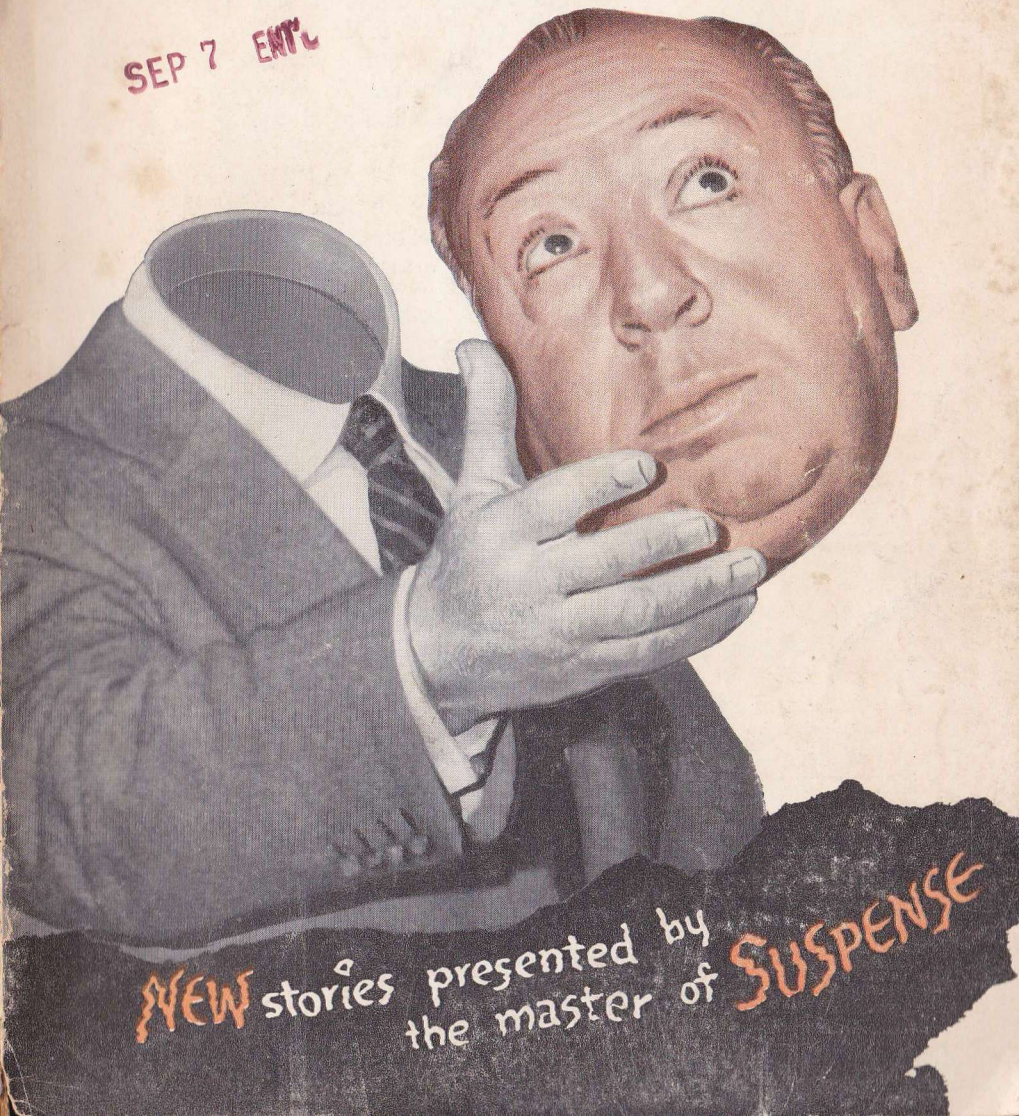
ALFRED

OCTOBER 35¢

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

Dear Readers,

I hope the cover of this issue does not alarm you unduly. Some of you may very well interpret it in this way: "Among the man's numerous sterling qualities, is generosity. To give one's shirt off one's back is not always sufficient." There will, of course, be those who will exclaim indignantly, "What! No silver platter?" And the more erudite will view the picture in depth and see great significance therein. "We must be able to adjust to a changing world," they will say. "No matter how tedious the circumstance, we must never lose our heads. This will make it possible to keep our wits about us, to have profundity at our fingertips and to estimate the weight of our thoughts."

Actually, this is a photo I had taken for my new television sponsor, the Lincoln-Mercury Division of the Ford Motor Company. I trust I have spelled all names correctly. I would not want to offend Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Mercury, or Mr. Ford. With the coming of the new television season, I am also moving to a new network. This one, quaintly enough, is known by its initials, NBC. And the head-in-the-hand photo has also been presented to it—with appropriate fanfare—and inscribed—at a vast inscription ceremony—"Alfred Hitchcock, Employee."

I wish you all, good mystery reading and watching.

Alfred Hitchcock

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VOLUME 5, NO. 10 OCTOBER, 1960

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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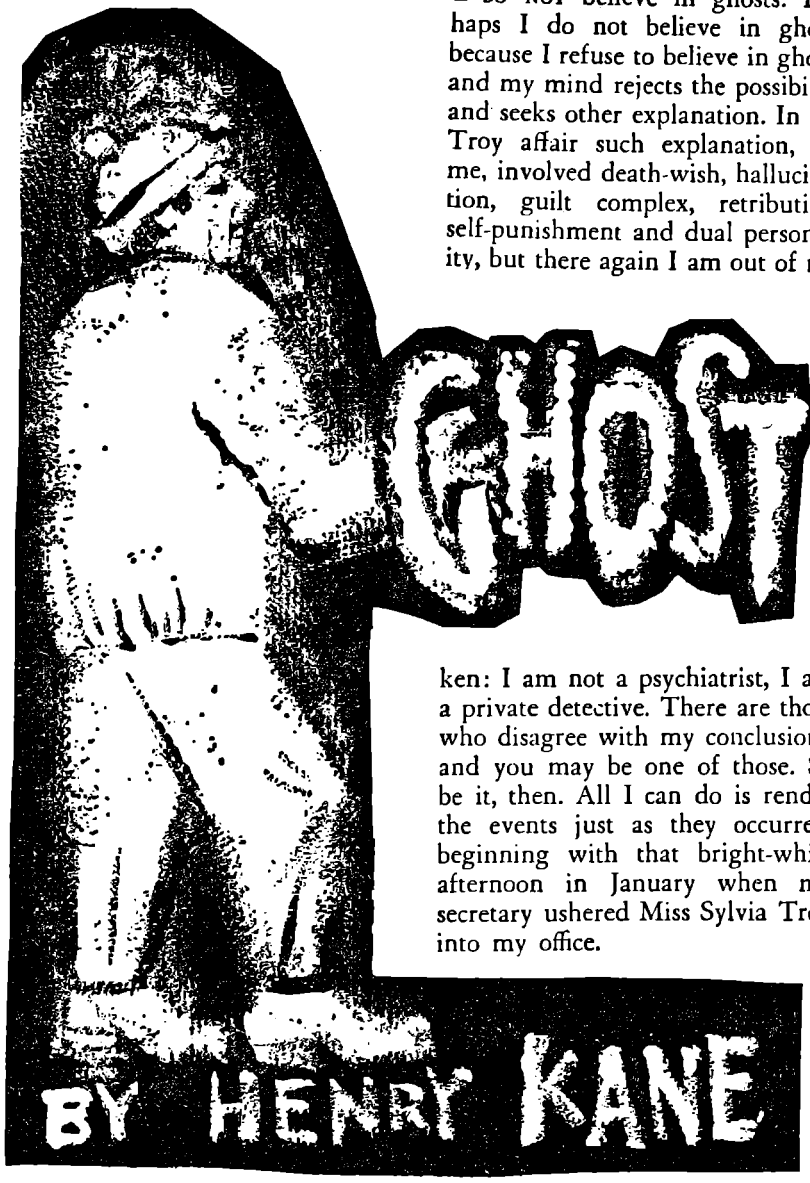


I DO NOT believe in ghosts. Perhaps I do not believe in ghosts because I refuse to believe in ghosts and my mind rejects the possibility and seeks other explanation. In the Troy affair such explanation, for me, involved death-wish, hallucination, guilt complex, retribution, self-punishment and dual personality, but there again I am out of my ken: I am not a psychiatrist, I am a private detective. There are those who disagree with my conclusions, and you may be one of those. So be it, then. All I can do is render the events just as they occurred, beginning with that bright-white afternoon in January when my secretary ushered Miss Sylvia Troy into my office.

"Miss Sylvia Troy," said my secretary and departed.

"I'm Peter Chambers," I said. "Won't you sit down?"

She was small, quite good-looking, very feminine, about thirty. Close-cut wavy russet-red hair was capped about a smooth round face in which enormous dark brown eyes would have been beautiful except for a flaw in expression almost impossible to put into words. There is only one word—haunted!—and that word, of course, is susceptible to so many different interpretations. Her eyes were far away, gone, out of her, not part of her, remote and lost. She remained standing while I, still seated behind my desk, squirmed uneasily.

"Please sit down," I said in as cordial a tone as I could muster within the embarrassment of trying to avoid those peculiarly-luminous, strangely-isolated, frightened eyes.

"Thank you very much," she said and sat in the chair at the side of my desk. She had a soft lovely voice, almost a trained voice as a professional singer's voice may be termed trained: it was round-vowelled, resonant, beautifully-pitched, very feminine, melodious. She was wearing a red wool coat with a little black fur collar and she was carrying a black patent-leather handbag. She opened the handbag, extracted three hundred dollars, snapped shut the bag, and placed the money on my desk. I looked at it, but did not touch it.

"Not enough?" she said.

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"The way you're looking at it."

"Looking at what?" I said.

"The money. Your fee. I'm sorry, but I can't afford any more."

"I'm not looking at it in any special way, Miss Troy. I'm just looking at it. Three hundred dollars may be enough or not enough—depending upon what you want of me."

"I want you to lay a ghost."

"What?"

Detectives should not be required to apprehend ghosts. It simply takes too much time. Moreover, though clothes may make the man, there's far more to a ghost than his bed sheet.

"Please, sir, Mr. Chambers," she said, "I'm deadly serious."

"A ghost—"

"A ghost who has already killed one person and threatens to kill two others."

I directed my squirming to seeking in my pockets and finding a cigarette. I lit it and I said, "Miss Troy, the laying of ghosts is not quite my department. If this so-called ghost of yours has killed anyone, then you've come to the wrong place. There are constituted authorities, the police—"

"I cannot go to the police."

"Why not?"

"Because if I tell my story to the police I would be incriminating myself and my two brothers in . . ." She stopped.

"In what?"

"Murder."

There was a pause. She sat, limply; and I smoked, nervously.

Then I said, "Do you intend to tell me this story?"

"I do."

"Won't that be just as incriminating—"

"No, no, not at all," she said. "I *must* tell you because something must be done, because somebody—you, I hope—must help. But if you repeat what I tell you to the police, I will simply deny it. Since there is no proof, and since I would deny what you might repeat, nobody would be incriminated."

It was coming around to my department. People in trouble are my department. Had there been no mention of a ghost, it would have been completely and familiarly in my department. But it was sufficiently in my department for me to tap out my cigarette in an ashtray, pull the money over to my side of the desk, and say, "All right, Miss Troy, let's have it."

"It begins about a year ago. November, a year ago."

"Yes," I said.

"There are—or were—four of us in the family."

"Four in the family," I said.

"Three brothers and myself. Adam was the oldest. Adam Troy was fifty when he died."

"And the others?"

"Joseph was thirty-six. Simon is thirty-two. I am twenty-nine."

"You say Joseph *was* thirty-six?"

"My brother Joseph killed himself—supposedly killed himself—three weeks ago."

"Sorry," I said.

"And now if I may—just a little background."

"Please," I said.

"Adam, so much older than any of us, was sort of father to all of us. Adam was a bachelor, rich and successful—he always had a knack for making money—while the rest of us"—she shrugged—"when it came to earning money, we were no shining lights. Joseph was a shoe-salesman, Simon is a drug clerk, and I'm a nightclub performer and, I must confess, a pretty bad one at that."

"Nightclub performer. Interesting."

"I do voices, you know? I used to be a ventriloquist. Now I'm a mimic; imitations, that sort of thing. Nothing great. I get by."

"And Adam?" I said. "What did Adam do?"

"He was a real-estate broker, and a shrewd investor in the stock market. He was a stodgy stingy man—which is probably why he never got married. He *was* like a father to us but, actually, he never helped us with money unless it was an emergency. But advice—plenty. And criticism—plenty. I can't say he was *bad* to us, but he wasn't really *good* to us. I hope I'm making myself clear."

"Yes. Very clear, Miss Troy."

"Now about the wills."

"Wills?" I said.

"Last wills and testaments. We all have like it's called reciprocal wills. If one dies, whatever he leaves is divided amongst the rest of us. I'm sure you know about reciprocal wills."

"Yes, of course."

"All right. Now last year, Adam made a real big win in the stock market and he suggested that we take a vacation together, a winter vacation, and that he would pay for all of it. A couple of weeks of skiing, fun, out-of-doors, up in Vermont. Two weeks in a winter wonderland, you know?"

I nodded.

"We, the rest of us, Joseph, Simon, and I—we arranged for those two weeks—the two middle weeks in November—and we all went up to a lodge at Mt. Killington in the Green Mountains of Vermont." She shuddered and was silent. Then she said, "I don't know how it began. Maybe we all had it in our minds, maybe that guilt was like a poison in all of us, but it was Joseph who said it first."

"Said what, please?"

"Said to get rid of Adam. Adam was upstairs sleeping and the three of us were sitting around downstairs in front of a big roaring fireplace, drinking, maybe getting a little drunk, when Joseph put out the suggestion and we were with him so fast it was like all of us said it together. I don't want to blame anyone. I say all three of us have the blame together. None of us ever had any money, real money, and all of a sudden it came to us, that we could have just that, real money, while we were still young enough to enjoy it." She shuddered again and put her hands over her face. She spoke through her hands. "From here I'd like to go real quick. Please?"

"Okay," I said.

Her hands dropped to her lap. "Next day, dressed warmly in ski suits, we went out on an exploring adventure, up into the mountains. Way up, high, Adam was standing near a crevice, a ravine, about a two thousand foot drop, with a little narrow river running on bot-

tom. Joseph came up behind him, shoved, and Adam fell. That's all. He fell. All the way. There were like echoes coming back, and then —nothing. When we returned, we reported it. We said he had slipped and fallen. The police went up to investigate, there was an inquest, and that was it."

"What was it?"

"The coroner's verdict was death by accident."

I came up out of my chair. I walked my office. I walked in front of her, in back of her, and around her. She did not move. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap. I said, "All right. So much for the incriminating matter. Now, if you please, what ghost killed whom?"

She was motionless. Only her lips moved. "The ghost of Adam killed Joseph."

"My dear Miss Troy," I said. "Only a few minutes ago you told me that Joseph committed suicide."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Chambers, I did *not* tell you that."

"But you—"

"I said *supposedly* killed himself."

Grudgingly, I admitted my error. "True, you said that. But how can one possibly tell the difference? I mean—"

"May I tell it my own way?"

"Please do." I went back to my chair, sat, watched her as she spoke, but my eyes did not meet hers. Somehow, on this bright-white normal afternoon in January, in the accustomed confines of my very own office, I could not bring myself to look full upon this woman's eyes.

"I live at One-thirty-three West Thirty-third Street," she said.

"Uh huh," I said and happily business-like, I jotted it down, delighted for something prosaic to do.

"It's a one-room apartment on the fourth floor. 4 C."

"Yeah, yeah," I murmured, jotting assiduously.

"Two months ago, on November fifteenth, exactly one year from the time of his death, Adam came to visit me."

"Adam came to visit," I murmured as I jotted—and then I flung the pencil away. "Now just a minute, Miss Troy!"

Quite mildly she said, "Yes, Mr. Chambers?"

"Adam is the guy who's dead, or isn't he? Adam is the guy whom, allegedly, you people murdered, or isn't he?"

"Yes, he is."

"And he came to visit you?"

"Precisely."

I sighed. "Where?"

"On the afternoon of November fifteenth, I had gone out to the supermarket for a bit of shopping. When I came home, he was there, sitting quietly in a chair, waiting for me."

I recovered my pencil and pretended to make notes. "Are you sure it was Adam?"

"The ghost of Adam. Adam is dead."

"Yes, naturally, ghost of Adam. How did he look?"

"Exactly as he had looked on the day he died. He was even wearing the same clothes—the high-laced boots, the green ski suit, the green ski cap."

"He talked to you?"

"Yes."

"How did he sound?"

"As always. Adam had a deep booming voice. He sounded sad, aggrieved, but not, actually, angry."

"And what did he say?"

"He said that he had returned to visit retribution on us; those were the exact words—visit retribution. He said he was going to kill Joseph first, then Simon, and then me. Then he stood up, opened the door, and walked out."

"And you?"

"I called my brothers, they came to my apartment, and I told them just what happened. Of course, they didn't believe me. They told me it was my imagination, that I had been highly nervous of late. They suggested that I go see a doctor. All in all, somehow, they talked me out of it. I did nothing about it—not even when Joseph was killed."

"Suicide, even supposed suicide —"

"Joseph slashed his wrists and died. *But there was no weapon.* No weapon was found near the body; there was no weapon with blood anywhere in his apartment."

I lit a new cigarette. The flame of the match trembled. I blew it out quickly and deposited it in the tray. I inhaled deeply. I said, "Miss Troy, you did nothing about it then—why are you doing something about it now?"

"Because Adam came to visit me again last night. When I returned from work, he was seated in the same chair, dressed exactly as the other time. He said that he had accomplished his purpose with Joseph—and that Simon was next. Then he got up, opened the door, and went out."

"And you?"

"I fainted. When I came to, I became hysterical. That passed, and then I put on fresh make-up, and went directly to my brother Simon. It was late at night, but I didn't care. Simon lives on West Fourth Street, quite near to where I work. I rang his bell until he woke up and let me in. I told him what had happened and again he just didn't believe me. He told me that he insisted that I go to a doctor and that he was going to make arrangements for just that. Today I decided I *had* to do something about it. I'd heard about you—and I'm here. Please, Mr. Chambers, will you help me? Please. Please."

"I'll do whatever I can," I said. I inquired and made notes about names, addresses and phone numbers, where she worked, where her brother worked, all of that. Then

I printed my home phone number on one of my business cards and gave it to her. "You may call me here or at home whenever you please," I said.

"Thank you." She smiled her first smile, gratefully.

I placed her three hundred dollars into a drawer of my desk and said, "All right. Let's go."

"Go? Where?"

"I'd like to see your apartment. May I?"

"Yes, of course." She stood up. "You're very thorough, aren't you?"

"That's the way I work," I said.

It was on the fourth floor, walk-up, of a six-story, new-fashioned, re-modeled house. It was a tiny one-room apartment: small living room with one tiny closet, a tiny bathroom, and a tiny kitchenette. There was no window in the kitchenette, one window in the bathroom, and two windows in the living room—each window with a secure inside turn-bolt.

"Excellent," I said. "Did you have these bolts put on?"

"No. The former tenant."

"They're good bolts in fine working order." I nodded approvingly, continued my inspection. "I see there's no fire-escape."

"No need," she said. "They were eyesores that were removed when the house was re-modeled because they made it fire-proof."

But the lock on the door was utterly deficient. Simple and ancient, it did not require an expert to solve it, and the door itself carried no secondary protection: no bolt.

"This'll never do," I mumbled.

"Beg pardon?" she said.

"Look, I don't know who's been visiting you, ghost or no ghost, but anyone can get in here with any old key, and a picklock can make this doorlock do somersaults. This has got to go."

"Go?" she inquired. "Go?"

"Where's your Classified Directory?"

She brought it to me and I checked a few locksmiths and called a few locksmiths and found one who was free and told him what I wanted. He promised to come within the next half hour and Miss Troy made coffee and sandwiches, and we munched and chatted but avoided any mention of ghosts, and she grew more animated and smiled more frequently, and I discovered that I was having a very pleasant afternoon.

"Why don't you come see me at the club this evening?" she said. "I told you where it is when you were making all those notes in your office. Cafe Bella on West Third in the Village."

"What time do you go on?"

"The show starts at nine, and it's sort of continuous. There are six acts—nobody's real great and they don't pay us much—but we don't work too hard and every-

body has his own dressing room which is something. The show runs from nine to two, sometimes later, depending upon business. In between, I just sit around in my dressing room. I don't like to mix with the customers and the owners don't demand that we do. I do wish you'd drop in and catch my act."

"I might," I said.

The locksmith came and he did as I requested. He installed a strong modern lock and he installed a sturdy steel slide-bolt. I paid him out of my pocket-money and I refused reimbursement from Miss Troy.

"Part of the fee," I said, "and it may do the trick. You may never be bothered again."

"I hope so, I hope so," she said. "God bless you. I'm beginning to feel better already. It's like when you go to a good doctor, you know, and he reassures you. Just your presence and your attitude—all these crazy things seem to be like a dream, a nightmare, and all of a sudden it's morning and it was all dreadful but silly, you know?"

"Yes, I do, and I'm glad. Just keep right on thinking like that. Good-by now, and thank you for the lovely lunch."

"Oh, don't mention it. Will you come see me tonight?"

"I'll try," I said.

Simon Troy worked in a drug store at 74th Street and Columbus Avenue. It was small, cluttered, and old-fashioned, and it did not have a soda fountain. It smelled of herbs and pharmaceuticals and germicidals and there was dust on the shelves and the dust in the air made you want to sneeze. Simon Troy, working alone, was a blond wispy little man with puppy-sad brown eyes, a beige-leather complexion, and small yellow teeth. His smile, as he greeted me, was perfunctory: a drug clerk greeting a customer. I told him who I was and why I was there and an expression of anxiety wizened his face as his smile receded.

"If you please," he said, "let us go in the back where we can talk."

The rear, partitioned by thick plate-glass from the front, was a narrow area dominated by a drawer-pocked wooden counter for the making of prescriptions. There were a couple of wire-backed, rickety, armless chairs, and he motioned me to one of them. Before I sat, I said, "You *are* Simon Troy?"

Impatiently he said, "Yes, yes, of course."

I produced cigarettes, offered one to him, and he grabbed at it with thin, bony, tobacco-stained fingers. He lit my cigarette, lit his, and puffed at it rapidly, shallowly, and noisily. I talked and he listened. I told him everything that Sylvia Troy had told me and I told him of the fee that she had paid me.

When I was finished, he was finished with the cigarette, and he lit one of his own from the stub of the one I had donated. "Mr. Chambers," he said, "I assume you must realize how terribly worried I am about my sister."

I nodded. I said nothing.

"She's sick, Mr. Chambers. I'm certain it was apparent to you."

I nodded again. I said, "Would you tell me what happened up at Mt. Killington?"

"You mean about Adam?"

"If you please."

He told me. "We weren't even near him. He had gone over for a peek at that precipitous edge. We were quite far away, many yards from him, the three of us together. He must have had a seizure, a dizzy spell. We heard the scream as he slipped, toppled—and then he was gone. The Vermont police examined the site after we reported it. It had begun to snow and they could not make out any footprints on the edge. But from the points of the jagged crags below, which they could reach, they recovered bits of bone, bits of flesh, and bits of the ski suit he had been wearing. The body, of course, was never recovered." He put the tip of his right index finger between his teeth and bit upon the fingernail, audibly.

"Mr. Troy," I said. "Do you have any idea as to why your sister has come up with this wild story of hers?"

"I'm afraid there's only one explanation. I believe her to be in the throes of a severe nervous breakdown."

"But is there any basis for it? Any past history? Any reason?"

"She mentioned our reciprocal wills to you, didn't she"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, Adam's estate, after taxes, was divided into approximately fifty thousand dollars for each of us. My brother Joseph, a childless widower, was a rather conservative man, as am I. We put that money away and continued in the even tenor of our ways—but not so Sylvia. She quit her nightclub work, went off to Europe, and within a year, she had squandered her inheritance in toto. I think this did something to her, disturbed her, that within a year she was back to where she had started. She was compelled to return to work for a living, and right then, right from the beginning, she began to act peculiarly. Then she began to prattle about a plot, our plot, to murder Adam. And now this terrible business about Adam's ghost."

"And what about Joseph?" I said. "His suicide. Would you tell me?"

"Precious little to tell. Joseph was a sweet, simple, meticulous man. He was quite a hypochondriac although he had a dread of doctors. About six months ago he developed stomach pains, nausea,

vomiting. He refused to go to a doctor, but I finally dragged him. X-rays disclosed a mass in his stomach. The doctors believed it to be benign, but Joseph believed otherwise. We had arranged for an operation but, before the time for it arrived, he killed himself."

"Yes, I know, he slashed his wrists," I said. "But what about this business of no weapon?"

He smiled, yellow-fanged, sadly. "The police are satisfied with the explanation. Joseph committed suicide in his bathroom. He cut open his wrists and bled to death. Knowing Joseph, I know exactly what he did, once he made up his mind to do it. There was an open razor found nearby, without a blade. He took the blade from that razor, cut his wrists, dropped the blade into the toilet bowl, flushed the toilet, and bled to death. There was a good deal of blood, all over that bathroom, but no actual weapon. Joseph was meticulous, a creature of habit. He flushed the weapon away into the toilet bowl. The police agreed completely with my thinking in the matter. After all, I was his brother; I knew him."

I stood up, saying, "Thank you."

"Mr. Chambers, please." He fidgeted, hesitant, obviously embarrassed.

"Yes?" I said.

"Mr. Chambers," he blurted. "I believe you should return that fee to my sister."

"Why?"

"She doesn't need a private detective. She needs a doctor."

"I'm inclined to agree."

He smiled, seeming relieved that I understood and acquiesced. "I've already made inquiries," he said, "and I've selected a physician, nerve-specialist, psychiatrist, whatever the devil they call them these days. By some pretext or other, I'm going to get her to him."

"Good enough," I said. "As for the fee, I agree. It belongs with a doctor, rather than with me."

"You're extremely considerate. I thank you."

"I don't believe I should give it to her, though," I said. "No sense disturbing her any further. I'll bring it to you. I don't have it with me, but I'll deliver it later on to your apartment."

"Please keep fifty dollars of it, Mr. Chambers. You've certainly earned that."

"Thank you. Then I'll see you later."

"You know where?"

"Miss Troy gave me your address on Fourth Street."

"It's apartment 3 A. And, oh!"

"Yes?"

"Actually, I'm a night man here. I work from two in the afternoon and I close at ten. Then I go home, eat, shower, relax. So I'm not home until quite late."

"I'm somewhat of a night man, myself," I said. "Suppose I come around midnight. Is that all right?"

"Fine, fine. You've been very kind, Mr. Chambers."

He shook hands with me and I left.

At ten o'clock that evening, with two hundred and fifty dollars of her fee in my pocket, I sat at a back table of Cafe Bella and watched her act. Cafe Bella was dim and unpretentious, the service was poor, the liquor was bad, and so was Sylvia Troy's act. She came out in black trousers and a black blouse and she did imitations of celebrities, male and female. Her range of voice was marvelous—from deep male baritone to male tenor to male alto to female contralto to mezzo-soprano to the high squiggly soprano of elderly women—but her imitations were rank, her material wretched, her timing deplorable, and her woeful little jokes were delivered without a spark of talent. I left in the middle of her performance.

I had a late supper, I wandered in and out of some of the Village clubs, I had a few drinks, I watched a few dancing girls, and then at midnight I went to 149 West 4th Street which was Simon Troy's address. A self-service elevator took me up to the third floor and there I pushed the button of 3 A. There was no answer. I pushed again. No answer. I tried the knob. The door was open and I entered.

Simon Troy was seated, staring straight ahead, his elbows resting on the edge of a table for two. On the table in front of him was a large cocktail glass empty except for a cherry at its base. He was staring at a vacant chair opposite. On that side of the table, in front of the vacant chair, stood a similar cocktail glass brimming-full and untouched. I went quickly to Simon Troy, examined him, and then went to the telephone and called the police to report his death.

The man in charge was my friend Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker of Homicide. His experts quickly ascertained the cause of death as cyanide poisoning. The cherry in the drained cocktail glass was thoroughly imbued with it. Simon Troy's fingerprints were on the stem of the glass. The other glass was free of poison. There were no fingerprints on its stem. Inspection revealed no vial or other container for poison in the apartment. After the body and the evidence were removed and Lieutenant Parker and I were alone, he said, "Well, what goes? What's the story on this? What are you doing here?"

"Do you believe in ghosts, Lieutenant."

Cryptically he said, "Sometimes. Why? Are you going to tell me a ghost story?"

"I might at that," I said. I told him the entire story and I told him what I was doing in Simon Troy's apartment.

"Wow," he said. "Let's go talk to the little lady."

She was in her dressing room. She maintained that she had been in her dressing room, or out on the floor performing, all night. Her dressing room opened upon a corridor which led to a back exit directly on the street. Parker questioned all the employees in the place. None could disprove what Sylvia Troy had said. Then Parker took her to the station house and I accompanied them. There he questioned and cross-questioned her for hours, but she stoutly maintained that she had not left her dressing room except to go out on the floor and do her act. Policemen came and went and the questioning was frequently interrupted by whispered conferences. At length Parker threw his hands up. "Get out," he said to her. "Go home. And you better stay there so we know where we can reach you."

"Yes, sir," she said meekly and departed.

We were silent. Parker lit a cigar and I lit a cigarette. Finally I said, "Well, what do you think?"

"I think that little chick is pulling the con-game to end all con-games and we don't have a thing on which to hold her."

"How so, my friend?" I said.

"You know about those reciprocal wills, don't you?"

"Yes."

"The first one—Joseph's—is still in Probate. Now the second one goes into Probate. With these two brothers dead, that little dame stands to come into upwards of a hundred thousand dollars."

"So?"

"So we've got Joseph listed as suicide, but since no weapon was found, it could have been murder. Now this Simon could be suicide too, can't he?—except no vial, no container." He waved a hand. "Spirited away."

"The ghost?" I said mildly.

"The dame," he said. "She killed the two of them and concocted this ghost story as the craziest smoke-screen ever. And we don't have one iota of proof against her. But we're going to keep at it, baby; that I can assure you." Then he smiled, wearily. "Go home, boy. You look tired."

"How about you?" I said.

"Not me. I stay right here and work."

I got home at four o'clock, and as I opened my door, my phone was ringing. I ran to it and lifted the receiver. It was Sylvia Troy.

"Mr. Chambers!" she said. "Please! Mr. Chambers!" The terror in her voice put needles on my skin.

"What is it?" I said. "What's the matter?"

"He called me."

"Who?"

"Adam!"

"When?"

"Just now, just now. He said he was coming . . . for me." The voice drifted off.

"Miss Troy!" I called. "Miss Troy!"

"Yes?" The voice was feeble.

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"I want you to close all your windows and bolt them."

"I've already done that," she said in that peculiar childlike sing-song.

"And lock your door and bolt it."

"I've done that too."

"Now don't open your door to anyone except me. I'll ring and talk to you through the closed door so you'll know who it is. You'll recognize my voice?"

"Yes, Mr. Chambers. Yes, I will."

"Good. Now just stay put. I'll be there right away."

I hung up and I called Parker and I told him. "This is it," I said, "whatever it is. Bring plenty of men and plenty of artillery. We figure to shake loose a murderer. I'll meet you downstairs. You know the address?"

"Of course."

I hung up and ran.

Aside from Parker, there were three detectives and three uniformed policemen—one of whom was carrying a carbine. As we entered the hallway, the detectives and the two remaining policemen took their pistols from their holsters. At the door to 4 C, Parker motioned to me and I rang the bell.

A deep booming masculine voice responded.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"Peter Chambers. I want to talk with Miss Troy."

"She's not here," boomed the voice.

"That's a lie. I know she's in there."

"She doesn't want to talk to you."

"Who are you?"

"None of your business," boomed the voice. "Go away."

"Sorry. I'm not going, mister."

The deep voice took on a rasp of irritation. "Look, I've got a gun in my hand. If you don't get away, I'm going to shoot right through the door."

Parker pulled me aside and called through the door: "Open up! Police!"

"I don't care who you say you are," boomed the voice. "I'm warning you for the last time. Either you people get away or I shoot."

"And I'm warning you," called Parker. "Either you open the door or *we* shoot. I'm going to count to three. Unless you open up, we're going to shoot our way in. One!"

No answer.

"Two!"

Deep booming derisive laughter.

"Three!"

No sound.

Parker motioned to the policeman carrying the carbine and he ranged up. Parker raised his right hand, index finger pointed upward.

"Open up! Last call!"

No sound.

Parker pointed the finger at the policeman and nodded. A stream of bullets ripped through the door. There was a piercing scream, a thud, and silence. Parker made a sign to two of the detectives, burly men. They knew what to do. They hurled themselves at the door, shoulder to shoulder, in unison, time and again. The door creaked, creaked, gave, and then burst from its fastenings.

Sylvia Troy lay on the floor dead of the bullets from the carbine. There was no one else in the apartment. The door had been locked and bolted. The windows were closed and bolted from the inside. Inspection was quick, expert, and unequivocal, but, aside from the corpse of Sylvia Troy—and now, ourselves—there was no one else in the apartment.

Detective-Lieutenant Louis Parker came to me, his eyes belligerent but bewildered, his face angrily glistening beneath a veil of perspiration. His men, tall, thick-armed, strong-muscled, powerful, gathered like silent children, in a group about him. "What the hell?" said the Detective-Lieutenant, the words issuing in a curious hoarse whisper. "What do you think, Pete?"

I had to swallow before I could speak, but I clung to my premise. "I do not believe in ghosts," I said.

Perhaps I do not believe in ghosts because I refuse to believe in ghosts and my mind rejects the possibility and seeks other explanation. In the Troy affair such explanation, for me, involved death-wish, hallucination, guilt complex, retribution, self-punishment, and dual personality.

There are those who disagree with my conclusions.

You may be one of them.

Would you like a glimpse into the future? Simply obtain an old-fashioned spy glass—available at all the better pawnshops—and gaze longingly through it towards the horizon. Should you see an indescribably beautiful scene, your lens may require wiping.

THE CASE of Paul 2473 really began when he discovered the old book. He recognized it instantly for what it was, because he had once been through the Micro-filming Section where they were recording some old-fashioned but worthy volumes on genetics before destroying them. But the sight of this book, obviously an uninspected relic of the dim past, provoked a simultaneous curiosity and dread in him.

He'd been marching with the Thursday Exercise Platoon over a country back road, and now they were enjoying their ten-minute rest period, lying by the roadside among the grass-strewn brick ruins of some ancient building. Paul was bored—Thursdays always bored him intensely—and both his mind and eye were casting about for something of interest to focus upon.

Which was why his gaze had roamed over the crumbling, disintegrating wall beside him. He saw the aperture almost immediately. At this particular spot, the bricks seemed to have fallen down against a still standing portion of the wall so as to make a small igloo or cave. A tiny, cozy, rain-proof den, he thought, for some small wild thing.

A few of the little beasts always seemed to survive the best efforts of the decontamination squads which constantly scoured vacant areas.

Paul turned over and lay on his stomach so that he could peer into

the dark hole, and saw the book. He knew instantly, of course, what the proper procedure was. He should take the thing, not open it, but hand it over instead to the Platoon Leader. He'd been taught that all such objects pertaining to the former civilization could be either valuable or dangerous. He had no more right to destroy the book than he had to look at it.

Half-intending deceit but not fully decided, he checked first to see if he were being observed. The Leader was nowhere in sight. The members of the Platoon were all prone, none of them close to Paul, and none of them paying the least attention to him. Tentatively, still not committed to disobedience, Paul reached into the hole, grasped the book and drew it out.

It was small, light, and seemed ready to fall apart at his touch. Trembling, but overwhelmed by curiosity, he lifted the cover and glanced at the fly leaf. *The Logic of Murder,* he read.

For a moment he experienced a dismal disappointment. The word "logic" had some meaning for him, though vague. The last word, "murder," was completely and totally mysterious. The book was useless if he knew absolutely nothing of its subject matter. But as he pondered it, he was not so sure. The book might teach him what "murder" was. And "murder" might be something vastly entertaining.

"Everybody up!" The Platoon Leader's shrill bark of command came from far away through the trees.

In the instant before the somnolent members of the Platoon could rouse themselves and stir from the matted grass, Paul 2473 came to a momentous decision. He thrust the little book inside his shirt. Then he got up, stretched, and walked back to the road where the files were forming.

In his cubicle, Paul 2473 re-invented the ancient stratagem of schoolboys. Every evening during the few minutes he had to himself, he held the little book behind the afternoon edition of *The News of Progress,* and thus, while seeming to be immersed in the sort of reading that was his duty, he was actually engaged in a forbidden pastime. He practiced this little deception in case the wall television screen chose at any time to look in on him.

As he read, though more and more conscious of the dangers involved, he grew more and more fascinated by what he found in the little book. Gradually, by piecing together scattered references, he began to arrive at some conclusions.

Murder, he discovered with something of a shock, was the taking of a human life. It was a completely new and hitherto undreamed of idea to him. He knew that life did not go on forever. He knew that elderly people sometimes got sick, were carted off to some medical building or physiology laboratory or clinic, and then were never seen again. Death, he also knew, was usually painless—unless there were a specific, scientific reason for the authorities to decree it should not be—and so he had neither considered death much nor feared it.

But murder had apparently been a phenomenon of the previous civilization in which the authorities not only did not arrange human death, but were actually opposed to individuals who took such matters into their own hands. Yet the practice, though accompanied by danger, seemed to have been amazingly popular. Paul 2473 shuddered at the barbarism of it, but could not stop reading.

But as he came to understand the title of the book, he discovered that although murder was hideous, it had been in its own past environment rather understandable. In a society where people had chosen their own mates at random, murders had been committed out of sexual jealousy or revenge. In a society where the authorities had not provided sustenance for the population, murders had been committed to acquire wealth.

As he read on, Paul was treated to the full panorama of homicidal motivations, both sane and insane. There was a chapter on methods of murder. There were sections on the detection, apprehension, and punishment of murders.

But the conclusions of the book

were the most amazing part. "Murder," it was stated emphatically, "is a much more widespread crime than statistics indicate. Many murders are committed without premeditation, in the heat of emotion. Those who commit such murders are quite often brought to justice. Much more successful at evasion, however, are the murderers who plan their crimes beforehand. The bulging files of unsolved murders are predominantly of this variety. In the battle of wits between murderer and policeman, the former has all the advantage. Although the findings of various statistical studies have varied somewhat, they all point inescapably in one direction. Most murders go unsolved. Most murderers live out their natural lives in peace and safety and the enjoyment of the fruits of their efforts."

Paul 2473 was thoughtful for a long time after he finished the book. He recognized the peril of his own position more than ever. The new civilization simply could not afford to let this book be disseminated, to allow humanity to realize how recently it had emerged from primitive savagery. He himself had therefore broken an important rule in reading the book, and he saw now why it was an important rule. If he were found out, he would surely be reprimanded, demoted, perhaps even publicly disgraced.

But he did not destroy the book. Instead he hid it inside his mattress. The notion of murder, like some inventor's dream, intrigued him, and he devoted all his spare time to thinking of it.

He even considered mentioning it to Carol 7427. He saw Carol 7427 almost every evening at Recreation, on many occasions had gone into the Caressing Booths with her, more often than with any other girl. He had taken Compatibility Tests with Carol 7427, and was hoping for a Three-Year Assignment with her, a Five-Year if he could get it.

That first evening after he had finished the book, he came very close to confiding in her. She came into the Recreation Center still in her work slacks, but they fitted her so neatly and snugly that he did not mind. He gazed at her close-cropped blonde hair, at her bright blue eyes and clear skin, and he thought about the Mating Assignment. It would be very nice to share a double cubicle with someone, to have someone to talk to, really talk to, someone to whisper to, out of the reach of the microphones, someone with whom to discuss strange and fascinating and bizarre ideas such as murder, and what civilization must have been like when individuals dared to murder one another.

He maneuvered her over into a corner, away from the Group Conversation on Radiation Agriculture. "Would you like to know a

real secret, Carol?" he asked her.

Her long lashes blinked at him, and her color heightened prettily. "A secret, Paul?" she breathed. "What kind of a secret?"

"I've broken a rule."

"Really!"

"A serious rule."

"Really!" She was enthralled.

"And I've discovered something that's terribly interesting."

"Tell me!" She leaned closer to him. She had taken a perfume tablet, and her exhalations enchanted him.

"If I told you, you'd either have to report me, or you'd be in the same dangerous position I'm in."

"I'd never report you, Paul."

"But I wouldn't want to get you into trouble."

She looked disappointed and began to pout. But her reaction pleased him. They shared the same spirit of adventure and curiosity. He wouldn't tell her now. But when the Mating Assignments came out—next week for sure—when they shared a cubicle, then he would give her the book to read, and they could discuss the wonders of homicide for hours and hours.

That was the day that Paul 2473 definitely decided he was compatible with Carol 7427. And surely the Tests, scientific as they were, would bear him out.

But the Tests didn't. He saw the results on a Thursday, as he came back from Exercise. The enormous poster almost covered the bulletin board, and it read, "Five-Year Mating Assignments for Members of Complex 55." Confidently he raced down the list. But it was with horror that he made two discoveries. Carol 7427 was paired with Richard 3833, and he had drawn Laura 6356.

Laura 6356 for five years! A simpering, dumpy little thing with mouse-colored hair. Was she the sort with whom they thought he was compatible? And Richard 3833, who was to have exclusive possession of Carol for five years, was a beast, a swaggering, arrogant beast.

Paul contemplated his future with indignation. He was now in the age group to which the Caressing Booths were no longer allowed. The authorities had found that at this age a worker would be more productive if he had a settled and well-defined social pattern. Therefore, the Mating Assignment meant that he would be tied exclusively to Laura 6356, while Carol would be just as exclusively the companion of Richard 3833.

He and Carol would scarcely see each other! There would be no cozy cubicle for them. No stealthy little discussions after hours about his wonderful book.

The book!!!

It was by no devious, hesitant line of reasoning that Paul 2473

came to a conclusion about committing murder. It posed itself instantly as the solution to his problem. His mind traveled briskly through the check list—motives, methods, risks.

Certainly the motive was there. He was to be mated with an incompatible person, while his compatible person was to be mated with someone else. As he referred to his handbook for possible variations to remedy this situation, he perceived that a purely emotional murderer might choose to eliminate Carol to prevent Richard's getting her. But that line of action would not obtain Carol for himself, and it would leave him with Laura.

A double murder was necessary then. Richard and Laura. A bit more complicated in the execution, but the only procedure that would guarantee satisfaction.

The details of the method he left for later. But he did choose a weapon. Or rather, necessity chose it for him. He had no gun, nor means of obtaining one. He had no knowledge of poisons, nor access to any. Richard 3833 was bigger and stronger than he, and Laura 6356 was hardly a frail creature, so strangulation and all such feats of overpowering violence were impossible to him. But he could get a knife, and he could sharpen it adequately. And he knew enough physiology to know how a knife should be used against the human body.

Finally, he tried to calculate the risks. Would they catch him? And if they did, what would they do to him?

It was then that something really amazing occurred to him. As far as he knew, there was no crime called murder in the statutes. If there were, he surely would have been aware of it. They were lectured often enough on things they should do and things they shouldn't do. At the head of the list, of course, was treason to the state. This included such things as sabotage, insurrection, and subversive activities of all sorts. Below treason on the list were the crimes of sloth, failure to fulfill work quotas, failure to attend meetings, failure to maintain mental and physical health.

And that was it. Murder wasn't listed, nor any of the other crimes often connected with murder—no fraud, none of the old attempts to gain material wealth by violence. Paul realized that he lived in an ideal civilization, where there was an absolute minimum of motivation for crime. Except the one that he had found—when some official made an obvious error in grading the Compatibility Tests.

Now the amazing thing then was simply this. Without the crime of murder even mentioned in the law books, the state simply possessed no apparatus for dealing with murder. There was no organization, no experienced detectives,

no laboratory scientists trained in sifting clues, none of the things or people that the book had said existed in the old civilization. With just a little reasonable caution and planning then, the murderer of this new, enlightened age could take the authorities completely by surprise, catch them utterly unprepared. And he could commit his crime in absolute safety!

This realization set Paul's heart to beating fast, and set his mind to scheming. The Mating Assignments would go into effect just as soon as the plan for the shifting of cubicle occupancy could be drawn up. This would, he knew, take a week. As it turned out, he had plenty of time. He was ready to begin operations in two days.

His job gave him an initial advantage. As an air filtration maintenance engineer, he was free to rove throughout the entire area of Complex 55. No one would question his presence in one place or his absence from another. All he needed was a work schedule that would take him on a route in the vicinity of first one of his victims and then the other.

Thursday came, and he had to waste a whole afternoon trudging about with the Exercise Platoon. On Friday, however, luck turned in his favor. As he glanced at the sheet which listed the air filtration trouble spots he was to visit that morning, he knew the time had come.

He carried his sharp steel blade tucked into his belt under his shirt. In his soft-soled, non-conductive shoes he padded noiselessly along the antiseptic corridors. His work schedule was tight, but the route was perfect. He could spare a minute here and there.

He arrived first in the vicinity of Richard 3833. The latter worked in Virus Chemistry, had his own private corner where he could work more efficiently out of sound and view of his fellows. Paul found him there, absorbed in peering through a microscope. "Richard," Paul greeted him softly, "congratulations on your Mating Assignment. Carol's a fine girl."

There was always a chance, of course—perhaps one in fifty, or a hundred—that a microphone would be eavesdropping or a television screen peeking in on them. But Richard—and Laura too, for that matter—had never caused any trouble. So they would not be under special surveillance. And very seldom did the guards monitor anyone during working hours. The small risk had to be taken. He would conduct his business as quickly as possible though.

"Thanks," Richard said. But his mind wasn't on Carol. "Say, while you're here, take a look at this little beast on this slide." He climbed off his stool and offered his place to Paul.

Paul took an obliging look, and managed surreptitiously to turn a

couple of adjustment knobs while he was doing it. "I can't see a thing," he said.

Richard patiently went back to re-adjusting the knobs. His broad back was turned to Paul, all of his attention concentrated on the microscope. Paul slipped the knife from under his shirt, chose the exact point to aim at, and struck hard.

Richard's reaction was a startled grunt. His hands clutched at the counter top. But before he sagged, Paul withdrew the blade, then stood and watched as his victim slumped into an inert heap on the floor. Then very carefully he wiped the bloody knife on Richard's shirt, and left the laboratory immediately afterward. No one saw him go.

Within four minutes from the time he stabbed Richard 3833, Paul arrived at the Mathematical Calculation Section where Laura 6536 tended one of the huge machines. As in the case of Richard, Laura worked practically alone, out of contact with the other girls who did similar work on similar machines. Her only companion was the monster itself, an enormous panel of switches, buttons, dials, and blinking lights of all colors.

Laura saw her visitor out of the corner of her eye, but her fingers continued to type out information for the machine. She was a very conscientious worker.

"Hello there, Paul," she said with a little giggle. She had scarcely noticed him before the Mating Assignments came out, but since that time she had grown very feminine. "Don't tell me our cubicle's ready to move into!"

Did she imagine that he would make a special trip to bring her news like that? He maneuvered to a position behind her and groped under his shirt for the knife.

Possibly she imagined he was going to caress her, despite the fact that such things were strictly forbidden during working hours. Her chubby shoulders trembled expectantly, awaiting his touch. He plunged the knife in quickly.

She did not sag to the floor as Richard had done, but instead fell forward over her key board. The machine continued to hum, its lights continued to flash, as Laura's dead weight pressed down upon the keys. The machine will be giving some inaccurate answers, Paul thought with grim amusement as he withdrew the knife and wiped it on the sleeve of Laura's blouse.

But then as he went away and back to his own work, another, pleasanter thought occupied his mind. Carol 7427 and Paul 2473 now had no mates. Surely it would be logical—and the easiest thing to do in view of the compatibility scores—for the Committee to assign these two orphans to the same cubicle. For five years, subject to renewal, of course.

He had not known what to ex-

pect. He could not predict how the rulers of Complex 55 would react. The book was an inadequate guide in this respect, since it dealt with the phenomenon of murder in the old civilization.

Murder always had the power to excite interest, the book said. Especially if the victim were well known, if the method of murder were particularly gruesome, or if there were some sensational, scandalous element involved. The newspapers featured detailed descriptions of the crime, then followed along as it unraveled, finally—if the murderer were caught—reported on the trial. The whole thing could drag on for weeks, months, even years in a spasmodic fashion.

But in Complex 55, *The News of Progress* was circulated that afternoon without containing any mention of an unusual happening. At Recreation that evening, nothing seemed amiss, except that Richard 3833 and Laura 6356 were missing.

Paul saw Carol there, and realized he had not spoken to her since the Mating Assignments were published. He managed to detach her from her companions, finally, and then carefully, casually asked her a question.

"Where's Richard?"

She shrugged her attractive shoulders. "I don't know," she answered. "I haven't seen him."

He was overjoyed at her attitude. Richard was missing and she didn't seem in the least concerned, as if she had never read the Mating Assignments. Probably she didn't care for him at all. When this was all straightened out, she'd be quite willing to accept a new arrangement without mourning for Richard.

He stayed with her most of the evening, in a happy, languorous state. He was even beginning to believe that the authorities, confronted with a new problem outside the realm of their rules and experience, might even decide to hush the matter up, pretend it never happened, in the hope that the rank and file, if kept ignorant of the idea of murder, would never think of indulging in it.

By the time he retired that night, Paul had convinced himself of the soundness of this theory.

Reveille on Saturday morning shattered his illusions. In fact, he wasn't even certain it was reveille because the high-pitched buzzer seemed to sound louder and more insistent. And also at an earlier hour. It was still dark outside his single window.

He climbed into his clothes quickly and joined the others out in the corridor. They were all as startled as he was, very meek, slightly uneasy.

"Forward . . . march!"

They tramped in long files to the end of the corridor, plunged down

the iron stairs on the double, emerged into the courtyard where light awaited them. All the floodlights on the roofs and the high walls had suddenly been turned on. In their harsh glare platoons and companies formed quickly and stood at stiff attention. There was no talking in the ranks, no complaining at being routed out at this early hour. An atmosphere of fear and foreboding settled over the whole place.

Paul felt it. Even if he had known of no reason to be afraid, the others' fear would have communicated itself to him. Nothing quite like this had ever happened before. Surely nothing pleasant was in store.

What were they going to do? There would be an announcement probably, stating that two people had been killed. And what then? Would they ask the guilty party to identify himself? Or ask if anyone could volunteer any information?

Then quite strangely, he felt calm. If they had brought everybody out here, that meant they didn't know who was responsible, didn't it? That was encouraging. Of course it appeared now that there would be an investigation of some sort. Questions asked. Whereabouts checked. He would have to be careful. But the main thing to remember was that the authorities did not yet know who the murderer was. And if he could keep his wits about him, they need never know.

But there was no announcement from the loudspeakers. The long ranks of silent men were left to contemplate the unknown, to nurse their fears. Perhaps the authorities had planned it this way, to let those fears wreak their psychological mischief for a little while before the questions began.

Half an hour went by, and still the dawn did not appear. Yet no one broke ranks. No one coughed or shuffled his feet. The only sound was the moan of the night wind over the high walls.

What bothered Paul the most was the floodlights. They seemed to be shining directly into his eyes. He could blink against the glare, but he discovered that if he tried to close his eyes for a few seconds, his body had a tendency to sway. He didn't dare call attention to himself by falling down or even by swaying too much. So he tried to endure the glare, tried to think of the pleasant things that would happen when this ordeal was over.

And it had to be over some time. The whole machinery of Complex 55 with its hundred thousand members could not be halted and disrupted indefinitely because two of those members had been murdered. People were taken off to die every day, and their places were filled with recruits from the Youth Farms. There would be some excitement and tension for awhile,

but sooner or later things would have to return to normal.

Normal . . . a mating cubicle with Carol . . . somebody to talk to . . . talk to privately . . . an end to the deadly aloneness . . . even with the microphones and the television screens, he knew that mated couples could manage a certain degree of privacy.

"Company Number One! Right face! Forward march!"

A sound of tramping feet, and a hundred men left the courtyard.

By listening to the shouted commands that followed, Paul could estimate where they had gone. To the Recreation Hall adjoining the Dormitory. Whatever was happening to them, whatever processing they were going through, was being done in the Rec. That didn't sound too ominous. If they had marched out the gate, he might have felt rather more uneasy.

A few more minutes passed. Possibly a quarter of an hour. The lights were becoming unbearable, and there was still no sign of dawn. But Paul was in the second company. Perhaps he could manage. But there were pains shooting up and down his legs. A slight dizziness attacked him momentarily. The floodlights danced before him. He closed his eyes tightly, but they could not be shut out. The dance became weird.

"Company Number Two!"

He marched, fawningly grateful for the exquisite feeling of being able to move again. Yes, they were going into the Rec. Two guards held the doors ajar, and the entire company tramped into the big place.

More lights, but no longer painful. A buzz of human voices pitched low. The company was taken to the far end, then formed into a single file. They were held at attention no longer, but still the men could not relax. Their fears had been worked on too long. They were silent, refusing to speculate among themselves.

Finally, the single file became a queue, and began moving through a small door. Paul was perhaps the twentieth man in line. It seemed to him that the men ahead of him moved through the door at a rate of one every thirty seconds or so. He awaited his turn, still calm, confident that the huge scale of this maneuver indicated desperation and helplessness on the part of the authorities.

Then he saw around the shoulders of the man ahead of him, saw through the door into the room beyond. There was no one and nothing there, but a nurse with a tableful of hypodermic needles beside her.

He could have either laughed or cried with relief. They were only giving shots. Oh, of course, it perhaps meant a plague scare. Or a test of some new serum. Or even a possibility of bacteriological warfare—and they were being given a

precautionary antidote. It had nothing at all to do with his two insignificant little murders.

When his turn came for the needle, he endured the small sting with supercilious disdain. After the long ordeal in the courtyard and his occasional uneasy imaginings, this was a small enough price to purchase reassurance.

Yet the effect of the shot was rather strange. There was scarcely any pain in his arm, but there was an odd lightness in his head. Surely, he thought, he wasn't going to faint in this moment of triumph.

But then he lost all awareness of himself as self. He did as a guard told him. He walked into the next room. There a man in a white coat and a very penetrating stare confronted him.

"Did you stab two people to death yesterday?" the man asked.

Somehow there didn't seem to be any choice, but to answer with the truth. Perhaps it had been the shot.

"Yes," he said.

There was a big trial. He was dazed throughout most of it. But it wasn't for his benefit anyway. It was rather for the edification of all the members of Complex 55.

Then afterward they put him in a glass cage at one end of the courtyard. He was strapped there in an upright position. More than a hundred wires were inserted into various portions of his body, and ran down through the floor and thence out into a control box where there was a button for each wire. His torturers were the members of Complex 55 themselves, who were expected to display their devotion to civilization by pausing in front of the cage whenever they had a moment and pushing a few of the buttons. The result was exquisite pain, which made him scream and writhe inside his bonds, but which was never fatal.

Once a day, of course, the loudspeaker reminded him and all the others why he was there. "Paul 2473," it would intone, "in wantonly and wilfully destroying two pieces of valuable state property, Richard 3833 and Laura 6356, committed sabotage, and is a traitor to the state."

But his miscalculations had not ended there. One of the most frequent visitors to the cage, and one of the most enthusiastic button-pushers, was Carol 7427.

CONTEST RULES

1. Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $1,500 as First Prize for the best original crime, suspense or mystery story entered in the contest.

2. Additional awards will be made as follows: One (1) Second Prize of $750. One (1) Third Prize of $500. Eight (8) Special Awards of $250 each. Duplicate prizes will be awarded in case of ties. All prizes include publication rights in Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine and all foreign serial publication rights.

3. All prize winners, and all stories entered in the contest, will be considered for purchase for television by "Alfred Hitchcock Presents." Payment for television rights to any stories thus purchased will be *in addition* to any prizes or payment made for publication in the magazine. It is agreed by all contestants that they grant an option to "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" to purchase television rights to their stories for ninety (90) days after the contest ends.

4. Preferably, stories should not be less than 2,000 nor more than 8,000 words long. Any number of stories may be entered. The writer's name and address should be on each story.

5. Awards will be made solely on the basis of quality of writing, with emphasis upon plausibility, characterization and originality of plot. Anyone may enter the contest except employees of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.

6. Final choice of the winners will be made by Mr. Alfred Hitchcock and the editorial staff of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.

7. All entries must be received at Box 218, Universal City, California, postmarked not later than November 30, 1960. Winners will be announced and prizes awarded as soon as possible thereafter.

8. All prize winners and other contestants whose stories are purchased agree that publication rights granted to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine shall include First American and all foreign serial rights.

9. All possible care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed, accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and mailed to:

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine
Short Story Contest
P. O. Box 218
Universal City, California

SUMMER EVIL

BY NORA H. CAPLAN

THE DRIVE, almost obscured by flanking bridal wreath, lilacs and forsythia, followed one boundary line of the property to a stone building that was once a barn. Between that and the house was a boxwood hedge pruned to a height of six feet.

The house was built in the early 1830's. It was a small, two-story cottage of red brick with a slate roof and huge central chimney. Weathered green shutters framed the windows and recessed front door. Beyond the swell of pin oaks and pines sheltering the site lay Sugar Loaf Mountain. And beyond that, a hazy suggestion of the Catoctin range.

From the moment they first saw the house, Phyllis had a watchful feeling about it. As if she expected some major obstacle to prevent their buying it. But the price was incredibly within their means; Ben had no objection to driving thirty-five miles into Washington; and the county school Kate would attend had a fine reputation.

One night shortly after they'd moved in, Phyllis and Ben were sitting on the steps of the back porch, watching Kate gather grass

There is nothing more charming than two little girls in crisp pinafores, pulling at one another's hair as they scream in perfect unison. This is play. This is pretending to be grown-up ladies.

for a jarful of lightning bugs, her bangs damp with concentration. The sun had almost gone down, and there was a faint mist rising from the creek that crossed the back of their land. The air seemed to be layered with both warmth and coolness, pungent with sweet grass and pennyroyal.

"I'd feel a lot easier in my mind," Phyllis said to Ben, "if we'd discover even one thing wrong about all this. People like us just don't find one hundred twenty-five-year-old homes in perfect condition for twenty-three thousand."

Ben folded the sports page and leaned back against her knees. "It's pretty far out here, and most families wouldn't consider a two-bedroom house." Then he added dryly, "Besides, I've never liked the way old houses smell. I noticed it about this one, too, right off."

"I've told you a hundred times, it's the boxwood. That's what the smell is, not the house, darling. Anyway, you'll have to get used to it. I have absolutely no intention of getting rid of that hedge. Mrs. Gastell said it's as old as the house."

Ben grinned as he turned and looked up at her. "Then would you at least trust me to spray it? There are spider webs all over the stuff."

"You'd better check with that nurseryman first, just to be sure. What's his name . . . ?" Phyllis pulled a letter from the pocket of her jamaicas and glanced through it. "Newton. He's just this side of the bridge in Gaithersburg."

"Who's the letter from? The old lady?" Phyllis nodded. "What'd she have to say?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just that she's getting settled, and she thinks she'll like Florida. Every other word is about her granddaughter. I guess the real reason she wrote was to remind us to put in a new furnace filter this fall. A few other things like that." Phyllis frowned. "There's a part here at the end I couldn't quite figure out."

She handed Ben the letter.

He scanned the page and then handed it back. "What's so mysterious about this? All old people take a proprietary air about everybody else's kids. Personally, I don't know why she's so worried about the creek. It's not more than a foot deep. There's no danger of Kate's getting drowned. And I haven't seen any snakes down there—not up to now, I haven't."

"Well, it's not only what she said in the letter. It's the way she's acted about Kate since she saw her. Almost as if she wouldn't have sold the house to us if she'd known we had a child. But I'm sure I mentioned Kate to her the first time we came out with the agent."

Ben lit a cigarette. "Maybe she thought Katie would tear up the place."

"No, it wasn't that. In fact, several times I told her how we've taken Kate to all kinds of museums and historic homes, and how she's always been careful with valuable old things. But Mrs. Gastell hardly paid any attention at all to me. She kept saying Katie shouldn't be allowed to wander all over the place by herself."

Ben shrugged. "Mrs. Gastell's seventy years old. People her age think we give our kids too much freedom. That's all she meant."

Their daughter had abandoned the lightning bugs and was now making hollyhock dolls, lining them chorus-fashion across the brick path to the grape arbor. Her shorts were grass-stained and the soles of her bare feet were already seasoned a greenish-rust. Ben reflected on her a moment and then he said, "I guess it will be hard on Katie, being alone so much now. It might be a good idea to get acquainted pretty soon with the people around here."

Phyllis leaned her elbows on his shoulders. "That's the trouble. Nobody on this road has children her age. But it's only six weeks until school starts. And in the meantime there's plenty around here to keep her occupied. The two of us can start all kinds of projects. I can't describe what a wonderful feeling it is, not to have people running in for coffee all day long or the phone ringing every ten minutes. Everybody knows this is a toll call, thank goodness. Maybe now I can start on the book."

Ben stood up abruptly. "No, you don't. Not after what you went through with that last story. Remember, you promised me you wouldn't do a thing for the rest of the summer."

She took his hand. "I didn't mean anything soon. I only meant now that we've moved. I promise not to write a word until we're all settled and Kate's in school." She called to the child, "I'm going to start your bath now, so don't be long."

"In a minute," Kate said automatically. "Daddy, come here. I made seven pink ones with white hats, and seven white ones with pink hats and . . ."

Phyllis smiled, and went into the kitchen. She turned on the brass lamp over the round pine table. The planked floor gleamed with a fresh coat of wax. It was a low-ceilinged room, full of early morning sunshine and pine-shaded in the afternoon. Women years before her had stood at her win-

dow and cleaned berries, kneaded bread, stamped butter with a thistle-patterned mold. Perhaps the room had given them moments of completeness, as it gave her now when she poured milk into a brown earthenware pitcher and set it beside a bowl of tawny nasturtiums.

Then as she was slightly bent over the table, one hand on the pitcher, Phyllis had the sensation that this room, the whole house, had an inexplicable fullness. That the very atmosphere had absorbed a century and a half of other lives. It reminded her of an incredible camera she had once read about—one that recorded, through heat radiations, images from the past, that were of course invisible to the naked eye. There was something about this house that seemed to retain, at times even emanate certain . . . presences. And it was not a feeling that came from any conscious attempt to visualize previous occupants. Somehow this thought disturbed her.

She let go of the pitcher and went into the bathroom. The sound of water rushing from the faucet partially distracted her from whatever had bothered her and she dumped half a jar of bubble soap into the tub. Kate would love her extravagance.

The following day the Reverend Mr. White, rector of St. Steven's Church, called. He had the same cheery roundness of a Toby jug, smoked good Havanas and produced a box of licorice cough drops for Kate. Before he left, he told Kate to bring her parents to church Sunday. It'd be a good way for her to make new friends, too.

Until the mail came at eleven, Phyllis had planned to spend the afternoon with Kate, repainting her doll shelves. But she received a letter from her agent. *Woman's World* was interested in her revised manuscript, but they had decided the climax was still weak. She felt a familiar, obsessive pressure to get the work finished as soon as possible.

"I'm sorry, darling," she told Kate after lunch. "But I'm going to have to type for awhile."

Kate's gray eyes clouded. "I got everything ready out on the back porch."

"I know, but I'd be all on edge if I tried to do anything before this gets done. You run on outside now. Take your dolls down to the arbor. Or ride your bike."

"Couldn't I start painting anyway? I'd be careful."

"You'd have the whole porch smeared up and get paint all over your hair. Remember what happened the last time I left you alone with a paintbrush?" She pushed Kate away gently. "Go on, now. I'll try not to be long."

Phyllis had already taken the cover off the typewriter. She didn't

hear Kate leave the house and walk down the path to the creek.

Whether it was because she hadn't written for weeks or because it was hard to concentrate in new surroundings, the story just wouldn't come off right. Before she started the third draft, she looked at the clock. Five-thirty, and she hadn't even taken the meat from the freezer. Then she remembered Kate. Phyllis called upstairs and didn't get an answer. She went out on the porch. Kate wasn't in the arbor. She called louder.

Finally, from under the willows beside the creek, Kate appeared. She ran toward the house, pigtails flapping wildly. Phyllis hugged her. "I was beginning to get worried. Didn't you hear me calling and calling you?"

Katie's face was vibrant. "We were playing. Is dinner ready?" She pulled away from her mother and threw open the screen door.

Phyllis followed after her. "By the time you get washed and set the table, it will be." As she was searching the refrigerator for something to fix in a hurry, she thought of what Kate had said. She asked curiously, "Were you playing with someone?"

Katie turned toward her with a handful of silver, and her eyes glowed. "Her name's Letty. She's just my age. Seven and a half. Only her birthday's in December. I guess that makes her a little bit older."

Phyllis sliced some cheese. "Where does she live?"

"I don't know," Kate said. "But she showed me how to make a cat's-cradle. It's a trick you do with string. Want me to show you?" Her fingers were still grubby.

"Young lady, you were supposed to wash your hands."

"I did."

"Well, take another look. And use plenty of soap this time."

She heard Ben pull into the drive. She hoped he was in a good mood. As a rule, he didn't like grilled cheese sandwiches for dinner.

Kate didn't mention her doll shelves the following day. Right after breakfast, she told her mother that she was going down to the creek. Letty might be there. In a way, Phyllis was glad. She could have the morning free to work without any twinges of guilt over Katie's having nothing to do. She wrote until noon.

Katie came in long enough to wash down a peanut butter sandwich with lemonade. Then she wanted to be off again, telling her mother before she left, "Letty said she might have to go into Washington City tomorrow to visit her aunt. So we're trying to finish our doll house this afternoon. Can I take her some cookies?"

Phyllis wrapped a handful with a paper napkin. A phrase Katie had used reverberated queerly. "Did Letty mean her aunt lives in Washington, D. C.?"

The girl stuffed two plastic cups into a paper bag. "I guess so. Letty says she loves to go there. Her mother always packs a lunch, and they stop off by the canal locks to eat. I asked her if I could go, too, but she said there wouldn't be room." Kate filled the thermos with milk. "What's a gig, mommy?"

Phyllis hesitated. "It's some kind of carriage, I think. Why?"

Kate started past her. "Oh. Well, I'd better go now."

Phyllis caught at her arm. "Look, why don't you bring Letty up here to play? You'd have lots of fun, showing her all your things. I feel funny about the two of you being down there all alone."

"Why do you feel funny? You could hear us if anything happened." Then she said evasively, "Letty's kind of shy. I already asked her to come inside, but she won't. She said her mother wouldn't like it."

Phyllis snapped, "What does her mother think we are, anyway? I never heard of anybody being so . . . so provincial."

Katie squirmed. "Letty's not like that. She's nice. Honest, she is."

Her mother released her. "All right, but don't go any farther away than the creek."

Perversely, now she wished Katie weren't so wrapped up in this other child. She felt like taking a break herself. It would be nice for the two of them to work in the garden or bake something special like eclairs. There weren't any excuses now for not being with her daughter as much as she liked. Phyllis poured another cup of coffee. She stared at the white linen curtains in the living room gently breathing in, then out against the low sills. Finally, she went back to the typewriter.

Later, she decided to walk down to the creek. She could hear Kate chattering away. When she pushed aside the trailing willow branches, she saw only her child.

Kate looked up. "Hi. Letty just went over to the woods to get some more ferns. See, we're making a rock garden . . ."

Eddies were still swirling in the stream from a recent wading, but Phyllis couldn't detect any movement among the trees beyond.

For a time, Kate was eager to tell her mother and father all about Letty. Gradually, however, she divulged less and less. She sensed that something about her friend made her mother uneasy.

"I'd swear this child was all in her imagination," Phyllis told Ben one night as they were getting ready for bed. "But she's really there . . . or was, until I show up.

I mean, the things they do together are really there. Like checkers and doll dishes and scrapbooks."

Ben surveyed his face in the mirror. He leaned closer. "More gray hairs. 'Will you love me in December as you do in May'?"

Phyllis put down her face cream. "Haven't you been listening?"

He turned around. "Sure, I have. It just seems to me that you're the one with the imagination, not Kate. This friend of hers is all right, I guess. From what I gather, her folks must belong to some kind of offbeat religious sect or something. You know how strict they are with their kids. They're pretty slow about taking up with outsiders, too."

"I never thought of that." Phyllis massaged her face.

Ben got into bed and folded his arms behind his head. "Why don't you take Kate into town tomorrow? Have lunch at Garfinckel's and go to a movie."

She turned out the light. "Maybe I'll do that if I can tear her away from Letty."

He pulled her into the curve of his arm. "See, you're tired of country living already. All I had to do was mention town, and you're ready to go."

She didn't rise to the bait. Her voice was unsure. "Nothing's ever the way you think it's going to be." A car passed on the road. Then except for the frogs down in the creek, there was no sound other than the soft brush of a pine bough against the window. Phyllis moved closer to Ben. He seemed to be asleep already, and she wouldn't wake him just to say she was afraid, for no particular reason.

The trip to town had to be called off. Kate was listless the next morning and complained of a headache. Phyllis was almost relieved. Now she could insist on Kate's staying indoors. She walked with Ben to the car.

"I don't think it's anything serious," she said, "but Kate is running a fever so I'll call the doctor. The Warrens told me the name of a good pediatrician near Poolesville."

He kissed her, and turned on the ignition. "Give me a ring after lunch. I'm sorry about today, honey. It would've done you both a lot of good to get away for a change."

She smiled, "I don't mind. Kate and I can watch TV and I'll make something special for lunch."

But Kate was irritable all day, and her fever rose that afternoon. She talked about Letty incessantly. She was obsessed with the idea that Letty might never come back. By the time the doctor arrived, Phyllis was exhausted. He reassured her, "I think she's getting German measles. I've had a dozen cases within the last week. Just

give her aspirin and keep her in bed for a few days."

He was right. By Tuesday Kate was almost well. Phyllis remembered a dinner party she'd promised they would attend Wednesday. She wanted to cancel it, but Ben said, "Kate's all right now. Why don't you ask Mrs. Warren to come over and watch her. You told me she'd offered to sit for us."

Phyllis agreed reluctantly. Just before they left, she told Mrs. Warren, "Please call us if anything comes up. I feel uneasy about leaving her."

The older woman propelled her toward the door. "Go on and enjoy yourselves. I brought up six children. Katie and me'll make out just fine."

It was almost eleven when they returned. Mrs. Warren was asleep, completely erect in the wing chair. Phyllis tiptoed over to her.

The woman's eyes flew open. She got up hastily. "Didn't even hear you come in," she said. "I'm so used to going to bed at sundown, I must've dozed off."

"I'm sorry we've kept you up so late." Phyllis glanced up the stairs. "How's Kate?"

"Not a peep out of her since I tucked her in."

After Ben drove off with Mrs. Warren, Phyllis went upstairs. Just as she reached the landing, she saw the light go out under Kate's door. Before she even entered the room, she was sure something was off-balance. "You're playing 'possum,' missy," she whispered in the dark. The child didn't answer. Phyllis turned on the bedside lamp.

Kate's eyes were enormous. Her mouth fixed in a tight unnatural smile. She lay rigid, the covers pulled up to her chin.

Phyllis sat down on the bed. "What's the matter, honey?" She touched Kate's forehead. It was cool.

"I'm all right." Kate flinched under her hand.

She folded back the sheet and blanket, and said lightly, "Well, you'll smother, all bundled up like that."

Kate fumbled at the collar of her pajamas, but Phyllis saw what she was trying to conceal—a string of red beads. She took Kate's hand away, and inspected the strand. It was coral, curiously strung in an even pattern of six large, then six small beads. "Where did you get this?"

The child avoided her eyes. "Letty gave it to me. She said it'd keep me from getting the pox."

"Keep you from . . ." Phyllis drew in her breath sharply. *But all the doors had been locked and there were screens on the windows.*

Kate took one of her braids and rolled the rubber band on its end back and forth between her thumb and forefinger. "Letty was afraid you might get mad at her. But all we did was play. I promised to sleep late tomorrow." She added as

Phyllis stared dully at her, "Look what Letty made for me. Isn't it neat?"

Phyllis took the paper doll. It was crudely drawn, but there were certain significant details. The hair wasn't penciled in exaggerated curls; it was shown parted in the middle and knotted on top. Even the features were strange. There had been no attempt, obviously no knowledge of how to indicate mascaraed eyelashes or a conventionally full, lipsticked mouth.

She turned it over. There was printing on the back. It appeared to be an advertisement of a sale, probably livestock. The paper was cheap rag that would yellow quickly, but it was now crisp and white, the type starkly black. Then she saw two words that formed part of the doll's shoes. *Healthy wench.* She felt nauseous as she realized that this wasn't a handbill for a cattle auction at all.

Phyllis could only ask, "Where did Letty get this paper? Was it something she found in an attic or . . ." She faltered, then repeated, "Where did she get this piece of paper?"

Kate took the doll from her and smoothed down the upward curl of the slippers. Quite easily she said, "In town. Last week. A man in the market was passing them out to everybody. Letty's father got her a whole bunch to draw on. She gave me some, too. Look."

But Phyllis knew that a sheaf of slave auction circulars and a nineteenth century paper doll and a coral talisman were not enough to convince Ben. No matter how much evidence were presented to him, he would never accept the fact that there could be no scientific explanation for Letty. Nor would anyone else. Except perhaps Mrs. Gastell.

The real significance of the episode, though, was that Letty had ventured into the house for the first time. Having once achieved this, she would become more and more sure of herself until . . .

From that night on, Phyllis resolved never again to mention the name Letty or refer to her in anyway—at least not to Kate. She thought that if she refused to accept Letty's existence, eventually Kate would, also. She tried to keep her daughter occupied as much as possible. But if she took a shower or tried to write a letter, Kate slipped down to the creek. Always, Phyllis would discover her alone, with a look of annoyance on her face that Letty and she had been interrupted.

"We'll just have to move, that's all," Phyllis told Ben finally. "I can't keep this up much longer."

He handed her a tall gin and tonic. "I still think you're making too much out of this whole thing.

You know what vivid imaginations kids have. This is probably just Kate's way of compensating for the lack of other children to play with. I don't doubt at all that Letty is real to her, but for you to accept her as some kind of ghost is . . ." Ben took her hand and rubbed it between his. "It's unhealthy, honey."

There was no sensation of warmth in her hand. She said tonelessly, "Yesterday I found . . . there's a grave in St. Steven's churchyard. It's hers . . . Letty's. She died of small pox in 1844. She was only eight years old."

Ben studied the slice of lemon drifting sluggishly around the bottom of his drink. She was too numb even to speculate on what he was thinking.

Indirectly, it was Mr. White, who provided a solution. Phyllis had invited him to dinner one night in late August. Afterwards they went out to the back porch, and he lit a panatella. The aroma of it blended with the smell of wild honeysuckle from the woods. He began a discussion on ancient rites of the Church. One that he mentioned pricked Phyllis into complete awareness. *Exorcism. The driving away of evil spirits.*

She leaned forward. "Mr. White, would it be possible for such a rite to be performed now . . . in the present day?"

Ben spoke up, "Phyllis, I don't think . . ."

Mr. White removed his cigar. "There's nothing the matter with a question like that at all. In fact, exorcism has always fascinated me. The last case I remember reading about occurred . . . let me see". . .

Phyllis interrupted, "But could it be practiced now? Could you . . . could any clergyman perform it?"

His eyes behind the silver-rimmed glasses grew very thoughtful. "A great deal of evidence must be presented to prove that such an act should be performed. It is a very serious step. There are certain dangers involved."

She said clearly, "But exorcism is possible."

"In very rare instances, yes."

It could have been the very stillness that made Phyllis certain that Letty had heard and understood.

After Ben had left the following morning, Kate lingered at the table, slowly eating the last crumbs of a blueberry muffin. With her eyes still on the plate, she said to her mother, "What's exorcism?"

Phyllis's instant reaction was, "How did you happen to ask that?"

The child lifted her face. She went on in the same carefully controlled tone of voice, "If you exorcise somebody, does it hurt?"

Her mother stooped and held her close. "Of course not, darling. It's just a ceremony, a very serious

one that has to do with driving away . . . something harmful. Who told you . . ."

Kate interrupted, looking directly into her eyes, "And they'd never come back? The person you make go away?"

Phyllis nodded. "We hope so."

Kate was silent a moment and then she said matter-of-factly, "But you don't have to worry about Letty anymore. She's already gone away."

Without further explanation, Kate reached for another muffin and went into the living room to watch the nine o'clock cartoon show. Dumbfounded, Phyllis arose from beside the chair, and crossed the room to the doorway. For a time she stood there, watching Kate's profile. But the child was absorbed in the program, nothing else.

A few days before school began, Mrs. Warren dropped by with a little girl. She called into the kitchen, "Anybody home? I brought somebody for you to meet." She put an arm around both Kate and the other child. "This here's Judy Davis. She's the daughter of my new dairyman. I been telling her all about you, and how you'll be taking the school bus together."

The two children sized each other up, and then Kate said, "Want me to show you some of my dolls?"

That evening as Ben was helping her with the dishes, Phyllis glanced through the window to the grape arbor where Kate and her new friend were engrossed in coloring books. She handed Ben a plate. "Kate's room is a shambles, but I couldn't care less. They've had such a marvelous time all afternoon."

Judy put down a crayon, and blew a wisp of blonde hair away from her eyes. "Wasn't this a good idea? I wish we'd thought of it sooner."

Kate agreed, "Mm-mm."

The other child deliberated over a picture. Then she said, "I think I'll color her breeches green, dark green."

Kate popped her bubble gum in disgust. "Listen, if I can remember to call you Judy, you'd just better learn to say *slacks*. You want to get me in trouble again?"

DESTRUCTION IS ALWAYS ARRANGED

by Gilbert Ralston

If you have something illegal to do, you had best do it yourself. The job will then be done to your horrendous satisfaction. You will also save time—though you may, conceivably, also find yourself serving it.

ARCHER entered the little shop, the ting of the door chime almost covered by the ticking of the clocks lining the shelves upon the walls. The room was small and softly dark, only the hands of the seated man at the high bench at the end of the room appeared to be illuminated by the light from a gooseneck lamp. He crossed the room, waiting patiently while the spatulate fingers of the workman maneuvered a tiny cog into the jeweled bed of a clockwork mechanism, after which the piece was placed precisely in the center of a square of cloth. Then one of the brightly illumined hands moved to the edge of the bench to touch a switch, flooding the room with light.

Shrugging the loupe out of his eye, the fat man stared at him impassively, his bulbous eyes wetly intent. "May I be of service?" he said, the words precise, the tone musical, touched faintly with accent.

"Daggett sent me," Archer said.

The fat man sat unmoving, not a muscle indicating that he had heard.

"He said to give you this." Archer reached into the pocket of his jacket, placing a torn piece of pasteboard on the bench.

The man reached into a drawer, then neatly fitted the torn half of Archer's card into a matching half, laying the two pieces on the bench without comment. After a moment's examination he heaved his blocky figure off the stool to cross to the door of the shop, which he closed and locked, turning again to face the younger man. "You may call me Jaeger," he said. "Come." He led the way through a door set in the back wall, to a richly furnished living room, sumptuous leather pieces harmonizing with a muted Oriental rug. "Be seated, Mr. Archer."

"You know my name?"

"Yes." Jaeger was dialing the telephone, turning his gaze once again to his visitor, holding the stare unblinkingly while he awaited a response. "Describe Archer," he said into the receiver, his eyes flicking over Archer's body as he received the information. "Hold out your right hand, Mr. Archer. I wish to see your ring."

"You're very careful," Archer said, holding out his hand.

"Very," Jaeger replied, cradling the phone. "Do you like music?" He indicated the neat rows of phonograph records near the console across the room.

"Yes."

"It is the only reality," Jaeger said, crossing to the wall. "Schubert?"

Archer nodded.

The swelling strains of the Second Symphony filled the room.

"I will turn it low. Then we can talk." Jaeger sat, folding himself into one of the leather chairs. "No unnecessary details, Mr. Archer, and no names. The address, the layout of the building, what you want done, and when. Nothing more." Unconsciously his right hand beat time to the music as Archer took some papers from his pocket.

"Here's a drawing of the interior of the house. A photo of the outside."

"Expertly done," Jaeger said, his lips pursing a little as he studied the blueprint.

"I am an architect."

Jaeger fixed him with a steady gaze. "I know," he said.

"The address of the house is on that envelope. Here are the keys."

"Neighbors?"

"None nearby. The house rests on a cliff overlooking the ocean on a seven-acre plot."

"It is tenanted?"

"Not at present."

"Why don't you sell it?"

"My father left it to me when he died a year ago. The restrictions of the will do not permit a sale."

"But you may collect insurance?"

"Yes."

"A stone house. Slate roof. Awkward. You wish a total loss?"

"Yes. A total loss."

"Do you have gas in the house?"

Archer nodded.

"Show me where the gas line is."

Archer pointed to a closet leading off the living room. "It comes in here at the back of this closet, branches off to the kitchen at the back, another branch of the pipe through the wall to the fireplace in the living room."

"There is a cellar?" Jaeger asked.

"No. The house is on a concrete slab."

"The interior walls?"

"Brick or stone, for the most part."

Jaeger looked up at him. "It's not an easy problem. We shall have to blow it up."

"Yes," Archer said.

"To blow it up is easy. To simulate an undetectable gas explosion is an art."

"That's why I am here."

"My service is expensive, Mr. Archer."

"How expensive?"

"Five thousand dollars . . . in advance."

"Twenty-five hundred now and twenty-five hundred more when the job is done."

Jaeger made a little deprecating gesture with his hands. "All. Now," he said. "In cash."

"How will you do it?" Archer asked.

"First the money." Jaeger crossed to the phonograph. "Delius?" he asked politely.

Archer reached for the envelope in his jacket pocket, opened it, and tossed it on the coffee table beside the chair.

"Listen to this," Jaeger said. "It soars to the skies." He counted the money methodically, placing the bills in little piles in front of him, a thousand dollars to a pile. "This is music, too," he said.

"Now tell me how you will do it."

"It is necessary that I tell you. I shall need your help."

"My help?"

"You must prepare the house according to my instructions. Also, there are some supplies that I will need. You will buy them, thus making yourself accessory before the fact." The thick lips twisted into a smile. "*My* insurance policy."

"I didn't agree to that."

"Your money is on the table. Take it and go."

Archer hesitated. "What would you want me to do?"

"You will close the house up tightly, leaving the furniture and personal effects intact."

"What else?"

"You will discreetly purchase a case of dynamite and an ordinary

automobile storage battery, leaving them on the closet floor."

"Dynamite?"

"You are an architect. You will know where to buy it or where to have it bought."

Archer studied the bland face before him. "I'll do it, Jaeger."

"I'll be there Thursday night at eleven-thirty."

"Does it take long?"

"Only long enough to attach a small device to the gas pipes in the closet."

"When will it happen?"

"At twelve o'clock the following day. Exactly."

"Do you wish to inspect the house?"

"That will not be necessary. I have your excellent plans. Every moment I am there is dangerous for me—and you. I enter—devote ten minutes to the work—then go."

"What should I do?"

"Stay in town. Conduct yourself normally. After you have prepared the house."

"Will you need tools?"

"Nothing. A roll of tape. I'll bring it."

Archer rose to leave. "It is all arranged, then?"

"All arranged, Mr. Archer."

The swirling strains of Debussy sang around him as he left the shop.

Two days later, at exactly eleven-thirty, Jaeger puffed his way up the graveled drive to the darkened house, carefully placing his feet on the hardened edge of the roadway, stopping now and then to obliterate the occasional footprint left in a softer spot. Slowly and patiently he made his way, the sound of the surf on the strand beneath the cliff covering the crunch of his approach.

The house, low and massive, was held in a hand of protecting rock at the top of the cliff, only the seaward side exposed to the pressure of the wind. Jaeger stepped onto the concrete lintel of the doorway, stopping to stab the light of his flashlight over the shuttered windows, grunting his approval when he found them carefully closed. Fumbling in his pocket with his gloved hand, he found the key and opened the door, pausing for a moment, after closing the door behind him, to feel the silence of the interior. Quickly he oriented himself, the beam of his light moving across the landward wall of the living room with the great stone fireplace set in its center, the bookshelves, a few pieces of heavy furniture, the beams of the massive roof leading to the seaward side of the room, whose picture windows were shuttered. There were no other windows in the room, those on the seaward side, at their highest point, were furnished with transoms for ventilation. The door to the closet in the farther wall was opened, rows of liquor bottles just visible in its dark maw.

Swiftly he crossed to it, his light

exposing an opened cardboard box on the floor of the closet. Sticks of dynamite were in the box and a storage battery close beside it. From his pocket he took the timing mechanism, a coil of wire, two blasting caps. Removing his gloves, he took a penknife from another pocket and cut into one of the sticks of dynamite, placing the caps delicately, taping the armed stick of explosive to a bundle of the others, fastening the whole to a gas pipe on the floor.

With infinite care he wired the assembly, leaving one pole of the timer unattached while he rechecked the circuit. He glanced at his watch again, set the timer, then dropped to his knees before the door to make the last connection. Satisfied, he then turned to the door with his handkerchief, wiping the inside edge free of possible fingerprints, closing it carefully and rubbing the outer surface clean, the closing of the latch making a soft click in the silent room.

His hands gloved again, he crossed to the foyer, a sigh of regret escaping him as his light flashed across a large collection of records, on shelves beside a closet. He turned to twist the knob of the front door, surprised to find that it continued to revolve in his hand. Annoyed, he fished in his pocket for the key, trying to insert it in the keyhole above the knob, cursing softly when it refused to enter. He tried the door again, giving it a closer scrutiny, damning for all time the makers of the lock, leaning his weight against the knob, his final wrench pulling it off in his hand. The spot was bare where the knob had left it, nothing behind it except the steel sheathing of the door, two small holes showing where the knob had been attached. He used the screwdriver blade of his knife to unscrew the lock plate. That too was false, the door behind it innocent of space for a key to enter, only the outside keyhole functional.

For a moment he stood there, the pieces of the lock held in his hands, then he tossed them aside and crossed the floor to the kitchen door, only to find it locked solid in its frame. Slowly he flipped the light around, bringing it to rest on the closet door. He walked to it, holding his hand in the air for a moment before he touched the knob, knowing that it too would turn without resistance.

Archer, he thought, angrily, bitterly. Archer . . .

He returned to the foyer, to the wall switch and flooded the room with light, planted his big bulk in the chair near the window to collect his thoughts, unhurried in his analysis of the problem. Jaeger was a professional, adjustable to change, able to think without emotion. For a moment he put aside the "Why?" of the effort to trap him, beginning a systematic search of the room. The fire irons had been removed from their hooks beside the mantelpiece, the grate and logs removed

as well, the marks of the grate legs still visible on the fireplace floor. He tested the wall around the fireplace, turning his attention elsewhere when he realized that it was solid stone, the rough rocks composing it seated solidly in cement. The wall nearest the door was equally solid, the bookcases set into the cement and stone with wooden braces bolted to the walls. He made a mental note of the bolts, realizing that almost every sizable piece of metal had been removed from the room.

A stone box, he thought. Steel doors. The floor placed over a concrete slab, only the plastered ceiling vulnerable, perhaps the shuttered windows. He tried the crank which opened the shutters to the sea, another which controlled the high transoms. Jerking the crank handles out of their sockets, he examined them, to find them neatly cut, the end which engaged the turning mechanisms carefully removed. The window glass was shatterproof, embedded in the metal sills, a heavy grille evident between the glass and the shutters, bolted anchors holding the grille to the stone casements.

Turning again, he ticked off the list of furniture in the room: the massive desk, two leather easy chairs, a solid sideboard against the wall, three straight chairs, a sofa, an upright piano in the corner, the drapes, a small coffee table with a marble top, various pieces of ceramic bric-a-brac. There were no lamps. His eyes moved to the plastered ceiling, examining it inch by inch, giving a grunt of satisfaction when he saw that it could be reached from the floor at its lowest point, which was along the fireplace wall.

There was little in the room to use for tools, except for the shortened shutter handles, or perhaps the ceramic pieces whose broken shards might be used to pry or scrape. He glanced at his watch again. Ten and a half hours left. First, the door to the closet—one hour. If that effort failed, thirty minutes each for the others. Two and a half hours total. There would be eight hours left. One hour spent against each of the other three walls, five hours remaining for the ceiling.

The closet door frame was fitted with a metal flange designed to cover the cracks of the four edges of the door, the hinges of the door were internal, the hinge pins impossible to reach from the living room. With the screwdriver blade of his knife, Jaeger tried turning back the edge of the metal rim near the lock area of the door. Patiently he worked around the flange, scraping off the grained paint deep enough to know that the tools he had were ineffectual, that the flange spring steel was too strong to turn, and that the door was of heavy metal.

He stood back a little from the

door, suddenly heaving his great bulk at it, striking it solidly with his shoulder, then testing it to see if it had given way. He checked the room again, searching for an article of furniture which could be used as a battering ram. The leather chairs were bulky, too heavy to handle practically, the straight chairs comparatively fragile. He carried one of them to the front of the house, carefully smashing it on the step leading to the foyer, placing the broken pieces of it aside, not knowing quite how to use them.

He spent some time examining the entrance door, turned to the kitchen and bedroom doors, to which he gave a lesser amount of time, finding them seated in the same sort of flange encountered at the closet. Jaeger was panting from his efforts, his coat had been laid on the sofa, sweat was running down the front of his shirt. For the first time, he was conscious of fatigue, thirst began to bother him. He glanced at his watch, deliberately forcing himself into a chair to rest.

After a time he rose to try the windows, his tongue wandering over his drying mouth and lips. Grunting with the effort, he picked up one of the heavy chairs, driving one of the legs into the window. He was shocked to find that it resisted his attack. He tried again, bringing the chair around in a clumsy arc, the rebound throwing his overbalanced body to the floor, consuming him in a fiery streak of pain which rushed up his arm and shoulder. He was furious with rage when he picked himself up off the floor, trying every portable object in the room against the glass, finally, ignoring the shock of pain which tore up his arm and wrist, he battered the window with a solid ceramic dish until a jagged hole made entrance of his arm possible. He felt the bars in front of it, shook them savagely, knowing that even if he managed to batter the rest of the window down, he could never get around the steel bars between him and the shutters.

Jaeger was bone-tired now, his arm throbbing painfully. He checked his watch again, sitting for a long time, one hand rubbing injured arm and wrist, the racing minutes ticking by.

Finally, he arose and shoved the desk against the landward wall, placing a chair against it to serve as a step. Taking a broken chair leg in his hand, he reached up to scratch the ceiling, a vast sigh of relief escaping from him when a sandy handful of plaster came down in his face. Dropping to the floor, he placed another chair on the desk, forcing his injured and aching arm to function. He was angry with himself for not having chosen the ceiling as his first point of attack. He stood first on the chair that was on the floor, then stepped to the desk to work from that posi-

tion, then stood on the seat of the chair that he had placed on the desk. The speed with which the plaster fell pleased him. He scraped methodically, first through the whitecoat, then through the material beneath it, exposing a portion of the metal lath. He tried the strength of the lath, punching the broken chair leg up against it, hitting it again and again with the end of the stick, and, finally, with his bloody fist.

"Cement," he said. "Cement between the joists." Wearily, he descended to the floor, his face working, tears of frustration pouring down his cheeks. Suddenly enraged, he rushed the closet door, smashing into it with such a thudding crash that he was bounced grotesquely to the floor. His head spinning, his mouth making little inarticulate cries of rage, he rushed to the window again and pounded at it in a frenzy, finally sinking in a futile heap upon the floor.

There were thirty minutes left. In the closet, two small metal arms crept closer and closer toward a contact.

Perhaps it will not work, Jaeger thought. But he knew it would.

Six miles and a number of city blocks away, Daggett's ferret face was wary in the dim light of the bar. Motioning Archer to a seat, he poured a shot of whiskey in a glass. "Here," he said.

Archer reached for the drink.

"Sit here. I'll be back."

Archer's eyes went to the clock while Daggett poured some drinks for a handful of noisy customers nearby.

"Couldn't sit it out alone?" Daggett whispered as he returned.

Archer shook his head.

"What time's the fireworks?" Daggett said.

"Twelve o'clock. In a quarter of an hour."

"Play it cool. There won't be any problems. Jaeger doesn't make mistakes."

Archer's voice was barely audible. "He made one."

"When? Where?"

"Last year. When he torched the clothing store."

"Who told you that?"

"How do you suppose I got your name, Daggett? You set 'em up. He does the work. The client collects the insurance."

Daggett leaned across the bar. "You're nervous, boy. You better watch your mouth."

"There was a fire chief killed in that store fire."

Daggett's hands clawed at the bar top. "You trying to shake me down?"

"No. Just thought you ought to know. The man who was killed was my father."

"Why, the fire chief's name was Stimson."

"I know. That's my name, too. Archer Stimson."

Daggett stared in horror. "And you mean to say you hired Jaeger to do your job?"

"A job's a job," Archer replied.

Daggett jerked around to look at the clock.

"That's it," Archer said. "Twelve o'clock."

"Well, I'll be damned," Daggett said, after a moment. "Now I've heard 'em all. Have one on the house."

"One on the house," Archer replied, as he threw the glass of whiskey straight in Daggett's face.

"You're crazy," Daggett said. "Crazy."

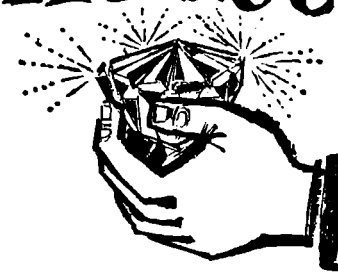
Archer stood solidly before him for a moment, then calmly turned to go.

"Wait a minute!" Daggett hissed. "Tomorrow you'll be up to your neck in insurance investigators. You talk, and you'll go up, too."

"There won't be an insurance investigation," Archer Stimson said. "I cancelled the insurance on my father's house a week ago." He turned, and walked into the sunlit street.

You all know that safecrackers are somewhat obvious and decidedly blatant. However, style—the elegant flourish, the masterly bon mot—is well thought of in some criminal circles.

CON MAN PAR eXcellence



by ALBERT UJCIC

THE WIND and sea shot craps with everything on deck not bolted down. The boat moved up and down and every way that motion goes. Me, I hung onto a lifeline while the deck slanted, sea-water washed to my knees, and the wind sand-blasted my face. Only it wasn't sand, but little pellets of salt water. A whole world full of them. Here I stood knee-deep in the lower left-hand corner of the Gulf of Mexico, my fare paid from Veracruz to Merida, with no guarantees.

Lightning and thunder, a sea full of stabbing stalagmites, and then suddenly the pitch of the deck changed. What junk hadn't washed overboard blew around me, iron like paper glancing off my feet and calves, breaking nothing I noticed.

Quite a few hours later I pried my fingers from around the lifeline. We'd escaped the witches. Their big dark skirts billowed over on the horizon. Putty water rolled under the boat.

I crossed the deck, closed the cabin door against still howling wind. Nobody was there but me, by myself. So I got out of the life jacket, out of my slicker and coat and shirt and pants. In my shorts and money-belt, I shivered. Before I got dry clothes though I dug a finger into the belt just to make sure I had the big stone. I had it all right. I took it out. A million of me stared back from the facets. How it shone. It occurred to me that I could've used the diamond as a reflector if I'd been washed into the gulf. Occurrences like this come to me all the time. I skip over the improbability of their working. Improbabilities I ignore.

Now I might as well tell you. You probably guessed it already from the flashy way I have of describing things. My imagination is keen. It's a gift.

Like this stone was a gift. Practically. A gift from the gods. Because there I sat in the lounge of *Del Prado* in Mexico City, minding my own business, when these ladies at the bar started laughing. Laugh and laugh. Until all of them had out their handkerchiefs, wiping their eyes dry of joke-water. On the floor by my foot I saw the stone. Something connected with my hair-trigger imagination went to work. I covered the stone with my foot.

Stand up, bring over the gem, and ask which woman dropped it was what the ordinary right-thinking man would do. But barging into the conversation was wrong. Impolite. Anyway, I already figured the stone belonged to the middle woman. The one about thirty, with jewels, and smoky blonde hair. She outranked the dumpier women in style and quality of clothes. They had to be casual acquaintances. So what I didn't want was just loud thanks.

Now I have to tell you how I live. I live by being useful to people. Without fawning. I accent my fine features and manly build with the best tailoring. Ladies are good to me. They buy me things I don't ask for. The presents come from a deep desire to share my company. No gentleman could deny them.

I win the respect of men too. Maybe it's the wide range of topics I know first-hand. Maybe they see in me the boldness they once had.

My uncle says if I weren't so restless I'd be a millionaire by now. He's a millionaire. It isn't a criticism. More of him later.

So what happens is I promote. I illuminate my backer. I enrich him. Then I move on to something new. Change is a condition of my nature. The millionaire for all his strokes of brilliance gets rich by being conservative. That's what I think. How I think.

The reason I've told you what I think, and how, is so you can understand two things. (1) I didn't steal the stone. (2) I intended to return it to its rightful owner.

So I sat in *Del Prado* until the three women left. I picked up the stone, went to my apartment. The idea was that I'd check the lost-and-found columns. I could see myself declining the reward, a reward that might not even have gotten mentioned if I'd returned the diamond on the spot. In the privacy of the lady's suite I could see myself allowing her to dwell on my attributes. We'd think of *something*.

No ad appeared.

So the stone was mine by default. Before I had time to worry about it I was on this boat headed for Merida, Yucatan. A friend offered to back me in a tourist hotel catering to Americans on their way to the Mayan ruins around Chichen-Itza. I was to look into the purchase of *Hotel Narcissus* now that I hadn't drowned.

"Nice stone."

I clamped my hand over my diamond. I looked around. Hanging over the edge of the upper bunk was the face of one of my fellow passengers. Nothing but a boy, maybe sixteen. He grinned. Teeth came to points like a row of tobacco-stained gabled roofs. "Quite nice," I said putting the stone back in the money-belt, sitting on my own bunk, and taking off wet shoes and socks.

"Don't worry," he said, "your secret's safe with me."

I said, "You seem to be trying to stimulate a conspiracy."

He just grinned.

I reached for my clothes, started dressing. The stone was on *me* and my conscience was clear. I even felt good-natured. Maybe it had something to do with being alive after the storm.

"Taking it to Merida for sale?" he said.

"I'm going to Merida on business. *Other* business."

"You're in business?"

He was harmless. I ignored his sarcasm and told him my hotel plans, changing only names and locations. He didn't believe me. Nobody believes the truth. With his dark, pitted face and big-boned meatless nose, he suggested deserts and tents. Cunning. Which is not to say he was anything like me; I saw that at once. His motives were practical. Mine are charged with an intuitive search for grandness everywhere.

He swung up on his bunk, then sprang to the floor. "You want to sell that stone, don't you?"

"It's a keepsake."

"You can talk to me. Call me Abel."

"It's a keepsake, Abel."

"I don't ask where you got it. I ask if you want to sell it. I think we can get a quarter of what it's worth. That's good, considering."

"We?" I admired that. "If I meant

to sell it, I'd've gone to a dealer in Mexico City."

"You're from the capital?"

I admitted I lived there.

"Then why *didn't* you sell it there?" He cocked his head. "Because the police have its description."

"You're wrong," I said.

"I don't care how you got it. The point is you've got it and it doesn't belong to you."

"Oh . . .?"

"I could tell the way you looked at it, and handled it. It's the way I look at a thing that doesn't belong to me. My eyes feast." He gave me the rip-saw grin. "Don't admit a thing. Just listen. Merida is my home. I know the place. People. I get around. Let me take you to him." One of the other passengers in the four-bunk cabin came in, a student who'd spent part of the morning telling me about climbing *Mount Popocatepetl.* He'd shown me his membership card in the Alpine Club of Mexico City College. Because he majored in anthropology, he thought it only right to see the Chichen-Itza ruins before going back to the States and into his father's grain-elevator business. Climbing into his bunk now, he just moaned. His tongue lay like dead liver over his lower teeth. He turned his face to the bulkhead.

"Outside," I said to Abel. We left the seasick student after I got a coat. Wind blew across the deck. Lime seas nipped at the railings.

"The man I know," Abel said, "used to work in customs. During the war many Europeans tried to slip gems into Mexico. This man made a fortune. He knows how to dispose of such things."

What Abel *didn't* say impressed me. "The man has influence?"

"Everywhere!"

I looked for men like that in every town. From what Abel told me so far I could find him for myself. But I try not to spread bad feeling. I spread *good* feeling. "Suppose I said yes."

Abel said, "We split."

I looked out to sea.

"You can't sell the stone in Mexico without me. And you can't smuggle it out. I don't think you'd dare."

I liked the boy even though he had no aptitude for what he was doing. "What do you think the stone is worth?"

"Let me see it again."

Up in the wheelhouse, the captain was looking the other way. I fished out the stone, stamped it into the palm of Abel's hand. He held the gem to the light as if he understood what he was doing. "You might get eight hundred dollars. That's four hundred dollars each."

He was guessing. I don't know gems so I guessed too. "It's worth three thousand."

"In a window."

I took back the stone. "I'll give you a hundred *pesos* for the man's name."

Abel just grinned. "Not *pesos*. Dollars. I get half of whatever you get."

"You *know* the man?"

"I guarantee he has influence," Abel said. "I've dealt with him. In a small way."

I saw Abel's flaw. His aims were trivial. Still, I liked his curiosity. His problem was to keep out of jail. I said, "The man's name."

"Half."

"His name."

"Half?"

Money isn't everything. "Half," I said.

"Sandalio Fuentes. I'll tell you how to get to his house."

When we landed in Merida, I accepted Abel's invitation to stay at the home of his parents. The house was surrounded by mildewed walls. The boy's parents greeted me like their son's guardian. They owned a store. The income, I figured, didn't justify Abel's shady inclinations.

The father did the talking while the mother stroked her beard and stared into ceiling corners. He recited local business conditions, suggested bargaining attitudes when I went to see about buying the hotel. Casually I asked if he knew a Sandalio Fuentes. "Everyone in Merida knows Sandalio Fuentes," he told me. "A man with connections!"

After everyone else went to bed, Abel's father and I had chocolate. He told me how worried he was about his son. People confide in me constantly and completely.

Then he showed me to my room. We said good night. At the door he turned. "The room has just been sprayed," he said. "So don't worry about tarantulas."

I said good night again. I dreamed nothing.

After breakfast Abel took me aside. He volunteered to lead me personally to Sandalio Fuentes. Quietly but firmly I said no. He said, "How do I know you won't cheat me?"

I told him he had no way of knowing, that at his age hot blood stood in the way of clear judgment. "I'm twice your age," I said. "Take my word."

The residential district Abel directed me to exploded with tropical flowers. I didn't appreciate them. Abel was headed for trouble. Adventure is the exclusive business of adventurers. It's an art. It takes brains and discipline. All Abel had was the flourish. The itch to try. He needed scratching.

Sandalio Fuentes met me in a white shirt and slacks. In his study hung a diploma from *Georgia Tech*. Next to it was a photograph of himself with an arm around Jack Dempsey. He started to talk about the good times he'd had in New York during prohibition, shifted into an account of his chairmanship of the Yucatecan delegation to the last Mexican presidential convention, unfolded newspapers in which his name and picture appeared.

Facts gushed like a river. I noticed though that none of the facts cost him anything. He knew how to keep his mouth shut. I'd come to the right man. "Now," he said with confidence, "you want something from me."

"Possibly."

He made me a drink. He said that a liver condition kept him from drinking with me. He told me about his operation.

When he gave me a chance, I told him how the diamond came into my possession. I wasn't dealing with a boy now.

"What's this to me?" he said.

"I thought you might like to look at the stone."

Sandalio Fuentes bit off the end of a cigar, mentioning that he had them imported specially from Cuba. "Who sent you?"

"A boy named Abel."

He went through a filing system in his head. "I don't know him."

"I thought not," I said. "Still, he sent me. Would you like to look at the stone?"

"Look?"

"Buy."

Sandalio Fuentes lit his cigar. "You have it?"

As I laid the big diamond on the green desk blotter his eyes swelled. Fine hairlines webbed his brows. He blew smoke away. Without taking his eyes from the stone he reached into the drawer of his desk, took out a magnifying glass shaped like a chess rook. The kind jewelers use. He studied the stone a long time. Then he turned to me. "This is glass. Well-cut glass. It's worthless!"

"Make an offer."

He laughed in my face.

I left with the stone in my pocket. What I supposed was the opening shot of the negotiations proved to be his last word. The sparkling thing was worthless. Worse than that, I'd jeopardized an important connection in Merida.

Abel came down the path from his house to meet me. His eyes slitted with worry. "You came back!"

"Did you doubt me?"

"How much did you get?"

"He hasn't paid anything."

Abel threw bony arms at the sky. "How much did he offer?"

I said, "Eight hundred."

"Exactly what I predicted!" He did a dance in the dust. "That's four hundred for each of us."

"No."

"No? You're backing out?"

"Listen." I described Sandalio Fuentes' passion for the diamond, a passion I supposed would've been there had the thing been real. "He's a good man to know," I acknowledged. "I'll let him have it for a thousand dollars."

"But he offered eight hundred!"

"Don't underestimate me."

"You should've taken the eight hundred! We'll never get a thousand! We won't get a *peso* now!"

The boy's panic didn't surprise me. It surprised *him* I'm sure.

Showed him how ill-equipped he was for this kind of job. He needed the scare. I left him.

I walked toward the downtown district of Merida. I composed the telegram I'd send my uncle. I have an uncle. Everyone has *someone.* My uncle loves me with the love of one outcast for another; my father speaks to neither of us. In the telegraph office I wrote out the message: *Everything as splendid as usual. Need five hundred dollars. Thanks.* I'd repay, as I always do loans from my uncle, at the next good turn of my luck.

I sent the telegram, then walked to the *Hotel Narcissus.* Before introducing myself to the owner, I decided to observe the hotel's business so I went into the bar. I ordered the drink Sandalio Fuentes mixed me. All wasn't lost with him. He had style. He could *appreciate* style. A shrewd man. An artist.

All at once I recognized someone. I checked her clothes and the spray of jewelry on her well-formed wrist. I couldn't mistake the smoky blonde hair.

The stone *had* to be hers.

Ice melted in my drink before she decided to reach into her purse for cigarettes. Then I constructed in my imagination the fall of the stone from her purse, I even recreated, for my own amusement since she looked the other way, an expression of surprise and decision I might've shown on discovering the stone. I marched over to where she sat. I pretended to pick up something. "This is yours?" I said.

Her large gray eyes matched the smoky blonde hair. "What?" She took the stone, turned it over and over. "Why! That's astonishing! Astonishing!"

"I think it fell from your purse."

"But, you see it's been missing. I don't know how I could've overlooked it. I've searched and searched. Thank you. But this is *astonishing!*"

I observed her cultivated features, the evaporation of boredom from her milky brow. Now I glanced at the stone in her hand. "You're wise not to carry the original. That's a convincing copy."

A light blush ignited her face. "Then you know precious stones."

"A trifle."

The play in her eyes meant growing involvement. Her blush became something else, a glow of anticipation. I knew it would do me no harm. She said, "How charming."

Where there is an imitation, there has to be an original. We compared the two in her suite.

The original stone now winks from my tie-pin. She insisted.

I told her the truth when I thought her ready for it. That is to say, I presented the facts about the stone as an insert into the larger truth about myself. My candor, as it always does, especially with women, delighted her. She had the

artistry to comprehend. As I made certain she had beforehand.

I outlined Abel's misguided greed and my attempt to educate him. She saw the wisdom of giving Abel a "split"; I mean, my claiming to have sold the stone to Sandalio Fuentes and making Abel a party to the pretended sale. Her laughter jingled like bells when I described Abel's pitiful anxiety during the interval he feared I'd ruined the sale, an anxiety which proved to him finally he lacked the talent for this subtle work.

You ask why I bothered with Abel. True, I made no visible profit. Precisely here is where I differ from the millionaire and approximate the aristocrat. I did it because it pleased me to do it. My spirit and style of life require flamboyance. To me style is everything.

The lesson probably saved Abel from jail, for he took the cash and entered his father's business. From behind a counter he still tells one and all of my adroitness.

I paid him with the five hundred my uncle sent me. She wished to contribute. I refused to accept her money, rich as she is. Later she persuaded me to allow her to repay my uncle, in fact, insisted on it.

She is *very* rich, in fact. A widow. Her husband was killed by a boulder spewed from one of their oil wells. A young woman in search of adventure. But prudent too. She'd had sense enough to carry an imitation of the valuable stone.

In Merida these days I sometimes see the anthropology student who shared my cabin on the boat that brought me here. He never did go back to his father's grain elevators. And I view those days with a tender longing.

At the Hotel Narcissus, Sandalio Fuentes and I often sit together in the Jack Dempsey Dining Room. We discuss politics and other artful games while she, her lovely brow under the smoky blonde hair crimped in concentration, keeps the ledgers.

She also handles the cash. But I don't need cash if I decide to embark on new adventure. All my nature needs is the urge. But this widow, she has *style*. I did not expect her to domesticate me. I suppose no husband does. This question has occurred to me: Did I truly get the valuable stone, or did she get me?


A
REAL, LIVE
MURDERER

When we glance over our shoulders reminiscently, we see the golden glow of the good old days. Then, murderers were decidedly quaint. As for ghouls, why we have nothing today to match those of yesteryear.

I WAS waiting on the back porch, a trifle mistrustful of the dark. It was overly quiet and the trees seemed to be watching me dourly as if they knew I was going to do something I shouldn't. Even the wind had stopped. I could hear Pa snoring through the upstairs window in slow, breaking rhythms.

It felt as though I'd been standing there for hours, but it wasn't more than fifteen minutes. I'd gotten out of bed at ten of twelve and the midnight bells had come tolling over the meadows about five minutes after I'd come down. I was almost hoping that Pete wouldn't show up. But I knew he would. He was always out late at night anyway. He was the only one allowed out so late; or maybe he wasn't allowed; but either way, he was always around, looking for some mischief.

Pete had seen the murderer last night and had told me about it this afternoon while I was watering Pa's horse at the trough in front of the Dooley House. He'd promised to take me tonight, if I could get out. It had to be very late, he said, because we had to be sure the murderer didn't see us because he was going to be hanged shortly and everybody knows it's bad luck to be looked at by somebody who is going to be hanged. We couldn't go to look at him during the day because he'd be sure to see us. So we had to be sure he was asleep. I really wanted to see him too. I'd never seen a murderer before and I wasn't going to be done out of it now no matter what.

I heard him coming then. He was coming through the elms across the road. I could hear him in there. I went down the porch steps as light as I could and went across the back yard and climbed over the picket fence. I met him in the middle of the road. A full white moon had come over the trees and you could see almost like it was morning.

"I made it," I said.

"That's good," Pete said. He had his thumbs hooked inside his suspenders. He was wearing the Union Army forage cap that Clay Taylor had recently brought back from Virginia for him. Pete was the

A NOVELETTE BY DONALD HONIG

only one in Capstone who owned a hat like that and he wouldn't trade it for anything. He said it was as near as he could come to fighting Rebs; the War was in its second year then.

We went down to the crossroads and then along Grant Avenue's moonlit emptiness.

"You sure he won't see us?" I asked.

"Nothing to be worried about," Pete said. We walked between the ruts that the wagons made, on the shaggy grass that grew there.

"How many times have you seen him?"

"Twice," Pete said. "The last two nights."

"What does he look like?"

"You'll see. You'll see him good tonight. The moon is just right."

The jail stood off by itself, a long, low, oblong building. Down further were the Dooley House and Gibson's tavern and the stores, but they were quiet now, very quiet.

We lightfooted around behind the jail. High up in the long, whitewashed wall were the little cell-windows. Pete had moved the rain barrel under one of them and that was where the murderer was. Pete climbed up onto the barrel first and took hold of the bars and looked in, bending his face in close.

"Is he there?" I whispered, clasping my hands.

"Shhh," he said.

"Let me up," I said.

He moved aside on the barrel and I climbed on. I hooked my fingers into his belt and pulled myself up and took hold of the bars and held my breath and looked down into the cell.

He was lying on the cot, the murderer was, on his back, sleeping. The moon fell full and bright through the bars and showed him good. I recognized him now as a man I'd seen about town from time to time, Jimmy Grover. Mostly I'd seen him drunk. He was not a very large man but was sort of round. He had a short beard which lent a peculiar sadness to his reposing face. His hands were clasped over his chest and he looked just like any other man who is asleep.

"That's him," Pete whispered.

"He don't look so special," I said.

Then his eyes opened. They opened slow and mysterious and were looking right up at our faces in the bars. And he looked worse with his eyes open—he looked like he was dead. The way they had just opened like that, it was uncanny; they had opened and found us there, or more properly caught us, and were holding us, and there was nothing we could do about it. We couldn't move. We couldn't do anything but stare back, our fingers caught around the bars.

At first his eyes showed nothing, as if our faces peeping there were a continuation of his dream. Then they became startled and I could detect a tremor go through his body. But he didn't move yet. I think if

he would have moved—if he would have so much as parted his hands—we would have gone over backwards off the barrel.

He spoke first.

"What do you want?" he said. He was a little afraid and perhaps a trifle indignant.

Neither of us spoke, could answer. He asked it again, his voice not so harsh this time.

"We don't want anything," Pete said.

"You must want something," the murderer said.

"Honest we don't," Pete said.

The murderer moved now, slowly, almost deliberately slowly so as not to alarm us. First his hands slid away and then he sat up on the cot, watching us.

"You've come to look at me, haven't you?" he said. "You must think I'm a strange specimen."

"Yes sir," Pete said, not precisely agreeing, but trying to be agreeable.

"If you've come to see a murderer, then you're wasting your time," the murderer said, sitting there in the moonlight and looking up at us as if *we* were the peculiar ones.

"You mean to say you're not a murderer?" I asked.

"I never killed anybody," he said.

"Then why are you here?" Pete asked.

"The jails are full of innocent men."

"But everybody says you're a murderer," Pete said stubbornly, as though trying to convince him.

Then he commenced to tell us his side of what had happened those few days ago when he'd got into his trouble.

"We'd been drinking some, Eddie Larsen and I," he said. "We'd got ourselves a jug from Gibson's and gone over towards the marsh in good spirits. On the way we passed the Misses Tabers and Doctor Howell, and Eddie, being in his state, sorta sassed them and I had to cuff him on the head to make him stop and he yelled at me for it and we went off arguing into the woods. That's what the Misses Tabers and the doctor told at the trial and they were right as far as they told; what was wrong was the conclusions that were made of it."

"You couldn't blame people for thinkin' it," Pete said.

"Maybe not. But it ain't right to hang a man for what people happen to conclude," Jimmy said hotly. Then he subsided a bit. "I'll tell you the rest, if you want to hear."

"We want to hear," I said.

"We finished the jug, Eddie and I, and he wanted some more. He said that there was probably some in Mattick's shed and that he'd go over there and steal a jug. I was in good spirits, but still in control of myself. No, I says, you can't go onto a man's property and steal from him, especially a man such as Mattick. But Eddie, he was of a mind and when he got like that there was no standing him off. The last I saw

of him he was reeling down the road to Mattick's place. The next thing I know is two days later I'm arrested for the murder, for which they have not even found a corpse . . ."

"But lots of blood marks on the rocks near the road," Pete said.

"It's a far cry from real evidence," Jimmy said.

"They say you killed him and buried him somewheres," Pete said.

"Hang it, boy, I know what they say. And I say they're liars."

"They say you was awful drunk and did it without knowing and that now you don't remember," Pete said.

"That's what they say, and that ain't evidence," Jimmy said. He rose now and stood there in all dignity, the moon halfway up him, his legs standing in shadow. "You're looking at an innocent man, boys," he said.

"Then who is the murderer?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said.

"But you're stuck for it," Pete said.

"Unless a miracle happens," Jimmy said.

"Well you hang on," said Pete, "and maybe the miracle will come true."

We got down off the barrel then and went away. We walked up along the middle of the empty road.

"I don't know," Pete said, "but he looks innocent to me."

"Innocent or not, they're going to hang him sure. Pa said it yesterday."

"I don't like it," Pete said, starting to brood on it.

"A man can look innocent and not be."

"Or might well be too. I'll tell you, Gascius, once they hang a man it don't make no difference to him if they find later he was innocent after all. They can name a park or a horserace after him, but he's finished all the same, poor chap."

"But if he's innocent then where is Eddie Larsen? It's been more than a week now."

"Could be anywhere. Maybe waiting for them to hang old Jimmy and then come out of the woods and say wasn't it a fine joke he done. Some fellows has got humors like that."

"So what can we do?" I asked.

"We give it our every thought," Pete said as he hooked his thumbs into his suspenders.

Pete would think of something, I knew. The prospect was both intriguing and intimidating because often he let ingenuity outgallop prudence. His ideas often sounded as if they had been propounded in a nightmare and then been chased for two miles over stones and then fallen down a precipice into a rapids and gone over a waterfall and been thrown back onto dry land still on hind legs and still running.

I suppose I felt sort of sorry for old Jimmy. Justice in Capstone in the 1860's was brief and positive.

Public opinion—which was the prejudices of the men who sat on Dooley's porch—generally decided if a man was guilty or not, and so the trial was generally a mere formality. If enough men said, "I reckon Jimmy Grover murdered Eddie Larsen," then that was the way it was to be no matter how hard Jimmy Grover's lawyer ranted.

So they had the gallows all fixed and waiting for Jimmy and it looked sure like he was going to dance on it.

The next day, just past noon, Pete popped up out of the bushes back of my yard, the Union Army cap askew on his head, his brown hair hanging out from under. That's all he did, never said a word, and then went back down into the bushes again. But that was enough. I went across the yard and into the bushes.

"Let's go," he said. I followed him across the road and into the elms where it was cool out of the sun. When he stopped I noticed he had in his hand three mighty peculiar things to be holding all at once: a hammer, a chisel, and a bugle.

"What's all that truck for?" I asked.

"We're going to spring old Jimmy," Pete said. I didn't bother to ask him how those things would fit in. The explanation wouldn't have made sense anyway, nor sounded feasible. So I just followed along, as I had learned to do with him, waiting for some powerful revelation.

When we came into sight of the jail, Pete stopped and pulled me behind the livery stable.

"Now listen here," he said handing me the bugle. "I know you can play this. I want you to go in there and give the sheriff a serenade."

"Play him a serenade?" I asked.

"Sure. Play him all those fancy tunes you regaled the town with at the last picnic. Get in there and make lots of noise."

"Suppose he won't let me?"

"Tell him you've got to rehearse in a place that's got walls around, 'cause you got to play at the church dance on Saturday. The sheriff is a simple-hearted fellow with compassion for his brother man. He'll let you play for as long as he can stand it By that time I'll have broke the bars and hauled Jimmy out of there. Now get on."

I went around to the jail and stepped up onto the boardwalk. The cider barrels under the shed, where the men usually sat, were empty; the men never liked to sit there when somebody was inside waiting to be hanged. I opened the door and saw Sheriff Rice just coming out from the passageway where the cells were.

"Hello, Gascius," he said.

"Can I practice my bugle here, Sheriff?" I asked. "I'm up to play at the social on Saturday night and

I need a place to practice. They ran me out of my house."

"Why don't you go into the woods?"

"You can't judge it too good out of doors. The sound waves go off and don't come back."

"Well," the sheriff said thoughtfully, a trifle dubious, "it probably constitutes undue cruelty, but we ain't got but one prisoner at the moment and he's getting a hempen collar soon anyway—so I guess it's all right."

So I stood straight up and took in a good breath and brought the bugle up to my puckered mouth and began blasting out some military calls my Uncle Herm had taught me. It got too much for the sheriff to bear and he went out and sat down on a barrel while I filled the place with fine brassy noise. And it was a good thing too that he went out, because each time I paused to pull in some fresh air I could hear Pete hammering and chipping in the back like a woodpecker with an iron nose. I must of stood there for a half hour, until my head most cracked and I felt that my next deep breath would surely turn me inside out, and I had to stop. I cocked my ear and couldn't hear Pete anymore and so I went outside. Sheriff Rice was sitting clear across the street now, under a tree.

"You all finished, Gascius?" he called.

"Yes," I said. "And I thank you kindly, Sheriff. I sure thank you."

"That was mighty nice playing," he said coming across the road. He took a seat on the steps and I was glad for that. I didn't want him going inside just yet.

Then I went down the road, putting my footprints in the dust as nonchalant as a prize heifer, and then cut back into the alley behind the livery stable and ran as quick as I could to the back of the jail. There waiting for me was an unusual sight indeed. Pete had knocked the bars out all right, but he was having considerable trouble trying to get Jimmy to fit through the little window. He had him out to his waist and in fact you couldn't see any window at all and Jimmy looked as if he was bolted onto that wall without legs; his arms were going like they were demonstrating swimming. And Pete was jumping there, every so often grabbing an arm and giving it a tug but unable to do much good.

Then Pete saw me and whipped off his cap and whirled it round and round to put me into haste, and I came on the fly. He ran to meet me and grabbed me by the shoulders.

"We've got to get him through!" he said, all heated up.

I stuffed the bugle down into my pants and ran after him. We stopped under Jimmy and looked up at him and he looked back at us, hung up there like a fixture, bald head covered with sweat-beads, mouth open in the little beard but unable to

speak anything (though that round wordless orifice spoke louder than any words), and his body jerking and quivering which led me to suspect that his legs were doing considerable thrashing behind him.

"Now take hold," Pete said to me reaching up and taking an arm, "and take hold good. We're going to heave him out."

"Easy now, boys," Jimmy said.

"You leave out your breath and let it be that way," Pete told him.

Then we were pulling. At first it didn't seem as if he'd ever come out of there and then it seemed as if we were pulling him in two and I had a vision of the town hanging just his legs while the rest of him was being wheeled away by us, but then his eyes squeezed shut and his mouth too and his face grimaced and he was on the way. There was an awful scraping and scratching and ripping, but he was coming, inch by inch. The sides of the window gave off a little spurt of dust and then he popped right out, fast and unexpected—and Pete and I were both pulling suddenly a flying force and falling back and down as Jimmy fairly flew out of there and plummeted chest-down between us.

We lay there for a second, the three of us, tuckered out with exhaustion and surprise. But we'd done it. Jimmy groaned and tried to get up.

"What's the matter?" Pete asked as we got up and whipped the dust from us.

"It's my leg," Jimmy said. "I can't put weight on it."

He'd given it a good solid whack when he'd come down and now he couldn't walk. So Pete and I lifted him up erect and he put his arms around us and skipped along on one foot as we hurried him into the woods. We took him a little ways into a very secluded spot in the elm grove and sat him down in the bushes next to the brook.

"Here you are," Pete said. "At least you'll have some water if you want, till we can scare you up a horse."

"My leg feels like 'twas mule-kicked," Jimmy said, lying back, shutting his eyes. He looked a sight, what with the dust all over his vest and trousers and his trousers considerably ripped from his slide through the window.

"Anyway it's a far sight better than being hanged," Pete said, with that unimpeachable wisdom of his.

Jimmy opened his eyes and looked up at us, the sun and the leaves making speckles of shadow on his face, and his eyes filled with tears.

"I reckon I'm mighty obliged to you lads," he said.

"That's fine," Pete said. "Now you just lay quiet till we can rustle up some transportation for you. These bushes hide you pretty good, so you don't have to worry."

We left him there and hurried on back.

"Where do you reckon we can

get a horse?" I asked Pete as we skipped through the woods.

"I don't know just yet," Pete said. "From a careless man probably. Let's just keep our eyes open."

When we got back, we found the place in a general furor. Men were running about and a group on horseback was gathering in front of the Dooley House. The dust was flying thick as smoke.

"See here," Pete asked a young lad in overalls, "what's going on?"

"Old Jimmy's got away," the lad said breathlessly.

We heard somebody shout out, "We should've hanged him when we had him."

I hadn't ever seen such activity in Capstone. It seemed that everybody was there, all the storekeepers in their aprons and the men from the tavern that never came out in daylight and all the farmers and their sons. Most everybody who had a horse was mounted and so there wasn't an idle horse about at all. The sheriff and his deputies went by us and the sheriff looked at me and I shuddered but he kept right on going toward a wagon full of men with rifles, never suspecting anything at all I guess, and jumped up into the wagon as fierce as a bear. Just then Eddie Larsen's father ran up onto Dooley's porch and shouted out:

"Listen here, you men!" And he held up two fingers and said, "Two hundred dollars reward to the man that brings him in, dead or alive!"

I looked at Pete and his face lighted up as if he'd received a benediction. His face was a map to his every thought and scheme.

"You can't do it, Pete," I said.

But he had his hand inside my arm and was steering me off into the alley. "I didn't say I would," he said. "But isn't that a pile of money? Think of the suit of clothes and the derby hat and the buckboard a fellow could buy with that. And it looks like they'll catch old Jimmy anyway since he don't have a horse and we can't get him one. It'd be a pity to have one of those far-spittin' farmers carry off that money, don't you think?"

"No, I don't think," I said. He was moving along real quick into the woods now and I had to skip over fallen trees to stay with him. "You can't do it," I said.

"You listen here," he said. "We don't know for sure if he's innocent or not anyway. *He* says he is of course, but I don't suppose he'd have much trouble influencing himself of that. We're going against the whole town, ain't we? What's the chances of us being right and everybody else wrong? I ask you that."

"I'm against it," I said.

"Then the whole two hundred belongs to me."

"It's blood money."

"But he's most likely a murderer. The more I think on it the more I feel convinced."

The idea was hot in his head and there was no stopping him. I told

him I'd have no part of it and so he went on ahead, slipping through to the elm grove as quiet as smoke. I sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree and clasped my hands in my lap and tried not to believe anything that had ever happened. A little bit of trumped-up disbelief can go a long way in mitigating a nervous conscience, or so I thought.

Then I heard Pete whistling through the woods and I jumped up and went hurrying, sure he'd changed his mind. But he hadn't. When I came to the brook he was standing there and Jimmy was stretched out as peaceful as last night.

"I tapped him with the chisel," Pete said. "He never saw me either, so he can't tell."

"You might've killed him," I said.

"There's a difference in knocking a man out and killing him. Now you give me a hand with him if you want to have a hundred dollars and be a hero too."

So we gathered him up by the wrists and the ankles and started toting him through the woods.

"I don't like a bit of it," I said.

"You ain't so pure yourself," he said. "Standing there and playing that fool bugle makes you liable for jail yourself."

We carried him back to the yard behind the jail and laid him down.

"We'd best bring him around the front," Pete said.

"I'll tell you one thing," I said. "They're going to hang him as soon as they let eyes on him. It won't be so pretty either, if you've never seen a man hanged, and you're going to have to stand there and watch and know that you done it."

Well, that sobered him proper. He looked down at Jimmy and began nodding his head like a man who sees he's been standing in syrup.

"I reckon they would too," he murmured.

"They're riding mean right now."

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"What we intended on doing in the first place—help him get away. And the first thing is to get him away from here."

"I reckon you're right," he said, and that was more than a casual admission for Pete Mariah to make. It was like a man crossing party lines. "You're the first one ever to talk me out of something I'd fixed on," he said.

"And a good thing too," I said.

"Let me go around to the front and see what's going on."

While Pete did that, I dragged Jimmy into the edge of the woods and hid him in the brush. He was sleeping real good. Pete had given him quite a good tap it seemed.

A few minutes later Pete came hurrying back, shoving his cap around on his head. He jumped into the bushes and crouched down.

"We've had some luck," he said. "There's an empty wagon standing with a team right in front of Dooley's. Now here's what we do: I'll get up there and drive her off and

swing her around behind the stable. You carry Jimmy over there and we'll load him on and take him down to Shantytown. They just love to hide fugitives there."

So, with some effort, I dragged Jimmy into the tall grass behind the stable and hid him there. I became a little uneasy thinking about the consequences I might have to face if I happened to be caught in it. That was one thing about Pete Mariah: he never concerned himself with the idea of consequences. You have to be born inordinately fearless to be like that. But if I could tell lies like Pete could then I reckon I'd be the same as him. He could turn mighty artful when the moment called for it.

So I hid there with Jimmy, without a lie or an explanation to my name, my head just like a pocket that's been picked clean. I put my ear on Jimmy's chest to test him out and he was still there, thank the Lord, with a rasp in him like dry straw.

Then Pete came swinging into the alley with the wagon, sitting up on the seat holding the reins. He swung the rig in behind the stable and jumped down.

"Come on, let's heist him in," he said.

"Won't it be risky," I said, "riding along with him in there like that?"

"It won't either," said Pete. "We've had some more luck."

The luck was in the shape of a long pinewood box that looked to me like a coffin. In fact I thought for sure it was a coffin until Pete, using the hammer and chisel which had sure become a couple of all-purpose instruments—pried it open and we saw that it didn't hold anything but some rocks. We threw the rocks away in the bushes and then picked up Jimmy and got him into the wagon bed and then into the box. He fit in pretty neat too. Then Pete made a couple of holes in the side for air; after that he put the lid back on.

"There," he said. "Now we can ride off and not worry about more'n we have to."

We got up on the seats and Pete lifted the reins and made the team turn around and go back down the alley. We came out onto Grant Avenue and rode past the Dooley House—and that was a long moment because we didn't know for sure where the owner of the wagon was—and down the grade. Once we cleared the crest of the grade, we put on a little speed and went rattling and bumping down the dirt road towards Shantytown where all the disreputables lived.

We'd gone a little ways when we heard ourselves being hailed from behind. Turning around we saw seven or eight men on horseback coming down on us.

"No sense trying to outrun them," Pete said. So he reined in and we sat there in uneasy quiet while the hoofbeats clattered louder and then we were surrounded by the man.

Deputy Ned Casey was among them and I noticed Jack Mattick too and several other men I knew.

"This your rig?" Casey asked Mattick.

"That's it," Mattick said. "We left it in front of Dooley's while we went in for a sentimental drink. When we come out it was gone."

"We found it strayin' by itself," Pete said, just as nonchalant as a butterfly. "Just meanderin' along. Figured it belonged to somebody down near the creek."

"Well, it belongs to Mattick," Casey said. They all had a look at the box in the back and I figured this would be a fine time for Jimmy to wake up and start hollering. But he didn't. We jumped down and stood in the road. I looked at Pete, but he was offering nothing but profound innocence. He still had the hammer and chisel stuck in his belt, but nobody remarked on them.

Mattick dismounted and tied his horse behind the wagon and then climbed up into the seat and took the reins and shook them against the team.

"I reckon we'll be able to finish our business now," he said. He turned the wagon around and began moving slowly back up the grade, the men following. They were all very solemn and quiet.

We followed along after, watching the wagon bump along.

"We'll have to tag along till they set that box down somewheres," said Pete.

"Suppose he wakes up in there?". I said.

"I hope he'll have sense enough to keep still. He'd better, at any rate. If he starts in a-rattlin' around in there then there's nothing anybody'll be able to do for him."

I was going to ask why Jack Mattick had bothered to seal up a box of rocks and what he might be intending to do with it, but I didn't get a chance because what we saw next happening took the breath right out of me. Mattick had drawn the wagon off of Grant and down towards the Baker Avenue Cemetery. Pete and I both had the same realization at the same minute, but we were too scared to speak it. We just watched.

Mattick got down and unhooked the tailboard and with some of the others was sliding the box off the wagon. Further up on a knoll inside the gate, among the headstones, we saw standing the preacher and some other people.

I wanted to yell out, but Pete he just grabbed my arm and said to me without taking his eyes away from the men carrying the box on up to the knoll, "You run off and steal the first shovel you see. Then get back here as fast as your legs know how. Do it all on the fly, otherwise we've seen the last of old Jimmy."

So while Pete sat down on the rocks behind the low iron fence, I dashed off for the first house in sight, away on the other side of the

meadow. I whipped around into the yard and went into the shed there. I found a rake, hoe and shovel leaning against the wall and I took the shovel and went rushing away with it. A chap came down the back steps and said, "You there!" but he never had a chance; by the time he finished saying it, I wasn't there any longer. He chased me a little ways, but I knew I was carrying Jimmy Grover's life in my hand and there was nobody that could have flagged me down then.

When I got back to the cemetery, Pete was still sitting in the same place, cool as a winter's moon.

"They've planted him," he said, getting up, running his thumbs up and down inside his suspenders.

"What are we going to do?" I asked, lathered with sweat.

"The way I see it, we've got a little time."

"Poor Jimmy," I said.

"Never mind him," said Pete. "If we don't reach him in time you'll be the one to go through life with it on your conscience. So don't feel so sorry for him."

The preacher and the others watched as Mattick knocked in the headboard with a stone and then they came down from the knoll and through the gate. They got on their horses and Mattick drove the wagon away with the preacher sitting next to him. We waited a few minutes until they'd gone out of sight, then Pete jumped the fence and I went after him, shovel and all. We spurted up to the knoll where the fresh earth had just been patted down. The headboard looked like the back of a chair and it had inked on it: DINK O'DAY DECEASED JUNE 8, 1862. Dink O'Day was Mattick's handyman, a seedy nondescript who hung on around the farm and did some chores for his bed and board.

But we had no time to speculate. Pete grabbed the shovel and started stabbing with it and the dirt began to fly. The dirt hadn't been packed down too well and Pete was able to dig it out in big scoopfuls. When his arms got tired, I took the shovel from him and then he took it back when I got tired, and then he was hip high and still going like convulsions when he struck wood. We could hear Jimmy in there then, kicking and hollering, and the first thing Pete did was take the hammer and chisel and knock in an air hole on top where it might do some good. Then he pried open the lid and Jimmy sprung up like there'd been a chain attached from the lid to his belt. His hair, what little he had left of it, was fair stood on end and his eyes looked as if they'd never seen sky before. He gulped twice before he could say a thing, his throat working and his shoulders heaving like he was trying to swallow an egg.

"Take it easy," Pete said.

"What happened?" Jimmy said. "Where am I?"

"Somebody tucked you into a

coffin and you near suffocated, if not for us," Pete said.

Jimmy jumped up then and looked around at the headstones and the carven angels and I guess it was a mighty discomforting feeling for him. He started trembling as if his bones were coming loose and he took hold of Pete and said,

"G-get me out of here. P-please get me out of here."

We did that, of course, but it wasn't easy either. First we had to close up the coffin and fill in the grave again and make it look innocent. Then we had to get Jimmy out of there via the back way. Then Pete had the bright idea that with all the town looking for him, Jimmy wouldn't be very safe again in the woods (for didn't some mysterious stranger creep up behind him before and sock him on the head and, for some unknown reason, try to secretly bury him under another man's name?) and that the only safe place would be in my hayloft.

So we smuggled him up into there and put a horse blanket over him. Then we went back to the Dooley House. Most of the men were still out on the chase and Dooley in his white apron was sitting on the porch smoking a cheroot.

"They found him yet?" Pete asked as we came up there and leaned on the bannister.

"Nope," Dooley said, savoring his cheroot.

"Think they will?"

"He couldn't of got far."

"How'd he get out?"

"Sheriff says he must've been working on them bars for some time."

"Say," Pete said, rubbing his chin as if he had just thought of it, "I noticed they buried Dink O'Day today."

"Yep. He passed on a few days ago. Had a fit, Mattick said. They was in here taking a drink to his soul when the team strayed off, but they found it. Mattick said it was just like Dink to do that," Dooley said with a chuckle.

We strayed away then and Pete was in a cloud of thought; I could tell because he'd become so profoundly still. I gave him his head and didn't say anything. Sometimes, when he thought enough, it could come useful. We wandered along the road in that manner of quiet, him profound and me respectful. Every so often some men sped past on horseback pounding up the dust. The dust hung in the air, settling back like something very old. What with the men scouring the woods and back roads for Jimmy the town was most quiet, the sun hot and yellow on the houses. Just a few old men were sitting by watching things.

"First of all," Pete said, breaking his spell, "you've got to feel as I do, which means to have a low opinion of Jack Mattick."

"I've never thought much about him," I said.

"Well he's a nasty-tempered, foul-brained, whiskey-blooded son of a turtle. None of his friends are dainty I can tell you."

"Why do you suppose he was burying a box full of rocks?"

"We're going to inquire into that."

"How?"

"You meet me tonight at the crossroads and we'll see."

"Why tonight?"

"It's always better to do these things in the dark."

"What things?"

"Looking around."

"Say, you're not going to go fooling around up at Jack Mattick's are you?" I asked.

"You just meet me, Gascius," he said. "Ten o'clock, at the crossroads."

I wasn't so cheered by the prospect, you can be sure. But I was being devoured by curiosity about what had happened to Eddie Larsen and why Jack Mattick should want to have buried an empty box. I think that next to the ague, curiosity is the most devilish affliction a body can be stung with; it's the most humanizing thing next to being born and can't be resisted so far as I know. So I spent the rest of the day in a state of collapsed resistance and later that night, after sneaking some food and water up to Jimmy in the loft, set off to meet Pete. He was there at the crossroads, as he said he'd be. The men were sitting on Dooley's porch under the bug-swarmed lamps, looking all tired and sour.

"Well," I said to Pete.

"They're in a state of mutters," he said, "'cause they haven't found him yet. Eddie Larsen's father is still shouting two hundred dollars for Jimmy."

"I thought you'd got that off your mind."

"I have. But I can't very well get it out of my head, can I? Come on, let's go."

Mattick's place was off in the back near the marsh. It wasn't much of a place, sort of run down and not very good soil, and folks wondered how he made any living from it. The truth was he was something of a dubious character who associated in Shantytown a lot and it was probably true that he made a lot of money that he shouldn't have. Nobody in Shantytown ever worked, but they always had money, so you can figure it out.

We went off of the road and through the night-webbed trees, hearing the silly crickets peep-peeping all around us and they gave me the impression of black little lights not fit for human eyes to see. We struck a path and followed it till it ran out, then pushed through the hawthorn that bunched around outside Mattick's. There was a half moon just up and it gave us enough light to see where we were going. We came out next to the house—it

was little more than a cabin with a porch covered by a slanted roof. There was a light going in one window, but otherwise the house was dark and no sound coming from it.

I was of a mind to tell Pete that this was futile and ill-advised and sure to touch off some bad luck, but it would have been like trying to explain to a dead dog. I followed him over towards the shed. It stood a good ways from the house, past the well and some cords of wood. Pete got the door opened and we went inside. There was a window and the moon gave a little light through it. There wasn't very much to the shed. It had an earthen floor and there was a shelf of cider jugs, some full, some not, and an assortment of tools laying handy about and a harness and a barrel in the corner covered up by what looked like canvas.

"Doesn't appear to be much here," I said.

"Maybe not," Pete said, but not convinced, I could tell. "Let's have a look into that barrel." He went to it and pushed away the canvas. The pale film of moonlight fell right onto the barrel and so we were able to have a good look. And we looked and we saw and I wish I had never done it, because it was something I knew I'd never forget. I was old enough to join the army for the last year of the War, going as bugler in a New York regiment, and I saw some service in Virginia and saw some dead men in a field once, but I never saw anything that looked like Dink O'Day looked that night in the barrel.

Dink was stuffed into that barrel real horrible—his feet were even up with his face as if they had been shoved in there after the rest of him, and his face was rolled over on one side.

"Pete," I said, all quavery and sick inside, "let's get out of here."

He saw the wisdom of that and we lit out of there. Too scared to pass the house again (it looked the most ominous thing in the world now) we went the other way, went clear across the breadth of the farm and took the long way around back to town. We found the sheriff up on Dooley's porch with the men. Pete hailed him down and we walked a little ways into the shadows.

"Sheriff, we've found something of interest," said Pete. The sheriff looked at him kind of skeptical.

"Of powerful interest," I said, and he looked at me too. He was a big man. He had on a slouch hat, the brim hung low over his face.

"Such as what?" he asked.

"A dead body," said Pete.

The sheriff never said another word, but he put his hands on both our backs and began pushing us along in the direction we'd come, doubtless taking for granted the body was that of Eddie Larsen, never even asking of us who, just pushing us on through that dark.

When we got up to the Mattick place he said, "Here?"

"In the shed," Pete said.

"In the shed?" the sheriff asked, incredulous.

"Yes sir," Pete said. "Tucked into the barrel there."

The sheriff headed for the shed. I liked the way he walked; he didn't care if he made noise or not. The one light was still on in the house, but Mattick didn't come out. The sheriff went into the shed and made for the barrel and had him a good look. Then he swore and said,

"That ain't Eddie Larsen—that's Dink O'Day."

"He buried an empty box, Mattick did," I said.

That seemed to make the sheriff real sore and he headed right off for the house. While we were walking across the yard, Mattick opened the door and stood there in the lighted doorway. I guess that for a second he didn't know who it was because he said out,

"Is that you, doctor?"

Then the sheriff, still walking, in powerful motion now, sure and steady and resolute, said, "What do you need a doctor for, Jack?" Then he was on the porch, in the light, facing Mattick, bigger than Mattick, and stronger, and with the badge, the authority; so when Mattick saw the shed door hanging open and he tried to break away he never had a chance, the sheriff moving—countermoving—with him and catching him by the arm and throwing him against the wall. Mattick gave the sheriff a fierce look like a caught animal.

"Dink died of a fit, eh?" the sheriff said. "Maybe from your fit, eh?" he said taking Mattick by the shoulders and pulling him away from the wall and then throwing him back against it again.

"Lay off, Rice," Mattick muttered.

Then the sheriff collared him good and led him off while Pete and me followed behind and Pete said:

"I've got it half figured in my mind."

But I couldn't figure it nohow and when it was all told then Pete confessed that it had been too complicated even for him to have totally figured.

What it was was this, as we heard Mattick tell it in the jail to the sheriff and all the others:

Mattick had caught Eddie Larsen in his shed trying to steal some cider and had lit out after him with a rifle. He shot him down and killed him. Then he'd sent Dink over to that doctor in Little Village, the other side of the marsh, and sold the doctor the body (the doctor was known to rob graves to get cadavers to do research on). Then Dink started getting frisky about it and tried to squeeze a little money out of Mattick and that had set off Mattick's fierce temper and he had choked Dink to death and then on the day of the funeral he decided he

might as well sell Dink's remains to the doctor too, and so that was why he had planted the empty box. He'd been waiting for the doctor to come that night when we were there.

After it was all said and Mattick was locked up, the men took Pete and me over to the Dooley House for a sarsparilla drink. It was then that Eddie Larsen's father (after vowing to skin that doctor) said,

"It has just occurred to me, gentlemen, we all owe Jimmy Grover an apology."

"Wherever he is," somebody said.

"I know where he is," piped up Pete.

"Where?" old Larsen said.

"Well," said Pete, "I'll tell you, but it seems to me the last thing I heard you say regarding Jimmy Grover was that you was giving two hundred dollars for him."

When everybody finished laughing at the one we had on him, old Larsen said,

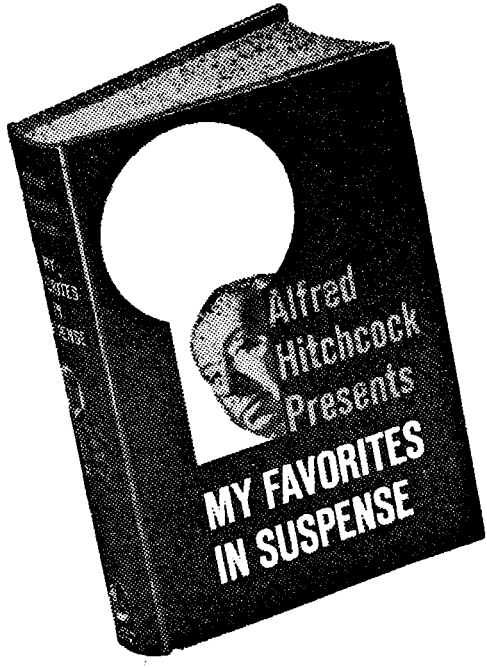
"Well, boy, I had offered that money to see a man hanged. It'll do my heart better to see him *not* hanged; so the money is still good."

Then the fastest thing anybody in Capstone ever did see was Pete and me rush out of there to fetch Jimmy from that loft and bring him back to respectable society.

BIG

BIG

MONEY SAVING OFFER



BODIES

BY TOM MACPHERSON

THIS WILL be the last season that Dorothy goads me into turning over the back lawn. I've lost count of how many successive Septembers she has gotten me to sow new lawns, back or front or both. Each fall I gripe that it's me we're killing, not the crabgrass. It was inevitable that one day I'd realize that her gardening would kill me if I didn't kill her first. So this year we will turn over the back lawn again, but when I seed it, Dorothy will be lying underneath.

My twist to this familiar plan is so foolproof that I'm sorry I didn't think of it one, two, five years ago. Each year Dorothy nags until I agree to hire old Krajewski to bring in his rotary plow and turn over either or both lawns. Then, while she spends the next four days at the flower show in Newark, I spread fertilizer and seed, and water every four hours. This September I'll help her pack her bags, then just before she leaves I'll rap her over the head. I will dig a trench in the newly turned-over lawn, put her in, then the next morning I'll do my seeding. The quick germinating ryegrass in the seed mixture will sprout within three days. By the fifth day, when I will have to report her missing because she didn't return from the flower show, the lawn will have a uniform stand of young grass.

Old Krajewski turned over the back lawn just before supper. We knew he'd do it late, for he forces himself to give his truck farm a full day's work before he hires out for odd jobs. By the time he had it raked smooth it was getting dark.

After supper I carried Dorothy's bags out to the garage and put them in the car. I didn't back the car out; instead I abused the starter while alternately flipping the ignition key off and on, off and on.

This story might well have been titled, The Green-Thumb Burials, or The Case of The Well-cared-for Lawn. Those of you who must mow lawns—and your number is legion—will surely see the relationship between this arduous sport and murder.

As I knew she would, Dorothy got impatient waiting on the driveway.

"Oh, Miller," she snapped, "you flooded it."

As I slipped out of the driver's seat, I heard her clacking into the garage, her hard-hitting heels spelling out her exasperation. It was now 7:31. I knew Marion Gorton would have sprinted to her kitchen window, for the ninety seconds duration of the first commercial on Wagon Train. She would have heard me working away at the starter, and most likely she had seen Dorothy make her bad-tempered entrance into the garage.

I moved around the front of the car to open the door on Dorothy's side. As she stooped to climb in, I hit her one solid crack with the oscillating sprinkler. It wasn't through a diabolical sense of revenge that I used the sprinkler; it just happened to be handy, hanging on the exposed 2 x 4 studs. Dorothy went down soundlessly, and I slammed the car door shut.

"I guess I did flood it, dear," I called out, "but if we wait a few minutes it'll turn over."

I dragged Dorothy over to the corner and covered her with the burlap bags we had accumulated over the years for covering new seed. I climbed in behind the wheel, pulled the door quietly onto the first latch, and started the motor. I headed in the general direction of the railroad station, but just outside of town I detoured to the town dump where small mountains of refuse were smoldering. Dorothy never spent money on anything but her garden, so the suitcases were nothing but composition-board and would be ashes by morning. Just to be sure, I had brought along the gallon can of gasoline we used for fueling the lawn mower. I poured gasoline over the opened suitcases and her

clothes, and touched them off with a match.

When I got back to the garage, Marion Gorton was putting out a milk bottle.

"Hi, Miller," she said, "Dorothy off to the flower show?"

The first thing I noticed about the little detective with the gray and saffron walrus mustache was that no one else seemed to notice him. But I knew, right off, that he was the one I had to be careful of. He was on the front walk with Detective Lieutenant Delaney and the other two plain-clothes men. When they arrived, they didn't come right up to the house. I watched through the blinds of the window in the front bedroom as the lieutenant huddled with the other two. Little Whiskers stood offside a few feet, peering at the clusters of azaleas Dorothy had set out as a skirmish line in front of the house. He held a small open notebook in one hand, a pencil in the other. The way his left arm was crooked, I was surprised not to see an umbrella hooked on it. When the huddle broke up, Delaney turned to Whiskers while the other two went to the front doors of the houses flanking mine.

As I came down the stairs I heard the knock on the front door.

"Mr. Davis?" Delaney asked, showing his identification card. I was surprised that he didn't recognize me, for I had noticed him sizing me up when I was at headquarters reporting Dorothy missing. That was on Thursday, only two days ago. I opened the door all the way and he walked in. Little Whiskers hung back, then noticing that I kept holding the door open he nodded sharply, broke loose from where he was standing with a little jig step, and walked briskly in and past Delaney.

"I know you told Missing Persons that Mrs. Davis didn't make any hotel reservation," said Delaney, "but Newark police checked and they report she didn't register at any hotel there. So that brings us right back here, to start looking from where she was last seen." I almost waited for him to add *alive*.

Dorothy never reserved a hotel room when she went to the flower show. She always found a room somewhere. Maybe I should have made a reservation for her this time, but I was afraid to introduce any action contrary to her normal habit. That may have been a mistake on my part, for even when I had told them down at headquarters that she never made advance hotel reservations, they obviously hadn't been convinced.

Delaney wanted some answers about Dorothy's habits, hobbies, and whether she had any friends or relatives in other towns. I said her habits and hobbies were all dirt gardening, and gave him the address of her sister and male cousin, both

in California. Then he asked did I mind if they looked around the premises.

Little Whiskers had been standing at the dining nook window, looking out at the back lawn. When Delaney and I walked to the side door in answer to a knock, Whiskers executed an about face with that little break-away jig and trotted over. I opened the door and the other two detectives were standing in the driveway. Delaney beckoned them in. All except Whiskers went down into the basement. With his grimy little notebook in his left hand, the little man went out the side door and walked around the back. I went over to the window where he had been standing, and from there I watched his movements.

Whiskers was careful to stay on the slates and not step on the new grass. I watched him circle the back lawn twice, slowly. Then the lieutenant's voice, right at my shoulder, made me jump.

"What's that mound out there?" he asked, pointing to the southeast corner of the backyard.

"That? Uh, why, uh, that's a compost heap."

My stuttering did it. He looked at me—I guess you'd call it piercingly. "Compost heap, huh? I think we'll take a look at it."

I tried not to look too relieved, for I didn't want him to realize that what had actually made me jumpy was Whiskers squatting and peering at different sections of the new lawn.

Delaney got a rake and shovel from the garage. While the compost heap was brought down to ground level, I tried to appear nonchalant and disinterested. I gazed everywhere, but at the digging operation. I looked at the houses surrounding our three-quarter acre plot, and could imagine slats of window blinds being held apart for inquisitive eyes.

"Want us to keep digging, Delaney?" one of his men asked.

I was surprised by how close to me the lieutenant was when he answered. He was studying my face, and I guess my confidence was showing. "No," he said. "Knock off."

The two men leaned on the handles of their shovel and rake and looked unhappily at the several small piles they had made of the compost heap. I felt sorry for them and gallantly offered to take care of the mess later.

"No," said the lieutenant. "Leave it just as it is. We'll send out some men to shovel it back. Or we may be out again."

The three men walked out front, while Little Whiskers hung back. So did I. He lifted his notebook to within eight inches of his nose, and made some marks in it while he mumbled, "did . . . quad . . . S four . . . first." He peered again at my new lawn, then suddenly pocketed his notebook as though

surprised to find the others had left. I was so close to him that his break-away jig dumped me smack into the zinnia patch.

Another too frequent and maddening chore I usually got out of my wife's gardening was transplanting her zinnias. As Whiskers apologetically helped me to my feet, I realized my wife was still capable of making me dig dirt. Now I had to transplant Dorothy, because Whiskers had made a map of the lawn and gridded it like a road map. I didn't know where S four might be, but I knew for certain that the whole lawn would be torn up until the police either found Dorothy or gave up.

I was thinking of my precarious situation, standing there where Whiskers had left me, when my nervous system got jolted again by a voice beside me saying, "Can't see any sign of the old crab, huh Miller?"

"What? What's that?" I whispered hoarsely, turning, seeing the grinning face of Herb Gorton.

"The crabgrass. You finally got it licked. I don't see a sign of the old crab."

Some people never are convinced that turning over a lawn sends the crabgrass underground, millions of seeds waiting for next year. I never could convince Dorothy of that—"You're just lazy!" she'd always say—so we still turned over one or both Davis lawns every fall. The Gortons and their crabgrass, on the other hand, lived amicably side by side.

Herb had come over to ask, "What's with the two carloads of cops?" Of course, he and the rest of the neighborhood knew what the police were looking for, but I was glad to see Herb. I wanted to find out whether my staging of Dorothy's departure had fooled his wife. It had. Herb told me that Marion swore that she had seen me take Dorothy off to the station and that Dorothy had waved to her from the car as we backed out. That bonus cheered me up plenty. But I was still facing the problem of "S four."

I couldn't risk transplanting Dorothy to a spot under the compost heap. I wasn't sure whether Delaney had been considerate or suspicious when he'd discouraged me from shoveling the small heaps back into a single mound. I walked around the lawn and in and out of the garage without getting any inspiration. Inside the house I paced through all the rooms, but it was in the basement that I found the ideal spot. We had two of those old wood barrels, used by movers and so hard to find these days. Dorothy had intended to have me plant strawberries in them some spring, but right now both were half full of miscellaneous junk. The old cotton-crepe bedspread that Dorothy used to cover them was inside out, and Dorothy would never have covered them that way, so I

knew the detectives had uncovered the barrels and probably had searched carefully through their contents.

The Gortons had planned a Saturday night block party. One of the things Herb came over for, was to ask if I would prefer that they call the party off so that I might have some quiet. I had talked Herb out of canceling the party, feeling that it could help me in getting Dorothy moved unnoticed. I set my alarm for four in the morning. I knew the party would break up between two and three, and that all the neighbors who didn't get invited to the Gorton's parties, would certainly be catching up on lost sleep by four o'clock.

Before daylight, Dorothy was in the strawberry barrel down in the basement. I had used the spade to lift the divots of new grass carefully before doing the serious digging. When I finished, I replaced the divots. In full daylight, the next morning, I opened a bale of peat moss and began laboriously breaking it up and spreading it thin over the top of the lawn. Thus I covered up any possible indications of what I had done.

When Herb came over about noontime, I sanctimoniously explained that for Dorothy's sake, wherever she was, I would do my utmost to create a perfect lawn. Herb sighed, placed a consoling hand on my shoulder. After a moment of silence, he headed back to his own place—for breakfast, I supposed.

Although I saw Whiskers driving slowly by in a '51 Ford late Sunday afternoon, it wasn't until Tuesday that he and Delaney came out again. Delaney said he just wanted to check on whether I had heard from or about my wife. He told me they had contacted her sister and cousin through the police out in California, and that neither knew anything about Dorothy's whereabouts. He reminded me to call headquarters if I heard anything. Neither he nor Whiskers looked at the lawn.

As he was about to leave, Delaney remembered the compost heap. He apologized for forgetting to send some men out to put it back together, and promised they'd be out in the morning. Whiskers put his notebook up to within eight inches of his nose, and as he scribbled I heard him mumble, "Cesspool."

That made me jump, and I was glad the lieutenant was already walking away so he didn't see I'd been startled. Earlier in the day I had plugged the drain under the basement wash tubs. I was going to fake a cesspool stoppage and get old Krajewski to dig up the front lawn and uncover the cesspool. I knew Krajewski would arrive just in time to dig down to the cesspool cover before dark. Then during the night I'd drop Dorothy in, replace

the cover, and start shoveling on the dirt myself. By daylight, I'd resume shoveling openly and if anyone asked, I'd tell them it had been a drain stoppage all the time. Now, with Whiskers thinking cesspool, I'd have to unplug the drain and try to come up with a better hiding place for a body that just wouldn't stay down.

By Thursday no one had come to dig up the back lawn, nor did any police arrive to do anything about the cesspool. Dorothy was getting pretty strong in the strawberry barrel, and the sprays and wicks that I had around weren't too much help. Three men did come out late in the day, however, to work on the compost heap. First, they dug about three feet below the surface under the spot of the original heap. The lieutenant had ordered that, they explained. They were about to start shoveling everything back, when I decided to take advantage of their muscle. Herb had come over to watch. And while we were all guzzling the beers I'd brought out, I asked the diggers to leave the hole open.

"The wife always wanted a big weeping willow tree," I told them, "and since I now got a hole all dug, I can put one in," I almost said *in memory,* "as a surprise for her when she comes home."

I knew I could get Dorothy into that hole and well covered during the night. And the next day, I could leisurely replace the compost heap. If the police diggers reported to Delaney that they had left the hole open, so I could plant a willow tree and he got suspicious as to why I'd changed my mind, I could always tell him the willow-idea had been sort of an impulse that I'd dropped after a little thought. The next day, when Herb helped me shovel the compost heap back, I told him I had reconsidered putting a tree in. I'd realized that it isn't right to plant a large tree close to a neighbor's plot, since its branches would hang over his, Herb's, property.

Whiskers came out alone the next day. But not before I had the compost heap all neatly piled up, covered with a bag of manure, and watered until the aroma was much stronger than Dorothy had been when I'd rolled out the barrel. Whiskers didn't talk at first. He just walked around the backyard, occasionally squatting to peer at the lawn or the flower beds. Then out came that dog-eared notebook again and up it went to that spot eight inches short of his nose.

"The police didn't dig up your cellar floor yet, did they? he asked.

When I heard my jaws snap, I realized my mouth had dropped open as far as it would go. I looked at him for a good long moment, then swallowed some saliva and shouted, really shouted, "The *who* didn't what?"

He blinked his eyes, pulled down his notebook and looked a little hurt. Then he repeated it, halting-

ly, "The police didn't dig up your cellar floor, did they?"

"The *police!*" I bellowed. "You're talking about them as if you're not one of them!"

He answered with a soft "Oh." While I stood with my eyes bugging, he got into his unmarked '51 Ford and drove away.

The lieutenant was laughing. I laughed, too. When I'd started downtown, I was going to storm into headquarters screaming my indignation. But as I got closer to the police, I cooled off considerably.

" 'Whiskers', as you call him, has never been on any police force," said Delaney. "Maybe he took a correspondence course somewhere. I wouldn't know. You've heard of fire buffs, well I guess we got us a homicide buff. The first time he followed us on a case, we didn't even realize he was along until one of the boys spotted him making one of those crazy grid maps of a backyard. We chased him away, but that night we got a phoned-in tip that our suspect was out in the dark digging up his yard. We sneaked out and let him finish the shovel work before we grabbed him and the corpse. Naturally, now we don't feel the same way about Whiskers following us around. Say, that's a good name you got for him—Whiskers."

"You know, Mr. Davis," Delaney continued, "we almost came out to tear up your lawn. But, when we found there wasn't much insurance on your wife, and you had no other motive we could tumble to, we decided against crowding you just yet. Then when your neighbors told us how you worked like a dog every year and this was your best lawn yet, we figured to let the whole thing ride. Besides, we still don't know that anything has happened to Mrs. Davis. All we know right now is that she's missing."

When I left headquarters, I felt so good I had to stop the car a few blocks from home and work my face into a harried look again. Just as I drove up to the door, I noticed a huge flatbed truck from Wilton Nurseries backed up on the Gorton driveway. A big tree hanging over the tailgate extended to our back lawn near the compost heap. Or, rather, to where the compost heap had been.

Herb Gorton intercepted me and placed both hands on my shoulders, in a fatherly fashion, while he chokingly explained, "Miller, after you said how Dorothy always wanted a weeping willow, your neighbors decided to chip in and buy one. It's sort of a token of our feelings for you and Dorothy, wherever she is, while you are both going through this trying time. We don't mind a bit if it hangs over into our yard. What do you say, we go over and watch those nurserymen dig? At the rate they're going, fella, won't be able to watch them long . . ."

SOME

GREG MACNEEL nursed his drink along, wanting to pick it up and swallow it and order another, but knowing that would accomplish nothing at all toward solving the problem. Actually, it would in all probability have an adverse effect because in addition to soothing his jangled nerves it would give him a false outlook and that was one thing he could not afford. Not now.

Simply stated, the problem was a matter of choosing between two alternatives. On the one hand he could chuck Clarissa, break off with her—completely and with finality. He was very good at that. Or, he could kill Harry Melton. Clarissa would then be free to marry him and she would have all Harry Melton's money.

Eenie, meenie, minie, mo . . .

He took another sip of his drink and looked around the dim-lit bar. It had started right here less than three months ago. Clarissa had been watching him in the mirror behind the bar. He knew she was watching him, that wasn't an unusual thing to happen to Greg MacNeel. A glance at him explained it, cleft chin, straight nose tipped up just a bit at the end, wide-set gray eyes, wavy black hair, white even teeth. The sum total of his features was an aristocratic handsomeness that fostered an intuitive dislike in most men and a hopeful distrust in women.

He waited, over-eagerness being the mark of the amateur. After awhile he lifted his glass to his lips and as he did so he crooked a finger and the bartender came and stopped before him. The contrast between the two men was complete, Adonis confronted by a gargoyle.

"Refill, Mr. MacNeel?"

"Not just yet. Who is she, Barney? The one there at the end, that's been giving me the once-over."

Barney flourished his rag over the spotless bartop and cut his eyes down the bar. "The blonde doll with the earrings and brooch? The one that spells dough with a capital D?"

MacNeel suppressed a smile.

Never listen to a barber or a bartender—except for the former's "next" and the latter's "what'll it be?". As they expound on life and death, politics, certain migratory practices of the tree swallow, etcetera and etcetera, I suggest you doze off.

SUGGESTED HOMICIDE

by Richard Hardwick

"That's the one." Barney had become a great deal more observant of the finer things these past months, as a result of watching MacNeel in action.

"Search me. Never laid eyes on her before. Not bad, though."

"Not bad at all. What's she drinking?"

"She's had a pair of champagne cocktails. Acts a little like something's bugging her."

MacNeel finished his drink and pushed the glass across the bar. "I'll have that refill now, Barney, and a champagne cocktail for the lady, with my compliments."

The bartender grinned his admiration, screwing his homely face into a caricature of itself. "You're a pleasure to observe, Mr. MacNeel! None of these young punks can hold a candle to you, not a candle! The old master himself!"

Greg MacNeel took the words in the sense they were offered, as a statement of fact rather than as flattery. A man does not succumb to blandishments concerning a business he has been successfully engaged in for more than twenty years. He did wish, however, that Barney had not put quite so much emphasis on the word "old". MacNeel was barely thirty-nine, but he was a realist and therefore aware of the beginning sag beneath his chin, of the incipient paunch when not wearing his girdle, and of the alarming quantity of black hair that turned up in his brush each morning. Barney, by using that word, had reminded him that the time was drawing near when he should consider some permanent alliance, and the time to find just the right one was while the cards were still stacked in his favor.

So he had met Clarissa there in Barney's place and after he had gotten a few more cocktails into her, he learned from her that she was married to a man named Harry Melton and that Harry Melton

was twice her age and had a great deal of money.

"I'm the little bird in the gilded cage, Greg," she said later as they danced at a road house in Jersey.

"How'd you manage to fly the coop tonight? It can't be much of a cage."

"Harry's in Chicago on business. He doesn't go away often and when he does I feel that if I don't get out of that house and have a little fun I'll go stark raving mad." She shook her head as she looked up at him. "You wouldn't know what that feels like, would you?"

He grinned. "I suspect you weren't forced at gunpoint to marry the man."

Clarissa laughed, bitterly. "Everybody can be bought. I was bought." She touched a finger to MacNeel's lips. "Let's have a fling. I'm Cinderella and it's not midnight yet."

"I hope this will be more than a fling with us."

She laughed again, but gaily this time. "That smacks of a line, Mr. MacNeel. But I like it."

It was a line. And of course they both knew that it was. But Harry Melton's trips away from the city grew more frequent and every time Harry was away Clarissa went directly to Greg. They met in out of the way places, and never twice in the same place. Clarissa insisted on this. "I don't love him, but I do love his money," she said to Greg.

And that was another thing that bothered MacNeel. Clarissa never picked up the tab, even though he told her frankly that he was broke. She explained that expenses incurred while her husband was out of town would be hard to explain.

About a month later, Greg stopped off at Barney's place one afternoon.

"Well, hello there, Mr. MacNeel! Ain't seen you in awhile!"

"All play and no work, you know, Barney."

Barney winked knowingly. "The doll with the earrings and brooch?" he said, and his hands got busy mixing a martini.

MacNeel shrugged and the bartender's face split in a wide grin. "*Magnifico!* Like putting the little leaguers against the Yanks! Yes sir, these young squirts just ain't got the touch of the old master!"

There it was again, that unpleasant pang when the word "old" came up. "You make it sound too easy," MacNeel said, "We've all got our problems."

Barney frowned. "*You* got problems?" He put the martini on the bar, in front of MacNeel. "I should have a half a dozen of the problems you handsome guys got, two blondes, two redheads, and a pair of brunettes. If you ever get married and settle down, Mr. MacNeel, the world is goin' to lose one of the great ones!"

Barney moved down the bar to wait on a customer and Greg Mac-

Neel sat staring into his drink. He picked it up occasionally and sipped at it. He was thinking about marriage. He'd marry Clarissa if he could. In a way, he really liked her. Maybe if she got a divorce, it could be framed so that she would get a hefty settlement from the old man.

The bartender came back and picked up MacNeel's empty glass. MacNeel nodded and Barney set about preparing a fresh martini. "Like I was saying, Mr. MacNeel, I should have the problems you good-lookin' guys have. Now you take me, for instance, ninety-nine percent of the time a dame'll laugh right in my face."

MacNeel smiled. It was a switch, the customer listening to the troubles of the bartender. "You probably make out better than any guy in town."

Barney sighed philosophically. "Well, there's always that one percent that doesn't laugh at me. You might not believe it, but some dames really dig us ugly guys! Sure! I figure it's got something to do with the mother instinct. Anyhow, when you work for something, really work, you appreciate it more. Keeps you right on your toes, too." He tapped his forehead. "Keeps you using the old bean."

A few nights later when he was with Clarissa, Greg thought of what the bartender had said. They had dinner, then went to one of the cheap roadhouses Clarissa insisted on frequenting and danced and had a few drinks. A man like Barney could probably solve this, MacNeel thought. Maybe I'm rusty. Maybe I've been operating in the same old rut too long.

"My, it must be serious," Clarissa said with a little laugh.

He realized he had been frowning. "It is serious. I was thinking about us—you and me."

She nodded and began turning her glass slowly, thoughtfully, on the table. Then she said, "Harry's talking about moving south, Greg."

His frown deepened.

"He's starting to liquidate some of his active interests. He's planning a sort of semi-retirement now that he's made it. We'd go to Miami, or maybe the west coast, Sarasota."

Inside, he began to panic. She was the one he'd waited for. "You —you can't let him do that, Clarissa. We love each other, doesn't that mean anything?"

She laughed, without humor. "Well, what can I do? Unless . . . unless you want me to leave him."

"I—" Suddenly, he was trapped. "It wouldn't be fair to you. I haven't got any dough. You know that."

"I do know that, my sweet." She reached out and touched his hand. "Maybe we'll think of something. Right now, I think I'd like to dance."

There were others, he told himself at that point. But where was there one potentially worth four or five million? Clarissa would marry him, if he asked her to, of that he was certain. She'd walk out on Harry Melton and his millions and take pot luck with him. He could visualize it, a cold water flat someplace with a view of the air shaft, and after a few years a bunch of kids screaming around the place, while the great Greg MacNeel grew fat drinking beer while he watched ball games on television. It made his blood run cold.

As usual, the next afternoon he went into Barney's place. Barney could always buck him up with a little enlightening conversation and a fine dry martini or two.

Barney prepared the drink then leaned on the bar with a newspaper before him. There was only one other customer at the bar. "Whatdya think of that creep down in Florida?"

"Who's that, Barney?"

"I been keeping up with it in the papers. It sort of goes back in a way to what we was talking about the other day. Now, if it had been me, I'd have done it all different. And I'd have had a mighty good chance of getting away with it. Like it stands, the guy'll get the chair."

MacNeel turned the paper on the bar. There was a picture of a sulky young man and a police officer.

"Maybe you ain't been watching it," Barney said.

MacNeel shook his head.

"Well, this kid wanted to marry this rich guy's daughter out there in Chicago, but the old man spotted him for a kind of fortune hunter, which he was, and the old man told the girl if she saw this guy any more he'd cut her off without a dime. So, this kid goes and knocks the old man off, figuring the girl'll get the loot and the two of 'em can go and live happily ever after."

"And?" MacNeel said.

"Ahhh, this kid pulls this off about as smooth as a idiot chimpanzee. All he'll get is some free voltage from the state."

"And you would have done it some other way?"

"Right! And you know why? Because nothing ever came easy to me!" He touched his forehead. "Always had to work for every thing. The kid went off half-cocked. I'd of been all cocked or not at all!"

"Yeah?"

"Wait around, that's what he shoulda done. Make it look like he gave up and moved off. Meanwhile, case the old man, maybe find out if he goes somewhere regular, like on a business trip. He could follow him somewhere, maybe, disguise himself, knock off the old man so's it looks like a robbery, you know, and after things cool off, he slips the girl a wedding ring

and . . ." Barney shrugged. "Simple."

It had been in his mind, just under the surface. MacNeel knew that. The idea that Harry Melton had to go was basic to the whole thing. But it had been so appalling that up until now he had kept it buried. The electric chair had an awful finality about it.

Still, there was a lot in MacNeel's favor. The affair with Clarissa had certainly been kept under wraps; she had insisted on that.

The afternoon business began to build up and Greg had another martini and watched Barney move around expertly behind the bar. *A great deal of untapped wisdom lies inside the skulls of bartenders,* he thought. *From the mouths of babes —and bartenders . . .*

He had to think a great deal about this. Here was something he had never even considered before. Killing a man. You don't explain your way out of that if you're caught. But why would he get caught? People get away with murder all the time.

He remembered suddenly something that Clarissa had said, "Maybe we'll think of something." Had she been getting at *this*? Maybe she had been hinting at it, not wanting to say it in so many words, but trying to put it across to him nevertheless. It stood to reason that if a woman started talking to a man about killing her husband, and this same man was in line as her next husband, mightn't he be a little nervous when she brought him his morning coffee, or met him in the afternoon with a martini? So she'd leave it up to him. Maybe hint at it, but that was all.

The next time MacNeel met Clarissa she said, "Harry's coming back from Los Angeles tomorrow; then he's going on to Atlanta for the rest of the week. He's definitely going through with what he was talking about, Greg. He's selling off some of his interests now. He wants to move to Florida as soon as possible."

"How soon? A month? Six months?"

"Maybe even less than a month. He's leased a place in Miami Beach and he says he can operate out of there until things are settled the way he wants them."

MacNeel picked up his drink, looked at it. "But he's going to Atlanta first, is that it?"

"I confirmed his plane and hotel reservations myself. He'll be at the Imperial Plaza, and he's leaving on the six-fifteen Eastern flight, straight through on Friday."

There it was again. It could have been a perfectly innocent remark. Still, why would she give him the name of the hotel and the exact time of the flight, unless she was inviting him to do something about the dilemma in which they found themselves?

He picked up the menu and studied it intently. "The lobster should be good. And perhaps a bottle of *Liebfraumilch*?" He let his tongue touch his lips. "Six fifteen? Delta?"

"Six-fifteen. Friday. Eastern Air Line. And the lobster and wine sound delicious." Clarissa looked up and smiled and laid the menu aside.

MacNeel recognized Harry Melton immediately, from the pictures of him that he had seen in the newspapers from time to time. He was a big, bluff man who, strangely, did not look quite as old as MacNeel had imagined he would.

MacNeel, who had booked passage on the same flight under the name of Clarence Smith, sat four seats behind Melton on the big Super Constellation. Disembarking in Atlanta, MacNeel took a cab into the city and checked into a small, second-rate hotel close by the Imperial Plaza. He was very nervous when he took the revolver from the suitcase and put it under his belt. This was the dangerous part, this was the part he had to handle with the utmost of care.

He called the Imperial Plaza and got Melton's room number and also learned that Melton was just then checking in. MacNeel went to the hotel and took a seat in the lobby and sat reading a newspaper until Clarissa's husband appeared. He followed him out to the street, dodging through the moderately heavy pedestrian traffic, keeping his eyes fastened on the back of the man's head. Perspiration beaded his body. It was now only a matter of waiting for the right moment to come along.

And then Melton turned down a side street, still walking fast, and in the determined manner of a man taking a constitutional.

The phone rang behind the bar and Barney answered it. "Oh, hello," he said. He listened with deep interest for a number of seconds, then nodded his head. "It's done then. Good, good . . . Stop your worrying. There's nothing to worry about. So he wasn't caught. So what? If he tries to make any trouble for you, he'd just be cookin' his own goose and he'd find himself in the chair . . . No, honey, no, there's no way he can be connected with you . . ."

Barney listened to the voice on the other end of the wire for quite awhile. He nodded slowly as he listened, as though the caller could see him, and when he spoke at last his voice was muted with tenderness. "I know you love me, Clarissa. And you know how I feel about you, but it just wouldn't look right so soon after Harry's death. It just wouldn't . . . In a couple of months. Yes. Sure. No reason why we couldn't go and get married then . . ."

The family is the basic unit of society. To demonstrate this point, may I mention the Hatfields and the McCoys, the Jukes and the Kallikaks, and the Capulets and the Montagues. Quite obviously, families that fight together stay together.

by BRYCE WALTON

STRICTLY PSYCHO

IT WAS suddenly necessary for me to escape from Heathstone Rest Sanitarium.

Not that the place was driving me crazy, or becoming a bore. The inmates still interested me, but my burgeoning personality was ready to absorb the greater varieties outside. Heated thoughts were running to wild little sportscars, turning more to girls of which there was a rather lugubrious selection at Heathstone.

But more to the point—I must admit it—I was frightened. If I didn't get out and have a final showdown with Mother at once, I might never have the chance. I might remain buried in Heathstone until the world abruptly came to an end.

I read the letter again, the one from Mother.

"Dearest Sunny: Happy Birthday! As you read this, I'll be honeymooning with silly Mr. "Y" whom I mentioned in my last letter. He looks like a crane with an amputated beak and is well into his second childhood if he ever grew out of his first. But all is compensated for by his rolling in wealth like a pig in mud (as you might guess, ha ha!).

"Stay happy, study hard, add to your genius and finish that delightful novel. If you need anything let me know at once. Mr. "Y" and I will be at the Retreat beginning July 3rd, so remember to write but don't forget to make it General Delivery. Mr. "Y" is a narrow smug old soul who might take philistine

offense at the postmark on the letter. Say hello to your eccentric friends for me, especially to that handsome devil, Dr. Lawrence. Hope you enjoy your present. Love always, Mother."

The first letter in nearly two months when she used to write every week. The birthday present, a wristwatch, wasn't comparable to her usual expensive gifts, but was a shoddy gesture. It was also a brief formal note compared with her usual long effusive outbursts. She was losing interest in me. She would forget about me completely!

Fear gnawed, then turned to quite ominous rage. As bughouses go, Heathstone was one of the finer institutions. Its guests paid up to fifteen hundred dollars a month for doubious special privileges. But just the same I had no stomach for being walled off there forever. It was adding insult to injury for my Mother to forget about me, as if I were simply buried alive!

No, it was now or never that I get out and settle with Mother. If my being a free spirit irritated her too much, she might find herself choking on her protests. If something really gruesome occurred then so be it. It was now July 1st, the morning of my 17th birthday. They would be at the retreat beginning the 3rd. I had to be there on the 3rd also to connect up with that blissful couple. And it would be a somewhat shocking get-together, I would make sure of that!

I had to escape that evening to reach the Retreat by the 3rd, and fix things so that I would never be sent back to Bedlam.

First, to arrange a transfer from Seclusion Cottage K to Heathstone Hall which housed the administrative staff and the open wards where milder inmates considered well enough not to need close custodial care were herded about.

My cottage window was open. I looked through the heavy wire mesh at the lovely spring morning under the shade trees. Then I began to howl and gibber with a repercussive skill that comes only after long association with pros. A layman shrieking wholeheartedly produces nothing comparable to even the mild outbursts of a practiced lunatic. The most energetic novice can howl himself hoarse and elicit perhaps a few derisive catcalls. But let a pro sound off and every fellow inmate takes up the cry with the lunar urgency of a pack of hungry wolves.

This isn't tolerated, especially in status institutions such as Heathstone. Burly attendants, who go by the polite euphemism of bughousers, bear down like beerhall bouncers and clubbing fists skillfully find their marks; a report is turned in—you fell over a chair or out of bed. If the bughouser can restrain excessive indignation you're "necked-out", that is, choked into insensibility with no marks visible so that the filling out of a form is

not necessary. But I rated more humane treatment from Eddie who regarded my 178 I.Q. with awe, and even suspected me of being a spy from some public investigative committee. Above all, he was greedy. And Mother had always provided me with ample bribe-moneys.

I slipped Eddie a ten plus my birthday watch. "Go tell the Director he must see me at once. I've been hallucinating rather wildly about my mother."

"Okay, Sunny," he said and scurried away.

Dr. Zitner, I knew, would treat my request in a cavalier manner. But Dr. Zitner was away on vacation, replaced by Dr. Lawrence who now doled out salvation, reprieves and purgatives. I expected compassion from Dr. Lawrence. Ever since he had seen my Mother when she came to visit me, he had shown zealous interest in me. "How's your charming Mother," he was always asking me.

I didn't blame him for being influenced by my Mother's charms. I admired her predatory talents that had, in a dangerously competitive business, resulted in her becoming exceedingly wealthy.

"Sit down, Sunny," Dr. Lawrence said, smiling from behind Zitner's teakwood desk. He tossed me a pack of smokes and a lighter and I sat down and lit up. He studied me meanwhile through smoke that seemed designed to curtain any clinical light. He was the studied informality type, the I'm-just-a-plain-Joe kind of Doc. This was supposed to inspire confidence, but seemed to me only a cover up for genuine ignorance. "What's this malarky about Mom hallucinations, Sunny?"

"Malarky?" I feigned astonishment.

"Exactly. During Dr. Zitner's absence I've been examining your personnel files. You've had no hallucinations here. There's something fishy about these reports, too."

"I'm not here to be pried at like a clam," I said. "But to ask a favor. I've felt a music mood coming on. If I were transferred back to Heathstone Hall I could play Mozart on the recreation piano."

He studied me as if trying to pretend I was something a bit more than a bug under a microscope.

"We'll see," he said, mysteriously.

I tensed. He was holding his permision in abeyance. I was in for more clinical probing. I couldn't waste time with that jazz. All I could think about was getting upstate for that final gruesome rendezvous with Mother.

"You're so talented," he said. "Mozart on the piano. And a novel finished."

"Not quite," I said. "My precocity will make it a sure commercial success when it is finished. And its literary value will bring praise from critics. They'll compare it with early Sagan, which will then seem like the mewlings of a semi-literate sophomore."

Dr. Lawrence grinned. "You couldn't convince me you had delusions of grandeur, not even if you came in here saying you *were* Françoise Sagan." He blinked slowly like a frog. "Your case intrigues me. Why do you insist on loving your mother? Why no normal resentments?"

I was on guard. My Mother was my own busines. I couldn't afford to have any interference now. She was going to settle up with me. I was going to get everything that was coming to me. And I didn't intend giving anything away.

"Level with me, Sunny." He thumped a file folder. "I think you're the victim of injustice. Something smells."

"Such as what?"

"In the first place, I don't think you're any crazier than I am—if that's any sort of effective comparison."

"It's quite appropriate," I said. "Anyway, I'm only a patient here myself. Dr. Zitner put the official stamp on me. I'm strictly psycho."

"I put in my dissenting vote, Sunny."

"So what? You'll never go over the head of Dr. Zitner."

"But you could level with me and we might work out something."

"Who am I to challenge Dr. Zitner's diagnosis?" I said.

Dr. Lawrence leaned forward. "It's easy to railroad a juvenile. Any constituted adult authority can have any juvenile committed. A juvenile has no legal rights. You found that out didn't you, when at the tender age of fifteen you were accused of being a teen-age maniac? All right, so you were committed. But so far as I'm concerned you were perfectly sane at the time. Now, every month Dr. Zitner gets a big fat check from your Mother, and as a result you remain crazy. So Zitner's human, and we all must earn a living, granted. But why should you accept it all so meekly? Why no protests?"

"Either because I'm really a loony," I said, grinning. "Or because I'm too smart to disagree with Doc Zitner. I might be proud of my 178 I.Q. and prefer not to get my cells short-circuited by having Zitner subject me to shock-therapy. Take your pick."

Dr. Lawrence nodded. "That makes sense." He fondled his lower lip and mused over my enigmatic presence. Meanwhile I was eagerly trying to control my nervous excitement in anticipation of leaving Heathstone and getting the show on the road. There was a kind of beautiful terror in imagining my Mother and me confronting one another at last—with murder arriving to seal our continued familial affections forever.

"All right, Sunny. It's a rare thing for an authentic psycho to admit it. And you're obviously a phony. No one but a psycho can act like one and you've never fooled me for a minute. Your being in a booby hatch is about as logical as Noel

Coward standing in for King Kong."

I laughed appreciatively.

Then he barked suddenly. "So why do you insist on loving your mother who has kept you locked up in a cage for three years?" Lawrence was getting himself worked up. "Of course I know she sent you to the finest institution of its kind, but it isn't an ivy-walled private school! This is a nuthouse, friend! But you don't fight. You never protest. Why do you go on loving your mother?" He slammed the desk. "If you were really crazy, then loving the hand that poisoned you might make crazy sense. Guilt, need for punishment, disguised hostility. Name your school, take your choice. But you're not crazy. So loving your mother has to make some other kind of sense."

"I don't love her. Love is a deceptive illusion, a sentimental relic of the past. I admire, respect my Mother."

"All right! Call it admiration and respect then. But do flies admire Flit? You ought to *hate* your Mother!"

"But that's just it," I yelled. "She's my *Mother!*"

"Just simple, old-fashioned loyalty to the clan. That it?"

"The present fad of loathing one's parents doesn't appeal to me. Mother did the only possible thing under the circumstances. It hurt her far more than it hurt me, I'm positive of that."

"Well, for a broken-hearted mother she's sure been having a good time out there. If your mother's behavior is supposed to represent celebrated mother-love, then it's too far out for me. Ever since you were in swaddling clothes it seems your mother's main concern was to avoid the sight and sound of you. She farmed you out to foster homes when you were less than a year old. Then into private schools, finally into an insane asylum! Mother seems to have considered you an intentional leper, or a carrier of bubonic plague."

"She had to earn a living," I said. My face felt flushed. Inside of me, a cauldron of hot lava waited to boil over.

"What kind of work? Come on, tell me. Whisper it in my ear if it'll make you blush. Write me a note."

"It was none of my business," I said.

"Then why do you conceal facts?"

"I'm not!"

"You're trying to conceal your own sanity!"

I shrugged. "All right, I'm sane, perfectly normal. All I ask is that you don't tell Dr. Zitner I've been arguing about his judgment. Now, what about my transfer to Heathstone Hall?"

"Acquiescence isn't an explanation," Dr. Lawrence said. "Now you cooperate, answer questions with some pretense at honesty, and I'll seriously consider giving you another trial run in the Hall."

I tried to appear cool and relaxed. This salvation-happy Doctor was intent on seeking what he thought of as justice in my case. He could foul up everything. He was sharper than I would have given him credit for being. He might even end up having my mother investigated before I could get to her myself!

I lit up another cigarette and grinned. "I know your game," I said. "You want to expose Zitner as a fraud so you can take over Heathstone yourself."

His eyelids flickered. "An astute deduction and it only intensifies my conviction that you are not crazy. But listen, Sunny, has it ever occurred to you that I don't want to see your genius wasted, that I don't like seeing talent railroaded into a booby hatch?" He glanced at the file. "Three years ago you ran to the police with certain—it says here—'fantastic allegations' concerning your mother. Is that correct?"

I nodded.

"You were enrolled at Black Hills Military Academy and you ran away from there so you could go home for Christmas. Was your charming mother expecting you?"

My throat felt tight. "No, I wanted to surprise her," I said.

"You mean it surprised your mother to have her only beloved son home for Christmas! Is it possible that you sneaked home for Christmas, Sunny, because you knew that if you gave advance notice she would prevent you from sharing the joyous Yuletide?"

My mouth felt dry. The cigarette tasted foul and I smudged it out.

"Why don't you admit it, Sunny? She didn't want you home for the happy holidays. You would have been an impediment, a canker, a wet blanket—"

"Why don't you try the rack, or thumbscrews?" I asked.

Lawrence studied me a moment. Then he swiveled his chair and looked out the window. "On that Christmas Eve, did you or did you not interrupt a rather bizarre interlude between your mother and a certain Mr. Croats?"

"What is this, a trial?" I yelled.

"And did you then run to the police and tell them that your mother had deliberately, even perhaps maliciously, set Mr. Croats on fire?"

I started laughing.

"It doesn't strike me as funny stuff, Sunny."

"Sorry, but you know the basis for humor, Doc. I got a mental picture of old man Croats on fire, running around that blazing Christmas tree trying to put himself out with a bottle of seltzer."

"You weren't laughing when you ran to the police," Dr. Lawrence said wryly. "Anyway, they considered your story to be unrealistic. And they therefore didn't believe you."

"Of course not," I said. "Because at the time I was not in my right mind."

"And it's a good thing they didn't believe you, isn't it, Sunny?" Dr. Lawrence stood up suddenly and leaned across his desk. "Imagine people thinking, even erroneously, that a charming woman like your mother would go around setting old men on fire!"

"Especially," I said with a calm grin, "on Christmas Eve."

Dr. Lawrence sat down with a sigh. "A convenient time for a fatal accident, wasn't it? Your mother explained all of that afterward, of course, how it was a terrible accident. Croats was trying to put out the Christmas tree blaze and in so doing contracted a fatal dose of the flames."

"That's what happened," I said. "A fatal accident."

"And the original story to the police was only the result of hallucinations, right, Sunny?"

"That's all in the report," I said. "Stamped by Dr. Zitner. You see, emotionally, I had never really understood being kept away from home all those years. I resented it. I was jealous of the men who replaced me in my mother's affections and I wanted revenge. When I sneaked back home for Christmas and saw Mr. Croats on fire I imagined that he had been deliberately *set* afire, because that was what I wanted to do to him. Later, probably because of moral cowardice or because I wanted my mother to show how she hated those men as much as I and that she loved me after all, I imagined that mother had set him on fire."

"Very neat," Dr. Lawrence said. "But granting all that was true why must you remain crazy and incarcerated here, Sunny? Any other mother, or most mothers, would have forgiven you and sought your release. You're cured. You could be released any time."

"Not according to Dr. Zitner," I said. "According to Dr. Zitner, I'm a hotbed of repressed hostility, capable of anything. It would be dangerous for me to roam around loose out there."

Dr. Lawrence, smiling warmly, stood up. He walked around the desk and looked down at me. "Thank you, Sunny, for an extremely interesting discussion. I'll tell Eddie to transfer your stuff over to the Hall."

I stood up. "Thank you, sir."

"But no funny stuff, Sunny. Don't try running away."

"Why should I do that?"

"A better question would be, why shouldn't you? But I know the answer. Your mother would send you back. Strictly for your own good, of course, even though her heart would be breaking."

"I wouldn't necessarily say that."

"But you've never taken the chance and put the proposition to the test, have you?"

"No, because that would be stupid."

"Not only stupid, but it would upset your mother, right? The de-

votion you two have for one another is really a touching thing. If you were released, you might start spreading unpleasant gossip about your mother again. And we wouldn't want that, would we?"

"No," I said. "Her life is difficult enough as it is."

Soon as Eddie transferred my personal belongings to a locker in the open ward at Heathstone Hall, I packed a few items, including my Leica camera, into a padded bundle and tossed it through the window bars into some brush in the rear of the institution's north wing. After that, I entertained a few of my fellow inmates with Mozart and Brahms. I wasn't in the mood for it. I kept thinking of the bloody rendezvous waiting at the Retreat, and the result was hardly a polished performance. But my audience wasn't the discriminating sort and it did have a properly therapeutic atmosphere.

Later, about sundown, I mixed with the patients in the recreation rooms and later edged outside for more strenous play—that included tennis, swimming and a few rounds of croquet.

Only the mildest and most malleable patients were allowed to roam about in that relatively free manner. Most of them found Heathstone a pleasant place compared with the complex world outside and wouldn't have escaped if urged to do so. Most of the others were literally scared into submission. This is by way of pointing out that the attendant of the open wards had been lured into complacency. My particular attendant lolled in a sunchair, half-dozing as I casually stroked a croquet ball into the brush, walked in to retrieve it and never reappeared at Heathstone.

I continued on along the wall of the North wing, picked up my bundle and hiked away into the woods and over the wall.

I glanced back with a touch of nostalgia at Heathstone Rest. My companions there had much to recommend them. They had merely, for the most part, sought refuge from a frightening world. There is a justifiable logic in regarding what is whimsically known as "sane society" with alarm. Like the poor, God must be on the side of the disturbed people, for there are getting to be so many of them.

As for me, I saw only a quantitative difference between the inside and outside of Bedlam. I was ready to start living fast and on a scale that would allow for no imposed limitations. I was ready to live dangerously and meeting Mr. "Y" and my mother would give me a good sendoff.

I proceeded to make my way exuberantly and directly, without wasting time, toward the Retreat upstate. I hitchhiked into the nearest town, picked up suitable clothes in a hockshop. I had saved a neat

little nestegg from the liberal allowance sent me regularly by Mother. At a war-surplus store I bought a canteen, a blanket, and an army knapsack. I expected to spend at least one night sleeping under the stars. I went to a gunshop and bought a high-powered BB target pistol. These weapons are perfectly lethal when fired accurately at close range, and they require no gun permit or a certificate of legal age. I bought film for my Leica, then boarded a Greyhound bus that was headed upstate.

With my knapsack and appropriate attire, I suggested a rather sophisticated nature boy heading out to the boondocks to replenish my spirit with open sky and earthiness.

A lovely young girl challenged me with hot dark eyes, and my unleashed senses stirred me toward aggressive action, but I kept myself under control. I would no more make a move to exploit my freedom until it was assured, than I would go to the races with only a dime in my pocket.

Meanwhile, I sat back and watched the night lights of my world—my oyster—rolling past. I would appropriate whatever I demanded of it which would be considerable. My Mother would furnish the financial means, and murder itself would, of course, be no obstacle. It never has been, as you know, for really ambitious people.

First, I would acquire a wardrobe and a sportscar, custom-built. By then my novel would be published and fame added to financial status. That is important because, after all, any rigidly grooved idiot can be wealthy.

As the bus rocked through the night, I lay back on a cushion of anticipation. There would be interviews, television appearances, tours. There would be a European jaunt, visiting a few individuals important in the world of international art. I could even hear a broadcast tape-interview with Françoise Sagan in Paris.

"But, Sunny," she said in her sulky French. "You're so *young!*"

"My dear, I was never young," I said. "Early in life I decided not to waste my life on youth."

"But you're only seventeen. And this novel—it sounds so autobiographically mature. You couldn't already have spent three years in a mad house!"

"Oh yes. I had myself put away so I could mature at once."

"You didn't! Why, that's so philosophically correct!"

I laughed. "Isn't it, my dear Françoise. What better training could a young artist have for interpreting the present state of the world than to spend his formative years in an asylum?"

I lay staked out about fifty yards from the cabin, back up among the pine trees. It was a wild pleasant nest on top of a pile of boulders,

curtained off from below by brush. Dead pine needles were my bed. I lay listening to nature's song, watching the cabin and the lake. Night came again. Moon and stars appeared in familiar patterns. Night prowlers and their prey came out to cavort in their eternal drama of bloody pursuit and flight. I munched chocolate bars and studied the sky. Each star seemed to be but a glittering facet of my multiple destiny.

Early on the morning of the 3rd I practiced a little, plunking BB shot into birds and squirrels. I loaded my Leica carefully.

Although I had no idea what name my Mother would be honeymooning under this time, finding the cabin had been a simple bit of detective work. I knew she would own the cabin. Every letter I had ever gotten from her when she was honeymooning or vacationing with some guy had been written from the Retreat—postmarked Stevens Corners, a whistle-stop in a secluded valley. I knew, from letter references, that it was on the lake. I had only to find that section of the lake reserved for private cabins as opposed to the public campsites. This being the heart of the vacation season, I had only to find the one empty cabin among those privately owned after determining that my Mother wasn't in any of the others. Anyway, she had said she would arrive on the 3rd.

At nine A.M. a spanking new station wagon drove up and parked in front of the cabin near the front porch. I controlled my excitement with difficulty as Mother jumped exuberantly out of the car followed by Mr "Y" who moved in a much less animated manner.

Mother, wearing a red skirt and white blouse, urged him to even greater animation, goading him with laughter and polite teasing as he struggled unloading and carrying heavy suitcases onto the porch. Mother had always been carefully selective so, of course, Mr. "Y" was hardly up to this sort of unabated workout. Mother's description of him had been amusing, but understated. Compared with Mr. "Y", old Croats could have won the Mr. Universe contest hands down. My Mother, although she was a bit plumper now and a blonde, had not changed, but was as spry and effervescent as ever.

After Mr. "Y" wheezed and staggered the suitcases onto the porch, I heard Mother giggling as she asked him to carry her over the threshold. I shuddered, but didn't see what happened then as they moved out of sight under the porch roof.

Later they appeared on the back patio with lunch and a batch of martinis. Mother wore sunshorts and seemed to have acquired a nice suntan. "Mr. "Y" in an old-fashioned bathing suit reminded me of a spindly, pale insect that had lived all of its life in a dark cellar.

There followed a fast and prolonged game of ping-pong at which Mother was adept. Mr. "Y" almost collapsed, but was goaded into the woods in the rear of the cabin where Mother led him skipping grotesquely, like a Diane who had stumbled onto a decrepit and disgruntled old faun.

Mother wouldn't waste any time. She had often said she was strictly a city girl. The Retreat was a necessary evil. Her dislike of nature and open spaces bordered on allergy. She would work fast.

I checked my Leica with the exposure meter, rolled a fresh charge of BB shot into the pistol, and followed them into the woods.

From less than ten feet away, I began snapping pictures of their idyllic little pagan rite. From behind a curtain of thick leaves I could observe and record without fear of detection. The creek had been dammed up to form a large pool. I could almost hear the precarious knocking of the old boy's heart as he tested the icy water with his foot and jumped back shivering. "Why didn't we go in the lake?" he croaked dismally. "Warmer in the lake."

"You tenderfoot," my Mother said, giggling girlishly. Then, without hesitation, she dived in, came up sputtering and laughing in uninhibited joy. "Oh come on, don't

be a wet blanket!" she yelled, good humoredly. "Come on, dear, let's play!"

Mr. "Y" bent down and rubbed his pale bones. "Ah," he whined. "Ah, honey."

She grabbed at his ankles, but he stumbled away. She taunted and teased, but he crouched a few feet from the edge of the water, and assumed a stubborn sullen expression. "Well," Mother pouted charmingly, "I'll just have to play by myself."

She surface-dived, clowned, cavorted like a water nymph. Mr. "Y" watched her with that sullen stubborn resistance. There might be trouble with Mr. "Y", I thought. For all his outward appearance, he could well be made of extremely stern stuff.

Suddenly Mother gasped, doubled over in the water. She beat at the water futilely and began to choke and cry out for help.

Mr. "Y" was a reluctant and cautious hero. He approached the water with the enthusiasm of a housecat and leaned over it trying to reach my Mother who managed to remain out of reach.

I was busily snapping my Leica as Mother grabbed his ankles and pulled him in. Then I realized that the main reason why he had been reluctant to go in was because he couldn't swim. Mother immediately took advantage of this handicap by leaping up and pushing his head under repeatedly. But as I feared, Mr. "Y" was fired by unexpected reserves of survival urges. He began crawling desperately up the bank, digging and wriggling in the mud. Mother's usually capable hands slipped. She lunged to reclaim her hold, this time by the straps of Mr. "Y's" antique bathing suit. I continued clicking away with my Leica as his suit began sliding off, causing him to turn—a victim of false modesty—in an effort to hold the suit on. He even succeeded in continuing his frantic flight up the bank with one hand.

I could see that Mother was desperate, even as desperate as Mr. "Y". Deciding it was time to establish my postponed partnership with my Mother and define it uncontrovertibly forever, I stepped out of concealment. Bending down I banged the barrel of the pistol against Mr. "Y's" forehead.

The shock was sufficient. Stunned and terrified, he slid back down into the water where my Mother quickly disposed of him.

Following the initial surprise at seeing me, Mother hugged and kissed me with genuine spontaneous joy. This I appreciated.

"But what on earth are you doing here?" she asked.

"A boy should be with his mother," I said.

"I know, but you'll just have to go back, honey," she said regretfully. Then her eyes flickered to-

ward Mr. "Y", bobbing like a misshapen bottle in the pool.

"No, I'm not going back," I said. "I'm staying with you now. It wouldn't be fair for either of us, for me to stay in there indefinitely. Actually, it was never necessary for me to be put away."

I patted her wet shoulder in reassurance. "I know what just happened with Mr. "Y." And it's all here in my Leica. That's just in case I'm ever called on to prove that what I've just seen wasn't an hallucination."

"Why, Sunny, that sort of sneaky business isn't like you!"

"It's just in case," I said, smiling. I lifted the pistol. "Just as this is. There's no need to send me back and you mustn't. My assistance with the difficult Mr. "Y" should be proof enough of that. I know about all the others, too. I've always known. No need to mention names, but I know and I understand."

"And you don't—don't *care?*"

"Of course not. On the contrary, I admire your success."

"But you did go to the police about Mr. Croats."

"That was before I wised up, as they say. That was before I really understood you, Mother. I bore a grudge. I thought you boarded me out just to get rid of me. Now I know you did it because you didn't think I would understand. You thought I would condemn your actions."

"Of course I thought you would."

"I felt bitter that night and went to the police—mostly because you just never confided in me, never shared your work and dreams. If you had been honest with me from the first, you would never have had to have me committed so that whatever I might have said would be considered the hallucinations of a mad person. I would have understood the truth. After all, I'm your son."

"I know, I know," she half-sobbed with joy and relief and then embraced me. "And you really sympathize with my—kind of enterprise?"

"Of course, Mother!"

"I didn't want to put you in that place, but I couldn't think of anything else to do after you told about Mr. Croats."

"Oh there was one alternative, Mother. And I got to thinking about that. I knew that because you didn't take that logical alternative you really loved me."

"What else could I have done Sunny?"

"You could have murdered me."

"Oh no, Sunny!" she screamed. "I could never have done such a thing. Why, I'm your Mother!"

She heard it too, just as I did. A slight chuckling sound from the brush nearby. I twisted around and grabbed up the pistol. I edged forward. At that moment, Dr. Lawrence stepped into view and stood there grinning at me.

Dr. Lawrence chuckled again and casually lit a cigarette. Either

he was a brave man or didn't consider me a threat. I walked a few feet nearer so some high-compression BB slugs could easily penetrate his stupid head.

He ignored me, bowed slightly and said good morning to Mother. Without looking at her, I caught the very agreeable tone in her voice as she acknowledged his affable greeting.

"All right, Doc," I said. "Now maybe you figure to die happily because you've solved everything."

Dr. Lawrence exhaled thoughtfully into crisp morning air. "Yes, my research can lead back to odd sources. But I don't like to waste time. I was sure you intended to run away, Sunny. I had been confiscating your letters. The pattern became clear to me, but I followed you, a sort of a shortcut to the heart of the matter."

I pointed the pistol at his face. "Too bad you won't live to receive the Nobel Prize for snooping," I said.

"I hope I didn't exaggerate your intelligence, Sunny."

"Only your own," I said.

He laughed. "You mustn't compare me with Mr. Croats, Mr. "Y" or those other lucrative expendables, Sunny. I wouldn't be easily explained away. Especially with a load of buckshot in my head."

"But you won't be worried about it," I said.

"Now wait, Sunny, please," my Mother said. She swayed past me in that seductive walk and smiled at Dr. Lawrence.

"Get out of the way!" I screamed at her. But she ignored me and walked right up to him and there they stood gazing into each others' eyes. It was the sort of unabashed drooly gaze often seen in Ladies Home Companion illustrations. It was nauseating and incredible and if filled one with choking rage.

"Get out of the way, Mother!" I yelled again. "We've got to kill the damnable snoop!"

She continued to gaze up into Lawrence's face, transfixed. "But Sunny," she whispered, without turning toward me, "Dr. Lawrence saw everything didn't he? He saw what was happening and he didn't do a thing to prevent poor Mr. "Y's" unfortunate accident."

I stumbled back and sat down heavily on Mother's florid beach-towel. It was true, horribly true. No need to speculate about Dr. Lawrence's game which he had probably been playing, or planning to play, for some time. He wanted half of what my Mother had acquired, he wanted to share the wealth that I had expected to monopolize. And Mother was also eager to play the game, only this time I could see it was true love in all of its sentimental odiousness. Dr. Lawrence knew everything. From now on he would be calling the plays. I realized suddenly that I had better admit the facts, make a fast adjustment, or I would be lucky to

end up with a weekly allowance.

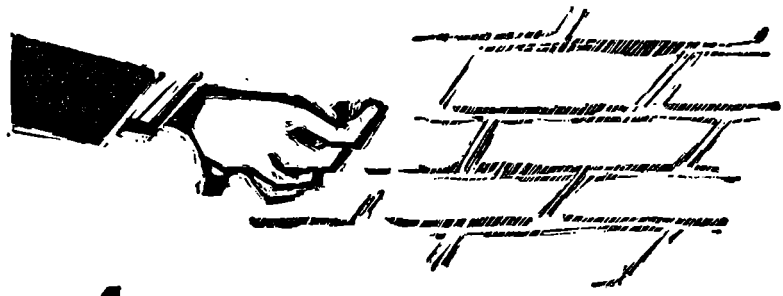
I jumped up as Dr. Lawrence, his arm around Mother's waist, walked toward me smiling. He put his other arm over my shoulders.

"It's my business to know things of this sort," he said. "And what you've always needed, my boy, is a father. A real father. You've needed a genuine, warm, family relationship. I want you to call me Dad."

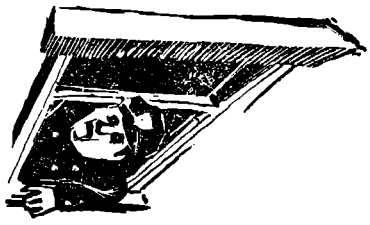
I had to grin. "You're the doctor, Dad," I said.

Then, Dr. Lawrence being a legally constituted medical authority, we discussed the proper sort of obituary report for Mr. "Y." Then we carried him back to the patio and went into the cabin for lunch before making our emergency call.

COME BACK, COME BACK...



A NOVELETTE BY DONALD E. WESTLAKE



DETECTIVE ABRAHAM LEVINE of Brooklyn's Forty-Third Precinct was a worried and a frightened man. He sat moodily at his desk in the small office he shared with his partner Jack Crawley, and pensively drew lopsided circles on the back of a blank accident report form. In the approximate center of each circle he placed a dot, drew two lines out from the dot to make a clock-face, reading three o'clock. An eight and a half by eleven sheet of white paper, covered with clock-faces, all reading three o'clock.

"That the time you see the doctor?"

Levine looked up, startled, called back from years away. Crawley was standing beside the desk, looking down at him, and Levine blinked, not having heard the question.

Crawley reached down and

Window ledges are constructed primarily as a place upon which one may set flower pots. Should you insist on going out on one that is high above the busy streets, just remember the chance you're taking of attracting a crowd.

tapped the paper with a horny fingernail. "Three o'clock," he explained. "That the time you see the doctor?"

"Oh," said Levine. "Yes. Three o'clock."

Crawley said, "Take it easy, Abe."

"Sure," said Levine. He managed a weak smile. "No sense worrying beforehand, huh?"

"My brother," said Crawley, "he had one of those cardiograph things just a couple months ago. He's just around your age, and man, he was worried. And the doctor tells him, 'You'll live to be a hundred.'"

"And then you'll die," said Levine.

"What the hell, Abe, we all got to go *sometime*."

"Sure."

Abraham Levine was fifty-three years alive, twenty-four years a cop. A short and chunky man, he wore plain brown suits and dark solid-color ties, brown or black plain shoes. His hair was pepper-and-salt gray, trimmed all around in a stiff pseudo-military crewcut. The crewcut didn't go with the face, roundish, soft-eyed, sensitive-lipped, lined with fifty-three years' accumulation of small worries.

"Listen, Abe, you want to go on home? It's a dull day, nothing doing, I can—"

"Don't say that," Levine warned him. "The phone will ring." The phone rang as he was talking and he grinned, shrugging with palms up. "See?"

"Let me see what it is," said Crawley, reaching for the phone. "Probably nothing important. You can go on home and take it easy till three o'clock. It's only ten now and—Hello?" The last word spoken into the phone mouthpiece. "Yeah, this is Crawley."

Levine watched Crawley's face, trying to read in it the nature of the call. Crawley had been his partner for seven years, since old Jake Moshby had retired, and in that time they had become good friends, as close as two such different men could get to one another.

Crawley was a big man, somewhat overweight, somewhere in his middle forties. His clothes hung awkwardly on him, not as though they were too large or too small but as though they had been planned for a man of completely different proportions. His face was rugged, squarish, heavy-jowled. He looked like a tough cop, and he played the role very well.

Crawley had once described the quality of their partnership with reasonable accuracy. "With your brains and my beauty, Abe, we've got it made."

Now, Levine watched Crawley's face as the big man listened impassively to the phone, finally nodding and saying, "Okay, I'll go right on up there. Yeah, I know, that's what I figure, too." And he hung up.

"What is it, Jack?" Levine asked, getting up from the desk.

"A phony," said Crawley. "I can

handle it, Abe. You go on home."

"I'd rather have some work to do. What is it?"

Crawley was striding for the door, Levine after him. "Man on a ledge," he said. "A phony. They're all phonies. The ones that really mean to jump do it right away, get it over with. Guys like this one, all they want is a little attention, somebody to tell them it's all okay, come on back in, everything's forgiven."

The two of them walked down the long green hall toward the front of the precinct. *Man on a ledge,* Levine thought. *Don't jump. Don't die. For God's sake, don't die.*

The address was an office building on Flatbush Avenue, a few blocks down from the bridge, near A&S and the major Brooklyn movie houses. A small crowd had gathered on the sidewalk across the street, looking up, but most of the pedestrians stopped only for a second or two, only long enough to see what the small crowd was gaping at, and then hurried on wherever they were going. They were still involved in life, they had things to do, they didn't have time to watch a man die.

Traffic on this side was being rerouted away from this block of Flatbush, around via Fulton or Willoughby or DeKalb. It was a little after ten o'clock on a sunny day in late June, warm without the humidity that would hit the city a week or two farther into the summer, but the uniformed cop who waved at them to make the turn was sweating, his blue shirt stained a darker blue, his forehead creased with strain above the sunglasses.

Crawley was driving their car, an unmarked black '56 Chevvy, no siren, and he braked to a stop in front of the patrolman. He stuck his head and arm out the window, dangling his wallet open so the badge showed. "Precinct," he called.

"Oh," said the cop. He stepped aside to let them pass. "You didn't have any siren or light or anything," he explained.

"We don't want to make our friend nervous," Crawley told him.

The cop glanced up, then looked back at Crawley. "He's making *me* nervous," he said.

Crawley laughed. "A phony," he told the cop. "Wait and see."

On his side of the car, Levine had leaned his head out the window, was looking up, studying the man on the ledge.

It was an office building, eight stories high. Not a very tall building, particularly for New York, but plenty tall enough for the purposes of the man standing on the ledge that girdled the building at the sixth floor level. The first floor of the building was mainly a bank and partially a luncheonette. The second floor, according to the lettering strung along the front windows, was entirely given over to a loan company, and Levine could under-

stand the advantage of the location. A man had his loan request turned down by the bank, all he had to do was go up one flight of stairs—or one flight in the elevator, more likely—and there was the loan company.

And if the loan company failed him too, there was a nice ledge on the sixth floor.

Levine wondered if this particular case had anything to do with money. Almost everything had something to do with money. Things that he became aware of because he was a cop, almost all of them had something to do with money. The psychoanalysts are wrong, he thought. It isn't sex that's at the center of all the pain in the world, it's money. Even when a cop answers a call from neighbors complaining about a couple screaming and fighting and throwing things at one another, nine times out of ten it's the same old thing they're arguing about. Money.

Levine's eyes traveled up the facade of the building, beyond the loan company's windows. None of the windows higher up bore the lettering of firm names. On the sixth floor, most of the windows were open, heads were sticking out into the air. And in the middle of it all, just out of reach of the windows on either side of him, was the man on the ledge.

Levine squinted, trying to see the man better against the brightness of the day. He wore a suit—it looked gray, but might be black—and white shirt and a dark tie, and the open suit coat and the tie were both whipping in the breeze up there. The man was standing as though crucified, back flat against the wall of the building, legs spread maybe two feet apart, arms out straight to either side of him, hands pressed palm-in against the stone surface of the wall.

The man was terrified. Levine was much too far away to see his face or read the expression there, but he didn't need any more than the posture of the body on the ledge. Taut, pasted to the wall, wide-spread. The man was terrified.

Crawley was right, of course. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the man on the ledge *is* a phony. He doesn't really expect to have to kill himself, though he will do it if pressed too hard. But he's out there on the ledge for one purpose and one purpose only: to be seen. He wants to be seen, he wants to be noticed. Whatever his unfulfilled demands on life, whatever his frustrations or problems, he wants other people to be forced to be aware of them, and to agree to help him overcome them.

If he gets satisfaction, he will allow himself, after a decent interval, to be brought back in. If he gets the raise, or the girl, or forgiveness from the boss for his embezzling, or forgiveness from his wife for his philandering, or whatever his one

urgent demand is, once the demand is met, he will come in from the ledge.

But there is one danger he doesn't stop to think about, not until it's too late and he's already out there on the ledge, and the drama has already begun. The police know of this danger, and they know it is by far the greatest danger of the man on the ledge, much greater than any danger of deliberate self-destruction.

He can fall.

This one had learned that danger by now, as every inch of his straining taut body testified. He had learned it, and he was frightened out of his wits.

Levine grimaced. The man on the ledge didn't know—or if he knew, the knowledge was useless to him—that a terrified man can have an accident much more readily and much more quickly than a calm man. And so the man on the ledge always compounded his danger.

Crawley braked the Chevvy to a stop at the curb, two doors beyond the address. The rest of the curb space was already used by official vehicles. An ambulance, white and gleaming. A smallish fire engine, red and full-packed with hose and ladders. A prowl car, most likely the one on this beat. The Crash & Rescue truck, dark blue, a first-aid station on wheels.

As he was getting out of the car, Levine noticed the firemen, standing around, leaning against the plate glass windows of the bank, an eight foot net lying closed on the sidewalk near them. Levine took the scene in, and knew what had happened. The firemen had started to open the net. The man on the ledge had threatened to jump at once if they didn't take the net away. He could always jump to one side, miss the net. A net was no good unless the person to be caught *wanted* to be caught. So the firemen had closed up their net again, and now they were waiting, leaning against the bank windows, far enough away to the right.

Other men stood here and there on the sidewalk, some uniformed and some in plainclothes, most of them looking up at the man on the ledge. None of them stood inside a large white circle drawn in chalk on the pavement. It was a wide sidewalk here, in front of the bank, and the circle was almost the full width of it.

No one stood inside that circle because it marked the probable area where the man would land, if and when he fell or jumped from the ledge. And no one wanted to be underneath.

Crawley came around the Chevvy, patting the fenders with a large calloused hand. He stopped next to Levine and looked up. "The phony," he growled, and Levine heard outrage in the tone. Crawley was an honest man, in simple terms of black and white. He hated dishonesty, in all its forms, from

grand larceny to raucous television commercials. And a faked suicide attempt was dishonesty.

The two of them walked toward the building entrance. Crawley walked disdainfully through the precise center of the large chalked circle, not even bothering to look up. Levine walked around the outer edge.

Then the two of them went inside and took the elevator to the sixth floor.

The letters on the frosted-glass door read: "Anderson & Cartwright, Industrial Research Associates, Inc."

Crawley tapped on the glass. "Which one do you bet?" he asked. "Anderson or Cartwright?"

"It might be an employee."

Crawley shook his head. "Odds are against it. I take Anderson."

"Go in," said Levine gently. "Go on in."

Crawley pushed the door open and strode in, Levine behind him. It was the receptionist's office, cream-green walls and carpet, modernistic metal desk, modernistic metal and leather sofa and armchairs, modernistic saucer-shaped light fixtures hanging from bronzed chains attached to the ceiling.

Three women sat nervously, wide-eyed, off to the right, on the metal and leather armchairs. Above their heads were framed photographs of factory buildings, most of them in color, a few in black and white.

A uniformed patrolman was leaning against the receptionist's desk, arms folded across his chest, a relaxed expression on his face. He straightened up immediately when he saw Crawley and Levine. Levine recognized him as McCann, a patrolman working out of the same precinct.

"Am I glad to see you guys," said McCann. "Gundy's in talking to the guy now."

"Which one is it," Crawley asked, "Anderson or Cartwright?"

"Cartwright. Jason Cartwright. He's one of the bosses here."

Crawley turned a sour grin on Levine. "You win," he said, and led the way across the receptionist's office to the door marked: "Jason Cartwright PRIVATE."

There were two men in the room. One was sitting on the window ledge, looking out and to his left, talking in a soft voice. The other, standing a pace or two away from the window, was the patrolman, Gundy. He and McCann would be the two from the prowl car, the first ones on the scene.

At their entrance, Gundy looked around and then came over to talk with them. He and McCann were cut from the same mold. Both young, tall, slender, thin-cheeked, ready to grin at a second's notice. The older a man gets, Levine thought, the longer it takes him to get a grin organized.

Gundy wasn't grinning now. He looked very solemn, and a little scared. Levine realized with shock that this might be Gundy's first brush with death. He didn't look as though he could have been out of the Academy very long.

I have news for you, Gundy, he thought. *You don't get used to it.*

Crawley said, "What's the story?"

"I'm not sure," said Gundy. "He went out there about twenty minutes ago. That's his son talking to him. Son's a lawyer, got an office right in this building."

"What's the guy out there want?"

Gundy shook his head. "He won't say. He just stands out there. He won't say a word, except to shout that he's going to jump whenever anybody tries to get too close to him."

"A coy one," said Crawley, disgusted.

The phone shrilled, and Gundy stepped quickly over to the desk, picking up the receiver before the second ring. He spoke softly into the instrument, then looked over at the man by the window. "Your mother again," he said.

The man at the window spoke a few more words to the man on the ledge, then came over and took the phone from Gundy. Gundy immediately took his place at the window, and Levine could hear his first words plainly. "Just take it easy, now. Relax. But maybe you shouldn't close your eyes."

Levine looked at the son, now talking on the phone. A young man, not more than twenty-five or six. Blond crewcut, hornrim glasses, good mouth, strong jawline. Dressed in Madison Avenue conservative. Just barely out of law school, from the look of him.

Levine studied the office. It was a large room, eighteen to twenty feet square, as traditional as the outer office was contemporary. The desk was a massive piece of furniture, a dark warm wood, the legs and drawer faces carefully and intricately carved. Glass-faced bookshelves lined one complete wall. The carpet was a neutral gray, wall-to-wall. There were two sofas, brown leather, long and deep and comfortable-looking. Bronze ashtray stands. More framed photographs of plant buildings.

The son was saying, "Yes, mother. I've been talking to him, mother. I don't know, mother."

Levine walked over, said to the son, "May I speak to her for a minute, please?"

"Of course. Mother, there's a policeman here who wants to talk to you."

Levine accepted the phone, said, "Mrs. Cartwright?"

The voice that answered was high-pitched, and Levine could readily imagine it becoming shrill. The voice said, "Why is he out there? Why is he doing that?"

"We don't know yet," Levine told her. "We were hoping you might be able to—"

"Me?" The voice was suddenly a bit closer to being shrill. "I still can't really believe this. I don't know why he'd—I have no idea. What does he say?"

"He hasn't told us why yet," said Levine. "Where are you now, Mrs. Cartwright?"

"At home, of course."

"That's where?"

"New Brunswick."

"Do you have a car there? Could you drive here now?"

"There? To New York?"

"It might help, Mrs. Cartwright, if he could see you, if you could talk to him."

"But—it would take *hours* to get there! Surely, it would be—that is, before I got there, you'd have him safe already, wouldn't you?"

She hopes he jumps, thought Levine, with sudden certainty. *By God, she hopes he jumps!*

"Well, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," he said wearily. "I suppose you're right. Here's your son again."

He extended the receiver to the son, who took it, cupped the mouthpiece with one hand, said worriedly, "Don't misunderstand her. Please, she isn't as cold as she might sound. She loves my father, she really does."

"All right," said Levine. He turned away from the pleading in the son's eyes, said to Crawley, "Let's talk with him a bit."

"Right," said Crawley.

There were two windows in the office, about ten feet apart, and Jason Cartwright was standing directly between them on the ledge. Crawley went to the left-hand window and Levine to the right-hand window, where the patrolman Gundy was still trying to chat with the man on the ledge, trying to keep him distracted from the height and his desire to jump. "We'll take over," Levine said softly, and Gundy nodded gratefully and backed away from the window.

Levine twisted around, sat on the windowsill, hooked one arm under the open window, leaned out slightly so that the breeze touched his face. He looked down.

Six stories. God, who would have thought six stories was so high from the ground? This is the height when you really get the feeling of height. On top of the Empire State building, or flying in a plane, it's just too damn high, it isn't real any more. But six stories—that's a fine height to be at, to really understand the terror of falling.

Place ten Levines, one standing on another's shoulders, forming a human tower or a totem pole, and the Levine in the window wouldn't be able to reach the cropped gray hair on the head of the top Levine in the totem pole.

Down there, he could make out faces, distinguish eyes and open mouths, see the blue jeans and high boots and black slickers of the fire-

men, the red domes atop the police cars. Across the street, he could see the red of a girl's sweater.

He looked down at the street, sixty-six feet below him. It was a funny thing about heights, a strange and funny and terrifying thing. Stand by the rail of a bridge, looking down at the water. Stand by a window on the sixth floor, looking down at the street. And from miles down inside the brain, a filthy little voice snickers and leers and croons, "Jump. Go on and jump. Wouldn't you like to know how it would feel, to fall free through space? Go on, go on, jump."

From his left, Crawley's voice suddenly boomed out. "Aren't you a little old, Cartwright, for this kind of nonsense?"

The reassuring well-known reality of Crawley's voice tore Levine away from the snickering little voice. He suddenly realized he'd been leaning too far out from the window, and pulled himself hastily back.

And he felt his heart pounding within his chest. Three o'clock, he had to go see that doctor. He had to be calm; his heart had to be calm for the doctor's inspection.

At night— He didn't get enough sleep at night any more, that was part of the problem. But it was impossible to sleep and listen to one's heart at the same time, and of the two it was more important to listen to the heart. Listen to it plodding along, laboring, like an old man climbing a hill with a heavy pack. And then, all at once, the silence. The skipped beat. And the sluggish heart gathering its forces, building its strength, plodding on again. It had never yet skipped two beats in a row.

It could only do that once.

"What is it you want, Cartwright?" called Crawley's voice.

Levine, for the first time, looked to the left and saw Jason Cartwright.

A big man, probably an athlete in his younger days, still muscular but now padded with the flesh of years. Black hair with a natural wave in it, now mussed by the breeze. A heavy face, the chin sagging a bit but the jawline still strong, the nose large and straight, the forehead wide, the brows outthrust, the eyes deep and now wide and wild. A good-looking man, probably in his late forties.

Levine knew a lot about him already. From the look of the son in there, this man had married young, probably while still in his teens. From the sound of the wife, the marriage had soured. From the look of the office and the apparent education of the son, his career had blossomed where his marriage hadn't. So this time, one of the exceptions, the trouble wouldn't be money. This time, it was connected most likely with his marriage.

Another woman?'

It wouldn't be a good idea to ask

him. Sooner or later, he would state his terms, he would tell them what had driven him out here. Force the issue, and he might jump. A man on a ledge goes out there not wanting to jump, but accepting the fact that he may have to.

Cartwright had been looking at Crawley, and now he turned his head, stared at Levine. "Oh, no you don't!" he cried. His voice would normally be baritone, probably a pleasant speaking voice, but emotion had driven it up the scale, making it raucuous, tinged with hysteria. "One distracts me while the other sneaks up on me, is that it?" the man cried. "You won't get away with it. Come near me and I'll jump, I swear I'll jump!"

"I'll stay right here," Levine promised. Leaning far out, he would be almost able to reach Cartwright's out-stretched hand. But if he were to touch it, Cartwright would surely jump. And if he were to grip it, Cartwright would most likely drag him along too, all the way down to the sidewalk sixty-six feet below.

"What is it, Cartwright?" demanded Crawley again. "What do you want?"

Way back at the beginning of their partnership, Levine and Crawley had discovered the arrangement that worked best for them. Crawley asked the questions, and Levine listened to the answers. While a man paid attention to Crawley, erected his facade between himself and Crawley, Levine, silent and unnoticed, could come in on the flank, peek behind the facade and see the man who was really there.

"I want you to leave me alone!" cried Cartwright. "Everybody, everybody! Just leave me alone!"

"Look up at the sky, Mister Cartwright," said Levine softly, just loud enough for the man on the ledge to hear him. "Look how blue it is. Look down across the street. Do you see the red of that girl's sweater? Breathe in, Mister Cartwright. Do you smell the city? Hark! Listen! Did you hear that car-horn? That was over on Fulton Street, wasn't it?"

"Shut up!" screamed Cartwright, turning swiftly, precariously, to glare again at Levine. "Shut up, shut up, shut up! Leave me alone!"

Levine knew all he needed. "Do you want to talk to your son?" he asked.

"Allan?" The man's face softened all at once. "Allan?"

"He's right here," said Levine. He came back in from the window, signalled to the son, who was no longer talking on the phone. "He wants to talk to you."

The son rushed to the window. "Dad?"

Crawley came over, glowering. "Well?" he said.

Levine shook his head. "He doesn't want to die."

"I know that. What now?"

"I think it's the wife." Levine motioned to Gundy, who came over, and he said, "Is the partner here? Anderson?"

"Sure," said Gundy. "He's in his office. He tried to talk to Cartwright once, but Cartwright got too excited. We thought it would be a good idea if Anderson kept out of sight."

"Who thought? Anderson?"

"Well, yes. All of us. Anderson and McCann and me."

"Okay," said Levine. "You and the boy—what's his name, Allan?—stay here. Let me know what's happening, if anything at all does happen. We'll go talk with Mister Anderson now."

Anderson was short, slender, very brisk, very bald. His wire-framed spectacles reflected light, and his round little face was troubled. "No warning at all," he said. "Not a word. All of a sudden, Joan—she's our receptionist—got a call from someone across the street, saying there was a man on the ledge. And it was Jason. Just like that! No warning at all."

"The sign on your door," said Crawley, "says Industrial Research. What's that, efficiency expert stuff?"

Anderson smiled, a quick nervous flutter. "Not exactly," he said. He was devoting all his attention to Crawley, who was standing directly in front of him and who was asking the questions. Levine stood to one side, watching the movements of Anderson's lips and eyes and hands as he spoke.

"We are efficiency experts, in a way," Anderson was saying, "but not in the usual sense of the term. We don't work with time-charts, or how many people should work in the steno pool, things like that. Our major concern is the physical plant itself, the structure and design of the plant buildings and work areas."

Crawley nodded. "Architects," he said.

Anderson's brief smile fluttered on his face again, and he shook his head. "No, we work in conjunction with the architect, if it's a new building. But most of our work is concerned with the modernization of old facilities. In a way, we're a central clearing agency for new ideas in industrial plant procedures." It was, thought Levine, an explanation Anderson was used to making, so used to making that it sounded almost like a memorized patter.

"You and Cartwright equal partners?" asked Crawley. It was clear he hadn't understood a word of Anderson's explanation and was impatient to move on to other things.

Anderson nodded. "Yes, we are. We've been partners for twenty-one years."

"You know him well, then."

"I should think so, yes."

"Then maybe you know why he suddenly decided to go crawl out on the ledge."

Eyes widening, Anderson shook his head again. "Not a thing," he said. "I had no idea, nothing, I—There just wasn't any warning at all."

Levine stood off to one side, watching, his lips pursed in concentration. Was Anderson telling the truth? It seemed likely; it *felt* likely. The marriage again. It kept going back to the marriage.

"Has he acted at all funny lately?" Crawley was still pursuing the same thought, that there had to be some previous build-up, and that the build-up should show. "Has he been moody, anything like that?"

"Jason—" Anderson stopped, shook his head briefly, started again. "Jason is a quiet man, by nature. He—he rarely says much, rarely uh, *forces* his personality, if you know what I mean. If he's been thinking about this, whatever it is, it—it wouldn't show. I don't *think* it would show."

"Would he have any business worries at all?" Crawley undoubtedly realized by now this was a blind alley, but he would go through the normal questions anyway. You never could tell.

Anderson, as was to be expected, said, "No, none. We've—well, we've been doing very well. The last five years, we've been expanding steadily, we've even added to our staff, just six months ago."

Levine now spoke for the first time. "What about Mrs. Cartwright?" he asked.

Anderson looked blank, as he turned to face Levine. "Mrs. Cartwright? I—I don't understand what you mean."

Crawley immediately picked up the new ball, took over the questioning again. "Do you know her well, Mister Anderson? What kind of woman would you say she was?"

Anderson turned back to Crawley, once again opening his flank to Levine. "She's, well, actually I haven't seen very much of her the last few years. Jason moved out of Manhattan five six years ago, over to Jersey, and I live out on the Island, so we don't, uh, we don't *socialize* very much, as much as we used to. As you get older—" he turned to face Levine, as though instinctively understanding that Levine would more readily know what he meant "—you don't go out so much any more, in the evening. You don't, uh, keep up friendships as much as you used to."

"You must know *something* about Mrs. Cartwright," said Crawley.

Anderson gave his attention to Crawley again. "She's, well, I suppose the best way to describe her is *determined*. I know for a fact she was the one who talked Jason into coming into partnership with me, twenty-one years ago. A forceful woman. Not a nag, mind you, I

don't mean that at all. A very pleasant woman, really. A good hostess. A good mother, from the look of Allan. But forceful."

The wife, thought Levine. *She's the root of it. She knows, too, what drove him out there.*

And she wants him to jump.

Back in Cartwright's office, the son Allan was once again at the phone. The patrolman Gundy was at the left-hand window, and a new man, in clerical garb, at the right-hand window.

Gundy noticed Levine and Crawley come in, and immediately left the window. "A priest," he said softly. "Anderson said he was Catholic, so we got in touch with St. Marks, over on Willoughby."

Levine nodded. He was listening to the son. "I don't know, mother. Of course, mother, we're doing everything we can. No, mother, no reporters up here, maybe it won't have to be in the papers at all."

Levine went over to the window Gundy had vacated, took up a position where he could see Cartwright, carefully refrained from looking down at the ground. The priest was saying, "God has his time for you, Mister Cartwright. This is God's prerogative, to choose the time and the means of your death."

Cartwright shook his head, not looking at the priest, glaring instead directly across Flatbush Avenue at the building across the way. "There is no God," he said.

"I don't believe you mean that, Mister Cartwright," said the priest. "I believe you've lost faith in yourself, but I don't believe you've lost faith in God."

"Take that away!" screamed Cartwright all at once. "Take that away, or I jump right now!"

He was staring down toward the street, and Levine followed the direction of his gaze. Poles had been extended from windows on the floor below, and a safety net, similar to that used by circus performers, was being unrolled along them.

"Take that away!" screamed Cartwright again. He was leaning precariously forward, his face mottled red with fury and terror.

"Roll that back in!" shouted Levine. "Get it out of there, he can jump over it! Roll it back in!"

A face jutted out of one of the fifth-floor windows, turning inquiringly upward, saying, "Who are you?"

"Levine. Precinct. Get that thing away from there."

"Right you are," said the face, making it clear he accepted no responsibility either way. And the net and poles were withdrawn.

The priest, on the other side, was saying, "It's all right. Relax, Mr. Cartwright; it's all right. These people only want to help you; it's all right." The priest's voice was shaky. Like Gundy, he was a

rookie at this. He'd never been asked to talk in a suicide before.

Levine twisted around, looking up. Two stories up, and the roof. More men were up there, with another safety net. If this were the top floor, they would probably take a chance with that net, try flipping it over him and pasting him like a butterfly to the wall. But not here, three stories down.

Cartwright had turned his face away from the still-talking priest, was studying Levine intently. Levine returned his gaze, and Cartwright said, "Where's Laura? She should be here by now, shouldn't she? Where is she?"

"Laura? You mean your wife?"

"Of course," he said. He stared at Levine, trying to read something to Levine's face. "Where is she?"

Tell him the truth? No. Tell him his wife wasn't coming, and he would jump right away. "She's on the way," he said. "She should be here pretty soon."

Cartwright turned his face forward again, stared off across the street. The priest was still talking, softly, insistently.

Levine came back into the office. To Crawley, he said, "It's the wife He's waiting for her."

"They've always got a wife," said Crawley sourly. "And there's always just the one person they'll tell it to. Well, how long before she gets here?"

"She isn't coming."

"What?"

"She's at home, over in Jersey. She said she wouldn't come." Levine shrugged and added, "I'll try her again."

The son was still on the phone, but he handed it over as soon as Levine spoke to him. Levine said, "This is Detective Levine again, Mrs. Cartwright. We'd like you to come down here after all, please. Your husband asked to talk to you."

There was hesitation from the woman for a few seconds, and then she burst out, "Why can't you bring him in? Can't you even *stop* him?"

"He's out of reach, Mrs. Cartwright. If we tried to get him, I'm afraid he'd jump."

"This is ridiculous! No, no, definitely not, I'm not going to be a party to it. I'm not going to talk to him until he comes in from there. You tell him that."

"Mrs. Cartwright—"

"I'm not going to have any more to do with it!"

The click was loud in Levine's ear as she slammed the receiver onto the hook. Crawley was looking at him, and now said, "Well?"

"She hung up."

"She isn't coming?" It was plain that Crawley was having trouble believing it.

Levine glanced at the son, who could hear every word he was saying, and then shrugged. "She wants him to jump," he said.

The son's reaction was much smaller than Levine had expected.

He simply shook his head definitely and said, "No."

Levine waited, looking at him.

The son shook his head again. "That isn't true," he said. "She just doesn't understand—she doesn't really think he means it."

"All right," said Levine. He turned away from the son, trying to think. The wife, the marriage—A man in his late forties, married young, son grown and set up in his own vocation. A quiet man, who doesn't force his personality on others, and a forceful wife. A practical wife, who pushed him into a successful business.

Levine made his decision. He nodded, and went back through the receptionist's office, where the other patrolman, McCann, was chatting with the three woman employees. Levine went into Anderson's office, said, "Excuse me. Could I have the use of your office for a little while?"

"Certainly." Anderson got up from his desk, came around, saying, "Anything at all, anything at all."

"Thank you."

Levine followed Anderson back to the receptionist's office, looked over the three women sitting against the left hand wall. Two were fortyish, plumpish, wearing wedding bands. The third looked to be in her early thirties, was tall and slender, good-looking in a solid level-eyed way, not glamorous. She wore no rings at all.

Levine went over to the third woman, said, "Could I speak to you for a minute, please?"

She looked up, startled, a bit frightened. "What? Oh. Oh, yes, of course."

She followed him back into Anderson's office. He motioned her to the chair facing Anderson's desk, himself sat behind the desk. "My name is Levine," he said. "Detective Abraham Levine. And you are—?"

"Janice Shapleigh," she said. Her voice was low, pleasantly melodious. She was wearing normal office clothing, a gray plain skirt and white plain blouse.

"You've worked here how long?"

"Three years." She was answering readily enough, with no hesitations, but deep in her eyes he could see she was frightened, and wary.

"Mister Cartwright won't tell us why he wants to kill himself," he began. "He's asked to speak to his wife, but she refuses to leave home—" He detected a tightening of her lips when he said that. Disapproval of Mrs. Cartwright? He went on. "—which we haven't told him yet. He doesn't really want to jump, Miss Shapleigh. He's a frustrated, thwarted man. There's something he wants or needs that he can't get, and he's chosen this way to try to force the issue." He paused, studying her face, said, "Would that something be you?"

Color started in her cheeks, and she opened her mouth for what he knew would be an immediate denial. But the denial didn't come. Instead, Janice Shapleigh sagged in the chair, defeated and miserable, not meeting Levine's eyes. In a small, voice, barely audible, she said, "I didn't think he'd do anything like this. I never thought he'd do anything like this."

"He wants to marry you, is that it? And he can't get a divorce."

The girl nodded, and all at once she began to cry. She wept with one closed hand pressed to her mouth, muffling the sound, her head bowed as though she were ashamed of this weakness, ashamed to be seen crying.

Levine waited, watching her with the dulled helplessness of a man whose job by its very nature kept him exposed to the misery and frustrations of others. He would always want to help, and he would always be unable to help, to really help.

Janice Shapleigh controlled herself, slowly and painfully. When she looked up again, Levine knew she was finished weeping, no matter what happened. "What do you want me to do?" she said.

"Talk to him. His wife won't come—she knows what he wants to say to her, I suppose—so you're the only one."

"What can I say to him?"

Levine felt weary, heavy. Breathing, working the heart, pushing the sluggish blood through veins and arteries, was wearing, hopeless, exhausting labor. "I don't know," he said. "He wants to die because of you. Tell him why he should live."

Levine stood by the right-hand window, just out of sight of the man on the ledge. The son and the priest and Crawley and Gundy were all across the room, watching and waiting, the son looking bewildered, the priest relieved, Crawley sour, Gundy excited.

Janice Shapleigh was at the left-hand window, tense and frightened. She leaned out, looking down, and Levine saw her body go rigid, saw her hands tighten on the window-frame. She closed her eyes, swaying, inhaling, and Levine stood ready to move. If she were to faint from that position, she could fall out the window.

But she didn't faint. She raised her head and opened her eyes, and carefully avoided looking down at the street again. She looked, instead, to her right, toward the man on the ledge. "Jay," she said. "Jay, please."

"Jan!" Cartwright sounded surprised. "What are you doing? Jan, go back in there, stay away from this. Go back in there."

Levine stood by the window, listening. What would she say to him? What *could* she say to him?

"Jay," she said, slowly, hesitant-

ly, "Jay, please. It isn't worth it. Nothing is worth—dying for."

"Where's Laura?"

Levine waited, unbreathing, and at last the girl spoke the lie he had placed in her mouth. "She's on the way. She'll be here soon. But what does it matter, Jay? She still won't agree, you know that. She won't believe you."

"I'll wait for Laura," he said.

The son was suddenly striding across the room, shouting, "What is this? What's going on here?"

Levine spun around, motioning angrily for the boy to be quiet.

"Who is that woman?" demanded the son. "What's she doing here?"

Levine intercepted him before he could get to Janice Shapleigh, pressed both palms flat against the boy's shirt-front. "Get back over there," he whispered fiercely. "Get back over there."

"Get away from me! Who is she? What's going on here?"

"Allan?" It was Cartwright's voice, shouting the question. "Allan?"

Crawley now had the boy's arms from behind, and he and Levine propelled him toward the door. "Let me *go!*" cried the boy. "I've got a right to—"

Crawley's large hand clamped across his mouth, and the three of them barreled through to the receptionist's office. As the door closed behind them, Levine heard Janice Shapleigh repeating, "Jay? Listen to me, Jay, please. Please, Jay."

The door safely shut behind them, the two detectives let the boy go. He turned immediately, trying to push past them and get back inside, crying, "You can't do this! Let me go! What do you think you are? Who is that woman?"

"Shut up," said Levine. He spoke softly, but the boy quieted at once. In his voice had been all his own miseries, all his own frustrations, and his utter weariness with the misery and frustration of others.

"I'll tell you who that woman is," Levine said. "She's the woman your father wants to marry. He wants to divorce your mother and marry her."

"No," said the boy, as sure and positive as he had been earlier in denying that his mother would want to see his father dead.

"Don't say no," said Levine coldly. "I'm telling you facts. That's what sent him out there on that ledge. Your mother won't agree to the divorce."

"My mother—"

"Your mother," Levine pushed coldly on, "planned your father's life. Now, all at once, he's reached the age where he should have accomplished whatever he set out to do. His son is grown, he's making good money, now's the time for him to look around and say, 'This is the world I made for myself, and it's a good one.' But he can't. Because he doesn't like his life, it isn't *his* life,

it's the life your mother planned for him."

"You're wrong," said the boy. "You're wrong."

"So he went looking." said Levine, ignoring the boy's interruptions, "and he found Janice Shapleigh. She wouldn't push him, she wouldn't plan for him, she'd let *him* be the strong one."

The boy just stood here, shaking his head, repeating over and over, "You're wrong. You're wrong."

Levine grimaced, in irritation and defeat. *You never break through,* he thought. *You never break through.* Aloud he said, "In twenty years you'll believe me." He looked over at the patrolman, McCann. "Keep this young man out here with you," he said.

"Right," said McCann.

"Why?" cried the son. "He's my father! Why can't I go in there?"

"Shame," Levine told him. "If he saw his son and this woman at the same time, he'd jump."

The boy's eyes widened. He started to shake his head, then just stood there, staring.

Levine and Crawley went back into the other room.

Janice Shapleigh was coming away from the window, her face ashen. "Somebody down on the sidewalk started taking pictures," she said. "Jay shouted at them to stop. He told me to get in out of sight, or he'd jump right now."

"Respectability," said Levine, as though the word were obscene. "We're all fools."

Crawley said, "Think we ought to send someone for the wife?"

"No. She'd only make it worse. She'd say no, and he'd go over."

"Oh God!" Janice Shapleigh swayed suddenly and Crawley grabbed her arm, led her across to one of the leather sofas.

Levine went back to the right-hand window. He looked out. A block away, on the other side of the street, there was a large clock in front of a bank building. It was almost eleven-thirty. They'd been here almost an hour and a half.

Three o'clock, he thought suddenly. This thing had to be over before three o'clock, that was the time of his appointment with the doctor.

He looked out at Cartwright. The man was getting tired. His face was drawn with strain and emotion, and his fingertips were clutching tight to the rough face of the wall. Levine said, "Cartwright."

The man turned his head, slowly, afraid now of rapid movement. He looked at Levine without speaking.

"Cartwright," said Levine. "Have you thought about it now? Have you thought about death?"

"I want to talk to my wife."

"You could fall before she got here," Levine told him. "She has a long way to drive, and you're get-

ting tired. Come in, come in here. You can talk to her in here when she arrives. You've proved your point, man, you can come in. Do you want to get too tired, do you want to lose your balance, lose your footing, slip and fall?"

"I want to talk to my wife," he said, doggedly.

"Cartwright, you're *alive.*" Levine stared helplessly at the man, searching for the way to tell him how precious that was, the fact of being alive. "You're breathing," he said. "You can see and hear and smell and taste and touch. You can laugh at jokes, you can love a woman— For God's sake, man, you're *alive!*"

Cartwright's eyes didn't waver; his expression didn't change. "I want to talk to my wife," he repeated.

"Listen," said Levine. "You've been out here two hours now. You've had time to think about death, about non-being. Cartwright, listen. Look at me, Cartwright, I'm going to the doctor at three o'clock this afternoon. He's going to tell me about my heart, Cartwright. He's going to tell me if my heart is getting too tired. He's going to tell me if I'm going to stop being alive."

Levine strained with the need to tell this fool what he was throwing away, and knew it was hopeless.

The priest was back, all at once, at the other window. "Can we help you?" he asked. "Is there anything any of us can do to help you?"

Cartwright's head swiveled slowly. He studied the priest. "I want to talk to my wife," he said.

Levine gripped the windowsill. There had to be a way to bring him in, there had to be a way to trick him or force him or convince him to come in. He had to be brought in, he couldn't throw his life away, that's the only thing a man really has.

Levine wished desperately that *he* had the choice.

He leaned out again suddenly, glaring at the back of Cartwright's head. "Jump!" he shouted.

Cartwright's head swiveled around, the face open, the eyes shocked, staring at Levine in disbelief.

"Jump!" roared Levine. "Jump, you damn fool, end it, stop being alive, *die! Jump!* Throw yourself away, you imbecile, JUMP!"

Wide-eyes, Cartwright stared at Levine's flushed face, looked out and down at the crowd, the fire truck, the ambulance, the uniformed men, the chalked circle on the pavement.

And all at once he began to cry. His hands came up to his face, he swayed, and the crowd down below sighed, like a breeze rustling. "God help me!" Cartwright screamed.

Crawley came swarming out the other window, his legs held by Gundy. He grabbed for Cartwright's arm, growling, "All right,

now, take it easy. Take it easy. This way, this way, just slide your feet along, don't try to bring the other foot around, just slide over, easy, easy—"

And the man came stumbling in from the ledge.

"You took a chance," said Crawley. "You took one hell of a chance." It was two-thirty, and Crawley was driving him to the doctor's office.

"I know," said Levine. His hands were still shaking; he could still feel the ragged pounding of his heart within his chest.

"But you called his bluff," said Crawley. "That kind, it's just a bluff. They don't really want to dive, they're bluffing."

"I know," said Levine.

"But you still took a hell of a chance."

"It—" Levine swallowed. It felt as though there were something hard caught in his throat. "It was the only way to get him in," he said. "The wife wasn't coming, and nothing else would bring him in. When the girlfriend failed—"

"It took guts, Abe. For a second there, I almost thought he was going to take you up on it."

"So did I."

Crawley pulled in at the curb in front of the doctor's office. "I'll pick you up around quarter to four," he said.

"I can take a cab," said Levine.

"Why? Why, for the love of Mike? The city's paying for the gas."

Levine smiled at his partner. "All right," he said. He got out of the car, went up the walk, up the stoop, onto the front porch. He looked back, watched the Chevvy turn the corner. He whispered, "I *wanted* him to jump." And he thought, "It's crazy. How would that have kept my number from being up?"

Then he went in to find out if he was going to stay alive.

And now that you have finished reading Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, how did you like it? I should also be very interested to receive your reactions to the stories in it. Write to me c/o Suite 105, Lakeview Building, North Palm Beach, Florida.

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