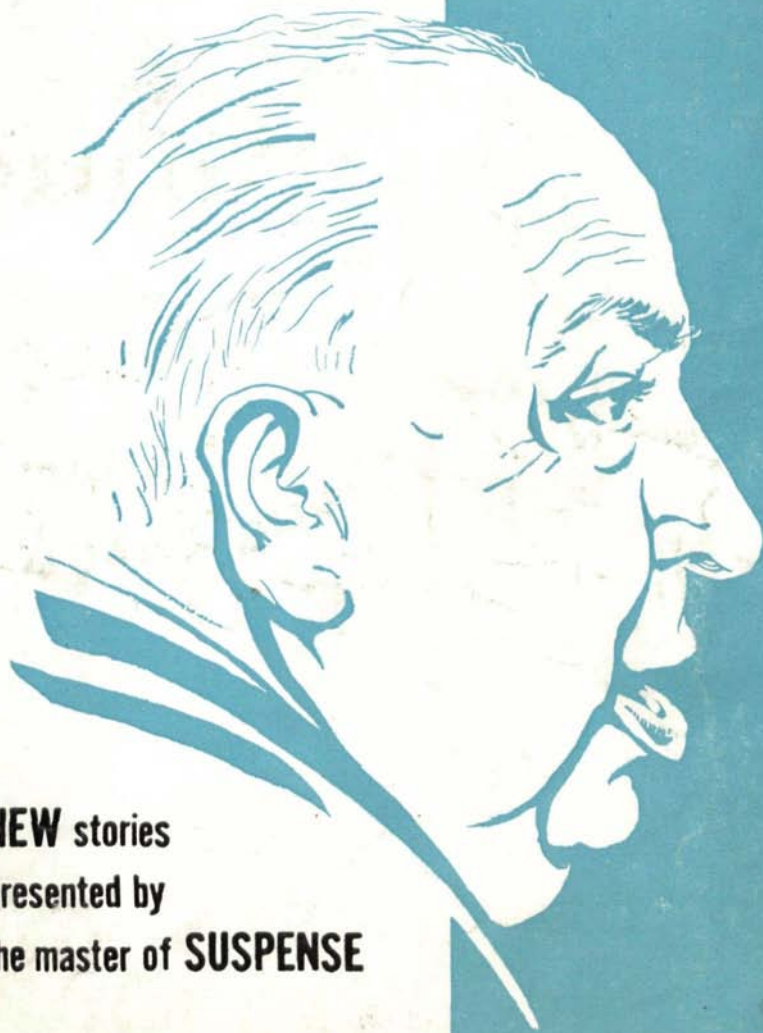


ALFRED

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HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories
presented by
the master of **SUSPENSE**



March 1967

Dear Reader:

A profile of our time would not be complete without a close perusal of pertinent issues. Historians of the future could do no better in grasping a well-rounded picture of our era than to consult the magazine you are now holding. The latest electronic advances and a momentous decision by the highest court in the land are among the current events mystery writers explore. The fine arts, child psychology, banking, botany, bridge and physics are some of the others represented herein—from particular viewpoints.

It was brought to my attention that a citizen bent on extreme wrongdoing was attempting to find a suitable method. He was so startled by the arts and sciences in these pages that, as a result, he returned to college, earned his degrees and became a doctor of medicine.

So AHMM makes practical reading, whether you are snowbound or beachbound. At this time of year the chances are even that you are one or the other, but whichever, you might prepare yourself for a sudden chill not necessarily related to the weather.

Alfred Hitchcock

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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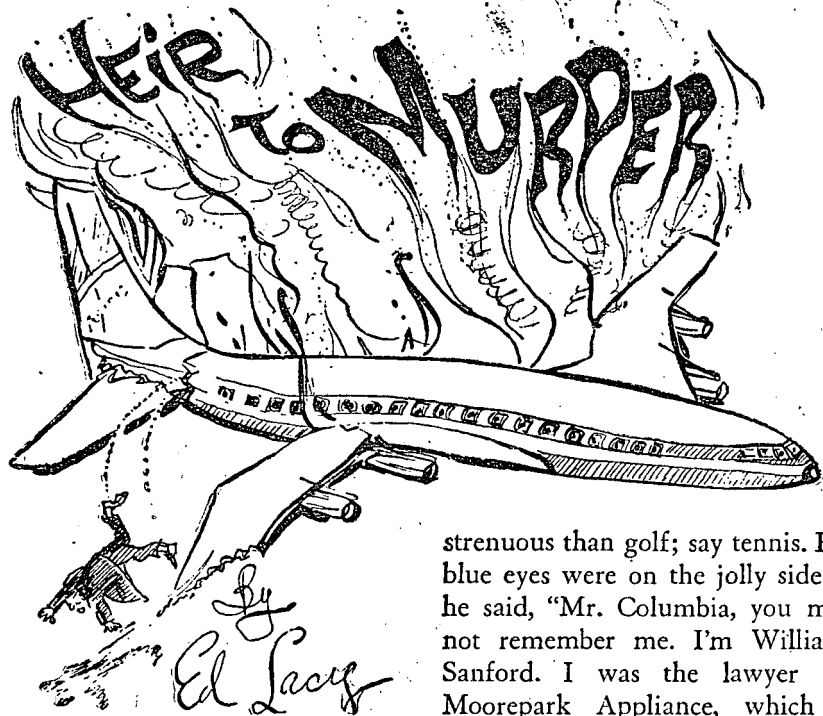
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Where one's actions are so abstruse that normal human behavior is seemingly defied, we have a mystery indeed.



IT was difficult to peg his age, but I guessed forty-five. He was already bald; but his face was handsome, in a fleshy way, and the custom-tailored suit showed off a good build—from something more

strenuous than golf; say tennis. His blue eyes were on the jolly side as he said, "Mr. Columbia, you may not remember me. I'm Williams Sanford. I was the lawyer for Moorepark Appliance, which is why I thought of you when I decided I need a private investigator." The deep voice went with his build.

"After that mess, I'm surprised you'd want me for anything, Mr. Sanford," I said politely. Actually it hadn't been my fault. I'd been

hired to get information on a rival outfit's new models and prices. However, they must have expected their offices to be bugged, for they'd had a whole false information deal set up.

"That's all in the past, Mr. Columbia. For the present I need to find a man—that's the job."

"Have you tried the police?"

"This isn't a police matter." The blue eyes actually twinkled. "Aren't you seeking business, Mr. Columbia?"

"Like crazy, but I'm the wrong type of investigator for you. My field is electronics, electrical snooping, bugging. For the run-of-the-mill detective work, I have a friend, Al Peters, a retired cop who—"

"I'd like to hire you."

I shrugged. "Okay. But my fee is \$150 per day."

"That's rather steep. This won't require any of your electrical gadgets, Mr. Columbia—Fred."

"That's why I suggested Al Peters, Mr. Sanford. He'll only cost you \$50 a day and he's an expert at shadowing, that sort of work. You'd be taking me from other possible cases, so I have to charge for my time."

Sanford nodded his polished head. "I appreciate your frankness and agree to your fee. I'm looking for a Steven Massini. About fifteen

months ago Mr. Massini's uncle died, leaving an estate worth over \$800,000. Mr. Massini—that is Steven Massini—was willed \$18,000. As executor, I've been looking for Steven so the will could be probated. A few months ago I finally located him in Nice, France. I gather young Steven is an artist, a kind of beatnik character. I immediately airmailed him a letter explaining that he had to be here before the will could be probated, although his share is the smallest one of the estate. He wrote back, via ordinary mail, asking why the money couldn't be sent to him. Well, after an exchange of letters, he finally flew to the States two weeks ago. I imagine you read about the jet that crashed and burned at Kennedy?"

I nodded. "Was he on it?"

"Yes. According to the papers, Steven was one of the three survivors. He happened to be seated in the tail section, which broke off on impact. Steven was thrown clear and escaped the flames and death that ninety-two others met. He was rushed to nearby Brook Hospital for a check-up. He wasn't injured but was merely in a mild state of shock. On reading about this, I called the hospital the next morning to speak to Steven. I was told he had made a phone call an hour after he had entered, that a

young lady had come for him and he had gone with her. That's the last I know of Steven, although I've been running ads in the public notices columns of the papers, urging him to contact my office." Mr. Sanford smiled, waved his hands as if to smooth the air in front of him.

"Has this Steven been in touch with any of the other heirs, his relatives?"

"No. He was adopted and not on speaking terms with the rest of his family. As I told you, Steven's a sort of wild type, a nonconformist. His adopted parents died seven years ago in a car crash, and Steven's been abroad ever since. As you can understand, the other heirs are most impatient to have the estate settled."

"Sure. And eighteen grand should interest a struggling artist, too. Is he married?"

"Not as far as I know. I've never seen Steven, haven't even a photo of the lad. The last time any other members of the family saw Steven was many years ago, when he was about four years old. His father was on the wild side, too, had married an Indian girl. Frankly, I was astonished to find Steven had even been mentioned in the will. This lack of knowledge has been the reason it had taken me so long to find him."

"How did you locate him, Mr. Sanford?"

Sanford smiled. "One of his cousins happened to read a news item about a Steven Massini being arrested for picketing the U.S. Consulate in Nice, some kind of peace protest. As Massini is hardly a common name, I wrote him, established that he was the missing heir. The only hard fact I know about Steven is that he's twenty-six years old."

"You've hardly given me anything to work on, Mr. Sanford. I want \$300 now, as a binder, for two days' work, including today. All I can tell you is, I'll give it the old college try."

"Fine. Let me know the moment you locate him," Sanford said, getting to his feet, taking six \$50 bills from a fancy wallet, and his card, and dropping them all on my desk. "Of course, all this is strictly confidential, Fred."

"Sure, Mr. Sanford."

It was two-twenty p.m. when he left. I phoned a guy who works for a top credit rating house, asked for a rundown on Sanford and on Steven Massini, of Nice, France. I do this with all my clients; credit houses have better files than the FBI.

Then I phoned a newspaper friend and was told the jet had crashed at six-ten p.m., meaning Massini couldn't have reached the

hospital before seven p.m. This gave me time to attend to some other things.

After supper I was at Brook Hospital at seven p.m. Flashing my fancy gold badge, something I hadn't done in a long time, I explained to a stout man in the office I was looking for Steven Massini, and about the inheritance, and asked if I could speak to the nurses and doctors who had treated him when he was admitted.

Two nurses gave me a description of Steven: six feet tall, rangy, about 175 pounds, dark hair, no distinguishing marks, ordinary face. They thought he was about thirty years old. Part of his suit had been burned, but a doctor told me Steven himself hadn't suffered any known injuries. He was dazed and in shock, yet had refused a sedative, saying he didn't believe in allowing anything but organic foods in his body. Within an hour after he was examined, he had made a phone call. About twenty minutes later an excited blonde woman, about twenty-five years old, had called for him. Against the doctor's advice, Steven had insisted upon leaving the hospital.

"When he made this call, was he in bed?" I asked, hopefully.

"Yes."

"Good. Then there should be a record of the call in your switch-

board records. May I have the number?"

Five minutes later I called a fellow working for the phone company, who told me the number was that of a Mr. Phil Wells, and gave me his Queens address. I drove out there; it was one of these small houses with a tiny lawn and a one car garage in the back, a carbon copy of every other house in the area.

It was now nine-thirty p.m. Phoning Al Peters from a corner booth, I told him to stake out the Wells house from five a.m. on. Then I drove back to the steno's apartment to get the transcript of the tape I'd left and to spend the night with her. This wasn't quite as romantic as it may sound, since she's my ex-wife. One of these days we'll remarry, I hope.

I was at my office by eight the next morning, and did some work on an industrial spying job. At ten a.m. I phoned my buddy in the credit office.

He told me, "We've nothing on Steven Massini, meaning he's probably broke and hasn't any employment record. Williams Sanford is a credit risk. He took a bath in Moorepark Appliance stock a year ago. His law income is in the \$20,000 per year bracket but he lives above it—house in the suburbs, two cars, expensive wife,

his third, by the way, membership in a couple of swank clubs. He's deeply in debt, although he made a small killing in the market a few months ago, started paying off some of his IOUs. But he still owes plenty. He comes from a once wealthy family and will step into a fat bundle when his uncle dies. The said uncle is seventy-nine and still plays eighteen holes of golf every week. That's it, Fred."

I thanked him, asked for a run-down on a Phil Wells and hung up. From my old safe I took a tiny transmitter, so small it fits into the mouthpiece of a telephone receiver. I also took out another of my receiving tape recorders. These gadgets were the reason my marriage went on the rocks, since I have to plow everything I make back into the business. Putting my phone repairman's outfit on over my suit, I drove out to the Wells' house and found Al Peters sitting in his old sedan down the street, sipping a container of orange juice. As I slipped onto the front seat beside his bulk, he said, "Nothing, so far, Fred. The milkman left a bottle at seven a.m., and at eight-thirty a blonde took it in. Nice looking babe, even with her hair in rollers."

"Mr. Wells didn't leave for work?"

"Nobody has left or come in." Al yawned. "You want some

orange juice, Fred?" When I shook my head, he finished the container, asked, "You want me planted here all day?"

"I don't know, yet."

I was studying the house. I could wait until the Wells went out, then break in, but that was risky for the other houses were very close, and in the snooping business you have to be careful. You're always on the brink of breaking a dozen laws.

Back in my car, I put on a cap, pulling it down over my face, added a wispy gray moustache and two hairy warts to my fat face. Strapping on my tool belt, I carefully put the transmitter in my pocket and set up the receiving recorder on the back floor of Al's car. Handing him a listening plug and a pad, I said, "You know the routine, Al; write down anything you hear. I should be back in an hour. Oh, pull up, you're more than three hundred feet from the house."

When I rang the door chimes, there was a rush of slipped feet and the door opened on a blonde in a standard pink housecoat. She had a nice figure only because it's hard for a 25-year-old *not* to have one. Her average face was on the nervous side, and the dark circles under her eyes said she hadn't been sleeping much. Glancing at my

notebook, I asked, "Mrs. Phil Wells?"

"Yes. I'm Mrs. Wells."

"There's been a buzz in the code area phone lines. I'd like to check your phone for a possible short." I was careful *not* to say I was from the phone company.

"My phone's all right."

"Yes, but if there is a short, it could affect the other circuits. It will only take a second, Mrs. Wells."

"All right."

The livingroom was in cheap contemporary. I went through the routine of pretending to check with the operator. I took the receiver apart and, even though she was watching me, I attached my tiny microcircuit transmitter, certain she didn't know what it was. These are so small I once installed one in a plastic olive in a martini glass and listened in on a bar conversation while I was two hundred feet away. A moment later, when I was finished, I checked the dial tone and told Mrs. Wells, "I put in new parts to be on the safe side. Your phone checks out okay. Thank you, ma'am."

I drove a few blocks away, took off the disguise and coveralls, and went into a stool joint for a bite to eat. It was forty-five minutes later when I dialed her number. When she answered I said, "Mrs.

Wells, I'm a friend of Steven Massini's. Can you—"

"You have the wrong number!" She hung up, hard.

I dialed again, and she let the phone ring five times before asking, "Yes?"

"Mrs. Wells, don't hang up until you hear what I have to say. I know you picked up Steven Massini at the hospital after the plane crash. I have a large sum of money for him, an inheritance. If you'll—"

"I told you before, you have a wrong number! I never heard of any Steven . . . whatever-his-name is. Leave me alone!" She banged the receiver down again, but there had been a trace of hysteria in her voice.

I drove back to Al Peters. He nodded and followed my car around the corner, where we both parked. As I sat beside him he said, "An easy one, Fred. She called a Mr. Stevens, room 121, Devenport Hotel, a few seconds after your second call. She—"

"A Mr. Stevens? Not a Steven Massini?"

"Nope, a Mr. Stevens. She told him about your call, sounding unglued." Al squinted at the pad. "He said, 'Take it easy, Rose. If he calls again just say you don't know what the hell he's talking about, Rose, how about going over to your mother's, in Newark, for a

few days? I'll send for you later.'

"I can't put on the act there. No. Oh, honey, I'm worried! Worried sick!"

"Relax, darling. Tell you what, don't answer the phone again or . . . I've a better idea, come over here.'

"But if mama calls and doesn't get any answer, she'll get upset and . . . I'm going to pieces!"

"Rose, baby, take it slow. Things are breaking fine for us. Listen to me: call your folks and say you're going away for a few days, the house spooks you and all that jazz. Then come here. I'll expect you around two. Now calm down, baby."

"Nice, Al, real nice work. I'll set the recorder on automatic receiving and you drive back, park within two hundred feet of the Wells house. I'll wait here for you."

When Al drove off, I went into a drugstore and found the Deventport Hotel in the phone book; it was near the airport. Al returned on foot and I dropped him at the subway, told him to wait in his room for my call.

The hotel was modest and new. I told the elderly desk clerk, "I'm going up to room 121 to pull a surprise gag on Mr. Stevens. Don't call him on the house phone." I left a ten-dollar bill on the desk and went up the one flight of steel

steps. The hallway was empty.

The guy opening the door of 121 wore slacks and an open white shirt, and fitted the hospital description. When he asked, "Yeah? What you selling?" there was a faint whiskey aura around the words.

Flashing my gold badge, I said, "I have to talk to you, Mr. Massini."

He grabbed my wrist and studied the badge. Then he let go of my hand. "A store cop. Take a walk before I call the real fuzz."

"Go ahead, call them, Mr. Massini. But you misunderstand the nature of my visit. I'm here to put \$18,000 in your hands." I got my foot in the doorway and tried to smile. Massini had at least three inches on me, and I'm not much of a battler. "No harm in our talking about it, is there?"

"Okay, talk." He was studying my shoe in the door.

"In the hall?"

"That's right. I have some . . . company, very shy. You know. You from the lawyer, Sanford?"

"Correct. Why haven't you been in touch with him? He only wants to settle the estate."

"Just tell him to leave me alone. When I get ready to see him, I'll do it. Also tell him I don't like his putting a private eye on me." He smoothed his hair with his right



hand, and I saw the lumpy knuckles of a puncher.

"Aren't you interested in your inheritance, the \$18,000?"

"I don't know. The dough puts me in a high tax bracket, and it may cost me more in the long run. I may go back to Nice."

"Why haven't you called Sanford and told him this?"

"Because I don't feel like it. Now get your foot out of the door before I take your fat face apart, snooper."

"Okay." I got my shoe out before he slammed the door.

In the lobby I phoned Sanford, told him where Massini was, and added, "He doesn't seem interested in collecting his inheritance—said something about returning to France. I suggest you get out here quickly, if you want to see him."

"Thank you, Mr. Columbia, your service is fast and excellent. You've put in one day's work. You owe me \$150. I advanced \$300."

"I haven't figured the expenses yet. Listen—"

"You said nothing about expenses."

"Sanford, we'll argue about my bill later. If you want to see him, get out here quickly. He'll probably change hotels now."

"I'll handle things from here. A fine day's work, Mr. Columbia." He hung up.

I drove back to the Wells house

and parked down the block. I had to get my transmitter back. Aside from the fact it had cost me \$180, at some future time the phone company would find it and might be able to trace it to me. Then I'd be in a real jam.

The telephone repair act was out. Breaking into the house would be simple, except there were far too many people around now. I decided to return at night to see if I could get in. I put a note on Al's windshield that the car was out of order and waiting for a mechanic. Then I drove to my office, called Al, and told him we'd pick up his car in the evening.

I phoned my credit buddy, who told me, "The Wells have a joint income of \$9,400. Their house cost \$20,000 and carries a \$15,000 mortgage. They furnished it, when they were married four years ago, on installment buying; very prompt on their payments. She's a typist for a local real estate company. He was employed as a reservations clerk at Trans-Europe Airlines."

"Isn't that the company whose plane crashed recently?"

"Right. Phil Wells was killed in the crash. Okay, Fred?"

I said, "Thanks," very slowly.

I was going to phone Sanford but decided to wait, just in case I didn't recover my transmitter and he started beefing about expenses.

I did some work around the office, then later in the afternoon I stopped at a newspaper office and read up on the crash. Phil Wells was among those burned to a crisp. As an airline employee he had been riding free, had spent the weekend in Paris. Identification was based on a cigarette lighter with his name on it, a Christmas gift from the company, found among the remains of one of the charred bodies. There was even a human interest sidelight:

"Mrs. Rose Wells, the deceased's young wife, stated she was supposed to have gone with her husband on the weekend flight. 'Phil had just finished five years with Trans-European, so I could go free, too. It would have been our first trip together, but on Friday my boss took sick and I couldn't get Saturday off.'"

I had supper with my ex-wife. She wanted to take in a movie, but I said I had to work, and we got into another of those arguments about my crazy hours. She told me to get out.

I phoned Al and picked him up at the 59th Street Bridge at nine p.m. As we drove out to the Wells house and I mentioned I was going to break in, Al shook his big head. "Fred, I've told you this before, I don't break the law, openly, anyway."

"Cut it out, Al, I've had my share of being told off for the night."

"Okay. I'll pick up my car, and what you do is your business. Just give me time to get out of the neighborhood."

"Sure. By now things should be quiet around there. I'll call the Wells house first, to make sure there's nobody home."

When I stopped at the corner of their block to let Al off to pick up his heap, things weren't exactly quiet: four police cars were parked in front of the Wells house and a small crowd was hanging around.

Al glanced at me and groaned. I said, "Go on, get your car. You were driving by this morning and the motor stalled. Raise the hood and fool around. And find out what's happened."

A half hour later Al honked his horn as he passed me and I followed him a few blocks before we parked. Al was wiping his sweaty face. "That was too close! A lot of stuff has hit a big fan. It seems this Wells blonde knocked off your Massini guy! They found her in some rundown hotel, with his corpse and the murder gun, this afternoon."

"She's confessed to the killing?"

"Way I heard it, she hasn't talked one way or the other. Hasn't even asked for a lawyer. I'm sure glad

we're off the case, that's for sure."

I was about to remind Al that my transmitter was still in the Wells' telephone, but he was upset enough as it was. I took the tape recorder from his car, drove to my office, and played the tape back. There was a call from Mrs. Wells' mother, full of trite gas as she told her daughter to bear up and be brave in "your hour of sorrow." Then a call from Steven Massini who asked impatiently, "Who were you talking to? Line's been busy for the last ten minutes."

"Mama. Oh, I forgot to tell her I'm going away for a few days."

"You can call her back later. Pack a bag but wait for my call, hon. Some fat private eye working for Sanford visited me here, so I have to move."

"How could anybody have found you? I wish we'd never got into this mess, Phil."

"Relax, there's nothing to worry about. I told him I wasn't interested in the inheritance and threw him out. I'll call you as soon as I get moved. Take it easy, baby, we're going to be rich."

My recorder was automatic, and worked only when the transmitter was in action—when the Wells phone was in use. I heard another call and the same man's voice said, "Hon, I've moved. A small and crummy, but clean hotel in Long

Island City, called the Monroe. It's two-forty now, best you don't take the car. You can be here within—"

There was the bark of a shot and then Rose Wells shouting, "Phil! Phil! What's . . . ?" Somebody hung up, cutting her off.

I replayed the tape, doing some furious thinking, and the only thing I ended up with was a cold sweat and a headache. I got Al on the phone. "This is important, Al. Can you find out the exact time of death for Steven Massini?"

"Yeah; I can ask around but, Fred, it will look . . . bad. I mean, my calling some old pals now, at night. It sort of connects me—us—with this mess. Maybe tomorrow, during the day I can—"

"Al, I have to find the time of death now."

"Fred, as an experienced police officer, let me give you some straight advice—don't make any waves. I haven't forgotten that your transmitter is still in the phone, but there's little chance of the police bothering to take the phone apart now. But once I start asking around . . . it's hardly a secret I do some work for you and then they'll—"

"Al do you think the police would go for a deal? Forget us and the transmitter, give it back to me, in exchange for the real killer?"

"I could . . . *Blondie didn't do it?* Hell, Fred, what are we getting into?"

"Al, I'm trying to get *out* of this mess. I know Mrs. Wells didn't do it, but I haven't the kind of stand-up evidence the police would need for court. However, I think I can get a good confession for them, if they'll deal with us. Will they?"

"Fred, I guess if we could deliver a confession all neatly wrapped up, a deal could be worked. But I don't like the way this is shaping up. I don't like it at all, that's a fact. Why do we have to get in any deeper?"

"First, there's Mrs. Wells being framed and . . . Al, use your head; even if the cops don't find the transmitter now, the phone company will, in time, and then we'll really be up the creek. The phone company will recall the murder, be sure to report finding the transmitter to the police, even if it's months or a year from now. Okay, the chances are slim that they can trace it to me, but it's *still* a chance and the kind of a long shot I don't want to win. Al, I'm at my office. Find out the time of death and exactly what happened at this Monroe Hotel this afternoon. Then come to my office."

At a little past two a.m. I phoned Sanford at his house. He asked, "Mr. Columbia, what's the mean-

ing of this late call? Don't you—"

"I have to see you, right now. I guess you know Steven Massini was killed?"

"The police have notified me. They found my letter on his body. But I still don't understand why you're—"

"Sanford, I'll pick you up in front of your house in a half hour. Be waiting!" I hung up.

I was talking from a street booth, less than a mile from Sanford's house and had time to kill. I phoned my ex-wife and she wasn't happy about my getting her out of bed, but I had to hear her voice again, maybe for the last time. I told her, "Baby, we've had enough of this crazy stalling. We're getting married again tomorrow. I'll try to be at your place before daybreak—I hope."

"Fred, are you drunk? I . . . Fred, are you on a rough case, a real bad one?"

"It's sort of rough."

"Oh, Fred, I told you I can't take this!" she wailed.

"I know what you've told me. Baby, I love you, that's the only thing that has to be said now. Tomorrow, we'll talk about the rest. Maybe I'll take one of those steady jobs in an electronics factory, like you want me to. See you, hon."

Sanford's house was set back from the street by a wide lawn. He

was waiting for me on the dark curb, wearing a snappy and loud hat, a light spring coat and gloves. The sight of the pigskin gloves made me feel better. Sliding onto the front seat beside me, he asked the routine question, "Did you tell anybody you were coming to see me, Mr. Columbia?"

"No." I drove on, wondering how soon he'd pull the gun. I drove to the outskirts of the suburban area and turned into what seemed a deserted dirt sideroad and stopped. My life depended upon stopping.

Sanford asked, "Why are we parking, Mr. Columbia?" The gloved hands still rested on his lap.

He was playing it too cool. If I was wrong about things, I'd end up doing time for sure. I said, "We have to talk. You hired me to find a missing heir, which I did. But now it's become a murder."

"Is that what you got me out of bed for, Columbia? That this Wells woman was carrying on some sort of affair with Mr. Massini and killed him doesn't concern me. Or you."

"It sure involves me. Sanford, when you first came to me, I told you to hire an ordinary investigator, not an electronics snooper. But you insisted upon hiring me. I don't know what you had in mind then, perhaps to frame me,

get even for that mess with the appliance company. The point is, I never would have taken the job if I thought it involved murder."

"I don't know what you're talking about. That the wretched young lady shot Steven is hardly any of my business."

"Sanford, she didn't do it. I had her phone bugged, that's how I operate. I have a tape of her phone conversations for yesterday afternoon, on the back seat. I'll play it for you, if you like. The medical examiner has fixed the time of Massini's death at about three p.m. At two-forty she was talking to him, from her house, with the sound of the murder shot on tape, giving Rose Wells a perfect alibi. You waited for her to come to the room at the Monroe Hotel, where you'd already slugged the rummy desk clerk and killed Massini. When she entered the room, you hit her and left the gun and the corpse in the hotel room, with Mrs. Wells, for the police to find."

Sanford still hadn't moved his hands from his lap as he stared at me, saying softly, "A fantastic yarn. Is this some kind of a shakedown, Columbia?"

"Have I asked you for any money? But I can't stand still and watch Mrs. Wells framed for a stupid murder. As I said, you shouldn't have hired me, Sanford.

I do a lot of routine checking on my cases, far more than the usual investigator does. I know you're broke, and have been dipping into that \$800,000 estate, stalling the heirs with an excuse that you couldn't find Steven. You were hoping your uncle would die and solve your money matters. One of the heirs found Steven, so you had to write him, and he was on his way here when the plane crashed. I suppose you always meant to kill him to delay settling the will. Could be you hoped to work out a deal with Steven, have him contest the will, anything to stall until your old uncle died. Steven's mysterious disappearance from the hospital suited you fine, but you had to find him, silence him one way or another, knowing he would show up sooner or later. So you hired me."

"Columbia, you're spouting pure nonsense. I hired you to find a missing heir, a legitimate job. You found him. That he was later killed is no affair of mine." His mouth was a hard line.

I was still puzzled as to why he didn't try to gun me. "This death will delay probating the will and you're praying uncle will die in the meantime. But Sanford, I *didn't* find Steven Massini."

"I'm getting bored with this silly talk. Drive me—"

"Steven Massini died in the plane crash. Phil Wells was also on the jet, one of the few survivors. You shot and killed Phil Wells. He had a sharpie mind, and when he saw all those burning bodies around him, he picked up a wallet from near a charred body—Massini's wallet—and threw his own lighter near the burned corpse. Phil then passed as Steven Massini. He left the hospital after phoning his wife, Mrs. Rose Wells. It isn't hard to guess Phil's angle: his wife would collect his \$10,000 G.I. policy and of course she'd sue the airline. Later they would go away together. Due to the flames, any positive identification was impossible, so Phil had a—"

"As impossible as your story," Sanford cut in, eyes like blue marbles.

"Phil must have been tempted to collect the \$18,000 from the estate. Your letter was in Massini's wallet, but Phil was afraid he'd be recognized as an imposter. Poor Phil had no way of knowing either you or any of the heirs, and hadn't the smallest idea of what Steven looked like. Sanford, like all amateurs, you were stupid. Aside from my having Mrs. Wells' alibi on tape, *you were the only person besides Mrs. Wells who knew where 'Massini' was holed up.* After I phoned you that he was

at the Devenport Hotel, you rushed out there, perhaps was told he was leaving, managed to follow him to the other hotel. You killed him after overhearing him phone Mrs. Wells to come over. He must have phoned the second he was in his new room and you were out in the hallway."

Sanford's heavy face was sweating. He pulled off his hat and that's where he had the gun, a two shot derringer. He said, "I don't understand this rock move on your part, Columbia. You realize that you've forced me to kill you now?"

Despite the gun pressing into my side I was dizzy with relief that he had finally gone for his gun, confessing to murder by the action. Maybe I was also dizzy with fear. I said quickly, "See, I'm keeping my hands on the steering wheel, in the open, so don't get trigger-happy, Sanford. Before you do anything, open the glove compartment. Everything we've said has been broadcast to police cars. We're on the air. *Open the glove compartment, Sanford!*"

Keeping his hard, blue eyes on

me, he opened the compartment with his gloved left hand, saw the transmitter. I said, "That's a powerful one, Sanford, has a range of two thousand yards, and the police—"

"Your bluff won't save you, Columbia. A transmitter needs tubes and I don't see any."

"This uses the new—"

The dirt road turned bright with flashlights, and the police captain standing next to Al Peters shouted, "You're surrounded, Sanford, drop your gun!"

Two uniformed cops holding rifles stepped out of the bushes ahead of us. Sanford jabbed my side with his derringer and shrilled, "Get out of the car, Columbia! I'm using you as a shield—"

I grabbed his gun hand. We wrestled on the cramped front seat. As the cops yanked the door open, Sanford fired. I felt the slug wallop my gut. I tried hard to keep from fainting.

I was wearing a bulletproof vest, but I never did have a strong stomach.



3

A stylized illustration of a pedestal with the word 'CRIME' on top, crowned with a crown and radiating lines. The word 'CRIME' is written in a bold, blocky, sans-serif font with diagonal hatching. It sits on a wide, fluted pedestal. Above the word is a crown with several spikes and radiating lines, suggesting a crown of thorns or a crown of glory. The entire illustration is in black and white.

Talmage Powell

concrete apron where the Cleveland bus was due to pull in at any moment for its brief stop.

Presenting shadows roughly in the shapes of a bowling ball and a tenpin, Alfie and Bud peered through the dingy window of the dim waiting room. A lone person was visible on one of the scarred benches, an ill-clad, dozing old lady with a battered pasteboard suitcase tucked under her seat. The ticket window was closed. Anyone wanting to catch a local out of Hoskinsburg at this hour had to pay a fare directly to the driver.

"Dad-burn," Alfie growled in disappointment.

Then a door inside the waiting room opened. A man came out of the men's room, and Alfie's blue eyes lighted.

"Dad-burn!" he echoed in an entirely different tone. "Believe we got him, Bud! He sure fits the description."

The man inside was short, stocky, swarthy, wearing tan poplin pants and a soiled zipper jacket. He looked at the dusty clock over the deserted ticket stall. The time was 10:53. The local, bound for Cleveland, was due to trundle in three minutes from now.

Alfie grabbed Bud's strong, wiry arm and yanked him away from the lighted window area.

"I guess we solved this one in a

hurry," Bud said. "Lucky for us he's a real dumb crook." Bud glanced toward the waiting room. "Just a sitting duck. Like he wanted to get caught."

"We ain't all the way caught him yet," Alfie reminded. "Got to be careful. Don't want to get the old lady in there hurt."

Bud nodded, his long face grave. "What's the plan, Alfie?"

Alfie's black slicker rustled. His eyes made a quick summation of the surroundings.

"We'll box him," he decided. "You cover the front door. I'll go in from the side where the buses come in."

"Gotcha, Sheriff!"

"Keep a sharp eye through the front window," Alfie cautioned. "If he ducks back into the men's room, scat around to the alley."

"You cut him off to the rear, he won't get away," Bud promised. His tone caused Alfie to look sharply at him. Bud's eyes had a glint that reminded Alfie of a blood-hungry bear dog.

Alfie stabbed a finger in front of Bud's hawkish nose. "Now, Bud," he ordered the deputy, "you keep in mind all them court rulings about the treatment of suspects, arrestees, and criminals. Seeing as how we're the only law in this here crossroads community, we can't afford the time and taxpayers'

money defending ourselves against charges of police brutality."

Bud ground his teeth. "All right," he growled, "but if he swings on me, I'm gonna bust him one!"

"Just so long as you don't use undue or inhumane force. He's got rights, you know."

"Rights, hell! Downright privileges, I call it," Bud snorted.

Alfie's attention was again centered on the bus station. He took a breath, hunched his shoulders in his moisture-laden raincoat. "Well . . . here goes!"

As he barged around the corner of the building, Alfie figured he had a grade-A smart guy inside. In his book, a smart guy was a cluck so dumb he was convinced all other folks had even less sense.

The bird roosting in the waiting room with the hand of the law about to tap him must have sized up Hoskinsburg as a spot for easy pickings, with nothing more than a rube constable on duty.

But the yegg had botched his caper from the start, walking nervously into the Hoskinsburg Service Center and Truck Stop where the night man, Jim Harper, was on duty alone. With no more aplomb than a wiggle-worm feeling the first touch of a fishhook, the punk had tried to keep a lookout in all directions at once as he'd pulled a

rusty revolver and informed Jim that this was a stickup.

Almost as scared as the would-be bandit, Jim had let out a bleat and dived behind a counter. The yegg had interpreted Jim's screech as a cry of wrath from a heroic man plunging toward a hidden weapon. He'd panicked, dropped his gun, took off. Hearing the sounds of flight, Jim had scrambled from behind the counter.

Short minutes later, Alfie and Bud had been on-scene, summoned by Jim's phone call.

"He hightailed it down Main Street on foot, Sheriff," Jim had wound up his account of the event, sitting sickly on the counter. "He was a loner, nobody waiting for him."

"No car?"

"Not that I seen, Sheriff."

"Hmmm," Alfie had pondered. "No train depot or airport . . . just the Cleveland bus due . . ." He snapped his fingers. "Dadburn, Jim! That hooligan has cased our town. Timed his caper to the arrival of the Cleveland bus. Planned to leave you slugged unconscious while he made his escape with the loot, bold as brass!"

"That's it, Alfie!" Bud had grabbed his arm. "You done deduced it!"

"Unless he had a car stashed on a side street," Alfie said. "Anyhow,

rule number one is to cover all modes of exit, and in Hoskinsburg, the bus station is it. Come on, Bud. We got to beat the Cleveland bus to the station."

Now it seemed that Alfie's efficiency and keen mind were about to pay off. Instead of covering the few miles to Cleveland and losing himself in the crowds before a dull-witted country constable got on the job and figured things out, the yegg was smack between the jaws of a trap. Alfie was sure he'd spotted the right man. It was unlikely that two strangers fitting Jim's description so closely would be in Hoskinsburg on the same night.

Alfie had reached the wide, swinging side doors. He peeked through the glass panes at the man in the waiting room. The man was younger than Alfie had first thought: about thirty, but hard looking, with heavy bones jutting against the swarthinness of the thick-lipped face, and a mane of black hair tucked like glistening feathers about the ears and bull neck.

Alfie gulped some of the sudden dryness from his throat, pushed open the door, and lumbered into the waiting room with the awkward grace of the bus that would arrive too late to do the punk any good.

The yegg threw an instant glance

of suspicion at Alfie, then at the front door. He saw Bud's lank shadow out there, let out a wild breath, and took a step toward the men's room.

Alfie sidestepped to intercept him. The yegg rocked back on his heels. His mouth gave an ugly twist. "What gives, pal? You trying to get in my way or something?" His voice reminded Alfie of sand spilling from a dump truck.

Alfie opened the collar of his raincoat to expose the small silver badge pinned to the lapel of his black suit. "I'm the sheriff of this county, and I got probable cause to hold you on suspicion."

The yegg gave his head a bravado tilt. "You nuts? I'm just waiting for a bus."

"I know," Alfie said mildly. "But there will be others, if you're lucky enough to be innocent."

"Yeah? Innocent of what?"

"Attempted stickup of the Hoskinsburg ServiCenter and Truck Stop less than twenty minutes ago," Alfie said.

The yegg made a desperate assessment of Alfie's size and determined face. "Listen," he snarled, "I got my rights..."

"Which will be respected," Alfie assured him. "Fact is, we'll start off by warning you that anything you say may be used against you."

Although a sudden sag hit his

shoulders, the yegg threw out a final threat. "Okay, pal. But you go throwing a false arrest on me, I'll sue you until you can't afford a pretzel with your beer."

"Beer's the drink on my salary," Alfie said placidly. "Now let's get going." He turned his prisoner with a polite touch on the shoulder and frisked him.

Wedged between Alfie and Bud, who drove, the suspect was steeped in gloomy silence during the short ride to the small, drab building that housed Alfie's office and the four-cell jail.

When they had filed into the office, Alfie motioned toward a wooden armchair near the flat-topped desk.

The suspect eased into the chair, gripping the arms. "I been thinking it over. Maybe I better level with you—"

Alfie jerked up a silencing palm. "Whoa, now. We ain't taking any confessions from you under duress. The courts says it's the law."

The suspect stared. "Duress?"

Alfie stabbed a thumb at himself and then at Bud who had taken a guard position beside the door. "Two police officers," he said, "holding you against your will, all alone, in a little room in the dead of night. Reckon you could claim it constituted duress, hence a violation of your rights."

"You mean you're not going to listen to me?" the yegg said, slack-jawed.

"Not until you got a lawyer," Alfie said. "The law says that's the rule."

The yegg slumped back in the chair. "What kind of sheriff are you?"

A sudden weariness flooded Alfie's eyes. "I used to think I was a dad-burned good one. Now I don't reckon it matters so much. I got less than a year to go to retirement, and I won't have an outside punk using his rights to foul up the end of my career. I figure I'm due that pretzel with that beer."

The suspect scurried a glance from Alfie to Bud, back to Alfie. "That crack about suing you . . . it was just that. Just a crack."

"But a dad-burn good point," Alfie said. "No, sir. Law says you're not supposed to give me anything but your name, age, address whilst there ain't no lawyer present. Then if you got no lawyer and no means to hire one, I'm supposed to get one for you, even if we have to pay him with the taxpayers' money."

The suspect sat in a stunned vacuum. His nervousness was gone entirely. "I'll be a monkey's uncle," he said at last. "So even the hicks have heard the Supreme Court gospel."

"Just going by the book," Alfie said. "You're the first thing approaching a major crime in Hocksburg in the past three years. Probably the last before I retire. I ketched you. I got a gun you handled, and a witness. My job is done, all the way by the book as she's written today."

The yegg pulled himself upright. "If you'll let me cop a plea, I'll tell you everything . . . First time I tried a stickup and I—"

"Name?" Alfie said doggedly as he dragged a sheet of paper across the desk.

The suspect gusted a breath. "Silvio Santos," he said morosely.

"Age?"

"Thirty-one."

"Address, Mr. Santos?"

Santos shrugged. "No permanent address."

"Okay. That'll do it for now. Take him back to a cell and see that the bed is clean, Bud."

"Yes, sir." Bud crossed the office, took Santos by the arm.

"Now wait a minute!" Santos held onto the chair. "I got a few things to say about the caper in the truck stop—"

"When your lawyer arrives, Mr. Santos."

"Who said I wanted a lawyer?" Santos yelled.

"Man, you *have* to want a lawyer," Alfie jumped to his feet, yell-

ing back. "That's the way it is."

"Who says so?"

"The law, you dummy! You got rights whether you know it or not. You have got to have a lawyer!" Alfie glanced down at his knuckles which had been thumping the desk. He pulled in a breath, lowered his voice. "Now who is your lawyer?"

"I know a fellow in Cleveland, I guess . . ."

"What's his name?"

"Arnold Eman."

"We'll contact him for you," Alfie said. "Part of our job. Part of the safeguards that have been erected to protect your rights."

The attorney didn't arrive at Alfie's office until ten o'clock the following morning. He swept in, introduced himself, shook Alfie's hand with a firm grip. Alfie's eyes were bugging. He'd expected a cheap shyster. Instead, Mr. Eman was a robust, expensively tailored individual who wore a diamond on his pinkie that weighed about nine carats. He exuded polished self-confidence and a waft of cologne that suggested Bond Street. Outside, a chauffeur waited in the limousine that had brought him here.

"Now if I may see my client, Sheriff."

"Sure," Alfie said. "He's the only boarder we got in our jail just now. You'll have all the privacy you want. This way, please."

When Alfie returned alone to his office, he rocked back in his desk chair, folded his hands across his girth, and gave himself to complex pondering.

After a time, he relaxed. With the rusty revolver, Silvio Santos' fingerprints, and Jim Harper's sworn eyewitness, he had an airtight case.

A smile tugged at Alfie's lips. Let Santos and the fancy lawyer go over it all they want, this was one case that wouldn't get thrown out on a technicality. The prisoner's rights had been protected to the final word, letter, and period.

In the sequestered quiet of Santos's cell, Eman was saying, "Under the circumstances, I suppose it was best to call me."

"Sure." Santos sat on the comfort of his spotless bunk enjoying a cigarette.

Eman sat beside his client and laid a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "Just don't worry, Silvio. You'll go up—and then be out within a year."

"With twenty five grand waiting!" Silvio's dark eyes dreamed into the future.

"Shouldn't be a bad year," Eman chuckled, "except for the lack of women. Prisons are not what they used to be. Today you got rights, privileges; movies, ball games, libraries; inspectors who come around and taste the chow."

"I'll make up for the woman part when I get out with my pockets full of payoff." Silvio elbowed Eman in the ribs and laughed. Then the swarthy man leaned back and his face became serious. "A year to decide on when and how to do it," he mused.

"Check," Eman said. "Nobody will ever suspect you'd even heard of the mark. You'll never be connected with him." The lawyer's face hardened. "He's a lousy, dirty squealer who deserves no more consideration than a fly that needs stepping on. Between now and the trial I'll have plenty of time to brief you fully. Once you're inside and have everything sized up, we can smuggle in anything you need."

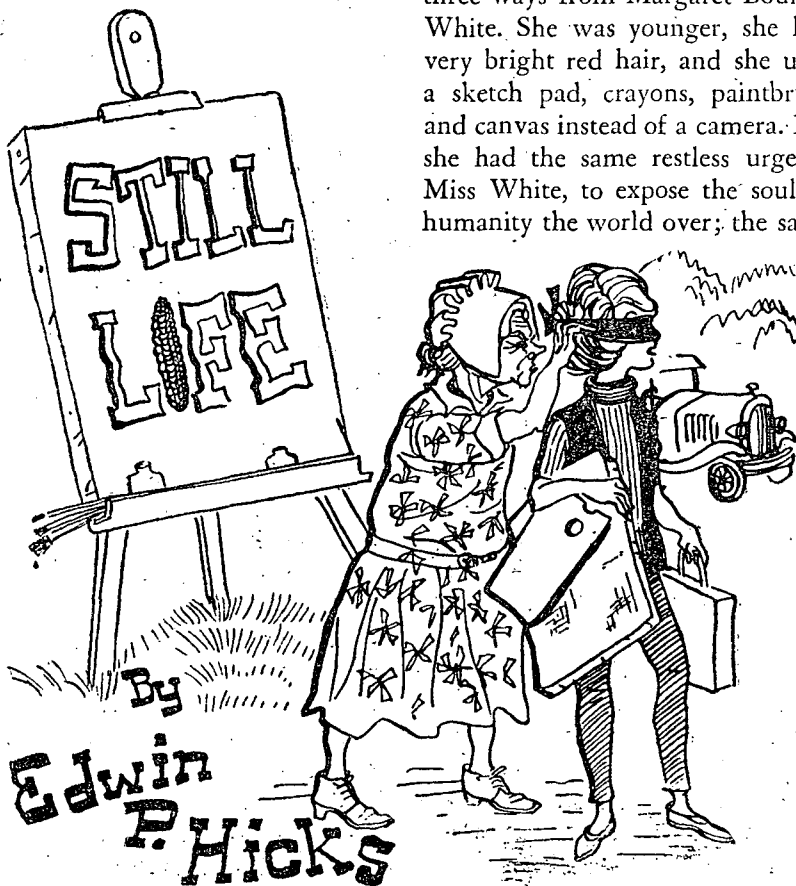
Santos nodded. "Imagine. Here I'd gone to the trouble of setting myself up for a parole-able penitentiary offense. Then it began to dawn on me that a legal jackass might be rung in who'd get me off completely."

Eman lit an ivory-tipped cigarette, smiling at Santos through the curl of smoke. "Exactly. Now for a few preliminaries about the creep the syndicate has decided to exterminate." Eman cleared his throat. "First, he is convict number 11802. His name . . ."

Eman's voice dropped to a confidential drone, and Santos listened, eyes half closed.

Although educational relations reputedly make the strongest tie, there is something to be said for consanguinity.

ELIZABETH HARRIS differed in three ways from Margaret Bourke-White. She was younger, she had very bright red hair, and she used a sketch pad, crayons, paintbrush and canvas instead of a camera. But she had the same restless urge as Miss White, to expose the soul of humanity the world over; the same



compulsion to be where things were happening. Elizabeth had spent six months with American military forces in the Viet Nam campaign, capturing with her art the spirit displayed by the Vietnamese patriots in war against aggression. Before this, the magazine which employed her had kept her shuttling back and forth between the Berlin Wall and the Congo.

Elizabeth was on what she planned to be a long, indolent, fall vacation in the Ozark country, with nothing to do but eat breakfast in bed, then paint mountain scenes and Ozark types through the long, lazy afternoons.

Instead, Elizabeth no sooner had arrived at the Ozark hotel than an idea possessed her and she began casting about trying to contact an honest-to-goodness mountain moonshiner. Eagerly, happily she passed the word around among the fishing guides, and all the other mountain people with whom she made contact, that she would pay \$500 cash to any Ozark moonshiner who would let her do an oil painting of him at his still.

An honest-to-goodness, on-the-spot painting of an Ozark mountaineer tending his still, Liz was quite certain, would win first prize for her in the annual American Art Association contest for paintings in the Americana division.

Once, immediately before her first assignment overseas, she had done a painting, "Boyhood," the portrayal of a freckled-faced lad catching bullheads off the bank of a Mississippi River slough. This painting had placed third. Her present project was bound to ring the bell for the top award!

Now she lay blindfolded on the back seat of an ancient car which was chugging along a dusty road in the heart of the Ozark mountains in the dark, and she was listening to the crackling voice of an old woman singing camp-meeting hymns.

Earlier that night the woman and her husband had appeared at her hotel room at the North Arkansas fishing resort. The old lady had giggled. The man, as if suddenly remembering his manners, had reached a gnarled hand to the tattered felt hat he was wearing, removing it to expose a shock of white hair. His lantern jaws worked slowly as he chewed tobacco and calmly appraised the red-headed "city woman." His eyes were as blue as the skies Liz had painted during her artist colony days at Taos, and as cold as the frosty breath of the East German border guards on a winter day.

"Are you a moonshiner?" Elizabeth asked the man.

"Do you have that \$500?" he

asked, eyeing her suspiciously.

Elizabeth got her purse and counted out \$250. "And here is the other \$250 which I will put in the hotel safe to be paid to you when I am delivered safely back here with the painting," she said.

The hard hands of the man beat the eager claws which the woman extended towards the money. He pocketed the bills in an ancient wallet. "Fair enough," he said.

"Yes, fair enough," the woman agreed.

The car they got into coughed and wheezed and rattled. Once outside town, the old man pulled to the side of the road and stopped. "Get out and let my Sarah blindfold you," he said. "We can't take no chances of you leading a passel of revenooers in where we're going."

The woman did a thorough job of blindfolding, using a strip of black cloth. Then Liz was helped into the back seat of the car and told to lie down. She complied as best she could.

It was after midnight when the car came to a bumping stop and the blindfold was removed. Elizabeth discovered that they were in a barnyard, behind a primitive house of hewed logs—but where the barnyard and house were situated, she hadn't the slightest idea. The October moon was shining bright-

ly down through the boughs of fresh smelling pine and scrub-oak trees, relieving to some extent the odor of horse and cow manure which was heavy on the night air. Three cows were bedded down almost beneath their feet, and two mules peered sleepily from the shelter of a ramshackle shed.

Elizabeth sank deeply into a featherbed and was unconscious immediately. She awoke to find the mountaineer's wife standing by the bed, a lighted kerosene lamp in her hand.

"Breakfast's on the table," she said. The old woman put the lamp on a stand and left the room.

It seemed to Elizabeth that she had been asleep only a few minutes, but her watch showed five o'clock. Yawning, she slipped a housecoat over her green pajamas and sleep-walked into the other room. The light from a lamp in the middle of the table shone upon rude, hand-carved furniture and an old-fashioned wood-burning range. Breakfast consisted of hot biscuits, eggs, bacon, white gravy, coffee, peach preserves, and honey. Liz was hungry and ate like a starved teenager.

She was also happy, eager to get started on her painting, and she tried to draw her host and hostess into conversation, but they spoke very little, and the old woman's

voice was edged with something Liz did not understand. The old lady sat across the table, the light between them, and it was hard to see her face. This morning she was wearing a blue calico mother Hubbard, instead of the dark Sunday-go-to-meeting cotton dress that she had worn when she appeared with her husband at the hotel room. The woman's white hair was combed down against her head, with a tight ball at the back. Now and then Elizabeth caught the old lady's dark eyes peering at her from behind the glare of the lamp, and for some reason they made her uncomfortable.

After breakfast the blindfold went into place again, and Elizabeth, with her drawing pad and kit under her arm, was guided by the old mountaineer along what seemed like an interminable mountain trail. When the blindfold was removed it was broad daylight, but they were still in the shadows and the reason was obvious. They were now beneath a ledge of gray limestone rock, with a big slab of granite-like rock in front. Within this recess was a well-used, much worn, green-mottled copper still! Liz's pulse began racing from excitement and pure joy. This was it! This would win that American prize for her or she would take up number painting!

The ground about the place was worn smooth by countless footprints. Near the old still were barrels and large earthen jars of fermenting mash, and stored next to the wall of the cliff were bags of cane sugar and many sacks of grain. A spring trickled down from beneath the ledge, and a large basin had been hollowed out big enough to hold several barrels of water. It was an ideal hiding place, an ideal location for an illicit still, and it probably had been used by generations of moonshiners for that very purpose.

That first morning Liz sketched the old moonshiner as he went about firing the still and handling the mash. She sketched him in various attitudes—placing earthen jugs beneath the copper worm of the still, sampling the new brew from a jug, chopping firewood.

But in the lines and crevices of the old fellow's face, in his horny hands and brown arms, in the icy stare of his keen old eyes, the grizzled head of hair, the weather-beaten parchment of the lantern jaws, Elizabeth found what she wanted to portray. She finally posed him seated on a block of wood, his lanky frame stretched at ease, his fierce eyes gazing off into the distance, the greenish copper still by his side, the repeating rifle propped across his knees. In the



background she sketched the barrels and crocks of mash, the sacks of sugar and grain, the chopped firewood and the earthenware jugs. In the morning she would go to work on canvas.

That evening Liz, bubbling with happiness and excitement, offered to help the mountaineer housewife with the dishes. The old woman turned on her angrily. "I don't want you putting your lily white hands in the dish water. They mightn't never be the same again."

Liz was too astonished to answer.

"And another thing," the woman continued, "you keep your distance from my man down there. Jed, he ain't no man to control hisself when a woman walls her eyeballs at him, especially a fancy red-headed woman like you be."

"Why, the ideal!" said Liz. "He could be my grandfather!"

"Jed's still quite a mite of a man, he is, and you are minx enough to know it."

They heard Jed coming from the barn, where he had been feeding the livestock. Before he entered the house, Elizabeth went to her room and shut the door. She got into her pajamas then and lay upon the bed, listening to the strange, unusual sounds of the Ozark mountain wilderness going to sleep—the last twitterings of some birds, the hooting of owls in the distance, a

barking which might have been a fox, the baying of hounds. The strange, unreasonable jealousy of the mountaineer woman prevented her from going to sleep very early. She had been in various places of the world—with thousands of young American men away from home and yearning for the sight of a girl from the States—and always had remained unharmed. But this illiterate backwoods woman, who was probably old enough to be her grandmother, was green-eyed because she was painting a picture of her "man", and paying \$500 for the privilege.

Elizabeth's friends in New York would get a real bang out of this when she told them—that is, if she didn't wake up in the middle of the night to find Grandma belaboring her with a meat cleaver or something! But Liz lived through the night, and went to sleep in spite of herself.

The next morning she went through the ritual of the blindfold, and as soon as she started to work on canvas everything else was forgotten. Every stroke of her brush was one of joy. She wasn't on the job now—she was at play—she was going to win the art association award. But the motivation was greater than this, the desire to create something brutally primitive and real. She painted what she saw,

and she saw more than an ordinary person. She painted those hard, rough old hands, still with the power of steel in them. She painted those merciless eyes, that shock of white hair—white hair streaked with the original black that it once had been. She painted the ruggedness of the setting, the gray, limestone rocks, the black smudges from the still smoke, the trickling water, the golden, dripping corn-likker, the red coals of the hickory fire glowing beneath the greenish old still-pot.

Elizabeth had no idea who her moonshiner model was, except that his wife called him Jed. This may or may not have been his real name. Anyhow, in the serenity and beauty of the place, Liz forgot all about the wife. The canyon at the time seemed to her to be the most beautiful place in the world, the most peaceful at any rate, with the leaves of the trees golden and russet against splotches of green. Frost already had come in these mountain altitudes, and it was Elizabeth's privilege to be there breathing in the wild fragrance. Her spirits bubbled with exuberance, because she was creating, and creating something she believed was worthwhile, something that would live.

That night they ate off the fat of the land, from a table loaded

with smoking cornbread, strong black coffee, fresh milk with thick cream, fresh meat which Liz believed was venison, fruit cobbler, and sorghum molasses. But the woman and Liz didn't speak to each other. They hadn't spoken since the explosion of the night before, but Jed noticed nothing strange in their lack of conversation, or if he did he ignored it.

For that matter, Jed himself was a very quiet man. There was something about him which refrained Liz from asking questions. He was living up to his part of the bargain, and that was all she had any right to ask. In fact, Liz felt like a small child who had been given the key to a candy store. Her good fortune was almost unbelievable. The child in the candy store was certain to be confronted with the problem of getting away with all the candy he could carry. Liz believed she had the painting that would make the contest judges and the art critics gasp—if she could get it completed and get out of there with it.

As the afternoon of the fourth day in the mountains came on, the deep threat of the enmity of Mrs. Jed was more and more in Elizabeth's mind. She knew there would be no peace between them as long as she remained in the woman's home. To the old lady, she was a red-headed siren, an evil temptress,

who would grab her precious man and take him away from her if she could.

Very well, one more day's brush work and the painting would be done. Elizabeth would have her canvas, and the couple would take her back safely to her hotel and collect the remaining \$250. She would break the good news at the supper table that night, and perhaps that would relieve the tension.

But trouble arrived that afternoon in the form of a singing bullet which came closer to hitting Liz than anything among the Viet Nam fireworks had ever done. Her brush was clipped in two between her hand and the canvas!

Elizabeth dropped to the floor of the cave with reflex action. Equally fast, old Jed moved between the pine saplings, buck bushes and undergrowth, leaping from boulder to boulder with the agility of a mountain goat, and headed toward a cloud of white smoke which rose from a clump of sumac bushes some sixty feet away. There was a commotion in the bushes and an outcry, and in a surprisingly short time Jed was back again, carrying two weapons in his arms—his own, and a long, muzzle-loading rifle. He was grinning. It was one of the few times Liz had seen any semblance of amusement on his face.

"You wouldn't believe it,

ma'am," he said, "but my Sarah is afeered you're aimin' to run off with me. That was her down there. She didn't mean you no real harm. She can shoot the eye out of a fox squirrel in the top of the highest hickory tree in the woods. I taught her to shoot years ago. She can't stand it, you and me down here together day after day, so she just cut your brush in two to scare you away from here. That two hundred and fifty extra dollars, or the whole blame five hundred, don't mean a dern thing to her. But you go right ahead, ma'am, and take all the time you please, because old Betsy here, that she took down from over the mantel, is the only other gun we got."

Elizabeth resumed her work with another brush—after her hands stopped trembling. From time to time Jed chuckled to himself. "Poor old Sarah," he said, half apologetically. "She's lived back in these hills so long she can't stand the sight of another woman gettin' even near me. She promised to be good, when we heered about that \$500 you was offering, but now it's to hell with the five hundred—just get you away from here."

He chuckled again and continued: "Makes me think of the time Cousin Rufe and me was havin' it out tryin' to win Sarah's favor.

Rufe and me was both just young colts and still wet behind the ears. She was queen at all the barn dances, a regular hillbilly belle, and me and Rufe was the pick of the young bucks for a whole whoop and a holler around here. We sure was. She got a whole hell of a lot of fun out of first playin' Rufe against me and me against Rufe. Sometimes I think she got mixed up herself over which one she really did favor most, but she finally chose me. And ever since I reckon as how she thinks every woman is as interested in me as much as she is. Crazy old fool. That was a long time ago when a woman would look at either Rufe or me."

That night when Jed and Elizabeth went back to the house, Sarah was working in the kitchen, wearing a sunbonnet. At the table, she kept her face turned away from Liz throughout the meal; but once Liz caught a fleeting glimpse beneath the bonnet. Her eyes were puffed and swollen.

Before she retired that night, Elizabeth pushed a dresser in front of the door to her bedroom. A jealous woman, she had found out, is more dangerous than a Congo tribal uprising.

The afternoon of the next day, the fifth that Liz had been in the mountains, she laid down her

brush. "Come and look at it, Jed," she said. "The job's all done."

The old fellow had hardly glanced at the painting up to this time. Now he examined it closely. Liz saw that he was pleased and that beneath the surface he was as excited as a child.

"That's me all right, ma'am," he said, "and that's old Copper Annie thar. You shore done a good job."

"Glad you like it. Now you can take me back to the hotel and get your money."

"There's just one thing, ma'am. What you going to do with this pitcher?"

"Jed," Liz boasted, "that picture of you and the still is bound to carry off first prize in the biggest art contest in the nation this year. It's pure Americana, and there's been nothing like it before. It's the best thing I've ever done."

"Yep, so you told me. But I don't know as I understand what all that means. There wouldn't be no pitcher of that paintin' come out in the paper, would there?"

"Picture in the paper! Listen, Jed, you're famous! If that painting wins, it very likely will appear in every paper in the country. That's one piece of art everyone can understand—art critics and the public alike."

"Not my pitcher, it ain't."

"Now, Jed, we've got an agree-

ment. I'm paying you five hundred dollars for that picture. It's mine."

The old man shook his head stubbornly. "Ain't been nothin' said about my pitcher and old Copper Annie bein' put in no newspaper at no time. We never had no such agreement. You must take me for a dad-blamed fool. Ever' revenooer in the state will see that pitcher, and most of them know me and been trying to get something on me for years."

"Now, don't be like that," Liz pleaded. "I'm down here hundreds of miles from home, just to make that picture."

"And you're plumb shore goin' all the way back without it, ma'am, unless'n—"

"Unless what?"

"See here, ma'am, them artists who'll judge that pitcher don't have to see my face just like it is. Can't you change my looks a mite?"

"I can," said Elizabeth, "but it's your face that makes the painting."

"Tain't my face at all—it's that copper still thar. You could sit any old long-eared mountain goat down alongside of old Copper Annie thar, and them city galoots would think it was a real still-runner. Why don't you paint me on a beard, a long, thick beard?

That's what city folks expect us mountain people to look like anyway."

So Liz worked yet another day, prayerfully and with her fingers crossed, painting old Jed with a long, heavy beard. From time to time Jed inspected the painting and gave his ideas about the coloring of the beard. Liz complied. She had to, or she knew she would never get out of the mountains with any painting at all. She had to cover the mouth lines, the boney thrust to his chin, the parchment texture of his lantern jaws. Finally old Jed was satisfied, and Liz had to be.

That night they drove to town, Elizabeth lying in the back seat, blindfolded, as she had been on the trip into the mountains, but the tension was lifting every mile of the way. Liz was feeling it, old Jed was getting an extra notch or two out of his ancient car, and Sarah was humming to herself. Halfway to town Sarah was in full crackling voice, once more, and she entertained them with camp-meeting hymns. At the hotel, Sarah looked almost kindly at Liz as she counted out the remaining \$250 and handed it to Jed.

The next day Elizabeth headed for New York, and barely got the painting under the wire for the entrance deadline. Then she left

for Florida, for a sure-enough vacation, and to await further assignment from her magazine.

Shortly after the first of the year Liz got the good news—almost simultaneously with an assignment to Central America. Old Copper Annie and Jed, whiskers and all, hadn't let her down. She had rung the bell, winning first prize and first place in the Americana oil painting division.

Elizabeth had been right. Her painting was a smash! Sophisticated art critics praised its depth and power. The Joes in the pool-halls understood the painting and were equally enthusiastic. Editors gave it plenty of space, some playing it on the front page. Her own magazine ran it double page, full color, with a story of her career.

Six weeks later Liz was back in New York. Her painting was to hang in the Art Gallery, and she was completely happy—until one day a subpoena server tapped her on the shoulder. She was ordered to appear as a witness in a murder case in the Arkansas Ozarks!

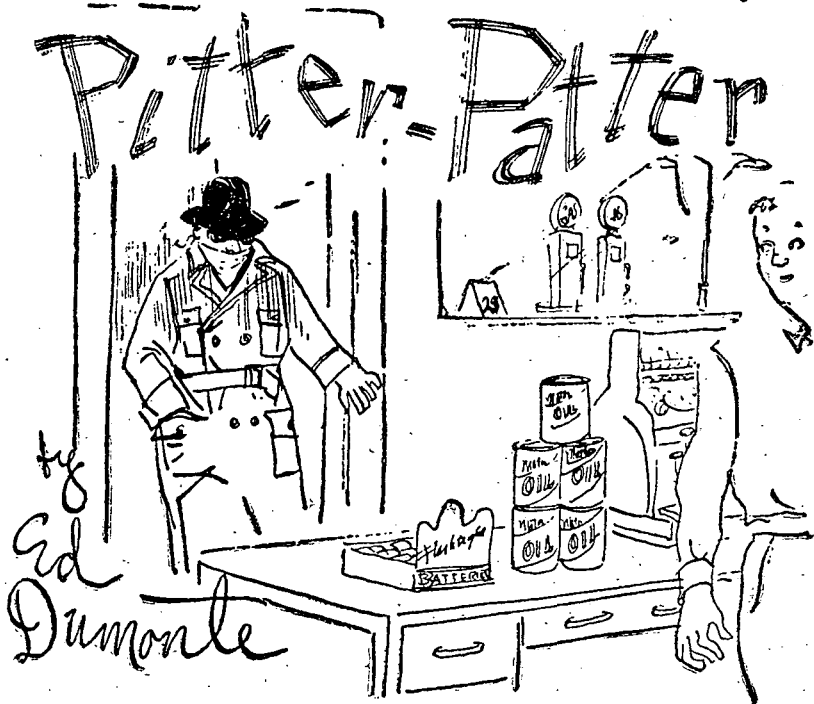
It seemed that Rufe, Jed's cou-

sin, also was a moonshiner and, Liz learned for the first time, Rufe bore an amazing facial resemblance to Jed. Following their split-up over Sarah years before, Rufe had grown a *heavy beard*, while Jed remained clean-shaven, in order to break up the hated resemblance.

When Rufe saw the picture of his bearded self sitting beside a moonshine still, in a newspaper reproduction of Elizabeth's award-winning painting, he knew the revenooers would be on his neck immediately. Expert illicit still operator that he was, Rufe had instantly recognized the classic lines of Jed's Copper Annie, and he knew that Jed, although keeping his mouth shut—true to the moonshiner's code—had betrayed him just the same. Now, the State of Arkansas charged, Rufe had taken his gun and gone over one night and shot poor Jed dead. He then surrendered to the sheriff for protection. And Elizabeth figured poor old Rufe would need plenty of protection—from Sarah and her muzzle-loader!



There's the patter of raindrops, and of little feet, and then there's plain old pitter-patter.



I WAS an honest man before the day I asked Barbara Ann to marry me. I don't mean by that to blame Barbara Ann for my adventure in crime, but it's a fact that until I promised to marry her I was perfectly content with my job at the filling station.

Barbara Ann is without a doubt

the sweetest, prettiest little girl I ever knew, but I think the reason I proposed to her is because she was so convenient. We lived on the same floor of the rooming house and, because I worked nights at the gas station and she worked days in an office downtown, we kept meeting each other in the hall. As

I left for work at night she'd be getting in from a date or a movie with some girl friends, when I got home in the morning she'd be leaving for her office.

Soon we were greeting each other like old friends, in a little while I was dating her, and before long Barbara Ann began waiting for me to get home from the station in the morning with breakfast and a good-night kiss.

Now I work hard all night, and when I get home I'm tired and shouldn't be held responsible for what I might say. Anyhow it was one of those mornings, over strong coffee and sugar covered doughnuts, that I asked Barbara Ann to marry me and she said yes. That was the day I began losing sleep over how I was going to provide for a wife.

And a week later the filling station was held up again.

He came into the office of the station about two-thirty in the morning, wearing a Hollywood-gangster trenchcoat with the collar turned up. His hat was pulled down over his forehead and a handkerchief covered the lower part of his face. He stood in the doorway glaring at me, one hand held ominously in the pocket of his coat.

"O.K., Mac, this is a —"

"Yeah, I know. Press the NO

SALE key on the cash register to open it. The bank deposit envelope is behind the oil cans on the second shelf."

It wasn't the first time the station had been robbed. It happened every month or so, and always between two and four in the morning.

"That's right, Mac," he said, heading for the cash register. "You just cooperate and nobody'll get hurt."

"That's a real good disguise you've got," I told him. "I wouldn't be able to identify you if I saw you again."

"Yeah, thanks. Simple but effective, that's my policy. Hey, what's the matter with this cash register? You trying to pull a fast one?"

"Oh, I must have locked it. Sorry. Turn the key to the right, then press the NO SALE button."

He did and the cash drawer popped open. With his free hand he scooped the money out of the machine and stuffed it into his pocket. The other hand remained in the pocket of his coat, pointing at me threateningly.

"Say, do you really have a gun in that pocket?"

"What do you mean? Of course I have a gun. You try something funny and you'll find out."

"Oh, I wasn't going to try anything," I assured him. "I just won-

dered. The guy who stuck me up last month only had a toy pistol. A couple of months before that, the guy just kept his hand in his pocket, didn't have anything at all."

"Well I got a real gun," he said and pulled it partly out of his pocket for me to see. Then, behind his mask, he gave what might have been a giggle. "I ain't got any bullets for it, but don't let that give you any ideas. Where did you say that bank envelope was?"

"Behind the oil cans on the second shelf."

He took the envelope and put it with the money from the cash register. Then he backed away from me, toward the door. "All right, I'm leaving now. Don't call the cops until—"

"Aren't you going to tell me how much money you took?"

"Why should I?"

"I gotta pay taxes, you know. I know how much was in the envelope; just count the money from the cash register. Go ahead, you've got time. Nobody will be in for a couple of hours."

Grumbling, he took the loose cash from his pocket and counted it. "Sixty-three dollars," he snapped when he finished counting. "A lousy night."

"Sixty-three? Are you sure? It should be more."

He counted the money again. "Seventy-three. I missed a ten. It's still a lousy night. All right, I'm leaving now. Don't call the cops—"

"It sure must take a lot of nerve to stick up a place."

"You bet your life it does. And brains, too."

"Brains? Go on, what brains does it take to stick a gun in a guy's face and say 'stick 'em up?'"

"Boy, you amateurs! You think that's all there is to it? Let me tell you, Mac, it takes a lot more than that. If you're going to be a pro you got to develop your own style, a *modus operandi* the cops call it. Take me, for instance. My M.O. is to pick out five or six gas stations that look ripe for plucking. I spend three weeks or a month casing the joints, then when everything is laid out I pull all the jobs in one night and blow town before morning. Neat, eh? But it takes years to perfect your own style. It ain't so easy as you think."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. It ain't so easy."

"You bet your life it ain't. All right, I'm leaving now. Don't call the—"

"That's too bad. I'll never be able to pull it off by myself."

"Pull what off?"

"A robbery. I know a place that's just crying to be robbed. But I don't have the nerve to do it, or

the brains to try it right now."

"Ah, what do you know about it? You probably think a bank is a good place to rob because it has a lot of money."

"Well, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't! A bank is tough. It takes a lot of planning to rob a bank, and equipment." As he talked his voice became dreamy and far away. "You got to know the bank schedule right to the second, and time the job just right. You got to train a bunch of boys to be in the right place at the right time. You got to plan a getaway route in advance, and have a place to hide out until things cool off." He ended the statement with a sigh. "I'll rob a bank someday, but it'll take a big investment."

"Well, this is nothing like that," I told him. "It's just thirty thousand dollars in an old lady's shoe-box."

"An old lady, huh? I don't like that. Them old ladies are tricky."

"No, not this one. This old lady is my Aunt Rosemary, and she runs a roadhouse outside of town. She must rake in seven-eight thousand a week; and she only goes to the bank once a month, so the rest of the time the money just lays around in piles. But what's the use of talking about it. I don't have the guts to try and I know it."

The man left the doorway of the

station and, motioning me back away from him with his free hand, sat on a corner of the desk.

"Now wait a minute, Mac. Let's talk this over. Maybe we can work something out."

"It's no use. I told you, I don't have the nerve for it."

"No, but I do."

"You mean we could work together on this stickup?"

"Don't jump to conclusions," he snarled at me. Then, through the pocket of his coat, he pointed the gun he didn't have bullets for at me. "And don't move so fast, it makes me itchy. Now tell me, you know what day of the month this old lady goes to the bank?"

"Sure. The first banking day of every month."

"And you know the layout of the roadhouse?"

"Like the back of my hand."

"Well then maybe, just maybe, we can work together on this to get that money."

"Gee, that's swell," I said. "I wouldn't be afraid to try it with someone who knew the ropes. I could leave here any night after two. If I got back before four no one would ever know I was gone. A perfect alibi."

"Man, that's what I mean about amateurs!" he said, disgusted with me. "You just don't think. The night you ducked out of here to



pull a job would be just the time someone came around looking for you. If I do this job I'll do it alone, I don't want no amateurs around to panic and blow it."

"Well, where do I come in? It was my idea, remember."

"That's where you come in," he told me. "For fingering the joint and telling me the layout you're doing part of the work, so you get part of the loot. Now, where did you say this roadhouse was?"

"Just outside of town. About ten miles out on highway— Oh, no you don't. It won't be that easy, buddy. Once I tell you where the place is you don't have any more use for me."

"You don't trust me, huh? How are we going to work together if you don't trust me?"

"Who says we have to work to-

gether? It's my idea. I'll wait a while and do it myself sometime."

"Ah, you don't have the guts for it. You said so yourself. You need someone like me to do the job."

"And you need me to point out the easy mark. But once I do that, you don't need me. You'll just take the money and disappear."

"That's why no one wants to work with amateurs," he said sadly. "Haven't you ever heard the expression 'honor among thieves'? If we work together I'll pull the job and come right back here and give you your share."

"Sure you will. Except, as you pointed out, I'm not a thief—not yet. No; there's no way we can agree: I don't trust you and you don't trust me. We might as well forget the whole deal. Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you give me my half now. In advance."

"Give you— Are you out of your head?" he shouted at me. "What do you think, I go around sticking up gas stations for a hobby? Where would I get that kind of money?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right," I said. "We'd better forget the whole thing. We can't work together, and I need the money too bad to let you walk off with it alone."

He stalked around the office of the station for a minute, glaring at me. Then, abruptly, he was over his fit of anger.

"You want that money pretty bad, huh?" he asked.

"Yeah, real bad. I'm getting married."

"All right, and I want to do the job because maybe my share will be enough so I can afford to rob that bank I was telling you about. But neither of us will get anything this way. You can't do it yourself, you don't have the nerve or the know-how. I can't do it because I don't know where the place is."

"So what are we going to do? You don't want me to work with you, and I'm certainly not going to give away an idea I may be able to use someday."

"I think I've got the answer to that. You don't give the idea to me, you sell it to me."

"Sell it?"

"Sure. You sell me the information you have about the place. That way, at least you'll get something out of it. I'll check it out and if it looks right I'll pull the job. If it doesn't I'll go back to my regular business. I'll be taking all the risk, see? Tell you what, if the take is as good as you say it'll be I'll even guarantee to give you a percentage of it. Now what could be fairer than that?"

"Well . . ."

While I hesitated, he began rummaging through his pockets and dropping handfuls of crumpled bills on the counter beside the cash register.

"Sorry," he said apologetically, "it's the only money I have. This was the fourth station on my list for tonight. I haven't had time to get these straightened out."

He broke open a couple of bank deposit envelopes similar to the one he had taken from me, sorted the bills according to denomination and counted them out. It came to something over five hundred dollars.

"That's the best I can do," he said at last. "How about it? Remember, an idea you can't carry out isn't worth anything at all to you."

At the sight of all that money lying in neat stacks on the counter I capitulated. I told him how to

get to Aunt Rosemary's roadhouse, drew him a floorplan of the place and told him what hours it was most likely to be empty. He had what he wanted and was ready to leave when I stopped him at the door.

"Hey, what about the filling station's money?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah. Almost forgot. Guess I can't stick you up, now that we're partners. Honor among thieves, and all that." He put the money and the envelope he had taken on the counter beside the cash register. Then with a casual salute said, "So long, Mac. See you by the end of the week and let you know how we stand."

I didn't see him by the end of the week, or by the end of the next week, either.

Barbara Ann and I used part of the five hundred dollars to rent a cabin at the lake for a week's honeymoon. I managed to get in some fishing and had pretty good luck. When we got back to town we rented a new apartment and had enough money left over to make a downpayment on some

provincial furniture she wanted.

What I forgot to tell my partner was that Aunt Rosemary is a widow. Her husband was a cop, and for years she's been feeding all the state and county cops in the district. There's always at least one team of patrolmen in the back room of her place, putting away a free meal and shooting the breeze. But I guess he's found that out by now, one way or another.

For me, things haven't changed much. I'm still working nights here in the filling station, and not making any more money at it than ever. Only now I have a wife to support, and Barbara Ann has had to quit her job, and the baby is on the way . . .

Well, I see that somebody is coming into the place, so you'll have to excuse me for a minute. Here we go again.

"All right, Mac, this is a —"

"Yeah, I know. Press the NO SALE key on the cash register. The bank deposit envelope is behind the oil cans on the second shelf. Say, that's a real nice disguise you got there, buddy."





In this marvelous age of electronics, one is inclined to dismiss peremptorily the possibility of human aberration.

CALCULATED ALIBI

By
Richard
Deming

AS USUAL, cocktails were served exactly at five-thirty and they sat down to dinner exactly at six. As usual, Amos Crowder signaled the end of the meal by rising from his chair exactly at six forty-five. At the Crowder home every act was timed to the split second.

As his host and employer led the way from the dining room into the huge front room, Peter Abbott could understand how the set routine was gradually driving the retired industrialist's young wife to distraction. Abbott was merely the older man's secretary and, ordi-

narily, had to submit to the unvarying schedule of Amos Crowder's life only forty hours a week; plus each Wednesday evening, when he was expected to be the Crowders' dinner guest. Vivian was sentenced to conform to the schedule twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Vivian took her accustomed chair in the front room and Abbott, as usual, sat on the sofa. Sometimes he had the impulse to choose a different seat just to mar the metered rhythm of his employer's existence, but he never did. Even so minor a change as a different after-dinner seating arrangement would have disturbed Amos.

As he always did immediately after dinner, Amos Crowder momentarily held his hands to the heat of the burning log in the fireplace, his back to his wife and secretary. At sixty-five he was still muscular and erect and not unhandsome in an austere sort of way. His complexion was still smoothly unwrinkled and his hair, although nearly white, was thick

and crisply wavy, well groomed.

Vivian took advantage of her husband's back by forming her lips into a silent kiss to Peter Abbott. The handsome secretary gave his head a warning shake.

After a precise thirty seconds of warming his hands, Crowder turned around and said, "I'll get the coffee."

This was another ritual. Although the Crowders employed both a housekeeper-cook and a maid, drinks were always personally mixed and served by Amos. Before dinner he had mixed martinis at the bar dominating a corner of the livingroom. Now he would repair to the kitchen and return with a tray bearing three mugs of Irish coffee. Plain coffee was never served with dinner at the Crowder home. It was always Irish coffee served, following dinner, in the livingroom.

As Amos disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, Peter Abbott gave Vivian an intimate smile. She was a slim, shapely blonde of thirty, with a lovely but unsmiling face. She had been Amos Crowder's private secretary for five years before his retirement as president of Crowder Enterprises, and had married him the day he retired a year ago. It was her first marriage and the industrialist's second. Abbott had never known the first

wife, but gathered she had been a mousy little woman who had endured the rigid routine of marriage to Crowder for forty years before dying about two years previously. There had been no children during the forty years.

Vivian said in a soft voice, "Still love me?"

"Of course," he said in an equally low tone. "But this is no time to discuss it."

The inevitable had happened. During the six months since he had been engaged as Amos Crowder's personal secretary, Peter had often wondered how such an obviously intelligent man as Amos could deliberately throw his young wife into nearly constant contact with a virile and unattached man her own age without anticipating what would develop. Peter's duties were not exhausting. Aside from handling Amos' rather limited correspondence, his prime duty was to transcribe the retired industrialist's memoirs from the tape recorder into which Crowder dictated. Since for a good part of each day Amos was locked in his study dictating into the machine, Peter had much idle time. With two servants, Vivian's time was equally idle.

The result could have been foreordained. In the beginning Peter had merely been a welcome

companion to relieve Vivian's loneliness. Then, gradually, without either being fully aware of just when it started, an intimacy developed which began to express itself in minor but telltale ways. At an accidental touching of hands, both would jerk back as though the contact had been electric. Sometimes they would find themselves staring at each other for long, silent moments, before simultaneously looking guiltily aside. Then had come the day when, alone in the front room, they hadn't looked aside. Instead, Peter had taken her into his arms and she had clung to him in passion.

After that there had been clandestine meetings outside the home after Amos was asleep. These had not been difficult to arrange, because Amos' sleeping routine was as rigidly patterned as the rest of his life. An insomniac, he took a sleeping pill exactly at ten each night and retired at ten-thirty. By a quarter to eleven he was invariably in a drugged sleep which lasted until seven in the morning. Neither servant lived in and, as Vivian and her husband had separate rooms, it was easy for her to sneak from the house without detection.

"We have to discuss it," Vivian said. "He can't hear us in the kitchen. I don't think I can stand

it much longer, darling. It's like being in jail."

"Leave him," he urged. "When I said I loved you, I meant all the word involves. Divorce him and marry me."

"And live on what?" she inquired.

He flushed. At thirty, Peter Abbott was not an outstanding financial success. Over the years he had held a series of minor clerical jobs with various companies, none with any particular future. His present employment as Amos Crowder's secretary paid a fair salary, but naturally would terminate if he ran off with the man's wife. He didn't have much security to offer.

"We can't keep on meeting in back streets forever," he growled. "We have to do something."

"I know," she said. "I've been thinking of something we can do. We'll discuss it when we're alone. Can we meet tomorrow night?"

"Why not tonight?" he inquired.

She made a face. "It's Wednesday."

He felt his face redden. Damn Amos Crowder and his inflexible routine. Wednesday was the night he deigned to let his wife share his bed.

They heard Amos coming from the kitchen and lapsed into silence. The older man entered the room carrying three coffee mugs on a

tray. Thick whipped cream floated on the top of each cup.

Irish coffee is nothing but black coffee with a slug of Irish whisky in it and a blob of whipped cream floating on top. Peter didn't particularly care for it, but when you dined with Amos Crowder, you submitted to his tastes. Because Amos had decided that Irish coffee was the perfect after-dinner drink, his guests were never offered any other choice.

Wednesday-evening conversation was always the same. Amos and Peter discussed the progress of Amos' memoirs while Vivian listened in silence. From Peter's point of view the book, now about a third finished, was incredibly dull, but Amos obviously regarded it as a literary masterpiece. In the interest of keeping his job, Peter naturally did nothing to discourage his employer's opinion.

Amos had a letter from a New York literary agent to show to his secretary. Amos had answered an ad of the agent, who offered to evaluate and criticize book manuscripts for a reading fee, and market those he judged marketable. Amos had submitted three chapters and an outline of his memoirs to the agent, along with a check.

According to the letter, the book had great literary possibilities and, for additional reading fees, the

agent was willing to furnish editorial advice and criticism of each chapter as it was completed. The whole matter could be accomplished by mail, but if it were possible for the author to get to New York, a personal conference would be of value.

"I don't want to go up there," Amos said. "It would throw my schedule all out of kilter. You know as much about the book as I do, so I want you to go talk to the fellow. You can fly up Sunday night, talk to him Monday, and fly back that night."

"All right," Peter agreed. "It's only about two hours by jet."

Exactly at seven twenty-five the maid came in to collect the empty coffee mugs. Five minutes later she and the housekeeper-cook departed for the night. At eight Amos rose and lifted the tape recorder which lay on a corner of the bar.

"You transcribed everything I recorded this morning, didn't you?" he said to the secretary.

"Yes, of course," Peter said. "The manuscript is on your desk."

"I feel in the mood for starting a new chapter. I think I'll dictate for an hour. Will you excuse me?"

"Certainly," Peter said, rising. "I'll run along early then, if Vivian doesn't mind."

He was a trifle surprised, for

this was a departure from routine. Usually when Peter came to dinner each Wednesday, he and Amos discussed the book until nine, then Amos retired to his study to proof the day's output or dictate until bedtime, and Peter took this as a signal to go home. Amos had never previously broken up the evening so early.

Vivian escorted Peter to the door as her husband carried the tape recorder to his study. She gave his hand a tight squeeze.

"Tomorrow night?" she whispered.

"If you think it's safe."

"It's always safe except for Wednesdays," she said. "Thanks to sleeping pills. Same place, same time?"

"Uh-huh," he said. "Thanks for dinner."

The next morning Peter phoned the airport and discovered there was a jet flight to New York at six p.m. on Sunday. He made a reservation, and also one for an eight p.m. flight back from New York on Monday.

He didn't see much of Vivian that day, because she was gone on a shopping tour all afternoon.

At midnight Peter parked on the curve near the elephant house in Forest Park. Moments later a convertible with the top up parked behind him. Leaving his

car and buttoning his topcoat against the outdoor chill, he walked back to the convertible and got in the front seat. The car was equipped with a gas heater which made it comfortably warm despite its thin canvas roof.

Vivian moved into his arms and kissed him passionately.

After a time he said, "Motel?"

"Not tonight," she said. "We have things to discuss."

"Like what?"

"What we're going to do. As you said after dinner last night, we can't go on forever like this. But if I simply leave Amos, we'll be penniless. He'll fight any sort of financial settlement. I know him."

"I can get another job," he said without much conviction.

"Oh sure. At peanuts. After a taste of luxury, I have no intention of ever pinching pennies again, Peter. I want you *and* Amos' money."

"That would be nice, but how do you plan to swing it?"

Dropping her head to his shoulder, she whispered against his chest, "Would you be averse to marrying a rich widow?"

He stiffened. "You're not serious?"

She raised her head to look into his face in the dimness. "I've never been more serious. Do you really

love me? Enough to prove it now?"

"Of course I do. But murder!"

"Is it your conscience or the thought of getting caught that bothers you?"

After a moment of contemplation he said reluctantly, "Probably the thought of getting caught. I really don't particularly like Amos. But I'd hate to spend our honeymoon in the gas chamber."

"We won't get caught," she said. "I have a foolproof plan."

"I'll bet. A lot of residents of death row thought they had foolproof plans."

"This one is," she assured him. "With those sleeping pills he takes, he sleeps like a rock. He would never hear a prowler break into the house. Suppose he was murdered by a prowler at a time when we both had perfect alibis?"

"What kind of alibis?"

"Yours is ready-made. The prowler will break in around midnight Sunday, while you're registered at a hotel in New York City."

He frowned. "You're going to pull the killing?"

She shook her head. "You are. I said you'd be registered at a New York hotel. I didn't say you'd actually be there, but no one will ever be able to prove you weren't."

"Maybe you'd better fill me in," he said. "I don't follow you."

"I visited the airport today," she

said. "Your flight arrives in New York at 8:01 p.m. There is a jet flight back to here at 9:35 p.m. That gives you an hour and thirty-four minutes to get to a hotel, register, go to your room long enough to make the bellboy think you're in for the night, duck out the back way and taxi back to the airport. You'll fly back here under an assumed name, getting in at 11:28. There is a jet flight back to New York at 2:00 a.m., getting you there at 3:58. You could be back in your hotel room before dawn, and no one would ever know you had been out of it."

He did some silent calculation. "That leaves two and a half hours, approximately, for me to get from the airport to your house, do the job and get back to the airport again. Enough time, I suppose, providing all three of the planes I have to take are on schedule. But suppose one runs late?"

"It won't matter if the last one does, only if your first flight or the one back here is too late for you to make connections. If either is, you simply forget it and we wait for another opportunity. What have we lost except the price of a couple of plane fares?"

He thought some more. "I would have to have reservations on the two extra flights."

"They can be made by phone."

In order to confuse your trail, they should be made under two different fake names. Suppose I make them for you tomorrow and pick up the tickets?"

"Don't rush me," Peter said. "How do I kill him? I don't own a gun."

"I do." She straightened in her seat, opened her bag and took out a hammerless .32 revolver. "I bought it in a pawnshop today, under an assumed name. It can't be traced, because it's never going to be found. After you use it, you can take it back to New York and drop it in the Hudson



River, or wherever you decide."

"You were certainly confident I'd go along," he growled.

He opened the glove compartment, groped for the flashlight in it and examined the gun by its beam. It was a five-shot Smith and Wesson, probably fifty years old, but it seemed to be in good condition. Breaking it, he discovered it was fully loaded.

When he glanced at her inquiringly, Vivian said, "I bought cartridges in a sporting goods store. You won't need more than are in the gun, so I threw the rest away."

He switched off the flashlight, returned it to the glove compartment, and thrust the gun into his topcoat pocket.

"Okay," he said. "Now how about your alibi?"

"I plan to be in the hospital that night."

When he stared at her, she said, "Amos is always sound asleep by a quarter to eleven. Saint John's Hospital is only six blocks from us. I'll check in, complaining of severe abdominal pains, shortly after eleven. Naturally they'll keep me overnight for observation. You won't arrive at the house much before twelve thirty, so I'll be covered."

He said dubiously, "Providing they fix time of death when it

actually happens. There won't be any witnesses to just when he dies."

"Neighbors are bound to hear the shots."

He frowned at that. "Yeah," he said slowly. "And suppose one comes to investigate?"

"People don't break into dark houses to investigate shots," she said patiently. "They'll just wonder what the noise was, then forget it. But somebody will remember the time when police later question neighbors. Just to make sure, you can put a bullet through the alarm clock on Amos' bedside table. That will fix the time."

"All right," he agreed. "I think they can fix time of death pretty closely by autopsy anyway. You should be in the clear."

"Here's what I want you to do," she said. "We want this to look like a burglary, so I won't give you a key. Break one of the panes in the French doors leading into the front room in order to get in. You won't have to worry about Amos hearing you, because an earthquake wouldn't rouse him after he's had one of his sleeping pills. You know where the first-floor linen closet is?"

"Uh-huh."

Get a couple of pillowcases

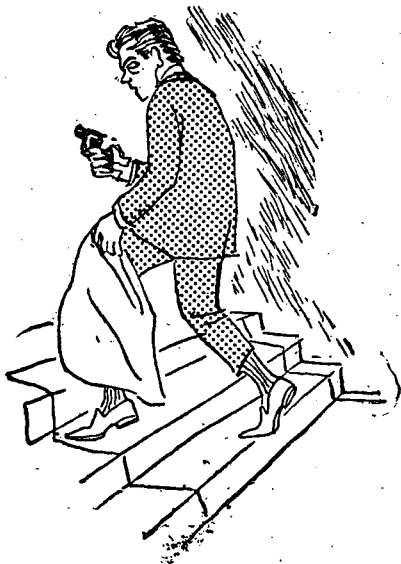
from there and fill one with my sterling silver from the dining-room buffet. Leave it near the door you came in and carry the other case upstairs. After you shoot Amos, drop it next to the bed. It will look as though the burglar took it upstairs, intending to pack it with whatever valuables he found there, then dropped it in panic and ran, after shooting Amos. It will also look as though he were in too much of a hurry to stop for the filled case on the way out."

After thinking this over, he nodded. "It should work. I'll go along."

She moved back into his arms. "Kiss me," she said.

Sunday evening Peter Abbot's jet landed at Kennedy Airport exactly on time. He was carrying only an overnight bag, so he didn't have to wait for luggage to be unloaded. At twenty minutes to nine he was registering at a hotel. Fifteen minutes later he emerged into the alley from a fire exit. He was lucky enough to find a cab immediately, and by offering a ten-dollar bonus, got the driver to break most of New York's traffic laws on the way back to the airport. He made his flight thirty seconds before the jet's passenger door closed.

"Mr. Arthur Reynolds?" the



stewardess asked, her pencil hovering over the only unchecked name on her passenger list.

"Eh?" Peter said, then remembered that Arthur Reynolds was the name Vivian had used when making the reservation for this flight. "Yes, that's right."

This flight arrived on time too. Peter had left his car at the airport parking lot, so there was no need for a taxi.

It was a quarter after midnight when he arrived at the Crowder home. He parked a half block away and walked the rest of the distance. The house, and those each side of it, were

dark, but he advanced cautiously.

Quietly he made his way across the lawn to the front porch. Before the French doors he shined the small flashlight he had brought on the panes in order to locate the one next to the inside latch. When he found it, he broke the pane with the butt of his gun, then switched off the flashlight and listened. When several seconds had passed with no sound from inside, he reached through with a gloved hand and unlatched the door.

Using only the flashlight for illumination, he located the first-floor linen closet and removed two pillowcases. In the dining-room he loaded one with silver, then carried it to the front room and laid it in the center of the floor.

Carrying the other pillowcase, he climbed the stairs as silently as he could. He eased open the door of Vivian's bedroom and flashed the light around to make sure she was gone. When he found the room empty, he crossed the hall to open the door to Amos' room.

Amos Crowder always slept with the windows open, and the room was quite cold. The figure in bed was completely covered by a quilt, head and all.

Peter stepped into the room,

tossed the empty pillowcase on the floor before the bed and directed the flashlight beam at the sleeping figure. Raising his gun, he squeezed off four shots. At the first shot the figure beneath the quilt jerked and emitted a muffled gasp, but the other slugs merely riffled the quilt.

Moving closer, Peter focused the beam on the alarm clock on a night table the other side of the bed. Aiming carefully, he put a bullet in the center of the dial.

A lamp sprang on in a corner of the room. Jerking his gaze that way, Peter was horrified to see Amos Crowder, bundled in an overcoat, seated in a chair next to the lamp. A forty-five automatic was leveled at Peter.

"Drop it," the older man ordered crisply. "I imagine it's empty, but drop it anyway."

Peter dropped both the gun and the flashlight.

"Wha—wha—" he stammered.

"I suppose you'd like an explanation," Amos said pleasantly. "I've been suspecting you and Vivian of—ah—intimacy for quite

some time. You had a way of looking at each other which was more revealing than you apparently realized. So I've been leaving the tape recorder around here and there, running. It was running Wednesday night as it lay on the bar, and recorded your whole conversation. Since you made a date with Vivian for the following night, I decided to eavesdrop on it. Just before I went to bed Thursday, I carried the tape recorder out to the garage and put it in the trunk of Vivian's car, with the speaker pushed through under the back seat. I had it loaded with a two-hour tape, so it was good until twelve-thirty. It ran out before your conversation was finished, but there was enough on it to get the gist."

Peter's gaze strayed to the figure beneath the quilt. Amos chuckled without humor.

"Go ahead and look," he said. "Vivian never got to the hospital. I dropped a few of my sleeping pills into her Irish coffee after dinner this evening."

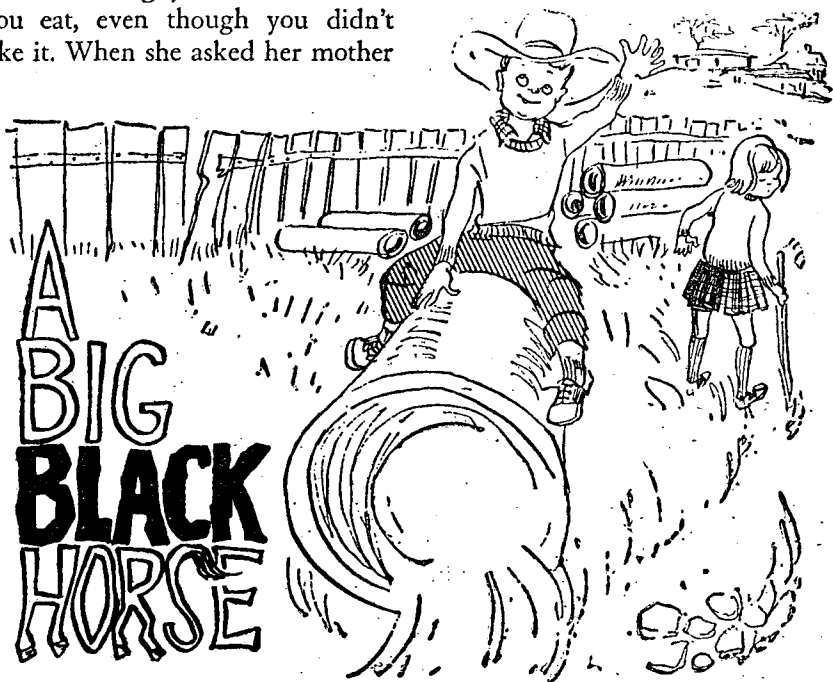


I shall remember never to become mired in both a pit and a possessive child's affection simultaneously.

CARA didn't know what cabbage-town meant. She had guessed, by the taunts from the kids at school, that it wasn't a very nice word, but she had always thought cabbage was something your mother made you eat, even though you didn't like it. When she asked her mother

what it meant, all her mother did was get real mad, and tell her to 'never mind.'

If Daddy were still here, he



By Patricia A. Sykes

would tell her, and he would buy her and Stevie lots of nice clothes, and toys, and lots of things. But Daddy wasn't here, and Mommy said he wouldn't be coming back, ever, so she would probably never know what cabbagetown meant.

Cara pulled at six-year-old Stevie's arm. "Come on, Stevie. You don't want to be late gettin' home, do ya? And put that darn ol' stone down. What do ya want a darn ol' stone for, anyway?" Stevie was only a year younger than Cara, but he seemed so young and silly sometimes.

Stevie put his hand over the pocket containing the stone. "It ain't no stone. It's a rock. I'm gonna put it in my c'lection."

"You and your silly ol' collection. It's a stone. Rocks are bigger an' prettier. So throw it away."

"I won't. It's a rock, and I'm gonna put it in my c'lection."

Cara didn't feel like teasing her brother today. Anyway, Mommy would make him throw it away when she found it in his pocket, just like she had made Cara throw away her bugs. She wondered why her mother didn't let them keep anything. They didn't have anything the other kids had—no dolls, no toys, no dog, no Daddy. Mommy had said they couldn't afford toys and stuff. Cara wondered if it cost money to have a Daddy.

Someday, when she was big, she would have enough money to buy lots of toys and dogs, and a Daddy too. She'd show those darn ol' kids at school. She didn't care what cabbagetown meant, and she didn't want any stupid ol' dolls and stuff. "Come on, Stevie. Hurry up." She pulled roughly at Stevie's hand.

They turned off the road to cut through an empty lot. There was a fence around it, but some of the boards were broken, and they had a special place where they could squeeze through.

Stevie ran over to some old pipes that had been lying in the same place for as long as he could remember. Mommy had said they were for sewers or something, but that was a long time ago, and the pipes were still here.

"Stevie, you be careful," Cara said. "You know Mommy'll get mad if you get dirty."

Stevie climbed on top of a pipe, and crawled along it on his hands and knees. He couldn't stand up without falling off, and he didn't want his sister to see him fall. When he came to the end of the pipe he straddled it, and sat there kicking his feet into the rounded sides. Someday, when he was big, he would buy a horse, a big black one with a long tail.

He looked over at Cara. What a

dumb girl! Why doesn't she come up here and have some fun? All she does is hit the grass with a stick. "Hey, Cara," he called. "Look at me. How do ya like my black horse?"

"It ain't black, and it ain't a horse," she yelled. "It's red. It's a darn ol' red sewer pipe. Now come on."

Stevie slid off the pipe. "Ah, you don't know nothin'," he said. He kicked at the dust, and a shiny stone skipped across the ground. "Hey!" he squealed, and chased after the stone. He picked it up, and rubbed it on his shirt. "Hey, Cara, look what I found," he called. "This is a real good rock."

Cara just waved her hand, urging him to catch up with her.

Stevie put the stone in his pocket, and was about to run after his sister, when he heard a noise—a kind of groan. He looked around quickly. He saw nothing, but there was a hole close by. Maybe there was something in it. Cautiously he moved toward it, and heard the noise again. He stopped to look for Cara, but she was quite a way ahead of him and didn't see what he was doing. He fingered the stones in his pocket, wondering if he should go any nearer to the hole. Finally, he crept closer. He leaned over the edge and looked in.

The hole was deep, at least it seemed so to six-year-old Stevie, and he could see a dark figure huddled at the bottom. He jumped up and scampered after his sister. "Cara, Cara," he shouted. "Come and see what I found. It's in a hole back there."

Cara stopped, and looked disgustedly at her brother. "What did ya find now? I don't wanna look at any of your darn ol' stones."

"It ain't no stone, Cara. Come and see."

Reluctantly she followed Stevie, who ran excitedly back to the hole. He pointed. "Look!" he whispered.

Cara leaned over and peered into the hole. "Is it dead?"

"I don't know. What is it, Cara?"

Cara thought for a moment. "I think it's a man." She lay down on her stomach to get a closer look.

Stevie joined her. "How can ya tell?" he asked.

"Look, there's two legs. Hey, and look! He's only got one arm!"

Stevie's mouth dropped open. "Gee, how come he's only got one arm?"

"I don't know. Do ya think he's dead?"

Stevie dropped a stone onto the still figure, but it did not move. He cupped his hands over his mouth, and yelled, "Hey, you!"

Hey, you, hello!" They waited.

Then they heard a sigh, and slowly the figure rolled over so they could see two white eyes staring at them from a bearded face. Stevie jumped up, ready to run, but the figure made no attempt to chase them so he knelt down at the edge of the hole.

They waited for the figure to speak, but he lay quietly, his legs bent under him in an unnatural position, his ragged clothes stained with dark, damp patches, and his white eyes staring blankly from the darkness.

Finally, Cara spoke. "Hey, who are you?"

The white eyes remained blank, but the matted beard moved, and there was a grating sound. "Who am I?" The voice paused. "Who are you?" Another pause. "Who is who?"

Stevie was frightened by the raspy voice, and by the strange words. Again he stood up, but Cara leaned over the edge of the hole. "I'm Cara, and this here is my brother Stevie. Don't you know who you are?"

The white eyes closed, and there was no answer, but the dark figure shook, and they heard a noise they could not distinguish as a laugh or a cough.

Cara looked at her brother. "I guess he doesn't know his name.

Let's call him George, shall we?"

Stevie pouted, on the verge of tears. "I found him. He's mine. I wanna name him."

"Oh, okay, ya baby. You name him."

Stevie thought for a moment. "Blackie! That's what. I'll call him—Blackie."

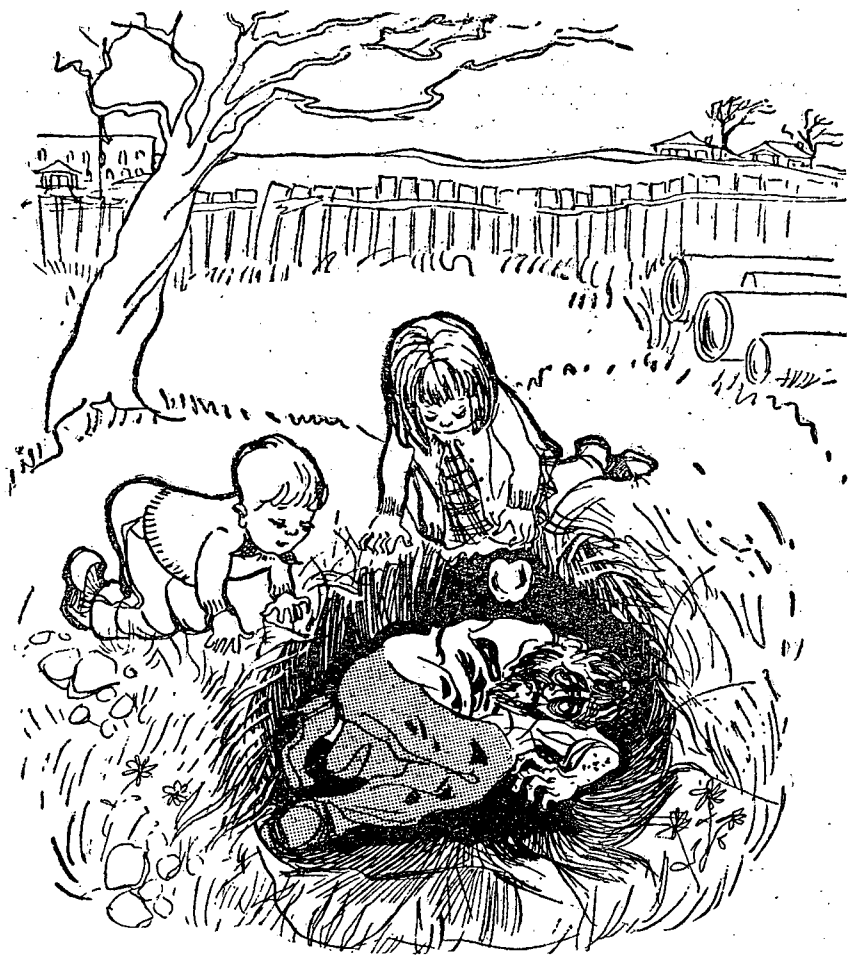
"Boy, is that a stupid name!"

Then Cara saw his lip tremble, and she said, "But if that's what you want to call him, okay." She leaned over the hole again. "Hey, you." She waited for a reply. "Hey, you. We're gonna call you Blackie 'cause we don't know your name. Okay?"

The white eyes opened again. "Blackie," he mumbled, and again they saw the body shake, and heard the strange sound.

Cara stood up. "We've gotta get home for supper now," she said. "Mom will get mad if we're late." She brushed the dust from her dress. "We can't come out after supper, but we'll come and see you tomorrow on the way to school. Here's an apple I saved from recess." She dropped the apple into the hole, and it landed near the lone arm. "We'll bring something for you to eat tomorrow. Okay?"

There was no answer from the hole. She shrugged her shoulders, and turned to her brother. "Come



on. We gotta hurry or Mom'll get mad again." She took Stevie's hand, and they hurried across the empty lot.

"Do ya think Blackie's sick?" asked Stevie. "Maybe we could bring him some of Mom's medicine?"

"Yeah, maybe," Cara said thoughtfully, then added, "but we can't tell Mom about Blackie. You know she'll just tell us we can't have him. We gotta keep this a secret. Just you and me can know. We can't tell anyone." She stopped and looked at Stevie. "Can you

keep a secret, Stevie? Can you?"

"'Course I can," he said indig-
nantly. "I can keep a secret bet-
ter'n you. I won't tell nobody. Not
the kids, not even Mom."

The next morning they each
took an extra apple from the re-
frigerator before leaving for
school. They hurried to the hole
and peered in. The dark figure
was still.

"Hey, Blackie," Stevie called.
"Are ya awake? We got ya some-
thing to eat."

Slowly the figure rolled over,
and they heard a low groan. Stevie
dropped his apple into the hole,
and it landed next to yesterday's.

"Hey," he said, "ain't ya hun-
gry? Ya didn't eat the apple we
gave ya yesterday." The white eyes
remained closed. "I guess he's still
asleep," Stevie said.

Cara leaned over the hole.
"We'll come back after school,
Blackie. Okay?" She heard a
groan, and took that as a "Yes."
She jumped up, brushed her dress,
and took Stevie's hand as they
hurried to school.

In the afternoon they returned
again, and saw that the apples
were eaten. The sun shone directly
into the hole, and they could see
their "Blackie" quite clearly. He
lay in much the same position as
when they had discovered him,
with his legs still folded under

him. His beard and hair were
caked with mud, and they could
see that his white eyes were now
streaked blood-red.

Cara and Stevie were on their
stomachs, resting their chins in
their hands. "Are ya feeling bet-
ter?" Cara asked.

After a long pause, the dark
figure answered, "Yes."

"Here's a sandwich I didn't eat
at lunch," Cara said, and dropped
a peanut butter and banana sand-
wich into the hole.

They watched in fascination as
the one arm slowly picked up the
sandwich and put it to the beard.
The beard alone seemed to devour
the food, as they could not see a
mouth beneath the matted hair.

"Hey, Blackie," Stevie said, "I
hope ya like your name, 'cause I'm
the one that named ya."

His eyes sparkled when he
heard the low, rasping, "Yes, it's
fine."

"Where do ya come from?" Cara
asked.

After a few moments the voice
answered, "I don't know."

"Don't ya know where ya live?"
Stevie asked incredulously. "I do.
My name is Stevie Colier, and I
live at 64 Cane Avenue, and I'm
six years old."

Cara looked at her brother. "Oh,
shut up, stupid." She looked back
into the hole. "Well how did ya

get here?" she asked. "You fall?"

"I don't know," came the reply.

"Maybe this is where he lives," Stevie offered. "My teacher says that rabbits and groundhogs and things live in holes in the ground. Maybe Blackie does too."

"Well, how long ya been here?" Cara asked.

This time there was no answer.

"Hey, Blackie, are ya sick?" he asked.

Again, after a long pause, the answer came, almost as a sob, "I don't know."

Stevie looked puzzled. "Don't ya even know if you're sick? Don't ya feel good? I mean do ya hurt anywhere?"

This time Stevie understood the answer, "Yes," from the dark figure.

"Well, we gotta go now," he said, "but we'll be back tomorrow morning, and we can stay longer 'cause it's Saturday, and we don't gotta go to school, and I'll try to sneak some of Mom's medicine, and bring it to ya. Okay?" They both said goodbye, and ran for home.

Cara and Stevie awoke early the next morning and, as was customary on Saturdays mornings, they dressed and made their own breakfasts—peanut butter on toast. Cara took the bottle of brown medicine from the cabinet and

poured some into a plastic glass. Stevie made some peanut butter sandwiches, and put them into a brown paper bag. Finally, they were ready to visit their Blackie.

As they opened the front door and stepped onto the porch, Cara stopped. There was a large puddle of water in front of the house, and the trees were still dripping. "Stevie," she said, "it's been raining! It must have rained last night."

Stevie looked alarmed. "We better hurry and see Blackie. He'll be cold and wet."

They started to run, but Cara couldn't keep up with Stevie because she had the glass of medicine.

Stevie was staring into the hole when she caught up with him. She too peered into the hole, then gasped. Water partially covered the motionless form at the bottom. His eyes were wide and unblinking, and drops of water glistened on his matted hair and beard.

Stevie's lower lip quivered. "Is Blackie dead, Cara?"

"I don't know."

"He looks awfully still," Stevie said. "I talked to him before you got here, but he didn't answer."

Cara looked around her and, seeing a long stick, picked it up. She looked into the hole again. "Blackie," she called, "are you

awake? We brought ya some medicine." There was no answer. Carefully, she poked the still figure, but it did not move. Cara and Stevie stood silently as they stared into the hole.

Finally, after a long silence, Stevie spoke. "What are we gonna do, Cara?"

She thought for a moment. "I guess we should bury him."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Come on, Stevie. Let's go and get the shovel."

"Okay."

When they returned about a half hour later, the morning sun was beating down on the wet earth, and the wild, green grass was drinking in its life-giving warmth. Already, the water had begun to disappear from the bottom of the hole, but the sun could not return warmth to the motionless body.

In a last, longing gesture, Stevie shouted into the hole, "Blackie, are you awake?" His voice echoed faintly, but that was all the answer he received. He turned to Cara, and silently they began to fill the hole—he with a small sand

shovel, and she with a garden spade.

It was long, hot work for the two small mourners. In an hour's time they had covered the body and nearly filled the hole. They stopped, both tired and perspiring.

"I guess we should say a prayer or something," Cara said.

"Yeah, I guess so. Let me say it, eh, Cara?"

"Okay, go ahead."

In the quiet of the sunny spring morning, the two children folded their hands, while Stevie said, "Now I lay me down to sleep . . ."

When the prayer was finished, they picked up their shovels and slowly, wearily, trudged across the quiet, empty lot. Stevie took Cara's hand. "Do ya think we'll ever find another Blackie, Cara?" he asked.

"I don't know."

Stevie spied a shiny, green stone on the ground, and ran to pick it up. He polished it against his shirt. "When I get big," he said, "I'm gonna have lots of money, and buy me a big black horse, with a long tail."



I find it impossible to label the protagonist as either white-collar or blue-collar, for he is identified by a hue all his own.



FRANK HOLCOMB was sitting by the stove in the kitchen of his ranchhouse, warming his hands around a cup of steaming coffee, staring out through the frost patterns on the windowpane as he waited for the phone to ring. It was not yet seven o'clock. The call, he knew, would come around seven; it always had.

Beyond the window he saw an early morning snow mist hover low over the flat pasture that stretched from his house to the mountains a mile away. It was pure white, billowy and rolling, like a thick, warm cloud, but Hol-

By Clark
Howard

THE MARKSMAN

comb knew there was nothing thick or warm about it. The snow mist was thin and cold; walking through it would be like wading in ice water. Utah, he reflected, must be the coldest place in the world in January.

He put down his cup and lighted a cigarette. Exhaling the first deep drag, he turned to stare at the phone on the wall across the room. He did not know why he was so edgy waiting for it to ring. This time would be no different from the other—how many?—eight, yes—the other eight times. He sighed heavily, deciding that he was nervous simply because it had been so long. They had never gone two full years before this.

Upstairs he could hear Lill getting their daughter Bonnie up for school. Usually Lill had a difficult time of it with the girl on Monday mornings, but probably she would not on this particular Monday morning. This was the first day of school after the Christmas holiday; Bonnie was eager to show her classmates the new wristwatch she had found under the tree Christmas morning. She was certain, *absolutely* certain, that she would be the only girl to have a genuine self-winding heart-shaped young lady's wristwatch in the entire fourth grade.

The fourth grade, Holcomb pon-

dered soberly; Bonnie was ten years old. That made him thirty-six. Lord, time passed quickly. He looked at the kitchen clock and saw that it still was not quite seven. *Years* passed quickly, he corrected himself; minutes seemed to drag by.

He heard Lill coming down the stairs; a moment later she entered the kitchen, chenille robe buttoned to the throat over her flannel pajamas.

"They haven't called yet?" she asked.

"No." He did not know why she asked, really; she would have heard the phone ring just as well upstairs as he would have in the kitchen.

"Maybe they won't," Lill said in a neutral tone, neither hopeful nor pessimistic.

Holcomb looked intently at his wife. She's a cool one, he thought admiringly. Always has been, come to think of it. Even that first time, when he had told her what he was going to do, she had accepted it as if it were a thing *every* husband did; no surprise at all, no consternation, no arguments—just calm acceptance. Of course, that had been the year of the Big Freeze, the year that winter had become a white death and left their cattle frozen stiff standing straight up, the year of no meat, no grain

and no money. Maybe Lill had been as scared as he had been; maybe that was why she had not objected. That first time, with that first five hundred dollars he had earned, had carried them into spring and helped them save their ranch.

Then the second five hundred had paid for the doctor and the hospital when Bonnie came.

The third five hundred had bought the fence they needed to keep strays out of the west pasture, where the winter grass had to be protected.

The fourth five hundred had—"I said," Lill repeated, "maybe they won't call."

"They'll call," Holcomb said. "Once it gets this close, they never back down. It's not like in some other places."

"If you go, what will you tell Bonnie?"

"Same thing I've always told her, I guess."

"She might be getting a little old for that story, mightn't she?"

"What do you mean?" Holcomb said, mildly indignant. "She's only ten. Besides, she always believes what her daddy tells her, you know that."

"All the same," Lill said, "I think you'd better give some thought to a new story. One of these days she's going to be old

enough to put two and two together."

"Well," said Holcomb, "maybe by that time we'll be far enough ahead so I can quit—"

The phone rang.

Holcomb lifted the receiver before it could ring a second time. "Hello . . . Yes, operator, this is Frank Holcomb—"

A crisp, businesslike voice came over the line. As he listened to the same words he had heard the other eight times, Holcomb watched his wife. Her easy movements, the way she used her hands, the twist of her shoulders as she turned to do something, all were pleasing to Holcomb. For years he had secretly enjoyed watching her do the casual things that a woman does around her own house; the straightening, the arranging, the setting of a table as she was doing now. It gave Holcomb a warm feeling to see her moving about like that; it made him feel as if he *had* something.

"Yes, all right," he said into the phone when the crisp voice had finished, "I'll be there. Yes. Good-bye." He hung up and stood for a moment next to the phone.

"You're going?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm going." He stepped over to his place at the table and sat down. The smell of frying bacon filled the room. He

heard his daughter coming down the stairs, and turned in his chair as she entered the kitchen. She walked directly to Holcomb and put her arms around his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"Good morning, sweetheart," he said, hugging her back. He saw that she was wearing a Sunday dress instead of her usual woolen skirt and sweater. "Will she be warm enough in that?" he asked Lill.

"She can wear ski pants under it and take them off at school," his wife said. "It's the first day back and she's got her new watch on, you know."

Lill put a large platter of bacon and eggs and biscuits in the center of the table and they began eating breakfast.

"I can't wait to see how everyone likes my watch," Bonnie said excitedly. "It's such a pretty watch."

"Pretty watch for a pretty girl," said Holcomb. It wasn't true, really; she wasn't a very pretty girl. She was rather plain and had none of the full feminine features that made her mother so attractive. But she had the *lines*, Holcomb thought. Her nose and mouth and eyes all had the right lines, and someday, seven, eight years from now, she would bloom into a very clean, very pretty young woman. Before then, he told himself silent-

ly, I will have to quit this business I'm involved in. It's one thing for her mother to know, but never—*never*—would he ever want Bonnie to find out.

"Daddy won't be home tonight," he said as casually as he could. "I have to go out of town and I won't be able to get back until sometime tomorrow afternoon."

"Where are you going?" the girl wanted to know. "Won't you be home to hear how everyone liked my watch?"

"You can tell me all about it tomorrow night. I have to take a trip up north. Fellow I know wants me to shoot a bad cat for him."

"A mountain lion?" Bonnie's voice grew breathless. Having grown up on a small cattle spread, she knew, even at ten, the hazards of a mountain cat.

"Not sure just what kind it is," said Holcomb. "Just know that it's a bad one."

"Aren't you glad you're such a good shot, daddy," the girl said, a little worshipful.

Holcomb did not answer.

They finished the meal and Lill started cleaning away the dishes. "You run along and get into your ski pants," she told Bonnie. "The school bus will be here in five minutes."

Holcomb remained at the table and sipped more coffee until

Bonnie was bundled up for the trip to school and they heard the familiar honk of the school bus as it came slowly down the snow-covered road. Holcomb and his wife kissed their daughter at the door and watched through the window as she ran awkwardly along the slippery path to the road, waved briefly, then disappeared inside the bright orange vehicle. It moved off sluggishly before a trail of billowing exhaust and a moment later was gone.

"Well," Holcomb said, almost to himself, "better get ready, I guess."

"I'll get your bag and other things from upstairs," Lill said.

"All right."

As Lill went up the stairs, Holcomb walked into a spare room they called their den and unlocked his gun cabinet. There were five weapons in the rack: two shotguns and three rifles. Holcomb removed one of the rifles and laid it on a table next to a jigsaw puzzle he and Lill and Bonnie had been working on since Christmas. The puzzle, nearly complete, was a picture of a beautiful ballerina standing tall and graceful with arms upstretched in the classic ballet pose. The gleaming, deadly rifle looked frighteningly incongruous lying next to the sedate picture, but Holcomb did not notice. He sat down and with a small screw-

driver prepared to disassemble the weapon.

The rifle Holcomb worked on had a smooth, solid walnut stock mounted under a cold forged barrel twenty-three inches long. The receiver and bolt and trigger housing all were chrome plated, as were the swivels that held tautly the pliable black leather sling at the gun's belly. There was a matted ramp sight at the front of the muzzle, and a dual range peep sight at the rear of the breech. A spring magazine, blued, lay snugly in its niche beneath the chamber entry. At that moment the magazine was empty; later on it would hold five 30-30 caliber, 220-grain, steel jacketed, semi-pointed bullets.

Lill came in with Holcomb's overnight bag just as he finished breaking down the rifle and was placing the parts neatly into a fleece-lined takedown case.

"I put in a clean shirt and socks for you to wear on the train coming back," she said. "Also extra handkerchiefs, your battery shaver, and four packs of cigarettes."

"Four packs?"

"You ran out and had to look for a place to buy some last time, remember?"

"That's right, I forgot." She's a cool one, all right, Holcomb thought again. But it pleased him that she took care to remember

so many little things regarding his comfort. Every man should have a woman like her. He zipped up the gun case and laid it in the open suitcase Lill had brought in.

"Guess that's about it."

Lill followed him into the front hall where he opened the closet to get out his heavy mackinaw.

"Will it be colder up there than down here?"

"Most likely. Usually is."

Holcomb slipped a pair of fur earmuffs over his head before putting on his hat. He wrapped a wool muffler around his neck, turned up the collar of his coat and drew on a pair of deerskin gloves lined with rabbit fur.

"Keep the doors locked and leave a light on all night," he said, the same thing he had said the other eight times he had gone away. "I'll be back around three tomorrow if the trains run on time."

Holcomb gave his wife a warm, soft, lingering kiss. He left the house then and trudged off across the frozen snow, suitcase in hand, toward the barn to get out the pickup for the drive to town to the depot.

Spaak met him when he got off the train.

"Hello, Holcomb."

"Hello, Spaak."

It was night now; Holcomb had been on the train for eleven hours. The northern air was bitterly cold.

"Car's over this way," Spaak said. Holcomb walked with him along the wooden passenger platform and down three railroad-tie steps to where a car waited with its motor idling. "Always leave it running," Spaak explained, "so's the heater'll stay warm."

Holcomb nodded. He had heard the same thing before from Spaak. Eight times before, to be exact. Opening the car door on the right side, he laid his bag on the back seat and got in. Spaak swung the car in a slow arc away from the depot and eased it up a cinder-covered drive to the highway.

"What's the temperature?" Holcomb wanted to know.

"'Bout six, I reckon," Spaak said clinically, "maybe five. When it gets under ten it don't make much difference anyway."

"Guess you're right," Holcomb agreed. He settled back in the seat, loosening his collar and muffler and taking off the earmuffs, and lighted a cigarette.

The road they drove was a two-lane blacktop, piled high on each side with a continuous mound of snow laid out almost geometrically perfect by the blade of a snowplow. It was a straight, level road,

and although Holcomb had never traveled it except at night, he knew it cut across the flat plane of a high valley, through pastures and meadows and grazing land much like that of his own place far to the south. The land was vast and sweeping, stretching to lofty, white-topped mountains on all sides, the high altitude air thin and pure and, like the land, rich. Maybe, Holcomb thought, when it was all over, when he had quit and been away from it for a few years, he would bring Lill and Bonnie up here for a vacation, just to see what it did look like in the daytime.

"You follow pro football much?" Spaak asked in an attempt to make conversation.

"Not much," Holcomb told him. They had been all through this before, he recalled, trying to make conversation and failing miserably at it because, although they had known each other for longer than eleven years, they were absolute strangers. Apart from their brief association at times like this, they never saw one another and thus had never established any common ground between them. It was a shame too, Holcomb thought, because Spaak seemed likeable enough, and undoubtedly there could be found many things of mutual interest,

such as hunting, which was common to nearly all men in Utah. Because of Holcomb's unique position in their association, however, he was precluded from discussing anything like that, anything in the least way personal that might give an indication of who he was, where he lived, whether he had a family, a business.

To Spaak, Holcomb had to remain simply Holcomb, that was all: a name, and a man who answered to it. Spaak did not even know exactly how Holcomb was summoned; all he knew was that on the night he was needed, Holcomb would arrive. He would arrive on a train that had sped the length of the state; he might have come from anywhere. To Spaak, the man called Holcomb was really little more than a specter.

"How 'bout a little music?" Spaak said, reaching for the radio.

"Fine," said Holcomb. They were about halfway there now, he guessed. It wouldn't be much longer. He rested his head back against the seat and closed his eyes. The radio warmed up and soft music filtered out of the speaker. Between the soothing melody of the music and the lulling sound of the car cutting the wind, Holcomb soon dozed.

He awoke when he felt the car

slowing to a halt. Opening his eyes, he saw in the glare of the headlights the gate being opened for them.

"We're there," Spaak said quietly, seeing that Holcomb was awake.

"All right." Holcomb sat up and reached inside his coat for a cigarette.

They passed through the gate and across a snow-covered courtyard to a small, very narrow wooden shack; three wooden walls built onto a wooden floor and supporting a flat wooden roof. Where the fourth wall should have been was a partition four feet high; the opening between it and the roof was covered with a length of burlap.

Spaak parked the car directly beside the shack and put it in neutral, pulling on the parking brake and leaving the motor running. Holcomb adjusted his muffler and buttoned his mackinaw; he did not bother with the earmuffs this time. Turning in the seat, he flipped open his bag and removed the rifle case. Spaak got out of the car and came around to open the door on Holcomb's side. Cradling the rifle case in the crook of one arm, Holcomb stepped out into the thin, bitter cold of the high Utah night.

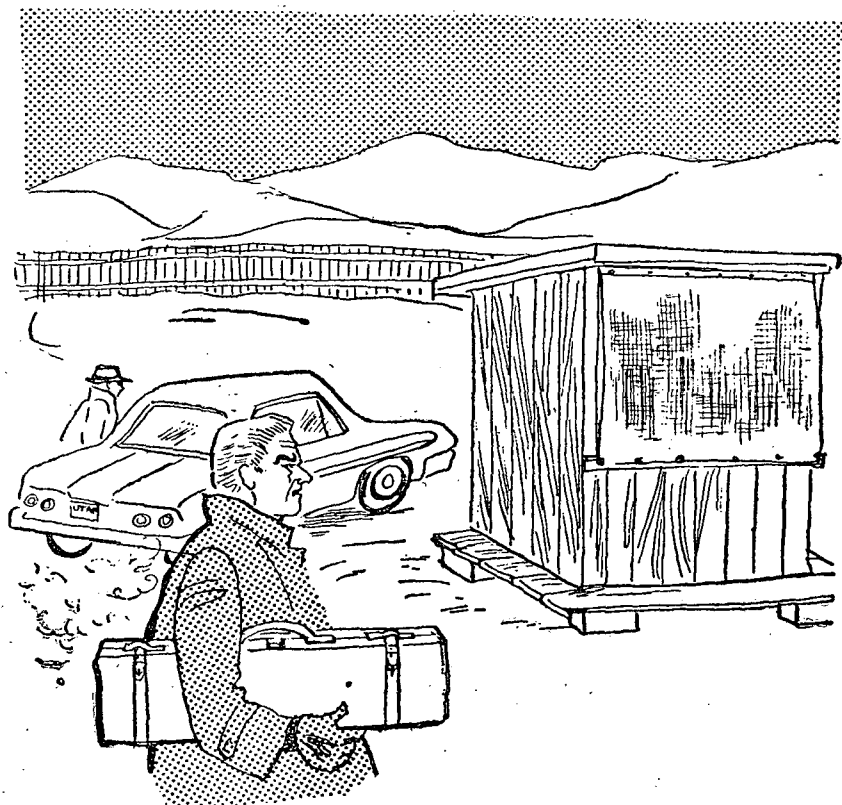
Spaak pulled open a narrow

door and Holcomb followed him into the shack. Inside was an atmosphere of dull, greenish light, emanating from a large oil lantern suspended on the wall. Aside from the lantern, the shack was completely empty, totally bare.

"I'll tell 'em you're here," Spaak said. Holcomb nodded and Spaak left the shack.

When he was alone, Holcomb stood for a moment in the quiet emptiness, smelling the cold pungence of the freshly sawed lumber of which the shack was built. He breathed deeply of the smell, because it was pleasant to his senses, like the smell of fresh hay and of the high woods country where he hunted. He wondered briefly how it would feel to know that the new wood of the shack would be the last thing he would ever smell; to know that he was going to die with that rich, vigorous odor in his nostrils, a final reminder of just how precious life was.

There was a sudden flapping sound and Holcomb turned to the half wall that had the length of burlap stretched across its opening. A corner of the burlap had come loose from its nail and was being whipped back by a shaft of wind from the open courtyard outside. Stepping over to the partition, Holcomb forced the truant



corner back tightly over the head of the nail. He did not try to look beyond the burlap; what was there he would see soon enough.

With a sigh, Holcomb turned and knelt beside the back wall, placing his rifle case on the floor and unzipping it. Removing his gloves, he spread open the wings of the case and began to assemble the rifle.

When Spaak returned a few minutes later, Holcomb was lean-

ing against the wall smoking a cigarette. The fully assembled rifle rested, muzzle down, between his hip and one arm.

"Bout ready," Spaak said.

Holcomb nodded. He took a final deep drag on the cigarette, brushed the ash off with his thumb and put the butt in his pocket. He could as easily have dropped it on the floor, but he had a fetish about these shacks, this one and the other eight in which

he had stood; he did not like to leave anything of himself behind.

The shack door opened and a small man wearing a hat and heavy overcoat entered.

"Holcomb," he said, bobbing his head in brusque acknowledgment. He drew one hand out of his overcoat pocket and handed Holcomb five brass-colored, steel-tipped .30-30 cartridges. While both he and Spaak watched, Holcomb slid them into a spring magazine and inserted it into the belly of his rifle. He loosened the sling, slipped his left arm into it, and tightened it across his muscle.

"Ready?"

Holcomb wet his lips and nodded. He turned and faced the partition as Spaak turned off the lantern and began removing the burlap. This was the worst part of it for Holcomb; not the actual squeezing of the trigger, but the two or three minutes between the time he was ready and—

The shack door closed behind him and he knew that he and Spaak were alone again. The burlap was all the way off now; an icy draft flooded the narrow room. In a moment, Holcomb thought, the floods will go on. He tried to close his eyes but could not. Always it was the same; he *wanted* to close his eyes, but his eyelids would never function.

This is the last time, he swore to himself. *The last time—*

The area beyond the partition was flooded with sudden light; stark, glaring light from powerful floodlights and the half-wall beside eyes a scene of horror was illuminated. A second three-sided enclosure, lumber-new like the first, stood a scant twenty feet away, its open side facing the floodlights and the half-wall behind which Holcomb waited. Within the structure a crude, heavy wooden chair had been built of the same raw timber; a chair of flat, hard planes, without contours, without dignity. A man was strapped to the chair, his forearms, thighs, calves and chest bound to the new wood with leather belts. A black hood covered his head and fell to his waist. Pinned to the dark cloth, over the man's heart, was a four-inch circular target.

Last time, Holcomb vowed again. *I won't do it anymore.*

He tore his eyes away from the hooded figure in the chair and nervously scanned the rest of the cold midnight scene. A dozen men, witnesses, stood still as statues to one side of the execution shack, their faces turned away from Holcomb, the wind whipping at their coattails and swirling gusts of powdery snow around their feet. Four guards armed

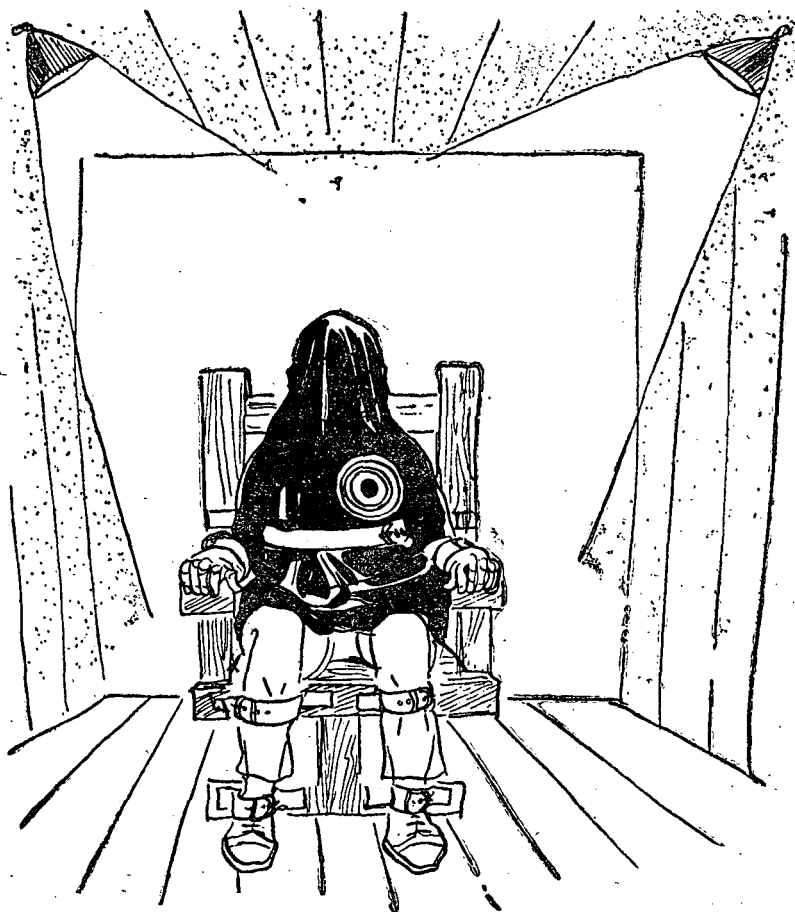
with shotguns stood between the witnesses and the shack. A doctor, stethoscope in hand, huddled near the guards. A Mormon bishop, hatless, moved his lips silently.

Holcomb lowered his eyes and stared at the partition in front of him. He thought of home, of Lill,

of Bonnie; Bonnie, growing up so quickly, so few years left for her to be daddy's little girl. Suppose she found out someday . . .

Never again—never.

Outside the shack, the man who had given Holcomb the bullets stepped into the side light of one



of the floodlights. He put on a pair of glasses and held up a document from which he began to read aloud.

"Order of Execution. The Supreme Court of the Sovereign State of Utah, having found . . ."

The wind whistled into the shack where Holcomb stood. The sound of it muted some of the hurried, official words, but it did not matter to Holcomb; he had heard them all eight times before.

"... murder in the first degree, and having been duly sentenced in the Superior Court of the County of . . ."

The words droned on, and the wind whipped and whistled while the guards stood erect, the doctor waited patiently, the bishop continued to move his lips, and the witnesses shuffled uneasily as death drew near.

Then it was silent, starkly silent; even the wind stopped. The little corner of the prison courtyard became for the men assembled there the stillest place in the world.

"Ready . . ."

Holcomb raised the rifle and dug its butt into his shoulder. A trickle of sweat escaped from his armpit and ran slowly, distractingly, down his side.

"... aim . . ."

From beneath the black hood

of the man in the chair, a sob escaped. It pierced the thin night air like the slash of a blade.

"... fire!"

Holcomb squeezed off the first round and saw a hole appear dead center in the target; the body behind the target lurched violently. Holcomb's hand worked the bolt fluidly, ejecting the spent shell, throwing another one into the chamber.

Last time—

He flexed his sensitive trigger finger and fired again. And again and again and again.

In the car, with Spaak driving him back to the depot where he would have a three-hour wait for the morning train, Holcomb's thoughts settled again on his little ranch and his little family. If he had a good year this year—that is, if he did better than break even after all expenses, if he could manage to put a few hundred in the bank—then at the end of the year he would write a letter to the prison bureau and tell them to find someone else for the job. He would quit; quit for good, and get out of it once and for all.

Settling more comfortably in the seat, Holcomb reached into his shirt pocket for a cigarette. His fingers brushed against the voucher for five hundred dollars that

the warden had given him. If he mailed the voucher to the state paymaster that afternoon when he got home, he'd have his check in about a week. He had hoped to be able to use the money for a good stock bull to build up his herd, but thinking of it now he did not see how he would be able to. The electric pump on his well was going bad and would surely need replacing by spring; a hail-storm had damaged the roof of the barn last month and he had to buy material to repair that; and Lill had mentioned a couple of times that maybe they should see about braces for Bonnie because a couple of her front teeth were turning crooked. So most of the five hundred would go for those things and probably a few others he hadn't even thought of.

He could not help thinking, though, how nice it would have been to buy that bull. Just a little more good blood in his stock and he soon would have a prime-line of beef. Then he wouldn't have to sell through stock jobbers any more and give away twenty per-

cent of his profit; he could take a trip to the Chicago stockyards and get himself lined up with one of the top grade beef buyers and be able to sell directly for premium market price. Of course, a trip to Chicago would take money too. Everything took money . . .

Holcomb rubbed his chin thoughtfully and turned to Spaak.

"How many more you got up there in the death house now?" he asked casually.

"Three," said Spaak. "Probably be four pretty soon. Fellow over in Provo was convicted last week of killing an Indian woman; ain't been sentenced yet but he'll probably get the max. Federal government's touchy about their Indians getting murdered, and the state court knows it. Yeah, he'll get the max for sure."

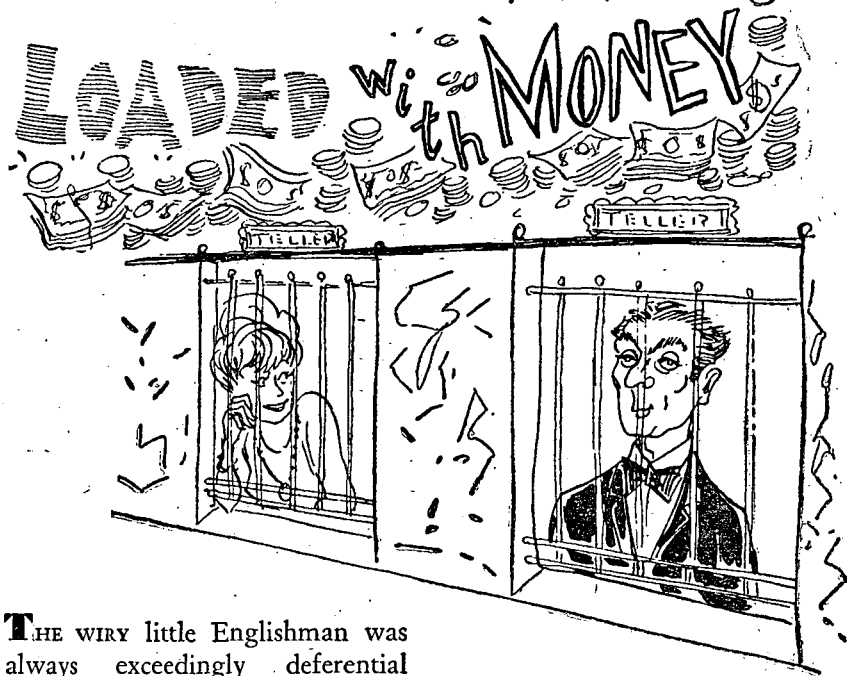
"But right now you've got three?"

"Yep. Right now three."

That was fifteen hundred dollars worth, Holcomb thought. A man could do a lot on a little ranch with fifteen hundred dollars.



From as far back as the Second Century, B.C., it has been counseled, "According as the man is, so must you humour him."



THE WIRY little Englishman was always exceedingly deferential even when he was bucking authority. The effect was enhanced by the perpetual, bland expression on his face and the old-fashioned, wire-rimmed spectacles that clung to his nose like a piece of himself.

"Look, Mr. Pembridge," said the manager, "this is the policy of the bank, and I am really not interested in any schemes you may have

for changing it. Is that clear?"

"Well, I think we ought to put up a bit more fight, sir. We can't just sit quietly on one side and let people get away with this sort of thing."

"And I and the board of directors happen to think that we are

doing what we ought to be doing. Every bank has to take the chance of being held up some time or other. Our accountants have worked this out for us in dollars and cents. It's like any other of our overheads; we're financially pre-

By *Anthony Marsh*

pared for it, so don't fight it."

"But this branch has been held up three times in the past few months, sir."

"That's just the luck of the game, Mr. Pembridge. We'll probably be left alone for a while now. Anyhow, there's nothing you or I could do about it."

"If I may say so, sir, there is. Look what happened to the last man who tried to hold me up."

"That was very commendable, but you were also very, very lucky that gun didn't happen to be loaded, otherwise there might have been a tragedy, and your heroics would have been no consolation to us for your loss. It wouldn't have done our public image much good either."

"It isn't always a question of heroics; sometimes a little ingenuity can be of service. I was in the Royal Engineers during the war

and I became expert in what you might call gadgetry. I'm sure I could devise—"

The manager looked up at the clock impatiently. "Mr. Pembridge, we employ a firm of highly competent engineers who can devise any alarm system we choose. It is very easy for us to prevent a robber from getting away with a little loot, but we cannot guarantee that a member of our staff or a customer will not get hurt."

"Yes, sir, but in the Royal Engineers—"

"We are not in the field of battle now. We are in the downtown branch of the bank in Market Street, San Francisco, one of the busiest streets on the west coast. We are not in the business of catching bank robbers; we are in the banking business, which is quite different. In case you haven't realized it yet, Mr. Pembridge, we are here to make money. As long as we conduct our bank on proper lines, our customers will continue to come in and do business with us, but if they learn that we are prepared to turn the place into a shooting gallery, they will stop coming in here, there will be no business; there will be no money, and there will be no job for me or for you, Mr. Pembridge. Do I make myself clear?"

"I still think, sir—"

The manager slammed his hand on the desk. "I don't care what you think. I don't want any more of your heroics, and I don't want any change in the alarm system; do you get that? If a bandit walks in, armed with a gun, a bottle of acid, or any other weapon of destruction, and asks for the contents of your till, you are to give it to him. I cannot be more explicit than that, Mr. Pembridge. Those are your orders."

The bank clerk drew himself up to attention and saluted smartly. "Yes, sir."

"And I don't particularly care for your brand of humor, Mr. Pembridge."

"I'm sorry, sir." Mr. Pembridge's eyes behind their narrow-rimmed lenses showed deep contrition, but his tone and manner belied this. He wheeled round with military precision and marched out of the manager's office.

He returned to his place at the front counter, and Nancy, the petite redhead at the next window, gave him a flashing smile. Ever since he had called the bluff of that last unfortunate bandit by simply leaping onto the counter, vaulting over the grill, and disarming him, Alex Pembridge had become a hero among his fellow workers. It had all happened in a split second. "The poor devil never

really had a fighting chance," as he modestly told the reporters afterwards. The other clerks knew he had acted contrary to the rules, a move they would not have dared themselves. This made him a rebel, and since these were days when most rebels were heroes, too, Alex Pembridge was doubly honored. Now he had a hefty reputation to maintain.

For a time the manager's guess proved correct; they were left alone. Maybe the knowledge that there was a clerk at the downtown branch who would brook no nonsense frightened off the amateurs and less venturesome thieves. Alex Pembridge was rather sorry that his firm stand might have produced this undesirable effect. Secretly, the banking business was only of secondary interest to him; his main, devouring preoccupation was the apprehension of holdup men.

It was several months before he was rewarded. His reputation must have died down, or perhaps the man was a newcomer to San Francisco. Mr. Pembridge recognized his adversary as soon as he came through the glass doors, the slouch hat, the loose topcoat, and the man's right hand stuck, Napoleon fashion, inside the coat.

It was the quiet part of the morning before the lunchtime

scramble. There were a few men at the executive desks in the carpeted space across from the counter, including the manager who sat out front interviewing customers instead of using his private office; it looked more friendly and democratic. Two people waited at Nancy's window; the next two were closed, and the others had one or two customers apiece. Happily, Mr. Pembridge was alone; he blinked at the robber and bestowed on him his most inviting smile. The man came right over. He dropped a cloth sack onto the counter, then hastily covered up his mouth and the tip of his nose as if to minimize the exposure. He withdrew his right hand from under his coat just far enough to reveal the chamber of a heavy revolver.

"What can I do for you, sir?" Mr. Pembridge's manner was bright and businesslike.

"Quit fooling," said the man. "Just put all the cash you've got in there, and be quick about it."

"Certainly, sir. I'm always willing to oblige a gentleman who knows his business." He started pulling notes out of the drawer and stuffing them into the bag, whistling softly as he did so.

The robber glanced about him quickly. "Cut that out. You're up to something."

Mr. Pembridge straightened up and held out his palms to show how innocently empty they were. "Nothing at all, sir, I assure you. Still, if my levity offends you—"

The man tried to snatch the bag but Mr. Pembridge drew it back. "Pardon me, sir, but I haven't finished yet. My orders are that if a gentleman like you, sir, comes in and asks me for all my money, I am to give it to him without argument. I always carry out my orders, sir."

"Stop making with the phony accent, and give me that sack. I've been in here too long already."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I was born in Tunbridge Wells in England, and I went to Rugby School. My accent—"

"Shut up and give me that sack." The gun was held right out now, but the man leaned forward so no one else in the bank could see it.

Mr. Pembridge ignored the weapon. "There's a special bonus for you today, sir." He opened a lower drawer and brought out a neatly stacked wad of notes almost two inches thick. "These are fifties, sir. I'm sure a gentleman like you could make use of them." He dropped the packet into the sack and leaned forward confidentially. "Don't turn round, sir, but there's a lady approaching; I think she's going to join your line."

Just act normally, and I'll get rid of her. I'd put that thing out of sight if I were you, sir."

The robber withdrew the gun back but kept it pointed at the clerk under his coat as the woman came up and stood behind the bandit.

Mr. Pembridge called to her, "Would you mind going to the next window, ma'am; I'm closing this one for lunch." He saw Nancy give him a curious glance, but the woman moved over and nobody said anything.

Mr. Pembridge winked at the bandit. "You see, everything is all right, sir. Now you'll need a little small change."

"Give me that sack!" The bandit did not pull the gun out this time, but he was scowling.

Mr. Pembridge reached into the top drawer and scooped up handfuls of coins which he drained into the sack. He shook them well down, tied the neck of the sack carefully, and held it up. It was too thick to go through the bars. "I trust you have transportation, sir." Through the glass doors he could see the car which was parked by the curb, its driver jerking his head and peering into the bank with constantly increasing anxiety.

"It's none of your damn business. Give me that sack!"

"Take my advice, sir, don't run;

just walk out naturally as if nothing untoward were happening." Mr. Pembridge lifted the sack over the top of the grill.

The man snatched it, and although he did not run, he walked out at such speed it amounted almost to the same thing. The car started off while he was still struggling with the door.

Mr. Pembridge sauntered across to the carpeted section and stood stiffly in front of the manager who at that moment was busily engaged with a prominent downtown merchant.

"I'd like to tell you, sir, that I carried out your orders explicitly."

"Can't you see I'm busy?"

"But it's important for you to know now, sir."

"Mr. Pembridge, please, some other time."

"I have to report this now, sir. That gentleman who left so hurriedly a moment ago was a bank robber. He was just engaged in holding me up. I obeyed your instructions to the letter and gave him all my money."

The bank manager shot up, almost falling across his desk. "Then what the devil are you doing here? You ought to be on that special line, calling the police."

"I will if you want me to, sir."

"I told you, Pembridge, I don't care for your sense of humor.

Quick, let's give them a description of the man." The manager dragged him over to the phone without ceremony.

Mr. Pembridge described the man comprehensively; five foot eight, crooked mouth, wide chin. He was also able to help them with the driver; he'd had only a glance at his face, but the man wore a dark, handlebar moustache, "Rather like the R. A. F. types we had during the war," he added.

He had hardly left the phone before the police arrived, a patrolman and a sergeant. The latter immediately started to question him in detail, and he told them in a leisurely manner exactly what had happened. The sergeant and the bank manager took turns opening their mouths in astonishment.

"You mean to say," the officer said, "that you kept this man here for a good five minutes and nobody took the slightest bit of notice of what was going on?"

"I did my best to avoid attracting anybody's attention."

"Why?"

"Orders, Sergeant. After all, I didn't want to take the risk of anyone getting hurt. That was a heavy revolver the bandit was wielding, a forty-five I would say, and probably loaded."

"Aren't you the man who disarmed a bank robber here a few

months back? Single-handed?"

"Yes, Sergeant, but I was given strict orders not to repeat that performance."

Nancy came over to say that the policeman was wanted on the phone, and he left to speak on the private line. The manager said nothing as he remained there staring at Mr. Pembridge, but there was a strange, questioning look on his face.

When the sergeant came back he was very excited. "They've caught the pair of them. It seems you were quite right to act as you did, Mr. Pembridge; that gun was fully loaded."

"I was really quite sure it was."

"But did you know about that little bomb they had with them as well?"

"The bandit didn't mention that to me," Mr. Pembridge said, truthfully.

"Well, it must have gone off in the car. They've got the two men in the emergency hospital, peppered with nickels and dimes like somebody unloaded buckshot into them. The doctor says it will be about a week before they can take them off to jail."

The manager was still staring at his clerk with that strange look, but Mr. Pembridge merely stood rigidly at attention and stared straight back.

An established pattern of life can, at times, assume a false prominence, thereby subjugating a deviation to misinterpretation.



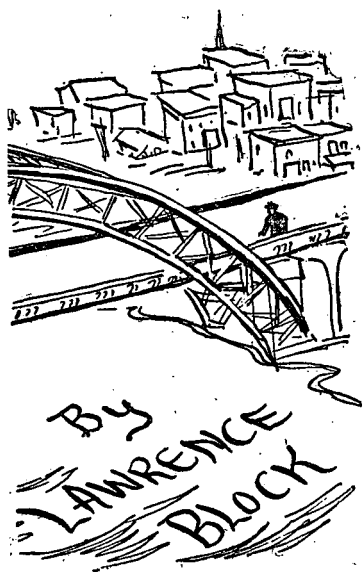
DEATH
WISH

THE COP saw the car stop on the bridge but didn't pay any particular attention to it. People were apt to pull over to the side in the middle of the span, especially late at night when the traffic was thin and they could stop for a moment without somebody's horn stabbing them in the back. The bridge was a graceful steel parabola over the deep channel of river that cut the



city neatly in two, and the center of the bridge provided the best view of the city, with the old downtown buildings clustered together on the right, the flour mills downriver on the left, the gentle skyline, the gulls maneuvering over the river. The bridge was the best place to see it all. It wasn't private enough for the teenagers, who were given to long-term parking and preferred drive-in movie theatres or stretches of road along the north bank of the river, but sightseers stopped often, took in the view for a few moments, and then continued across.

Suicides liked the bridge, too.



The cop didn't think of that at first, not until he saw the man emerge from the car, and walk slowly to the footpath at the edge, and place a hand tentatively upon the rail. There was something in his stance, something in the pose of the solitary figure upon the empty bridge in the after-midnight gloom, something about the grayness of the night, the way the fog was coming off the river. The cop looked at him and cursed and wondered if he could get to him in time.

He walked toward the man, headed over the bridge on the footpath. He didn't want to shout or blow his whistle at him because he knew what shock or surprise could do to a potential jumper. Once he saw the man's hands tense on the rail, his feet lifting up on the toes. At that moment he almost cried out, almost broke into a run, but then the man's feet came back into position, his hands loosened their grip, and he took out a cigarette and lit it. Then the cop knew he had time. They always smoked that last cigarette all the way down before they went over the edge.

When the cop was within ten yards of him the man turned, started slightly, then nodded in resignation. He appeared to be somewhere in his middle thirties,

tall, with a long narrow face and deepset eyes topped with thick black eyebrows.

"Nice night," the cop said.

"Yes."

"Having a look at the sights?"

"That's right."

"Saw you out here, thought I'd come out and have a talk with you. It can get lonely this hour at night." The cop patted his pockets, passed over his cigarettes. "Say, you don't happen to have a spare cigarette on you, do you? I must have run out."

The man gave him a cigarette. It was a filter, and the cop normally smoked nothing but regulars, but he wasn't about to complain. He thanked the man, accepted a light, thanked him again and stood beside him, hands on the rail, leaning out over the water and looking at the city and the river.

"Looks pretty from here," he said.

"Does it?"

"Sure, I'd say so. Makes a man feel at peace with himself."

"It hasn't had that effect on me," the man said. "I was thinking about, oh, the ways, a man could find peace for himself."

"I guess the best way is just to go on plugging away at life," the cop said. "Things generally have a way of straightening themselves

out, sooner or later. Some of the time they take awhile, and I guess they don't look too good, but they work out."

"You really believe that?"

"Sure."

"With the things you see in your job?"

"Even with all of it," the cop said. "It's a tough world, but that's nothing new. It's the best we've got, the way I figure it. You're sure not going to find a better one at the bottom of a river."

The man said nothing for a long time, then he pitched his cigarette over the rail. He and the cop stood watching it as it shed sparks on the way down, then heard the tiny hiss as it met the water.

"It didn't make much of a splash," the man said.

"No."

"Few of us do," the man said. He paused for a moment, then turned to face the cop. "My name's Edward Wright," he added. The cop gave his own name. "I don't think I would have done it," the man went on. "Not tonight."

"No sense taking chances, is there?"

"I guess not."

"You're taking a chance yourself, aren't you? Coming out here, standing at the edge, thinking it over. Anyone who does that long enough, sooner or later gets a little

too nervous and goes over the edge. He doesn't really want to and he's sorry long before he hits the water, but it's too late; he took too many chances and it's over for him. Tempt fate too much and fate gets you."

"I suppose you're right."

"Something in particular bothering you?"

"Not . . . anything special, no."

"Have you been seeing a doctor?"

"Off and on."

"That can help, you know."

"So they say."

"Want to go grab a cup of coffee?"

The man opened his mouth, started to say something, then changed his mind. He lit another cigarette and blew out a cloud of smoke, watching the way the wind dispersed it. "I'll be all right now," he said.

"Sure?"

"I'll go home, get some sleep. I haven't been sleeping so well, not since my wife—"

"Oh," the cop said.

"She died. She was all I had and, well, she died."

The cop put a hand on his shoulder. "You'll get over it, Mr. Wright. You just have to hold on, that's all. Hold on, and sooner or later you'll get over it. Maybe you think you can't live through it,

nothing will be the same, but—"

"I know."

"You sure you don't want a cup of coffee?"

"No, I'd better get home," the man said. "I'm sorry to cause trouble. I'll try to relax, I'll be all right."

The cop watched him drive away and wondered whether he should have taken him in. No point, he decided. You went crazy enough hauling in every attempted suicide, and this one hadn't actually attempted anything, he had merely thought about it. Too, if you started picking up everyone who contemplated suicide you'd have your hands full.

He headed back for the other side of the bridge. When he reached his post he decided he should make a note of it, anyway, so he hauled out his pencil and his notebook and wrote down the name, *Edward Wright*. So he would remember what the name meant, he added *Big Eyebrows, Wife Dead, Contemplated Jumping*.

The psychiatrist stroked his pointed beard and looked over at the patient on the couch. The importance of beard and couch, as he had told his wife many times, lay in their property for enabling his patients to see him as a func-

tion of such outward symbols rather than as an individual, thus facilitating transference. His wife hated the beard and felt he used the couch for amorous dalliance. It was true, he thought, that he and his plump blonde receptionist had on a few occasions occupied the couch together. A few memorable occasions, he amended, and he closed his eyes, savoring the memory of the delicious way he and Hannah had gone through Krafft-Ebing together, page by delirious page.

Reluctantly, he dragged himself back to his current patient. "... no longer seems worth living," the man said. "I drag myself through life a day at a time."

"We all live our lives a day at a time," the psychiatrist commented.

"But is it always an ordeal?"

"No."

"I almost killed myself last night. No, the night before last. I almost jumped from the Morrissey Bridge."

"And?"

"A policeman came along. I wouldn't have jumped anyway."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

The interplay went on, the endless dialogue of patient and doctor. Sometimes the doctor could go through the whole hour without thinking at all, making automatic

responses, reacting as he always did, but not really hearing a word that was said to him. *I wonder, he thought, whether I do these people any good at all. Perhaps they only wish to talk and need only the illusion of a listener. Perhaps the entire profession is no more than an intellectual confidence game. If I were a priest, he thought wistfully, I could go to my bishop when struck by doubts of faith, but psychiatrists do not have bishops. The only trouble with the profession is the unfortunate absence of an orderly hierarchy. Absolute religions could not be so democratically organized.*

He listened, next, to a dream. Almost all of his patients delighted in telling him their dreams, a source of unending frustration to the psychiatrist, who never in his life remembered having a dream of his own. From time to time he fantasied that it was all a gigantic put-on, that there were really no dreams at all. He listened to this dream with academic interest, glancing now and then at his watch, wishing the fifty-minute hour would end. The dream, he knew, indicated a diminishing enthusiasm for life, a development of the death wish, and a desire for suicide that was being tentatively held in check by fear and moral training. He wondered how long

his patient would be able to refrain from taking his own life. In the three weeks he had been coming for therapy, he had seemed to be making only negative progress.

Another dream. The psychiatrist closed his eyes, sighed, and ceased listening. Five more minutes, he told himself. Five more minutes and then this idiot would leave, and perhaps he could persuade plump blonde Hannah to do some further experimentation with him. There was a case of Stekel's he had read just the other night that sounded delicious.

The doctor looked up at the man, took in the heavy eyebrows, the deep-set eyes, the expression of guilt and fear. "I have to have my stomach pumped, Doctor," the man said. "Can you do it here or do we have to go to a hospital?"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Pills."

"What sort? Sleeping pills? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"What sort? And how many did you take?"

The man explained the content of the pills and said that he had taken twenty. "Ten is a lethal dose," the doctor said. "How long ago did you take them?"

"Half an hour. No, less than that. Maybe twenty minutes."

"And then you decided not to act like a damned fool, eh? I gather you didn't fall asleep. Twenty minutes? Why wait this long?"

"I tried to make myself throw up."

"Couldn't do it? Well, we'll try the stomach pump," the doctor said. The operation of the pump was unpleasant, the analysis of the stomach's contents even less pleasant. The pumping had been in plenty of time, the doctor discovered. The pills had not yet been absorbed to any great degree by the bloodstream.

"You'll live," he said finally.

"Thank you, Doctor."

"Don't thank me. I'll have to report this, you know."

"I wish you wouldn't. I'm . . . I'm under a psychiatrist's care. It was more an accident than anything else, really."

"Twenty pills?" The doctor shrugged. "You'd better pay me now," he said. "I hate to send bills to potential suicides. It's risky."

"This is a fine shotgun for the price," the clerk said. "Now, if you want to get fancy, you can get yourself a weapon with a lot more range and accuracy. For just a few dollars more—"

"No, this will be satisfactory. And I'll need a box of shells."

The clerk put the box on the counter. "Or three boxes for—"

"Just the one."

"Sure thing," the clerk said. He drew the registry ledger from beneath the counter, opened it, set it on the top of the counter. "You'll have to sign right there," he said, "to keep the state happy." He checked the signature when the man had finished writing. "Now I'm supposed to see some identification, Mr. Wright. Just a driver's license if you've got it handy." He checked the license, compared the signatures, jotted down the license number, and nodded, satisfied.

"Thank you," said the man, when he had received his change. "Thank you very much."

"Thank you, Mr. Wright. I think you'll get a lot of use out of that gun."

"I'm sure I will."

At nine o'clock that night Edward Wright heard his back door-bell ring. He walked downstairs, glass in hand, finished his drink and went to the door. He was a tall man, with sunken eyes topped by thick black eyebrows. He looked outside, recognized his visitor, hesitated only momentarily, and opened the door.

His visitor poked a shotgun into Edward Wright's abdomen.

"Mark—"

"Invite me in," the man said. "It's cold out here."

"Mark, I don't—"

"Inside."

In the livingroom Edward Wright stared into the mouth of the shotgun and knew that he was going to die.

"You killed her, Ed," the visitor said. "She wanted a divorce. You couldn't stand that, could you? I told her not to tell you. I told her it was dangerous, that you were nothing but an animal. I told her to run away with me and forget you but she wanted to do the decent thing and you killed her."

"You're crazy!"

"You made it good, didn't you? Made it look like an accident. How did you do it? You'd better tell me, or this gun goes off."

"I hit her."

"You hit her and killed her? Just like that?"

Wright swallowed. He looked at the gun, then at the man. "I hit her a few times. Quite a few times. Then I threw her down the cellar stairs. You can't go to the police with this, you know. They can't prove it and they wouldn't believe it."

"We won't go to the police," the man said. "I didn't go to them at the beginning. They didn't know of a motive for you, did they? I could have told them a motive,

but I didn't go, Edward. Sit down at your desk, Edward. Now. That's right. Take out a sheet of paper and a pen. You'd better do as I say, Edward. There's a message I want you to write."

"You can't—"

"Write *I can't stand it any longer. This time I won't fail*, and sign your name."

"I won't do it."

"Yes, you will, Edward." He pressed the gun against the back

of Edward Wright's shaking head.

"You wouldn't do it," Wright said.

"But I would."

"You'll hang for it, Mark. You won't get away with it."

"Suicide, Edward."

"No one would believe I would commit suicide, note or no note. They won't believe it."

"Just write the note, Edward. Then I'll give you the gun and leave you with your conscience. I



definitely know what you'll do."

"You—"

"Just write the note. I don't want to kill you, Edward. I want you to write the note as a starter, and then I'll leave you here."

Wright did not exactly believe him, but the shotgun poised against the back of his head left him little choice. He wrote the note, signed his name.

"Turn around, Edward."

He turned, stared. The man looked very different. He had put on false eyebrows and a wig, and he had done something to his eyes, put make-up around them.

"Do you know who I look like now, Edward?"

"No."

"I look like *you*, Edward. Not exactly like you, of course. Not close enough to fool people who know you, but we're both about the same height and build. Add the character tags, the eyebrows and the hair and the hollow eyes, and put them on a man who introduces himself as Edward Wright and carries identification in that name, and what have you got? You've got a good imitation of you, Edward."

"You've been impersonating me."

"Yes, Edward."

"But why?"

"Character development," the

man said. "You just told me you're not the suicidal type and no one will believe it when you kill yourself. However, you'd be surprised at your recent actions, Edward. There's a policeman who had to talk you out of jumping off the Morrissey Bridge. There's the psychiatrist who has been treating you for suicidal depression, complete with some classic dreams and fantasies. And there's the doctor who had to pump your stomach this afternoon." He prodded Edward's stomach with the gun.

"Pump my—"

"Yes, your stomach. A most unpleasant procedure, Edward. Do you see what I've gone through on your account? Sheer torture. You know, I was worried that my wig might slip during the ordeal, but these new epoxy resins are extraordinary. They say you can even wear a wig swimming, or in the shower." He rubbed one of the false eyebrows with his forefinger. "See how it stays on? And very lifelike, don't you think?"

Edward didn't say anything.

"All those things you've been doing, Edward. Funny you can't recall them. Do you remember buying this shotgun, Edward?"

"I—"

"You did, you know. Not an hour ago, you went into a store and bought this gun and a box of

shells. Had to sign for it. Had to show your driver's license, too."

"How did you get my license?"

"I didn't. I created it." The man chuckled. "It wouldn't fool a policeman, but no policeman ever saw it. It certainly fooled the clerk, though. He copied that number very carefully. So you must have bought that gun after all, Edward."

The man ran his fingers through his wig. "Remarkably lifelike," he said again. "If I ever go bald, I'll have to get myself one of these." He laughed. "Not the suicidal type? Edward, this past week you've been the most suicidal man in town. Look at all the people who will swear to it."

"What about my friends? The people at the office?"

"They'll all help it along. Whenever a man commits suicide, his friends start to remember how moody he's been lately. Everybody always wants to get into the act, you know. I'm sure you've been acting very shocked and distraught over her death. You'd have to play the part, wouldn't you? Ah,

you never should have killed her, Edward. I loved her, even if you didn't. You should have let her go, Edward."

Wright was sweating. "You said you weren't going to murder me. You said you would leave me alone with the gun—"

"Don't believe everything you hear," the man said, and very quickly, very deftly, he jabbed the gun barrel into Wright's mouth and pulled the trigger. Afterward he arranged things neatly enough, removed one of Wright's shoes, positioned his foot so that it appeared he had triggered the shotgun with his big toe. Then he wiped his own prints from the gun and managed to get Wright's prints all over the weapon. He left the note on top of the desk, slipped the psychiatrist's business card into Wright's wallet, stuffed the bill of sale for the gun into Wright's pocket.

"You shouldn't have killed her," he said to Wright's corpse. Then, smiling privately, he slipped out the back door and walked off into the night.



An economy-minded head of household should realize that reduction of overhead is a goal not limited to shrewd businessmen.

SPLIT
MILK



MARTHA and Philip Wendover lived in a pleasant little cottage on a quiet road in a very nice suburb, and were, as far as the eyes of the world could see, a happy couple. No one cared to pry too deeply into their affairs, however. Under the circumstances this was not surprising, for Philip had fallen down a flight of steep stairs a few years before and now was confined to a wheelchair, a helpless quadriplegic.

by JAMES
A.
COX

The accident had cut short his working days, of course, and the Wendovers were not rich. The cottage was paid for, but with the rising cost of living the disability insurance check which arrived every month just barely took care of

their basic necessities. Happily, Martha was able to pick up a little extra for the simple luxuries they enjoyed by performing minor services for their more affluent neighbors. Not washing or ironing or darning socks or anything like that, of course, but ladylike things, such as crocheting dresser scarves and tending house plants when the owners were on vacation, and making needlepoint cozies for rarely used teapots.

She also on occasion would baby-sit, and this work she loved above any other.

"I feel positively guilty accepting money for sitting with dear little Bruce," she would say to Mrs. Archer, for example, as she accepted the money. "He's such a beautiful child and I love him as if he were mine. Oh, Mrs. Archer, if you only knew how much I would love to have a baby of my own!"

She said the same sort of thing to Mrs. Carroway and Mrs. Le Fevre and Mrs. Harrington and Mrs. Levine. These gracious ladies would all nod and look sad, and pat Martha condescendingly on the shoulder, and for that moment, at least, feel that having a baby wasn't such a dismal chore after all. Out of this mist of momentary motherly camaraderie usually came a handsome tip in addition to the

fee. I mention this fact not to suggest that Martha was playing a promotional game, for she was intensely sincere in her maternal desires, but to show that she was a perfect gem of a wife in some ways and that Philip was a fool for not realizing it.

Yes, the sad truth is that relations between Philip and Martha were not exactly what they appeared to the rest of the world. As a matter of fact, there were no relations at all of a certain sort, for Philip's paralysis was graver than anyone imagined—although some of the neighbor ladies would occasionally raise a quizzical eyebrow when Martha spoke so wistfully of wanting a child.

For obvious reasons Philip had become accustomed to the deprivation more readily than Martha, and in fact was, at this point, rather grateful for it. After all, he would point out defensively, with the way the cost of living was rising so rapidly, their fixed income would soon be hard put to meet even the necessities. "I say it is a blessing," he would announce solemnly, "that we have no brood of brats to eat us out of house and home."

"But just one wee babe?" Martha would say plaintively. "One wee babe wouldn't eat much."

"Do you have any idea how

much the price of a quart of milk has gone up in the last few years?" was Philip's usual retort, although he sometimes cited a loaf of bread. "I tell you I'm glad we have no children, and I do wish you would stop harping on the subject. You ought to appreciate when you're well off."

Then Martha, overwhelmed by her anguish and yearning, would invariably go into the solarium and feed bits of bread to her canaries and polish the leaves of her philodendron and ivy plants with milk, while Philip, the cords of his neck popping out in anger and frustration, would scream, "If I had the use of just one finger I would rip out every one of those dirty weeds and throttle every one of those idiotic birds!"

Martha, to punish him for the outburst, would wheel him fuming into the solarium and leave him there.

This was an old-country practice that Martha had learned from her mother—rubbing the leaves of her household plants with milk, not wheeling her husband into the solarium. It would, her mother assured her, give the leaves a healthy gloss and help the plants to grow.

This bit of folklore from her girlhood came back to Martha when, childless and frustrated after eight years of marriage, she began

raising plants and canaries for solace. In spite of Philip's carping, she milked her garden faithfully every week, and the results were nothing short of amazing. Lush green foliage had turned the solarium into a small, square jungle, long arms of ivy scaling the walls and ceiling on suction-cupped feet, philodendron with leaves larger than a pugilist's palm cascading green to the floor and circumnavigating the room on trellises which Martha had cunningly contrived from old wire coathangers. Indeed, so spectacular was the growth that once, when she neglected her pruning shears for a few weeks, the canary cages were almost engulfed and Martha all but disappeared from sight as she worked her way, pitcher of milk and sponge in hand, into the depths of the room.

Because the Wendovers lived a quiet life and had the scantiest of social relations with their neighbors, only a few people recognized Martha's horticultural genius. One of these happened to be the strapping young Italian gardener from the Archer place next door. He had seen the greenery through the solarium windows on a quiet peeping-tom expedition when he was supposed to be clipping the hedge, and was experienced enough to realize that such ver-



dant growth did not occur naturally, except perhaps in the tropics, in which the dull little town of Tottenham certainly was not.

Here was a secret worth having! It never occurred to the young gardener, Salvatore Buonaventura by name, to approach Martha and ask her point-blank how she did it. With old-country cunning he managed to be pruning the far side of the lilac grove at the end of the Archer property on the same bright spring morning that Martha was adding some clippings to her mulch pile behind a clump of screening yews.

Being experienced in things other than gardening, Salvatore had plotted carefully for this moment.

His crisply curling black locks were arranged on his forehead, his brilliant white teeth were scrubbed with celery, he wore his tightest dungarees and a handtooled Mexican belt with a huge silver buckle, and he had lovingly invested a half pint of the finest imported olive oil in his magnificent torso—first taking off his shirt, of course—so the sun would glint on his burnished skin as the muscles rippled underneath. Ah, he knew women as well as flowers, did this Salvatore. But he was not as yet too familiar with the American species. From what he had seen in the movies he suspected that things were a little different here, and as a concession to the unknown had

tucked a spicy clove in his cheek.

Let it be said now with some pride that American women are not so easily beguiled into parting with their most cherished possessions. The Archer lilacs were pruned almost into oblivion, the Wendover mulch pile assumed monumental proportions, and poor Salvatore was reduced to swabbing himself with domestic cooking oil before Martha would give up her secret. Even then, shrewd Yankee trader that she was, she waited until she was in her third month to make sure.

Salvatore Buonaventura, sick to death of cloves and homesick to boot, took himself back to Italy, where he expected to become rich and famous with the botanical secret which his family could henceforth claim to have kept proudly for generations. As it turned out, unfortunately, his family didn't believe him. How could they be expected to? No self-respecting plant in all Italy, they were convinced, much less in the proud hills of Tuscany, would stand for a bath in *milk*, of all things. *Madon!* Incredible!

But this is not Salvatore's story, and it is not really very important that the strapping young gardener from Tuscany carried a spear in an epic Italian film, showed his burnished torso to an aging Amer-

ican movie queen who hated cloves, and soon found himself on an estate in southern California with keys to the doors of the wine cellar and the dairy locker, among others. But it does help to get us by the next six months, during which time things happened that are rather unpleasant to write about. Philip, you see, was not blind, and as the truth of Martha's condition grew upon him he reacted in beastly fashion.

As a matter of fact, he was just as bad after the baby, a girl, was born. Martha suggested calling the child Phyllis, but since this had no perceptible effect on Philip's pique she decided instead on Sally, though whether through a momentary fit of spite or nostalgia will never be known.

Philip maintained a perpetual low-key rage. Not, as you might suspect, over the indiscretion that had proved him a cuckold, however. He never mentioned that, never demanded the name of the father, almost as if the paralysis that had taken away his physical capability had also erased all memory of how babies got started in the first place. To hear him carry on, you would think Martha had managed the act of creation all by herself, just to spite him and prevent him from saving enough money for a battery-operated,

voice-controlled wheelchair by raising the milk bill.

Sitting there with a beatific smile on her face as she gazed down at the babe at her breast, Martha would sometimes raise one eyebrow ever so slightly at Philip's bitter railing over the milk bill. If he became too noisy, as he often did, she would calmly walk out of the livingroom and continue feeding the child in the solarium.

One day, when little Sally was about four months old, Martha bluntly interrupted Philip's newest complaint, the gist of which was that he was not being fed on time because she was too busy feeding the baby, and he was not being bathed regularly because she had to bathe the baby, and he might just as well hire a maid or a caretaker as have a wife, since he'd be assured of some attention then or he'd fire the wench, and it would probably be cheaper than the situation he had on his hands now, God knows.

"We shall have to begin ordering another quart of milk tomorrow," Martha said.

Philip made strangling noises in his throat.

"Our wee babe is an infant no longer," she continued. "She is ready to be weaned. She will require eight ounces of milk four times a day. That makes thirty-

two ounces, or one quart," she said.

"I know how much four times eight is," Philip spluttered, "and I know very well how many ounces there are in a quart."

"She is also ready for cereal and strained baby food," Martha said. "Vegetables and fruit and meat and orange juice."

"No!" Philip exploded. "The expense . . ."

"Raising a baby is no simple matter," Martha chided him firmly. "There are things she must have which the neighbors can't provide."

"What things?"

"Mrs. Archer has loaned us the crib and the stroller. Mrs. Levine gave us a whole box of baby clothes——"

"No, no, no, no, you idiot!" babbled Philip. "What else does she need?"

Martha looked surprised. "Why, vitamins, for one thing. Dr. Harrington says she should have vitamins every day, to supplement her diet. And she must be vaccinated against smallpox and get shots to protect her from diphtheria and polio and tetanus and——"

Philip groaned. "You've been going to the doctor, too? At ten dollars a visit? We'll never be able to pay it."

"Five," Martha said. "I explained things to Mrs. Harrington and she

talked to the doctor and they're willing to let us pay it off little by little, the same way we're going to pay him for the delivery. It was very kind of them. They even loaned us the money for the hospital."

Philip really did seem to be strangling now. "How much? No, don't even tell me," he choked. "I thought you went to the clinic! We'll never be able to pay it. Not in a million years. You're a fool and an idiot."

"I wish you would stop carrying on so," Martha said. "You're the one who is being a fool. Of course we'll pay it. I've already started to save money."

She went across to the solarium door and opened it. "Listen," she said. "Do you hear anything? No, of course not. You've been making so much noise you don't hear anything, even when it's gone."

"What did you do with them?" Philip said with surprise. "I didn't see you take them out."

"I didn't. I just stopped feeding them. I'm *not* an idiot, you know. I know we have to save money now. Besides, they made so much noise they kept my babe awake, and I couldn't have that." Martha smiled serenely. "The solarium is quiet now. It's the only quiet place in the house where she can sleep in peace."

Philip said nothing, but his eyes widened.

"And another thing," Martha continued, "now that we're on the subject. You're always complaining about the milk; but I haven't been bathing my plants, either. The poor things haven't had a drop of milk since Sally was born."

Philip did not seem to hear her. "What did you do with the birds?" he asked. "With what was left of them, I mean?"

"They're all dried up now. You can't see them. The plants grew around them."

"The plants are still in there, though?"

"I'm watering them, since they make a nice warm shady nook for Sally to sleep in, but pretty soon they'll look just like anybody else's. They miss the milk, poor things. Just the other day I was feeding Sally in there and I heard a rustling noise and felt something tickling my neck, and pretty soon at least a half dozen ivy creepers worked their way over my shoulder and under my arm and curled around my breast. They must have smelled the milk. Sometimes animals and plants know what's good for them better than people do."

She sat for a moment with a faraway look in her eyes. "It was strange," she said musingly. "They were so tenacious, and much

stronger than I thought they could be."

Suddenly she stood up. "I don't think I'll leave Sally in there anymore," she said.

She wheeled the sleeping baby in the carriage into the living room and parked it by her chair. "You've been too noisy," she said to Philip. "From now on you'll have to be quiet."

"But you let the canaries *starve*?" whispered Philip. "Those poor, helpless birds? Why didn't you sell them, or at least let them go free?"

Martha sniffed impatiently. "Don't be ridiculous," she said. "They made too much noise. Besides, they couldn't take care of themselves outside. They'd be helpless. They are better off dead."

They sat quietly, Martha smiling down at her baby, Philip staring down at his useless hands and his shrunken legs.

When he looked up his eyes were unnaturally wide and bright. "I guess I haven't been too pleasant to live with lately," he said.

"No," said Martha coldly, "you certainly haven't. You've been perfectly horrible about little Sally."

"Well, you see, I've been pretty worried about our financial situation. I didn't see how we could manage with another mouth to feed."

"That's why I stopped feeding

the canaries and bathing the plants. To save money."

"Yes," said Philip, "I understand that now. But I didn't before, and I was worried, don't you see? Since we were just scraping by with only two in the family, I didn't see how we could afford another mouth to feed."

"You keep harping about another mouth to feed," Martha said irritably. "As if the poor little wee babe ate so much! Why, you eat more than Sally and I put together. We could really save money if it weren't for you and the way you eat."

Philip took a deep breath and licked his lips. "Well, I'm not going to worry about it anymore," he said. "I'm going to leave it all up to you. You seem to have everything all worked out."

"Yes," said Martha, "I have. Our wee babe is going to have everything she needs." She looked challengingly at Philip.

"Of course," he said quickly, with a little cry that tried to be a laugh. "But within reason, of course, considering our finan——"

"Everything," Martha said with great intensity. "No matter what. I am determined to do everything in my power to make sure she has everything she needs."

"Yes, of course," said Philip.

At that moment the baby began

to whimper. Frowning, Martha leaped to her feet.

"I think I'm beginning to love her," Philip said, but the whimper had become a piercing cry, and Martha was hurrying out to the kitchen, so no one heard him.

In a few minutes she was back, carrying a baby bottle full of milk. She stood before his wheelchair and held the bottle out for inspection. "See?" she said. "Only eight ounces. That isn't too much to begrudge our sweet wee babe, is it?"

"Not at all," Philip said, rolling his eyes. "I was very wrong."

"Oh, dear. The cap seems to be loose." Martha giggled nervously. "I've never done this before, you know."

Peering intently at the bottle, she unscrewed the cap. "The nipple isn't in right," she said, trying to press it into place with her thumbs. Her hands twisted as she did so and, as luck would have it, the bottle, which she had apparently forgotten in her concentration on the cap and nipple, twisted too. The warm milk poured out,

splashing on Philip's head, streaming over his face, dribbling down his shirt.

"Oh! Clumsy!" Martha exclaimed.

Philip sat speechless, his mouth hanging open.

The baby was screaming.

"I'll have to warm up another bottle right away," Martha said. "I'll clean you up after I've fed Sally and calmed her down. She might hurt herself by crying so hard."

She wheeled Philip's chair toward the solarium door. "I'll just leave you in here where it's warmer so you can dry off in the meantime and not catch cold."

Philip threw back his head to look up at her. His eyes, bulging and red-rimmed, blinked as milk dripped into them from his sodden hair.

There was a rustle in the solarium, a stirring, as if a hot wind had suddenly fingered its way through a tangled jungle. But Martha, hurriedly closing the door behind her, could hear nothing but the hungry cry of her wee babe.



Rarely, indeed, does one find a "dedicated dispenser of justice" who can render an equable and impartial decision in every instance.

HIS HATRED for the man in the newspaper photograph was so intense that for a moment the stern, strong-featured face seemed to blur, as if obscured by a pale, pink mist. He closed his eyes, squeezing the lids together hard, willing himself to control the anger that caused his hands to clench the

edges of the newspaper so tightly that his wrists ached. When he opened his eyes again, he looked at the group photograph next to that of the man, at the lovely smiling woman and the two handsome youngsters at either side of her. Then that photograph, too, grew blurred, this time with tears.

Behind him he heard Mrs. Corey's heavy tread, and he put the paper down on the table, aligning



the edges with the edges of the table in unconscious precision.

Mrs. Corey stood at his elbow now, her flat, florid face set in a worried frown. "You haven't even touched your breakfast, sir," she said. "You haven't been eating right since—"

"Mrs. Corey," he said, and then paused.

"Yes, sir?" she said. She had never, he reflected, addressed him in any other way, not once in all the years she had been with him. When she spoke of him to others, she referred to him as 'The Mister'.

"Mrs. Corey," he said, "look at that man in the photograph there. What do you see?"

"See, sir?"

"Yes—see. The caption says he is Judge Arthur G. Harrington. The *honorable* Arthur G. Harrington. Down in the story about the murders he committed, he's called distinguished, and respected, and dedicated, and a number of other fine things. Is that what you see when you look at his photograph, Mrs. Corey—an honorable and respected and dedicated dispenser of justice?"

"Sir, I don't . . . I just don't know what you mean."

"I'll tell you what you see. You see a cold-blooded killer there, Mrs. Corey. You see a monster

who murdered a woman and her two children, that's what you see." He closed his left hand into a fist and brought it down sharply on the man's face. "He murdered them, just as surely as if he'd hacked them to death with an axe."

Mrs. Corey shifted her feet uneasily. "It-it was an accident," she said.

"Accident? A man gets drunk and causes a wreck that kills three people—and that's an accident?"

"The papers didn't say—"

"No, the papers didn't *say* he was drunk. They printed the facts, but not *all* the facts, Mrs. Corey."

"You ought to try to eat, sir. I'll just poach some more—"

"My wife is dead, Mrs. Corey. My children are dead. Ten days ago this house was filled with them. And because of them, there was happiness and wonder and beauty—and love." He felt the tears begin to blur his eyes again. "Their murderer deserves to die, Mrs. Corey. He deserves to, and he is *going* to."

"You've got to stop torturing yourself, sir," Mrs. Corey said, picking nervously at a fold in her skirt. "You don't eat right, and you don't sleep hardly at all and you—"

"This morning," he said, rising from the table. "This morning,

Mrs. Corey. No time to delay."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I'm going to kill him," he said. "I'm going to destroy the murderer of my wife and children. This morning, Mrs. Corey—within the hour."

Mrs. Corey's eyes widened with alarm. "Sir?" she said uncertainly.

"Oh, you can't mean that, sir!"

He smiled at her, knowing how ghastly that smile must be. "Have you ever known me to say I was going to do something, and then not do it?"

"No, sir. But—"

He turned and strode toward

ing-goods store," he told the driver.

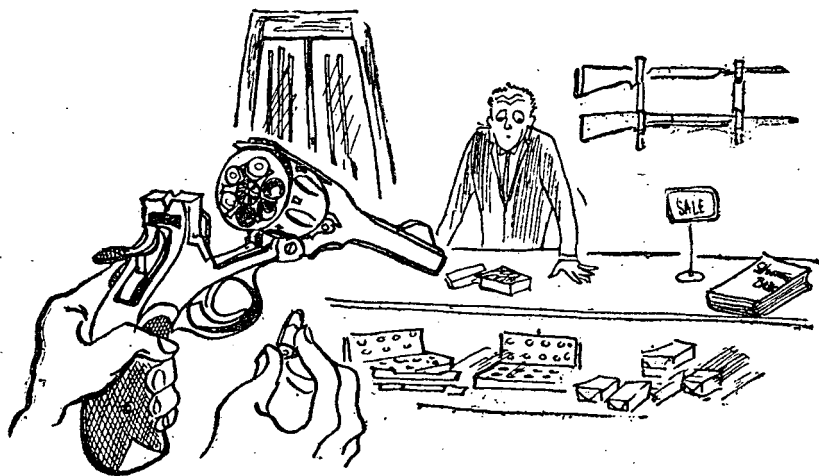
"That'd be Donovan's," the driver said. "Corner of Woodland and Ninth."

While the cab waited outside Donovan's, he bought a .38 revolver and a box of cartridges. As the clerk watched with amazement, he pushed six of the cartridges into the gun's cylinder and put the box with the remaining cartridges on the counter.

"I shan't be needing these," he said.

"But, sir—" the clerk began.

"Thank you for helping me," he



the front door. "Good-bye, Mrs. Corey," he said.

A cab was approaching even as he went down the steps, and he hailed it.

"Take me to the nearest sport-

said. "Good-bye." He walked out.

In the cab again, he leaned back against the cushion, his fingertips caressing the cold metal of the gun in his jacket pocket. "Take me to the courthouse," he said.

Yes, he thought, *the courthouse. That grim gray pile of granite where the honorable dispenser of justice, the murderer of women and children, had sentenced so many other men to death. How completely just that his own execution should be carried out there. There was a rightness about it somehow; it was almost inconceivable that Arthur G. Harrington die anywhere else but in his own courtroom.*

"Nice day, eh?" the driver said.
"Beautiful, in fact."

"Yes," he said. "Beautiful." It had been just such a day when his wife and children were killed. And now the cab was passing the park where Margaret had brought Billy and Bonnie when the twins were very small. And down that street a block or two were the stores where Margaret had loved to shop. And now, just up ahead, was the junior high school where the twins would have started classes next September.

"Well, it looks like we made it," the driver said, drawing to the curb. "That'll be a dollar-ten."

He paid his fare, walked up the wide stone stairs to the bronze doors, and went inside. And from that moment on, he neither looked at anyone nor replied when spoken to. He half heard the puzzled comments, the curious whispers, that followed him, but he kept his eyes straight ahead, striding rapidly toward the double doors at the end of the corridor—the courtroom of that most honorable judge, Arthur G. Harrington.

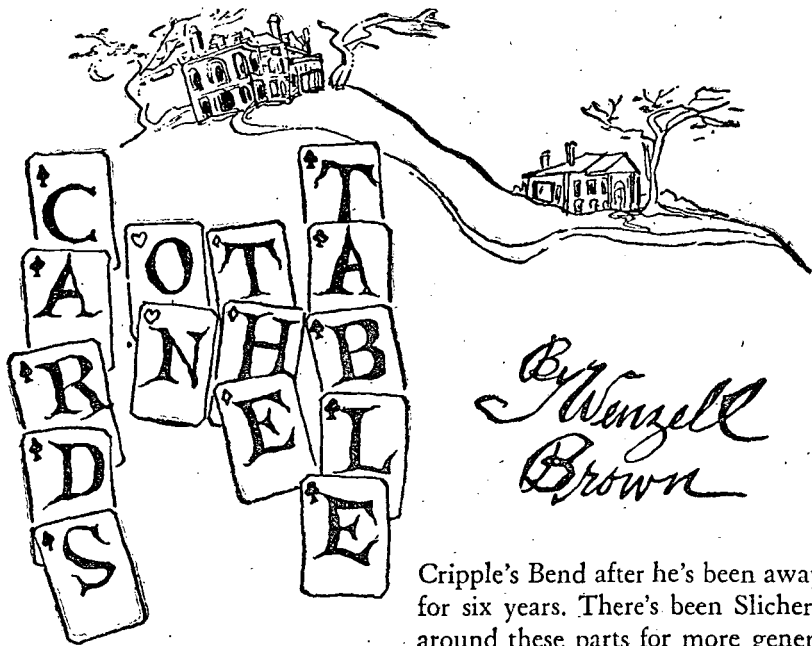
The massive doors echoed hollowly in the empty courtroom as he closed them and started down the aisle toward the bench. When he reached the bench, he turned right; then, ten feet farther on, he turned left and walked to the door of the room directly behind the bench: Judge Harrington's chambers.

He paused for a moment, one hand on the doorknob, the other on the revolver in his pocket.

Then he went inside, sat down in the tall leather chair behind the desk, put the muzzle of the revolver against his right temple, and pulled the trigger.



A deck of cards has been likened to a hierarchy, with every card a master to those below it, a lackey to those above it.



*By Wenzell
Brown*

It's nigh onto ten years since the killin' on Nebbins Hill and I reckon if Maw hadn't been on a bridge binge that summer or I hadn't been so plumb ignorant about the game things might of turned out different than they did.

Seems like the story really starts with Tobe Slicher comin' home to

Cripple's Bend after he's been away for six years. There's been Slichers around these parts for more generations than you can shake a stick at but there ain't none of 'em left savin' Tobe and his granddaddy. Now I ain't sayin' nothin' against Gramps but he's a man with a fondness for the bottle and about all he ever had to give to the boy was plenty o' good healthy neglect.

All things considered, you had to hand it to Tobe. From the time he was knee-high to a woodchuck,

he was doin' odd jobs here and there and savin' money for clothes and such. He was the kind of a kid you didn't notice much, slight and short with dark hair and blunt, ordinary features. He was on the rough side but I'll say this for him, he never once got into trouble with the law.

It was when he was in high school that Tobe discovered his gift. He's got a voice that's true and clear as a bell. Not much volume to it but it's the kind a mike picks up and smooths out 'til it's like a giant croonin'.

Tobe never had lessons in music but Florence Hartery took him in hand. Flo ain't more'n three or fours years older'n Tobe but she's a heap more sophisticated. Her dad's a doctor who come up here first with the summer folk, then decided to settle down in Cripple's Bend. Flo's lived half of her life in New York where she studied piano, folk-singin' and such.

Flo loves ballads and she's got a big stack of records: Burl Ives, Tom Scott, and a lot of others whose names I don't even know. She played them records over'n over again to Tobe 'til he learned 'em by heart. She even taught him to strum the guitar to accompany himself. Pretty soon Tobe was singin' at every high school dance and church social. There was plen-

ty of girls ready to swoon over Tobe, teen-agers bein' what they are, but Tobe kept 'em all at a distance. He had eyes only for Flo.

Mebbe Flo should have given Tobe the brush-off quicker'n she did, but I reckon she never took him seriously. Tobe as a protégé was one thing; as a suitor, he was something else again. Families like the Slichers and the Harterys just don't mix. Tobe knows that as well as Flo but I guess he's so bedazzled by her he just can't give up hopin'. As for Flo, she ain't got a mean bone in her body. She lets Tobe hang around because she can't bear to speak the hurtin' words that would send him away.

Then Jack Castle shows up in Cripple's Bend. Jack's thirty or so but he looks younger. He's got a thatch of golden blond hair, skin smooth as bronze, and features I've heard described as lookin' like those of a Greek god. Jack's part of the summer crowd, but his Dad bought the old Crowley house on Nebbins Hill just afore he died. Seems like Jack takes a shine to the place and uses it as a sort of hide-away from the process servers trying to collect back alimony from him. Jack inherited a fortune but he's already worked his way through three marriages, and he's got expensive tastes. He runs to fast cars, a yacht in the harbor, and

a heavy-drinkin' set of fast friends.

The Harterys are Jack's closest neighbors. Doc Hartery lives halfway down the slope of Nebbins Hill and there ain't another house for half a mile around. I guess it's natural for Flo and Jack to be drawn together. Flo's pretty as a pitcher, fresh-lookin', with vivid colorin' and a sort o' breathless innocence about her when she's excited, that creeps under a man's skin.

As for Jack, he's a dashin' figger and he's got a smooth line of gab that makes the local boys look like a bunch of yokels. He talks to Flo about theatre and ballet and all the things she's been missin' from the big city, takes her for drives in his fancy car and entertains her on his yacht, so it ain't no wonder she falls hard for him.

Doc Hartery don't like it and to tell the truth I don't either. Jack Castle's a boy as believes because he was born with a golden spoon in his mouth he can break all the rules and walk away scot-free. Up to date, he's never had to pay for his wild ways but I reckon sooner or later trouble's goin' to catch up with him and, when it does, I don't want to see Flo gettin' hurt too.

Pretty soon Flo announces she's gettin' married at the end o' the summer. Doc puts as good a face

on it as he can. Flo's the apple of his eye and he can't bear hurtin' her, not even for her own good.

The weddin' is the biggest shindig Cripple's Bend has ever seen. Scads of society folk come up from Boston and New York. The party lasts for the better part of a week and there's enough champagne drunk to float that yacht of Jack's in.

But there's one sour note to the weddin'. The day before the ceremony Tobe Slicker shows up on Jack Castle's lawn. The party's in full swing and one thing is for sure, Tobe ain't been invited. I reckon Flo's forgot all about him in her infatuation for Jack.

It's like Tobe come out of nowhere. He's dressed in his neat blue serge suit he's bought for graduation from high school. His hair is plastered down and he's got a scrubbed schoolboy look.

Jack is standin' on the lawn with a crystal glass in his hand. Tobe marches straight up to him, his face set in a scowl and his fists clenched at his sides. He takes a fightin' stance and says real loud, "You, Castle, I want to talk to you."

Jack's a bit looped but even so he's poised and smilin'. He says, "Do I know you, sonny?"

"My name's Tobe Slicher. You better remember that."

"Well, surely, old chap. But what is it you want to say?"

"Just this. You treat Flo right, because if you don't, I'll come back and kill you. I swear I'll kill you."

Everybody's silent now. Jack carries it off pretty well. He says, "Of course, I'll treat Flo well. I happen to be in love with her." He laughs and tries to clap a hand on Tobe's shoulder but the boy backs away from him like he has the plague.

Just then Flo comes to the porch door. Tobe spots her and goes up to her quickly.

He says, "Flo, I'm leavin' Cripple's Bend. I couldn't stay here. Not now. I wouldn't be tellin' you this but some day you may need me. If you do, Gramps will know where I am."

Flo cries, "Oh, Tobe, I'm sorry."

Tobe swings around and starts through the crowd, half-runnin', his face all twisted up like if anybody speaks to him he'll bust out bawlin'.

Flo stands there, lookin' dazed, 'til Jack comes up and puts an arm around her. He uses his free hand to cup her chin and tilts her face up so he can kiss her.

Tobe has left a cardboard suitcase down to Powers' Fillin' Station. When the Portland bus rolls through an hour or so later, Milt Powers sees him swing aboard. Af-

ter that there ain't nobody in Cripple's Bend has seen hair nor hide of Tobe 'til he shows up again six years later and walks bold as you please into Gimpy's Diner.

Everyone's tryin' to guess what'll happen when he meets up with Jack Castle 'cause if Tobe meant that threat he made six years ago, he's got plenty of reason for killin' Jack.

Mebbe Jack Castle ain't too much to blame. I reckon some men just ain't built for marriage. To them, a woman's a toy to play around with for a while and then toss to one side. No woman can hold Jack for long. Lord knows Flo tried, but there's a story runnin' around that even on their honeymoon Jack lights out with some other woman and don't come back to Flo for the better part of a week.

From then on, Jack and Flo drift in and out of Cripple's Bend. Folks around tell as how Flo's mighty unhappy. Jack leaves her no self-respect. He shows up at the country club or the Gateway Inn with one woman, then another. Jack wants a divorce and he don't make no bones about it. He even tells Flo so in public.

Flo takes it as long as she can; then she walks out on Jack and moves back into the Hartery house. But she ain't givin' Jack a divorce. Flo can be stubborn as a mule.

when she puts her foot down. There's nothin' Jack can do or say to change her mind.

There's a spiteful streak in Jack. You'd think he'd clear out o' Cripple's Bend, but it seems like he wants to flaunt his light-o'-loves in Flo's face. Lots of nights there's big parties goin' on in the house at the top of the hill 'til the wee hours. But there's nobody to complain but the Harterys.

From the winders of Doc's place, you can see the front porch and into the livin' room of Jack's house. Most nights it's lit up like a Christmas tree. But there's times when it's quiet and the lights are dim. There's nobody up there but Jack and whatever girl has taken his fancy for the night. You can see 'em on the porch, silhouetted against the yellow glow of the room beyond, kissin' and clingin' to each other. Later they go inside and the lights of the house go off, one by one.

Flo is watchin' from the house below and eatin' her heart out 'cause, in spite of everything, she's still in love with Jack. Randy Hartery takes it in his mind to do something about it. Randy is Flo's kid brother, just a few years younger'n she. The trouble is, Randy's the easy-goin' kind who's never got into a scrap in his life. So when he and his wife, Lillian,

meet up with Jack and his crowd at the country club, it don't prove a thing savin' that Randy ain't much of a fighter. He may have the heart of a lion but he's got no more equipment than a jackrabbit.

Randy starts the fight, there ain't no denyin' that. He gets in the first blow, that explodes on Jack's chest with all the force of a cream puff. Jack laughs and drives a piston right to Randy's jaw that straightens him up and leaves him wide open for a loopin' left to the pit of the stomach. Randy skids halfway across the room, bangs into the wall and sits down hard. He makes a half-hearted attempt to get up and make a rush at Jack but three or four fellers squeeze in between 'em and the fight is ended.

All this time, Flo never shows up in town and won't see people even when they drop by the house. She's always liked the woods and the fields and sometimes she goes for long walks, movin' around like a wraith, avoidin' even a chance encounter.

There's one walk she never comes back from. She's gone all night, and in the mornin' Doc Hartery comes to my office to ask me to form a posse to help look for her. The way things turn out we don't have to look long. A couple hours later a pair of young'uns spot her floatin' face down in the

water of Pinney's Pond, deep in the woods.

Mebbe it's an accident. Could be Flo got lost in the woods and confused with nightfall. She could've floundered into the pond, fallen down, panicked and somehow managed to get drowned. But it don't look that way to me. I put it down as suicide, and everybody knows as how Flo has plenty of reason.



Randy Hartery don't see it my way. Later that day he comes stormin' into Gimpy's while I'm there drinkin' a mug of coffee, and demands I arrest Jack Castle for murder. He's spoutin' off a lot of wild talk without a shred of evidence. I warn him he's headin' for a slander suit but there's nothin' I can say will keep him quiet.

He yells, "You know damn well it's murder and so does everyone else here."

I says, "Look, son, there warn't no sign of violence I could see, but

we'll know better after the autopsy. So why not take it easy?"

He's so excited I think he's goin' to take a swing at me. He shouts, "Even if it was suicide, Jack drove her to it. Morally he's a murderer and if the state won't make him pay, I will."

He calms down a little after that, but I don't like what I'm hearin'. Threats come mighty easy, but I've learned in my thirty years as sheriff that even a coward can whip himself up into action if he boasts long and loud enough about what he aims to do. As for Randy, he's neither coward nor hero, just a fair-to-middlin' brave man which makes him unpredictable as all get-out.

The autopsy proves death is by drownin'. There ain't a single bruise on the body, not a thing to suggest foul play. Doc Hartery stands right beside the coroner all the time. Later he asks me to help him break the news to Randy. He's scary of what his son may do.

Randy starts off ravin' and rantin' but finally Doc gets through to him. He says, "Look, son, we've had one tragedy in this house and that's enough. If you start playing God, you'll destroy us all—me, your mother, and Lillian. Let Jack Castle go his own way. Sometime there'll be a just retribution."

Randy don't like it but he has to

admit his father's right. When I leave, I reckon there ain't goin' to be any more trouble with him.

All the same, I can't see why Jack Castle has to hang around town. It's vanity, I guess, a sort of perverse pride in provin' how thick-skinned he is. He's got a new girl with him, a lovely lithe blonde who, accordin' to rumor, is expectin' to be the next Mrs. Jack Castle.

That's the way things stand when Tobe Slicher shows up in Cripple's Bend.

Tobe don't do anythin' you could rightly call suspicious. He stays out on the farm with Gramps but most nights when it's fair, he walks into town. He wanders around a bit and usually ends up at Gimpy's Diner for a beer or a cup of coffee. He carries his drink over to a corner table and sits there all alone, lookin' mean and surly like he's darin' anyone to as much as look at him cross-eyed.

Some of the crowd who knew him back in high school try to persuade him to sing, but Tobe's havin' none of it.

He says, "That's all over and done with. It's kid stuff anyway."

When they still egg him on, he turns and walks away.

I'm sort of keepin' a watch on Jack Castle's place, but as far as I can see Tobe don't come near. All

the same, I can't forget that look of hidden violence I saw in his face the first day. I got the feelin' of sittin' on a time fuse and waitin' for the big blow.

Finally, when I decide to go out to the Slicher farm, I find Tobe sprucin' up the place. Gramps is huddled in a beat-up old Morris chair in the kitchen and he don't more than give me a grumpy nod, which is about average for Gramps.

Tobe has cleaned up part of the mess that Gramps has made over the years and he's puttin' a coat of paint on the front room. He starts off givin' me the edge of his tongue, but I got myself braced not to get riled. Pretty soon Tobe sits down and starts talkin' reasonable. I reckon it's a relief for him to let off a little steam.

From what he says, I gather that the last six years have been mighty rough on Tobe. When he left Cripple's Bend, he headed straight for New York with the idea he's goin' to make a fortune with his singin' and his guitar-strummin'. But it don't work out that way. He learns folk-singers is a dime a dozen. All he gets is nowhere fast.

After that Tobe takes a series of jobs but he has no trainin' and no idea how to sell himself. The jobs are all piddlin' ones—bus boy, kitchen-helper, or cleanup man. The worse things get, the nastier

his temper grows. Pretty soon he ain't speakin' to a soul. He's lonely and filled with spite and he can't break out of his shell.

Accordin' to him, at first he does a lot of thinkin' about Flo but after awhile he almost forgets her, like she's part of a hazy dream out of long ago. He writes to Gramps now and then but Gramps never answers, so he has no way of knowin' what's happenin' between Jack and Flo, and afore long he can't care less.

It takes Tobe six years to learn what a fool he's been, that he can't ever be happy in New York. He hates the ceaseless traffic, the grimy streets, the crowds, the noise and the jumpin' neon signs. He's got to clear out or he's goin' to crack up, and there's only one place he can think of to go—back to Cripple's Bend.

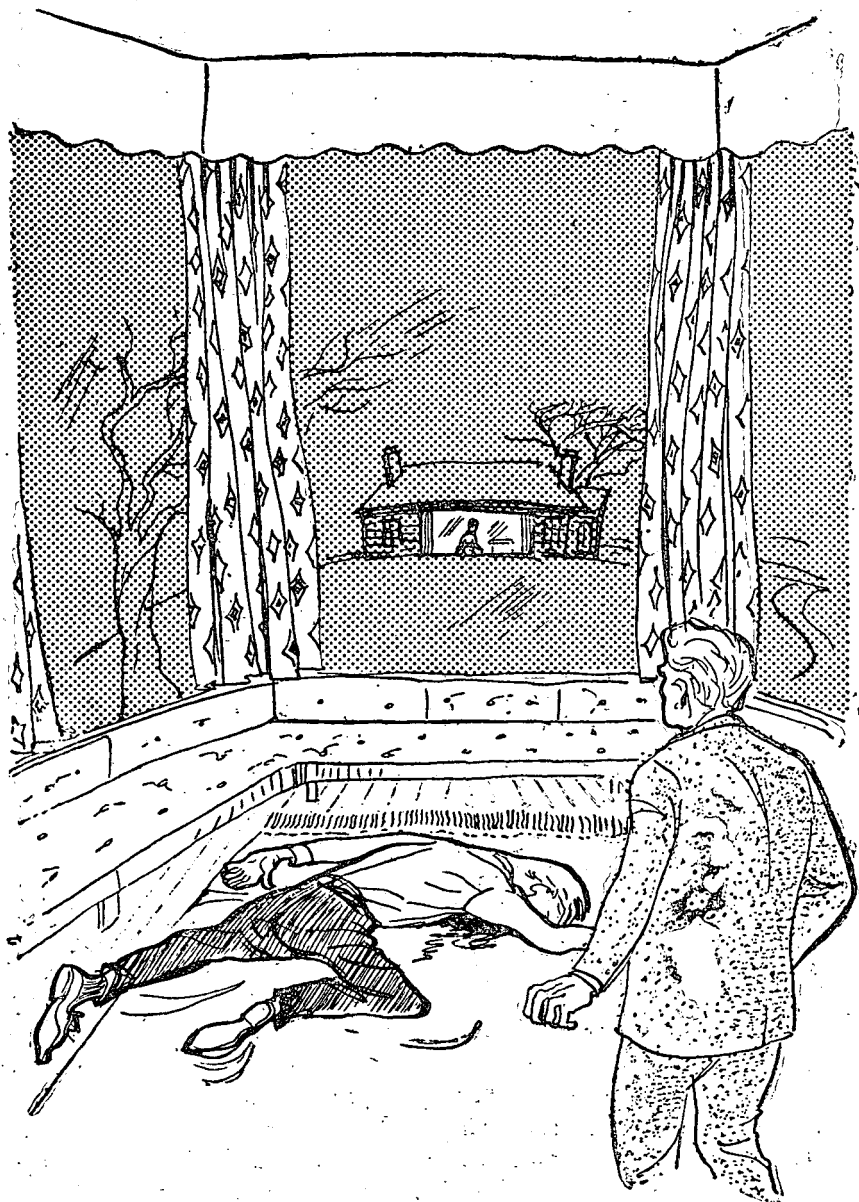
He swears that's the only reason he's here, that it ain't got a thing to do with Jack and Flo. I look at him and I don't know whether to believe him or not. Even while he's tryin' to convince me, his mouth is hard and his eyes are hooded so I can't tell what lies behind 'em.

I get the news about the killin' on Nebbins Hill one night late that summer. It must've been a Thursday 'cause it's Maw's bridge night. She's been playin' with Katie Dowd and a couple of her friends,

and I'd run out in the county car to fetch her. Maw's just settled herself down in the front seat beside me when the squawk box lets off with a blast. Roy Nelson, who's workin' as my deputy that summer, is so excited his words is stumblin' all over each other, so it takes me awhile to sort 'em out.

It seems like Mary Hartery, who is Doc's wife and Flo's mother, has just phoned in. She claims as she was standin' by the open winder of her home when she hears a commotion up to Jack Castle's place. She looks up and sees two figgers strugglin' on the porch. The fight carries 'em through the door into the front room, and Mary gets another glimpse of 'em through Jack's bay winder. They break away, and then there's the sound of a shot. Seconds later a man runs down the porch steps and onto the driveway. She sees his shadder in the light, then loses it. That's all she does see.

Even while Roy is relayin' the news, I'm drivin' towards Nebbins Hill. On the way I tell him to call up the state police and the coroner and to try to round up Tobe Slicher. I ain't got far to go. Katie's home is near Shore Corners and there's a shortcut from there to Nebbins Hill, so it ain't more'n ten minutes afore I'm in Jack's driveway. I run up the steps. The front



door is wide open and the lights is all ablaze.

Jack's sprawled near the wide bay winder in a crumpled heap, one leg twisted under him, his cheek restin' on the carpet. I know he's dead even afore I kneel beside him and feel for the pulse that ain't there.

I get up and take a quick look out the winder. There's lights on in the Hartery house, and Mary Hartery is standin' in her winder lookin' up at me. It's a long way down the hillside but I can see her real plain, as though she's framed in the light. Her face is masked in the shadders but you can't miss her white hair or the pride in her slim, erect figger. There's others in the room behind her, but I don't stop to see who they are. Already I'm hurryin' back to the county car and Maw.

As the car eases down the hill, Maw ain't got much to say, which is strange for her. Once she asks if Jack's dead, and I grunt that he is.

Maw says, "It's kind of funny, Doc not rushin' up there. After all, he is a doctor."

"Mebbe so, but Jack took down the welcome sign for Doc long ago."

Doc shows up in his door when I'm halfway up the drive. I jump out quick and tell Maw to stay where she is. Seems like I'm wast-

in' my breath. While I'm mountin' the stairs to the porch, Maw's right at my heels.

Doc's face is white and tense but his hand is firm enough when he shakes. When I tell him Jack's dead he sort of shakes his head.

"How can you be sure? I'd better go to him. Perhaps I should have gone sooner, but Jack warned me off his property. Besides, as far as Jack's death is concerned, I guess you'd say I was an interested party."

"That still goes, Doc. Jack's dead-er'n a cold mackerel and there ain't a thing that you can do for him. I don't want anybody messin' around up there till Doc Colby takes a squint at him and the lab boys from the state police take over."

Doc nods again and leads the way into the house. Maw's still traipsin' along. She squeezes by me, goes directly to Mary Hartery and puts her arms around her.

I ain't payin' much attention. I'm watchin' Randy Hartery. There ain't no doubt he's got the jitters. He's holdin' a glass in his hand and the ice cubes is rattlin' inside of it like he's got palsy. His eyes are sort of wild and he acts like he's havin' trouble breathin'.

I try to keep my voice casual. "Randy, have you been up to the Castle place tonight?"

Randy gulps and, afore he can answer, Lillian rushes in between us. She's a cute little trick with red hair, a freckled face, and plenty of pluck to her. She puts both her hands on my lapels and looks up at me.

She says, "Randy hasn't left the house tonight. He was here for supper and as soon as we were through, he helped Doc set up the bridge table. We've been playin' ever since."

Mary Hartery's voice, cool and level, slices across Lillian's rush of words. She says, "It was exactly 11:15 when I heard the shot. For two or three minutes before that, I was standing at the window watching Jack struggle with his assailant. All that time my husband, my son and his wife were seated behind me."

I think it over. "You see two men fightin' and you don't say a word to nobody?"

Mary Hartery draws herself up a bit straighter and a haughty look spreads across her face. Then she smiles wanly. "No, Sheriff, I didn't speak until I heard the shot. Maybe that seems odd but really it's not. Did you ever come unexpectedly on a strange scene of violence? The first reaction is incredulity. You freeze and watch in shocked silence, somehow not quite believing your senses. At least that's the

way a woman reacts. I don't know about you, Sheriff."

"You'd been playin' cards since supper-time. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Then how come you wasn't at the table?"

Mary gives a little laugh. "I take it you don't play bridge, Sheriff. I was dummy. To tell the truth, I was a bit bored with the game. After the bid I walked around the table and glanced at my partner's hand. Then I drifted over to the window."

Mary's right. I never played a hand of bridge in my life. Pinochle's my game, and now and then I sit in on a poker session. I look around for Maw to see how she's takin' it.

Maw's standin' at the bridge table, frownin' down at the cards. I can tell she's troubled, but I don't see nothin' wrong. Mary's hand is lined up in tidy rows for her partner who, I learn, is Doc. The other hands have been tossed carelessly on the table.

Maw looks up at Mary and there's somethin' in her eyes I don't understand. It's like she's seen something as has scared her.

"What's the bid?" she asks.

"Three no trumps."

Maw sighs. "I'd a-thought Doc would have more card sense than that. Makin' game in spades would

be a heap easier." She waits, but Mary doesn't say anythin'. Then Maw adds, "You say you been playin' all night?" There's more'n a question in her voice; it's almost an accusation.

"Yes."

"Where do you store your cards, Mary?"

"In the leather case on the hall table."

Maw starts across the room and I watch her, wonderin' what in tarnation she's gettin' at, but afore she reaches the hall, there's a crunch of wheels outside and headlights come spearin' across the lawn. Three cars have come up the road to Nebbins Hill. One of 'em is a state patrol car. Another belongs to Doc Colby, the coroner. The third I recognize as Roy Nelson's. Voices are boomin' out and, among 'em, I hear the angry, truculent tones of Tobe Slicher.

I swing around just in time to see Maw handin' four cards to Mary Hartery and I see something more, a look of frozen fear on Mary's face. I move up quick and Mary drops the cards face-up on the table. I get a good look at 'em. Four low cards: the three and four o' clubs, the six of diamonds, the nine of hearts.

Then Mary reaches down and mixes the cards all up. I don't know why, but I know I ought to stop

her. But, by the time I grab her wrist, it's too late. She pulls herself free and walks away.

Just then there's a loud shout from outside and the sounds of a struggle. I reach the winder in time to see Tobe flailin' wildlly at Roy Nelson. Roy stumbles backward and Tobe makes a break for it, racin' across the fields toward the pine woods beyond. One of the state troopers lights out after him. At the edge of the wood, Tobe trips and rolls in the grass. The trooper lands on top of him and snaps cuffs on his wrists.

The trooper leads Tobe back to the road, and I'm bound to say he warn't too gentle about it. Tobe's breath is wheezin' and I got a feelin' he wants to cry, but when he sees me he makes a defiant gesture.

He yells, "Why can't you leave me alone?"

"You know Jack Castle's dead?"

"Sure, I know. Roy's been yakkink about it ever since he picked me up. So what? I'm not sheddin' any tears over Jack Castle. But I didn't kill him."

I move closer. There's the sour smell of whisky on Tobe's breath. I turn to Nelson. "Where'd you find him, Roy?"

"Not more'n half a mile away."

I swing back to Tobe. "Have you got an alibi?"

"How do I know? I don't even know when Jack was killed or how. I don't know nothin'."

That's Tobe's story and practically the whole of it. He'd been drinkin' earlier in the evening and was in a bad mood. He'd sat for a while in Gimpy's, nursin' a cup of coffee. Then a couple of high school kids come in and they start raggin' him about his singin'. Tobe blows his top and takes a swing at one of 'em, so Gimpy frog-marches him outside.

After that, Tobe just wanders around. For a while he sits by the side of the road and mebbe he nods off. Then for some reason he can't remember, he decides to take a look at the Hartery place.

Tobe's arrested that night and soon as can be, he's indicted for murder. Folk around feel a lot of sympathy for Tobe. Jack Castle warn't exactly popular in these parts and Tobe had reasons for killin' him. Still and all, a man ain't got the right to take the law in his own hands. Murder can't go unpunished. That's the way people are talking, and it seems like there ain't nary a soul in Cripple's Bend as believes in Tobe's innocence.

Three months later, when Tobe comes up for trial, the courtroom is crowded. By this time I think even Tobe warn't quite sure whether he'd killed Jack or not.

The first few days of the trial, it looks like Tobe ain't got a chance. Then on the afternoon of the third day, Mary Hartery takes the stand. Dave Reagan, who's county prosecutor, puts her through her paces. She tells about witnessin' the struggle on the front porch of Jack Castle's house, of seein' the two men stumble inside and then one of 'em run away.

Dave Reagan's lookin' right smug and self-satisfied. He sticks his hands in his galluses and teters back and forth on his heels. He clears his throat and says, "And now, Mrs. Hartery, can you identify Mr. Castle's assailant?"

That's when Mary decides to toss her bombshell. "No," she says, "I never saw him before nor since. I don't know who he was, but I can state positively that he was not Tobe Slicher."

The courtroom is in an uproar and Judge Reynolds has to pound his gavel for order.

Dave Reagan tries again and again to shake Mary's story but he can't. He questions her eyesight, asks why she didn't make her statement earlier, and comes next-door to callin' her a liar, but all of it don't do him one bit of good. Mary comes through with flyin' colors. The more she repeats her story, the more it's got the ring of truth to it. After awhile Dave sees

he's licked and finally gives up.

Mebbe Mary ain't convinced the jury of Tobe's innocence but, sure as shootin', she's raised a reasonable doubt. They're out for less'n three hours afore they come back with a verdict of not guilty.

As far as I can see, there's only one person who ain't surprised by the turn the trial took and that's Maw. All along she's been tellin' me Tobe ain't goin' to be convicted and, while the trial's goin' on, she's been sittin' alongside of me, knittin' and sort o' hummin' to herself. She don't even look up when Mary Hartery's givin' her testimony. She just nods like she's heard what she's been expectin' to hear.

There's something fishy about the way Maw's actin' and I got a hunch it has to do with them four cards I saw her handin' to Mary Hartery. Maw's caught something I missed, but I don't want to give her a chance to prove how much smarter'n me she is, so I don't dare ask her questions outright.

It's a funny thing; mostly Maw's a great one for gossip and she can talk the whiskers off a tomcat, but when she decides to be close-mouthed, hell's fire can't pry a word out of her.

Time goes on and I must say Tobe Slicher don't suffer none from his trial. The town sort of makes a hero out of him and that

mellers him up a bit. He starts singin' again, and I'll be switched if some talent scout don't pick him up and put him on the map. From time to time I hear he's goin' great guns, first in some nightclub and later on with TV.

Maw don't open up in all these years 'til last winter, when Mary Hartery dies just a few months after her husband. Maw sits through the funeral service dry-eyed, but when she gets home she starts blubberin'. She rushes upstairs and, when she comes down, she's holdin' a long white envelope. She tosses it into the fireplace and watches the flames curl it up and turn it into ashes.

I come up and put an arm around her and ask, "What is it, Maw?"

"A confession to the murder of Jack Castle."

"Mary Hartery lied on the stand, didn't she?"

"Only about one point. She saw the murder committed right enough, and the killer warn't Tobe Slicher. Like Mary said, he was a bigger man."

"Randy Hartery killed Jack, didn't he, Maw? And the whole family conspired to give him an alibi."

Maw looks at me wide-eyed. "Is that what you been thinkin' all the time? No, it warn't Randy. He ain't got that kind of guts."

"Who then? Not Mary herself?"

"Of course not. It was Doc."

"How'd you know, Maw? I always reckoned you pulled some sort of flimflammy with them four cards, but I don't see how they pointed to Doc."

"They didn't. Not in themselves. But let me tell you something, Paw. When you've got bridge in your blood, you automatically look at a hand and take notice if anything's wrong. The first thing as takes my eye is the dummy's one card short. Then I look at the other hands. In each case there's a card missin'. Yet accordin' to the Harterys, they been playin' bridge for hours with only forty-eight cards. Does that make sense?"

"Mebbe not. But I don't see what it proves."

"That the whole kit and kaboodle of 'em was combinin' to set up an alibi, which in turn means one of 'em was guilty. Mary Hartery saw the killin' all right, but she didn't lose the man in the shadows. He comes straight home. And I'll hand it to Mary, she does some smart thinkin' mighty fast. She puts up the card table and tells Lillian to fetch the cards. She deals 'em quick and sets the scene to make it look like they was in the middle of a game. Under circumstances like that, if you were missin' one card or two or three, the deal would

come out uneven and you'd spot it right away. But lackin' *four* cards, you might not notice, 'specially when you've got a lot on your mind."

"But four cards missin'! That's too much."

"No, it ain't. You'd be surprised at how many times you miss the bottom cards of a pack when you pick 'em out of a card box, and Lillian warn't in no mood to be careful. She snatched 'em up quick and brought 'em to Mary."

I hem and haw a bit. Then I says, "Maw, you been playin' God—suppressin' evidence."

"Suppressin' evidence of what? That they were ninnies enough to play all evenin' with four cards short? What kind of evidence is that to take to court?"

"But you knew they were lyin', the whole bunch of 'em. Still you let Tobe Slicher take his chances of spendin' the rest of his life in jail."

"That ain't so, Paw. When I faced the Harterys and told 'em what I knew, Doc Hartery made a full confession in writin'. He gave it to me and told me I could use it if Tobe was convicted. That's the letter I just burnt."

"All the same, standin' trial for a murder he didn't do was rough on Tobe. It sounds to me like he got a raw deal."

"You're wrong again, Paw. Tobe

knew or guessed who killed Jack Castle and he kept his mouth shut. Meanwhile, word got through to him that Mary would testify for him on the stand and she'd do it at the last moment to catch Dave Reagan by surprise. In a way, you could say Tobe was a party to the conspiracy of silence. He didn't kill Jack Castle but he hated him enough to protect his real killer."

I'm mullin' it over—Doc Hartery pullin' the trigger; Tobe Slicher keepin' silent; the rest of the Harterys lyin' to protect Doc. Legally there was none of 'em without guilt—or Maw neither. And I'm sheriff, sworn to uphold the law. There ain't no statutory limitations on murder. But what can I prove? If I go to the county prosecutor and start jabberin' about four missin' cards, he'll think I'm daft.

It's like Maw's readin' my mind. She says, "You'll have to admit that Doc Hartery did a lot of good in his last years in Cripple's Bend, while there warn't nobody mourned Jack Castle."

"That ain't the point, Maw."

"I reckon it ain't. The real point is there ain't nothin' you can do without puttin' a lot of dirty linen on display and harmin' a lot of people. What's more, seein' as how your wife's involved, you'll be ruinin' your chances of bein' re-elected sheriff."

Maw's right like she usually is, and there ain't no sense tellin' her different. Havin' a fight with Maw and makin' up, always means buyin' her a new hat over to Bancroft, and Maw sure don't need a hat right now. She's got at least a dozen of 'em in her closet.

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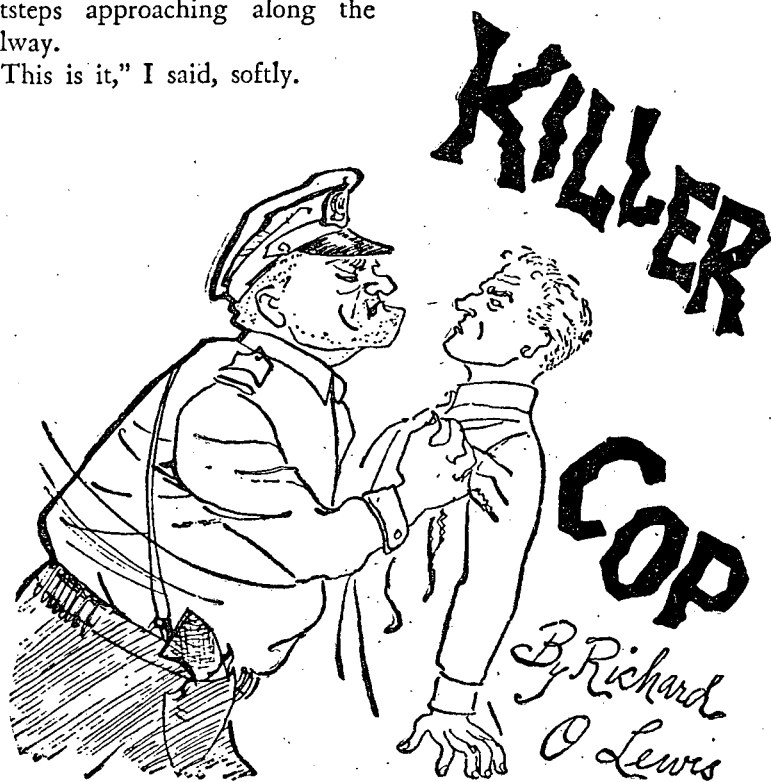
ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

One requisite for self-protection is, "Laugh then at any but fools or foes." Another, it seems, is calculated timing.

JAKE and I were in the little hotel room. I was leaning back against one wall in a rickety chair, and Jake was half reclining on the sagging bed. We exchanged glances as we heard the very quiet footsteps approaching along the hallway.

"This is it," I said, softly.

Jake nodded but said nothing. The footsteps paused just outside the door, and there were whispers. High strategy! Real cloak-and-dagger stuff! Soon the door would



shatter, come bursting open. . . .

Wham-o! It did. Pieces of broken latch went skittering across the floor, and two cops came charging in, guns drawn. One of them was rangy, broad-shouldered, and lean of face—Shancy Milligan, prize cop of the force. The other was equally tall, but heavier of build. His face was round and swarthy and spotted with patches of darker pigmentation. His full lips were partly drawn back from big teeth—Manny Markus. Killer Markus, he was called behind his back.

"New way of opening a door," I said casually to Jake, who hadn't moved from his position on the bed. "Guess they haven't heard about doorknobs."

Markus wheeled toward me and shoved his gun under my nose. "You!" he said. "Get up!"

I looked up into his face. His narrowed eyes were arrogant, domineering, the eyes of an egocentric.

"Why?" I asked, cramming the single word with as much venom as I could.

"Here's why!" His left hand shot out, slapped hard against my right cheek, knocking me half out of the chair.

I got the rest of the way out and stood up slowly, my cheek and eye burning. I had heard a lot about Manny Markus and his



ways. Even so, I hadn't fully expected the sudden and vicious attack. There was a lot of power in that left arm of his, and the blow had taken me completely off guard.

"Turn around!" he commanded. "Face the wall!"

My eyes were on a level with the base of his thick neck. I let them travel slowly and deliberately up into his. Then I began to turn around, slowly, taking my own sweet time.

"When I say move, *move!*"

He grabbed me by the shoulder, spun me around, and slammed me against the wall. I stood with hands spread against the faded wallpaper while he frisked me.

He didn't find much—a pocket-knife, some loose change, a comb and handkerchief, and a billfold.

I could hear the soft sigh of leather as he opened the billfold.

I couldn't see his face, but I could hear the sharp little intake of breath, and I knew he had spotted the name on the driver's license; the name, Paul J. Hasselton.

There was silence in the room for a full half minute. I knew he was digesting that name, letting it squirm around in his brain, trying to put things together.

"All right," he said, finally. "Turn around!"

When I turned around, I saw that he had holstered his gun and had tossed the billfold and the rest of my belongings onto the chair. And I saw something else, something in his dark eyes. The arrogance was still there. But there was also another look, a look of wariness and uncertainty.

"Where is it?" he wanted to know. "Where did you hide it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said.

"The stuff from the filling station. A couple hundred dollars. Flashlights. Cigarettes. Other stuff. Where is it?"

I didn't say anything. I just stood and looked at him, my lips curled as if I had a bad taste in my mouth.

"Wipe that smirk off your face," he ordered, "before I knock it off!"

"Is that what happened to Stanley Hasselton's face?" I asked. "You used your fists on him?"

"Your brother tried to get away. He fell down the stairs. You read about how it was in the newspapers."

Yes, the name on the driver's license had registered with him. The name had been in the newspapers; Paul J. Hasselton, older brother of Stanley Hasselton who had been arrested on suspicion of robbery by one Officer Manny Markus and had been brought to the police station—dead.

"And maybe you hammered his face and head to a pulp!" I said. "Then maybe you pushed him down the stairs! After all, you were the only witness. . . ."

I was ready this time and saw the punch coming. I rolled with it, but I didn't roll enough. The left side of my jaw went numb, and my tongue told me that at least two teeth had been loosened.

It was an effort to keep myself under control. But I didn't dare fight back—yet. I needed to keep putting the needle to him.

"Where's the stuff?" he demanded.

"Go hunt for it," I said. "Murderer!"

"Why, you. . . ." He grabbed me by the shirt front, slammed me down into the chair, and drew his right fist back.

There wasn't much I could do. I just sat there, waiting.

But the fist never landed. Shancy had leaped forward to take hold of the arm. "All right, Markus," he said, quietly. "Lay off. Our job is to search for the stuff and to take them in. We'll attend to the rest of it at headquarters."

The arm relaxed slowly, but the murderous hate that had flared into his eyes remained there. Had we been alone in the room, I am certain he would have welcomed the chance to pound me into insensibility with those ham-like fists, the way he had undoubtedly pounded Stanley when unable to find the evidence of the suspected robbery.

Jake was picking up his things from the bed and cramming them back into his pockets. There hadn't been the least altercation between him and Shancy—which was precisely the way it should be.

It didn't take long to search the room. Besides the chair and bed, the only other furniture in the room was a scarred dresser with a mottled, upright mirror.

Markus jerked the drawers from the dresser, spilled out their meager contents, and cast the drawers aside. He tore the thin mattress from the bed, ripped it half apart, and tossed it into a corner.

The room was a mess when we left.

I didn't go down the narrow flight of stairs fast enough to

please him. I deliberately took my time. He gave me a vicious shove from behind.

I stumbled, but regained my balance halfway down. "Murderer!" I said, giving him the needle again. "Don't shove too hard! There are witnesses this time. Remember?"

He gave me another push, and I went reeling through the open doorway at the foot of the stairs and out into the street.

A crowd of curious onlookers had gathered, the way a crowd usually gathers when it spots a patrol car parked in front of a shabby hotel, and someone in the crowd had a camera.

Now that he had an audience, Markus put on a show. He grabbed my left wrist with his left hand, passed his right arm over my upper arm and back under my elbow in what is generally known as a policeman's "come-along" hold. Then he pressed my wrist down, bending my elbow backwards, and struggled along with me to the car, as if he were the sole agent that stood between a vicious criminal and an otherwise unprotected people.

I closed my eyes against the pain in my elbow and let him drag me to the car. Then, just as he released me, I brought the heel of my shoe down hard on his instep and ground it in with all

my weight. I really enjoyed that.

He would have slugged me, I am quite certain, if it hadn't been for the man with the camera. After the clamor the newspapers had created over the Stanley Hasselton affair, Markus didn't want pictures taken of him slugging a defenseless man who was now calmly getting into the back seat of the patrol car.

He got in beside me, jaws clamped, trying to keep the pain in his foot from showing in his eyes. I had dealt his ego a severe blow. He would not be able to live with himself now until he had retaliated.

The room we were taken to at the second precinct was not a large one. There were two doors opening into it, and along one wall was a row of tall, low-slung windows. There was a desk and two or three chairs. Lieutenant Brown sat in one of the chairs behind the desk. He looked up as we were brought in, his brown eyes traveling from me to Jake and back to me again. They remained fixed on my face for a second or two.

Markus and Shancy had left their caps, blouses, and gun belts in an outer room, and I noticed with satisfaction that Markus limped on his right foot, as if he had a crushed metatarsus or two. He sat down in a chair, straddling

it, facing me over its back. He was waiting, waiting for a possible third degree, itching to get his big hands on me in revenge.

"Have any trouble?" asked the lieutenant, gazing at my face again.

"Not at all!" Markus said, quickly. "None at all!"

I knew that my right cheek had puffed and, I guessed, had begun to discolor by now. Also, there was a sizable lump on my left jaw.

"Liar!" I said, letting the word ring loud and clear. "Look at my face. . . ."

"It was that way when we broke into the room!" Markus told the lieutenant, shooting a quick glance at Shancy.

Shancy didn't say anything.

"Liar!" I said again. "Tell the lieutenant how you kicked in an unlocked door! Tell him how you slapped me half off my chair, slammed me against the wall to frisk me! Tell him how you slugged me on the jaw, tore up the room, shoved me down the stairs, tried to dislocate my elbow. . . ."

Markus was on his feet, hate spilling from his eyes. "Listen, you!" he snapped. "You need to be brought down a bit, taught a little respect. . . ."

"Respect for what?" I said. "Respect for a stupid cop who enjoys pushing innocent people around?"

I walked up to him. "Respect for an inefficient clown I could take apart with my two hands any time I took the notion?"

His left hand suddenly fastened itself on my shirt front again, the way it had in the hotel room. I could hear the fabric begin to rip as the fingers tightened.

"Just a minute!" It was Lieutenant Brown. He had half risen from his chair and was leaning forward, his hands supporting him on the desk top. "Young man," he said to me, "I hope you understand that you have made some very grave statements concerning a member of this city's police force. You have accused Officer Markus of brutality, destructive procedure, and incompetence in making a proper arrest."

"All of that," I said, "and more! I could have disabled this moron the very moment he started frisking me."

"That," said the lieutenant, "I should like to see."

He came around to the side of the desk and seated himself on its edge. "Officer Markus," he said, "suppose you show me the frisking procedure you used on this young man. Show him just how efficient you can be."

"A pleasure!" said Markus, a light of triumph showing in his eyes. The hand at my shirt front

gave me a shove toward the wall behind me.

"This is it," I thought as I faced the wall and placed the palms of my hands flat against it a few inches above my head. If I submitted calmly to the frisking, I would simply be admitting that I had spoken empty words. And if I made an unsuccessful move against him, to prove his efficiency to the lieutenant he would slug me down or try to break my neck.

He came up behind me, warily, suspecting a trick, alert for any quick move I might make. He reached forward and began patting the sides of my shirt lightly. I shifted my entire weight to my left foot and let my head sag down between my arms, my eyes measuring distance and taking careful aim. I didn't feel sorry for the man. If anyone had something coming to him, Markus certainly did.

He shifted his search to my hips, and I moved one hand along the wall to attract his attention. Then I swung my right leg back—with the force of a kicking mule. The crunch of a solid leather heel against a shin bone was instantly drowned out by the sudden bellow of pain.

I wheeled about, ready to duck any fists that might be flying in my direction, but none were there.

Markus was hopping about on

his left foot, the one with the bad metatarsi, and was clasping his raised right leg in both hands. He hopped to the chair he had recently vacated, rested his foot on it, and began massaging the damaged bone, his face twisted and white beneath its swarthiness.

I had delivered his ego a devastating blow. I had made of him a blundering clown before his superior, the lieutenant, and when news of this leaked out to his fellow officers there would be snickers behind his back. They would laugh him off the force—unless, of course, he could retaliate, save face, in some manner.

"Now, maybe you'd like to show the lieutenant how efficient your policeman's come-along hold is," I said, "the one you nearly dislocated my elbow with." I let my left arm dangle limply and invitingly near him.

The pain in his eyes gave way to murderous rage. He spun from the chair, grabbed my wrist and quickly shot his right arm over and under the elbow, his intentions obvious.

Had I waited until he got completely set, he no doubt would have rendered my left arm useless for the rest of my life—but I didn't wait. In one unbroken series of moves, I leaped lightly into the air, turned into him, passed my right

arm over his head in a front headlock, and brought my wrist tightly up under one side of his jaw, twisting his neck. I let the downward sweep of my leap carry me backwards, his head firmly in my arm, neck twisted. I hit the floor in a sitting position and rolled back. The forward momentum I had given him did the rest. He did a flying somersault over me, and I gave his head an extra twist just before releasing it at the proper moment so he could take it along with him.

He landed against the far wall in an upside down position, and there was a crash of shattering glass as his flying heels took out the lower section of one of the windows.

He came up—groggy, bewildered, completely disoriented—and I could see that the madness in his eyes had reached a point of no return. Take the ego from an ego-maniac and you have only the maniac left.

"Damn you!" he gasped, wheeling toward me. "Damn you!" He came at me, head down, arms outstretched: "I'll fix you the same as I fixed your brother. . . ."

He didn't get a chance to finish the sentence. I placed the palm of my hand on the top of his head as he went past and gave it a quick shove downward. Off balance, he

plunged forward to the floor, flat on his face.

Jake, Shancy, and Lieutenant Brown stood in silence by the desk. Finally, the lieutenant glanced at Shancy and motioned with a nod of his head. Shancy crossed over to Markus, raised him to his feet, and led him toward one of the doors, a sick and battered killer.

I went over to the desk.

Lieutenant Brown shook his head, sadly. "It was a long shot," he said, "but I couldn't think of any other way to break him down. Knowing his extreme egoism, I had a good hunch it would work out all right. *Anyway, I had to find out!*"

He was silent for a moment. "Under the circumstances, no witnesses to Stanley Hasselton's manner of death, we may not be able to get a conviction. But of one thing I am certain. His kind is not wanted on this force, or on any other police force. He's finished!"

"Too bad we had to do it the hard way," I said, fingering the egg-sized knob on my right jaw.

I tossed my billfold to the desk,

and Jake tossed his alongside it. Each contained a faked driver's license bearing the name Paul J. Hasselton. Had Markus—sent on a false trail by the lieutenant—chosen Jake in the hotel room instead of me the outcome would have been slightly different. Jake, being head coach at the new officers' training school, would have handled the man much more deftly and with greater dispatch than I, the assistant coach. Also, Jake would have had an aching face instead of me.

"Mind if I come over to the third precinct gym and let you coach me in a few of those tricks?" the lieutenant asked me.

I shook my head. "You can work out with Jake," I said. "He's top man. Me, I'm going to take a few days off to heal up."

The lieutenant grinned.

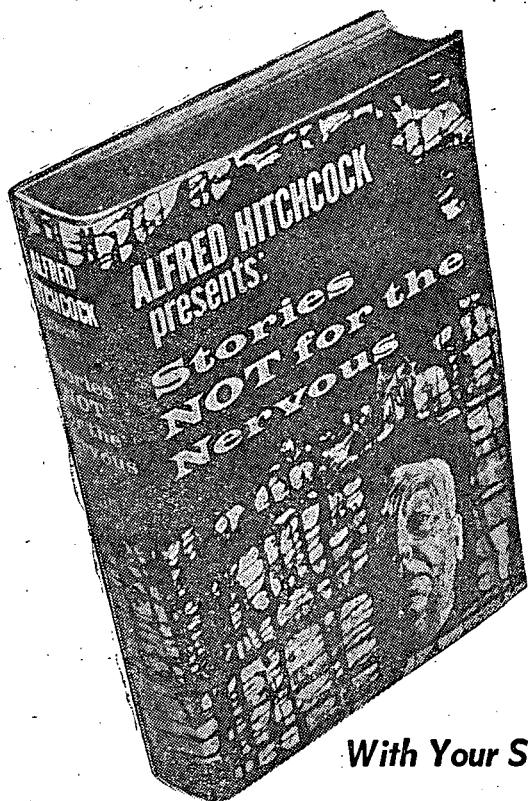
On our way out, I stopped and turned. "Sorry about your window," I said.

The lieutenant's grin widened. "Sorry about your face," he said.

I tried to grin back, but it didn't turn out too good.



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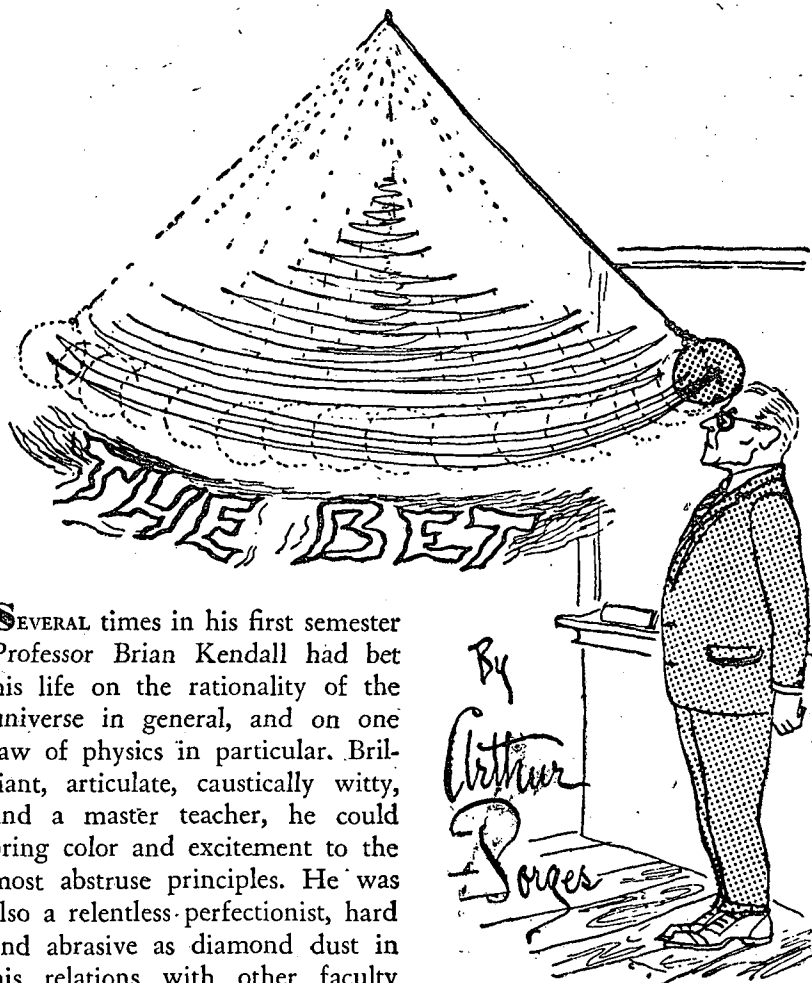
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One may search for a lifetime, yet find no force in the world more compulsive than self-preservation, with its myriad ramifications.



SEVERAL times in his first semester Professor Brian Kendall had bet his life on the rationality of the universe in general, and on one law of physics in particular. Brilliant, articulate, caustically witty, and a master teacher, he could bring color and excitement to the most abstruse principles. He was also a relentless perfectionist, hard and abrasive as diamond dust in his relations with other faculty

members. If a colleague wasn't first-rate in his field, whether it was English or chemistry, Kendall saw no virtue in the fellow. He had been brought into Midwestern University to revitalize its physical science department; the deadwood was being swept out in a veritable cloud of sawdust.

The particular demonstration that put his life in the balance was indeed absorbing to watch. He had suspended a ten pound metal ball from a wire fastened to the ceiling of the classroom. At rest, it hung a few inches above the floor. He would haul the sphere up and away from this lowest point until it was just high enough to touch his forehead. When released, it flew away from his face, rose to an equal height directly opposite, and then, with a seemingly irresistible swoop, swung right at his head. But Kendall didn't retreat even one-tenth of an inch. He knew—and bet his life on the truth of that comprehension—that the metal sphere could not rise any higher than its starting point; that, in fact, it would actually be a minute distance short of his forehead, because of friction at the pivot overhead, where the swivel was, and air resistance against the ball. Nevertheless, the gaping students involuntarily flinched en masse, breathing a fervent *ahhhh!* as the

metal bob hurtled directly toward Kendall's face.

So successful and popular was this stunt as a means of arousing interest in physics that the professor, ever the perfectionist, made plans to improve it. He requisitioned a big room adjacent to his lab. It was a kind of museum for the geology department, but Kendall overrode their objections, clearing out tons of junk, as he put it. The ceiling was much too low for an adequate pendulum, so he had a slot cut in it, and sent the chain up to a loft, fastening the swivel to a roof beam there. For a better weight, he wangled an empty mine casing from the local coast guard station; it was almost a yard in diameter, very impressive as a bob—roughly two hundred pounds of black metal.

Finally, while his numerous enemies at the university sneered at him for a flamboyant charlatan, he rigged a stand of the sort used by old-time photographers who had to keep their clients immobile for the long exposure needed in those days. It held Kendall's head vise-like in a fixed position, being fastened to the floor, and had heavy clamps for his cheeks. Obviously, the setup shouted, this man can't possibly pull away from the bob in time now, even if he wanted to. Before the clamps could be loos-

ened, his head would be pulp—but only if the ball rose higher on its return than at the start of its swing. It was all meant to show his absolute faith in the laws of energy.

As with any apparatus, there were last-minute changes needed. Kendall worked evenings on them. He decided against standing in place, and had a heavy armchair screwed to the floor. The clamps for his head were firmly attached to the back, and since the mine casing was so difficult to draw up into position, touching his face, Kendall provided a small winch. He would hook its wire to the bob's ring, crank the sphere into place, and after seating himself, complete the preparations by a last few turns that made the black iron touch his forehead. Then a tug at the quick-release mechanism would send the great ball flying away from him.

On a Friday evening, the professor returned to make a last check. There were two honor students at work in the lab; he gave them a curt nod on entering. Then he went through the small door at one side that led to the narrow, winding stairway serving the loft. They assumed he was inspecting the swivel.

A few minutes later he came down and, after entering the pendulum room through its only door

at the end of the lab, could be heard cranking the winch.

"At it again!" one of the students said, shaking his head. "He's nuts on that contraption, if you ask me."

"Let him be," the other boy said. "Best physics teacher they've ever had. Why, I've learned more from him—"

At that moment there was a loud, angry cry from behind the closed door of the pendulum room. The words were not clear, but one student thought Kendall yelled, "No! No—get away!" After that a shriller sound, more like a scream; then silence.

They stared at each other, first in surprise, then in dismay. Kendall didn't like to be disturbed when working, but this was different; maybe he needed help.

"We'd better go in there," one student said, leading the way.

They found Kendall strapped in the armchair. He was obviously dead, the mine casing having mashed in most of his face. It was still swinging gently to and fro, returning each time to within a few inches of the corpse.

It seemed that the professor had lost this particular bet with the universe.

As chief claims investigator for Great Lakes Mutual, Ben Joyce

had broken many tough cases, but this was the first time his only suspect was the famous Law of the Conservation of Energy. Working against him, so to speak, as defense counsel, were such distinguished scientists as Helmholtz, Maxwell, and Lord Kelvin—quite an array of talent!

Joyce was a widower, and had a problem at home far worse than any on the job. Her name was Melissa; she was twelve, had an IQ of almost two hundred, and a fierce dedication to science. It's bad enough to have the task of rearing any girl these days, but for a man alone, and with a young genius on his hands, the situation varied from urgent to desperate.

Ben had made the mistake of using Melissa for a sounding board. On his first case after the death of his wife, he felt lost without a sounding board, and turned to the girl. After that, he was hooked. Aside from being sharper than pure mustard powder, Mel enjoyed the experience so much, and had such a flair for the work that he found it quite impossible to discourage her.

"I'm your new, unpaid, permanent assistant, Daddy," she told him firmly—and that was that.

In the matter of Kendall's death, it was Joyce's business, as always, to pick the proper label from

three: accident, suicide, and murder. In case of the second, no insurance need be paid; that would save the company fifty thousand dollars. As between accident and murder, Great Lakes' concern was not financial, but rather to discourage death by other than natural causes as general policy.

For a week Joyce gathered data, questioning everybody at the university who might have relevant information. He was expert at getting people to talk, a talent vital to his work. Finally, having done all this preliminary investigating, he settled down one night across the table from Melissa, and began to summarize, for her benefit, and his own, the basic information.

"You've always hoped for a locked-room case, Mel," he said, "and this seems to be one in spades—blast it!"

She was a skinny redhead, with great eyes of electric blue; her mouth was rather large, but mobile and generous; and her voice usually had a lilt that warmed Joyce's heart. In spite of her rare intelligence, the child was not priggish, and he rejoiced in that fact. Perhaps by working with him on real cases, she avoided the academic detachment that poisoned some other young geniuses.

"Great!" she sang, glowing. "I've been just dying with impatience

all week while you made tons of notes, and I didn't ask one question, did I?"

"You've been a good girl," he said with mock unctuousness. "So now the reward."

She squirmed in excitement. "I read about his pendulum in the paper. Tell me about the locked room."

"Oh, no, young lady. First you brief me on the law—" he glanced at a note, "—of the conservation of energy. And remember, my major was *not* physics."

"The only point here," she said, "is very simple, Daddy. The pendulum bob has a certain amount of energy when it's raised to a given height—what it takes to lift it there. Now, in falling back down, and then rising at the end of its arc, it uses up that energy. If there were no friction or air resistance, the weight would reach exactly the same height above the ground as it started from; but since things aren't that perfect, it stops a tiny bit short. So it couldn't have hit the professor on its return swing."

"But it did!"

She cocked her head, giving him a shrewd stare. "If I see a thermometer going up, and a pond freezing at the same time, I know that somebody's applying heat to the bulb. Right?"

"You mean somebody added ex-

tra weight to the pendulum, eh?"

She sighed. "No, Daddy. That wouldn't change a thing. If the bob weighed ten pounds or a thousand, it still rises only as far as the beginning point. Only if it's given a push, or more weight, *after* being raised, would it go higher on the return."

"Ouch!"

"And," she continued inexorably, "if the room was really locked, then nobody could have tampered with the pendulum after Kendall lifted the bob for his trial run. Now, will you tell me about that?"

"Consider me on my back, with all four paws waving," he grinned. "It's like this, my child: only one door to the pendulum room; two students working in lab swear nobody else went in; ditto, the stairway to the loft. So Kendall was definitely alone when your nice law was suddenly repealed."

She made a moue. "Windows?"

"None in loft; two small ones in pendulum room. Not big enough for a man, even if fully open, but they go up only halfway, anyhow. Kendall had put heavy stops in; valuable stuff in the lab, he felt, should be protected from casual thieves. I assure you, my love, nobody came through those windows."

The blue eyes were very bright. "A real locked-room case, at last!"

For three hours Joyce went over his notes with the girl. Suicide was quite unacceptable; Kendall was at his peak both in research and administratively; he ruled with an iron hand, exerting influence even over other departments not actually his concern.

"Like the case of Dr. Kent," Joyce said. "Poor old guy. Been teaching biology for years—sixty-one; due to retire in four more years. Not Kendall's business, but he went out of his way to pressure the administration to dismiss the man. Not a biologist; never has been one. Just a zoo-keeper! The physicist had said at the meeting. The kids liked him—not that a school can put too much faith in them in rating a teacher. They may go for a guy who's easy or entertaining, instead of competent and demanding."

"Kendall must have offended a lot of people there, made a scad of enemies," the girl said.

"Too true. Besides firing most of the teachers in chemistry and geology, he scuttled a few in other departments. No PhD, no papers, no reputation, he'd say. Get rid of him! We can't afford him."

"I rather agree," Mel said, with all the callous idealism of her youth and bias. "Who gets his insurance—if you pay any?"

"His wife, but she's in the clear.

They got along exceptionally well, and she's rich herself."

"No clues in the room itself?"

"Nothing the cops or I found—except one tiny, tiny angle."

"Well, what was it?" she demanded. "Don't hold out, Daddy."

"The place was very neat, and the bob freshly painted glossy black. But there was one greasy smear on it. I wiped some off with a bit of tissue." He reached into his shirt pocket, abstracted a mass of crumpled white paper, and held it out. "Have a sniff."

She put the tissue to her nose.

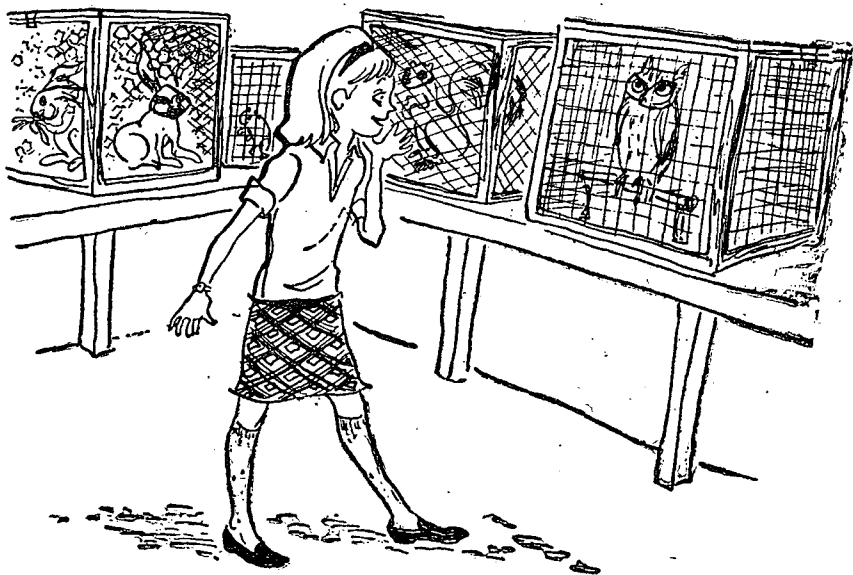
"Ester? Fruity enough; banana oil?"

"Smells like it," he agreed. "Suggest anything?"

"Not right off. Give me time."

"Sure, but not now. I'm beat. Let's adjourn until tomorrow."

The next evening they sat down again, the table piled high with papers. Mel had skipped school to visit Midwestern with him on a tour. They had taken in not only the scene of the crime, but all the other buildings on campus. The girl, who loved animals, was particularly delighted with Dr. Kent's "zoo," with its rabbits, mice, guinea pigs, a horned owl, assorted monkeys, a chimp, snakes, and even that most mischievous and endearing beastie, a coatimundi. Kent's real interest, they soon



learned, lay more in the field of animal behavior and psychology than the modern researches on RNA and genetics. It is doubtful that he could have explained the lymphatic system of amphioxus.

"I like him," Melissa told her father later. "He's nice."

"No PhD, no papers, no reputation," he said, heavily ironical. "Thought you agreed with Kendall about dumping him."

"I changed my mind," she said sweetly. "A prerogative of my sex, if you'll pardon the expression." Then she added thoughtfully, "Where does Professor Kent live?"

"He has some kind of ranch, or old farm, away from the city. Lives

there with his wife. She's been an invalid for years. That's why, I suppose, he's hung onto the job to the bitter end. Most of the men here quit at sixty, even though the pension system is lousy."

"You should have a look at his farm," Mel said, her face grave.

He gulped. "What for?"

"I'm not sure. But I would guess —no, I'd better not. Just go, and tell me what you see. Check the barn, and other buildings like that."

"But what am I looking for, confound it?"

"I don't know," she said demurely. "You're the investigator. Maybe nothing."

He knew his daughter; she wasn't about to add anything now.

"Okay. I'll pay Kent's place a sneak visit Monday, while he's teaching." He cast a rueful glance at their list of theories, each with a heavy line through it. "Are we absolutely sure these are kaput? 'Pole prodding bob through window.' Too far; wrong angle. 'Shooting or throwing something through window against bob.'"

"No shot was heard," she said. "And no bullet or pellet would have anything like the necessary mass. Something gave that bob a good thrust of twenty pounds or so, I expect."

"'Pulling chain in loft.' Nobody there; only one door; and practically speaking, very difficult to get proper leverage on chain that high up. Hmm. They're kaput, all right. So it's the farm, says you. Yes, dear, says I. And now, let's knock off; your old dad is tired."

When Mel returned from school the following afternoon, her father was pacing the floor, waiting for her. His face was a dead giveaway, and she grinned impishly at the sight of it.

"You found something! What?"

"I know what—but 'why' I don't know, or what 'what' means," he said, ludicrously sorrowful. "There was an armchair in the barn; a heavy one, like Kendall's. And a

new hook, freshly installed, if I'm any judge, in the roof. But that's all. It must mean something, I know, after hearing from you, but what?"

"I was afraid of that," she said, her face dark. "I almost wanted to be wrong. I like Dr. Kent."

"So you said. But you like me too, just a little, I hope. I'm stuck on this case. So give already."

"It was the banana," she said, "and the windows—oh, a lot of little things—and Kendall's being so mean to the old man. Dr. Kent set up his own pendulum in the barn. You didn't see any bob?" she demanded.

"No. Built his own pen— Why, for heaven's sake?"

"To train that adorable little chimp—they're bright, you know—smartest of all primates, probably. They love to jump and swing, too. He'd sit in the chair, let the bob fly, and the chimp was taught to grab the bob at the far side of its arc, and hang on until it came back to Kent. Banana for a reward, plus love, I think."

"Mel! Are you saying—?"

"Kent must have passed by the back of that pendulum room on his way to and from the 'zoo,' and everybody knew what Kendall was working on all that week. Kent could count on teaching a clever chimp in just a few tries since it

was a natural activity for a monkey to begin with.

"The night of the murder—it was murder, I'm afraid," she added solemnly, "Kent waited by the window, and when Kendall was strapped in, and had released the bob, the old man pushed his chimp through the window (he'd fit easily) and said, 'Go, girl!' or the like. She jumped to the bob, adding about thirty pounds of weight. Kendall saw her, knew what that extra mass would do. That's when he shouted, 'No! No—get away!' He tried to get the clamps off fast, but there wasn't time. The chimp's weight would bring that bob a few inches higher than its starting point. Two hundred pounds!" Her face was pale. "Horrible!"

"And the chimp left that little smear of banana."

"Yes. Kent was probably soothing her with bits before she went in, and he must have rewarded her when she came out, too."

"I think you've got it; I know you have." He frowned then. "But as a court case? Still, there's the chair; and I'll find the bob—"

But he didn't. Evidently Kent somehow learned about a man inspecting his barn because, when the insurance investigator came back with the police and a warrant, all the evidence was gone.

"Well," he told Mel heavily, "the old man will now hang on until sixty-five—one more murderer who got away with it. Pity."

"Kendall bet that the universe was rational," the girl said, "and that may be true. But some murderers aren't so rational, so Kendall lost on a foul!"



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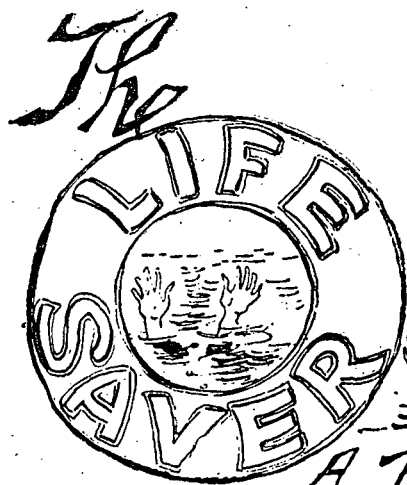
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Most sincerely,
Pat Hitchcock
Sherman Oaks, California

An Indian giver, as everyone knows, is one who gives only to take away, but not always is the act relegated to the category of a harmless pastime.



A Novella

*by
Lyle Tottle*

BENNY'S Cottage was a cocktail lounge few unescorted women would venture into, especially on a Saturday night. Eleanor Matthews was one of the few. Five minutes had passed since Danny, alone in his green sports car, had watched her saunter through the front door. Five more minutes would be just about right, just long enough not to arouse her suspicion when he "accidentally" bumped into her. If he waited much longer than that, he might

find her already occupied with some other man. Too, the faster he could get her out of the bar the less risk of anyone later remembering his face, even though that part of it wasn't too much of a worry. He'd watched her go home with

four different strangers in a week.

She was alone at the bar when Danny, wearing T-shirt, denims and sneakers walked up beside her. He ordered a beer, then casually turned toward her. Her heavily-painted lips parted slightly in a smile.

Danny feigned a thoughtful

frown. "Don't I know you?" He knew her all right, knew enough about her to—

She stared directly into his blue eyes. "With your looks, honey, you don't need a line."

He snapped his fingers. "I remember now." He reminded her about the beach. She remembered too, and insisted on buying him a drink. It was the least she could do, she told him, after what had happened.

Later, in her livingroom, as he lowered the glass from his lips, the bourbon set fire to his tonsils, almost bringing tears to his eyes. He hoped she hadn't noticed. She herself swallowed her whiskey like a Little Leaguer gulps cherry-flavored soda after a hot ball game.

She seemed barely awake now, her head against his broad shoulder, her legs drawn up almost under her. A bottle on the coffee table in front of them showed less than two fingers of whiskey. She sat up with a start. "Booze almost gone," she announced, thick-tongued but concerned, her mouth twisted in a grotesque smirk.

She picked up the bottle, her hand wrapped around the neck of it like a sailor hugging a cold beer, and put it to her mouth. Dropping her head back, she tipped the bottle upright. The liquor disappeared. Her arm

dropped numbly. Whiskey trickled down her chin. She smiled drunkenly, then without opening her eyes, she said, "Hey! Forgot your name again."

"Ed," he lied. It would do no harm, really, to tell her his real name, because— But then, unnecessary chances were foolish.

"Eddie! Yeah, thass right. Remember now." She sank back on the couch.

He knew she was twenty-six. She looked thirty-five or forty. Her face was thin, wrinkled, her cheeks sunken. With her face



filled out, she might have been attractive, even beautiful. Now, with her eye makeup running and her powder thick and splotchy, she looked dissipated, prematurely aged, a discarded piece of human rubbish. She was useless to herself, or to anyone else. She wouldn't be missed.

The phone rang and Danny's hand involuntarily shot toward it, but he stopped himself in time. It rang again, demanding attention. The shock of the sound to him was the shock of diving into a cold ocean after sitting under a hot sun for several hours. His hand trembled, and he was suddenly, acutely aware of how much on edge he had been the whole night. When it came right down to it like this, he was always a little nervous.

Eleanor Matthews didn't seem to hear the phone, not until the fourth ring. She'd fallen asleep, a drunkard's deep, sudden sleep. Now she stirred, tried to focus bleary eyes, glancing at Danny as if to ask why he wasn't doing something about that annoying sound, and reached for the phone.

"Hello," she said, then waited. Danny heard a man's voice, the words too muffled to understand. Her nose wrinkled in anger—or disgust—Danny wasn't certain which.

"I told you! Leave me alone! We're through!" she closed her eyes a moment, listening, then shook her head. "We've had it, Carl. No! No! No! I don't want to try again. No! I can't see you. I don't want to talk about it." She slammed down the receiver.

The exchange had sobered her somewhat. Then she seemed to remember where she was and who she was with—a boy almost—somebody to occupy her mind, to make her forget. She took a cigarette from a bowl on the table, and worked the lighter between trembling hands. Danny offered her no help. She took a deep drag and exhaled a thick billow of smoke. "Don't worry—we're separated. He's filing for a divorce. They all do . . . sooner or later."

She looked around. "Be a sweet boy and get more booze for Ellie from the kitchen, will you?"

"Don't you think you've had enough?"

She slammed her hand on the table, losing her cigarette. "You, too? A perfect stranger! Why is it everybody has to try to reform me? Look, honey, *I want* to drink. *I like* to drink. I'm a lush. I'm gonna die young! That's *my* business. Right?" She broke down, sobbing, her face buried in her hands.

Danny reached down and

picked up her cigarette. He put it in the ashtray, and stood up. Not yet twenty-one, he was tall, broad-shouldered, darkly tanned. His biceps bulged against the sleeves of his T-shirt. His blond hair, sun-bleached, was crewcut. His features bore a strange mixture of male handsomeness and feminine delicacy. His eyes were deep ocean blue, his cheekbones pronounced above a broad jaw. "Excuse me." He turned and softly walked away from her.

She watched him move across the livingroom. "Hey! The kitchen's that way—the booze is in there."

He stopped and looked back over his shoulder. "I'm going to the bathroom."

"Oh." She giggled and put her hand to her mouth.

In the bathroom, he used his handkerchief to turn on the tub faucets. Deliberately, he adjusted the hot and cold water. The tub began to fill. He hadn't closed the door behind him. By the sound of her steps, he knew she was staggering across the livingroom, and he turned as she appeared in the doorway.

"What are you doing?"

"Running bath water," he answered simply, smiling. Dimples cut into his cheeks, but his eyes studied her with an icy coldness.

"I thought you might—like a bath." His manner changed. "I just thought—" he felt giddy, detached, "it would feel good."

"Me take a bath?" She looked from him to the tub and back to his face. "Are you nuts?"

Something flashed in his mind, and he moved forward, bringing his hands toward her throat. She staggered back. He stopped, fought to control himself.

"You're tired." He breathed deeply. "I thought soaking in a hot tub would feel good. Besides," he told her, putting his hands on her shoulders, "I could wash your back."

She relaxed, and laughed nervously. "Well, this is one I never heard. But I like it, I like it." She kissed him on the lips, her breath stinging his nostrils. "What happens then? Do you tuck me into a nice warm bed?"

"Why don't we wait and see?" He smiled. "I might just do that."

"Okay, surprise me." She unbuttoned her dress, and pulled it over her head. Slip, panties, and bra followed. Naked, she stood before him without modesty. He hadn't made a move toward her. She sat down in the tub and let herself slide down into the warm water. "HMMMMMM, it does feel good."

He picked up a bar of soap and

a washcloth. Muscles jumped along his wrists and forearms as he began sudsing the cloth. Silently, he soaped her shoulders, gently massaging her skin with his fingers. His hands moved closer to her neck.

She closed her eyes. "Hey this is service."

"Give me your hands." He spread the washcloth open on his palm, and she placed both hands in it. His fingers tightened like steel bands, choking off the circulation of blood in her fingers. He read the terror in her eyes. Holding both her hands in his hand, he moved them to her stomach, and drove his fist into her midsection.

She struggled against the pain. He grabbed a towel from the rack at his side. She was wide awake now, terrified.

She opened her mouth to scream, but he shoved the towel against her teeth and pushed her head down into the water. She kicked and thrashed, trying to break loose from his grip. Roughly, he jabbed her hands into her own stomach, knocking the wind out of her. The strength to fight left her. Her struggles weakened. She tried to shake her head free from his hand, but he held her down, moving the towel away from her mouth before it was too late.

She must not suffocate. She had to drown. That was important. She had to die that way, and that way only.

He looked straight ahead at the black tile squares. Then he closed his eyes, and still held her down. He started counting, slowly—one . . . two . . . He couldn't tell when it was that she stopped moving. At the count of twenty, he stopped, and looked down at her body.

Water still ran from the faucet, too rapidly for the overflow drain to handle it, and spilled over the rim of the tub. He was kneeling on the floor, and his white denims darkened wetly from the knees down.

When he stood up water covered the bathroom floor. Carefully, he wrapped the towel around her head. He used his handkerchief again to turn off the faucets. With the water off, the house became very still.

Before leaving the room, he paused to be certain he hadn't touched anything that would hold a fingerprint. He took his time in the livingroom too, wiping the glass he had used and the whiskey bottle. He polished clean the knob on the front door as he stepped out into the night.

The L.A. night was damp and

cold, permeated with a light, misty fog. It was past twelve o'clock when Andy eased the unmarked squad car over to the curb. Stu Blake ambled out of the nearest apartment house, one of the plain, gray, square kind that looks like a prison building.

Andy Ettinger smiled to himself as he watched the lumbering gait of the large young man hurrying toward the car. His latest partner must be cursing the day, not many years ago, that he decided to be a police detective. A kid thinks of all the glamour, never gives much thought to the prospect of being roused out of a warm bed to hurry out into a cold night to look at an often colder body. A kid doesn't think about that end of it, not until he's had to go through it a few times. If Andy had a buck for every night it had happened to him in twenty-three years, he could afford to tell the department to keep his pension.

Andy reached across the car and jerked back the door handle to let the door swing open. Stu got in and closed the door without slamming it.

"That's a good boy."

Stu looked at him with sleepy eyes. "Oh. Sure. Why wake everybody else up? Just because we're a couple nuts who don't know when it's time to be home in bed."

Andy was tempted to make a crack about Stu's bride of six months. Instead, he remarked, "You want regular hours? So you should have been a dentist."

"That's what my old man always said." Stu frowned. "In fact, Sally was saying that just the other day."

"Already?"

"What do you mean—already? We've been married almost seven months."

"Sorry, kid, I forgot you were an old married man."

"Another bathtub deal?" Stu yawned.

Andy nodded. "Over in the Wilshire District this time. Andrews phoned me soon as it came in. A woman; husband found her dead, floating in the tub around," he glanced at his watch, "twenty minutes ago."

"Sound like the others?"

"Andrews thought so. That's why he called me."

"How come nobody ever gets murdered in the daytime, at a decent hour?"

"Same reason babies are always born at three in the morning."

Stu grunted. "Ask a stupid question and—"

"When's the big day?"

"Doctor says between Christmas and New Year's."

"Maybe you'll get a haircut to

celebrate, huh?" Andy looked at the young man beside him. Stu was twenty-five, an ex-football player, ruggedly handsome, with a head of thick brown hair that refused to be controlled. Andy had been ribbing him about it for the month they'd been working together.

"I know. It's tickling my ears. So, who has time to go to a barber?"

"You're complaining? I wish I had a reason to go to a barber." Andy brushed his hand across his own bald head. They both laughed.

Thirty minutes later they stopped before a white, Spanish-style stucco house with iron bars on the windows and red clay tiles on the roof. A patrol car was parked in the driveway.

A red-faced police officer opened the front door for them. "Hi, Andy."

Andy nodded, and looked past the policeman's shoulder to see a man sitting on a couch. "Matthews?"

"Yes, sir." He spoke softly. "Been sitting there, just sort of moaning and crying the whole time."

"Just you and he here?"

"Yes, sir. The lab boys are on their way."

Andy walked over to the couch

and introduced himself and his partner. Matthews, a middle-aged man wearing a well-tailored dark blue suit, stood up to shake hands with them.

"You discovered your wife's body, Mr. Matthews?"

Matthews nodded abruptly. He opened his mouth to answer, but a sob choked off his words.

Andy looked around the room. Besides the front door, there were two other doors, one leading to the kitchen and one leading to a hallway. Two sets of wet footprints on the rug pointed to the hallway door. Andy took a closer look.

"I'll take the bathroom. You can ask Mr. Matthews a few questions when he's up to it."

Stu nodded. "Right."

When Andy was on a case, he was the first man into the murder room, and he went in alone. Nobody else entered until he said so. A few rookies had found it difficult to understand, but Stu hadn't given him any trouble. Walking close to the wall, Andy made a wide track around the wet imprints.

The floor of the bathroom was wet. The water in the tub was level with the bottom of the overflow outlet. The woman in the tub, a towel wrapped around her head and covering her face, ap-

peared at first to be taking a beauty bath. A closer inspection showed she wasn't breathing. Andy left her exactly as he'd found her, leaving even the towel untouched. A bar of white soap was floating against her leg. Andy noted it had a thick softened outer layer, the way soap gets when it's left in water. No chance for prints. Except for the wet floor and the woman in the tub, he saw nothing unusual—no signs of a struggle, nothing remiss. As he studied the room, he heard Stu questioning Matthews in the next room.

Matthews said, "I rang the doorbell three times. She didn't answer. Her car was out front. She never walked anywhere. It was late. I was sure she was home. The lights were on. I was afraid something was wrong."

"Why should you think that, Mr. Matthews?"

"You see, Eleanor—my wife—she, well, she ran around. She was—was always meeting fellows in bars and bringing them home. She did it whenever I was out of town. She didn't think I knew." After a painful pause he continued, "Anyway, I waited. Then I let myself in. I still have a key to the house."

"You *still* have one?"

Andy smiled. The kid was turning out to be a good interrogator. It took a good man to catch the

subtle, but important, remarks in a suspect's story.

"We've been separated for two months. That's why I came over—to try to patch things up."

If the woman had died any other way, or if Matthews hadn't struck him as such a decent sort, Andy would have jumped him right then. He could write a book just about the homicide cases he'd handled where a husband trying for a reconciliation had ended up by killing his wife, usually along with the boyfriend with whom he found her.

"Go on," Stu said.

"I let myself in. I called her name. No answer, so I looked around the house. That's when I found her."

"You touched nothing?"

"Only the telephone, when I called the police."

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

Silence a moment. "That would be about a week ago. That's why I had to see her tonight. I couldn't stand being away from her. I had to see her—even though she told me not to come."

"When did she tell you that?"

"I phoned her around nine o'clock. She—she hung up on me," he stammered.

Andy came back into the living-room. "Did she seem upset?"

"No, not anymore than usual. Not so much that I'd ever dream she'd kill herself."

"Kill herself?" Andy and Stu said it at the same time. Stu let Andy go ahead. "You think she committed suicide?"

"Of course. Didn't she? I've always been afraid of something like this."

Andy shook his head. "I hardly think so, Mr. Matthews. It's practically impossible for a person to drown himself."

"An accident then? Maybe she hit her head. Maybe she . . . passed out."

"The coroner can tell us more about that." Andy was convinced Matthews wasn't implicated. "That's all for tonight, Mr. Matthews. I know it's Sunday, but I'd like to ask you to come down to my office tomorrow, I mean today. It's important."

Matthews used his handkerchief to dry his face, then he blew his nose. "I've got to work. I don't know how I'll do it, but I have to. I'm a missile engineer. We're on a crash program, and if I don't get done what has to be done by Monday morning, we'll have two hundred people sitting idle."

"Sometimes it's better to bury yourself in work." Andy spoke from experience. The day after his wife had been killed in a smashup

on the freeway, he was investigating an ax murder in East Los Angeles.

"I'll be through around four o'clock. I'll come down then."

"I wouldn't ask you, but it is important. I doubt very much that your wife's death was an accident. Someone murdered her. Is there anything you can think of now that might help us find out who did it?"

Matthews shook his head in bewilderment. "No! Eleanor drank a lot, but she had no enemies. Everyone who knew her liked her, and tried to help her."

"Okay, we'll talk about it tomorrow. You can go now."

Matthews mumbled, "Thank you," then got up slowly, and moved toward the door, pausing to glance once at the bathroom in disbelief.

The experts, two of them, got there right after Matthews left. The rug was thick and just absorbent enough to hold the shape of the imprints. They sprinkled plaster of Paris on the deepest indentations.

The shoe print was Andy's second clue in five cases. Several blond hairs, an inch or so long—barely long enough for the victim to grab but she had managed it in her struggle—had been found at the scene of the second killing.

"We have a lot to go on, sir, the color of his hair and the size of his shoe." Stu wasn't too encouraged.

"More'n a lot of cases I've seen. We've got the top and the bottom. All we have to do is fill in the middle."

The medical examiner wasn't much help. "Can't say for sure just yet, but my guess is she was just plain drowned. No signs of strangulation, no bruises or abrasions. No wounds that I can see. We'll know better after the autopsy."

"How long has she been dead?" Andy asked.

"Being in that hot water complicates things, but I'd guess three or four hours."

"You do a lot of guessing, don't you?" Stu said.

The coroner looked at Andy. "Nother fresh one, huh?"

"Yeah, they stuck me with another one." Andy shrugged, and winked at Stu when the coroner wasn't looking. He figured rookies had a hard enough time of it.

Playa del Rey, a beach town almost directly west of L.A., lies on the coast between Laguna Beach and Malibu. Playa's beach is less crowded during the summer than most of the adjacent beaches. There's a lot of sand but no place

to park a car. It's a wide beach, with a long walk to the water from any place you're lucky enough to find for your car.

It was late in the season, with one of the last good Sunday crowds. Danny always hated to see the end of summer, the deserted beaches. The usual heavy afternoon breeze was building up, and the surf was getting choppy. It had been a slow day. He'd pulled a middle-aged businessman, a teenaged girl, and two surfers out of rip tides.

He sat up on his chair-tower, his eyes taking a swinging glance of the water every few minutes. He read the bodies in the surf as easily as words on a page; a swimmer in trouble was as obvious as a word printed upside down. The most obvious potential rescue was a swimmer away from the crowd, out too far.

He was aware of her presence before he looked down. He felt her eyes on him.

"Hi, Danny." There she was, looking up at him. She was eighteen or nineteen, with long blonde hair blowing loose. She smiled, and he couldn't help but smile back. Her solid one-piece blue suit wasn't skimpy by modern standards, but she managed to look sexier in it than most girls do in bikinis. Her young body would



look good in a baggy potato sack.

"Hi, Maggie."

"You saved another one. I saw the whole thing." Her eyes sparkled. Her hair bounced about her shoulders as she tilted her head and shaded her eyes against the sun. Every day she told him the same things, about how wonderful he was. He could never be sure just how much his saving her life had to do with it—he'd pulled her out a week ago—but he didn't really care. She embarrassed him with her open hero worship, but he liked it and he liked her.

He made his way down the ladder from the chair to the sand.

"How many's that for today?"

"How many what?"

"You know, silly. How many people did you save?"

"You mean, how many did I help out of the water?"

"Come on, Danny, how many?"

"Only four. Look, Maggie, probably none of them would have drowned. I just keep them from getting tired out there."

"Yeah, sure." She got serious. "Danny? Is there something wrong with me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Am I ugly or what? It's been a whole week. You haven't even asked me for my phone number."

"Well, we're not supposed to do

that. Besides, how do you know I didn't look it up? I've got your name and address. Remember that card we filled out?"

"Why haven't you called then?"

"I've been busy. I'm shy, too."

"You're fooling again, Danny. I don't have a phone. My father had it taken out."

"He sounds strict. What would he think of you talking to a strange boy on the beach?"

"You're *not* a strange boy—you saved my life. He wants to meet you, to thank you. How about it?"

"Okay. You doing anything to-night?"

She bit her lower lip excitedly. "No."

"Would you like to go to dinner and take in a movie?"

"Danny, Danny, I'd love to. Come by around six?"

Carl Matthews stepped into the office at four-thirty.

"Thanks for coming, Mr. Matthews." Andy shook his hand. "I'll try to make this as brief as possible."

Andy informed him of his constitutional rights and asked for his permission to tape the interview. Matthews insisted that he needed no attorney to be present. "I've nothing to hide. I don't need a lawyer to help me tell you the truth. I'm here to help you find

the killer, not to figure out ways to prevent implicating myself. I suppose a lawyer would tell me not to say anything. We'd never get anywhere that way."

Andy admired the man's sincerity, but he'd seen a lot of innocent men become entangled in a bushel of trouble by not having an attorney with them. However, Andy wasn't going to press the point.

"I want you to start at the beginning, from the time you met Mrs. Matthews until—well, until now. Don't leave out anything. Tell me everything that comes into your mind."

Carl Matthews had known Eleanor for a year and a half. They had met at a party, fallen in love, and married two months later. She wasn't drinking then. She had tried to tell him that she'd once been an alcoholic, but he hadn't been able to believe her. She'd been married twice before. She wanted children badly, but neither of her first two husbands had been able to give her children. Matthews told Andy how she had started to drink after about a year, how he had realized when it was too late that she was turning to drink because of a feeling of inadequacy.

It was toward the end of the interview when Matthews said, "I really thought she had committed suicide when I found her in the

bathroom. She spoke many times of trying it. In fact, I really think she was trying to kill herself, drown herself, in the ocean just a few weeks ago. The lifeguard got to her just in time. There was a heavy undertow—down at Playa del Rey. She—"

"Playa del Rey?"

"Yes, we went to the beach every chance we had."

Butterflies brushed their wings against the lining of Andy's stomach. Andy claimed he got butterflies in his stomach when the pieces begin to fit together. Some oldtimers claimed their feet itched, or their ears burned, or their mouths got dry, like a boxer when he's got that feeling the next punch is going to do it. This was one of the times.

Andy stood up. "Mr. Matthews, I'm not going to keep you any longer. You've been very helpful."

"That's all you want to ask me?"

Andy had a good feeling about Matthews. "That's all for now. Just keep yourself available in case I need you."

"All right, I'll do that."

As soon as Matthews left, Andy dug out the files on the other bathtub cases. It was in the third case, the Johnson fellow, that he thought it had come up. He was right. He found it there in the in-

terview with Johnson's wife. He read the transcription:

"Detective Ettinger: Is there anything else you can tell us?"

Mrs. Johnson: It seems so funny that just a week ago, poor Leonard almost drowned in the ocean . . . right down at Playa del Rey . . . and now this in the . . . in his own bathroom."

It required seven phone calls and an hour for Andy to check out his hunch. The pieces fit together. All five victims had been pulled from the surf at Playa del Rey during the past four months.

Andy dialed Stu's number. "I'm down at the office. Be here in fifteen minutes. We've got work to do."

By the time Stu arrived Andy had arranged to meet Paul Langly, the captain of the Playa del Rey beach guard crew, at Langly's office.

Langly was waiting for them when they got there. A husky red-head with freckles, Langly failed to understand why they wanted a list of all the beach guards who had worked Playa del Rey during the summer. When they told him what they had in mind, he came up with something better—the file of rescues. The guards must fill out a white card for each rescue, showing name, age, and address of the victim. There they were, all

five names, and all with the same name at the bottom—Danny Gruen. Gruen lived in nearby El Segundo. They headed over there on the double.

A silver-haired woman answered their ring.

Andy told her who they were. "We're looking for a Mr. Dan Gruen, ma'am."

"That's my son." Her eyes clouded. "Why are you—Danny hasn't done anything wrong. He's a good boy. He's *never* done anything wrong—not Danny."

"Is he home?"

"No, he's out, on a date with a girl, a nice girl, he told me."

"Do you know the girl?"

"No, Danny didn't tell me her name. He doesn't always tell me who—"

Andy interrupted. "That's not important, Mrs. Gruen. This is an emergency. We'll have to search Danny's room."

"But I don't think you—" she started to object.

"Did your son bring a package home from work today?" Andy glanced at Stu, and caught the look of puzzlement on his face.

"I don't know. I didn't see him come in."

"A clock—a small clock. It was left at your son's lifeguard station as a prank. It's really a bomb and we don't know when it's set to go

off." Andy ignored Stu's cough. Sometimes, you had to stretch the rules of the game a little.

"Who would—"

"We don't have time to explain, Mrs. Gruen." Andy's tone was urgent. "Your son may have left it in his room. I think you'd better leave the house while we search for it."

"Are you sure—"

"Yes, ma'am. Some nutty kid at the beach was jealous because his girl kept flirting with your son." He turned to Stu. "It could blow any minute, Stu. You'd better help Mrs. Gruen outside. I'll have a look. No use both of us taking a chance."

Stu nodded, and took a firm grip on the woman's arm. Andy waited until they were outside.

He found the boy's room. It was in good condition—for a college kid's room. The bed wasn't made, several men's magazines were scattered near the bed, pajamas were draped over a chair, pennants took up half the wall space. All in all, it looked like a normal, growing young man's pad. Andy looked under the mattress. He searched the closet. A pair of tennis shoes lay in the corner—they were damp. On the floor was a discarded cardboard container. Andy traced the outline of both shoes on the cardboard, folded it,

and put it in his coat pocket. If he tried to walk out with the shoes, it might look phony. Besides, without a search warrant, the shoes might not be admissible as evidence.

He found what he was looking for in the bottom drawer of the dresser, a small notebook with names in it, pages and pages of names. Most of the names had lines through them. Some had crosses. Andy recognized five that had been crossed out. Four names were still open. He took a deep breath as he tucked the book into his pocket.

He was about to leave when he remembered one more thing. He went to the bathroom. There was a hairbrush, the kind men use on short haircuts, on the basin. He picked several hairs from it and dropped them into a small envelope he always carried.

"Nothing in there," he told Mrs. Gruen and Stu when he got outside. "Your son has a car, hasn't he, ma'am?"

She told them what kind of a car her son owned, and found the license number on a gas credit card bill.

They told Mrs. Gruen not to worry about her son's safety, that they would be sure to find him before anything happened.

Back in the car, Stu wasn't so

sure they had done the right thing. "You didn't have to do that. You scared the daylight's out of her."

Andy handed him the little black book. "I had to save time. That girl is in trouble."

Andy radioed for a car to be sent to Danny's house while Stu looked through the names.

"I see what you mean. Looks like four names are still open, three of them women."

"Yeah," was all Andy said. He was thinking about that nice girl Danny Gruen's mother had been talking about.

As they drove along Sepulveda, the fog began to roll in from the ocean.

"Your folks are nice, Maggie." Danny meant it.

"Thank you. They like you, too."

"How can you tell?"

"Oh, Papa didn't make a big deal about my deadline. When he doesn't like my date he makes a big deal about getting in by twelve-thirty."

"He watches you pretty close. Not many parents do these days."

"I don't mind." She smiled. "Papa's fair about it. Some girls' folks don't care what they do, where they go, who they go with. I don't think I'd like that."

Danny glanced at her. "How

come so far away? Come on, scoot over so I don't have to yell."

"I thought you were shy." She slid over on the seat, moving closer to him without crowding him. "Where are we going to eat?"

"Like I told your father, Redondo Beach. You like fish, I hope."

"Love it."

Andy and Stu found phone numbers listed for two of the three women. Andy phoned one, Stu the other. Andy's was a Torrance woman, at home with her husband. Andy explained the situation to the man without going into detail and told him to keep his wife home until they heard from the police. The other gal was an S.C. coed. Stu talked to her father, who agreed to bring her home from her sorority house until things cleared up. The third girl, Maggie Randolph, wasn't listed in the phone book.

The two detectives headed for Maggie's house.

They got to the house an hour after the girl had left with "such a fine looking young man," as Maggie's father put it. Andy figured there was no sense in overly alarming them. He told them they wanted Danny for questioning, routine questioning.

"Did they say anything about their plans for the night?" Stu

asked. "Where they were going?"

"We always know where our girl is going," Mr. Randolph answered. "They're going to have dinner in Redondo Beach, then they're going to see one of those Elvis movies."

"Did they say where for dinner?"

Mrs. Randolph volunteered, "No, but Danny said he knew a fine place for a fish dinner."

"How about the show?"

They both shook their heads.

"I think we have enough to go on," Andy told Stu. They gave the Randolphs a number to use just as soon as their girl got home. They didn't tell them they would have a car sent to the house to wait.

By the time they reached the Redondo Beach city limits the fog was so thick they had slowed down to five to seven miles an hour. Store fronts were barely visible from the street.

"Fog picked a great night," Stu moaned.

"Yeah, it's going to be rough."

Maggie blotted her lips and set aside her napkin.

"Good?" Danny needn't have asked. Her plate was clean except for a few fish bones.

"Lousy. I only ate it to be polite," she answered, then laughed

at the shocked expression on his face.

He smiled. Maggie had an infectious warmth that reached out to him. He'd been relieved a week ago when he'd decided, without a doubt, that she had a place on this earth. She'd been worth saving.

"Why did you wait so long, Danny, to ask me out? I had to flirt with you every day for a week. I almost died waiting."

"I don't go out much. Like I told you, I'm shy."

"Am I the first one you've rescued and taken out on a date?"

He hesitated before answering. "Yes, as a matter of fact."

She stared into his eyes. "It must be wonderful to be able to save lives."

"That's what I'm trained for."

"I mean, it must *feel* wonderful. I bet you've saved a hundred lives."

"In three summers, at least a hundred, I guess."

"Well, doesn't it make you feel, oh, I don't know how to say it."

"It makes me feel like I'm doing my job. That's what they pay me for. I don't like to talk about it." This kind of talk made him nervous. He wanted to drop the subject.

The mild outburst had surprised her. She nodded without saying anything, and they finished

their dessert quickly and in silence.

When they stepped outside, he asked, "You sure you want to go to a movie?"

"Why? Do you want to take me home? I made you angry."

"No, of course not. You're the first person I've met in a long time that I can talk to. I'd just like to talk. There's something I've got to tell somebody. We could walk out on the pier."

"In this fog?"

"Sure, it's fun."

She hesitated only a moment.

"Okay, let's go."

The pier was a couple blocks from the restaurant. They left his car in the parking lot and started through the fog. She held onto his arm tightly. "Don't let go of me," she told him. "Boy, I've never seen it this thick."

A foghorn broke the air.

Maggie hesitated. "I'm scared."

"Of what? You're with me, what's there to be scared of?"

"It's just so weird not being able to see anything in front of your face."

The shops had closed early. They walked along one side of the pier, with Danny guiding himself by the rail and Maggie walking on the inside. It was like being blind.

When they had been walking for five minutes, Maggie said,

"You wanted to tell me something."

"I don't know if I should."

"Why not? Is it something wrong?"

"No, I don't think so—not really wrong. That is, I'm not sure. I just have to tell someone." He stopped. "Can I trust you? Can I really trust you? You promise not to tell anyone?"

"Sure, I promise, Danny. What is it?"

He knew he could trust this girl. He could tell her everything.

Andy and Stu had made their plans in the Redondo Beach Police Station. Captain Josephson was anxious to help.

The town force had been alerted. Each car was assigned to check all restaurants in its cruising area. Andy figured if Danny had told the truth, the couple might still be in one of the local eating places. The first step was to check the parking lots for Danny's green car. The fog was so thick, the lots had to be checked on foot. Squad cars moved around the city at five miles an hour.

Andy and Stu, unfamiliar with the area, had chosen the three-block section where most of the restaurants were concentrated. They moved on foot.

Near the end of the last block

they found the car, in the parking lot of Otto's Grotto. They checked their guns and entered the seafood restaurant. Stu phoned the station to let them know where they were while Andy questioned the cashier girl. The place was empty.

"Yeah, I remember him. Tall, blond, good-looking. He had a sweet-looking girl with him. They left an hour ago."

"You sure?"

"They're the only customers we had tonight, Mac."

"His car's out in back."

The girl shrugged. "Maybe they went for a walk. Maybe they went out on the pier."

Stu heard the remark as he walked up. The two men exchanged glances as Andy said, "Out on the pier. Phone Josephson. Tell him to send some men to the pier. Tell him to alert the Coast Guard too. We might need them."

"Right." Stu nodded and hurried back to the phone.

"What's the quickest way to the pier?"

"Straight down the street one block, then over a block. You can't miss it—when it's not so foggy."

At the end of the deserted pier Danny was telling Maggie what had happened at the beginning of summer. "It was a week after I

saved his life that I saw his picture in the papers, all over the front page. He'd picked up this little girl, just six years old. He told her that her mommy was hurt. Then he took her for a ride, strangled her, left the poor little thing out in the bushes."

"How could a man do that, Danny?"

"Not a man—a monster. I've seen things like that in the papers before, but this time it was different. Here was a man who was alive only because I'd saved his life. If I hadn't pulled him out of the ocean, he would have drowned. He would have been dead. And that little girl would still be alive. That's all I could think about for weeks."

"You can't blame yourself for that. It's fate."

He felt good telling her about it. He knew he could trust her now. He could tell her everything. She'd understand.

"I've been thinking a lot about that little girl. I'd stay awake at night. Was she really meant to die like that? Was that monster really meant to be saved, so he could live long enough to do a terrible thing like that? Or should he have died? And I interfered!" His last words were harsh, angry. "I helped kill her. If it weren't for me, she'd be alive now, and I was responsible."

"Danny, you—you can't do this."

"I have the picture." He took out his wallet and opened it for her. "I cut it out of the paper. Such a tiny, pretty thing, with big brown eyes and pigtails." The tears came to his eyes as he thought about it.

"He's going to the gas chamber, Danny."

"That's right, he's going to die—but he should have died in the ocean." A hardness entered his voice. "I've got a secret to tell you. It's about one of the fellows I work with. He thinks that maybe some of those people we save were meant to die—not all of them, but maybe some of them. So, after he saves them, he checks into their lives. He follows them. He finds out whether they were worth saving or not."

"I don't understand, Danny. What good does that do?"

Danny waited a moment. He looked her straight in the eyes, trying to predict her reaction. Then he told her, "He kills them."

"That's crazy! That's murder!"

"No, no, not murder." How could he explain it so she'd understand? "The ones he kills are the ones who should have died." Something was wrong. Why was she backing away from him? "He saved their lives. He has the right

to take them away, destroy them."

"He told you all this?"

"Yes. Because I was the one who got him started, when I saved that madman's life. That's what started him to thinking."

"We have to tell the police. Danny, don't you see? He's as crazy as the man who killed the little girl."

"What!" He grabbed her by the shoulders. "Don't say that!"

"You're hurting me."

"Say he's not crazy!"

"Danny, stop!"

"Say it! Say he's not crazy!" He turned her around until her back was against the low wooden railing.

The fog cleared for a moment. Their eyes met, and he knew now that nobody would ever understand. He'd been a fool to think she would. "You know, don't you?"

"No, Danny, no."

"You lie. You're going to tell the police about me."

"Gruen. Danny Gruen." At the sound of his name echoing through the fog, he stopped and listened. Maggie opened her mouth to scream. He caught her as she took a deep breath, and clamped his hand over her mouth, forcing her back over the railing.

"I swear I heard voices out there," Stu insisted.

"Me, too." Andy squinted, tried to penetrate the fog. It was no use. You couldn't see your own hand in front of your face. The flashlights had turned out to be useless.

"Let's hold hands and make a human bridge across the pier," Stu said. "That way he won't slip past us."

"It's worth a try. Okay, boys, let's make like ring around the rosie." Andy was at the right end of the line, using the railing as a guide. He could hear the waves crashing below as they advanced.

"Let's go easy. We're not sure it's our man. Besides, if it is, he has a girl with him."

They hadn't gone far when they heard a girl's frightened scream. They stopped.

One of the Redondo men said, "I think she was falling."

"Let's go, on the double," Andy ordered. They started to trot, still holding onto each other.

Somebody ran into Andy, head-on. He fell on his back, a heavy body on top of him, fingers working at his throat. His grip with Stu had been broken.

"Andy, you okay?" It was Stu, yelling almost into his ear.

Andy gurgled, thrashed out with his arms. The grip suddenly loosened, and he felt the weight lifted from him.

"Andy, is this you? Talk, man!"

"I'm down here," Andy blurted out, rubbing his throat. He could faintly make out two outlines struggling, punching at each other, next to the railing. A loud grunt, then one figure disappeared.

"Stu?" Andy asked cautiously, taking his gun from its shoulder holster.

"It's me. I'm all right. Our friend is in the water. I think I got him in the throat. I doubt if he'll make it. He's—"

"Help! Help!" The girl's cries, barely loud enough to reach them, were weak.

"Come on," Andy shouted as he moved along the railing. "She's farther out."

"Keep yelling so we can find you." Stu's deep voice carried through the fog.

They ran toward the voice, and stopped when it began to die away.

"We passed her." Andy turned and bumped into Stu. "Back up."

They walked, slowly, homing in on the voice.

"I think she's right below us now." Stu's voice was firm, confident. "I'm going in."

"Wait! You can't jump. You can't see anything down there."

Stu laughed nervously. "All the better—I'm chicken about heights. If you don't hear from me, keep talking to her."

Andy tried to grab his partner's arm as Stu climbed over the railing, but he was too late. Stu jumped into the fog and disappeared.

The Coast Guard made it in thirty minutes. Stu and Maggie had hugged a barnacle-laden piling. They were scratched, tired, and half-frozen, but they were all right.

As the boat made its way to shore, Andy poured two cups of hot coffee, and handed them to Stu and the girl, huddled under one blanket. "Didn't anyone tell you we're supposed to be brains, not heroes?"

"No, sir," Stu answered innocently. "Nobody ever mentioned that, and it's not in the book. One of us had to go. I figured I had

the best chance, so I just jumped."

Andy straightened up. "Hey, wait a minute. I'm not that old."

"I didn't mean it that way. I just meant that I figured I had enough hair on my head to keep my brain from freezing up in that cold water. But you, well . . ."

Andy laughed and slapped him on the back. "Okay, say no more, Tarzan."

The boat dropped the couple off and went back to search for Danny Gruen. They found him two hours later, floating face down. Andy assumed that Stu's karate blow had paralyzed the killer enough that he hadn't been able to help himself after he hit the water. Andy wanted to believe he had drowned. It didn't help the other five, but it made a little sense.



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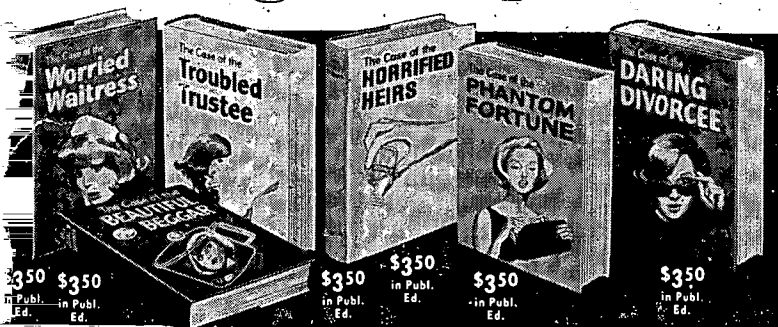
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