "I really sounded scared, didn't I?"

"You still do," said Mort. "To work, boy, to work! But I still think this is one of those down-beat scripts where the hero's buddy dies a lingering, last-act death."

Jerry took the smaller of the two tape recorders to the living room and plugged it in where he could sit near the front door. He dragged the coffee table over to use for a desk, and stacked some paper and pencils on it. He put on the earphones and sat down, with his eye near a crack in the broken old blind that covered the glass in the front door.

It was hard to see well enough to write, with all the shades pulled down. And, as he expected, through the crack in the blind he shortly beheld a cab stop at the curb. None other than Mr. Wilfred "Bill" Fox got out and ran up the steps. Jerry and Mort had a first-floor apartment with a door facing the street. Mr. Fox pounded on the door again and again.

Jerry sat there just inside it, with the sweat pouring off in rivers. Until this very moment, he had been quite sure that no one out there in the bright sunlight could make out anything

in the dark apartment through that crack in the blind. But when he beheld Mr. Fox's pale, malevolent eye at the crack, he wondered how he could have been such a fool. Mr. Fox was staring straight at him.

"Damn!" they heard Mr. Fox cut loose. "The little whelp did run, after all. Well, he'd better show up tonight, that's all I've got to say!"

The eye was withdrawn. Jerry breathed again.

He ran the tape over and over, scribbling and listening at the same time. A little later Mr. Fox made two more attempts to get into the apartment. The second time, a man was waiting in the back seat of the cab. It might not have been Mr. Barney Cupp; on the other hand, it was about the same size man as Mr. Cupp, and he filled the cab with the same blue, rich-looking cigar smoke that continually surrounded Mr. Cupp.

This time, Mr. Fox tried to get in the back door too, but the landlady caught him and threatened to call the police. Mr. Fox beat a hasty retreat.

Meanwhile, Mort remained busy in the kitchenette, "rectifying" the tape, whatever that meant. They finished with their separate jobs about the same time. Then came the job of rerecording. Their hair stood on end while this was going on, because Jerry had to speak in a normal tone of voice, and sometimes louder than normal. But it did not take long and they were not interrupted.

From about five thirty on, they discovered, the phone rang regularly every ten minutes. The calls which they had to make, they spaced in between the calls from the outside. Several times, they had to call their party back, so Mr. Fox would not get a busy signal when he rang their number. It was imperative that he be convinced that they were away, and a busy signal would have told him that they—or at least someone—was using the phone in their apartment.

At eight o'clock—not a minute before and not a minute after—Mr. Barney Cupp and Mr. Wilfred Fox rang the front doorbell. Mort had moved his electronic gear back to the service hall; so Jerry admitted the two guests.

Mr. Cupp was impatiently affable. He was also smoking a big dollar cigar as usual. He did not wait to be asked to sit down. He made himself at home in the only comfortable chair in the room, leaned back, and crossed his legs.

"Bill tells me he pulled a silly sort of stunt and got you in trouble, Jerry," he said. "Now, I don't know what I can do to help you out, but if a few hundred bucks will do you any good, you know Bill's not a tightwad."

Mr. Fox smiled his pale-eyed smile. His freckles seemed to be a little pale, too. "That's what I tried to tell Jerry-boy, Barney," he said, exposing most of his pale gums. "But he seems to be greatly attached to you, and I can't blame him for that, can I? The main thing is for me to get that stuff from the camera."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Cupp. "Get the stuff back, give our pal Jerry a few hundred bucks to make life pleasanter for him, and get out of his hair, eh? Exactly!"

"First, Mr. Cupp," said Jerry, "there's something I think you should know. My conversation with Mr. Fox was recorded this afternoon."

"What? Why, you idiot, you smart-aleck!" Mr. Cupp shouted. He half rose out of his chair. "Bill, you're a worse idiot than he is!" he said, brandishing his cigar at Mr. Fox. "How much did you say over the phone?"

Mr. Fox blanched a little, but he said, "Nothing to worry about, Barney. They already knew the rocks were coming through, didn't they? That's why they held you so long this afternoon. And they can't use wiretap evidence! The mere fact that a phone conversation of mine was recorded without a beeper makes it inadmissible in court."

Slowly, Mr. Cupp settled back in his chair. He did not look happy—only relieved, and not very much of that. Before he had entirely assimilated Mr. Fox's legal advice, Jerry addressed him again.

"Anyway, Mr. Cupp, I think you ought to hear the recording. It'll only take a couple of minutes," he said. "Okay, Mort, turn it on!"

From the six speakers of their hi-fi set the two voices, Jerry's and Mr. Fox's, came booming out clearly. Mr. Fox listened with a contemptuous little smile that soon turned to an expression of frozen, incredulous horror. He recognized his own voice. He even recognized some of the words. But these were only fugitive, phantom recollections of a call that he could have made only in his bad dreams:

Mr. Fox: Oh, I see! You say you already looked in the camera?

Jerry: Yes, and there is only half as much as you said there would be. Only four diamonds and four emeralds, and both rubies are missing. What are you trying to do—cheat Mr. Cupp?

Mr. Fox: Jerry-boy, Mr. Cupp was detained by the customs officers, so it will probably be a little while before—

Jerry: You mean arrested? You turned him in, like you said?

Mr. Fox: "I'll admit frankly that I played a dirty trick, but I'm going to make up for it.

Jerry: Don't you go offering me any of those thousand-dollar bills again, to help double-cross Mr. Cupp!

Mr. Fox: Jerry-boy, I'm going to bring you two of the fattest bills you ever saw.

Jerry: Mr. Cupp's thousand-dollar bills, you mean. After you ratted on him to the customs inspectors, too!

Mr. Fox: Jerry-boy, Barney Cupp is a dirty, rotten, double-crossing heel, an ignorant slob, a thief besides!

Jerry: If Mr. Cupp is in trouble, I'm going to the customs inspectors and tell them that I've got the jewels.

Mr. Fox: Jerry-boy, it would be about the most dangerous thing you can do.

Jerry: But it makes me nervous, sitting here with the jewels while he's under arrest. Why, I wouldn't go through with this for three thousand dollars!

Mr. Fox: How about five? I'm sure we can get together, keed, but Barney Cupp is a dirty, cowardly rat. Now, why can't you and I get together on a friendly basis, without bothering him?

At this point, Mr. Fox found his voice. At any rate, he found somebody's voice, because the strangled scream that issued from his throat sounded like no noise that he had ever made before.

"It's a phony! I didn't say that stuff, Barney," he shrieked. "You've got to believe me!"

Mr. Cupp stood up. "So only four diamonds and four emeralds are left, hey?" he said. "And both of those lovely rubies are gone! You pinch them and then turn me in to customs, do you?"

"Barney, please, it's phony, I tell you!"

"Do you think I don't know your own voice? Hal! Maybe they can't use a tape in court, but I'm not so particular. So I'm a slob and a coward and a rat, am I? And you're going to pay Jerry off to shut up about it with five thousand of *my* money, are you?"

Mr. Cupp lumbered swiftly across the small living-dining room toward Mr. Fox, who leaped up on the shabby old couch. There he stood, with his back to the wall, quavering, "Barney, if you'll only listen! Please, you've got to believe me!"

"I'll believe my own ears," said Mr. Cupp. He took Mr. Fox's knees in one of his arms. "Tell me, Wilfred, where you put my beautiful diamonds and emeralds and rubies that I

brought all the way from France to Mexico. Where are my jewels? Where are they?"

For a flabby Beverly Hills investor, Mr. Cupp was very strong indeed. Holding Mr. Fox by the knees with one arm, Mr. Cupp turned him upside down and bumped his head rhythmically against the floor. Jerry watched interestedly, regretting that he had neglected to have paper and pencil handy, so he could make notes.

Nothing he had ever seen on the stage equaled the scene before him for sheer drama—especially the point where the two customs inspectors stepped out and placed both Mr. Cupp and Mr. Fox under arrest. Mr. Fox remembered that he was a lawyer. He began shouting, "Entrapment, entrapment! And you can't use any of that tape! In addition to being an illegal wiretap, there's something phony about it."

Said one of the agents, "There's no entrapment, Mr. Fox. You came here to get certain jewels. They're all here. Even without the doctored tape, we have your own admission and that of Mr. Cupp that they were unwittingly smuggled in for you by these boys. So long as we don't touch a phone, we have a right to record anything on the premises with the written consent of the owners, tenants, or inhabitants thereof."

"All this was recorded too?" said Mr. Fox.

"Yes," said Mort. "Got an excellent record, and all sorts of witnesses that it wasn't doctored, rectified, spliced, and rerecorded like the other one. So I'm pretty sure it will stand up in court."

Mr. Fox moaned.

Mr. Cupp hit him on the jaw with a powerful right fist. "What a lawyer!" he said. He held out his hands, wrists together, to the customs agents. He tried to smile as the handcuffs clicked home. "Do you think maybe I'll draw Atlanta again?" he said. "I always did easy time there. Is this a big enough rap for Atlanta?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," said the agent.

The agent turned to Jerry and Mort. "You boys went to a lot of unnecessary trouble. We knew when these jewels were stolen in France and we knew when friend Cupp came into possession of them. We knew he was in Mexico, and we knew he'd try to bring them across to peddle them here. All you had to do was bring the jewels to us and tell your story! You'll probably split a nice reward on this, but why do it the hard way?"

"It's kind of difficult to explain," said Jerry. "You see, we

both put off our term papers all year, planning to do them during Easter vacation. Then we got this chance to go to Mazatlán for some surfing, and we were really up against it when we got back! This gives us our themes and our bachelor's degrees, see?"

Jerry's paper was titled, *Use of Electronic Recording Tape and Substituted Dialogue in Simulated or Re-Created News Events—A Suggested Dramatic Technique*. Mort's was called, *Rectifying Induction-Coil Signals by Various Methods, Including Magnetic Resonator and High and Low Frequency Tonal Separations*. In addition to splitting a \$10,000 reward, both boys got A-Plus.

HOLLY ROTH

A Sense of Dynasty

It really happened in 1947 when those who could, flocked to the Riviera—the older ones to repair their war-torn lives, and the young to find the gaiety they'd been cheated of . . .

The cabdriver said, "There y'are." He looked at me with curiosity.

I got out, paid him, walked up the two steps, opened the door, and paused. I was still trying to get my breath, control the terrible thumping inside me. Also, I was confused by the look of the place. The sign outside said, "Police Station," but I had never seen anything less like one. It came to me, however, that I never *had* seen the interior of a police station; my ideas had been formed by the world of fiction. Maybe in reality all police stations looked like this small bare room with its one table and few straight chairs.

The single person in the room was elderly, bespectacled, shirt-sleeved. He was sitting at the table, reading a newspaper. He lowered the newspaper, lowered the eyeglasses by a deft contraction of his nose, and raised his eyebrows. All three motions were fractional—admirably energy-saving, if I had been in the mood to admire.

I accepted the raised eyebrows as a question and replied to them, "I want to report a murder. I think. A something." My state of shock was great, but an awareness filtered through that my phraseology was not very convincing.

The man—a cop, I supposed—said, "Body?"

"No. That is—no. There never was one. Not exactly. I mean, if you'll let me—"

"We don't usually have murders without bodies. Not in this town. But then, we don't usually have murders. Come to think of it, never have had. But we're very small. Still growing."

"This is not funny."

"Have I laughed? Your name?"

I opened my mouth to protest the waste of time and then realized that we had finally got down to a recognized formula. I welcomed normality. "William Dentelle." He raised the eyebrows and spelled it.

He took a big black-covered book out of the table drawer and by sliding down on his spine, found a ballpoint pen in the drawer's extreme rear. He opened the book toward its middle and wrote down my name. His handwriting was flowing, more outgoing than the man himself seemed.

"Age?"

"Forty."

"Business?"

"I am a salesman employed by the Simpson-Bluet Manufacturing Company."

"They make heavy machinery? Largely mining machinery?"

I nodded.

"Here to see the people at the mining works, huh?"

I nodded.

"Staying at the Benntown Hotel?"

There was no place else. I nodded.

"Arrived when?"

"This afternoon. Five o'clock. My appointment at the works is for eight tomorrow morning."

"The five twelve from Pittsburgh." It wasn't a question. "So you've been here two hours and you're a witness to a murder."

"I didn't say that."

"No, you didn't. Didn't say much. Want to start somewhere? I mean, like telling me who's dead?"

"Well, of course. But—it was fifteen years ago."

He put down his pen, took off the drooping eyeglasses, folded the newspaper, and leaned forward to rest on his folded arms. I noticed then that a uniform jacket was hanging on the chair behind him. He was a captain. He said, "So you don't want me to rush anywhere? We—you and I—are not going off with a clatter of hooves to see justice done?"

"Yes, I think we should do just that. But I'll have to explain."

He looked at me for quite a long time—perhaps a minute, but it seemed like a long time. He had clear brown eyes, exceptionally clear for his age, which was probably more than the sixty or so I had estimated at first. He also had all his hair, a nice cap of heavy whiteness. It occurred to me that he spoke with no trace of the accent of the region, although the

residents of small hamlets in that corner of Pennsylvania were often almost incomprehensible.

He said, "I am the Chief of Police of this town. It is my duty to see that—ah—justice is done. One way to do my job properly is to save my energy by not wasting it on nuts. I don't apologize for my choice of words, because I haven't called you a nut—yet. Truth is, you don't look like one, but you sure sound like one. Other hand, the Simpson-Bluet people probably don't employ nuts. Usually. Got anything to prove that you are William Dentelle, and that William Dentelle is employed by Simpson-Bluet?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "Sure."

I began disgorging more papers than I had realized I carried: driver's license, business cards, a hospitalization card that had been in an inner flap of my wallet for at least five years, a Social Security card from beneath it. Two credit cards. I looked up at him, but he showed no signs of surfeit. So I produced three letters from my jacket's inner pocket. They were all addressed to me at Simpson-Bluet; they all had to do with business orders.

I stopped.

He went through each item with care, returning them one at a time. He checked the driver's license, flicking glances at me as he read "color of eyes, height, and date of birth." He reopened the black book and entered my home address in it. He then gave each of the business letters his careful attention, and returned them.

He said, "All right, Mr. Dentelle. I've had my dinner. You want to tell me a story, is that it?"

"That's it exactly," I said gratefully. "It's long and it's confused and if you'll just—"

"Tell it any way you please." The eyes were very clear, not difficult to talk into.

When the war was over, I—like lots of GI's—felt the time had come to make up for lost years. I still had two years to spend at Carnegie Tech before I would get my mining engineer's degree, and I had every intention of completing the course. And it would be easier, what with the GI Bill. My parents were quite well-to-do, but I was twenty-four and it was nice to know that I wouldn't have to lean too heavily on them.

But first . . . There was that mustering-out pay and, I figured, a vacation coming to me—two weeks per annum for almost six years, four years of war, two of Occupation. Say, three round months. "Where," asked William Dentelle of

William Dentelle, "is the juiciest, ripest, to-say-nothing-of-gayest vacation spot in the world?"

William Dentelle answered himself and ended up on the French Riviera.

Cannes. In April, 1947. I was twenty-four. And I had company, lots of company. The place was teeming with GI's who had figured it out the same way I had. And there were girls—French girls, English girls, even American girls. Of the people of middle years, there were few; they were repairing their lives. But those of the old who could possibly afford it came to the sun to mend their tired bones and souls, and the young, whether they could afford it or not, came to find the gaiety they had been cheated of. "Affording it" wasn't too difficult. The beautiful beach-front avenue—le Boulevard de la Croisette—had almost completely regained its prewar glamor and beauty, but not, as yet, its prices.

Also, of course, there arrived at Cannes the leeches—gamblers, con men, gigolos, budding syndicalists, and plain adventurers; they too had been deprived of their callings, of their chosen way of life, by the years of upheaval. They rushed, as their kind always has, to the spot where people were living easy, free, and in the slight delirium of relaxation that tends to bring incaution.

First there was Irene. Irene was a delight. Then there were three others—I've forgotten their names—all delights. They were displaced by Valérie—English, despite her name. Valérie specialized in just lying on the beach. With Valérie's figure that was enough.

And then there was Anne.

For fifteen years, not a week has passed in which I have not remembered Anne.

I am a married man now. I have two sons, good boys. My wife is a dear and charming woman whom I love with almost all my heart. But a piece of that heart has remained always with Anne. For fifteen years I have remembered and ached, and for the first few I did more than that: I wept. I am six feet two inches tall and I have a broken nose that makes me look a little dangerous, but I wept half the nights of my life during my mid-twenties.

I hope you can forgive a little corn—I feel impelled to corniness. Thing is, only repetition makes clichés, and only profound truths are repeated. With Whittier, I point out that my regret was based on those saddest of words, "It might have been." There was a time, you see, when I think I could have married Anne, but I didn't push it. I can find a dozen excuses for myself—my age, my need to finish college,

money, the ambiance of the times—but the excuses have never afforded me solace. Always I have felt that I not only failed to get my heart's delight—by my selfishness I was guilty of destruction. Of murder . . .

Anne was swept into town on a wave of medical students, both American and French, from the Sorbonne. It was a confused, practical-joking, somewhat hysterical crowd she traveled with; I understand medical students are often like that, and all such tendencies were heightened in 1947.

Anne wasn't the least like her companions.

She was sitting on the edge of a crowd, a slender girl, obviously American. She had a very slight figure; what there was of it was startlingly swathed in an unusual bathing suit, a vivid green woven with silver. Metallic material like that was almost unknown in the making of bathing suits at that time. She was also wearing a small smile; the conversation didn't deserve more. The boys were discussing who they would plant a cadaver on.

I took a chance. "Do they travel with them?"

"With what?"

"Cadavers."

"Part of the necessary equipment of their lives."

"But—" And then I realized she did not mean of their professional lives but of their juvenility. "You're not one of them?" I asked.

She shook her head; straight brown hair, very simply cut, fanned out in the sun. "I'm *with* them," she said, "but mine is the world of the good old liberal arts."

"And so why are you *with* them?"

"I like them. Perhaps I'm morbid too."

"I don't believe it. What is it you're looking for?"—I should explain that the direct-and-searching question was a "line" with me in 1947. It seemed to intrigue girls. I was too immature to realize that questions about themselves intrigued girls, boys, men, women, and the senile. I thought I had discovered a formula.

It was not a formula to use on Anne, however. The truth of that was the beginning of her attraction for me. My question caused her to focus on me for the first time—a surprisingly penetrating look. She had large, very light eyes, with small pupils. They were her only beauty, but that beauty was reinforced by the contrast the lightness made against her tanned skin, and by the fact that her undistinguished features were set in a thin little face, with a slightly pointed chin.

"I am looking for a husband."

I backed up—mentally and probably physically as well.

She gave me her small smile. "Is that unusual?" she asked.

"Well, no. I suppose not. But—"

"The statement of truth is unusual?"

"Well—yes. I suppose so."

"That is a difference between us," she said. "You suppose things. I know them." She sounded factual, not arrogant. She stood up, gracefully but with no effort wasted, no coquetry expended. "Excuse me," she said and joined the budding doctors.

A few days later I ran into her again. In the water. It was 8:30 on a Riviera morning, sky clear, air warm, water not too warm, beach almost empty. A delightful time to swim.

My frenzied Australian crawl—fashionably if unscientifically practiced to cause a maximum of froth and fury—had isolated me from everything, even something as near as Anne, until she raised her voice and shouted, "Hi!"

She was five feet away, drenched. Of course, she's drenched, I told myself, and realized that the fact was underlined by her lack of a bathing cap. She was less attractive—a drowned-mouse look. But her eyes seemed even bigger when one saw the smallness and narrowness of her skull.

I stopped flailing and said, "Hi."

"You swim very well, don't you?" Not a comment but a question, it was earnestly delivered.

That earnestness trapped me into honesty. "Not really," I admitted. "Wear myself out—raft and back and I've about had it." I treaded water, gasping for breath, thoroughly surprised at myself.

"Oh."

Was she disappointed? Perhaps she had cast me as an Apollonic hero. I used my formula and veered the subject hastily. "How about you? You don't seem winded and we're quite a way out."

"Oh, I don't swim at all. Not really. I just sort of half float, and do a little bit of sidestroking. I can go practically anywhere but it takes me forever."

"Well, let's go in and talk about forever." I had quite a line in those days.

As she emerged from the water, the same gleaming green-and-silver bathing suit came into view. (I later realized it was the only one she had.) The material shimmered even more when wet. I said, "That's quite a thing, that suit."

There was no nonsense about "this old rag." Anne said, "It should be quite a thing. I had it specially woven. Cost me six months of clothes, practically."

"It's beautiful, but . . ."

"But?"

"Somehow it isn't like you."

She laughed.

When I asked her to have dinner with me that night, she said, "With you? Or on you?"

I gulped and made an unusually adult response. "With me, in a civilized sense."

"Ah." She smiled that grave little smile. "Don't forget that I travel with medical students. If they *had* money they wouldn't be inclined to spend it. They haven't any, so the question doesn't arise. But forgive me."

She looked very nice in street clothes. She looked like something I had almost forgotten existed: a lady. I outdid myself in the choice of a restaurant. I couldn't afford it often during three months but one indulgence couldn't ruin ninety days, I told myself . . . until I saw the check. Then I controlled my blink, and reached despondently for my wallet.

Anne made no bones about reading the check. She never made any bones about anything, of course. She studied the upside-down figure and said, "Are you rich?"

"No."

"Then that is a whopper."

"Yes."

"Do you mind?"

And suddenly I didn't. "No," I said. "It was a good meal."

She nodded gravely. "You like to live well. So do I."

"I wouldn't have thought it mattered to you."

"Wouldn't you? Well, you couldn't be more wrong. I like to live well, and that takes money. So"—she smiled—"I want to get married."

"You want to marry money?" I was shocked.

"In a way," she said. "In a way."

I saw her every day and every evening for almost a month. For twenty-six days, to be exact.

During that time we discussed Life, of course. At least, I did. Anne didn't talk much. She listened, and if prodded she sometimes gave an opinion. She was always frank, or seemed so. If she did not want to be frank, she said so.

If you have not yet realized it, she was a most unusual person. Most unusual for a female. Astonishingly unusual for a young female. She said what she meant, meant what she said, knew what she wanted, and tried in a direct way to get it.

"Aren't you wasting your time with me?" I asked her, all humor on the outside, a small ache and a growing confusion on the inside. (I *could* afford to marry. It wouldn't be a snap,

but my parents would be happy to indulge an only son who had emerged whole from a nasty war . . . I had never told her that.)

"Probably," Anne said, and didn't miss a step. We were dancing at the Casino at Monte Carlo. She looked virginal and unutterably sweet in a long white gown.

"Let's get off this floor!"

She seemed momentarily surprised, but not disconcerted. She moved gracefully, but with no swinging of hips, to our table.

I sat down with a thump that shook the neighborhood, and demanded, "Don't you believe in love?"

"Certainly I believe in love."

That surprised me. "But—still you want to marry for money?"

"In a way."

"Because you've never been in love?"

"I've been in love."

I was an instant victim of gnawing jealousy. "Who with?"

"Grammar, grammar, sir.—With a man not unlike you—a poor boy who is an engineering student. He can't afford me now and will never earn a penny. He's a weak man, I know that, but he is—well, somehow suitable. Still, he's not the kind of man who can earn money."

"I am not weak and I can earn money."

"Are you asking me to marry you?"

"No."

"I didn't think you were." But she smiled.

"You wouldn't marry me," I said, still playing with the fire I feared but couldn't seem to get far away from, "if only because I have such a pug-ugly sort of face."

"Ah, that." She didn't deny it, just put her head a little to one side, and examined me. Then she said, "That inclines me toward you."

"How about the fact that I will be a money-maker? Don't you believe it?"

"I do believe it. Entirely. But I want money now. I am twenty-two. I don't want to wait thirteen years. I want these next thirteen years to be full of nights like this—of gaiety and clothes and beautiful things."

"That dress is beautiful."

Her face went totally plain, the only time I ever saw it that way. "This dress," she said, "is cheap and shoddy. If it doesn't look bad that's because I'm twenty-two. It would have looked even better when I was sixteen. But by the time I'm twenty-six, twenty-seven, I won't be able to get away

with this sort of off-the-rack cheapness. I'm not beautiful, but I could be. With money. Only with money."

That was the one moment when she looked most unbeautiful.

"Thirteen years," I said. "Why thirteen years? Thirteen and twenty-two—does the age of thirty-five mean something special to you?"

She smiled, and the almost-ugliness went away. "Mean something?" she said gently. "Yes, my dear Bill, it means something. At thirty-five I inherit my father's estate. Very substantial. Quite rich, I'll be. At thirty-five. He left a *very* explicit will when he died—when I was seven years old. The point he made was that women are flighty, foolish, idiotic. I was not to be married for my money. If, at thirty-five, I had still not married, then perhaps it would be best if I were married for my money. His will was unforgivable, but it was not difficult to understand his reasons. My mother *was* flighty and foolish. She ran away with another man. She died before he did, but he never forgave her and he never forgave me.

"He left me to be a ward of the court, and he pleaded posthumously with that court to bring me up 'simply.' Parsimoniously, was what he really meant. In my opinion they carried out his will very faithfully. If he were around to have an opinion he would probably feel that they have been extravagant." She paused. "Perhaps he didn't know, perhaps he didn't realize what a monstrous thing he was doing, was creating. Perhaps?"

She took a deep breath. Then she said, "I don't like to talk about it. I'm surprised that I am talking about it. But you're a—nice boy. You see, I want family. I want children, but not if I have to scrape and treat them as my father did not have to but did treat me. And even more than children, I want to belong to someone, to something, to be a part of family. That's easy to understand, too—the sort of common-sense psychology that preceded Freud. I have been alone, always alone. I have a need to belong—a sense of"—she paused, and then said almost violently—"dynasty."

"Dynasty?" I smiled. "Look, Anne, I haven't been entirely frank with you."

"No?" She came with bewilderment out of her absorption, her fixation, and tried to remember who William Dentelle was. "No?" she asked.

"Not exactly. It's true that I'm poor, but—well, I don't really have to be. My parents are pretty well off. And they would help me. Willingly. Until I could earn that money that I know I will earn."

"Oh." She found me then, remembered me. But her reactions weren't what I expected. Her so-clear eyes seemed to cloud, and the small pupils grew even smaller. Then she shook her head—not in dismissal of me, I didn't think, but of some thought, some notion of her own. She said, "You know, you are a very nice young man, Bill. Too nice, in a way." Her eyes left my face and looked over and behind me. "Who is *that*?"

"Who?"

"That man, the handsome man at the bar?"

"Oh, him." And I told her.

Paul—well, I don't remember his last name, probably because he was always called "the Baron." One said, "Paul," "the Baron," or "the Baron Paul." He was undeniably handsome—theatrically so, the sort who was too good-looking to be trusted, and the distrust was justified.

His mother was the queen of some little Balkan country—I've forgotten which. She was a very real queen, a very real Bourbon. His father was a gardener. Not—so the joke went—the *head* gardener. People made gags about Lady Chatterley's lover. The little country went down into the dust, the lady his mother went into the dust, and Paul, like his father, never rose above dirt level. He supported himself, if one can put it that way, openly and explicitly, by paying suit to ladies.

Something about his openness was disarming. To my surprise and slight shame, and in defiance of my upbringing, I rather liked him.

"I've always wanted to say, 'Not to put too fine a point on it,' and you've finally given me the chance, Anne. Not to put too fine a point on it, he's an outright gigolo. And you've surprised me once again. I don't think you've ever paid much attention to another man. Good manners, you have." I grinned. "Usually."

She didn't take her eyes off the Baron, and my grin faded. "Usually," I said a little sharply. "But I'll admit he is surprisingly good-looking."

She gave a decisive little nod. "Yes, he is. But most of all he is astonishing because he looks exactly like what he is. Even his clothes. That's what made me ask about him. I had never seen 'an outright gigolo' before. Do you know him?"

"The way one does. Around."

"Introduce me, will you?"

She had explained her interest. It seemed harmless. I brought Paul over to the table and performed the introductions.

She married him two weeks later.

I didn't see her during those two weeks, except at a distance. I kept saying to myself, "Dynasty." That funny, unsuitable word she had used to explain her desire in life—I decided that was what she found fascinating in the man she herself had admitted was a blatant example of a low kind.

But she married him.

One week after the marriage they went out in a little boat, and he came back alone.

Two days later they arrested him. The medical students had set up a clamor, and the police—although very anxious not to get involved with Americans, which is all Anne spelled to them, very anxious to let Cannes reestablish itself as the playground of the world, very anxious to avoid any but the happiest of publicity, very anxious to deny that such types as Paul ever, *ever* put a foot in their paradise—the police gave in and arrested him.

Then, because he was so damned inept, they had no choice but to hold him for trial. To the question of where his wife had disappeared to, he said, "She got out and swam away." And he stuck to that idiocy. It was his whole defense.

After talking to me the prosecution asked, not as a legal command but as a favor, if I would remain for the trial. They seemed to feel I would be helpful. I didn't understand that until the trial. Then I could see how I was helpful, very helpful.

The *coru d'assises* would not sit for two months. Then they would hold court farther up the shore, in Nice, which is the prefecture of the canton of the Alpes-Maritimes.

So my three idyllic months on the fabulous Riviera stretched to five bitter ones . . .

A French courtroom is fancily confusing. I had to be guided to my place; I took a long time spotting the accused; I took a longer time accustoming myself to acceptance of the fact that he was considered guilty until he had proved otherwise.

Once I did get accustomed to it, I took a great pleasure in it.

The testimony was totally damning. All of it, including the Baron's. And he was left without a shred of dignity—not that he had much to start with, but he made a surprisingly good try for it at that trial. Still, out came the illegitimacy of his birth. Everybody knew it, of course, but in a whispering sort of way, and he had a passport that clouded the facts.

And out came his age. When had this little Balkan country vanished? 1951. And how old was he at the time? Small bits

of history piled up to push him to the truth: he was fifteen. So his passport had been falsified; the man who looked thirty-four and admitted to thirty-seven was forty-seven—and the admission meant more to him than to other men. Youthfulness was one of his stocks in trade.

And why did he marry this twenty-two-year-old? He flabbergasted everyone with the truth: he married her for her money. Ah, then he didn't know that she would have no money for thirteen years? "Not," said the prosecuting attorney nastily (he was given to nastiness), "until you reach the very edge of the age of sixty?"

"She didn't tell me that."

I remember that the defense attorney gasped helplessly.

"So you married her for her money, discovered you weren't going to get it for thirteen years, and so decided you would collect it by inheritance?"

"I married her because she asked me to, because she was a nice person, and because she said she was rich. Until I entered this court I did not know anything about this 'thirteen years.' She said she had transferred money but that French banks are slow. Which they are. We had only a week of marriage."

"A week. Only a week," the prosecuting attorney said, slowly and bitterly, and sat down.

I was eventually guided to the stand, where I stood, hanging on, shaking with pain, loss, and rage. Did I want an interpreter? I was asked, and I said no, although my French wasn't really sufficient. But I didn't want anything clouding the air between me and vengeance.

My main value to the prosecution, I realized later, was my passion of love and regret. Through my eyes the judges saw how simple, how direct, how young, how eager for life she was. Through my loving eyes they saw how lovable she was.

They also got some facts.

"You went swimming with the Baroness?"

"Often."

"She swam well?"

"Not at all well. Very badly."

"You discussed money with the Baroness?"

"Yes."

"She led you to believe she was in possession of her estate? Of the considerable assets—bank accounts, company stocks, bonds, et cetera—that were read out and entered as evidence?"

"She did not."

"She told you the contrary?"

"She told me, explicitly and in detail, that she could not touch any of her money until she reached the age of thirty-five."

"And yet you were in a similar relationship to her as the accused later was? That is, the question of marriage arose between you?"

"It arose between us. It was then that she explained she had very little; she lived 'parsimoniously'—that was the word she used."

The defense tackled me briefly, and was sorry.

"You said you went swimming with the deceased?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, she *could* swim, could she not?"

"Certainly. She swam like an infant poodle, half on her back, with one paw waving."

"A little less rhetoric, Monsieur Dentelle, and a little more fact."

"That was fact."

"Another fact is that you discussed marriage with the lady?"

"We talked around it."

"What does that mean?"

"What it says."

"It does not say anything in French. I put it to you that you asked her to marry you, she refused, she then decided to marry another man, a far handsomer man. Perhaps she told you just that and you do not feel a kindness toward the accused as a result?"

"I did not actually ask her to marry me, and so she did not refuse. I think if I had asked her she might have accepted. And the only comment she ever made to me regarding the man she married was he looked exactly like a gigolo."

The defense excused me abruptly.

Paul's lawyers had only a few forlorn little points to play with, and one powerful fact.

They tried first to play on the point that Anne's estate was not hers to will, that her father had entailed it. On her death, they reminded the court, the money would go to some woman in the States, a distant cousin of Anne's. (The will had been read droningly aloud, and then droningly translated. I had noted bitterly that the woman in the States inherited directly. Either she was well over thirty-five or Anne's father's enmity had not stretched to her.) Now, said the defense, what man would commit murder without even bothering to find out that he wouldn't inherit? —And the answer was too obvious to avoid: Paul had admittedly married for

money that was untouchable, and he hadn't bothered to find *that* out. He was simply a foolish man.

Who would drop someone overboard and then say she swam away? . . . He was simply a foolish man.

All right, they said, where's the body?

That one caused the usual fuss. The *corpus-delicti* business is often tossed around, but it has never really been resolved. Men have been found guilty of murder although no body was produced, and anyway, the term is misunderstood. "*Corpus delicti*" does not, in law, mean the physical body of the victim of a murder. It means the fundamental facts necessary to the commission of a crime. The prosecution claimed they had that, and then some.

But they weren't stuck with it because in mid-trial a part of the body showed up.

Doctors were then paraded to and from the witness stand. Those called by the defense said the body was too long dead to be the body of the Baroness. Those called by the prosecution said the body was too long in the water to be able to say how long it was dead.

And the prosecution simply pointed out that the pathetic remnants were clothed in shreds of Anne's bathing suit. And nobody—the defense, the prosecution, Paul, or me—denied that that bit of silvery green was not from Anne's bathing suit.

The Baron Paul was hanged.

The Chief of Police nodded at me. "And you came home," he said, "and then you got married and had two sons and remembered the young lady in the green suit with the light eyes. It's a very interesting tale, Mr. Dentelle. Sad. But—forgive me—so what?"

"So," I said, "an hour ago, as I was walking from the hotel toward that roadside place where they serve the charcoal-grilled steaks—"

"The Bluebell Inn. On Long Lane."

"Yes. As I was walking along, before I reached the end of the main street that has the two traffic lights, a plum-colored Mercedes-Benz, chauffeur-driven, drew up beside me to wait for the light—"

"I know the car." He nodded. "Naturally. Only thing like it in town. Belongs to the people who own the mill."

Why didn't he put a name to the main street, I wondered impatiently, since he was such a glutton for detail? But . . . "Own the mill?" I repeated. "I've dealt with it for years but

never thought of it as being 'owned.' It's a monster of an operation. Isn't it a public stock company?"

"Uh-huh. Family held. But he isn't an executive type. They travel. Rarely here. Some say he's a nice boss, and some say he's just a bad businessman and has the sense to know it . . . As I said, so what?"

"So in the back seat of that plum-colored car was Anne."

The chief took his weight off his elbows. "You," he said slowly, "are nuts. Most likely, the lady in the back was Mrs. Frauenfeld."

"It was Anne. The brown hair is silvery now—it can't be her age, but however false, it looks good. She is very beautiful and very cold-looking."

He was still looking at me as if I were totally insane. He said, "Thirty-five? Thirty-six?"

"She is thirty-seven now, but she looks older."

"Mrs. Frauenfeld does give an impression of being—well, 'beautifully preserved.' Odd, since she's pretty young."

"Frauenfeld?"

"I told you—"

"Frauenfeld. Wait." I frowned, and then it came. "That was the name of the distant cousin. It was read out in court. That was the name of the distant cousin who inherited. But—it was a woman."

"His first name is Marion."

"Ah. Yes, that was it."

"Something is funny, Mr. Dentelle?"

"Was I smiling? Well, it depends on one's sense of humor. I was wondering if Anne took that feminine-sounding name into her careful account, and I decided it was not impossible. Because I also was remembering that unusual but not very suitable bathing suit. Only thing I ever saw on her that wasn't understated. Cost her several months' clothes, she told me."

He stared at me for one of his long minutes. Then he said, "You are *sure*, Mr. Dentelle?"

"Absolutely sure. Older, colder, more beautiful. Same eyes."

He said slowly, "I noticed Mrs. Frauenfeld's eyes at a charity affair once. She handed me a cup of punch. She was very charming, very gracious. But I wondered if she took dope."

"I don't think so. Pinpointed with total determination, that's all. That may make medical nonsense, but it's what I always thought."

He looked at the clock behind me on the wall. He looked

at the telephone on his table. Then he looked at me. He said, without expression, "Not a heck of a lot is known about the Frauenfelds. Perhaps because there is no one of their social level in town. There is a rumor—women's gossip, I'm sure—that she is 'no better than she should be,' as my mother would have said. Lives her own life, the ladies suggest. Doesn't respect her husband. But then he isn't a strong man. Has a weak chin. Pointy. One thing I do know—he is a mining engineer. Like you."

"Like me and the man she loved—who was no businessman and would never be rich, who was 'weak, but somehow suitable.' Has a pointed chin, huh? Like his wife and cousin? . . . 'Dynasty,' she said. Maybe she had some idea that to marry the only relative she had would make for a kind of dynasty, and keep the money in the family."

His hand moved slowly toward the telephone, arrived, and stayed there, motionless. He said, apparently to himself, "Not only her, but him. Accessory . . . So what you're saying is this: she couldn't inherit for thirteen years. But if she 'died,' her cousin—the man she was in love with—would inherit. So she arranges 'to be murdered,' her cousin inherits, she marries him and has the money right away . . . There are details to check, to confirm—wills, birth certificates, marriage certificates, that part of a body in shreds of the green bathing suit. And"—he looked at me—"slowness, sureness, silence—until we reach certainty. Will you join me in these precautions, Mr. Dentelle?"

"Yes."

"The state's attorney," he said musingly. "Too big for me." He still held the phone, thinking it out. "Will you come back when we need you, Mr. Dentelle?"

"I'll wait around."

He looked dubious. "At least two weeks. Might be much more."

"I waited on the Riviera for two months."

He looked at me curiously. "You feel—vengeful?"

Did I? I said slowly, "Less so every minute. At first I felt sorry for the weeks of agony suffered by the young William Dentelle, and then for his years of pain-filled, regret-filled nights. But now I am thinking only of simple justice. I feel that you and I must ride off and see justice done. For Paul's sake. As I told Anne, he was really a likeable guy, and honest according to his peculiar lights."

"Um. Well, you know, so was she. And I think you might also experience some thankfulness."

"For what?"

"Despite the fact that your face might have had a suitable effect on a jury, your parents were unsuitably well-to-do. You lacked motive to kill her, and motive to murder her was one of the qualifications for marriage."

He watched realization dawn on me, smiled, and then became businesslike. "Do you, Mr. Dentelle, wish formally to charge that you believe murder was done to one Baron Paul—we must get that last name—that murder was done to one Baron Paul Something, in the city of Cannes, France, in the year nineteen hundred and forty-seven?"

"I do."

He took the phone off the hook.

EDWARD D. HOCH

I'd Know You Anywhere

A powerful story—one of the most powerful Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has published in some time . . . a memorable story . . . a story that anthologists will be reprinting for years to come . . . a story which marks, we think, a turning point in Mr. Hoch's writing career . . .

16 November 1942

From the top of the dune there was nothing to be seen in any direction—nothing but the unchanging, ever-changing sameness of the African desert. Contrell wiped the sweat-caked sand from his face and signaled the others to advance. The tank, a sick sad monster wanting only to be left to die, ground slowly into life, throwing twin fountains of sand from the path of its tracks.

"See anything?" Grove asked, coming up behind him.

"Nothing. No Germans, no Italians, not even any Arabs."

Willy Grove unslung the carbine from his shoulder. "They should be here. Our planes spotted them heading this way."

Contrell grunted. "With old Bertha in the shape she is, we'd be better off not running into them. Six men and a battered old tank against the pride of Rommel's Afrika Korps."

"But they're retreating and we're not, remember. They just might be all set to surrender."

"Sure they might," Contrell agreed uncertainly. He'd known Willy Grove—his full name was an impossible Wiloughby McSwing Grove—for only a month, since they'd been thrown together shortly before the North African invasion. His first impression had been of a man like himself, drafted in his early twenties into an impossible war that threatened to envelop them all in blood and flame. But as the weeks passed, another Willy Grove had gradually become evident, one that stood next to him now, peering down into the empty, sand-swept valley before them.

"Damn! Where are they, anyway?"

"You sound like you're ready for a battle. Hell, If I saw them coming I think I'd run the other way." Contrell took out the remains of a battered and almost empty pack of cigarettes. "A sand dune on the Tunisia border is no place for a couple of corporals."

Grove squatted down on his haunches, resting the carbine lightly against his knee. "You're right there—about the corporal part, anyway. You know, I been thinking the last few weeks—if I get back to the States in one piece I'm going to go to OCS and become an officer."

"You found yourself a home."

"Go on, laugh. There's worse things a guy could do for a living."

"Sure. He could rob banks. What in hell do army officers do when there's no war around?"

Willy Grove thought about that. "Don't you worry. There's goin' to be a war around for a good long time, maybe the rest of our lives."

"Think Hitler will last that long?"

"Hitler, Stalin, the Japs. It'll be somebody, don't you worry."

Contrell took another drag on his cigarette, then suddenly came to sharp attention. There was something moving at the top of one of the dunes, something . . . "Look!"

Grove brought up his binoculars. "Damn! It's them, all right. The whole stinkin' German army."

Contrell dropped his cigarette and went sliding down the dune to tell the others. The officer in charge was a paste-colored captain who rode the dying tank as if it were his grave. He looked down as Contrell spoke and then spoke a sharp order. "We'll take Bertha up the dune and let them see us. They might think we've got lots more and call it quits."

"Sure. Sir." And then again, Contrell thought, they just might blast the hell out of you.

By the time the wounded steel monster had been moved into position, the first of the three German tanks was within firing range. Contrell watched the big guns coming to bear on each other—two useless giants able only to destroy. He wondered what the world would be like if guns had the power to rebuild too. But he had little time to think about that or anything else before the German gun recoiled in a flash of power, followed an instant later by the thud of the sound wave reaching them. A blossom of sand and smoke filled the air to their left as the shell went wide of its mark.

"Hit the ground!" Grove yelled. "They've got us zeroed in!"

Old Bertha returned the fire, scoring a lucky near-miss on the nearest tank, but the odds and the firepower were all against her. The German's second shell hit the left tread, the third slammed into the turret, and Bertha was as good as dead. Someone screamed—Contrell thought it might have been the captain.

Grove was stretched out on the sand a dozen feet away. "Damn things are iron coffins," he said, gasping at the odor of burning flesh.

Contrell started to get up. "Did any of them get out?"

"Not a one. Stay down! They're coming this way."

"God!" It was a prayer on Contrell's lips. "What'll we do?"

"Just don't move. I'll get us out of this somehow."

Two of the enemy tanks remained in the distance, while the third one—basking in its kill—moved closer. Two German soldiers were riding on its rear, and they hopped down to run ahead. One carried a rifle, the other what looked like a machine pistol to Contrell. He tensed his body for the expected shots, his face nearly buried in the sand.

The German tank commander appeared in the turret and shouted something. The soldier with the machine pistol turned—and suddenly Willy Grove was on his feet. His carbine chattered like a machine gun, cutting down the German from behind. With his left hand he hurled a grenade in the direction of the tank, then threw himself at the second German before the man could bring up his rifle.

The grenade exploded near enough to knock the officer out of action, and Contrell moved. He ran in a crouch to the German vehicle, aware that Grove was right behind him. "I got 'em both," Willy shouted. "Stay down!" He pulled the dying officer from the top of the tank and fired a burst with his carbine into the interior. He clambered up, swinging the .50-caliber machine gun around.

"Hold it!" Contrell shouted. "They're surrendering!"

They were indeed. The crews of the other two tanks were leaving their vehicles, coming forward across the sand, arms held high.

"Guess they had enough war," Grove said, training the machine gun on them.

"Haven't we all?"

Grove waited until the eight men were within a hundred feet, then his finger tightened on the trigger and a burst of sudden bullets sprayed the area. The Germans looked

startled, tried to turn and run, and died like that, on their feet.

"What the hell did you do that for?" Contrell shouted, climbing up to Grove's side. "They were surrendering!"

"Maybe. Maybe not. They might have had grenades hidden under their arms or something. Can't take chances."

"Are you nuts or something, Grove?"

"I'm alive, that's the important thing." Grove jumped down, hitting the sand with an easy, sure movement. "We tell the right kind of story, boy, and we'll both end up with medals."

"You killed them!"

"That's what you do in war," Grove said sadly. "You kill them and collect the medals."

30 November 1950

Korea was a land of hills and ridges, a country poor for farming and impossible for fighting. Captain Contrell had viewed it for the first time with a mixture of resignation and despair, picturing in his mind only the ease with which an entire company of his men could be obliterated without a chance by an army more familiar with the land.

Now, as November ended with the easy victories of autumn turning to the bitter ashes of winter, he had reason to remember those first impressions. The Chinese had entered the war, and every hour fresh reports came from all around the valley of the Chongchon, indicating that their numbers could be counted not in the thousands but in the hundreds of thousands. The word on everyone's mind, but on no one's lips, was "retreat."

"They'll drive us into the sea, Captain," one of his sergeants told Contrell.

"Enough of that talk. Get the men together in case we have to pull out fast. Check Hill 314."

The hills were so numerous and anonymous that they'd been numbered according to their height. They were only places to die, and one looked much like another to the men at the guns.

Some tanks, muddy and caked with frost, rolled through the morning mists, heading back. Contrell stepped in front of the leading vehicle and waved it down. He saw now that it was actually a Boffers twin 40-mm. self-propelled mount, an anti-aircraft weapon that was being effectively used as infantry support. From a distance in the mist it had looked like a tank, and for all practical purposes it was one.

"What the hell's wrong, Captain?" a voice shouted down at him.

"Can you carry some men back with you?"

The officer jumped down, and something in the movement brought back to Contrell a sudden memory of a desert scene eight years earlier. "Willy Grove! I'll be damned!"

Grove blinked quickly, seeming to focus his eyes, and Contrell saw from the collar insignia that he was now a major. "Well, Contrell, wasn't it? Good to see you again."

"It's a long way from Africa, Willy."

"Damn sight colder, I know that. Thought you were getting out after the war."

"I was out for three weeks and couldn't stand it. I guess this army life gets to you after a while. How are things up ahead?"

Grove twisted his face into a grimace. "If they were any damned good, you think we'd be heading this way?"

"You're going back through the Pass?"

"It's the only route left. I hear the Chinese have got it just about cut off too."

"Can we ride on top your vehicles?"

Grove gave a short chuckle. "Sure. You can catch the grenades and toss them back." He patted the .45 at his side as if it were his wallet. "Climb aboard."

Contrell issued a sharp order to his sergeant and waited until most of his few scattered forces had found handholds on the vehicles. Then he climbed aboard Major Grove's "tank" himself. Already in the morning's distance they could hear the insane bugle calls that usually meant another Chinese advance. "The trap is closing," he said.

Grove nodded. "It's like I told you once before. The fighting never stops. Never figured back then that we'd be fighting the Chinese, though."

"You don't like fighting Chinese?"

The major shrugged. "Makes no difference. They die just like anyone else. Easier, when they're high on that stuff they smoke."

The column rolled into the Pass, the only route that remained open to the south. But almost at once they realized that the hills and wooded stretches on either side of the roads were filled with the waiting enemy. Contrell looked back and saw his sergeant topple over to the ground, cut through the middle by a burst from a hidden machine gun. Ahead of them, a truckload of troops was stalled across the road, afire. Grove lifted himself up for a better view.

"Can we get around them?" Contrell asked, breathing hard.

"Around them or through them."

"They're South Koreans."

Those still alive and able to run were scrambling off the burning truck, running toward Grove's vehicle. "Get off!" Grove shouted. "Keep back!" He reached down and shoved one of the South Koreans over backward, into the roadside dust. When another clambered aboard in his place, Grove carefully took out his .45 pistol and put a bullet through the man's head.

Contrell watched it all as if he were seeing an old movie unwinding after years of forgotten decay. I've been here before, he thought, thinking in the same breath of the medals they'd shared after the North African episode.

"They were South Koreans, Willy," he said quietly, his mouth close to the major's ear.

"What the hell do I care? They think I'm running a damned bus service?"

Nothing more was said about it until they'd rumbled south into the midst of the retreating American army. Contrell wondered where it would all stop, the retreat. At the sea, or Tokyo—or California?

They took time for a smoke, and Contrell said, "You didn't have to kill that Gook, Willy."

"No? What was I supposed to do, let them all climb aboard and get us all killed? Go on, report it if you want to. I know my military law and I know my moral law. It's like the overcrowded lifeboat."

"I think you just like to kill."

"What soldier doesn't?"

"Me."

"Hell! Then what'd you re-up for? Fun and games?"

"I thought I might do something to keep the world at peace."

"Only way to keep the world at peace is to kill all the troublemakers."

"That Gook back there was a troublemaker?"

"To me he was. Just then."

"But you enjoyed it. I could almost see it in your face. It was like North Africa all over again."

Major Grove turned away, averting his face. "I got a medal for North Africa, buddy. It helped me become a major."

Contrell nodded sadly. "They do give medals for killing. And I guess sometimes they don't ask for too many details."

Someone called an order and Grove stubbed out the cigarette. "Come on, boy. Don't brood over it. We're moving on."

Contrell nodded and followed him. Once, just once, he looked back the way they'd come . . .

24 August 1961

Major Contrell had been in Berlin only three hours when he heard Willy Grove's name mentioned in a barside conversation at the Officers' Club. The speaker was a slightly drunk captain who liked to sound as if he'd been defending Berlin from the Russians single-handed since the war.

"Grove," he said with a little bit of awe in his voice. "Colonel Willoughby McSwing Grove. That's his name! They say he'll make general before the year is out. If you coulda seen the way he stood up to those Russians last week, if you coulda seen it!"

"I'd heard he was in Berlin," Contrell said noncommittally. "I know him from the old days."

"Korea?"

Contrell nodded. "And North Africa nearly twenty years ago. When we were all a lot younger."

"I didn't know he fought in World War II."

"That was before we were officers."

The captain snorted. "It's hard to imagine old Grove before he was an officer. You shoulda seen him last week—he stood there, watching them put up that damned wall, and pretty soon he walked right up to the line. This Russian officer was there too, and they stood like that, only inches apart, just like they were daring each other to make a move. Pretty soon the Russian turned his back and walked away, and damned if old Grove didn't take out his .45! We all thought for a minute he was going to blast that Commie down in his track, and I think we'd all have been with him if he did. You know, you go through this business long enough—this building up and relaxing of tensions—and after a while you just wish somebody like Colonel Grove would pull a trigger or push a button and get us down to the business once and for all."

"The business of killing?"

"What else is there, for a soldier?"

Contrell downed his drink without answering. Instead, he asked, "Where is Grove staying? Is he married now?"

"If he is, there's no sign of a wife. He lives in the BOQ over at the air base."

"Thanks." Contrell laid a wrinkled bill on the bar. "The drinks were on me. I enjoyed our conversation."

He found Colonel Grove after another hour's searching, not at his quarters but at the office overlooking the main thoroughfare of West Berlin. His hair was a bit whiter, his manner a bit more brisk, but it was still the same Willy Grove. A man in his forties. A soldier.

"Contrell! Welcome to Berlin! I heard you were being assigned here."

They shook hands like old friends, and Contrell said, "I understand you've got the situation pretty well in hand over here."

"I did have until they started building that damned wall last week. I almost shot a Russian officer."

"I heard. Why didn't you?"

Colonel Grove smiled. "You know me better than to expect lies, Major. We've been through some things together. You're the one who always said I had a weakness for killing."

"Weakness isn't exactly the word for it."

"Well, whatever. Anyway, you probably know better than anyone else my feelings at that moment. But I kept them under control. There's talk of making me a general, boy, and I'm keeping my nose clean these days. No controversy."

"And I'm still a major. Guess I don't live right."

"You don't have the killer instinct, Contrell. Never did have it."

Major Contrell lit a cigarette, very carefully. "I don't think a soldier needs to have a killer instinct these days, Willy. But then, we've been debating this same question for nearly twenty years now, off and on."

"Haven't we, though." Willy Grove smiled. "I'm sorry I don't have somebody I can kill for you this time."

"What would you have ever done in civilian life, Willy?"

"I don't know. Never thought about it much."

"A hundred years ago you'd have been a Western gunman probably. Or forty years ago, a Chicago bootlegger with a tommy gun. Now there's just the army left to you."

Grove's smile hardened, but he didn't lose it. Instead, he rose from behind the desk and walked over to the window. Looking down at the busy street, he said, "Maybe you're right, I really don't know. I do know that I've killed fifty-two men so far in my lifetime, which is a pretty good average. Most of them I looked right in the eye before I shot them. A few others got it in the back; like that Russian nearly did last week."

"You could have started a war."

"Yes. And some day perhaps I will. If I had the power to . . ." He let the sentence go unfinished.

"They're not all like you," Contrell said. "Thank God."

"But I have enough of them on my side. Enough of them who know that army means war and war means death. You can't escape it, no matter how hard you try."

He looked at the white-haired colonel and remembered the captain he'd spoken with in the bar earlier that afternoon. Perhaps they were right. Perhaps he was the one who was wrong. Had he wasted away his whole life pursuing an impossible dream of an army without war or killing?

"I'll still do it my way," he said.

"Good luck, Major."

A week later Contrell heard that a Russian guard had been killed at the wall in an exchange of gunfire with West Berlin police. One story had it that an American officer had fired the fatal shot personally, but Contrell was unable to verify this rumor.

5 April 1969

It was the day before Easter in Washington, a city expectant under a warm spring sun. The corridors of the Pentagon were more deserted than usual for a Saturday, and only in one office on the west side was there any activity. General Wiloughby McSwing Grove, newly appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was moving into his suite of offices.

Colonel Contrell found him bent over a desk drawer, distributing the contents of a bulging brief case to their proper places. He looked up, a bit surprised, at his Saturday visitor. "Well . . . Contrell, isn't it? Haven't seen you in years. Colonel? You're coming along."

"Not as fast as you, General."

Grove smiled a bit, accepting the comment as a sort of congratulation. "I'm at the top now. Good place to be for a man of my age. The hair's all white, but I feel good. Do I look the same, Colonel?"

"I'd know you anywhere, General."

"There's a lot to be done, a damned lot. I've waited and worked all my life for this spot, and now I've got it. Our new President has promised me free reins in dealing with the international situation."

"I thought he would," Contrell said quietly. "Do you have any plans yet?"

"I've had plans all my life." He wheeled around in his swivel chair and stared hard out the window at the distant city. "I'm going to show them what an army is for."

Colonel Contrell cleared his throat. "You know, Willy, it

took the better part of a lifetime, but you finally convinced me that killing can be necessary at times."

"Well, I'm pleased to know that you've come around to" General Grove started to turn back in his chair and Contrell shot him once in the left temple.

For a time after he'd done it, Contrell stood staring at the body, hardly aware that the weight of the gun had slipped from his fingers. There was only one thought that crowded all the others from his mind. How would he ever explain it all at the court-martial?

GERALD KERSH

The Persian Bedspread

As odd a tale as you've ever read—about the smoothest, slickest rug and tapestry dealer you've ever met in print—a story with a curiously haunting quality . . .

In the trade, some sinister similes were applied to Mr. Hadad—he evoked images of danger. “A coiled spring wrapped in fat, such as the Eskimos use for catching bears,” said one. Another said, “Dealing with Hadad is like feeling for a double-edged razor blade on a slippery floor in the dark.”

But in the discreet light of his shop, which was the shyest of all those shops off Fifth Avenue where sensitive tradesmen seem to hide for fear of customers, Mrs. Gourock saw only a plump, creamy-skinned, spaniel-eyed little man, forlorn in posture, smiling wistfully. Mrs. Gourock was a woman who knew what she wanted, and had the wherewithal to buy it.

“I want a rug for my husband's study,” she said. “How much is the thing in the window?”

The jeweler in that street exhibited one pearl, the milliner one hat, and Hadad one rug.

“Oh, that?” said Hadad, thinking that some women's egos need inflating, others invite a pinprick. “The silk Bijar? Oh, say twelve thousand dollars.”

Taken aback, she said, “It's for my husband's study. Twelve thousand dollars!”

“Ah,” said Hadad, “for your husband's study. You have in mind something less costly. First, pray be seated, and let me offer you a cup of coffee.—Oh, Dikran, coffee, please.”

And he said to himself: If a woman like this one buys her husband gifts, she is up to some hanky-panky. She is a payer of payments, not a giver of gifts.

“Perhaps a Bijar is too blazing a blue for the seclusion of a study; it is hard to read on a Bijar,” he told her. “On the

other hand, there is something gently hypnotic about a Sarafan. I love a Sarafan. But such as I have here would perhaps cost more than you would be prepared to spend, just for a study."

"What's that one up there?" she asked, pointing to the wall behind Hadad. "Is it a rug? Or a tapestry? And why is it framed?"

"So many questions all in one breath!" said Hadad, laughing. "It is framed, dear lady, because I had it framed. And its history is not for ladies to hear—"

"Do you take me for a child?"

Hadad shook his head, and surmised: about thirty-nine years and six months old, you—without counting your teeth.

"In any case, it is a sort of curiosity, ma'am, which you wouldn't care to buy even if it were for sale," he said.

"Why? How d'you know?"

"Ah, coffee," said Hadad. His assistant drew up a low table and set down a tray.

"I can't eat that Turkish delight," said Mrs. Gourock.

Hadad said, "Other *rahat lakoum* you cannot eat. This you will eat. Now let me think what would be nice for your husband's study. He is a quiet, reserved man, I think?"

"How d'you know?"

Because, Hadad decided, wordlessly, it is generally the gentle ones that get grabbed in marriage by great brassy women like you, who would have your cake and eat it too. Also, I think he has a controlled devil of a temper, and the money is all his—or why should you be all of a sudden so considerate of him in his study?

Meanwhile, he murmured, "I have Mosul, Kir Shehr, and sumptuous Teherans. I have Kirman, Shirza, and silken Tabriz. I have Bergama, Fereghan, Khorosan—"

"I want you to tell me what that is in the frame."

"Well," said Hadad, smiling, "it is *not* something you can get at Mejjid's Auction Rooms in Atlantic City, where—unless my memory deceives me, which it never does—you bought for \$300 a pair of Chinese vases worth, alas, about \$40." He added, "June 29th, 1950."

Then his voice faded, his lips parted, his eyelids drooped, and Mrs. Gourock was reminded of Peter Lorre in a murder movie: Hadad had just that lost, sick, hopeless look.

He forestalled her inevitable "How d'you know?" by saying, "It happens that I was there at the time, and I never forget a face. You were bidding against an old lady in an immense straw hat. Her name was Kitty. She was a skill."

"I like auctions," said Mrs. Gourock. "I didn't want the

vases. I've paid more—oh, so much more—than \$300 for two hours' entertainment . . ." She was surprised to catch herself making excuses. "What's a shill?"

"You know," said Hadad, "that if anyone is running a so-called game of chance at a fair, somebody must appear to win *pour encourager les autres*. Thus, at a pea-and-thimble game, a seemingly silly farmer will win \$100 while the audience is gathering. He is a shill, employed by the thimble-rigger, and he is not paid in real money.

"Conversely, at a certain type of auction sale, somebody must get an obvious bargain to excite the on-lookers.

"Thus, the attics and thrift shops of the nation are full of Mejjid's stuff, all bought by people who cannot for the life of them say just what made them blurt out that last silly bid before the auctioneer cried 'Gone!' It's no disgrace to you; it is like feeding a slot machine with silver dollars, but warmer, less impersonal—only, once in ten thousand tries, a slot machine will disgorge a jackpot, and Mejjid will never disgorge anything."

Dogged as a spoiled child, Mrs. Gourock persisted. "I want you to tell me about that thing in the frame."

Hadad seemed not to have heard her; he went right on.

"You know how it is, dear lady. You look in—only for fun, mind. No harm in that, eh? The auctioneer is about to give away a cut-glass lemonade set, free of charge. He doesn't want to—personally, he'd cherish such a lemonade set, make an heirloom of it. But he's paid (sigh) to give things away. However, first things first; and here's a Moorish coffee table. Everybody nudges everybody else as the auction room fills up; everybody is there to kill time. Nobody's going to buy anything at all. The joke's on Mejjid, eh? Poor old Mejjid!

"And so some joker bids fifty cents for the coffee table, and there is a titter when a grim old lady in inappropriate shorts calls out seventy-five. Then it's a dollar. '—And four bits,' says a fat man with a cigar. '—And a quarter,' you say, just to keep the ball rolling. It really is fun, no? All you have to do is keep saying '—And a quarter,' and sit back and watch your neighbors making fools of themselves. The bidding is up to \$13, let us say. '—And a quarter.' you call, waiting for the inevitable. It doesn't happen.

"All of a sudden you are the loneliest person in the world, for it is, 'Gone to the lady for \$13.25!'"

Mrs. Gourock said, "About that hanging, or whatever it is, in the frame . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Hadad, offering her a cigarette. "Now once upon a time—no, never mind . . . A rug for a study, eh?"

"Once upon a time what?"

With a helpless gesture Hadad said, "You are a very dangerous lady. You must know everything. Once upon a time, driven by necessity, I worked as a shill for Mejjid."

"Yes, but what about that?" She pointed to the framed tapestry.

"Madam, are you determined to drive me frantic?" cried Hadad, clutching his head. "I will tell you about it, since you are so insistent. Did you ever hear of the Mighty Mektoub? No, I think not. But you have heard of Casanova? Of Don Juan? Naturally, everybody has. Well, Mektoub was the Syrian Casanova; only Casanova was a mere sower of wild oats, and Don Juan nothing but a juvenile delinquent, compared with Mektoub. His exploits were put into verse by one Shams-ud-Din, in the seventeenth century, but it would take an epic poet like Firdausi, or Homer, to do justice to him as a fighter, a hunter, and, above all, as a lover."

She was all excitement. "I'd like to read it. Where can I get a copy?"

"Dear lady, you cannot—the only known copy of that poem is in the possession of King Farouk. The tapestry you see was Mektoub's bedspread, and it is supposed to convey to its owner some of Mektoub's remarkable powers—"

"And does it? It doesn't!" said Mrs. Gourock. "Does it?"

"Let me proceed," said Hadad. "I say, I was one of Mejjid's shills—to my eternal shame and sorrow—for I spoke little English at that time, and had an aged father to support. And I hated Mejjid, with reason. With excellent reason, but that is private and, in a way, sacred."

"Why?"

"It was not," said Hadad, looking reproachfully at her, "it was not that he underpaid me; that was nothing. It was not that—falsely calling himself Mejjid Effendi, a title to which he had no more right than a pig has to the name of Lion—he publicly humiliated me. For I am descended from the Kings of Edom, madam, and cannot be insulted by an inferior. A Hadad would not own a dog with the pedigree of a Mejjid."

"What was it then?"

Hadad sighed. "I do not know why I tell you this," he murmured. "Simply, by bringing the force of his money to bear upon her father, he married my fiancée, a girl of sixteen."

"How old was Mejjid?"

"Sixty-eight. He had outlived four wives," said Hadad.

"Pretty hard on the poor girl," said Mrs. Gourock.

"It would be cruelty to animals to marry a hyena to the

likes of Mejjid. Still, she bore him three daughters, old as he was. Let us not talk of her any more, if you please. I say, I was Mejjid's shill, and his most trusted one, because he knew that as a gentleman I would die sooner than cheat him. These people make capital out of honor," said Hadad. "So it was my business to 'buy in' the Mektoub bedspread."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Gourock. "But if Mejjid prized it so highly, why didn't he keep it at home?"

"He took it home with him every evening, after I had brought it back—but it is in the nature of a certain type to derive a thrill from imperiling what they value most. So, with me to trust, Mejjid could enjoy every day the sensation of the reckless gambler whose fortune trembles on the turn of a card, and his overwhelming joy when he is dealt another ace to his pair of aces; although, with me to trust, he could be sure that he risked nothing. I hope I make myself clear?"

"Yes. So I suppose you had a copy made, and—"

"No, dear lady!" said Hadad sharply—while the commentator in his head said: That is just the sort of thing you would have done, you exceedingly horrible woman! "I said 'My honor was involved.' Even if it had not been, Mejjid would not have been fooled by a substitute."

"I'd just have walked off with it instead of giving it back," said Mrs. Gourock.

Hadad was shocked. "That, sweet lady, is not Hadad's way. I will tell you what I did. Every day or so, you see, I bought the bedspread at Mejjid's auction. I was one of those shills that get the unmistakable bargains, you understand. Mejjid had provided me with a checkbook of the Jersey Provincial bank. The check I signed was, of course, worthless—I signed myself M. Mehrabi, sometimes, or T. F. Hafiz, or Aram Aramian—any name but mine.

"So came the fatal afternoon when I bid for the Mektoub bedspread for the last time. The auctioneer introduced it as a 'rare piece of Persian tapestry, in perfect condition, dating back to the year 1580 A.D.'

"The auctioneer flogged that crowd and yipped at them like a cowboy rounding up cattle. 'Twenty-five, twenty-five, who'll say forty?—Thirty, thirty-five, forty!—Forty, forty, do I hear fifty?—Fifty-five, fifty-five, sixty!—Seventy, seventy, who said eighty?—Eighty, ninety, ninety, and five, ninety-five, one hundred, one hundred'—'Two hundred,' I said, and someone cried '—and fifty!' 'Two hundred and fifty,' cried the auctioneer, 'who says two seventy-five?—Three, I hear three, three, three!—And twenty-five, three twenty-five, three twenty-five, three fifty!'

"He became very brisk then, talked very fast, 'Three fifty, three fifty—going, going—gone to the gentleman over there for three hundred and fifty dollars!—and if you can find a tapestry to equal that on Fifth Avenue for \$3,000 I'll eat my hat! . . . Right now let's see that pair of antique brass candle-sticks . . .'

"I took the tapestry with trembling hands, for if the bidding, by some chance, had gone \$50 higher, my plan would have come to nothing—although the virtue of this same plan was that it could wait another day, or week, or month, if need be. I wrote my check on the Jersey Provincial bank, but this time I signed it with my own name—Mansur Hadad. Then I carried the tapestry away, while the crowd gave its slightly stimulated interest to the next lot.

"I went to my room, and waited. As I expected, Mejjid rang me somewhat later, and shouted, 'Why weren't you here at six?' I replied, 'Because I preferred not to be there at six.' 'I'm coming over,' he said. So he did. He asked for his Mektoub bedspread. I told him, 'It's mine.' Something in my manner must have alarmed him, for he became sweet as honey. 'Of course,' he said, 'I understand—you're playing a little joke on poor old Mejjid. You want a raise, and this is your funny little way of asking for it. He-he-he! Eh?'

"I said to him, 'Mejjid, you son of a dog, you brother of seventeen vile sisters—I cannot properly tell you what I called him, and in any case it loses in the translation—you have seen the last of the Mektoub. Go away, before I beat you about the head with a stick. The transaction is complete. The Mektoub bedspread is mine.'

"He said, 'I don't think you understand American law, little fellow. You have stolen my property and swindled me, and I can send you to prison for a number of years.'

"Feigning innocence, I said, 'The other checks were not good, because I signed them with false names. But this one is good, because I signed it with my own.'

"'Give me the Mektoub, and we'll forget this folly,' he said. 'Ignorance of the law is no excuse. You have broken the law, but I will forgive you.'

"'The only law I have broken,' I said, 'is the law that prohibits the keeping of pigs in houses. Go!'

"He said, 'I suppose, in your ignorance, you imagine that I fear a scandal. Ha! I have connections, you little crook, connections—I am wired in, if you understand the phrase.'

"'I do not,' I said. 'Unless you refer to the fencing farmers use in America to restrain beasts.'

"'I'll have you in jail tonight,' he shouted, and ran out.

Sure enough, in a very short time he returned with a policeman in uniform and another in plainclothes, and had me arrested on a charge of swindling him by passing a worthless check.

"He begged to the last for the Mektoub bedspread. 'Give it to me, and all's forgotten and forgiven,' he cried piteously, until the detective whispered something about compounding a felony.

"I said, 'It is where you'll never find it.' As a matter of fact, Mejjid was standing on it, for I had laid it under the cheap hooked rug that was on the floor of my little room. So I went to jail—"

Mrs. Gourock cried, "No! For how long?"

Hadad replied, "For exactly sixteen hours. Mejjid, you see, was so perfectly certain that this last check, like all the others, was so much stage money, he acted impulsively.

"He did not know that I had opened an account in my right name at the Jersey Provincial bank and, by starving myself and living like a worm, had saved \$380. That check was good. I had legitimately bought the Mektoub bedspread. It was mine! At all events, it was not Mejjid's. Then I sued him for false arrest.

"He settled out of court for \$10,000. 'Your account is paid, O perverter of innocence,' I told him. And with this money, I went into business on my own, dealing in nothing but goods of the most superlative and unquestionable quality and value, adhering always to the honest truth thereafter, so that my brief career as accomplice to Mejjid is behind me—finished—a dream. Mejjid himself, though apparently hale and hearty, suddenly became decrepit, a vegetable, and I married his widow. Now I have told you everything."

"Tell me," said Mrs. Gourock, "is there really any truth in that Mektoub bedspread story? I mean, about making its owner like . . .?"

Hadad shrugged. "That is not for me to say."

"Why not? It's yours, isn't it? And why do you keep it in a frame?"

"Dear lady," said Hadad, "youth needs no enchantments—youth is its own magic. I have had my moments. Now I keep the Mektoub bedspread in a glazed frame, because it might be more than my life is worth to take it out."

"Why?"

"Madam, I am afraid of it—I have a weak heart. Now, concerning this rug for your husband's study . . ."

"Eh? Oh, that. You choose one," said Mrs. Gourock.

"I have a very rich old Bokhara—the perfect thing for

leather-bound books, lamplight, and contemplation—that I can let you have for \$3,500.”

“Yes, I suppose so. All right, I’ll have that. Wrap it up,” said Mrs. Gourock, “but do you know, I’m interested in curios. Antiques with a history. You know?”

“Alas, I deal only in carpets and tapestries,” said Hadad.

“How much would you want for that Mektoub bedspread?”

“What? I beg your pardon! Its intrinsic value—about \$15,000—aside, it has other significances, my good lady,” said Hadad, with something like indignation, his hands on his heart.

“Now look—” said Mrs. Gourock, moving. “Listen—” An hour later, gasping painfully, Hadad swallowed a pill.

“Pray talk no more, ma’am, I have no more strength to argue,” he said. “For heaven’s sake, take the accursed Mektoub! Give me \$20,000 and take it away!”

Mrs. Gourock took out her checkbook.

“After all, perhaps I am getting a little too tired for even such memories as the Mektoub invokes,” said Hadad. “With the Bokhara, it will be \$23,500. Do you want the frame, madam?”

“I think so. No, I do not want the frame.”

“Dikran, take the Mektoub out of the frame. Now, where shall I send these, good lady?”

“Here’s my address,” she said, writing on a pad. “Send”—she paused—“wait a moment. Let’s get this straight: send the Bokhara rug to Mr. Ingram Gourock, at that address—and put the Mektoub in my car, I’ll take it with me.”

“If you are not going directly home, sweet lady, it can be delivered before you arrive—”

“It doesn’t concern you where I . . . Just put it in my car,” said Mrs. Gourock, in some confusion.

When she was gone, Dikran asked, “What shall I put in the frame this time, Mr. Hadad?”

“I will think of something appropriate to its size. First, take this check to the bank at once. And Dikran!”

“Sir?”

“Wipe that silly grin off your face.”

“Yes, Mr. Hadad,” said Dikran.

FRED A. RODEWALD &
J. F. PEIRCE

The Man Who Was a Station Wagon

One of the oddest stories Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has ever published—yes, odd—and charming, and provocative, and meaningful . . . We just couldn't resist it . . . Can you?

The road was rougher now, the pavement cracked, the chug-holes impossible to miss. Mike's press camera jounced against his leg, and he pushed it from him, then slowed to twenty miles per hour.

This couldn't be the highway.

His eyes burned from the steady glare, his skin from the dry wind set up by the movement of the car.

Without warning the road gave way to wagon tracks and the dust swirled up behind. Mike braked slowly and reached for his map.

Where the hell was he?

The map told him nothing. The mileage gauge and his sense of direction said that he was about a hundred miles south of the border.

But where?

He took a quick glance at the sun. It seemed to be sitting on the canvas top of his convertible. And now that the hot dry air had stopped, sweat beaded his forehead and ran in rivulets down his body.

He looked around at the hard-baked clay, the torture-shaped mesquite trees.

Not a sign of life—

Then he saw him, an old man as misshapened as any of the mesquites, standing in the drainage ditch that flowed with dust when the wind blew. He would have dismissed him as a scarecrow, but there were no cornfields.

Dust was now all that Mike could smell and taste, and he

made the convertible crawl the hundred yards to where the tattered figure stood.

Poking his head from the car, Mike called, "*¿Habla usted inglés, señor?*"

"Sí."

"How far is Monterrey?"

The old man struggled, then pointed down the dirt road and across it to the right. "*¿Quién sabe?* Who can say?" he said.

"Can you tell me where I am?"

"Sí, one kilometer from Rio Escondido."

Mike couldn't remember any Rio Escondido on the map. Probably a small place. But at least he seemed to be going in the right general direction.

"Well, thanks. Thanks a lot," he said. "Can I give you a lift somewhere? Into town maybe?"

"*Gracias, señor*, but it is not possible. I cannot ride. I am a station wagon."

"You're a what?"

"I am a station wagon."

"Oh? Oh, I see! Well, thanks a lot."

Mike let out the clutch and the convertible moved forward. "Damned old coot," he muttered. "Some stupid con game he's got to bleed the suckers. Well, I'm not *that* green."

He glanced in the rear-view mirror. The old man was standing exactly as he had left him. "Aw, the bloody hell," he said and braked to a stop, then backed to where the old man stood.

Mike opened the door and got out, glancing warily about as he did. He lit a cigarette, then held out the pack to the old man. "Cigarette?"

"*Gracias, señor*, but I cannot smoke. I am a station wagon."

"Yeah, yeah, I forgot." Again Mike looked about. "Okay, I'll bite. What's your angle?" The old man did not answer. "What's your racket? Your business—what do you do? Wait, don't tell me. I know. You're a station wagon."

The old man smiled and nodded his head. "Sí. Sí."

Mike took a drag from his cigarette and looked both ways along the road. Taking a one-dollar bill from his wallet, he stepped over to the ditch and held it out to the old man.

"Look, old man, let's say I don't mind paying for information. I know the ropes; I'm willing to play the game. I've a little larceny in my blood too—who hasn't? Now just tell me what your angle is and I'll slip you the one-spot before your buddies get here."

The old man ignored the money. "I am a station wagon," he said.

"I know. I know. Now, here." Mike took the old man's hand and put the bill into it, closing the gnarled fingers over the money. "Now," he said and smiled, "you can level with me. Hurry before they get here and you won't have to split with them."

The old man let the bill fall into the dust. "I am a station wagon," he said.

"I'll be damned!" Mike said. "You really do believe it." He took a final drag from his cigarette and gave it a flip. "You're a station wagon?"

"I am a station wagon."

"Prove it to me! Prove it!"

The old man shook his head sadly. "I am a station wagon," he said, "but I am not official. I have no license."

"License? You mean a license plate?" Mike said, pointing to the plate on the rear of the convertible.

Sí. I am not official, but I am a station wagon."

"Why don't you have a license?"

"Carlos will not give it to me. He says I am not a station wagon."

"Carlos?"

"The official in Rio Escondido."

"Well, I don't blame him. You're not a station wagon," Mike said. He squatted down in the ditch to retrieve the dollar, and when he stood up the heat hit him. "Damn but it's hot! Now, look," he said, "you have eyes, ears, a nose. Sure you do! You're a person."

"I am a station wagon."

"You're not a station wagon. Listen, you're like me. Do you understand? You've got feet, legs, arms, a head—just like me. You and me, we're humans. We're not station wagons. We're not machines."

"I am a station wagon."

"If you're a station wagon, what am I, a truck? A bus?"

"You are no vehicle."

"And you're no station wagon."

"I am a station wagon."

"Well, I'll be double-damned!" Mike said, and ran his fingers through his crew-cut hair. "Okay, now let's say just for a minute that you *are* a station wagon—mind, I don't say you are, but let's just suppose you are. What are you doing out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"I have no gasoline."

"Okay, that explains your being here. But why are you standing in the ditch?" Mike took out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

"It was night and a vehicle might strike me."

"You mean you ran out of gas and you pulled off the road so you wouldn't be hit by a passing car. Okay, that follows—I'll buy that. But you said it was night."

"Sí, it was night."

Mike made a rapid calculation. "You mean you've been standing here in this damned sun for seven hours?"

"Sí."

"Well, look now," Mike said, shaking his head, "seven hours in this sun . . . you're sure I can't give you a lift?"

"I cannot ride. I am a—"

"Yeah, I know. I know. Well, what can I do to help you? You can't stay here, not in this heat."

"You could give me a pull?"

"You mean a tow? With my car?"

"Sí."

"Sure, I guess so. But can you make it into this town, this Rio Escondido?"

"Sí."

"Okay," Mike said, shaking his head.

He crossed to the car and opened the trunk compartment. Taking out a chain he hooked it onto his bumper; then he carried the other end over to the old man. "I've got to fasten this onto your bumper," he said.

The old man held out his hands and grasped the end of the chain that Mike handed him.

"Now when the chain straightens out, when it gets tight, be sure to move. You could get hurt. Understand?"

"Sí. My wheels work fine, but slow. I am an old station wagon."

"Okay, easy does it then."

Mike returned to the convertible, climbed behind the wheel, and started the engine. Keeping his eye on the old man through the rear-view mirror, he let the car roll forward taking up the slack in the chain, and as the chain grew taut, the old man clambered out of the ditch.

Mike drove, shifting his gaze back and forth from the rear-view mirror to the speedometer. Only occasionally did he glance at the road ahead.

The old man seemed to be doing fine. He held the end of the chain tightly in his hands.

Mike felt more relaxed now. He hoped he wasn't asking for

trouble by believing in the old man, by trying to help him. The old coot seemed harmless enough, and he felt a certain responsibility for him. Why? Why?

They had gone about a quarter of a mile when a sharp turn in the road revealed the town some distance ahead.

Rio Escondido? *Rio* meant river. But *Escondido*?

He dredged the word up from the past, from high-school.

Hidden. Hidden River. If the drainage ditch were any indication, it would be a river of rich red dust.

The mesquites gave way to cornfields. A farmer still grubbed in his field, though it was time for the *siesta*. The old man behind the car was moving awkwardly but steadily along. A spotted goat at the side of the road bleated.

Adobe dwellings of different shapes and sizes were becoming more and more frequent. They were now in what would be the city limits of Rio Escondido. There appeared to be a municipal building of some sort down one of the side streets, but for the most part there were only adobe houses and places of business, nearly all of them *cantinas*.

The only signs of life were an old dog lying under a wringer-type washing machine tilted against the side of a house and two half-naked children playing at bullfighting in the afternoon sun.

One boy, his hands tight against his head, two fingers projecting outward like horns, charged a mincing *torero*, who called, "Huh, huh, *toro!* Huh, *toro!*" then executed a perfect *verónica* with a faded *rebozo* as the bull swept past.

But at the sight of the old man and the convertible, the *torero* and the bull became children again and followed them down the street calling, as near as Mike could make out, "Hey, Pepel! Hey! Give us a ride in your station wagon!"

They passed what looked to Mike like the village market, but except for a listless wave from one of the attendants, they went unnoticed.

It was a quiet town.

Mike stuck his head out of the car and called back, "Hey, old man, where do you get your gasoline?"

Still clutching the chain, the old man lifted both hands and pointed down the street. "*El Perro Negro!*"

Mike followed the gesture with his eyes and saw the words painted in orange and blue on the side of an adobe *cantina*.

El Perro Negro. The Black Dog. What a wonderful name for a bar! Like most Spanish names, it lost nothing in translation.

Mike braked the convertible to a stop in front of the *cantina*.

"Well, we made it," he said. "Let's unfasten the chain." He took the chain, and the old man let go. Disengaging the hook from the bumper of the convertible, Mike threw the chain into the trunk compartment. The old man didn't move.

"Isn't this where you get your gas?" Mike asked.

"Sí."

"I get it—you're waiting for service. Who waits on you?"

"Juan."

"Okay, I'll send him out *mucho pronto*."

"*Gracias, señor. Gracias!*"

Mike crossed the unpaved street toward the batwing doors of *El Perro Negro*, but stopped just short of the board sidewalk. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said and put a hand on a shiny, new parking meter stuck in the loose dirt. Looking along the street he saw two rows of parking meters, but not a single car—nor could he remember having seen one since entering the village.

But why hadn't he noticed the parking meters before? Probably because he was too busy looking out for the old man. And what the hell were parking meters doing in a town too poor to afford pavement? Or street lights, for that matter?

"Damn!" he said under his breath and stepped through the batwings of *El Perro Negro*. Pausing just inside, he let his eyes adjust to the gloom. He could make out a bar on the right, and he crossed the room toward it, stumbling over a chair, but managing to catch it before it hit the floor. Reaching the bar, he sat down near a large man in uniform.

A fat man with a towel tied around his waist was behind the bar, and Mike addressed him. "*¿Habla usted inglés, señor?*"

The bartender nodded and pulled at his walrus mustache.

"You are Juan?" Mike asked.

"I am Juan," the bartender answered.

"There's a station wagon out front that needs gas, and I need some coins for the meter."

"Did you hear, Carlos?" Juan said to the man in uniform. "It is Pepe!"

Carlos. That would be the official who wouldn't give the old man a license.

Carlos shrugged his massive shoulders. "Sí," he said, "it is Pepe."

The bartender took a bottle of tequila from behind the bar and was almost to the door when Carlos' voice stopped him. "You should not, my friend Juan," he said. "You should not give Pepe gasoline. He is no station wagon."

Juan turned without speaking and stepped through the batwings into the glare of the street.

Carlos sighed heavily and looked at the tequila bottle in front of him. With his heavy right arm he swept a saltcellar and a small bowl of cut limes into position beside the bottle.

"What's wrong with the old man?" Mike asked.

Carlos licked the top of his left hand below the first joint of the thumb and poured salt on it. "Old Pepe?" he said. "Five years ago he was hit by a station wagon in Monterrey. Now he is a station wagon."

"And everyone believes him?"

"Sí. They say he has been touched by the hand of God."

"And you? Do you believe he is a station wagon?"

Carlos licked the salt, drank from the bottle of tequila, bit and sucked the lime. "Me? I believe that he was hit by a station wagon. It is wrong to let him believe he is a vehicle. It does him no good. But the people will not understand. It is different in your country. But here the people believe in such things."

"How does he live? Who takes care of him?"

"The people. Juan gives him tequila. Others, food and clothing. I tear up his traffic tickets. He has a shack. He calls it a garage. He is happy, but he could be happy without being a station wagon."

Coughing and sputtering sounds issued from the street outside, then gave way to loud honks and beeps that faded off down the street.

"He is disturbing the *siesta* again," Carlos said, shaking his head as Juan returned to the *cantina*. "I told you to keep him quiet on the street. Now I will have to give him another ticket for honking his horn. It is a terrible horn. It is the loudest horn in all Mexico."

"Pepe means no harm," Juan said, "and the people do not care."

He raised his hand and pulled at his mustache. As he did, a piece of cardboard approximately five inches deep and a foot wide slipped from beneath his "apron" and fell to the floor. The cardboard had numbers and letters penciled heavily across its face. Juan picked it up hurriedly.

"What is that, my friend?" Carlos asked.

Juan looked away. "The license for Pepe," he said.

Carlos jumped to his feet. "You have no right to give it to him!" he shouted. "It is no license! It is wrong to give it to him!"

"It's only cardboard," Mike said. "What's the harm if it makes the old man happy?"

"It is wrong!" Carlos shouted. "It is not official!"

"Sí. It is not official," Juan said. "Pepe, too, said it is not official. He would not take it. Only Carlos can make it official. It is a paper license. It cost nothing. But it could make Pepe happy if you gave it to him. Only you can make Pepe official. Carlos, you must! Please, I beg of you."

Carlos made no reply, and Juan pulled with both hands at his mustache. The two men glared at each other.

"Look," Mike said, and ran his fingers through his hair, "how about me buying the two of you a drink? I could use a cold beer."

Juan quit pulling at his mustache and leaned his hands on the bar. "We have beer," he said, "but it is not cold."

"Not cold?"

"There is no ice. We have no electricity in Rio Escondido."

"No electricity? But— You can't be serious! You don't have electricity, you don't have pavement, but you do have parking meters, don't you?"

"Sí."

"For cat's sake, why?"

"We are a poor village," Juan said. "We cannot afford these things. Our government told us that electricity is too expensive; they could not give it to us. They told us they would sell us the meters to make the money to pay for the electricity."

"But where are the cars?"

Carlos threw up his hands. "We have three—all government vehicles. And they do not pay."

Mike whistled. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said. "You've been taken—and by some A-one con men. Which reminds me, I need some coins for the meter."

"No, my friend," Carlos said, "the meters are forever free to the first to use them. We have waited seven weeks. You are the first."

"We told the government there were no vehicles," Juan said, "but they told us if we had meters we would have many *touristas*. You are the first. The others will soon follow."

"But this place is nothing! Nowhere! You won't get any tourists here."

Juan shrugged. "The government told us."

Carlos pounded the bar. "Sí, the government told you, but, the government was wrong. You would not listen to me. You never listen! I, Carlos Rodriguez, told you that it was not so. But you would not listen."

Coughing and sputtering noises could be heard approach-

ing along the street outside. In front of *El Perro Negro* they stopped and gave way to loud honks and beeps.

"Pepe needs more gasoline," Juan said. He reached for the tequila, but Carlos took it from him.

"No," Carlos said, "Pepe is no station wagon—he is a man. He does not need gasoline—he needs tequila. I will take it to him."

At the batwings Carlos stopped and turned to Juan. "You are all Pepes in this town. You are children. Foolish children. You believe when Pepe tells you he is a station wagon. And Pepe is no station wagon. You believe when the government tells you there will be rich *touristas*, that there will be much money if you have parking meters. And there are no *touristas*. There is no money. *Sí*. You are all Pepes. You have spent your *pesetas*, and for nothing!"

Carlos strode through the batwings and Mike turned to Juan.

"What's his story?" Mike asked.

"He is the village conscience."

"Why isn't he like the rest?"

"A woman."

"It figures."

"He no longer believes. He would not hurt Pepe. But he cannot believe. He is a good man. His heart tells him that Pepe should have the license, but not his head. So he cannot give it to him."

A stream of high, staccato Spanish exploded like a string of firecrackers outside. Mike could understand none of it—it was hardly high-school Spanish, but it was obvious that Carlos was very angry. It was impossible to hear Pepe's calm replies.

Then all was quiet—a quiet broken at last by Pepe starting his engine and chugging and sputtering down the street.

Moments later a dirty, half-naked boy entered carrying the tequila.

Mike recognized the boy who had played the bull.

The boy handed Juan the bottle, and the two spoke rapidly, Juan pulling at his mustache.

Mike caught the words "Pepe" and "*cárcel*." The latter word was repeated several times, but he could not recall its meaning.

Juan and the boy finished talking, and Juan fished a coin from his pocket and tossed it to the boy, who once again became a bull. With head lowered and horns pointing outward, he went charging through the cape-like doors.

Juan unfastened the towel from around his middle and turned to Mike, his manner quite serious. "Carlos has taken Pepe to jail."

"This is something new?"

"Sí. It has never happened before."

"What will happen?"

"I do not know, but we must help Pepe." He paused as if realizing it was none of Mike's affair. "You will help," he said. It was a statement, not a question.

"Of course. If I can."

Juan took the cardboard license from behind the bar and stuffed it under his shirt, then hurried outside.

Mike followed him into the street and was again struck by the suddenness of the heat, the brightness of the sun.

Carlos and Pepe were nowhere in sight. All was quiet. It was still the *siesta*.

Juan led the way along the dusty, unpaved streets till they came at last to a squat, adobe building with *Estación de Policía* in neat black letters above the door.

They entered a bare, cheerless room containing a desk and two straight-backed chairs.

Carlos glared at them from behind the desk as they entered.

"How is Pepe?" Juan asked.

"He is *loco*!" Carlos said, waving his arms. "That is how he is! He is *loco*, *loco*, *loco*! He will not understand he is no station wagon!"

"Maybe he is a station wagon," Mike said.

"What? You say this? No, my friend, you think as I do. You cannot believe him. He is *loco*!"

"How do you know Pepe is *loco*?" Mike asked. "How do you know he is not a station wagon?"

"Because he is no vehicle," Carlos answered, turning away as if not wanting to discuss it.

"Our friend Juan here," Mike said, "is he a bartender?"

"Sí."

"Why is he a bartender? What makes him a bartender?"

"He serves tequila."

"If you come to my home and I serve you tequila, am I a bartender?"

"It is not the same thing, my friend. Pepe is human—he cannot be a vehicle."

Juan could contain himself no longer. "What have you done with Pepe?" he demanded.

"Pepe! Pepe! Pepe!" Carlos shouted, waving his arms. "Why will you not understand? Pepe is no station wagon. I say to him, 'Pepe, where are your wheels?' and he tells me he is a station wagon."

"You have put him in jail?" Juan asked.

"He would not go to jail!" Carlos shouted. He pounded on

his desk. "I gave him parking tickets! I gave him tickets for honking his horn! I gave him tickets for disturbing the *siesta*! I told him for this he must go to jail. But he said he could not go to jail because a station wagon cannot fit into a jail, that a jail is for people."

"What have you done with him?"

"I have impounded him."

"You've what?"

"I have impounded him! He would not go to jail, so I chained him to one of the government vehicles. I had to! I had to do it! He would not go to jail! So I impounded him as I would a stolen vehicle. Oh, he is a bad station wagon, that Pepe!"

Mike smiled. "Then you do believe that Pepe's a station wagon?" he said. He tried to visualize the little old man standing off Carlos—Carlos with his heavy arms and broad shoulders.

"Eh? No! He is not a station wagon!" Carlos said.

"But don't you see that he really is?" Mike said. "He's as much a station wagon as Juan is a bartender. Juan is a bartender because everyone agrees that he's a bartender. And Pepe is a station wagon because everyone agrees that he's a station wagon—except you."

Carlos shook his head.

"Oh, I know he isn't official, that he doesn't have a license. But would you deny Juan a license if he needed it to tend bar?"

Carlos again shook his head, and Mike continued.

"You said, 'Oh, he is a bad station wagon, that Pepe!' So you must believe him."

"I said it only because I was angry."

"You gave him parking tickets?"

"Sí, I gave him parking tickets."

"Do you give parking tickets to pedestrians?"

"No. But Pepe is different."

"Of course he's different. He's a station wagon! You gave him tickets for honking his horn, for disturbing the *siesta*?"

"Sí," Carlos said and shrugged.

"Do you do this to the others? No, because they don't have horns."

"But Pepe's horn is so loud—it is the loudest horn in all Mexico!"

"But he does have a horn—you have just admitted it. The others, do they have horns?"

"No," Carlos said. He sighed heavily.

"Of course they don't. And now you have impounded him."

Can you impound a citizen? No! What do you do with citizens who break the law?"

"I put them in jail."

"But you didn't put Pepe in jail, even though you are bigger, stronger than he is. You impounded him! You impounded him because he's a station wagon, because in spite of everything, you believe he's a station wagon."

Carlos shrugged imperceptibly. His normal gestures were violent, sweeping, and the two men, who had been following his every move, sensed that this was his moment of truth and were silent.

Carlos studied his strong, brown hands. It was as if he were aware of his hands suddenly for the first time. His expression might have been the same if he were considering cleaning his nails or cutting his hands off at the wrists.

"*Stá bien*," he said at last, avoiding their gaze, "give me the license."

Juan took the license from beneath his shirt and put it into the hand that Carlos held out to him.

Carlos straightened himself to his full height. Then, assuming his most official manner, he strode into the street.

Mike waited with Juan in the comparative cool of the office, but hearing the station wagon start up, the two men rushed to the door in time to see Pepe come charging around the corner of the building. He was bent forward stiffly from the waist. His hands were pressed tight against his forehead, two gnarled fingers projected forward, forming a bumper.

Mike caught a remembered glimpse of the children playing in the sun—and understood.

The station wagon stopped at the sight of them and honked happily. Then with feet churning the dust, Pepe went honking and beeping down the street, his license plate wired to the seat of his pants.

By then Carlos had rejoined them. "Who'll pay for the tickets?" he asked.

"Wasn't he the first to use the meters?" Mike asked.

"Sí. It is so."

Carlos turned to Mike and again assumed his most official manner. "I am sorry, *señor*," he said, "but I must give you the ticket for illegal parking. But for you I will make it easy, very easy—only ten pesos."

"But you said—" Mike began, then broke into a grin and took out the dollar bill he had offered Pepe. "Hell, for eighty cents it's not worth it. Besides I knew it was going to cost me when I listened to the old man; I just didn't know how much."

LAWRENCE TREAT

L As in Loot

It is not generally known, or if known, not generally recognized, that Lawrence Treat was the important pioneer in the origin and development of the contemporary procedural detective novel—the novel of what might be called the “public eye.” Of course, in their own times, many famous fictional characters operated as procedural detectives; for examples: Gaboriau’s *Le-coq*, in his own (and by today’s standards, primitive) way; the various detectives whose exploits (chiefly imagined) were chronicled by Allan Pinkerton; R. Austin Freeman’s Dr. Thorndyke, with his scientific (and still sound) methods; and Freeman Wills Crofts’ Inspector French cases which surely emphasized legwork and painstaking investigation.

But it was Lawrence Treat who gave the realistic procedural approach a feeling of substance and unity in a modern sense. His earliest novel in this genre was *V As in Victim*, published in 1945 (nearly twenty years ago!) which was ten years before J. J. Marric’s (John Creasey’s) first Gideon novel, *Gideon’s Day* (1955), and eleven years before Ed McBain’s first novel of the 87th Precinct, *Cop Hater* (1956). Other Lawrence Treat novels were called, in a title pattern all his own, *H As in Hunted*, *Q As in Quicksand*, *F As in Flight*, and *T As in Trapped*. Anthony Boucher made the historical point clear when he wrote: “The prime pioneer in the naturalistic novel of police procedure was Lawrence Treat whose stories . . . are not only far ahead of their times but admirable in themselves.”

(Note to Anthony Boucher: How would you classify William MacHarg’s *The Affairs of O’Malley*—short stories which were first published in book form in 1940 but began to appear in magazines much earlier? Wasn’t it William MacHarg, that grand old man, who started the procedural trend?)

But to get back to Lawrence Treat and his major contribution to the form: two characters carry the ball,

as a kind of 'tec team, in Mr. Treat's procedural stories—detective Mitch Taylor and laboratory technician Jub Freeman. (Was it sheer coincidence that Mr. Treat chose the same surname as Dr. Thorndyke's creator, R. Austin Freeman?) The germ of Mitch Taylor's character (the germ only) came out of a five-minute interview that Mr. Treat had at a New York City precinct house in the early 1940s, when Mr. Treat and a friend reported some obscene anonymous phone calls. The germ of Jub Freeman came from Mr. Treat's persistent "hanging around" the New York City technical lab—the perfect place, of course, for Jub Freeman to be born. Other realistic details, of procedure and technique and background, emerged from an unofficial "hitch" with the San Diego police force while Edward Dieckman was Chief of Homicide (Mr. Dieckman has since become a true-crime writer who really "knows his stuff").

And now Lawrence Treat has begun, especially for Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, a new series of short stories about Jub Freeman, Mitch Taylor, and Taylor's superior, Lieutenant Decker; and you will find them engrossing tales of the now popular procedural style. But we did want you to realize that in a contemporary sense it was Lawrence Treat who blazed this particular trail—the police procedural novel—and all credit to Mr. Treat for his significant contribution.

It was the middle of the morning when Mitch Taylor drove the patrol car through the archway and into the big courtyard in the center of the municipal building. He parked in the space reserved for police, picked up the hub cap with the bullet hole—if it was a bullet hole—and stuck it under his arm.

Mitch Taylor was a stocky guy, of medium height, chesty, with a small-featured face that had enough flesh on it to take an occasional sock without getting hurt. He always looked cheerful enough but you could never tell what he was thinking, because usually it was nothing. Or anyhow, nothing you ought to know.

What he was thinking now was, he should have left the thing back there in the junk yard where he'd spotted it. Because he was going on vacation tomorrow—three weeks of it up at the lake—and no new business was going to mess up that vacation.

A couple of hours ago he'd had everything figured out. He still had those summonses to serve, and he'd string those out till afternoon. Then he'd stop in at the garage and tell them there was something wrong with the steering, he didn't know exactly what, they'd better look it over. He'd hang around while they found nothing, and when it was time to quit, they'd stop kidding themselves and he could go home and start packing.

That's what life was for. Vacations. Him and Amy and the kids, taking it easy, having a good time. A girl like Amy, she came ahead of everything else. She always had and always would.

Still, when a hub cap starts telling you stuff, you can't pass it up. You take it up to the lab and find out—from Jub Freeman, who was a wizard at things like that.

Jub, perched on a stool and hunched over a work bench, was studying something under a microscope when Mitch marched into the lab. At the sound of the door Jub swung around, grinned, and ran his hand through what was left of his hair, which was pretty well thinned out from brain-work.

"Hi," he said energetically. "All set to go?"

"Right after breakfast tomorrow. Bought me a hub cap, too, on account I had one missing."

Jub glanced at the disk in Mitch's hand. "That's the new one?" Jub asked.

Mitch shook his head. "No, I got mine outside. Thought maybe you'd want to look this one over."

Jub took it and examined it carefully. He tilted it so that the light caught it at an angle, then he bent down and squinted at the hole. He ran his finger along the rim, turned the cap around, and studied the inside. After a couple of minutes he put it down on his work bench.

"Chevy," he said. "Almost brand-new. Not driven in the winter because there's no corrosion from the salt. No wrench marks, either. Where'd you get it, Mitch?"

"Junk yard," Mitch answered. He didn't give any details and Jub didn't ask for them. Jub merely tapped the disk as if he wanted to test the ring it gave out.

"Brand-new Chevy," Jub said again. "Are you thinking the same thing I am?"

"Rogan," Mitch said promptly.

Jub nodded. Rogan was a bank robber who'd broken out of jail the month before and was still on the loose. His picture, on Wanted sheets, was all over the place and showed a squat, heavy-set guy with bulging eyes, a broad bulging forehead,

and spread ears. A teller at the Farmers' Bank had identified him as one of the pair that had held up the bank a week ago and got away with \$14,000, after exchanging shots with the guard. They'd been driving a brand-new, stolen Chevy; but they'd ditched it somewhere, switched cars, and smashed their way through a road block, where they'd killed a State Trooper in a gun battle and then escaped in his car. The state car had been found the next day, with the body of one of the bandits in it. But neither Rogan nor the money had showed up.

Jub fingered the hub cap. "Didn't notice a new Chevy in that junk yard, did you?"

"When I got a vacation coming up?"

Jub got the point. "Look," he said. "Why don't you go back there while I check this over? If it's a bullet, I'll know it from the trace metals, and I can drive over later and try to spot the Chevy. That way, I'll turn in the report, not you. Okay?"

Mitch nodded. "Just so I don't get tagged with a case," he said.

But out at the junk yard again, Mitch saw he'd taken on too much. There were acres of cars—rusty jalopies, smashed-up wrecks, cars without motors, cars without wheels, cars upside down or lying on their sides. Killer cars—and over-age cars that had been towed here to die a natural death. They were stacked up everywhere and they overflowed into a marshy hollow wild with sumac or something . . . Easy to run a hot car in here, bust it up with an ax, and then seem to abandon it. And maybe with \$14,000 in cash, locked up in the trunk . . . It was possible—a graveyard of old cars was a pretty safe hiding place for loot.

Nevertheless Mitch realized he had pulled a boner coming back. Because after a while this Jackson fellow who ran the place would come over and ask Mitch what he was doing. Mitch would say he was just looking, or else he'd say he was doing calisthenics or something, and the guy would get nasty about it and the whole thing would end up with an arrest. Then Mitch would have to hang around tomorrow so he could show up in court.

This Jackson fellow was built like a tackling dummy, except he had muscles instead of cotton wadding inside him. An hour ago he'd told Mitch to fork over fifty cents and go out and find his own hub cap. Tough cookie, this Jackson.

Any other time Mitch would have taken it all in stride and walked in without any worries except maybe was there any

poison ivy around. But now he stared at the shack that was supposed to be an office, over there at the other end of the lot. There was no sign of Jackson, so the hell with him.

Mitch had gone about twenty or thirty feet, watching his step so he didn't trip over the rusty springs and fenders and stuff, when the kid's voice sounded out. "Boom-boom—you're dead!"

Mitch swung around and saw this brat with the toy gun. He was maybe six years old, but for a second or two that mug of his had wrinkles and the gun was real, so Mitch froze.

There couldn't be two faces like that—the same bulging eyes and spread ears and oversized forehead. For that second Mitch felt as if he were seeing Rogan cut down to size. Then the kid's eyes seemed to get a little smaller, the ears weren't quite so spread out, and the forehead looked almost normal. Mitch wasn't sure now, except the impression stuck.

Yet, this was Rogan's kid. He was sure of it.

Mitch let out a smile, lifted his hands and said, hamming it up, "You got me, kid. Now what?"

The kid stared, bug-eyed. Mitch, real friendly-like, said, "What's your name, huh?"

The kid didn't answer.

You can chase a kid in the open and catch him easy, but six-year-olds are slippery and they get through narrow spaces where a grown man can trip and land flat on his puss. And by the time Mitch could get hold of the kid and drag him off, Mitch would have Jackson on his neck, and then what?

So Mitch said, "You know what?"

The kid didn't move.

Mitch lowered his hands and said, "I give up. Now you take me to jail and lock me up." And trying to make like a crook caught with the goods, he approached the kid.

"Pretend that's your car over there," Mitch said softly. "You bring me over there and make me drive, see? You just keep your gun on me, and I can't do a thing about it."

The kid still stood his ground, still didn't say anything. Maybe he was scared or maybe they'd left the brains out of him and he didn't have enough sense to scam. Anyhow, all he did was say, "Boom-boom" again, but in a frightened kind of a whisper.

So Mitch put his arm around him, and when the kid tried to pull back, Mitch picked him up and said, "What's your name, huh? What are you doing here?"

The kid shook his head and dropped the toy gun. Mitch picked it up, stuck it in his pocket, and brought the kid over

to the squad car and settled him down on the front seat. Mitch chattered all the way back to headquarters, but the kid didn't say a word. His vocabulary was *boom-boom*, and that was it.

He took Mitch's hand when they got out of the car, and he kept hanging on tight while they walked down the corridor and through the door marked Homicide Squad. There, a couple of the boys were kidding around with the blonde who did secretarial work for the lieutenant.

They stopped talking at the sight of Mitch and the kid. Bankhart said, "Holy hell—did you make a pinch?"

The blonde smiled and bent down and said to the kid in a soft, sugary voice, "Hello. What's your name?"

Junior's face puckered up like a walnut and he burst out crying. Mitch, still holding his hand, said, "He don't talk much. Lieutenant in?"

The girl nodded. Mitch, dragging this yowling brat along with him, crossed the room, knocked on the lieutenant's door, and went in.

Lieutenant Decker had the smallest office and the biggest collection of junk in the Police Department. He went in for souvenirs of his cases and for magazines on criminology, and he stacked them up on the filing cabinets and the shelves and the window sill and the extra chair, along with the official reports he was always in the middle of reading. He swung around and looked at Mitch and the kid as if they both belonged in the loony bin, which maybe they did.

"Well?" Decker said. But the kid let out a blast and kept pumping it out, and Decker put his hands over his ears. When the kid finally stopped for breath, Mitch had a chance to say something.

"Take a gander at him," Mitch said. "What does he look like?"

"Like a damn nuisance," Decker said. "What's the idea?"

Things weren't working out exactly the way Mitch had intended. He'd figured the gang outside might be a little slow on the trigger, but the lieutenant ought to be sharper. Still, Mitch had to admit that a six-year-old, with his face screwed up and his heart in shreds on account maybe he wanted his mother, didn't look much like Public Enemy Number One.

All Mitch said was, "He got lost."

"Brother!" the lieutenant exclaimed. "You've pulled some screwy ones, but this time—wow! Listen, Taylor. In case nobody ever told you, the Homicide Squad handles crimes of violence against the person, but there's a Lost and Found

Department and a Juvenile Bureau, and you can classify the kid either way. Use your own judgment." Decker grinned. "What's really on your mind?"

Mitch came straight out with it. "He's Rogan's kid."

Decker flipped back in his chair and almost dumped over. "Did he tell you that?"

"No. But when he quits crying, he looks like Rogan."

"And when does that happen?" Decker asked.

"Lieutenant," Mitch said, "this looks like a lead. I could be wrong, but do you want to bet on it?"

Decker nodded. "Yes," he said. "How much?"

Mitch didn't take the bait. "What I want," he said, "is we should put the kid's description on the teletype and on the municipal radio. A kind of appeal. Then somebody comes and picks him up, and we tail whoever it is."

Decker frowned, searched his soul, and decided to give Mitch a break. "All right," Decker said. "You're going on vacation tomorrow, you'll be out of my hair. Tell the girl to send it out."

"Thanks," Mitch said, and went outside.

The kid quieted down a little, but he wasn't happy. He needed somebody to blow his nose and tie his left shoelace, which the blonde proceeded to do. Meanwhile, Mitch pulled a form from the supply shelf behind the door and began filling out the description: age, color of eyes, color of hair, height, weight, clothing worn, where found, identifying scars or marks, if any, and so on.

He handed the sheets to the blonde and told her what the lieutenant had said. Then Mitch took the kid upstairs to Jub.

Jub turned out to be no smarter than the others. He frowned at the kid and said, "Who's he?"

"Rogan," Mitch said.

"Doesn't look like him."

"You know how kids are," Mitch said. "They change. They look like one thing one minute, and a couple of minutes later they're different."

"All right," Jub said, smiling. "Make him look like Rogan."

Mitch perched the kid on a stool, gave it a spin, and turned his back. "What about the hub cap?" he asked.

"A thirty-eight slug, and the car was moving fairly fast when it was hit. What about that Chevy?"

"I found the kid, instead," Mitch said. "I figure Rogan was hiding out back there and used the kid for a lookout. All the kid had to do was make a nuisance of himself, which he's good at, and that would warn Rogan so he could beat it. I

picked up Junior on account somebody has to come around and claim him."

"Sure," Jub said. "His mother."

For the next couple of hours Mitch hung around kind of nursemaiding the kid. Word spread that Taylor had come up with a lulu, and guys from other parts of the building dropped in to see.

Mitch explained cheerfully. "He's a child prodigy. Going to grow up and be a mental defective. No work, no trouble. State'll take care of him."

The kid sat in a corner and played with a busted pinball machine. Mitch almost got to like him, because he was a guarantee against a last-minute assignment. So Mitch was figuring on staying put until five, and then he could blow.

But the kid's mother walked in, and she had brown, bulging eyes. Her forehead was sort of wide and her ears almost stuck out of her hairdo. She was a dead ringer for the kid.

She gave her name as Mrs. Leonard Jackson and she said her husband ran an automobile junk yard and her child had been playing there when he'd disappeared. And she thought something ought to be done about it.

She was nervous and scared and determined, all at the same time. She threatened to bring a kidnapping charge, but she wouldn't sign a complaint and nobody could figure out exactly what she was after.

Finally the lieutenant got fed up and gave her a lecture on how she shouldn't let a six-year-old run around loose in a junk yard where he could hurt himself or get lost or something, and she was lucky they didn't bring charges against her and her husband for not taking proper care of their child.

She said they wouldn't dare say that to her husband, they were taking advantage of her because she was a woman, and she up and left. As soon as she was gone, the lieutenant burst out laughing. And the ribbing that Mitch got after that was just a beginning. He figured these wisecracks, they'd still be coming at him three weeks from now, when he got back from the lake.

Mitch let them ride him—there was nothing he could do about it; but he kept remembering that hub cap and how the kid had looked like Rogan when he aimed the toy gun. And how maybe that Chevy and the \$14,000 in loot *were* in the junk yard. And finally, if a kid looked like his mother, why couldn't he look like his old man, too?

So Mitch, partly because he had this idea in the back of his

head and partly because he was sick of being kidded, wanted an excuse to beat it. When he felt the toy gun still there in his pocket, he took the thing out and said maybe he ought to return it. The lieutenant said sure, go ahead, why not?

Before Mitch left, he went upstairs to the lab and told Jub what the score was and asked him to take a trip down to the junk yard. Because, even if Mitch had made a mistake about the kid, that bullet hole was real and there was still a chance of locating the Chevy. So Mitch arranged to meet Jub there and help him look.

The Jackson address was in the west end of town, not too far from the yard. The house was in a fairly good residential section and there were two cars in the driveway, one of them the jalopy Mrs. Jackson had driven down to headquarters, and the other a brand-new job.

Because of the new car and because nobody who ran a broken-down junk yard could afford to live in a house like this, Mitch had a funny feeling as he walked up the short path to the front door and rang the bell. The Jackson female opened the door, and she looked just as scared and nervous as she had been at headquarters.

She kind of shrank back from Mitch and then she said, "We just phoned and asked to have you come and bring it, and they said you were on your way." She raised her voice and called out, "Len, he's here."

Jackson came from somewhere in the rear of the house. "Come on in," he said. He'd been sullen and itching for a scrap when Mitch had bought that hub cap this morning, but now the guy was all smiles and tail-wagging. So he wanted something, and the question was what.

Mitch stepped inside and took the imitation gun out of his pocket. "Junior forgot his toy," he said.

"That's what we wanted, that's what we called about," Jackson said. He grabbed it, and Mitch wondered if maybe the thing meant something and he'd missed out on it.

He asked directly. "What's so important about it?"

Mrs. Jackson answered. "It's Junior's favorite toy, and he's unhappy without it. He just can't bear to lose it."

"Yeah," Mitch said, thinking how Junior had forgotten all about it ever since Mitch had stuck it in his pocket, and how neither of the Jacksons bothered to give it to the kid now.

So the toy gun was a handle to get Mitch here; they wanted to talk to him and now they were tense and edgy, but Mitch still couldn't figure out what the play was.

Jackson said, "How about a drink?"

And Mrs. Jackson said, "Yes, what would you like?"

"Make it a beer," Mitch said. He kept looking around the room, but he found nothing out of the ordinary, except that the place didn't look used—no personal stuff lying around, as if they'd just got here and hadn't had time to get settled.

The Jackson dame went out to the kitchen for the beer. Jackson and Mitch sat down and Mitch said, "How come you're not working? Yard closed up?"

"Too worried about the kid to bother with business," Jackson said. "I been sitting here and stewing around, wondering what happened to him."

"Must have been tough," Mitch said. But if the guy had been worried, why hadn't he gone up to headquarters instead of sending his wife?

"What was the idea of you grabbing him?" Jackson asked.

Mitch shrugged off the question with the gesture of a guy who had nothing but innocence inside him. "He was lost," Mitch said. "I felt sorry for the little fella."

"How'd you get along with him?" Jackson asked.

"Okay."

"I mean, did he talk much? Kids are funny sometimes. What did he say?"

"A little of this and a little of that," Mitch said, and he began to understand. Jackson was worried whether the kid had given something away—so worried that he had to find out.

The guy made some remark about the weather and about the neighborhood, and Mitch asked Jackson how long he'd lived here and Jackson switched the subject without answering direct. And all the time Mitch's mind was churning, trying to figure out the real reason Jackson had phoned for him. Besides wanting to know if the kid had said anything, Jackson hoped Mitch would go back and say the Jacksons were nice normal people, that they had nothing to hide, had even invited Mitch in and given him a beer.

Which meant they weren't normal and had plenty to hide.

Then it hit Mitch with a jolt that they were covering up—covering up for Rogan.

The kid was Rogan's, and Rogan wasn't far away. He'd come back for the loot. Jackson was a stand-in for him and was putting on an act to fool the police, and maybe the dame was Rogan's wife and maybe she wasn't, but sure as hell Jackson wasn't the kid's father. So if Mitch could slip in a question to show it one way or the other, he'd be on first base, anyhow.

He leaned back in his chair, as if he had nothing in mind except a little small talk. "That kid of yours," he said. "He go to school?"

"Sure. What about it?"

"I was wondering what grade he's in."

"What do you think?" Jackson snapped. Obviously the subject was a touchy one and he forgot about being polite. "He's six years old. Think he's in high school?"

"Naah," Mitch said. "I thought he was in college, maybe."

Jackson picked up the toy gun and kind of hefted it, balancing it and fingering it as if he were plenty used to guns. "You got a real sense of humor," he said.

"Yeah," Mitch said. "What school's he in?"

"Public school," Jackson said, spitting the words out.

"Sure. Which one?"

It was the key question. Any father knew what school his kid went to. So if the kid was Jackson's and everything was on the up-and-up, he'd rattle it off without even thinking. But if he couldn't, then Mitch was right all the way.

Jackson turned around and called out to the kitchen. "Hey, Betty—our friend wants to know what school Junior goes to."

She came out of the kitchen to answer. "P.S. Forty-five," she said. "And we don't have any beer."

"That's okay," Mitch said. He looked at his watch and stood up. "Time for me to blow, anyhow." And he left.

But outside, sitting in the car, he saw he had a problem.

He couldn't let this ride—not when there was a chance he had a lead on a cop killer. On the other hand, if Mitch told the lieutenant that this was nothing but a theory on Mitch's part, the lieutenant would either laugh it off or else tell Mitch to stay with it until he got something—which meant goodbye tomorrow.

So Mitch was hooked, and he knew it. His only hope was that Jub would dig up something at the junk yard that would blow the case wide open today . . . or else that Jackson would scare and lead the way straight to Rogan.

Mitch started the car, drove to the corner, and parked on the side street where he had a full view of the Jackson house.

Mitch waited about ten minutes, and then he saw Jackson come out and get in the new car, nose it out the driveway, and head up the street, past Mitch. Mitch followed, staying maybe fifty feet behind and letting himself be seen. After a couple of blocks Jackson pulled up at the curb and got out of his car. Mitch stopped directly behind and waited for Jackson to step alongside.

"What's the big idea?" Jackson said. Being polite hadn't

worked; it hadn't fooled Mitch, so Jackson was going to be nasty again. "You tailin' me?" he demanded.

Mitch shrugged. "Maybe."

"What for?"

"You guess."

"Look, copper—I got a right to go where I want to."

"Sure," Mitch said. "Anybody stopping you?"

"Just lay off. Turn around and beat it."

Mitch tapped his hand on the steering wheel, and Jackson had sense enough to see there was nothing he could do.

"Okay," the big guy mumbled. "Meet me in my office, we can talk there. I'll be waiting inside." And Jackson wheeled, marched back to his car, and took off. Mitch stayed behind, still at a fifty-foot distance.

It didn't take much brain power to dope things out. Rogan was hiding in the office, and when Mitch stepped inside, they'd gun him down and take their chances. Because the way things stood, what did they have to lose?

Jackson kept going, nice and easy, and Mitch kept tagging along behind. He'd find Jub at the yard and pick him up. And what to do then was a tricky business. They couldn't take the chance of going into that shack, they had no grounds for an arrest, and at the same time they couldn't just kiss the thing off and go home.

If it wasn't for that vacation of Mitch's he'd have hung around and kept an eye on Jackson while Lieutenant Decker ordered an investigation. At the school, from neighbors. Check Mrs. Jackson, check the files. And after a while they'd know. Except that Mitch was planning to go up to the lake tomorrow, and how could you tell how long an investigation like that would take?

So he rolled along and tried to cook up an angle. And all he drew was a blank.

The road was deserted out here, a long stretch with the marsh on one side and the junk yard and its wrecked cars strung along the other. Jub's police car—its insignia plainly marked—was parked on the macadam, and a couple of hundred feet away Jub was hard at work. He had a crowbar and was forcing open the trunk of a car—a Chevy.

What happened next took Mitch by surprise.

He was expecting Jackson to turn into the dirt road that led to the office-shack, but the guy went right on past, still going slow. Maybe he expected Mitch to stop and talk to Jub, but Mitch didn't. Mitch gave a blast on his horn, blinked his lights, then touched the siren button to attract Jub's attention. When Jub turned around, Mitch waved for him to come over.

Jackson reacted to that siren as if he were wired for sound. His car seemed to jerk and leap forward, and he had a hundred-yard lead by the time Mitch realized it.

Mitch gave his car the gun, locked the siren button in the On position, and picked up his radio phone. He spoke crisply.

"Signal Nine-Nine," he said. "Gray Mercury going west on Lincoln." Then he slapped the phone back in its cradle and concentrated on driving. Signal Nine-Nine would bring out every radio car and every State Trooper on patrol, and Lincoln Avenue would be blocked off. But how soon?

Mitch, with the wail of the siren and the roar of air and the scream of tires in his ears, drove like a speed demon. Four miles to the turnpike. Jackson would cover it in three minutes maybe. Three minutes wasn't long enough to mobilize and set up a road block, and Mitch had to hang on until help arrived.

Jackson, with that head-start he'd got by speeding up first, was now a couple of hundred yards ahead, and gaining. He swung out to the left abruptly, whizzed past a green car, then careened back to the right. Mitch saw a truck coming toward him, filling the opposite lane.

Mitch realized immediately that he was in a helpless position. Braking easy wouldn't do any good, and braking hard would probably throw him into a skid—and he'd lose Jackson, besides. So the green car ahead of him or the truck coming toward him had to save his hide—but what the hell was the matter with them? They could see him, they could hear his siren. Didn't they know they were supposed to pull over and give a cop room?

He gritted his teeth, thought of Amy, of Jackson, of the lake, of everything, of nothing. A green car and a truck, a couple of damn fools who'd lost their heads or didn't know the rules. Mitch tensed; maybe he prayed and maybe he didn't. He had no idea. And then the green car ahead of him started doing tricks, in slow motion.

The tail lights went red, the turning signal blinked, but for a left turn. The guy at the wheel was rattled and doing everything wrong. The left blinker went off and the right blinker came on. Mitch was practically on top of the car when the driver finally edged over to the right and slipped onto the shoulder of the road.

Mitch whizzed by, but he never knew how he made it. He felt the sweat pouring down into his eyes and he wanted to wipe it off. But his hands wouldn't move, they were locked tight on the wheel. Up ahead Jackson was still gaining.

Mitch came out of it slow, and in a funny way he was able to relax a little, to think, to move his fingers again. He

brushed off the sweat, decided the hell with this, he'd slow down, save his own life, and let the other boys close in on Jackson. The guy was trapped, wasn't he?

Then Mitch saw the turnpike overpass ahead, saw Jackson's brake lights flash on. Jackson's car seemed to sway, flutter, almost go off the road as it careened into the approach to the turnpike.

Mitch applied his brakes gradually. He didn't want to go shooting into turnpike traffic at eighty—or at sixty or forty, either. And once Jackson was out there, the State Troopers could worry. Mitch didn't even have jurisdiction.

Above the dull roar of wind and tires Mitch heard the crash. He had a sick, empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, and he hoped nobody else was involved in the smash-up. He slowed up, and he was doing a modest thirty when he sighted the smoldering wreckage where Jackson had rammed almost head-on into a retaining wall . . .

Mitch got home around seven. Amy was giving the kids supper, and the hallway of the apartment was jammed with suitcases and bundles. Amy came flying into his arms as he opened the door.

"Mitchell," she said, holding on tight, "I was getting worried. I couldn't imagine what kept you so late."

"We got that bank robber," he said. "Jub found the loot in an old car in the junk yard, and the guy killed himself trying to get away."

"Rogan?" she said.

Mitch shook his head. "Naah. That's what we thought at first. But this bank teller had Rogan on the brain, like lots of other people did. I don't want to blame the guy for making a mistake."

"Of course not," Amy said.

"Well, when somebody held up that bank, the teller thought he recognized Rogan. Only Rogan had nothing to do with it. We just got word they nabbed him out west."

"Then who did it?"

"Guy named Jackson. We caught up with him this afternoon. He got rattled when he was followed and when he saw Jub searching cars for the money. He knew we were closing in, so he tried a getaway and ran into a stone wall."

"Well, you can tell me all about it later. Do you know you forgot to write that note to Joey's school? The one the PTA wants everybody to send, asking for better lunches. I promised you'd write. As a policeman, what you say carries weight."

"Sure," he said. "I'll take care of it right away. Amy, does Joey look like me?"

She laughed at the question. "Sometimes," she said. "Some people think so and others don't. Why?"

"Nothing," he said. "I better go write that note. Only—look, Amy, what's the name of the school? I mean, what's the number?"

STANLEY ELLIN

The Crime of Ezechiele Coen

A yearly event for readers of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—Stanley Ellin's newest story—and this year there are interesting differences . . .

"The Crime of Ezechiele Coen" is unmistakably El-linesque—in mystery and suspense; but it is also (a departure for Mr. Ellin) a "pure" detective story—a modern procedural tale of detection set among the ancient ruins of Rome.

And there are other differences: "The Crime of Ezechiele Coen" is a novelet—also a departure for Mr. Ellin; and the approach, background, characters, mood, even the special tenderness of this story, are new and shining facets of Stanley Ellin's impressive talent.

Mystery Writers of America judged Stanley Ellin's "The Crime of Ezechiele Coen" to be one of the three best mystery short stories published during 1963. Since two of the three stories were not tales of detection, it follows that MWA considered "The Crime of Ezechiele Coen" the best detective short story of the year.

Before the disenchantment set in, Noah Freeman lived in a whirl of impressions. The chaotic traffic. The muddy Tiber. The Via Veneto out of Italian movies about *la dolce vita*. The Fountain of Trevi out of Hollywood. Castel Sant' Angelo out of *Tosca*, Rome.

"Rome?" Pop had said. "But why Rome? Such a foreign place. And so far away."

True. But to old Pop Freeman, even Rockland County, an hour from New York, was far away, and his two weeks of vacation there every summer an adventure. And, in fact, it was unlikely that Pop had been too much surprised at his son's decision to go journeying afar. After all, this was the son who was going to be a doctor—at the very least a teacher—and who had become, of all things, a policeman.

"A policeman in the family," Pop would muse aloud now and then. "A detective with a gun in the family like on TV. My own son. What would Mama say if she ever knew, may she rest in peace?"

But, Noah had to admit, the old man had been right about one thing, Rome was far, far away, not only from New York, but also from the blood-quickenning image of it instilled in young Noah Freeman when he was a schoolboy soaking himself in gaudy literature about Spartacus and Caesar and Nero. And the *Pensione Alfara*, hidden away in an alley off Via Arenula, was hardly a place to quicken anyone's blood. It took an ill wind to blow an occasional American tourist there. In Noah's case, the ill wind was the cab driver who had picked him up at Fiumicino airport and who happened to be Signora Alfara's brother-in-law.

It was made to order for disenchantment, the *Pensione Alfara*. Granting that it offered bargain rates, its cuisine was monotonous, its service indifferent, its plumbing capricious, and its clientele, at least in early March, seemed to consist entirely of elderly, sad-eyed Italian villagers come to Rome to attend the deathbed of a dear friend. Aside from Signora Alfara herself and the girl at the portiere's desk, no one on the scene spoke English, so communication between Noah and his fellow boarders was restricted to nods and shrugs, well meant, but useless in relieving loneliness.

Its one marked asset was the girl at the portiere's desk. She was tall and exquisite, one of the few really beautiful women Noah had yet encountered in Rome, because among other disillusionments was the discovery that Roman women are not the women one sees in Italian movies. And she lived behind her desk from early morning to late at night as if in a sad, self-contained world of her own, skillful at her accounts, polite, but remote and disinterested.

She intrigued him for more than the obvious reasons. The English she spoke was almost unaccented. If anything, it was of the clipped British variety, which led him to wonder whether she might not be a Briton somehow washed up on this Roman shore. And at her throat on a fine gold chain was a Mogen David, a Star of David, announcing plainly enough that she was Jewish. The sight of that small, familiar ornament had startled him at first, then had emboldened him to make a friendly overture.

"As a fellow Jew," he had said smilingly, "I was wondering if you—" And she had cut in with chilling politeness, "Yes, you'll find the synagogue on Lungotevere dei Cenci, a few blocks south. One of the landmarks of this part of Rome.

Most interesting, of course"—which was enough to send him off defeated.

After that, he regretfully put aside hopes of making her acquaintance and dutifully went his tourist way alone, the guide book to Rome in his hand, the Italian phrase book in his pocket, trying to work up a sense of excitement at what he saw, and failing dismally at it. Partly, the weather was to blame—the damp, gray March weather which promised no break in the clouds overhead. And partly, he knew, it was loneliness—the kind of feeling that made him painfully envious of the few groups of tourists he saw here and there, shepherded by an officious guide, but, at least, chattering happily to each other.

But most of all—and this was something he had to force himself to acknowledge—he was not a tourist, but a fugitive. And what he was trying to flee was Detective Noah Freeman, who, unfortunately, was always with him and always would be. To be one of those plump, self-satisfied, retired businessmen gaping at the dome of St. Peter's, that was one thing; to be Noah Freeman was quite another.

It was possible that Signora Alfara, who had a pair of bright, knowing eyes buried in her pudding face, comprehended his state of mind and decided with maternal spirit to do something about it. Or it was possible that having learned his occupation she was honestly curious about him. Whatever the reason, Noah was deeply grateful the morning she sat down at the table where he was having the usual breakfast of hard roll, acid coffee, and watery marmalade, and explained that she had seen at the cinema stories about American detectives, but that he was the first she had ever met. Very interesting. And was life in America as the cinema showed it? So much shooting and beating and danger? Had he ever been shot at? Wounded, perhaps? What a way of life! It made her blood run cold to think of it.

The Signora was unprepossessing enough in her bloated shapelessness, her shabby dress and worn bedroom slippers; but, at least, she was someone to talk to, and they were a long time at breakfast settling the question of life in America. Before they left the table Noah asked about the girl at the portiere's desk. Was she Italian. She didn't sound like it when she spoke English.

"Rosanna?" said the Signora. "Oh, yes, yes, Italian. But when she was a little one—you know, when the Germans were here—she was sent to people in England. She was there many years. Oh, Italian, but *una Ebreja*, a Jew, poor sad little thing."

The note of pity rankled. "So am-I," Noah said.

"Yes, she has told me," the Signora remarked, and he saw that her pity was not at all for the girl's being *una Ebreia*. More than that, he was warmed by the knowledge that the beautiful and unapproachable Rosanna had taken note of him after all.

"What makes her sad?" he asked. "The war's been over a long time."

"For some, yes. But her people will not let her forget what her father did when the Germans were here. There was the Resistance here, the partisans you know, and her father sold them to the Germans. So they believe. Now they hate her and her brother because they are the children of a Judas."

"What do you mean, so they believe? Are they wrong about her father?"

"She says they are. To her, you understand, the father was like a saint. A man of honor and very brave. That might be. But when the Germans were here, even brave men were not so brave sometimes. Yet, who am I to say this about him? He was the doctor who saved my life and the life of my first son when I gave birth to him. That is why when the girl needed work I paid back a little of my debt by helping her this way. A good bargain, too. She's honest, she works hard, she speaks other languages, so I lose nothing by a little kindness."

"And what about her brother? Is he still around?"

"You see him every day. Giorgio. You know Giorgio?"

"The cleaning man?"

"He cleans, he carries, he gets drunk whenever he can, that's Giorgio. Useless, really, but what can I do? For the girl's sake I make as much of him as I can. You see the trouble with kindness? I wish to repay a debt, so now the windows are forever dirty. When you need that one he is always drunk somewhere. And always with a bad temper. His father had a bad temper, too, but at least he had great skill. As for the girl, she is an angel. But sad. That loneliness, you know, it can kill you." The Signora leaned forward inquiringly, her bosom overflowing the table. "Maybe if you would talk to her—"

"I tried to," said Noah. "She didn't seem very much interested."

"Because you are a stranger. But I have seen her watch you when you pass by. If you were a friend, perhaps. If the three of us dined together tonight—"

Signora Alfara was someone who had her own way when she wanted to. The three of them dined together that night, but in an atmosphere of constraint, the conversation moving

only under the impetus of questions the Signora aimed at Noah, Rosanna sitting silent and withdrawn as he answered.

When, while they were at their fruit and cheese, the Signora took abrupt and smiling leave of them with transparent motive, Noah said with some resentment to the girl, "I'm sorry about all this. I hope you know I wasn't the one to suggest this little party. It was the lady's idea."

"I do know that."

"Then why take out your mood on me?"

Rosanna's lips parted in surprise. "Mood? But I had no intention—believe me, it has nothing to do with you."

"What does it have to do with? Your father?" And seeing from her reaction that he had hit the mark, he said, "Yes, I heard about that."

"Heard what?"

"A little. Now you can tell me the rest. Or do you enjoy having it stuck in your throat where you can't swallow it and can't bring it up, one way or the other?"

"You must have a strange idea of enjoyment. And if you want the story, go to the synagogue, go to the ghetto or Via Catalana. You'll hear it there quick enough. Everyone knows it."

"I might do that. First I'd like to hear your side of it."

"As a policeman? You're too late, Mr. Freeman. The case against Ezechiele Coen was decided long ago without policemen or judges."

"What case?"

"He was said to have betrayed leaders of the Resistance. That was a lie, but partisans killed him for it. They shot him and left him lying with a sign on him saying *Betrayer*. Yes, Mr. Freeman, Ezechiele Coen who preached honor to his children as the one meaningful thing in life died in dishonor. He lay there in the dirt of the Teatro Marcello a long time that day, because his own people—our people—would not give him burial. When they remember him now, they spit on the ground. I know," the girl said in a brittle voice, "because when I walk past them, they remember him."

"Then why do you stay here?"

"Because he is here. Because here is where his blackened memory—his spirit—remains, waiting for the truth to be known."

"Twenty years after the event?"

"Twenty or a hundred or a thousand. Does time change the truth, Mr. Freeman? Isn't it as important for the dead to get justice as the living?"

"Maybe it is. But how do you know that justice wasn't

done in this case? What evidence is there to disprove the verdict? You were a child when all this happened, weren't you?"

"And not even in Rome. I was in England then, living with a doctor who knew my father since their school days. Yes, England is far away and I was a child then, but I knew my father."

If faith could really move mountains, Noah thought. "And what about your brother. Does he feel the way you do?"

"Giorgio tries to feel as little as he can about it. When he was a boy everyone said that some day he would be as fine a man and a doctor as his father. Now he's a drunkard. A bottle of wine makes it easy not to feel pain."

"Would he mind if I talked to him about this?"

"Why should you want to? What could Ezechiele Coen mean to you anyhow? Is Rome so boring that you must play detective here to pass the time? I don't understand you, Mr. Freeman."

"No, you don't," Noah said harshly. "But you might if you listen to what I'm going to tell you. Do you know where I got the time and money to come on a trip like this, a plain, ordinary, underpaid cop like me? Well, last year there was quite a scandal about some policemen in New York who were charged with taking graft from a gambler. I was one of them under charges. I had no part of that mess, but I was suspended from my job and when they got around to it, I was put on trial. The verdict was not guilty, I got all my back pay in one lump, and I was told to return to duty. Things must have looked fine for me, wouldn't you think?"

"Because you did get justice," Rosanna said.

"From the court. Only from the court. Afterward, I found that no one else really believed I was innocent. No one. Even my own father sometimes wonders about it. And if I went back on the Force, the grafters there would count me as one of them, and the honest men wouldn't trust me. That's why I'm here. Because I don't know whether to go back or not, and I need time to think, I need to get away from them all. So I did get justice, and now you tell me what good it did."

The girl shook her head somberly. "Then my father isn't the only one, is he? But you see, Mr. Freeman, you can defend your own good name. Tell me, how is he to defend his?"

That was the question which remained in his mind afterward, angry and challenging. He tried to put it aside, to fix on his own immediate problem, but there it was. It led him the next morning away from proper destinations, the ruins

and remains italicized in his guide book, and on a walk southward along the Tiber.

Despite gray skies overhead and the dismally brown, turbid river sullenly locked between the stove embankments below, Noah felt a quickening pleasure in the scene. In a few days he had had his fill of sightseeing. Brick and marble and Latin inscriptions were not really the stuff of life, and pictures and statuary only dim representations of it. It was people he was hungry to meet, and now that he had an objective in meeting them he felt more alive than he had since his first day in Rome. More alive, in fact, than in all those past months in New York, working alongside his father in the old man's tailor shop. Not that this small effort to investigate the case of Ezechiele Coen would amount to anything, he knew. A matter of dredging up old and bitter memories, that was about what it came to. But the important thing was that he was Noah Freeman again, alive and functioning.

Along Lungotevere dei Cenci construction work was going on. The shells of new buildings towered over slums battered by centuries of hard wear. Midstream in the Tiber was a long, narrow island with several institutional buildings on it. Then, facing it from the embankment, the synagogue came into view, a huge, Romanesque, marble pile.

There was a railing before the synagogue. A young man leaned at his ease against the railing. Despite the chill in the air he was in shirt sleeves, his tanned, muscular arms folded on his chest, his penetrating eyes watching Noah's approach with the light of interest in them. As Noah passed, the man came to attention.

"Shalom."

"Shalom," Noah said, and the young man's face brightened. In his hand magically appeared a deck of picture post cards.

"Post cards, hey? See, all different of Rome. Also, the synagogue, showing the inside and the outside. You an *Americano Ebreo*, no? A *landsman*?"

"Yes," said Noah, wondering if only *Americano Ebreos* came this way. "But you can put away the pictures. I don't want any."

"Maybe a guide book? The best. Or you want a guide? The ghetto, Isola Tiberina, Teatro Marcello? Anywhere you want to go, I can show you. Two thousand lire. Ask anybody. For two thousand lire nobody is a better guide than Carlo Piperno. That's me."

"Noah Freeman, that's me. And the only place I want to go to is the rabbi's. Can I find him in the synagogue?"

"No, but I will take you to his house. Afterwards we see the ghetto, Tiberina—"

The rabbi proved to be a man of good will, of understanding; but, he explained in precise English, perhaps he could afford to be objective about the case of Ezechiele Coen because he himself was not a Roman. He had come to this congregation from Milan, an outsider. Yet, even as an outsider he could appreciate the depth of his congregation's hatred for their betrayer. A sad situation, but could they be blamed for that? Could it not be the sternest warning to all such betrayers if evil times ever came again?

"He's been dead a long time," said Noah.

"So are those whose lives he sold. Worse than that." The rabbi gestured at the shuttered window beyond which lay the Tiber. "He sold the lives of friends who were not of our faith. Those who had lived in Trastevere across the river, working people, priests, who gave some of us hiding places when we needed them. Did the daughter of Ezechiele Coen tell you how, when she was a child, they helped remove her from the city at night in a cart of wine barrels, risking their lives to do it? Does she think it is easy to forget how her father rewarded them for that?"

"But why her?" Noah protested. "Why should your congregation make her an outcast? She and her brother aren't the guilty ones. Do you really believe that the sins of the fathers must be visited on the children?"

The rabbi shook his head. "There are sins, Signor Freeman, which make a horror that takes generations to wipe away. I welcome the girl and her brother to the synagogue, but I cannot wipe away the horror in the people they would meet there. If I wished to, I could not work such a miracle.

"Only a little while ago there was a great and flourishing congregation, here, signore, a congregation almost as ancient as Rome itself. Do you know what is left of it now? A handful. A handful who cannot forget. The Jews of Rome do not forget easily. To this day they curse the name of Titus who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem as they remember kindly the name of Julius Caesar who was their friend, and for whose body they mourned seven days in the Forum. And the day they forgive Titus will be the same day they forgive Ezechiele Coen and his children and their children to come. Do you know what I mean, Signor Freeman?"

"Yes," said Noah. "I know what you mean."

He went out into the bleak, cobblestoned street, oppressed by a sense of antiquity weighing him down, of two thousand years of unrelenting history heavy on his shoulders, and not

even the racketing of motor traffic along the river embankment, the spectacle of the living present, could dispel it. Carlo Piperno, the post-card vender, was waiting there.

"You have seen the rabbi? Good. Now I show you Isola Tiberina."

"Forget Isola Tiberina. There's something else I want you to show me."

"For two thousand lire, anything."

"All right." Noah extracted the banknotes from his wallet. "Does the name Ezechiele Coen mean anything to you?"

Carlo Piperno had the hard, capable look of a man impervious to surprise. Nevertheless, he was visibly surprised. Then he recovered himself. "That one? *Mi dispiace, signore*. Sorry, but he is dead, that one." He pointed to the ground at his feet. "You want him, you have to look there for him."

"I don't want him. I want someone who knew him well. Someone who can tell me what he did and what happened to him."

"Everybody knows. I can tell you."

"No, it must be someone who wasn't a child when it happened. *Capisce?*"

"*Capisco*. But why?"

"If I answer that, it will cost you these two thousand lire. Shall I answer?"

"No, no." Carlo reached out and dexterously took possession of the money. He shrugged. "But first the rabbi, now Ezechiele Coen who is in hell long ago. Well, I am a guide, no? So now I am your guide."

He led the way through a labyrinth of narrow streets to an area not far from the synagogue, a paved area with the remains of a stone wall girdling it. Beyond the wall were tenements worn by time to the color of the clay that had gone into their brick. Yet their tenants seemed to have pride of possession. In almost every window were boxes of flowers and greenery. On steps and in stony courtyards, housewives with brushes and buckets scrubbed the stone and brick. In surrounding alleys were small stores, buzzing with activity.

With shock Noah suddenly realized that here was the ghetto, that he was standing before a vestige of the past which thus far in his life had been only an ugly word to him. It was the presence of the wall that provided the shock, he knew. It had no gate, there was no one to prevent you from departing through it, but if it were up to him he would have had it torn down on the spot.

A strange place, Rome. Wherever you turned were the reminders of the cruel past. Memorials to man, the perse-

cuted. This wall, the catacombs, the churches built to martyrs, the Colosseum. There was no escaping their insistent presence.

Carlo's destination turned out to be a butcher shop—the shop of Vito Levi, according to the sign over it. The butcher, a burly, gray-haired man, stood behind his chest-high marble counter hacking at a piece of meat, exchanging loud repartee with a shriveled old woman, a shawl over her head, a string bag in her hand, waiting for her order. While Carlo was addressing him he continued to chop away with the cleaver, then suddenly placed it on the counter, and came around to meet Noah in the street, wiping his hands on his apron as he came. The old woman followed, peering at Noah with beady-eyed interest, and in another minute others from the street were gathering around, getting the news from her. Ezechiele Coen may have been dead twenty years, Noah thought, but his name was still very much alive in these quarters.

He was not sorry that the matter was going to be discussed in public this way. As a young patrolman on the beat he had learned not to be too quick to break up a crowd around an accident or crime; there might be someone in the crowd who had something to say worth hearing. Now he gathered from the heat of discussion around him that everyone here had something to say about Ezechiele Coen.

With Carlo serving as interpreter, he put his questions first to Levi the butcher, and then to anyone else who volunteered information. Slowly, piece by piece, the picture of Ezechiele Coen and his crime took shape. It was Levi who supplied most of the information—the time, the place, the event.

The butcher had known Ezechiele Coen well. Like all others he had trusted him, because no man had a greater reputation for honesty than the doctor. He was a great doctor, a man of science; yet he was a man of God, too, devout, each morning binding on his phylacteries and saying his prayers, each sabbath attending the synagogue. Not that there was any gentleness in him. He was a proud man, an arrogant man, a man who would insult you to your face for the least offense. After all, it was one thing to be honest, but it was something else again to behave as if you were the only honest man in the world. The only one on earth who would never compromise with truth. That was Ezechiele Coen. You might trust him, but you could not like him. He was too good for that.

Then the trust was betrayed. Over the years one had learned to live with Il Duce, but when the Germans came to Rome, the Resistance of a generation ago reawoke. Sabotage,

spying, a hidden press turning out leaflets which told the truth about Il Duce and his ally. Many said it was useless, but Vito Levi, the butcher, and a few others continued their secret efforts, knowing they had nothing to lose. Jews were being deported now, were being shipped to the Nazi slaughter pens in carloads. What else to do then but join some of their Gentile neighbors in the Resistance?

"Ask him," said Noah to Carlo, "if Ezechiele Coen was one of the Resistance," and when Carlo translated this, the butcher shook his head.

Only once was the doctor called on to help. Three leaders of the Resistance had managed to get into Rome from the mountains—to help organize the movement here, to give it leadership. They were hidden in a cellar in Trastevere, across the river, one of them badly wounded. The doctor's son, only a boy then, no more than fifteen years of age, was a courier for the partisans. He had brought his father to attend the wounded man, and then, soon after, the three men together were captured in their hiding place by the Germans. They had been betrayed by the honest, the noble, the righteous Ezechiele Coen.

"Ask him how he knows this?" Noah demanded of Carlo. "Was there a confession?"

There was no need for one, as it happened. There was no need for any more evidence than the money case of Major von Grubbner.

Noah silently cursed the tedious process of translation. Carlo Piperno was the kind of interpreter who richly enjoys and intends to get the maximum effect from his role. It took him a long time to make clear who and what Major von Grubbner was.

The major was one of the men assigned to the Panzer division quartered along the Tiber. But unlike the German officers around him, Major von Grubbner was cunning as a fox, smooth in his manner, ingratiating in his approach. Others came with a gun in their hands. He came with an attaché case, a black leather case with a handsome gold ornament on it, a doubleheaded eagle which was a reminder of the great name of his family. And in the case was money. Bundles of money. Packages of lire, fresh and crisp, a fortune by any estimate.

Give the devil his due. This von Grubbner was a brave man as well as a cunning one. He walked alone, contemptuous of those who needed guards to attend them, the money case in his hand, a smile on his lips, and he invited confidences.

"After all," he would say, "we are businessmen, you and I. We are practical people who dislike trouble. Remove the troublemakers and all is peaceful, no? Well, here I am to do business. Look at this money. Beautiful, isn't it? And all you have to do is name your own price, expose the troublemakers, and we are all happy. Name your own price, that's all you have to do."

And he would open the case under your nose, showing you the money, fondling it, offering it to you. It was more than Money. It was life itself. It could buy the few scraps of food remaining to be bought, it could buy you a refuge for your wife and children, it could buy you safety for another day. Life itself. Everyone wants life, and there it was in that little black leather case with the doubleheaded eagle in gold marking it.

Only one man was tempted. The day after the three partisans were taken, Ezechiele Coen was seen fleeing with that case through the alleys, running like a rabbit before the hounds of vengeance he knew would soon be on him. Only Ezechiele Coen the devout, the honorable, the arrogant, fell, and died soon for his treachery.

Vito Levi's words needed translation, but not the emotion behind them. And the crowd around Noah, now staring at him in silence, did not need its feelings explained. Yet, the story seemed incomplete to him, to Detective Noah Freeman, who had learned at his job not to live by generalities. The evidence, that was what had meaning.

"Ask them," he said to Carlo, "who saw Ezechiele Coen with that case in his possession," and when Carlo translated this, Levi drove a thumb hard into his own chest. Then he looked around the crowd and pointed, and a man on its outskirts raised his hand, a woman nearby raised hers, someone else raised a hand.

Three witnesses, four, five. Enough, Noah thought, to hang any man. With difficulty, prompting Carlo question by question, he drew their story from them. They lived in houses along Via del Portico. It was hot that night, a suffocating heat that made sleep impossible. One and all, they were at their windows. One and all, they saw the doctor running down the street toward the Teatro Marcello, the leather case under his arm. His medical bag? No, no. Not with the golden eagle on it. It was the doctor with his blood money. This they swore on the lives of their children

During siesta time that afternoon, Noah, with the connivance of Signora Alfara, drew Rosanna out of doors for a walk

to a café in the Piazza Navona. Over glasses of Campari he told her the results of his investigation.

"Witnesses," she said scathingly. "Have you found that witnesses always tell the truth?"

"These people do. But sometimes there can be a difference between what you imagine is the truth and the truth itself."

"And how do you discover that difference?"

"By asking more questions. For example, did your father live in the ghetto?"

"During the war, yes."

"And according to my street map the Teatro Marcello is outside it. Why would he be running there with the money instead of keeping it safe at home? Even more curious, why would he carry the money in that case, instead of transferring it to something that couldn't be identified? And why would he be given that case, a personal possession, along with the money? You can see how many unanswered questions come up, if you look at all this without prejudice."

"Then you think—"

"I don't think anything yet. First, I want to try to get answers to those questions. I want to establish a rational pattern for what seems to be a whole irrational set of events. And there is one person who can help me do this."

"Who?"

"Major von Grubbner himself."

"But how would you ever find him? It was so long ago. He may be dead."

"Or he may not be. If he is not, there are ways of finding him."

"But it would mean so much trouble. So much time and effort."

The way she was looking at him then, Noah thought, was more than sufficient payment for the time and effort. And the way she flushed when he returned her look told him that she knew his thought.

"I'm used to this kind of effort," he said. "Anyhow, it may be the last chance I'll have to practice my profession."

"Then you're not going back to your work with the police? But you're a very good detective. You are, aren't you?"

"Oh, very good. And," he said, "honest, too, despite the popular opinion."

"Don't say it like that," she flashed out angrily. "You are honest. I know you are."

"Do you? Well, that makes two of us at least. Anyhow, the vital thing is for me to locate von Grubbner if he's still somewhere to be found. After that, we'll see. By the way, do you

know the date when all this happened? When your father was seen with that case?"

"Yes. It was the fifth of July in 1943. I couldn't very well forget that date, Mr. Freeman."

"Noah."

"Of course," said Rosanna. "Noah."

After returning her to her desk at the pensione, Noah went directly to police headquarters. There he found his credentials an open sesame. In the end he was closeted with Commissioner Ponziani, a handsome urbane man, who listened to the story of Ezechiele Coen with fascination. At its conclusion he raised quizzical eyebrows at Noah.

"And your interest in this affair?"

"Purely unofficial. I don't even know if I have the right to bother you with it at all." Noah shrugged. "But when I thought of all the red tape to cut if I went to the military or consular authorities—"

The Commissioner made a gesture which dismissed as beneath contempt the clumsy workings of the military and consular authorities. "No, no, you did right to come here. We are partners in our profession, are we not, signore? We are of a brotherhood, you and I. So now if you give me all possible information about this Major von Grubbner, I will communicate with the German police. We shall soon learn if there is anything they can tell us about him."

Soon meant days of waiting, and, Noah saw, they were bad days for Rosanna. Each one that passed left her more tense, more dependent on him for reassurance. How could anyone ever find this German, one man in millions, a man who might have his own reasons for not wanting to be found? And if by some miracle they could confront him, what would he have to say? Was it possible that he would say her father had been guilty?

"It is," said Noah. He reached out and took her hand comfortingly. "You have to be prepared for that."

"I will not be! No, I will not be," she said fiercely. Then her assurance crumpled. "He would be lying, wouldn't he? You know he would." The passage left Noah shaken. Rosanna's intensity, the way she had clutched his hand like a lost child—these left him wondering if he had not dangerously overreached himself in trying to exorcise the ghost of Ezechiele Coen. If he failed, it would leave things worse than ever. Worse for himself, too, because now he realized with delight and misery that he was falling hopelessly in love with the girl. And so much seemed to depend on clearing her

father's reputation. Could it be, as Rosanna felt, that Ezechiele Coen's spirit really waited here on the banks of the Tiber to be set at rest? And what if there were no way of doing that?

When Signora Alfara called him to the phone to take a message from the police, Noah picked up the phone almost prayerfully.

"*Pronto*," he said, and Commissioner Ponziani said without preliminary, "Ah, Signor Freeman. This affair of Major von Grubbner becomes stranger and stranger. Will you meet with me in my office so that we may discuss it?"

At the office the Commissioner came directly to the point.

"The date of the unhappy event we are concerned with," he said, "was the fifth of July in 1943. Is that correct?"

"It is," said Noah.

"And here," said the Commissioner, tapping a finger on the sheet of paper before him, "is the report of the German authorities on a Major Alois von Grubbner, attached to the Panzer division stationed in Rome at that time. According to the report he deserted the army, absconding with a large amount of military funds, on the sixth of July in 1943. No trace of him has been discovered since."

The Commissioner leaned back in his chair and smiled at Noah. "Interesting, no? Very interesting. What do you make of it?"

"He didn't desert," said Noah. "He didn't abscond. That was the money seen in Ezechiele Coen's possession."

"So I believe, too. I strongly suspect that this officer was murdered—assassinated may be a more judicious word, considering the circumstances—and the money taken from him."

"But his body," Noah said. "Wouldn't the authorities have allowed for possible murder and made a search for it?"

"A search was made. But Major von Grubbner, it seems, had a somewhat—the Commissioner twirled a finger in the air, seeking the right word—"a somewhat shady record in his civilian life. A little embezzling here, a little forgery there—enough to make his superiors quickly suspect his integrity when he disappeared. I imagine their search was a brief one. But I say that if they had been able to peer beneath the Tiber—"

"Is that where you think he ended up?"

"There, or beneath some cellar, or in a hole dug in a dark corner. Yes, I know what you are thinking, Signor Freeman. A man like this Doctor Ezechiele Coen hardly seems capable of assassination, robbery, the disposal of a body. Still, that is not much of an argument to present to people violently an-

tagonistic to his memory. It is, at best, a supposition. Fevered emotions are not to be cooled by suppositions. I very much fear that your investigation has come to an abrupt and unhappy ending."

Noah shook his head. "That attaché case and the money in it," he said. "It was never found. I was told that when Ezechiele Coen was found shot by partisans and left lying in the Teatro Marcello, the case was nowhere to be seen. What happened to it?"

The Commissioner shrugged. "Removed by those who did the shooting, of course."

"If it was there to be removed. But no one ever reported seeing it then or afterward. No one ever made a remark—even after the war when it would be safe to—that money intended to be used against the Resistance was used by it. But don't you think that this is the sort of thing that would be a standing joke—a folk story—among these people?"

"Perhaps. Again it is no more than a supposition."

"And since it's all I have to go on, I'll continue from there."

"You are a stubborn man, Signor Freeman." The Commissioner shook his head with grudging admiration. "Well, if you need further assistance, come to me directly. Very stubborn. I wish some of my associates had your persistence."

When Rosanna had been told what occurred in the Commissioner's office she was prepared that instant to make the story public.

"It is proof, isn't it?" she demanded. "Whatever did happen, we know my father had no part in it. Isn't that true?"

"You and I know. But remember one thing: your father was seen with that attaché case. Until that can be explained, nothing else will stand as proof of his innocence."

"He may have found the case. That's possible, isn't it?"

"Hardly possible," Noah said. "And why would he be carrying it toward the Teatro Marcello? What is this Teatro Marcello anyhow?"

"Haven't you seen it yet? It's one of the ruins like the Colosseum, but smaller."

"Can you take me there now?"

"Not now. I can't leave the desk until Signore Alfara returns. But it's not far from here. A little distance past the synagogue on the Via del Portico. Look for number 39. You'll find it easily."

Outside the pensione Noah saw Giorgio Coen unloading a delivery of food from a truck. He was, at a guess, ten years older than his sister, a big, shambling man with good features that had gone slack with dissipation, and a perpetual stubble

of beard on his jowls. Despite the flabby look of him, he hoisted a side of meat to his shoulder and bore it into the building with ease. In passing, he looked at Noah with a hang-dog, beaten expression, and Noah could feel for him. Rosanna had been cruelly wounded by the hatred vented against her father, but Giorgio had been destroyed by it. However this affair turned out, there was small hope of salvaging anything from those remains.

Noah walked past the synagogue, found the Via del Portico readily enough, and then before the building marked 39 he stood looking around in bewilderment. There was no vestige of any ruin resembling the Colosseum here—no ruin at all, in fact. Number 39 itself was only an old apartment house, the kind of apartment house so familiar to run-down sections of Manhattan back home.

He studied the names under the doorbells outside as if expecting to find the answer to the mystery there, then peered into its tiled hallway. A buxom girl, a baby over her shoulder, came along the hallway, and Noah smiled at her.

"Teatro Marcello?" he said doubtfully. "Dove?"

She smiled back and said something incomprehensible to him, and when he shook his head she made a circling gesture with her hand.

"Oh, in back," Noah said. "Thank you. Grazie."

It was in back. And it was, Noah decided, one of the more incredible spectacles of this whole incredible city. The Teatro Marcello fitted Rosanna's description: it was the grim gray ruin of a lesser Colosseum. But into it had been built the apartment house, so that only the semicircle of ruins visible from the rear remained in their original form.

The tiers of stone blocks, of columns, of arches towering overhead were Roman remains, and the apartment house was a façade for them, concealing them from anyone standing before the house. Even the top tier of this ancient structure had been put to use, Noah saw. It had been bricked and windowed, and behind some of the windows shone electric lights. People lived there. They walked through the tiled hallway leading from the street, climbed flights of stairs, and entered kitchens and bedrooms whose walls had been built by Imperial slaves two thousand years ago. Incredible, but there it was before him.

An immense barren field encircled the building, a wasteland of pebbly earth and weeds. Boys were playing football there, deftly booting the ball back and forth. On the trunks of marble columns half sunk into the ground, women sat and tended baby carriages. Nearby, a withered crone spread out

scraps of meat on a piece of newspaper, and cats—the tough-looking, pampered cats of Rome—circled the paper hungrily, waiting for the signal to begin lunch.

Noah tried to visualize the scene twenty years before when Ezechiele Coen had fled here in the darkness bearing an attaché case marked with a doubleheaded eagle. He must have had business here, for here was where he lingered until an avenging partisan had searched him out and killed him. But what business? Business with whom? No one in the apartment house; there seemed to be no entrance to it from this side.

At its ground level, the Teatro Marcello was a series of archways, the original entrances to the arena within. Noah walked slowly along them. Each archway was barred by a massive iron gate beyond which was a small cavern solidly bricked, impenetrable at any point. Behind each gate could be seen fragments of columns, broken statuary of heads and arms and robed bodies, a litter of filthy paper blown in by the winds of time. Only in one of those musty caverns could be seen signs of life going on. Piled on a slab of marble were schoolbooks, coats, and sweaters, evidently the property of the boys playing football, placed here for safety's sake.

For safety's sake. With a sense of mounting excitement, Noah studied the gate closely. It extended from the floor almost to the top of the archway. Its iron bars were too close together to allow even a boy to slip between them, its lock massive and solidly caked with rust, the chain holding it as heavy as a small anchor chain. Impossible to get under, over, or through it—yet the boys had. Magic. Could someone else have used that magic on a July night twenty years ago?

When Noah called to them, the boys took their time about stopping their game, and then came over to the gate warily. By dint of elaborate gestures, Noah managed to make his questions clear, but it took a package of cigarettes and a handful of coins to get the required demonstration.

One of the boys, grinning, locked his hands around a bar of the gate and with an effort raised it clear of its socket in the horizontal rod supporting it near the ground. Now it was held only by the cross rod overhead. The boy drew it aside at an angle and slipped through the space left. He returned, dropped the bar back into place, and held out a hand for another cigarette.

With the help of the Italian phrase book, Noah questioned the group around him. How long had these locked gates been here? The boys scratched their heads and looked at each other. A long time. Before they could remember. Before their fathers could remember. A very long time.

And how long had that one bar been loose, so that you could go in and out if you knew the secret? The same. All the *ragazzi* around here knew about it as their fathers had before them.

Could any other of these gates be entered this way? No, this was the only one. The good one.

When he had dismissed them by showing empty hands—no more cigarettes, no more coins—Noah sat down on one of the sunken marble columns near the women and their baby carriages, and waited. It took a while for the boys to finish their game and depart, taking their gear with them, but finally they were gone. Then Noah entered the gate, using his newfound secret, and started a slow, methodical investigation of what lay in the shadowy reaches beyond it.

He gave no thought to the condition of his hands or clothes, but carefully pushed aside the litter of paper, probed under and between the chunks of marble, all the broken statuary around him. At the far end of the cavern he found that once he had swept the litter aside there was a clear space underfoot. Starting at the wall, he inched forward on his knees, sweeping his fingers lightly back and forth over the ground. Then his fingertips hit a slight depression in the flinty earth, an almost imperceptible concavity. Despite the chill in the air, he was sweating now, and had to pull out a handkerchief to mop his brow.

He traced the depression, his fingertips moving along it, following it to its length, turning where it turned, marking a rectangle the length and width of a man's body. Once before, in the course of his official duties, Detective Noah Freeman had marked a rectangle like this in the weed-grown yard of a Bronx shanty, and had found beneath it what he had expected to find. He knew he would not be disappointed in what would be dug up from this hole beneath the Teatro Marcello. He was tempted to get a tool and do the digging himself, but that, of course, must be the job of the police. And before they would be notified, the pieces of the puzzle, all at hand now, must be placed together before a proper witness . . .

When Noah returned to the Pensione Alfara, he brought with him as witness the rabbi, bewildered by the unexplained urgency of this mission, out of breath at the quick pace Noah had set through the streets. Rosanna was at the quick pace Noah had set through the streets. Rosanna was at her desk. She looked with alarm at Noah's grimy hands, at the streaks of dirt and sweat on his face. For

the rabbi she had no greeting. This was the enemy, an unbeliever in the cause of Ezechiele Coen. She had eyes only for Noah.

"What happened?" she said. "What's wrong? Are you hurt?"

"No. Listen, Rosanna, have you told Giorgio anything about von Grubbner? About my meeting with the police commissioner?"

"No."

"Good. Where is he now?"

"Giorgio? In the kitchen, I think. But why? What—?"

"If you come along, you'll see why. But you're not to say anything. Not a word, do you understand. Let me do all the talking."

Giorgio was in the kitchen listlessly moving a mop back and forth over the floor. He stopped when he saw his visitors, and regarded them with bleary bewilderment. Now is the time, Noah thought. It must be done quickly and surely now, or it will never be done at all.

"Giorgio," he said, "I have news for you. Good news. Your father did not betray anyone."

Resentment flickered in the bleary eyes. "I have always known that, signore. But why is it your concern?"

"He never betrayed anyone, Giorgio. But you did."

Rosanna gasped. Giorgio shook his head pityingly. "Listen to him! *Basta, signore. Basta.* I have work to do."

"You did your work a long time ago," Noah said relentlessly. "And when your father took away the money paid to you for it, you followed him and killed him to get it back."

He was pleased to see that Giorgio did not reel under this wholly false accusation. Instead, he seemed to draw strength from it. This is the way, Noah thought, that the unsuspecting animal is lured closer and closer to the trap. What hurt was that Rosanna, looking back and forth from inquisitor to accused, seemed ready to collapse. The rabbi watched with the same numb horror.

Giorgio turned to them. "Do you hear this?" he demanded, and there was a distinct mockery in his voice. "Now I am a murderer. Now I killed my own father."

"Before a witness," Noah said softly.

"Oh, of course, before a witness. And who was that witness, signore?"

"Someone who has just told the police everything. They'll bring him here very soon, so that he can point you out to them. A Major von Grubbner."

"And that is the worst lie of all!" said Giorgio tri-

umphantly. "He's dead, that one! Dead and buried, do you hear? So all your talk—I"

There are animals which, when trapped, will fight to the death for their freedom, will gnaw away one of their own legs to release themselves. There are others which go to pieces the instant the jaws of the trap have snapped on them, become quivering lumps of flesh waiting only for the end. Giorgio, Noah saw, was one of the latter breed. His voice choked off, his jaw went slack, his face ashen. The mop, released from his nerveless grip, fell with a clatter. Rosanna took a step toward him, but Noah caught her wrist, holding her back.

"How do you know he's dead, Giorgio?" he demanded. "Yes, he's dead and buried—but how did you know that? No one else knew. How do you happen to be the only one?"

The man swayed, fell back against the wall.

"You killed von Grubbner and took that money," Noah said. "When your father tried to get rid of it, the partisans held him guilty of informing and shot him while you stood by, refusing to tell them the truth. In a way, you did help kill him, didn't you? That's what you've been carrying around in you since the day he died, isn't it?"

"Giorgio!" Rosanna cried out. "But why didn't you tell them? Why? Why?"

"Because," said Noah, "then they would have known the real informer. That money was a price paid to you for information, wasn't it, Giorgio?"

The word emerged like a groan. "Yes."

"You?" Rosanna said wonderingly, her eyes fixed on her brother. "It was you?"

"But what could I do? What could I do? He came to me, the German. He said he knew I was of the Resistance. He said if I did not tell him where the men were hidden I would be put to death. If I told, I would be saved. I would be rewarded."

The broken hulk lurched toward Rosanna, arms held wide in appeal, but Noah barred the way. "Why did you kill von Grubbner?"

"Because he cheated me. After the men were taken, I went to him for the money, and he laughed at me. He said I must tell him about others, too. I must tell everything, and then he would pay. So I killed him. When he turned away, I picked up a stone and struck him on the head and then again and again until he was dead. And I buried him behind the gate there because only the *ragazzi* knew how to get through it, and no one would find him there."

"But you took that case full of money with you."

"Yes, but only to give to my father. And I told him everything. Everything. I swear it. I wanted him to beat me. I wanted him to kill me if that would make it all right. But he would not. All he knew was that the money must be returned. He had too much honor! That was what he died for. He was mad with honor! Who else on this earth would try to return money to a dead man?"

Giorgio's legs gave way. He fell to his knees and remained there, striking the floor blow after blow with his fist. "Who else?" he moaned. "Who else?"

The rabbi looked helplessly at Noah. "He was a boy then," he said in a voice of anguish. "Only a boy. Can we hold children guilty of the crimes we inflict on them?" And then he said with bewilderment, "But what of the blood money? What did Ezechiele Coen do with it? What became of it?"

"I think we'll soon find out," said Noah.

They were all there at the gates of the Teatro Marcello when Commissioner Ponziani arrived with his men. All of them and more. The rabbi and Carlo Piperno, the post-card vender, and Vito Levi, the butcher, and a host of others whose names were inscribed on the rolls of the synagogue. And tenants of the Teatro Marcello, curious as to what was going on below them, and schoolboys and passersby with time to spare.

The Commissioner knew his job, Noah saw. Not only had he brought a couple of strong young *carabinieri* to perform the exhumation, but other men as well to hold back the excited crowd.

Only Giorgio was not there. Giorgio was in a bed of the hospital on Isola Tiberina, his face turned to the wall. He was willing himself to die, the doctor had said, but he would not die. He would live, and, with help, make use of the years ahead. It was possible that employment in the hospital itself, work which helped the unfortunate, might restore to him a sense of his own worth. The doctor would see to that when the time came.

Noah watched as the police shattered the lock on the gates and drew them apart, their hinges groaning rustily. He put an arm around Rosanna's waist and drew her to him as the crowd pressed close behind them. This was all her doing, he thought. Her faith had moved mountains, and with someone like this at his side, someone whose faith in him would never waver, it would not be hard to return home and face down the cynics there. It didn't take a majority vote of confidence to sustain you; it needed only one person's granite faith.

The police strung up lights in the vaulted area behind the gate. They studied the ground, then carefully plied shovels as the Commissioner hovered around them.

"Faccia attenzione," he said. *"Adagio. Adagio."*

The mound of dirt against the wall grew larger. The men put aside their shovels. Kneeling, they carefully scooped earth from the hole, handful by handful. Then the form of a body showed, fleshless bones, a grinning shattered skull. A body clad in the moldering tatters of a military uniform.

And, as Noah saw under the glare of droplights, this was not the first time these remains had been uncovered. On the chest of the skeletal form rested a small leather case fallen to rot, marked by the blackened image of a doubleheaded eagle. The case had come apart at all its seams, the money in it seemed to have melted together in lumps, more like clay than money, yet it was clearly recognizable for what it was. Twenty years ago Ezechiele Coen had scraped aside the earth over the freshly buried Major Alois von Grubbner and returned his money to him. There it was and there he was, together as they had been since that time.

Noah became aware of the rabbi's voice behind him. Then another voice and another, all merging into a litany recited in deep-toned chorus. A litany, Noah thought, older than the oldest ruins of Rome. It was the *kaddish*, the Hebrew prayer for the dead, raised to heaven for Ezechiele Coen, now at rest.

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